

# **A Visual Journey into the Bible**

# **Jesus**

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## Jesus

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## Introduction

### *The Gospels*

There exists not one unique biography of Jesus Christ that could be heavenly inspired as the Revealed Truth. There are four such accounts, even five when one includes the sayings of Thomas. We call these texts the Gospels. The texts are not to be read purely as a historical description of the life of Jesus. They form as a record of the 'Good News' or 'Evangilium', the teaching brought by God's realisation as a human, Jesus Christ. Each Gospel differs slightly, not only in the chronology of the events, but also in content: specific scenes of Jesus's life are described in one Gospel and not in another; other scenes are told in two or more Gospels. Of course, the chronology follows the general timeline of birth, youth, preaching, suffering, death and resurrection, but the order in which the parables, the miracles and the preaching appear varies. The Message prevails, and the sequence of events in the story is subordinated to the necessity of the account of the message.

The Gospels plus the Old Testament form the Bible. The Old Testament records the history of the Jewish people and of the Covenant promised by the God of the Jews to his people. The four Gospels break with the tradition of the Jewish Old Testament. The old biblical records contain one account, one history only of the historical events. The Old Testament is the one and sole history of the Jewish people. They are a story of triumph, glory and dismay, often a violent account of wars and repression. Of the life of Jesus, four versions exist, stories as remembered and written down by various witnesses or as the written tale of past testimonies. This lends more credibility to the Gospels as a whole. The Gospels are an account of the humble life of one person, and they contain a message in which love dominates. The breadth and style of the Old and New Testament differ markedly. The Old Testament is epic in style and centred on the historical acts of kings and prophets. The stories of the Gospels are simple life-scenes of a teacher who was rejected by the religious ruling elite of the Jews. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament texts are not a literal, objective historical narrative. A lyrical breath pervades many tales.

The Gospels are usually presented in the canonical form, that is in the form historically and officially accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, always with first the text of Matthew, then the text of Mark, followed by the Gospels of Luke and John. A fifth Gospel, called of Thomas, was discovered only in 1945 and is usually not included in publications of the Bible. The three first Gospels are called Synoptic (i.e. 'with the same eye') because they are most alike in presentation. They have probably used the same sources and the same tradition. Yet, even the Synoptic Gospels differ from each other. The Gospel of Mark for instance does not tell us about the birth of Jesus. It starts with Jesus's baptism. Luke is the most complete; many elements of the life of Jesus are told only in Luke. Examples of these particular events are the Visitation, the Circumcision, and the Temptation of Jesus in the desert.

The Gospel of John calls on a different tradition than the Synoptic Gospels. It is written in a more intellectual, poetic and epic style. This Gospel also does not tell of

the nativity. John wants to teach and to explain. Many of the themes of the Gospel are assembled in a large discourse given by Christ during the Last Supper. As an account of the events of Jesus's life, John's Gospel is the less complete in the number of events recalled.

Mark's Gospel was written in the language of the Hebrews, in Aramaic. The other Gospels were written in Greek. Mark's account, the shortest Gospel, is usually presented as a source for the others. But it is now supposed that an earlier version in Aramaic, maybe of Matthew, was the true basis, probably with other accounts that influenced the story of Mark. Mark's text, plus these other accounts that are designated by the letter Q for the German word for source 'Quelle', led to Matthew's final text and to Luke's Gospel, both written in Greek. The original Matthew account could date from the years 40 to 50. Matthew as a source can be historically plausible, since Matthew was one of the Apostles. But there remains a period of twenty to thirty years of oral traditions or of first texts that we know nothing of, between Jesus's death and the Gospels. Mark's Gospel would have been written around 65. The final Matthew version and Luke's text could date from between 70 and 80.

The Gospel of John, who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, dates from around the same time: from the years 70 to 80, maybe even from a decade later. The origin of these writings also seems to go back to another Apostle, John. The Apostle John is consistently called 'The Beloved of Christ'. During his Crucifixion Jesus asked John to take care of his mother Mary. He implored Mary to consider John as her new son. When John relates a specific scene, he recalls many details. John may indeed have been a witness to the scenes and he may have told as a writer the most accurate history, even though he shows in his writings a poetic inspiration and a special affinity for storytelling. John's Gospel is the latest of all, and scholars think it is already a reflection more of the developing Christian community than a direct narrative of the life of Jesus. John may have chosen his themes in function of the aims and beliefs of the first Christians.

The New Testament consists next to the Gospels also of the Acts of the Apostles and of a series of Epistles, the preaching of the first missionaries. The New Testament terminates on the 'Revelation to John', a mystic vision of the end of the world. The Gospel of Thomas was not added to the traditional Bible. This text was found in Upper Egypt in 1945. It was probably written around 120 to 140 AD and it mainly presents a Gospel of sayings.

### *The New Testament Apocrypha*

The New Testament canon was established by the Church Fathers over a period of time out of a much larger volume of writings. The rest, the rejected writings, form what is called the New Testament Apocrypha. One of the best-known books was the 'Protevangelium of James', written in the second century.

The Apocrypha contain more stories of the infancy of Jesus, and of the life of Mary. They contain more epistles and accounts described as 'apocalypses' or revelations. There are very many apocryphal texts compiled from the second century to the late Middle Ages. Many of these stories were widely known in the Middle Ages, especially the ones that were copied into the 'Golden Legend' or 'Legenda Aurea', so

that most of the scenes represented by painters can be found documented in written form in this 'Golden Legend'.

Painters depicted scenes from Jesus's life, from Mary's life and from the lives of the Apostles, which were not narrated in the New Testament, so for which there were gaps in the Gospels, but which were described in the apocryphal texts. The apocryphal texts that interest us most are those that give narrations of Jesus's early childhood, of the period after Jesus's childhood, of the early and late life of Mary and of the martyrdom of the Apostles.

The basis for stories on the early life of Jesus was the already mentioned 'Protevangelium of James', dating from the second half of the second century.<sup>G107</sup> The word 'Protevangelium' refers to pre-evangelistic narration, to stories of before Jesus's public life. Various other apocryphal texts relate events that are presented in the Protevangelium. The Protevangelium comes from Eastern sources. The 'Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew' was inspired by this Protevangelium and this version was more used in the West as a source for images.

The 'Gospel of Nicodemus' covers the period after Jesus's death. This text goes back to the fifth or sixth centuries.<sup>G107</sup> The document consists of two parts, one being the 'Acta Pilati' and the other the 'Descensus ad Infernos'. The 'Acta Pilati' provides the life of Pontius Pilatus. The 'Descensus' tells of Jesus's descent into the underworld to release the souls of the just that died before his act of redemption. This act is called the 'anastasis'.

Many of the stories of the early life of Mary come also from the 'Protevangelium of James'. This inspired other apocrypha, such as the 'Gospel of the Birth of Mary'. The stories of Mary's parents, of Mary's education in the Temple and of her betrothal to Joseph originate in these texts. Still other documents relate the 'Death of the Virgin', the earliest written around the fourth century. One of these is the Greek 'Discourse of Saint John the divine concerning the Falling Asleep of the Holy Mother of God'.

There are five main apocryphal 'Acts of the Apostles', of John, Paul, Peter, Thomas and Andrew. But very many other apocryphal texts or fragments of texts remain on the lives of the Apostles. To these should be added medieval texts such as the 'Acts of Andrew' by Gregory of Tours.

The 'Golden Legend' was a compilation of the lives of Jesus, the Virgin and the Saints as assembled by Jacobus de Voragine (circa 1230-1298). The books were written around 1260. The 'Golden Legend' was compiled from more than a hundred thirty sources going back from the second century to the thirteenth<sup>G49</sup>.

De Voragine was born in Varazze near Genoa, hence his name. Jacobus or Jacopo de Voragine was a Dominican friar who became the Archbishop of Genoa in 1292. He wrote several books of sermons, a chronicle of Genoa, and the 'Golden Legend' also contains a short history of the Lombards, though handled from disparate and religious stories.

The 'Golden Legend' was originally only called 'Legenda Sanctorum' or 'Readings on the Saints', but it was widely known and received its final name already during the Middle Ages. The 'Golden Legend' was at first copied by hand into thousands of manuscripts, later printed in its original Latin by the young printing industry. The

book was immensely popular in the Middle Ages. It was translated in many languages and became an important source of symbols in art. It must have been the only book of the Middle Ages to be as widely read as the Bible. Painters of later ages read the 'Golden Legend' eagerly. Many medieval painted images can be understood only when one knows well the sources in the 'Golden Legend'. The texts were translated in English for instance by the American Father William Granger Ryan; the book we used was published in 1993.

### *Christian art*

The words and the teaching of the Gospels spread over Europe in the early centuries. The Roman Catholic Church encouraged the representation of scenes of the life of Jesus Christ. Mosaics, frescoes and tempera painting techniques were used before the discovery of oil painting. The pictorial representations were most proficient of course near the seat of control of the Church, which was in Rome and in Italy. Wonderful mosaics that have been cherished and preserved can be found in the Baptisterium in Florence and in the Saint Marc Basilica of Venice. Other centres of early art developed where the seats of lay power were established, in the first place in Constantinople. Constantinople was the capital of the East Roman Empire who developed a society as powerful in wealth and military force as in spiritual brilliance. After the fifth century, power shifted in Western Europe and other centres of power established, such as for instance in Aachen in Germany, where the first Frankish Emperor Charles the Great, Carolus Magnus, resided in the ninth century. Charles was the first new Holy Roman Emperor re-entitled by the Popes.

It is something of a miracle that European Christian art produced pictures at all. The Decalogue, the Law of the Covenant written down in the Book Exodus of the Bible states, 'You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish a parent's fault in the children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren among those who hate me; but I act with faithful love towards thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.'

The Jewish and Muslim religions take the first phrase literally. They do not consider it as having been written purely in the context of the next phrases. Therefore, the Jewish and Muslim religions prohibit representations of humans and of animals. Christianity prohibited worshipping other Gods, but it was lenient towards making pictures and sculptures of Bible scenes. Pope Gregory the Great can be credited with allowing pictorial arts in the Western Christian Church in a definite way, around 600 AD.

Pictures were made almost exclusively for religious aims in the first millennium until the seventeenth century. The Church needed to instruct, and there was no better way to teach than to show. The faithful could actually see the scenes of the lives of Jesus, of Mary, and of the Saints as illustrations of what they heard the preachers talk about. They could keep these images in their mind while at home. They could pray to the Saints with a sense of intimacy that would otherwise have lacked. This use of the visual arts was recognised and emphasised at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. The monks and priests could use pictures to prove the truth of the Word. When oil painting developed, after the mosaics and the frescoes, this religious

tradition continued. Pictures could be paid for only by the wealthy and by the Church. The Church could pay, for to her flew the funds that the crowds gave. Similarly, large works of architecture such as the Italian basilicas and the Gothic cathedrals were mainly the results of communal activities organised by leading citizens, by the nobles or by the towns' guilds. These buildings were erected to the honour of their beliefs. The altars of the cathedrals needed grand pictures.

Since the majority of images were used by the Church to teach, and since Christian beliefs pervaded society, the wealthy did not change the tradition of religious painting for their palaces and mansions. At best, individual portraiture developed, as well as pictures of battles, all for private and secular uses. Later only, very slowly, started the painting of landscapes and of still-lives to decorate the villas or town palaces. Gradually images were freed from the influence of religion. Throughout this evolution, however, though art was a community act, paintings also were developed for the wealthy individuals. Art thus reflects the visions of the commissioners, the noblemen, the merchants, the Princes of the church and the leaders of the monasteries, as much as the visions of the individual artists. And the commissioners preferred conservative views instead of revolutionary art.

In the history of painting from the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth century, religious paintings meant for Europe scenes of the life of Jesus, of the Apostles and of other figures around Jesus. These form the overwhelming majority of all images made. The history of painting until the seventeenth century is mainly religious and Christian. For a person or historian who dislikes religious art, these centuries must seem very frustrating indeed. Religious art simply cannot be avoided for these centuries.

The countries in which painting flourished were Italy, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium, Hungary, Poland and Czechia. Frescoes and oil painting were far less developed in England and Scandinavia. The pictures made in these last named countries were painted by famous artists of other regions, mainly the Netherlands and Flanders, but for England also by German painters. To some extent this was also the case for Spain, where the Flemish influences, Flemish imports of paintings and emigration of Flemish artists, were important. The reason for this Flemish influence in Spain was both the far advanced stage of Flemish art, and later the special links between Flanders and Spain, for these two countries were part of the same empire.

This book is dedicated to themes in religious pictorial arts. We will however not treat neither the art of the Byzantine Empire nor the scenes of the Greek Orthodox Church. We include in the latter art the pictures made for the Christian cult in the Ukraine, Russia and the Lithuanian regions.

### *The evolution to secular art*

Paintings of non-religious, that is secular, themes seldom accompanied pictures of religious themes. In the early centuries up to the seventeenth century, sacred art formed the major part of the artistic production. The advance to a more secular output has to be projected against the background of the concentration of attention on

individual man. The long road to democracies and to confidence in man as the centre of the universe began nevertheless earlier than the Italian Renaissance, so that this evolution can be traced back to the very beginning of art.

The first images were as sacred as their subjects were. The early icons are still venerated in the monasteries of the Orient and of Eastern Europe, as if they had captured some of the Holiness of Christ and the Saints. A legend of which we will talk of further in this book, states that the very first icon that was preserved was the imprint of Jesus's face on the Holy Shroud. Thus the first icon contained the spirits of Christ himself. Later, pictures were believed to carry some of the essence of the portrayed figure. From that starting point on, pictures would only be of the grandest spiritual elevation.

The purest pictures of modern spirituality of Europe were to be found in Byzantium-Constantinople, then in Italy and especially in Flanders from the thirteenth century on, in International Gothic art. But as early as these times, the images were drawn inexorably closer to man. In Catholic, very pious Flanders, the genius Jan Van Eyck began to use mystic images subtly for playful diversion. He introduced new combinations and meaning of symbols, sometimes on the brink of disrespect, always hidden as private puzzles. The ambivalence between apparent and hidden meaning was used ever more by other, later painters like Jean Fouquet. This was the continuance of an old tradition that had its sources in the Gospels and even earlier Jewish texts. Jesus and the Evangelists talked in aphorisms and parables, also hiding meaning. Van Eyck merely added new symbols and combined them to arouse still more interest in his pictures and to lend them more spiritual content, trying thus to emphasise the mysterious power of pictures.

The earliest Christians had imagined Jesus as the victorious God and King of the Heavens. For images of Jesus they groped for concepts they were familiar with. The splendid courts and unlimited power of the Roman Emperors appealed most to their imagination. The first Christians absorbed these tangible concepts of total, mysterious power, and brought them over on the image of Jesus to depict him in all this triumph over humans and nature. They had the hope for an ideal world of political and religious power in which the social justice and the egalitarian society of humans that Jesus had preached would be realised. But this world still needed to be brought by a King or Emperor. Hence the magnificence of the early mosaics of the throning Jesus and his Saints.

The pictures of glorious, throning Jesus and Virgin Mary softened very gradually. Giotto introduced human emotions, and pictures of humble Madonnas became the most popular representations of Mary. Later in the evolution, various painters showed common people as direct witnesses in pictures that were otherwise reserved for the Holy Family or the saints. One of the first artists to do this was Hugo van der Goes. Pieter Bruegel continued this tradition. Bruegel placed the scenes of the life of Jesus solidly in Brabant's country villages. Lucas van Leyden and Jan van Scorel evolved these tendencies further to genre pictures, in which they drew Jesus in the midst of households and showed Him as the poor wanderer. Ultimately, the Holy Family itself would become depicted as ordinary people such as one might expect every day in the streets. But when John Everett Millais did this openly and crudely in as late as the nineteenth century, his 'Carpenter's Shop' met still only criticism and refusal.

Jan Van Eyck hid many symbolic elements in his pictures. This was wholly in the air of his times. In the Middle Ages, symbols and numbers were part of spiritual mysticism. But Van Eyck proved that one could side step from the pure presentations of spirituality. Van Eyck very hesitatingly moralised with his undertones. Moralising is a very human characteristic. Sandro Botticelli also, dared to moralise openly in the Sistine Chapel. This moralising evolution grew until it became devoid of its religious content. It would reach its zenith in the early nineteenth century with the sometimes pitiful, sometimes ironic and always terrible images of Francisco di Goya y Lucientes.

Landscapes were introduced in paintings, first as backgrounds to the Christian scenes. Then, the themes of the New Testament were blended into the landscapes and the landscapes became the principal theme. It is interesting to note that this trend was begun with painters that originated from regions of luxurious forests and deep river valleys. These painters were Joachim Patenier and Henri Blès, both of the river Meuse valley.

The nude also entered the visual arts first through religious pictures. The baby Jesus was often drawn nude in pictures of the Madonna. Mary also in certain pictures was shown as the Virgo Lactans in the act of giving milk from her breast to the baby Jesus. Masaccio painted the baby Jesus older and with the beginning of a splendid young, well-muscled body. Pictures of Saint Sebastian nude against a column and pierced with arrows were an ideal occasion to show a painter's skill at the male nude. This evolution ended in pictures that glorified the body of man. There is no better representative of that art than the great Michelangelo. Michelangelo also painted man in all possible stages of emotion, the continuance of the evolution that had started with Giotto in the Arena Chapel of Padua.

The movement towards secularisation of pictures accelerated without diminishing the religious output. The Reformation from Catholicism to Protestantism in the sixteenth century can also be seen in view of this human-centric evolution. The crossing point of the two tendencies was reached in the seventeenth century. The evolution passed through a stage in which imagery was still very religious, but with emphasis on the human emotions in the figure of Jesus and other participants in the stories of the Old Testament. Tiziano showed Jesus's human suffering in all its poignancy. But also many other painters of the Baroque period played openly upon emotions in their pictures, and upon the emotions they hoped to induce in their viewers. A pivotal artist in this passage was Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio, who drew the final conclusions. He not only used living models, common people, to depict Jesus in suffering, but also did not try in any way to transcend these images. Before his time, most images of Jesus were sublimated, elevated, stylised to symbols of spirituality, even with Tiziano. For Caravaggio, Jesus was a suffering human and nothing more. His images were direct and crude. Caravaggio's spirituality was very different from past concepts, but it was still very much present, and then with unrivalled poignancy.

Examples of the end of these evolutions were the pictures of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, Holman Hunt, Manet and the abstract painters. Goya painted religious scenes, but more than any artist he drew attention to the suffering of individual man without reference to Christian religion. Millais showed the Holy Family as ordinary people in a carpenter's shop. Manet merely was interested in the style elements of

Christian art and used these elements. Abstract art was based on the purest spirituality that could be found in the oldest images, but took away the figurative references and all content matter. Nevertheless, Christian spirituality survived in rare painters such as Georges Rouault, the Expressionist religious artist.

### *The seventeenth century*

The seventeenth century was the time when the seeds of the Reformation of Luther and Calvin, as well as of the movements of the Humanists like Erasmus, started to mature. The main emphasis of the visual arts continued to be on religious scenes in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Flanders and the Eastern European countries. But in France and foremost also England, portraiture was more popular. Religious painting never reached a stage of similar importance in England as on the continent. Also, the painting of themes of antiquity, stimulated by the Renaissance, gained a place next to the Christian themes.

Painting in the Netherlands knew an exceptional blossoming in the seventeenth century. Marine painting, landscape painting and genre painting of intimate household scenes were in prominence, whereas religious painting receded.

The Calvinist teachers of the Netherlands did not encourage religious painting anymore. Their churches were devoid of decoration and the devotion to images and sculptures was denounced as idolatry.

In the Netherlands developed a government based on a broad class of city merchants with middle-class standards and principles of living. The Netherlands' cities and counties were largely independent. They explicitly chose their leaders instead of acknowledging automatically the supremacy of inherited monarchy, even though this choice went most of the time to the one nobility Dynasty of Orange.

The Netherlands evolved into an economic powerhouse with a society built on the hard-working and enterprising individual. As Protestant traders and guildsmen, they honoured austere ethics. Whereas the Italian city states of the sixteenth century had gone through a similar evolution, their closeness to the Papal States and the mere fact that they had been most active in the first evolution, kept them solidly linked to Catholic spirituality. The Netherlands was the first country with an art that tore itself loose from the Catholic tradition. The art of the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent the English pictorial tradition, is thus of great importance for the evolution of European art, because it formed the example that could be taken up fully by the neighbouring countries.

The Northern Low Countries of the Netherlands merged into a Republic. The city-states freed themselves from the Spanish domination in 1579. The Dutch painters gradually abandoned religious themes as their main subject in favour of scenes from everyday life. They painted genre scenes of intimate interior house life. They also painted burlesques and even brothel scenes, which could be considered humorous by a certain audience. They painted the vast landscapes of their flat country. They painted marine views of ships at sea, exalting the overseas commerce that generated the wealth of the Netherlands. Mythological scenes from classic antiquity also remained popular. In order to decorate the rich houses, they painted flower bouquets. Finally, the Dutch painters turned to the economic life of their country in portraits of

merchants, military leaders, and of associations of guildsmen. The Netherlands was therefore the first country in which a more secular art developed openly so that it became the main production.

The worldly art of the Low Countries surpassed in volume the works of religious themes. However, besides this secular art flourished religious art as ever. Scenes from the Old Testament found grace even with the most austere Calvinist preacher. The town of Utrecht had for instance a large Catholic community. Utrecht painters who continued to paint Catholic religious scenes in the Italianist ways were Abraham Bloemaert, Hendrik ter Brugghen, Gerard van Honthorst, Jan Both, Bartholomeus Breenbergh, Dirck van der Lisse, Claes Berchem, and Jan Baptist Weenix among others. Scenes from the Bible remained overall popular. It is typical that the greatest of the Dutch painters, Rembrandt, proved his original and very individual mind in painting in so many religious works. We also have to note that the still lives, which were extremely popular, very frequently contained profound spiritual meaning. These pictures were full of symbols referring to Christ's passion and in their 'Vanitas' subject matter emphasised the transience of life and the virtues of morality.

### *Religious art after the seventeenth century*

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, religious painting remained predominant in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Flanders, and the Eastern European countries. The seventeenth century humanised sacred art completely. Caravaggio stressed with his pictures of the beginning of the century the realism of human suffering. He rejected the use of symbols and the aesthetically elevated representations of Gothic and Renaissance religious art. He rejected also the visions of the powerful, victorious God. The trend to further humanisation of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the apostles was not to be stopped.

In the eighteenth century of course, the tendency shifted and other kinds of painting grew in importance of production. First and foremost there was more portraiture. But also landscapes, genre pictures and pictures of scenes of antiquity were part of the larger output.

This trend in art was part of the general evolution of the times. It was the accompaniment of progress in the sciences and in the evolution of philosophic ideas. The eighteenth century was the century of Enlightenment for the sciences. It was the age of the French Philosophers Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau. The advances of chemistry and physics raised the hope that man alone, without the help of a deity, could ultimately not only discover the secrets of nature but also dominate nature as only a God could have done. Small circles of intellectuals challenged the idea that the Bible was literally true and was the one and exclusive revealed truth. The French Revolution of 1793 finally, radically proved that man could make his own fate, without a King who reigned by the grace of God, and without a political constitution directed by religious rules of law. The Roman Catholic Church had been a powerful hierarchy whose influence had been disputed by Kings and Emperors. The new-founded republics did not tolerate any other power of the citizens but their own. If

Christian religion was tolerated, the Church hierarchy was to be subdued to lay political power. This happened not without reaction. At the beginning of the nineteenth century art, and people were split in blatant anticlericalism on the one side and Christian conservatism on the other.

In the eighteenth century began the first investigations into the real nature of the historical Jesus. The pictures of Jesus as the triumphant Son of God that were still doctrine and had been taken for granted until the seventeenth century, were criticised. Scholars became interested in the Jesus of before the Resurrection. The awareness grew that just maybe the Gospels were not only the literal account of the events and words of Jesus, but also the interpretations and the hopes of the early Christians.

In the nineteenth century, religious painting was replaced by various new representations. This was the era of more widespread wealth. The cities grew. Economy and industry boomed. There was less concentration of wealth and more freedom of spirit. Yet, through the various movements such as Romanticism, Realism, Victorian art and other that developed in this century, painting of scenes of the life of Christ continued to be a source of more than occasional inspiration. Finally, in the twentieth century, abstract painting of course banned all figurative representation. But in Expressionism and in very individual paintings, religious images remained to be in favour.

Robert Motherwell wrote in 1944 that, ‘The social condition of the modern world, which gives every experience its form is the spiritual breakdown, which followed the collapse of religion. This condition has led to the isolation of the artist from the rest of society. The modern artist’s social history is that of a spiritual being in a property-loving world.’<sup>G86</sup>. Thus the crisis of religion and of religious painting was a crisis of the artists also. Yet, religious Christian painting lived on and offered clear spiritual images that invited to other spiritual searches. Early modern abstract art was such a search for spirituality and a sense of transcendence and mysticism can be regularly remarked in later manifestations of abstract art.

### *Religious themes*

All themes of the life of Jesus were depicted in the glorious years of religious painting. This book is dedicated to those themes. Some scenes were more popular than other for various reasons, sometimes even for merely local reasons. One or other painter would eventually put any event, parable and miracle of the Gospels into image. But some scenes were more popular than others. There was an effect of fashion. And each painter liked to show his skill by making his own version of such popular scenes. Thus the Nativity, the Adoration of the Kings, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Wedding at Cana, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, The Descent from the Cross, the Pietà, and the Resurrection are themes that can be found in hundreds of major and lesser paintings. Other themes such as the Parable of the Vineyard, the miracles of various healings, also the Preaching on the Mountain, are less depicted.

Not just pictures of the life of Jesus were popular. The life of the Virgin Mary was painted in scenes, which were not described by an Evangelist but which were taken

from apocryphal writings and from legends. The lives and especially the scenes of martyrdom of Saints became popular. The last part of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles and the 'Golden Legend' could be used as a source of inspiration. And Mary Magdalene also was a beloved subject of painters. Amongst the Apostles, Peter and Paul, Andreas and Philip, Matthew and Mark were the most popular. Added to these pictures came representations of the Holy Trinity and of the Assumption of Mary Virgin.

### *The meaning of Christ*

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a town of Palestine. Palestine was close to the Mediterranean, the centre of many cultures. Jesus's parents did not live at Bethlehem; they were merely called to this town because of a Roman census. Jesus lived a private life until he was thirty years old, of which little is known. Then he led a public life of maximum three years and maybe as few as two years<sup>G40</sup>. It is remarkable what an influence these two to three years had on Europe, since Christianity became the most adhered to religion of the continent. Christianity founded the Church or congregation of people who believed in the teaching of Jesus. The Church as an organisation needed a clergy hierarchy of Pope, Cardinals, Bishops and priests. These had an overwhelming role in the politics of the individual countries for many centuries. Next to the Church and its hierarchy, Christian monks founded monasteries, which under the direction of the two major ones of spiritual influence, Cluny and Citeaux, also were of the first importance for the economical and cultural life in Europe, from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance periods. Some of that importance continues till our days.

Jesus differed strikingly from the many other teachers who founded religions or philosophical movements, like Buddha or Mohammed. Jesus explicitly claimed to be the Son of God, to be God. This was of course considered presumptuous and even blasphemous in Jesus's own time by the Jewish establishment. It was tolerated because considered harmless and preposterous by the Romans who occupied Palestine. Nevertheless, Jesus was executed for proclaiming to be God. But exactly this message, which sounded so preposterous, appealed to the masses of Europe by its daringness, consistency, originality, and force. According to Jacobus de Voragine, God came to us through Jesus in four ways. He came in the flesh, in the hearts, at death, and He would come to judge humans in the Last Judgement. All these were very intimate to humans, and appealed to them directly.

It is remarkable how the Christian religion could spread so rapidly in Europe although the man Jesus was apparently so inadequate. He was not understood in most of his preaching, even though he used much imagery in parables to illustrate his messages. His closest disciples did not understand him and He said so repeatedly, as if to repel them. Only fishermen at first followed him. He was always disconcerting, almost never agreed with anything the people around him though, so that in the end they only interrogated him. He was a disturbing radical who rarely stayed in one place and travelled around as the poorest among the excluded. He was betrayed, captured, tortured, ridiculed in public, ignominiously nailed to a cross and killed. The elite of his own country refused him when given the choice of clemency by the Romans, and preferred to let a bandit live. Finally, his message was put in writing but then in many

versions out of which the Catholic Church chose four as its Canon. Jacobus de Voragine said that humanity was in need of a teacher, a redeemer, a liberator, an emancipator, an enlightened man, and a saviour<sup>G49</sup>. Jesus Christ epitomised these roles.

Jesus's message was impossible to realise. Only so very few people could come near to fulfilling it, that the Catholic Church gave these the particular name of Saints, the few sanctified. The message was one of love, in a world where struggle and violence were the daily necessities to survive for individuals and for communities. Yet, the message conquered Europe. We cannot understand the almost only and complete art of more than four centuries and the cultural influences that continue to be generated by Christianity, without trying to understand at least partly the man Jesus and his message. Maybe we could try by following the most famous painters. These were some of the most intelligent and deepest feeling individuals of their times. These might teach us to grasp the reasons for the importance of the Christian message.

It is impossible to understand the mystery of the existence or not of a God from mathematics or logic. Piero della Francesca tried geometry, the science of perspective and of numbers, but he did not come up with a definite answer. Philosophy and theology might lead to answers, but again these disciplines of the mind remain the application of logic reasoning. We have to turn to men and women of heightened sensitivity, to the geniuses of art, to discover some of their intuition of the necessity of man to believe in a God. Maybe that same God induced this inherent need in man. The artists probed, reflected upon the questions of the meaning of life. Not just the painters of religious images did so. Many painters sought answers for the existence of mankind in other places but a deity. But we will follow the painters of religious scenes with particular attention to these questions. This remains a very private and intuitive journey. Each of us has to draw his or hers own conclusions.

### *A spiritual journey*

The evolution of Christian visual art is the result of the advance of the ways of thinking of European man, of his philosophies and of his views on religion. The teaching of Jesus provided a ready and coherent answer to man's most fundamental, existential questions. What is the meaning of life? What are the most important values of life? How should I behave to other men and women? What are the criteria to distinguish between good and right, what creates morality? In the teaching of Jesus, humanity obtained a revealed truth that was miraculously offered as immutable, universal and eternal.

European man never accepted simply to live and let live. Acceptance of nature and events as they were or happened without apparent aim was the basis of Oriental philosophies. European man, however, was destined to strive and to search. He sought transcendence, to ever surpass himself and to become greater than he was. European man never accepted his banality. When faced with his smallness and his solitude, he sank into depression. However pathetic and limited, European man desperately looked for external truths and for objectives greater than himself. Christianity offered the framework of values and the hope of reaching the ultimate transcendence of being united with a God, the ultimate victory over oblivion and death. Unfortunately, it also

allowed Christians to commit the worse crimes against humanity in the name of the message.

It was no coincidence that Christianity took such firm hold in Europe, whereas so many Apostles and disciples were sent to the East and the South to convert. Isolated grains of the Word fell in small communities and thrived there until our times, but Christianity did not become strong elsewhere but in Europe. Was it a coincidence that the most powerful disciples, Peter and Paul, came to the West? Of course, here was Rome and here lay the core of the power of the Mediterranean, but Peter and Paul did strike at that core and founded in their turn by their martyrdom a spiritual Empire that remains unequalled. The acts and teaching of the disciples who went east and south, practically disappeared in the desert, to be overwhelmed by Islam.

In the first centuries, a concept of the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-victorious Jesus as God emerged, which was accepted by the developing hierarchy of the Christian Church and turned into immutable doctrine. By the thirteenth century, from which date the first paintings of this book, this process was complete.

The Revealed Truth was not just targeted at an elite, but at all men and women, including the lowest classes. Its wisdom was based on the most appealing of all emotions, love. For centuries, the sacred message of love of Jesus as told in the Gospels pervaded the lives of people. The emphasis on love between humans and between humans and a Deity caught the sympathy and never relenting support of intellectuals and artists. Even modern man has to acknowledge that if it all was an illusion to believe in a submissive way in a God, it was the grandest, most splendid and most fertile illusion of history.

The fundamental question was since old: is this message true? Were Jesus, his words and acts and especially his miracles part of real history? Or were certain events of the life of Christ true history but other parts just stories generated like symbols of the deepest wishes and urges of our minds in their longing for transcendence? This interrogation also occupied the painters that we will encounter. They did not have a scientific proof of whether Jesus was truly God or not. This belief remained an act of faith. However, their acts of faith are compelling. If one gives credence to intuition, feelings, emotions, and testimony, then the answers that come from the centuries are a sound 'yes'. And the answers are definitely a 'yes' to Jesus's values and to the need for the spirituality he preached.

Artists of the thirteenth century started with an established view of Jesus. The answers were all defined for them to use. The search for the true nature of Jesus and the quest for the real meaning of religion came later. In this way, the history of religious painting is the history of the breaking down of elevated images and established views, instead of a process to form an elaborate image from nothing. The early ideas were adapted, however, until a new understanding and a new basis of representation of religious faith arose.

With the growing confidence in man, the Revealed Truth that the Catholic Church saw as the 'Veritatis Splendor' imposed from the heavens, became more and more oppressive to the inquisitive mind. Man wanted to be delivered of all bonds, also the most holy. Externally enforced religion was rejected several times on the long path to

deification of European modern man. But the need for transcendence of European man remained always very strong. When religion was fought, man sought other ways to become greater than himself and to create meaning to his life. Communism can be considered as one of these 'new secular religions'. These apparently lacked a God image, but the masses and the common good readily assumed the aspirations for transcendence. Many men and women offered their own life for love of this transcendence. Today, when hearing the speeches made by Corporate Executive Officers of the large commercial corporations, one cannot but have the impression that the 'marketplace' and the 'shareholder' have assumed the image of the invisible God. Substitution comes in many flavours.

Christianity offered spirituality to artists. Without spirituality, art has it difficult to exist and to be admired. This was a problem for the Impressionist painters. The French Impressionists made marvellous pictures of nature, and wonderful portraits. But their images were rarely aimed at dense spirituality, nor did they show the way for man to surpass himself. Theirs were contemplative images. Their art remained one-layered. In the end, their art was replaced by Symbolism that offered a new emphasis on the mind and on myths. We forget easily that the first great early abstract artists like Frantisek Kupka, Kasimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondriaan were drawn to abstract patterns out of the mysticism of spiritual theories such as Theosophism.

Representations of religious figures gradually became less sublimated over the centuries. Representations of Jesus and Mary as King and Queen of the Heavens turned slowly into images of suffering and warm-feeling humans. After this evolution, religious pictures almost disappeared. Spirituality and transcendence that had inspired so many artists shifted. Religious art lost its dominance almost entirely to portraits and landscapes, to scenes of classic antiquity and to historical scenes, then to the suggestion of emotions.

But the need for spirituality was far too powerful to be denied. At the end of the twentieth century, the Symbolists and later the first Russian abstract painters, brought it back to the foreground. Spirituality is the realm of the mind, the mind without the necessity of a body. The abstracts brought art entirely in this realm until pictures were pure productions of the spiritual, intellectual mind. At that point however, the only thing that remained were abstract patterns and forms that could be easily combined but that ultimately lost their original meaning. Kasimir Malevich understood this well, when after having made 'White Square' he declared having proved all. He reverted to figurative painting. Pure spirit and its manifestations in art seem an illusion without the images of the body or of the form humans can recognise. The artists of the centuries we will pass offer the most understandable images of spirituality, because they combined their ideas with the tactile forms of our and their lives.

We discover in art and in the representation of religious themes the growing consciousness of the individual. When man rejected the authority of the Revealed Truth, another Truth was sought from within man. This was his immanent truth. In the final stages of the evolution, in our own times, man finally admitted that the fundamental values of Christianity such as love, hope, charity, forgiveness, and equality were necessary as much as the water of life itself to realise a modern compassionate welfare society that aspired to a new form of transcendence.

Transcendence and spirituality again were sought as precious values. Thereby the interest in Jesus grew, and a new thirst for spirituality and Christian values was on the move. Christians of course add to these the love for the Creator and the belief that Jesus was sent to give testimony of these values, which were laid down in the Gospels.

### *The themes of this book*

It is the subject of this book to present the main themes of the New Testament. Painters have used these themes from the thirteenth century on to our times, not just to show pictures of Jesus, Mary and the apostles, but also to communicate spirituality. Not all themes can be handled in the scope of this work. Many more themes than those presented herein have been painted at one moment or other, by one painter or other. For each theme we present in this book, one or more example is discussed in terms of lines, forms, composition, colour and technique. Not always the finest example has been chosen; often the most interesting painter or picture was preferred. The book is thus not an exhaustive list of themes and the examples do not follow a historical timeline.

There are three further threads that underlie the main subject of this book.

One thread is the evolution of representations of spirituality. We already talked about this evolution in the way painters looked at religious subjects and how they evolved from pure religious, elevated spiritual depictions to human-centred visions.

The second thread is the individual genius of the artist. Painters captured the ideas of their contemporaries and transformed them into evolution of art. The artist was immersed in his tradition. But being more finely tuned to the perception of changes in the thinking of his fellow men, he or she often modified traditional representations or even dramatically broke with tradition. Whether these changes were subtle advances or great leaps forward, all great painters contributed to the evolution.

The third thread is the search for the genuine Jesus, the Man. This is the search for the historical Jesus from before the Resurrection and for the learning, teaching, healing and wonderful man that continues to fascinate us. We will recognise the significance of the transition from the figure Jesus, as He is shown in the Gospels, to the medieval images of Jesus in his majestic reincarnation of God. After the Gothic times we will find the slowly growing awareness of Jesus as He was before the Resurrection: a Jewish peasant, a human person. It is as if the Godly qualities that were laid upon Jesus until the thirteenth century were peeled off again, layer by layer, until only the suffering and not even the mythical man remained. Painters tried to understand how the man Jesus felt during His suffering, how He talked to people, how He was as a wandering preacher and how He loved. The one image that strikes the mind in this respect is Caravaggio's 'Christ at the column'.

### *The method of this book*

We will look at paintings with Eye, Mind and Heart.

With our eyes we will look at the visual effects of the colour areas, the lines that create static or dynamism in a picture and symmetries or asymmetries created in the volumes of composition.

With our mind we will try to understand why a painter made a particular picture and how his life's period influenced his representation. We will also situate the painter in his century and in the historical events of his environment. For some paintings we will elaborate on history to obtain a glimpse of understanding of the rich framework of events that formed the background for the lives of the painters and their art at any period of time.

But foremost we will look at pictures with our heart, and let the emotions communicated by the overall view come to us. We may be overwhelmed with forceful emotions, or suffer and have pity. We may be outraged or stand in revulsion. We may be touched in our souls by the spiritual elevation of a transcendental view of a Christian theme. And finally, we may admire the incredible genius of representation of the painter, look in awe and respect, and feel close to the artist. This communication of emotions that have come from centuries past, the intimacy of artist and viewer, is one of the mysteries of paintings that we will constantly experience.

## **The Young Jesus**

## *Nativity*

### **The Counting at Bethlehem**

Pieter Bruegel (1515-1569). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. 1566.

### **Mystic Nativity**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). The National Gallery – London. 1500.

Augustus had succeeded to the great Julius Caesar who had founded the line of Roman Emperors. The wars had ended, the world was conquered. It was time to understand just how large the Roman world was for now. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This was the first census, which took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee, but being of the lineage of David he had to be registered in David's town, Bethlehem in Judaea. So, Joseph set out for Bethlehem with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

### *Pieter Bruegel*

Pieter Bruegel painted the arrival of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem. It is near Christmas, and in winter. Bethlehem is in a freezing cold and under the snow. Joseph and Mary enter the village alone. Mary sits with their belongings on a donkey. Joseph pulls the tired animal painstakingly forward. Joseph is bent at the effort. He also brought a cow for milk, and the cow trods near the donkey. Mary is enveloped in a cloak to keep out the cold. The communal house is near. There are so many people to inscribe that the official had to set his desk outdoors. There he sits with his books and his pens and ink. A crowd has gathered before the desk. People are pushing and shouting. There are mothers with small children, soldiers with halberds, merchants, Jews. All are around the official. He needs money for the registration. His hand is outstretched and receives each time a few coins. Many people have come to this village. They need food. Pigs are slaughtered and cut to pieces. The meat is fried in a pan. Wood needs to be cut. In this cold, alcohol is welcome. Barrels of wine and beer have been brought and are unloaded. It is still early in winter, so the children are enjoying the frozen pond. They are skating and they play with sledges. Elsewhere they make snowballs and throw them at each other.

For Bruegel, the mystery of the birth of the Son of God is within each of us. Bethlehem lies close. Bethlehem and the coming of Jesus are in our own communities. The birth of Jesus did not happen far away in a foreign, exotic and warm land. Bruegel lived in sixteenth century Brabant, now a province of Belgium, and since the birth of Christ is feasted at the day called Christmas, this day falls in winter in the region of Brabant. Joseph and Mary have arrived unobtrusively, so the couple is not remarked by the village people who have all something more important to do: to have the registration done and over with so that they can go to their daily tasks. Nothing extraordinary happens besides that in the village. Life goes on, everybody works and the children play. Thus starts the Nativity. The new message

will be part of us, says Bruegel; it is an ordinary thing that is a simple part of our lives and souls. It is not foreign for us, but intricately bound to our human nature. Is there a better way to start the narrative of Christ's life? No intellectual discourse needs to be done, priests are not needed; this is a message for all. This was how Bruegel saw the Nativity of the redeemer of sins.

At the same time, admire the painterly skill of Bruegel. The scene is set in winter, which is normal for Christmas, but quite rare for paintings of those centuries. Bruegel had few examples of landscapes in winter. Most northern Gothic pictures made by the great landscape painters are in high summer. Pictures were to please. It was not very pleasing to show the desolate winter season. Bruegel dared to change the image to underscore his own message. Admire also the movement in the picture: every individual figure is in action and all action is different. We are very far here from the static, sublime elevation of Van Eyck's pictures. Bruegel is the painter of movement taken as a snapshot in time. This also was new. Bruegel has made a picture that is, like so many other of his paintings, apparently commonplace and 'just everyday peasants' activities'. Those pictures however bring us to the crux of ideas by the novelty of their expression and the novelty of their technique.

### *Sandro Botticelli*

While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her child. She gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space<sup>G38</sup>.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angle of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: 'Glory to God in the higher heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours'<sup>G38</sup>.

For Sandro Botticelli, the intellectual Florentine who stood in the centre of a resplendent Renaissance merchant town, a very different vision of Nativity came to mind. Less a Nativity of the hearth and of simplicity as one of reflection and of heavenly glory. What was the Nativity about? Peace on earth was the main message, the message that still pervades all church ceremonies of Christmas today. What did peace mean? The angels embrace the humans. In the lower part of Botticelli's picture three angels embrace three mortals. The angels of pure love are around the people and the animals; together they surround the manger. There is no discord. Three angels in robes of different colours are sitting on the roof of the shed, protecting the child by unison of hands. The angels rejoice also in heaven. They are dancing around, holding each other's hands. They are singing peace on earth for all men of good will. Laurel crowns of peace are all around. This is the picture of the intellectual hope of the nativity of Christ.

Botticelli has painted the scene after the announcement of the birth of God to the shepherds. The throngs of angels of heaven are making music and they are singing the Gloria. The words of the Gloria have been taken over in the Holy Mass and they still are the most exuberant of all prayers of the Catholic liturgy. A Saviour is born, all rejoice. The painter entered into this scene. Sandro Botticelli painted a Nativity of the mind and a Nativity of the new cultural splendour of the Renaissance.

The painting is not all a message of joy however. Botticelli tried to understand the mystic in the event and he represented that mystic meaning for man. Hope for peace was his idea of Nativity. The peace he desired in times of war and troubles, he showed in his painting. He wrote that down too, in Greek phrases at the top of the painting. Botticelli wanted to underscore once more the message of peace of Jesus while wars were going on around Florence. His picture was his pamphlet.

The message of the Peasant-Bruegel goes deeper within us now, than the intellectual message of Botticelli. But Botticelli as well as Bruegel was a child of his time and he painted for another audience than Bruegel. Was he less strong a personality? He was only different. Botticelli was still linked by intellect and by tradition to very spiritual representations of religious themes. Bruegel, half a century later, had thrown off his tradition. He painted as he felt, maybe sitting in a small house of a Brussels suburb, among the peasants he loved. These were two very different visions of Christianity, one intellectual and universal and the other intimate. These are two ways of looking at the New Testament, two roads to take when looking at pictures of the Bible. Which attitude will you prefer?

The two different views of Bible subjects and of course also of other themes run through art of any century. Should paintings be the representation of universal ideas and concepts or can it show images of local life? The two attitudes towards art have always existed but the latter view more than the former has been considered to be of lesser value by many. Still, genius painters like Bruegel emphasised the small life. So did the Bible and many great works of art. In the Bible one finds mostly stories about common people, not about kings and princes. Jesus meets a woman at a well and talks with her; he helps beggars and lepers; he goes fishing. These simple stories take on epic dimensions when the grand concepts of morality, love, miracle working and lessons of a deity are imagined behind the stories. We will see this dichotomy throughout the scenes from the New Testament. Pieter Bruegel well understood this duality of the themes of the Bible. For in the unobtrusive arrival of Joseph and Mary lies a sentiment of loneliness, of desolate coldness but also of epic grandeur. Mary and Joseph arrive in the hearth of winter to bring a new hope. Soon it will be spring.

*Robert Campin*

### **Nativity**

Robert Campin (1378/79-1444). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Dijon. 1425.

Robert Campin's Nativity is an elegant and graceful picture. We receive an impression of solemn splendour and also of course of a distant cold, probably due to

the clear lines, the rigid poises of the figures and to the use of white hues in various places. It is a picture of purity, of supernatural devotion, of the mystic of the moment of nativity and an essay to represent a story on a higher plane than the human. Robert Campin wanted to make a picture that fitted with the spirit of refined admiration for all things of elegance that characterised the late Middle Ages at the Burgundian courts. He made a picture also that the owner could explain to chance viewer, since several scenes of the New Testament as well as of the apocryphal writings are brought together in one frame, plus a few surprises that proved to painter, commissioner and viewer that beyond the obvious lay a more sophisticated state of the mind.

We see the Virgin Mary dressed entirely in white so that her purity and innocence is clearly emphasised. Her robe still suggests the pregnancy and her cloak her marriage. The cloak falls widely on the ground in intricate patterns of folds, in which Campin could demonstrate his skill for drawing lines and also in representation of volumes and shades. The gold lining that forms the border of the cloak looks as if drawn in golden thread. Here Campin proved his patience and meticulous, realistic depiction. The golden border of course also tells that Mary was a queen, even though she wears no crown. She looks frail, but this is the winter time of Christmas and yet she is the least warmly covered of all the figures of the painting, as if she were above time and nature – which obviously she was. Mary's hair falls profusely to her shoulders and she has the face of innocent youth, of good health, but not of the calculated grace of a courtier, of a noble lady. Her face is somewhat full, of a tender mother, and her hands are held in a gesture that seems more to express wonder and astonishment than to come together in a sign of prayer.

Mary looks at her child, which must have just come to the world. To earth he lies, very small and helpless, still curved in awkward twist of limbs, with uplifted breast gasping for the first breath of life. Already a silver-golden light shines from his body. He is the light of the world indeed and pervades the painting with a diffuse light that comes from all directions.

Next to Mary sits Joseph. The apocryphal texts tell of him that he was an elderly man when he married Mary, but seldom do we find Joseph in such a conspicuous place and so obviously old. He is almost bald; his hair is scarce and grey; his head slumps on his shoulders. Joseph needs heavy robes and cloaks to protect him from the cold. He could not make more of a contrast with Mary, as if Campin had wanted to show the spiritual life of Mary next to the meagre earthly life of Joseph. Robert Campin pointed out the image of Joseph. He dressed him in dark colours, in red and brown and dark blue to stress the contrast with the delicacy of Mary. The brown cloak is course and Joseph indeed wears several layers of cloaks. He holds a candle, for this is the night of Christmas, but the light of Jesus renders the candlelight dim and useless. Joseph's gesture is sympathetic, but superfluous. It is the gesture of a human, somewhat a silly gesture in the grandeur of the scene, the birth of God.

Robert Campin painted to the right two personages mentioned in the apocryphal texts, the two midwives that assisted Mary, Zebel and Salome, called in by Joseph as was the custom in his land. The 'Golden Legend' tells that the one probably whose face we do not see, Zebel, recognised Mary's virginity despite the birth. The other, Salome, the prouder one, refused to believe this. So her hand withered. An angel told her to touch the child and she was healed, recovered her hand completely. Both these

women are splendidly dressed, as if she were women of a court. Salome wears many pearls, the ancient symbol of the earth and the sea, here used to display wealth. The blue cloak on her shoulders is simply marvellous. Here Campin may have used lapis lazuli, the precious stone that was the only pigment known in Campin's time to give such splendid blue hue and especially a lasting blue. Zebel wears a less striking, a grey and lighter blue robe but Campin made also her robe to be admired because here he painted again the marvellous golden lace borders like we found in Mary. Zebel had a link to Mary since she recognised Mary's virginity. The golden borders on Mar's cloak are fine and distinguished, but thin, indicating her humility. On Zebel, Campin used golden lines lavishly.

On the right side, with Zebel and Salome, Robert Campin could situate the scene in the environment of noble ladies so that viewers of the court of wealthy Burgundy, for which undoubtedly the painting was made, could also feel familiar with the scene. The left side however, is the poor, humble side, the side of Mary. Here Campin placed the shepherd's barn of the Nativity. The shed is old and neglected. Through the openings we see the oxen and the ass, the two animals that the Gospels do not mention, but which were introduced in the apocryphal writings to keep Jesus warm. The barn is half-destroyed, like in other paintings where the setting was in Roman ruins, symbolising the destruction of the old order of things by the coming of Jesus. Between the left and right side, in the centre, we find the three poor shepherds that have come to honour the child. Campin drew the three shepherds above Mary. He could have positioned Mary more to the left. The painter placed the humble shepherds above the Madonna surely to mark her side. Mary will side up with the poor and humble of this world and provide them with solace.

Above the scene of Nativity hovers an angel dressed in white, announcing the birth of the Redeemer. This angel also represents the star of Bethlehem that shone over the birth. The wings of the angel are also white, Mary's white, whereas the wings of the three angels to the left are painted in green, red and blue hues. Green and blue do not match well, but with a patch of red in between them, harmony of colours was saved. We now know – but Campin may not have remarked this – that these three colours together as light streams can form in the additive process of colours shades of white-grey, the colour of the central angel. Green, red and blue mixed together on the painter's palette in paints give a very dark hue, very close to black, in the subtractive process of colour mixing. And this, Campin must have known. Thus the three coloured angels could represent also the Trinity, which together were three aspects of God and were in contrast to Jesus, the light of the world.

The allusion to the Trinity is the hidden but central theme of the picture, as Campin placed Jesus, the Son, right under the father figure of Joseph. Joseph represents God the Father and the white angel above Joseph, might represent the Spirit. The number three is not just in the three angels and in this central theme of the Trinity. It is also in the three shepherds and in the three women, and even in the three aspects of the landscape: land, sea and sky.

Behind the scene of Nativity, in the upper right corner, Robert Campin painted a fine landscape. The landscape is a fictitious one, and Campin represented the various landscapes of the world. He painted on the right a view of meadows, a view of the low lands with small houses, as he knew from Flanders and Picardy. He painted a city

towards the centre, a walled medieval town and port. He painted a sea with ships and open sails. Towards the left he also showed a mountain view. A high castle thrones there. All these features of landscape and nature are rendered in an admirable way, in the smallest detail, like a miniaturist would have done. The landscape is in winter, even though a magnificent sun sends its first golden rays. Jesus was born at Christmas, so although there is no snow; the trees are leafless and the meadows barren.

The viewer can distinguish several lines of structure in the painting. The vertical Gothic lines are the most obvious. The direction of the main figures, of the barn walls and door show the vertical direction that always inspires rigidity and spirituality in their aspiration for the skies. There are also oblique lines in the structure. The sides of the roof of the barn indicate the oblique directions, and these directions indicate also natural movements in the picture, as the spectator follows the colours. The white colour of Salome's headdress for instance leads upwards to the white colour of the angel, in the direction proposed by the roof. These white colour areas form a kind a triangle or pyramid structure with the white angel at the top and with Mary and Zebel-Salome at the sides. Within this pyramid we find most conspicuously Joseph, and then very much below also Jesus. Campin thus draws the attention of the viewer to Joseph. This cannot have been an accident, a chance facet of Campin's structure. The artist really wanted to honour the man whose child was Jesus. Campin might have expressed that Joseph was really Jesus's father and we know already that Campin gave with Joseph an allusion to God the Father. So Campin showed also in the structure of the painting the trinity theme of the picture, which needed the father image above Jesus. Joseph's candle then again refers to the theme of the light of the world.

In the structure we can furthermore distinguish several symmetries. There are symmetries of vertical lines around the axis Jesus-Joseph-angel. There are symmetries of colours in the painting. The blue colour of Salome's cloak continues in Joseph's cape, in the cape of the shepherd and into the blue angel of the left. The colour red indicates the same oblique direction: from Salome's robe deep below, over Joseph's robe, to a shepherd's cape and then towards the red angel. This is also one of the directions of the roof's sides, the right border of the roof. This direction leads to the sun, again to the light of the world, which thus might be the second theme of the painting. And with the Nativity we have three themes. Three themes are also in the narrative of the scenes: the work of the midwives before birth, the Nativity itself, and the coming of the shepherds. Finally, when we look at the areas in white colour we cannot but remark that they are essentially three (Salome and Zebel's white of headdresses form one area) and these seem to surround in a circle the figure and head of Joseph.

In the very centre of the panel we find the hat of a shepherd. This shepherd has also a red cape, so a hat is superfluous and the other shepherds do not wear hats. Yet the hat is in the very centre of the picture and it covers the hearth of the shepherd. Did this happen by chance or did Campin also wanted to say that his heart was with the poor shepherd? The shepherd is dressed with his cape in the same colour as Joseph –red. So again we find links with Joseph. Robert Campin may have told with this detail that Jesus's divine message would be addressed to the humble of the world first and that god the Father felt most for the poor. We see no kings or sages coming to honour

Jesus in this painting. We admire Campin's painting and value it highly not just because of its antiquity. Campin's Nativity is a masterpiece by its intrinsic value, as a marvellous painting by which one can easily be impressed, in which much is to be discovered, and for which we would like to know more about the painter's life and art.

Robert Campin was an aging man of around forty-seven years old when he made the Nativity. We know very little of his life. He may have been born in Valenciennes, a town now in the north of France, and he had a workshop in rich Tournai, somewhat northerly of Valenciennes and close to Bruges of Flanders. He had famous students in Tournai, who became great masters in their own right: Rogier de le Pasture later called Rogier van der Weyden, and Jacques Daret. Campin certainly had the skills for a painting worthy of the Dukes of Burgundy who also ruled over Flanders and who could not but covet the city and lands of Tournai.

We may wonder where a masterpiece of sophistication and elegance like the Nativity came from, so suddenly in the history of art. Paintings like the Nativity emerged suddenly, as if without any tradition, in the last years of the fourteenth century and the first years of the fifteenth. The tradition of paintings churches with frescoes of wall paintings had ended since the twelfth century with the success of the austere Order of Citeaux. The Cistercian monks preferred mystic atmosphere in clean, whitewashed churches. The walls of white French stone of the Cistercian abbeys were devoid of decoration and thus offered spirituality without distraction. In the scriptoriums of the Cistercian abbeys however, monks and artists could lavishly decorate manuscripts since these were dedicated to the private devotion of the abbots and of the wealthy courtiers or textile traders of France and Burgundy. From this miniaturist tradition emerged masters like Robert Campin. These new artists simply applied to larger panels the images of the manuscripts, in their style, when the strictness of Citeaux gradually eased under the influence of the wealth of the courts of the Dukes.

The masters of the late Middle Ages in Flanders had not yet discovered, remarked the wonderful effects of light, nor accorded their skills to this feature. There was no real revolution, no lost art re-discovered, but simply an ancient tradition that came from the ancient naïve Carolingian frescoes that were still much inspired by Byzantine models and that had sophisticated considerably in the miniaturists' hands. Thus naïve expression of narrative had evolved into delicate refinement of detail, over two centuries of small paintings on folios of paper or parchment.

Robert Campin was one of the very first painters and masters to work on larger panels in Western Europe. He was really a great master, not just in skills, but also in competence and intelligence. He knew the power of structure, of directions in a painting, and of symbolism of colours. He is a phenomenon of intelligence. He is a long evolution away from the naïve Romanesque painters of the eleventh century. With Robert Campin we feel reflections on art on the move. This painter thought deep, devotedly on his art and brought a sophistication of representation that could hardly be bettered later. There might only be four things to learn in the art of painting beyond Campin: the power of contrasts of light and shadows, the power of movement, the art of expression by colours only, and the art of observation of nature. But Campin came close. He did paint shadows in the folds of the figures, but that was a technique to create volumes that was quite known to Roman, Byzantine and hence the Romanesque painters. Campin did not really use the natural effects of light falling

from a certain side in his painting. Observation of nature was also not so important for him in his landscapes. Campin's landscapes remain the result purely of his imagination and they are subdued to the theme. Campin did not paint landscapes like after him Joachim Patenier or Henri Blès, or Pieter Bruegel. Campin still positioned his figures in positions of rest and we see so obviously the long vertical lines of Gothic still in his picture. Yet, he used slanting directions in his structure and must have started to discover their function in a painting. Finally, he was of course all dedicated still to the fine lines of the miniatures of the old manuscripts. He, like all other painters of this time, limited unbridled expression by colour only. But then, he painted for spirituality and refined courts, and not for wild passions or for the expression of his own feelings.

It is unknown for whom the Nativity of Robert Campin was made, but the panel must have been since the fifteenth century in Burgundy. It shows beyond doubt that Campin was one of the master trendsetters at the turn of the fourteenth to the fifteenth century in Western Europe.

*Other paintings:*

**Nativity**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

**Adoration of Christ – Krivoklat Altarpiece**

Anonymous. Krivoklat Castle. Krivoklat (Czechia). Before 1490.

**The Nativity**

Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). Le Musée des Beaux-Arts. Lyon. Around 1490.

**The Nativity**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). The National Gallery. London. 1643-1644.

**The Light of the World (Nativity)**

François Boucher (1703-1770). Le Musée des Beaux-Arts .Lyon. 1750.

**Nativity**

Vitale da Bologna (1300-1361). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna. Ca. 1335-1340.

**Nativity**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Scuole di San Rocco .Venice. 1576-1581.

**Nativity**

Lluís Borassà (1380-1425). Museu Nacional d'Arte de Catalunya. Barcelona. Ca. 1403-1411.

**Nativity**

Robert Campin (1375/1380-1444). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Dijon. Ca. 1425-1430.

**The Birth of Christ (Te Tamari no Artua)**

Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1896.

**The Birth of Christ**

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609-1664). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genua. Ca. 1645-1650.

**Nativity**

Bartolomeo Guidobono (1654-1709). Collezioni Piero Pagano. Genoa. 1690-1693.

**Nativity**

Domenico Ghirlandaio and workshop (1449-1494). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Nativity with Saints Roch and Sebastian**

Lorenzo lotto (1480-1556). San Giorgio Parish Church. Credaro. 1525.

## *The Adoration of the Shepherds*

### **The Adoration of the Shepherds – The Portinari Altar**

Hugo van der Goes (1440-1482). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1475.

It happened that when the angels had gone from the shepherds into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: ‘Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event, which the Lord has made known to us. So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them<sup>G38</sup>.

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen just as they had been told<sup>G38</sup>.

The ‘Adoration of the Shepherds’ of Hugo van der Goes was made in 1475 for Tommaso Portinari who was the representative in Bruges of the Florentine Medici bank. The painting was transported by boat to Florence in 1483 to decorate the altar of the Portinari family in the church of San Egidio of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. The arrival of the picture was a major event in the cultural capital of Tuscany. Many Florentine painters admired it and were astonished at the style differences as compared with their own paintings. Intellect and reason dominated the Florentine pictorial art in the late Quattrocento whereas here was a work that the Florentine artists could only call local art. Yet it showed detailed and meticulous observation. It was a seemingly simple painting but at second sight as complex in subject matter and in structure of composition as a Florentine masterpiece. This painting that had come from so far impressed the Florentine masters like Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Our view is attracted immediately attracted to the very small baby lying on the ground almost - but not exactly - in the middle of the picture. Florentines would have put the baby right in the middle, but such obvious structure was of no interest to a Hugo van der Goes. The baby is small, out of proportions, to increase our sense of frailness and vulnerability. This is even more accentuated by the total nudity of the child and its position on the hard, cold ground. Immediately we feel that here was a painter at work who subordinated representation to idea. If a baby is frail and helpless, then it must be painted smaller than the other figures. This was a very medieval view of the North and the Florentines had left such representations behind them.

Our view passes to the Virgin Mary standing in prayer, clad in a heavy dark blue cloak. Mary cherishes the baby and all that is around. She ponders over the marvels told by the shepherds. Around the Child and Mary gravitate the other scenes.

A group of magnificently dressed angels, down on the right, keeps our attention due to the magnificent gold-brocaded cloaks, their cheerful hats with red feathers and the

colours of their wings. Contrasting with these angels is another group of two angels. These angels are completely in white. The difference in dress of these two groups may symbolise the difference in worldly hierarchy: cardinals and bishops versus priests. On the other side of the frame are two angels in blue, who may represent the religious orders. Thus, these three groups can refer to the combined clergy of the Catholic Church. In the original story of Luke, the angels have departed when the shepherds arrive. Van der Goes kept them in his picture for their symbolic value.

Van der Goes may have painted the angels smaller to indicate that they are dream-figures, fresh in the minds of the shepherds and thus still present. Of course, as was frequent in northern painting, scenes of different periods in times are often mixed in the same frame; there was no unity of time in the pictures.

Our view follows the border of the frame from the white angels to Joseph. He is represented as an older, bearded man as was the traditional way. Over Joseph we follow flying angels, to an eerie ghost-angel above Mary. We admire the skill with which the artist has painted the transparency of the white robes around this figure.

Then we come to a group of shepherds.

The shepherds are rough peasants. They look naïve. They are simple folk with rustic faces. They kneel respectfully. More shepherds are coming: there is movement behind the three that are in front. The first announcement of Christ's birth was made to shepherds. The Christian religion was addressed to poor people. This was in the Jewish tradition. It proved a powerful message so that the religion would appeal to the destitute masses of the Roman Empire in the first place. Van der Goes has well understood this central point of Christian learning and instead of elevating the event to intellectual spirituality such as was the habit in Gothic northern art, he has painted the shepherds realistically as rough, poor people. Thereby he came closer to the original communication as was certainly in his time proclaimed by the Catholic clergy, but not felt as poignantly immediate as by van der Goes. This fact makes also of van der Goes an original thinker. He pondered about the gospels and went back to the original idea of the adoration of the shepherds. We wrote earlier of Pieter Bruegel's earthly images. We find in van der Goes the first representations of this streak in Flemish-Brabant character. Many of these painters knew the intellectual developments of their time but more than the Florentines they also remained linked to their land and to the local, common people. The idea was that peasants should be rustic and thus represented in contrast with the divine spirituality of the holy Family. Van der Goes took the idea literally and painted the shepherds indeed as rough people, to make the idea crystal clear.

Van der Goes used subtle symbolism in his colours. Joseph wears a red cloak since he was the man who gave all his love and understanding to Mary even though she gave birth to a child that was not his. Van der Goes applied deep tones of colours on Joseph to bring him in the background as compared to other figures of the panel. Mary is dressed in dark blue. Blue is a receding colour that creates a distance between the viewer and its area and thus the appropriate colour for the Holy Virgin in a double meaning. Blue is also the colour of heaven, but Van der Goes reserved the light blue of the divine for the two angels on the right of Mary. By using these two blue colours the artist indicated that Mary was an outstanding figure, belonging to the distant

heavenly and spiritual world. But by not giving her the brighter and cooler blue of the angels, the painter kept Mary to some extent closer to earth. Finally, the shepherds on the extreme right were painted in truly earthly colours, first dark green and then brown. Note how the three basic colours red, green and blue were used to create harmony in the progression of colours. Downwards in the panel then, Van der Goes used white in the angels on the left to create contrast of colours and thus again harmony and brilliance in the colours. White is also the colour of purity and Mary's purity is somewhat further indeed emphasised in the iris flowers of the vase. The use of white colour in this panel and in that place applies nicely a principle that was only discovered in the nineteenth century. A principle of colouring says that colours like deep red and blue are heightened in hue when confronted with a white surface. The painter used these to make his colour hues brighter.

Van der Goes had to depict somewhere the royal descent of Jesus and the magnificence of God of which Jesus was the realisation on earth. It may have been for that reason that in the lower right corner, the artist added a splendid scene of richly clad angels. Here is profusion of gold, of rich brocades, of a splendid assortment of colours, of red, green and blue and yellow (or gold) in almost the full chromatic scale that Johan Wolfgang von Goethe really called the 'splendid' arrangement. Goethe saw in the juxtaposition of red, green and blue the realisation of the divine Elohim and the three basic colours of course also call to mind the Holy Trinity, whose mystery pervaded the Middle Ages. When one reads and realises this full analysis of colours, one can only admire the great art, knowledge, intuition for colours and the intelligence of Van der Goes.

The structure of the painting is based on the two diagonals of the panel. To the right of the frame we find two groups of three figures. To the left the figures are more isolated. This means broken balance, with more gravity of figures to the right. The child lies in heavenly light. The figures to the left, Mary and Joseph and the animals behind them, are more in the dark than the figures of the rest of the painting. These asymmetries in colour weights and in figures grouping are disconcerting for the viewer, create some feeling of tension, and must have puzzled the Tuscans, who applied mostly only evenly distributed light and for whom harmonious composition of design was the rule. But the asymmetries keep the attention of the viewer on the scene.

The figures are drawn irrespective of perspective, at least that is the first and general impression. The angels are smaller than the other figures. Yet the angels in the foreground are somewhat larger than those of the background. And Joseph is taller than Mary, who is painted taller than the shepherds are. Thus perspective does exist; our unease comes from the fact that there are two different perspectives at work in the painting.

The total impression of the asymmetries and of the effect of the 'wrong' perspective is thus an impression of unease. Something abnormal is happening here. The structure and perspective do exist, yet also the scenes give an impression of disorder. We are kept on one leg, surprised and caught in wonder. Can this be a specific sought-after effect to symbolise the extraordinary event that is depicted: the mystery of the Nativity of the Son of God?

Hugo van der Goes leans on medieval symbols. Beneath the Child Hugo van der Goes painted a bushel of wheat, representing the bread of the host and thus the Eucharist and the waiting death of Jesus. There are lilies in a vase, 'sword lilies' or irises, symbols indeed of swords representing the sorrows of the Virgin that would pierce her heart. The other small blue flowers are herbs that were used in medieval times to ward off evil spirits. Thus, they are symbols of Christ who will gain the victory over evil. The ox and donkey were not symbols that were particularly introduced by van der Goes. But the ox represented power and patience. It was also a sacrificial animal. In the book of the prophet Isaiah it is said that 'The ox knows its owner and the ass its master's stall. But Israel, my own people, has no knowledge, no discernment'. Thus, ox and donkey were seen as the symbols of the prophecy of the Jews' refusal to recognise Jesus as the Messiah<sup>G41</sup>. The ox and ass near Jesus are not images mentioned in the New Testament Gospels. They come mainly from the 'Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew' written in the eighth or ninth century. So here we have a good example of images taken from an apocryphal text that became popular and were well known by painters.

Art historians still count the Flemish fifteenth century as being a Gothic period, but the Renaissance had then definitely also reached Flanders. The scene of the Nativity was set by van der Goes not in a cave, as the Bible states, but in a palace. Other Nativity scenes of van der Goes have palace ruins as the natural decorum and we think of the ancient palace of King David as the new birthplace of Jesus. Indeed, in the Portinari altarpiece a Greek column is shown as an ornamental element in the left foreground and it is only in the background that we can discern elements of Gothic architecture. The love of classic antiquity had reached the devote van der Goes.

The Portinari painting is an altarpiece. The first of the two other panels represents Tommaso Portinari, the donor himself, with his sons Antonio and Pigello. Two patron saints are standing behind the group: Saint Thomas and Saint Anthony. The second panel holds Maria Portinari Bonciani, Tommaso's wife, with her daughter Margherita. The two saints behind these are female patron saints again, now Saint Margaret and Mary Magdalene. The saints hold their symbols. Thomas has the lance of his martyrdom; Anthony was an eremite so he wears his rosary and a beggar's bell. Margaret has a cross and a bible, Mary Magdalene her pot of balms with which she anointed Jesus.

Hugo van der Goes has drawn the faces of all figures in meticulous detail. Saint Thomas looks naïve; Anthony is pensive and mild. Saint Margaret is alert and interested; Mary Magdalene is sad and melancholic. Mary herself is devote and tender-loving. Joseph has a heavy beard; he shows respect and restraint since he is somewhat behind and in the shadows. One shepherd, the one in the front, with a thin beard, looks more intelligent and mature than the others do. He is the leader shepherd. One is a beautiful youth; the other seems totally simple of mind. Remark the differences in all the faces. Even the faces of the angels are all different and yet look similar. The movements of all pairs of hands also are different. The three peasants refer to the three magi or kings who came to adore Jesus later.

Hugo van der Goes has applied a style of detailed observance of all figures, scenes, clothes, faces, and hands. The structure is seemingly disordered, but various symmetries are intertwined with deliberate broken symmetries such as the position of

the Child. Van der Goes' aim was to evoke an intuitive immediate feeling of mystery so that we would be interested in the picture and incited to look further. Van der Goes captivates us with interest.

This captivation became the wonder of the Florentine painters who flocked to admire this work of a far Flemish master. The painting radiated mystery and piety whereby apparent strong realism created heavenly illusion. The Florentine artists came to understand that a viewer's interest could also be captured by effects of disharmony, of asymmetry in refined settings, by unusual foreshortening. They knew this of course, but were astonished to see it applied to a result of beauty. These were all style elements that were heresy in Florentine fine design. Yet, the Florentine artists were puzzled that viewers and themselves remained so long standing captivated before van der Goes' picture. Van der Goes' images attracted people longer than their own so harmonious pictures. These effects were some of the characteristics of the greatest artists among the Flemish Primitives, starting with Van Eyck. The Flemish understood very well that a picture only existed as long as it was being looked at and this of course was what the Florentine masters also were after. Thus the Flemish aroused interest through curiosity and visual effects, the Florentines through harmony in design. Both effects appealed to viewers, but the means of van der Goes belonged for the Florentines of a period that was over. They admired the art from the North, but their views would conquer Europe.

*Other paintings:*

**The Adoration of the Shepherds and the Flight into Egypt**

Pieter Aertsen (1507/1508-1572). National Gallery in Prague. Prague. 1572.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Hugo van der Goes (1440-1482). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Fray Juan Bautista Maino (1581-1649). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1612.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1775.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1770.

**The Birth of Christ**

Martin Schongauer (ca. 1450-1491). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1480.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Jacopo da Ponte called Jacopo Bassano (1515-1592). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. 1545.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). Metropolitan museum of Art. New York.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Antonio Travi (1608-1665). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genua.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1689.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli called Il Morazzone (1573-1626). Church of the Collegiata di Santa Maria Vergine. Arona. Ca. 1619.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1565-1632). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1590-1600.

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**

Defendente Ferrari (ca; 1480-1535). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Adoration of the Magi*

### **The Adoration of the Kings**

Hugo van der Goes (1440-141482). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1473.

Luke does not tell of other figures but the shepherds coming to adore the newborn child. Matthew on the other hand, only tells about a visit by magi. Neither Mark nor John narrates of the early life of Jesus. Matthew's story goes as follows.

Some wise men came to Jerusalem from the East asking, 'Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.'<sup>G38</sup>

When king Herod heard this he was perturbed. He asked to see the wise men and spoke to them. Herod asked them to find out all about the child.

Having listened to what the king had to say, the wise men set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered them gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were given a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way<sup>G38</sup>.

In this story of Matthew no mention is made of kings, only of magi or wise men. The magi were astrologers, probably from the Persian court. They had followed a star. They received the name of kings by Christian writers of the third century. The 'Golden Legend' says that their names in Greek were Apellius, Amerius and Damascus; in Hebrew Galgalat, Malgalat and Sarachin; in Latin Caspar, Balthazar and Melchior<sup>G49</sup>.

The magi are often shown on their journey to Bethlehem. The most famous of these images are the frescoes made by Benozzo Gozzoli around 1459 for the chapel of the Medici Palace in Florence. Very many paintings were made of the 'Adoration of the Magi' and an iconography developed on the subject. The oldest magus is Caspar. He is usually kneeling before the Virgin and child. Balthazar stands behind Caspar. One finds somewhat further the youngest, the Negro Melchior. The retinues of the Magi are mostly eastern, like the turban Balthazar usually wears. The gifts of the magi are gold, which is a gift for a king as Jesus was supposed to be. There is also the frankincense as a gift, a symbol of the divinity of Jesus. The last gift is myrrh, the balm of the dead, and a sign of the passion and death of Jesus. Gold, frankincense and myrrh were specifically mentioned by Matthew. The 'Golden Legend' however, tells in its succulent language that the Magi offered gold to the Virgin to relieve her of poverty, frankincense to dispel the bad odour of the stable, and myrrh to strengthen the child's limbs and drive out harmful worms. Or the gold was offered as a tribute, the incense for sacrifice and the myrrh represented the burial of the dead so that the three gifts corresponded also to Jesus's royal power, divine majesty and human mortality<sup>G49</sup>.

The three Magi can represent the three continents known in medieval world. Caspar represented the old continent Europe; the black Melchior represented Africa and Balthazar was Asia. The homage to Jesus can also be seen however as a symbol of the submission of the secular powers to Christ. The adoration of the shepherds means that God's message was brought first and benevolently to the poor, the meek of the earth. The shepherds were the first to be called in by the angels. The magi as kings however came of their own accord to pay homage and they brought gifts of respect. Thus in the scenes of Nativity, the choice of both shepherds and kings has symbolic meaning.

After having shown Hugo van der Goes' painting 'The Adoration of the Shepherds' it is natural to turn also to a picture by the same painter of the theme of 'The Adoration of the Magi'. This last work dates from around 1473. Van der Goes was then not yet deacon of the painters' guild of Gent in Flanders. He would seven years later move to the abbey of Rouge-Cloître in Brussels. His masterwork of the 'Adoration of the Shepherds' would be made ten years later and then transported to Florence. Van der Goes was around twenty-five to thirty years old when he painted the 'Adoration of the Magi', which can thus be qualified as an early work of the artist. We could expect van der Goes to paint in the full tradition of the van Eyck brothers, of Petrus Christus or even of Hans Memling though this last was a contemporary of van der Goes. Van der Goes had been a member of the guild of painters of Gent since just three years.

This 'Adoration of the Magi' is called the Monforte altarpiece because it hung since the beginning of the seventeenth century in the abbey of Monforte de Lemos in Spain. It remains unknown how the picture came there<sup>D1</sup>. The painting was originally the central picture of a three-panelled altarpiece. The two other panels are probably lost and the middle panel itself was shortened from a cross form to its present rectangular form. Like the 'Adoration of the Shepherds' it landed outside Flanders. Van der Goes was a humble artist but his paintings gained international appraisal.

Although van der Goes was still young, he had reached the fullness of his art. The 'Adoration of the Magi' is maybe not a work in which is shown the forceful individuality of vision of the Portinari altarpiece, van der Goes' 'Adoration of the Shepherds'. But it is already the work of a master artist.

The scene is set in a ruined Romanesque building. In some representation of Nativities, the ruins symbolise the ending of the Old Testament. Just as the old Torah gave way to the new message, Romanesque art was led through International Gothic into the Renaissance's new style. It had become a fashion in Italy to depict scenes of the New Testament in ancient Roman palaces and van der Goes, although a northern painter, knew already of that fashion. Mary is seated and holds the child. She looks at the hands of Jesus and holds the hands of the child as if to a blessing. But the baby is more interested in the magnificent golden gifts that Caspar has just put on a stone beneath. It is a gold dish filled with gold coins. The dish is in the form of a quatrefoil, a form much used in Gothic France and Flanders. Mary is very attentive and earnest. So is the elderly Joseph. Van der Goes has drawn a miracle of psychological expression in the two faces of Mary and Joseph. Joseph is mild, tender, dreamy, somewhat innocent and naïve. He is almost dressed like a monk, with long robes and up to the monk's cap on his back. Mary is noble, gentle, but distant. She holds her head as a queen. These expressions of distance were quite standard in Gothic art.

All the attention, all eyes of the figures in the picture go to the child in the centre. So does our view. The child returns the gaze of the viewer. He is the only one who seems to look out of the picture, even if the direction of the eyes is downward to the gold. Thus, the emphasis is also laid on the central meaning of the panel: the homage to Christ.

Caspar kneels in front of Mary; his hands are folded in prayer, but a gesture that is also a common sign of respect in the East. Caspar remains noble, elegant, and courteous. The magi are ambassadors at a foreign court. The splendid red cloak is in the centre of the altarpiece and indeed the adoration of the magi is the central theme. Joseph, Mary and Caspar form the main triangle in the painting. The rest of the picture needed to be less emphasised in order to preserve the harmony and solidity of the triangle formed by Joseph, Mary and Caspar. So, van der Goes has painted the other figures, to the right, in darker tones. Balthazar comes after Caspar. Belshazar's page hands him a golden vase, maybe containing the frankincense. Balthazar is clad in rich furs and he wears a small golden crown on his headdress. Van der Goes may have thought of him as one of the Baltic merchants that were very present also in Bruges and Gent in his lifetime. Look at the elaborate detail of the curls of the hair of the page. Lastly comes the Negro king Melchior. He brings the balm, myrrh, in a golden pot. Melchior stands at the extreme right and he is the only one to wear a sword. This may be a reminder of the wars and conquests of the Mohammedans who had conquered vast territories around the Mediterranean. Melchior also is richly clad. To brighten up this part of the scene somewhat, van der Goes has brought to that side the red and gold ornamented cloak of Melchior. Finally, the suite of the kings is shown in the right upper corner. Only one figure looks at the viewer, like Jesus. It was thus that sometimes in Medieval and Renaissance times painters depicted themselves. It is a wild guess, but this could be a portrait of van der Goes himself.

The magi represent also the three ages: youth, maturity and the elder man. Traditionally in Flemish paintings, the Negro Melchior is the younger man. Here, van der Goes has also drawn the dark skinned Mohammedan as the younger man. In a way, this makes sense. It marks the conquests of a dynamic Near East and Northern Africa that had gone from victory to victory to win vast territories around the Mediterranean.

In smaller and separate scenes, van der Goes incorporated several additional symbols in his picture. In the upper middle are the shepherds and their flock, called in to Jesus. Shepherds and kings represented the first of the Jews and the first of the gentiles. On the right is depicted the travel of the kings. The journey has led over a bridge and through a Flemish village. The bridge was often associated with the idea of transition from Old to New Testament. On the lower right are iris flowers with their long sword-like leaves. They are the symbols of the seven sorrows of the Virgin that will pierce her hearth. The wild flowers in the lower left were used in medieval times to ward off evil spirits<sup>D1</sup>. These flowers are thus a symbol of the powers of Jesus.

The 'Adoration of the Magi' is a wonderful panel of a master painter. Full northern Gothic detail is shown and van der Goes had all the genius skill to continue the tradition of the splendid Flemish Primitives. He remained a keen observer of real people however. We feel that van der Goes wants to come closer to us than van Eyck or van der Weyden. He painted the faces as of people we know, and he makes us

interested in their lives. Van der Goes attracts our curiosity, even to a page by his elaborate curly head. And he painted a very spiritual scene, sublime, full of respect, as would have been the general feeling at an audience of ambassadors bringing their credentials to a new king. He has not yet gone as far as in the Portinari altar to depict the rough country people, the working monks he knew later from the abbey in which he would retire. This 'Adoration of the Magi' was his early work so that he had not yet made the step into innovation of representation for which he needed more maturity of art and mind.

*Other paintings:*

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

**Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi**

Joos van Cleve and Workshop (ca. 1485-1540/1541). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Jan Gossaert (1478-1532). National Gallery – London.

**The Holy three Kings on their Way to Bethlehem**

Leopold Kupelwieser (1796-1862). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. 1825.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Fray Juan Bautista Maino (1581-1649). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1612.

**The Nativity – Holy Night**

Antonio Allegri called Correggio (1489-1534). Staatliche Kunstsammlungen. Dresden. 1530.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Giorgione (1506-1510). The National Gallery. London.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence.

**The Adoration of the Sages**

Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869). Kunsthalle. Hamburg. 1813.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. 1624.

**The Journey of the Kings**

Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497). Palazzo Medici. Florence. 1420-1422.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Lucas Van Leyden (1494-1533). The Chicago Art Institute. Chicago.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Active 1551-1569). The National Gallery. London.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770-). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1753.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp (1612-1652). Dordrecht City Museum. Dordrecht.

**The Adoration of the Child**

Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678). Dordrechts Museum. Dordrecht. 1647.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Domenico Veneziano (1400-1561). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. 1440.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Salomon Koninck. Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1660.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Hans Suess von Kulmbach (1480-1522). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. 1511.

**The three Kings Altarpiece**

Hans Baldung Grien (1484/1485-1545). ). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1506/1507.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). The National Gallery. London. 1573.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Tiziano Vecellio (1488-1576). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. 1559-1560.

**The Adoration of the Magi.**

Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Museo Civico Correr. Venice.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Bartolomeo Biscaino (1632-1657). ). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1650-1657.

**The Adoration of the Kings**

Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari (1598-1669). Accademia Lingustica di Belle Arti. Genoa. Ca. 1640.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Vincent Malò (ca. 1606-1650). Accademia Lingustica di Belle Arti. Genoa. After 1634.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Jan Mostaert (1475-1556). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam. Ca. 1510.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Amico Aspertini (1475-1552). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Giovan Francesco Caroto (ca. 1480-1555). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Adoration of the Magi with Saint Helen**

Jacopo Negreti called Palma Vecchio (1480-1528). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1525/1526.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Gaspere Sacchi (active 1517-1536). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Jan van Dornicke (the Master of 1528, the Master of the Abbey of Dielegem) (active 1500-1525). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Late 1520's.

## *Adoration by the Virgin*

### **Mary and her Child; Adoration in the Forest**

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Gemäldegalerie - Berlin. Around 1459.

The 'Adoration in the Forest' is a truly beautiful picture. It shows nice, warm colours, no harsh tones. The background remains unobtrusive. One forgets easily to look what is behind, so that the view remains to the mother and child. The scene is idyllic: a sweet family setting. Everything is delicate and pure. There are not many figures, so the picture remains intimate. Colour areas are round and soft. The figures are caught in natural poses, full of loveliness. God the Father looks benevolently and compassionately from above. Universal harmony, beauty, peacefulness are in this painting. You could print this picture on Christmas Cards and sell it endlessly. Yet, the Adoration is not a simple bucolic picture: it is a complex painting, with profound meaning.

The scene is round as a tondo: the figures form a circle in their natural movements. The Lady Mary, in a magnificent blue hue catches the eye first. This blue contrasts completely. It seems a little too obvious: it makes Mary stand out of the picture and it is a bit too ample so that the symmetry of the figures is broken. But Mary has all the right to catch our eye; her adoration after all is the primary subject of the painting.

The veil of the Madonna is transparent. Filippo Lippi exercised all his art to make us feel the frailness, vulnerability and exquisiteness of the young lady. Her hands are delicately held together in prayer and show the orange sleeves in the same subdued tones as the robe. She is seen knelt down and reverent. The old monk is only shown in part, his only function seems to be to form the link between God the Father and the shepherd boy. His cloak is red, but bears the same sweet hue as Mary's robe. Finally, our eye view goes on to the child, indeed in the last place. He rests in soft grass, white flowers of innocence and purity around Him.

Blue pigment was obtained from lapis lazuli or azurite, both quite expensive. It was sparingly used in the fifteenth century. Here it is lavishly applied, diluted pastel-like to marvellous colour, and that magnificent blue really makes the picture. Gold is used for the aura, and gold lines go down from the pigeon. Gold can be found also in the stars around God the Father, in the auras of God the Father and of the Child. This also was expensive. The use of these ingredients seems only normal for such a holy subject, but still: Filippo Lippi had to have rich sponsors for this painting. The most wealthy Medicis of Florence ordered the painting, for their own house chapel<sup>D1</sup>.

The monk is supposed to be Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the abbey of Clairvaux in the Citeaux order<sup>D1</sup>. Bernard wrote against the self-indulgence of knowledge (he argued and won against Abélard in this respect), and he preached full abandonment to the higher love of God. Bernard wrote around 1120 four 'Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother' and commented the message of the Annunciation. Bernard recognised in Mary all the virtues he sought in monastic life: humility,

obedience, silence, withdrawal, intimate prayer, and the personal union with God in love. His presence in this picture is logical since he was one of the earliest defenders of the theory of the virginity of Mary. He emphasises the mysticism of the scene. So does the environment: the dark forest, the loneliness, and the isolation from the world. Bernard also brings the harmony of the father figure in a family to the painting. God the Father cannot bring that harmony; he is too formidable. But the godly figure of Bernard is well suited to bring that element.

The shepherd boy is John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence. The boy John holds a ribbon on which can be read 'Ecce Agnus Dei', Behold the Godly Lamb. John is the only figure looking at us; he conveys the message to the viewer. The water that he is always associated with, needed to baptise, runs in a nearby brooklet.

The pigeon represents the Holy Spirit so that the picture is also a representation of the Holy Trinity of Catholic faith: Father, Spirit and Son. God the Father rules the Universe: the strings of stars emanate from Him.

There is an axe under John the Baptist and next to the Child Jesus. This refers to a line in the Gospel of Luke: 'The axe is already put at the roots of the tree. The tree that bears no good fruits will be hewn and thrown in the fire'. The saying fits nicely with the forest scene, a cut tree and cut wood is on the right of the picture in symmetry with the message. There is a straight line between the axe, the Child Jesus and the cut tree. This Child will destroy the bad fruit, cut down the rotten trunks.

Although the general impression of the scene is round, there is a triangle in the structure of the painting. God the Father is at the top of the triangle, the base line is the Child Jesus and the line between the axe on the left and the cut wood on the right. Both the movement of the body of Mary and the direction of her head point to God the Father. The staff of John the Baptist also points to God the Father. The base of the triangle is horizontal to form a solid base that adds to the restfulness of the picture, yet enough slightly oblique to not be obvious and too straightforward. The Holy Trinity is formed in a direct vertical line from God the Father to the Child, accentuated by the rays traced from the Holy Spirit to the Child.

All the figures are shown in natural attitudes; they are caught in movement. God the Father opens his arms, but somewhat obliquely, thus not in a static position, and he looks down. The boy John seems to be stepping down and also holding his gown together so that he not stumbles. John looks somewhat puzzled at us, as if astonished to find a viewer. He has a broad, round face. This is a characteristic of Filippo Lippi's paintings: you find these broad faces of youths, both boys and girls, in all his paintings.

The naturalness, fluidity of motion, is what Lippi brought new to paintings. Of course there is a whole evolution in this respect from before Lippi and we can follow how the austere poses of figures of Giotto and Duccio in the fourteenth century begin to change through Simone Martini and Gentile da Fabriano. But none before Lippi dared to present these Holy Saints in such a normal, natural way. The same can be said of the environment. With Duccio, Cimabue and even still later on in Masaccio, Domenico Veneziano, Andrea del Castagno – who were his contemporaries - the figures are set in closed, restricted environments that always give the impression of

chapels, very often emphasised by the forms of the frames. Most often in these early paintings there is no background at all, just a single colour area. Paolo Uccello who lived in Filippo Lippi's times, also set his battle and hunting scenes in complete surroundings such as forests, but he too stayed bound to very strict rules (Uccello was obsessed by the laws of perspective) and stiff figures. And although again, Gentile da Fabriano, then Lorenzo Monaco and Domenico Veneziano started to bring in trees and flowers in the background, one of the first painters to seem to break loose from traditional rules and one of the first to set his paintings in natural surroundings, is Filippo Lippi. Lippi's pupil, the flamboyant Sandro Botticelli, would continue this.

We often forget the chain of master-pupil relations in Renaissance paintings, but many masters were inter-linked. Filippo Lippi was a young Carmelite monk in Santa Maria del Carmine and saw Masaccio paint frescoes there. He was himself the master of Botticelli. Filippino Lippi, the son of Filippo Lippi, was brought up by Sandro Botticelli after Filippo Lippi died. Filippino was then about twelve years old. Filippino Lippi remembered the images of his father. He made for instance pictures of the 'Apparition of the Virgin to Saint Bernard', now in the Badia Church of Florence, thus recalling the prominent place of Bernard de Clairvaux in his father's scenes.

Painters had to learn from other painters: how to mix oil and pigments, which pigments gave which colours, the first rudimentaries of applying colours harmoniously, the art of perspectives. Thus chains of master-pupil developed in Italy. Lorenzo Monaco taught Fra Angelico. Gentile da Fabriano was master to Jacopo Bellini, who taught his two sons Giovanni Bellini, and Gentile Bellini, and also Vittore Carpaccio. Nicolosia Bellini, sister to Giovanni and Gentile, was married to Andrea Mantegna. Andrea Mantegna's adoptive father and master was Francesco Squarcione, who also taught Giorgio Schiavone. Giovanni Bellini taught Giorgione. Both Tiziano Vecellio and Sebastiano del Piombo worked under Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione. Gentile da Fabriano was also the master of Domenico Veneziano who taught Piero della Francesca. Piero della Francesca in his turn taught Luca Signorelli and Pietro Perugino. Perugino also worked in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio. Pietro Perugino taught Raphael Sanzio. Leonardo da Vinci and Lorenzo di Credi were taught by Andrea del Verrocchio. Verrocchio and Antonio del Pollaiuolo frequented the workshop of Alessio Baldovinetto. Michelangelo's teacher was Domenico Ghirlandaio, who was pupil to the same Alessio Baldovinetto. Giorgio Vasari worked a while in the bottega of Michelangelo. Piero del Pollaiuolo was brother to Antonio Pollaiuolo and pupil of Andrea Castagno. Castagno was a friend of Domenico Veneziano. Piero di Cosimo worked with Cosimo Rosselli and so obtained his name. Piero di Cosimo taught Andrea del Sarto. Jacopo Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino were taught by this Andrea del Sarto. Jacopo Pontormo was teacher and practically father to Agnolo Bronzino. And so on, and so on. The connections between all these Florentine, Venetian, Parma and Padua painters were very, very strong. Thus, tradition was continued and renewed, constantly added upon.

Filippo Lippi lived from around 1406 to 1459. He was an orphan; his mother had died not long after his birth and his father died when he was two years old. He lived a time with his aunt but she found it difficult to bring him up and sent him at eight to the Carmelite monks of Florence. So Filippo saw the fresh works of art of Masolino and Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel of the Carmine. But he was not destined to remain a monk, contrary to Fra Angelico. He did not want to live a life of chastity. At the age

of seventeen he threw off his friar's habit. Filippo was praised for his paintings and he received enough commissions to be able to live and to live well. He had an adventurous life. Giorgio Vasari recalls in his 'Lives of the Artists' written around 1550, that once when Filippo was in a boat off Ancona he was seized by a Moorish galley and taken to Barbary in captivity. Luckily he made a portrait of the head of this slave master and was freed from the chains. Filippo Lippi worked then in Naples, and in Florence again. He enjoyed the friendship and protection of Cosimo de Medici. Vasari told that "Fra Filippo was so lustful that he would give anything to enjoy a woman he wanted if he thought he could have his way; and if he couldn't buy what he wanted, then he would cool his passion by painting her portrait and reasoning with himself. His lust was so violent that when it took hold of him he could never concentrate on his work. When he worked in Cosimo de Medici's house, Cosimo had him locked in so that he wouldn't wander away and waste time"<sup>G46</sup>.

In Prato, near Florence, Lippi worked with Fra Diamante in the Carmelite convent. He caught sight of a beautiful nun and fell in love with her. Filippo was so desperately in love with this Lucrecia Buti, that he eloped with her. Luckily, the monks were understanding at first. Then they were less. It helped that Filippo already had found a strong supporter and Maecenas in Cosimo de Medici, the most powerful merchant of Florence. Cosimo de Medici intervened for Filippo Lippi with the Pope. The Pope Eugene wanted to relieve Filippo and his Lucrecia from their religious vows so that they could marry. But Vasari wrote that Filippo Lippi refused, even though he had a son by Lucrecia. As Vasari mentioned, Lippi wanted to stay free for his desires and his art.

Lucrecia Buti stood model for the 'Adoration in the Forest'. She was the Virgin Mary. Her son Filippino who was born in 1457, when Filippo Lippi was around fifty years old, probably also was the model for the child Jesus<sup>D1</sup>.

Lucrecia Buti stood model for other Maria paintings. A very similar painting, also an 'Adoration in the Forest', was made in 1463. This painting is now in the Uffizi Museum in Florence. In that painting we find similarly a Madonna in blue and kneeling before a baby in the grass, the John the Baptist wearing the Agnus Dei ribbon is also there, but stands to the right, whereas Saint Bernard has moved to the lower right. This picture is of somewhat lower pictorial quality than the one in the Berlin museum.

In what times did Filippo Lippi lived and worked? In the middle of the fifteenth century, Florence was Cosimo de Medici's. Cosimo lived from 1389 to 1464, and succeeded to his father Giovanni at the head of the bankers and merchants family in 1429. The Medicis already had at that time a network of subsidiaries. Their banking house in Bruges for example was held by Giovanni Arnolfini who was painted together with his wife Giovanna Cenami in 1434 by Jan Van Eyck: the famous 'Arnolfini Marriage'. (There is a complex story around that picture. It is no longer certain that Arnolfini was married, nor are art historians still certain who was the lady in this picture.) Cosimo wanted supremacy of Florence for the Medicis. This shocked many aristocrats and he was imprisoned in 1433, but he saved his life by bribing judges. He was banned from the town but returned triumphantly the next year. He was ruthless then: almost a hundred aristocrat families had to leave Florence and were banned in their turn that same year 1434. Cosimo de Medici was only the first among

the Signoria of Florence, but he would create a generation of Florentine rulers that would last until 1737. The Medici would give two queens to France (Maria and Catherine) and three Medicis would become Pope (Leo X, Clement VII and Pius IV).

Cosimo guaranteed peace in the Florence of Filippo Lippi: he made a pact with the Sforza family of Milan, with Francesco Sforza. This Sforza made a pact with Francesco Foscari; the Doge of Venice and this triangle league of Venice-Milan-Florence was so strong that no other Italian city-states armies seriously dared attack it. The French king, who always threatened the north of Italy, was still bound in the Hundred-Year War against England. For instance: Joan of Arc was burnt in the marketplace of Rouen in 1431, when Filippo Lippi was 25 years old. So, Florence itself lived in peace and arts thrived with the wealth. Cosimo was a merchant and banker. Merchants can make lots of money by wars, but they generally prefer peace, security and free travel to trade. Of course the peace eventually came to an end: Francesco Foscari of Venice was Doge only until 1457, Cosimo de Medici died in 1464 and Francesco Sforza of Milan in 1466. The end of the Hundred-Year war between France and England came around 1450 so that gradually France turned its attention to Italy. All that meant the end of a precarious peace. Let this view not be too idyllic. Francesco Sforza was one of the worst dictators of Italy and also the Medici were usurpers of power, more than servants of the state.

Yet, during Filippo Lippi's painter's lifetime, Cosimo de Medici secured peace between 1434 and 1466.

Cosimo de Medici also cared for the helpless: he had Brunelleschi build from 1419 on the Hospital of the Innocents. From 1445, this hospital was to care for foundlings that could be left anonymously in a special place of the column hall in front of the building. Along that column gallery, in the façade, were masoned the white and blue majolica's of Luca della Robbia presenting foundlings in swaddling clothes. Filippo Lippi, who was an orphan, must have appreciated.

Painters that worked a little earlier than Filippo Lippi in magnificent Florence were Masaccio (1401-1428) and Masolino (1383-1447). Simone Martini (1284-1344) and Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti (both around 1280 to 1348) continued the tradition of Siena. Gentile da Fabriano (1370-1427) worked in Florence in 1425-1426, Lorenzo Monaco (1370-1425) was born in Siena but also worked in Florence. The tradition and style of Siena was powerful, also in Florence. Filippo Lippi has inherited the softness of the Sienese painters and combined it with the rational mind of Florence.

The contemporaries of Filippo Lippi were Piero della Francesca (1420-1492) who travelled a lot, worked in Ferrara from around 1446 and later in Arezzo. Contemporaries also were Lorenzo di Pietro (1410-1480) and Stefano di Giovanni called Sassetta (1400-1450) who worked in Siena. In Florence worked at that time Andrea del Castagno (1421-1457), Alessio Baldovinetti (1425-1499), Fra Angelico (1400-1455), Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), and Domenico Veneziano (1400-1461).

Filippo Lippi painted the 'Adoration of the Forrest' for the small altar of Cosimo de Medici's private chapel in the Medici Palace of Florence. The altarpiece was surrounded by frescoes that covered the walls of the room. Benozzo Gozzoli painted these frescoes in the same year as Lippi's panel. The scenes on the walls show an

‘Adoration of the Magi’, recalling the Pope’s Council of Florence of 1439 and its splendid processions of the East-Roman Emperor and the Italian grandees of the times. Benozzo Gozzoli also painted part of the frescoes in the Campo Santo, the Holy Graveyard of Pisa. Gozzoli and Lippi thus both worked for ‘Adoration’ paintings in the Medici Palace.

The Italian Renaissance started in pictorial art with the painting in 1427 by Masaccio of the Holy Trinity fresco on a wall of the church of Santa Maria Novella. The Renaissance was a very fertile period for art. Filippo di Ser Brunelleschi (1377-1446) built the cupola of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore during 1418-1436, so Filippo Lippi must have fully witnessed the works. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) made the famous doors of the Baptisterium of Florence from 1425 to 1452; Filippo Lippi must have seen their inauguration. The most famous sculptor Donato di Betto Bardi called Donatello lived from 1386 to 1466. He worked between 1418 and 1425 on statues for the cathedral Santa Maria del Fiore and the campanile of Giotto. Lippi must have seen them installed. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) was the theoretician of Renaissance architecture. He lived in Florence from 1434 to 1436. He built the façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence from 1456 on, so that Filippo Lippi also saw this master at work.

When one reads these names and their accomplishments, one can only wonder at the magnificence of these artists, all true geniuses with formidable skills in their professions. These men undeniably and forcefully shaped European civilisation. They were mostly born in the cities where they worked, this was particularly true for Florence, but they travelled among the Tuscan cities and knew each other.

Among them, as one of the greatest, was Filippo Lippi. More than any other of that time, he opened up Tuscan art to sweetness of representation and to realism of nature. From him on, there were no real rules anymore in ways of representing people in nature. Of course, it would still take many hundreds of years until this ended in the total liberty of what we now call modern art, pop art or abstract art. Painters like Giotto had made the first definite but still hesitant steps. Filippo Lippi took the first major step.

This place in painting he shares with nobody of his time. There was only one other artist that could contend with his place and that was the sculptor Donatello. Donatello went even further than Filippo Lippi. But sculptors are by definition more free than painters are. Painters are prisoners of the frame, and of the flat surface. Sculptors can work in the unbounded three-dimensional space. Lippi made two-dimensional presentations as free as they can be. His paintings are resplendent, free in form, harmonious, and rich, the expression of people who believed for the first time in history that man really ruled the world and could accomplish anything he set his mind to. Filippo Lippi’s paintings radiate sweet confidence in the divine providence and in the benevolence of Mary, Christ and the Saints.

Cosimo de Medici protected Filippo Lippi during his lifetime. The subsequent Medici rulers honoured him. Lorenzo Il Magnifico appealed in the late fifteenth century to the citizens of Spoleto to return Lippi’s body for the cathedral of Florence. But the Spoletans answered that they did not have the monuments of too many famous people in their own city. They desired to keep the body of the genius painter and Lorenzo de

Medici had to satisfy himself by erecting a cenotaph to the memory of Filippo Lippi.  
G47

*Other paintings:*

**Adoration of Christ**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. Bohemian Gallery. Hluboká (Czechia). Ca. 1380.

**Mary's Adoration of Christ**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Madonna in Adoration of the Child**

Matteo Cesi (ca. 1490-1520). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Adoration of the Child**

Luca Longhi (ca. 1507-1580). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Circumcision*

### **The Circumcision**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon.  
1646.

When the eight day came after the birth and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus; the name the angel had given him before his conception<sup>G38</sup>.

Only Luke tells about the circumcision and he does not relate the circumstances in which the event took place. But in Christian art the circumcision always happens in the temple. Circumcision was required by the laws of Israel as a token of the Covenant. In the 'Golden Legend' is told why Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. For according to Maimonides, 'the flesh of a boy of only seven days old was still tender as it had been in the womb, whereas on the eighth day it became stronger and more solid'. An angel brought the flesh removed at the Circumcision to the first new emperor Charlemagne, enshrined in his capital Aachen but later transferred to Charroux, and then to Rome in a church called Sancta Sanctorum<sup>G49</sup>. The Holy Membrane is indeed venerated in various churches of Europe and is thus one of the most exotic curiosities of medieval relics and legends.

In Guercino's painting Joseph and Mary are present while a priest performs the operation. An acolyte priest is also assisting. The priest is seated and holds the knife. A young man stands behind the priest with a dish to catch the blood and flesh and he also has come with towels to clean the baby. The acolyte looks intently at the baby and is dressed like a Jew, but not so the priest. The priest looks more like a monk of the own times of Guercino. The event of circumcision was significant since it was the first occasion on which Christ's blood was shed. It was the rite where Jesus's name was first given. The Jesuits laid emphasis on this event because this order was the Society of Jesus, and thus bore the name given at the circumcision<sup>G41</sup>. The priest may be a reference to the Jesuits.

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Il Guercino or 'The Squinting One' because he was cross-eyed painted 'The Circumcision'. Guercino was born in Cento, close to Ferrara in 1591. Cento and Ferrara were towns of the Papal States. He was much influenced by the Bolognese style of Lodovico Carracci, who reigned over the art in Bologna until his death in 1619. In 1618 Guercino went to Venice and saw there the works of Palma Il Vecchio, the elder Palma. The Bolognese and Venetian styles are both soft and harmonious, devoid of violence in colours and composition of the scenes. Il Guercino continued the style. Guercino had been to Rome in 1621 together with the important Bolognese artists Guido Reni and Il Domenichino, painters whose way of presenting figures resembles Guercino's works. Guido Reni returned to Bologna where he took the place of Carracci as the leading painter, while Guercino stayed in Rome to work for the Popes. Around 1623 he went back to Cento.

Guercino made of the 'Circumcision' a picture that follows classical examples. He painted a scene of classical antiquity. A Romanesque arch forms the background of

the image and also the altar is a solid block of Roman marble, carved with Roman-like bas-reliefs. The figures are set in a rigid, dignified pose. Two solid forms of figures are depicted in a balanced composition. To the right are Mary and Joseph. Especially the blue cloak of Mary draws the attention to this side. Classical painting often used pure, harder colours such as this blue. To the right are the seated priest, the stooped acolyte Jewish priest, the helping young man and other bystanders. This block of figures is lower than the standing Mary and Joseph, so Guercino has brought emphasis back to this left side by picturing in a Roman column that rises to the upper frame. The lines in this painting are preponderantly vertical, as the dimensions of the frame are. Joseph, Mary and Anne are long figures and Joseph wears a staff. To the left, the priest's helpers wear two high candles. Although Guercino has added movement, specifically in the way the heads of the figures are held, all the figures give an impression of classic rigidity, they are in idealised poses, as suits the solemnity of the scene. All eyes are directed to the child and Guercino has directed to the baby an intense light. Jesus thus also attracts the eyes of the viewer, who then proceeds to the figures to the right and left.

This work was made in 1646, for the church of the convent of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary in Bologna. The painting was delivered to a congregation of women, which explains the restraint and classic handling of the subject. This was not to be a Baroque picture of passion and drama, especially since the panel was destined for the main altar of the church<sup>F5</sup>. The classical, idealised way of handling the theme brought the dignity that was necessary for a scene that could be a strange one for a convent of women.

Why did Guercino grip back to the austere representation that we call now Classicism? The older traditions of International Gothic had profoundly expressed spirituality. The Renaissance and the burgeoning Baroque art had not undermined this spirituality, but in effect smoothened and diverted representations of elevated spirituality. Mannerism and Baroque had brought passion and effusion of emotions in the pictures that the more intimate-oriented painters found too ostensible and untrue. Classic antiquity offered a dignity, austerity, sense of epic and respect that had almost disappeared from religious art and that was newly revered. Guercino seems to have needed the features of Classicism to re-invent the imaging of the transcendent feelings in art. This tendency was started by several painters, among which Annibale Carracci who like Guercino originated from the town of Bologna. Annibale Carracci founded with two other members of his family an academy in Bologna that transformed art. A new tradition thus was founded and representations of spirituality revived.

Guercino had only been four years in Bologna, where he had replaced Guido Reni as the master painter of the town after Reni's death in 1642. He was over fifty when he made the 'Circumcision' and we feel the respect of the mature painter by the classical restraint in which he composed the scene.

*Other paintings:*

### **The Circumcision**

Federico Barocci (1535-1612). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1590.

**The Circumcision**

Master of the Tucher Panels. Suermondt-Ludwig Museum. Aachen. Ca. 1440-1450.

**The Circumcision of Christ**

Master of the Holy Family (active end 15<sup>th</sup>, beginning 16<sup>th</sup> century). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**The Circumcision of Christ**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Church Parrocchiale di San Rocco. Miasino.

**The Circumcision of Christ**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Church Chiesa dei Santi Angeli Custodi. Turin. Ca. 1620.

**The Circumcision of Christ**

Tommaso Alessi called Fadino (active ca. 1500-1526). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Circumcision of Christ**

Michele Coltellini (ca. 1480-1559). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Circumcision**

Marco Palmezzano (ca. 1455-1539). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Circumcision**

Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1620-1630.

## *Simeon's Song of Praise*

### **Simeon's Song of Praise**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Mauritshuis. – The Hague. 1631.

Jesus had to be presented in the Temple of Jerusalem to be purified. Every first-born of Israel and certainly one born from the house of David had to be consecrated to the Lord and to be offered in sacrifice. The rite commemorated the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn in the times of Moses, when the Jewish children were spared. When the babies were brought to the Temple, they were redeemed from the sacrifice by the payment of five shekels. This was prescribed in the old laws of Israel. According to Luke it was also required according to the law to sacrifice a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. It was the fortieth day after Jesus's birth, the moment at which it was thought that the body was infused with the soul.

In Jerusalem lived a man called Simeon. He was an upright and devout man. He looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him<sup>G38</sup>. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. He came to the Temple of Jerusalem prompted by the Spirit. Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to Simeon, to do for the child what the law required.

Simeon took Jesus in his arms, blessed God, and said the words that are called now the 'Nunc Dimittis', for Nunc Dimittis Domine or "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace". This is Simeon's praise or Simeon's song:

« Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised;  
 For my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight  
 of the nations;  
 A light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel »<sup>G38</sup>.

Joseph and Mary wondered at these words. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary:

« Look, he is destined for the fall and the rise of many in Israel,  
 he is destined to be a sign that is opposed  
 - and a sword will pierce your soul too –  
 so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare »<sup>G38</sup>.

Not only Simeon was in the temple, but also a prophetess, Anna. She was a widow and eighty-four years old. She also came up a moment and praised God. And she spoke of the child to all that looked forward to the deliverance of Israel.

Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth in Galilee, where the child grew to maturity, filled with wisdom and in God's favour<sup>G38</sup>.

Only Luke tells about these scenes in his Gospel, the other Evangelists do not. Simeon's praise, the presentation in the Temple, Anna's praise and her proclaiming the deliverance of Jerusalem are main themes of Christian art. The prophecy of Simeon that a sword would pierce the heart of Mary, was also much used as a

medieval symbol. From this image came the paintings of the 'Seven Sorrows of Mary', which are often depicted as seven swords in her hearth. The flowers called irises were a symbol of Mary because they had long leaves sharp and flat like swords. In German irises are called 'Schwertlilien' or sword-lilies. So lilies also became symbols associated with Mary. And irises are sometimes erroneously depicted as lilies.

Simeon's song and Anna's praise have a rational meaning and a special place in the long line of events leading to Jesus's Calvary. Simeon and Anna are hoping for the deliverance of Israel. Meant is the deliverance from the oppression of the Romans or of any other nation holding supremacy over the Jews. Such was from the presentation in the Temple and the expectation for Jesus. It was a very worldly expectation, the expectation for the Jews to have a great King who would throw off the yoke of obedience. The praise of Simeon and Anna was necessary in order to be contradicted by Jesus afterwards. His reign would not be of this world. He would bring the deliverance of Jerusalem but in a spiritual way; the real Jerusalem would be destroyed. Jesus insisted several times on the difference between the expectation and what he could offer.

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn was a Dutch painter of the seventeenth century, living in Amsterdam. He was a Protestant painter, who made meant pictures of Bible scenes. Most of his paintings are in very dark tones out of which his figures seem to appear to the foreground. Rembrandt was the master of dark and light and most of his pictures are made in this style of struggle between dark and light, night and day, sorrow and joy. Rembrandt was never a very happy man, except in his first years of marriage. His 'Simeon's Song of Praise' is an early work.

Figures emerging from the darkness as an element of style have become the hallmark of Rembrandt. The famous monumental painting of the guards of Frans Banning Cocq in the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam was so dark that it has been called 'The night Watch', although the guild did not keep watch at night and it has not been Rembrandt's intention to see this as a night scene. So, we wonder sometimes at the pictorial necessity of the dark background and the few bright colours used by this painter, even though we understand that Rembrandt painted images from the depths of his mind. Only in the paintings of the most forceful artists of history do we find this focus of vision on the human scene and on the most direct expression of emotions. Only the greatest masters used subdued tones in their paintings. The most powerful painters such as Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Tiziano and Rembrandt share this feature. Lesser masters seem to need landscapes, architectures and side figures to interest the viewer. In 'Simeon's Song' Rembrandt has attained an effect that suits the subject to perfection. Rembrandt had already found his style, even if brighter colours are still nicely present here. The figures furthermore form an inverted pyramid so that Mary and the middle of the trough seem to capture the light, as if Mary and Jesus were a sink of that light.

The Temple of Jerusalem was a vast and dark place. Israel can be very hot in summer; people always try to keep the sun out in southern countries. The interior of halls is kept cool by thick walls and small windows. Thus, Rembrandt's style of dark backgrounds fits with the real scene.

In the middle of the Temple is a shaft of light, falling straight on the child Jesus in the arms of the singing Simeon. Mary, Joseph and a temple priest are near. According to the apocryphal Protevangelium of James, Simeon was the high priest of the temple, having succeeded to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist.

Simeon's face is lifted to the heavens, up to the light. Rembrandt has imposingly emphasised this feeling of elevation by the effect of the column right behind Simeon. A movement of arches rising from the left middle of the picture amplifies the grandeur and the feelings of growth, elation, majesty and lifting of the spirit. The joint effect of Simeon's raised head and the church architecture is certainly the most surprising invention of this picture. Even more stunning is the fact that 'Simeon's song' was made in 1631, when Rembrandt was a mere twenty-five years old. How could such a young man find in himself the intelligence, the artistic qualities, the vision and grandeur to make such a picture? The young artist viewed a praise to God as a sudden desire of the hearth for a lifting of the mind, a hope projected as a longing for the heavens, thus to transcendence. Only a great genius could imagine such a work.

'Simeon's Song' is a miracle of a painting. We have here a picture of a painter young enough not yet to fall entirely in the darker style of the older man so that colours and brightness still fill the frame. Although Rembrandt was young, his genius had reached maturity and he had found in himself already the spiritual maturity to envision powerful scenes like this one. Rembrandt had a strong spiritual feeling for religious scenes. He had all the skills of a master painter as shows in the splendid detail of the High Priest's robes and in Simeon's cloak. He had found his style and applied it judiciously. 'Simeon's Song' is a marvel of a painting.

*Other paintings:*

**Simeon's Song of Praise**

Arent de Gelder. Mauritshuis. The Hague. Around 1700.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1641.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. 1648.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Leon Picardo (active 1514-1530). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Jan van Coninxloo (1489-1584). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1692.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Jean Boucher (ca. 1568-1633). Musée Magnin. Dijon. 1620.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Jean-François de Troy (1679-1752). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1710.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Pietro Antonio Magatti (1691-1777). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Romanino. Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1529.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Vittore Carpaccio (1460-1526). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1285-1348). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. 1342.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Giovanni Battista Naldini. Church of Santa Maria Novella. Florence. 1571.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Francesco Francia (ca. 1450-1517) and Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome.

**The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. 1628.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Francesco Franciabigio (1482-1525). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1500-1510.

**The Presentation of Christ in the Temple**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1640-1641.

**The Presentation in the Temple**

Giovan Battista Discepoli called Lo Zoppo da Lugano (ca. 1590-1654). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Pietro Rotari (1707-1762). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. 1745.

**The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

Gerolamo de' Romani called Romanino (ca. 1484/1487-1560). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1540-1545.

## *The Holy Family*

### **The Virgin with Child and Saint Anne**

Masaccio (1401-1428) and Masolino (1387-1447). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1425.

Many paintings took up as a subject the very young Jesus, still a baby, together with his family. Jesus is often shown together with Mary and Joseph in their home in Nazareth. The Virgin may be feeding the child, or Jesus may be in the house of his grandmother Anne. Scenes of domestic life around the baby Jesus were popular in the Flemish sixteenth century for instance. This was the case especially for scenes of the Virgin Mary feeding the child, while giving him milk or food. Other paintings show Mary, Jesus and John the Baptist. Sometimes also John's mother Elisabeth enters the pictures. This was a favourite theme of the Renaissance. Finally, also pictures of the three generations together with Anne, Mary and Jesus were well in demand.

One such painting of the three generations is a monument of art history. It is a work at which two giants of the very beginning of the Italian Renaissance worked together: Masolino and Masaccio. The painting is called the 'Sant'Anna Metterza'. The panel presents Saint Anne, Mary and Jesus. 'Metterza' was a word of Medieval Latin meaning 'the same' for 'met' and 'the third' for 'tertius'<sup>113</sup>. Originally the painting stood in the church of Sant'Ambrogio in Florence, a church in which also the Immaculate Conception was venerated. Masaccio and Masolino were Florentines. Masaccio probably painted Mary and Jesus, while Saint Anne is attributed to Masolino, as well as most of the angels<sup>16</sup>. The 'Sant'Anna Metterza' dates from 1425. This was two years earlier than the date at which Masaccio made the fresco of the Holy Trinity in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, which is often considered as being the first Renaissance image of history. This Holy Trinity, famous also for its use of one-point perspective, was probably the last fresco Masaccio made in Florence before his early death. The 'Sant'Anna Metterza' would then be the first tempera painting of the Renaissance, tempera being the old technique of panel painting in which pigments were mixed with egg-yolk as dilution.

The new style that Masaccio imagined shows in Jesus. He is painted nude, as a well muscled human, well in flesh, not idealised as in earlier Gothic era pictures, and with the blonde curls of a prince of antiquity. Mary holds Jesus in her lap and she still looks solemnly, somewhat dreamy, conscious of her maternity. The pyramid form made by the Virgin's blue maphorion robe is sculptural, splendid in its solidity and monumentality. This is how solid and protective motherhood should be. Yet, the solidity does not diminish the noble grace of the Virgin, but more underscores it. The elegant headdress and shawl, gently laid around her head and shoulders indicate the grace of Mary. The general composition of the panel was decided by Masolino, one can only wonder whether it was Masaccio's idea to thus picture the Virgin or Masolino's.

Behind Mary all is painted in subdued colours, in red, brown, and yellow tones. Saint Anne wears a cloak in these tones. Saint Anne is usually figured in a red robe with a green cloak; the red represented then love and the green represented spring. Spring meant new life and birth. But Masolino inverted these colours to better suit the

general hues of the background, thus recognising the force of Masaccio's representation of the Virgin and Child. Mary is seated very statically, while Anne is more energetic. Anne has an elder, more severe face and her gestures are also protective. She has one hand on Mary's shoulder; she keeps one hand over Jesus's head. Life sprang from Anne, out of her womb came Mary. Out of Mary's womb then followed Jesus. This close intimacy is the whole meaning of the painting; it is protection within protection, womb within womb. And Anne looks as if she had planned it all. She is the most imposing figure here, even though she remains in the background. Masolino, the elder painter of the two, supported Masaccio.

The strong image of Saint Anne was supported by the early generations of painters. Saint Anne was even sometimes depicted in the role of the Madonna. She is then seated not unlike in pictures of the Virgin Mary on a throne holding a child in her lap. This child would be Mary instead of Jesus. One of these rare, very early paintings made by a Tuscan artist can be found in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo of Pisa.

The 'Sant' Anna Metterza' is to be compared with the three Maestà's made by Duccio di Buoninsegna, Cimabue and Giotto. In these panels, Jesus is fully clad and always somewhat strained. These portraits of Jesus are far from the confident, satisfied, forceful Jesus of Masaccio. Masaccio's Jesus was painted anatomically exact and Masaccio opened with other similar paintings of nudes the new style of the Renaissance. Yet, after having absorbed the style of Giotto as for instance in his frescoes of the Arena Chapel of Padua, one can feel the same monumentality in the Virgin and Child of Masaccio. Masaccio owed Giotto and took history a step further.

The angels in the 'Sant' Anna Metterza' are also far more natural, gentle, and sweet. The two angels on each side of the throne are in movement: they bring smells of perfume to the panel. Four angels are in yellow and ochre, but one of them to the left is in green. This angel looks finer, more elegant than the other ones. It is believed that this angel was also of the hand of Masaccio. The angels are still standing, but some of them hold the flowered curtain, which is likewise a cloak of protection for Anne. This is the cloak of revelation, the protection from Heaven. The Divine hands that open the curtain reveal the scene to us. This revelation enhances the viewer's curiosity. This effect also is absent in the three great Maestà's. In the Maestà the throne takes an important place. Masolino and Masaccio have also entirely made the throne disappear behind the figures and they made the seat much wider, to enhance the impression of solidity we perceive of the Virgin.

Masolino and Masaccio were working here together probably for the first time. So, the 'Sant' Anna Metterza' became an example of the transition from the late International Gothic style, impersonified by Masolino, and the newer Renaissance started by Masaccio. But the two painters had not worked together for the last time. They collaborated almost at the same time for the frescoes of the life of Saint Peter in the Brancacci chapel of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine of Florence.

Masolino was the elder painter. He was born around 1383 in Panicale near Perugia as Tommaso di Cristofano Fini, and then called Masolino da Panicale. He died around 1447. Masolino had worked with Lorenzo Ghiberti on the bronze doors of the Baptistery of Florence. It may be because of this that Felipe Brancacci, a rich merchant and diplomat who had been the ambassador of the Republic of Florence to

the Sultan of Egypt, gave the commission for the chapel to Masolino. Masolino started to work in 1424 or 1425, but interrupted the frescoes to work in Budapest where he became a painter of the King of Hungary. In 1427 he returned to Florence and continued the Brancacci chapel, this time accompanied by Masaccio. Masaccio was still young then, born at the end of 1401, but he took prominence over Masolino in the Brancacci frescoes. Masolino abandoned quickly and Masaccio did the major work.

Masaccio was born as Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone Guidi in Castel San Giovanni, now San Giovanni Valdarno, in the Tuscan province of Arezzo, then also of the Papal States. 'Masaccio' meant something like 'Clumsy Tommaso' because he looked quite careless and absent-minded. Nothing is known of where he learned to paint, but he entered the guild of Florentine painters in 1422. He worked in Florence but also in Pisa. Giorgio Vasari wrote of Masaccio that he perceived as one of the first that the best painters should follow nature as closely as possible, since painting was simply the imitation of all the living things of nature.<sup>G46</sup> Thus, it was primarily Masaccio who would have introduced liveliness, human nudity in splendour and emotions, movements and vivacity. But we know that these elements were the culmination of a long evolution that started before Masaccio. The collaboration with Masolino da Panicale started around 1424, probably first with the 'Sant' Anna Metterza'. Masaccio had a more powerful character than Masolino and in the end it was Masaccio who would shape art history.

In 1428, the works in the Brancacci chapel were stopped again when Masolino and Masaccio left for Rome. Masaccio died there so very young in that same year 1428. Filippino Lippi finished the series of the Brancacci chapel only much later from 1480 to 1485. So many famous names worked in this chapel, that it became one of the main pilgrimage places for Renaissance art lovers.

#### *Other paintings:*

##### **The Holy Family with the Sheep**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Museo Nacional del Prado.– Madrid. 1507.

##### **The Holy Family**

Palma Il Vecchio (1480-1528). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. 1520.

##### **The Holy Family, the Doni Tondo**

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. 1503-1504.

##### **The Virgin, Jesus and Saint Anne**

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1508-1510.

##### **The Meal of the Holy Family**

Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1628.

##### **Virgin at the Milk Soup**

Gheeraert David (1460-1523). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. Around 1500.

##### **The Virgin Mary adoring the Christ Child**

Simon Vouet (1590-1647). Museum Boymans-van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

##### **The Virgin with the Host**

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867). Musée d'Orsay. Paris. 1854.

**The Holy Family**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Around 1650.

**The Holy Family with a Donor**

Gaudenzio Ferrari (ca. 1475-1546). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Sarasota (Florida). 1520.

**The Holy Family**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). The National Gallery. London.

**The Holy Family**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1655.

**The Holy Family with an Allegory of the Redemption**

Pierre Mignard (1612-1695). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**The Holy Family with Saints Elisabeth and John the Baptist**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago. 1615.

**The Holy Family with Saints Elisabeth and John the Baptist**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Wallace Collection. London. Ca.1614.

**The Holy Family with Saint John**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Sarasota (Florida). 1655.

**Holy Family**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1620.

## *The Tree of Life*

### **The Tree of Saint Anne**

Gheeraert David (1460-1523). Musée des Beaux-arts de Lyon – Lyon. Around 1490.

The ‘Tree of Jesse’, ‘Tree of Anne’ or ‘Tree of Life’ paintings represented genealogies. The tree of Jesse was the genealogical tree of the descendants of Jesse, the father of David, which led to Jesus. The representation of these descendants as a tree stems from an image in the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah told: ‘A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from its roots.’ And further, ‘The root of Jesse, standing as a signal for the peoples, will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.’<sup>G38</sup> These words were the occasion for the theme of the ‘Tree of Life’ and thus of the representation of genealogies.

Taddeo Gaddi made a particularly impressive fresco on the large wall of the refectory of Santa Croce in Florence. In the enormous painting he used the ‘Tree of Life’ as the middle piece of several scenes, which include a majestic long predella-kind ‘Last Supper’, and four panels of scenes of the lives of saints. Out of the crucifix of Jesus grow apostles, missionaries and saints that were truly the spiritual offspring of Christ.

From around 1300 dates another ‘Tree of Life’ made by Pacino di Buonaguida, a panel now in the Galleria del’ Accademia of Florence, which represents like Taddeo Gaddi’s fresco the crucified Jesus. But out of the crucifix grow branches representing scenes of the life and passion of Christ.

The tree of Saint Anne, however, represented the offspring of Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, and this is a much rarer theme! According to the ‘Golden Legend’ Anne had married three times, so that she had a large family. These genealogies all arrived at Jesus as the most famous offshoot, so these pictures can be considered in general also as genealogies of Jesus. In analogy to these trees the images were used also to represent families of saints, since the saints were spiritually born out of Christ. The imagery of the genealogy by drawing a tree is thus a very early symbol, popular as well in the northern countries, that is Flanders and Germany, as in Italy.

Gheeraert David was a painter of Dutch origin, born in Oudewater close to Gouda around 1455. He worked in Renaissance Bruges and died there in 1523. David continued the tradition of the Flemish Primitives of Bruges, but he was also inscribed in the guild of painters of Antwerp, probably because the glory of Bruges was on the decline. He made some very inspiring and surprising pictures of the Madonna and he could also fill the backgrounds of his pictures with marvellous landscapes in the tradition of Van Eyck. He was a gifted artist, belonging to a transition period in the art of Bruges and Flanders.

David made a ‘Tree of Saint Anne’ that shows the three generations of Christianity in the same image as Masolino and Masaccio’s ‘Sant’ Anna Metterza’. Saint Anne is seated on a throne with the Virgin Mary at her feet. Mary holds her child Jesus. The representations of the three generations, although a theme of the thirteenth century and before, thus continued to be used by painters until the sixteenth century. Symbols

are also used in this painting, in the best Flemish tradition. Anne holds the book of wisdom, out of which she taught Mary. The book lies open on her knee, and Jesus plays with a rosary in his fingers, a sign of his passion. Two donators and two other figures flank the throne, whereas out of Anne then grows the tree of her genealogy, which ultimately leads at the top again to the Virgin Mary and Jesus. The tree is in bloom, and Anne's family is shown as growing out of the flowers. The tree with unreal green, spiky leaves and the rose flowers is set against a background of gold. The picture was certainly used for teaching reasons, to illustrate the genealogy and family of Saint Anne, as explained in the 'Golden Legend'.

Gheeraert David knew the paintings of Jan Van Eyck, so we can find various references to the pictures of Van Eyck in David's panel. His throne bears woodcarvings as van Eyck loved to draw, and the throne and carpet under it are similar to paintings of Van Eyck. The figure of the lower left wears the brocaded robe with the word 'Adonai' which was also used in van Eyck's 'Adoration of the Lamb'.

Anne's family is detailed in the 'Golden Legend'.

Joachim was the first husband of Anne. David pictured him directly above Anne. This marriage gave one child, the Virgin Mary, painted at the top of the picture. The Virgin is flanked to the right by her husband Joseph, the human father of Jesus. At her left is God the Father, the spiritual father of Jesus.

When Anne's husband Joachim died, she married again to Cleophas. Cleophas is painted at the extreme left, at the same height as Joachim. From this marriage Anne had another daughter, called Mary. This Mary is painted also on the left top branch, next to her sister the Virgin Mary. Mary of Cleophas married Alpheus. Gheeraert David painted Alpheus next to Mary of Cleophas. The couple's hands almost touch. This couple had several children: the apostle James the Lesser, Joseph the Just also called Barsabas, Simon and Jude. All these are portrayed in the lower left circle. Simon and Jude are probably the two lower figures holding swords, because they were both martyred in Persia. Simon was killed by a falchion and Jude by a club, but Gheeraert David may have pictured Jude simply as the younger man, and with a curved sword of Persia.

Anne married a third time, now to Salome. Salome is situated in the painting to the right of Joachim, so that the three husbands of Anne occupy the same middle level of the tree. Again, Anne gave birth to a daughter, called Mary. This Mary Salome and her husband Zebedee are in the right circle above Salome. Thus, the Virgin is flanked by her two sisters, and all are called Mary. From the marriage of Mary Salome and Zebedee sprang the apostle John the Evangelist, easily recognisable in the picture because he holds his poisonous cup, and the apostle James the Great.

Furthermore, Anne had a sister, Hismeria. Hismeria was mother to Eliud and Elisabeth. This Elisabeth married Zachary. She gave birth to John the Baptist. Eliud was the father of Eminent according to the 'Golden Legend', and Eminent the father of Saint Servatius. Since these were no direct offspring of Anne, they are not in the picture.

In May of 2011, Dr. Peter Ackermann (Bodenheim, Germany) saw a tapestry in the sacristy of the Saint Crucis Church of Erfurt, a tapestry that dated probably from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and which was almost a replica of David's painting, which in its turn is supposed to have been produced after an even earlier drawing. Near the figure on the lower left one can read on this tapestry the name of Aaron, the Levite, the brother of Moses and Moses' mouthpiece, Aaron the priest. The figure on the lower right, the figure with the harp, is King David. The tapestry shows how fast pictures were used for several media in the sixteenth century and earlier.

The 'Golden Legend' emphasizes the descent of Joseph and Mary from the line of David, so this figure is at his place in the painting. The painting is a religious image, so the priest Aaron indicates the religious theme. Gheeraert David was without doubt a Christian. His many and totally Roman Catholic paintings testify to that, as well as his status in Bruges, but names given in the Middle Ages have a meaning, and Gheeraert David may have had people of the Jewish faith in his forefathers. The presentation of King David in the picture may refer thus also to who made it, to Gheeraert David, and Gheeraert may have wondered whether he too might have descended from the early King David.

Pictures such as these have more art historical than aesthetic value, even though the scene is harmonious and well painted with all the skills of a master artisan as Gheeraert David.

Particularly interesting of course is that the idea of the tree of genealogy is still used by many families today. This representation thus goes very far back into medieval times.

*Other paintings:*

**The Tree of Life**

Taddeo Gaddi (1325-1364). Museo del' Opera di Santa Croce. Florence. Around 1350

**The Tree of Life**

Pacino di Buonaguida. Galleria del' Accademia. Florence. Around 1300.

**The Tree of Jesse**

Jan Mostaert (1475-1556). Rijksmuseum. Amsterdam. Around 1505.

**The Tree of Life**

Pacino di Buonaguida. Galleria dell' Academia. Florence. 1305-1310.

**The Tree of Jesse**

Circle of Geertgen tot Sint Jans, possibly Jan Mostaert (1475-1556). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

## *The Flight to Egypt*

### **Resting on the Flight to Egypt.**

Joachim Patenier (1475-1524). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. Around 1520.

### **The Flight to Egypt**

Auguste Donnay (1862-1921). Le Musée de l'Art Wallon – Liège.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: « Get up, take the child and his mother with you and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him ». So Joseph got up and left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead<sup>G38</sup>.

Not only in Florence did painters work together. Also in Flanders, the artists joined sometimes their skills to collaboration. One painter excelled in landscapes and the other in figures so they collaborated when a really perfect picture had to be delivered. Joachim Patenier was an excellent landscape painter, but he did less well in figures. He appealed sometimes to other painters to work on these. He worked together with Quinten Massys and Joos van Cleve, and maybe also with Adriaan Ysenbrant<sup>G9</sup>. Since the flight into Egypt brought Joseph and Mary through wild and exotic land, this theme suited Patenier as no other to demonstrate his skills in landscapes. He made several panels of this scene, among which one is in the Museum of Berlin; another one is in the Prado of Madrid and still another one in the Museum of Antwerp. We will follow the painting of Berlin.

Patenier was born around 1475 near the city of Dinant, maybe in the village of Bouvignes, in Wallony, Belgium. Bouvignes lies on the Meuse River. This river has cut through the rocks around Dinant, so that dramatic landscapes show here. The valley is narrow, some hundred meters wide, and the sides of the valley are steep rock formations with high promontories and citadels. The valley and the hills above are very green, filled with forests. The result is very romantic, and when the fogs of the river rise also very mystical. The river Meuse is rich in legends; people were much impressed with the wild majesty of its nature. It is no wonder that Patenier took these images of his youth with him to the rich Flemish and Brabant towns where he could earn a living as a painter. Until his time most paintings were portraits or scenes of the life of Christ with figures. Landscapes were added in the background to fill the frames. After all, paintings were artificial images. It did not enter the mind of the early painters to render nature as it was, nature for nature's sake, since this was so in contradiction with the essence of a picture.

Patenier showed that commissioners could like a bit of landscape. He was one of the first painters to make of landscape painting his foremost style. And who knows: maybe Patenier was homesick and longed for the nature of his youth. Another painter of his home village continued his style. This painter may also have had the name of Patenier but he was called Henry Blès in his native French, or Herry met de Bles in the town Antwerp where he worked principally. He was called 'Civetta' in Italian for

he travelled to Italy and worked there in various towns. 'Civetta' means 'owl', for he pictured an owl as a kind of signature in many of his works. This artist brought the northern art of landscape painting to Italy, to Padua and Ferrara.

In the 'Rest of the Flight to Egypt', the landscape indeed has all the ingredients to please, to arouse curiosity and admiration. The view is from above so that the whole land unfolds before our eyes. A river meanders to a seaport. Patenier worked from 1515 on in Antwerp, until his death in 1524. This painting dates from 1520, from the short Antwerp period of Patenier, so a reference to the port was always welcome. To the right lies the village of Bethlehem from which Joseph and Mary have escaped. Soldiers are running around in search for Jesus. They can also be seen running in a cornfield where reapers are working. According to a medieval legend, Joseph and Mary passed by a farmer sowing seeds of corn. The Virgin asked the farmer to tell Herod's soldiers that they had passed by at the time of sowing. The corn miraculously grew and ripened overnight so that when Herod's soldiers came the next day they thought Mary and Joseph had fled a long time ago and they abandoned their quarry. This story is also shown in the Prado picture, more clearly and closer to the foreground than in the Berlin version. Patenier used the same story in various pictures.

In the middle of the painting, Patenier painted a steep rock formation such as he had seen near his hometown. Inside is the round temple of Sotinen. This refers to a story told in the apocryphal gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew. When the Holy family passed this heathen temple near Hermopolis, the statues of the pagan gods fell to the ground and were broken. The falling statue is a theme that can also be found in the Madrid and even Antwerp versions of the 'Flight to Egypt' by Patenier. The Antwerp version features a variant theme of the 'Flight to Egypt', which was very popular too: Joseph is shown on the travel with Mary riding on a donkey.

According to the 'Golden Legend', Joseph took Mary to Egypt, to the city of Hermopolis, where they stayed for seven years until the death of Herod of Ascalon. All the idols in Egypt were destroyed. In Hermopolis also there was a tree called persidis that cured all kinds of illnesses when leaves or branches were applied to the neck of the sick persons. This tree bent down to Mary and thus adored Jesus. Although the picture of Joachim Patenier shows Mary on the road to Egypt, he has pictured her sitting under a tree.

To the left then is the peaceful village into which Joseph and Mary found refuge. Patenier has added bridges, roads leading into the mountains and travellers on their way. Lush green bushes and trees form the foreground. Then follows a band in the picture covered by the villages and meadows to right and left, in symmetry. The bluish mountains and the seaport form the upper band. Above all is the sky, where also the horizontal elongated clouds add to the impression of wideness of the landscape.

The Virgin and Child figures are not by the hand of Patenier. He probably asked Joos van Cleve, another Antwerp painter, or one of the artists of van Cleve's workshop to draw these figures. Van Cleve himself borrowed many scenes from other painters and the scene from the 'Rest on the Flight to Egypt' also comes from another artist, here from Robert Campin. It is a copy of the 'Madonna near the Hearth', a picture that is now in the Hermitage of Saint Petersburg<sup>D1</sup>. Mary's belongings are in a woven basket,

which may be an image borrowed from Gheeraert David. Patenier has added the bags wound around Joseph's staff. The painter has completed the picture with other symbols. Birds are approaching and a deer is nearby. These also refer to a legend according to which the animals followed Jesus on the travel, recognising the Lord in him. Various flowers refer to Mary such as the traditional irises. Legend also mentions a source of water coming out of the earth so that Mary and Joseph could drink and Patenier has painted the source close by to the left. These elements are to be found likewise in the Prado version.

Patenier has blended various style elements. He uses a religious theme and many symbols, which show his erudition. The symbols allowed the artist to bring a story with many aspects of narration in a picture where nevertheless the landscape is the major feature. The short representation of symbols was very handy to Patenier's aim and real interest: to represent landscapes of nature and yet to give content to the picture. Moreover, especially in the Late Middle Ages, symbols were widely used, and well known by viewers.

The tradition of landscape painting by artists of the river Meuse in Wallony lasted in history. Painters remained proud and conscious of their heritage. Auguste Donnay is one of those wonderful less well-known masters of Wallony that deserve to be rediscovered. He was a marvellous landscape painter, neither fully of the Impressionist movement nor of the Realist or Symbolist schools. He painted Walloon landscapes in soft pastel non-contrasting colours, yet with well-delineated volumes. He was an intimate artist in whose landscapes one feels strangely at ease, protected and hidden. He made a 'Flight into Egypt' where Joseph and Mary are again the theme used to show a Walloon landscape in autumn. A typical Walloon village is shown as well as the soft hills of the Meuse valley.

The pictures of the 'Rest on the Flight to Egypt' were the ideal occasion for painters to show their skills at imaginary landscapes that Mary and Joseph might have encountered on their road to Egypt. From Joachim Patenier and Henry Blès on, a tradition evolved. These pictures of nature were an exception in an art that was otherwise mainly centred on the human figure. Landscape paintings would become an art in their own right and reached their zenith in the French Impressionists.

*Other paintings:*

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Joos Van Cleve (1485-1541). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. Around 1520.

**The Flight to Egypt**

Joachim Patenier (1480-1524). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Henri Blès (1480-1550). Musée des Arts Anciens du Namurois. Namur

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Joachim Patenier (1480-1524). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Joos Van Cleve (1485-1541). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. Around 1520.

**Resting on the Flight to Egypt**

Lucas Cranach (1472-1553). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. 1504.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Sarasota (Florida). 1566-1568.

**Landscape with Flight into Egypt**

Pieter Bruegel (1515-1569). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries. London. 1563.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Staatliche Sammlungen von Bayern. Munich. Around 1630.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Scuola di San Rocco. Venice. Around 1583-1587.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. Around 1595-1597.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Jacopo da Ponte called Jacopo Bassano (1515-1592). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. 1547.

**The rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Robert Zünd (1827-1909). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1869.

**The Return from Egypt**

Nicolas Poussin (15594-1665). The Cleveland Museum of Art. Cleveland.

**The Return from Egypt**

Nicolas Poussin (15594-1665). The Dulwich Picture Gallery. London.

**The Rest during the Flight to Egypt**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The State Hermitage Museum. St Petersburg.

**The Return from Egypt**

Hans Fries (ca. 1465-1523). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1512.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Adriaen Ysenbaert (ca. 1490-1551). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1520-1530.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1627-1632.

**Landscape with the Flight into Egypt**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. 1603-1604.

**The Flight to Egypt**

Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1710.

**The Flight to Egypt**

Camillo Procaccini (1561-1629). Santuario della Madonna di Campegna. Pallanza. Ca. 1594.

**The Rest during the Flight to Egypt**

Francesco Nuvolone (1609-1661). Chiesa di San Giuseppe. Borgomanero. Ca. 1652.

**The Rest during the Flight to Egypt**

Sofonisba Anguissola (ca. 1530-1626). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo. 1559.

**The Rest on the Flight to Egypt**

Francesco Vecellio (ca. 1457-1500). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Massacre of the Innocents*

### **The Massacre of the Innocents**

Daniele da Volterra (1509-1566). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. Around 1557.

Herod had summoned the magi on their way to the newborn baby, to the supposed future king of Israel. He had asked the wise men to find out all about the child and to let him know when they had found him so that he, Herod, too might go and do him homage. But Matthew told that the wise men were given a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod. They returned to their own country by a different way. Herod was furious on realising that he had been fooled by the wise men and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the small children killed who were two years old or less, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men<sup>G38</sup>.

The massacre of the Innocents is a repulsive theme. It can be handled in all the violence of the base bloodshed, and such is da Volterra's representation. The theme can be also handled by distant restraint however and such is the picture of Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Pieter sets the scene in a Brabant village, made a view of the whole village and showed the soldiers kicking in the doors of the poor houses. But he did not depict all the violence that a bloodshed like the massacre of young children inherently possesses. Daniele da Volterra's picture is quite the contrary. Daniele was Italian, his real name was Daniele Ricciarelli but he was called after the town he was born in, Volterra. He worked first in Siena, then went to Rome in 1535. His 'Massacre of the Innocents' dates from around 1557.

Daniele da Volterra has expressed all the dramatic violence in a classical epic scene. He inspired himself on other great painters. Thus the setting on monumental stairs, with the Romanesque background and the strict symmetry of the scene remind of the 'School of Athens' of Raphael, a fresco in the rooms of the Vatican. The attitudes of some of the figures are taken from Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement' and that not in a too reverent way. For instance, the soldier slaying an infant in the left foreground is the almost exact replica of the figure of God in the 'Last Judgement'. Other nude figures also were copied, at least in their attitudes, from Michelangelo.

Volterra knew Michelangelo well and all the more the fresco of the 'Last Judgement'. Michelangelo had finished the 'Last Judgement' in the Sistine chapel at the end of 1541. Volterra was a friend of Michelangelo while he was working in Rome. Michelangelo had become the centre of a controversy launched amongst other by the libellist Pietro Aretino. The 'Last Judgement' was a tremendous picture of Michelangelo's preference for the depiction of nude male bodies. Pope Paul understood Michelangelo's force and genius, but the massed nudity shocked more than one of the Roman clergy. Pope Paul IV finally wanted the nudes to be covered. It was Daniele da Volterra who covered in 1555 the parts judged indecent of the nudes of Michelangelo's Last Judgement. So, Volterra put breeches on the private parts of the men and petticoats on the women<sup>G28</sup>. But he had pleaded with Michelangelo to have the job and he went so slowly at it that even the Pope lost patience in the end. Volterra put on so light a paint that the covering was almost unobtrusive. Volterra was somewhat of a practical joker, a true Renaissance man who could do all, though not

with a stroke of genius. He had learnt painting under Sodoma, he had studied architecture under Peruzzi and he was also a sculptor.

Daniele da Volterra was a follower of Michelangelo with this painting. The picture can be regarded as homage to the two great geniuses of the Italian sixteenth century to Raphael and Michelangelo. Such paintings are called Mannerist, because they over-emphasise everything in a desperate attempt to force the attention of the viewer. Thus in the 'Massacre of the Innocents', the scene is monumental, and the drama is totally violent and bloody. Children are not just being killed, but parents and especially the mothers are disputing the children from the torturers. So the children are being torn to pieces, held upside down, and killed by the sword from under their mothers. Small dead bodies are thrown negligently over the stairs. The scene is strengthened by the nakedness of the soldiers, which makes the violence very sensual and the brute force more direct. The stairs are littered with killed babies. To make the horror complete, Herod has come to supervise the killings. He enters from the dark of the far left, guards with trumpets opening his way.

A traditional icon used in many 'Massacres of the Innocents' is also present in Volterra's picture. In the lower left corner a woman is mourning her slaughtered child. Matthew cites the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamenting and weeping bitterly; it is Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more." Matthew told that thus the prophecy was fulfilled. Matthew repeatedly mentioned by these references to earlier prophecies that the life of Jesus had been foretold in the Old Testament. Daniele da Volterra has painted Rachel on the stairs.

The whole picture is painted in the brown and red hues of Venetian style pictures, which reminds of the blood on the white robes. Even the torsos of some of the assassins are coloured in deep red. It is difficult to comprehend that this picture, so overtly violent, could have been destined to hang in a church. But it was. It was commissioned for San Pietro or Saint Peter of the hometown of Daniele, of Volterra. The fathers of Volterra may have asked of Daniele a painting in the style of Michelangelo. Daniele certainly gave the good fathers what they had asked.

The 'Massacre of the Innocents' reminds us of the atrocity and ruthlessness of the ancient times. The Bible is littered with scenes of revenge. Jesus came to offer other values.

#### *Other Paintings:*

##### **The Massacre of the Innocents**

Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1638). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels.

##### **The Massacre of the Innocents**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1515-1569). The Royal Collections. London. Ca. 1565.

##### **The Murder of the Innocent Children**

Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1562-1638). Rijksmuseum. Amsterdam. 1590.

##### **The Triumph of the Innocents**

William Holman Hunt (1827-1919). Walker Art Gallery. Liverpool. 1876-1887.

**The Massacre of the Holy Innocents**

Carlo Innocenzo Carloni (1686 – 1775). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. 1730/1740.

**The Slaughter of the Innocents**

Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480-1530). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. Ca. 1521.

**The Slaughter of the Innocents**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1582/1587.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée Condé. Chantilly. Ca. 1627-1628.

**Allegory of the Massacre of the Holy Innocents.** Pietro Testa (1607/1611-1650). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. Ca. 1640.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Attributed to Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Petit Palais. Paris.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1647-1665.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Michel Corneille. Musée des Beaux-Arts. Tours. Ca. 1658.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1635-1640.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Ippolito Scarsella called Scarsellino (ca. 1550-1620). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1600-1610.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Massacre of the Innocents.** Giovan Francesco Caroto (ca. 1480-1555). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *Christ in the House of his Parents*

### **Christ in the House of his Parents**

John Everett Millais (1829-1896). The Tate Gallery. 1850.

Little is known of the young years of Christ before he started his public life. Luke only said that the child grew in maturity and wisdom. Nevertheless, painters took up as subject the young Jesus as a boy together with his family. Jesus is often shown with Mary and Joseph in their home in Nazareth. Joseph may be teaching the child his profession of carpenter. The English Pre-Raphaelites turned frequently to the theme because it had not so often been used before. It was part of their innovation, the surprise they wanted to impress on the viewers of their art, and of course also part of the Romantic revival of religious themes that had occurred all through Europe in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement was founded during the winter of 1848 to 1849. It consisted of a core of three artists: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt. The most independent artist was Millais, the most romantic and extravagant was Rossetti, and the most religious William Holman Hunt. Hunt stayed the most true to the style of painting of the group. He worked painstakingly as the first fresco painters on a substrate of wet white paint on top of which he put his colours. These paintings have a brilliance that has remained quite unique in the history of pictorial art.

John Everett Millais exhibited in 1850 a religious painting in the Royal Academy of London that he called 'Christ in the House of his Parents', but which became known thereafter as the 'Carpenter's Shop' since it was not accepted as a scene of the life of Jesus. The picture was highly criticised because the Holy Family was represented as ordinary people at work. No less than Charles Dickens wrote with very denigrating phrases on the 'Carpenter's Shop' in his 'Household Word', a weekly journal. He wrote that the boy was 'hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed'. The kneeling woman was 'horrible in her ugliness. She would stand out as a monster in the vilest cabaret of France or the lowest gin shop of England'. And so on. Dickens said nobody paid attention to the old woman who 'had mistaken the shop for a tobacconist's next door'. But Dickens wrote further that 'the shavings strewn on the carpenter's floor were admirably painted'. This was one of the most eminent diatribes ever passionately written against the work of art of a new artist.

The carpenter's shop is dirty and poor. Wood curls are everywhere on the ground. Which is quite normal since Joseph is planing a door with a carpenter's apprentice and a workshop of the first years certainly must have looked like that. But the representation is not very respectful for the image of Jesus as God. Sheep are outside, quite close to the shop; a dove is sitting on a ladder, inside. Birds are drinking from a dish on a window-still. All not too tidy. Showing such a plain scene was regarded as close to sacrilege. And the picture was not just religious sacrilege. Around 1850 artistic critics had a very academic view of painting, rooted in the traditional ways of representation and in long-established formal aesthetical concepts of beauty. Representing every-day life was all right for the seventeenth century Dutch painters, but not anymore, and not for scenes of the life of Jesus. The plain image of the

common house of a worker was unacceptable for nineteenth century Victorian society. The painting of Millais was also an artistic sacrilege. Attacks were virulent in the press. The painting was found to be ugly and uninspiring.

Millais depicted Jesus in a white night shirt, with red hair. Mary is an ordinary worker's woman with the humble shawl tied over her hair and with a wrinkled forehead. Grandmother Anne had to help in the shop and she also is shown as a very humble, old lady. Joseph is not the old, dignified leader of the family but a simple man who has to earn a living by working through all day and who clearly needs all the help he can get from his family. If the help is in the form of a young boy holding a pail to throw water over the ground, Joseph will accept it gratefully. Everybody needs to work in this household in order to survive. The figures are not in beautifully curved poses, except maybe the knelt Mary. The figures of Joseph, Joseph's assistant on the other side of the door and the boy holding the pail are all imagined in movement, but the movements look unnatural and angular. They are like poses that only artificially give an impression of movement. Finally, all figures and certainly Joseph are thin if not to say emaciated.

The picture seems simple. Yet it is full of symbols. Jesus shows his hand to Mary. He has hurt himself at a nail, maybe the nail that is still in the table close by. The nail has brought a wound in the middle of the hand and Jesus holds that hand high as if in a testimony. This is a symbol of Jesus's future Passion since later he would be nailed to the cross, nails going through the palm of his hands in ancient medieval representations. Millais' painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850 with a quotation from Zacharias: 'And one shall say unto him, What are these Wounds in thy hands? Then he shall answer: Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends'.

There are more symbols. The tools of the carpenter's shop may be the instruments of Jesus's Passion. The boy bringing the water must be John the Baptist, always associated with water. The dove represents peace and love. The sheep outside are maybe a reference to the image of the Lamb of God, soon to be offered on an altar. Finally, the image of Mary and Jesus is a reference to many pictures of the Madonna and Child. So, Millais introduced very many symbols in the medieval style in his work, linking modernity to romantic nostalgia for the past style of art.

The painting has a strong, balanced composition. Anne and Joseph wear a red cloak and shirt whereas the helpers are bare-breasted, a double symmetry forming strong unity. The long, horizontal door on the common wooden carpenter's bench also forms a counter-weight to the vertical figures. The concept of these rude straight horizontal and vertical lines in the composition was a surprising novelty as compared to the earlier fluid lines of paintings of Baroque. The sheep, birds and dove add a tender touch in the same strip of the painting, to an otherwise cold and artificial scene. So, the picture was also an exercise of equilibrium of composition and an innovation of representation.

John Everett Millais lived and worked in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet, here were painters who could still invent a new iconography, new images and views on a story almost two millenniums old. The Pre-Raphaelites were innovators, as well in the use of colour as in their imagery. Their task was difficult because they

applied the old subject matter and proved that other fresh, new visions could still be found in that. This needed a very vivid imagination. They succeeded a remarkable tour de force and thus revived spiritual representation in English art. There is a lesson here. Art and certainly figurative art can be renewed endlessly. A view on the Holy Family like this had never been seen before, yet this was a truly honest, humble and realistic picture. Millais broke with all traditions with this 'Carpenter's Shop' and many disliked what they saw, instead of applauding a new vision on Christ. The Pre-Raphaelites were immediately famous with these kinds of pictures, though probably not in a way they had imagined. They achieved a reputation of iconoclasts, of angry young men. They would live up to their reputation with many other pictures, achieving entirely new images of the world, which now seem fresh and surprising instead of revolting. It would take some time, but in the end the Pre-Raphaelites were recognised as being the most important movement of innovation in representation and means of painting of the second half of the nineteenth century in England. Millais received a knighthood for it. He would be known henceforth as Sir John Everett Millais.

Millais brought the Holy Family down from its mystical pedestal of adoration symbol. Scenes of the lives of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary were always images to be venerated. They represented in Christianity the highest form of spirituality in the visual arts. This veneration had been sacrosanct throughout the past centuries. Millais, as of the other Pre-Raphaelites Hunt and Rossetti in their early religious pictures, did away with the old forms and iconography of veneration. However, they were too much the aesthetes and too much venerator of art itself to draw religious themes such as the Holy Family in vulgarity. The presentation of the 'Carpenter's shop' by the surprise of the angularity of its form, the geometrical frugality of its composition, the surprise of the handling of the subject, and the soft colours in the brilliance of the painting, found a new language of expression. This did not abase the subjects but simply introduced a new, more powerful aesthetic. Furthermore, Millais' representation contained as dense symbolism as the medieval primitive art. The idealist art that was reborn in England – or continued, since a long tradition of idealist art existed in this country – was aimed at still more spirituality. The Pre-Raphaelites brought a revived interest in the meaning of ideas and their expression as symbols. The young Millais, Rossetti and Hunt did not abolish or ridiculed Christian themes but on the contrary, by reviving them accentuated once more the spiritual ideas of Christianity and thereby strengthened them.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ in the Carpenter's Workshop**

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée du Louvre. Paris.

**Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the Carpenter's Workshop**

Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

## *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*

### **The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple**

William Holman Hunt (1827-1919). Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery – Birmingham. 1854-1860.

Mary and Joseph used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old they went to the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over, they set off for home but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was in another band of kinsmen returning home. After a day's journey they went to look for Jesus among their relatives, but failed to find him. So they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. Three days later they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking him questions. All those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. His mother said to him: "My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you!" He replied: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's House?" But they did not understand what he meant<sup>G38</sup>.

William Holman Hunt, one of three other original members of the Pre-Raphaelites Brotherhood made a painting of this scene of the finding in the Temple. Hunt started the painting in 1854 while he was on a trip in Israel but it took him five years to finish it. The painting was sold in 1860 for a fabulous sum of money to a well-known art dealer. In ten years, the unknown dilettante Pre-Raphaelites had become a success. The picture of the 'Finding of the Saviour' received the general admiration of the public and of the critics. William Holman Hunt was also not a man to paint sacrilegious scenes. He was a through-and-through deeply religious person all his life and most of his pictures have an insisting moralising tone.

The 'Finding of the Saviour in the Temple' is a brilliant piece of painting. To the right is a beautiful youth, Jesus, being embraced by a happy Mary. The turbaned Joseph stands behind Mary. Look at the contrasts with Millais' painting. Here, Jesus and Mary are all grace, in beautiful gowns and Joseph is the strong, old, bearded father as tradition accepts.

To the left are the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees of the Temple of Jerusalem. The most important of the priests wear the Jewish phylacteries. The leading priest holds the Torah, the scrolls with the five books of the Pentateuch of the Old Testament. This priest is blind, maybe a symbol of the outstripped old messages. Very realistic details are abundant in the vivid scenes of the sitting priests. One is explaining what is happening to the blind priest with the Torah. Another one is checking the words of Jesus in scrolls, one is holding a small dish to drink from, and another one is fidgeting with a pencil. Behind the priests are musicians with various instruments. The figures continue in the background with women and their babies around merchants. The elder Jesus will throw all the musicians and merchants out of the Temple. An acolyte seems to be lighting a lantern, as Jesus will be the light in the darkness. Outside, on the right, is a blind beggar. Jesus will eventually cure him. The Temple of Jerusalem is still being built at, but Jesus will predict that all Jerusalem will be destroyed and that not

one stone will be left on the other of the Temple. So, Hunt has not just made a painting of the coming of Jesus to the Temple; he has added various symbols in the medieval traditional way. The result is an epic painting with a breadth of truth and prophecy far beyond what a first view might yield.

The painting of William Holman Hunt is in the bright pure colours of the Pre-Raphaelites. The result is astonishingly vivid and fresh, in the full brilliance of the Israelite sunlight. The blue and purple of the young Jesus attract our view, but also the white and black of the Jewish priests on the other side. The composition of the painting is also very strong. The almost classical pyramid of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is balanced by the sitting Jews. Finally, the frame is rectangular and elongated. This is emphasised by the long horizontal lines of the wooden ceiling, which are all carved into a thin lattice that adds to the lightness. The whole picture is full of detail, such as the features of the Temple door behind Joseph.

The 'Finding of the Saviour in the Temple' is a rare accomplishment. We may not like anymore some of the sentimentality of the scene and many modern critics object to the supposed harshness of the colours. But the picture remains one of the main cult images of the Pre-Raphaelites and a tremendous work of genius and vision of William Holman Hunt.

*Other Paintings:*

**Twelve-year old Christ at the Temple**

Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1821.

**Jesus among the Doctors in the Temple**

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1660.

**The Dispute in the Temple**

Hans Fries (ca. 1465-1523). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1512.

**The Dispute in the Temple**

Jan Steen (1625/1626-1679). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1659-1660.

**Jesus found in the Temple**

Andrea Ansaldo (1584-1638). Collezioni Zerbone. Genua. 1630-1635.

**Jesus amongst the Doctors**

Giovanni Serodina (1600-1630). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1625.

## *Christ appears to the People*

### **Christ appears to the People**

Alexander Ivanov (1806-1858). The Tretyakov Gallery – Moscow. 1837-1857.

John the Baptist preached in the desert. People from Judaea and Jerusalem came to him, were baptised and confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin and he lived on locusts and on wild honey. He preached that someone was coming after him, someone more powerful than he was. He told the people that he, John, had baptised them with water but this man would baptise with the Holy Spirit. At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John.  
G38.

The arrival of Jesus was thus told by Mark in his New Testament story. Mark does not dwell much upon the appearance of Jesus at the Jordan River, but Alexander Ivanov made a monumental painting of this very significant moment when Jesus for the first time and openly appears to start his public life.

Alexander Ivanov's father was a painter at the Academy of Fine Arts of St Petersburg in Russia. Russian painting had been mostly icon painting since the eleventh century or so, in the purest tradition learned and inherited from Greek Orthodoxism of the East Roman Empire of Constantinople. But Peter the Great had not only wanted to build a new city and port opened to Western Europe; he also had wanted to found an academy of arts. The Academy of St Petersburg was only founded after Tsar Peter's death, in 1757, and only opened really in 1763. But from that moment on Russian painters were encouraged and supported to paint other pictures but icons. Alexander Ivanov was first taught to paint by his father, who was a professor of historical painter at the academy. Ivanov painted a few pictures but already in 1837 embarked on a project for a truly immense work on the life of Jesus, which he finally painted on a canvas of 540 by 750 centimetres, a very large surface for a Russian painting and even for Western Europe. Alexander Ivanov was only thirty years old when he began this work and he worked at it for almost twenty years, until 1857. He died the year after, in 1858. While he painted 'Christ appearing to the People' he also made aquarels for more than two hundred fifty Biblical scenes, which were drawings and essays for the ideal church dedicated to the cult of Jesus, a church Ivanov never did find. So 'Christ appears to the People' is by far Ivanov's most important work. It is indeed a remarkable painting and one of the great prides of Russian nineteenth century painting.

The 'Christ appears to the People' has a simple but efficient structure of composition. We see a traditional 'Open V' constituted by the people that have come to be baptised by John the Baptist. On the left side is the Jordan, the baptised and also John the Baptist. Ivanov painted behind this scene high bushes and trees, which grow to the upper border of the canvas. The outline of these plants forms the left side of the V structure. On the right side, people come down the hills to meet John and the outline of these figures from the right side of the V, the basic structure of Ivanov's composition. The painter then had an open space, in which usually painters showed a

far landscape. Ivanov did the same, but his innovation, a truly original finding, was to position Jesus here. In doing that, Ivanov brought a truly epic and romantic breadth in his painting that reminds of the vast spaces of the Russian plains.

Jesus appears entirely alone. He is an extraordinary apparition, who comes like a hero sent by God from nowhere. Ivanov enhanced the difference between Jesus and the other people of the scene. He painted Jesus enveloped in a dark blue cloak and we see Jesus's traditional red robe underneath. But these colours are deep and intense whereas Ivanov used much lighter shades on all other figures.

Russian painting is not very well known in Western Europe and the United States. Yet, Alexander Ivanov made a masterpiece that can be counted among the best pictures of the nineteenth century. He used a strong structure and showed an unforgettable image of Jesus approaching that renders well the epic grandeur of Jesus's life. Remark the skills in depiction of this master.

Ivanov painted John the Baptist centrally and imposingly. John points to Jesus and also the people on the right look at Jesus so that the viewer's attention is always drawn to the lonely figure of the approaching Jesus. That is the message of the Bible, in this way Jesus appeared as a surprise comet in the sky of Canaan, a man awaited since very long as the Messiah, but that no Israelite really expected to come in their life time.

Ivanov painted various nude men in his canvas and he had an unwavering eye for exact anatomy. No man has hair on chests and backs, so Ivanov showed idealised men come to the Jordan. Many bearded men are around John, but most have white or grey beards; they are wise old men, aware of the mystery and wonder of the moment of complete silence when Jesus approaches. All men are shown in some action so that the overall impression of the picture is one of movement, even though the movement has obtained by the composition a static character so that the viewer can look continuously at the canvas without the movement becoming unacceptable. In this movement of the moment, Jesus comes near but it is as if he is a vision that remains standing and always stays equal in the approaching, due to the effect of perspective and the heath of the desert. Even John the Baptist, though the man holds his arms high towards Jesus, has a statuesque quality. The whole picture acquires such sculptural quietness, which is one of the style elements of Classicism. Ivanov also used delicate colours. He applied light blue, brown, many shades of creamy flesh colours and these hues support also the mood of the theme. Thus we see a blue area of the dress of a man that kneels down in the middle, where the lowest point of the 'Open V' is situated, and we have but one area of blue on either die. Remark how Ivanov opened the V. He had the people sit down in the middle lower part, whereas all the other figures are standing, walking, or even sitting on horses while they come to the Jordan.

Alexander Ivanov was a wonderful painter. He painted all the figures of his immense picture in fully delineated, clear detail. Remark the masterly way by which Ivanov showed the volume of the bodies of John and the other figures by the shades of the folds of the cloaks they wear. Ivanov used no sfumato; his colours are well separated in areas and this feature of design plus his light, chalky colours give the lower part of the picture the impression of being a fresco painting, a Tuscan clear, cold, fully thought-out image and not the spontaneous view of a by-passer. The viewer has the

impression of an austere, very solemn scene painted by a venerable painter from times before Raphael and Michelangelo. And the figures are certainly not painted in Michelangelo's sensual, powerful but un-natural, tortured way. All figures seem natural, are part of the grand Russian steppe and all are irreplaceable in the overall vision of forms and colours.

Look at Ivanov's knowledge of aerial perspective. On the right side he painted the nude men in full light, but in yellow-brown colours. The men that arrive there from the hills however, he not only painted smaller but in almost pure white, much lighter hues. Lighter hues in the far are aspects of aerial perspective. Ivanov also painted the far hills in hazy blue and it is as if Jesus walks over the desert to the green sides of the Jordan from out of the grey mists of the valley, out of the mist that carries always mystery, surprise, fear, un-natural creation, the unexpected and the wonderful. Alexander Ivanov was also a great painter of plants. He painted the trees, the bushes and the forest in the valley in all detail, meticulously, to a marvel of art.

Alexander Ivanov was a Russian. Christian art was not confined to Western Europe. The Russia in which Ivanov lived was Greek-Orthodox with a strong tradition of almost oriental, Byzantine painting. Christian thinking and Christian feelings also pervaded Russia of the nineteenth century. Christian culture is a main element of European culture and that linked Eastern to Western Europe. Alexander Ivanov's painting is therefore not just a masterpiece of Russia, but also a major picture of European culture.

## *The Baptism of Christ*

### **The Baptism of Christ**

Piero della Francesca. (1416-1492). The National Gallery – London.

In due course John the Baptist appeared. He proclaimed this message in the desert of Judaea: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is close at hand.” This man John wore a garment made of camelhair with a leather loincloth round his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins<sup>G38</sup>.

Then Jesus appeared; he came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him, with the words: “It is I who need baptism from you, and yet you come to me?” But Jesus replied: “Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that uprightness demands.” Then John gave in to him. And when Jesus had been baptised he at once came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And suddenly there was a voice from heaven: “This is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him.”<sup>G38</sup>

These are the words of Matthew. They have been eternalised by Piero della Francesca in a picture that is so mathematically exact as to fix in time and space once and for all the scene that was the beginning of Jesus’s public life. Images of the Baptism after this picture could never attain the force and definite view of Piero. The picture is so well known as to be trivial to present here.

Piero della Francesca was born around 1416 to 1420 in Borgo San Sepolchro of Umbria, Italy. His real name was Pietro di Benedetto di Franceschi. When exactly he started to paint is difficult to establish, but he was active as a painter from around 1440 to about 1492. His teacher was Domenico Veneziano, the Venetian. Among Piero’s pupils were Bramante, the architect of Saint Peter’s in Rome, Pietro Perugino and Luca Signorelli. He knew Leon Battista Alberti, the architect who defined the basic elements of Renaissance architecture. Piero worked all over Italy, in his hometown first, then in Ferrara, Rome, and Rimini. He worked for Duke Federico de Montefeltro in Urbino, and also painted in Florence and Arezzo. He made marvellous frescoes in this last town, a series of the true story of the Holy Cross according to a narration of the Golden Legend. Piero also coloured in tempera and in oil and his ‘Baptism’ contains both techniques. He stopped painting around 1470, probably to dedicate his mind and skill to perspective and mathematics.

Jesus stands in the Jordan and John pours water over his head. The action is caught like an instant photograph: drops of water fall over Jesus and are shown in mid fall. Angels stand to the left. To the right are believers that have come to be baptised by John. They also are caught by the instant since one is getting out of his shirt next to the river. Jesus is standing in the geometric middle of the painting. The dove of the Holy Spirit is exactly above Christ and also at the middle point of the half circle that forms the upper part of the frame. The dove represents the Trinity, a theme that Piero absorbed in various pictures. The three angels that stand on the left also hint at the

Trinity. The angels are painted in the three colours of the Trinity: white, blue and red. This left part of the painting represents the sacred part whereas all the disciples that have come to be baptised, in the scene's worldly part, are on the right.

Christ's folded arms form a triangle the top of which is in the middle of the dove. This triangle has as its base the lower base of the frame. This triangle gives the impression of a receding perspective as one would find in architectural drawings. The man bowing on the left brings a line that ends also in the dove. Jesus's hands are again held in the middle line. John and the tree are symmetrical to Christ and at equal distances from the sides. Jesus's navel is at exactly half the distance between the lower border of the frame and the dove. Thus the full circle of which the upper half forms the frame would pass through Jesus's navel. The middle angel of the left is exactly in the middle of distance between the frame and the main tree. Other triangles can be drawn in the painting.

Piero della Francesca used proportions of whole numbers in his painting. The panel is sub-divided in three equal parts in its height. The half circle is in the upper one-third. The horizontal line through Jesus's navel separated the lower rectangle of the frame in two equal parts. So proportions of  $1/3$  and  $2/3$  can be discerned. The middle of the tree is at a distance of  $3/5$  from the left border of the frame to the middle vertical line and so is the mine that goes through John the Baptist's standing leg. The triangle formed by Jesus's hands goes down to the line of the frame and is about  $3/5$  in length of that base. The height of the white angel is about  $3/5$  of the height of the rectangular panel. All these proportions are approximately those of the golden Section. The Golden Section is a section of a line segment such that the smallest part of the section stands to the largest part as that largest part to the whole segment. In integer numbers the proportion is about  $3/5$ . The Golden Section was thought to represent the basic aesthetic harmony.

So Piero della Francesca drew many lines first on the canvas and then based his figures and other elements along these lines. He may well have believed in the mysterious power of numbers and he may have been a Late Medieval man in that. He was indeed obsessed with numbers and geometry and the lines, numbers and triangles in this 'Baptism of Christ' are so obvious as to not have been possible by chance. That is at least true for the easiest divisions. Whereas for the Golden Section numbers, Piero may have come to these positions also by his own intuition for these can indeed be arrived at by chance. Three-fifth or 60% of a distance is a natural place to position figures because  $3/4$  or 75% or even  $2/3$  or 66% is too large in general. The proportions of the Golden Section have often been used in paintings, but most often this was by natural choice.

Many of the colours used by Piero della Francesca have changed over time, so also in this picture. Piero painted a first layer of green, the 'verdaccio' for the bodies and faces and this colour shows through after the ages. The bodies in the picture are almost translucent. Bright blue and red can be found in the angels, but the gold in their wings has disappeared. Piero has put a lush green Tuscan landscape in the background. We see however that his strength was in geometry, in perspective and in the figures because this landscape as compared to a Patenier for instance could lack imagination. But the prominent tree is a walnut tree, one of the symbols of Christ. Also the river Jordan is not much of the wide and sometimes wild stream it really is.

Again simply the water was enough as a symbol for John the Baptist and for Christ since Jesus told he was the water of life. The important idea for Piero was the spiritual meaning of the Baptism and of the Trinity. This was an eternal concept, so he tried to capture this in an instance of time by exact geometry and by applying symbolic elements.

Piero believed in the mystics of numbers. The 'Baptism of Christ' thus became an icon, a symbol in its own right. Piero's 'Baptism' is an attempt to transfix the religious concept of the act of the baptism of Jesus, the most important rite of passage, in immutable proportions. While doing that however, he succeeded in making a picture caught in action. Here is a wonder of the most rigorous static and impression of action in strict harmony.

*Other paintings:*

**The Baptism of Christ**

Gheeraert David (1460-1523). Groeninge Museum Bruges.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Joachim Patenier (1480-1524). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Vienna.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**Christ's Baptism**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Around 1655.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Gheeraert David (1460-1523). Groeninge Museum. Bruges. 1520.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries. London. 1580-1588.

**Baptism of Christ**

School of Joachim Patenier (1480-1524). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Tournai.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti. Florence.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). The San Corona Church. Vicenza. 1501.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The National Gallery of Art. Washington.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Tiziano Vecellio called Titian (ca. 1490-1576). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori. Rome.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Luciano Borzone (1590-1645). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1620-1621.

**Landscape with the Baptism of Christ and the Sermon of Saint John the Baptist**

Paul Bril (1554-1626). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1565-1632). Städelsches Institut und Städtische Galerie. Frankfurt am Main. Ca. 1601.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Donato Creti (1671-1749). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. 1733.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Paris Bordone (ca. 1500-1571). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1550.

**The Baptism of Christ**

Callisto Piazza (ca. 1500-1562). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

## *Christ in the Desert*

### **The Temptation of Christ and the Purification of the Lepers.**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). The Sistine Chapel – The Vatican. 1481-1482.

The Sistine Chapel of the Vatican was built close to Saint Peter's cathedral for Pope Sixtus IV. It was to be the Pope's own chapel and also to be used by the Sacred College of Cardinals in conclave for the election of a new Pope. The chapel is a rectangular brick building, quite common on the outside but richly decorated within. The architect was Giovanni dei Dolci and he worked after a design of Baccio Pontelli. The construction started in 1475. The chapel was decorated in three distinct periods. First, in 1481, rectangular frescoes were painted that ran along the walls as a large frieze. The fresco paintings formed two cycles, representing scenes from the life of Moses and from the life of Jesus. It may have been Sixtus IV who had the idea to join the Old and New Testament on opposite walls. This idea was continued by the subsequent painters as the central theme of the whole chapel. The two first cycles faced each other in six frescoes. The work was given originally to Pietro Perugino, but this painter called in other artists to help. The chapel was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and thus inaugurated the 15<sup>th</sup> of August of 1483, on the Holy Day of Mary's Assumption.

The episodes of the life of Moses started with 'The Voyage of Moses in Egypt' by Pietro Perugino and Pintoricchio, and 'Episodes of the Life of Moses' by Sandro Botticelli. Further scenes were 'The Passage through the Red Sea' by Cosimo Rosselli, 'The Tables of the Law' by Cosimo Rosselli and Piero di Cosimo, 'The Chastisement of Coreus, Dathan and Abiron' by Botticelli and finally 'The Testament and Death of Moses' painted by Luca Signorelli.

The episodes of the life of Jesus on the opposite wall are 'Christ's Baptism' by Pietro Perugino and Pintoricchio. Next scenes are 'The Calling of the First Apostles' by Domenico Ghirlandaio, 'The Preaching on the Mountain' by Cosimo Rosselli and Piero di Cosimo, 'Peter receives the Keys' by Il Perugino again and finally 'The Last Supper' by Cosimo Rosselli. Each fresco presents a religious scene with utmost respect, dignity, Florentine harmony of design and sublime spirituality. Each of these scenes is a masterpiece made by some of the greatest artists of the century.

Four other panels of this period covered the wall behind the altar. These were destroyed however and lost. They were partly the victim of cracks in the wall and partly covered by Michelangelo when he painted his 'Last Judgement' over them. During the first period of decoration the ceiling represented the blue firmament studded with gilded wooden stars, as made by Pier Matteo d'Amelia. On top of the large frieze of the lives of Moses and Christ was painted a gallery of the thirty-one first Popes. It is difficult to state now who painted the series of Popes. It may have been Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, Sandro Botticelli or even Fra Diamante. Michelangelo likewise later covered the portraits of the Popes on the wall of the altar for his own large fresco.

In the second period, dating from 1508 to 1511, Michelangelo painted the ceiling on commission of Pope Julius II della Rovere. This titanic work consisted of nine central scenes of the Genesis. Michelangelo added prophets and Sibyls and various other smaller scenes of the Bible, the Old Testament. After this period, from 1515 to 1519 tapestries were woven in Brussels according to designs of Raphael. These tapestries would cover for the great ceremonies the lower part of the walls under the frieze of frescoes.

During the third period, lasting from 1536 to 1541, Michelangelo painted the 'Last Judgement' on the wall of the altar, as commissioned first by Pope Clemens VII and then again by Pope Paul III Farnese.

The Sistine Chapel thus covers about sixty years of pictorial arts, which were among the most fertile for the splendid art of the Italian Renaissance. One of the frescoes of the earliest frieze is the 'Temptation of Christ and Purification of the Leper' by Sandro Botticelli.

Filled by the Holy Spirit after his Baptism, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil.

During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him: "If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf." But Jesus replied: "Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone."

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him: "I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage then to me, and it shall all be yours." But Jesus answered him, "Scripture says: You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve."

Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are Son of God", he said to him, "throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, to guard you. And again: They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone." But Jesus answered him: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Having exhausted every way of putting Jesus to the test, the devil left him until the opportune moment<sup>G38</sup>.

As Jesus was in one of the towns a man appeared to him covered with a virulent skin disease. Seeing Jesus, the man fell on his face and implored to cure him. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, "I am willing to cure you. Be cleansed". The skin disease left the man. Jesus ordered him to tell no one but to go and show himself to the Priest and make an offering for the cleansing just as Moses had prescribed, as evidence to the priests. But the news of the man kept spreading and large crowds would gather to hear Jesus and to have their illnesses cured. But Jesus would go off to some deserted place and pray<sup>G38</sup>.

Sandro Botticelli blended these two tales together in a painting with many figures. The narrative element of several figures in one picture is a characteristic of most of the friezes of the Sistine chapels. Crowds were shown in the frescoes to testify that the words of Jesus had been for everybody and that priests, monks, doctors, common folk and nobles were present around Christ. The people who would participate in the Holy Mass of the Pope in the Sistine Chapel thus were surrounded by the presence of many

painted figures that gave direct testimony of the acts of Jesus. For medieval man, the events of the Gospels were very tangible and the devote men and women shown on the walls of the Sistine Chapel were as present as the devoted people of flesh and blood that were standing in the chapel.

Since the 'Temptation in the Desert' was a lonely act, this scene would have been an exception among the other episodes painted by Botticelli's colleagues.

The painting shows the Temple of Jerusalem. Botticelli drew the Hospital of the Spirito Sancto in Rome as the Temple. On top of the Temple, to the left and right are the Temptation scenes. To the left a devil with thorny wings but dressed in disguise as a monk asks Jesus to turn stones to bread. On the Temple itself, the same devil asks Jesus to accept the wealth of the world, that is the Renaissance town and the seaport added by Botticelli in the background. To the right the devil has thrown off his disguise, his monk's habits, and he flies down the abyss tempting Jesus to follow him. At the same time Jesus condemns the devil and the satyr flees in fear and despair. Jesus has won and angels have come to wait on him again. Behind Jesus is a scene referring to the Last Supper and the Eucharist.

Under these scenes the cured leper, dressed in white robes of the penitent, presents an offering to the priest. The priest will burn the offer in the flames of a heathen altar. Purification is by fire, not by water. The fire brings us back to hell and to the devil, so Botticelli links the two scenes of the same picture. The sacrifice may bring the disease back to the devil. This is a symbol of the power of Jesus to drive out demons and the illnesses they bring to humans. It reminds us that ugliness, disorder, and corruption do not come from God but from the Bad. A crowd has gathered as told by Luke. Christ also is being led from the left to the crowds by the angels of the last Temptation episode. Thus, there is continuity in the tale of Botticelli.

The crowds represent all the classes of society. We can discern a prince, a Catholic priest, a woman with a basket filled with chicken, an elder merchant, a soldier, a judge, a hunter, and many more. To the extreme right is a head that looks at the coming of Christ on the right. This portrait resembles an auto-portrait of Botticelli in the 'Adoration of the Kings', a painting that is now in the Uffizi Museum of Florence.

There is something strange in the crowds though. The elder men of substance are standing to the right, which is not the traditional side of prominence. On this side we see the monk and the judge. A goddess comes along wearing cut old tree branches. One thinks of the goddess Ceres here, who is usually depicted like this wearing a corn-sheaf as the personification of the earth's abundance. A cornucopia is usually also close to this lady and indeed, just before her is a putto with such a horn. But this goddess does not wear a corn-sheaf; she wears branches of cut trees. Botticelli has transformed this goddess of abundance into a symbol of the power of the establishment that is going to be changed. Jesus himself has used the image of the cut trees. Luke reported the words of Jesus that "Any tree failing to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire". This idea was used also by Filippo Lippi, the teacher of Botticelli, in several images of the Virgin Mary with Jesus and the young John the Baptist called 'Adoration in the Forest'. The dignitaries on the right are the class of people, the generation that does not produce good fruit anymore. As a symbol of these, Botticelli used the putto bearing the horn of cornucopia of Fortune

and the fat grapes. These bystanders of the right were in Jesus's eyes the people who would have it most difficult to enter the dwellings of God. The politicians, the corrupt, the powerful and the wealthy that could not bring forth love, compassion, empathy and tolerance would be cut down. This wood would be thrown into the fire. The fire of the altar, representing hell, is close by.

On the other side of the fresco however stand the pure of heart. Here are the young, the rightful and the poor woman wearing a basket on her head, all rushing by and pushing. Only these talk of the new good message. Indeed, only on the extreme left side do we see youths discussing and obviously spreading the news, as in the story of Jesus.

In this fresco, once more, we find a two-faced Botticelli. On the one hand the dandy, the Florentine court painter filled with the grace of refined living and learning, presenting a scene that is a marvel of elegance to the viewer. On the other end, Sandro Botticelli was very much an extremely sophisticated thinker and constructor of images. Here was an intelligent man, moralising on society and the true message of Jesus in the middle of the Sistine Chapel. Sandro Botticelli was not yet forty years old, but he was already the kind of painter, recognised as a genius, who was allowed to moralise in this holy palace that was the Sistine Chapel. More than the other painters he was interrogating the messages and stories of the Bible. Much later Botticelli would become a zealot follower of the monk Savonarola and destroy the paintings he had made before and still had in his possession. Some of Botticelli's questioning can be found in his pictures in the Sistine Chapel.

Botticelli pointed out to all dignitaries, also of the Church hierarchy, that worldly power was not what Jesus had preached. Jesus refused the devil and the temptations of the material world. Jesus had no patience for the corrupt. They would be burned in eternal fire. It was not necessary for Botticelli to show the truths so obviously. However, the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel had to be painted to the real message of Jesus and to the real convictions of the artist. We do not believe that Botticelli was merely a slick court painter. He was a person that sincerely believed in Jesus's teachings. He had thought out or himself the moral message he needed to express in the Sistine Chapel, as he had done in other pictures. In the Sistine Chapel only honesty could work.

*Other paintings:*

**The Temptations and Baptism of Christ**

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528 – 1588). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Temptation of Christ in the Desert**

Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen (1470-1533). Suermondt Ludwig Museum. Aachen.

**The Temptation of Christ**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1578-1581.

**Christ in the Desert**

Domenico Morelli (1823/1826-1901). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1895.

**Christ in the Desert**

Ivan Kamiskoi (1837-1887). The Tretyakov Gallery. Moscow. 1872.

## *Christ served by Angels in the Desert*

### **Christ in the Desert served by Angels**

Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1608-1610.

The Spirit led Jesus in the desert. Jesus fasted for forty days and was then tempted by the Devil. The devil proposed Jesus to turn stones into bread because Jesus was hungry. He tempted Jesus to throw himself down from the parapet of the Temple to see whether angels would save him, and he offered Jesus all the splendours of the world if only Jesus would save himself by his own powers. But Jesus refused all the temptations and made the devil leave him. Then, suddenly, angels appeared and served Jesus. This story is only told in some detail by Matthew. Mark merely mentions that Jesus was in the desert for forty days; John does not mention the fasting in the desert.

Ludovico Carracci made around 1610 a painting on the theme of Jesus served by angels after the temptations in the desert. Carracci was then already an elder man, around fifty-five years old and at the height of his art. The work was made in Bologna, probably for the noble family of the Pepoli.<sup>D19</sup> The work stayed for centuries in Bologna, disappeared in the nineteenth century only to re-appear in private property in 1980, after which it was bought by the Berlin Gemäldegalerie. It is a Baroque work, but the Carracci painters were among the founders of a Classicist line of Baroque, which favoured calm dignity instead of overt depiction of emotions in dramatic scenes. 'Christ in the Desert, served by Angels' is such a work.

We see Jesus standing in the middle of the picture and several angels around him. The scene is not in a desert at all, but the Bible stories of the temptations may mention a 'wilderness', which is not necessarily a desert as we imagine it. A desert can also be a spiritual desert of loneliness and abandonment, and such a place can also be in a forest or a wide plains. We often forget that Jesus's Palestine was a finer place than it is in our days. It was a land of forests and green fields, more than current times. And Ludovico Carracci of course was painting for the halls of a Bolognese palazzo, so he had to deliver a picture that also had to be decorative. So he placed Jesus against a landscape of large trees. Such paintings also had to blend with the wall's decoration. The pictures could not be so bright, for then they would have been a false note in the hall, and contrast too much with the darker tones of the furniture and the vases, clocks or other objects placed in the hall. Still, although Ludovico Carracci situated the scene in the night and painted a dark-toned background of a wood behind Jesus, he used some very bright hues on the angels and on Jesus, so that viewers also had no difficulty to perceive quickly the main figures of the theme.

Ludovico Carracci made a picture in which viewers can discover several smaller scenes. It is a picture with much narrative, literary content. In the left lower corner an angel kneels to a pond and washes dishes. Above that angel, another one brings silver cups and a little higher up angels with opened wings pass to each other a golden bowl

and bring golden objects to the table. To the right, an angel in white kneels before Jesus and offers him a plate with water to wash his hands. On the other side of Jesus angels respectfully hold white linen to dry his hands. Still another angel pours water on Jesus's hands. Three angels, shown only in part, hover above the scene, make heavenly music and sing. Yet other angels are in the background, behind the trees and in the skies. There are twelve angels in the principal scene, but Jesus stands oblivious of them.

Jesus stands, lost in gratitude for his heavenly Father and he is in a dignified, humble, dreamy poise. Jesus is absent-minded for what goes on around him, and seems only automatically to offer his hands for the purification of water by the angels. Ludovico Carracci painted Jesus very finely, dressed in a clear-lined robe and cloak. He used harmonious colours on Jesus: a red brick colour for the robe going on to purple, and a dark blue cloak. These are all painted in fine chiaroscuro. Jesus makes a movement with his hands to the right, offering them to the water. Carracci balanced that movement nicely by drawing Jesus's head and shoulders somewhat to the left. Beneath, Jesus's right foot is placed a little to the left. The result is a classic, academic image of perfect pictorial balance and of course also of an elegant, delicate poise of relaxed distinction. Jesus is the Romantic hero, the transcendental spiritual being who addresses not the viewer but a being or spirit higher up, the God that is above the frame of the painting and above the viewer. Jesus neither looks at the viewer nor seems to care for the angels, nor does he look at the viewer. The painting is therefore an independent entity. The scene exists on its own, without and despite the viewer. It is the perfect object for a palace hall, non-obtrusive and non-committing, yet interesting enough to catch attention for a long time by its details of figures and fineness of painting. The scene is thus eternal, and not a temporary image caught in a moment by the viewer. The viewer then remains before the painting, unconsciously hoping that Jesus might move, abandon his thoughts and give attention to the angles and to the viewer after all. Ludovico Carracci thus knew very well how to create tension between moment and movement that is quite remarkable.

All the angels move around Jesus and the painter showed them all in various occupations but Jesus stands and is out of the movement. Yet, he is not in the rigid poise of the moment's anxiety. The fasting of forty days brought awareness not of the world but of the higher world, and Jesus is experiencing this liberation of the soul. He stands in the relaxed attitude that can go on forever. As for the angels, the viewer's attention moves from one from the other and Ludovico Carracci knew very well how to guide the viewer. In a subtle way the angels look or point at each other and also at the viewer, proposing to engage the viewer in their scene. The angels' eyes catch the viewer, and then lead him or her away to other places in the painting.

Ludovico Carracci painted Jesus and the angels against a dark background of trees. His robe is red, his cloak blue, so Ludovico needed to use the complementary colour of blue, which is yellow and golden, in the knelt angels. He broke symmetry some by painting the angel on the right of Jesus in white, only to harmonize that hue with the very light and subtle purple robe of the angel that pours water on Jesus's hands. In the group of angels on the left of the frame, the viewer finds these colours also: blue, yellow to golden and a few white patches also, in an agreeable, harmonious variation of shades. The green colour remains reserved for the background. Ludovico Carracci was a fine master in the choice of colours and he was very much aware too of

composition. Jesus and the angels that serve him with the washing of hands are in a pyramid form. Carracci made the angels kneel around Jesus so that they are the basis of the pyramid, a traditional but very strong form of composition. He painted the angels-musicians higher up and balanced these with the horizontal and lower masses, extending to the left, of the table and of the other angels. The group of angels there forms a fluid movement of hands that touch, of eyes that inter-lock, until in this scene the rightmost angel points to the musicians again. All the angels outside the pyramid thus seem to be connected and so isolate the front composition of Jesus and his serving angels in the pyramid structure, strengthening it and separating it from the rest of the picture, so forcing it more upon the first attention of the viewer and creating also a sense of space since the pyramid structure pushes the other scenes to the background.

Ludovico Carracci also introduced symbolism in his work. The washing of the hands is a ritual act of purity performed during Holy Mass. Behind Jesus is a table covered with a white, long cloth, equally a sign of purity and that reminds of the altar of the church, on which Catholic priests serve Mass. On the table stands only a golden cup with the wine of Mass and the bread, used to commemorate the Last Supper. The symbols refer to Christ's sacrifice and to the institution of Holy Mass. The angels around Jesus remind the viewer that God has to be served.

Jesus is tranquil, lost in thoughts, hardly still in the world. Ludovico Carracci contrasted this feeling, which is easily induced also in the viewer, with a turbulent and menacing background. We see dark trees there in a dense, black forest that seems impenetrable. The scene is set at night and Carracci took great pleasure in showing the silvery moonlight on the clouds and mist that rise in the skies. The artist painted the trees meticulously. Carracci worked long and with dedication at his picture, so that he really honoured a commission from one of the richer families of Bologna.

Ludovico Carracci was the son of a butcher of Bologna and also the cousin of two other famous painters of Bologna, Agostino and Annibale Carracci. Together with his cousins he founded in Bologna and in 1582 first the 'Academy of the Desiderosi' and later, in 1590, the 'Academy of the Incamminati'. This became the main school of painting of Bologna. The three Carraccis were the prominent painters of Bologna and with their school also formed famous pupils. Guido Reni and Guercino for instance were students of Ludovico. Ludovico travelled occasionally to Rome and Venice; he was in Rome in 1602 and must have seen some of Caravaggio's pictures there, as well as the decorations in the Palazzo Farnese on which worked his cousin Annibale. Ludovico stayed mostly in Bologna however, and left Rome to his cousins. He directed the academy of Bologna while his cousins were away from the town. The Carracci painters of that generation were among the very first baroque painters, abandoning Mannerism for a more natural, relaxed manner of positioning figures and they also referred more to nature and to landscapes again. The Carraccis returned to Classical themes but in the era of Catholic Counter-Reformation religious scenes were also common and hardly to be avoided by these artists. They favoured clear scenes with fewer personages, but their styles also much differed, as they were modulated by the different experiences and characters of the painters. One would expect Ludovico's work rooted in the region of Bologna and thus sweeter and more intimate, whereas Annibale worked in mundane Rome, on frescoes that had to show the wealth and sophistication of the Papal court. Still, after 1600, Ludovico Carracci also made larger

pictures, such as this 'Christ in the Desert' and he brought more elaboration, fantasy and freedom of lines and drawing in his pictures.

Ludovico Carracci worked slowly, meticulously but stubbornly. Each picture was a child in which he inspired poetry and care. He was a master of tranquil elegance, dedicated much to Catholic thought and to his links with the Church and its revivening of religious feeling to a new demonstration of the greatness of Christ. He painted many religious scenes and also in his 'Christ in the Desert' do we find the main characteristics of the new style that his academy proposed: elegance, fine composition, intelligence in symbols, dedication to detail and clear drawing, great skill in chiaroscuro, harmonious and soft hues, and content that was rapidly observed and understood by viewers. Pictures such as 'Christ in the Desert' were the images to which groped the Roman and French Classicists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This style also must have influenced Caravaggio, who worked at the same time as the Carraccis. Caravaggio focused on realism of his figures, drew these closer still to the viewer than the Carraccis so that the viewer were more directly and more forcefully implicated in the scenes. He forgot entirely the background that Ludovico Carracci so lovingly worked on. Maybe Ludovico also saw the deeper workings of contrast between light and shadow of Caravaggio, although he already may have taken such emphasis from earlier Venetian painters such as Tintoretto. 'Christ in the Desert' is a night scene, but Ludovico Carracci confined the harsher conflicts between light and night to the background.

Ludovico Carracci made a painting on the triumph of faith over the horrors and sadness of the world. A weak point in his painting could be the image of the three, golden musicians to the higher right of Jesus. In Ludovico's composition this small scene is somewhat of a strange appearance and it is surprisingly linked to the angel lower down, where the scene touches the white wing of the angel. Seen from a distance however, these angles from what almost looks like a golden crown held high above Jesus. The scene then becomes once more a symbol that Ludovico Carracci intended to stress: the symbol of Jesus's Coronation and his supremacy over heaven and world. Such representations were well in line with Counter-Reformation programs.

*Other paintings:*

**Jesus comforted by angels**

Sinibaldo Scorza (1598-1631). Pinacoteca. Voltaggio.

## *Christ in the House of Simon*

### **The Supper at Simon's House**

Pierre Subleyras (1699-1749). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1737.

When Jesus was on his travels to preach, a Pharisee called Simon invited him to a meal.

When Jesus arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, suddenly a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment<sup>G38</sup>.

After this scene, Simon the Pharisee wondered whether Jesus was really the prophet everyone told he was, because surely Jesus would have seen that this woman had a bad name and would not have let her touch him. But Jesus retorted with a parable and he showed the difference of welcoming he had received from Simon as compared to the welcome of the woman. Simon had poured no water over Jesus's feet and Simon had not anointed Jesus's head.

Jesus said: "For this reason I tell you, Simon, that her sins, many as they are, have been forgiven her, because she has shown such great love. It is someone who is forgiven little who shows little love". Then he said to the woman: "Your sins are forgiven"<sup>G38</sup>.

John in 11:2 names this woman Mary, sister to the man Lazarus that Jesus would resurrect, and sister to Martha, all of the village of Bethany. Tradition associates her with a woman Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out (Luke 8:2). This woman walked with Jesus and the twelve apostles when the Christ was proclaiming the Good News. Further women accompanying Jesus on the travel are named by Luke as Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna and many others who provided for them out of their own resources.

John also told that the house was filled with the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot – one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him – said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contents. So Jesus said, "leave her alone; let her keep it for the day of my burial. "You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me."<sup>G38</sup>

Pierre Subleyras was a French painter and engraver, born in 1699 during the reign of Louis XIV in St Gilles du Gard of the South of France. He studied with his father Mathieu who was also a painter. Pierre worked in Rome, where he was known as a painter of religious panels and of portraits. Subleyras remained essentially a Baroque painter, but he was also French with a rather austere tradition of portraiture. So there is quite a difference in the way he handles portraits and scenes like 'The Supper in the

House of Simon'. This picture came to France in the early years of the French Revolution, in 1799. The revolutionaries fancied the grand epic works of Subleyras even though he was mainly a religious painter. They confiscated several of his pictures from the court families, from the Countess du Barry, and from the Duchess de Nouailles. The vast painting (it measures 2.15 by 6.79 meters) of the 'Supper at Simon's' came from the Asti convent near Turin.<sup>F1</sup>

The painting is all Baroque action. Simon the host is seated or lying as an oriental satrap at one end of the long table. Jesus is sitting in the same manner at the left end. The tale of Luke and John is represented. Simon is whispering to his Pharisee neighbours, "Who is this man who forgives sins?" Other invited Pharisees pass the question along and comment on it. Near Christ may be Susanna, who accompanied the apostles on their travels. A little further wine is served to Peter. Other apostles are near. Judas Iscariot is behind Jesus. He is clearly protesting and pointing at Mary Magdalene. Mary is wiping Jesus's feet with her hair. She has her back all bare, the only one to show any naked skin around the table except a servant at the exact symmetrical opposite. Christ is dressed in a red robe. Red is the colour of love. He makes a sign of blessing or of forgiveness. Subleyras has added a lively scene of servants bringing the food, pouring wine, and washing the dishes. The scene in the foreground refers to various famous painting of the 'Last Supper', such as the middle theme of the picture. Indeed, there wine is being poured to Peter. The lines of movement from the right and from the left point to this act of presenting the wine, which is of course a reference to the Eucharist.

One can analyse this picture to find various symmetries in the horizontal and vertical lines. The figures are positioned in symmetrical groups around the middle vertical axis of the painting. Symmetries are also to be found in the colours; for instance the red of Jesus's robe is matched on the other side by the red of the robe of Simon. Jesus and Simon are the two most important figures of the theme. The blue of Jesus's cloak finds an answer in the blue robe of the youth on the other side, and so on. Subleyras has added the traditional symbols also like the dog, the tilted dishes, the basket and the pitchers, which have their own particular symbolic value, and which were often depicted in scenes of the 'Last Supper'.

Subleyras was a professional painter. His 'Supper in the House of Simon' is a professional picture that lacks maybe the intensity of a very original creative imagination, but that shows the symbols and refined representation that one could expect of the better works of art.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ in the House of Simon**

Dieric Bouts (1420-1474). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1460.

**The Supper in the House of Levi**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**The Feast in the House of Simon**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. 1560.

**The Supper in the House of Simon**

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528 – 1588). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Supper at Simon's House**

Bernardo Strozzi (1581 – 1644). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice.

**The Supper in Simon's House**

Francesco da Ponte called Francesco Bassano Il Giovane (1549-1592). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

**The Supper in the House of Simon the Pharisee**

Ippolito Scarsella called Scarsellino (ca. 1550-1620). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1590-1595.

**Christ in the House of Simon**

Sigmund Holbein (1470/80-1540). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

**Christ in the House of Simon**

Girolamo Muziano attributed (1528-1592). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.

**The Supper at Simon's House**

Valerio Castello (1624-1659). Galleria di palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1650.

## *Christ Preaching*

### **Harbour with Christ Preaching**

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. 1598.

Jan Brueghel the Elder was in many respects an artist that spanned a transition period in Flemish art. He was born in 1568 in Brussels, about ten years earlier than Pieter Paul Rubens, and although he died in 1625, well in the seventeenth century that was mostly Baroque in style, his own style was more linked to his father, to Pieter Bruegel.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder painted in a very original and individual way, but in many features the Gothic, late Middle Ages shined through his work so that to new viewers it always comes as a surprise that in fact he was a painter of the after-Renaissance. Pieter painted scenes from the lives of the common people that were living a simple but intense life in the Flemish country villages. He painted marriages and funerals; he painted their proverbs and their kermises. He painted genre scenes and so could be called a precursor of the genre style that later Dutch artists would bring to its apogee. Pieter Bruegel's style came from the observation of the rural life around Brussels, not from the involvement with the urban life of the northern metropolis cities of Antwerp or Amsterdam. Bruegel also emphasised the moral lessons that the later Dutch painters would insist on. But he also painted religious scenes and mythological scenes from classic antiquity. He disguised these stories and depicted them as everyday events from the countryside. In many of his pictures we find very many small figures and we have marvellous landscape drawings from him, also of the Alps Mountains between France and Italy, which Pieter must have visited on his voyage to Italy. He only visited Italy for a short time and although the Habsburg family members bought many of his paintings, he was never a court painter.

Jan Brueghel was Pieter's second son. He continued the tradition of genre painting in pictures with many small figures in wide landscapes seen from elevated viewpoints. But he also differed from his father in many aspects. Jan Brueghel stayed for longer periods in Italy. In 1590 he was in Naples, from 1592 to 1594 he stayed in Rome.<sup>D11</sup> Then he visited Milan, where he met Cardinal Borromeo. Jan returned to Antwerp in 1596, but he continued to exchange letters with the Milanese Cardinal and helped him to find the Flemish landscape pictures that the Cardinal favoured. Borromeo admired Jan's smooth art and also possessed many pictures from him. In 1604 Jan Brueghel went to Prague and in 1612 he travelled to Holland with Pieter Paul Rubens and Hendrick van Balen. He had a workshop in Antwerp together with the young prodigious Anthony van Dyck. Unlike his father Jan became a court painter for the Archduke Albrecht of Austria. Jan was also Dean of the Guild of Painters of Antwerp. He was a man of recognised social standing and a successful, internationally renowned artist. He was more a man of the world and less the fervent, but inner-oriented and innovating painter that was his great father.

In the 'Harbour Scene with Christ preaching', dating from 1598, Jan Brueghel painted a scene that reminds well of his father's 'John the Baptist preaching', a painting that he had seen before, and copied the same year. Moreover, this picture of Pieter may as well be a picture of Christ preaching, as the title has been disputed. In Pieter's scene

the figure of the person preaching is hard to find and also in Jan's painting Jesus is only a small figure in the background. Jan painted the 'Christ preaching' from a greater distance so that he could show more of the landscape and he painted from a more elevated viewpoint.

When Pieter Bruegel had been called the 'Peasant Bruegel', his son Jan was part of the international establishment of courtiers and renowned artists. Pieter painted peasants in small villages; Jan painted in his 'Harbour with Christ preaching' wealthy burgers of a huge port city, as he knew of Antwerp. Antwerp was at the end of the sixteenth century one of the most industrious ports of Europe, a metropolis and a city that attracted richness from out of the whole of Western Europe. Antwerp had the first stock exchange and although it found growing competition from the Dutch cities, it was a Catholic trading place with more ease of living than in the austere Protestant Holland. So, Jan Brueghel painted a large gathering of well-to-do people that have come with the common people of the town to buy fish at the fish-market, and then also to hear Christ preaching. Jan painted various scenes on the theme of the fish-market, exactly as in his New Testament scene. Although this is a harbour scene, it is hard to recognise Antwerp. The harbour town in the far is imaginary but grand, more resembling an Italian or Dalmatian port with dramatic views of nature. The town is not unlike Venice and more so than the image of a Flemish port of the Low Countries.

The structure of 'Harbour with Christ preaching' is simple. Jan Brueghel used the right diagonal to split the panel in two triangles. In the lower left triangle he painted the gathering of the people. He positioned his landscape view in the upper right triangle. We see many figures below, and there is a reference to the multiplication of the loaves and the fish, as fish is deposited and shown here in the fish market. People have come to buy fresh fish and to see the arrival of the fishing boats more than to hear

Christ. Jesus can hardly be perceived in the painting. For Jan, like for his father Pieter, the preaching was merely an occasion to show his skills at figure painting, to show his skills in detail of people and of boats, and of course his skills in landscape painting. The landscape unfolds to the far, with the mountains and towers in front. A river ends in the sea, situating the port on a peninsula that dramatically advances into the lake.

Brueghel brought balance in the dark parts of his painting. We see a sombre sky to the right and the dark masses of the long trees to the left. The sun is high, somewhat to the upper left and thus throws a diffuse light on the grouping of people and on the fish market. This then is more important than the scene of Jesus preaching, relegated to the background. Brueghel also used the left diagonal. He painted a figure in white cloak to the lower left, then following this diagonal two ladies in bright, wealthy robes and further on the prominent sail of a ship. In the lower triangle formed under the two diagonals, Jan painted the open space with the fish market. The light is concentrated upon this scene, reminiscent of a miracle of Jesus. Here the brightest colours can be found, mostly warm orange, white and pure blue. The landscape is first a dull blue-green around the beach, then a diluted blue-grey in the skies and in the seas. The mixing of small patches of different pure hues and tones, used nowhere else in the painting but in the crowd of the lower scene, adds very much to the impression of dynamism and variety we receive of the gathering. So we can understand why Cardinal Borromeo of Milan as well as the burghers of Antwerp liked these pictures.

There are so many details to discover that one can look for a long time attentively at the picture.

Look at the crowd. Somewhat to the right a fisherwoman sells her fish from a wooden board placed upon the baskets filled with her fish. Hungry Antwerpers have bought fresh oysters, eaten them at the market itself and have thrown the empty shells on the ground. The woman holds her baby and a man – maybe her husband – touches her shoulders so that she turns to look at him. Here is a scene of the moment, a picture of an immediate and rapid act. All the other figures are engaged in such moments. The woman next to the fisherwoman, maybe her mother, bargains hard the selling of an exposed large fish with three men, one of whom is already grasping at the fish, the other one watching and thinking about the price, the third whispering in his ear that the price can still go down some more. Somewhat further stand two stately ladies, keeping their backs well from the selling scene, but still throwing occasional interested glances to the fish market. A group of three merchantmen are arguing in the lower right and the conversation is animated. The middle man, a queer thin man with a long face and a top hat shows the sea with an outstretched hand. Another man makes a defensive, affirming stand by bringing his right hand to his hips and enlarging his profile with the triangle of his elbow and arms. Every figure in the picture is thus painted in a different, lively poise, engaged in some action and Jan painted each suggesting movement.

In the New Testament, Luke tells of such a scene near the Lake of Gennesaret. A crowd gathered around Jesus and pressed too much to hear him. Jesus caught sight of two boats at the edge of the water. The fishermen had gone from the boats to wash their nets. Jesus got into one of the boats, belonging to Simon Peter. He asked Simon to take the boat a little into the lake. Then Jesus sat down and preached to the crowds from out of the boat.

Later still, Jesus ordered the boats out to the lake and the fishermen made a miraculous catch of fish. The boats were loaded to their sinking point. Simon was so surprised and stricken with awe that he fell on his knees before Jesus. Also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were there. These were Simon's partners. Simon's brother Andrew was also with them. These were the first four Apostles. Simon was awe-struck at the miraculous catch but Jesus said to him, 'Do not be afraid, from now on it will be people you will be catching.' Simon, James and John brought the boats back to the shore and they followed Jesus. Luke only tells of three Apostles in this story but Matthew and Mark also narrated about Andrew. Matthew and Mark told this happened at the Lake of Galilee.

In the background of Jan Brueghel's picture 'Harbour with Christ preaching', and in a boat near the shore, stands Jesus. He is dressed in white and painted with a halo around his head to distinguish him from the other figures. He blesses the crowd from the bow of the ship and behind him are his first four Apostles. Part of the crowd of the fish market flocks together on the shore to hear Jesus preach, but this is by far not the largest part of the people on the shores of the lake. Still, here and there, as well on land as in the boats, figures look Jesus's way, are interrogating themselves about who the man is that speaks out on the lake and try to catch his words.

Jan Brueghel painted Jesus on the right diagonal of the frame, but somewhat lower than the intersection of the two diagonals, which would mark the centre of the picture. This could indicate that Brueghel indeed drew one diagonal, the right one, the one going from the lower right to the upper left, and based his structure upon this line.

The landscape scene of Brueghel is quite typical of Flemish landscape painting. The view is wide, and from an elevated point of view. The scene is an imaginary one with a weird rock formation, to which citadels loom, and with stretches of land that go far into the sea. The way land advances thus in the sea reminds vaguely of Venice but no elements of human architecture are indicative of Venice. On the contrary, a Flemish windmill stands prominently on the farthest stretch of land into the lake. But just behind the shored ships slides a typical Venetian gondola. So the landscape is imaginary, with elements taken from many sources and mind-images of Brueghel. Like in many Flemish landscapes and seascapes, the background is painted in vague, mystical, somewhat menacing and alluring hazy colours. This is a gloomy view of morning, at daybreak, when boats and figures are still hulled in half darkness.

Jan Brueghel the Elder made a picture at thirty years that is fully accomplished, as his commissioners liked. He did not paint a peasant scene like his father anymore, but a lively scene of a fish market of a metropolis. This is the fish market of Antwerp, where burghers came to meet, conclude business, flirt, and also buy fresh seafood. 'Harbour with Christ preaching' is a picture in which much is to discover, to the delight of Brueghel's clients. It is a professional but a delightful picture, in which the New Testament scene is but a detail. But this detail must be discovered, like Jesus's words and life.

## *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*

### **Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. 1648

John tells the encounter of Jesus with a woman of Samaria. Jesus holds a conversation with a Samaritan woman, which is doubly astonishing to his disciples. For the Samaritans were not considered real Jews but strangers in their own country. And Jesus was talking to a woman, discussing and arguing with her, which is also unusual when one takes into respect that only men were taught in the Temple. As always, John gives account of this with numerous details and he takes his time in his tale. By that style, John differs from the other Evangelists. Matthew, Mark and Luke only explain the essence of an encounter of Jesus. They just depict enough as is needed for the essential message. John is the real storyteller, who takes joy in explaining how things really happened in long. His anecdotes and conversations are marvels of realism.

John said that when the Pharisees found out that Jesus - but in fact his disciples – baptised more than John, Jesus left Judaea and went back to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. On the way he came to the Samaritan town called Sychar near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give me something to drink". His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew. How is it that you ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink?" Jews, of course, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied to her, "If only you knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me something to drink", you would have been the one to ask, and he would have give you living water."

"You have no bucket, sir", she answered, "and the well is deep; how do you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?" Jesus replied: "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but no one who drinks the water that I shall give will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life."<sup>G38</sup>

"Sir", said the woman, "give me some of that water, so that I may never be thirsty or come here again to draw water." "Go, and call your husband," said Jesus to her, and come back here. The woman answered, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you now have is not your husband. You spoke the truth here."<sup>G38</sup>

"I see you are a prophet, sir," said the woman. "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said: "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming – indeed is already here – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks. God is spirit and those who

worship must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes he will explain everything. Jesus said, “That is who I am, I who speak to you.”<sup>G38</sup>

At this point his disciples returned and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, “What do you want from her?” or, “What are you talking to her about?” The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have done; could this be the Christ?” This brought people out of the town and they made their way towards him. Many Samaritans of that town believed in him on the strength of the woman’s words of testimony, “He told me everything I have done.” So, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and many more came to believe on the strength of the words he spoke to them. And they said to the woman, “Now we believe no longer because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world.”<sup>G38</sup>

Jesus thus spoke a long time to the Samaritan woman. We know she lived in sin with a man who was not her husband. Jesus could talk on the living water and reveal himself as the Messiah. We left out an entire passage where Jesus talks to his disciples on the grain and food of eternal life. And the story showed again how people came under the spell of Jesus’s words so that they even did not need to witness a miracle or hear a prophecy anymore to believe in him.

Philippe de Champaigne was born in Brussels in 1602; he belongs fully to the glorious seventeenth century. Born in Brabant, now in Belgium, he lived most of his life in France however, and died in Paris in 1674. He could have become one of the greatest Baroque painters of the Southern Netherlands, of Flanders and Brabant, where Anthony van Dyck, Jan Brueghel the Younger and Jacob Jordaens were his contemporaries. But after first studies with the landscape painter Fougnières, de Champaigne tried to enter the workshop of Pieter Paul Rubens in Antwerp. He was rejected. So he left for Paris where his reputation grew. He married the daughter of the Painter of the Queen, Duchesne. In the end he replaced Duchesne at the court of the French king Louis XIII.

Philippe de Champaigne was foremost a painter of religious scenes. He is especially well known for his scenes of the life of the Virgin Mary. Philippe de Champaigne made about twenty different versions of the Annunciation. In 1637 he received a royal commission to paint a large canvas called ‘The Vow of Louis XIII’ for the cathedral of Paris. Louis XIII had ordered this painting to thank the Virgin for the successes gained by his armies<sup>F11</sup>. Louis XIII at that occasion had even consecrated France to the Virgin.

De Champaigne had seen to profusion and had learnt Baroque art in Brabant, but he became quite another painter in Paris. France was marked by a new classical austerity, a style that would later be academised by Charles Le Brun. De Champaigne contributed to that style. The painters Simon Vouet, then Nicolas Poussin set the tone and fixed the tastes and fashions in the pictorial arts, even though Poussin worked in Rome. Claude Vignon and Laurent de la Hyre also worked in a clear sculptural way. The Caravagesque contrasts between light and darkness did not really take hold in

France. Monumentality and transparency of theme won in France over obscurity and passion. No intimate scenes but a courtly art of state decorum was in fashion in that country, which was almost completely centred on Paris. Philippe de Champaigne fell at ease in this French austere mode, maybe because he had so well known the Flemish tradition of detail and Flanders' devotion.

The 'Samaritan Woman' of de Champaigne looks indeed like a picture of classic antiquity. The colours are crystal clear, limpid, though rich in variation. Jesus's blue cloak contrasts with the opposite yellow of the cloak of the Samaritan woman. The soft blue sky of the background finds similar tones in the shirts of Jesus and the woman, in the greys of the well and of the mountain and castle of the background. The mountain and its structure resembling a castle represent the holy Gerizim of the Samaritans.

Philippe de Champaigne's composition is rich and elaborated. The canvas is a round tondo. To match this form, the painter has drawn Jesus in an oblique sitting pose. The mountain slope also follows this curve. On the other side of the frame, the outstretched arm of the Samaritan fills the furthest round contours of the tondo. It was never an easy feat to present figures in the difficult round shape of a tondo and only the greatest masters like Raffaello Sanzio could make a success of scenes in these forms. De Champaigne has succeeded in giving his figures the natural gestures of a conversation – the real subject of the encounter – to fill the space. He did paint neither a realistic nor a Baroque picture. Vivid expression of engaging emotions has given way to idealised faces and frozen gestures instead of passionate movement. The verticality of the lines emphasises this impression. This verticality and the clear detail of lines in the robes remind of International Gothic art.

The colour scheme of the picture is sophisticated. Heavy blue and strong yellow is in the lower part of the picture, each filling a quarter of the tondo. Softer hues are in the upper part, a greenish hue to the right and a reddish one on the left. Each time complementary colours, each in a quarter of the frame. The heavier colours below give stability, solid grounding to the scene.

The theme of the encounter is kept as in the story of John. Jesus is sitting on the stairs of a well. These remember ancient Roman ruins and may be a symbol of the old beliefs that Jesus has come to demolish. The Samaritan woman stands next to the well and has deposed her stone jar, which she has brought to carry the water. Both these are symmetrically painted opposite the central vertical diameter of the tondo.

The 'Samaritan Woman' of Philippe de Champaigne was painted in 1649, when the artist was forty-six years old. He was in the full power of his mature art by then. The picture seems easy and simple, but when one takes a closer look and analyses it as we have done, we find all its complexity and it appears to be a scene that was not easy at all to depict in the constraints of a round tondo. The quiet loveliness in a respectful image proves de Champaigne to be a great master. He has meticulously added a text in French to his picture, of which we give the translation: 'Jesus is seated, the Samaritan is standing, the pitcher and the well are evoked and the Apostles that interrogate Christ on this unusual encounter appear in the far'<sup>F11</sup>. De Champaigne has indeed used the traditional fashion of representing the 'Samaritan Woman'. There is always Jesus and the woman, the well and pitcher, and the apostles arriving. The

Samaritan in some Italian examples has a bare breast to indicate an adulteress, but for the devote de Champaigne this was impossible to paint. The text added by de Champaigne proves that the artist had read the Gospel scene with strong attention. He understood the significance of the event, one of the rare conversations of Jesus with a non-Jew and with a woman of a refused sect. De Champaigne calls it an unusual encounter as if he himself had been astonished while reading the scene. He was probably puzzled, enchanted, and made it a theme of one of his major paintings.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ and the woman of Samaria**

George Richmond. The Tate Gallery. London. 1828.

**Christ and the woman of Samaria**

William Dyce (1806-1864). The Birmingham Art Collections. Birmingham. 1860.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Juan de Flandes (ca. 1465-1519). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Between 1496 and 1504.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. 1550.

**The Samaritan Woman at the Well**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Christ and the Woman of Samaria**

Duccio di Buoninsegna (ca. 1260-1319). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Madrid. 1310/1311.

**Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Madrid. Ca. 1640/1641.

**Christ at the Well with the Samaritan Woman**

Alessandro Allori (1535-1607). Church of Santa Maria Novella. Florence. 1574.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well**

Follower of Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well**

Circle of Domenichino. Galleria Borghese. Rome. First half 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Giovan Battista Gaulli called Baciccicia (1639-1709). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. Ca. 1680.

**Jesus and the Samaritan Woman**

Simon De Vos (1603-1676). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Pieter Pietersz Lastman (1583-1633). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

**Jesus and the Samaritan Woman**

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Collezioni Zerbone. Genoa. Ca. 1700.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well**

Vincent Malò (ca. 1606-1650). Accademia Linguistica di Belle Arti. Genoa. After 1634.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Alessandro Bonvicino called Il Moretto (ca. 1498-1554). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Christ and the Samaritan Woman**

Giovanni Battista Caracciolo called Battistello (1578-1675). Pinacoteca di Brera.  
Milan. 1620-1622.

## *The Transfiguration*

### **The Transfiguration**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). Museo e Gallerie Nazionale di Capodimonte – Naples.

Giovanni Bellini was a Venetian. He was born in 1430 in a family of painters. His father was Jacopo Bellini, a great early Venetian master of International Gothic painting. His brother, Gentile Bellini, was also a painter and his sister Nicolantina married Andrea Mantegna, who was the major master painter of Padua. Giovanni Bellini was the artist of light, of pure crystalline colours, of forms and lines in the crisp Florentine style. He added vivid expressions of moods, though usually gentle and soft, never overly sentimental. He held the respectful distance between viewer, artist and subject, which epitomise an aristocratic character of soul. His paintings are very dignified. The viewer is always kept at a distance from the inner drama of the image. The image stays a private work of beauty and Bellini was reluctant to break into the intimacy of his proper scenes. He was the ideal painter for the majesty of Jesus's Transfiguration.

Matthew tells the strange scene of the Transfiguration, so do Mark and Luke. We take the story of Matthew, which must be one of the earliest.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light. And suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were walking with him. Then, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord," he said, "it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice, which said, "This is my son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him." When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, "Stand up, do not be afraid." And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, "tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead."<sup>G38</sup>

The last line may explain why John does not talk about the Transfiguration: he was a witness, but Jesus asked him explicitly not to tell about the vision. John may have kept to the promise even until after the Resurrection.

In Giovanni Bellini's 'Transfiguration' a rift separates viewer and scene. Here is the distance we have talked of in the painter's character. The view is held from a bridge or path that runs on the other side of the rift so that the viewer is only allowed a distant view of the opposite landscape. This underscores the mystery of the Transfiguration scene. Two worlds are represented. We see the world of Jesus and the heavens on one side. Our earthly world on the other must remain separate.

Jesus is dressed in a white, now slightly grey robe, which is splendidly drawn in almost translucent colours. The folds of the robes of all the figures are painted in sophisticated detail, as was known by Giovanni from the International Gothic style of his father. These are also Mantegna's fluid but clear lines. Moses and Elijah are standing near Jesus. They are painted as patriarchs with long white beards, long flowing white hair and both are dressed in light red cloaks. They are the wise men that dwell near to God. They are depicted in full geometrical symmetry, which continues in the two trees near the figures of the prophets. Jesus holds his arms open; Elijah holds one outstretched arm in a movement that continues to Moses who holds his hand to his heart. These two gestures link the prophets together around Jesus.

The apostle Peter lies in the middle, dark James is on the left and his younger brother John is on the right. They have thrown their faces to the earth. Surprise and fear show in the gesture of escape of James. In these figures also is strong symmetry, broken only by the tree trunk on the left. The trunk serves a purpose. The cut tree is a symbol of life without Jesus and of the punishment that awaits the sinners.

In the background is a wonderful landscape. The figures of Jesus, Moses and Elijah are projected against this landscape. They tower above it, as the view comes from beneath. The landscape suits the holy men. It is painted cool and crisp, controlled and clearly delineated. The landscape is a neutral setting that at first sight fits the respectful mood of the picture.

Giovanni Bellini was an early master of light. Very bright light is all-pervasive in this picture, as suits the subject. The miracle story tells of this light that radiated out of Jesus, but in this picture the hard light is everywhere. Yet, long before the great Italian masters of light and shadow of the seventeenth century, Giovanni Bellini uses the subtle play of contrasts. The light comes from the left. The background landscape on the right is brightly lit. On that side the aspects of architecture, roads, meadows and especially the far, grey hills, are bright. On the left, however, the slopes remain dark. We feel that here on another attitude and in the darkness glooms a high citadel castle. We discover here the contrast between life and death. It is not a coincidence that the tree on the dark left side seems dead and is leafless, remains small and sunk in the earth, whereas the tree on the full bright right has luxurious foliage and grows into the skies. Giovanni Bellini has created clarity of space and he also included rich symbolic meaning. On the dark left we find peasants toiling the soil. On the right are monks, the church, maybe an abbey, in an idealised architecture. Jesus, Moses and Elijah are standing on a mount, a symbol of the scene that actually happened in the mountains.

Giovanni Bellini's 'Transfiguration' is one of the greatest masterpieces of the late fifteenth century of painting in Venice. Bellini created space, dignity, strong symmetrical composition and subtle symbolic meaning in his picture. Most important is the focus on Jesus as the godly redeemer, who is the light of the world. Bellini expressed his profound religious feelings. A man who was not profoundly devoted could not have imagined a Transfiguration with such care of detail and meaning, such respectful love and glory of vision.

The Transfiguration is a rare event in the Gospels because it is a revelation of the godly nature of Jesus. All through the life of Jesus doubt remained on this aspect of

his person. Jesus himself nurtured the doubt, which could only be solved by the mystery of faith, the belief in a double nature that was not proved by the means by which humans prove physical truths. Hence also the parables: Jesus did not reveal the meaning of the parables to the listeners but only explained them to his disciples. For to see what could not be seen was the faith Jesus needed and the faith God claimed. The Transfiguration was a miracle, but more than the miracles it was the one event that would have been – if performed in public - the ultimate proof of Jesus's godly nature. The scene had to remain private and the disciples were not allowed to talk about it until Jesus's death in order to keep the secret and the doubt alive. Blind faith was needed; physical proof was too easy for God. Giovanni Bellini grasped these meanings and therefore increased the distance and kept his symbols subtle.

*Other paintings:*

**The Transfiguration**

Giovanni Savoldo. Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence.

**The Transfiguration**

Giovanni Gerolamo Savoldo (1480-1548). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. Ca. 1530-1535.

**The Transfiguration**

Giovanni Bellini. Museo Civico Correr. Venice.

**The Transfiguration**

Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520). Pinacoteca Vaticana. The Vatican. 1517-1520.

**The Transfiguration**

Andrea Previtali (1470-1528). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Transfiguration**

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Palazzo del Principe. Rome.

**The Transfiguration of Christ**

Giovanni Buonconsiglio (1460-1537). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Transfiguration**

Giovan Antonio de' Sacchis called Pordenone (ca. 1483-1539). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 16515-1516.

## *Jesus with Martha and Mary*

### **Jesus with Martha and Mary**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Tournai.

Luke tells that on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now, Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me." But the Lord answered, "Martha, Martha," he said, "you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her."<sup>G38</sup>

Jacob Jordaens painted the scene of 'Jesus with Martha and Mary' for the abbey of Saint Martin in Antwerp. Jesus is sitting in front of Mary of Bethany. This Mary was also the Mary Magdalene. Jordaens underscored the moral teaching of the anecdote of the life of Jesus. Mary is a bourgeois lady in magnificent, wealthy robes. She is dressed up and wears all her jewels. She has a book in front of her. Jordaens tells the viewer by these signs that Mary has been doing no real work since quite a while. She has been sitting in a chair and seen time pass quietly by. She has taken time also for her elaborate toilet. She holds her head graciously inclined as if she were gently succumbing to the charm of Jesus's words. Admire the way Jordaens has drawn Mary's face. This is the face of an innocent, naïve young girl who only thinks of the nice events of life and sits in sweet idleness.

When one looks closer, one remarks that Mary is actually writing in a book with a magnificent pen. She is attentively listening to Jesus and taking notes. Jesus explains things to her and he seems to say, "Write this down too!" The movements of Jesus and Mary are quite natural. The movements are very instantaneous; they bring action in the picture. Martha opening the door induces this feeling of action. She is dressed in the drab grey of a maidservant. Her hair is undone; her face has the rosy colour of haste and work. She wears no jewels. Martha has energetic eyes, an intelligent large forehead. Her sleeves are rolled up. She is the housekeeper. Of course, she points to Mary, as the story of the Gospels tells. One feels the sting of jealousy in Martha. And the captured oblivion of a flattered Jesus having an interested lady in front of him who actually takes notes of his words and clings to his lips. Jesus is encouraging this attention of the gentle, silent, coquette Mary.

Jesus is sitting massively in his heavy chair. He wears an ample cloak painted in deep red and he is barefooted. Here also we find the skills of Jordaens in the intricate, yet natural way in which he painted the folds and flows of the cloak. This massive red area draws the attention of the viewer to Jesus. In order to bring equilibrium in the composition, to balance the figures of Martha and Mary, Jordaens has painted two disciples to the left of Jesus. These might be the older Peter and the younger John or

Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. Remark again the skills of portraiture of these three figures. Jordaens was a master portrait painter. He is more renowned for his paintings of burlesque interior scenes such as 'The King drinks' or 'The Satyr and the Farmer'. Both these paintings are also in the Tournai museum. But Jordaens made extraordinary portraits where in rough brushes he could typify a person.

The whole scene of Martha and Mary is set in the interior of a rich Antwerp mansion. There are intricate trompe-l'oeil bas-reliefs on the walls and the door is of massive oak, also elaborately sculpted. The Dutch of the seventeenth century loved interior genre themes. The style was very popular in the Netherlands. Many genre scenes were supposed to have a moral story, as asked by the austere Calvinist preachers. Jordaens was a boasting, exuberant Brabander however. Brabant was in the South of the Netherlands and the land of Brussels, Antwerp and Leuven. The joy-de-vivre and ease of old wealth of Antwerp could not but show up in Jordaens' work. A Dutchman of Amsterdam might not have indulged in the decorum of Antwerp. Jordaens loved it. He displayed the richness of the room, the warmth and wealth of colours, the full forms of the ladies and the luxury of the dresses and of the furniture such as Jesus's chair. Jordaens in fact painted a combination of Dutch and Antwerp tastes, including the moral value of the biblical story.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ in the House of Martha and Mary**

Jan Brueghel II (1568-1625) and Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1628.

**Martha and Mary Magdalene**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). The Detroit Institute of Arts. Detroit. Around 1595.

**Christ at the House of Martha**

Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1645-1650.

**Jesus with Martha and Mary**

Jean-Baptiste Corneille attributed (1649-1695). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**Christ with Martha and Mary**

Friedrich Overbeck (1809-1869). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1812-1816.

**Jesus with Martha and Mary**

Joachim Beuckelaer (ca. 1530-1574). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. 1565.

**Christ with Martha and Mary**

Pieter Aertsen (1507-1575). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Jesus with Martha and Mary**

Paul-Alexandre-Alfred Leroy. Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1882.

## *Christ blessing little Children*

### **Suffer the little Children to come unto Me**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). The National Gallery of Canada – Ottawa. Around 1618.

Matthew tells that people brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, “Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.” Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way<sup>G38</sup>.

Pictures were made in the seventeenth century for occasions of everyday life, as we take photographs of happy occasions today. Rich aristocrats or wealthy traders would ask a painter to make a picture of a wedding, of a birth, or of a nomination to important functions in society of the father of the family. One of these occasions was First Communion for the boys. Most rich people would choose a great painter and pay a lot of cash and wait a long time. One could also find a young, promising artist just accepted in the guild of painters and have a nice painting for less money.

Such an event may have happened to Anthony van Dyck and the picture ‘Suffer the little Children to come unto Me’. Van Dyck painted the scene around 1618 when he was still eighteen or nineteen years old. The picture came to us from the eighteenth century collection of the Dukes of Marlborough of Blenheim Palace and it was known there as a portrait of the family of Pieter Paul Rubens<sup>B10</sup>. Scientific, historical investigation proved however that the attribution is very unlikely. It is a family portrait all right. The two parents are shown, three children and a baby. Van Dyck has had the very nice idea to make a devotional picture of the family portrait. And since Jesus is laying his hand on the head of the elder boy who is probably around seven to eleven years old, this could indeed be a picture of a First or of a Solemn Communion.

Christian boys and girls have to go through two rites of admission into the Roman Catholic Church Community. At First Communion they participate for the first time in the Eucharist and take to them the Holy Host. From then on they can go to communion in the church every time they want. At Solemn Communion they repeat the vows of Christianity made for them by their foster parents at baptism. These occasions have since old been great feasts and solemn affairs in church and at home. They are milestones on the path to becoming adults for children; the events are rites of passage that go back far to primeval times. The First and Solemn Communion were feasts to assemble all members of a family to a banquet that could last several days. The occasions were happy ones, as can be seen from the faces of the mother and father who intently look at Jesus as if he were the priest leading the ceremony.

Anthony van Dyck was something of a child prodigy. His first known painting, a self-portrait, dates from when he was fourteen years old. He had been a pupil of the painter Hendrick van Balen since he was eleven (since after his Solemn Communion?). The year the painting of the ‘Little Children’ was made he had already

other painters to assist him in his newly opened workshop, like Herman Servaes and Justus van Egmont. Van Dyck worked also in the workshop of Rubens, the master of masters in Antwerp. Van Dyck was still very young but he had already handled religious themes like 'Christ Carrying the Cross' and 'The Martyrdom of Saint Peter' with much confidence so that his fame started to be known. He had made family portraits before. So it was a young but quite accomplished painter who has been at work for this 'Little Children'.

Van Dyck shows in this painting already many of the skills of a great painter. There is strong composition and there are wonderful colours here that catch the eye of the viewer. Our gaze is attracted first to the mother dressed in white and feeble but brilliant blue, then to Jesus in deep red. We see intimate movements of hands. We see faces that show all the characters of the figures. The hands of van Dyck are always marvellous. Look at the small chubby fingers of the baby, the baby that is sucking at a toy. Then look at the delicate hands of the boy at the lower right. This boy is painted as an angel or a putto, with a coral necklace around his chest. The feasted elder boy wears rings. He folds his hands in prayer and has already the hands of a clerk. The middle boy has the nervous hands of youth. The father holds his hands to the heart. Jesus has his long hands tenderly on the head of the boy. The apostles have the worn hands of elder fishermen. All the hands are vivid, elegant, full of expression, all painted in different poses. They really tell the story.

One senses a young artist in this simple picture. But the rich palette of the maturer van Dyck is present too. There is the green-yellow robe to the left, which contrasts with the blue cloak of the father. The deep red colour of Jesus's robe is the colour of love, the very colour that would suit this scene. The mother is in the splendid very bright and light blue that we find back in many of van Dyck's later portraits of his English period. Red colour attracts our view whereas blue is a colour that creates distance. Red is therefore much used by painters not just because it was a colour of love but also so that the viewer be sympathetically attracted to Jesus. Van Dyck contrasted this feeling with the cold white-blue, a receding colour, the picture obtained a soft kind of relief, a dynamism of view that supports the liveliness of the scene.

The only element that lacks in this painting is maybe the forcefulness of expression in the faces, the subtle but clear expression of the characters in the faces of the figures. But this was an occasion of joy for van Dyck too, and not an occasion of too much analysis nor of intricate reflection on the figures. And then still, look at the heads of Jesus and especially of his apostles. Van Dyck only needed to mature some more in force; all the rest of his art was present already.

*Other paintings:*

**A Mother entrusting her Children to the Redeemer**

Mattia Preti (1613 – 1699). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1630's.

**Jesus calls to him the little Children**

Anicet-Charles-Gabriel Lemonnier (1743-1824). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen. Rouen. 1783.

**Christ and the Children**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée du Louvre. Paris.

**Christ blessing the Children**

Master HB. Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1528-1553.

**Suffer the Little Children to come unto Me**

Vincent Sellaer (active first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Alte Pinakothek. Ca. 1538.

**Sinite Parvulos**

Nicolas Tournier (1590-1657). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1619-1626.

**Sinite Parvulos**

Otto Van Veen. 17<sup>th</sup> century. Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

## *The Glorious Entry in Jerusalem*

### **The Entry in Jerusalem**

Jan van Scorel (1495-1562). Centraal Museum – Utrecht.

Jan van Scorel was a remarkable personality. He was named after the village Schoorl, a village near Alkmaar in the Northern Netherlands, where he was born in 1495. He studied in Amsterdam. The Netherlands artists were in search for their own style, away from International Gothic and away from the Flemish Primitives. Van Scorel was drawn inexorably to Jan Gossaert who was in Utrecht in 1515, when van Scorel was still young and could be influenced. He was drawn to Italian experiences and to classic themes. Gossaert was considered then to be able to show the new direction in painting, resolutely focused as he was on Italy. Van Scorel started to travel. He went to Strasbourg, to Basel and Nuremberg where he met Dürer. He continued to Venice and from there passed even to Palestine, to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem. Van Scorel apparently was in search for fundamental values, in search for his absolute spiritual truths. From Jerusalem he returned to Venice and then to Rome where he became a trusted art counsellor of Pope Adrian VI who also originated from Utrecht and was only too eager to talk and trust another Dutchman. After about two years in Rome, van Scorel returned to Utrecht and worked there until his death in 1562.

Jan Gossaert had remained a halfway painter. He was torn to continue on the one side the Northern Dutch and Flemish tradition of precise detail of all forms, in the use of symbols to add meaning in all religious themes and to the use of pure colours that filled the contours. On the other side he had seen in Italy the marvels of colour that could make appear volumes by themselves and he had seen and admired the architecture of classic antiquity. He had seen the beginning of Mannerism in Italy and been impressed by Michelangelo's nudes. Like Jan Gossaert, van Scorel was one of the first Flemish/Netherlands painters to represent the human naked body for its own purpose of representation.

Van Scorel applied light and shadow as the most essential elements, especially in his interior scenes. His religious pictures seem to have lost their spirituality and are set sometimes in antique, imposing Italian monumental architectures. These were maybe less maniacally detailed and less over-laden than Jan Gossaert's, but still gave the same impression of artificiality. Of van Scorel's search for inner spirituality - after all he had been to Jerusalem, he had worked for the Pope in the Vatican and become a canon in Utrecht - little can be found in his remaining works. These were the pangs, the convulsions of a Netherlands new art in the making. Van Scorel looked in Jan Gossaert's direction. Gossaert pointed to Italy and van Scorel followed the superficial ideas, not seeing the profound spirituality of the greatest Italians and of his own tradition. Another Dutch painter of these times, Lucas van Leyden, had shown a tendency to look at the Bible only as to a book of stories to be told in a secularised manner. The same can be said of van Scorel.

Van Scorel excelled in portraiture. He had seen the world, its aristocracy and its misery. So he matured and was a master in the expression of character. His loss of the fifteenth century tradition of profound spirituality in feeling religious scenes was not a detriment to his art of portrait painting. Van Scorel's influence continued after his death in the Netherlands. Maarten van Heemskerck followed his italianising path and Anthonis Mor his portraiture.

Jan van Scorel's 'Entry in Jerusalem' is a work that epitomises these tendencies. Van Scorel had been to Jerusalem, so it was a theme he mastered.

Luke tells that when close to Jerusalem, Jesus's disciples found him a tethered colt that no one had ridden yet. They took the colt to Jesus and, throwing their cloaks on its back, they lifted Jesus on it. As he moved off, they spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: "Blessed is he who is coming as King in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!"<sup>G38</sup>

Van Scorel shows the town of Jerusalem in the background of his painting. The city remains in vague colours, wrapped in a light fog. The dramatic hard landscape of the hills of the true Jerusalem has made way for a thought, a dream image as remembered a long time after by a Dutchman come home. The left part of the panel shows Jesus and his disciples coming down a hilly path to the valley of Jerusalem. The contrast between these two parts of the picture is striking. For this part contains intricate detail and Jesus and the disciples are Dutch countrymen. They are seemingly on their way to their own private image of a mirage, of a golden town in the heavens, where they will see all their wishes come true. Jerusalem is the end of the journey, the mystical town. The conflict between the two parts of the painting is striking. The left part is in clear forms and hard colours. The right part remains vague. Maybe Jan van Scorel remembered his own arrival in Jerusalem this way. Yet, remark the usage of shadows and darkness in the road, and in the lower figures.

Van Scorel's painting has nothing to compare to the Roman classic architectures and the monumental settings of Jan Gossaert. It is as if van Scorel was already leaving Gossaert's influence behind. Lucas van Leyden strove to represent a religious scene as a popular event. Jan van Scorel did the same. In his picture Jesus and the disciples are ordinary Dutch peasants and fishermen walking down a mountain. Every figure is occupied with himself; Jesus is no exception from the other figures. All is nervous movement; gestures go to all sides as also van Leyden painted.

The 'genre' feature, the trait to depict intimate scenes of local and mostly interior scenes of local life was a strong feature of Flemish and Netherlands painting. In the late sixteenth century, Flanders' cities were less rich as before and the wealth was being amassed in Antwerp of Brabant. But Antwerp was a metropolis and its painters more men of the world than ever before. Rubens was an ambassador, and Van Dyck a court painter. These were not men to show simple life of the Flemish countryside nor did they frequented commissioners who would have ordered such pictures. The local streak did not disappear completely however in Brabant, since Jacob Jordaens worked a lot on such scenes. But it developed more in the Netherlands. Van Scorel was a

precursor of Dutch genre painting and that would grow to a proper, strong worldly movement in the seventeenth century in the Netherlands port towns.

Jan Gossaert, Lucas van Leyden and Jan van Scorel were the major masters of the early till middle sixteenth century of the Dutch school. They tried to leave a tradition but had not enough inner force, imagination, soul, and spirituality, to create their own mature styles. They left traditional values behind but could not bring entirely something of the same value instead. They lacked individuality and force. The one artists – Gossaert - thought to find a new style in the ornament of Roman antiquity, which would then slip into over-laden, heavy use of decorative elements without soul. The other would seek novelty in genre scenes, mostly applied to religious themes. But they could not rival with the delicate use of such style elements as for instance before them had done a Hugo van der Goes. Others again, like Jan van Scorel, turned to the representation of movement in their pictures. International Gothic was characterised by lack of gestures and motion. Its figures had remained very static and dignified. Jan van Scorel's figures in the 'Entry' are all in movement. But action is uncoordinated; it is present in the picture for action's sake and not for strength of composition. All these painters had in common was that they sought effect to impress their commissioners and buyers. Van Scorel obtained effect by showing Jerusalem – he could say he had been there -, by the various gestures of his figures shown in detail, which is always a feat in a picture, and by transposing the entry of Jesus to his time.

There is always value in a search. Van Scorel's picture may have been more a success than another. The overall result of this half-style is disappointing when compared to the artisan skills and talents these painters possessed. The best of these artists delivered excellent work in portraiture and in landscape painting, which would then evolve also to mastership art in the seventeenth century.

*Other paintings:*

**Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshapat from the Hill of Evil Council**

Thomas B. Seddon (1821-1856). The Tate Gallery. London. 1854.

**Christ's Entry into Jerusalem**

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1686.

## *The Merchants chased from the Temple*

### **Jesus chasing the Merchants from the Temple**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). The National Gallery – London. Around 1600.

Domenikos Theotokópoulos was born in late 1541 in Crete. He may have started to learn Greek icon painting and his abilities at painting may have been discovered in Greece. He arrived in Venice in his early twenties, which was quite logical when one remembers the maritime connections of Venice in that part of the Mediterranean. He may have been for a while a pupil of Titian and the way he prepared his panels with underlying covers of dark animal glues and a red gesso layer of ochre, may prove he knew Venetian ways of painting. In 1570 he was in Rome. While in Rome he painted a first version of ‘Christ and the Money Changers’, which is much less the true El Greco style than the picture we show.

‘Jesus chasing the Merchants from the Temple’ was made more than twenty years later. In Rome ruled Pope Pius V (1566-1572) and it seems that the unknown Greek Theotokópoulos proposed to the Pope to paint a better ‘Last Judgement’ than Michelangelo had done, and one more chaste in presentation. There had indeed been remarks on the nudity of Michelangelo’s figures of the ‘Last Judgement’ in the Sistine Chapel, there had been some talk of redoing the painting, until finally the Pope decided merely to have only the most intimate parts of the figures painted over. Theotokópoulos’ proposal more irritated the Papal court than it found approval. Maybe due to this the Greek painter left Rome for Spain.

Before Theotokópoulos left Rome he had appealed to the Royal Court of Spain for a job, but many other painters were working already in Madrid and he was turned down. After all he had no name and only his own high regard for himself as proof of his art. He was unsuccessful in Madrid but accepted an offer to paint an altarpiece in Toledo. And he stayed in Toledo.

Toledo was still a very rich town in the late 1570’s. It was a town of industries. There was a thriving arms industry; the swords of Toledo were world-famous. There were weavers too and silk manufactories; the Toledans worked at jewellery and ceramics. Besides the Court of Spain in Madrid only the Catholic Church was rich enough and avid enough for images and Toledo had hundreds of religious houses, abbeys and churches. After one picture came commission for another, so the painter who was by now called ‘El Greco’, the Greek, stayed in Toledo. And El Greco’s art remained almost exclusively devotional. The religious nature of Castille may have suited his own obsessional and passionate character with its hang for mystique. But El Greco also met and had Spanish humanists among his friends in Toledo.

El Greco continued to work in Toledo, for Madrid remained elusive. He did obtain an important commission from the Spanish Court already in 1580, a picture for a chapel of the Escorial Palace of Madrid. But King Philip II rejected the painting. That was not so surprising, as one glance at his pictures of those times may prove. El Greco’s

paintings were radically different from anything Philip and his Court had seen until then and the courtiers could not see beyond tradition.

In 1585 El Greco moved into a large house, a small palace of the old Jewish quarter of Toledo. He remained to work there until his death in 1614. He died poor and debt-ridden for Toledo had constantly been losing its golden lustre and wealth so that commissions became fewer and fewer. Yet, El Greco loved Toledo as a few very touching pictures of the town he made may prove. He painted these views in his hard colours and of a Toledo under a very menacing thunderstorm sky. These images were only matched so much later, in the twentieth century, by Oskar Kokoschka who showed something of the spell that Toledo still displayed then, with its sun-scorched tiled roofs high over its countryside, closed but joyful and so bright in light. The view of Toledo indeed is dramatic as it lies on a granite layer surrounded on three sides by the Tagus River and protected by its walled fortifications. Toledo resembled Crete in more than one aspect. El Greco could feel at home here.

King Alphonso VI of Castille had conquered Toledo on the Moors in 1085. Toledo had become the capital of Castille but Philip II transferred his court to Madrid in 1559. That and other factors started the decline of the town. The Jews who had lived in large numbers in Spain since the beginning of our era were expelled already in 1492. A large community of Jews had contributed to the natural wealth of Toledo. The Moriscos, the remnants of the Moorish population of Spain had waged a rebellion against Philip II from 1568 to 1572. These Moors were converted to Christianity since long, but they had kept signs of their culture. From 1564 on King Philip's government forbade the Moriscos to wear arms, to speak their language, and even to close their doors. Morisco women were not allowed to wear their veils and the Moriscos could hold no slave anymore, especially none from Africa as they had been used to. Public bathhouses were closed and Moorish art and music was banned. When El Greco arrived in Spain there were almost no Jews or Moriscos left in the town. With them departed much of the town's prosperity. And there was worse. Due to the import of gold and silver from South-America, prices soared in Spain at the beginning of the seventeenth century. That was not so bad for Spain's interior agricultural economy but Spanish exports stagnated and hence its industry. And Spain was engaged in costly wars.

Spain had been part of the empire of Charles V and tried to keep up the lustre of that empire. King Philip wanted to keep his territories in the Netherlands, where Toledo's Duke Don Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, led the Spanish armies. The Netherlands was Protestant and ardently sought independence from Catholic Spain. The war lasted until the end of the sixteenth century and although Flanders was retained, the Netherlands was lost. Not all wars brought bad news. A Spanish, Venetian and Papal allied fleet had fought and stopped at the battle of Lepanto the Turkish invasion of the Mediterranean in 1571. Philip's half-brother, Don Juan of Austria, had led the allied fleet. On Spain's western border, the Duke of Alba entered Portugal in 1580 so that at the end of that year Philip II was proclaimed King of Portugal.

The wealth and the prestige meant in time also Spain's demise so that the Toledo of El Greco impoverished. There is something ironic therefore in El Greco's picture of 'Christ chasing the merchants from the Temple' for this was a moral lesson coming

true. Spain had chased its Jewish and Morisco merchants and artisans for the sake of the purity of its Christian religion. Spain was over-zealous and the Inquisition courts ruled and condemned. El Greco would make a haunting portrait of a Grand-Inquisitor. But in chasing these people away, Spain had struck at its spinal chord. This and the economic crisis would end its power. And later it would not be able anymore to actively support its faith. In the meantime, extremely passionate religious scenes were the fashion in Toledo and throughout Spain and first Mannerist, the Baroque art delivered all the ingredients to serve the Royal Court of Madrid.

El Greco's painting should firstly be seen not with our eyes accustomed to rapid and drastic changes in art, but with the eyes of the Spanish ruling class of the sixteenth century, with eyes that had known only the Gothic and the Renaissance. Art of Spain had been much influenced by the Flemish masters. Flanders and the Netherlands had been part of the German Empire, to which Spain also belonged, under Charles V. Several Flemish masters worked in Spain and through trade with Bruges, Spanish art had been linked to the North for many centuries already. The Court of Spain was extremely devote, so devote as to build its Royal Palace, the Escorial, as an unusual complex of palace, abbey and churches. The Court of Spain was traditional and conservative. When one looks as these people to El Greco's work, one understands quickly why Philip II refused this artist's work. And yet, the Escorial could have been a very special place adorned with El Greco's extraordinary visions.

In 'Christ chasing the Merchants from the Temple', El Greco applied the vibrant, acid and hard colours that are his hallmark. Many have called these colours his own 'Cretan' colours and these colours probably also suit Toledo and its climate very well, as Toledo's position in its landscape. Jesus stands in fierce red and bright colours, not in the deep sympathetic, warm red of his usual robe of love, but in a robe with hues of authority and divine wrath. He has snatched away a purse of gold and that gesture also condemns the men around him. Jesus is ready to strike, but being who he is he can only take away angrily but without violence. His gesture nevertheless remains a gesture of threat. Jesus looks at a man and that man – already at Jesus's feet – recoils in evident fear and awe.

Other fiery colours are around Jesus. We find especially the yellow of El Greco's lead and tin pigments. In fact, there are not so many brightly coloured surfaces in this painting, but a general background of non-committing brown and grey backgrounds enhances them so that the few coloured areas really well stand out to the viewer. These few colour zones support the structure and the symmetry of the picture.

In the right lower corner an old man is sitting on his knees, maybe a Saint Peter or an elderly priest of the Temple of Jerusalem. This man looks at Jesus and the yellow of his robe is answered by the yellow further along the right diagonal higher up. Here is the yellow of the robe of the man that reclines in fear of Jesus. Thus the harsh yellow areas stress the right diagonal and attention is led to Jesus who stands in the middle of the picture. On the other side of Jesus, on the right again, stands another man at level head with Jesus, also dressed in yellow. The two yellow surfaces on either side of Jesus now show the left diagonal. And the three yellow areas together form a triangle in which stands Jesus. This triangle is also lengthened towards the lower right, as Jesus's figure is lengthened to enhance a feeling of spirituality.

On the extreme right, the upper right, stands a lady with a basket. She is dressed in a last almost yellow colour. This area finds symmetry in a red-yellow colour on the far left lower corner. The red-yellow is here on the back of a man who lifts a trunk from the ground. Remark how well El Greco structured these views under the left diagonal of the frame. On the left lower part, the diagonal starts and so a stooping figure indicates the low point and the money chest is on the ground close to the lowest point of the diagonal. The diagonal then grows over Jesus and is emphasised in its sense of elevation by the lady on the upper right. She does not stoop but has at her disposal the full length of the frame, so she stands and even has the basket on her head. El Greco was not just a wizard in colours. He had the genius of composition, of using plain and strong structure to enhance the harmony of his picture.

Still, colours more than lines form El Greco's harmony. Look for instance at the men in green. These green areas also are symmetrical as to the centre of the picture, which is Jesus. And in this green again we find emphasis of oblique lines since on the right the greens are mainly on the back of a stooping man – again a low point – whereas to the left the green area is on a man who stands higher up and who is fleeing. This is also a stressing of the direction of the lines. The effect of fleeing and of lines growing to the upper border is underscored on the left – again – by a man wearing a basket on his head (right next to the man in green). So El Greco used the same effects and images twice, on the left in the man and on the right in the woman.

El Greco used symmetries in colours, symmetries in dynamism of lines and yet these lines are almost invisible. All is so seemingly natural and nervous as to be totally unexpected in near analysis. This structure forms the equilibrium of the picture. And equilibrium is needed, because especially in the left group of people movement is everywhere. El Greco used reclining persons, persons falling or lying on the ground, stooping figures. He used slanting lines here to indicate movement, clearly about as much as Caravaggio was doing in Rome. But it seems hardly possible for El Greco to have seen early Caravaggios, so we have here a genius painter inventing or discovering the same techniques of movement as Caravaggio in another country, approximately at the same time.

The blue colours also are supporting the symmetry. A lady lies on the ground in the left mass of people. Her blue-green cloak forms an area of colour, which is in symmetry with another surface in blue on the upper right, even some in the colours of the lady wearing a basket there. These blues follow the same aspiring left diagonal, over part of the dark blue cloak of Jesus.

Blue, green and yellow are the three basic hues. These surround Jesus like the Trinity and Jesus also stands - as we have seen – in a triangle of three yellow colours.

El Greco worked and re-worked his compositions. He made sometimes several smaller panels in wood before starting on his grander work and he painted very slowly, leaving his compositions untouched for days and then re-interrogating and changing the lines, forms and the colours. El Greco's 'Christ chasing the Merchants from the Temple' is a seemingly impetuous, spontaneous picture, simple in structure since Jesus stands so obviously in the middle in splendid colours, but there is a lot more than that to El Greco's work. We saw how this artist directed colours and lines

to a lifting of the spirit, to an elevating concept of direction, drawing attention to Jesus's face and to the high.

El Greco placed the Temple scene in a Roman building and through the open arch we can see what is almost a Venetian view for the large houses have balconies as El Greco certainly saw on Venice's Canal Grande. A patch of open sky leads the view to the far and El Greco thus created depth behind Jesus. El Greco was not much concerned with perspective but he did use some receding lines, even if they do not all go to the correct point. The eye's point of the perspective should be situated somewhere to the left of Jesus, but still rather high, at approximately the height of Jesus. Such a high viewpoint stresses the grandeur of Christ since the viewer seems to look from beneath, an effect still more enhanced by Jesus's elongated figure. We find such elongated figures in Gothic, but more so in Italian Mannerism and in painters like Jacopo Pontormo and later Parmigianino. El Greco indeed is called a Mannerist painter for these style effects, but whether he had seen this style before and absorbed it or invented it alone remains to be proven.

The long figure of Jesus in the fierce red colours splits the painting literally in two halves. On the left we find younger, unbearded men and nude figures. On the right the personages are elder, and all fully clad. Jesus snatches away money from the new generation of the left and seems to want to hand it over to the right. Depicting elder men on the right and younger men on the left was not a new idea. Sandro Botticelli had already done just the same in one of his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican of Rome. Did El Greco remember this picture, and maybe unknowingly, copied the idea?

The men on the right talk, discuss, plead and interrogate whereas on the left is work, but also fear and awe. These people seem to be struck by an invisible light from above that blinds them. Some of the men cover their eyes or hide. Has El Greco implied here that reason and wisdom should prevail over the new mood? Or is the spiritual world condemning the already poor and destitute left side? The mass on the left indeed is poorly dressed, not richly clad, as moneychangers would be. Here are only poorer merchants, people with baskets from the countryside. It may be ironic too that Jesus seems to be throwing these out of the Temple. El Greco made almost only devotional pictures, but he was also much a Humanist as other pictures prove. He may have introduced in this painting some conflict with the message of the New Testament. Jesus definitely seems to prefer the elderly, the wise and the worldly.

El Greco was turning on sixty when he made this painting. In his earlier picture of 1572-1574 made in Rome, he indeed showed a lady in opulent and splendid clothes on the left and almost all figures are massed on that left. In that picture a nude woman is on the right. The elder picture was made when El Greco was much younger and still more in the influence of Venetian and Roman mannered art. There is more emphasis on Roman architecture in that picture, more show of Corinthian colonnades and of the grandeur of the palace-temple. In our painting we see a more powerful scene, emotions more direct and unhindered by unnecessary detail. And El Greco reached his startling use of violent, acid colours. El Greco's management of emotion was clearer by 1600; his lines and structure more mature and devoid of decorative elements.

With the 'Jesus chasing the Merchants from the Temple' El Greco made a picture that is already very Baroque in theatricality and pathos, in movement and tension. In his depiction El Greco joined Mannerism, especially in the elongated view of Jesus. He applied very rough brushstrokes as can be seen in the way he handled the red robe of Jesus. All the strokes of a hard brush in thick paint, maybe oil paint enhanced with wax to make it thicker and more tactile, are visible in the cloak around Jesus's arm. El Greco also knew where and how to use texture. Here he seems to have wanted to give an impression of a rapid work, of rapid brushstrokes, of a nonchalant and impetuous work. But El Greco knew very well how to control all these elements of the art of painting. He showed impetuosity by texture but he also surprises the attentive viewer with a sophisticated structure and the composition of a genius maker of images. He rebukes the viewer with his hard and strange colours, but these create a harmony by themselves and of course a style no other artist has dared to copy. There are only a few painters who so powerfully mastered their own particular style: Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Pontormo, Poussin and Rembrandt, but not many more.

*Other paintings:*

**Jesus chasing the Merchants from the Temple**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1650.

**Jesus and the Moneychangers**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Institute of Arts, the William Hood Dunwoody Fund. Minneapolis.

**The Expulsion of the Moneychangers from the Temple**

Giovanni Panini (1691-1765). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the Villahermosa Palace. Madrid. Ca. 1724.

**The Expulsion of the Moneychangers from the Temple**

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the Villahermosa Palace. Madrid. Ca. 1760.

**The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple**

Angelo Trevisani (1669-1753/1755). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**Christ driving the Money Changers out of the Temple**

Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome.

**Jesus drives the Money Changers from the Temple**

Francesco Boneri called Gecco del Caravaggio (1589 - after 1630). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1610-1625.

## *The Instruction of Nicodemus*

### **Jesus instructing Nicodemus**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Tournai.

Only John tells of the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus. During Jesus's stay in Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, came to Jesus by night. He said, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him". Jesus answered: "In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said, "How can anyone who is old be born? Is it possible to go back into the womb again and be born?" Jesus replied: "In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit; what is born of human nature is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: you must be born from above. The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." <sup>G38</sup>.

Jesus continues to talk to Nicodemus as is recalled in the poetic language of John. Jesus further explains to the Pharisee in images that he is indeed the Son of God, and the light of the world.

The two great Baroque masters of Western Europe Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) worked for twenty years in the same town of Antwerp. Their styles of painting were so similar, the famous Rubens look of Baroque, that it is sometimes difficult to discern who painted which picture. Rubens was the famed diplomat who resided in the higher circles of aristocrats and wealthy merchants of mundane Antwerp. He knew Kings and Queens and received commissions from them. Jordaens' pictures were more destined for the burghers of the town who did not feel familiar with the highest establishment. Rubens has been very careful in the choice of his themes, whereas Jordaens was more drawn to burlesque going on vulgar themes and representation of common people. When Rubens and Jordaens painted religious scenes for the churches and abbeys of Antwerp, Rubens stepped down from his themes of classic antiquity and Jordaens elevated his views and left his inclination for vulgarity. Both showed then an art that was almost indistinguishable. Such was the case for 'Jesus instructing Nicodemus' that was first attributed to Rubens, then to Jordaens.

The picture indeed feels more like a Jordaens. The texture is rough, broad and free. The firm red and ochre of Jordaens are the predominant colours and there is an expression of faces that is the love and force of Jordaens.

Rubens and Jordaens would make in their workshops several of such paintings a month. Rubens in particular had a workshop that had turned art into an industry so that he left thousands of paintings. Few museums in the world do not have a Rubens. Both painters would get up in the morning in the knowledge they needed to start

working on a commission for a religious scene like 'Jesus instructing Nicodemus'. Rubens' house can still be visited in Antwerp even though few original items of his proper home remain. One is astonished at how small such a house could be, how small the rooms and kitchen, how small even the private workshop of Rubens. One is surprised at the lack of light in the house itself, in which the walls were covered by dark paper or heavy tapestries. There would be dark wood for ceilings and floors, even dark Spanish leather on some of the walls. The workshop would of course be the largest room, in which also most of the light could come in through larger windows.

The painters would read the Gospels after breakfast, for inspiration and to have the right scene in their minds. For clergy would look with scrutiny at how the artists represented a part of Christ's life. Then the painters would think for a while on a new but acceptable setting for the anecdote from the Bible. They would look at engravings of other artists for similar themes. For their 'Nicodemus' they would finally settle for a daring new representation. Jesus and Nicodemus stretch out their hands to the viewer, take him as a witness and thus draw him or her into the picture. Pleased about their idea, they would sketch the first lines on the canvas, paint a little at a head here and there and leave it for the rest of the day to one of their students to fill out the colour areas of the robes of Jesus and Nicodemus.

The following days the masters would return to work at the faces. Jordaens made a splendid work of the faces in this painting. We know the magnificent, dignified, smooth work of Anthony van Dyck who was also a contemporary of Rubens and Jordaens and who was also from Antwerp. But we forget often the marvellous skills of painting faces of Jordaens. The faces of Nicodemus, Jesus and the disciples are marvels of detailed expression of individuality. Jesus is young, noble, and intelligent. Nicodemus has an honest face: he seems cautious, attentive, and intelligent too. Maybe he is a little on his guards, somewhat secretive in his hood. He came by night and did not want to be recognised. The white-bearded disciple, who could be Peter, is deep in thoughts. The words exchanged between Jesus and Nicodemus make Peter ponder for he is slower to comprehend the arguments of the learned men. One sees on the face of Peter that he does not understand it all, and that it takes him quite an effort to follow and think over the rich images. Yet, this is the triangle of understanding. The other disciples are just listening, not following nor fully hearing the words. They try to catch a word here and there but they are not completely in the conversation.

'Jesus and Nicodemus' is a masterpiece of detailed attention, painted with the love of their maker – whether Rubens or Jordaens. It is a work either painter could be pleased of.

The painter would over the weeks come back to his own work, and to the work of his students. He would explain his mind to teach his pupils. He would correct a fold in a gown. He would with the streak of genius astonish his students at a rapid brush of colour that would suddenly turn a common or drab surface into a marvel of colour and contrast. The students would feel the instant inspiration of a genius. The painting would be finished, shipped, and forgotten by its makers. For with a new week there would be a new scene. But the spark of the brilliant idea, the religious and devote reflection on a Gospel theme, and the spirituality of the artist would survive in the picture.

## *Jesus amongst the Doctors*

### **Christ among the Doctors**

Bernardino Luini (active 1512-1532). The National Gallery – London.

We follow Mark's account of the days of teaching of Jesus before his passion. As Jesus was walking in the Temple of Jerusalem, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him and they said to him, "What authority have you for acting like this? Or who gave you authority to act like this?" Jesus said to them, "And I will ask you a question, just one: answer me and I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism, what was its origin, heavenly or human? Answer me that." And they argued this way among themselves, "If we say heavenly, he will say, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?" But dare we say human? – they had the people to fear, for everyone held that John had been a real prophet." So their reply to Jesus was, "We do not know". And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this."<sup>G38</sup>

Jesus continues to talk in parables to the priests and he prophesied the fall of Jerusalem. These long discussions and the preaching of Jesus precede the Passion of Jesus. In the Gospels the scene of Jesus before the doctors of the temple is the occasion for a major series of teachings before the events of the final act. The Pharisees and Sadducees have to act and to destroy Jesus, they call for the Crucifixion from now on.

Bernardino Luini was a Milanese painter. He must have been born in Luino near Milan around 1481 and he was active in Milan until his death in 1532. Not so many works have survived of this talented master. Not much is known of his life, but he seems to have travelled to Rome and met Raphael. He knew the pictures of Leonardo da Vinci, who had worked in the Milan of the Sforza dictators from 1483 to 1499 and who had left many works in Milan among which the now very famous fresco of the 'Last Supper' in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Luini worked often in the style of Leonardo da Vinci, so that his painting 'Christ among the Doctors' was long thought to have been Leonardo's work.

A strange picture indeed is this 'Christ among the Doctors'. It has something of the strange experiences in depiction of Leonardo. An almost effeminate, very young Jesus is shown in the midst of the Doctors. Jesus is arguing and counting off the arguments on the fingers of his left hand. He holds two fingers up as if to count one and two. He touches with a finger of the other hand the second argument. Jesus is very calm, melancholic, amiable and somewhat sad at the lack of comprehension. He is conscious of his superiority and of his secret of being the Son of God. Jesus's hair curls as a girl's and it falls down on his shoulders, accentuating the slightly androgynous representation. One might detect some resemblance between the features of Luini's Jesus and of Leonardo's Mona Lisa. The full light falls on Jesus's face, whereas the Doctors remain in the shadows. Il Caravaggio was not the only painter of the moment to apply strongly the contrasts between light and dark. Luini applies the

same technique with drama to emphasise the difference in age and argument of Jesus and the Doctors.

Luini was a wonderful realist. He painted the Doctors very characteristically, in all detail of their physiognomy. We find very different temperaments in the Doctors. The one at the far left is angry over Jesus. He looks at Jesus scornfully and will almost certainly condemn him. The Doctor next to him seems a quiet, softer and older – thus wiser - man. At the very right is the real one that will condemn Jesus. This Doctor is the only one with no beard; he may be the final judge. He keeps his lips tightly together in firm determination. His opinion is made and this man will not waver even though he does not understand the real argument and prophecy of Jesus. Next to this man is another heavy-bearded figure who could represent the doubter, the one who would rather be in another place, another time. The contrast between the beautiful young man and the old, wrinkled learnt men is striking.

Luini built in structure around the traditional pyramidal portrait volume of the Jesus figure. The Doctors are set symmetrically around Jesus, but Jesus is painted a head higher than the Doctors are, so he dominates them. The Doctors at the far left and the far right are watching Jesus, taking him a prisoner with their eyes. Jesus will not escape from out of this cross-view. The middle Doctors look outside the frame, in opposite directions and they certainly do not look at Jesus. They are only the bystanders. They are obviously embarrassed of being in the scene.

Bernardino Luini has depicted Jesus as an affable, wise, aristocratic youth that is a prisoner of tradition. The painting is strange; Luini introduced a twist in the representation of Jesus that can be called an experience. He had another vision of Jesus than most of the painters we know of his period. Which is a welcome surprise in Renaissance portraiture. Luini was searching for a new comprehension of Jesus, experimenting with visions of Jesus and of course he was returning to the sources, as was the essential movement of the Renaissance.

*Other paintings:*

**Jesus amongst the Doctors**

Charles de la Fosse (1636-1716). Musée des Beaux- Arts. Rouen.

**Jesus amongst the Doctors in the Temple**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1558.

**Jesus among the Doctors of the Law**

Pier Francesco Mazzuchelli called Morazzone (ca. 1571 – 1626). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. Ca. 1616.

**Christ among the Doctors**

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Madrid. 1505.

**Christ instructs in the Temple**

Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1808-1821.

**Christ among the Doctors**

Jacques Stella (1597-1657). Collégiale Notre Dame. Les Andély. 1642.

## *The Adulterous Woman*

### **Christ and the Adulterous Woman**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Musée du Louvre- Paris. Around 1530-1535.

Lorenzo Lotto was a painter born in Venice around 1480. He was a contemporary of the leading masters of Venice, Tiziano and Palma Vecchio, but he left the town's artistic production to these two latter artists. Lotto travelled around Italy, to settle in Bergamo near Venice. In 1554 he became a religious Brother in the Holy House of Loreto and died somewhat later in 1665. Lorenzo Lotto had a profound religious feeling and a contrasting very secular tendency for worldly motives. He was a strange, conflicting personality with sudden moods that reflected in the large variety of themes in his painting. He lived away from the mainstream of artists, preferred to stay aloof and delivered a very individual art. An example of the struggles within his soul may have attracted him to a representation of sin, next to the religious fervour of many representations of the Virgin Mary.

The theme of the 'Adulterous Woman' is taken from John. It is a story that happened in Jerusalem. Jesus had been to the Mount of Olives but at daybreak he appeared in the Temple and as all the people came to him he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle they said to Jesus, "Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?" They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus sat down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, "Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she replied. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go away, and from this moment sin no more!"<sup>G38</sup>

John gave no explanation on what Jesus was writing in the ground, but a medieval tradition held that Jesus was putting down the sins of the scribes and Pharisees. On seeing their own sins made public, the Pharisees left<sup>G41</sup>. Jesus has also no sentimental attraction to sin. He does not agree with sin, does not excuse it. Nor does he show any feeling of complicity with the adulterous woman. He only does not condemn her and tells her not to sin anymore. Before all, Jesus emphasised the weakness of man or woman and set the value of the person before other feelings. In pictures, the adulterous woman generally has braided hair and one breast bare, the signs of the courtesan. One Pharisee may hold the book with the old Law of Moses; another may hold a stone in his hand<sup>G41</sup>.

Lorenzo Lotto painted the turmoil. Jesus is amidst a crowd of shouting, ugly men. An uproar is in the making and is growing to a climax of violence. All kinds of men are around Jesus and the woman, even Orientals with turbans. The men are all pointing at

Jesus and they are gesticulating and tearing at the woman. A harnessed soldier is grasping the woman's gown away to bare her and show the apparel of temptation. The woman is being undressed in the minds of the spectators and certainly in the eyes of the lecher next to her. The soldier grasps at her hair too so that the woman reclines her head in fear and pain.

Jesus is standing in the middle with a calm but decided face. His face is round and mild. It does not seem up to the task. This Jesus is not authoritative, towering above the crowd. Who will win, what will be the outcome? Will Jesus fear too and give in to the people? The moment is still undecided. The conflict is centred on the woman, So Lotto has drawn lances above Jesus that are growing out of the crowd and emanating from the adulterous woman as radiation. These are the thorns of sin, which may one day fall back on Jesus and crown him.

The colours in this painting are clear but not hard. This is Venetian colour, but the painting definitely has a Florentine crystal clear line and tone. All is painted in detail and the colour areas conflict as the theme dictates. There is the green of the woman's cloak. This is neither the red colour of love nor the blue colour of spirituality. The transparent white shirt of the woman is in the same hues as her bared neck. Next to her is the bright red robe of Jesus and his blue cloak. Remember that this red is the colour of love. Around Jesus there is much brown, black, white patches and the metal-grey of the guard. No two colours are the same; Lotto's palette was very rich and brilliant.

Jesus staying serene in the midst of a violent crowd is a recurring theme in religious imagery. The image is international too. Jeroen Bosch of Flanders painted Jesus thus surrounded by ugly heads. And Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg made in 1506 a 'Christ among the Doctors' in which Jesus is similarly surrounded by ugly faces. Lotto may have known these pictures or more probably has expressed the same feeling of oppression. It was not the first time Lotto had shown this feeling. We have – also in the Louvre Museum – a "Christ carrying the Cross" which resembles much Bosch's painting, but which of course was shown with the rich Italian colours and light.

The Jesus of the 'Adulterous Woman' of Lorenzo Lotto is a tormented Jesus on the brink of losing control. Yet he remains calm and mild. He lifts a soothing hand and presses his lips together. Despite the pressure he has to stand up to the crowd, yet not give in to its violence by his own violence or anger. John explained that Jesus took a detached air, started writing on the ground as if he was not part of the crowd. This was a good reaction for otherwise Jesus would have been drawn into the turbulent arguments and gestures of the men. Lotto has so well understood this and painted his picture accordingly. At the same time, Lotto had to bring the viewer into the picture. Therefore the figures in this painting are not shown from head to foot but only to the middle. This is the view we ourselves would have had we stood in front of Jesus in the middle of the scene. Lotto used this way of representation often.

Lorenzo Lotto was a deeply religious person. He must have been a tormented man, unsure of himself, and unsure of his feelings. The guilt that Christian faith imposes on men was heavy on him. Lotto was unsettled in life, in search for peace and without inner rest. His picture shows some of these feelings in marvellous colours and scene. This profound characterisation of psychology in the middle of action is what Lotto

painted often. In the 'Adulterous Woman' we are tempted to believe that Jesus is Lorenzo Lotto.

*Other paintings:*

**The Woman taken in Adultery**

Giovanni Battista Benvenuti called Ortolani (1487-1527). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries. London.

**The Woman taken in Adultery**

Guercino (1591-1666). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1621.

**Christ and the adulterous Woman**

Vassili Polenov (1844-1927). The Russian Museum. St Petersburg. 1887.

**Christ and the Adulterous Woman**

Nicolas Colombel. Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1682.

**Christ and the adulterous Woman**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris.

**Christ and the Woman of Canaan**

Juan de Flandes. Patrimonio Nacional, Palacio real. Madrid. 1496-1504.

**Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery**

Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480-1530). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1521.

**Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1518-1594). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1545-1550.

**Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery**

Mattia Preti (1613-1699). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

**Christ and the Adulterous Woman**

Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

**Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery**

Bonifacio de' Pitati called Bonifacio Veronese (ca. 1487-1553). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1550.

**Christ and the Canaanite Woman**

Ludovico Carracci (1555-1629). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1593-1594.

## *The Sermon on the Mountain*

### **The Sermon on the Mountain**

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne (1631-1681). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

Matthew and Luke wrote about the sermon of Jesus on the mountain. In Matthew, the sermon is most formidable and epic. Luke's story is more humble.

Luke states that Jesus spent a whole night in prayer on the mountain. Then he came down with his apostles and stopped at a piece of land that was at level ground. A large crowd of people had gathered there from Jerusalem and Judaea but also from Tyre and Sidon, the old Phoenician coastal cities. Luke recalls the beatitudes spoken for the poor, the curses on the rich, an entreaty to love one's enemies and for being compassionate and generous towards one another. Jesus told the parable of the blind guiding other blind, and Jesus would have ended with another parable, the parable of the man that build a house on solid rock. A true disciple of God thus builds on what he or she has heard from Jesus. Then Jesus leaves, and he goes to the town of Capernaum.

Matthew writes that Jesus ascended the mountain. His disciples came to him there, and Jesus began to speak. With this scene of course, parallels are drawn with the handing over of the tablets of the Law to Moses on mount Horeb. Jesus gave rules to his disciples on the mountain. He started to say the Beatitudes, in which he praised the poor of the earth. They would be blessed, receive the earth in inheritance and be recognised as children of God. Jesus called them the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Then Jesus told that he had not come to abolish the old Law, but to complete it. Jesus recalled the old commandments of Moses and he brought each to a higher level of spirituality. The old Laws were laws of human conduct in society; now Jesus brought them in the realm of individual spiritual conduct. It is forbidden to kill but you cannot even call someone a fool or a traitor in private. You could divorce your wife under the old Law by giving her a dismissal note in writing; for Jesus, divorce is simply forbidden. You will love your neighbour; but Jesus told to love your enemies. Alms giving should be done in secret; prayer should be done in private and not in public; fasting should be done in secret; treasures should be built up for life in heaven and not for life on earth. Jesus then gave the 'Our Father', the Lord's Prayer. He continued to say that no one can be the slave of two masters, of God and of money. He urged his disciples to trust in divine providence, urged them not to judge so that they not be judged, and not to profane sacred things. He said, 'ask and you will be given'; he repeated the Law rule to treat others as you would like to be treated. He warned against false prophets. Then Matthew recalls the parable of the house built on rock, like Luke. Matthew ends this part of his text by saying that the teaching made a deep impression on the disciples, because Jesus taught with authority.

We, who are not in the presence of Jesus when we read the sermon on the mountain, as written by Matthew, nevertheless cannot but be impressed by the words. Jesus's sermon drew Moses' law onto a much higher level, onto an in-human order, not to a

level that is still attainable by a human being. Even saints cannot control their thoughts to the degree that Jesus asked, commanded in this sermon. Thoughts well up in the minds of humans in a seemingly uncontrolled way but Jesus told that such thoughts should not even happen to somebody truly dedicated to the devotion of heaven. The sermon on the mountain is therefore the most formidable handing over of the new rules, which superseded the old rules of Moses, in the Gospels. The oldest text, the one of Matthew, seems to have grasped most the extraordinary meaning of Jesus's words on the mountain. These were the new laws of a new religion.

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne made a picture of the 'Sermon on the Mountain'. He was the nephew of a far more famous painter called Philippe de Champaigne. Philippe and Jean-Baptiste were born in Brussels, now in Belgium. Philippe had first tried to build up a career in Antwerp, from the workshop of the great Baroque painter of Brabant Pieter Paul Rubens, but Rubens refused him. So he had gone to Paris and became a very well known painter there. When his son died, Philippe de Champaigne sent for his nephew, allowed him to go for a year and a half to Italy, and then from 1659 on employed Jean-Baptiste as his assistant. Jean-Baptiste perfected his skills as a pupil, but he remained in the shadow of his brilliantly successful uncle. Yet, he also made fine pictures in a style of his own and among these the 'Sermon on the Mountain' is one of his most excellent paintings. It is today in the Magnin Museum of Dijon in Burgundy, a museum and a collection mostly dedicated to French art.

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne painted the moment at which Jesus delivered his teaching. Jesus is the central figure of the picture and the artist showed Jesus somewhat larger than the other figures. He also painted Jesus's robe and cloak in light blue colours, unusual hues but the symbol of the heavens. There is a small patch of blue colour on either side of Jesus, but these remain inconspicuous as compared to the splendid blue area of Jesus. The attention of the viewer is thus immediately attracted to Jesus and this attraction is magical and powerful. De Champaigne applied various structures to focus on Jesus.

Jesus is in ecstasy. He does not look to the crowd but seems to utter words that are sent to him from heaven, as if he were but an instrument. A halo surrounds his head and a slight wind stirs up his cloak behind him, whereas all other robes and cloaks are at rest. The light of the scene comes from the lower left corner. It illuminates Jesus's face and with the figures on the left side seems to indicate the left diagonal. Another direction is in the man in a blue robe on the right side. This movement is along the right diagonal. Jesus is caught in the crossing of the two diagonals of the frame, as shown by the figures, and he is also caught in the inverted 'V' made by the trunks of the trees behind him. Finally, a bare mountain rises behind the trees, and just behind Jesus. The mountain top is above Jesus and its sides go down in the lines of the people sitting around him, so that the viewer's eyes look at a pyramid structure. Jesus is inside this pyramid. These are at least three strong suggestions of structure, which all emphasise the figure of Jesus. All the eyes of the people are directed at Jesus, so that the viewer always returns to the central figure.

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne was a fine painter. He painted the trees marvellously. All the figures of the disciples are well rendered. He brought an exquisite landscape to the right and in that he could show that indeed the sermon happened on a high mountain. Jesus not just stands somewhat higher than his audience; de Champaigne

showed easily how high the mountains were above the landscape by painting that view in a light blue haze, as if it were far below and far away. Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne was of course a Baroque painter, so his scene is lively, but a serene rest and dignity pervades his picture. He painted all the men with different, very characteristic strong faces. Some men are standing; others are sitting; still other lie around, relaxed and caught by Jesus's spell. De Champaigne painted nicely the play of light on the folds of the robes and in the gradations from light to shadow on the people to the left, under the trees. His landscape in bluish hues of distance is imaginary but plausible. The main structure of the scene of figures is under the right diagonal, in the left triangle under that diagonal. The artist also drew subtly the attention of the viewer to the landscapes, since on the far right a man turns his back to the viewer, to summon other disciples, but thereby turning attention to the landscape on the right.

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne did not leave a profusion of works to us. He was merely the assistant of his famous uncle. But he was beyond doubt a gifted artist, among the French community of painters of Paris, and even among the French painters living in Italy. He grasped well the epic, grand moment of ecstasy when Jesus delivers his emotionally loaded and so important Sermon on the Mountain, the one teaching that established the spiritual core basis of the Christian religion.

## **The Miracles and the Parables**

## *The Miracles*

The word 'miracle' is a religious term for a fact of supernatural origin. A miracle can be observed by the senses of humans, yet it is full of mysterious force. It lies outside of the natural order of things and witnesses of powers completely strange to the normal perceptions of humans. In the Gospels, the miracles testify that Jesus stood above the created nature.

The miracles show Jesus's power over nature. Yet, Jesus never worked against the natural order. He for instance did not turn time back. Jesus's miracles remained in the line of expectations of the people around him. His deeds were not frightening. They were only subtle changes to the natural progression of an illness, to the normal course of small events. The miracles were such that the people could always easily understand them, yet they showed without doubt a supernatural power at work.

The only way to prove that Jesus was more than a mere human and that he was sent by another power was to show some of that power. Otherwise he may not have been heard, certainly not in the troubled times of his life. So, Jesus had to perform miracles. Miracles were inevitable. Some scholars believe the miracles are only symbolic narratives or myths, referring sometimes to other tales of the Old Testament. Yet then even some among them acknowledge that the stories are religiously true in that they represent fundamental feelings, perceptions of truths of Jesus. The evidence that Jesus was a healer seems compelling though.

All Evangelists talk of the miracles and they give account of them. The miracle of the wedding at Cana was the first according to John. It seems also the easiest, simply turning water into wine. Nothing living is involved; the act could be merely a chemical transformation. But the miracles continued and the power necessary to fulfil them increased. After Cana Jesus cured sick people. He cured virulent skin diseases and he healed the blind and the deaf. He cured a paralytic and a man with a withered hand. He healed a woman with a haemorrhage, a dropsical man and an epileptic. Jesus healed lepers. Jesus multiplied loaves of bread and fish to give crowds to eat. He calmed a storm on a lake and he walked on water.

Between these miracles in start a series of acts, which increasingly show Jesus's power over life and death, over the living world and over the world after death. Jesus cured a royal official's son who was at the point of death. He restored to life the son of a widow who had just deceased. He brought to life Jairus's daughter who had just died. Finally, as a culmination, he arose Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus was not a young man on the point of dying or who had just died, but a mature man who in the force of age had deceased and was already in his grave. One can thus follow a line of growing confidence and force in Jesus's own power to perform miracles, up to the crescendo of the raising of Lazarus.

Miracles of course became very popular extraordinary stories over the centuries. Although they were of divine power, the miracles were enacted mostly on humans and remained at the human scale. There is no account of large earthquakes and upheavals, of the sun standing still as enacted by Jesus, no spectacular intervention of hordes of spirits. The miracles stayed at the human level. They appealed immediately

to the imagination of suffering people and they talked of intimate but dramatic human events. Plays of miracles were performed in Europe in medieval times, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Bands of actors travelled from village to village. They would set up an impressive décor of the earth, heaven and hell on their wagon and impressed the country people with special effects, thunder and fire. The plays gradually became more vulgar and more mysterious and imaginative beyond the Gospel stories so that the Protestant preachers definitely took their distance from them.

Painters also frequently took up themes from the miracles. These were powerful themes in which the artists could compete in representations of the strong emotions that always radiated from miracle deeds. The painters could show the strength and the mystique of Christ in tangible scenes. They dramatised the wonder and surprise of the people around Jesus. There is also an astonishing diversity in scenes that could thus be depicted. Painters were grateful for these scenes that were very popular with commissioners. The Church and the Clergy were all too happy to found faith in deeds that were testimonies to the power of the heavens, and the miracles caught the imagination of people as no other images.

Miracles were not just introduced in the New Testament. The Bible contains a very ancient tradition of miracles. And miracles were also expected of the saints that came after Jesus Christ. The 'Golden Legend' is a compilation of the innumerable miracles that were performed by the saints during or after their life. The saints were supposed to be the instruments through which God worked, so the 'Golden Legend' is an extraordinary account of these mystical events.

## *The Wedding at Cana*

### **The Wedding at Cana**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1562-1563.

John wrote that the wedding at Cana was the first miracle of Jesus. He is the only Evangelist to tell this story. John witnessed that this was on the third day of Jesus's public life and his story goes as follows.

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. And they ran out of wine since the wine provided for the feast had all been used and the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine". Jesus said "Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that were customary among the Jews; each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water" and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast." They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from – though the servants who had drawn the water knew – the president of the feast called the bridegroom and said, "Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined, but you have kept the best wine till now." This was the first of Jesus's signs; it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. <sup>G38</sup>

John's text reveals much. It reveals in the last phrase why miracles were necessary. Jesus had to prove that he was the Son of God. The miracle at Cana was the first and by far the nicest. What could be more sympathetic to us, modern sybarites, than the transformation of water into wine? The miracle was also performed at a feast, placing Jesus amidst life among his neighbours or people who knew him well.

Paolo Caliari was born in Verona in 1528. He was trained in the arts there, but he worked from around 1555 in Venice and died in this town in 1588. Art in Venice was in its High Renaissance period then, at the height and almost at the end of its glory. Living masters were Titian (1487-1576), Paris Bordone (1500-1571), Palma Giovane (1544-1628), Sebastiano del Piombo (1485- 1547) who had left Venice for Rome from 1511 on and Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Jacopo di Ponte (1517-1592) worked in Bassano but had been taught the art of painting in Venice. Titian was the settled and recognised great master of the arts. He was the painter of Kings and Emperors. This fact left the town of Venice itself more to Tintoretto and Veronese. These two were in competition for the altarpieces in the churches of Venice, for decorations in the various Scuole and in the Doge Palace, the Palazzo Ducale. They worked in very different styles. Tintoretto was dedicated to drama and to preponderance of colour in the best tradition of Venice. Veronese preferred clearer forms, well-delineated areas of brighter colours, and he loved to use elements of classical architecture in his scenes.

Tintoretto and Veronese worked on grand scales, on paintings and frescoes of enormous dimensions. Tintoretto's 'Paradise' on one of the walls of the Palazzo Ducale is the largest oil painting in the world<sup>G3</sup>. Veronese's 'Wedding at Cana' is almost 7 by 10 meter. In 1798 the French Revolutionary Armies had trampled over Italy in a rapid campaign. French Cultural Commissars took away the painting of Veronese from the refectory of the Benedictine convent on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore near Venice, a convent built by the famous Venetian architect Palladio. In 1815, when the allies who had beaten Napoleon discussed the redistribution of these confiscated works of art, the dimensions of the 'Wedding at Cana' were quite a problem. The Allies preferred the exchange of this canvas for one of the French artist Charles Le Brun. So the 'Wedding' remained in the Louvre and Le Brun's painting travelled to Italy<sup>F1</sup>.

The 'Wedding at Cana' was thus painted on a grand scale. Although the picture represents a religious scene, the grandeur of Venice is represented here so monumentally. Veronese has gone a long way towards treating his subject as if it were a worldly, a secular scene of a Venetian wedding. Of course, such an epic scene probably shows a very idealised form of Venetian life. The decorative effect of the painting is striking. The setting of the wedding in a Roman palace gives us an impression of solemnity where otherwise we would see only the tumult of a boisterous feast.

The picture is divided in three horizontal strips and is thus very solidly structured in order to enhance the monumentality of the picture.

The lower strip contains the table of the wedding. Here is the crowd, all in movement and gestures, oblivious of the viewer. A small orchestra is playing a concert in the middle. One can hear the sounds of the music over the whispering and laughter. People are asking for their favourite tunes. This is not an ordinary orchestra however. For one, it is situated exactly in front of Jesus. The musicians are from the left to the right Paolo Veronese himself with a tenor viol, Jacopo Bassano with the treble cornett, Tintoretto with the violin and Titian with the bass viol<sup>G57</sup>. A heavenly orchestra of painters is thus seated close to Jesus and is entertaining him. Other figures are standing up and are walking all through the picture. They are talking to each other, calling for waiters, they are being served, they watch the wine being poured, and so on. They brought their dogs along. Admire the marvellous robes of the invited Venetians. Jesus is sitting in the middle of the table and he is only recognisable by the halo or radiation that emanates from his face. His mother, Mary is at the left of him. Around these two are probably the apostles, all engaged in vivid conversations. Jesus remains stoically calm, as if he were isolated and in sole conference with God to perform the miracle of the transformation of the water in wine.

The miracle has already been performed. On the right of the frame we see wine being poured from the white stone jars and the wine is presented to the President of the feast. He holds a glass high to admire the colour of the liquid and the sitters around him look appreciatingly. The entire scene at that side of the table is very vivid. On the other side, to the extreme left, we see the married couple. There is symmetry in colours since the President and the bride are both painted in grey-white splendid robes. Wine here is also being served, to the bridegroom, and by a black young

servant. Two invitees are looking at this scene and so are two invitees on the right. Veronese has thus introduced symmetries in colour and symmetries in the narration. For the rest, all the bustle of a feast is wonderfully displayed as a feast to the eye. Forms and colours are a splendid harmony. Veronese was even more a colourist than Tintoretto, but he vowed to Florentine lines and clear forms in a happy combination.

The colour strip above the table shows the same intense life. From the left and from the right, from between the columns of the palace, meat is brought in. Entire roasted pigs, and fowl are presented on plates. In the middle the meat is chopped up and brought down the large marble stairs. This is a feast in Venice, the town in which accounting was invented. So on the left accounts are held of all that is served at the feast. A scribe is there, with two acolytes and conversation, control and ordering is very animated. The horizontality of the scene is enhanced in this strip by the railing of the platform that overhangs the lower scene. This railing was a splendid idea for the picture; it adds space, clarity of vision and invites the viewer to look at the scenes one after the other. It delineates also the action since in the lower strip all is crowded and confused. In the middle band more order is shown whereas the upper band contains the Roman classical rationality. The viewer is reminded that although Venice was all energy, imperial order also reigned the town. There is a definite top-to-bottom feeling in this picture. Order comes from above. Popular life is below. Industry, administration and accountants in the middle and the aristocratic upper construction of Venetian society is magnificently present.

The third strip of the picture shows a wonderful Venetian sky, full of light. The light pervades the impeccable white marble columns. This could be imperial Rome. Veronese must have loved his Venice, have been proud of its wealth and accomplishments. The palace is even adorned, high above, with classical sculpture. A bell tower rises out of the scene as a token of the independence and privileges of the town. But the airiness had to be preserved so that one can see through the floors of the tower and the construction is held very light. Even here, Veronese added life: flocks of birds fly around the tower.

The 'Wedding at Cana' of Paolo Veronese proves the success of Christian religious painting. In the Gospels all themes could be found that could be handled with vivid imagination almost to any effect. There are many anecdotes in the Gospels, scenes of joy, scenes of solitude, of passion and of grand images, scenes of interior and scenes of wide nature. Solemn and stately occasions can be depicted as well as popular feasts. The Gospels permit endless variations on themes so that painters had all the freedom they could imagine composing their works of art. The themes were not exhausted at the end of the seventeenth century. Paolo Veronese wanted to show the grandeur of Venice in his marvellous decorations. Venice was all the wonderful light of its lagoons. It was a boisterous town where all the cultures of the Mediterranean came together, collided and collaborated. This is why various references are made in the picture to oriental fashion in the turban hats of the invitees, in the Moors and Negro servants. Veronese has assembled this cultural splendour and wealth in his painting. All in this picture is movement, gesture, talks, whispers, and of course colour. Colour was Venice's own in art. Veronese combined his feeling of colour with the clearer forms of Florence. But there is no rational restraint here, in contrast with the rationally ordered pictures of Florence. Veronese was too much a painter of the senses, as most Venetians were.

*Other paintings:*

**The Wedding at Cana**

Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (ca. 1500-1559). Rijksmuseum. Amsterdam. 1530.

**The Wedding at Cana**

Gheeraert David (1480-1523). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1511.

**The Marriage Feast at Cana**

Jan Steen (1626-1679). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1665-1670.

**The Marriage feast at Cana**

Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art (Nelson Fund). Kansas.

**The Wedding at Cana**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Casa Rezzonico. Venice.

**The Marriage at Cana**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1600-1610.

**The Wedding at Cana**

Jan Swart van Groningen (1500 – after 1553). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

**The Wedding at Cana**

Carlo Bononi (1569-1632). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara.

**The Wedding at Cana**

Gaetano Gandolfi (1734-1802). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

## *The Cure of a Sick Man at the Pool of Bethesda*

**The Pool at Bethesda.** Giovanni Panini (1691-1765). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1724.

John the Evangelist tells the story of the curing of a sick man at the pool of Bethesda in the New Testament.

Jesus went to Jerusalem for a Jewish festival. He came by a pool with five porticos. The pool was called 'Bethesda' in Hebrew. It was thought that an Angel of God came sometimes down to the pool and disturbed the water. The first person to enter the pool then was known to be cured. Under the porticos gathered many sick people, paralysed people, lame and blind, waiting for the water to stir miraculously. Jesus walked by the pool and spoke to the sick. A man had an illness since thirty-eight years and when Jesus heard that the man had suffered for so long he asked the man whether he wanted to be well again. The man answered that he had nobody to put him into the pool when the water got disturbed and so someone else was always before him in the water to be cured by the actions of the Angel. Jesus then said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around.' From that moment, the man was cured. The man did not know Jesus but they met later in the Temple and Jesus there addressed himself to the man again, saying, 'Do not sin anymore lest something worse may happen to you than your past illness!'

This happened on a Sabbath and the Jews began to harass Jesus for having cured a man on the Sabbath. But Jesus said to them that on a Sabbath his Father still worked, and so was he. This of course infuriated the Jews more, not so much now because of the breaking of the Sabbath, but because Jesus spoke of God as his own Father, which made him the equal of God. Jesus told the Jews that they studied the Scriptures, believing these would bring eternal life. Yet, these Scriptures testified to him and the Jews refused to receive life from Jesus. Jesus said human glory meant nothing to him. He also told them that his own testimony was greater than John the Baptist's, and that his deeds were ordained by his Father who had sent him. In truth, whoever listened to Jesus' words and believed in him that sent Jesus, would have eternal life.

Giovanni Paolo Panini belongs to the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Baroque art was transforming into Rococo. His own art was one of 'veduti', of views of architectures in which small figures moved. Panini was born in Piacenza and trained in Bologna, where the Carracci family had founded a classicist school of painters. He studied architecture and scenography. Later, he became renowned in Rome for his decorations of the palaces of the town's nobility. Panini painted religious scenes, but these were also mostly fine landscapes and dramatic sights of ancient ruins, as his rich commissioners of the time seemed to like. He was a master in showing fantastic imaginary settings for which he a vivid inspiration. He was also quite well known in France for this style of painting. Since 1711 Panini worked in Rome. He died there in 1765.

Giovanni Panini had read the passage from the New Testament of Saint John about the pool at Bethesda. We imagine him reading stories from the New Testament and reflecting about how he could turn those into grand pictures that showed Roman architectures and landscapes. Not many miracle and parable scenes lent themselves to such handling of the subjects. The phrase on the five porticos in the story of the pool of Bethesda must have immediately struck him as a useful subject. Panini's specialties were views or 'veduti' of classical ruins and scenes set in antique Roman architecture. Painting buildings in the old Roman style was what he liked and his New Testament pictures were merely an excuse for his landscape pictures. But he always had to remain credible and his pictures had to remain justified by a true story of the Bible. He would use the Jewish Temple a subject, as he did in another painting of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, in the 'Expulsion of the money-changers from the Temple'. But he was also a painter that wanted to remain original and he needed to vary his subjects. The word 'portico' must have triggered his imagination for he could use that to show Roman arches as porticos. So that is what we see as most striking feature of the 'Curing of a sick man at the Pool of Bethesda' of around 1724.

We see a scene of imposing Roman arches and columns. Panini just hints at the fact that these are ancient ruins. On the upper left side one remarks the loose stones and the lack of a roof, as well as plants growing between the massive stones. The structures are old and unattended. What was once the pool of a patio of a rich Roman patrician is now a gathering place for the sick and the lame. The arches are grand however, majestic and overwhelming. Panini showed dramatic perspective in the lines of the columns to offer a deep view of a patio in which lies the pool of Bethesda.

Panini created a fine sense of space not just by this linear perspective, in which the lines converge to a vanishing point situated in the far Roman arch. He also diligently applied aerial perspective. Thus the front scene is painted in warm colours, in browns and dark orange colours, ochres and yellows. The background however is in grey hues and broken yellows that tend to green and blue. Here also the lines and shapes are more hazy and resemble the blue-grey colours of the sky, an effect that is a true one of nature. Painters had observed since Antiquity that far mountains and structures, which normally should be very dark seen from large distances, appeared in fact in grey-bluish hues. This was a result of the diffusing of light through the particles suspended in the air. Panini used the effect to indicate distance and he created a dramatic impression of depth in this way. Moreover, we see the building in the distance smaller than the near columns, a means of representation that adds to the viewers' impression of distance. Panini also shows one architectural structure as placed in space one before the other. The Roman arches in the front hide one or more of the buildings in the background. We imagine the continuation of the hidden lines so that we recognise the complete structure of the far building. Painting thus one building 'in front' of the other also creates powerful depth and illusion of space in a painting.

Panini's painting has but one vanishing point in its perspective. The viewer will remark how many lines, such as in the foreground upper foundation of the Roman arches, are parallel to the lower border of the frame. All other lines flee to one point. The main lines of the building in the background are also horizontal and parallel to the viewer. That allows a painter to use only one vanishing point and to concentrate the viewer's gaze in one direction of depth. Depth then is more powerful. Panini also

seldom designed the vanishing point of perspective to lie in the middle of the picture. Panini liked to put the vanishing point somewhat more to the left or the right. So in 'The Pool at Bethesda' the vanishing point lies somewhat more to the right, exactly behind the open arch of the background architecture. It is in the open arch so that the view would go deeper than this building. In other of his pictures, Panini might situate the vanishing point on the extreme left or right, even exactly on the left or right vertical frame border, or even outside the frame. Panini obtained very lively representations of architectures then and he sought ever-different ways of creating more powerful illusions of depth this way. It is one of the special characteristics of Panini that he used single point linear perspective in many of his paintings. The reason was of course that in this way the artist could obtain in his pictures such dramatic, concentrated impressions of depth in viewers.

So Panini used the four elements of design that a painter has at his or her disposal to create illusion of depth on a flat canvas. He used linear perspective of lines fleeing to one vanishing point, perspective of height or foreshortening, aerial perspective of colours and he placed architectural structures one before the other, by a play of showing and hiding lines. Panini was the undisputed master of perspective in Rome's eighteenth century painting.

Light falls through the front arches onto the ochre ground. Once this ground was covered with the same marble as the arches, now we only see earth on the floor. But due to this the setting is almost pastoral, a Roman portico built at the whim of a rich man or set up by a rich community long gone. We discover an ancient civilisation and in the ruins of that civilisation Jesus preaches a new world. In the light before the pool stands this Jesus. He invites with an outstretched arm the sick man to enter the pond and to be cured. Jesus can easily be recognised, as he is dressed in pure red and blue and a halo forms around his head. All along the pool are sick people and a paralytic walking with sticks is prominent in the foreground. Panini arranged the figures along the columns so that the view of the pool and of the deep perspective would not be hampered, but enhanced. The figures are along the columns, so leave the view to the vanishing point of perspective quite open. Moreover, just as the columns of the foreground are higher than those in the back, Panini painted closer figures significantly taller than the figures in the far. Thus Jesus, near the pool, is smaller than the sick men in the foreground. That might have been a problem to Panini, for Jesus had to be remarked easily by his viewers. So he painted Jesus in the only truly pure, bright red and deep blue hues that one can find in the picture.

The painting 'The Pool at Bethesda' is an example of a New Testament scene that is an occasion for another painterly goal: to show a grand, imaginary, unreal image of an ancient world of classical antiquity. It is thus a very romantic picture of nostalgia that indicates the ages that have passed since Jesus preached and performed his miracles.

Panini produced a grand setting that would have been a dramatic sight in a large dining room of a Roman palace. The picture showed with much skill a scene that would open the hall into a deep view so that it would be perceived larger than it actually was. The picture is a window into the far that could hang on a windowless wall and break the flatness of that wall with a view into space. At the same time Panini could offer a devote picture of Jesus offering charity to the poor and the sick. The master of the house had thus a piece of art that was very decorative, interesting to

enlarge his hall, that could prove to guests of the Roman clergy his or her devotion to the church and to the messages of the New Testament. And in his or her lonely hours, the master could ponder with melancholy and intimacy at the old story from ages gone when Jesus cured a sick man at Bethesda.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Pool at Bethesda**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

## *Christ heals a Deaf-Mute Man*

**Landscape with Christ healing the Deaf-Mute.** Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). University of Michigan Museum of Art. Ann Arbor. Ca. 1650-1655.

Philippe de Champaigne was born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1602. He received the first training of his given talent of painting from the master Jacques Fouquières (1580/1590-1659). There were many fine painters in Brabant at that time however, especially in Antwerp, so Fouquières and de Champaigne left together for Paris in 1621, where the French royal court grew in splendour. De Champaigne was merely nineteen years old then. Yet he rapidly obtained commissions to work on decorations of Parisian palaces, such as the Palais du Luxembourg. There, he worked with another painter, somewhat older than he, a man called Nicolas Poussin, who would a few years later leave Paris for Rome. With Nicolas Poussin, de Champaigne lived at the Collège de Laon in 1622. Philippe de Champaigne learned mostly landscape painting from Fouquières, and also from Poussin, even though Poussin was in that period more interested in scenes of figures prominently set against a hidden background. De Champaigne gained a reputation as a fine painter, who also always remained sufficiently solemn to be well accepted by the then still strict Parisian courtiers. De Champaigne had worked in the Luxembourg Palace under the direction of Nicolas Duchesne and after a while he married that artist's daughter so that he had a ready entry to Duchesne's sponsors. In 1628 de Champaigne's talent had become so well known that he was remarked by the French Queen, Marie de Medicis. He became her court painter and from that moment on his career was established. In 1648, when the French Academy was formed, de Champaigne was one of its fourteen founding members and in 1653 also one of its professors. He painted for Cardinal Richelieu and for King Louis XIII, in whose favour he remained. By then he was among the three or four most prominent painters of France, receiving commissions from Parisian churches and monasteries as well as from the French Royal Court. It is from that period that dates his 'Christ healing the Deaf-mute'.

De Champaigne was a painter from whom it is said that more than any other he epitomizes French Classicism. Much of that categorisation comes from the fact that in our times mostly only one of his paintings is reproduced in books of art: his 'Ex-Voto' picture made in his later years, in 1662, a picture in the Louvre, in which he portrayed two nuns of the Convent of Port-Royal. The nuns are the Mother-Superior Agnès Arnauld and his own daughter, the nun Catherine de Sainte Suzanne Champaigne. De Champaigne's daughter had fallen gravely ill in 1660 and became progressively paralysed but she recovered after a novena of prayers (nine days of praying) and the care of the Mother-Superior. De Champaigne was henceforth even more influenced by his belief in the pre-established ordnance of the world by God and in the convent Mother Catherine talked to him about how all was ordained, his own fate as well as the fate of his daughter. These thoughts on the fixed world were from the Jansenist movement that centred on Port-Royal. De Champaigne's style evolved to the austerity and fatality that Jansenism inspired. The strictness can be remarked in most of his portraits of those times and these are usually reproduced in printing. His portraits are for instance of Cardinal Richelieu, of court people living around the Cardinal and around King Louis XIII. So it should be no wonder that rigidity and dry,

solemn tones are the main impression we receive from de Champaigne's portraits. At the end of his life he even retired to Port-Royal and lived in the convent. Now he only painted portraits of his family and friends, such as the Arnauld family, as well as religious themes. His later work is much more sober than the paintings he made in the middle of his life. He died in 1674.

De Champaigne was not merely the strictly religious painter. He had a very long career and absorbed many elements from Baroque art, from the style of his Flemish colleagues such as Pieter Paul Rubens. He had broad interests and he painted in his long career many subjects. Among these were biblical scenes set in wonderful landscapes. Philippe de Champaigne's career spanned about fifty years and in that period he was a contemporary of some of the most famous French painters ever, such as Simon Vouet (1590-1640), Georges Lallemant (1575-1636), Claude Vignon (1593-1670), Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632), Nicolas Tournier (1590-1639), the Le Nain brothers, Charles Le Brun (1616-1690) and the French painters in Rome like Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Gellée called Claude Lorraine (1600-1682). All these painters and Philippe de Champaigne formed the Golden Age of French painting, and that age was Classicist. Later painters were Pierre Patel (1605-1676), Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671), Lubin Baugin (1612-1663), Jacques Stella (1597-1657), Laurent de la Hyre (1606-1656), Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655) and Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (136-1699). In such a company Philippe de Champaigne could nevertheless uphold his reputation, supported and protected by the French royal court.

Mark wrote that Jesus returned from Tyre over Sidon to the Lake of Galilee. A deaf man was brought to Jesus. The people asked Jesus to put his hands on the man and to cure the deafness. Jesus drew the man away from the crowd. He put his fingers in the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle<sup>G38</sup>. Then Jesus looked to the skies, said 'Ephphatha' to the man, which means 'to be opened'. The man could hear and speak again after this. Jesus ordered the people to tell to nobody about the miracle, but the crowd proclaimed it everywhere. Mark tells this story before the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the bread. The miracle of the deaf-mute is one of the early miracles of Jesus. Jesus does not want these deeds to be known, and the handicap of the man was still a modest one to be healed. Jesus would do much more powerful miracles, such as raising people from the dead, later, so one feels the growing strength and confidence in the man Jesus here. The miracle happens, but Christ does not want the people to know about it. Yet, Jesus' fate advances inexorably and the people spread the news of the miracle. Jesus will not escape his ultimate fate. The miracle has always appealed to writers, priests and artists. Are we not all to some extent deaf people? Also, here is an immediate contact between the human and Jesus since Jesus, the divine, touches the deaf-mute and brings his own saliva on the man's tongue. Philippe de Champaigne used this theme for his painting, and the miracle is also recalled in the readings of the Catholic liturgy.

In the lower right corner of Philippe de Champaigne's painting we see the scene of the miracle. The deaf-mute kneels before Christ and Jesus holds his hands on the man. Jesus looks to the heavens and heals the man. It is exactly above Jesus, to enhance Jesus' appeal to God, that de Champaigne painted the brightest parts of his picture. The light of the sun plays on the water of the river and bright yellow hues mark an opening in the dark forest to where Jesus' thoughts ascend to the heavens. De Champaigne however only hints at the light for we see no very bright, silvery rays

break through the clouds. Merely a diffused light opens the sky above Jesus. The emotions of the scene are thus only hinted at, not thrown in dramatic effects.

Jesus is clad in white and light blue robes, the colours of purity. He is accompanied by two men who might be in de Champaigne's view two apostles. One of these wears a magnificently red cloak. This very bright colours and hard hues attract the eye in the picture to this man and from there to another detail of purity in the picture, for the apostle's left arm points to swans in the river. These white swans are symbols of the candour of the deaf-mute. Only because of the purity of the man's soul can Jesus heal the deaf-mute. De Champaigne remained very faithful to Mark's story, for he also painted figures coming from over a path along the river, towards the scene. Yet, like in Mark, these people only arrive and they hidden behind the trees of the forest. In the far, more people run towards the scene, realising Mark's words that the crowd grew and passed on the news of the deeds of Christ.

Philippe de Champaigne did not paint the scene near a lake. His picture shows not a lake with barren rocks of a desert and not the exotic bushes and trees that one might expect around the lake of Galilee. He painted the story in a setting that would be more familiar for Parisians. We see a forest and a river among the trees, maybe a scene that could be along the Seine River, which meanders through the plains between Paris and the sea. So, Parisians might feel closer to the miracle than by reading and imagining the Bible story. That of course would emphasise the essence of the religious message. On the river also, but in the shadows of the trees, but near the swans, is a man in a boat, on the other side of the river. The boat may bring people from one side of the river to the other, as would exist more often in those times. This signifies a change of life in the symbols of paintings, and this of course is what happens to the deaf-mute man. Philippe de Champaigne added this subtle symbol of transition in his picture, for us to discover.

The overall impression we have of the painting is of a mellow nostalgia. That impression is created of course by the subdued colours and the mass of the forest trees on the riversides. Soft brown and darker greens dominate the picture. De Champaigne damped down all hues and especially the green colours. This is a characteristic feature of the colouring of French Classicist paintings. John Constable would have to fight hard a hundred years and more later, to show bright green hues again, and the Impressionist painters of course brought the trends to pure colours to the extreme by using pure, very bright hues in their landscapes. Yet, the overall effect of de Champaigne's art is one of fine intimacy and restfulness, the impression one would expect from a picture hanging in a stately room. Brighter, baroque colours are however also in the picture, on Jesus and on the men around Him. This contrast draws the eye regularly back to this place when the viewer looks at the painting. De Champaigne knew very well how to balance the subdued and darker colours of the forest trees' foliage by the purer hues of the small scene of figures.

All the details of the scene of the healing of the deaf-mute, as well as the details of the foliage of the luxurious forest, are nicely painted. De Champaigne delivered not a rapid-and-easy picture. He obviously worked for a long time on this painting, deploying all his skills as a painter, so that the result would be up to his reputation. Pictures like this are little gems of craftsmanship and should have been a joy for any collector. De Champaigne's skills were not only in colouring, of course. The French

Academy still gave preponderance to line and structure in a picture, before colour. De Champaigne used the diagonals of the frame. He used the diagonals rather less than more, however, to soften a little the effects of too strong structure of design. The river flows along the left diagonal, but that line is lowered down to the right lower corner, towards the healing scene. The river then bends to the left, emphasising just a little the right diagonal. The forest, on the farther side of the river, is drawn into the left triangle formed by the two diagonals of the frame, but de Champaigne painted in more trees here than such a triangle would allow so that he could lead the viewer's attention to the details of the foliage. The forest forms a dark mass in the picture. This mass balances the bright colours of the Christ scene and also the light colours descending from the heavens that suggest the divine intervention.

The 'Healing of the Deaf-mute' is thus in structure and in colour a well-thought out picture, in which we find more rational design than blatant show of emotions. Yet, de Champaigne has softened too rigid structure and to neutral hues also. De Champaigne was a master in finding the right equilibrium between structure, line and colour. If we assume that the picture was to be hung in a large hall, one imagines the delight of the owner. The 'Healing of the Deaf-mute' is a seemingly modest painting. It does not cry out; it is not dramatic and striking. It blends with the environment, yet it also invites being looked at with interest and delight by any viewer, inducing in that person feelings of calm and serenity. And the viewer will come back to look, because the painting is so inviting and nice, well- balanced and inspiring restfulness.

Philippe de Champaigne remained very much the Classicist painter in the 'Healing of the Deaf-mute'. There is no grandiose emotion in the picture and no overt show of drama. How different would Pieter Paul Rubens have painted such a scene! We would have seen the figures prominently covering the frame and overwhelming the view, not the landscape, and we would have seen the great joy and also the wonder of the deaf-mute at the moment of his healing, retrieving instantly the use of his ears and tongue. Pathos would be blatant in a Rubens' picture, the colours striking and contrasting and rough. De Champaigne was more subtle.

De Champaigne's picture is all that a Rubens would not be. Every patch of colour in de Champaigne's picture fits in a pre-ordained place and in a structure. No hue intrudes on another hue and contrasts out of place. Line predominates. The narration is painted in a corner of the painting, as if de Champaigne wanted to state that life is not so important, after all, compared with the grandeur of nature. Still, de Champaigne emphasises the Christ scene with brighter colours, as if to recognise also the importance of pure hues in a picture. This contrasting visual experience however does not destroy the mood of the picture. De Champaigne had a softened design in his head of the meandering river, and then he placed the figures and the landscape according to his idea of masses of colour. He used marvellous shades of colour, which are especially very rich in the foliage of the trees of the forest and he did not shy away from also using the very bright hues on his figures. De Champaigne painted the 'Healing of the deaf-mute' when he was in his forties, at the height of his art and his reputation and before he became more austere in his work. For all of de Champaigne restraint, the picture is evidently poetic in visual experience and a jewel of a picture.

## *The Raising of the Youth of Nain*

**The Raising of the Youth of Nain.** Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1565-1579.

Luke tells that Jesus arrived in a town called Nain. The apostles and a large number of people accompanied him. When Jesus arrived at the town gate, he saw that a dead man was carried out and he heard that this was the only son of a widow. Jesus felt sorry for the woman. So Jesus touched the bier and said, 'Young man, I tell you: stand up.' The young man indeed stood up and began to talk. So Jesus gave the son back to his mother. Since a large crowd had accompanied the funeral bier, all wondered in awe at what had happened and said among them that a great prophet had risen. Jesus's glory spread over Judaea.

Paolo Veronese made a painting of this scene. We see a picture in warm subdued colours but we do not know really whether these were entirely Veronese's original colours, as the hues may have smoothed with time. Even then the hues are harmonious. The colours are mostly orange and red hues that are very close, as well as various shades of blue. The only other colour is a bright brown in the architecture and in the cloak of Saint Peter. Two features are most striking in this picture: the unusual oblique composition, and the nice view of the widow of Nain as a wealthy Venetian lady.

Veronese applied a daring composition for his painting. He showed Jesus and the apostles, the widow and the dead son. But we would expect emphasis on the resurrection of the dead young man. Veronese showed the dead only in the far left corner so that one really has to deliberately search for him to find the scene of the funeral bier in the picture. Only a small part of the man is to be seen so that the viewer has to imagine the rest of the body. We do not find the many people that accompanied the bier. A servant holds the dead man at the arms, and Veronese also painted this figure only in half, and partly hidden by the corpse. Then the scene follows entirely, very obviously and theatrically along the left diagonal over the mourning widow pleading for her son, to the standing Jesus. There is a very strong line of emotion going from the lower left to the upper right, along this diagonal.

The dead man represents death, the earth, the end of being able to think, the end of intelligence and feeling. The scene rises upwards to the pleading woman, showing in an overt way her disarray, her sorrow and maybe also her future happiness. She still has to be supported by two servant women. She kneels down, half belonging to the earth like her son, half rising from the earth. She symbolises humanity and human emotions. The woman is the centre of the painting and since she is elegant, demanding sympathy and consolation, the real theme of Veronese's picture can but be elegance. The theme is not death but charity and pity for strong but beautiful widows overwhelmed by the vagaries of fate. The scene rises further upwards towards Jesus, standing compassionately, commanding, imposing, in the glory of his being the Son of God and with a halo around his head. Jesus represents ultimate love. He is the only one that can help. He is the essence of spirituality. The dead man thus has to arise like

a newborn from the state of non-thinking, inanimate corpse to the state of emotions and finally to spirituality.

The scene also foresees what will happen to Jesus. Once he will be dead, a corpse over which his own mother Mary will weep in the Pietà and then his Father in Heaven will resurrect him from the dead. The 'Raising of the widow of Nain' thus also symbolises Jesus's own life, suffering and death. It was a strong theme, for which a strong picture was needed.

In such a painting our eyes follow the diagonal, rise with it and cannot escape the ascending movement. The viewer's eyes will always converge to Jesus and linger there, for Jesus wears a nice red robe and a deep blue cloak painted in warm colours. The widow of Nain is a virtuous woman, so she is clad in a very light blue robe that is almost of such a light tone to be white. But she also has a warm orange cloak thrown over her shoulders. The light blue colour is the colour of reserve, of distinction and of innocence. The Virgin Mary wears these colours, but the widow of Nain is an elegant wealthy lady that wears her cloak with sophisticated grace. The widow has a warm heart and character, indicated by the warm orange of her cloak and by her gently pleading eyes. Look how she holds her head in an oblique way, as humans do when they ask for pity and sympathy and help. Paolo Veronese modified his scene a little as compared to Luke's story, for in the story the mother does not plead for her son. In Luke's miracle, the widow does not know Jesus or his reputation as a healer. Jesus takes the initiative in Luke's story, un-appealed to.

Paolo Veronese's composition is fresh, appropriate, unusual and striking. Was it also innovative? Veronese's picture of the 'Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain' dates from 1565 to 1570. He had a great example in another picture, made by another Venetian artist – and not a minor one – around 1534 to 1538. That was Tiziano Vecellio's 'Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple'. Titian painted this picture for the Scuola della Carità. This Scuola held its meetings in the building in which is now the 'Galleria dell'Accademia' and it still hangs there in the same position for which it was designed. In this picture a crowd has assembled on the left around Saint Anne, Mary's mother. Titian shows massive stairs that rise to the upper right. The young girl Mary climbs slowly the stairs, ascending towards the Temple patriarchs who stand at the end, as high as Jesus in Veronese's painting. Paolo Veronese used Titian's composition. His innovation lies only in that he brought the scene closer to the viewer. Titian's painting is a wide scene so that the painter could represent many more figures and a wide architecture. Titian's picture gives the impression to viewers that they stand farther from the scene. Paolo Veronese brought the figures in the proximity of the viewers. That allowed him only to suggest the dead man more than really showing him. There are fewer figures in Veronese's painting, so that he could depict the figures of the widow and of Jesus larger. But the basic idea of the theatrical composition must remain Titian's.

Paolo Veronese was the painter of grace and elegance of rich Venice. We must imagine the 'Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain' in one of the halls of a Scuola of Venice. The Scuole were institutions of mutual support of the communities of the lagoon city. Not only would the picture augment the room of the Scuola since it shows a false staircase, but it would also document charity itself as a duty enforced by Jesus. In the miracle of Nain Jesus helps a widow that remained in sorrow without a

husband and a son. Such situations must have been common in Venice, as the town's merchants traded in foreign and far countries. When widows appealed, the Scuola would help. So it is the very image of the basic institutions of Venice that Paolo Veronese glorifies in his picture. The Scuola institution system was venerable. The wisest men of Venice, uncommonly rich and honoured men, guaranteed its management. In the Scuola meeting rooms the best citizens of Venice gathered. The Scuola halls were the scenes of the most elegant gatherings of the town. Massive funds flew to the Scuola, which were the equivalent of our contemporary pension funds. The custodians of the Scuola controlled immense wealth. But the Scuola system was a realisation of one of the basic concepts of Jesus's teachings and examples, and of one of the basic principles of Christianity. Nowhere else but in Venice were these concepts applied so early and completely in Europe.

The meeting halls of the Venetian Scuole demanded grace, elegance, but also power and dignity, though not forgetting the pious goals of the society. So Paolo Veronese could not show the broken corpse of death. He could show charity. His images had to reflect charm and elegance. So Veronese showed death in a corner and a beautiful, apparently quite wealthy, still young lady in elegant dress in the middle, in the prominent place. Veronese emphasised the concepts of spirituality and of charity, the concepts from which the Scuole took their reason of being. Jesus stands higher than the other people so that everybody in the Scuola halls would have to look up to him as the undisputed master from which all Venice took its spiritual force. Paolo Veronese's picture is not only a masterpiece of composition, colours and skill of detail. Veronese was also a master professional in the intelligence with which he could ply a composition to the situation and the - often unspoken but acknowledged by all - wishes of his commissioners.

Paolo Veronese was no Venetian by birth. He was born in Verona, hence his name, in 1528 and he initially was trained there in the art of painting. But as soon as 1555 he was in Venice and never really left the city, finding in the Scuole and churches enough patrons of his art. There was only one Scuola for which he could not really work, that was the Scuola di San Rocco, in which worked his rival Jacopo Tintoretto. But Tintoretto was engaged in a titanic work for this institution so that he more rarely worked for other commissions. As no other artist of Venice Paolo Veronese was the painter of Venice's splendour and he offered works in the most striking colours that a painter could find, with scenes that reflected the wealth and the social standing of the town. Veronese sought beauty in harmony in vibrant colours and charming content. He painted mostly religious and mythological pictures. His subjects were however merely the occasion to show grand and very decorative images for and of Venetian citizens. He had all for himself a Venice avid for pictures and wealthy enough to afford them. Together with Tintoretto he prepared the Baroque period and many of the elements of the Baroque style can be recognised in his and in Tintoretto's work. For Veronese it was first and foremost a kind of light, joyful profiting of the richness of Venice.

Like the great Pietro Perugino, Paolo Veronese had an ideal of society and he painted his pictures very much to represent that ideal. For Perugino the ideal was one of ethereal beauty, of intellectual purity, of solemn dignity, of frugal decoration, and more of ascetic aestheticism. For Paolo Veronese the ideal was graceful charm, easy heroism, elegant masculinity and decoration for an opulent world of wealth. Perugino

lived in fifteenth century Florence, Paolo Veronese in late sixteenth century Venice. Florence and Venice worked themselves out of darker ages by hard and austere work in the fifteenth century. Perugino represents some of the spirit that generated the wealth of the Italian city-states. Veronese represents the ensuing enjoying of the wealth. This joy announced the Baroque period.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Raising of the Youth of Nain**

Hans von Aachen (1552-1615). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1590.

## *The Awakening of the Daughter of Jairus*

### **The Awakening of the Daughter of Jairus**

Ilya Yefimovitch Repin (1844-1930). Russian State Museum. Saint Petersburg. 1871.

Luke tells that Jesus was welcomed by a crowd that had been waiting for him. A man came to Jesus. This man was called Jairus and he was president of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus's feet and pleaded with Jesus to come to his house because his only daughter, barely twelve years old, was dying. Jesus then performed a first miracle for in the midst of the pressing crowd a woman suffering from haemorrhages had touched him slightly. Jesus had felt the touch and the woman had been cured at that very moment. Then someone came from the president's house to say that the daughter of Jairus had died. The crowd wanted to retain Jesus, and said not to trouble Jesus anymore since anyhow the child was dead. But Jesus went up to Jairus' house.

Jesus went into the house with Peter, John and James, and with the child's parents. They were already mourning the girl, but Jesus said that the girl was only asleep. Everybody ridiculed Jesus then, for obviously the girl had deceased. Jesus took the hand of Jairus' daughter and spoke to her, 'Child, stand up!' The girl recovered her spirit and she stood up. Jesus told to give something to eat to the girl. Jairus and his wife were very astonished. But Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

The Russian painter Ilya Yefimovitch Repin painted the 'Awakening of Jairus' Daughter' in 1871. He was born in the Ukraine, but studied quite young from 1865 to 1871 in Saint Petersburg at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. He received a golden medal with the 'Raising of Jairus' Daughter' and with that medal came a stipend to travel outside Russia for several years. Repin travelled to Paris and Rome and continued to learn. He became a very famous painter of the Russia of the nineteenth century. He was an intimate friend of Leon Tolstoy and he made portraits of Tolstoy and of the musician Modest Mussorgsky. He painted a few historical scenes, many portraits, a few religious scenes and many genre scenes of Russia's social situation. He received official commissions of the Russian Imperial state and thus was quite linked to the establishment of Russia's ruling class.

In 1863 fourteen students of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts of Saint Petersburg left the academy to protest against its conservative and too restrictive ruling. There were thirteen painters among them and but one sculptor. These founded an association that grew and was only officially installed in November 1870, called the 'Wanderers' or 'Itinerants'. The name came from populist students that wandered in those times through the country promoting their ideas of social reform. Ilya Repin was one of these 'Wanderers', the leader of which was Ivan Kramskoï (1837-1887). In the years 1890 the association of the 'Wanderers' was so well accepted that three of its members, Vassili Polenov, Bogolioubov and our Ilya Repin were asked to define new statutes for the Academy of Saint Petersburg and Repin and a few of his friends became professors of the new academy. Repin was a professor from 1893 to 1907. Then

however, Repin continued to paint in his own realist style whereas the Russian Avant-Garde of abstract painters received the attention. Ilya Repin died in 1930 in Finland.

Repin's 'The Awakening of Jairus' Daughter' is a large painting, in the realist style of the epic historical pictures of the nineteenth century. It is an impressive painting that is difficult to forget. Repin shows Jesus and the daughter of Jairus in full light.

The girl lies on a white bed, but as the room is lit by candles Repin could paint in mellow, soft white and yellow hues that show masterly the skills of the painter in using chiaroscuro. Repin drew a candelabrum on the left with three candles and these lit the scene. It is always a considerable feat to show a room lit by point sources of light such as a few candles, and Repin made an extraordinary, fabulous scene of Jesus and the girl. Jesus takes the hand of the girl and locks his eyes into her. Thus Repin painted a very strong link between Jesus and the girl and that link draws all attention of the viewer.

Repin painted Jesus in a non-conformist entirely blue cloak. Jesus has a long beard and long hair and Repin showed him like he was sun-burnt after long wanderings through the countryside. Jesus is a long, slim man, and the viewers can remark the tiredness but also the spirituality that emanates from Jesus. Repin painted Jesus in blue instead of in the usual red colours to enhance this spirituality, to indicate the distance between the girl, the rest of the humans and Jesus. The candlelight plays upon Jesus robe and we cannot but admire the way Repin rendered the shadows of the bed on the lower part of his tunic. Jesus touches with an emaciated hand the daughter of Jairus. We feel Jesus's spirituality thus pass from Jesus into the girl. Jesus looks in a very decided, confident way, detached, with the look of a commander. He will command the girl's spirit to come back into her.

Jesus and the girl attract all attention of the painting, but in the darkness of the room, to the right, the viewer remarks other figures. There is the old Jairus, dressed as a Hebrew, and his wife. Behind Jairus stand Jesus's companions, still young. There is John on the right, painted in his traditional red robe, but also James, John's brother, and Peter stands in the distance, hidden and almost invisible. Here Repin used dark brown, even black on Jairus' wife, and dark red hues and as the figures disappear in the background Repin used rougher brushstrokes. These add power to the scene and contrast with the high detail of the bed and of the girl. Repin painted here as if he wanted to state that he could as well work in full detail like Italian and Renaissance Flemish painters, as work in the strong style of more modern work. With this effect also, Jesus and Jairus' daughter appear out of a dream, unto which all intentness is concentrated. The other figures fade out of the dream; they appear only at the edges of the awareness. Repin knew psychology well in portraiture and he masterly showed the incredulity in the astonished, somewhat un-intelligent gaze of Jairus. Jairus has appealed to Jesus not out of intelligence but with the naivety of an emotional man.

Russian painting is less well known in Western Europe and the United States, but Russian art of the nineteenth century, be it in painting, in literature or in music was impressive. Many painters like Ilya Repin worked then, and made impressive, extraordinary pictures like this 'Awakening of Jairus' Daughter'. It is a powerful work, which showed the strong vision of the painter. Repin showed marvellously

Jesus's confidence and his command of life, in a slender man wandering through the country to promote his ideas. That was also the aim of the Russian 'Itinerants'.

*Other paintings:*

**The Raising of Jairus' Daughter**

Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572). Church of Santa Maria Novella. Florence.

**Jesus raises Jairus' Daughter**

Alfred Dehodencq (1822-1882). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1875-1876.

## *The Raising of Lazarus*

### **The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547). The National Gallery – London.

John alone tells the miracle of the rising of Lazarus. He tells it in many details. The story follows here, for it is interesting to understand how extraordinary John – who otherwise gives account of few miracles - thought this particular act of Jesus was.

There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, “Lord, the man you love is ill.” On receiving the message, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God’s glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.” Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that he was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judaea. Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.” Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by ‘rest’ he meant ‘sleep’. So Jesus put it plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.” Then Thomas –known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, “Let us also go to die with him.”<sup>G38</sup>

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said, “I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection, anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.” When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, “The Master is here and wants to see you.” Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.<sup>G38</sup>

Mary went to Jesus and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died?” At the sight of her tears and of those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh he said, “Where have you put him?” They said, “Lord, come and see. Jesus wept and the Jews said, “see how much he loved him.” But there were some who remarked, “He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man’s death?” Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb; it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, “Take the stone away.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he

died.” Jesus replied, “Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father I thank you for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that you hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.”

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The dead man came out, his feet and his hands bound with strings of material and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go free.”<sup>G38</sup>

John tells few miracles, but the ones he tells about he recalls compellingly as if he had been present. And he might indeed have been since he was one of the apostles and very close to Jesus.

For a picture of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the death, we look at a painting made by another Venetian, Sebastiano del Piombo. Sebastiano was born in 1485 and he was called Sebastiano Veneziano for his first works. In 1531 he received an office from the Pope. He became the friar of the Piombo, the signet-office of the Popes. This provided Sebastiano with a papal sinecure, that of Keeper of the Papal Seal, which owed him the name of del Piombo.

Sebastiano del Piombo had been a pupil of Giorgione da Castelfranco. Sebastiano worked not for most of his life in Venice, but in Rome. He arrived there in 1511 and never really returned to his hometown. Together with Giorgione da Castelfranco and Tiziano Vecellio, Sebastiano formed the main Venetian High Renaissance painters. But Giorgione died young and Sebastiano left for Rome, so Venice was all for Tiziano. Sebastiano del Piombo is thus a generation younger than Veronese and Tintoretto.

Sebastiano del Piombo worked in the circle of Michelangelo in Rome and it seems that for the ‘Resurrection of Lazarus’ Michelangelo helped Sebastiano with a design of composition<sup>F1</sup>. Some of the figures are depicted in Michelangelo’s style. Look at Lazarus for instance. The way the man is positioned, the way his body is turned is very sculptural. We feel here the sculptor working with a model, twisting the arms and legs of the body until the necessary original pose is found. We feel the delight and force of Michelangelo working with a body, touching it with his powerful hands and shaping it like a God. This is quite unlike anything Giorgione or earlier painters could have devised, and even the great Tiziano would show more fluidity and softness in his nudes.

Jesus conjures Lazarus to stand up in a rhetoric gesture. The Jesus must have been Sebastiano’s, because a little too much of the rhetoric is necessary, more than Michelangelo would have needed. Other gestures of drama can be seen in Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Michelangelo and, or Sebastiano del Piombo, have well understood the most powerful miracle of Jesus. Lazarus is indeed a strong, mature man and Jesus needs all his powers of appeal to bring back Lazarus. But appeal is shown here, not command.

Sebastiano del Piombo is not considered one of the greatest painters of his time. This is maybe why he needed the help of Michelangelo for such a forceful theme as this miracle of all miracles. The ‘Resurrection of Lazarus’ is a very special picture though.

It surprises by the well-delineated forms of the figures, which are all painted completely, such as Jesus and Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Each figure is shown in a different gesture, each figure is differently clad. Were all these based on individual drawings by Michelangelo? Look at the old man knelt on the lower left, but also at the hooded lady in the background on the right. All figures are very different, worth discovering. Next to Jesus is a bearded disciple showing his hands in marvel, whereas to the left of Jesus are two youth, dressed similarly. One is looking at Jesus with intense curiosity; the other discusses the scene with energy. All these figures are painted in shining, bright colours, which are so hard they give an impression of coldness. These colours and the frozen, artificial gestures seem as if time was brought to a standstill. This artificiality we only find back much later in for instance French neo-classicist art of the nineteenth century.

The background of the picture consists of the scene of a town by a lake or river. The town feels Roman more than Venetian. There is solidity of robust walls and of a heavy bridge, which is very alien to the grace of Venice.

Del Piombo may not have been a great master by himself, but his 'Resurrection of Lazarus' certainly captures the spirit of the most difficult miracle of Jesus as told by Saint John. Sebastiano of course read the story and painted it accordingly: Lazarus still has the white cloth over his face as John recalls. Sebastiano's picture is a surprising painting, which blends Florentine clearness of form and idealistic representation, Roman volume and Venetian sense of colour. Sebastiano was an excellent artisan in showing us the forms in the contrasts between the hard light and the shadows on the robes. The genius of drama of the master sculptor Michelangelo was added. When one looks at the development of Michelangelo, one feels a treatment of texture and colour in his paintings that come from another place than Florence. Michelangelo may well have helped painters like Sebastiano del Piombo, but by watching them further develop the theme, also wonder and be surprised at the effects. Venetian influence may have worked back some to Michelangelo.

*Other paintings:*

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Nicolas Froment (1430-1485). Galleria degli Uffizi Museum. Florence. 1461.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Aelbert van Oudewater (ca. 1415-1475). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1450-1460.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638). The National Gallery. London. 1600.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Gian Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1619.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Geertgen tot Sint Jans (1460-1493). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1480.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1619.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Leandro da Ponte called Bassano (1557-1622). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Mattia Preti (1613-1699). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1660s.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1578/1581.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Master of Coëtivy (Colin d'Amiens?). Musée du Louvre.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Franz Christoph Janneck (1703-1761). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Juan de Flandes. Patrimonio Nacional, Palacio real. Madrid. 1496-1504.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Franz Christoph Janneck (1703-1781). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Tours. Ca. 1750.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus with his Sisters Mary and Martha**

Santi di Tito. Church of Santa Maria Novella. Florence. 1576.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Pasquale Ottini (1580-1630). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Alessandro Turchi called Orbetto (1578-1630). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1617.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée Magnin. Dijon. 1648-1649.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavalier d'Arpino (1568-1640). Galleria Corsini. Rome. 1591-1593.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Francesco de 'Rossi called Francesco Salviati (1510-1563). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1545-1548.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Charles Sellier (1830-1882). École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Paris.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1850.

**The Resurrection of Lazarus**

Giovan Mauro della Rovere called Il Fiammingho (1575-1640). Museo Civico. Tortona. 1617.

**The Raising of Lazarus**

Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480-1528). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1527.

## *The Healing of the Blind*

### **The Healing of the Blind**

Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533). The State Hermitage Museum – Saint Petersburg. Around 1530.

It is to Luke again we have to turn to, to receive a detailed account of this miracle and to hear a story that fits most the painting of Lucas van Leyden.

As Jesus drew near to Jericho there was a blind man sitting at the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about, and they told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. So he called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him, and when he came up, asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Sir”, he replied, “let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.” And instantly his sight returned and he followed him praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God.  
G38

John also tells a similar story. But in this narration John adds various details. The blind man, who was born blind, needs to give account several times in order for the Jews to believe him. John also tells that Jesus spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the man and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. John’s story is very convincing, epic in breadth and really told as if John had been a witness.

Lucas van Leyden’s work is more true to the story of Luke. The picture was made around 1530 and it is one of the last paintings of the artist. Thus, the painting dates from the period in which Sebastiano del Piombo worked in Rome. What a contrast offers this picture of Lucas van Leyden with the works of the Florentines and the Venetians we have seen so far!

The scene of the healing is situated in a broad landscape, which is almost painstakingly assembled and which certainly lacks the inspiration, the grandeur and the interest of the landscapes of a Joachim Patenier who was the Flemish contemporary of van Leyden. The soul of del Piombo or of Veronese is missing in this picture and its figures. The men and women are nicely drawn, but van Leyden seems to have sought deliberately to demystify the actors. Jesus is an everyday person who passes there by accident and the blind man is an ordinary man, distinguished in nothing from the other people. He is dressed simply, and led by a boy. Mark calls the man Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus.

Van Leyden painted the townsfolk mainly on the right of the picture but also some on the left so that the Jesus’s crowd is surrounded and he seems to mock this crowd gently. For instance the bystanders wear preposterous hats. On the left are Jesus’s disciples, shown as a group of weary travellers. Indeed, at the far left a woman even indicates to a follower of Jesus that something special might be happening. Otherwise the man would not have noticed, as he seems to be more interested in a young lady

with a baby at his feet. Notice also some disproportion in the image of van Leyden's babies; there is a townswoman on the right who has an incredibly small, nude child in her arms and also the baby on the left is in no proportion to the woman holding it. Was this clumsiness of the painter, symbolic representation of the smallness of babies or a reference to older images like those of early Gothic painters?

Instead of elevating the scene and having brought inspiration and soul into the picture, van Leyden has apparently done his best to ban entirely the spiritual meaning of the miracle. Even if this might not be expected of this painter, the picture lacks or deliberately avoided communication and expression of emotion to the viewer. The viewer does not feel engaged. Van Leyden's 'Healing of the blind' is a nice old picture that seems to tell a story of no importance, a passing anecdote. What does seem important for the painter is the small details of everyday life. These details would later be much emphasised by Dutch painters in their specific seventeenth century style of 'genre' images. In these pictures scenes of interior life are shown, sometimes mockingly. Spirituality made place for vulgarity in some of these images, which yet were very popular with the burghers of Holland.

And yet, a layer is hidden under this immediate impression. Van Leyden did deeply feel some of the inherent truths of the Gospel stories. His painting is a travel scene. Jesus is on his way. He is simply clad and has no possessions. The people of Jericho are all richly dressed. Maybe Van Leyden understood well that Jesus's radicalism came from the contrast between his group of travelling peasants, devoid of all possessions, who roamed with a free spirit through Palestine and the people who lived in towns. Jesus needed to travel. Not just to teach. If he had stayed in one place a court would have gathered around him and he would have been assumed to be just another part of the dominant classes, the Pharisees and the Romans. Jesus needed to be a wandering prophet, hence so many scenes of preaches in the open, along the roads and on mountains.

Jesus and his small group of followers would have met the people of the villages and the towns on his way and the contrast would have been great. Van Leyden showed the contrast in his picture. The townspeople would have to accept and make theirs the concepts and ideas of the itinerants. Van Leyden has shown this clash or meeting between two worlds. The healing of the blind, that is a miracle, was probably the most convincing means by which the townspeople could be won to Jesus's cause. So we find here a picture of reflection on the true Jesus. Van Leyden tried to imagine Jesus as he travelled from village to town, poor and destitute and how he might have won to his cause these people who would at first sight have abhorred or considered him as something of an interesting oddity. Mark specifically adds that the people scolded at Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. Bartimaeus annoyed the townspeople, but Jesus did the unexpected and instead of turning away from the man spoke to him.

Van Leyden was trying to understand who Jesus really was, without the layers of additional meaning laid upon Jesus by the traditions of the Church, and he brought the image of Jesus closer to us all.

Van Leyden was Dutch, as he was born in the town of Leiden. He was born there in 1494 and worked for some time in Antwerp, but returned and died in his hometown quite young in 1533, when he was about forty years old. He was foremost an engraver

and seems to have been an infant prodigy who made already very accomplished engravings at fifteen<sup>G9</sup>. However, his works show little growth and little evolution to powerful images. In his 'Healing of the Blind' Van Leyden has favoured the small sentimental details of children leading the blind, pointing at the scene, and the slow dispassionate movements of the figures. The gestures are weakly pictured in; they look artificial and sentimental. The painter thus announced a style and a fashion of Dutch painting to come. Yet his picture is neither devoid of interest nor devoid of search for spirituality and for Jesus.

With this picture Lucas van Leyden may have played into the taste of the Dutch new wealthy, some of whom were descended from the poorest artisans, fishermen and farmers. Genre painting became of course only one of many types of the worldly art of the Netherlands, and in this genre also the best genius painters could bring in spirit and moral lessons, which elevated the images above van Leyden's 'Healing of the Blind'. The picture thus has historical and antiquary value, but also pure aesthetical, and artistic value.

Van Leyden knew and worked with Jan Gossaert called Mabuse. Van Leyden and Gossaert made a voyage through the Netherlands together<sup>G9</sup>. As an artist, Gossaert took the direction and style of pedantic show of skills and he set his figures in grand scenes of Roman architecture. He followed the tastes of settled wealth in metropolitan Antwerp bourgeoisie. Van Leyden had only his considerable skills, with less vision, and he foremost engraved intricate prints with extraordinary detail. He interspersed his work with the beginning of genre oil painting in the North Netherlands, probably equally to satisfy the tastes so different from Antwerp tastes, of the smaller and younger, more local, Dutch growing wealthy class.

We find with van Leyden an example of a painter who started genre painting. This could be one of the proofs that genre painting began in the Netherlands not just because of the fact that Calvinist Preachers did not agree with or only reluctantly approved of religious pictures of the life of Christ. The Calvinists and Van Leyden were clearly in search for the origins of the meaning of the New Testament. Van Leyden positioned the miracle of the healing of the blind in its historical context and thus took distance from the majestic visions of the Jesus of the Renaissance. He brought Jesus very close to everyday life. The evolution to genre had started earlier than the arrival of Calvinism in Holland. One of the actors in that evolution was Lucas van Leyden.

Genre scenes were not limited to the Netherlands. Dutch artists had an important role in spreading the style in various forms in other countries. Thus, Pieter Van Laer (1599-1642) who originated from Haarlem settled in Rome around 1620. This painter had a bodily malformation so he was called Il Bamboccio, which means something like 'the puppet'. He painted small scenes of Roman common life with many figures. These pictures were animated landscapes of Rome or its surroundings with peasants, artisans at work, thieves and Bohemians. The pictures were sometimes funny, sometimes moralising, always with much to discover in its details. The style became popular in Rome and the artists who practised this style were called Bamboccianti after Van Laer's nickname. The Bamboccio style was exercised by Sinibaldo Scorza (1589-1631), Lucas Van Wael (1591-1661), Michelangelo Cerquozzi (1602-1660) and Jan Miel (1599-1667). Also Jan Both (ca.1615-1652) and Jan Asselijn (1610-

1652) followed this mode though they gave more importance to landscapes. Later Johannes Lingelbach (1623-1674) and Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683) continued the style. The French painter Sébastien Bourdon was at the same time in Rome as Van Laer. So were Nicolas Poussin and Claude Gellée, but Bourdon was still very young and in need of earning a living. Bourdon took up the Bamboccio style and brought it back to France when he returned after a stay of five years in Rome. He added his pictures in Paris to the imports from the Netherlands. It is interesting to note how a style that found its source in the character of the Netherlands influenced art in other European countries. Thus, Dutch genre became Bamboccio in Italy and Bamboche in France, whereas several Dutch painters century were called Italianates when they presented popular scenes of Italian life and landscapes with Roman ruins. This cross-pollination of styles should not surprise us however. It happened in art as it did quite naturally in the social and economic life of Europe.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ healing the Blind**

Nicolas Poussin (1593-1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris.

**The Healing of the Sick**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1578-1581.

**Christ heals a Blind Man**

Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1650.

**Christ heals a Blind**

Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657). Collezioni d'Arte di Banca Carige. Genua.

## *The Miraculous Fishing*

### **The Triptych of the Fishermen of Bruges**

Pieter Pourbus (1523/1524-1584). Musée de l' Art Ancien – Brussels. 1576.

The Triptych of Pieter Pourbus was ordered in 1576 by the Guild of Fishermen of the town of Bruges, to be hung in the chapel of Saint Christopher. Who better could be commissioned in Bruges than the respected citizen and past deacon of the Guild of Painters, than this Pieter Pourbus? Pieter worked at the panels with his son Frans. He let his son paint the grisaille images of Saint Andrew and the Virgin Mary on the opposite side of the main pictures.

The opened triptych shows in the middle panel a scene that was the ultimate to please the Guild of Fishermen, the 'Miraculous Fishing'. Jesus was on the lake of Gennesaret tells Luke, when he got into one of the boats and taught the crowds from there since they occupied the shores.

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch." Simon replied, "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets." And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point. <sup>G38</sup>

Pieter Pourbus showed exactly this moment to please the Guild. Jesus can be seen in the boat while the catch is on in a quite violent sea. This last element refers also to another miracle, the 'Calming of the Storm'. A fully loaded boat is on the coast and is being offloaded. The miraculous fishing causes quite a stir. Fishermen come running to the surprise. One such fisherman links the two scenes. The boat on the coast is simply a later instant of the story, for Jesus is here too but on the shore. This is still the first boat; the second boat remains in the water with full sails.

Pieter Pourbus worked for the Guild of Fishermen, but he delivered a beautiful work. Witness to that is the marvellous landscape he painted in the background, the detail of shells on the sand beaches and the wonderful bay with the boats.

The left panel shows the calling of the first apostles, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. The brothers wash their nets and get the last fish out. Peter and Simon hold the same big fish to Jesus. This panel emphasises the fact that the two first apostles, among whom the illustrious Simon Peter – and upon whom Jesus founded his church - were fishermen. How pleased must have been the Guildsmen of Bruges and how proud for the recognition and respect shown by the master painter of their town for their profession! The right panel could represent the 'Calming of the Storm' and its aftermath the miracle of 'Jesus Walking on Water'. But Pieter Pourbus really knew how to please his townsmen, so he left preponderance to the fishermen. The panel shows Peter, a fisherman, walking the waves. The panel does not show the act of Jesus. Every fisherman would have liked to walk on the sea, but the event also taught

the men to have faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Matthew and Mark related this particular event.

Jesus had gone into the hills to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head wind. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost"; they said and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying "Courage! It's me. Don't be afraid." It was Peter who answered. "Lord", he said, "if it is you tell me to come across the water." Jesus said, "Come." Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. "Lord", he cried, "save me!" Jesus put out his hand at once and told him, "You have so little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat dropped down before him and said, "Truly, you are the Son of God."<sup>G38</sup>

The three panels are very anecdotal. They show stories in an uncomplicated, simple, instantly understandable way and thus are part of Bruges' folklore.

Pieter Pourbus was Dutch, born around 1523-1524 in the town of Gouda, the cheese capital of the Netherlands. He settled in Bruges however, quite young. Bruges was still a rich city with a long tradition of patronage for painters. Pourbus was member of several guilds of Bruges from 1543 on and a member of the managers of the guild of painters. He was twice the deacon of these artists. He worked for the office of the mayor of Bruges. He drew several maps of the town and was thus known as a cartographer. Pourbus founded a workshop in Bruges and his son and grandson also were famous painters of the town. Pieter himself married the daughter of another very interesting painter of Bruges, Lancelot Blondeel. Generation kept traditions alive this way. In all respects, Pieter Pourbus was a venerated citizen of Bruges. He participated in its ceremonial, public communal life. He was charged for instance in 1541 with the decoration for the Joyous Entry in Bruges, for the official state visit of the prince Philips of Spain who would be as Philips II the King of Spain after Emperor Charles V. Bruges eagerly adopted men of talent, even if they came from other regions.

Bruges was over the height of its fame by then. In the last part of the fifteenth century its waterway to the sea, the Zwin, became more and more clogged up with sand. Canals were dug, but ships had to pass sluices and large tonnage ships could not reach its interior port anymore. Large Venetian galleys had to be offloaded further from town and all this meant lost time and money. Mainly Spanish ships still came to Bruges. But during the years 1528 to 1529 and during 1552 to 1554 this traffic also was partly paralysed because of the danger for Spanish ships of French pirates. Around 1540 Bruges fell to the position of fifth important port of the Netherlands. Since 1480 the town of Antwerp had taken over its status of sea metropolis. Bruges had in these years 1480 waged a war against its overlord, Emperor Maximilian, which had resulted in sieges of the town. Maximilian added taxation, devaluation of its mint and communal sanctions. Bruges' seaport of Sluis was the victim of pirating during the conflict, Bruges was encircled, and its neighbouring villages were sacked. Foreign merchants were ordered then to leave the town. A same fate would befall on Antwerp much later, and just as for Antwerp these hard measures sounded almost the dead toll for Bruges. Yet the town retained a good part of its wealth throughout the fifteenth

century and considerable capital still had its base in Bruges, even if the merchants traded from Antwerp.

Pieter Pourbus' importance lies in this continuance of a tradition of citizen-painters of Bruges, the old guilds town, more than in artistic innovation. Pieter Pourbus' picture of the Fishermen's Triptych is a witness of the rich, proud tradition of the Bruges guilds who at times fought ferociously for their independence. Pieter Pourbus was a skilled painter and his portraits can favourably be compared with the very best that was produced in Italy and the Netherlands. But he did not show the originality of a Pieter Bruegel, of a Barend van Orley or of Jan Sanders van Hemessen who all were his contemporaries. Pieter Pourbus was the foremost painter of Bruges however and the 'Triptych of the Fishermen' needs to be considered in this view.

This picture, ordered by the Guild of Fishermen, is an example of the general consideration of Bruges' townsmen for Christianity. Religion still pervaded public life in devote Flanders. The guildsmen could imagine no better picture to display their importance and self-respect than by a religious scene. This was a desire of transcendence, a desire to dedicate their work to the heavens. The guildsmen paid homage to the Church and recognised its preponderance in communal life. At the same time they ostentatiously expressed their pride and dignity.

*Other paintings:*

**The miraculous Fishing**

Konrad Witz (1400-1445). Musée d'Art et d'Histoire. Geneva. 1444.

**Jesus and the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee**

Jan Brueghel (1568-1625). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. 1595.

**Christ in the Storm of the Sea of Galilee**

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection -Madrid. Ca. 1596.

**The miraculous Draught of Fishes**

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1706.

## *The Finding of the Tribute Money*

### **The Apostle Peter finding the Tribute Money in the Fish's Mouth**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Statens Museum for Kunst – Copenhagen. 1620-1625.

When Jesus and his disciples reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel (a yearly tax on all Jews for the upkeep of the Temple) came to Peter and said, "Does your master not pay the half-shekel?" "Yes", he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, "Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute?" And when he replied, "From foreigners," Jesus said, "well then, the sons are exempt. However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself."<sup>G38</sup>

Jacob Jordaens' picture of this miracle dates from the seventeenth century and Jordaens worked in Antwerp. At the end of the sixteenth century a war waged between Catholic Spain and the Protestant Netherlands. Brabant and Antwerp were still Catholic, but just under half of the population of Antwerp was Protestant. War was mostly fought in the Southern Netherlands, in Flanders and Brabant and since the fighting armies were neither Flemish nor Brabants they did certainly not spare the country or its crown jewel, Antwerp. In 1576 the Spanish troops that had remained unpaid for long, sacked the town. The army plundered the richest city of the Netherlands. Because of this so-called 'Spanish fury' Antwerp chose the side of the Dutch Prince of Orange. But Orange had called in the help of a French mercenary army led by the Duke d'Alençon. This Duke, a younger brother of the French king, was not much pleased by the minor role that Orange had promised him, which was merely to become Duke of Brabant. D'Alençon went for power and tried to take Antwerp in his turn. So the town knew now a 'French Fury'. But the Antwerp citizen troops could beat the French Duke. The romantic nineteenth century historical painters of Belgium took up these events as themes for pictures. For sixteenth century Antwerp it only meant that the town was spoiled, its works of art destroyed, and death and fear fell on its citizens.

While these events happened in the war, General Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma, who had taken over command of the Spanish troops, advanced steadily in Flanders. He took Bruges and Gent and soon stood before Antwerp. The town led by its mayor Marnix van Sint Aldegonde defended itself ferociously. The townsmen tried to break out several times in hard fights. They even sent burning fire ships devised by the Italian Giannibelli against the Spanish naval blockade of Antwerp's access to the sea, the river Schelde. Alexander Farnese was strongest however and the mayor started negotiations. Antwerp capitulated in August of 1585.

By that time there were more Protestants living in Antwerp than in Dutch Amsterdam. But the Counter-Reformation had won in Antwerp and though Farnese was generally mild, the Spanish General made Antwerp a Catholic town again. Between 1585 and 1589 Antwerp lost half its population. Most significantly, its most dynamic merchants and industrials immigrated to Amsterdam. The river Schelde ran to the sea through

Dutch territory after Antwerp, so the Schelde was closed. This meant that ships had to pay additional taxes to transport goods on the Schelde and all goods for Antwerp had to be trans-shipped on Dutch territory before Antwerp.

Nevertheless, as in Bruges of the fifteenth century, Antwerp of the seventeenth knew a renewal of the arts based on the remaining capital and wealth. Only one third or so of the original traders had remained in the port, but this proved sufficient for Antwerp Baroque art to thrive and come to international prominence. Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and his student Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) were the most famous painters in a town in which also the sciences and literature revived. Immediately after Rubens and van Dyck came in fame Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678), Jan Brueghel (1568-1625), David Teniers (1610-1670), Frans Snijders (1579-1657) and many others. We learn from history however that the most prominent artists of Antwerp travelled to become rich and famous in other countries of Europe. Rubens had worked in Italy. Van Dyck equally spent several years in Italy and he became the royal court artist of England. Talent travels to where the money is, and that in every century as the nature of man is universal and does not change much over time.

Jacob Jordaens learnt his profession in the workshop of Adam van Noort. He became a member of the Antwerp guild of painters, the Saint Luke guild, in 1615. He knew Rubens and van Dyck in the town and was most influenced by Rubens' unique flamboyant baroque style. Jordaens had also seen paintings by the great Italians like Caravaggio. He developed a very personal, forceful, original style next to Rubens' way of painting. Just as Rubens he opened an important workshop in Antwerp and all themes of antiquity, of religious or of secular scenes, as of genre scenes were his. Jordaens could be as aristocratic as Rubens could, and as princely distinguished as Van Dyck. But he painted also images, which were more rooted, in the popular life of his town. Some of his pictures are on the edge of vulgarity although a moralising tone then always joins in the scenes. Jordaens did not shy away from showing in full front of a frame a woman wiping the bottom of her child. Jordaens could be rougher than Rubens, more close to life, closer to nature in his landscapes and less heroic.

Jacob Jordaens' 'The Apostle Peter finding the Tribute Money in the Fish's Mouth' is a painting of the young artist, as he was then only around 25 to 30 years old. The influence of Rubens is all there, but the roots of Jordaens in popular themes are soundly developed already. The picture is also called 'The Ferryboat to Antwerp' and both themes of the miracle and the ferry are indeed immediately perceived. The miracle theme is on the right. Peter is taking the first fish out of the river Schelde and finding the coin. Since tax still had to be paid to the Dutch for the boats navigating to Antwerp over the river Schelde, Jordaens may have hinted at this 'foreigners' tax' just as Jesus did in the Gospels story.

The boat is a ferry taking cows and horses together with people to the other side. The boat is filled to the trim with lustful ladies, babies, old men, and a Moor, weeping children, youths and apostles. Four apostles are around Peter. Rubens and Jordaens loved anatomy, preferably of men and women of mature age and full in flesh. Jordaens finds his pleasure in the two ferrymen, one driving the boat and the other raising the sail. They are naked to the waist, showing their powerful muscles and chests. Rubens however would never have painted falling trousers; Jordaens' sailor is losing his shorts, they fall down on his buttocks in full sight of the viewers. This is the

Jordaens of the people of all characters and upbringings. Jordaens did not seek to refine the image of the people of Antwerp. He tried to say, "Look how Antwerp people are in reality, all different, yet in the same boat and liking to be together whether elegantly clad or naked." The figures are basic, solid images as warm, fleshy humanity.

The painting has symbolic value. It might be the boat of the Church led by Peter the first Pope. It might be the boat Antwerp on the waves of history in which all together just keep abreast of the storms, all floating together on the waves of time. This is a large sized picture, so we can suppose it was made for a guild, maybe a fisherman's guild or the guild of ferrymen. Just as in Bruges, scenes of Jesus's water or sea miracles were more popular than other scenes in the seaport of Antwerp.

Jordaens was a man of the earth and so were his pictures. He did never forget however the laws of art. There is a strong composition in the picture, with a left and right scene and the two ferrymen in between as the vertical link. The two side scenes start low, and then rise on each side to the top of the frame. Night seems to be falling, so colours are harmonious and rich but on the dark side. The sky is menacing, danger looms and the people are frightened. The ferrymen cannot comfort the voyagers so they just do their job and hope for the best.

So is life. All of us together, rich and poor, left to the vagrancies of life and time. We are thrown to the left and to the right without able to steer our boat and master the elements of fate. This is the message, maybe sad, but also represented in a somewhat comic way, that Jordaens felt and put to image. Again, Jordaens joined the Flemish-Brabant tradition of bringing religion very close to the people. We have seen this tradition in paintings of Bruegel and of many other Flemish and Netherlands painters before. This art was always closer to the common people than the intellectual art of Italy. The spirituality of the theme is forced to the background to enhance the human moral lesson.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Peter finding the Tribute Money**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1618.

**The Tribute Money**

Mattia Preti (1613-1699). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**The Tribute Money**

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1621-1627.

## *The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish*

### **The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes**

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1620-1625.

Giovanni Lanfranco was born in Terenzo, close to Parma in Italy, in 1582. He died in Rome in 1647. He is a representative of the Italian early seventeenth century. This was a period when Italian art was less famous than their counterparts in the Netherlands, France and Spain. Yet from all over the European world painters came to Rome to study antique examples and the Baroque style. The Italian painters of that century worked in various towns and more than before travelled in their country, going to where their fame called them. Lanfranco worked with the Carraccis of Bologna in Rome. He worked together with Il Domenichino on the decoration of the church San Andrea della Valle in Rome. Annibale Carracci, Il Domenichino and Lanfranco worked all in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which is a marvel of a palace and now the French Embassy of Italy. The Palazzo Farnese perpetuated the tradition of Italian palaces decorated by the geniuses of their times.

In Rome worked two of the greatest French painters. Nicolas Poussin had arrived in 1624 and Claude le Lorrain in 1634. Another important painter in Rome was Pietro da Cortona who had come in 1612. At the same time Guido Reni painted in Bologna, Procaccini in Milan and in Rome, Cesare Dandini in Florence. Giovanni Barbieri, called Il Guercino, was in Rome in the 1620's working for the Pope, but from 1623 on he returned to Cento and Bologna. In Venice worked Bernardo Strozzi and Johann Liss. All these painters were influenced by what Caravaggio had revolutionised in the beginning of the century and by the new Classicist style of the Carraccis. There was much competition in Italy among the painters, but also so much wealth accumulated in the cities of Rome, Bologna, Genoa, Naples and Venice, that the artists could work together on major decorations. The great Flemish Baroque masters Rubens and van Dyck were of course also known and had travelled in Italy. Van Dyck worked for some years in Genoa and in Palermo of Sicily. At the end of his life, from 1634 on, Lanfranco was for more than ten years in Naples. In that town had worked from 1618 the Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera.

Lanfranco painted many religious decorations for churches and palaces in Rome. The 'Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes' was commissioned for the Blessed Sacrament chapel in the Basilica of Saint Paul Fuori le Mura, outside Rome<sup>R1</sup>. Lanfranco made eight canvases for this chapel on the theme of the Eucharist. The scene of the miracle is seen in perspective from below, so the painting was intended to hang high.

Matthew tells that when Jesus received the news of the beheading of John the Baptist, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd and he took pity on them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "There is no need for them to go: give them something to

eat yourselves.” But they answered, “All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.” So he said, “Bring them here to me”. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of the women and children<sup>G38</sup>.

Lanfranco’s painting must be looked at as a professional production, one picture among many in a series. It is not the masterpiece of a painter who saw this picture as the foremost expression of his faith and grandest conviction. Lanfranco continued the Roman style in which volume was all-important as created by the play of light and shadows. But line and form inherited from the Florentines were still important for him and suited the story that had to be told to the churchgoers. Thus, his figures are clearly delineated as can be seen in the figure of Jesus. The wonderfully bright Jesus stands out against the darker tones of the people who have come to hear the Messiah. Jesus shows the loaves to the people, reassuring them. He towers above all and the view of the devoted faithful in the chapel must have fallen immediately on him. Look at all the detail in which the figures are drawn. All are in a different pose with sometimes theatrical movements of hands and heads. The gestures remain believable however. It is always a tour-de-force in such anecdotal pictures to have the figures move, point, show surprise and agitation, yet keep the gestures natural without too much sentimentality, and to keep them still credible. Lanfranco succeeded in this feat.

A person coming to pray under Lanfranco’s pictures entered a world well populated and credible. Such a person could stay a while and ponder at the scene and the spiritual message of the miracle, which was that God always takes care of its faithful. Jesus felt close to the people. He was lonely and sad after the departure of John the Baptist. Jesus did not want the people to leave and kept them with him. Therefore he had to give them food. He had to sustain them. This closeness with Jesus was exactly what devoted people sought when they came to pray by Lanfranco’s picture. Lanfranco succeeded in creating a natural, living world, which could interest viewers and capture their imagination. Lanfranco succeeded in a difficult feat to show a vivid crowd and make the viewer feel as if he could have been part of that. Thus he merits great respect, not just as an artisan but also as a thinker.

Giovanni Lanfranco respected his commissioners. Lanfranco did probably not need to deliver such a lively scene with so many precise details, but he did. There is even a scene within a scene. For an apostle is handing out the fish and the bread to the poor on the right. The miracle happened after the Sermon on the Mount, and Lanfranco referred somewhat to this preaching for he set the right scene on the flank of a hill. This then gave the painter an occasion to add a beautiful landscape of trees.

Lanfranco was a master in creating space. The figures on the left are near the viewer. The scene on the right is more far off. So, the figures on the right are smaller. In this seemingly easy picture, made by a painter who is not that well known, we find a masterpiece of narration, of colour and of space, which fits perfectly the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

*Other paintings:*

**The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish**

Henri Blès (1480-1550). Musée des Arts Anciens du Namurois. Namur.

**The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice.  
Ca. 17578/1581.

**The Nurturing of the Five Thousand**

Franz Christoph Janneck (1703-1781). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna.

**The Multiplication of the Loaves**

Juan de Flandes. Patrimonio Nacional, Palacio real. Madrid. 1496-1504.

## *Christ and the Centurion*

### **Christ and the Centurion**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. 1655-1660.

Matthew and Luke tell the miracle of the cured centurion's servant. Here is Luke's version.

Jesus went into Capernaum. A centurion there had a servant, a favourite of his, who was sick and near death. Having heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders to him so as to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they pleaded earnestly with him saying, "He deserves this of you, because he is well disposed towards our people; he built us our synagogue himself." So Jesus went with them, and was not very far from the house when the centurion sent word to him by some friends to say to him, "Sir, do not put yourself to any trouble because I am not worthy to have you under my roof; and that is why I did not presume to come to you myself; let my boy be cured by your giving the word. For I am under authority myself, and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it." When Jesus heard these words he was astonished at him and, turning round, said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith as great as this." And when the messengers got back to the house they found the servant in perfect health. <sup>G38</sup>

This miracle of the Gospels showed that Jesus did not make any distinction between the people to whom he performed a miracle. It could be a Jew as Lazarus, a blind beggar or a Roman centurion. These acts must have astonished all Jews who remained much segregated from the Romans because of their religion and because the Romans were the invaders of their country. Jesus made it clear with his praise that he had not just come for the Jews, but also for the hated invaders as long as the men believed in God and in himself.

Sébastien Bourdon, a French painter of Louis XIV's reign period, made a picture of this scene. His 'Christ and the Centurion' was made around 1655 to 1660. Louis XIV still had Mazarin then and the Peace of the Pyrenees was just signed in 1659, whereby Louis married Maria Theresia of Spain. Another Maria Theresia, Maria Theresia of Austria, renounced her claims on the Spanish throne. By the agreement of this Peace and Louis' marriage to an heiress of the Spanish throne, a Bourbon king would later reign over Spain.

Bourdon was one of those painters who had a great natural talent, but who was born in a period of many other prominent artists. He was not awaited for and although almost a child prodigy – he painted very young, at less than fourteen years old – he had it difficult to attain enough renown to live off his art. And he had one handicap that alone would have made it tedious to be accepted easily in Paris: he was a Calvinist from Montpellier. Sébastien Bourdon was born in 1616, under Louis XIII, in the midst of the wars of religion the Cardinal Richelieu fought against the Protestant cities of France. Montpellier was attacked by the Catholic armies and taken in 1621. La Rochelle, the proud, magnificent, old port led a heroic resistance under its mayor Jean

Guition also surrendered to Richelieu's armies after a siege of more than a year. Bourdon's parents sent him to Paris, to one of his uncles, soon after the siege of Montpellier. Very young, without resources, Bourdon entered the army. But an officer remarked his talents, discharged him from duty and apparently gave the young man enough money to go to Rome.

Sébastien Bourdon arrived in Rome not even twenty years old. He would stay there for five years. He met Nicolas Poussin, and of course copied him. But Bourdon earned a living by painting small pictures in the style of the Bamboccio. These were pictures of Roman landscapes filled with figures of the common people, of artisans, peasants, often of gypsies and thieves. Dutch painters had popularised this style that was close to their genre painting and Bourdon eagerly became one of the better-known Bamboccianti in Rome. When he returned to Paris, it was first to paint for the Parisian Protestant merchants and better-off artisans. He took the Bamboccio style to Paris. Soon however he gained success with the style that was really in demand and that suited French and Parisian character best. This was the grandiose art that was in fashion at the court of the King and thus also for the nobility: scenes of history, scenes of classic antiquity and religious themes. Protestant circles favoured scenes from the Old Testament and Bourdon also became proficient at these themes. The wars against the Reformed Church were over by then and national unity was primed in France over the religious differences. Bourdon's Protestant references helped him even also for he was called to the court of the King of Sweden. Bourdon arrived in Stockholm in 1652 and made portraits for a while at the court there, for instance several of Queen Christina.

In Paris, Bourdon competed with Simon Vouet, with Jacques Stella whom he could count among his friends, with Philippe de Champaigne, Eustache Le Sueur and Laurent de La Hyre. Bourdon was remarked by Charles Le Brun and he became one of the first members of the Academy after Le Brun had founded this most French of all art institutions. Bourdon taught at the Academy. Bourdon's fame was settled. He painted in the style of French Classicism, but always in a very individual way. Bourdon sought rare themes, both from the Bible such as the rarely painted scene of 'Christ and the Centurion' and also rarely painted themes from classic antiquity. He must have been a well-read, intellectual type of a man even though much of an autodidact. He died in 1671.

Bourdon's late picture of 'Christ and the Centurion' represents the centurion knelt before Jesus. Bourdon follows here the traditional representation after the Gospel of Matthew, in which the centurion indeed throws himself at Jesus's feet. The centurion humbles himself and has taken off his helmet as a sign of respect. The figure of the centurion in the knelt position and with uplifted head leads the viewer's attention cleverly to the face of Jesus. Jesus praises the centurion for having come to ask help for someone else and he holds his hands in a blessing. His apostles and disciples accompany Jesus. The centurion has his own companions and Roman soldiers. The painting is thus balanced between the two figures grouped together, with Jesus and the centurion in the middle. The painting is roughly sketched in colours more than in line. It shows however Sébastien Bourdon's skills in representing a traditional religious subject. Bourdon was a follower of Simon Vouet and Nicolas Poussin who had introduced again classic themes in French painting. Bourdon painted in their style, which we would now call academic. All figures are static again. Baroque

representations were not of the past. But dignity and poise were added. And the background is also a scene of classic antiquity with the ruins of an aqueduct and a Roman citadel painted in the general brown tones of the whole picture. Such antique landscapes were already very popular in France. Bourdon captured well in this rapidly executed scene the humility of the centurion and Jesus's praise.

In the oeuvre of Bourdon very few scenes are so seemingly roughly thrown on the canvas. The picture consists almost only of fairly large juxtaposed colour areas of the same pure hues. Bourdon usually elaborated his surfaces in much more detail, though this tendency to reduce colour areas to the essentials can be found elsewhere in his paintings. Here it is as if Bourdon wanted to spare on pixels and as if he had tried an experiment much like the Cubists would arrive at more than two centuries later. But the picture may also not be completely finished in detail and thus merely a stage in the process that Bourdon applied to arrive to reach a final presentation. Then Bourdon first brought the whole composition on canvas and gradually painted in the colour detail. We believe the picture is quite well finished however, as a visual experiment of a mature artist for whom the quick expression of a complete scene, its composition and lyrical colours mattered more than detail.

Bourdon's style in 'Christ and the Centurion' is still baroque in the evident show of emotions in the centurion and in Jesus. The centurion opens his arms and thus abandons himself to Jesus. Jesus has a soothing and surprised gesture. We find the two styles Baroque and Classicism mixed in the attitudes of the two groups. Remark the static vertical dignity of Jesus's disciples and the more dynamic scene on the left, around the horse. The menacing dark sky and the landscape suggesting wind and storm over Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo also are Baroque.

Once the viewer has absorbed the main figures and the main theme of the centurion and Jesus Bourdon's picture remains interesting in the many figures and in the landscape features. There is much to discover but the real value of this picture lies in the way the artist could blend these elements in various planes with the strong composition centred on the two main figures. The view is attracted immediately to the essence of the theme, further detail need to be sought thereafter. We find of course French dignity foremost in this painting, but also a calm poetry and a sensuality of soft colours that was more avoided by artists like Poussin and Stella.

French Classicism was on the move. Epic scenes were preferred at one of the grandest courts of Europe. Bourdon took a religious theme, but he did not just paint fishermen for Paris. What better combination was there to be found than a scene of a Roman Centurion – a prominent figure of classic antiquity – and the Christian Jesus? An evolution was on the show with this picture, a blend of subjects and views towards art and religion. Religion served the purpose of adding support to the grandeur, but the grandeur was secular and represented by classic motives. Bourdon however added poetry and softness.

*Other paintings:*

### **The Centurion at the Feet of Jesus**

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1713). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Tours. 1712.

**The Centurion at the Feet of Christ**

Louis Boullogne the Younger. Musée des Beaux-Arts. Arras. 1685

## *The Parables*

Jesus spoke in parables for easy teaching by using images. He spoke in short sayings or aphorisms and in short stories, the parables, which could be easily remembered. He thus leaned on the oral traditions of the early people and on the oral tradition that was necessary for the illiterate to remember teachings.

Mark explains, "Using many parables, Jesus spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were by themselves."<sup>G38</sup>

Luke also recalls why Jesus instructed with parables. Luke tells, "His disciples asked him what the parable might mean and he said, "To you is granted to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God, for the rest it remains in parables, so that they may look but not perceive, listen but not understand."<sup>G38</sup>

Matthew is the clearest on parables. His account is as follows. "The disciples went up to him and asked, "why do you talk to them in parables?" In answer, he said, "Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled:

Listen and listen, but never understand!

Look and look, but never perceive!

This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled,

They have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see,

Their ears to hear, their heart to understand,

Changing their ways and being healed by me.

But blessed are your eyes because they hear! In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it, to hear what you hear, and never heard it."<sup>G38</sup>

The parables had multiple functions. They attracted people always avid of a good story. They were short stories easily listened to by people and even by children. Jesus was helping to make everybody better understand and remember his message in images. Jesus was brilliant in the imagination with which he brought forward his aphorisms and parables. The parables had a didactic function. Yet at the same time, as Jesus stressed, there was mystery in the parables. For they needed faith to be really understood as to their moral and spiritual meaning. Somebody who had no faith would only hear a story and not listen with his heart. Such a person would not become a believer and not pierce the true meaning of a parable. Only the ones open to Jesus's message would look for a deeper meaning and understanding. The parables were simple stories and at the same time a commitment of the person listening to the parables, an opening of heart, and an act of faith. Jesus explained the moral and spiritual meaning of the parables to his disciples but he mostly refrained from doing

so in public. This was enticing talks and rumours, so that his fame as one who spoke in mysteries grew. People discussed the parables, tried to discern the moral message and thus kept interested in Jesus.

To painters however, the parables, like the miracles, were wonderful stories to be depicted. The parables also offered the occasion to depict secular themes by which the artists could show other images than Jesus, Mary or the apostles. Painters eventually took up all parables as subjects. And some stories such as the parable of the Prodigal Son were more popular than other ones because they contained more religious or moral meaning or were references to the real final dramas of Jesus's life: his suffering, death and resurrection.

## *Caesar's Due*

### **The Tribute Money**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Galleria del Palazzo Bianco – Genoa. 1625.

### **The Tribute Money**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). The National Gallery – London. 1568.

Anthony van Dyck was a genius painter of portraits. But he needed examples for his pictures. He must have lacked imagination to design scenes and artistically strong compositions by himself. He needed proto-images for his pictures, and these could either be the sitters for his portraits, or older paintings of the great masters. Van Dyck's need for examples was of course especially the case in his younger years. Van Dyck was twenty-six years old when he made the 'Tribute Money' and he copied the design of a picture made by Titian on the same subject. As he did often, van Dyck inverted Titian's original scene and painted Jesus on the left instead of Titian's Jesus on the right. He used the same colours, the same figures and only slightly changed details. Titian's canvas was in Spain whereas van Dyck worked in Italy when this picture was made, in Genoa. Van Dyck must have seen a painted copy for he applied the same colours as Titian. The 'Tribute Money' represents a parable of the New Testament.

The scribes and the chief priests of Jerusalem awaited their opportunity and sent agents to pose as upright men, and to catch Jesus out in something he might say and so enable them to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. They put to him this question. "Master, we know that you say and teach what is right, you favour no one, but teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus was aware of their cunning and said, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and title are on it?" They said, "Caesar's". He said to them, "Well then, pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and God what belongs to God." They were unable to catch him out in anything he had to say in public; they were amazed at his answer and were silenced<sup>G38</sup>.

Van Dyck painted the figures of the 'Tribute Money' parable with more expression in their faces than Titian. Thereby he announced the genius portrait artist he would become in his later years. The head of Jesus is that of a younger man than in Titian's picture. Titian pictured a more wise and softer man. Van Dyck made a triumphant Jesus. His Jesus radiates holiness. Van Dyck's Jesus is more melancholic and sad. The painter brought the shadow of Calvary on the bright face of Jesus, with more feelings and sentiment. The figures of the scribe and priest also are more expressive and so are the movements of the hands. Van Dyck's scribe is holding and showing the coin and Jesus is further from the scribe than in Titian's picture, indicating more the isolation and distance of the Messiah. Van Dyck created a more dynamic, lively picture. Titian showed a more restrained and intimate one. We find us spontaneously more involved in van Dyck's scene of the parable.

Anthony van Dyck arrived late in the year 1621 in Genoa, having come there from his native Antwerp where he had been a student in the workshop of Pieter Paul Rubens. He had settled as an independent artist around 1615 already. He had worked on his own from 1615 on, some with his friend Jan Brueghel the Younger. But van Dyck

also continued to work together with Rubens until 1620, just before he left for Italy. Rubens may have spoken to his young aid of the years he had worked in Italy and in Genoa. Rubens may have told of the fame he had obtained there, of the advantages for young painters to travel and learn in Italy, and thus put the idea of an Italian adventure in van Dyck's head. Van Dyck travelled to Genoa in November 1621 and stayed there in the house of two friends from Antwerp, the brothers Cornelis and Lucas de Wael. Although he painted for the Genoese noblemen such as the Balbis, the Brignole-Sale and the Lomellini, he travelled also to Rome and Florence, to Venice, and he remained for a time in Palermo of Sicily. Van Dyck returned only to Antwerp in September of 1627. He had remained six years in Italy and returned with the reputation of a great master. His painting the 'Tribute Money' dates from his later years in Italy.

The 'Tribute Money' indicates the tension between the two realities of Jesus. The denarius presented by the scribe is a symbol of the world that we perceive with our senses. Jesus was a human too, born of a human, but he possessed a double nature. Jesus points to the heavens, to the transcendent world that humans cannot perceive but that was part of his nature. Jesus told in his parables that this unseen world was very real also and the aim of his testimony was to show humans what that world was about. It was a world of adoration of God, of love and justice.

Van Dyck and Titian pledged to their belief in this transcendent world of Jesus. They seem to say that indeed this is a reality beyond mind-images and dreams. They expressed their faith by the gesture of Jesus. Titian painted Jesus humbly, undisturbed, taking for granted that the spiritual world existed. Jesus is depicted almost surprised that his could be put to the question. Van Dyck did not go as deep in his thoughts. Van Dyck made Jesus radiate glory and he showed him as a king of the heavens. The scribe on the extreme right of Van Dyck's picture holds his glasses in an extraordinary but vain effort to capture the truth. However sceptic we may be says van Dyck, the glory of the other world does exist. Here lies the fundamental ever-unproven truth to which Jesus came to teach and the basic mystery of the venue of the Christ.

*Other paintings:*

**Caesar's due**

Maarten De Vos (1531-1603). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. 1601.

## *The Good Samaritan*

### **The Good Samaritan**

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1650.

Luca Giordano was a painter of Naples of the seventeenth century. He was born there in 1634 and died in 1705. Naples was a prosperous city then and many painters from other Italian towns and from other countries worked there either permanently or for short periods. The Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera arrived in Naples in 1616 and remained until his death in 1652. Caravaggio was in Naples in 1607 and 1609. Luca Giordano is a generation older than these two giants are, but we find their influence preponderantly in Giordano's pictures. Giordano travelled to Rome and Florence and worked also from 1692 to 1702 at the court of the Spanish King Charles II in Madrid, thereby doing the reverse of his master Ribera. Naples and Spain remained closely connected.

Giordano worked for religious commissioners and for aristocrats. He was a very religious painter and very prolific at that. He made hundreds of Baroque pictures, many glorifying in open pathos the victory of Christ, of the Virgin Mary and the Archangels. His paintings are scattered all over Europe; rare is the museum that has no Luca Giordano. The pictures can even still be found in small parish churches such as in the village of Bossière in Belgium. A recent cleanup of the altarpiece that had been offered to the church in the nineteenth century by a local businessman revealed a Giordano. Giordano's extraordinary capacity of work gained him the surname 'Fa Presto'.

Luca Giordano loved splendid and bright colours that usually contrasted with the darker tones of Ribera's Spanish tradition to very theatrical effects. He worked in a suave, devotional, sometimes pathetic and usually sentimental, but strong masculine style. Among the tremendous amount of very classic, though never plain pictures, came a few real masterpieces of expression and individuality such as the 'Good Samaritan' of the Rouen Museum of Fine Arts. Giordano painted a parable of the New Testament.

Luke gives account of the parable of the Good Samaritan after a teaching of Jesus. Jesus has been saying that one has to love one's neighbour as oneself. At that moment a man asks who is his neighbour. In answer, Jesus tells the following parable.

A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half-dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have". "Which of these three do you think proved himself

a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?" He replied, "The one who showed pity towards him." Jesus said to him, "Go, and do the same yourself."<sup>G38</sup>.

The Samaritans were the descendants of Assyrians. The Assyrian King Sanherib had conquered Israel and sent the ten tribes of the land in exile. He brought Assyrians to colonise Israel. They settled mainly in Samaria and mixed with the remaining local inhabitants, taking over their Jewish religion. When the original Jews returned after the Babylonian exile, the Samaritans asked to be considered as true Jews but they were turned down. The Samaritans then built their own temple on mount Gerizim to compete with the Temple of Jerusalem. The temple of Gerizim was however destroyed in 126 before Christ. Maybe because they were considered outsiders in Israel, many converted to Christianity but their separate sect continues till this day with offers of lambs still being made on mount Gerizim. Jesus used the Samaritans to indicate people the Jews knew intimately, but that remained strangers and outcasts for the same Jews. Talking to Samaritans and praising them was unusual.

Luca Giordano's 'Good Samaritan' is a poignant image of human misery. The images that come to mind immediately when looking at this work are the numerous Saint Sebastians, such as Georges de La Tour's 'Sebastian tended by Irene'. In these pictures of the martyr of Sebastian also a miserable man lies defeated and helpless, naked on the ground and somebody is having pity over the injured. In Giordano's picture not Irene, a woman, is caring however, but a man – the Samaritan.

The body of the injured man lies on hard rock. The body is contorted. The man's bony body lies with the breast upheaved, its arms and legs and hands are crooked. The neck is elongated; the head hangs down and away. The body is grey-white, bleak, the colour of death. There could be no more gripping, horrible image of misery, ugliness and death. This image reminds us of the Crucified Christ of Mathis Gotthard Niethart alias Dürerwald. Here also we find the crooked fingers and a revelation of pain. Of course, Giordano reminds of Spanish pathetic imagery as brought to Naples by Jusepe de Ribera. The dark colours surrounding the corpse certainly reveal the Spanish master.

Giordano's Samaritan bows over the injured man. He puts balms on his wounds. The Samaritan is cautious, gentle and caring. He bends over the man's body. And yet, the Samaritan could be the torturer at the same time. He encroaches on the injured body like a usurper. Giordano has not painted the Samaritan as a loving carer. The Samaritan is old, all the wrinkles of his neck are shown and he is sunburnt to a nasty red from the voyage. The Samaritan's features are angular. His head with the protruding nose could be the beak of a scavenger bird. The softest image of the painting remains the horse, the head of which appears in the dark background directly confronting the viewer. Innocence and gentleness is in the horse, not in the Samaritan.

Luca Giordano has in fact rendered the most direct and true understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Here is not a nice young lady, nor a young handsome nobleman helping a poor injured man. Giordano showed a miserable human, the Samaritan, weary and sunburnt of the road, neither rich nor beautiful himself, helping something that is even more miserable so as to be hardly human. The injured and robbed man is miserable but the Samaritan is hardly less so. Therein lies the true

message of the parable: all humans are poor, helpless and miserable and these miserable sometimes help each other. Wherein lies their greatness for God.

It is strange to find a picture like this painted by the conventional Giordano, who should have been an extrovert, laughing and enjoying Neapolitan. There was however also much overt poverty and misery in Naples and Giordano could not but have noticed that aspect of his hometown too. These pictures also are in the Spanish tradition of devotional passion as shown by Ribera and El Greco. The conventional Giordano was a more powerful painter than one might expect. In this picture he has expressed something of his inner soul. This one picture would be enough to reconcile us with the many so easily expected paintings of this artist, and thus to call him a great and individual master. The painting announces the poignant images of Francisco de Goya, who would profoundly sense human misery. Luca Giordano had the same feelings and expressed them in the same dark colours and the same strength of image as Goya.

The Catholic Church always emphasised charity. Its many monk orders were dedicated to poverty for themselves and to the healing of wounds of humans, be these wounds of the soul or of the body. Abbeys cared for the forsaken, took them in and gave them to eat. Pilgrims on the road were sustained. One of the first tasks of priests was to organise charity in their community. Catholics and Protestants founded schools and hospitals. The institutions thus created refer to the parable of the Good Samaritan and its moral lesson. Pictures of this parable frequently adorned hospices and hostels. In many countries of Europe the organisations that were thus created still are a formidable power of human solidarity. One might think that with the lowering numbers of for instance Catholic Priests this caritative power also would dwindle, but nothing is less true. The number of people that help in Christian charity institutions, founded sometimes centuries ago by the clergy, has steadily grown. So have the numbers of helpers in charity of secular institutions.

The parable of the 'Good Samaritan' appealed to a forceful element in man. Because love for another human, however miserable, meant solidarity and a form of transcendence. These feelings have absolutely not faded away in our present capitalist free economy. On the contrary, most politicians and persons of influence have confirmed them. With his parable Jesus touched a fundamental characteristic of man and gave it a spiritual founding.

*Other paintings:*

**The Good Samaritan**

Jacopo Bassano (1535-1592). The National Gallery. London.

**Landscape of the Parable of the Good Samaritan**

Henri Blès (1480-1550). Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte. Naples.

**The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

Domenico Fetti (1588/1598-1623). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1612.

**The Good Samaritan**

Jacopo da Ponte called Jacopo Bassano (1510-1592). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori. Rome.

**Landscape with the Good Samaritan**

Herman van Swaenevelt (ca. 1600-1655). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

**The Good Samaritan**

Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1632.

## *The Prodigal Son*

### **The Story of the Prodigal Son**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. In the 1660s.

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo was born in 1618 in Sevilla in Spain. He lost his parents young. He studied the great Spanish painters and worked in his twenties for abbeys and churches. Somewhat later, in the 1660's, he learnt to know the royal collections of paintings and its Flemish and Venetian masterpieces at the court of Madrid. In his later years he painted mostly in Sevilla and developed there not just religious scenes, but more and more also genre pictures. He painted scenes with the children of the Santa Cruz quarter of Sevilla as well as interior scenes of the poor houses of the town. The clergy did not commission these pictures. Murillo painted them for his own pleasure and then brought them to the market. These scenes of children playing together were so sweet, sentimental and tender, so irresistible that they became extremely popular. Murillo's pictures were copied, engraved and spread in prints in so many copies that in later centuries they were considered tasteless.

Murillo knew the height of his fame around 1660 when he made the pictures of the 'Prodigal Son'. At that time he founded a workshop and academy in Sevilla. Murillo died there in 1682. He painted a whole series of pictures on the theme of the Prodigal Son, seven of which are in the National Gallery of Ireland. But he returned to the theme and there is for instance another canvas showing the 'Return of the Prodigal Son' from around 1671 in the National Gallery of Washington. The series may have been suggested by the similar life of a Spanish nobleman, Don Miguel de Manara. This man commissioned a series of religious paintings from Murillo and Valdès Leal for the Hospital de la Caridad<sup>R1</sup>.

Luke tells the parable of the Prodigal Son as follows.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here I am dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." So he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf

we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast. Because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found”<sup>G38</sup>.

Murillo situated the scenes in Sevilla. The pictures represent life in Spain in the seventeenth century. Murillo started the series with the ‘Prodigal Son receiving his portion’. Then he painted the ‘Departure’, and the ‘Feasting’. The ‘Prodigal Son driven out’ follows. The ‘Prodigal Son feeding the swine’ is the most dramatic picture. The series end with the ‘Return’. The pictures contrast very much, so one might be tempted to date them over a longer period of years. But Murillo made several series of religious themes as commissions in short periods so that the scenes we discuss here also can have been made over a short time only. The first two pictures show brighter colours and strict form, more rigid figures, which point to an early period. The last pictures are roughly brushed and in more gloomy colours of the same tones. Which was characteristic of the older painter who lost patience and now gave pre-eminence to the expression of a theme rather than to fine artistry. So, the exact dating of the series remains unknown.

In the ‘Feasting’, the Prodigal Son is at a table holding a lady by the shoulders. He is feasting on a banquet. He is the centre of all attention, as a rich young man spending lavishly would naturally be. The painting is in bright colours and in the texture of the rough canvas. Murillo knew as any master the play of light and shadow and its dramatic effects. He used it to create depth in his picture. The music player on the left remains thus in the dark, against the white area of the table linen. This white patch emphasises the rich orange colour of the shirt of the son. The small dog peering from under the table adds an element of genre, as Murillo would develop in his later period. We find these dogs under the table in almost all scenes of the ‘Last Supper’ or in the ‘Wedding at Cana’ and similar paintings. The ‘Feasting’ is a masterpiece in Murillo’s series.

The ‘Prodigal Son feeding the Swine’ is almost a devotional picture and it could not contrast more with the ‘Feasting’. The son is now praying to God among the swine. He holds one hand to his hearth; his other hand is outstretched. The left hand denotes love of Christ and God the Father. With the right hand the young man shows in what sad condition he is. The gestures of the man in the two pictures, the ‘Feast’ and the ‘Feeding the Swine’ are the same: left arm bent and right arm stretched. But of course the whole scenery has changed. This ‘Feeding the Swine’ is all gloom and desolation. The sky is heavy and closed from the sun, the barn is in ruins, and the ground is dark and menacing. The man looks at long, thin trees that swing to the skies. Murillo has expressed the loneliness of a person who has been abandoned by everybody and who is entirely throwing his fate to the Lord.

The ‘Return’ shows the Prodigal Son being embraced by his father. The mother stands behind the father, which may refer to Jesus and his mother. Because the parable of the Prodigal Son is all about forgiveness by God. The parable of the Prodigal Son has also been associated with the days of Jesus’s passion between his doubts in the garden of Gethsemane and his resurrection. Jesus was in this dramatic period the lost Son of God, who only at the resurrection seemed again to return to the favours of his father.

The brother of the young man does not agree with the father taking his other son in again. But Luke tells that the father answers to his angry son as follows: “My son you

are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found".<sup>G38</sup>

The parable handles a paradox in justice. It would be justice in our world to condemn the lost son and send him out again, so that the faithful son could be rewarded fully with the remaining heritage. But Jesus here stated clearly that God could forgive, thereby showing a justice that goes beyond our societal justice. Justice is needed, but forgiveness and confidence that no sins will be committed anymore goes very further. God can receive a sinner with joy. This message brought an infinite hope to people who committed sins and even crimes. They can repent, take on a new life, hope for forgiveness and change their ways.

The parable of the Prodigal Son was a cure for despair. The story could bring a spark of light to the imprisoned criminals, for after their period of 'feeding the swine' they could live a new life in the love of Christ. Christ could take them in and let them live as anybody else. This message of love of course was very much in contrast with all practices of the Roman times. The parable showed that the Kingdom of Heaven was for everybody, also for the condemned. Thieves and sinners could be re-integrated in a society whereas usually they were outlawed and signalled as evil for the rest of their lives. For the gloomy Murillo this must have been a very powerful message. He was a sentimental man who probably also felt lost and lonely at certain times. He may have painted the Prodigal Son as his own message of forgiveness and hope, his personal plea to God for being heard as an abandoned son and not forgotten. Murillo lost his parents young. We know the feelings of instability and uncertainty, the lack of self-confidence that can be created in orphans and that pursues them throughout their entire life. Murillo's series is thus also a Spanish prayer.

*Other paintings:*

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Edouard de Jans. Groeninge Museum. Bruges. 1878.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Clément Belle attributed (1722-1806). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**The Prodigal Son**

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Museum Boymans-van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**The Prodigal Son**

Jan Sanders van Hemessen (ca. 1500-1575). Musée de l' Art Ancien. Brussels. 1536.

**The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

Domenico Fetti (1589-1623). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Caen.

**The Prodigal Son**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp.

**The Prodigal Son. Biblical landscape**

Robert Zünd (1827-1909). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1867.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Théodore Chassériau (1819-1836). Musée des Beaux-Arts. La Rochelle.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). The State Hermitage Museum. St Petersburg. Ca. 1666-1669.

**The Pleasures of the Prodigal Son**

Circle of Pieter Coecke van Aelst. Museo Correr. Venice.

**The Farewell of the Prodigal Son**

Johann Heiss (1640-1704). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. 1676/1676.

**The Prodigal Son and the Prostitutes**

Johann Heiss (1640-1704). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. 1676/1676.

**The Prodigal Son and the Pigs**

Johann Heiss (1640-1704). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. 1676/1676.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Johann Heiss (1640-1704). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. 1676/1676.

**The Prodigal Son**

Johann Liss (1597-1629/1630). The Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. Between 1625 and 1630.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Domenico Fetti (ca. 1588/1590-1621). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1620-1623.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called il Guercino (1591-1666). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1619.

**The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Bartolommeo Bassanti (active ca. 1635-1650). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**The Prodigal Son**

Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1656). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1622.

**The Prodigal Son**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Guercino (1591-1666). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1627-1629.

**The Prodigal Son**

Michelangelo Cerquozzi (1602-1660). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**The Prodigal Son**

Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978). Museo del Novecento del Comune di Milano al Palazzo della Permanente. Milan. 1922.

## *Lazarus and the Rich Man*

### **Lazarus and the Rich Man**

Marcus Gheeraerts. Museum of the Catherines Convent – Utrecht. Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man is given in Luke's Gospel.

There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there used to lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came in and licked his sores. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace.<sup>G38</sup>

The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his embrace. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in agony in these flames." Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours."<sup>G38</sup>

So he said, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."<sup>G38</sup>

Marcus Gheeraerts was one of the artisan painters that have almost disappeared from public knowledge over the ages. This was the result of the destruction of many of his works during a Protestant fury against sculptures and pictures that happened in Bruges in 1566. Gheeraerts, born around 1521 in Catholic Bruges, became a Protestant himself, but his companions of the same religion did not spare his work. He was still a painter in Bruges in 1566, but his wife had remained Catholic and when the Spanish Duke of Alba installed a special Council to pacify and counter-reform Bruges, Marcus left the town, alone, without his wife. Gheeraerts went to London. He worked there probably until his death in 1587, but he is also known in the archives of Antwerp where he may have worked occasionally<sup>B9</sup>. His son, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, was court painter of Elisabeth I and also of King Charles I's mother Anne of Denmark. Other court painters at the court of Charles I were Daniel Mytens and Cornelius Johnson, until the Antwerp genius portraitist Anthony van Dyck and the Italian Orazio Gentileschi - and also for two years Artemisia, the daughter of the latter - arrived similarly at the court of England<sup>B10</sup>.

Gheeraerts was not the most important painter of Bruges of the sixteenth century. Many painters worked at that time in the town. Better-known masters were Lancelot

Blondeel (1498-1561) and Pieter Pourbus (1523/1524-1584). There worked also Frans Pourbus (1545-1591), son of Pieter, Ambrosius Benson (active 1518-1550) who came from the North of Italy, and Adriaan Isenbrant (1480-1551) who worked mainly in the first half of the century. Bruges' painters had evolved from the International Gothic style of its fifteenth century to knowledge of the Antique themes and the Italian Renaissance. The tastes of Bruges' old wealthy families had changed with the growing number of Protestants to a more secular art, italianised in its themes. In Bruges of the late sixteenth century also, fashion was directed to more worldly themes than the ever present very religious, traditional art. Practically all art remained Christian of inspiration though and among the few paintings Gheeraerts left us is a magnificent 'Jesus Triumphant', a Jesus carrying the cross, a picture now in the Memling Museum of the Bruges Saint John's hospital.

The painting 'Lazarus and the Rich' shows a new way of representation as compared to the so well known Flemish Primitive Gothic style. Gheeraerts remained close to the traditional rendering of the parable. Lazarus, the beggar, is lying on the ground, piteously, with his beggar's staff and meagre belongings in a small bundle next to him. Dogs, symbols of unclean animals in medieval imagery, lick at his wounds and sores. The rich man Epulone is seated on a golden chair at a table filled for a banquet, with all kinds of expensive fruit presented. Epulone is dressed like an oriental satrap; he wears golden slippers and a wide purple mantle. A courtesan and maidservants accompany him, all equally finely dressed. The servants bring the food. The table is set under a canopy supported by wooden mounts, which are sculptured into satyrs and cupids. The feast and the decoration remember us of a Bacchanal. A guard dressed as a Roman soldier holds high a stick, ready to beat away the beggar. Lazarus' fate is hinted at in the far upper right background; an angel or Abraham rises to the heaven with poor Lazarus.

Marcus Gheeraerts the Older has painted a Gospel theme. He used Roman and Persian motives (the guard, the dresses of the rich man, the mounts of the canopy, the decoration of the architecture) to indicate that corruption is in these as compared to poor Lazarus. Thus in a strange way, Gheeraerts played on the growing taste for classical themes of the wealthy audience and turned the fashion diligently against the viewers and commissioners of his time. The result is a moral fable in which sympathy should go out to poor Lazarus, even though the decorative elements of the rich table, the canopy, the rich man, the courtesans and the Roman guard would have pleased and impressed innocent viewers. The picture is a splendid example of the newer Italianate style of painting as emerged in Bruges, but mostly in Antwerp at the end of the sixteenth century. Marcus Gheeraerts succeeded in making a picture that would please, while staying faithful to his more strict Protestant ideas. He made a very moralising picture that bears almost no references to spirituality or to religion. A theme from the Gospels was used, but only for its value of moral lesson. This is secularisation of spiritual evangelic messages.

*Other paintings:*

### **The Rich Epulone**

Bonifacio de' Pitati called Bonifacio Veronese (1487 – 1553). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1543/1545.

**The Rich Man**

Josef Danhauser (1805-1845). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. 1836.

**Lazarus and the Rich Man**

Carlo Saraceni (1579-1620). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori. Rome.

**Kitchen Scene with the Episode of Lazarus and the Rich Epulone**

Giacomo Legi attributed. 17<sup>th</sup> century. Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

**The Parable of Dives and Lazarus**

Nicolaus Knüpfer (ca. 1603-1660). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

## *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*

### **The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard**

Johann Christian Brand (1722- 1795). The Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts –Vienna. 1769.

Matthew tells the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Jesus said that the Kingdom of the Heavens was like a man who went out early in the day to hire workers for his vineyard. He promised one denarius for a day's work. The man went again out at the third hour, hired more workers and sent them to the vineyard, promising them a fair wage. He did the same at the sixth hour and at the eleventh hour. In the evening, the owner of the vineyard ordered all the workers to be called in, to be paid. He told to start with the last arrived and to give one denarius to each labourer. Of course, the workers of the first hour grumbled because all received the same wage and they expected more than the ones that had come last and had worked less. One worker spoke out in this way. The owner however replied, 'My friend, you received what we agreed to; so take your earnings and go off. I have all the right to give to each labourer as much as I paid you. Why should you be envious of me being generous?' And the parable of Matthew finishes with the saying, 'The last will be first and the first will be last'.

Johann Christian brand was a Viennese, so Austrian painter of the eighteenth century. His father was a landscape painter and Johann Christian treaded in his father's footsteps. He came to some status in the artistic milieu of Vienna. He became a councillor and a professor of landscape painting at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna. He also taught that art at the Viennese porcelain factory. Born in 1722, Brand died in 1795 in an era of splendour for the Austrian Empire. The Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna has many fine works of its artists because every new member of the Academy had to leave an entry painting to the Academy as a token of the membership. The 'Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard' was the entry piece of Johann Christian Brand to the Viennese Academy. It dates from 1769.

We see a picture in warm, orange-brown hues on the left and green hues on the right. The structure of the painting is in the traditional 'open V'. To the left is a scene situated under the right diagonal. There we see the landowner giving his instructions, or maybe explaining to a grumbling labourer why he got paid in justice, as promised earlier. To the right upper corner rises the left diagonal over a tower that protects another farmhouse. Beneath that farm is the vineyard. Here we see soft tones and a diffuse light playing on the leaves of the vines. The landscape is indeterminate, but looks much like the countryside we might expect around Vienna. There is a soft plains and the vineyard is enclosed and not in arid but in lush terrain, since trees and bushes abound. The houses could be Austrian and are certainly not the buildings of rural Palestine. Vienna knew well about vineyards as its surrounding land was covered with them, suite close to the city gates. Up to our times, a suburb of Vienna is famous for its wine cellars and small farm houses now turned into wine bars called 'heurigers' and restaurants where the yearling, young Austrian wine is drunk. So Johann Christian brand used a theme from the Bible that must have been very sympathetic to every Viennese.

Although this is a Viennese scene, the landowner stands before his house dressed in the oriental way with a turban. The scene around the landowner is lively. We see cows and sheep, a labourer walking home wearing a pick over his shoulders. A woman enters the house and another one looks at her young child near the stairs. These women and the landowner as well as the labourer to whom he talks form a mass of colour that finds its balance in the animals and the man before them.

The light seems to come from the right, so it brightens the scene of the landowner. The colours are golden orange here, with an occasional white spot. The ground before the landowner is lit to a lighter orange that contrasts nicely with the lush green of the vineyard. The vineyard remains however more in the shadows of the farm and trees. Johann Christian Brand showed his considerable skill in the marvellous way he depicted the trees on the left and the right. Although the direction is vertical, he bowed the high trees on the left so that the trees seem to move, to live, and thus they do not accentuate the verticality so much. In the hazy far we see a tower, as we can often find in paintings of the Italian countryside, in old Bamboccio pictures made with nice landscapes and gentle scenes of everyday life. Paintings like this, of a calm, undisturbed, almost sweet pastoral life, were quite popular in the eighteenth century, also in Vienna.

Brand did not underscore the morality of the parable. He does seem to tell us something. The landowner points to the right and the labourer with the pick, even the cow in the middle, look to the vineyard where work is still going on. Exactly what the landowner is saying remains a mystery however and the denarii that are so important in Jesus's parable are not shown. Landowner and labourer stand at rest in a picture without passion, of which the main theme is the vineyard. That was probably an aspect that Viennese Academicians of the second half of the eighteenth century preferred. The parable of the workers in the vineyard was a sub-theme of the real theme of this picture, which was the pastoral landscape and a gentle narrative of the Viennese countryside.

Johann Christian Brand was a good professional painter. Admire the way he painted the delicate clouds and also the golden touches on the leaves of the vineyard, in which we sense the eye and touch of Constable. The 'Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard' is a nice genre picture. We can look happily at this canvas. But it is a picture without much emotion, a smooth piece made without great ambition and strength. Yet, Johann Christian Brand made a piece of art that shows interesting handling of colour. Brand certainly knew how to bring a peaceful mood in the image. It is an image of a parable as the audience of Jesus might have had in their minds when Jesus started to tell his story. But more than this, we must imagine for whom this picture was made.

Imagine a Viennese evening and a hall lit with candles. The hall is filled with professors dressed in austere black dresses, having gathered to give honour to the new member of the venerable Vienna Academy. There may be small violin orchestra playing soft music. The entry painting of Brand stands in a corner and all the professors pass before the painting. They hold wine glasses in their hands of course, for such an occasion must be feasted. All chat and drink and they discuss art and gossip over the latest news of the empire. Imagine the pleasure of these professors to

remark that Brand's painting is on the subject of a vineyard, glorifying by a religious scene one of the most delicious pleasures of life: the white wine of Vienna. Brand pictured part of Vienna's richness and such a sweet one, that cannot but be liked by everyone! Johann Christian Brand was not only a good professional. He was also smart and it is certainly with a wink that he delivered his 'vineyard' to the Academy and his colleagues.

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## *The Parable of the Darnel*

### **The Parable of the Tares among the Wheat**

Domenico Fetti (1588/1589-1623). The Prague Castle Picture Gallery – Prague.

The part of the Gospel of Matthew dedicated to the discourse of parables starts with various stories that all pertain to agriculture. Tilling the land, sowing and harvesting were the major occupation of the people in the countryside that Jesus passed. These subjects also lend themselves to metaphors on the pious life and heavenly reward that awaited the just. Jesus told parables to the farmers in stories that were directly linked to their work in the land so that these people could understand rapidly his messages or ponder about hidden meanings. These parables are reminiscent of Jesus's travels as a wandering preacher in between the cities.

Jesus compared in a parable called the 'Parable of the Darnel' the kingdom of the heavens with a farmer who sowed good seed to his land. While everybody was asleep, weary of a day's work, the man's enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat. The evil man made off before the farmer and his labourers awoke. When the wheat grew and ripened, so did the darnel. The farmers' labourers saw this and wondered where the darnel came from. The farmer understood that some enemy of his must have done that and he said so to the labourers. The labourers then asked whether they should go in the field and weed the darnel out. But the farmer told them that while weeding out the darnel they also might pull out the wheat. So the farmer told to let the darnel grow with the wheat. At harvest time he would say to the reapers to first collect the darnel, to tie it in bundles and to burn it. The wheat could be gathered into his barn.<sup>G38</sup>

Jesus explained this parable. He said that the sewer of the good seed was the son of man, the field the world, and the good seed the subjects of the kingdom. The enemy was the devil, the darnel the subjects of the Evil One. The harvest would be at the end of the world, and the reapers would be the angels. Just like the darnel burnt in the fire, at the end of the world the angels would come and throw all those who did evil into the blazing furnace. The evil would weep and grind their teeth but the upright would shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.<sup>G38</sup>

Other such agricultural parables of the New Testament include the parable of the seed that falls on rock, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast, the labourers in the vineyard, the story of the barren fig tree and of the seed growing by itself. Further parables that can fall in this category are the stories of the lost sheep and of the good shepherd. Matthew was the only apostle to recall the parable of the darnel and the wheat.

Domenico Fetti made a picture of Matthew's parable. Fetti was born in Rome and may have been a pupil of Cigoli. He became the court painter of Mantua in 1613 and realised monumental frescoes there for the ducal palace and the cathedral. He left Mantua rather soon, in 1622, and settled in Venice where he had been before to buy art for his patron the Duke of Mantua. In Venice Domenico Fetti enlivened the art of

painting parables so that no other artist like him treated these themes. Fetti died in 1623, still a young man in his thirties so that his career was short and few paintings remain of his hand. The 'Parable of the Tares and the Wheat' was part of a series of thirteen paintings of which nine came into the collection of the imperial castle of Prague. Currently the picture is the only one remaining in the castle <sup>22</sup>.

In the painting 'The Parable of the Tares among the Wheat' one sees the evil enemy, the devil, sowing the darnel seed on the ploughed field. In the foreground the farmer and his labourers are fast asleep. The parable is a metaphor of good and evil and Domenico Fetti showed the menacing moment of evil while the good are asleep. The devil comes with the wind that rocks at the trees and bushes. One can see a palm tree bending against the heavy breeze and next to that a barren trunk, also bent sideways. These two high trees that dominate the painting so much are symbols also of good and evil, of good and prosperity versus death in evil. All the leaves of the trees and bushes of the background feel the disturbance in the atmosphere and the devil blends with them like an antique faun. Menacing clouds are in the sky. On the far right one sees the farmhouse and a primitive plough.

Domenico Fetti painted the picture of the 'Parable of the Tares and the Wheat' partly in rapid brushstrokes and partly in delicate, fluent touches. He might have done that because he was in a hurry and because these kinds of picture did not need detailed depiction. The story of the parable represented visually as a narrative was the most important element that the commissioners would ask. Domenico Fetti seems to have made very many works of the parables and more than a wonderful picture showing all the delicate skills of the artist, the narrative was what appealed. The rapid brushstrokes are mostly in the trees however, which may indicate also the use of this technique of long strokes to show movement.

A painter like Fetti had to uphold a fame so he painted a few marvellous parts of the picture in all detail just to show his considerable skill. This is the case with the farmer lying asleep in the right lower corner. Fetti let the light come from the left and play in beautiful shades and hues on the torso of the man. Here Fetti worked in minuscule detail with slight brushstrokes and thus showed to what art he was capable. The tilled land, the devil and the background are not painted in such detail.

Domenico Fetti was the master painter best known for his pictures of parables. For his scene in this painting he chose a very dynamic moment, the crux of the action of the story. It is not always easy to represent a whole narration visually in a convincing way. The parables also contain a meaning and that is of course an abstract concept difficult to represent in a static picture. Remark how Fetti marvellously coped with the task. He showed a painting in movement, but showing the movement of the devil was not enough to give an impression of dynamism to the viewer. So he painted the effects of the disturbance in nature of the wind that surrounds the evil man. One sees the wind in the luxurious palm tree of warm foliage and he brought a general elation from the left to the upper right in the composition. Fetti contrasted the foliage of the living palm tree with the dead, barren trunk of the dead tree and thus clarified the concept. The confrontation between good and evil was symbolically shown in a way that was not only rapidly understood by viewers, but that also immediately induced feelings of tension and unease. Furthermore, the farmers are asleep and their horizontality of lines of course also contrasts with the standing devil.

Domenico Fetti was a Baroque painter and influences by Rubens, Caravaggio and Elsheimer have been attributed to him. We find in this painting of the 'Tares among the Wheat' a few – but only a few – Baroque elements. The obvious show of emotions is Baroque and so are the rapid brushstrokes to indicate movement. But overall this painting is quite calm and serene, probably also as the parable is about sleeping men. It does not contain whirling action in the figures, or overloaded decoration. The composition is clear and open. Fetti may have preferred the more dignified, solemn vision of the Italian Classicists of the Carracci family of Bologna. These artists were somewhat older than the first masters of the Baroque so might have been seen somewhat more by Fetti. But much more than all these influences, we must conclude that Domenico Fetti simply made pictures that were direct, clear, to the point, of the stories of the parables. Fetti's symbolical representation of evil and good in the image of the two trees was not exactly new, but how he used that view proved that he was an intelligent young man with a keen, rapid mind for his subject. No wonder then that he was much admired for this kind of work.

*Other paintings:*

**The Sower.** Copy after Domenico Fetti. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan.

## *The Blind leading the Blind*

### **The Parable of the Blind**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1515-1569). Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte – Naples. 1568.

The parable of the ‘Blind leading the Blind’ can be found in Matthew and in Luke’s Gospels, in different circumstances. In Luke it is a small sentence among many others of parables and learning. Luke quotes the parable in a chapter of teachings on integrity.

Jesus told them a parable; “Can one blind person guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? Disciple is not superior to teacher; but fully trained disciple will be like teacher.”<sup>G38</sup>

Matthew situates the parable in a chapter on clean and unclean.

Jesus called the people to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into the mouth does not make anyone unclean; it is what comes out of the mouth that makes someone unclean. Then the disciples came to him and said, ”Do you know that the Pharisees were shocked when they heard what you said?” He replied, “Any plant my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind; and if one blind person leads another, both will fall into a pit.”<sup>G38</sup>

The parable of Matthew and Luke has not only been presented literally as blind leading blind. A recurring theme in pictures and engravings is the image of a donkey instructing other donkeys. The most famous image is probably Goya’s plate 37 of the ‘Caprichos’, ‘Si sabrá mas el discipulo?’ or translated ‘would the student know more’?

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, the first of a generation of painters from Brabant all called Brueghel, made a painting of the theme of the Blind leading the Blind. There are two villages not far from Antwerp with the name Bruegel; one is close to ‘s Hertogenbosch. This last town, which is more Limburg than Brabant, would be called in English like ‘The Forest of the Dukes’. It is generally accepted that Pieter Bruegel originated from Bosch. Another formidable painter came from ‘s Hertogenbosch: Hieronymus Bosch. He was directly named after the town. Bosch (ca.1450-1526) died before Bruegel’s birth. Yet, Bruegel’s visions are very much alike Bosch’s. Pieter usually named himself as ‘Bruegel’; his sons preferred to write ‘Brueghel’. Pieter must have been born somewhere around 1525. His name appears in the archives of the Antwerp Painter’s Guild around 1551<sup>G9</sup>. His teacher would have been Pieter Coecke van Aelst. He married his master’s daughter Maria in 1563. Karel van Mander, a Brabant painter of the early seventeenth century, and writer of a book on Netherlands painters, told that Bruegel had been to Italy over France. Bruegel would have been as far as Rome.

Pieter Bruegel was not just a painter. He was first and foremost an engraver. He made even designs that were engraved by other artists. He worked for a growing printing industry in Antwerp. Antwerp had become a great metropolis in the sixteenth century. It had taken over the role of Bruges as the most important seaport of western Europe and the reformation had not yet led to the persecutions of Protestants in Brabant, though the wars of religion started in Bruegel's time. Antwerp was rich and Bruegel had powerful patrons. Bruegel first engraved, then painted. Painting became dominant in his art from around 1558, so that it seems remarkable how many pictures he made in the period between 1558 and his death in 1569. About fifty major paintings are now catalogued of Pieter Bruegel. Many of his pictures have been preserved because they were appreciated by the Habsburg dukes and kings. Philip II, Rudolph II and Archduke Leopold-Wilhelm loved his rustic peasant scenes<sup>G9</sup>. The largest collection of his paintings has thus been kept in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna.

The 'Blind leading the Blind' of Pieter Bruegel is among his best masterpieces. It strikes the viewer immediately by its forms and colours. The scene represents a group of poor blind people, maybe even beggars. Each holds the shoulder or the walking stick of the predecessor in the line. The line of blind advances out of the frame. But a pit is in the way, as told by Matthew, and the first blind has already fallen in it. The second blind man has stumbled and is falling also. The third is being pulled forward and feels that something is wrong in his step. Inexorably all the blind are drawn into the pit. There is something pathetic about the scene. The blind on the right lies helplessly on his back in the pit. Like a tortoise on its shell, he may never rise. The second blind falls down into a void and he cries out. His cap flies off in front of him. The third feels that something strange is happening, so he puts his head in the air as if wanting to sniff the danger. The fourth also brings up his head, he opens his mouth and wants to hear or catch by whatever other means but his eyes of what is happening. The last but one blind man seems also to sense something of the danger and has that first impression of fear on his face. Only the last one trods on happily, innocently and confident. The scene is not just a representation of the parable. It is also an allegory on our life and how we all unknowingly step into black death.

Bruegel's painting is a marvel of movement. By using several figures, the artist has been able to show the various stages of the falling. Each blind man is in another state of falling and walking, the movement is caught like by a camera, but a camera that moves from front to back. Bruegel could not have known Caravaggio's style techniques although the two painters worked almost at the same time. Caravaggio used oblique lines to express movement. We find here, in a painting made in north-western Europe, by such a different genius, the same technique. The blind men in Bruegel's picture follow the diagonal of the frame, from the upper left to the lower right. This style of composition was very new; it broke entirely with the static vertical presentations of figures in previous Flemish and Brabant pictures. Diagonals had been used before, but not to dynamically draw movement in the figures. Two geniuses used the same technique because it imposed itself in the composition.

Bruegel painted real men, poor blind people here. This is not the elevated, spiritual image as the ones we are used to of the Flemish Primitives. Bruegel painted peasants, villagers, and beggars. He painted the miserable, the feeble. His figures are unshaven, unclean, everyday people. Just as Caravaggio and at the same time in history, Bruegel went very close to the core of the life he saw around him. His paintings were filled

with moral messages, but the messages were brought through the smallness of life, not through its most dignified and spiritual side. Bruegel followed no conventions and traditions. He must have been a very strong person to set aside both his tradition of late Gothic, Flemish primitive art and the new tendencies of the Italian late Renaissance, Florentine Mannerism and Venetian grandeur. If Bruegel had been to Rome, then yes he would have been closest to Caravaggio but he certainly avoided the extravagant buoyancy of the Papal artists. Bruegel replaced grandeur by fantasy. His figures are small, squat, plump, laughing and dancing. They are very far from the majestic, imposing nude statues of Michelangelo. A Michelangelo statue needs to be looked at from below; Bruegel's figures are looked at mostly from above and they are seldom nude. In the 'Blind leading the Blind', the viewer is at the best at level with the figures, if not slightly in a higher position. Italian Renaissance had admired the season of spring; Bruegel loved to paint winter scenes and if it was not winter then all his figures were anyhow well dressed in wool and linen.

So also in this picture of Pieter Bruegel: all the blind wear cloaks over heavy cloth, as if they walk and sleep outdoors. The scene could be in autumn or in the very late summer, when the leaves of the trees grow golden. The earth is golden too and submerged in light. The light is extremely bright in certain parts of the picture, but is to no avail for the blind men.

Bruegel was a wonderful engraver of landscapes. Some of these skills of a drawer are present in the 'Blind leading the Blind'. A landscape unfolds in the upper triangle of the picture. We observe a chapel, in which a small church of a village near Brussels has been recognised, and the gently flowing curves of low hills and parts of village houses. There is a small pond, into which the blind may be eventually stumbling. In the lower triangle we discover that the blind men have been walking all the time on the border of a ditch. Unknowingly they have been confronted with danger all along their road. Finally, landscape and figures are shown in all detail and we can admire the skills of a master drawer in the figures, in their dresses and in their gestures.

Pieter Bruegel has made a painting as Jesus would have liked. The message of the Gospels was meant for everybody. But Jesus constantly talked about small people, people with infirmities, beggars, of people robbed, of sick, of the meek. Bruegel painted these. His pictures could not be viewed by the people he painted because his art was recognised very rapidly for the genius art it was. Kings and Emperors bought it for their private collections. Thus, the message of Jesus also reached the splendid palaces of the Habsburgs, but Bruegel's images were not for his poor neighbours. Whether the Habsburgs only saw in Bruegel's pictures the greater moral lessons is doubtful. They may have bought the pictures only for its popular peasant scenes, to laugh at the clumsiness of the figures. But in the 'Blind leading the Blind' Bruegel created a tragic scene of life. The blind men are laughed at, but the danger and tragedy for all our individual lives are very obvious. Do we not all walk like blind men, pushed and pulled by fate into a dark pit? Do our philosophers, professors, businessmen and scientists know where to lead us? Does the teacher know more than the student does, 'Si sabrá mas el discipulo'?

## *The Good Shepherd*

### **The Good Shepherd**

Jules-Louis Rame (1855-1927). Musée d'Art et d'Histoire – Lisieux (France). 1906.

The parable of the Good Shepherd can be found in Luke and in John. John's parable is very poetic and the text is quite elaborated on the subject. We present an extract.

I am the good shepherd;  
I know my own and my own know me,  
Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father;  
And I lay down my life for my sheep.  
And there are other sheep I have  
That are not of this fold, and I must lead these too.  
They too will listen to my voice,  
And there will be only one flock, one shepherd. <sup>G38</sup>

Jules-Louis Rame made a picture on the parable of the 'Good Shepherd'. Rame was a very regional painter. He was born at Ouézy, near Mézidon in the Calvados part of Normandy, France, in 1855. He died in his village in 1927. Rame learnt to draw in Caen. He remained and worked all his life at Ouézy, far from the cultural exuberance of Paris. He did not avoid Paris though. He could not expose in Caen because there were no art dealers of importance there and Paris did not want his works although the dealers there recognised his talent. Rame exposed at the various yearly Salons of Paris. He rarely found people who appreciated his landscapes enough to acquire them. Yet, some amateurs of new art did discover and liked Rame's rural pictures. One was an English Maecenas. Rame was invited by the English Lord Sir Ingram to travel to England and Scotland and he also had been to Holland <sup>F13</sup>. Rame had few contacts with the great masters of French Impressionist painting. He stayed at Ouézy but had many friends among the regional Normandy artists. He knew and admired the landscape painters of his country: Corot, Millet, and Camille Pissarro.

Jules-Louis Rame was a farmer. He kept sheep and as everybody in the Calvados region he cultivated apples. Rame had to be a farmer to survive; he could not live of his art alone. He stayed poor, had few friends and because his art was not very appreciated he withdrew inside his village. He became somewhat of a hermit in his village of a few hundred souls. At twenty-four he married a girl from Luxemburg, Marguerite Lion, who was the teacher of the two sons of the count and countess who lived in the Ouézy castle. Rame was a religious man. He attended mass regularly and played the organ in the village church.

Jules-Louis Rame rarely worked inside. He loved nature and painted his valleys and hills in all seasons, as much as he could. His art is dedicated to nature, as almost all Impressionist art. Rame probably did not call himself of any movement, but he lived in his times and could not but see the new techniques that slowly were accepted by art lovers of Europe.

Jules-Louis Rame painted landscapes. He painted the flocks of sheep he herded. He painted his pastures, the low sloping hills of other places he could love like those of the Aude region. In winter he painted the village and views of churches. Rame first painted in sombre tones, like the Barbizon and the The Hague schools. He applied paint thickly. From 1890 on his palette grew richer, more varied in colours and his pictures glowed with light. His colours were wonderful then, as he really tended to Impressionism and their discoveries in colour.

Rame never sought the degree of abstraction of Claude Monet. Rame's landscapes are very recognisable, clear, open and wide. Most marvellous are his landscapes with herds of sheep in which he occasionally also figured in a shepherd. Rame is the ultimate painter of bucolic sheep. His colours can be very green and very golden as he followed spring, summer or autumn. In winter he stayed in the village but not inside. He painted village scenes with the roofs of the houses covered with snow.

Jules-Louis Rame was a true farmer-painter. He really kept sheep and went with them to his high pastures. He really was a shepherd. He sowed and harvested his corn. He picked his apples and brew original Calvados cider.

Rame painted one religious pastoral scene that is very rare in Impressionist art. The picture is called 'The Good Shepherd' and it shows a vision of the idyllic land life that the artist led in Ouézy.

A shepherd is asleep. It is early dawn. The shepherd sits before his flock but he sleeps. Somebody else guards the flock in his place though. An eerie white Jesus has replaced the shepherd and guards the animals as a Good Shepherd. The picture is all colours, as the finest Impressionist would make. The light from the growing sun on the fields is a splendid view. Rame had a marvellous eye for colour. The 'Good Shepherd' is one of the very rare Impressionist truly religious pictures. The figure of Christ standing high above the low landscape in all peace and beauty, glowing white, is a view that is very difficult to forget. We recognise some of the mystic dialogue Rame must have had with nature and with his sheep. Yes, this is a bucolic painting of easy emotions. But here is a painter who was truly honest so that one cannot but be moved and have respect for Rame's image. Jules- Louis Rame was a great painter who deserves to be better known. He had an authentic feeling for nature, which would elevate him to true religious feelings when he was confronted with the quietness, peace and calm of his lone perception.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ, the Good Shepherd**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Ca.1660.

**The Good Shepherd**

Philippe de Champaigne (1609-1674). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. Ca. 1650-1660.

*The Parable of the Mote and the Beam***The Parable of the Mote and the Beam**

Domenico Fetti (1591/1592-1623). The Metropolitan Museum of New York. New York. Ca. 1621

The parable of the Mote and the Beam is told in Matthew. Jesus told that one should not judge others in order not to be judged, because the judgements one gives are the judgements one would get and the standard used would be used on you. He asked: 'why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and do not notice the great log in your own?' And how dare you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye', when look, there is a great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.

Domenico Fetti's 'The Parable of the Mote and the Beam' is a rare example of this parable.

## *The Ten Wedding Attendants*

### **The Five Foolish and the Five Sensible Wedding Attendants**

Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867). Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf im Ehrenhof – Düsseldorf. Ca. 1813-1816.

Peter von Cornelius made a painting on the parable of the ten wedding attendants. These came with lamps to a wedding, to meet the bridegroom. Five took oil for their lamps, but five did not. The bridegroom was late, so the ten wedding attendants fell asleep. At midnight the bridegroom arrived. All woke up and prepared their lamps. That was no problem for the five sensible attendants; but the five foolish ones had no oil. The five sensible attendants had not enough oil for all, so they advised the foolish ones to go and buy oil. While they were off, the bridegroom entered the wedding hall and the doors were closed. When the five foolish attendants arrived, they could not enter. They asked for the doors to be opened, but the bridegroom replied that he did not know them. The bridegroom told them to stay awake because they did not know the day or the hour. Matthew told this parable of Jesus among a series of such metaphorical tales by which Jesus explained that one should nurture one's relations with God by prayer and sacrifice and not let things happen as they came. Only those that actively searched to fulfil God's commandments and that did not neglect to serve him well would receive his support at the Day of the Last Judgement.

Peter von Cornelius was born in Düsseldorf in Germany. He studied there but in 1811 joined the Nazarene movement in Rome. In 1816 he made frescoes from the life of Joseph the Egyptian in the Palazzo Zuccaro in Rome, the house of the German consul Bartholdy. These frescoes made him to be well-known in Germany so that the Academies of Düsseldorf and Munich offered him to teach at their schools. He accepted both posts, leaving Rome in 1819, and worked alternatively in the two towns. In 1824 he became the director of the Munich Academy. He worked for King Ludwig I of Bavaria but in 1840, after a dispute with the king, he left for Berlin. Many of the works of Peter von Cornelius were frescoes, which either have disappeared or remained projects. He decorated the Quirinius church of Neuss and also the Glyptotek of Munich but these were destroyed. His project for the Camposanto, the cemetery of the kings of Prussia in Berlin, was never realised.

The German painters of the Nazarene movement in Rome preferred Christian themes. They sought a revival of the late gothic style. The picture of the 'Five Sensible and Five Foolish Virgins' was made in Rome over an extended period of several years. Peter von Cornelius was then one of the most prominent figures of the Lukasbund in Rome. We see Jesus as the bridegroom and the five sensible virgins are being presented to him by an angel. Jesus is accompanied by David and by Saint Peter; other disciples stand behind him. David stands to the right side of Jesus. He plays the lyre and is dressed like an oriental king. To the left of Jesus (to the right of the picture) stands Saint Peter, holding the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He also closes the massive wooden doors of the wedding hall. These must represent symbolically the doors of heaven. The two virgins that kneel before Jesus hold no lamps, but the three other virgins that stand to the left of the picture show their oil lamps openly. Peter von Cornelius painted in the right upper corner a dark scene. Here he represented the outside of the hall. It is night; a silvery moon shines and throws some light on the landscape. The five foolish virgins knock desperately on the door. They tear at the

door with upheaved arms and hands and some even kneel begging for entrance. They see an orange light in the interior of the hall, but nobody from the wedding party bothers to come to their aid. Von Cornelius thus painted the whole scene of the parable.

The picture of Peter von Cornelius was made in oil, but at least his colours on the left side of the frame remind of fresco paintings. Von Cornelius' colours are almost pastel, soft and chalky, and that is particularly the case on the figure of Jesus, who resembles a rigid sculpture. Jesus appears in a very pale, almost white flesh colour, even in his face, and the dress he wears is a shade of light grey-grey-white. This is a very unusual colour for Jesus's robe, unlike the traditional red that often indicates Jesus's warm compassion and love combined with the blue of spirituality in his cloak. Jesus stands on white-grey clouds so that his appearance is as of a ghost figure. Jesus has replaced the bridegroom in the mind of von Cornelius and it was in this ethereal, post-resurrection image that the painter represented Jesus. The figures of David and Peter also indicate an allegorical image. Von Cornelius thus more showed the explanation, the symbolic meaning of the parable in the left scene, much more than its literal representation of the parable as a true wedding. The wedding is spiritual, so von Cornelius showed the spirituality of the parable first. This was quite normal for the Nazarene mindset, as these painters sought spiritual revival through Christian ideas and imagery.

The parable is however also a story of a real event and it would be impossible not to show this event. In the right part of the picture therefore Peter von Cornelius showed how well he could compete with late Gothic and early Renaissance painters. We see the virgins and the angels in full detail, drawn with fine lines and clearly delineated areas of colours, the best Florentine style of drawing. The colours are soft but nicely contrasting. We see blue with subdued red, bright orange combined with a greyish, light blue, golden with light purple, a reddish orange with yellow and green. Von Cornelius worked quite bright colours and deeper colours well together here, to a very harmonious and nice whole. He contrasted the dark background on the right finely with the colours of the virgins in full light so that their colours appear stronger. On the left side however, where colours had to be weakened to represent the mind scene, we see a light but pale sky filled with child angels, putti, and the very bright brilliance of God's heaven. Here lighter colours are dominant.

Peter von Cornelius organised his composition of the theme in various scenes, which are also the successive scenes of the narrative in the parable: heaven in the top left, Jesus with David and Peter to the left as the spiritual meaning of the story, the sensible virgins on the right and the outside night scene with the five foolish attendants in the upper right of the frame. Von Cornelius balanced the pictorial volume of Jesus, standing high and rigid, but painted in light hues, with the two ladies standing in full colour, painted in bright and even in hard colours, on the right. Since these virgin attendants stand against the dark background of night, and since the light of the oil lamps is intense here, their colours appear even stronger, more pronounced, clearer and more striking. With this effect of contrast between the hues of higher intensity on the right and the paler, subdued hues on the left, especially in the figure of Jesus, Peter von Cornelius represented the duality of the parable, the opposition of dream and reality, of physical presence and spiritual meaning.

Although there are such contrasts in von Cornelius' picture, the painter hardly applied powerful differences in light and shadows. There is chiaroscuro in the folds of the robes of the figures, so that the figures are finely chiselled. Jesus particularly seems to have been sculptured in white marble. But von Cornelius certainly did not show a Caravagesque picture with harsh light-shadow conflicts. This was also in the medieval Gothic style and fitted with the spiritual theme, which was not really a truly happened story but an exercise of the mind. Von Cornelius also make us think in the way he showed the rightmost girls of pictures of Gherardo della Notte, Gheeraert Seghers, a Flemish-Dutch painter who painted scenes lit by point sources of light. In this scene von Cornelius did apply dark-light gradations but he did this non-obtrusively and certainly much less than was usual in the Baroque period.

Most characteristic of this painting is the solemn, dignified setting of the figures around Jesus, and the vertical directions, which are not only emphasised in the figures but also in the high door panels behind Saint Peter. These are the lines of Gothic, the lines also of spiritual aspiration, and of a style that von Cornelius and the Nazarenes revived in new views.

Peter von Cornelius made a fine picture on the real meaning of the parable, the difference between the reality of a tale and its meaning in mind-images, in a style very characteristic of the Nazarenes. The parable was a nice subject, which surprisingly allowed von Cornelius to develop an interesting subject with a single view. He showed his fine skills as a sensitive artist, as well as his intelligence and his delicate, mastered emotions. The 'Five Sensible and Five Foolish Virgins' thus became a noble picture of Christian ideas – more than powerful expression of emotions or of depiction.

## **Jesus's Passion**

## *The Last Supper*

### **The Last Supper**

Willem Adriaensz Key (1515-1568). Dordrechts Museum – Dordrecht. 1560.

### **The Last Supper**

Gustave Van De Woestijne (1881-1947). Groeninge Museum – Bruges. 1927.

The day of Unleavened Bread came round, on which the Passover had to be sacrificed, and Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make the preparations for us to eat the Passover.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to prepare it?” He said to them, “Look, as you go into the city you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house he enters and tell the owner of the house, “The Master says this to you: Where is the room for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?” The man will show you a large upper room furnished with couches. Make the preparations there.” They set off and found everything as he had said them and prepared the Passover<sup>G38</sup>.

Thus starts the story of Luke of the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples. The story continues with the institution of the Eucharist.

When the time came he took his place at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, “I have ardently longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because I tell you, I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”<sup>G38</sup>

Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall never again drink wine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you: do this in remembrance of me.” He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, “The cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you.”<sup>G38</sup>

After this, Jesus foretold the treachery of Judas. We leave Luke here, for the story of John. John was probably the eyewitness; his story is always more detailed.

Having said this, Jesus was deeply disturbed and declared, “In all truth I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, “Ask who it is he means”. So leaning back close to Jesus’s chest he said, “Who is it, lord?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give the piece of bread that I dip in the dish.” And when he had dipped the piece of bread he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him<sup>G38</sup>.

After these words of John, we often find a disciple of Jesus close to his chest. The ‘disciple Jesus loved’ must have been John himself, too modest to quote his own name in the Gospel.

The Last Supper starts the drama of the Passion of Jesus Christ, his betrayal, his imprisonment, his torture and Crucifixion.

'The Last Supper' of Willem Adriaensz Key was painted around 1560 for the 'Grote Kerk', the main church of the Dutch sea town of Dordrecht. This small city had a tradition of painters born there and working in their hometown, of which the Cuyper family was among the sixteenth century's best known masters. Willem Key was born in Breda around 1515. He worked in Antwerp however since 1542, so this painting was probably commissioned from Dordrecht to the workshop of Key in Antwerp. It is an indication of the love of the Dordrechters for pictures that they ordered paintings from out of other towns. 'The Last Supper' is still a Catholic picture. After the Reformation to Protestantism, the painting disappeared from the main church and moved to the City Hall of Dordrecht<sup>N3</sup>.

Willem Key's picture is a work made by a nicely skilled artist. The painting is typical of Antwerp art of the middle of the sixteenth century. Just as in the 'Wedding at Cana', paintings of the 'Last Supper' are always an occasion for artists to use horizontal strips of composition separated by the white linen of a long rectangular table. In the strip below the table surface you find jars and baskets. Willem Key has shown a basket of fruit that recalls the still lives of later periods of Dutch and Flemish painting. He also showed the traditional dogs under the table. Dogs were always the companions of meals, usually depicted as symbols of loyalty. They are very often associated with images of the Last Supper. The dog forms a painterly balance for the basket here. It is more an element of intimate genre style than a symbol.

Above the table area and in the middle, Jesus is shown. All the apostles on his side are leaning towards him to hear his famous words; "One among you will betray me". John is sitting closely to Jesus, near Jesus's hearth and lips, wanting to hear every whisper of Jesus, just as is told in the Gospels. He is here in the arms of his Lord. On each far side of the table other apostles are discussing Jesus's words of betrayal. Who might he be, who will betray? Jesus told that the hand that would betray sat at the table with them.

The betrayer is Judas, sitting in front of the viewer. Judas is dressed in green, always a dubious colour, with a red cloak and since this is the cloak of the betrayer it will be the red of blood. No apostle looks at him. His neighbour to the left even turns his back to him. And the sign of God is upon Judas. Jesus's hand is held exactly above Judas' head. This is a double play of words and images for on the frame is written in Latin the phrase of Luke, "Look, the hand that will betray me is at this table and it will go with the Son of Man as ordained. But alas for the man who will betray him. And immediately they started to argue among them on who it would be." It would be Judas ' hand and Jesus's hand is held above Judas. Willem Key explicitly wanted to show this moment of the story of the Gospels. Judas also turns his back to the chalice and the salt, both symbols of Jesus and of eternal life in the love of God. The chalice is the symbol of Christ's passion and of the Eucharist, whereas Jesus once told that he was the salt of the earth.

'The Last Supper' of Willem Key is a well-balanced painting, with various symmetries and colours. The setting of the painting is in a style of classic antiquity as had become the fashion in Antwerp and Holland of the sixteenth century. Willem

Key's picture shows a finely skilled work of art, clear and simple, in which some symbols are traditional and in which some new symbols such as the hand held above Jesus are nice ideas to discover.

### *Gustave Van De Woestijne*

Quite a different picture is Gustave Van De Woestijne's 'Last Supper'. This painting was made in 1927. Van De Woestijne was a Flemish expressionist painter, also part of a mainstream of painters in Belgium in the early twentieth century. These artists came together at a village in Flanders called Sint Martens Latem. Van De Woestijne was part of this school of Sint Martens Latem and worked in the village. He was born in Gent in 1881, died just after World War II in 1947 in Brussels.

The spirituality and reflection of Willem Key has not disappeared with the centuries. On the contrary, the view of Jesus has deepened and become more tragic. The same horizontal composition as Willem Key's picture is of course used, but Van De Woestijne's canvas is more high than long. All the figures thus had to hug around Jesus. No symbols like dogs or fruit basket with grapes of the wine of the Eucharist are present anymore. Iconography has been reduced to the essentials since only a glass of wine and a loaf of bread are on the table. The bread is not a delicate host, but a full loaf of workers. The apostles indeed could be miners or fishermen, having gathered a Saturday for a meal among friends. Their hair is pitch black and neatly combed in the 1920 style. The workmen have dressed up for the meal and sad solemnity is in their grave faces. Jesus's passion happens every day again.

Jesus's hair and beard is red as his wine and so is the hair of the figure on the lower left, who then is probably Judas. Jesus looks in that direction, where a particularly rough and sad Judas is sitting and showing his tough, large worker's hands on the table. Look at the difference in hands between Key and Van De Woestijne. As in Willem Key's picture, Jesus's bare feet protrude from under the table. Jesus indeed in Van De Woestijne's picture is crucified already; Jesus is drawn in the same elongated vertical pose as in a Crucifixion.

Whereas Willem Key's picture was still made to please, Van De Woestijne composed his 'Last Supper' around the concept alone. Table and figures are only the symbols that are absolutely necessary to render the idea of the Last Supper. They are the expression of a mind concept. This was one of the characteristics of Expressionist art. Van De Woestijne's painting was made in the twentieth century. Remark how this painting linked with the Flemish tradition of situating images from the New Testament among common people. Art of Flanders and of the Netherlands has kept this feature throughout the centuries. In Flanders devotion was still very much lived in the flesh and the hearth and the stories of Jesus's Passion were still acutely felt in the 1920s.

'Last Supper' paintings are among the most magnificent pictures of the life of Jesus. Leonardo da Vinci made the most famous one in Milan. But also in lesser well-known artists such as Willem Key and Gustave Van De Woestijne do we find true devotion and full understanding of the theme.

*Other paintings:*

**The Last Supper**

Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Around 1306.

**The Last Supper**

Justus van Gent (1460-1480). Palazzo Ducale. Urbino.

**The Last Supper, Instoration of the Eucharist**

Vincente Juan Masip called Juan de Juanes (1523-1579) Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid.

**The Last Supper**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Last Supper**

Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Statens Museum for Kunst. Copenhagen. 1909.

**The Last Supper**

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1745-1750.

**The Last Supper**

Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507). The Sistine Chapel. The Vatican. 1481-1482.

**The Last Supper**

Daniele Crespi (ca. 1600 – 1630). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Last Supper**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1652.

**Christ instoring the Eucharist**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1640.

**The Last Supper**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Scuola di San Rocco. Venice. 1592-1594.

**The Last Supper**

Andrea Bianchi called Vespino. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. 1611-1616.

**The Last Supper**

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528 – 1588). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Last Supper – Il Cenacolo**

Leonardo da Vinci (1542-1519). The Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Milan. Ca. 1497.

**The Last Supper**

Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594). Santa Maria dell'Orto. Venice. 1551-1552.

**The Last Super**

Alessandro Allori (1535-1607). Church of Santa Maria Novella, the Great Cloister Refectory. Florence. Ca. 1590.

**The Last Supper**

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Museum of San Marco, the Refectory. Florence. 1479-1480.

**The Last Supper**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Monastery of San Onofrio or di Fuligno. Florence. Ca. 1490.

**The Last Supper**

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530). Monastery of San Miche a San Salvi. Florence. 1511-1527.

**The Last Supper**

Andrea del Castagno (1421-1457). Church of Sant' Apollonia. Florence. Ca. 1447.

**The Last Supper**

Lorenzo Monaco (1365-1426). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1390.

**The Last Supper**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola. Genoa.  
Before 1620.

**The Last Supper**

Nikolai Gay (1831-1894). The Russian Museum. St Petersburg.

**The Last Supper**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Pinacoteca Nazionale.  
Bologna.

**The Last Supper**

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1565-1632). Church Parrocchiale della  
Natività di Santa Maria Vergine. Cerano. 1594.

## *Christ washes the Feet of his Disciples*

### **Christ Washing Peter's Feet**

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893). The Tate Gallery – London. 1851-1856.

We follow again the story of John.

Jesus got up from the table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand." "Never!" said Peter; "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said, "Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus said, "No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are." He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, "though not all of you are."

When he had washed their feet and put on his garments again he went back to the table. "Do you understand", he said, "what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him."<sup>G38</sup>

Ford Madox Brown has chosen the scene of the Last Supper in which Jesus washes Peter's feet for one of his major paintings. The picture dates from 1851 to 1856, for Brown repainted several details. The scene represents the conventional white clothed table and the apostles, but Brown gave the view an unusually deep angle of view. A surprisingly old and worn-out Peter is sitting in front of Jesus. Brown has painted in Peter a portrait of William Holman Hunt, another Pre-Raphaelite painter of religious scenes. William Holman Hunt was most loyal to the Pre-Raphaelite concepts of painting. He was also the most true to religion. He had been to the Holy Land and made several pictures with a heavy moral message. Ford Madox Brown could choose no better image, nor better a figure, for his Peter.

Peter holds his hands in prayer. He is looking intently at Jesus, in abhorrence of the act. Jesus is a slender, romantic figure. He is using the towel as John recounted. The towel is knotted around Jesus's waist. Jesus is shown as a very humble, noble figure. He bends his head in abject humility. Jesus bows his head to Peter. The apostles are around the table. Remark how Brown has depicted the heads low, just above the surface of the table, caught between the upper side of the table and the border of the frame in a very unconventional view. This kind of depiction pushes the heads of the apostles down as if the skies all weigh on the figures. The composition is very unusual, original, and proves how a theme, even one so well known, is never exhausted.

The apostles are not so much astonished as sad. They are horrified at the sight of the act of Jesus. One apostle holds his head in his hands, another even bites on his hand. It

seems as if the end of the world is coming. Maybe indeed the end of their world, more of their illusions, was near. Either the apostles feared the wrath of Jesus after the washing or they suddenly understood that this Jesus would not be the King of the Jews after all. Desolation is on the faces of the disciples. Yet, the next apostle, to the left of the table, unlaces his shoes.

Ford Madox Brown's picture is very unconventional in composition, in detail and in style of colours. It is a religious scene of the Victorian age, which was the period also of French Classicism, Realism and beginning Impressionism. But the Pre-Raphaelites sought the themes of more spirituality again, like the later French Symbolists. They were drawn to the spirituality of Christianity as some of the French Romantics.

Ford Madox Brown's way of painting is somewhat rough here, in hard colours. Brown has used the splendid dark brown for Peter, dark green beneath and hard red behind Peter. But a golden cloth makes the transition to the pure white of the table. This white then introduces Jesus in lighter green.

Brown has added traditional details like a pitcher under the table and a halo around Jesus's head. A purse lies on the table next to the disciple who is unwinding his sandals, a symbol of Judas. There is much talk of Judas in John's account; Judas seems to have always been in Jesus's mind during the Last Supper. Judas also in Brown's painting is the only apostle who seems to be insensible to the general horror.

Above the table, the background is completely black and some of the faces emerge only with difficulty out of the shadows. Ford Madox Brown painted in full realism. Some of the faces are portraits. Thus, the bearded disciple just to the left of Peter's head is Dante Gabriel Rossetti, another of the very first Pre-Raphaelites. Brown's figures are ordinary people. Even but for his halo, Jesus could be an ordinary young worker.

Ford Madox Brown adhered to socialist thought. In his later years he taught at the 'Working Men's College'. He made several social paintings such as 'Work' and 'The Last of England'. The first picture, 'Work', shows workers of various professions of manual labour; the latter shows poor emigrants leaving an England of unemployment. Brown worked in towns like Liverpool and Manchester. He made murals for the Manchester City Hall. Thus, he was a witness to the misery of the peak of the industrial revolution in England. He was a witness of all the spiritual poverty that was brought along by the exploitation of workers and of the miserable conditions in which they lived. The Pre-Raphaelites tried to escape this world in Romanticism. But Brown did not escape. He did not close his eyes to the misery. He treated subjects of social realism. His 'Christ washing Peter's feet' can also be seen in this perspective. The realism suits the theme. Brown has caught and shown feelings in the disciples and in Jesus as might really have happened, though in more drama than was necessary. Other interpretations to how the disciples reacted can and were given, but Brown certainly has given much thought to the Gospel scene and he must have wanted particularly to stress the sentiments of the apostles.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ washing the Feet of his Disciples**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Museo del Prado. Madrid. Around 1547.

**The washing of the Feet**

Giovanni Agostino da Lodi (active 1500-1520). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1500.

## *The Institution of the Eucharist*

### **The Institution of the Eucharist**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1640.

The synoptic Evangelists recall the institution of the Eucharist. We follow the account of Matthew.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. “Take it and eat”, he said, “this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them saying, “Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. From now on, I tell you, I shall never again drink wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father.”<sup>G38</sup>

Nicolas Poussin was French. He was born in 1594 and left his home village to learn to draw and to paint in Rouen. Little is known of his years in France except that he was not successful in the beginning and out of poverty and hardships had to return to his parents' home before going to Paris. French painting had not been very resplendent in the sixteenth century, not excelled in individuality. It had not been an example of powerful innovation. Art was mostly limited to the Parisian court and to the circle of magnificent palaces of the Ile de France. Foremost among these was Fontainebleau.

For the decoration of his palace of Fontainebleau king François I had called many Italian artists, among whom Rosso Fiorentino and Il Primaticcio to France. The palaces demanded light and intellectual scenes, not too violent in emotions, solemn scenes but nice, and depicting mythological heroes or antique hunting scenes. Austere scenes of Christianity were not too much in fashion. It may well be that because of this direction to lightness, clarity, simplicity in themes of antiquity that French painting became later also foremost a Classicist art.

Nicolas Poussin may have seen these pictures in Paris. He admired them and he longed for the source of their themes, Rome. It was not easy for him to get enough funds for the travel but in 1624, thirty years old and not particularly a successful artist in France; he arrived in Rome via Venice. He would remain in Rome until his death in 1665, helped by wealthy cardinals. From Rome out his fame reached France. Cardinal Richelieu who governed France for Louis XIII called him home in 1640. Poussin decorated the ‘Grande Galérie’ of the Louvre palace, but soon returned to Rome in 1642.

Nicolas Poussin is not the father of French Classicism. That honour should go to Simon Vouet who was four years older than Poussin was. But Poussin was certainly its most accomplished artist. Nicolas Poussin had a very strong personality to discover or quite naturally paint in his own way in the middle of the vortex of the Baroque period. The strong examples of diverse styles he saw were of genius artists like Caravaggio, Orazio Gentileschi, Bartolomeo Manfredi and the Bolognese artists like Annibale Carracci and Guido Reni. He may have seen Titian's canvases as well as works of Paolo Veronese, Palma Vecchio and Palma Giovane in Venice. Titian, the

Palmas and Veronese also painted many classical themes. Poussin took up the themes of his epoch but he added a very intellectual touch. More than in any other painter of the Baroque period we find in Poussin the intellectual painter of themes as universal images. Poussin was a scholar and a painter of the mind.

Nicolas Poussin had read many books of old Latin writers such as Virgil and Ovid. He did paint scenes from the life of Jesus and themes from the Old Testament but best known are his scenes of mythological antiquity. He composed these in novel ways and favoured allegories in which he could assemble many figures in new themes. He usually painted many or several figures in a picture and his scenes were always the products of profound reflection on life itself and on the place of the arts in life. Poussin was a visual philosopher. He could as well paint landscapes as imposing architectures or interior scenes. But his student Claude Gellée le Lorrain would better and more pursue the art of landscape painting. Like the greatest of all artists, like Michelangelo and Titian and Caravaggio, Poussin was interested in man. But he was interested not in the common man of France or Rome. He was interested in the universal man of the intellect.

Poussin lived in Rome and only returned to France for a brief time between 1640 and 1642. One of the first paintings he made in that period was 'Jesus Christ institutes the Eucharist'. The picture was of course made for one of the great palaces of Louis XIII around Paris, for the castle of Saint Germain en Laye. The painting marvellously blends Baroque, Caravaggism and Classicism.

'The Institution of the Eucharist' is baroque in the curves of the cloaks of the apostles. The cloaks are depicted generously flowing around the bodies of the holy men, in ways as Rubens would not have able to better. All in these cloaks is movement. Movement of emotions can be found in the attitudes of the thirteen figures. Jesus makes a blessing sign with outstretched arm and hand, the blessing of which talks Matthew. The apostles express their feelings in obvious ways. One disciple holds his hands in prayers; another is knelt with the open arms of ecstasy. Several apostles hold their hands to their hearth in surprise; still others throw their arms to the heavens in wonder or in horror of unbelief. Movement, direct display of feelings, flowing curves associated with a profusion of various rich colours are all elements of the Baroque style and Nicolas Poussin knew how to apply the style elements to remain in the fashion of his days.

Poussin even used some style elements invented by Caravaggio, for he situated the scene at evening, inside a hall lit by one hanging oil lamp. Thus Poussin painted the contrasts between the source of light and the play of shadows in the robes and cloaks of the figures. A single source point of light of course allowed the skill of the painter to be demonstrated, his mastering in depicting the play of shadows on figures and objects. Thus, Poussin combined the two new styles in painting that he had learned in Rome and presented an exercise in visual arts to his commissioners in a credible composition.

Nicolas Poussin however added his own more austere personality. He succeeded in adding the spirituality and epic of Classicist art as well, and his own reflections on the basis of Roman Catholic ritual. The scene is characterised by austere vertical lines. These lines can be seen in the high columns of the vast hall, in the long chain of the

oil lamp that hangs from the ceiling and in the standing poses of Jesus and the apostles. Poussin broke with the traditional setting of the Last Supper pictures, which favour horizontal lines. Thus a more static, solemn feeling emanates from his picture. The setting in the Roman hall is a reference to antiquity and so are various other elements. Classic wisdom can be seen in the bearded faces of the men, including Jesus whose face is surrounded by the red-brown curling hair of a classical hero. The cloaks are worn like Roman togas.

The Eucharist scene is explicitly shown. Jesus presents the dish with the pieces of unleavened bread that are now the hosts. The chalice of wine is shown clearly in the middle. The symbolism is direct since the chalice that would hence represent Jesus's blood is exactly under the point where the diagonals of the frame meet. Thus attention is drawn immediately to the chalice, the essence of the Eucharist. Above the chalice hangs the light of the Holy Spirit referring also to the words of Jesus, "I am the Light of the World".

Admire the composition around the chalice. There are two groups of figures on each side. The colours of these figures respond in symmetry. On the right, Jesus wears a red cloak and Poussin knew this tradition; further on the right is an apostle with a blue cloak and then follows a yellow-brown colour area. The same sequence of colours is on the left of the chalice. Such symmetries are also to be found in the two apostles that are knelt. The structure of the painting also is very sound. The two disciples that are knelt are positioned along the two diagonals. Their heads are held upwards to the light, thus forming a triangle or pyramid that was of old the style element that secured solidity and stability in a picture. Furthermore, all masses are balanced on each side of the chalice. The result is a marvel of colours, of equilibrium between movement and static in the solemn restraint that fitted so well the character and reflection of Poussin.

If this 'Institution of the Eucharist' was one of the first pictures of Nicolas Poussin in his home France, it was a formidable masterpiece of a genius artisan that must have baffled experts. In a seemingly simple theme that was rendered in a transparent, clear scene, Poussin had succeeded to teach the various style elements of his time. He delivered a new view leaving the horizontality of preceding pictures behind. And on top of that he could show how profound he was able to think about Roman Catholicism for contrary to most of other 'Last Supper' paintings, Poussin chose to show the sacrament itself.

The sacraments are symbols or signs that were first taken by Roman Catholic theology as instituted by Jesus himself. The sacraments were mysteries that brought inner spiritual grace. There are seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, accepted as dogma at the Council of Trent that lasted from 1545 to 1563, in defiance of the Reformation that reduced the number of sacraments. The sacraments were Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance (confession and absolution), the Anointing of the Sick (extreme unction), Marriage and the Holy Orders. The Council of Trent stated that Christ was entirely present both in the consecrated wine and the consecrated bread but left it to the Pope to decide of whether or not the chalice should be granted to the laity. Nicolas Poussin made the chalice his central item.

Nicolas Poussin made this painting probably as an introduction to the French Court. He showed most of his skills in composition, colours and erudition. The painting bears so much all the ingredients of the new arts. Yet he was not pleased in Paris and soon returned back to Rome. Here his art was more appreciated. The French Royal Court later would buy many of his works made in Italy.

## *Christ's Farewell to his Mother*

### **Christ's Farewell to his Mother**

Bernhard Strigel. (1460-1528) Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Gemäldegalerie – Berlin.

Bernhard Strigel was a German painter of the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. He was born in Memmingen around 1460 and died there in 1528. This was the time that German painting reached maturity and fame. Well-known painters were the Master Lcz (active 1480-1500), who may have been Lucas Cranach the Elder whose dates are known as 1472-1553, Hans Baldung called Grien (1484/1485-1545), Hans Suess von Kulmbach (around 1480-1522), Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), Hans Burgkmair (1473-1531), Albrecht Altdorfer (around 1480-1538) and Wolf Huber (1480/1485-1553). Hans Holbein (1497/1498-1543) should be named of the next generation and he worked much in England.

These artists painted in various parts of Germany and Austria, from the Western Alsace region to the town of Vienna. The centre of artistic energy lay first in Cologne, then in Nuremberg where Dürer and his students worked. The Cranach family also worked there and so did Hans Baldung Grien. Other centres were Augsburg, where the Emperor held the Reichstäge and the rich towns of Franconia like Halle. Bernhard Strigel worked much for Emperor Maximilian I. Not so many paintings are left of that period and the remaining works show a great variety of styles, as is the German mindset. Germany always remained very regional. Each 'Land' was proud of its independence and preserved it jealously till the nineteenth century. Even today Germany is a federation in which each Land has its own elected members of Parliament, elections being held at different times for each Land. As of old, Germans are only united to elect their President, the Reichstag or Parliament and the Kanzler or Prime Minister.

The picture 'Christ takes Leave of his Mother' is remarkable. It is different in general feeling from all other paintings of the period. It was part of what must have been a very large altarpiece, maybe painted for the town of Isny in the region of Allgäu<sup>D1</sup>. This origin however remains uncertain. Two further panels are in a museum in Karlsruhe; four other were burnt in Berlin in 1945. A pity, because these are definitely masterpieces that should be known beyond German borders.

The panel we look at is of the Late International Gothic period. To this testify the long, vertical, static figures. But this panel in particular, if seen in isolation from Gothic style and in isolation from the other remaining panels of the altarpiece, is very original, powerful and individual. This picture could be considered as a work of a much later period, maybe even as the work of a late nineteenth century painter who would have wanted to express a religious scene in a highly stylised way.

Jesus is standing in the middle of the frame, holding and consoling his mother. Mary is in misery and needs to be supported. She bows her head deep; she has the open mouth of crying out in pain and desperateness. Fate has finally broken her when she heard the last private message of Jesus, which was that she could not be part of what

would happen next, that is of Jesus's passion. It is hard for a person loving another human being to have to abandon that one to his fate, yet that was exactly what Jesus has asked. Admire the tender, loving face of Jesus. Rarely has a painter better succeeded in showing the good and the love in a man.

On both sides of Jesus are groups of figures. Mary's ladies stand to the right. They stand silently. They are compassionate and reverent. A group of disciples of Jesus are on the left, somewhat hidden between the trees of the garden. Saint Peter stands in front, white-bearded and devote. These also hold their distance. Notice how remarkably Bernhard Strigel has created space and depth. Space by setting Mary's companions somewhat higher. Depth by showing the disciples further away, more hidden and smaller because of perspective, thus creating the distance. The background of the painting is also very deep. It is a far landscape with trees of full foliage, a medieval castle and the high blue-white alpine mountains. This was the hour of Mary first, not just of two loving people keeping intimate, so it was appropriate to have the ladies of Mary closer than Jesus's apostles. The distance between ladies and apostles and Jesus and Mary emphasises the drama in the picture.

'Jesus saying Farewell to his Mother' of Bernhard Strigel is really a marvellous picture of early German painting and Strigel was a great master of which it is a pity that we have so few works left. The scene is powerful, well composed, in good colours. Strigel even dared to put the darker tones in front and the brighter ones in the back. Mary is in dark blue-green, which is scarcely the conventional colour of her cloak. Jesus is somewhat lighter, but still in brown that is dark beneath. Contrasting with this is the green and gold of the interior of the cloak of Mary's companion at the extreme right.

Bernhard Strigel was a painter of the Late International Gothic period in Germany, a period in which apparently Renaissance ideas had not yet fully influenced the painter. Strigel has brought us a picture that is very original in depiction. More interesting is the calm, strong, unwavering, direct expression of emotion. Would we not feel exactly the same way as Jesus and Mary in this picture? Strigel, from over the centuries brings us a message of universality of human emotions. The painter shows us conclusively how little difference there is between humans of the early sixteenth century and ourselves. There could not be a better homage to Jesus's message, here given by a very individual personality.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ's Farewell to his Mother**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1521.

**Christ taking Leave of his Mother**

Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538). The National Gallery. London.

**Christ's Farewell to his Mother**

Giovanni Busi called Giovanni Cariani (1480/1485 – 1547). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. Ca. 1525.

**Christ taking Leave of his Mother**

Cornelis Engelbrechtsz (1468-1533). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

## *The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane*

### **The Agony in the Garden**

Andrea Mantegna (1430-1506). The National Gallery – London.

Jesus made his way as usual to the Mount of Olives, with the disciples following. When he reached the place he said to them, “Pray not to be put to the test”. Then he withdrew from them, about a stone’s throw away, and knelt down and prayed. “Father,” he said, “if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine.” Then an angel appeared to him, coming from heaven to give him strength. In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. When he rose from prayer he went to the disciples and found them sleeping for sheer grief. And he said to them, “Why are you asleep? Get up and pray not to be put to the test.”<sup>G38</sup>

So far goes the story of Luke. Matthew told additionally that Jesus took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, John and James.

Andrea Mantegna made a painting of the ‘Agony in the Garden’ that became one of his best-known pictures, not in the least because it is the pride of the National Gallery in London. The striking feature of the picture is the molten lead curvature of the landscape that bends to a road leading to Jerusalem. Mantegna’s vision is the dream of Peter, James and John. The scene does not really exist except in the minds of the apostles. Therefore, Jerusalem consists of skyscraper towers leaning against ferocious mountains that rise as fingers to the heavens. A dream is a bend of the mind, leading from one scene to the other and thus Mantegna’s vision unfolds from the sleeping disciples to the crowd that is approaching to arrest Jesus.

Andrea Mantegna was a very individual painter. He worked during the Italian Renaissance, but he always had his particular view on the world, which sometimes was in conflict with the visions of his time. When he needed the static of Gothic, he applied that style and when he needed strong emotion he changed the style. Mantegna regularly went more profoundly into any subject than most painters before and after him. His views are always new and surprising. His ideas for a scene are fresh and mature. Mantegna had a profound and very rich imagination.

In the ‘Agony in the Garden’, Jesus does not confront the viewer. Mantegna stayed close to the story of Luke so Jesus is seen at a distance. Mantegna’s way of representation forces our attention to the sleepers and thus he enhances our conviction that this picture is a dream scene.

Mantegna stayed close to the story of the Evangelists. He read the story of all the holy writers and assembled the details. The apostles Peter, James and John are sleeping on the ground. Jesus is some distance away and seeing the angels. The angels are giving him strength. Jesus is kneeling alone. He wanted intimacy and that is exactly how Mantegna showed Jesus: away from the viewer, with his back to the viewer. The scene plays on the Mount of Olives, so Jesus is on a symbolic mount. And the arresting party is already coming to the garden.

In a dream it is acceptable for a cloud to descend, bearing young children angels showing Jesus the cross of his near Passion. In the story of Luke the angels comfort Jesus and Mantegna has shown the angels thus presenting to Jesus his coming triumph. The cross is of wood and to the right of the picture one can see the dead trunk, already in the form of a beam for the cross. The tree next to the dead trunk is also almost dead; the tree bears practically no leaves. It is a symbol of death and so is the black scavenger bird or raven in the top of the tree. Dreams also have hallucinating aspects; Mantegna could not miss this aspect of dreams.

Particular aspects of the picture are indeed more hallucinating. Such is Jerusalem, depicted as an ancient New York. But this was painted in the late fifteenth century. Towers rise menacingly out of the desert. Mantegna was a Florentine. Florence had many high and slender buildings, which came to be constructed both out of protection and because as many people as possible wanted to live inside the fortified walls of the city. Mantegna only had to amplify this image of Florence. Skyscrapers as a particular aspect of towns were familiar to him.

Jerusalem is barren of love and compassion. So tells us the desert ground of what should be the Garden of Gethsemane in which this scene allegedly happened. Desolation, hallucination, isolated symbols are what dreams are made off, exactly as Mantegna designed in his painting. All this then is rendered in crystal clear line and detail. Even the sharp clouds in the skies and the soft hills with the palm tree of the lost Eden are painted in the uncompromising style of the rational Florentine. A Florentine was incapable of painting a vague dream hulled in mysterious mist of ages, in soft colours that would flow into each other. In Mantegna's picture, all areas are clearly separated in form and colours as in a fresco. The yellows and browns dominate, but Mantegna has added pure colours in only two separate instances, which are enough to enliven the picture and make it more striking. He painted splendid blue and light red in Peter, some red and a very little pure yellow in James and John and then he brought some of these colours in the advancing party of figures to the right. The pure colours are thus balanced in the frame and they are only present in the lower strip under the symbolic Mount of Olives on which Jesus receives the vision of the angels. Dreams are not in colours, so the light brown pervades the whole picture, but against a background of a dream also sometimes particular aspects appear crystal clear. Thus Mantegna painted the 'Agony in the Garden'.

This painting is a rare vision. Foremost it tells us again of the very many painters that have read the gospels, absorbed them and tried to live in every scene they would depict. How sincerely must Mantegna have thought about this scene to come forward with such a novel idea! How powerful his imagination to be able to surprise us after the centuries. Mantegna kept the idea days and days in his head. He turned the idea over and over. He must have been desperate at times in search for new ways of representation, compromising for no existing concept. The result is pure spirituality, novelty, and a surprise of heavenly imagination. Mantegna had faith.

*Other paintings:***Christ on the Mount of Olives**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Before 1350.

**Christ on the Mount of Olives**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

**Christ on the Mount of Olives**

Jan Gossaert (1478-1532). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. Ca. 1510.

**Christ on the Mount of Olives**

El Greco. Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. 1610-1614.

**Christ in Gethsemane (the Mount of Olives)**

Ary Scheffer (1795-1858). Dordrechts Museum. Dordrecht. 1839.

**The Shadow of Death**

William Holman Hunt (1827-1919). Manchester City Art Gallery. Manchester. 1870-1873.

**Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane**

Giulio Campi (1502-1572). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan.

**The Agony in the Garden**

Giovan Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1600). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan.

**The Agony in the Garden**

Antonio Allegri called Correggio (ca. 1494-1534). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. Ca. 1525.

**The Agony in the Garden**

Sebastiano Conca (1679-1764). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane**

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Christ praying in the Garden**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1577/1578.

**Christ in the Garden of Olives**

Andrea Mantegna (1410/1411-1504). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. 1459.

**Christ on the Mount of Olives**

Wolf Huber (ca. 1485-1553). Alte Pinakothek - Munich. Ca. 1530.

**The Agony in the Garden**

Francesco del Cairo (1607-1665). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1630-1633.

## *Judas and the Arrest of Christ*

### **The Taking of Christ**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery – Bristol.

The climax of Jesus's life starts with his arrest on the Mount of Olives. The four Evangelists tell all the story of the Taking of Christ. We follow Luke's version.

Suddenly, while Jesus was still speaking to the apostles on the Mount of Olives, a number of men appeared, and at the head of them was the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, who went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?" His followers, seeing what was about to happen, said, "Lord, shall we use our swords?" And one of them struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. But at this Jesus said, "That is enough." And touching the man's ear he healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the Temple guard and elders, who had come for him, "Am I a bandit, that you had to set out with swords and clubs? When I was among you in the Temple day after day you never made a move to lay hands on me. But this is your hour; this is the reign of darkness." They seized him and took him to the high priest's house. <sup>G38</sup>

John adds to this that it was Simon Peter who struck off the ear of the high priest's servant, of whom he also gives the name: Malchus.

Anthony van Dyck painted this scene of the 'Taking of Christ' around 1620. Van Dyck, painter of the city of Antwerp, was then twenty-one years old. That same year he would leave briefly for England, where his fame had grown as a promising young talent. At the end of the year after, in 1621, he would leave Antwerp for Italy to stay there for six years, mainly in Genoa. Van Dyck was young and ambitious. Antwerp, though a metropolis and seaport where ships from the entire known world accosted, was too small for him. He wanted to see the world and he was confident in his skills.

Van Dyck's painting 'The Taking of Christ' is a picture of these younger years. He had already made many portraits, which would become the core of his work and the speciality of skill that would many years later draw him to the court of the king of England. He made also many religious scenes. Van Dyck always made religious scenes when in Antwerp. He would do so after his return from Italy too, because portraits were not so in first demand in Antwerp. This kind of paintings – portraits – were foremost asked in England and somewhat less in Holland, but Holland did not have the rich, cultivated court life of the King of England. English court life particularly appealed to van Dyck. And portraits were the main paintings appreciated in England.

'The Taking of Christ' is typical of Antwerp Baroque art as instituted and brought to its zenith of fame by Pieter Paul Rubens. Around 1620 van Dyck occasionally worked for Rubens in the latter's workshop, even though van Dyck possessed his own atelier. Van Dyck was an admirer of Rubens and he was grateful to him. He painted a portrait of Isabella Brandt, Rubens' wife, and he gave the picture to Rubens when he left for Italy. Van Dyck may as well have given or sold a version of the 'Taking of Christ' to

Rubens, for such a version was acquired later by the Spanish King Philip IV from Rubens' estate. This picture is now in the Museo Nacional del Prado of Madrid<sup>B10</sup>. The version we present is from the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. This is the second version and probably the originally commissioned altarpiece. Van Dyck made several sketches and even another oil painting in smaller format as preparation for the image we look at. So much preparation shows that this was a major picture of Van Dyck, and also important to him personally. Indeed, it is one of the principal acts in the tragedy of Jesus since it represents his betrayal.

Jesus is standing serene and very sad, almost but not entirely in the middle of the crowd in the Garden of Gethsemane. The time is night. The scene is only lit by a high torch-holder, which dramatically lightens the trees on the upper left. Jesus has abandoned himself to his fate. Van Dyck has masterly succeeded in showing this resignation on the face of Jesus. Next to Jesus, in the exact middle of the frame, stands Judas. Judas is enveloped in a wide yellow-brown cloak. This cloak seems so broad as also to want to envelop Jesus in a cloud of hatred, exactly as Giotto painted the scene in the thirteenth century in the Arena Church of Padua. In this picture of van Dyck, that will not happen. Yet, the threat is imposing. Judas holds Jesus's hands to immobilise him and thus make sure that the mob accompanying him can seize Jesus. A half-naked Temple guard keeps a rope hidden behind Judas' back so that Jesus would not see it. An invisible, anonymous figure throws the noose of the rope over Jesus. Only the hands of the act of the taking are shown by van Dyck. The ignominious act will remain anonymous. Humanity betrays Jesus and not just Judas. Another lecherous old guard to the right also has gripped Jesus's shoulder. This man looks intently at the success of the rope that will imprison Jesus. In the other versions, van Dyck also has shown the violent act of Peter slaying off the ear of Malchus. But in this final image the high drama remains concentrated on Jesus and Judas alone.

Judas has bent forward to kiss Jesus and exactly at this moment the rope will fall over Jesus, thus deciding his fate. Van Dyck has presented this very moment. Showing the rope in pictures of the betrayal theme was quite rare; van Dyck used it to heighten the tragedy of the scene. Tragedy is enhanced also by the violent movements, the whirling of gestures, the curves of the rope, the curling colours all around Jesus, and the lines of the wild tree that bends over Jesus and that almost crushes the scene. Remark the lines of the tree leaves above, and the colour lines in the shoulders of the men on the left. Lances and torches are held in all directions.

The picture of the 'Taking of Christ' is a whirlwind of emotions in the night. Van Dyck has brought the drama to its zenith, using soft colours and the shadows of the night as rarely Rubens has dared to do. The scene must have happened this way: betrayal in confusion, and capture with bad consciences, bad faith and wrong, warped minds to tear down someone better than the crowd. The ultimate Judas act.

*Other paintings:*

**The Arrest of Christ**

Matthias Stomer. National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1641.

**The Arrest of Christ**

Dieric Bouts (1420-1474). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Around 1450-1460.

**The Arrest of Christ in the Garden**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1618-1620.

**Eight Scenes from Christ's Passion**

Hans Holbein the Elder (ca. 1460/1465-1524). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1502.

**The Judas Kiss**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). The National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. Around 1603.

**The Judas Kiss**

Pierre Subleyras (1699-1749). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**Christ taken Prisoner**

Wolf Huber (ca. 1485-1553). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1530.

## *Jesus before the Sanhedrin*

### **Christ and Caiaphas**

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca. (1494-1557). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

The men who had arrested Jesus led him off to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance right to the high priest's palace, and he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus, however false, on which they might have him executed. But they could not find any, though several lying witnesses came forward. Eventually two came forward and made a statement. This man said, "I have power to destroy the Temple of God and in three days build it up". The high priest then rose and said to him, "Have you no answer to that? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, "I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered him, "It is you who say it. But I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven". Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed. What need of witnesses have we now? There! You have just heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?" They answered, "He deserves to die." Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists; other said as they struck him, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who hit you then?"<sup>G38</sup>

Thus goes the story of Matthew of Jesus's accusation before the high priest Caiaphas. Francesco Ubertini, a painter of Florence called Bachiacca, who lived from 1494 to 1557, made a picture of this part of Jesus's last ordeal. Baccio and Francesco Ubertini were students of Pietro Perugino in Florence. Vasari told in the 'Lives of the Artists', in the life of Perugino, that Bachiacca was a 'most diligent master of small figures' and that he 'took delight in making grotesques'<sup>G46</sup>. Bachiacca made paintings for wooden cabinets and also cartoons for tapestries.

A serene Jesus is brought, hands bound, before the high priest. Jesus looks gentle and youthful. He is not yet the man of sorrows and neither are signs of torture shown on him. Jesus is even slightly smiling; he does not look at Caiaphas and seems to remain in the stoic silence as is told in the Gospels. He is dressed in a flowing robe that covers him completely and that even hangs down very low to the floor. Jesus has long, well-kept hair, which lends him an air of intellectualism and frailty. This way of depicting Jesus was maybe not new, but also not usual.

Jesus is a serene youth but around him are cruel, weird faces of soldiers and scribes. Guards are bringing Jesus before the high priest. The scribes are arguing to Caiaphas, pointing out the wrong statements on Jesus. Bachiacca has shown the scribes in the lavish dresses of his contemporary Italy. One scribe particularly, the one on the extreme left side, looks like madman. His red hair is dressed on his head, his lips are full and opened as if in a scream. Bachiacca certainly wanted to show some of the mad cruelty around Jesus in this figure.

Caiaphas is sitting like an oriental potentate on a throne in a courtyard. In the times of Ubertini the cruel men that judged Jesus could be represented as the rulers of the East, the Arab and Turk Muslims, who fought Europeans all around the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe. The high priest has the cold face of the sophisticated, smart and scheming Arab ruler. Ubertini has brought several images together, for Jesus wears already here the purple robe that the Roman soldiers would put around him mockingly. And in the background is a small scene wherein Pilate washes his hands. This is a scene of the future.

Bachiacca's aim with this picture was clearly to give a vivid tale of a story that happened in a far land. The painter thus emphasised the oriental features of the scene and showed how Jesus was condemned not by learned Jews but by cruel Arabs who always were a menace to trade in the Mediterranean and who had defeated the European knights in the Holy Land.

Bachiacca took delight in painting and in composing grotesques. Some of the artist's preferences for exotic scenes are shown in 'Christ and Caiaphas'. Bachiacca used Orientalism, even in the Roman Pilate scene, to induce the general exotic feeling. He worked towards the exaggerations of the later Italian Mannerist painters and is thus one of the first artists of this movement. The evolution towards fantasies and wild images that could finally also be shown by painters, can be discerned in this picture.

### **Christ before Caiaphas**

Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585). Accademia Linguistica di belle Arti. Genoa. 1570-1575.

Luca Cambiaso, a painter of Genoa, made also a picture of 'Jesus before Caiaphas'. This painting is remarkable in several features for the sixteenth century. It was night when Jesus was brought to the Sanhedrin, and Jesus was brought to Caiaphas' house. So Cambiaso painted the scene inside the house, where the figures are only lit by candlelight. Cambiaso was one of the first painters to show scenes lit by the artificial light of candles. During Gothic and Renaissance times painters flooded their pictures by the divine light that came from all sides, so that shadows were practically absent. They also used the natural light from the sun or from the skies, but even then they were spare with shadows. Chiaroscuro was of course necessary to shape the volume of the bodies of the personages, but the effects of light and shadow were otherwise seldom dramatic. Luca Cambiaso was one of the truly famous painters to introduce candlelight scenes, with powerful effects of shadows. Later, other painters used this technique and made the style typically their own, such as Gherard van Honthorst (1590- 1656) – who was even called Gherardo delle Notte (Gerard of the Nights) – in Italy, as well as Georges de La Tour (1593 – 1652) in France. These painters were a generation elder than Luca Cambiaso. Cambiaso made many pictures in which he privileged light effects over colour and in this way he certainly was a forerunner for other Genoese artists such as Alessandro Magnasco (1667 – 1749), and other Italian painters like Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625) and maybe even the great Caravaggio (1570 – 1610). Caravaggio and other painters in Rome could study

Cambiaso's works in the Giustiniani collection of Rome. The roots of the Giustiniani were in Genoa and they had many pictures of Luca Cambiaso. Cambiaso then could have had a determining influence on the better known innovations of Caravaggio.

Luca Cambiaso's painting is also remarkable because we sense a simplification of forms that transformed the curved, organic volumes of the human body to straight lines and hooked shapes. Look for instance at Jesus's face and legs. Jesus's face is almost flat and expressionless. The line of his nose lies in the continuation of the line of his forehead. Jesus's robe is tended in straight lines around his legs. His arms are not curved but make well-determined angles with his body. Such straight lines we also remark on Caiaphas' body. Luca Cambiaso enhanced the long, vertical lines of the standing personages in the elongated figures of the Sanhedrin. He drew figures composed of almost elementary shapes: of cubes, cones, squares and triangles, near-perfect ovals. Cambiaso may have learned this technique from his father Giovanni Cambiaso, who is believed to have adopted a technique of subdividing the body in elementary shapes, to better draw the effects of perspective on the human body in foreshortening effects. In the sixteenth century other painters such as Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer made studies on the proportions of the body. We sense in 'Jesus before Caiaphas' the rapid, underlying sketch of straight shapes, filled in later and softened with colours – which remained sparse – and the artist seemed to have been unable to transform the simple shapes after all. Luca Cambiaso may have left this process visible, particularly in Jesus with an aim. Cambiaso obtained that Jesus is otherwise shown than the other personages. That effect would mean that Jesus was more the symbol for Cambiaso than the real man.

In later centuries, and we have to go now to the beginning of the twentieth century, artists sought in perfect squares, rectangles and triangles the shapes that were not to be found in nature, so they understood these were truly man-created shapes, and man-imagined forms. The fundamental geometric shapes therefore received a meaning that was mysterious if not transcendental, a meaning of some form of supremacy of man's mind over nature. If Luca Cambiaso used sharp outlines on the figure of Jesus in this sense, Cambiaso's painting is not only a striking but also a premonitory idea and at least an idea of genius.

In the scene of 'Jesus before Caiaphas' we see an imposing high Priest painted with a truer-than-life realism, such as one would have expected only from Caravaggio a few decades later. This feature also adds to the fact that we are in the presence of a rare and special picture. Luca Cambiaso painted marvellously the psychology of Caiaphas. The man has probably been drawn out of his first sleep. His eyes are deeply set in his face, in the dark shadows, maybe even still half closed. Caiaphas does not speak but looks at the evidence that the Jews have written down from him on several small sheets of paper. He fingers these pages and points them out accusingly for Jesus. Still, with his deep-set eyes we do not know whether Caiaphas really looks at Jesus too. He has an old, stern, dignified face. His mouth is closed in a determined, hard way. Like his eyes, his mouth – which might betray his emotions and reactions – is inwardly drawn. Caiaphas' beard covers his mouth and is forced forward. This man will judge without remorse, without pity and without showing any possible personal reaction of doubt or compassion. He will not betray any personal feelings by a movement of his face. His face has become set with time to his function. Cambiaso painted Caiaphas to be a rock among the people, solid, opulent, broad in shoulders and chest. Cambiaso

brought most of the light of the candles to Caiaphas' face, so that the viewer has no doubt that this man is the ultimate judge and the very main personage of the painting.

In most other paintings of this scene of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Jesus remains the main figure. Luca Cambiaso did otherwise, which is the sign of a powerful and self-confident artist that dared to innovate. Only a powerful artist can draw forceful personages. We have seen only few paintings in which such a strong man like Cambiaso's Caiaphas is shown. The only other figure on which some light from the candles is thrown is Jesus. Jesus stands before Caiaphas humbled and silent. Jesus looks at the papers of his accusation, but in doing that he bends his head downwards, in defeat. Caiaphas has most authority here, and accuses. Jesus knows what will come; here it is not he who commands, and he is already much directed inwardly, into himself, as many prisoners do when a judgement is inevitable and known. Jesus addresses with his eyes, which are likewise almost hidden, no men from the group and also not the viewer. Luca Cambiaso emphasised with light the simpler, more artificial volumes of Jesus's body members, of Jesus's arms and legs. Jesus is not really present in the scene, or only half present, as compared to Caiaphas, who is solid materiality. Jesus's body is also almost hidden between soldiers. Cambiaso painted the sheer black shadow of a soldier, who turns his back to the audience, between Caiaphas and Jesus. A word of incomprehension separates the two, and violence separates them. Caiaphas should indeed not confront Jesus directly and Luca Cambiaso did well to bring a dark mass between the two figures, so that these remained the only two easily visible, different, striking personages of the painting. Cambiaso's image is thus perfect in its immediacy of effect, of its evoking of easy understanding by the spectator of the two actors of the tragedy.

Of the other figures we only see the faces, some of which are only imperfectly painted with colours and less drawn with lines. Here we see only grimaces, rage, ugliness and even idiocy, as we might expect in a painting by Jerome Bosch or Lorenzo Lotto. These faces evoke in the viewer the horror and injustice of the scene. Cambiaso painted a picture in which the vertical lines dominate, but all the faces are situated in a narrow horizontal band, where the action plays, and the faces encircle and imprison Jesus. Still, there is an exception in the painting.

Jesus looks down to Caiaphas pointing fingers. That look leads however also the viewer to the lower left, where Cambiaso painted the figure of a boy. The boy is out of place among the Sanhedrin and the soldiers. But the viewer readily discovers the link between Jesus and the child. The viewer observes that the child is, like Caiaphas and Jesus, painted in bright light. That should be an indication enough that the painter had a message to tell with this figure too. Jesus looks at the boy and he may suddenly see his own youth in retrospect, his happy and innocent days, as well as the years between his youth and his present state. It was like a youth such as this that Jesus already confronted the doctors in the Temple and argued with them. In the normal psychology of a condemned person, Jesus remembers his past years in an instant of time. Cambiaso suggests thus the ending of life and the nostalgia of the happiness of youth, the marvel of life, but also the missed occasions. One thinks at how the years have passed, at what one should have done otherwise, which occasions one has missed to do better things, how one was once filled with the hope of doing great deeds, and of how much should still have to be done. By the link between the child and Jesus – and no other figures are thus linked – Luca Cambiaso opened a very wide

world of thoughts, of impressions, of remembering, beyond the mere picture frame, only to fascinate more the viewer and catch the viewer in his or her turn in thoughts.

The child is also a symbol of hope. The boy may be a grandchild to Caiaphas and the child may have admired the High Priest much. But he looks not at the High Priest with admiration; the boy looks at Jesus. We sense that he will follow Jesus later and become a Christian, like so many others would be fascinated by the figure of Jesus and by the strange example of his death. The boy will leave Caiaphas and follow Jesus. In the child lies the only hope of Jesus, so here is where Jesus looks. Finally, Jesus does not seem to be linked to Caiaphas either. Jesus does not look at all at Caiaphas. The High Priest is but an instrument, and Jesus knows all about the true role of Caiaphas. Caiaphas has not really a choice. Neither does Jesus. Only the boy has.

Luca Cambiaso painted a seemingly static picture, with austere and hard, vertical and horizontal lines. But he also brought movement in his figures. Caiaphas points to the papers; the heads of the figures are inclined; a soldier grasps Jesus at the neck and draws so much on his robe that it opens; the boy grasps something under the table. Cambiaso combined variety of action with the moment perpetuated in structure.

Luca Cambiaso painted a night scene. It is striking how, decades later, Georges de La Tour, a seventeenth century French painter of the Lorraine region, worked equally on candlelight scenes and used the same rigidity of representation as Cambiaso. De La Tour also painted in his candlelight figures very regular, straight lines and simpler shapes. Cambiaso and de la Tour may have keenly remarked how in little light indeed our mind sees and recognises the simpler shapes only, among other wise complex forms. We remarked this on Cambiaso's Jesus, but also on the simple ovals of the armour of the soldier on the right. Very few painters have observed and studied these effects of light in human perception and then applied them in their paintings. Cambiaso also could not but have noticed that many colours disappear with diminishing light. Red and purple, and green hues fade away to dark grey and black in candle light. Only the white, golden and orange parts of colours remain. Cambiaso used these only to revive his picture. De La Tour would remark the constancy of blue, but not Cambiaso. 'Jesus before Caiaphas' is for all these reasons not just a marvellous painting. It is a masterpiece of observation, of rich psychology, painted with wonderful skills. It is a painting that proved to have rich meaning, which leads a viewer to reflection and discovery.

Luca Cambiaso was a painter who is relatively less known and admired today. He was born near Genoa in 1527. He studied at first with his father, later visited Florence and Rome. He painted rapidly and in marvellous light colours until around 1570, when he started to experiment with dramatic effects of contrasts between light and dark. He made at least two other versions of 'Jesus before Caiaphas'. From 1583 on he worked in Spain. He was invited to the court of King Philip II to decorate the Escorial of Madrid, the monastery-palace of the Spanish King. Luca Cambiaso may be less known today; in his own time he was famous and considered a religious, even zealous man. He painted many religious scenes throughout his career, and that was also the work he delivered at the Escorial. He died there, in the palace near Madrid, in 1585.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ before Caiaphas**

Master of the Litomerice Altarpiece. Gallery of Northern Bohemia. Litomerice. After 1500.

**Jesus before the Sanhedrin**

Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255-1319). Museo dell' Opera del Duomo. Siena. Ca. 1308-1311.

**Christ before Caiaphas**

Giovanni Battista Carracciolo (ca. 1575-1635). The State Hermitage Museum. St Petersburg. Ca. 1615.

## *Saint Peter denies Christ*

### **Saint Peter denying Christ**

Pensionante del Saraceni. National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1610-1620.

We continue the account of Matthew.

While Jesus was before Caiaphas, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him saying, “You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it in front of them all. “I do not know what you are talking about,” he said. When he went out in the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, “This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.” And again, with an oath, he denied it, “I do not know the man.” A little later, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.” Then he started cursing and swearing, “I do not know the man.” And at once the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, “Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.<sup>G38</sup>

This story is important in the life and in the message of Jesus, for Peter was the man on whom he would build his church. Peter would be the first Pope and the most venerated of all the apostles. Yet Jesus predicted that this same Peter in whom he had put most of his faith for the continuance of the message of God, would deny him three times. This tale brings back Peter among the humans. Humans can err, and they can act cowardly. Jesus needed to prove for all the next generations that he knew the faults of humans, their limitations and weakness under temptation. Yet, with all the imperfections of humans, Jesus had chosen a very common man to lead his church. It was a sign for eternity that Jesus was well aware of the nature of men but that notwithstanding the imperfections of even a Peter, men could proclaim the message of the kingdom of heavens. Jesus also did not pick a man from the learnt elite of his country, or a powerful man of wealth. His message of the hearth appealed to simple men first; intellectuals would have to be persuaded by arguments instead of by intuition and by emotional appeal. Peter was a fisherman.

The painter Pensionante del Saraceni who was active in Rome between 1610 and 1620 made a picture of ‘Saint Peter denying Christ’. Pensionante del Saraceni had known Caravaggio and this picture is completely in the style of the great Roman renovator. In fact Pensionante was a now unidentified artist, only called the ‘Boarder of Saraceni’. His existence was derived by Italian art historians from style differences in painters around Caravaggio and more particularly of the environment of Carlo Saraceni. This Carlo Saraceni (1579-1620) was active in Rome in the circle of Caravaggio. Pensionante del Saraceni may have been a French artist, but all attempts at identifying him with the major French painters working in Rome have failed. There are only twelve paintings associated with this painter.

The picture is very vivid and painted in all realistic detail, as would have done Caravaggio. Saint Peter is shown arguing with a servant-girl. The girl is talking on the right; Peter is sitting on the left. The girl argues with her hands, she stresses her words with her outstretched, showing hands. Peter however holds one hand in a gesture of refusal in front of him. With the other hand he holds his breast as if saying, “On my

heart, it wasn't me!" Pensionante thus could depict vividly the contents of the conversation although pictures have no words. He made several pictures in which movement is thus indicated by gestures alone and he did not use Caravaggio's very dynamic style of oblique lines. The Pensionante's picture is more restful, quieter than the works of the great master. Light falls in a Caravagesque way though, like a shaft from the left, forming Peter's old, worn-out face as well as the young, arguing servant-girl. The light falls right on the white headdress of the girl, thus also bringing a vivid colour in the scene.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Peter denying Christ**

Nicolas Tournier (1590-1639). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Around 1625.

**Saint Peter denying Christ**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Shickmann Gallery. New York. Around 1606-1610.

## *The Trial*

### **Christ before Pilate**

Master Lcz. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1500.

The whole of the Sanhedrin rose after having interrogated Jesus, and they brought him before Pilate, told Luke. They began their accusation by saying, “We found this man inciting our people to revolt, opposing payment of the tribute to Caesar and claiming to be Christ, a king.” Pilate put to him this question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He replied, “It is you who say it.” Pilate then said to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no case against this man.” But they persisted. “He is inflaming the people with his teaching all over Judaea and all the way from Galilee, where he started, down to here.” When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man were a Galilean; and finding that he came under Herod’s jurisdiction, he passed him over to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time<sup>G38</sup>.

The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus, not the Jewish people but a class of ruling elite. This elite could retain some of its old prerogatives by collaborating with the Romans. This collaboration is proven by the two trials, the one before the Sanhedrin and the other by Pilate.

‘Christ before Pilate’ of Master Lcz is a very odd picture. Here we are with figures from a magic world or from a nightmare. This could be a world of dwarfs, of little nervous men. The figures have strange, untypical faces and heads too large for their bodies, as babies have. Their features are pathetic. The gestures are artificial, very diverse. This is a picture made around 1500, when German art was still in International Gothic. Gothic has definitely influenced this painter. The folds of the cloaks are painted in all detail and the colours are very pure. But the movements and pathos are quite unusual for that period of severe dignity. For fifty years before and after Lcz such depiction of figures was not common. The only painter who came close to this style was Lucas Cranach the Elder, and indeed one proposal of identification for Master Lcz was this artist. But in other pictures Cranach the Elder did not go that far in the strange stylisation of his figures, whereas this ‘Christ before Pilate’ is one panel of a whole altarpiece painted this way. A recent name that has been proposed is that of Lorenz Katzheimer, a master of Bamberg. The panel we look at is part of a polyptych, of which the other panels are in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum at Nuremberg, in the Louvre and in private collections. The central panel is a Transfiguration. Lorenz Katzheimer was known in Bamberg and in Nuremberg around 1480 to 1500 and in his panels landscapes that remind of Bamberg have been recognised.<sup>D19</sup>

The figures of Lcz’ panel oddly make one think of regional anonymous artists and sculptors who exaggerated all show of emotions in order to more easily impress the naïve country viewers with their message. This painter had more than normal skills though. He was certainly a professional, for his detail is impeccably drawn. He knew the balance of colours to enhance the composition of the figures. Thus Jesus and his

foremost accusers are painted in the same green and blue colours to contrast them with the Pilate in red and with the browns of the right side of the picture.

The picture feels of an earthy primitivism. It induces primitive feelings of danger and violence in the viewer. Look at the expression of Pilate and at the boar-like face of the soldier who pushes forward Christ with the handle of his steel axe. Remark the cold, Roman style small window and the whirling skies beyond. These are all the primeval ingredients of nightmarish fear assembled in one panel. And especially, there is a very unusual setting of the checkerboard tiles on the ground, forming lines that are in total conflict with any perspective that might be present in the picture. All is skewed, distorted as these tile patterns. Pilate is a weird magician with his pinned hat and he wears a long stick as sceptre. He has long, strangely pointed shoes at his feet and even thus stands on the feet of a plaintive. The painter knew of course the story of the Gospels very well, for Pilate makes a movement of refusal. He holds his hand up to push back the Jews. This hand effectively throws back the pressure of the crowd. All sorts of arms are held high, one more menacing and cruel than the other, no two the same. Cruelty and menace are the central themes of this picture. Jesus looks an innocent child brought before the ultimate witch master.

These entire elements makes one suspect this picture might have been deliberately painted this way and that it is not merely the result of a naïve unskilled hand. Painter Lcz must have known the pictures of other German artists of before his period, for instance those of Konrad Witz and of Martin Schongauer. Lcz's vision is entirely different, as if he had deliberately returned to a more primitive expression of the regional German amateur painters. Master Lcz's mind may have been full with these very particular images as such. We are indeed inclined to see this as a representation of early German mind, had we not known all the marvellous painters of before Lcz. Lcz was a very individual painter who has brought a hallucinating view on Jesus's trial. His picture deranges, shocks viewers, which might have been exactly the effect Master Lcz sought.

The twenty-eight steps that Jesus ascended in the house of Pontius Pilate to go to his trial were according to legend recovered by Saint Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine. The steps were brought to Rome and placed in the Lateran Palace, the first palace of the Popes. Before the Popes moved to Avignon in 1309; this was the official residence of the Popes. The old Lateran Palace was destroyed however by fire in the fourteenth century, in 1308. The steps were moved under pope Sixtus V to a new building, designed by Domenico Fontana and constructed in 1586-1589, which contained surviving parts of the palace. This building is now in front of the Popes' church of San Giovanni in Laterano.

San Giovanni in Laterano was once Rome's first Christian basilica, built by Emperor Constantine on land seized from the Laterani family. The church was rebuilt several times; its current interior dates from 1646 and was designed by Francesco Borromini. The main façade is an 18<sup>th</sup> century addition. But the octagonal Baptistery, next to the basilica, adorned with magnificent frescoes and mosaics, still dates back to Constantine's times. Next to San Giovanni in Laterano stand the new Lateran Palace. Until 1870 all the Popes were crowned in this church.

The stairs are called the Scala Santa. No foot may touch the steps so they are covered by wooden boards. They may only be climbed by the devout on their knees and still today you can see pilgrims, sometimes handicapped people hoping for a miracle, going up the Scala Santa on their knees. The Scala Santa leads to the Sancta Sanctorum, a chapel built by Pope Nicholas III in 1278. This is a chapel dedicated to Saint Lawrence, but it contains a very old golden polyptych that contains the 'Acheiropoeton', or 'picture painted without hands'. The Acheiropoeton is supposedly an image of the face of Jesus, a painting made by Saint Luke with the help of an angel. The picture was shown in processions in the Middle Ages to ward off plagues. So, memories go back very far in Rome around the first Christian church in Rome. They go back to Jesus's face and to his suffering in Pontius Pilate's praetorium.

*Other paintings:*

**Pilate washes his Hands**

Derick Baegert (1440-1515). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. Around 1500.

**Christ before Pilate**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice.

**Christ in the Praetorium**

Léon Bénouville (1821-1859). École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Paris.

## *The Flagellation*

### **The Flagellation of Christ at the Column**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1606/1607.

### **The Flagellation.**

Piero della Francesca (1410-1492). Galleria Nazionale delle Marche– Urbino. Around 1460.

Matthew tells the last moments of Jesus's passion in most detail.

After having Jesus scourged, Pilate handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort around them. And they stripped him and put a scarlet cloak round him, and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucifixion. <sup>G38</sup>

The Evangelists do not dwell in many details on Jesus's scourging or flogging. The only element we know is that it may have happened in the inner part of Pilate's palace, or the judgement hall, the Praetorium, where colonnades were. Thus imagery usually depicts the flogging of Jesus against a column.

Michelangelo Merisi was brought up in Caravaggio from around 1571 or 1573. As was the habit in Italy for many artists, he was called Il Caravaggio after his home village even though he may actually have been born in Milan. Caravaggio is a village near Milan and Michelangelo's parents may have fled there from an epidemic of the plague in Milan <sup>G48</sup>. He died in Porto d'Ercole, close to Naples, in 1610. He died allegedly of malaria. Caravaggio was thus only around forty years old when he died, but he changed the art of painting in a definite and final way.

Caravaggio learned painting in Milan with Simone Peterzano. He left Milan an orphan for both his parents had died. At scarcely twenty years old he craved for a career in Rome. He first helped in the workshop of Giuseppe Cesari di Arpino, the Cavaliere di Arpino. He soon found cardinals to protect him and to commission pictures to him personally, such as the Cardinal Francesco del Monte. Caravaggio painted cycles for the cardinals' churches in Rome, the churches of San Luigi dei Francesi and Santa Maria del Popolo. He seemed to have had a violent character and was sent to jail already for a short time on a charge of slander to the painter Giovanni Baglioni. He was imprisoned for illegally owning weapons. He fought in a brawl over a lady and injured a notary. Caravaggio fled to Naples, but quickly presented his excuses and returned to Rome. In 1606, he probably fought in a duel, maybe because of a ball game but probably over older grievances, and an adversary, Ranuccio Tomassini, was wounded and did not survive. Caravaggio had suffered an injury too, but he had to leave Rome for he was accused of murder. He escaped to Naples and stayed there the year 1607. That same year however he was already on the island of Malta, working

for the Hospitaller Knights of Saint John the Baptist who then held the island and mainly for their Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt. Caravaggio was appreciated on Malta, for he received a title of Knight of the Order of Malta. But he was excluded again from the order the same year, and put into prison. He succeeded to escape shortly after. In early 1609 he was in Sicily, in Syracuse. Then he travelled on the island to Messina, later to Palermo.

In late 1609 Caravaggio was in Naples again and suffered an attempt to his life in a vendetta attack by hired mercenaries, hired by a Maltese Knight. He was severely wounded in the face by a knife's stab. He tried to return to Rome by boat, having obtained protection from a Roman Cardinal, but he was arrested by Spanish soldiers while the boat on which all his possessions had been brought sailed off. He was ill, and liberated rapidly. He set out on foot for Porto Ercole, maybe to catch his ship further on the coast, but his illness grew worse there, and he died in that village near Naples from a fever. It remains unclear whether he died of fever or was reached by the wronged Knight of Malta, and murdered<sup>G48</sup>.

The art of painting in Italy before Caravaggio was in a period of Mannerism. This style had emerged out of the Renaissance, maybe induced by Michelangelo but enhanced by the lesser painters of his entourage and by Michelangelo's followers who exaggerated his style elements. At first Michelangelo's outburst of naked intertwined bodies was represented again and again, then Mannerist images were idealised, as in earlier Gothic but in an entirely different way of representation, modified to sometimes unreasonable forms. The proponents who brought this kind of painting to its extreme were Jacopo Pontormo and more so Il Parmigianino, who depicted very elongated pictures in artificial, mannered poses. Emotions were shown by unnatural gestures and positions. Faces remained typified and impassible. This was thought to best represent spirituality and in religious pictures it was supposed to be necessary to show with this emphasis the dignity and sublime of the apostles, the Saints, the Holy Family and Jesus.

Caravaggio's roots and affinities lay deeply with the Italian people of the alleys of Rome and Naples. He opposed the artificial compositions and mannered expression of emotions with the realism of immediate sense. He painted natural poses and his figures were very dynamic, very lively and very present in his compositions. To the pure colours of the Florentine Renaissance he opposed more sombre tones and he introduced prominently the contrast between light and dark. The Florentines had used shadows since always, but Caravaggio constructed his figures out of the conflict between light and absence of light. Stating that Caravaggio used sombre tones and introduced the contrast between dark and light in the visual arts is however an inadequate description of the genius that he was.

Caravaggio was a natural genius who presented new visions, colours and compositions in each painting. It is very impossible to typify an artist who evolved so rapidly with each painting and so drastically. After 1600, still his early period, his figures seem to be shaped by the light or to exist only by shafts of light coming from various angles at his scenes. Caravaggio's figures are thrown at the viewer in a flash of sudden brightness, ready to disappear again in the dark the next moment. In that sudden flash, intense movement is caught. Instead of Mannerism and dignified detachment of subject, Caravaggio thus threw the viewer in the middle of his scenes.

A Cupid was so realistically painted as to want to jump out of the canvas; a Jesus suffered so close to us that we could be one of the torturers. This was Baroque pathos, but rendered in a totally realistic and explicit way.

Caravaggio painted his 'Flagellation of Christ at the Column' in Naples in 1606-1607, just after he had left Rome. He was bewildered. He had participated in killing a man; he probably had killed the man himself. His conscience tore at him, to the right and to the left, but he could not escape the image in his mind. Such also is the image of Jesus at the column. Jesus tears aside of the column, but his hands are tied and kept to the marble by a soldier of Pilate. Suffering cannot be escaped from, as a conscience cannot be escaped from. A soldier grasps Jesus's hair and holds the whip high, ready for the next lashing. All is intense movement in this picture, caught on the canvas in the spur of the moment.

Jesus reclines to the left. He does not stand upright as in all the paintings of previous Italian artistic periods and styles. Jesus is naked, showing a powerful muscular body. He is not the young idealised, even slightly androgynous, Renaissance youth anymore. The other figures of the paintings are also drawn in oblique directions, leaning to left or right. Caravaggio favoured diagonals. But balance and the vertical dimension had to be added to give the viewer a line of reference besides the frame. Therefore there is the column. The column of the Praetorium is in the title of the picture. It has become the one element of stability that we are familiar with. Here we find pure genius at work. Once stability and the line of reference were established, Caravaggio could represent the figures in swift movements and unusual angles. The picture seems easy and natural, but Caravaggio broke with all academics and styles with 'The Flagellation of Christ at the Column'.

Caravaggio used a very direct realism in the picture. He might have wanted to represent Jesus entirely naked – as Jesus probably had been during the torture – but the painter had to stop just close of that. Jesus's loincloth falls as low as could be decently presented and accepted by clergy. Even Caravaggio had to shy away from an entirely nude Jesus. The church hierarchy would certainly not have allowed him to go further in representation. The guards in the picture are rough soldiers of Caravaggio's time. They can be guards or simple workmen of Rome or Naples. Jesus is among us, says the painter, Christ is flagellated by us here and now.

Caravaggio was an extremely skilled painter who can be compared to the best Florentines in the art of drawing. Look at Jesus's muscular body. Look at the realism of the faces of the guards, the way their intense, energetic faces gleam out of the darkness of the inner room of the palace. The guards' shirts and trousers are painted in all the crisp detail of Florence. The picture in this aspect very clear, limpid in its lines and in the way the areas are filled with colour.

Caravaggio's composition of the 'Flagellation of Christ' is very dynamic. There is however a strong balance and stability in the view. The painter probably started with an idea to depict a Jesus in an unconventional oblique pose. Caravaggio divided the canvas vertically in two equal parts. As often in portraits, the vertical that divides the frame in two passes exactly through the eye of the central figure. Christ is entirely on one side of the halves; the middle line goes through his bound hands. The left part he divided again in two. The middle line of that part is one side of the column. Then he

used the diagonal that goes from the lower left to the upper right. Here is the movement of the guard with the outstretched arm holding the lash. There are two other diagonals that are exploited. One is the diagonal in the left half of the painting, a diagonal that goes from lower right to upper left. Jesus's body follows this diagonal. The parallel diagonal of the right half is followed by the guard tightening Jesus's ropes. The heads of Jesus and of the guard with the lash are entirely above the long diagonal in the upper left part of the frame.

The gravity point of the two bodies of Jesus and of this guard is brought to the central theme of the picture, which is to the column. The mass of these areas created a void in the right lower part under the long diagonal. This void needed to be filled. Hence the guard on the lower right. This guard forms also a counterweight to the reclining Jesus. The head of the guard with the lash is in the middle of the distance between the column and the right soldier. We could go on with these considerations of geometry in the picture for there are still more, also horizontal symmetries, to be found.

When we thus analyse Caravaggio's 'Flagellation', we find to our astonishment that this very natural and realistic image in which so much instantaneous energy of movement is expressed, in fact obeys very strong static lines of composition. This kind of strong geometrical structure would be found only in the strictest mathematical designs of Florentine pictures such as those made by Piero della Francesca. The composition, the way Caravaggio brings gravity of masses back to points of reference, lends the picture its stability despite the diagonals of movement. The resulting stability and rest allows the viewer to look at the painting indefinitely without feeling out of touch with familiar dimensions. This skill shows the incredible genius of Caravaggio. The painter imagined a natural, energetic scene within the constraints of strict mathematical form. The dynamism, the flash of the scene in the moment, necessitated strong balance in order for the viewer not to lose his points of reference.

'The Flagellation of Christ at the Column' was painted around 1606-1607, at a time when Caravaggio was in Naples. He had been banned from Rome. He might not have been too well off. He would have known, seen and lived in the small streets of popular Naples. He may have lived among tanners, carpenters, guards and thieves. It might have been the first time he found himself in a small dark room, alone with his conscience. He might have been suppressed by guilt or have been bitter over his fate of being banished from Rome due what he may have felt as an injustice, even though he had killed a man. He certainly felt rejected, and an outcast. Some of this can be seen in Jesus's face, but also much resignation, acceptance of fate and the state of desperateness a tortured man is in at the height of the pain that cannot be escaped from.

A painter like Caravaggio could only express his own feelings in a picture like this since every man knows only best and directly his own emotions. The particular moods Caravaggio was in at that period of his life have shown the suffering to an intense human emotion as no painter except some of the very greatest could represent. This picture is certainly the most powerful of all the paintings on themes of the New Testament, of all Christian art and particularly on Christ's Passion. The very realism, the intense light in the darkness of the room has made of this picture a mystery of human suffering that transcends man. And this is all the story of the life of Jesus. Jesus has come to transcend man, to give him the hope that would drive European

man for centuries. Europeans sought frantically to become more than human, more than the mere men and women of the earth. The hope for transcendence, the hope to be part of the Gods pushed Europeans ever further, internally in their art and outwardly towards conquests of land and matter. The transcendence started like a shaft of light in a dark palace room, in turmoil of movement. This is the mystique captured in Caravaggio's picture.

With Caravaggio and this painting of the 'Flagellation at the Column' we are at a definite turnaround in art. Caravaggio was a natural genius. He was an intelligent man with a natural intuition for structure and movement. He had a very individual vision built on contrasts and powerfully mastered his religious themes. Caravaggio knew well the traditions of his profession but he created his own art and that art was entirely the result only of his own stubborn and powerful, independent character. For the first time the vision of an artist was blatantly forced upon commissioners. These recognised his genius and skill. The generations of painters after Caravaggio recognised the transition to the lone individuality of the artist and of his personal feelings about subjects of religion, even when this went entirely against all known tradition.

### *Piero della Francesca*

Caravaggio's 'Flagellation' contains astonishing strong geometries that are underlying in the movement of the figures and thus are not obvious in the scene. A picture in which the geometries are all too obvious is of course Piero della Francesca's version of the 'Flagellation'. This painting was made after 1459, an exact date is unknown; a probable date is around 1460<sup>G56</sup>. Piero worked much earlier than Caravaggio did. He was born in Borgo San Sepolchro in Tuscany around 1416 to 1420 and died there in 1492. Piero worked in Rome, Ferrara, Rimini and Urbino. He liked the study of mathematics and dedicated the last ten years of his life to perspective, geometry and mathematics as applied to art. His paintings are the joy of art analysts because strict geometries can always be found in the composition of his pictures. In his 'Flagellation' also, his love of architecture, of perspective and numeric ratios is very apparent.

Piero della Francesca's painting of the 'Flagellation of Christ' is very enigmatic. The panel contains two parts. On the right part, three wealthy merchants or aristocrats are having a solemn conversation, oblivious of what happens on the left. The rich people are magnificently dressed. On the far right a merchant or nobleman wears a blue robe with rich golden embroideries. The man in the middle of this group is more soberly clad and does not seem to participate in the talk; he does not look at the other two persons of his group. Only one makes a gesture and then still that gesture with the left hand remains low. The persons are standing impassively; they remain inactive. This scene is shown in a very solemn way, in all the static of International Gothic art, with all the dignity of Florentine or Urbino aristocracy.

On the left of the panel Jesus is tortured. He is standing against a column and on each side two men hold their Roman military whips high. These persons are not dressed as soldiers however. They seem ordinary citizens of a Renaissance town. They wear no special armour, no iron coat of mail, but only the simple togas. If one of the soldiers

were not wearing a leather helmet, one would not have thought of these men as being guards. The concept of Romans flogging Jesus is enhanced by the Roman statue on top of the column. Yet, the person seating on a throne-like chair to the left cannot be taken for Pilate. He looks like an eastern satrap, dressed in strange rose and blue colours. The man is sitting in front of the flagellation, but he remains just as static and impassive as the other personages of the picture. This could be Herod, allowed to sit in the Praetorium of Pilate's palace to witness the torture or Pilate himself.

The Praetorium resembles a Renaissance palace with a row of columns and a richly decorated, flat ceiling. The Praetorium was a Roman construction. Yet here all the columns are of Corinthian style and so is the column against which Jesus is scourged. The Praetorium was the inner judgement hall of Pilate's palace, indeed flanked by rows of columns. Hence as in most paintings of the Flagellation, Jesus is depicted bound to such a column. All the figures, both to the left and to the right stand impassively. Even Jesus is almost nonchalantly standing to his column. The Christ is being flogged, but this seems only a non-important moment in time, lost and forgotten in the splendour of the Renaissance palaces. The Praetorium was an inside hall, not opened at various sides to the air as in della Francesca's picture. But opening the hall was necessary in order for us to be able to see the flagellation. This is as if the scene were a mind-image.

Perspective is applied rigorously in this painting, in the lines of the buildings to the left, in the lines of the hall, and especially in the black and white tiles of the floor. Here we perceive the interest of Piero della Francesca. The perspective is a tour de force and Piero has especially shown dramatically his skills in the checkerboard pattern of the floor. But also the foreshortening of perspective in the beams of the ceiling and of the lines of the buildings on the right prove the expert knowledge of this painter.

What does this picture mean? It is a picture of contrasts. Jesus is tortured but all, even Jesus himself, seem not to care. Faces remain expressionless. The image is so static, cold, without emotions, that it evokes in the viewer a feeling of disquiet, of strong unease. The act of the flagellation is negated, ignored, its horror diminished, the picture is bloodless, and devoid of emotions. The act of torture simply does not exist, even though it happens. Merchant and city life of Florence and Urbino ignores the passion of Christ.

The real meaning of the painting of Piero della Francesco remains a mystery as deep as late medieval artists could hide messages in symbols and images, following the ancient examples of the aphorisms and parables of Jesus himself. We have no records of Piero explaining the picture. The earliest hint given by scholars dates from the eighteenth century. Marco Bussagli has made a good study of the possible meanings proposed by scholars such as Kenneth Clark, Bertelli, Ginzburg and others<sup>G56</sup>. According to one of the explanations the characters on the right could represent Federico de Montefeltro and his son Guidobaldo. The youngest man in the middle could be Federico's stepbrother Oddantonio de Montefeltro. The most likely person is Oddantonio and if the two other figures do not compare well to other portraits of the Montefeltri, then the scene could represent Oddantonio and his bad councillors for Oddantonio died in a conspiracy in 1444.

According to other hypotheses, two of the figures could be the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Paleologus and his brother Thomas with the young Jesus. The man sitting on the throne watching the Flagellation could then be Sultan Mehmet II who took Constantinople in May of 1453 and who thus usurped the throne of the East-Roman emperors. Still other scholars saw in the first figure Giovanni Bacci, a member of the family that ordered to Piero della Francesca the frescoes of the 'Legend of the True Cross' in Arezzo. Bacci would be with Cardinal Bessarione, a friend of Federico de Montefeltro and with Buonconte de Montefeltro, an illegitimate child of the great Federico. The painting may allude to the crusades against the Turks since at least one of the flagellators seems to wear a turban, and there was a crusade against the Turks in 1443. Still another scholar saw in the painting references to the dream of Saint Jerome in which God reproached Jerome of preferring to read Cicero instead of the Holy Scriptures. The real purpose of the picture will stay allusive. Many more elements can be added to the discussion.

Piero della Francesca worked much with the number three. We find three figures and only three often in his pictures. In 1439 the Council of Cardinals that had begun in Ferrara in the Papal States moved to Florence. Piero could have seen John VIII Paleologus during his marvellous entry into Florence. The Council obtained the temporary unification of the churches of Rome and Constantinople. One of the most important points discussed during the Council was the Trinity. The Paleologi Emperors of Constantinople were desperately looking for support in the West against the Turks and proposed once again to finish the schism between the Western and Eastern churches.

The joining of the churches was a diplomatic card frequently played by the Emperors of Constantinople. The very first Paleologus Emperor already had drawn the card to foster alliances. The founder of the Paleologi dynasty was Michael VIII Paleologus. He was the Emperor of Nicaea and thus a Greek, but he had usurped that throne and he had conquered Constantinople from the Latin rulers, the descendants of the crusaders. Michael had already proposed the religious union in the years 1270 for he needed support against Charles d'Anjou who had strengthened his grip on Italy and who also wanted to make the old imperial city his and thus wear the title of Emperor. Michael sought support of the Pope of the moment. The Pope equally feared the power of Charles of Anjou, the brother of the King of France. In 1274 at the Council of Lyon the Pope had decreed the union. But the Greeks had not accepted, refuted the Paleologus Emperor, declaring the union invalid because not all Greek patriarchs had been present at the Council.

Later, as well John VIII Paleologus as his brother and successor Constantine came to Italy to recognise that the Holy Spirit was a product of both the Father and the Son. Greek Orthodoxism stated that the Spirit only emanated from the Father. But the Nicene Creed, the main Christian statement of faith, commonly called the 'Credo' in the Roman Catholic Church, stated 'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son'. The words 'and from the Son' are in Greek 'Filioque'. This famous element, the 'Filioque', was one of the most important theological disputes that formed the schism between the Western and Eastern churches. Everybody agreed that the Holy Spirit was divine. But the Greek Church recited the Nicene Creed as stating that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Father was the only origin of the deity, of God. The Roman Catholic had inserted

the 'Filioque', thereby saying that the Spirit proceeded from Father and Son. The Orthodox Christians of Constantinople felt that the 'Filioque' diminished the value of the Spirit. The Spirit was for them as much part of the deity as the Father and the Son. This was an ancient controversy between the Roman and Greek Churches, which may date from the ninth century. Both Churches had debated for over a thousand years on the exact nature of Father, Son and Spirit and now the position of the Spirit was the last and final dispute.

The other point of conflict was the Papal supremacy over the Christian Churches. Constantinople only accepted the equal authority of five patriarchs among whom the patriarchs from Rome and Constantinople were but two equals. The Byzantines considered in general that the true defender of faith was the whole Church, not just one Pope. But this point was not a theological one. It was merely a point of canonical law. The conference of Florence debated only nine days on the claims of the papal supremacy. The Filioque was debated for nine months however; the Filioque was the real dividing item of discussion.

The Emperors and their patriarchs pledged in Florence to Roman Catholic rites instead of to the Greek rituals hoping for the material help of the Popes in their wars with the Turks. The Union of Florence was never popular with the majority of the Greek Orthodox however and the idea collapsed with the Byzantine Empire.

Piero della Francesca was a youth at the times of the Council of Ferrara-Florence; he was in his later teens. The splendour of the courts of Emperor and cardinals may have very much impressed the young painter as well as the central talks on the Trinity dogma, even if Piero only fully understood its meaning later in life. The entry of the Paleologus Emperor in Florence must have been very splendid for also other painters recalled memories of the feasts and processions. Benozzo Gozzoli made the famous frescoes in the Medici Chapel on this theme as an 'Adoration of the Magi'.

Piero della Francesca was also a mathematician. His treaty on perspective, 'De Prospectiva Pingendi' dating from 1482 was all about the art of perspective in painting. Piero must have worked for many years maturing his ideas and treaty on perspective and the 'Flagellation' contains complex perspective views. Perspective is about three points. Two points define a line segment and these two are connected to a point that represents the eye's focal point. All perspective of areas derives from this concept of three linked points and perspective geometry contains thus only triangles in its construction. All lines of perspective converge together in one point, and that was a concept that could mystically refer to God as the focal point and creator of the universe. Triangles and the number three plus the mystery of the Trinity were much on Piero's mind. The association of the triangle form with the Trinity was not new. John Gage wrote on that subject, 'Roger Bacon (c.1214-1294) in his lengthy discussion of the crucial usefulness of physics and mathematics in the 'Opus Maius' had adducted the equilateral triangle as a perfect image of the Trinity precisely because it was a figure which could be found nowhere else in nature'<sup>G97</sup>. And also, 'The association of the Trinity with the triangle was a Manichaean notion, condemned by Saint Augustine, hence was theologically suspect! It only became less so in early Renaissance, when the triangle appeared as the form of the halo of God.'<sup>G97</sup>.

Therefore Jesus at the column is being flagellated by three figures and he stands impassively caught in their triangle. When one looks at the marble tiles of the floor under Jesus, one sees that Jesus stands in the middle of a circle of black marble. The two soldiers that hold high their whip are one in front, the other almost at the same distance to us as Jesus, even though his arm is depicted behind Jesus. The third figure stands a little in front, not inside the circle. Since this man wears a turban we may here also have a hint to the Turks and to Sultan Mehmet, whereby the sitting figure could be the last Emperor of Constantinople, Constantine Paleologus. The scene could mean that Mehmet II could force Constantine to witness another pain of Jesus, the fall of the most important Christian city of the Orient. The figure sitting on the throne wears a pointed hat that is the same as the hat of Emperor Constantine in the 'Battle between Constantine and Maxentius' as painted in Piero's cycle of the 'True Cross' in Arezzo. This kind of hat is the 'Paleologi' hat. Piero may have worked simultaneously at the scenes in Arezzo and at the 'Flagellation' or anyway have had the same figures in his head at that time. But Piero re-used often faces and elements throughout his pictures so this detail also is no conclusive proof.

The three figures on the right could also symbolically represent the Trinity. The middle figure alone is barefoot and wears the traditional simple red robe of Jesus. A wise bearded figure could represent the Holy Spirit and the third figure the Father. This scene could again be Emperor Constantine on the left and sultan Mehmet on the right. Indeed, the robe of the right figure flows downwards as if the person holds a curved sword. The left figure has a forked and pointed beard as also Emperor Constantine has in the episode 'Constantine's Dream' in the Arezzo cycle of the 'True Cross'. Emperor Constantine of 'Constantine defeats Maxentius' and the sitting figure of the 'Flagellation' likewise have these pointed black beards. Piero may have seen Constantine in Florence or at least his brother Thomas and remembered their face.

Maybe Piero only wanted to express his mystic belief in the Trinity and the number three, as he arrived at a double representation of that symbolic number of Christianity and filled in allusions to characters and situations in the medieval way.

The 'Flagellation of Christ' is also an example of scenes ordered according to Golden Mean divisions. The picture consists of two scenes. The lengths of the two scenes of the painting are in the proportion of the Golden Mean. The left scene then contains again two parts, horizontally and vertically. In the left scene stands the column against which Christ is being flagellated and this column divides the left scene in two sub-scenes, the lengths of which are in the Golden Mean. The left scene is horizontally divided in two parts. One part contains the scene with the figures, the other the ceiling. Furthermore, the right scene of the painting holds three figures and the right scene holds five figures, which are Fibonacci numbers. The Fibonacci series and the Golden Mean hold the same proportions and both were considered in the late Middle Ages as divine proportions. So Piero della Francesca obviously brought into his painting not only mysterious references to the Trinity but also mystic proportions.

The golden statue on top of the column against which stands Jesus holds a white ball in its outstretched hand. The statues could as well represent the old Roman deities as refer to the emperors of Constantinople. Piero might have used this symbol to point to the old gods that Jesus has come to replace, and to their temporary victory over Jesus tortured at the column. If the statue refers to the East-Roman emperors, Piero could

have suggested that the East-Roman Emperors, who were Christians, were tortured by the Turks, impersonified by Mehmet II watching from near the throne. Constantine Paleologus fought for his city and died with a sword in his hands. He was decapitated and his head put on display on a column. The three bystanders of the right then could be the powerful Italian rulers who did not intervene but literally turned their backs to the fall of Constantinople, the most splendid Christian court of the world.

Piero della Francesca and Benozzo Gozzoli may have witnessed the visit of John and Thomas Paleologus to Florence, maybe even the visit of Constantine. The Turkish sultans stood then and since long before the doors of Constantinople. The East-Roman Emperors had gradually lost all their territories to the Ottoman Turks, not just their Asian lands but also the European parts as well as the Peloponnese and the rest of Greece. The Turks fought as north as Hungary and the Albanians in the West. As a response to the Paleologi pleads in the West a crusader army had started in the 1440s, but the Turks at the battle of Varna annihilated this army in 1444. When John VIII Paleologus died childless in 1448 his three brothers could claim the throne but Constantine was the oldest. He became Emperor in 1449 with the support of the Turkish Sultan Murad, the father of Mehmet II.

When Mehmet drew his armies against Constantinople he was merely twenty-two years old. Constantine XI Paleologus had sought help. He too had been to Florence with his brother Thomas and he had sent ambassadors to King Charles VII of France. The Pope had assembled a Genoese and Venetian fleet but this army, if it could have turned fate, arrived too late. Mehmet prepared his attack during the year 1452 and made his final assaults in 1453. The East-Roman Empire then had been reduced to the mere city walls of Constantinople. Constantine had vowed to unite the Roman and the Greek churches and in Saint Sophia, then the largest cathedral of the Christian world, Latin liturgy was performed again. In 1452 Constantine and the legate of the Pope, Archbishop Isidore of Kiev, held together with the patriarchs a formal Latin Mass in the Saint Sophia and accepted officially the Filioque. But the city was weakened because of the theological disputes, which did not end after the Latin Mass. The leader of the Greek religious party was one George Scholarius, also called Gennadios and although this monk had earlier worked in Florence for the unification of the faiths, he now openly fought the Emperor's reforms inside the city and while the Turks prepared to attack. Few Greeks stood to defend the city.

The fall of Constantinople is hulled in romantic heroism. The defenders had little hope of holding out to the masses of Turk soldiers amassed before their gates. Yet they stood on the walls together as a choice of the warriors of Christ abandoned to their fate by the Western Europe from where they originated. Inside the city stood thus a small number of soldiers of various nationalities, because Constantinople was the most important trading centre with the East. All had in common their Christian faith and of course the trading interests of their homelands.

The Genoese captain Giovanni Giustiniani Longo had arrived just before the siege with 700 soldiers and he was made the leading general of Constantine. The Emperor himself defended the gate of Saint Romanus. Don Francesco di Toledo helped him. The brothers Paul and Anthony Troilus Bochiardi defended the Adrianopolis gate. Theodorus of Karystos held the Egrikapu gate. The German Johannes Grant commanded the artillery. Slavs, Serbs and Bulgarians were led by Cardinal Isidore

who was Archbishop of Kiev, who had also been in Florence and who had held theological conferences with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. Isidore had led the Russian delegation at the Council of Florence; the Roman Pope had appointed him a cardinal and an apostolic legate. In Moscow however, Prince Basil II rejected the agreements of Florence and had Isidore arrested and imprisoned. Isidore escaped abroad, to Constantinople, but Muscovy had refused the Union. The Venetians Hieronymus Mainotto, the brothers Hieronymus and Leonardo de Langosto defended other parts of the town. The Venetian Gabriele Trevisano kept the gate at the port; the Venetian Contarino stood at the Golden Gate. The Genoese Maurizio Cataneo fought at the Selymbria gate. The Spanish Consul Pedro Giuliani helped with his Catalans there too. Admiral Lucas Notaras defended the port.

The final attack started on April 2 of 1453 and lasted about eight weeks. Then the Turks could enter the city and slaughtered the defenders. Mehmet let his soldiers pillage for three days. Then he entered the city himself. Sultan Mehmet would now take the citadel of Constantinople as his headquarters and Saint Sophia became a mosque.

The fall of the last rampart of Christianity in the Near Orient made an enormous effect on the states of Western Europe. New crusades were preached in Germany and France until several years later but not organised. The Genovese and the Venetians were blamed for having sold Constantinople and having let Mehmet's army draw its ships over land to the other side of the fabulous chain that had protected the entry to the harbour. Genoans and Venetians continued their trade out of the Galata district of Istanbul, as the city would henceforth be named. At best the storming Turks could be halted for a while with western help in Hungary, but in Albania Skanderberg had to fight without western troops and after his death also this land passed under Turk control. Demetrios was accepted at the Sultan's court. Thomas Paleologus could flee to their Peloponnese possessions but soon also Mehmet took this land. Thomas fled then to Italy, to Rome.

The fall of Constantinople created an even greater problem for Greek Orthodoxy for the unity of church and empire, which had been extremely strong over the previous centuries, and which had determined the culture of the region was destroyed. Furthermore, the moral and leading authority of the Church was now in the power of Muslims and the patriarch of Greek Orthodoxism received its investiture from the Turkish sultan<sup>G60</sup>. The Patriarchs of Constantinople remained in the city till our own days. Sultan Mehmet protected the Patriarchs. But no new churches could be built and outward signs of Christendom were to be reduced to a minimum.

Piero della Francesca may have had the number three and the Trinity constantly on his mind. He may have made a scene with various combinations of possible meanings. Piero could only have given the real answer himself and he might have acquiesced to several explanations given by others, as all indeed are equally possible. We do not possess a writing of his hand to that effect. Each viewer may find another truth in the mystery of Piero's painting. The images generate their own meaning. Piero's picture remains one of the most fascinating works of art that keep scholars in its spell.

The strong vertical lines, the rational mathematics of this picture, the coldness of the white marble and the detachment of the painter for his subject evoke loneliness and

timeliness. Piero seemed to want to convey the message that Italian society of the fifteenth century was impervious to suffering. Suffering was ignored. Suffering was forgotten in the splendour of the Renaissance courts. Backs were turned to human pain. Our society is cold, said Piero della Francesca. At the same time he compared the disasters of the court of Urbino and of the fall of Constantinople to the torture of Christ. Horrors happened in Italy; Jesus was flagellated all the time by the cruelty of dictators who illegally usurped power in the city-states. Courtiers played at intrigues; they worked at doom scenarios that might bring fame and fortune but in the meanwhile people suffered or would suffer as a result. The wealthy states turned their backs on one of the major defeats of the Christian civilisation. The very coldness of the painting makes us think and reflect on the true values of life. The message of this 'Flagellation' thus is a very moral one. Piero has applied all his geometries and rational skills to point us directly on human emotions even though he seems to deny these emotions in his painting.

The 'Flagellation' of Caravaggio and the 'Flagellation' of Piero della Francesca are two very different paintings.

Caravaggio painted a scene of violent movement discovered in a flash of light. He showed human figures linked in sweat, torture and suffering. He showed all the tactile emotions of pain in a dark hall. Piero della Francesca painted an intellectual scene in full bright light. He pictured a very static scene caught in the intricate pattern of strict geometry. Caravaggio plunged us into the horror; Piero was seemingly detached from suffering. Caravaggio appeals to our senses, Piero della Francesca to our mind. Piero puts on a wrong foot so that we are intrigued by his painting, start to reflect, try to understand and then discover his message which finally is the same as Caravaggio's: Jesus is tortured every day somewhere among us.

*Other paintings:*

### **The Flagellation**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Museo Nazionali di Capodimonte. Naples. 1607.

### **Christ is robbed of his Clothes**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest.

### **Christ against the Column**

Antonella da Messina (1430-1479). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1476.

### **The Flagellation.**

Jaime Huguet (1414-1491). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Between 1450-1460.

### **The Flagellation**

Master Lcz. Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1490-1500.

### **The Flagellation**

Luca Signorelli (1445-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Around 1490.

### **The Flagellation**

Fernandez Aliego (1475-1545). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid.

### **Christ at the Column**

Donato Bramante (1444 – 1514). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Flagellation**

Luca Signorelli (1450-1523). Casa d'Oro. The Giorgio Franchetti Gallery. Venice.

**The Flagellation**

Tiziano Vecellio called Titian (ca. 1490-1576). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1570-1575.

**The Flagellation of Christ**

Giovan Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1657-1658.

**The Flagellation of Christ**

Bernardino Luini (1460-1532). Church of San Maurizio. Milan. 1520's.

**The Flagellation**

Bartolomeo di Giovanni (active 1488-1511). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Crowning with Thorns*

### **The Crowning with Thorns**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Musée du Louvre- Paris. Around 1542.

### **The Crowning with Thorns**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1570.

### **The Mocking of Christ**

Edouard Manet (1832-1883). The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1865.

Tiziano Vecellio painted two versions of the ‘Mocking of Christ’ or ‘Crowning with Thorns’. The first picture dates from around 1542 and is in the Louvre of Paris. The second dates from around 1570 and is in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich. Although in these two works of art the scene and compositions resemble each other much, there are notable differences that show the altering style of an ageing artist.

Titian was born around 1488-1489 but he always made a mystery of the date of his birth, claiming to be older than he really was. Around 1542 he was in his fifties and at the maturity of his art. He worked for the Emperor Charles V. He had been knighted in 1533 and throughout the 1540’s he indulged in the admiration of the Emperor. He participated in the German Diet meetings of Augsburg. Italy was still in principle a part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, even though most of the cities pledged to independence. Titian painted major portraits of Charles V and of Empress Isabella. He had many princely patrons in Italy among whom the Farnese family. Pope Paul III was a Farnese and Titian worked around 1546 also in Rome for that Pope.

Titian had a very clear style of painting in the 1540’s. His ‘Mocking of Christ’ is painted in well-defined forms. Areas are filled delicately with full colours and no adjacent areas have the same colour. The brushstrokes are exact, smooth, well defined and adjacent patches never overlap. The colours are pure, contrasting and in certain areas very bright. The scene of the picture is more in front of the entry of a prison or cellar than inside dark rooms. The scene is set outside on the large stairs leading to the prison, maybe still inside the Praetorium of Pilate’s palace.

Jesus is mocked at the entry of the prison, to be even more tortured later within darker walls. This has allowed Titian to use more light so that the colours are brighter and full light falls on the figure of Jesus. This colour then is Venetian and the pure areas form the figures. But the ‘Crowning with Thorns’ is one of the most Florentine pictures of Titian. One senses a strong underlying drawing. Jesus’s figure is very in light, almost painted in white colour. Titian attracts the attention of the viewer thus immediately to a Jesus in suffering. The figure is fully in pain and this is also the only emotion to be read on Jesus’s tormented face. The limbs of Jesus are delicate in the light. Titian even suggested the finer nature of Jesus such as in the long legs that are almost without muscular structure.

The scene of the ‘Mocking of Christ’ is very violent. Titian had entered a period in which he may have been influenced by the growing violence of the Reformation in Germany with the wars between the Protestants and Charles V. He had heard of the sack of Rome of 1527 by the Emperor’s hired mercenaries. He lived the tensions

caused in Italy by the Counter Reformation actions of the Popes and the Vatican States. Violence is in the gestures of the soldiers. Jesus is already crowned with thorns and these thorns are being pressed into his flesh by the relentless, brutal force of the long reeds the soldiers hold on the crown of thorns. It would be difficult to paint a crueller scene with such directness of torture and pain. We feel ourselves how the long thorns scrape the bone of Jesus's skull bones. The torture is not just physically present, but aimed at Jesus's mind as the thorns try to penetrate the head.

The soldiers encroach on Jesus. They surround and envelop him so that he cannot move, escape, breathe. Titian painted even the half-nude guard to the left as a very heavy and squat man in order to emphasise the pressure of bodies onto Jesus. The composition of the scene further stresses this pressure by the lines of the rods, but also by the lines of the bodies that are all directed to Jesus's head. One senses therefore even more the moral pressure on Jesus. The picture represents a mocking of Christ, so Jesus is already wearing the purple robe, which was an excellent means for Titian to bring Jesus in the colour of suffering. Titian's realistic art is fully displayed in the folds of Jesus's robe and in the yellow robe and white trousers of the left guard. The two guards on the right have knelt on the stairs, seemingly revering Jesus, and one soldier holds the other in mocking tenderness. Mocking and haughty also is the bust of the Roman Emperor Tiberius set high over the entry of the hall.

Titian has added borders in the painting. The horizontal beam of the door entry answers the horizontal limits of the stairs on the lower part of the wooden frame. Here are written the words 'Tiberius Caesar'. These horizontal lines reduce the long vertical dimensions of the frame to the scene of pressure on Jesus. The lines compress the picture. There are no vertical, stable lines in the scene itself. All lines are angular, diagonal, brutal and nervous. There is also much expression of volume, expression of three-dimensionality, of figures round and almost protruding out of the picture such as the soldier clad in the coat of mail on the front right.

The painting was made on commission. It was necessary to please people of Northern Italy and this may explain the clarity and brilliance of the picture. The 'Mocking of Christ' was made for the church of Santa Maria della Grazie in Milan. The picture was taken away by French Revolutionary Commissars in 1797 and brought to the Louvre in Paris. When in 1815 the Allied Controllers returned masterpieces to Italy, this picture was left in the Louvre.

A wholly different image is Titian's late remake of the 'Mocking of Christ'. Titian was around eighty years old now. Historians may claim that he was only seventy, but both ages are sufficiently old for Titian to have felt at the end of his life. In any case Titian was an old man. He had radically changed in tone of painting. Death was much on his mind. His later paintings included many themes associated with death. The 'Death of Actaeon', Actaeon devoured by his own dogs, the 'Mocking of Christ', Saint Sebastian, were scenes he undertook then.

We might call the later version of the 'Mocking of Christ' of Tiziano 'the other side'. Jesus is inside the dark hall, maybe on the other side of the lit Praetorium. The stairs are still there, but the door entry is a round Roman arch and the horizontal beams were not necessary anymore. Many details have become vague. The scene in the hall is lit dimly by a high torch-holder and its whirling flames. The clarity of forms and the rich

pure colours of the earlier work have disappeared. All is darkness and shadows. The forms are delineated in rapid, sinewy brushstrokes. The play of light and shadows form the volumes, but much of the earlier three-dimensionality has disappeared. Only the colour and shadows build the picture.

Jesus is more resigned in this painting of Titian. The pressure on Jesus's head is still very present, but more sublimated and less explicit. The reeds are held more aside and in front of Jesus's head, they do not seem to press down so much. The figures also are painted more in darkness, thus more anonymous and less pressing onto Jesus.

What has remained in this later picture of Titian is only the suffering of Jesus. The suffering is the essence now of the picture. Neither explicit form nor pure colours were necessary to please anymore, nor the intellectual image of the pressure on Jesus. Suffering is the essence of the scene in the Gospels and suffering is the centre of the image. Titian only expressed the concept of torture and the suffering of the Redeemer. Forms, dimensions, colours flow instinctively into the sombre background and seem now to want to draw Jesus into the back of the hall, into oblivion.

Titian remained a colourist however also in this painting, his second version. For although the tones are very subdued in this and in other of his later paintings, he did remember the earlier richness of his palette in delicate patches of pure colours in the front soldier and in spare details. This figure of the forefront seems to want to rally life again into Jesus. It has been argued that Titian's later paintings, such as this 'Mocking of Christ', were unfinished pictures. Titian painted over long periods, adding colours over first layouts. But the colour patches are already so diligently placed here, and the rest of the colours so full and complete that the conjecture does not seem to hold.

The figures of Titian's late 'Mocking of Christ' seem to melt into the world around them and their forms appear out of the surrounding matter. Titian's late vision is a dark, pessimistic vision. It is still extremely powerful, reduced as subject to the essential concepts of an image. Thus ultimately were the darkest moments of Jesus's life when abandoned by everybody, mocked, tortured, and thrown in a cellar he waited for the hour of his death. Together with Titian's Saint Sebastian, another picture of death and probably the last picture of Titian, we have with this version of the 'Mocking of Christ' a picture of a painter who has imagined the depths of despair just before the moment of death. Titian must have felt intimate with loneliness, despair and death at his old age.

### *Edouard Manet*

Very different from these pictures is Edouard Manet's 'Mocking of Christ'. It is a rare painting for various reasons. Manet (1832-1883) was a painter of a period between several powerful styles in nineteenth century French art. The new French Classicism of the beginning of the century with Jacques Louis David and Auguste Dominique Ingres had been followed by the realism of Corot and others. An evolution to further daring in colours and composition would lead to Impressionist painting. The passion of Romanticism showing wild emotions and exotic scenes was another of the mainstreams of French painting. In French political life of the nineteenth century the

laity of the state frequently clashed with the Romantic revival of religious thought. Amidst all that was the intellectual Manet who tried to introduce a realistic, raw way of painting of everyday scenes but with an intellectual twist and underlying hidden symbolic meaning that were exercises in style. Manet founded his novelty in the representation of the subject and in the juxtaposition of uncommon elements that could shock an audience. Manet took old subjects of Renaissance or other early paintings and transposed those in his own times. While doing this he transformed the subject and the representation in a novel way. Edouard Manet was a strange renovator, interested in the contrast between old and new image, yet apparently devoid of emotions.

French painting was mainly secular since the Revolution of the end of the eighteenth century. French painters like David and Ingres referred to classic themes of antiquity to represent the higher aspirations of man. For less spiritual themes they applied portraiture. Ingres would occasionally paint a religious scene, but overall French society of the nineteenth century, and especially the bourgeois wealthy middle class preferred non-religious scenes. The Romantic movement of literature could introduce Christianity again and lay emphasis on religious faith, but this mainstream did not really break through in the pictorial arts. Even in Romantic paintings, non-religious themes and representation of pure emotion in oriental motifs were preferred to the spiritualism of Catholic Christianity. Exceptions existed, such as in Lyon, far from Paris, where worked for instance Louis Janmot. In the pictorial arts then the Romantic Movement sought escape from reality, either literally in oriental themes or in violent emotions. Painters of this tendency were Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault. As a reaction to Romanticism came the Realists who tried to get back to basic values of everyday, and to uncomplicated life. Gustave Courbet and Camille Corot thereby returned to nature.

The search for transcendence was strong and undefeated however. But transcendence and spirituality could not be found in religion for French society of Paris did not have the strong religious feelings anymore, not the admiration, not the education, not the basis for appreciation of religious themes. The only alternative for artists was to look for transcendence in the prevalent themes, in the description of nature itself. So entered the Impressionists with their inquisitive, profound view of the landscape. The Impressionists sought to elevate images of nature to the ultimo of sublimation and thus to find a substitute for the old spirituality of religion.

After a century of this quest for spirituality in material subject matter, the recognition of pure spirituality of the mind was inevitable. The Symbolist movement was created. The Symbolists represented mind-themes and they would also return slowly to religious themes even though hesitatingly, for the secularity of French society had remained dominant. The drive for spirituality then continued in abstract art, founded by people of whom some of the most prominent artists were members of occult societies such as the Theosophists. And later still, Surrealism sought spirituality again in the mind, now in the erratic, spontaneous and chaotic appearance of images of dreams. Around the First World War certain Expressionists returned to religious themes and remarkably, the most religious Expressionist of all was a Frenchman, Georges Rouault.

The French nineteenth century governing society however, remained very secular in the tradition of the Revolution, of the Republic and of the Philosophers of the Enlightenment Rousseau, Diderot and Voltaire. The measure was man and not religion. So, Manet's religious scene of the 'Mocking of Christ' is a rare exception in French art of that century. Manet again sought renovation. But was he in search of spirituality?

Manet's painting is without background. This can be accepted when one considers that the mocking of Jesus may have taken place in a prison or an inner hall of a dark palace. Many painters before Manet, such as Titian, had represented the scene in a dark setting. The most powerful painters rarely had need of a filled background such as a wide landscape for their forceful representations of Jesus. Suffering had to take place against the darkness of the cosmos alone. Manet took this style element of the genius artists of the past, the concept of darkness, just a bit further to total blackness. In his scene Jesus is almost nude. But Manet's Jesus is idealised again, as was less the habit in previous centuries, in which Jesus had been totally humanised. Manet returned to the very earliest representations of Christ, of Gothic and of early Renaissance.

Jesus is not painted in realistic detail. His body is not muscular, nor emaciated. The body forms are painted rapidly, with a few suggesting features, as to their volumes. The contours of the body are clear. The whiteness of Jesus's body is in direct contrast with the background and in conflict with it. This contrast was also an old style feature of the contrast between light and darkness, but here stylised to its simplest expression in the difference between black and white. The figures are not made by the play of shadows; they are simply imposed upon the black background.

Jesus's body is not represented in intricate detail, not because Manet had not enough talent of line, form or colour. Manet showed in the same painting his delicate and accomplished skills for detail. Look for instance at the three guards surrounding Jesus. The guards have volume and are detailed. Jesus is one-dimensional. Manet did not show here the triumph of Jesus and the triumph of the church, but the pitiless truth that in a large part of French intellectual society Jesus had remained a flat message. In a strange sense, this is a picture with the outward aspirations of spirituality but the inward lack of transcendence.

The strangeness of emotions continues in the guards. One is knelt, which according to the title should be a mocking stand. This guard presents to Jesus a long reed as sceptre. A bearded soldier stands to the left, but he remains in a protective and respectful position. The third soldier, on the right, holds open the purple robe to envelop Jesus. This guard also seems to be respecting Jesus however. He poses as if a photograph was taken of him and he confronts the viewer directly instead of concentrating on Jesus.

The scene as imagined by Manet is thus very ambivalent. The image is destined to put the viewer in all the details on a wrong foot. The scene is almost Titian's composition, but Manet has played around with the figures and the meaning. This is a play of composition, of colours and forms and of intent. It was the kind of internal conflict, the skewing of old representations that Manet sought, and which are probably not so well recognised in his personality. Edouard Manet was not so much interested in the

spiritual message of Jesus, nor in the depiction of a human drama. He was interested in using a conventional scene, or a scene of a great master as Titian, and then taking the separate elements of such pictures very delicately a step further towards renovation of representation. Due to this, the painting became more an exercise in style than a powerful picture of one of the most dramatic periods in the passion of Jesus Christ. The art critic Michael Fried expressed Manet's innovation as follows in 1964: 'Manet emphasises the flatness of the picture-surface by eschewing modelling and (as in the *Déjeuner*) refusing to depict depth convincingly, calls attention to the limits of the canvas by truncating extended forms with the framing-edge, and underscores the rectangular shape of the picture-support by aligning with it, more or less conspicuously, various elements within the painting.'<sup>G86</sup> Edouard Manet was one of the first truly modernist artists who started to reflect on the very elements of the form of art of painting.

*Other paintings:*

**The Crown of Thorns**

Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641)). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1618-1620.

**The Crowning with Thorns**

Hendrick Ter Brugghen (1588-1629). Statens Museum for Kunst. Copenhagen. 1620.

**Christ crowned with Thorns**

Jacopo Negretti called Palma Giovane (1548-1628). Musée des Beaux-Arts .Rouen.

**The Crowning with Thorns**

Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

**The Mocking of Christ**

Gian Pietro Rizzoli called Giampietrino (active 1508 – 1549). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**Christ Crowned with Thorns**

Il Sordo. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Mocking of Christ**

Emil Nolde (1867-1956). Brücke Museum. Berlin. 1909.

**The Mocking of Christ**

Francesco Bassano (1549-1592). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.

*Ecce Homo***Pilate presents Christ to the People**

Henri Blès (ca. 1480-1550). Museum Boymans – van Beuningen – Rotterdam.

**Ecce Homo**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1558-1560.

**Ecce Homo**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. University of Birmingham. – Birmingham. 1625-1626.

John recalls in most detail the second trial of Jesus before Pilate.

When Pilate had had Jesus scourged, he came outside to the Jews again and said to them, “Look, I am going to bring him out to you to let you see that I find no case against him.” Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, “Here is the man.” When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews replied, “We have a Law and according to that Law he ought to be put to death, because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” When Pilate heard them say this his fears increased. Re-entering the Praetorium, he said to Jesus, “Where do you come from?” But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him, “Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?” Jesus replied, “You would have no power over me at all if it had not been given you from above; that is why the man who handed me over to you has the greater guilt.”

From that moment Pilate was anxious to set him free, but the Jews shouted, “If you set him free you are no friend of Caesar’s; anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar.” Hearing these words, Pilate had Jesus brought out, and seated him on the chair of judgement at a place called the Pavement, in Hebrew Gabbatha. It was the Day of Preparation, about the sixth hour. “Here is your king,” said Pilate to the Jews. But they shouted, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him.” Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king except Caesar.” So at that Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.<sup>G38</sup>

Jesus is shown twice to the assembled Jews. The first time Pilate says, “Behold the man”, or “Ecce Homo”. The second time he shouts, “Here is your king”. Jesus is shown to the Jews crowned in thorns and with a purple mantle of mockery. Jesus is blooded and in pain. This is the image after the scourging by which Pilate tried to induce pity in the Jews. But both calls on the mob of Jews, chief priests and guards were to no avail. The Jews wanted Jesus crucified. This is a crucial scene in Jesus’s passion and many painters have painted Jesus in this final image of suffering in front of the crowds.

*Henri Blès*

Henri Blès worked in the first half of the sixteenth century. Not much is known for certain of his life, but he came from the village of Bouvignes near the towns of Dinant and Namur in Belgium. He worked first in Antwerp and later in various towns of

Italy. He would have died and been buried in Ferrara. Blès was a landscape painter and may have been a namesake of the family of Joachim Patenier, the other great landscape painter of the river Meuse. Among Blès' favourite themes are the stories of the Gospels that lend themselves easily to landscape painting: the 'Preaching of Saint John the Baptist', the 'On the Road to Emmaüs', 'Saint Jerome', 'Road to Calvary' and the parable of the 'Good Samaritan'. Blès also liked to picture many miniature figures, crowds, and he added these in his scenes of John the Baptist's preaching or in his paintings of the Calvary.

Henri Blès made one town scene and it is this one, not typical for his art, which we present. This theme was not familiar for Blès for he copied it from an earlier painting made by Jan van Amstel or Pieter Aertsen<sup>B17</sup>. Blès' painting is a 'Pilate presenting Christ to the People'. A crowd has gathered in the courtyard before a palace complex. Jesus is shown on the top of monumental stairs. Blès liked to paint many small figures and therefore he must have found delight in this crowd of tens of figures, all dressed in an oriental way with turbans, pin hats, long cloaks and with some wearing curved swords. The people are screaming to have Jesus crucified. The figures in the background are not always smaller than those of the foreground. Look for instance at the people leaning over the balustrade of the Saint Sepulchre building. The balustrade is far too large to be credible and so are the figures as compared to for instance Jesus. Yet, Blès painted all small figures in detail. No figure resembles the other and all have different poses. His figures are wonderfully miniaturised. But many of the figures are to our sophisticated eyes almost clumsily depicted.

Blès made the picture mainly in two tones of colour, ultramarine blue like in the sky and cupolas and red or brown hues like in the sand of the courtyard. The courtyard is in front of a palace that vaguely reminds of the Saint Sepulchre church of Jerusalem. Blès copied also the balustrade from his example, but this element was definitely not present in the real Saint Sepulchre building. Blès copied the entire scene, with all towers and cupolas and Renaissance palaces. He used perspective, but not all lines recede as they should do and the foreshortening of the figures is not always right.

But the scene still efficiently tells the story. Pilate has brought Jesus before the crowds. Jesus is held between two guards, one of whom holds an impossible long lance. Jesus wears the blue-purple cloak and the guards open the cloak to show the marks of torture on Jesus. Thus, almost naked and helpless, Jesus is offered to the compassion of the crowd. But the crowd is furious and excited and hundreds refuse him with upheld arms of anger. All cry, 'Away with him, to the cross!'

Several scenes are painted in the same frame, so there is no unity of time, as was the case in many medieval pictures. In the middle right, Jesus is being flagellated at the column of a gallery and this scene can be seen through the right arcades. Then Jesus is led by guards to be shown to the crowds. On the far right Roman soldiers already prepare the three crosses whereas on the left, between the arcades again, opens a view on the road to the hills of Golgotha.

Henri Blès made a touching naïve picture of the scene of 'Pilate showing Christ'. He showed a scene that must have impressed him enough to want to copy it. It shows Jesus being presented publicly, one of the 'Ecce Homo' themes, in a medieval, primitive way. Compare this picture with the sophistication of Botticelli's pictures

and one may wonder how a painter like Blès could have success in Italy. Blès was skilled in views with myriad figures and details of nature that amazed and interested. He brought his naïve views, which at all times have touched people and he presented to Italy his cosmic landscapes for landscape's sake, a novelty in southern art.

### *Titiano and van Dyck*

Titian and van Dyck have made 'Ecce Homo' pictures of the private, more intimate theme. Van Dyck, the painter from Antwerp, admired Titian and used this artist's example. Titian's painting dates from around 1558 to 1660, when Titian was about seventy years old. We are already in Titian's darker period, but his colours had still a warmer tone, they were not yet as pessimistic as they would be later.

Colour is rich in Titian's picture, especially in the soft tones of the purple mantle that hangs deep around Jesus's shoulders. Jesus wears the reeds that were given him as a sceptre, which reminds of the second time Pilate called on the Jews and showed them Jesus as a king. Jesus has a powerful breast and arms. Bruises are to be seen on his wrists where the ropes have cut into his flesh and drops of blood have fallen from his head on his shoulders. Jesus inclines his head in weariness. His face is in shadows as if he was ashamed of his state, but a splendid light surrounds him and indicates his holiness. Thus, Titian showed the contrast between the godly descent of Jesus and his suffering during this moment of the passion. Jesus is not represented as a victorious or arrogant Son of God, but as a simple human in pain and shame. This is very forceful representation, the result of all the compassion and empathy Titian perceived when reflecting on Jesus's state of mind. Titian felt deeply into his work; he has imagined what emotions could have gone through the mind of Jesus at that moment. He could well feel as Jesus since he was so old and had death close by. Older painters often make their most powerful pictures late in age and seem to emphasise the suffering human, as if they had their fill of all the injustice they had seen during their long life. Such was evidently the case with Titian for several pictures of Jesus's torture, as if the artist had grown weary of all the injustice he had seen but not approved nor had been able to straighten during his life.

Anthony van Dyck has taken again Titian as an example. His work dates from 1625 or 1626 while he was in Genoa. He had departed from Antwerp and had travelled some in Italy. He had copied Titian's pictures and even owned a version of Titian's 'Mocking of Christ'. His admiration for the Venetian painter was immense.

Just as in Titian's work Jesus keeps his head in resignation and sorrow low and to the left. Rays grow out of Jesus's head, but van Dyck has less emphasised this aspect. Jesus wears the crown of thorns and the same black beard as in Titian's work. However, van Dyck has innovated on Jesus's body, which is resplendent in light and beauty. Here we sense the difference between van Dyck and Titian. Titian's painting is all about the expression of an emotion and of deep sympathy with the figure of Jesus. Van Dyck is more the outward artist. Even though the same feelings are conveyed, anybody coming before van Dyck's painting will admire it and be seized by instant admiration at the effect. Jesus's body is equally powerful as in Tiziano's image, but van Dyck has pictured a glorious body without blemish. Whereas Titian

hangs a purple mantle on Jesus's shoulders and thus stays close to the narration of the Gospels, van Dyck has let a dark blue-green robe fall low to Jesus's waist to attract the eyes of the viewers immediately and fully to Jesus's carefully depicted torso. Still, in the very dark background a grinning soldier holds a very dark but purple mantle around Jesus's shoulders. To add to the drama of the picture, van Dyck imagined Jesus with hands bound and here also we can admire the painter's skills at the wonderfully drawn hands of Jesus. As much emotion is here in the resigned way Jesus lets his hands hang without force.

Van Dyck was much younger than Titian when he made his painting. This difference of age of course shows through. Titian's Jesus is resigned and in the shadows of life, whereas van Dyck's Jesus remains a youth ever glorifying while he is suffering. Force and elegance thus contrast in two paintings that are almost equally powerful. Both artists showed a man, but van Dyck brought the idealised vision of a deity back in Titian's image of humanity.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ turned into Derision**

Jan Sanders van Hemessen (ca. 1500-1575). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1544.

**Ecce Homo**

Jean Hey (active 1480-1500). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. 1494.

**Ecce Homo**

Ludovico Cardi called Cigoli (1559-1613). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti. Florence.

**Ecce Homo**

Antonio Ciseri. Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti. Florence.

**Ecce Homo**

Juan de Flandes (?-1519). National gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1480-1485.

**Ecce Homo**

The Brunswick Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel?). Mauritshuis. The Hague 1540.

**Ecce Homo**

Pierre Mignard (1612-1695). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1690.

**Ecce Homo**

Gian Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). The Museum of Fine Arts. Caen. 1760/1770.

**Ecce Homo**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Around 1605-1607.

**Ecce Homo**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1543.

**Ecce Homo**

Lovis Corinth (1858-1925). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1925.

**Quid est Veritas?**

Nikolai Gay (1831-1894). The Tretyakov Gallery. Moscow. 1890.

**Ecce Homo**

Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Ecce Homo**

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1659-1660.

**Ecce Homo**

Andrea Solario (ca. 1460-1520). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *Pilate washing his Hands*

### **Pilate washing his Hands**

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851). The Clore Gallery – London. 1830.

Matthew tells that at Festival time it was the governor's practice to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they chose. Now there was then a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Which do you want me to release for you: Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?' For Pilate knew it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, his wife sent him a message, 'Have nothing to do with that upright man; I have been extremely upset today by a dream that I had about him'. The chief priests and the elders however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus. So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said, 'Barabbas'. Pilate said to them, 'But what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified.' He asked, 'But what harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Let him be crucified!'

Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' And the people, every one of them, shouted back, 'Let this blood be on us and on our children!' Then he released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged he handed him over to be crucified.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was born in 1775 in a street of Covent Garden, London. He lived by his art already as a very young man, selling his watercolours in his father's barbershop. He sent his first oil painting to the Royal Academy in 1790. It was accepted and indeed exhibited during the Academy's summer exhibition in London. Turner was of modest descent, but his genius was recognised early. He was elected an Associate Member of the Academy in 1799 and a Full Member in 1802.

Turner was famous in 1830 when he painted 'Pilate washing his Hands'. He was a fully accomplished artist by then and he was amassing a considerable fortune. He had made voyages to Italy; his last travel to Rome dated from 1828. He had painted portraits, landscapes, marines and pictures of classical themes. But Turner rarely had handled religious themes so that 'Pilate washing his Hands' remains an exception in his oeuvre.

The picture is an exception in more than that one respect. We do recognise Turner's spectacular own style. The painting is in glowing colours with the yellows and browns dominating as in many of his pictures. The figures and background structures are only hinted at. Nervous confusion is in the picture and the main theme is difficult to discern. The whole picture is painted as if the artist had his eyes half closed and saw

the scene vaguely as in a haze. By that haze, the warm colours overwhelm us with soft emotions.

The centre of the picture contains Mary, Jesus's mother, as well as a second woman who is probably Mary Magdalene, leaning against Mary. Other women surround Jesus's mother. Pilate washing his hands may be standing to the left with his back to the viewer. Pilate is a monstrous fluffy shape of superposed colour areas, only to be recognised because he holds a towel in his left hand. All around this central scene are tens of figures of which scarcely a hint of faces is suggested here and there, or a piece of a turban, or the line of a lance. With these frugal means Turner has suggested a considerable crowd.

Turner painted old symbols of Jesus's Passion and life. A young girl is seated at the feet of the Virgin. This girl holds a child in her arms. On the left a woman is standing with another child at her hand. These may be two stages in the lives of Mary and Jesus. Thus, Turner recalled the process of the visual arts of the Middle Ages times when unity of time was not respected and various scenes from different periods were shown in one picture.

One might expect the figure of the High Priest to be to the right of Mary, the only figure in which a little blue colour is applied to suggest the splendid ritual robes. Jesus is to the right of this High Priest. His figure is barely recognisable. Only his face is clear. The cross blends with the background. Jesus wears the crown of thorns and he is bent under the cross. Only a Roman silvery helmet indicates that Jesus is being led and pushed forward.

Behind Mary towers what could be a high offering altar or the curtains that shield Pilate from the crowd. This emphasises the verticals and the direction Mary is looking to. Above that is a ghostly white image of what could be the face of God. As always in Turner's pictures, at least in those after the 1820s, we sense that what was most important for this artist was his feeling of the emotions in colours.

Turner expressed his feelings in colours. He cannot be called an Impressionist, but he was utmost interested in colours and in colour theory. One of his last paintings, dating of 1843 – Turner died in 1851- was called 'Light and Colour, Goethe's Theory, the Morning after the Deluge, Moses writing the Book of Genesis.' Needless to say, also in this painting Moses is only alluded at. A long sentence is needed to help the imagination of the viewer plunge into the atmosphere of the picture and yet deduct a meaning. Turner sought to depict emotions and to show feelings in colours of varying shades. Colours had emotional content. Thus the dark browns surround Jesus, browns as the wood of the cross. Jesus's ghostly pale face appears only as a reference for our imagination to reconstruct by our own feelings the carrying of the cross.

The centre scene of the picture is very white, a radiating white, and the Virgin is looking upwards in an appeal to God. The vertical lines behind Mary emphasise the direction. Where have we seen that same image of a white centre and dark figures, the upward appealing glance, the figures receding in shadows, here and there only a lively colour patch? This is all Rembrandt and 'Simeon's Song', so thickly underscored as for this picture to be a pastiche. The thick cloaks of Pilate remember of Rembrandt's 'Jewish Bride' picture in which the husband is enveloped in thick clothes. In the lower

part of Turner's frame, fowl lies on the ground as in Dutch genre pictures with scenes of children. Turner may have viewed his painting of a theme of the New Testament as an exercise in style. Maybe he was trying to find out whether he could compete in colours with the greatest of the Dutch artists. But Turner obstinately remained himself and this picture, though lending style elements from Rembrandt, remains original in the shading of the colours, in the composition and the expression. Rembrandt had not the wealth of colours of Turner, though he well knew them and nothing withheld him from using them. Rembrandt's vision was dark. But Rembrandt would not have shown the figures with the complex confusion and vagueness of Turner, nor so many. Rembrandt's liberty of expression had not gone so far yet.

Turner lived in his later years much as a recluse. He liked the public. He had held exhibitions in his own house. He had given courses on perspective at the Royal Academy and he had travelled to Italy. He had learned the history of art and he knew the artists that had changed the style of painting before him. In 1830 Turner had the financial means not to need to depend from anybody. He had a definite love for solitude and independence. He had the liberty and the desire to paint as he felt and to experiment. He was as powerfully original as the strongest painters of history were. Turner did not have many followers in England and on the continent but the power of his innovation is comparable to that of Caravaggio or Rembrandt. The French Impressionists went further along the road, on which Turner had been one of the first if not the absolute first. No painter before him had shown such liberty in expression using only colour and fading subjects. Yet in many of his pictures, Turner obstinately kept detailed figures, such as Mary in 'Pilate washing his Hands', and he reserved vagueness for the background, for sky and water and ancient columned palaces.

In his later paintings, like the 'Pilate washing his Hands', Turner's figures also were painted in less detail and they were becoming background themselves. Thus, Turner was very close to abstraction, to pictures consisting of colour only with the subject matter only indicated in the long title. But the title was always present, with an unequivocal story. The longer the title, the more Turner left to the imagination of the viewer and the more mysterious and private became the visual representation of whirling colour areas. Turner's 'Pilate washing his Hands' was one of the firsts of this kind of works.

The inspiration to handle New Testament scenes was Rembrandt's, not Turner's. This picture was the only one of religious scenes of Turner. He returned to nature, and to his memories of Venice, to the marvellous Venetian sun. His paintings were more and more the representation of his innermost emotions and he almost reached abstraction. Turner sought spirituality in his solitude. The visions of his mind were in colour and he reached out for the light. The warmth of his colours and the brilliance that almost always formed the centre gives an impression of eternity. For Turner, sensitivity must have finally gained more importance than view.

*Other paintings:*

**Christ before Pilate**

Nicolaes Maes (1632-1693). ). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest.

**Christ before Pilate**

Ludovico Mazolino (ca.1480-1528). ). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest.

## *Christ leaves the Praetorium*

### **Christ leaves the Praetorium**

Gustave Doré (1832-1883). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1872.

When Pilate gave his verdict to hand over Jesus to the people of Jerusalem, to do with him as they pleased. Jesus was led away and a large crowd of people followed him. There were many women mourning and lamenting. Jesus told these not to weep for him, but to cry for themselves and for their children, predicting disasters on them. As Jesus moved forward, the crowd ordered a man, Simon from Cyrene, who had just arrived from the country, to carry the cross behind Jesus. They brought Jesus to Golgotha. Of the four Evangelists, only John wrote that Jesus carried his cross to Calvary. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell that Jesus marched through the crowd followed by Simon from Cyrene, who carried the cross.

Gustave Doré made a gigantic picture of Jesus leaving the Praetorium, descending the steps of the Roman building and advancing amidst a wild crowd. Doré's painting measures six meters by nine meters and it is one of the several very large pictures that Doré dedicated to religious themes. The painting was made in Paris, during very troubled times for France. Doré started working on it in 1867 but he had to bury it during the siege of Paris by the Germans, a war the French lost and which would cost Napoleon III his throne, and during the ensuing Paris Commune Revolt. He dug it up and completed it in 1872. He had seen movements of the masses by then and the outcry of passion of the people of Paris. The main feature of Doré's painting is the massing of the Jews around Jesus and the contrast between the serene, white innocence of Jesus and the pressing of the excited people.

Doré's painting was acquired by the Strasbourg Museum in 1988. The painting had a strange history until then. It had been sent by Doré to London to be exhibited there. Then it toured in the United States and was lost there, until it was discovered again in a warehouse in 1997. It then went through the hands of various owners. Gustave Doré was born in Strasbourg, so the painting ended in Doré's home town, as the city of Strasbourg bought it in honour of one of its most famous children.

Although Gustave Doré was born in the Alsace region of France, he moved to Paris with his parents when he was fifteen years old. He was already a child prodigy, and drawings of him, made when he was about five years old, still exist. When he was twelve he carved his own lithographic stones to illustrate stories. It seems that when he arrived in Paris, Doré burst into the shop of a publisher to show his engravings. The publisher, Charles Philipon immediately accepted Doré's drawings. Then, in the early 1850's, Doré took the initiative once more and contacted Louis Hachette, another, now famous, Parisian publisher. Doré made thousands of drawings for Philipon and Hachette, illustrating the works of Dante, Rabelais, Balzac, Cervantes, and many more authors. He illustrated fairy tale collections, the fables of La Fontaine and the adventures of the Baron von Munchausen. He made engravings for several editions of the Bible, so he knew the Bible well. Gustave Doré became the best known illustrator of France. He was more popular and famous even in England. In 1867 a

gallery was opened in London that displayed his engravings and paintings. The Doré Gallery existed for about twenty-five years and from out of that gallery, which Doré set up in the mid sixties, his paintings also toured in the United States. Doré had a large workshop in Paris and managed to continue his main business, illustrations for books, while painting his huge colour pictures in oil on canvas. He even started to sculpt around 1870. Doré became the most proficient and popular illustrator of the nineteenth century and many of his engravings continue to be the ultimate representation we still remember and use of figures such as Don Quixote or the 'Chat Botté'. His drawings were brilliant, imaginative to fantastic, elegant, detailed and surprising. Doré drew and engraved very quickly, with a never floundering imagination. Also in his later, huge paintings he never shied away from depicting much detail. Although the profusion of detail he presented a subject, such as the main figure, in the centre of attention of the picture, and left no doubt in the viewer's mind on the main topic of his work. He usually drew backgrounds and landscapes in fine detail and brought various additional personages in his pictures. We see this preference also in his painting of 'Christ leaving the Praetorium'.

Jesus walks majestically but humbly down the stairs of Pilate's Praetorium. He is the centre of light and the centre of all attention. Although the crowd and the soldiers are occupied with themselves or with their neighbours, most of the people look at Jesus. Jesus stands in the exact middle of the painting and the light radiates from his body to the scene, from his head and from his pure, white gowns. Doré's Jesus leaves the Praetorium unharmed, untortured, and not diminished in dignity. Jesus emits light over the diagonals of the frame. There seem to be four shafts of light to radiate along the diagonals and Gustave Doré painted the people along these diagonals of light. One remarks the people in the light, many however remain in the shadows. The effects of light in Doré's picture are dramatic, epic and very obvious, so obvious as to seem mannered to us now, artificial, over-emphasised. Doré enhanced much the mysticism and divinity of Jesus by this effect. By contrasting the glowing brilliance of Jesus with the mobbing, chaotic lines and colours of the crowd, Doré brought to preponderance the serene, pure, divine nature of Christ and he underscored the difference between Jesus and the people, between divinity and humanity. Around Jesus are so many people, Jews, women, me, soldiers, poor and rich, that the sole brilliance of Jesus receives easily first all attention from the viewer, seeking rest in an otherwise chaotic mass of patches of colours. Doré painted so many details of figures that they do not disturb finally his message, but strengthen it. Here is Jesus the Divine, the Pure and innocent, striding unhindered to his fate and the crowds open amply to let him through, despite the pushing and the throbbing pressure of the people. Pressure there is. Doré even painted a small scene in the higher left part of the painting, of a man having fainted and being pulled up a balustrade to get more air and breathe better.

The crowd widens beneath, opening, giving way, but in a broad way, opening wide, so that the composition along the diagonals open too. The view opens along the diagonals. Beneath it opens in the crowd, in the upper part it opens to the skies and to the menacing dark clouds. The design of composition supports the oblique cross of the light radiating along the diagonals. Gustave Doré never attended any academy of painting, so we can absolve him from having used traditional, well-known elements of composition. He found out by himself a structure that suited his narrative and that consists of an open V-structure towards the skies and an inverted open V below the diagonals. Doré radiated light in between and thus came to an original and very dramatic design.

Gustave Doré was a great draughtsman and also a marvellous colourist. 'Christ leaving the Praetorium' shows harmonious and yet interesting colours, used around Jesus in varied alteration. Doré mastered the gradations of hues, tones and intensities of colours in agreeable ways and he knew well where to apply emphasis through the use of brighter hues such as yellow or orange, versus smaller scenes that needed to remain in the shadow parts of his paintings. Here he used appropriately the lower intensity browns, greys and green hues.

There is an obstacle to the unhindered path of Jesus. That obstacle is the wooden cross. It lies ominously, straight in Jesus's path, blocking his freedom, confining him and endangering him. Simon from Cyrene already supports the beams. But Simon will follow Jesus, wearing the heavy wood. He will not force the cross on Jesus. Gustave Doré has not really solved the contradictions in the stories of the Evangelists, but he leaves no doubt that this Jesus will not carry the cross. Jesus will lead and Simon will follow him. Jesus will look at the cross and pass it. Nobody will dare to force the cross on Jesus, not on a figure of this transcendent light. Gustave Doré saw Jesus as the Divine Light of the World. If he did not himself believe in the New testament writings, he depicted Jesus like all believers would have liked Jesus to have been on his road to Calvary. This is the image that Christians prefer of Jesus, how they imagine the scene in the zeal of their fate. Gustave Doré had a keen intuition for enhancing the emotions of viewers, maybe just because he had never been to an academy and was dedicated to the essence of a scene and of its emotions. He knew how to illustrate a scene for maximum impact, according to maximum expectance. Doré painted in his own style, which was quite expressive. He painted so in times when Academicist tendencies were still very strong and when Impressionism was spreading (Doré's paintings were not the only ones to be buried in the 1870 French-German war: Camille Pissarro's canvases were abandoned by the artist when he fled to London and trampled upon by German cavalry in his house). Doré however had a natural talent and genius; he worked so hard on his own that he had discovered by trial and error the style forms, compositions and effects that were most useful to his drawings. His 'Christ leaving the Praetorium' therefore realised an original view. Doré had experimented and used many effects of light versus shadows in his drawings. In his huge oil painting he imagined an oblique cross of light that responded to the wooden cross of Jesus's crucifixion, and that became his composition. Jesus was not for Doré one individual among a throbbing crowd, in the midst of anger, fear, cries, accusations, jeers, insults, even beatings, among the sweat and close contact of bodies and breaths, like Jerome Bosch or Lorenzo lotto had imagined Jesus in this scene. Jesus must have been the divine apparition of brilliance that forced the crowds to make space for Jesus. This was how Christians saw Christ in their minds, the symbol of faith. Doré saw not Jesus the man, but Jesus the symbol.

Paintings like this 'Christ leaving the Praetorium' make us reflect now on how such an image of Jesus could be formed in our minds, and also on which image was the one that really could be seen, happened in Jerusalem that tragic day of Christ's crucifixion. Maybe Jesus was but a wounded, tortured, stained, insulted and humbled man among a shrieking and gesticulating crowd of curious and offended Jews, dragging himself to his shameful death like the lowest criminal, so exhausted as to be have been unable to carry his cross. Maybe Jesus was indeed enveloped in a radiating light so that people automatically and maybe silently, weeping, made ample way for

him and so that nobody had dared to stain his dignity by having him to carry the cross, so that Simon of Cyrene had to follow him. Maybe the scene was something in between. Reality would probably have been the first description, but Christians tend to believe the second. We are thus seeking what really happened, but only the very short descriptions of the New testament stories have come to us, factual in narrative and without many details. The Evangelists remained very brief on how Jesus walked to Calvary. We know it happened, which is the most essential, but we know not how it happened. The epic starts only in the New Testament stories when death nears Jesus, when the skies darken and when Jesus cries out to his Father, to god. The Evangelists wrote stories told by eyewitnesses, or stories remembered from oral narratives, a generation later. They wrote from close times, but they remain very dry and do not relate much the feelings of individuals among the crowds.

Gustave Doré also must have made such reflections on this, his subject of the painting and thought about various possible depictions of Jesus. For Gustave Doré there was no doubt; Jesus was the Divine.

Clement Greenberg once wrote that if there was an avant-garde in art there should also be an 'arrière-garde', a rear guard. In his original article he wrote that Academicist art that repeated traditional style forms and that was dedicated to imitation of nature must be this rear guard, which he called kitsch and despised. Later, he relativised his article and even called it arrogant. We agree with his later statements. Gustave Doré made with 'Christ leaving the Praetorium' a figurative painting that aimed to communicate a message from the bible, that was thus literary in objective, and that also exploited composition structures that were taught in academies –even if Doré had never followed courses in an academy. He painted the sky in a traditional 'open V', even if only a partial such structure, and the opening of the road before Jesus is an 'inverted open V'. Yet, his composition of the cross of light along the diagonals, emanating like rays from Jesus, was original. Doré found intuitively strong effects of epic and mysticism. He had a genuine genius talent. He was not a revolutionary avant-garde painter in his ways of depiction. He loved drawing too much and though he was ambitious he stayed close to his aims of illustrator. He succeeded nevertheless with ease in being original. Only the most intelligent and most gifted artists prevail in bringing such work. That work was no avant-garde but neither was it arrière-garde, and it was certainly no kitsch because original. In his ostentatious display of a certain image of figures like Jesus Christ, Gustave Doré invited the viewers to reflect on faith itself, on the true meaning and genesis of beliefs. Such is great art, whatever the style.

## *The Disrobing of Christ*

### **The Disrobing of Christ – El Espolio**

Doménikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Ca. 1590-1600.

The ‘Disrobing of Christ’ is a scene that is only rarely pictured by painters. It is not a scene that is described in the Gospels. Its origin comes from the ‘Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus’. In this text is told that before being crucified, the robe of Jesus was taken away and he was girded with a cloth of linen. So, a change of clothing had taken place at Calvary.

El Greco painted a first version of this scene around 1580 for the sacristy of the cathedral of Toledo.<sup>D11</sup> The priests change clothes in the sacristy of churches to perform the liturgy of mass, of baptism, of weddings and of funerals. So the theme of the ‘Disrobing of Christ’ was appropriate for such a place. Priests would change clothes in the sacristy and be constantly reminded that also Christ had been disrobed. Christ therefore would always have been present in the minds of the priests. Sacristies were often richly decorated, had a small private altar and strengthened cupboards where the reassures of the church were preserved as well as the Holy Hosts. Such a place usually also had devotional paintings on its high walls.

The work that is now in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich is a copy dating from 1585 to 1608, made either by El Greco or by his workshop.<sup>D11</sup> The original picture dates from 1580, when El Greco was about forty years old. He was born in 1541 in Thodele on the island of Crete, then under Venetian government. He painted first icons on his island and then moved to dominating Venice in 1566. He visited Rome for some time, but travelled to Spain from Venice in 1577. He remained and worked as a painter in Toledo until his death in 1614. He tried unsuccessfully to become a painter to the Spanish court, but he obtained many commissions of work from the monasteries and churches in and around Toledo.

El Greco was a Mannerist painter, influenced by many ways of painting from Byzantine icon painting over the Venetian smooth art to Rome’s grandeur of Michelangelo. All these experiences, his Cretan origins, his Toledan environment of scorching light and his very strong character made him into one of the most original artists of the later period of the sixteenth century.

The structure of the ‘Disrobing of Christ’ shows emphasis on the vertical lines. The frame is a long rectangle with the longest side up, so the painting may have stood to cover the highest part of a wall above an altar or a cupboard of the sacristy. El Greco placed Jesus almost in the middle of the frame, as an elongated figure. This was a feature of Mannerist painters like Parmigianino, occasionally used as an element of style also by El Greco. The feature adds to the spiritual aspect of Jesus. An armoured soldier, maybe a centurion, also shown in full length, stands next to Jesus. The soldier is dressed like a Spanish warrior, not like a Roman centurion. The soldier simply poses next to Jesus, not in a menacing or a violent mood, as a man that wants to show a scene. The soldier may indicate the symbol of the priest, as priests were soldiers of God. The centurion looks straight at the viewer, unlike any other figure in the

painting, and the red of Jesus's robe reflects on his armour. This may either symbolise that the red blood of Jesus is on the centurion, or that the red love of Jesus reflects on the soldier – and so on the priest. Long lances break out from the crowd above, adding to the static vertical lines in that part of the painting. On the left of Jesus are other soldiers; on his right are the Jews. The silhouettes of Jesus and the centurion hide these figures, so that only faces and heads are seen. Jesus and the centurion are painted in full and since they are standing, their figures add to the overall verticality of the picture.

Below the painting are two separate scenes. To the left are the three Maries. They are looking at a man who bores holes in one of the beams of the cross. These two scenes form an 'Open V' structure of composition, in which stands Jesus. If one supposes that the painting stood already quite high against a wall, the viewer could appreciate the lower scenes before being led to the higher scene of Jesus and the centurion, in which all the lines dramatically guide the view upwards, towards the thin lances, up towards the skies, the heavens, towards spirituality. This emphasis on verticality would definitely have been less strong if El Greco had started the Jesus scene immediately from down below on the panel.

There is much energy and movement in the scene behind Jesus, much confusion of heads stuck together, of bodies touching and pressing onto Jesus. The executioner on the right is tearing at Jesus's red robe to tear it off. Every figure behind Jesus looks in another direction. In that scene Jesus and the centurion are calm. Jesus is resigned, mystical and serene. The centurion seems more to protect Jesus in this turmoil, to assist Jesus as the priests would. Jesus looks upwards, in the traditional poise of a spiritual being that is already not anymore of the same kind of the other figures. Jesus is almost not a human anymore and El Greco, contrary to images of Jesus made by Caravaggio for instance, shows Jesus as near God. Two half-naked men therefore are on either side of Jesus, behind him, indicating the humanity that Jesus will soon leave.

Jesus is the only figure to look upwards, away from the scene to the heavens. El Greco underlined the contrast between spirituality and the earth of the humans, between Resurrection and death, in the glances of the figures. Thus the lower figures, the three Maries and the workman all look downwards, towards the earth, towards the cross, towards the symbol of death. The centurion in armour confronts the viewer to take him or her as witness, as if he were the narrator. Jesus holds his hand to his hearth, already awaiting his fate and setting his confidence in his Father above, maybe pleading to avoid his fate, which is the cross. If a viewer first looks at Jesus, so prominently in the centre and in the purest red hue of the painting, El Greco leads the view also downwards in the gesture of the executioner. The executioner tears at Jesus's robe and that gesture leads over the outstretched arm to the scene of the three Maries, and even more specifically to the Virgin Mary, Jesus's mother. Mary's view then leads to the workman. If one looks again towards Jesus, one is attracted inexorably to Jesus's face as the two men on either side of Jesus look in the direction of Jesus's face. These men were not allowed to make eye-contact with Jesus however, as no figure in the painting; so the two men glance at each other, behind Jesus. Thus El Greco guided the view of his spectators in a direct but subtle way, using as well gestures as eye-looks of his figures.

El Greco brought more structure in the picture than merely the vertical directions. The centurion's head is on the right diagonal and so is the man on the lower left so that the right diagonal is indicated. The line from the Virgin Mary to Jesus roughly follows the left diagonal. So El Greco also used the diagonals of the frame to build his composition on. The colours indicate further structure. El Greco used harsh yellow-green in the robes of one of the three Maries and in the carpenter. He used harsh brick red for the robe of Jesus. These are the only bright hues in the picture. Together they form a triangle mass, the traditional pyramid form around Jesus, at the top of which is Jesus's head. The centurion and the workman and Mary form equally such a pyramid, slightly skewed to the left of the frame. El Greco designed structure upon structure, using not only directions of the forms but also of the colours. The pyramid elements are not exactly in the middle of the frame so as not to mark too rigid a symmetry. The two pyramids are somewhat skewed so that enough place is left for the two figures, so that Jesus and the centurion seem balanced and not one diminished. Jesus' red robe attracts more attention, as is appropriate, but also the armour shines and our looks are drawn also to this feature. El Greco balanced the view in the centre of the painting. El Greco's painting is thus a masterpiece of delicate intelligence of design, or of course of an enormous genius of intuition for the art of painting.

We have shown how much structure El Greco drew in his picture. The colours give an impression as if they had been chosen rapidly, without much sensibility of harmony. Yet, the colours that El Greco used are almost unavoidable and logical. Jesus needed to be painted in red. That was Jesus's traditional colour and the priests of Toledo Cathedral would have expected nothing less. To our eyes the colour seems harsh, but in the very white colour of Toledo all surfaces are of enhanced brightness so that in the sombreness of a sacristy hard colours would just be the continuation of the colours outside. The red denotes love, warmth, and it is the central colour of the blood of life. The centurion's armour had to be painted in blue-grey. This could denote distance and coldness. So El Greco had to use yellow to contrast with the bluish armour and green to contrast with the red robe of Jesus. El Greco settled for a purer yellow in the carpenter to contrast with the blue armour and a yellow-green, grey-yellow modified hue in the robe of a Mary. These contrasts form a balance between the yellow patches and the blue and red, indicating the two pyramids of compositional structure. The yellow beneath also contrasts with the blue of the sky. And green, mixed with patches of yellow are also the colours of the executioner. So El Greco deliberately chose his colours. The colours support as well the structure, the balance of masses, as the feelings induced in the viewers. Moreover, by concentrating the lighter colours lower in the frame, El Greco attracted attention also to this part of the painting, which otherwise would have received little attention as the main scene is the disrobing of Christ. El Greco wanted to underline the fate of Jesus, the cross, and the fear that is to be found in most of Spanish seventeenth century paintings and that pervaded Spanish society. He used bright colours that deviated from well-known pure hues to do this.

El Greco seemingly brought the colours and the chiaroscuro impetuously on the panel, so that a viewer can easily forget to look at the structure in the picture. Viewers get an immediate impression of a hard, tough, very masculine art of strong colours when they look at this 'Disrobing of Christ' and the visible brush strokes here and there might also give the impression that El Greco worked rapidly. The crowd behind Jesus adds to the movement, to the restlessness of the scenes. These people look in all directions, in the action of the moment. But the seeming disorder and impetuosity of

the picture is a mask for a very intelligent composition, of which El Greco remained the master. His own emotions were strong but without sentimentality and the emotions did not dictate the work of this artist. El Greco respected the New Testament and his commissioners. He needed to show the emotions ostentatiously and he did just that in the vivid crowd, in the pious looks of Jesus, in the witnessing and affirming centurion, in the fearful women and in the meticulously working carpenter. All these emotions are strong and the only element of peace is Jesus.

El Greco's mark is the use of strange colours. We see not the usual pure hues, but hues that are just enough charged with discordant hues. El Greco's red is modified with a slight tint of blue to hang to the violet; his yellow evolved to tones of green and grey; his green is sombre and tinted with green. El Greco's blues are in dark tones. These were his colours, not academic colours. But he used them in a way to contrast the hues and yet to agree with as yet unwritten rules of harmony.

To such forceful art in which intelligence of profession is disguised in energy, we stand in awe.

## *Calvary*

### **Christ wears the Cross**

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Gent.

### **Christ wearing the Cross**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1526.

John tells that after the last appeal of Pilate, they took charge of Jesus and carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull, or as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

Luke recalls that as they were leading Jesus away they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus. Large numbers of people followed him, and women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For look, the days are surely coming when people will say, “Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on me!” to the hills, “Cover us!” For if this is what is done to green wood, what will be done when the wood is dry?” Now they were also leading two others, criminals, to be executed with him.<sup>G38</sup>

Mark confirmed the story that Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, helped Jesus to carry the cross. Matthew tells the same.

When a man of great sensitivity goes to such an ordeal as to have to carry his cross up the road to Calvary, the mountain of the skulls, even though someone is summoned to help carry the heavy wood, he turns inside. The world is concentrated into his mind and the suffering becomes very private amidst the crowd. There is no communication with the people around. There remains only a rejection of everything, a denial, and a definite and final separation between the person and all surrounding him. Such may have been the emotions of the man Jesus, although as the Son of God he might have felt an immense compassion despite the ignominy of the act and the ignorance of the Jews. Jesus’s passion was shameful because it happened in a place of shame, the Calvary, where criminals received their last punishment. It was humiliating because the punishment was unjust, Jesus had done no harm and he had not deceived.

The two paintings that have tried to capture this idea are the ‘Carrying of the Cross’ of Hieronymus Bosch and of Lorenzo Lotto. Bosch must have been born somewhere around 1450 in the small town of ‘sHertogenbosch in the north of Brabant, these days a town of the Netherlands. He died in 1516 and worked mostly in Antwerp as almost every painter of importance of the beginning of that century in Belgium and the Netherlands. He had an enormous and skewed fantasy. Bosch dwelled in monstrosities and in ugly images of hell and pain. He was a skilled painter, but lacked in many basic techniques of his trade. He did not well know perspective, and he rarely foreshortened his figures. He was a good landscape painter but had difficulty in creating three dimensionality and depth in his pictures. We suppose he was not much interested in these pictorial, stylistic techniques. He expressed ideas in the crudest,

most direct way possible and obtained his effects by showing individual images instead of by composition, colour, form and harmony of image.

Bosch's 'Carrying the Cross' is thus also an easy picture, with a simple emotion and a simple psychology. The picture shows a horrible crowd of faces. Jesus's face is in the middle and a beam of wood emerges to the upper left. The shape of the cross is not even hinted at. We only see a rectangle in the colours of wood come out of the crowd. This leads to the middle face, but that face is the least conspicuous and the most neutral of the picture. There is nothing to note on this face, no suffering, and no emotion whatsoever. The face has almost closed eyes and thus is the centre of a retracted universe, closed on itself. This, Jesus's face then, is surrounded by the obsessive heads of monsters as only Bosch could imagine. Bosch expressed hatred in these heads, devilish rejection, grins, mockery and scorn, derisive laughter and contempt. Jesus is amidst all that abhorrence, oblivious but these emotions turn around him and catch him in geometric strictness. Because there is strict symmetry underlying this picture.

Jesus and the line of the cross form one diagonal. One can discern the other diagonal of the frame as formed by other faces. Then the faces come in groups of three, reflecting in a strange way each time the global composition of the picture, for each group of three heads has one central face that is looked at scornfully by the two other. Thus the central theme is repeated four times in the four triangles of the picture formed by the two diagonals. In the lower left corner the central figure is Saint Veronica holding the Holy Shroud. When a face seems isolated and not participating in these intimate triangles, it has a particular function. Thus to the right a soldier's head leads the procession and Simon of Cyrene on the right holds the cross. These figures do not look at the rest of the scene. The soldier looks straight forward; Simon is intent on the cross and his hands are held high on the wood.

The picture is of course exquisitely painted in various soft and harmonious colours that almost seem to want to soften in a sarcastic way the true devilish message of the picture. Bosch here was a powerful painter with a vivid imagination and with a forceful potential to live himself into the interiorisation of Jesus on the way to Calvary.

### *Lorenzo Lotto*

A very similar image is Lorenzo Lotto's 'Carrying of the Cross'. Lotto was a contemporary of Bosch, but he worked in the south, in Venice. He lived from 1480 to 1536. His picture dates from 1526. It takes the idea of Hieronymus Bosch, but it shows a much softer image. Jesus is again the centre and other figures surround Jesus, but these are really only hinted at since we see only arms, the wood of a lance and part of a figure. But here also suffering is interiorised at the point of oblivion of the environment and in the same very powerful concept.

Jesus is more present in Lotto's picture. He seems a nice older man, almost carefully and tenderly carrying the cross. The colours are important, clear, and pure. Bosch and Lotto had a lot in common as personalities. We do not know too much of Bosch's life and of his psychology, but his picture shows an obsession with the ugly and with all

that was extraordinary in life and he had a very particular lonely vision of pictures. Somewhat of that lonely vision can be found too in Lotto's art. Lotto remained outside Venetian society and preferred to work in the marshes of the lagoons. He also sought his images inside himself and in his later age he retired into an abbey.

Bosch was a man of Northern Europe, Lotto a man of Southern Europe. Bosch worked in Antwerp, a port much directed towards the trade with the Baltic and the former Hanseatic cities. Lotto was a Venetian and worked for Venice, a port directed towards the Arabic countries, towards Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. What they had in common was their humanity, their obsession and power of feeling into the depths of Jesus's emotions on the road to Calvary. They were both very exclusive painters with visions all their own, coming from the depths of their mind. Lotto and Bosch fully concentrated on the human Jesus, and less so on the spiritual God. They emphasised how Jesus the human suffered and were very interiorised in that search.

*Other paintings:*

**Finding the three Crosses**

Jan van Scorel (1495-1562). Grote Kerk. Breda.

**The Bearing of the Cross**

Flemish Master. Musée d'Histoire et d'Art. Luxembourg.

**The Carrying of the Cross**

Quinten Massys (1465-1530). Mauritshuis. The Hague. 1512-1513.

**Christ Carrying the Cross**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Sint Paulus Kerk. Antwerp. 1617-1618.

**Christ falling on his Way to the Crucifixion**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1517.

**The Fall of Christ on his Way to the Cross**

Gian Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1772.

**The Way to Calvary**

Ugolino di Neri. The National Gallery. London. Active 1317-1327.

**Calvary**

The Master of the Passion Scenes. Groeninge Museum. Bruges. Around 1500.

**Christ carrying the Cross**

Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480 – 1532). Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Milan.

**Calvary**

Andrea Mantegna (1435-1506). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1457-1460.

**Calvary**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1555-1640). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels.

**The Road to Calvary**

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Church of San Alvise. Venice. 1740.

**Ascent to Calvary**

Giovanni Busi called Giovanni Cariani. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan. Ca. 1540.

**The Road to Calvary**

Domenico Zampieri called Domenichino (1581-1641). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1610.

**Calvary**

Toussaint Dubreuil (ca. 1561-1602). Musée National de la Renaissance, Château d'Ecouen. End of the 16th Cy.

**Christ carrying the Cross**

Gabriel Angler the Elder (active 1429-1462). Bayerisches Nationalmuseum – Munich. Ca. 1445.

**Christ carrying the Cross**

Pierre Mignard (1612-1695). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1684.

**Christ carrying the Cross**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1689.

**The Passion of Christ**

Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1470-1471.

**Lo Spasimo de Sicilia. Christ falls on the Way to Calvary.**

Raffaello Santi (1483-1520). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1517.

**Calvary**

Andrea di Buonaiuto. Church of Santa Maria Novella, the Spanish Chapel. Florence. 1365-1367.

**Christ carrying the Cross dragged by an Executioner**

Gerolamo de' Romani called Romanino (ca. 1484/1487-1560). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1540-1545.

**The Way to Calvary**

Lambert Sustris (ca. 1515/1520-1584). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1540-1542.

**Christ carrying the Cross**

Francesco Zaganelli (1460-1532). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1520's.

## *Veronica*

### **Veronica**

Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1911.

Oskar Kokoschka was born in 1886 in Austria, in Pöchlarn, a little town on the Danube west of Vienna. He started to work in the Wiener Werkstätte, an artistic workshop dedicated to the symbolist, decorative Art Nouveau in which the major Austrian artists like Gustav Klimt were associated. Klimt supported him, as well as an architect Adolf Loos who was his first Maecenas. Loos took him on travels to Switzerland and Berlin. In the Berlin of 1911, just before the First World War, Kokoschka encountered Herwarth Walden, the director of the Expressionist magazine 'Der Sturm'. Kokoschka discovered Expressionism and part of his work from that period on, especially his portraits, is fully Expressionist.

All art is to some degree expressionist, as it wants to imprint on the viewer an expression of its message. But the German and Austrian painters of that time intended to reduce images to the pure release of emotions. And then again, subject matter did not need to be so well detailed anymore since the expressive values of colours were discovered or re-discovered. Subject matter faded and colour and line took preponderance. The period was a time of great anxiety. In the German speaking societies of Europe, but also in other parts, a great unease with how society was evolving could be felt in art.

Still later, Kokoschka met the painters of the art movement 'Der Blaue Reiter', a movement originally founded in Munich, who were even less expressionists than colourists, and he worked also with them. Kokoschka was always a colourist and must have felt at home in the 'Blaue Reiter' movement.

In Berlin Kokoschka learned to know Alma Mahler, the widow of the composer Gustav Mahler and he fell madly in love with her. Kokoschka could not stay long in one place. He was restless, as he would be all his life. The couple visited Italy, Venice, and Naples. He made many passionate paintings and drawings of Alma, expressionist paintings of Alma and himself. But the relationship ended in 1914 and the disappointed Kokoschka engaged in the Austrian army<sup>C1</sup>.

In August of 1915 Kokoschka was severely wounded at the Russian front. But he returned to the front, now at the border with Italy, where fierce battles took place between the Austrian and Italian armies. He made many war drawings of the front lines of the Isonzo River in Italy, of the region where he worked in a group of painters-reporters.

After the war, Kokoschka taught at the Academy of Dresden in Germany<sup>C1</sup>. Dresden was a town in Eastern Germany, also with a tradition of artistic schools. In the beginning of the century the expressionist movement 'Die Brücke' was born here. Dresden marked a new, bright period for Kokoschka and slowly he reverted from expressionism to an individual style. He met a girl in Dresden, a student singer, Anna Kallin, and took her with him on new journeys through Europe<sup>C1</sup>.

Kokoschka left Dresden already in 1923 and between the period of 1923 to 1934, restless as ever, he continued his frequent travels all over Europe: Switzerland, the South of France, Paris, London, Lyon, Bordeaux. He also saw Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Palestine. He remained three years in Paris, went through a period of depression, mainly in 1927, then returned to Vienna. In 1934, just after the death of his mother, Kokoschka lived in Prague, where he became a friend of the President of the Czechoslovakian republic Thomas Masaryk. Both were admirers of the Bohemian scholar Comenius.

In Prague also he met Olda Palkovska, a law student, and married her<sup>C1</sup>. From that period, 1934 to 1938, date his many views of Prague, the capital of Bohemia. The Second World War threatened, so Kokoschka and his wife Olda left for London just before the German Nazi army entered Czechia. They stayed in Great Britain and lived mainly in Scotland with a Czech industrialist family, until 1953. From that period date wonderful landscapes of Scotland and even more wonderful colour drawings of flowers. These belong to the most intimate, delicate pictures of Kokoschka. Directly after the war, Kokoschka and Olda made many journeys to the South of France, Spain, Switzerland always, Rome, Florence, Greece, and Jerusalem.

In 1953 Kokoschka and his wife finally settled in Switzerland, in Villeneuve on the Lemane Lake<sup>C1</sup>. He visited other artists in Switzerland, among which the musician Pablo Casals of whom he made a portrait. Kokoschka continued his travels: Venice, Berlin, New York. He died in 1980 at the age of 94 in Montreux, Switzerland. So, Kokoschka's life spanned the twentieth century in which he saw and participated in two world wars. Some years later after his death his wife Olda Kokoschka created a foundation in the Jenisch Museum of Vevey, Switzerland.

The 'Veronica' painting of Oskar Kokoschka in the Budapest Museum dates from 1911. It was painted in a period when Kokoschka travelled through Germany, Berlin and Vienna and during which he made several religious pictures. Kokoschka wanted to prove with this work that the idea to catch the essence, the lustre of a dying God on linen was a vision that not only medieval painters could comprehend and represent but also contemporary artists.

The story of Veronica is not recounted in the Gospels. According to the apocryphal texts of the 'Acta Pilati', Veronica was the woman that had been healed of haemorrhages by Jesus near Caesarea Philippi. She had asked and obtained a cloth with a painted picture of Jesus. She went to Rome with the picture and when Emperor Tiberius fell ill, showed it to him whereupon he was cured. Later, around 1300, Roger of Argenteuil was the probable source of a new version of this story. Veronica now had been present at Calvary. Upon seeing Jesus in agony while he was bearing the cross, she had relieved Jesus by holding a cloth to his face to wipe away the blood and sweat. Then the features of Jesus had become imprinted on the cloth.

Medieval legend says that Veronica came out of her house while Jesus was on the road to Calvary. She used her veil to wipe the sweat of his face and thus Jesus's features were miraculously imprinted on the cloth. This cloth, the Sudarium or vernicle, is preserved as a relic in the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Rome. It was a very famous relic of Rome. The current Sudarium may however not be the original. During the sack of Rome of 1527, the German Protestant soldiers of the Catholic Emperor

Charles V passed along the image<sup>U11</sup>. The Veronica was so important because it was supposed to be one of the only true images of Jesus known in medieval Europe. The origin of the name Veronica may be of the Greek words 'Vera Icona' or 'True Image'.

Kokoschka's Veronica comes out of the vortices of time as a mystic appearance. She is surrounded by the white radiation of saints. She is in the red colour of blood, representing the suffering of Jesus on the road to Calvary. Veronica holds tenderly the linen cloth with the face of Christ as if it were her own child. The face on the linen is equally impregnated with red blood that is still drooping from the veil. Veronica also is a suffering woman. Her face is very white. She has rough and unkempt, long red hair. She has lips kept together in a determined way, long eyes that look inwardly at her own misery and she has the hard face of a German working woman who has had her share of unhappiness, hardships and death. She wears a simple red robe and the bright red colour of blood also comes from her body as can be seen just over her right breast.

Kokoschka made a compelling visionary image of Veronica in which he blended the medieval legend, the mystic story and his uneasy feelings on society of Germany, Austria and Czechia at a time just before the First World War. Particularly the expression of Veronica and the use of the red colours are premonitory. Soon, European women would have no male children anymore to hold. They could only look tenderly at the photographs of their children fallen on the war front and bow their faces to memories of their boys.

Kokoschka's image is a very spiritual one, appealing to very strong emotions and very much a picture of its time. There is a definite feeling of sameness in emotions when we look at the pictures of Bosch, Lotto or Kokoschka. They are images of suffering people made by artists who were profoundly touched by the injustice, violence, lack of tolerance and all the ugliness that can happen in life when people attack on each other. These feelings were universal, the more sensitive painters did not accept them but abhorred them, and hinted at the severe rejection given by Jesus in the Gospels.

*Other paintings:*

**Veronica and the Holy Shroud**

Master of Saint Veronica. Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Around 1420.

**Saint Veronica**

Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1508.

**Saint Veronica**

Bernard Buffet. The Collection of Modern Religious Art. The Vatican.

**The Holy Shroud of Turin**

Georges Rouault (1871-1958). Musée National d'Art Moderne. Paris. 1933.

**Two Angels presenting the Sacred Image**

Claude Vignon (1593-1670). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. Around 1640.

**Veronica**

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Around 1625-1630.

**Saint Veronica with the Sudarium**

Master of Saint Veronica (active in Köln, first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1420.

**Saint Veronica**

Colyn de Coter (1480-1525). Private Collection Rau. Germany. Ca. 1520.

**Saint Veronica with the Sudarium**

Doménikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614), workshop replica. Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1602-1607.

## *The Crucifixion*

### **Christ Crucified**

Antonello da Messina (Around 1430-1479). The National Gallery – London.

### **The Isenheim altarpiece**

Crucifixion, Saint Sebastian, Saint Anthony, Annunciation,  
Angels' Concert, Nativity, Resurrection, Entombment,  
Temptation of Saint Anthony, Anthony visits Paul in the Desert.

Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1470/1480-1532).

Musée d' Unterlinden – Colmar (Alsace-France). 1511-1515  
1515.

### **Virgin with Child**

Stuppach Church – Stuppach (near Würzburg-Germany). 1517-1519.

### **The Conversion of Saint Maurice by Saint Erasmus**

Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1520 - 1524.

### **Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg before the Cross**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (ca. 1472-1553). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1520-1530.

### **The Holy Mary Magdalene**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (ca. 1472-1553). The Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln.  
1525.

### **Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg as Saint Jerome**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), Hans Cranach (?). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota (Florida). 1526.

## *Crucifixion*

Matthew told in his Gospel that when the soldiers had reached a place called Golgotha, that is the place of the skull, they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. When they had finished crucifying him they shared out his clothing by casting lots, and they sat down and stayed there keeping guard over him. Above his head was placed the charge against him. It read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on the right hand and one to the left.

The passers-by leered at him; they shook their heads and said, "So, you would destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it! Then save yourself if you are God's Son and come down from the cross!" The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way, with the words, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe him. He has put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him. For he did say, "I am God's Son." Even the bandits who were crucified with him taunted him in the same way. <sup>G38</sup>

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of those who stood there heard this, they said, “The man is calling on Eliah,” and one of them quickly ran to get a sponge which he filled with vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink. But the rest of them said, “Wait! And see if Eliah will come to save him.” But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.<sup>G38</sup>

And suddenly, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks were split, the tombs opened and the bodies of many holy people rose from the dead. And these, after his resurrection, came out of the tombs, entered the holy city and appeared to a number of people. The centurion, together with the others guarding Jesus, had seen the earthquake and all that was taking place, and they were terrified and said, “In truth, this man was son of God.”<sup>G38</sup>

There are two ways of representing the crucifixion. One can show the scene in all the details of the stories of the Gospels, with the mocking priests and scribes, with the Roman soldiers giving Jesus to drink or stabbing him with a lance in his side, and with the weeping women at the basis of the cross. Mainly Baroque painters have used the evident pathos and strange events that happened at Golgotha such as the earthquake to depict the moving scene. Earlier painters, particularly Italian masters of the fifteenth century such as Antonello da Messina and Fra Angelico reduced the scene to a symbol, to a mystic icon. Thus, about half of the over forty cells of the abbey of San Marco in Florence were decorated by Fra Angelico in this way by man-high frescoes on the white walls.

One of the best-known basic pictures of the intimate, private suffering and symbolic representations of the final Passion of Jesus is the ‘Christ crucified’ of Antonella da Messina in the National Gallery of London.

### *Antonello da Messina*

Antonello da Messina was a very original artist. His mind was set to the study and to the comprehension of the New Testament and of his art. He was born around 1430 in Messina, a town of southern Italy. He worked mostly in Naples but he must have made a journey to Flanders to see the paintings of the Flemish primitives. He may have seen the pictures of Jan van Eyck there and he is supposed to have learnt all the possibilities offered by oil painting. This in itself was extraordinary. We know that northern painters frequently visited Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The contrary is very rare. But Messina was a man with a very spiritual vision, who must have admired the clearly detailed, rational yet nature-loving and very devotional spirit of Flanders’ Gothic images.

Antonello da Messina returned to Naples and to Messina around 1456, but he continued to travel through Italy. In 1475-1476, not so long before his death of 1479, he was in Venice and saw Giovanni Bellini with whom he conferred, and whom he could influence. Hence he had a certain impact on subsequent Venetian painting.

Antonello has reduced the Golgotha scene to an icon. Jesus is depicted high on a cross as a heavenly sign. Jesus is already a symbol floating in the air. Therefore his figure is stylised without the apparent features of his torture. This is still much a Gothic view, dominated by the long vertical lines that tend to enhance the divine character of Jesus. Jesus is a slender man on the thin, tall beams of the cross, thus bringing even more coherence of depiction. Jesus's elevation is emphasised by Antonello, in showing Mary and John huddled on the ground next to the high cross. These figures are lost in grief and despair; they have sunken to the earth of Golgotha. Golgotha means the place of the skull so Antonello has placed skulls and human bones in evidence at the base of the cross. Adam, the first man, was supposed to be buried on Golgotha. So in medieval pictures it is Adam's skull that is shown beneath the cross. This then depicts the death and the sins of humanity.

The scene of the Crucifixion is set not amidst a jeering crowd, nor with soldiers around, but in a wide landscape of what is supposed to be the town of Jerusalem. All aspects of landscapes are shown, such as a forest, meadows with isolated trees, the town, desert land, the far sea and even mountainous regions on both sides of the frame. These landscape views have a Flemish character in them. Northern Gothic painters, notably the van Eyck brothers, had introduced a keen eye for the splendid details of nature. Pictures like Antonello da Messina show also the growing awareness of nature in Italy. The skies are an eerie light blue but the absence of prominent white clouds denote that this was not intended to be a picture of nature.

Antonello has introduced a new style of painting with his 'Crucifixion'. The colours are subdued, with soft tones that all have the same tender hue. There are no harsh colours and no harsh lines too. All contours are soft and the shadows of a diffuse light that seems to come from the left side form the contours of Jesus, of Mary and of John. This same light is lost on the landscape however. We feel hereby the difference between the living, human matter and the inanimate. Antonello had found a different depiction than the strict design of Florentine drawing. This was depiction more of intuition and of emotion of the painter expressed through colour in the first place. By this finding Antonello most influenced Giovanni Bellini and Venetian art.

The general feeling of the picture is one of desolation, of loneliness and of despair. Mourning has come to the earth for Jesus has expired. The crowds have left and only Mary and John remain with their grief. The image is interiorised, dignified, poignant and unforgettable. Antonello has been able to compose a picture with which his fame has been settled for ages. We can imagine how he must have thought on his travels of a best representation of the ultimate scene of Christ's passion and of how to express spirituality in its purest form as the earliest painters but in an innovated way. The picture is the rendering of lonely nights of journeying through Europe. This is the essential spiritual picture in which the feelings of transcendence are completely supported by the elements of form. With this image all that could be said of Jesus's death has been told, all emotions and pictures of the mind shown. This is the mystic death of Jesus represented and its lasting image for humanity.

### *The Crucifixion of Issenheim*

It is between the sixth and the ninth hour. The light of the day has retreated by command to a threatening darkness. The suffering of Christ in the 'Crucifixion' is brought to a paroxysm of horror. The body is thin, elongated and dirty. Flesh is only a thin layer over bones. Holes of skin disease and pus cover body and legs. The arms are extraordinarily long, since all the body hangs from them. The rest of the body, chest and loins are outstretched too, fully under vertical stress. The hands have become claws, so expressive of the ultimate pain that continued till the last moment. The hands claw upwards as if they have been twisting to get out of the nails that go through the palms, but not entirely, so that the body hangs merely on the iron spikes. The feet also show the monstrosity of the crucifixion. The feet and toes are distorted. The blood has trickled on a wooden support that has remained too low to be of any help to agony of the body. The blood flows from there on the ground. A huge nail has gone through the feet but does not support the legs, so that the body pitifully hangs from the beams. The beams of the cross were cut from a tree; they were not planed but remained rough. The horizontal crossbeams are too small to support the weight of the man, so they bend in an arc. Christ's head is hanging down, hideous thorns on his scalp. His face shows the signs of blows and torture. The marks of torture are all over Jesus's body. His crown is a circle of long thorns, longer than any thorns ever seen in a crown of Jesus, and the thorns are driven not just into Jesus's head but the thorns also penetrate his shoulders. Soldiers have tortured Jesus, not just with whips studded with lead balls but also with the thorns, so that pieces of the thorns still remained stuck in his flesh. Jesus felt tortures in his flesh. His flesh is torn. Jesus is a sick man, and the signs of skin-wounds are all over his body.

Mary is dressed like a nun, in white coarse linen. This white linen reminds of the shroud of Jesus's entombment and is certainly unusual for a depiction of Mary. The white cloak makes of Mary a nurse and the nun of a convent. Her face is as white as her clothes. The blood has left her cheeks and she arches back as if fainting in front of the suffering. John needs to hold her so that she does not fall. John also is grieving, turns his head away from the crucified Jesus as if he cannot endure the sight any longer. Now he has to care for Mary, as Jesus just asked him from the cross in his last human plea. The man on that cross is not a human anymore. It is a sheer horror.

Mary Magdalene is smaller than Mary and John, as she was a sinner and thus less in the eyes of God. She has the long flowing hair of seduction, shown, as was the tradition since very early in paintings and sculptures. She also here is outcrying and holds her praying hands high to the dying crucified. The hands resemble the distorted gesture to the heavens of the hands of Jesus. Mary Magdalene is probably the one who feels most the true pain and thus has most true empathy with the crucified. She has suffered too. She has brought the balms to anoint Jesus when he will be lowered from the cross. She may well be the only one to still have the force to touch the dead body and certainly the one with the less aversion to handle the corpse.

Jesus is giving his death to redeem humanity. This is shown symbolically by the lamb at his feet. It bears the cross from now on. The blood of the sacrifice of the Son of God flows into the chalice, which will be used forever after in the ceremonies of Catholic Mass.

It was all prophesied. Saint John the Baptist stands to the left of the scene. He points at the scene with a long, crooked finger. He is the teller of the story, the guide who

reads to the viewers out of the book what has happened. This will be the New Testament that will testify for the redemption. The letters inscribed above John the Baptist are the first lesson: 'Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui' or, 'He will increase while I will decrease'. John has remained a long time in the wilderness; he is still wearing the leather skins of his isolation there. He also seems wild because of that, out of our world, fitting well in the scene of poverty and degradation. This scene is not a conventional one for the Calvary theme, as John the Baptist could not have been present at Jesus's death. He had been decapitated long before. The scene therefore is constituted for its symbolic and spiritual value. John baptised and by doing this made the baptised enter a spiritual realm.

No painter has shown so blatantly the horror of the crucifixion. Not only is there no embellishment whatsoever here, no transcendental thought, no respectful veneration, but also no dignity and no pity in the representation. There is no reference in the body of the crucified to something that could be more than an abject, tortured man in extreme suffering. This crucifixion is an experiment in thought, of somebody who has wanted to completely represent to himself, even to live himself utterly into, what might have been the real act of a crucifixion. It is a picture made by an artist who has read the testimony of the New Testament over and over again and then tried to put himself into the body of Christ. This artist has tried to understand how that Man has felt and suffered and contorted. But he did not want to paint an idea of Jesus, a concept of the mind. He wanted to draw suffering humanity, the suffering of a pestilence body clawing in pain. This somebody wanted to feel the suffering himself; he has read the Scriptures so much and thought so much about the scene that only this monstrous representation could be the result. He wanted to live this crucifixion again. And then he wanted to express all the suffering of humanity as well as the suffering of that one man, Jesus, in one scene.

This somebody was Mathis der Maler, Matthias Grünewald the German painter.

Who was this painter Mathis? Two names can be attributed to the artist; two names may have been used for one man. But the two candidate names may also be the names of different persons. One name is Matthias Grün, another Mathis Gothart Neithart. There are papers of the sixteenth century mentioning both names and on the pictures of Matthias Grünewald there are indications for the names. The first mention of the name of Grünewald is from a biography of painters published by the painter Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) in 1675. That publication came more than a century and a half after the presumed death of the master of the Isenheim altarpiece. But Sandrart may have had the information through an oral line of connections that originated with the true painter of the altarpiece so that the name Grünewald is plausible. Various sources talk of a painter Mathis or Mathis Grünewald that came from Aschaffenburg. This painter worked mostly for Archbishop Uriel von Gemmingen, archbishop of Mainz from 1508 to 1514. This master worked also in Frankfurt in 1511 and he may have worked as working-master on the castle of Aschaffenburg. Mathis Grün was known in Frankfurt as a sculptor. He was indeed also known as Mathis of Aschaffenburg, so he may have been born there. While in Frankfurt in 1511, he was present at the baptism to Christendom of a young Jewish woman called Anna and he married this Anna later in the year. He may have left Frankfurt for Issenheim late that year 1511. In 1523 Anna was taken in a hospital and stayed there. She may have been treated for folly. So Mathis Grün did not have a lucky marriage and Joachim von

Sandrart mentioned such a fact in his book. Grün seems to have lived in Frankfurt and he had a house there until 1526. From 1519 to 1525 he worked in Mainz and he died in 1532. He also worked for the Erbach family in Tauberbischofsheim from 1528 to 1530.

Several of Grünewald's paintings bear the monogram MGN. This may come from Mathis Grün, a name in which the letters M, G and N appear naturally. German historians of the beginning of the twentieth century found that there had been a Mathis Gothart also called Neithart who also worked for the Archbishop of Mainz. This Mathis Gothart Neithart had for instance worked at the waterworks of the castle of Bingen for the Archbishop of Mainz in 1510. When this master Mathis died, presumably in 1528, twenty-seven preaches of Martin Luther were found in his heritage, mentioned to be of Würzburg, not of Aschaffenburg but the two towns are not far one from the other. The letters M, G and N of the monogram may also indicate Mathis Gothart Neithart.

So who was Mathis der Maler, the painter of the altarpiece of Issenheim? Who was Matthias Grünewald? Was he Mathis Grün or was he Mathis Gothart Neithart or were Grün and Gothart two names for the same man? The answer to this riddle has so far not been convincingly solved.

### *The Panels of the Polyptych of Issenheim*

Matthias Grünewald has not only thought about the suffering of Jesus. He has also thought about the Resurrection of Christ. He painted this scene too, on one of the panels of an altarpiece he made in the town of Isenheim in the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the 'Resurrection', all is victory and resplendent. A ball of bright fire gloriously surrounds Jesus. Now He shows proudly the signs of His Passion on hands and feet. But the hands are held in a defying way, to stop people from coming too close. This is a gesture of which is also told in the Gospels, the 'Noli me Tangere', do not touch me for I am no human anymore and not yet a spirit. Now the gesture is a royal encompassing and a show of glory. Jesus's body has the nice rosy colour of healthy flesh now. Jesus is well built, still a young man, with a calm and wise face that has known no suffering. His gowns are a flaming red with a white inner lining that falls down until it reaches the sarcophagus. He rises out of the tomb. The soldiers are not sleeping, they are more struck by the ball of fire and have fallen down, their faces to the earth.

Here the painter did show a concept, an ideal view of Redemption and of Resurrection. The sick, tortured man Jesus has become a splendid youth to rise to the Heavens. This is the end of misery, the full glory of a new body and soul. So will the just arise from sickness and sin after death. In the Middle Ages plague and pests as well as skin diseases were thought to be the result of sin. The Bible texts of the Old Testament were very hard on people with skin diseases, ordering to expel them from the community. And in the New Testament, healing of lepers was a forceful miracle for Jesus. Grünewald showed with Christ's Resurrection image that there was hope not just for the body but also for the soul. The monks and brothers of the abbey of Isenheim treated skin diseases in their hospital. They healed the sick twofold. They

treated the body but equally the soul and the people who were being taken care of in the abbey must have believed fervently that the combination of an abbey and a hospital was their best hope for a cure.

Grünewald painted other scenes on the multi-panelled altarpiece of Isenheim. There is for instance a 'Concert of the Angels'. Pink angels are playing heavenly violins under a gothic chapel. There are organic vines growing on the columns of the structure, making the scene a strange view. The columns end in life figures of Saints. The cello of the foreground has ears, a nose, a mouth, seems alive like the building. There is also a warrior-angel, clad in armour. Or is he a devil, one of the fallen angels? He is looking at a whirling scene in the skies. A small crowned Virgin is seated in a halo of light. In this scene also a strange, alien view is presented to the viewers. The scene is inside a Gothic chapel, but since the figures inside needed to be shown, that chapel is only an open structure. Gothic architecture was strict and purified in style but Grünewald here exaggerated the flowing, curved lines of some of Late Gothic's decorations to a dramatic view. Natural, organic forms grow out of the slender stone construction and these forms are such a contrast to what the viewer knows of stone and thus expects to see, that a feeling of uneasiness is evoked in any spectator. The presence also of a devil figure among the angels, of a strange sort of almost menacing smaller heavenly creatures in the airs, all these put the viewer on a strange footing. It is as if Grünewald wanted to show how heavenly music and pure religious spirituality might turn easily and rapidly into sin. Delightful music is precious but the pleasure it procures is close to sin, to the sin that lurks in a corner like the hidden devil. The devil incarnates evil, so this scene must represent part evil, part salvation. Salvation then would be the figure of the virgin in the yellow halo. She is knelt and she wears a crown of flames like a figure from the Apocalypse. Yet this figure is indeed the Virgin. Before her stands a carafe of transparent, clean water. This is a symbol of the Immaculate Conception.

The 'Concert of the Angels' panel is next to the panel of the 'Virgin with Child' or the 'Nativity' panel. This panel starts at the bottom left with the utensils of simple house life. The little bed, pot and wooden bath are all there in a family scene. These are symbols also of cleanliness. Christ will cleanse the world of its sins. Mary has bathed Jesus, dries the baby in white linen and tenderly seems to want to divert and play with him and with a little bell. The child plays with Mary's necklace of beads. These represent also the rosary. Jesus is already counting the days and stages of his Passion. This Passion Grünewald also showed in the torn, white linen of Jesus and of the bed next to Mary. Torn linen is a sign of poverty and of misery, of a torn life and torn emotions. Here it represents the coming Passion of Jesus. Mary is a beautiful lady in fine blue and red robes, a princess or a rich merchant's daughter. The wall of the room does not exist and has given way to a fantastic landscape. There is a lake and a village with an imposing church on the right, maybe representing the praecceptory of Isenheim for which the painting was made. It seems a poetic scene, but the tone is still menacing. God throws in a yellow bright glow. He is a very old and wise man with long white hair and a white beard. He holds a sceptre and the imperial ball like the German Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire.

Mary sits in a closed garden, a symbol of medieval iconography. The closed garden is a reference to the Song of Songs of the Bible, in which are sung the virtues of the virgin before her marriage. In Grünewald's painting rose bushes grow all around

Mary. This also was a symbol as used in many German paintings in which Mary is seated in a rose garden. Red roses were a symbol of Mary's love and the red colour refers also to her son's Passion. There is a door to the left directing to a cellar under the ground. The closed door also is a symbol. It is called the 'Porta Clausa'. The symbol comes from the vision of the prophet Ezekiel. God showed the Temple to Ezekiel in this vision and brought him also to a closed door at the outer east of the sanctuary. God told Ezekiel: "no one may open it or go through it because the God of Israel had been through it. It must remain shut, but the prince himself may sit there and take his meal in the presence of Jahweh"<sup>G38</sup>. On the door is the sign of the cross, awaiting the Child. High blue, icy mountains rise behind Mary and the highest mountain looks like a volcano spewing red fire and smoke into the sky. A church and its abbey are painted on the mountains; a tower also was a medieval symbol of chastity. Out of the red sky emerge angels or devils, strange flying creatures. The mountain volcano rises almost out the head of the Virgin, as if to indicate that every human can be both a source of love and of the hottest passion. Again a scene of the Virgin as we have not seen before in any other painter of Gothic or Renaissance times.

The 'Annunciation' panel is more traditional. The Angel who announces to Mary that she will be pregnant of the Chosen has all flowing robes as can be found in many German, especially Nuremberg paintings. Mary delicately keeps her head away, out of modesty but maybe also in a gesture of refusal or disbelief. The Angel manipulates with his will and his hand pointing at Mary's head directly targets the Virgin's own will. This cannot be refused, has to be accepted. Mary is a simple German girl. She has a round uncomplicated face, with long hair as Mary Magdalene, the long hair that in the Crucifixion is all hidden under the nun's cap. The Annunciation theme is set in the interior of a Gothic cathedral. Grünewald created a strong illusion of space and depth. On the ceiling we remark menacing organic volutes, the exaggeration of late Gothic enhanced to a deranging effect. Mary is always shown in medieval Annunciation themes reading from the Book of Wisdom at the moment the angel meets her. In Grünewald's picture, a book lies open before her but on a Bible citation from the prophet Isaiah: 'Ecce Vigio concipiet et pariet filium et vocabitur nomen eius Emmanuel', meaning, 'A virgin will conceive and give birth to a child called Emmanuel'. The prophet Isaiah stands in grisaille like a statue of the past against the beams of the cathedral but Grünewald showed him as a malicious wizard. The books, among which maybe the Book of Wisdom, lie on a chest in front of Mary. This chest may represent the Ark of the Covenant into which Moses laid the tables of the Law of Israel. Grünewald painted Mary's robe marvellously in all detail of its chiaroscuro. But more remarkable even are the flowing robes of the angel, painted in a way, as we are familiar with from the Nuremberg masters. This angel also has fiery red wings, which are more the wings of battle than the white wings of spiritual purity.

The panel of the 'Conversation between Saint Anthony and Saint Paul' represents the two hermits in an oriental landscape. It is a scene as told in the Golden Legend. The two saints are seen in conversation and Grünewald painted a lively scene of that. Paul is dressed in leaves of the palm tree that can be seen in the background, as told in the Golden Legend too. Above the hermits flies the raven with two pieces of bread in its beak. This raven brought one piece of bread each day, until to Paul's astonishment it brought one day two pieces. That same day Anthony called on Paul. Below the figure of Saint Anthony one can remark, on the rock, the armouries of the praeceptor of

Isenheim and commissioner of the painting, Guido Guersi. The armouries are a blue Saint Andreas cross and five scallop shells of Saint James. Isenheim lay on the road to Compostella. From the presence of these armouries, one might deduce that in the hermit Anthony Grünewald has also represented the figure of Guido Guersi. There are also similarities between the Anthony of this panel and the Anthony of the front panel. But whether these figures are really portraits of Guido Guersi remains a conjecture, as we have no writings from the lifetime of Grünewald on the altarpiece, attesting to anything of the history and story of the paintings. Behind the two hermits Grünewald painted a luxurious landscape. The two men met in Egypt, so Grünewald placed a palm tree in a landscape of strange, un-German inspiration. Below, at the feet of the hermits are various plants that all have been recognised for their medicinal properties. Several or all of these plants must have been used in the hospital of Isenheim and Grünewald must have seen them in the botanical garden, in the pharmacy or kitchen of Isenheim.

In 'The Temptation of Saint Anthony' we seem to find back the Grünewald of the fantastic, mystic and unrestrained passionate violence we already met. Monstrous creatures, vultures, dragons and bodies covered with pustules emerge from everywhere around Saint Anthony. The creatures bring destruction everywhere. Of a house or farm there remain only the charred beams. No living nature is near: this is desolate mountain land where all trees have died to naked trunks. The beasts are tearing at Anthony's hair but the Saint desperately clings to a stake of wood in the ground. We only see his magnificent blue robe and a small white-bearded face amidst the torments. A nightmare as only Jeroen Bosch, who was one generation younger than Grünewald, could have seen. As all panels, we admire here the intensity of the colours, which are the main means of expression of the artist.

### *Mathis Gothart Neithart*

Mathis Gothart Neithart was born around 1470 or 1480, probably in the town of Würzburg. Würzburg is a town in a part of Germany called Unter-Franken in Bavaria. Most of the town lies on the right side of the river Main. Würzburg was an Archbishopric and an important town in which several Conferences of the German Nation or 'Reichstäge' with the emperors were held. Once a year all German Princes who were the Electors of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation gathered, to discuss matters of politics and highest justice of the country, together with their elected Emperor. The German parliament building in Berlin is still called the 'Reichstag'. The meeting or parliament is called usually in English the Diet and the word 'Tag' can best be read as 'Tagung' or meeting. The Reichstag was also the event at which the Emperor could call the Emperor's Ban on somebody, in German the old word is 'Acht', and stronger a conviction was the 'Aberacht'. Würzburg was not the main Reichstag town however. Augsburg, Nuremberg and Worms saw more important of such meetings.

Würzburg is best known for three events, the first of which may be of special interest to us as Mathis Gothart Neithart is concerned.

First, it was the town in which worked the Gothic wood sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider, called the 'Master of Würzburg', who settled there in 1483. Mathis

the Painter must have seen and been impressed by Riemenschneider's wooden sculptures. Maybe he was for the first time impressed by the art of Tilman Riemenschneider, introduced in another world of emotions and passions than Germany had known till then. Riemenschneider was a very realistic sculptor, but primarily interested in the expression of faces and bodies, not unlike Grünewald later. Riemenschneider made the wooden sculptures of the altarpieces for the surrounding towns such as Creglingen and Rothenburg. He made the Saint-Henry and Cunegonde tomb of the cathedral of Bamberg and of course he sculpted statues for the Saint-Kilian Dom church of Würzburg itself.

Secondly, in 1525, in the last years of Master Mathis, the Peasants Armies in revolt, led by Götz von Berlichingen took the town. Wolfgang von Goethe later wrote a play centred on von Berlichingen, depicting him as a Romantic hero of freedom. At the death of the painter a copy of the manifesto of the peasants' revolt, the 'Twelve Articles', was found in his possession.

The last important event in Würzburg was that Balthazar Neumann built here in 1720 to 1744 the Residence of the Prince-Bishops that is now considered one of the main masterpieces of Rococo art. The Venetian Giovanni Battista Tiepolo decorated this palace.

Würzburg had a university founded in 1402, which had fallen into decay in Grünewald's days, but which was re-instated in 1582 and became one of the most important Catholic universities of Germany and of course of Catholic Bavaria. From 1811 on it had the first Music Academy of Germany.

Grünewald travelled a lot, working where he could get a commission. From 1509 on he painted mainly in Aschaffenburg, not far from Würzburg. Aschaffenburg lies also to the right of the river Main, about halfway between Würzburg and Frankfurt-am-Main, situated likewise in Unter-Franken. It was a very old town, dating from Roman times, belonging until the end of the German Empire to the Electors of Mainz, after that to Bavaria. Aschaffenburg has a castle that was from the seventeenth century on the summer residence of the Princes of Mainz. Aschaffenburg was the seat of an Archbishop and these Archbishops had enclosed the town in heavy fortifications. Both Würzburg and Aschaffenburg had much to suffer in the Thirty-Year War of the seventeenth century. Both towns were besieged and taken several times. Its Stiftskirche or main church contains the painting 'The Deploring of Christ' made by Matthias Grünewald in 1525. Grünewald worked in Aschaffenburg, first for Archbishop Uriel von Gemmingen, and later for Archbishop Albrecht von Brandenburg. He may have been not just a painter, but also already an architect and engineer.

Grünewald also worked in Frankfurt in 1510 and 1511. He painted a now destroyed altarpiece there, for which the great Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg made the central panel. Some of the grace of this Nuremberg painter can be found back in the flowing robes of the angel of the 'Annunciation'.

### *The Order of the Anthonites*

Late in the year 1511, maybe only in 1512, Matthias Grünewald was called to Isenheim in the Alsace and he worked there on the altarpiece until about 1516. The Alsace region is now in France, but it had been since always under German influence. Its feudal lord was the German Emperor. In Isenheim, now Issenheim near the town of Guebwiller south of Colmar was a praeceptory founded in 1298 by the Anthonites. This praeceptory was also a hospital where skin diseases were treated. The hospital treated the diseases called 'Saint Anthony's fire', or the 'illness of the ardents', the 'ignis sacer' or 'sacred fire'. This disease was ergotism, caused by the fungus *claviceps purpurea* of rye. The fungus' spores settle in the flowers of rye. Instead of the rye the grains then develop a sclerotium that falls on the ground, survives through the winters and develops new fungus. When the sclerotii are mixed with normal rye however, bread can become poisonous. A person poisoned by such bread and who became chronically ill, itched all over, hence the name of 'Anthony's fire'. But the disease could take more acute forms, lead to gangrene and loss of toes or fingers, probably because arteries were obstructed so that limbs needed to be amputated. Acutely poisoned people got miserably sick, had to vomit, suffered from headaches. Their bodies were covered with pustules. The weakest died. This disease was not easily cured. The sick needed a long cure. The Anthonites gave the sick to eat Saint Anthony's bread, which was unpolluted bread without the fungi. The Anthonites knew many remedies to heal the scars on the skin. But they treated also all other skin diseases caused by bacterial and streptococcal infections which all caused rashes and warm skin: erysipelas, carbuncles and the like.

The 'Golden Legend' tells that demons tore at Anthony so savagely that everyone thought he was dead. But Anthony regained consciousness and challenged the devils to renew the fight. Wild beasts tore now cruelly at his flesh with teeth, horns and claws. But a wonderful light shone suddenly, and Anthony's wounds were cured. The Lord told that he had not intervened first, because he had wanted to see how Anthony would fight. Since Anthony had fought manfully, his name would be known all over the earth. Saint Anthony was thus often associated with skin wounds and the healing of lacerations of the flesh.

Matthias Grünewald was called to his Isenheim hospital. He had seen there the horrors of the skin diseases of some patients in terminal phase. He may have recalled his sins. He may have been scared to be afflicted by the same disorders and have imagined the horrors on his own flesh. Saint Anthony was the patron saint of the hospital. Grünewald painted Anthony amidst the devilish attacks of pestilence and the worst, fantastic horrors he could imagine. He also painted Jesus as one of the sick. This kind of image must have been extremely powerful for the people who were being taken care of in the abbey. Grünewald had understood the sick and felt very close to these people.

Pope Urbanus II founded the Order of the Hospitallers of Saint Anthony in 1095. They wore black robes with a blue cross. They rode about wearing little bells to attract alms. These bells later were hung around the necks of animals to protect them from disease. The bells became a symbol of the Anthonites. In the 'Virgin with Child' panel not of the Isenheim altar but of a painting that is now in Stuppach, and also of Grünewald, Mary holds such a bell for Jesus to play with. These small bells were even

taken on by the twentieth century Surrealist painter René Magritte to one of his major themes. Particular about the Hospital Brothers of Saint Anthony also was that in the Middle Ages their swine were allowed to roam the streets of the cities, thus being the medieval cleaning service. Or their pigs were allowed special grazing rights, as the bells distinguished them. The pigs' lard then was also considered a remedy for Saint Anthony's fire. The bells could drive off evil spirits, alluding to Anthony's temptation while a hermit.

The Anthonites had an important chapter house in the Dauphiné region in France. They founded a praeceptory in Issenheim around 1290 to 1313, as one of the over forty establishments of the Order. Issenheim was a praeceptory or a 'praeceptoriae subditae'. Jean d'Orlier was at its head from 1470 to 1490. He voluntarily resigned from this post in 1490. This Jean d'Orlier ordered the wooden sculptures to be made around 1486. This was the base of the altarpiece, as we still know it now. Guido Guersi succeeded on Jean d'Orlier. Guersi is an Italianised form of Guers, a French family name of the Dauphiné. Guersi (ca. 1445-1526) ordered the panels for d'Orlier's wooden sculptured altarpiece in 1511.

Saint Anthony himself was an Egyptian abbot who lived from around 250 to 350. He lived a part of his life as a hermit and underwent a series of temptations, which are found back on many pictures of the following centuries, up to the famous painting of Salvador Dalí. Anthony the Great was thus considered the founder of monasticism.

Anthony is usually painted as an old man, bearded, wearing a monk's cloak as the father of monasticism. He usually has a stick with a tau-shaped (T) handle like a crutch. This may simply be the emblem of the medieval monk helping the crippled and infirm. But tau, the Egyptian cross, was also a symbol of immortality in ancient Egypt. In the panel of the 'Temptation of Anthony', a small strip of paper down below in the right corner contains the words that Saint Anthony called out to God during his temptation. On the paper can be read, 'Ubi eras, Jesus bone, ubi era quare non affuisti ut sanares vulnera mea?' Or, 'Where were you, good Jesus, and why were you not present to heal my wounds?' Again we find here not words of solace but terms of protest, of scorn, of despair for God did not intervene and has let sickness and sin overcome Anthony. That phrase must of course have struck also the cords of protest in the viewers at Issenheim who had come to the praeceptory in sickness and misery and who must have felt abandoned by God.

In Grünewald's scene Saint Anthony is thrown on the ground by the horrible creatures around him. These tear at his hair and drag him over the ground. This form of representation as well as the figure of Anthony himself, with the white hair torn away from his forehead, remarkably resembles a same scene of the 'Temptation of Saint Anthony' painted by Jeroen Bosch. The similarity is so striking that it seems almost impossible that Grünewald had not seen Bosch's picture or engravings of it. The coincidence is obvious. It could mean that Grünewald had travelled in Brabant, which after all was not so far from the Alsace region and also part of the German Empire.

According to an account of Saint Jerome, Saint Anthony was supposed to have met Saint Paul, the first hermit, just before Paul's death. A raven dropped out of the sky a loaf of bread, which became the 'Saint Anthony's bread' with miraculous healing power. Lions dug Paul's grave. Grünewald painted this meeting of Anthony and Paul

also on a panel of the Isenheim altar so that the Hospitallers of Anthony could show the story of the Holy Bread. The Order of the Hospitallers of Saint Anthony does not exist anymore. It was abolished during the French Revolution and replaced by other orders of Hospital Brothers. That was also the time when the altarpiece was removed from the old hospital of Isenheim and transferred to Colmar.

The legend of Saint Anthony's bread was reminded for a very long time in folklore of Western Europe. Even after the Second World War, bakers in many towns baked once a year particularly small breads; so small that they could fit in a palm of a hand, and made without salt or yeast. These breads were blessed at a very early hour in the Catholic Church of the parish and then eaten by the families before breakfast. This was supposed to protect one for a year from bites of animals, like from wandering dogs with rabies.

### *The Altarpiece*

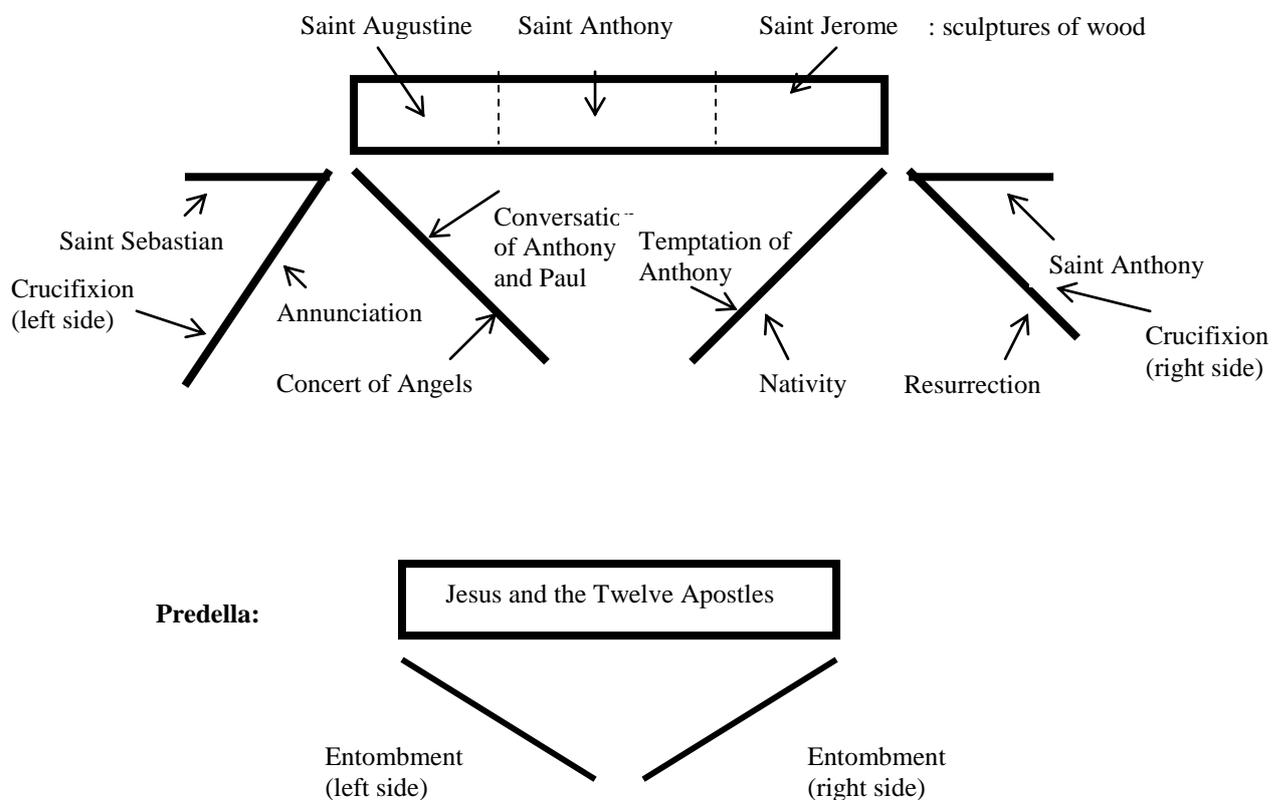
In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Anthonite praeceptory of Isenheim was prosperous. It attracted the wealthy, nobles and merchants with skin diseases, from far around. Its abbot, Guido Guersi, an Italian Hospitaller knight, invited Grünewald to decorate the panels of an altarpiece of which the central part were three wooden statues of Saint Anthony flanked by Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome, made by the wood sculptor Niklas Hagenauer around 1486.

Saint Augustine was a bishop who had established rules for monastic orders. The rules of the Anthonites were deduced from these. So Augustine was often considered a spiritual father for the Anthonite Order. At the feet of Augustine is a small statue of the donor of the altarpiece, Jean d'Orlier. He was the praeceptor of Isenheim from 1470 to 1490. On the other side of Anthony, to the right, is a statue of Saint Jerome who assembled the vulgate Bible, the official Catholic version of the New Testament. He can be recognised at the lion and his cardinal's hat.

The panels close twice on the central statues. Grünewald was asked to paint scenes of the life of Christ on these wooden panels. In medieval times, sculpture was evidently more important than painting. For altarpieces, painting served as a decoration for sculptures and often panels imitated statues in that the painters made grisaille pictures in which the figures were shown standing fixedly like stone statues. The altarpiece of Isenheim was no exception since the paintings of Grünewald were commissioned long after the central sculptures. These had been commissioned first by Jean d'Orlier, the preceding praeceptor of Isenheim. Grünewald's paintings decorated the panels that protected the casing with the sculptures. Moreover, on the two side panels Grünewald painted Saint Sebastian and Saint Anthony as statues on a pedestal. Jean d'Orlier ordered the sculptures to have an altarpiece for the church of Isenheim from Niklas Hagenauer, Nicholas of Hagenau, who was well known in the Alsace region and who also worked in the cathedral of Strasbourg, the largest town of the region.

The altarpiece consists of two pairs of mobile panels, two fixed panels next to these and a long, narrow supporting predella underneath. On the predella is painted the 'Entombment', but this also on two panels that open. When the predella is open one

sees another set of wooden statues, representing Jesus amidst his Apostles, made by Sebastian Beychel. When all panels of the very altarpiece are open, one admires on the first panel to the right the 'Conversation of Anthony and Paul' and to the right the 'Temptation of Anthony'. When these panels are closed, the viewer sees the 'Nativity' to the right and to the left the 'Concert of the Angels'. These are flanked by two other panels, the 'Annunciation' to the right, and the 'Resurrection' to the left. The painting that closes on all panels, is the 'Crucifixion'. So when all panels are closed, the spectator sees the Crucifixion flanked by Saint Sebastian on the left and Saint Anthony on the right. In all the Grünewald altarpiece of Isenheim consist of ten painted panels. It is therefore one of the most important and most imposing pieces of art that has come to us from Germany.



One of the fixed panels painted by Grünewald is Saint Anthony. This might be a portrait of the wise Guido Guerssi in the dark robes of a Hospitaller of the Order of Saint Anthony. Here also is a reference to Anthony's temptation since a devil breaks through the Gothic glass window above Anthony. The panel on the other side, the left one when one stands before the altar-piece, is a picture of Saint Sebastian, the other Saint whose sufferings are well known since he was shot by arrows and clubbed to death. Saint Sebastian was since old one of the plague saints, the saints to which men and women appealed to be spared from the plague or to be cured from it. A picture of Sebastian was thus also in its place in a hospital where skin diseases were treated. The

Saint Sebastian could be a self-portrait of Grünewald as a tortured man. How could it be otherwise?

When the altarpiece is completely closed one sees the Crucifixion with the two fixed panels of Sebastian on the left and Anthony on the right. The two central panels thus form but one scene. But Grünewald could hardly have painted Jesus exactly in the middle because then Jesus's body would have to be painted in one half on each panel. This would not only have been difficult, but also un-respectful. Grünewald chose to paint the crucified Christ entirely on the right panel. He positioned the imposing figure of John the Baptist also on this right side. Christ is shown quite longer than the other figures on the panels, which was also a medieval habit. So Grünewald had to balance the figures on the right panel with a lower but larger mass on the left. He did that in his composition by positioning here Mary, John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene closely placed together. These form a heavy, compact mass that balances the other figures that are more shifted to the right side. Such effects of balance can also be seen on other panels so that Grünewald must have been a genius artist of much intelligence, with a keen feeling for composition. Another example of intelligence in composition to support the theme is on the middle opening. When all the panels here are opened, the altarpiece shows from left to right the Annunciation, the 'Concert of the Angels', Nativity and the Resurrection. There is a definite line, direction of view, which goes from the foremost angel musician over Mary of the nativity to the rising Jesus of the Resurrection.

Underneath the altarpiece is the long but narrow predella, covered with the panels of the Entombment. When one looks from a distance at the whole, one sees that John the Baptist points with his arm and finger at the head of the other John who is supporting Mary. This John holds his head slightly inclined to the left and when one follows the line made by the finger and the head of John, one arrives at the head of Sebastian. And this figure could be Grünewald. So, John the Baptist points at the painter of the panels. Guersi/Anthony is fully clad but Sebastian only holds a red toga in front of him. Is that an indication of the humility of the painter? One starts also to understand that the writings over the arm of John the Baptist, 'He will increase while I will decrease', may have been written as the personal pledge of the painter Grünewald.

Very remarkable also, when seen from a distance, are the red colour areas of the closed altarpiece: Sebastian and Anthony are in red clothes, so are John the Baptist and John the Evangelist.

From 1516 on, Matthias Grünewald probably worked for the Archbishop Albrecht von Brandenburg, who was the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. Albrecht von Brandenburg had succeeded in 1514 on Uriel von Gemmingen. Würzburg depended from Mainz. Mathis Gothart Neithart was the water-architect of the Archbishop. He worked probably on the water works for the gardens of the castles. Matthias Grünewald was mainly the Archbishop's court painter. Albrecht von Brandenburg was also since 1518 the main Cardinal of Germany for the Catholic Church. This was because Mainz was the first town of Germany ever to have a bishop. The first Archbishop of Mainz had been Saint Boniface, the Anglo-Saxon monk who had evangelised the largest parts of Germany in the eighth century, protected by the Frankish King Charles Martel. This same Boniface had founded the Bishopric of Würzburg. Grünewald continued to work for Aschaffenburg however, which also

depended from Mainz. He painted for instance for the Marie-Schnee or Mary-Snow chapel of the Stiftskirche, the dean church of the town.

The painting 'Virgin Mary with Child' that is now in Stuppach near Würzburg was made for this Marie-Schnee chapel of Aschaffenburg. It is again a masterpiece of pure colours. Mary is in the middle of the painting in magnificent robes, dressed as a queen. She has the long hair and the same features as the Mary of the Isenheim altar. Here also her robe is red brocade, her cloak the traditional blue maphorion. Mary forms a solid pyramid that dominates the picture. Marie-Schnee means Mary Snow and so is Mary's face: very snow-white, as are her hands and the nude body of her baby Jesus. Mary and Jesus have hair of the same colour, German blond-red. We have a nicely laughing baby here however, not the anxious looking child of the Isenheim panel. The baby is playing with what could be a small bell that Mary holds affectionately. The environment also is splendid. There are many flowers around: the thorn-less red Mary's roses and the white lilies of virginal purity are to the right. To the left are further lush green bushes, but these are thorn bushes that wind around a wooden cross, symbols of Jesus's Passion and of his crowning with thorns.

The structure of the painting has clear lines. There is the triangle of Mary in bright colours. Another triangle cuts the panel obliquely in two: there is a line going from the upper right, from the top of the cathedral over the heads of Mary and the Child to the lower left bottom corner. This guides our eye to that lower left corner, where food and drink stands to give the appearance of an uncomplicated family scene, as in the Isenheim panel. A reference to the Holy Mass? Then, the Marie-Schnee panel is separated in an upper and a lower part by a horizontal line. On the lower part are the flowers whereas the upper part contains a village and town scene. To the left is the village, with a shack of beehives. On the right is a mighty cathedral with a high Gothic front. Connecting village and cathedral is a rainbow, which also forms the larger halo for Mary. The bright colours continue in the sky, where we find back the golden-red colours of the skies of Grünewald, here in the Godly vision piercing through the bluish clouds. Next to Mary a tree trunk takes our eyes to the heavens on the opposite side.

From 1520 on, Grünewald seems to have worked mostly in Halle and der Saale, an important town in Saxony that depended from the diocese of Magdeburg, and thus had the same Archbishop Albrecht who was Archbishop both of Mainz and of Magdeburg. Albrecht von Brandenburg built his new residence palace in Halle, as he was also the archbishop of Magdeburg. It is interesting to look at a map and glance at the more western towns where Grünewald remained: Würzburg, Aschaffenburg, and even Isenheim are not so far from Mainz. On the other side then, in the Saxony of Leipzig, with Dresden and Berlin in the vicinity, lie Magdeburg and Halle. Grünewald changed regions, but the connecting person was the Archbishop of Mainz-Magdeburg who simply commissioned works for Grünewald in his various fiefs.

Grünewald worked for Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg at the Saint Maurice church of Halle. He worked certainly in Halle from 1520 to 1523. Now look at the map again. Next to Halle, but very close by, on the river Elbe and not on the Saale, lies the town of Wittenberg. And in Wittenberg started and happened probably the most important events that European Christendom has known since the birth and Passion of Christ.

For here worked Martin Luther at Wittenberg University. Luther would change European Christianity forever.

### *Martin Luther*

Martin Luther was born in 1483, somewhat later than Grünewald, in Eisleben. His father, Hans Luther, soon moved to the town of Mansfeld where he became a man of some distinction since he was one of the Counsellors of the town. Martin spent his childhood in Mansfeld, but from his fourteenth on studied in the Latin schools of Magdeburg and Eisenach. In 1501 he went to the University of Erfurt to study law. He learned more the ancient rules of dialectic and the classics however, and after he had become a Magister in 1505, he started to read Aristoteles. In July of 1505 he went through a profound religious period, maybe accentuated by his loneliness and the fears that at that age besiege all young people, which left him in fear for his soul's salvation. He became a monk and entered the Augustine abbey in Erfurt. In 1507 he was ordained a priest of the Catholic Church. The Vicar general of the Augustines for Germany, Johann von Staupitz, remarked him in the abbey.

Johann von Staupitz was a friend of the Elector Friedrich der Weise, Frederick the Wise, of Saxony. Frederick had just founded in 1502 a new university in the old residence town of the princes of Saxony that is in Wittenberg. The princes of Saxony in fact were called of Saxony-Wittenberg. Frederick was an important man in Germany, probably its most influential Elector. And he was looking for bright men for his university. Von Staupitz recommended Martin Luther.

In 1508, Luther became a Professor of Philosophy and Dialectic at Wittenberg University. In those times, Wittenberg university was very popular because contrary to the universities of Leipzig and Erfurt, one did not have to study theology and philosophy there to obtain a degree in medicine or law. So the university quickly grew. In Luther's time there were about one thousand students studying in Wittenberg. Later that number would grow to several thousand. Luther also preached at the church of the castle. He liked Wittenberg, could study the Bible in its old languages, Greek and Hebrew, and he became also a Doctor in Theology in 1512. In the meantime, however he had made in 1510 a travel to Rome that had profoundly shocked him. He saw the decadence of the town and the results of the Papal court of the Borgia Pope Alexander VI who had reigned till 1503, then the splendour of the court and the Italian wars of Julius II.

In 1515 however, Leo X had succeeded Julius II as Pope. Julius II had started to build the magnificent new Saint Peter cathedral with Bramante as architect. Julius II wanted to make his new church the sign of the triumphant reign of the Roman Catholic Popes and Leo X shared these views. This Pope ardently wanted to continue the work of his great predecessor who had used artists like Michelangelo and Raphael. But he needed money. So he allowed more and more the sale of indulgences. Indulgences could be bought and were very much sought after by any Christian who had some money. Because indulgences could be used, as official acts of the church and so the Pope testified, to redeem one's sins. When one knows the fear of hell of medieval people, see the pictures of Hieronymus Bosch, one can easily imagine the profitability of the sales.

The trade was much to the spirit of Archbishop Albrecht von Brandenburg, Prime Cardinal of Germany. Pope Leo X charged Albrecht to manage the income from the indulgences for the German Empire. The Cardinal of course shared in the benefits of the sale of indulgences in Germany. Albrecht appointed as his main Commissar for the indulgences trade and sale the Dominican friar Tetzel. Tetzel put his market also down in Wittenberg. And now the story starts for real.

Luther began a dispute with Tetzel. He did not accept the sales, which he compared to the sales in the Temple of Jerusalem against which Jesus had fought. Jesus had thrown all the merchants out of the Temple. When Luther cried and wrote, Tetzel answered. The dispute mounted between the two men. Luther was not a man that could be stopped once he was in a temper. And the more Luther launched his diatribes in Wittenberg church during his preaches, the more people liked the sensational fight and came to listen to Luther.

During this time, Grünewald worked on the altarpiece of the abbey of Isenheim. He stopped painting in Isenheim around 1515 or 1516 and left the town. Another painter arrived however. Hans Holbein the Elder had financial problems in Augsburg. He moved to the abbey of Isenheim where he would stay until his death in 1524.

On October 31 of 1517 Luther nailed 95 phrases of wrath against the sale of indulgences on the door of the castle church of Wittenberg. They were rapidly printed and distributed all over Europe. In 1518, Tetzel burned the 'Neunzig Sätze' publicly in Frankfurt. Whereupon Luther's friends burned Tetzel's letters in Wittenberg. Until now, this had only been a dispute between one monk and another. But now, bye and bye, the Dominicans stood against the Augustines. The dispute mounted in tone. Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican and a Functionary of the Pope, together with the mighty Johannes Eck, vice-chancellor of the university of Ingolstadt, attacked Luther openly and reproached him for promulgating ideas not dissimilar to those of Johann Hus who had been declared a heretic and who had been burned. Luther was even more enraged now, so he started to argue against the whole medieval system of scholastic theories of Papist Catholicism. By that he enlivened Master Hoogstraten of Cologne, who brought the matter to the Pope.

We are now in the year 1518, while Grünewald was working in Aschaffenburg for the Marie-Schnee chapel, but also at the court of Albrecht von Brandenburg, where he heard the prelates talk about the latest religious news.

In this year 1518 was held in Heidelberg a large conference of the Augustine monks. All were in support of their brother Martin Luther. Johann von Staupitz, the Vicar General, supported Luther. Many German bishops agreed that some reform was necessary. Luther's supporters spread the new ideas, for here were words that many had expected but few had dared to say. Bucer, Brennius, Schnepf, and Theobald Billian preached the learning everywhere in Germany. Bucer even joined Zwingli and Bullinger in Switzerland, where a similar movement had started. The Bishop of Würzburg, Lorenz von Bilna, started to fear for Luther however. He asked support and protection from Friedrich der Weise the Elector of Saxony, which was granted. Neither Frederick nor Luther wanted at that time to break with Emperor and Pope, so that when these asked to stop the disputes between monks, Luther heartily agreed. The

German Bishops also all still had sympathy for Luther's ideas, but they grew scared and wanted to put a halt to the disputes that had gone awry. All Germany wanted reconciliation and was prudent about the outcome. But Rome did not stop.

An inquiry into the writings and actions of Luther started in Rome, in which Luther's opposer Sylvester Prierias took part. This court of inquiry asked Luther to come to Rome within sixty days to justify himself. But both Frederick of Saxony and the German Emperor asked the Pope to let German bishops judge Luther. The letter in which this was stated arrived too late in Rome however. The Pope named the Spanish Cardinal Thomas de Rio, called Cajetanus after his hometown, to begin a procedure to treat Luther as a heretic. Cajetanus had some connections to Germany; he had been the Pope's Nuntius at a Reichstag in Augsburg before. The Pope thought that Cajetanus might better understand the noisy Germans. Luther in the meantime had printed a book in which he put into question the right of the Pope to condemn, to ban and to excommunicate.

Friedrich der Weise, the Elector of Saxony, still wanted to end the disputes, as was everybody else really, including Luther. So he invited Luther to the Diet of Augsburg of 1519. But Cajetanus in his turn spoke a real diatribe in Augsburg against Luther. It turned so bad that Johann von Staupitz gave Luther a horse and told him to flee.

A Saxon nobleman, Karl von Miltiz, attached to the court of the Pope, tried now in all calm to settle the dispute. Helped by the death of Tetzl, and furthered by talks with Luther, yes Luther promised to join the Pope's views. But Miltiz continued secret talks with Cajetanus and with the Archbishop of Trier so that the latter summoned Luther to come to Trier. Frederick the Wise and Luther sensed a trap, refused that Luther would go to Trier. Somewhat later however, in a real last effort, Luther accepted and proposed to hold an antagonistic discussion with Johannes Eck.

This now famous oral fight was held in the Pleissenburg castle with arguments and counter-arguments, where ten propositions of Eck were set against thirteen propositions of Luther. Luther mainly argued that the precedence of the Roman Catholic authority was only founded on the decrees of the Roman cardinals, not on the texts of the Holy Writings.

The public discourse ended with a victory of Johannes Eck. Eck was the better scholar, more learned in scholastics and dialectic, a better orator still than Luther was. So, the victorious Johannes Eck travelled to Rome in 1520 to ask the Pope to excommunicate and pronounce the Papal ban Edict on Luther. The Pope, ignorant of the fact that not just some Augustine monks, but now also almost all German imperial cities and many of the princes and even its bishops were tired of Papal pressure, silently gave Eck the bull. While Luther continued his disputes with the Professor of Leipzig, Hieronymus Emser, the bull was handed over on 15 June 1520 by the Papal Nuntii Alexander and Carracioli to Archbishop Albrecht von Brandenburg. This was about at the time that Matthias Grünewald went to work in Halle, close to Wittenberg.

The German bishops refused to publish the bull. Even more: they were really angry of Johannes Eck who spread the bull by himself. By now, having followed these historical events, we have understood that Luther was a typhoon who liked nothing more than being fuelled. His fuels were the critics, arguments of his opponents. Once

he had fuel, he could not stop. And the most powerful critic had been delivered: a Papal bull. So, Luther now wrote two documents, dated 1520, 'An den christlichen Adel Deutscher Nation' or 'To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation' and still later 'Von der Babylonischer Gefangenschaft der Kirche', 'Of the Babylonian Imprisonment of the Church' in which he urged separation of the real church of faith away from Papal authority. He called the Pope the ultimate anti-Christ and openly preached a new Christian church based on the Bible instead of on the traditional Catholic Church, which was founded in the old feudal ideas whereby all clergy depended from the Pope. And he continued to write to the Pope: 'Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen', 'On the Freedom of a Christian' and finally 'Gegen die Bulle eines Anti-Christ's', the final declaration of war to the Pope. Luther repeated openly in writing that the Pope was the real Anti-Christ.

The answer of the Pope was to urge all universities to burn the writings of Luther, which was done in Cologne, Mainz, and at other German university institutions. And Luther of course took this in merely as more fuel. In his turn, he went outside the city of Wittenberg accompanied by a large assembly of adherents and burned publicly, in December 1520, the books of the canonical law of Catholic Church. Luther was now no longer an individual monk in a dispute with other monks. He was the spiritual leader of a growing radical group of relatively young scholars educated in the study of the Bible and the classics who wanted reforms desperately, passionately, and ever more decidedly.

Politically, the times were difficult for Germany. The old knight Emperor Maximilian I had died in 1519. For six months there had been no emperor. Germany had remained under the lead of Friedrich der Weise. An emperor had to be elected by the Prince-Electors of Germany. There were three candidates: François I King of France, Henry VII of England and Charles von Habsburg Duke of Aragon and Castille, the Grandson of Maximilian. None of these men even spoke one word of German. Charles, born in Flanders, in Gent, had been educated in French and that remained his preferred language. Later he spoke at best some very broken German. But he had the support of Friedrich der Weise and more importantly: he could lend the most money of Jacob Fugger the banker of Augsburg. With this money, electors could be bought. So, Charles won and became Emperor Charles V, crowned German Emperor in Aachen in October 1520. He was just twenty years old. We know that Dürer was present at the crowning, so was of course Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg and very probably also Matthias Grünewald. Although very young, Charles V and his counsellors wanted to end the disputes once and for all. Charles decided that an agreement on a solution by all German Electors was necessary and chose the next Diet at Worms of March 1521 as the date.

At first, Luther refused to go to Worms. But the Imperial herald Caspar Storm respectfully came to him and promised him security. So, Luther accompanied by his friends Hieronymus Schirf, Nikolaus von Amsdorf and Justus Jonas made their way in a peasants' cart to Worms, where they arrived in the begin of April. There they were violently attacked by the same Johannes Eck again, now the Vicar of Trier, together with Aleander, the Pope's Nuntius. Merely a fortnight after he had arrived, on April 26 Friedrich of Saxony once more fearing for Luther's safety, smuggled Martin Luther out of Worms, lead him to the Wartburg near Eisenach, and hid him there in the middle of Saxony. This pleading at Worms inspired Romantic historic

painters of the nineteenth century. Many pictures were made of the confrontation between Luther and the Catholic bishops and prelates at Worms, a confrontation that was witnessed by Emperor Charles V.

Many of the Electors left Worms in the middle of May. Charles V then threw the Imperial Edict, the old 'Acht' and 'Aberacht' ban over Luther. But he did this on May 26 when most Electors had left Worms, yet dated the Edict as May 8. What must have angered most Luther was that the Emperor asked Luther's old opponent Nuntius Aleander to write the text of the Edict. All adherents of Luther were now formally declared heretics, their books had to be burned, Luther was to be imprisoned, all goods of his supporters were forfeited and were to be confiscated. A second Edict forbade all new changes to the Catholic religion in Germany.

### *Albrecht von Brandenburg*

During that time, Matthias Grünewald worked in and for Halle. Around 1520 to 1524 he painted for the Saint Maurice church of Halle. In particular he made a picture there of the meeting between Saint Erasmus and Saint Maurice, which is now in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich. Albrecht von Brandenburg, Archbishop of Mainz-Magdeburg and Cardinal of Germany of course commissioned the painting. It seems that Grünewald has given Saint Erasmus the face of Albrecht. The painting was left in the Saints Peter and Alexander Church of Aschaffenburg, although it was commissioned for the Saint Maurice church of Halle.

The bishop is splendidly dressed, all in brocaded gold. He wears an imposing tiara and he is really shown in all the magnificence of a Prince of the Church. Opposite him is a Moorish knight in armour. Saint Maurice was usually depicted as a Moor. The golden dazzling brightness of Saint Erasmus contrasts with the armour of Maurice. Saint Erasmus is better known as Saint Elmo<sup>E5</sup>. He was tortured and died around AD 300 during a persecution of Emperor Diocletianus. There are many legends around this bishop. One of those legends is that he preached during a thunderstorm. He remained unperturbed by a thunderbolt that struck close to him. Has Grünewald used this symbol, just as Lucas Cranach, to indicate Archbishop Albrecht as a bishop in the midst of a storm, the storm of a reform that would shake all his beliefs in Catholic Church? By this legend Saint Erasmus became the patron saint of sailors, who of course feared storms and sought help from a saint who remained stoic in storms. And at sea, after thunderstorms, remnant electricity is attracted by the mastheads of ships, giving visual effects called Saint Elmo's fire, thought to be a sign of the protection of the saint. In Grünewald's painting the bishop holds a staff, which is in fact a windlass, to turn ropes, a reminiscence of Erasmus/Elmo being the patron saint of sailors.

Saint Maurice, who confronts Erasmus in Grünewald's painting, was an officer of the Theban legion, part of Emperor Maximian's army that marched into Gaul. The Theban legion was constituted of Christians recruited in Egypt. Hence the black face of Maurice. When Maximian's army was victorious in Gaul, it stayed near Lake Geneva to say thanks and make sacrifices to the heathen Gods. The Theban legion did not want to join in the heathen practices and withdrew to a place in the sweet Wallis region of Switzerland, a place now called Saint-Maurice. More so, Maurice as the

spokesman of the Theban legion professed not only to one single God. He refused to renounce the one true God, but he also spoke loud against the killing of the innocent Christians of Gaul. Maximian, according to the 'Golden Legend', murdered the entire Theban legion. Saint Maurice became a patron saint of soldiers, and in particular of the Swiss guards of the Vatican.

So, in Grünewald's painting a soldier faces Saint Erasmus. A soldier professing the true faith in one God and protesting against the killing of other Christians. Whether indeed willed so or not by Grünewald, one can see in this a symbol of the struggle going on in the German Catholic Church between the magnificence of the traditional authority now based on gold and outer pomp (Erasmus-Cardinal Albrecht) and the representative of the true inner faith ready to defend itself as a simple soldier (Maurice). One can also but note the similarity in the names of the Roman Emperor Maximian and the late German Emperor Maximilian. But in Grünewald's painting the two opposers continue to argue and to talk. They are ready for the fight, but they are not at that yet.

There was a namesake to Saint Erasmus, a Humanist scholar also called Erasmus. This Erasmus and Archbishop Albrecht corresponded. Albrecht was also known as a Humanist. Erasmus knew the Emperor Charles V quite well for he had been invited by one of the educators of the young Charles at the court of Mechelen. This teacher of Charles was Adriaan Boeyens who would later become Pope Adrian VI. The encounters between Charles, Adriaan Boeyens, Erasmus and other teachers were also a subject for historical paintings of the nineteenth century. It is remarkable how all the actors of the drama knew each other and each other's ideas, had even sympathy for each other's concepts, yet in the end diverged and confronted as enemies.

During his last years, Matthias Grünewald lived in Halle and der Saale that was so close to Wittenberg. In the nineteenth century the universities of Wittenberg and of the then larger Halle were even merged. So, Grünewald lived in the immediate surroundings of the Prime Cardinal of Germany. He heard all the ecclesiastics talk about the new faith. Even the Cardinal Albrecht himself was sympathetic to some reform. He supported and protected Luther as long as he could or deemed in his interest. But Albrecht was too much a Prince of the traditional church to take sides with the revolutionary Martin Luther. Grünewald however, who was possessed as we can see in the panels of his Isenheim altarpiece by a true inner fire, may have chosen the opposite side. Mathis Gothart Neithart must have become a Lutheran, as testify the papers found in his heritage. He had to leave the service of Cardinal Albrecht and died in 1528 a very poor man.

A contemporary painter to Matthias Grünewald was Lucas Cranach the Elder. Lucas Cranach was in service to Friedrich der Weise from 1504 to 1508. In the 1520s he worked for Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg and knew him well. Later on Lucas Cranach worked also for Martin Luther, whose friend he became<sup>D6</sup>. Lucas Cranach painted a portrait of the Cardinal Albrecht, as the cardinal is humbly knelt before the Holy Cross. This painting was made for the main Church of Aschaffenburg<sup>D3</sup> and on commission of Albrecht himself. The Cardinal wears the long red cardinal's robe, but no special jewels or adornment. The picture is an image of humility. The Cardinal has a somewhat weak and still young face with puffy cheeks. This is a person who likes to live well, to eat and drink to a full stomach. Lucas Cranach has not embellished him.

The painter added a somewhat arrogant, sceptic line of mouth and small, direct eyes. The scene is Golgotha at the moment when the skies darken and a thunderstorm threatens. Can this be a sign of the dark clouds that were amassing over the Catholic Church at the time the painting was made? Albrecht certainly needed a strong mind and steadfast line of mouth to steer the German Church.

Albrecht von Brandenburg was a man of the world. He came from one of the noblest families of the German Empire. He was the son of the Elector Johann Cicero of Brandenburg. His brother was the Elector Joachim I Nestor of Brandenburg. In 1513 he became Archbishop of Magdeburg and Administrator of the Bishopric of Halberstadt. The year after he became Archbishop and Elector of Mainz. He was appointed Cardinal in 1518. He liked to stay in Halle and der Saale, but as the reformation advanced he moved more to Mainz; in 1541 he even changed his designated burial place from the Collegiate Church of Halle to the Cathedral of Mainz. That same year he also transferred his art treasures to Mainz, the reason why there are so numerous works of art now in Aschaffenburg.<sup>D11</sup>

Another painting of Lucas Cranach showed the baker's daughter Magdalena Redinger who was the mistress of the Cardinal. Cranach showed her as Mary Magdalene, a close theme since the Cardinal's mistress' name was also Magdalene. Lucas Cranach showed how rich Magdalena could be dressed. She is on her way to virtue, on the path that leads away from sin, but she still wears all the jewels the Cardinal must have given her around her neck. There are a few symbols in this painting of Mary Magdalene. On the right is a lake with a boat, which may refer to the boat trip over the Mediterranean that the Magdalene made with her companions to arrive at Marseilles. The small mandorla high on the left is a reference to the Magdalene's life as a hermit in the Provence region of France. But the scene is set in a German forest environment of stags, where the Cardinal von Brandenburg may have hunted. Remark the magnificent way of depicting Mary's robe and the details with which Cranach painted the luxurious foliage of a tree behind the figure. This tree seems to embrace and to protect her. The Magdalene is dressed in an opulent manner. Lucas Cranach painted various pictures of women dressed this way and all from Bible themes. He painted Judith with the head of Holophernes and Bathseba in her bath dressed just as the Magdalene. It is tempting to combine all these scenes and to put them in the perspective of Cardinal von Brandenburg. Lucas Cranach vowed to Protestantism. He may have disapproved of the Cardinal's life and in various pictures hinted at the Cardinal's hidden lack of personal virtue.

Lucas Cranach delivered another painting from his workshop to the Cardinal, a painting on which maybe also Cranach' son worked. This shows the Cardinal as Saint Jerome, an image that might have flattered the Cardinal since there was no greater scholar in the Roman Catholic sphere than Saint Jerome who had put together the vulgate Bible. There was a tradition of showing Jerome in his study and so the Cardinal Albrecht is shown in his own study, reading from a heavy book. The cardinal is surrounded by many symbols among which typical Jerome icons such as the lion, the Cardinal's hat, many books and a nearby Crucifix. There are animals around, as may have been in the environment of the cave in which Jerome lived as a hermit. But the Cardinal von Brandenburg certainly did not live as a hermit. The animals may add to the qualities of the Cardinal, but some elements of the picture also have dubious meaning. The pheasant and the peacock may refer to divine immortality and to

redemption, but may also have been added to refer to the wealth of the church and to the rich ways the Cardinal lived. The beaver is an emblem of industriousness and constancy. The peacocks are tending their offspring as the Cardinal should tend to his church as a good father, but the family is a family of peacocks and not of sheep. An apple refers to the original sin, the pear to Christ incarnate. An hourglass on the wall warns of passing time and coming death and reckoning before God. Above the Cardinal however hangs a strange chandelier. This kind of chandelier was not uncommon in Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg's times. It is a 'Leuchterweibchen' that brings not only light but is also adorned with the bust of a lady. These ladies could have ample décolletés. Some of these chandeliers have been preserved. There is for instance a nice exemplar in the Suermondt-Ludwig Museum of Aachen, dating from the 1520's. A Leuchterweibchen was quite common in studies. But by hanging such a chandelier above the head of the Cardinal, the painters must have hinted at a secret. Probably Lucas Cranach, or his son or the helpers of his workshop, were hinting at the Cardinal's mistress Magdalena Redinger. The Cardinal may have had a small portrait of his beloved in his study. Here hangs on the wall behind the Cardinal a picture of the Virgin Mary and her child. Did the Cardinal have a child with his mistress?

We have seen various paintings of Cardinal von Brandenburg made by Lucas Cranach. It is almost unique in the history of art to see how many pictures with almost unconcealed dubious meaning were made by this painter or by his workshop. It is obvious from these pictures that the Lutherans could mock ever more openly the morals of the dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Subverting such devote themes as images of Mary Magdalene or Saint Jerome were signs of times of immediate and open crisis in the European Christian church. With these paintings Lucas Cranach showed the growing confidence of the new ideas. The Lutherans had left fear behind them and they knew there was no way back.

### *Protestantism*

The Edict of Worms of 1521 that was supposed to end the conflict in the Church and in the Empire was not enforced. Charles V had a war to wage against François I of France in which also the Pope became involved at times. Charles' brother Ferdinand, who governed the German states in his absence, but who was now also King of Hungary, had to wage a war against the Turks. For ten years Emperor Charles would not set a foot in Germany. He merely ruled out of Spain or Italy, sending letters to the Reichstag stating his opinions. Spanish and German hireling troops would even come to sack Rome in 1527 when in one episode of those wars the Pope had sided with France and allied Italian cities against Charles' troops. The wars between France, Charles V and the Pope would only end at the Peace of Cambrai, called the 'Ladies' Peace' because the two main persons who worked in the background for the reconciliation were the mother of François I, Louise de Savoie, and the aunt and educator of Charles V, Margaretha of Burgundy. As a final sign of conciliation, in 1530, Charles V was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by the Pope in Bologna. He would be the last German Emperor to be crowned by a Pope.

In the meantime, between 1521 and 1530, Luther's new doctrine was openly preached and practised. Luther worked in the Wartburg castle on his translation of the Bible. He edited the new catechism in 1529. Luther and his friend Melanchton worked at the practical foundation of the reformed religion. Germany was split between the adherents of Luther and the adherents of Pope and Emperor. In favour of the cause of Luther was primarily the powerful Philipp von Hessen who reigned over a very large part of Germany. But Duke Johann von Sachsen, Count Georg von Brandenburg-Ansbach who ruled over Saxony, also took Luther's side. Furthermore joined in Heinrich von Mecklenburg, Philipp, Otto and Franz von Lüneburg, Anton and Christoph von Oldenburg, Konrad von Tecklenburg, Count Wolfgang von Anhalt, and Duke Albrecht of Preussen. The Councillors of the towns of Strasbourg, Nuremberg, Konstanz, Ulm, Bremen, Reutlingen, Isny, Magdeburg, Lindau, Kempten, and many more, supported Luther. Most remarkable also was that the High Master of the German Knights Order, of the Teutonic Knights, Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach of the house Hohenzollern, joined the new league.

These nobles together would found in 1530 the 'Bund' or Union of Schmalkalden, so called after the town where they signed the agreement. This Bund would be the unified political force to confront the Emperor. On the other side were the dukes Wilhelm and Ludwig von Bayern, Archduke Ferdinand who was the brother of Charles V, the Archbishop of Salzburg, the Bishops of Trident and Regensburg, of Bamberg, Speier, Augsburg, Passau and others. Bavaria would remain mainly Catholic till today.

In the absence of Charles V his brother Ferdinand lead the Diet meetings. Charles had the Electors accept that Ferdinand would be crowned Roman King in Aachen in 1531. Two of those Reichstäge hold our attention. In 1526 in Speier, a clause was accepted by the Emperor, by which clause religious liberty seemed to be granted. On another Diet at Speier, in 1529, by majority of votes, a text was voted which stated that a National Conclave would be held and that until then all those who had not followed the Edict of Worms would withhold from new changes in religion. Catholic mass would not be abolished, the new religion would not be preached, but also neither goods nor territories of the adherents of the new religion would be forfeited. The outvoted Evangelist Electors formulated a public protest against this text, which they had also formally acted in the Reichstag's archives. From then on, they would be called Protestants.

We stop here the history of Protestantism. In 1532, as all parties were tired of the dispute, a religious peace was declared until the Papal Council would be organised.

This peace held until 1544. In the years 1520 to 1530, when Grünewald was working in Halle and surroundings, and in the absence of Charles V, two major revolts shook Germany.

The first revolt was a general uprising of the German peasants. There had been peasants' revolts before: in 1502 called the 'Bundshuh' and in 1514, called of the 'Poor Konrad'. Another revolt broke out in 1524. The peasants wanted a new social contract and soon the whole middle Germany was in uproar. Götz von Berlichingen took Würzburg. Mülhausen, or what is now the town of Mulhouse in the Alsace of France, not so far from Isenheim, was in the hands of Protestant preacher Thomas

Münzer. In 1525 at the battle of Königshofen, Götz von Berlichingen's peasant army was defeated by the army of the German Schwäbische Bund under Richard von Trier, Ludwig von der Pfalz, the Bishop of Würzburg and Duke Otto von Bayern. Philipp von Hessen and Duke Georg von Sachsen defeated Thomas Münzer in 1526 at Frankenhausen. Followed a frightful murdering and torturing of the peasants and their supporters all over those parts of Germany where the revolt has waged, including the Alsace region.

Mathis Gothart Neithart was a sympathiser of the peasants' movement. He would have been deeply impressed by the injustice done to the peasants however cruel their own revolt. He might have been profoundly shocked by the slaughters that followed the battles where these artisans faced professional soldiers only too keen on killing.

The second revolt was a revolt of German knights. The mightiest and richest robber-knight of the Rhine region, Franz von Sickingen, led it. He wanted to restore the old knights' traditions; he only recognised the authority of the Emperor. He wanted to free Germany of the Pope and found some support with important cities. It was a revolt of cities and knights against the Prince-Electors. The conspirators had some success, attacked and plundered Trier. But the Elector Philipp von Hessen and the Archbishop of Trier Richard von Greiffenklau, with the formidable army of the Bund, took Franz von Sickingen's Rhine castles one by one until he had only one left, Landstuhl, in 1523. Von Sickingen, who had found no support from any nobles anymore, was killed in the last battle.

### *Mathis der Mahler*

Mathis Gothart Neithart. There is a whole program in those names. Matthias was an apostle, a follower of Jesus from the very first moment of Jesus's baptism to his passion, chosen as an apostle very late, and then only to replace Judas. Neithart or Neithart may mean 'not hard' or 'hard in jealousy'. Mathis himself preferred to be called Gothart or 'hard in God'. And that was also Grünewald. Grünewald tried to put himself completely in the place of the suffering Jesus on the cross and then depict the emotions and details of the horror. He had read the Bible in a way that the words permeated him. He went back to the Bible texts, to the sources, as Luther had done, and as was one of the intellectual drives of the Renaissance. He then transformed the ideas in form but primarily in colour. He was a simple man, considered an artisan, albeit a very good one, no nobleman, and very inferior to the Princes of the Church among which the first was his Archbishop and commissioner Albrecht von Brandenburg. In the end Gothart must have chosen sides according to his conscience, although he must have known it meant rejection by the ones he needed to be able to paint. Hence he chose poverty. He made the choice of the people of Germany. He was a bystander and a participant in the religious reformation that shook Germany and later the whole spiritual world of Europe. His painting of ardour explains some of the reasons that led to Protestantism. If Grünewald was not Gothart Neithart, did he make the same choices or did he remain faithful to Catholicism and to his Cardinal Albrecht?

In that sign Gothart resembled many of the German people of that beginning of the sixteenth century. Renaissance of new ideas also broke through in the German scholars who worked in the proficient German universities. The German scholars chose the side of the people more than the side of intellect and of aristocracy. They did not necessarily consider intellect as a kind of nobility, contrary probably to their Italian confratres and contrary to Italian culture where intellect permeated and elevated society. The Germans went a step down the ladder to reach the city people and the peasants. As the German nineteenth century historian Friedrich Scholler<sup>E3</sup> has said, for the next two hundred years the German nation struggled with the question whether its state religion would be a religion for artists, poets, kings, princes, counts and knights or whether it would be a moralistic middle-class religion. In most parts of Germany Protestant faith would win.

Luther did it all. But Martin Luther was a very controversial person. He was fuelled by counter-arguments, could not stand being attacked and always retorted. This went crescendo until the final break. But was Luther in all these events so important? The German people like we can see so clearly in our painter Grünewald was ready for any Luther. Luther found ample following so quickly and in such numbers because the people expected this; they had enough of outward magnificence and wanted to hear again the first message of Jesus, which of course was one of love, pity and poverty. The tension between what they heard and saw of religion and what it should be according to the Gospels was all too obvious. Jesus had put man, whoever he was, at the centre of concern. That was in stark contrast with the outward life of the wealthy Catholic clergy and with the wide gap between the rich and poor of Germany. The people yearned, as we will see over and over again in our history of paintings, of a new, profound and true spirituality. The very signs Matthias Grünewald expressed in his paintings.

The altarpiece of Isenheim has remained almost intact. All the painted panels have been preserved, and most of the sculptures. Only missing is a wooden superstructure with – probably – a statue of God the Father. This was the crowning piece on top of the casing. The altarpiece remained at Isenheim until 1793. Then came the French Revolution. The Republican Commissars Casimir Karpff (who was also a painter and a student of Jacques-Louis David) and Jean-Pierre Marquaire, a magistrate, took the altarpiece to the National District Library of the Alsace in Colmar. The church of the Anthonites was destroyed in 1831 but parts remained and these can be seen today. The altarpiece remained in its new place until 1852. Then the convent of Unterlinden was transformed in a regional museum. During the First World War the panels were transported to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, where they remained until 1919. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the panels were brought to the Castle of Lafarge close to Limoges in France. From 1940 to 1945 they remained safe in the cellars of the Hoch-Königsburg in the Alsace.

The message and passion of Grünewald continued to inspire artists. The German composer Paul Hindemith worked in Berlin until 1935. He had composed a symphony 'Mathis der Maler' in 1934 on request of the Berlin orchestra leader Furtwängler and he worked on an opera with same name from that year to 1938, in which he expressed Mathis Gothart Neithart's doubts on society. This was not to the taste of the Nazi regime that had come to power in Germany in 1933. The Nazis associated him with decadent, modern art. Hindemith was defended by the great orchestra conductor

Wilhelm Furtwängler, but in vain. Furtwängler even resigned from most of his official posts. ‘Mathis der Maler’ was performed for the first time in Zürich in 1938, in Switzerland and not in Germany. Hindemith’s music was very modern and inspired by religion. Hindemith’s music was forbidden. History repeated itself. Again, an artist who primed individual thought and honest introspection was forbidden to work.

*Other paintings:*

**Crucifixion**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

**Crucifixion**

Master Theodoricus (active ca. 1359-1368). Chapel of the Holy Rood, Castle Karlstejn. Prague. Ca. 1360-1364.

**The Crucifixion of Vyssi Brod**

Cistercian Monastery of Vyssi Brod (Czechia). Before 1380.

**The Crucifixion from Saint Barbara**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1400.

**The Crucifixion**

Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1480-1532). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

**Golgotha**

Henrik Sorensen. Nasjonalgalleriet. Oslo. 1921-1925.

**The Crucifixion**

Jan Provoost (1465-1529). Groeninge Museum. Bruges.

**Crucifixion Panel with Mary Magdalene and Veronica**

Rogier van der Weyden (ca. 1399-1464). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna.

**Crucifixion**

Master of the Rajhrad Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1420-1435.

**The Crucifixion**

Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. 1491.

**Calvary**

Antonella da Messina (1430-1479). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. 1475.

**Christ on the Cross**

Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641). The National Gallery. London. 1628-1630.

**The Crucifixion**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Lyon. 1636-1637.

**Christ offers his Blood**

Gustave Van De Woestyne. Le Musée d’Art Moderne – Brussels. 1925.

**The Raising of the Cross**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Onze Lieve Vrouwe Kerk. Kortrijk. 1630-1631.

**The Crucifixion**

Follower of Gillis Coignet (1535-1599). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

**The Crucifixion**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1616). Museo Civico Correr. Venice.

**The Crucifixion**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice.

**The Crucifixion**

Max Beckmann (1884-1950). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1909.

**The Crucifixion**

Antonio Saura (1930-1998). Pinakothek der Moderne. Munich. 1959.

**The Crucifixion**

Renato Guttuso (1912-1987). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1941.

**Christ on the Cross**

Jean-Jacques Henner (1829-1905). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain.  
Strasbourg. Ca. 1890.

**The Crucifixion**

Francesco Raibolini called Il Francia (1450-1517). Saint Cecilia Oratory. Bologna.

**The Crucifixion with Saint Gerolamo Savonarola and two monks**

Mariotto Albertinelli (1474-1515). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Christ in Meditation on the Cross**

Defendente Ferrari (ca. 1480-1535). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Crucifixion Triptych**

Workshop of Cornelis Engelbrechtsz (1468-1527). National Gallery in Prague.  
Prague. Ca. 1520.

**The three Crucified**

Vincenzo Foppa (1427-1516). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Crucifixion**

Michele da Verona (ca. 1470-1536/1544). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Crucifixion**

Bartolomeo Suardi called Bramantino (ca. 1465-1530). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Crucifixion**

Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1725-1729.

**Crucifixion with Saint Mary, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Eusebius and Saint Philip Neri**

Pierre Subleyras (1699-1749). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1744.

## *The Lance Thrust*

### **The Lance Thrust**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Antwerp. 1619-1620.

Compare the ‘Crucifixion’ of Antonello da Messina with Pieter Paul Rubens’ ‘The Lance Thrust’.

Rubens is at his best in rhetoric. Passion, violence of contorted bodies is shown in his pictures. Rubens has exaggerated the depiction of emotions as far as he could, without falling in obvious ridicule. All elements of the Crucifixion as told by the Evangelists are in his scene. There are the Roman soldiers on the left, even more dramatically represented since they are on horseback. The centurion who gives the lance thrust is seated on a heavy horse. His red robe flows in the wind over Golgotha. Another soldier is on a ladder. He holds a large nail to crucify the third bandit. Mary and John are presented in the lower right part of the picture. They are shown reclining in more than obvious grief. Mary Magdalene has thrown herself tragically to the feet at Jesus’s cross. She also shows her feelings with outstretched arms, as if trying to withhold the Roman from doing further harm to Jesus. But how idle a gesture, how frail a woman like Mary Magdalene in the face of the force of the armed soldiers.

The frame is divided in a lower part with the soldiers, Mary, John, Mary Magdalene and other figures. In the upper part then we find Jesus and the crucified bandits, all also in violent contortions of bodies. Rubens showed especially the full impact of emotions in the powerful chests of the bandits Dismas and Gismas who curb in pain and torture. The darkness that fell over Golgotha at Jesus’s death forms an equally tormented background for the picture. Central in the painting is of course the lightened body of Jesus, hanging lifeless and completely passively down the cross. We feel the last spasm of pain in Jesus as the lance enters his side. The soldier on horseback thrusts with all his power behind the lance and he too arches back under the effort. He wears a red cloak, maybe the same one that was taken off Jesus earlier.

Rubens’ painting is neither a symbol nor a mind image as the one of Antonello da Messina. Rubens is after full power of emotions and immediate impression of the chaos at the death of Jesus, whereby the despair now is shown in the overall panic. Rubens could indeed impress instant effect on his viewers with this kind of picture. But as always, Rubens was also a powerful genius when he was in search of effect. In the ‘Lance Thrust’ he has used a composition based on a V-form since the bodies of the two thieves are lines that open up a space in which hangs Jesus.

Rubens’ painting refers to a text of John. John told that it was the day of Preparation, and to avoid the bodies remaining on the cross during the Sabbath – since that Sabbath was a day of special solemnity – the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking the legs one

of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water.<sup>G38</sup>

John said that he saw this. In, his own words: This is the evidence of one who saw it – true evidence, and he knows that what he says is true – and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfil the words of the scripture: “Not one bone of his will be broken.” And again, in another place scripture says, “They will look to the one whom they have pierced.”<sup>G38</sup>.

The lance that pierced Jesus and touched his blood was a holy object. Around 1200 Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote a novel based on ancient legends. The novel narrated the adventures of Parsifal, a knight of the Round Table of Arthur. Parsifal during his adventures arrived in the Grail Castle and actually saw the Grail Knights and their King who protected the Holy Grail. This Grail was already a Celtic cult object that also appeared in Chrétien de Troyes’ earlier writings of the twelfth century. But around 1200 another French author Robert de Boron, associated the Grail with the chalice used by Jesus in the Last Supper and in which Joseph of Arimathea would also have received Jesus’s blood of the Crucifixion. With the Grail, Parsifal also saw the spontaneously bleeding lance and as in Richard Wagner’s opera all wounds touched by the lance were cured. But Parsifal did not recognise the origin of the wonders he witnessed. Because of that he was doomed to wander until at last a hermit explained to him the true nature of the miracles.

The scene of the ‘Lance Thrust’ was an ideal theme for a Baroque painter like Rubens. The scene had not so much been painted before so that Rubens also had the favour of surprise. Despite the pathos, the picture is a masterpiece and the work of a master who knew perfectly how far he could go in the depiction of emotions to remain credible. For Rubens as an artist, religion was all about emotions, but in the man was profound reflection and sincere spirituality.

## *The Descent from the Cross*

### **The Descent from the Cross**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Pinacoteca – The Vatican. 1604.

### **The Descent from the Cross**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries – London. 1611.

Mark wrote that several women followed the scene of the death of Jesus. There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Josef, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee. And many other women were there who had come up to Jerusalem with him.<sup>G38.</sup>

John adds that near the cross stood Jesus's mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdala. John himself was also there.

These people would have been present at the deposition of Jesus from the cross.

In the Gospel of John an account is given of Jesus's descent from the cross.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus – though a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews – asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission, so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well – the same one who had first come to Jesus at night-time – and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices following the Jewish burial custom.<sup>G38.</sup>

The inevitable pictures of the 'Descent of the Cross' are the several versions Pieter Paul Rubens made of the subject. Rubens' most famous painting is the one he made for the Our Lady Cathedral of Antwerp. Rubens was born in Siegen in Germany in 1577, but moved when he was very young to the metropolis Antwerp. Antwerp was then probably the largest and richest port of Western and Northern Europe. Pieter Paul had various masters to teach him the art of painting in Antwerp, but he left around 1600 for Italy and stayed in Mantua, Rome, Genoa and even in Venice. Around 1608 he returned to Antwerp and became the painter of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella who governed the Southern Netherlands and thus also Antwerp. After 1620 Rubens would start again on a series of travels to Italy, the Northern Netherlands, Spain and England. He travelled not just as one of the most renowned painters of his era but also as a diplomat. Rubens' style was famous throughout the whole of Europe. He was a painter of kings and queens. Maria de Medici, then Queen of France, commissioned to him an enormous set of pictures on her and her husband's life, which paintings are still kept today in one vast hall of the Louvre in Paris. Rubens died in 1640.

His painting 'The Descent of the Cross' for the Antwerp Cathedral dates from 1612 to 1614. The version in the Courtauld Institute of London is from somewhat earlier, from 1611. So, this was a first try at a subject to which Rubens turned several times.

The picture strikes by its bold composition around one of the diagonals. Jesus is lowered from the cross and his body hangs in a line going from the lower left to the upper right. Rubens had learned how to use diagonals probably from Caravaggio, who used these lines with preference. Rubens had been in Italy and in Rome just before Caravaggio's death and had seen this master's innovations for instance in the use of oblique lines of composition. Rubens had a much less rigorous character though than Caravaggio. Caravaggio was uncompromising and indomitable and so were his pictures, especially his later ones. Rubens compromised with his commissioners. But he condescended as a Seigneur. Of course he grew very rich. Rubens was all abundance, greatness, unrestrained pathos, grandness in design, and he always tried to browbeat any viewer by his stunning effects. In some pictures such as in the series he made for Maria de Medici, Rubens was unrestrained in his exaggeration. But Rubens could also, without leaving his personal Baroque way of painting, be strangely intimate and quiet. Thus, we have marvellous landscapes of him such as the 'Winter' and 'Summer' in the Wallace Collection in London. In the 'Descent of the Cross' Rubens has applied his usual exuberance but he created at the same time a devote and very expressive image of Jesus.

Jesus hangs lifeless in a white shroud. He is lowered in and by the shroud. The shroud follows in a long movement the diagonal of the painting. The body of Jesus hangs in the linen, almost as pale and livid as the cloth. His arms still hold the form of the cross. Rubens has Jesus's arms supported by a disciple who has climbed to the top of the cross. Thus in death, Jesus has retained the first form of the symbol of Christianity. In the triangle to the right of the diagonal of Jesus are Saint John, Jesus's beloved disciple, and a figure that can be Joseph of Arimathea. John wears a red robe that Rubens painted in marvellous colours and detail. In the triangle on the left, the upper triangle, is Nicodemus. He may be recognised by his richer dress, but also by his large cloak and cap for Nicodemus was the one who came secretly in the night to argue with Jesus on his teachings. Nicodemus also is dressed in red.

The red surface of John is answered symmetrically by the red of Nicodemus' cloak and these two volumes are aligned along the second diagonal of the frame. Thus there is strong composition, strong lines and balance to be found in an otherwise seemingly chaotic scene. The scene is in intense movement. Lowering Jesus is a difficult task with so many figures around, probably with all people giving a hand but nobody in command and all in awe over the body of the dead Son of God. A dynamic scene with strong underlying composition is always one of the main features of the greatest artists.

Mary Magdalene is at the foot of the cross as is the tradition. She holds the lowest tip of the shroud and she is knelt, together with the other Mary, the mother of James and John. Jesus's mother in the blue maphorion is on the left and she shows her grief and tenderness for her son by trying to touch her son, even though Jesus is not fully lowered yet. Hence her outstretched arm and long hand touching Jesus's elbow, in a dramatic demonstration of love, which remains however entirely credible despite the obvious mannerism of the gesture.

The three Mary's form again a triangle, which is matched symmetrically by the triangle of the two workmen that are on top of the cross, and their outstretched arms. The two men are half-naked and the bare arms and necks of the two Mary's match

these colours of flesh. The workmen are powerful and Rubens has once more used the occasion to show his skill in depicting male anatomy. The arm of the man on the left is strong and very muscular. Rubens has painted this arm with the shadows of the muscles brought to full relief. The arms of Jesus are more slender and fine. Rubens has expressed here the difference between the delicacy of the intellectual Jesus and the rough workers. Colour symmetry can be found furthermore in the blue of the Virgin Mary's robe and on the other side of the point where the diagonals intersect, that is the middle of the frame, stands Joseph also dressed in the same blue. The whole structure of the composition then is also a pyramid, formed by the two ladders that have been put against the cross, on which stand Joseph of Arimathea to the right and Nicodemus on the left. Thus we are astonished how many deliberate lines, balance and symmetry of colours, and structure of volumes the seemingly unbridled Pieter Paul Rubens has used underlying in this picture.

Rubens had made a painting around 1609 of the 'Lance Thrust' where he had a soldier pierce Jesus's left side. Here Rubens shows the wound of the lance, but on the right side of Jesus. Jesus is shown totally lifeless and livid. His head hangs down powerless and also his lips have opened, in what could be understood as the last pain. Jesus is depicted as an ascetic man and also the lines of the white shroud are strict, elongated, and almost straight. All around Jesus however are folds, curves, flowing robes, and round forms. There is an encircling movement of heads and robed bodies around Jesus that surround him in human emotion. Emotion is all curves and volume; emotion is not expressed in straight geometric lines. Thus, although this 'Descent of the Cross' has very strong structure, the tondo form of the humans around Jesus is the central theme of feelings. The picture is a warm expression of compassion. The warm and harmonious colours used by Rubens enhance this feeling.

With the 'Descent of the Cross' Rubens has undeniably created a masterpiece. The exuberant master has shown here that he could contain the apparent exaggeration of expression of feelings within strict geometrical structure. The result is an example of the greatness of image the best painters could aspire to. There can be no better 'Descent of the Cross' than Rubens' picture.

### *Caravaggio*

Although Rubens had good masters in Antwerp like Adam van Noort and Otto van Veen, none of these could have taught him such sophistication in expression. Rubens had seen and studied this in the pictures of Caravaggio in Rome. Rubens had learned a lot of Caravaggio but he added empathy and sentiment to the immediate realism of the Italian master.

Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, painted a 'Descent of the Cross' in 1602 to 1604, during the time when he was still in Rome. This painting is now in the Vatican Pinacoteca. Rubens must have seen it while he stayed in Rome; such a picture was not to be missed. Caravaggio's 'Descent' however is quite another scene than Rubens'. The cross, the form of which is very apparent in Rubens' image, lacks here entirely. Caravaggio was a true innovator and it is no wonder that he pictured a 'Descent' without the cross. Caravaggio's scene is more of Jesus being brought down Golgotha

to his tomb. Joseph of Arimathea and John are carrying the lifeless body of Jesus. They are bent under the effort. Somewhat higher are the three Maries.

Caravaggio also has used the diagonal that goes from the lower left to the upper right, expressed in the line that goes from Jesus's right arm to the heads of Joseph and Mary Magdalene. The form of the cross could not entirely be missed in the picture, so Caravaggio has shown the third Mary with outstretched arms in the form of a cross. This becomes credible since also the arms of a cross are high.

In Caravaggio's painting there is much movement and gestures as the scene is caught in the flux of the moment. But equally, there is such strong structure as to be almost unbelievable. There is the diagonal. There is a pyramidal structure with as top the head of the third Mary and further on as basis the body of Jesus and the slab of stone at the bottom. There are two very strong horizontal lines, one in the body of Jesus and one in the stone slab. The heads of Joseph and of John are in symmetry and along the sidelines of the pyramid. So are the heads of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary. The long, bright red robe of John indicates the second diagonal.

Caravaggio has shown his great talent of realism and of expressing the psychology of the persons in their faces. John is a worried, very sad youth. He remains in the darkness of shame and private pain. Joseph of Arimathea - a figure that may also be Nicodemus - is an elder man with a wrinkled face, very intent, but tired. John is knelt and does not seem to suffer of the weight of Jesus. But Joseph is bent under the effort. Joseph is totally concentrated on his act of lowering Christ into the tomb, yet he also looks at the viewer and thus seems to call us to testify and to seek comprehension for the drama. Mary Magdalene holds her eyes down in shame and true sadness. She has wept and dries her eyes with a white cloth, maybe a corner of the shroud. She is a young girl with marvellous curls around a beautiful face. The Virgin Mary is the suffering mother, not the young Virgin anymore but the ageing mother of the mature Jesus. She has covered her head in an ancient sign of mourning. The third Mary throws her hands to the heavens in an outcry of grief. She may be a servant woman, with a more plain face. She could be Mary Salome. In these expressions of the various faces lay one of the many strengths of the remarkable painter Michelangelo Merisi.

Rubens must have stood in awe at Caravaggio's tour de force of combining movement and static lines, not in one but in so many pictures.

Caravaggio has painted then all flesh and muscles in splendid relief by the play of the shadows. Jesus again is not a very muscular man, but a graceful person. His chest is forceful but hairless; it is painted very respectfully. Here also, the white shroud is around Jesus but hanging in loose curves down from Jesus. Remark that Caravaggio has shown Jesus with a head hanging aside powerless and with open lips. Rubens' image of Jesus is similar.

Who of these two painters has made the most powerful image? Both pictures are undeniably masterpieces and since the two scenes are different we need not ask such a question. Everybody can have his or her preference. Caravaggio's picture is maybe a little too static, whereas Rubens has known perfectly to blend complete and extreme lively movement with the strong structure and symmetries. But Caravaggio's picture calls on us more as we are plunged in the middle of the scene and very close to the

lifeless Jesus. Both pictures are unforgettable and the final sophistication in expression of the highest moment of Jesus's passion.

*Other paintings:*

**The Descent from the Cross**

Giovanni Antonio Bazzi called Sodoma (1477-1549). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Siena. 1505-1510.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Hans Memling (1435-1494). Capilla real. Granada. 1480-1490.

**The Deposition**

Marcellus Coffermans (active 1549-1579). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The National Gallery. London. 1616-1617.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Harmensz Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1633.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1697.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1754-1829). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1789.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Laurent de la Hyre (1606-1565). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1655.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Caen.

**The Deposition**

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). The Wallace Collection. London. Around 1630.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Bartolomé Carducho (1554-1608). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1595.

**The Deposition from the Cross**

Giovanni Battista Benvenuti called Ortolano (ca. 1480/1485-after 1530). Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte. Naples.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1575.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rennes. Ca. 1684.

**The Descent from the Cross**

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1697.

## *Pietà*

### **Christ on the Knees of his Mother**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1643-1645.

### **Pietà de Luco**

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1523-1524.

### **The Descent of the Cross**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Metropolitan Museum – New York. Around 1435.

Pietà pictures are among the most widespread of Christian paintings and sculptures. The best-known sculpture is probably Michelangelo Buonarroti's Pietà in Saint Peter's cathedral of the Vatican. The best-known paintings are without doubt Rogier Van Der Weyden's various versions of the theme. The Gospels do not mention the scene in particular, but nevertheless the theme gained high popularity because it showed the suffering of Jesus's mother at her dead son. Many sculptures and paintings have only Jesus and Mary, but many others also show the same figures that can be found in pictures of the 'Descent of the Cross': Mary Magdalene may be anointing Jesus's feet whereas Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea may be supporting Jesus. John the Evangelist is also often witness to the scene, often supporting Mary. In the theme the first pictures showed Jesus lying over the knees of Mary. Later paintings may show Mary holding the head of her son.

One such a later depiction of the Pietà is Charles Le Brun's painting made around 1643 to 1645.

Charles Le Brun was a true Parisian, born there in 1619. He was a pupil of François Perrier, of Le Bourguignon, somewhat also of Simon Vouet. In 1642 he went to Italy, spent four years there, and was a pupil of Nicolas Poussin. Poussin had remained long in Italy before, was called to Paris in 1640 but soon left again for Rome in 1642. Le Brun was much influenced by the strict classicism of Poussin. At Le Brun's return to France in 1646, he obtained an order of Fouquet, the superintendent of Louis XIV, to decorate the castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte. Louis XIV, who recognised in him not just a painter but also an administrator, agreed to draw him to the court. Colbert, Louis XIV's main Minister, and Le Brun soon centralised the art industry in Paris. Le Brun became one of the founders in 1648 of the 'Académie Royale de Peinture', for which he also gave the very first lecture. He was only twenty-nine years old when he gave this first course. It must have been interesting to hear Le Brun's lessons in the Académie defining the first immutable rules of the theory of Classic and Baroque French art.

Le Brun became the first director also of the Manufactory of the Gobelins tapestries. In 1668 he was nominated to the position of First Painter of the King. Le Brun was very famous at the court; he was even promoted to nobility. He was the most important artist of Louis XIV. Le Brun's life work was of course the Palace of Versailles, the decorations of which were made mostly according to his plans and under his direction. The splendour of the Gallery of the Mirrors of Versailles, the 'Galerie des Glaces', is of Charles Le Brun. He painted many themes of classic antiquity and he

designed cartoons for these scenes to be manufactured as tapestries. But he was also a religious painter, emphasising in some of the scenes the link between the French royalty and the kingdom of the heavens. Louis XIV was King of France by the grace of God and Le Brun was not going to say the contrary. Le Brun was a great painter with a fecund imagination. Some of his pictures are surprising when viewed against the background of court life in that they are truthful, earnest, sincere and original. Such is the case of his Pietà or as it now called 'The dead Christ on the Knees of the Virgin'. It was made for Le Brun's patron at the court, the Chancellor Séguier. Séguier had paid for Le Brun's stay in Rome and the picture was probably made there, in Rome. It was given by one of Séguier's descendants to the church of Saint Elisabeth in Paris, where Séguier's daughter Marie was entombed in 1704.

Le Brun who introduced academism in the French Academy had to go back to the sources of the images of the Pietà. Mary is sitting on the ground and the head of Jesus lies on the knee of an outstretched leg. Le Brun has taken a classic image but changed it to a novel view. He favoured diagonals as he might have seen in the pictures made some decades ago by Caravaggio and Rubens. Jesus thus lies along one diagonal and Mary along the other. Le Brun departed from the strong vertical lines of the Flemish Primitives and the Italians of the early Renaissance. The colours he used also are not conventional. Jesus's body is so pale as to almost radiate brightness. The body becomes very livid but heavenly, more transcended by this effect. It is as if sculptured in white marble, with blue translucent veins showing through the delicate skin. Mary is dressed in a pure blue maphorion, of which the cap is lowered over her head in grief. She holds the white shroud under Jesus.

Le Brun's painting is cold. The whites of the shroud and the brightness of Jesus contrast with the very deep blue. These are cold colours; there are no warm browns or red colours. The background remains uncommitted, impersonal and dark, almost black. Mary is shown arranging the shroud. But there is no external show of emotions. At most there is a tender arrangement of cloth around Jesus. There is almost no movement in the image. This lack of gesture is combined with a very strong pyramidal structure formed by Mary and Jesus. The scene is frozen in time in a static pose.

Le Brun knew the new structures of diagonals and pyramids as assembled by Caravaggio, but whereas Caravaggio used this to enhance the dynamism of his figures, Le Brun showed that these techniques could as well be used to emphasise the static of a picture. The question one will probably always ask is whether this picture was an exercise in style to demonstrate particular techniques of the pictorial arts, as Le Brun taught them in his Academy. The picture may however also have been painted naturally out of Le Brun's own vision of a Pietà. Le Brun was the French courtier who always had to keep up strict protocol and appearances. His cool view may have been the expression of his own detached vision, of his distant feelings of respect for the two figures. Le Brun may have felt that the direct representation of private emotions was not the academic way of painting. The most sympathetic view on his picture is however that Le Brun was indeed very respectful in his view of the suffering of a mother over her dead son. Maybe because of this sympathy he has only shown Mary rearranging desperately, again and again, the shroud in which Jesus would soon be entombed. Whatever the concept that has gone through Le Brun's mind, his 'The dead Christ on the Knees of the Virgin' is one of the most still images

of a Pietà that were ever painted. It is a rare picture in the period when Baroque exuberant art was at his height. Paris and Le Brun were indicating yet another road.

### Andrea del Sarto

Andrea del Sarto painted his version of the Pietà around 1523 to 1524, over a century earlier than Le Brun's picture. Del Sarto was one of the most important masters of the late Florentine Renaissance. He was formed in the workshop of Piero di Cosimo but also could not but look at the other masters of Florence, who were his contemporaries and competitors for commissions. He saw the works of Leonardo da Vinci, of Michelangelo and of Fra Bartolommeo. He saw Michelangelo's new drive in the depiction of nudes and outright depiction of emotions, which would lead to Mannerism. His own pupils Rosso Fiorentino and Jacopo Pontormo would follow this trend fully.

But Andrea del Sarto was also permeated by the stricter images of the early Renaissance artists of his town. Florence was yet a merchant town, given to a more austere character. Del Sarto understood both trends and blended some of the newer directions of representation with the strong rationality of Florence. In that way he was immensely popular in Florence. He had his own workshop, which he held together with Franciabigio. The output by this workshop of religious scenes was very large so that today one can hardly go in any building of Florence without finding somewhere an Andrea del Sarto picture.

Andrea del Sarto's painting 'Suffering for the Dead Christ' is called the Pietà de Luco because it was commissioned for the main altar of the church of San Pietro de Luco, in the Mugello region. Del Sarto had taken refuge there when an epidemic of the plague had once more broken out in Florence.<sup>13</sup>

We certainly recognise Michelangelo's influence in this painting of Andrea del Sarto. The painter has used very pure, bright colours as if this were a fresco painting. He has applied some shadow to give much relief to the figures so that they resemble sculptures. The scene is almost static; all the figures are in poses of still gestures. John, Mary, Joseph of Arimathea do have a gesture in their arms, but they are touching Jesus in a silent slow position that they could hold for quite a time. The picture is very restful in these poses of the figures, so that it is peaceful to look at.

Del Sarto also innovated the theme. Jesus is sitting on a stone, just a little supported by John and the Virgin Mary. Mary Magdalene is at Jesus's feet but does not clench Jesus's body. Mary Magdalene also is without movement, in silent respect. She holds her hands in prayer and in a gesture of disbelief at what has happened. Joseph of Arimathea stands behind Mary in a manner that could make him a Saint Peter commanding the church. But the gesture is merely a tender touch to Mary. Mary herself is not painted in the blue colours but in warm red and in a slightly purple and white cap. Del Sarto certainly favoured the warm colours in this picture. He used various shades of red and rose and only tries some green and blue on the outer sides of the frame in the figures of John and the third Mary. Mary's head forms the centre of the picture. Around this head Andrea del Sarto has made a composition of symmetries. The composition is strongly symmetrical around the centre. And the

painter has given predominance to the diagonals. The heads of John, Jesus, Mary and Joseph thus form one diagonal. The other diagonal goes over the heads of Mary Magdalene, Mary and Nicodemus on the left. The strong use of diagonals was not so common in pictures. After Andrea del Sarto, the great Caravaggio would make this feature the main superb structure of his works. Here we see the technique applied long before Caravaggio, but not yet as the basis of simulation of motion. The structure of del Sarto's picture is in various other ways very strict since many stable triangles can be found.

The result of the austere geometric structure, the static induced by del Sarto in the figures and the sculpture-like build-up of the personages has turned his picture into one of the most peaceful, agreeable images to look at of his time. Andrea del Sarto added a beautiful landscape with rock formations on the left and he gave a wide perspective on the right. The artists added symbols, like a pot of balm on the lower right, which is always associated with Mary Magdalene, and a chalice in the lower middle representing the Eucharist that would be offered on the altar against which stood the panel. Del Sarto knew how to please and yet offer a picture of innovation that was not just the repetition of conventions. It must have been nice to sit during mass in this little church of Luco and ponder at this still picture of intimate, private tragedy. For del Sarto also showed the tenderness and loss of a mother at her dead son and the compassion of the friends around her. By the strong symmetries centred on Mary del Sarto gave this main message. The Virgin Mary was not alone in her grief, just as few people in the days of glory of Florence were seldom left alone. These were the kind of pictures Charles Le Brun had in mind when he founded academism in France and from which he could deduce the rules he taught.

### *Rogier Van Der Weyden*

We present in this book, in several places, paintings of masters from the Belgian town of Tournai dating from the early fifteenth century. Robert Campin was the first master of Tournai. We present further in this text an 'Entombment' of him. Jacques Daret and Rogier Van Der Weyden were together his apprentices from 1427 to 1432<sup>F20</sup>.

Rogier Van Der Weyden was the greatest of the three and where the two former painters, Campin and Daret, were the excellent craftsmen, Rogier was the greater artist. Born likewise in Tournai around 1400, he died in Brussels in 1464. He became the town painter of Brussels around 1430 and remained in that Brabant city until his death. We know he travelled to Italy between 1450 and 1455. He made for instance a Madonna with the weapons of the Medici in Florence. He has also visited Ferrara. Brussels and Brabant had become a part of the Duchy of Burgundy. So naturally, Rogier also worked in Burgundy, for instance for the Hospital of Beaune near Dijon, the capital of Burgundy. And of course, he worked for rich commissioners of Bruges.

Van Der Weyden, but also Campin and Daret, have been called Flemish Primitives, in the same line of painters as Jan Van Eyck, Hans Memling, and so many others. They are assimilated with the Flemish painters of Bruges. It is certainly true that these painters had style, form, colours, realism, and subjects in common. By right one can call these painters as belonging to the same general school. They worked and lived in towns close by: Bruges mostly, because the most wealthy, but also Brussels, Tournai,

Gent, Antwerp and a little further Lille, Arras and still more south than the towns of Burgundy. All these towns were rich from various industries, mostly linen, wool cloth, tapestries, and trade. The region lay at the centre of trade between France, England, Holland, Germany and still farther the Italian city-states of Genoa, Venice, Florence, Pisa as well as the Scandinavian and the Baltic states.

The towns of Northern France, Flanders and Brabant were also the near theatres of the Hundred Year War between the French and the English Kings. The rich and powerful Dukes of Burgundy were third party, once allies of England and then of France, as suited their interests. Yet, although the painters lived approximately in the same region, there is quite a difference in temperament between them. Campin, Daret and Van Der Weyden came from Tournai, where French was spoken. Contrary to the towns of Bruges, Brussels, and Gent, where Dutch was the language. Van Der Weyden is how he was called in Flanders. His real name was Roger de le Pasture. Campin and Daret are French names. So, Campin, Daret and de le Pasture are in modern Belgium hailed as the foremost Walloon painters, after the name of the French-speaking region of Belgium in which Tournai is situated, now called Wallony.

Tournai is one of those towns with a horrendously complicated history. It was a border town between Flanders and France. The town is almost two thousand years old. It was a Gallo-Roman town, conquered by the Merovingian Franks. It became the capital of the Frankish Kings Childeric and Clovis, who have been called the first Kings of France. Then it was French, English (for a short period under Henry VIII, a round fortified tower still commemorates this period), Spanish, Dutch, then again French (the town received its contemporary structure under Louis XIV), Austrian, French once again (after the French Revolution), Dutch and finally Belgian. Belgium has become a federation recently; Tournai is now in the Belgian French speaking region of Wallony. The town has twelve churches and chapels. Tournai was in the centre of the northern French Gothic building activity. The Notre-Dame cathedral is an imposing church, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, built both in Roman and gothic style, one of the largest in western European architecture with five towers of over 80 meters high. Tournai today has seven museums, remarkable for a town of about 20.000 people. Its Fine Arts Museum was built in 1928 by the famous Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta: still in that period Tournai could find rich maecenasses willing to add to the glory of their town.

In the 1430s, when our three painters worked, Tournai was under the direct sovereignty of the Kings of France. Almost all of the Tournai surroundings, however, belonged to the Duke of Burgundy. In 1433, around the time when the most famous Daret painting, an altarpiece for the abbey of Saint Vaast in Arras, was made, Jean de Thoisi the bishop of Tournai and former Chancellor of Burgundy had died. The Duke of Burgundy wanted to pass the bishopric to his own advisor, Jean Chevrot, who was an archdiacre in the Normandy town of Rouen. However, Jean de Harcourt, the bishop of Amiens, acted secretly with Pope Eugene IV, supported by the King of France, to become bishop of Tournai. De Harcourt was appointed by Rome and took up his office immediately. When the Duke of Burgundy heard of this, he became very angry with the Pope, who transferred the archbishopric of Narbonne in an act of conciliation to de Harcourt. But Tournai was much richer than Narbonne, so a much better price for the bishops of the fifteenth century, who lived as princes do with a large court of servants, with horses, dogs and mistresses. De Harcourt refused and

stayed in Tournai. The Duke of Burgundy then sent an armed delegation for Chevrot to Tournai to take possession of the bishopric. The people of Tournai were more inclined to France, had already liked de Harcourt during his short office. So they attacked Etienne Vivian, the grand vicar of Chevrot during the ceremony of possession. De Harcourt could only at the brink save Vivian. The Duke of Burgundy could not let this offence pass, so he confiscated all the possessions of the inhabitants of Tournai in his Duchy and he forbade anyone in Burgundy to trade with Tournai. De Harcourt was forced to go to Narbonne. The dispute with Tournai lasted five years. The incident shows some of the power of the enclave-town, how it was situated between the powers of the time, how it could be envy to Kings and Dukes. Rogier Van Der Weyden would paint the 'Triptych of the Seven Sacraments', now in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp, for Jean Chevrot, bishop of Tournai<sup>B2</sup>.

Daret and Campin painted pictures that could be admired for their craft. We see their paintings as lovely images. We look in astonishment to all the details that have been meticulously shown. We admire the time and the effort that the craftsman has dedicated. And so these men were considered remarkable professionals who needed to please and astonish their commissioners by the extraordinary gift of talent they had. Campin and Daret continued the tradition of the anonymous architects and builders of the gothic era. We truly admire. But something is missing. Painters were aware that the pure spirituality remained cold. The pictures of old did not appeal anymore to the public as before. A form of innovation, a sense of need for evolution was in the air. Jan Van Eyck tried to find a solution of his own: he tried to astonish by arousing interest and curiosity. He introduced strange settings, rooms that are too small, symbols, and hidden meanings. The viewer suspects that something is wrong in his paintings, so he is tempted to look further and discover in delight unexpected surprises.

Van Eyck's paintings and the Tournai paintings of Campin and Daret are very easy to admire, but difficult to love. Van Der Weyden would offer us just that in northern painting. The craft of colouring, drawing, the intelligence of the lines, of Rogier's 'Descent of the Cross' are even more important in all their details than those of Campin and Daret. But there is a lot more. The scene is a deliberate assemblage of bodies set in particular shapes so as to convey waves of emotions. The corpse of Jesus is a wave, as is the fainting Mary, the weeping Mary Magdalene, the helping John and the grieving Nicodemus. Van Der Weyden was one of the first Flemish painters to depict lyrical images. He presented emotions on a canvas of Gothic imagery.

First: Jesus. His corpse is lowered from the cross. His arms are still outstretched, so that the cross remains the central theme of the painting. One arm is supported by the apostle or angel who comes from the ladder; the other arm hangs down in a quite natural way. Yet, the arms do form the sign of the cross. Joseph of Arimathea supports Jesus's shoulders, Nicodemus his feet. The result is a curved body that brings us emotions of pity, helplessness, and defeat. We feel inclined to jump into the scene and help to support the body. The colours sustain the effect: Jesus is naked, glassy white, and white linen is behind him.

The wave of Jesus continues to Mary Magdalene. She is as if stricken by the line of Jesus's body, curved almost around Jesus's feet. Her body also is a wave, but where Jesus's wave is horizontal, hers is vertical. The curve of Mary Magdalene closes the

picture on the right: it makes the scene intimate, interiorised. Look at how her arms continue the curve, also her head. The same closing curve can be found on the left, where Saint John holds Mary. The same bending of legs, the same play of folds of the robes. Both are slender figures. The wave of John however is somewhat different because the viewer has to be drawn to the second tragedy of the painting.

Mary has fainted. She has a magnificent blue robe and the same white headdress we can find in other of Van Der Weyden's paintings and also in the Campin paintings. She likewise has one arm supported, one hanging down in a natural poise. The wave of her body exactly fits Jesus's: same movement of arms, same direction of body. The mother feels the same passion as the son. The colours of her robe are as light as Jesus's, but here it is an unworldly blue. She also has her eyes closed, just as her son.

For the rest of the painting, we find Nicodemus on the right in a marvellously decorated brown and gold robe. The two women on the left, Mary and Mary Salome match these colours. Nicodemus is a wealthy man, but we can see in his face that he is a man who has gone through many hardships. He might be a rich burgher, a manager of a tapestry factory, a carriage maker of Brussels, but he is a man full of devotion and sincere grievance. He represents the people. Joseph of Arimathea on the other hand, is depicted as a wise man with the small head cape of a scholar and the white beard of a learned man. He represents the clergy, the doctors, and the theoretical intelligence of a city. The one that has let it happen. Is that why this man has his eyes directed to the ground? The heads of all the figures are inclined as signs of grief. The apostle or angel who is still on the ladder emphasises the cross with a living body. The figure's body is equally in the form of a cross, again turned in a way as the other bodies of the painting.

The lines of the painting are curves, just as emotions are not straight lines but curves. The body of Jesus is mirrored in Mary; Mary Magdalene is mirrored in Saint John. The set of three figures on the right is in symmetry with equally three figures on the left. These lines and symmetries once more stress the deliberate setting of Rogier, his formidable knowledge of balance and harmony.

The painting of Rogier Van Der Weyden thus indeed is a dynamic emotion, not a picture. We are drawn into the feeling. And yet, everything is under control and spiritualised. This is not a painting to admire, but a painting to be in, to take part in, and to enter. Very few artists but Rogier have been able to do this. It is why we love him more than any other northern painter of the early fifteenth century.

The paintings of Van Der Weyden mark the evolution from Gothic art to newer times. In the Gothic period we find more miniaturists than painters in the North. Even the early painters learned their craft as miniaturists. They were indeed craftsmen, dedicated to cold detail. They were to decorate. However, they were supposed to decorate in such a way as to show all the splendour and power of the spirituality of Roman Catholic faith. The Church consoled. It was the guardian of the higher values. In times when war, murder and rape by roaming hirelings soared and in times when the luxurious lives of the rich contrasted so scandalously with the dark poverty of the peasants, it was necessary to provide hope. The only hope could be for a better life after death. So, the paintings had to show the splendour of after-life, the lives of the

Saints and of the Holy Family. The Clergy hoped thus to inspire also the nobility to a more virtuous life.

Van Der Weyden used the occasions that were presented to him by rich commissioners, to use this craft and turn it into a very personal art. From now on, painters became aware that they could express their own personal emotions into the paintings and still receive commissions for pictures. In time, they would claim not only the right to do so, but they would be admired by the way in which they did just that. Still later, in our times, only the immediate expression and the formless impression of feelings would remain.

Van Der Weyden's picture is history reversed. Here was one of the first painters to bring true emotion in his pictures. Andrea del Sarto stylised his emotions, reconciling the strictness of Florentine tradition with the depiction of pathos. And Charles Le Brun held emotions entirely in the ban of academism. Trend induces counter-trends. The reaction to French academism would later be the unbridled show of emotions in Romantic art.

*Other paintings:*

**The Lamentation**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Mauritshuis. The Hague. 1450.

**Pietà**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Around 1490.

**Pietà**

Daniele Crespi (1600-1630). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Around 1626.

**Pietà**

Fernando Callego (1440-1507). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. Active 1466-1507.

**Pietà**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels.

**Pietà**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. Around 1500.

**Pietà**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1500.

**Pietà**

Robert Crommelynck (1895-1968). Le Musée de l'Art Wallon. Liège. 1929.

**Pietà**

Lou Albert-Lasard (1885-1969). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1921.

**Pietà**

Bernardino Luini (1460-1532). Church of San Maurizio. Milan. 1520's.

**Dead Christ with Saint John and the Virgin**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Dead Christ Mourned**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1605) The National Gallery. London.

**The Deploation of Christ**

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Capilla dei Scrovegni. Padua. Around 1305.

**The Deploation of Christ**

Hans Memling (1435-1494). Capilla Real. Granada.

**The Deploation of Christ**

Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. 1641.

**The Lamentation**

Hugo Van der Goes (1440-1482). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin.

**Lamentation over the Body of Christ**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1655-1660.

**Lamentation over the dead Christ**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). The Royal Collections. London. 1495.

**The Body of Christ supported by an Angel**

Alonso Cano (1601-1667). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1636-1652.

**The dead Christ supported by two Angels**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. 1480 to 1485.

**Christ supported by an Angel**

Daniele Crespi (1600-1630). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**The Body of Christ supported by an Angel**

Antonella da Messina (1430-1479). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1475-1478.

**The Lamentation**

Vrancke van der Stockt (ca.1420-1495). Mayer Van Den Bergh Museum. Antwerp.

**The Lamentation of Christ**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Milan.

**The Lamentation of Christ**

Follower of Dirk bouts (ca. 1410-1475). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

**Pietà**

Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1535 – 1516). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Pietà**

Sophonisba Anguissola (1527 – 1625). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Pietà, Deposition from the Cross**

Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1876.

**The Lamentation of Christ**

Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Lamentation over the Dead Christ**

Altobello Melone (ca. 1485-before 1543). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1511.

**The Lamentation over the Dead Christ**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1527.

## *The Descent in Hell*

### **The Descent**

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) and Hans Rottenhammer (1564-1625).  
Mauritshuis. – The Hague. 1597.

The descent into hell of Jesus is not told in the Gospels. The Golden Legend however recalled a story from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and thus spread the tale in the Middle Ages. The early Church Fathers speculated about the subject to conclude that Jesus had only reached the outer borders of hell, the limbo<sup>G41</sup>. The story is a legend. It is a narration used to explain the nagging issue of how all souls of the righteous people who had died before the Redemption of Christ could have been rescued by his death and brought to heavens anyway. The story has mythological references, like the legend of Orpheus and also later the descent of Dante in the Inferno.

Jan Brueghel the Elder made a painting of this theme around 1597. It is a painting on copper plate. Copper plate is a marvellous medium for paint. The luminosity of the pigments on the very smooth metal surface is extraordinary. The layers of paint on copper are very thin so that a special interaction can take place between the light waves, the paint and the underlying medium. Paint is laid down very thinly on copper; it has thus translucent hues and a brilliance that is absent on canvas.

Painting on copper started in the sixteenth century. It seems that Sebastiano del Piombo was one of the first to use this medium, but other Italians like Correggio and Parmigianino used it. Northern painters who worked in Rome took over this art. Especially the Germans Adam Elsheimer and Johann Rottenhammer painted on copper and then the Flemish-Brabant artists Paul Bril and Bartholomew Spranger<sup>N9</sup>. Spranger had stayed in Rome and travelled to Vienna and Prague to work for the emperors Maximilian II and Rudolph II. Around 1600 Johann Rottenhammer worked together with other artists. Rottenhammer was a specialist of copper and of figure painting. He worked with landscape painters such as Paul Bril and Jan Brueghel. But of course it was impossible in these centuries to have very large surfaces in copper, so the formats have remained small, giving intimate pictures used for sole commissioners and for private collections.

No other painter than Jan Brueghel the Elder painted as often on copper. He was a painter of Antwerp who worked in the golden period of this metropolis. Born in 1568, he was the second son of the great Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Like his father he travelled to Italy then became the court painter of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella who were governors of the Southern Netherlands for the Emperor of the Holy German Empire. He painted landscapes and especially flower still lives. He was a friend of Pieter Paul Rubens and when van Dyck opened a workshop in Antwerp, his companion was also this Jan Brueghel. Jan apparently liked to work with other masters since his 'Descent into Hell' was also a collaboration with Johann or Hans Rottenhammer. Rottenhammer was born in Munich in 1654, so he was somewhat older than Brueghel was. He installed himself in Venice around 1596 and he also worked in Rome. Later, he returned to Germany and worked at various courts, among which again the court of Emperor Rudolph II. He died in Augsburg in 1625, the same

year as Jan Brueghel's death. The painting of Jan Brueghel and Hans Rottenhammer dates from around 1597, the turn of the century.

Hell is represented as a dark cave, guarded on the right by a smoking castle and a lake. Jesus has entered the darkness and he is tearing people out of the pool of hell, out of the hands of devils. Jesus is accompanied by Adam and Eve who were the first to be redeemed, thus are symbols of the beginning of time. Adam is white-bearded and that detail is a testimony for the passage of centuries. Adam and Eve hold the banner of the Resurrection of Christ: a red cross on a white flag. This banner will exorcise the devils and other malefic creatures of hell that dance around. The flag is bound to a high cross, the cross of redemption that no evil can resist. Satan is also behind Jesus in a crazy, frenetic dance. Satan's devils throw some of the people that Jesus has helped out of the pit back in another hole and furnace. These souls will be eternally doomed. The righteous are being dressed to cover their nakedness before stepping outside and are seen leaving the cave of hell through the opening on the right. Jan Brueghel has really thought privately that also infidels could be redeemed. Thus, a person with a Moorish turban is seen leaving with the others.

Jan Brueghel and Hans Rottenhammer remembered the Flemish-Brabant tradition of representation of monstrous figures by their forefathers Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel. These made various versions of nightmare and hell scenes peopled by a myriad of monsters and devils. Remark the hideous features of the devils, dancing around as monkeys, which are quite in this tradition.

Even in a picture like this, structure was introduced. Thus, a line goes from the devil in the upper left over Satan behind Adam and Eve to the pit of the doomed. The redemption line of the Saviour crosses this evil line. This then is the line of Jesus and the escape through the hopeful opening of the cave. Remark the difference between the nicely painted nude humans in the pool before Jesus and the small, monkey-like devils.

The 'Descent in Hell' was a work made for a private commissioner, to be held in his chapel or house. The work induces thought about the transitoriness of life and the ultimate hope brought by Jesus's redemption. It is also one of the finest paintings on copper plate.

*Other Paintings:*

### **Christ in the Limbo**

Alessandro Allori called Il Bronzino (1535-1607). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1591.

## *The Entombment*

### **The Laying out of Christ**

Vittore Carpaccio (1460-1526). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. Around 1519.

### **The Entombment**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels.

### **Triptych: The Two Thieves, the Entombment, Resurrection**

Robert Campin (ca. 1375-1444). The Courtauld Institute and Galleries - London.  
Around 1420.

Matthew gives a very brief but dignified account of Jesus's burial. He told that Joseph of Arimathea took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre. Mark notes that the second Mary was Mary of Joset. Luke adds that it was Preparation day and the Sabbath was beginning to grow light. Then the group of disciples returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath day they rested, as the Law required. In his turn, John said that they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices following the Jewish burial custom. John told that at the place where Jesus had been crucified there was a garden and in that garden Jesus was buried.

## *Vittore Carpaccio*

As much as the Evangelists Matthew and John, Vittore Carpaccio liked to tell stories in detail. He was a Venetian painter and though little is known of his life, he must have been born around 1465 or 1467. These were the times of the genesis of Venetian style, the times of Gentile Bellini and his son Giovanni Bellini. Carpaccio was not really a student or follower of Bellini, but of course there are style similarities and also a great genius as Giovanni Bellini sometimes liked to tell stories in various scenes on one canvas as Carpaccio became famous for. Vittore Carpaccio worked for the Scuole of Venice on lives of saints, and he also painted for the Doges. His fame as a narrative painter was appreciated in Venice. His most renowned picture is the 'Entombment' of Berlin. Carpaccio returned to a very static, early medieval way of representation. But he added also a sense of nature and of warm colour that is all Venetian fifteenth century. His 'Entombment' was made around 1505. Carpaccio lived until he was about sixty: he died around 1525.

Jesus is lying dead on a stone. As told in the scriptures, a shroud is under him and a separate one for his head. The stone table is supported by strange table-legs and by a red stone that seems to be the red Ointment Stone. This stone was very famous as a relic in the Byzantine church. It was brought to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages and is preserved in the Tomb Church there. Under the stone we see the sign of Golgotha where Jesus died. Golgotha means the hill of the skulls. Carpaccio has let his imagination dwell into totally unseen images here, since contours of humans are caught in stone slabs, such as on the left. Parts of torsos also lie among the skulls.

These are nightmarish visions. Carpaccio has given a very weird, almost alien and magic appearance to the scene of Jesus lying above the bones and torsos.

To continue the strangeness, Job is seating at a tree in the middle right. He is meditating. He is sitting to a tree that is both bearing much foliage, representing life, and dead trunks, representing death. Job was venerated in Venice where a church was dedicated to him, so this may be the reason why Job, who is not usually associated with Jesus, is depicted here<sup>D1</sup>. Job was a man of the Old Testament who had been put to the trial by God and who had very patiently and willingly abandoned himself to the designs of God, however terrible for himself and his family. This combination may indicate the danger of the power of Jesus. Jesus can doom people although he is the messenger of love. For Carpaccio Jesus may be a bringer of death, submission, doom and misfortune. This idea is continued in the broken column next to Job, when our view moves from Job to the left. The broken column is usually a symbol of the old Law that Jesus has come to replace with his new learning, but here it is the prolongation of a more morbid theme. So are the further ruins of a Roman temple with the statue of old Gods in the background. A lonely figure is still cleaning or working in full illusion of lost eras at the memorials of Roman emperors. The whole site of this temple looks desolate, forgotten in the desert mountains. On top of that mountain a trumpeter heralds the New Kingdom. Still higher up, at the top of the frame on the extreme left stand the crosses of Golgotha Mountain.

Under Golgotha is the tomb of Jesus. We have the impression that here a story is told of a time later than the entombment. Arab bearded soldiers are turning away the stone from Jesus's tomb and a figure that must be Joseph of Arimathea has come to wash Jesus. Joseph, equally heavy-bearded, stoops with a pail in his hands. To the far right of this scene are drawn the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Mary of Magdala supports the mother of Jesus. John the Evangelist, the beloved of Christ, is also in this scene, but he turns his back to the viewer. This may be the representation of the theme of the 'Lamentation' over Jesus, a scene of still another moment in time. Behind these scenes life continues. Farmers are working in the fields, travellers gallop by on horseback. Carpaccio shows us the sea and the blue, far mountains that blend with the blue skies in which a few white, delicate clouds pass.

Vittore Carpaccio has painted a very strange picture. Instead of love and warm feelings, instead of gentle sadness for the death of a beloved teacher, the artist Carpaccio introduces the viewer into a world of danger and weird magic. This is a menacing image. The weirdness is answered by the unusual structure of the picture. Few images are so based on the strong horizontal lines and layers that Carpaccio has applied here. There is the long horizontal Jesus lying on the table and then the horizontal strip of the three subthemes: of the opening of the grave, of Job and of the lamenting Maries. Further on are the rocks and the fields that form again a separate strip of the picture, and then also the far landscape. This emphasis on horizontal layers was not very new, and the earlier narrative painters of Venice had used it. Even Giovanni Bellini and also the Florentine Andrea Mantegna had occasionally used it in some of their compositions. Carpaccio continued this way of Venetian narration.

Vittore Carpaccio showed a very different feeling of Jesus, stressing the unworldliness of the death of a God rather than the emotions of a personal God. All religions prepare man for death. But Carpaccio has not shown a sweet, tender death.

He gave a vision as if he refused and abhorred the ultimate destiny of man, and as if he saw like this also Jesus's death, with resentment instead of with Job's acceptance.

### *Simon Vouet*

Simon Vouet was a French painter of the seventeenth century. This was the century in which the pictorial arts flourished in many European cultures and in which various styles were invented. Baroque art was at its height in the Southern Netherlands and genre painting as well as marines in the Northern Netherlands. Devote Spanish pictorial arts was driven by the very pious court of Madrid and the wealthy abbeys and church orders. French painting had only had isolated masters in previous periods. Schools and subsidised workshops had been founded but mostly led by Italian artists. Leonardo da Vinci had worked on the Loire River and Rosso Fiorentino had played a leading role in the School of Fontainebleau. It was time to create a proper French influential school with a specific style tuned to French society. France had reached finally the full prestige and ample means of its monarchy. The Kings were uncontested and wealthy since they concentrated the revenues of France at the court of Paris. Simon Vouet would be the artist capable to create a dedicated French style. He would lay the foundations for the fame and credibility of painting in France for the next centuries.

Simon Vouet was born in Paris in 1590 and died also in Paris in 1649. He left Paris around 1611 after a short apprenticeship with his father, to travel for two full years. He went as far as Constantinople and made even a picture there of the sultan Mehmet I. He went to Venice and saw the works of Tiziano, of Paolo Veronese and of Tintoretto. From 1614 on he worked in Rome for Cardinal Barberini. He saw the sculptor Bernini at work in the court of the Barberini. In 1621 he travelled to Genoa, where the Baroque artists Pieter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck had painted for several years before him. Of course he studied the pictures of the beginning of the century made by Michelangelo Merisi, the Caravaggio. He married an Italian woman, Virginia da Vezzo, and was destined to the same career as other talented French painters had in Rome such as Nicolas Poussin.

In 1626 the French King Louis XIII asked Vouet to come back to France. The King promised an apartment in the Louvre. The court wanted to establish a French national drive in art. Vouet accepted the offer and started a workshop in Paris that would deliver a generation of painters that included Eustache Le Sueur, Charles Le Brun and Pierre Mignard. Le Brun founded the first French Academy of Arts under Louis XIV. Mignard followed him up as Director of this state institution. French academism was solidly planted and French art would never wane since Simon Vouet.

Vouet founded French art from the very beginning to the image of the French monarchy. Art would be solid, refined, intellectual, clear, religious and grand. A touch of epics was needed and found in classic themes of antiquity. There was to be not too much sentiment, but much dignity and royal distance.

Simon Vouet's 'Entombment' is based on these concepts. The picture has a very strong structure. Structure would be taught in the French academy of Paris afterwards, and Vouet fully understood the power of structure in Baroque art. His painting is

based on the two diagonals, but Vouet did not create movement along these lines like Caravaggio. He more took the lines to create solidity of composition and thus give a sensation of rest in the picture. Vouet placed solid volumes under the diagonals, that is inside the triangles that the diagonals form with the lower border of the frame. Mary Magdalene, Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea entirely follow the first, right diagonal. Their bodies and volume are in the lower right triangle. The second diagonal also forms a base triangle on the left, wherein one finds the Virgin Mary and Mary Salome. The head of Nicodemus is also on this second diagonal. This structure is very solid because the triangles have as their base the lower border of the frame.

The early seventeenth century was the age of Baroque, but Vouet has shown little exuberance of emotions and gestures. Vouet thus certainly did not follow the style of Rubens. There is little movement in Vouet's picture. Yet, it is a picture of action since Jesus is lowered into the tomb. Only Mary Magdalene has a gesture of immediacy, and she is knelt to a static position. In Flemish Primitive pictures one can find back these static poses and in pictures of Jan Van Eyck for instance. Mary Magdalene is the only figure daring to move arms or hands. So, there is no outburst of emotion, no panic, no chaos here. The figures seem to be caught in a well-organised scene, in actions where each person knows instinctively what to do as in an orchestrated play. Thus, there is rest and dignified restraint in Vouet's 'Entombment'. There are no outcries here; it is a picture of silent feelings.

All the actors of the picture have their heads bent in grief. Mary holds her head in sadness. Joseph of Arimathea is grieved and ashamed. Mary Salome is completely bent away. Vouet has been able to express the fundamental, heavy, silent, intent sadness of what must have seemed to be the ultimate catastrophe and end of the teachings of Jesus. One feels that the personal grief of the figures in this picture is enhanced by the profound comprehension of a grander event. This event is the death of the founder of the major religion of Europe and of France. The helplessness at the injustice of the death of Jesus is enhanced by the image of the lifeless body that catches the central light. The feeling is dramatically suggested by Jesus's left arm that hangs down powerless. This arm hangs outside the tomb, over the knee and legs of Joseph of Arimathea and it points meaningfully to the earth.

Mary Magdalene's gesture now becomes clear. She points out this arm to Joseph, silently indicating to Joseph a difficulty for putting Jesus in the tomb. This is also a narrative factor in the picture. The Magdalene draws the attentions of Joseph that Jesus seems to point to the earth to which he returns. No one actor looks the other in the eyes. No one touches the other. Christ is lowered and that holds all last tender attention. All eyes are directed to nowhere or to Jesus. These elements add to the general feeling of dignity and restraint of sentiments. No figure looks to the viewer, who sees the scene from very close, and from below. This view was a particular technique used for panels that were hung high, as was the case for this picture. The viewer looked from beneath and entered the scene from below. But here the viewer remains private, non-committed to the theme. The viewer can watch in silence, in respect and from a distance. He is not needed to participate in the action. The picture was one of a series along which one could walk by in church and follow the life of Jesus in silence and private contemplation.

The colours in the painting are soft. Jesus is in full light and gradually from his body as centre out, all colours fade to darker tones. Vouet has shown his considerable skills in the structure of the painting, in the solidity of his composition and in the general character of the image. He used clear and light colours and showed a finely detailed depiction of the play of the tissues. Admire the draperies around the figures and the luxurious colours in the cloak of Mary Magdalene. The robes and gowns bear no ornament; there are no golden linings as one would find in Flemish Gothic pictures. But the simple cloaks become royal ceremonial gowns under the brush of Simon Vouet.

The 'Entombment' was made around 1636-1637 for the private chapel of the house of the Chancellor Séguier, for whom also Charles Le Brun would paint. The decoration of the chapel was composed of a central altarpiece, a 'Crucifixion' now in the Museum of Lyon, and eleven pictures of the life of Jesus. The ceiling was covered with the triumphant 'Resurrection'. The 'Entombment' is one of those impressive pictures. It is probably of all the pictures of the dead Jesus the one that expresses with the most dignity, distance and intimacy the intense feelings of grief, desolation and sadness at the great dramatic event of the most genial teacher of European humanity.

Vouet could represent his own intimate feelings. His paintings were for a private house and for a chapel that would not be visited by too many persons. He could thus show a serene image of Jesus without looking for dramatic effects. Yet the scene bears on us and is very effective in its message.

### *The Holy Shroud*

All the pictures of the 'Entombment' show Jesus Christ being lowered in a white shroud. Even in pictures of the 'Descent from the Cross', this white shroud may appear. The Gospels say that the shroud remained in the tomb. Although linen in which a dead body had been buried was considered unclean by Jewish religion, the Apostles may have preserved this most important relic, which was impregnated by the sweat and blood of Jesus. Turin cathedral preserves a shroud of 4.4 meter by 1.13 meter that shows faint imprints in front and back of a tall naked man with an impressive, dignified face. The man is bearded with long hair hanging down to his shoulders. The image shows wounds at the wrists and feet, a wound from a stab in the chest and horrible signs of scourging on the back. Is this the true shroud of Jesus? Now legends and tales from far centuries start.

According to legends the original shroud was sent to Abgar, king of Edessa, who had been a monarch very sympathetic to Christian religion. The town of Edessa, now Urfa in the Middle West of Turkey, a region called Anatolia, became one of the first towns to be Christianised. After Jesus's death Thaddeus may have travelled to Edessa and cured Abgar with the powers of the shroud, thereby converting King and city. The town of Edessa was conquered and taken in the first century AD and the dynasty of Abgar was destroyed.

During the siege the shroud had been hidden in the thick walls of Edessa. It surfaced around five hundred years later, in the sixth century, and Edessa once more became a famous pilgrimage site. Still not the shroud with an imprint of Christ's whole body

was known, but a cloth with only the face of Christ. This cloth and image was called the 'Mandylyon', the Greek word for cloth. Its other Greek name may have been the Tetradyplon, which could mean 'folded in four'. Scholars like Ian Wilson surmised this cloth was not just an image of the face of Jesus but the real, whole shroud folded in four so that only the face was visible, maybe to hide that this was a dead man's shroud and thus to hide its being unclean.<sup>G63</sup>

The Mandylyon had a great effect on art. For whereas in previous centuries various pictures of Christ could show him as well bearded as not, from the sixth and seventh centuries on, European representations seem to converge to the same image of a Christ with long black hair and long beard as seen in the Mandylyon.

The 'Golden Legend' contains a story that reminds of Abgar and Edessa. The story tells that Abgar had sent a letter to Jesus to ask him to be cured from an illness. But Jesus answered that he would not come for it was written that those who saw him would not believe and that those who did not see Jesus believed. Abgar realised he was not to see Jesus face to face, so he sent a painter to Jesus to make a portrait of the Lord. But when the artist came to Jesus, the radiance of the Lord's countenance was so intense that he could not see the face clearly so that he could not make the portrait as ordered. Seeing this, Jesus took a linen cloth that had belonged to the artist and pressed it to his face, leaving his image imprinted upon it. This imprint was sent to Abgar<sup>G49</sup>. The 'Golden Legend' said that the portrait showed the Lord as having fine eyes and a fine brow, a long face slightly tilted forward, which 'is a sign of maturity'. John of Damascus testified this story according to the 'Golden Legend'. The legends of the town of Edessa having a portrait of Jesus are thus very old and consistent. The chronicler Evagrius worked around 590 and he told that the mandylyon was used to repel a Persian army in 544. The 'Golden Legend' however does not further testify to the existence of the shroud. It makes no reference to the place where the shroud had been preserved together with many other relics, that is Constantinople.

A Byzantine army struck around the year 1000 to the thriving pilgrimage site of Edessa and only spared the town and region by recuperating the Mandylyon. The image was taken to Byzantium-Constantinople to become one of the main relics of the Eastern Roman empire. The Mandylyon supposedly was the shroud that was well guarded by the emperors, and only shown to the people of Constantinople in times of great distress in order to encourage them. The relic was guarded with many other famous relics in the Pharos chapel of the Blachernae palace of the emperors<sup>G62</sup>. A French knight, Robert de Clary, wrote he had seen this relic in Constantinople in the beginning of the thirteenth century. The city was considered to be impregnable as long as the Mandylyon was in the city.

Constantinople was the place of another legend connected to a shroud. Gregory the Great was a saint, one of the four western Church fathers, one of the seven deacons of Rome, a founder of monasteries and an ambassador of the Popes to Byzantium. He became Pope himself in the middle of an epidemic of the plague in Rome. He was a remarkable man. He installed the Gregorian music style of chant. Gregory took the lead in the conversion to Christianity of the Anglo-Saxons. He lived from around 540 to 604. The Empress Constantia asked a famous relic of Gregory and he gave her the Brandeum, or shroud, of John the Evangelist. The Empress rejected this gift as not

being authentic. But Gregory pierced the cloth with a knife and the relic started to bleed.<sup>G41</sup> The legends of the Brandeum and of the Mandylyon may have crossed.

In 1203 crusaders took Constantinople and plundered the city. Treasures were shipped to France and to Venice. The Mandylyon disappeared without a trace. Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince have found traces of adoration of symbols by the Templar Knights of France, which could lead to the Mandylyon<sup>G62</sup>. They wrote that the widow of a crusader called Boniface De Montferrat might have taken the shroud to Western Europe. This widow, Mary-Margaret of Hungary, had been an Empress of Constantinople since she had also been the widow of the former and deposed Byzantine Emperor Isaac II. The Templar knights may have kept the shroud in secret. One of the last Templar Knights to be killed in France when the order was abolished was one Geoffrey de Charney. There may be a coincidence of names, but around 1355 a shroud, which was supposed to be the real relic of Jesus's Entombment appeared in Lirey in France, in the castle of one Geoffrey de Charny.

The shroud, now showing a full body in front and back image, was exhibited in public. But the bishop Pierre d'Arcis, bishop of Troyes, refused it in 1389 and denounced it as a fraud. The bishop's letter is the first authentic witness of the modern shroud. From then on starts the known history of the Holy Shroud, as we know it. Geoffrey de Charny's daughter Margaret who had inherited the shroud took the relic out of Lirey Church and guarded it with her husband Humbert de la Roche-Villersexel<sup>G2</sup>. In 1464 she handed over the shroud to the Dukes of Savoy. The shroud disappeared for about fifty years and reappeared in 1494 when it was exhibited again and kept in the Chapel of Chambéry, the capital of the Savoy family. This lapse of time during which the shroud disappeared from public view induced Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince to believe the painted shroud was substituted by another more believable shroud. This new shroud had an imprint, which could have been produced by an ingenious early photographic process invented by Leonardo da Vinci.

The shroud lay in the Chambéry Church that was given the name of 'Sainte Chapelle' by Pope Julius II. But the church burned down in 1532. The shroud was saved however. It lay protected in a silver casket but drops of incandescent, molten silver fell on the cloth and put it to fire. The Poor Clare Nuns of Chambéry repaired the burn holes and these holes and the repairs can be seen presently in the shroud. The Savoy family, heirs of the ancient kingdom of Burgundy, acquired more lands and gradually became more powerful in the North of Italy. They brought the shroud to their new capital, Turin, in 1578. In 1694 it was placed in a new silver shrine and displayed in the Royal Chapel of Turin cathedral. This chapel was damaged by fire in April 1997, but the shroud was once more rescued from the flames. Currently the casket with the shroud is behind bullet-safe glass set in a mobile block in the middle of Turin cathedral.

The shroud was almost forgotten as a relic in the nineteenth century and the outlines of Jesus's face were indeed very faded. The clergy of Turin wanted the shroud to be archived but had a last picture made in 1898 by an amateur photographer, a lawyer of Turin, called Secondo Pia. This photographer found that the head was impregnated as if in negative on the shroud. The negative effect showed in Pia's photos many details of the image much clearer. It remains one of the puzzling effects of the Turin shroud that the photos revealed details that had remained hidden for centuries. The

controversy on whether the Shroud of Turin was a legend or not started then for good and several research institutions in Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States work still today at unravelling the true origins of the relic.

In 1988 a scientific committee took samples of the cloth and sent these to three independent laboratories for Carbon-14 dating. The Carbon-14 dating proved the cloth to have originated with 95% certainty from a period dating between 1260 and 1390, which is very consistent with the first historical appearance of the shroud, but various other scholars have contested the Carbon-14 dating. A Swiss criminologist, Doctor Max Frei had already taken samples of strips of the shroud in 1973 and indeed found pollen of Palestine, of middle Turkey, of Constantinople and of France in the shroud. These scientific results have been criticised however since no research was done to find pollen of other regions on the cloth and the cloth may have received of course all pollens during the centuries it has been preserved. An American shroud investigator, John Jackson, claims that there are marks of a Jewish prayer band on the imprint of the head and on the eyes he seems to have discovered images of coins. Francis Filas, a Jesuit theologian from Chicago has recognised on the coins the initials of the Roman emperor Tiberius who was emperor in Jesus's times. These findings also have been drawn into doubt. All scientific findings thus have been contested.

The shroud of Turin is not the only image that could claim to be the Mandylion. One image that originated from Charlemagne was in the Sainte Chapelle of Paris. This shroud was destroyed during the French Revolution. Another one is in the Barnabite Monastery of the church of San Bartolomeo degli Armeni in Genoa. Emperor John V of Byzantium gave this last picture to Leonardo Montaldo, the Captain of a Genovese colony on the Bosphorus and hence it passed to the Monastery in 1384<sup>U11</sup>. Various other shrouds may have existed and preserved in France, some of which could have been painted images, in Cadouin and Compiègne. A copy of the shroud of Turin is in Lier in Belgium.

The Turin Shroud shows a man apparently crucified, with wounds in the wrists. This is remarkable for if the shroud is indeed a fraud; this detail is entirely in contradiction with all images of the Crucifixion until the seventeenth century. Antonella da Messina, Fra Angelico, Carlo Crivelli, Pietro Perugino, all major painters of the fifteenth century made Crucifixions with Jesus's palms pierced with the nails. None made pictures of nails going through the wrists. Early sixteenth century painters like Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini continued this tradition. French artists like Nicolas Tournier and Spanish painters like El Greco still pictured Jesus's wounds like this at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. One of the first famous painters to depict Jesus on the cross with nails through the wrists was Pieter Paul Rubens and that may have been through the influence of the Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) whose book 'De humani corporis fabrica' was published in Rubens' Antwerp in 1543. Vesalius was a generation before Rubens (born in 1577), but Rubens may have known Vesalius' book.

Is the Turin Shroud legend or truth? In any case, the story of the Mandylion and of the Shroud of Turin remains extraordinary and if indeed true would make of the Turin shroud probably the single most important testimony of Jesus Christ since it would show us Jesus's true features. It is remarkable how legends and facts intertwine to

keep the mystery around the Turin Shroud very real for many believers despite the Carbon-14 dating. The study and research of the shroud continue.

### *Robert Campin*

Robert Campin was born around 1379 and very little is known about him except that he worked in the town of Tournai, in the Hainaut province of Belgium. He worked for the court of the Dukes of Burgundy. We have a remarkably realistic painting made by him of Robert de Masmines, counsellor and army leader of the Dukes of Burgundy John without Fear and Philip the Good.

The triptych of Campin is a very early masterpiece of Flemish painting. Nothing is known about its history<sup>U4</sup>. The donor is kneeling and praying on the left panel. He was probably a wealthy merchant of Tournai. He has a monk's cloak over his rich robe. In the background, the two thieves still hang on their crosses, contorted in agonies of death. Jesus's cross is empty. A ladder still stands to the cross to signify that the descent from the cross has only just happened. One can admire a very realistic landscape of green fields and bushes, leaves meticulously indicated. This is probably one of the very first landscapes in the new oil painting that started early in the fifteenth century in Flanders.

The middle panel of the triptych is the 'Entombment'. Jesus is lying on the sarcophagus, his wounds still bleeding. Mary, his mother, leans over him to a last kiss. Saint John, the beloved of Christ, supports her. Joseph of Arimathea on the left and Nicodemus on the right hold the body. These two saints are often shown on entombments. Mary Magdalene kneels to the right and anoints the feet of Jesus. Another woman holds the white linen in which Jesus's body will be enveloped. Still another woman in blue cloak and white cape can be seen between Saint John and Joseph of Arimathea. Look specifically at this figure: Rogier Van Der Weyden, who was Campin's pupil, has used exactly the same head cape in some of his paintings, the same blue cloak and white cape. The folds of the linen and the folds of the robes of all figures are magnificently painted to the finest detail. All the figures surround Jesus, who thus becomes the centre of all attention. In order to fill the frame horizontally and completely, an angel stands grieving to the right and another on the left. The left angel holds the lance with which Jesus was pierced while on the cross, and he looks directly at the donor on the other panel. The right angel holds the long stick with the sponge of vinegar. Angels in the sky hold the instruments of Jesus's passion: the crown of thorns and the nails of the cross. These angels also are dressed in luxurious robes, painted in magnificent folds. The landscape on the left is to the same height as the personages on the middle panel. The scene is set in the same landscape. A small grapevine and grapes in the lower middle indicate the Eucharist, the Sacrament that gives eternal life.

The wattle fence of the left panel and the green landscape continue into the right panel, where Jesus stands up from the tomb. He wears the symbol of the Holy Cross and of the Resurrection, and he makes a blessing sign to the stricken guardians. Shields, helmets, robes and a still sleeping guardian lie on the grass. To make the whole even more and naively realistic, a small white dog is painted both on the left and the right panel.

We admire more the professionalism of the painter in this work than his art. The painting is certainly imposing to look at by the realism of its details, the sophistication of the grouping of persons and the craft with which the painter has shown the robes in all its folds and magnificent colours. The colours are applied with diligence in the middle panel: the red robe of the kneeling woman who has her back turned towards us is mirrored in the red robe of Saint John. The headdress of Mary Magdalene answers the yellow-brown robe of Joseph of Arimathea. The lines connecting these two colour areas cross over the body of Jesus. The wide robes of the kneeling woman in red and of Mary Magdalene form the counter-weight to the mass of people painted higher, over Jesus. These colour masses draw the scene back to earth, together with the white mass of the sarcophagus. A red cloak thrown over the donor's shoulders and the red cloak of the resurrected Jesus on the left panel are in symmetry with the red robe of the middle. Finally, also the masses in the skies are balanced: on the left panel by the two thieves, in the middle panel by the red and blue clothed angels, on the right by the bushes of the landscape that rise here higher than in the other panels.

Gothic painters like Campin kept their symmetries and structure well in check. Medieval philosophy saw heavenly design in the entire universe, all was balanced and ordained, and this spirit continued in medieval imagery.

*Other paintings:*

**The Entombment of Christ**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

**The Entombment**

Rogier Van der Weyden (1399-1464). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. Around 1450.

**The Entombment**

Pieter Lastman (1583-1633). The National Gallery. London. 1612.

**The Deposition**

Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1570-1610). Pinacoteca. The Vatican. 1602-1604.

**The Deposition**

Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1651.

**The Entombment**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1520-1522.

**The Entombment**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1567.

**The Dead Christ**

Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1430 – 1506). Pinacoteca di Brera.– Milan.

**Mary faints while Christ is brought to his Tomb**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1545.

**The Burial of Christ**

Prospero Fontana (1512-1587). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Entombment of Christ**

Peter van Kempener called Pedro Campana (1503-1580). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*The Carrying of the Cross, the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross and the Entombment*

**The Entombment of Christ. (A Panel of the Orsini Altarpiece)**

Simone Martini (ca. 1284-1344). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Gemäldegalerie - Berlin. 1340.

The Orsini Altarpiece:

Angel, the Madonna, the Crucifixion, and the Descent from the cross:

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

The Bearing of the Cross: Musée du Louvre, Paris

The Entombment: Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz  
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

The tragedy was great: the Son of God was hung on a cross and had died ignominiously. His body was taken from the cross and entombed. Panic and grief were everywhere, in all minds and hearts. The corpse was frail and thin as it was lowered into the marble sarcophagus.

Mary's sorrow is the most profound and tender. While her son was put on the cross she fainted. Now, while he is being entombed, she embraces him a last time with a tender kiss on the face. Joseph, Jesus's father, anoints Jesus's feet. Nicodemus helps him and holds the vessel with the ointments. He also is sad and his face shows that he still cannot understand how such a tragedy could happen. From now on, times will be hard on us all, he is thinking. Behind Joseph, it is all too heavy to bear for John the Evangelist, so liked by Jesus. He cannot but weep and because he is a man he cannot show that, so he hides his face in his bright red cloak. Weeping women are seated in front of the coffin. They all show signs of distress, hold their hand to their ears, caress gently the arm of Christ, want to touch him a last time and kiss his hand.

Mary Magdalene leads the weeping women. When Jesus was on the cross, she passionately held the wooden beam, reaching for his nailed feet, her robe red as blood and her long yellow hair hanging down to the ground all over the robe. She is still dressed here in fiery red and her long blond hair curls down. She and her accompanying women really let their feelings free. Mary Magdalene shows them ostentatively what has happened: look at what has been done to our Beloved. We have to weep and cry to tear the sadness out of our hearths. The other ladies cry out to the heavens above. They throw up their hands. They grasp at their hair. They crowd all together to have a last glimpse. Other women support each other and embrace to find some consolation at the greatest tragedy that could have happened to them. Gone are the hopes for a new Israel, the aspirations for a new kingdom. The family and the disciples will see no glory. All ends here.

The scene happens in a garden. There are trees bearing fruits of hope. The trees are all different; there is even an exotic palm tree. This was the beautiful creation of God. Originally the skies were painted all gold, as appropriate in a painting by a Sieneese. Gold to symbolise the richness of creation.

The vivid colours accentuate the passion. Mary is of course dressed in the traditional blue maphorion cloak. The other hues are bright red, rose, yellow, blue, green. Very contrasting colours, splendours for the eye. Although there is so much passion in the painting, there are lines of structure that we follow unconsciously. The horizontal line of Jesus and Mary forms the basis of the picture. This is emphasised by the seated figures in front of the sarcophagus. But then there goes a line from the nimbus of Joseph over the nimbuses of Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene to the heads of the weeping women on the left. Balance is brought by the figure of John on the right, always a bystander and contemplator.

Simone Martini painted this panel for Cardinal Orsini in Avignon<sup>D1</sup>. It was part of a small travel altarpiece, together with four other panels. These present an Angel, the Madonna, the 'Crucifixion' and the 'Descent from the Cross' now held in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp. A sixth panel, the 'Bearing of the Cross', is held in the Louvre of Paris. All the panels present the same figures, in the same dress, all in the same strong colours, with the same pathos, the same golden background.

The Angel on the panel of the Antwerp Museum is delicately painted. The gold emphasises the fact that this is an envoy of the Heavens. Gold leaf and paint are lavishly applied, also to show the folds of the robe. Typical for Sieneese painters is the golden, engraved nimbus from Byzantine tradition. This tradition was difficult to leave, it would have been a lack of respect to paint it otherwise, but Martini did it in ethereal, lighter colours.

The same golden decoration continues on the panel of the Madonna. She is seated on a light throne, much less imposing and finer than the thrones of the Maestà's of Cimabue and Duccio. She recedes, as if in amazement and fear on the annunciation made to her by the Angel of the Lord. The borders of her blue maphorion flow playfully over her body, as in the Maestà of Duccio, and the cloak only covers her in part, showing a red robe. These flowing folds are typical of Sieneese painters, as also for instance of Pietro Lorenzetti who painted around the same time as Simone Martini. Here also, the colours are contrasting to a marvel for the eye.

In the three panels, the 'Bearing of the Cross', the Crucifixion and the 'Descent of the Cross', we see the same pathos, show of feelings, as in the 'Entombment'. The frailness of Jesus is emphasised so that we would be entirely compassionate. Jesus is naked; the clothes around him are translucent. The soldiers are richly clad, armour studded with gold. In the 'Crucifixion', Mary has fainted and is consoled by a group of women and saints. This group forms a balance with the group of soldiers. Mary Magdalene passionately embraces the wood of the cross. Simone Martini has even drawn two children down on the right who have come to watch; one child shows with his outstretched arm to his comrades that there is something special happening.

In the 'Descent from the Cross', the figures that are lowering Jesus all form a passionate embrace. The whole group supports the corpse and the group itself. On the right, weeping and outcrying women again form the balance of the painting. In the Louvre painting, the eye is drawn to Jesus carrying the cross. Jesus here is clad in red, the colour of his passion, and in a robe that forms the largest uni-colour surface amongst the figures. The brown cross forms a strong line. Around this line are

gathered a mass of soldiers. Mary, Mary Magdalene and women and men are following, out of a medieval fortified town. Children again are onlookers. Mary Magdalene here also is the personage that has been chosen to show the grieve and panic: she wears the same red robe, throws her arms above her.

The Orsini altarpiece is a small painting in various panels. Each panel is less than 30 centimetres high and half as large. It was a very private piece, to be taken on travels over Europe by a cardinal at the court of the Pope. Maybe for that reason Simone Martini has been able, more than in any other of his works, to tell a story, as a poet would have. Simone Martini had a keen eye for the costumes and their decorative qualities in these panels. He knew well how to show grace and elegance in his scenes. Martini appreciated the grandeur of the courts, the pomp show in his complex scenes. He has also been able to show feelings outrightly. His scenes are poetic narration. Martini's pictures are lyrical in their sweet display of sentiment. Simone Martini emphasises the grieve and sadness by extreme gestures of some of the figures, especially of Mary Magdalene. There is an enormous difference here with the frescoes of the rational Giotto, from whose frescoes one can read this artist's reflection and intelligence. This is even much different from Duccio or the Lorenzetti brothers of Siena. Simone Martini has painted with his hearth in the first place and less with his mind. Intelligence always remains present however in his art and workmanship: the scenes are well balanced, lines deliberately engaged, areas and colours used to attract the eye to what the artist wants to lead the viewer to first.

Simone Martini was born in 1284 in Siena. He may have been a student of Duccio di Buoninsegna who made the 'Madonna Rucellai'. Although a Gothic painter, sentiment of humans crept in his pictures and evolved from the austere, elevated images of previous periods. Martini was one of the foremost painters of the Sienese school. He liked to tell us stories and he does that seemingly with all the innocence of a naïve painter. He brought poetry in images. Supported by the bright contrasting colours and the gold so much used by the Gothic school of Siena. Simone Martini worked in Siena, Pisa, Assisi and Orvieto. He spent most of his life in Siena and Tuscany. He was first mentioned in 1315, with a Maestà he made in Siena. He visited Naples in 1317. He travelled to Avignon around 1335, but returned to Siena shortly after a time that remained only a visit. He returned to Avignon however in 1340. He died there in 1344. He was a friend of the most famous Renaissance poet Petrarca, whose father had to leave Florence when the White party there lost the political struggle in 1302. The Petrarca family wandered over various North Italian cities and finally also had landed in Avignon, in France. Petrarca dedicated poems to Simone Martini.

Simone Martini came to Avignon because there was the court of the Popes in the fourteenth century. He painted frescoes for the Popes, together with Matteo Giovanetti. Few of his Avignon frescoes however have survived the ages.

The struggle for supremacy in Italy between the Popes and the Holy Roman Emperor of Germany Frederic II had ended around the middle of the thirteenth century. Frederic's sons Conrad and Manfred lost Naples to the French house of Anjou. Charles of Anjou, its new monarch, was a brother to the King of France. The so beloved Sicily of Emperor Frederic II went to the house of Aragon. The Sicilians had more than enough of the harsh French regime of Charles of Anjou and helped Peter of

Aragon, ruler of parts of the Provence and married to a daughter of Frederic II, to the throne of Sicily. New struggles between Popes and Emperor and Kings then began, now however more between the Kings of France and the Popes, the influence of the German Emperors in Italy being stopped. Philippe IV le Bel of France finally forced the choice of the French archbishop of Bordeaux, Bertrand de Got, as Pope Clemens V in 1305. This Pope, fearing the wrath of Rome and Italy, preferred to hold his court outside of Italy, but also outside of what was then France. He settled in 1309 in the town of Avignon in the southeast of France. This town belonged then to the Kingdom of Naples and the Anjou house. The Popes had already received the Venaissin County close by Avignon in 1274. So they owned lands in the vicinity of Avignon. They were under the protection of a powerful count that was neither the French King nor the German Emperor, and probably they hoped to expand their Venaissin County. The Popes indeed also acquired Avignon as their personal property, but that only in 1348.

Thus began from 1309 on what is called the Babylonian Exile of the Popes in Avignon. The Popes would only return to Rome in 1377, when Gregorius XI was urged by many - among whom Saint Catherine of Siena was spiritually the most influential - to come back to the town where the tomb of Saint Peter lay. Gregorius died the same year 1377. The French and Italian cardinals chose each another Pope. From then on there would be two Popes: one in Avignon, another in Rome. Around 1409 a Conclave in Pisa, supported by the Kings of France and England, tried to elect a new Pope in place of the two current ones. The only result was that now there were three Popes. The Conclave of Konstanz of 1414-1418 finally brought an end to this sad period. Two Popes voluntarily abdicated. The third was the Avignon Pope Benedictus. The cardinals of the Conclave had to depose him. With all three previous Popes demised, a new Pope Martin V was elected. Thus ended the schism of Avignon.

The history of the Popes in Avignon spans more than a century. Their palace in Avignon has been preserved and can still be visited. Mainly the austere Pope Benedictus XII built it. The following Popes added more elegant halls and towers. The austerity of Benedictus XII shows: the palace looks like an impregnable, massive castle now, a citadel on a rock and a fortress. It certainly had to be in these late Middle Ages: roaming bandit soldiers in 1310 and 1365 attacked Avignon, the Pope had to buy relief at high price. The castle itself was held under siege in 1398 and 1410. But inside it was quite luxurious, a palace with frescoes of Matteo Giovanetti dating from 1346 to 1348 and of course of Simone Martini's workshop. The Popes were wealthy, held a princely court and drew artists to Avignon. They founded a university there and one can imagine the splendour of the cardinals and foreign ambassadors coming to this gentle town so close to the nice Provence and Vaucluse regions, mixed with the students, pilgrims and traders. This was where Simone Martini worked, in the stability and peace of the Popes and Cardinals.

Long after the Popes were gone from Avignon, the town remained their property. A papal legate continued to govern it for centuries. The town and the papal county Venaissin only returned to France after the French revolution, in 1791. Painters continued to work there and we have some fine paintings of the fifteenth century of the school of Avignon.

Simone Martini died in 1344. He died just a few years before the outbreak of the darkest period in Europe's Middle Ages. In 1348 began the first black plague

epidemics that would decimate European population by one third. Successive pandemic waves of the plague would occur from 1347 to 1350, and still later in the second half of the fourteenth century. Florence's population was halved. One of the main literature works of those times talks about the plague: Giovanni Boccaccio's Decamerone. Seven young ladies and three young men escape from Florence and the plague. They remain in a country house for ten days and each day each youth tells a story. These hundred stories form the Decamerone. They are stories of people of all classes. None is spared: noblemen, merchants, poor artisans, and priests. The stories are satires; tell the gallant adventures of all. The plague pandemics had other results besides killing off large parts of the population: it definitely changed people's minds.

It is hard to imagine the disarray of people in the second half of the fourteenth century. The Popes were not in Rome anymore, from 1379 on there were even two Popes. Who to believe? What had happened to the seat of Saint Peter? What truth and certainty was left? The all-important universal position of the Catholic Church was put to doubt from these times on. The plague spared no one. Some sought redemption in extreme submission to a self-invented mysticism. Many thought the calamities were brought by God who wanted to punish the Church and the sad behaviour of many priests and monks. Penitents roamed in bands throughout the countries. Flagellants torturing themselves by constantly whipping their bodies led in front of the roaming processions. Still others sought the reasons for the calamities with the Jews, and anti-Semitic persecutions intensified. Mostly however, since death was always near and the Church could neither protect nor offer a stable haven, morals deteriorated just as told in the Decamerone. Let's pluck the day 'Carpe Diem', do anything we like, let us find pleasure where we can, tomorrow we will be dead. On top of that, wars ravaged the countries, and not just in Italy.

The Hundred-Year War started between France and England around 1335. It would devastate vast regions of France. Just as the wars between the Popes and the Holy Roman Empire had ended the feudal system in Italy, the Hundred-Year War would prove the end of the feudal system in France. The Kings needed money and soldiers to fight, so they had to draw power to them. It was one major change more to medieval world. The wars brought a dearth of funding. Major banking houses of Italy went bankrupt when the Kings couldn't pay their vast interests. Economic crisis ensued. As a result of that, of general poverty and misery, peasants revolted both in France in 1358 where they were led by Jacques Bonhomme, a revolt known as the Jacquerie and in England in 1381 by Wat Tyler. Bands of impoverished, angry, wild peasants roamed and devastated the country that had already suffered so much of the war, in France of passing French, Burgundian and English armies.

In Italy, violent blood feuds continued between the city-states. Venice and Genoa disputed supremacy over the seas. Naples fell into a period of chaos during the reign of Joanna I. In 1339 Florence bankers had so much overextended their credits that they fell in a bankruptcy, over which they would only recover more than a decade later.

From the East, the tidings were not better: a combined Serbian and Bulgarian army lost battle to the Osman army of Murad in 1389. These lands would be Turkish now. When subsequently Hungary was threatened, a new crusader army led by French knights was defeated catastrophically by Sultan Bajesid in 1396. Again, it was as if

the Christian God had forsaken its flock. The only good news there was that the Osmons had met on their eastern borders a still more terrible enemy, the Mongol Tamerlan, so that they would stop further progress in the West for some time.

The Black Death also took a heavy toll to art and painters. The other two main Sienese painters, the brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti died of the plague. No major painter worked in the second half of the fourteenth century. The later Renaissance painters were either born late in the fourteenth or early in the fifteenth century. They started to work with major paintings only around 1420. The second half of the fourteenth century became almost a black hole in art.

The painting of Simone Martini is thus also a painting of premonition. He died just before the plague epidemics started, but the tragedy and panic shown by him then really would start to happen. And passion would become commonplace in the streets, towns and the country.

Simone Martini was one of the first painters who loved to tell stories and who showed sentimental, lyrical images. Many figures were part of his tales and the emotions of people in scenes like the Crucifixion or the 'Bearing of the Cross' are shown in anecdotal detail. Martini was one of the first to bring common folk in his pictures. We feel he was an ardent observer of the intense merchant and religious life at Avignon.

Out of the horrors of the fourteenth century would grow a civilisation that still, and even more than ever, believed in Jesus Christ and in the Catholic Church. But deep cracks had shaken Christianity. The plague pandemics, the unsuccessful crusades, the advances of the Turkish armies in Eastern Europe, and the scandals of the last Popes of Avignon had deep effects on society and on the conscience of European man. Much has been written on the Renaissance, the civilisation of the fifteenth century in Italy, but probably not enough on the roots of the awareness that God might just not interfere in the way that humans expected. Thus a humanity evolved out of the hardships that looked to itself, however frail, and that turned to more confidence in its own accomplishments while remaining in the respect of the message of Jesus Christ.

## *The Dead Body of Jesus*

### **The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb**

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/1498-1543). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1517.

Who was Jesus? Was he a man or truly a God? How was he when he died? Did he die in human agony or as an imperturbable deity? We have not stopped asking us these questions. They were also debated upon in the city of Basel in Switzerland, in the sixteenth century.

Hans Holbein was born in Augsburg of Germany. He learned to paint with his father, Hans Holbein the Elder. His uncle, Sigmund Holbein (ca. 1470-1540) was a painter also. Around 1515 he worked in the workshop of the painter Hans Herbster in Basel of Switzerland, where the painting we look at was made also. In 1516, still a very young but promising artist, he painted the portraits of Jakob Meyer zum Hasen and of his wife, Dorothea Kannengiesser. This Jakob Meyer was Basel's first mayor not belonging to nobility. Holbein married a girl from Basel in 1519 and acquired the town's citizenship. In 1521 Holbein the Younger decorated the Parliament Chamber of the Basel City Hall and he also painted in 1524 to 1525 a renowned eight-panelled 'Passion of Christ' polyptych that was kept in the City Hall. Hans Holbein had an elder brother, who also worked in Basel, but who died young: Ambrosius Holbein (ca. 1494-1519).

Hans Holbein was a traveller. In 1517 he was in Lucerne and in 1518 in Northern Italy. In 1524 he travelled to France and in 1526 he arrived in England. Basel had remained his home base however. Once in London, he painted many portraits for the international Hanseatic merchants that traded with England. He stayed in England until his death in 1543 and he became court painter to King Henri VIII, but he returned for brief periods to Basel: from 1528 to 1531, and in 1538.

Hans Holbein's most astonishing painting was the 'Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb', a picture that stayed in Basel ever since it was made. The painter was around twenty years when he made the picture so that it may be the fascination and curiosity not only of a young painter but also the doubts and existential questions of a young man, questions asked to his religion, that were expressed. He may not have had the idea for such a picture; it may have been brought upon him by men that were interrogating the Bible texts on the nature of Jesus. The picture disturbs deeply all viewers, among whom many famous people who made the journey over the centuries to the successive sites of Basel's Kunstmuseum to discover the picture. Among them were Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) and Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870-1924)<sup>C3</sup>.

Basel was a rather small provincial town, but it was early Protestant. From 1431 to 1439, the city was the site of a Roman Catholic Council called to bring about reforms in the Catholic Church. In 1501 Basel joined the Swiss Confederation and the town had become a centre of the Protestant Reformation movement. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), the Swiss theologian and leader of the Reformation, was educated at Basel

University. He preached in Zürich. The Humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who had translated a Greek New Testament in Latin, lived in Basel from mid 1514 to the beginning of 1516 and Hans Holbein the Younger knew Erasmus there. Erasmus proposed Holbein to go to France and work for a while at the court of King François I. And it was with the recommendations of Erasmus that Holbein sailed to England, to the protection of Sir Thomas More. Erasmus returned to Basel in 1535, to die in the town the next year 1536. John Calvin (1509-1564) lived in Strasbourg, where he married, and from 1546 on in Geneva, two towns very close to Basel. Basel was in the centre of Protestantism thought.

The origin of Hans Holbein's painting of Jesus's body is unknown, so we do not know whether it was a personal study or a commissioned work. But Bonifacius Amerbach (1495-1562) may have saved it from the ravages of iconoclasts that destroyed pictures in Basel in 1529<sup>C3</sup>. Thus, the painting entered the Amerbach Kabinett. This collection was founded by Johannes Amerbach (ca. 1440-1513), the father of Bonifacius. His real name had been Johann Welcker but he took as family name the name of his birthplace. Johannes Amerbach was a printer and through him and his successors, Basel became a centre of Humanist book printing in the 1500's, which may have been the main reason why Erasmus was attracted to the town. Erasmus was called the second time to Basel by Bonifacius Amerbach, and it was to this Bonifacius that Erasmus left his heritage<sup>C3</sup>. Hans Holbein the Younger worked, engraved for the Amerbach printing firm, but mostly for Amerbach's partner and successor in the shop, Johannes Froben (ca. 1460 -1527). Bonifacius' son, Basilius Amerbach (1533-1591) was also a collector of art. The Amerbach collection remained intact until the City of Basel bought it in its entirety in 1661, for Basel University<sup>C3</sup>. The Amerbach collection was one of the foundation collections of the contemporary Basel Kunstmuseum, where Hans Holbein's picture is now.

For the Roman Catholic Church, Jesus Christ was God. Jesus had told so. At the Last Supper Jesus also had told that he or she who ate his flesh in the bread and drank his blood in the wine, dwelled in him and he in her or him. The body of Christ was thus not only holy, divine, but also through the sacrament of the Eucharist and through the Holy Communion a religious, mystic object. The body of Jesus was brought by the communion of all believers to the realisation of the Catholic Church. The sacrament of the Eucharist was the most important of the Catholic Church and the centre key of the celebration of Holy Mass, the liturgy of which was feasted with much outer display of splendour and drama to emphasise the mysticism. The doctrine of the transubstantiation was ordained during the Lateran Council of 1215. Jesus Christ and God were truly present in the bread and wine of mass, consecrated by a Catholic priest.

The Humanists and the Protestant reformers tried to understand. They asked questions that had been untouchable for centuries. Was the body of the human Jesus truly holy? If Jesus was the true personification of God, how could that be? What was so special to the body of Jesus? How had been his body at the moment of death? How could a body of flesh be transubstantiated in bread and wine? Such reflections demanded an image over which to discuss. One needed an image to start from, the image of the dead Jesus. Hans Holbein's painting of the body of the dead Christ in the tomb could be used to hold such discussions. But in the true Humanist spirit, the picture should be the truth, show a crucified man who died in horror and then was laid in the tomb of

stone. The body had to be contemplated, so Holbein did not show Jesus enveloped in the white shroud, as Jesus certainly would have been deposited in the tomb, and of which we have testimonies in the New Testament, but which would have hidden Jesus's corpse. Holbein had to show the nude and tortured corpse of Christ. He showed the horrible, the ugly wounds in feet and hands and the contorted face. He showed the blue and bruised hands and feet with the deep wounds from which all blood had drained on the cross. He showed the fifth wound where a lance had been thrust into Jesus's side. He painted Jesus's body in pale colours, using green in the flesh hues to indicate bruises and death. But he could not paint the body in the full whiteness of death. The youth Holbein had an issue with the dead Jesus, and that issue he had to express in some way, in Jesus's face.

The most difficult part was the face of the dead man, and here Holbein the Younger surpassed himself in horror. He showed Jesus dead but with his eyes open. The first act and duty of any human that sees a dead fellow-man is to close the eyes. Here, Jesus's eyes continue to stare, not to the heavens but sideways, to the coffin and to the viewer. Hans Holbein had to express his doubts about the real death of Jesus. Jesus resurrected and even Protestant reformers accepted the fact that the Resurrection truly created Christianity. So Hans Holbein painted Jesus not as a truly dead corpse, all white and frozen, but as a corpse that retained life as long as the eyes were open. Yet, the horror is obvious. Jesus's mouth is also open in suffering, in a silent scream. Jesus's hair is not tugged under his head but it seems to spread out and stand out under the past stress of the pain. Jesus's short beard also does not fall on his neck but stands prominently up. One can understand Dostoyevsky taking in such details and wondering, reflecting for a long time as Basel's Protestants, trying to understand by what miracle this corpse, this body of a man who died under severe human tension of pain could be holy. Would we not expect a body relaxed in death, with serene traits, mouth and eyes closed as in quiet sleep, with a face peacefully confident in the Saviour, his Father? Why did Jesus die as any man, any innocent man, tortured and horribly, slowly dying in ignominy? We would not expect a bruised body, not a body blue and green in the places where it had been hurt, but a miraculously fine, tender body of the same texture and hue everywhere. Italian Renaissance artists would certainly have painted Jesus this way, and they did so - always. Hans Holbein did not paint Jesus as a God but really as a man, a human, terrified at the last moment of life. That posed a formidable question to the theologians and to the Roman Catholic Church as well as to the Protestant Reformers. Protestants did not believe in the transubstantiation and thus relieved part of the mystery that the Catholics associated with the body of Jesus, but Hans Holbein proved that to believe that Jesus was God remained as big a challenge as believe in the transubstantiation. And that challenge has remained until our days.

Roman Catholics might have reproached Hans Holbein the Younger for having made a blasphemous picture. But for the Humanists like Erasmus and the new Protestants, such questions on the nature of the body of Jesus had to be uttered and what the preachers discussed, Holbein showed in picture. Hence, Hans Holbein's work was a picture that was epitomised Basel, the spirit of Swiss interrogation into the figure of Jesus. It is not a picture that could be admired in composition or in colours but it illustrated the religious issues that were discussed in Switzerland. Holbein did not have to fear in Basel to be called blasphemous and to be burnt at the stake. He was allowed to search and present his ideas. He proudly drew the date in Roman figures

and his initials at the feet of the corpse. The picture may well have been commissioned by well known Protestants and Humanists of Basel to a young painter unstained by previous religious allegiances. The spirit of Basel was the atmosphere that Hans Holbein sought also afterwards in his life, not only in Basel but also later in England. He continued his life long to call himself 'Ioannes Holpenius Basilensis', a citizen of Basel <sup>C3</sup>.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Dead Christ**

Lubin Baugin (Ca. 1612-1663). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Orléans. Ca. 1645-1650.

## *The Magdalene's Sorrow over the body of Christ*

### **The Magdalene's Sorrow over the Body of Christ**

Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1867.

When Hans Holbein the Younger became only a citizen of Basel after his marriage, but made the town proudly his, Arnold Böcklin was a native of the town, but at a time – the nineteenth century – when such citizenship did not mean much anymore. Böcklin was born in Basel, 1827, more than three centuries later than Holbein the Younger. Böcklin first studied art at the Academy of Düsseldorf, from 1845 to 1847 and after that he went to study with Alexandre Calame (1810-1864) in Geneva. He was in Paris in 1848, the year of a major Parisian Revolution and he travelled then to Rome on the recommendation of the well known historian and Professor at the University of Basel, Jakob Burckhardt. He stayed in Italy twice, from 1850 to 1852 and from 1853 to 1857. He married in Italy, in 1853, during his second stay, to an Italian woman called Angela Pascucci, but he had to return to Basel in 1857 because he could not sustain his family from his art in Rome. He continued to travel. The next year he was in Munich, and very ill from typhus. Yet, a painting of his was bought by Ludwig I King of Bavaria and he had success. He taught landscape painting at the German Art Academy of Weimar from 1860 on for two years; then he returned to Rome and went later back to Basel in 1866.

The 'Magdalene's Sorrow over the Body of Christ' was a picture that Böcklin made in Basel, shortly after he arrived there, in 1867. Böcklin was now a well-known painter, but always in need to support his family by painting alone. Böcklin's painting of the Magdalene and Christ was bought by Basel's Kunstmuseum in 1868. Jakob Burckhardt continued to support Böcklin and ensured him a commission to paint frescoes in the halls of the old museum of Basel. Böcklin painted three frescoes from 1868 to 1870. But the frescoes were not to the taste of Basel's leading men, the paintings were disapproved of<sup>C3</sup>. So Böcklin left Basel again and moved with his family once more to Munich. Böcklin had a large circle of friends, many of whom belonged to the Nazarene movement. He had many students. He was one of the most influential German-Swiss painters of the nineteenth century, and Switzerland's major Symbolist artist. After his unsuccessful stay in Basel, he worked in Munich for a few years. Arnold Böcklin finally returned to Italy, this time to the region of Florence, in 1874, and died there at Fiesole in 1901. Arnold Böcklin had been first a landscape painter. Then he preferred themes of classical antiquity but also in Romantic views in which his personal moods and dream images were expressed in particularly gloomy, mysterious and mystic visions.

Arnold Böcklin knew well Hans Holbein the Younger's 'The Dead body of Christ in the Tomb', which was on display in the Basel Kunstmuseum. The old painting inspired him without a doubt to his own picture of Jesus and the Magdalene.

Böcklin showed Jesus, like Holbein, lying in his tomb. Böcklin drew Jesus however truly as an uncommon dead, and in a much more peaceful way. Jesus is at rest. He seems to have had a serene and calm moment of dying so that he also seems to sleep

but for the cold whiteness of death. Böcklin handled the subject with much more respect and reserve. Jesus's body is without blemish. His wounds are only delicately alluded to and no red blood or bluish bruises stain Jesus's flesh. His eyes are closed peacefully and his face lies sideways like the faces of humans at sleep. Böcklin painted Jesus's face with serene traits, not in tension, quiet, with young and strong features. He painted Jesus with the same short and black beard as Holbein. But Böcklin added a black, long moustache and he placed Jesus's black hair under his head, where it could protect the head softly from the cold marble. Jesus's head also lies on a white shroud, the absence of which gave such a terrible sight of Holbein's picture. Here, the Magdalene may have drawn the shroud aside for her last farewell to Jesus.

Arnold Böcklin then painted Mary Magdalene mourning over Jesus, holding her left hand to her eyes in sadness and crying out her despair with open mouth. Mary Magdalene wears a long black but transparent shawl and that shawl envelops first the woman's mourning, then flows over Jesus as if it were her hair that wanted to envelop Jesus and bring him back to life.

Böcklin was a Romantic and a Symbolist painter, but he stayed for all his unusual visions the Academician in his art, so we must admire his sense of balance in the composition. He balanced the horizontal body of Jesus with the vertical figure of the Magdalene. He balanced the areas of the whiteness of Jesus's body and the whiteness of the Magdalene with the dark mass of the black shawl. He balanced the rigid lines of Jesus and of Mary with the wonderful curves of the shawl. He placed the Magdalene somewhat aside to the right, so that he could balance that movement with her outstretched right arm covered by the shawl. The Magdalene is as white in flesh and bodice as Jesus, so that Böcklin only varied the mourning theme of white and black with a little auburn in Magdalene's long hair. This hair follows the flowing lines of the black shawl and seems only to be extended in that delicate black lace. Böcklin diligently cared for the link between the Magdalene and Jesus. She stretches out her right hand in the same horizontal direction as Jesus and in that gesture enhances Christ's body but also bringing the black shadow of death on him. The Magdalene's hand is somewhat uplifted above Jesus's head, wanting to tenderly touch the face. But the face turns away from the Magdalene, avoiding the touch, as in a 'Noli me Tangere' theme, in which Jesus asked the Magdalene not to touch him lest he would desire to live again a human's life.

Arnold Böcklin transformed Hans Holbein's dead Christ into a classical Greek tragedy of a forceful woman mourning ostentatiously over a young hero, enveloping the dead body with her hair and love. The black shawl of her mourning seems to cover the boy with her warmth and love, with her profound sadness and care. In that sense Böcklin's 'Magdalene's Sorrow over the Body of Christ' is eminently Symbolist and joins Böcklin's earlier paintings of themes of classical antiquity. It would be doubtful to expect that Protestant Basel would appreciate Böcklin's views of Christ, especially when they must have learned to appreciate Hans Holbein's austere picture. Still, they were willing to buy the picture for their town. Böcklin showed Jesus as the young hero brought back from the battlefield and laid down on the marble altar of a temple of Zeus. Arnold Böcklin took Hans Holbein's intriguing painting and imagined his own view, in which his wife and own family seemed to have to be present so that he could not but show a woman in the painting, to express his own feelings of an

aesthetic death and a tragedy of the mind more than of a realistic death of a common man. The rough times of the sixteenth century violent wars were over. Switzerland had become a settled country and Basel a thriving Protestant merchant centre, neatly lying on the Rhine River and thereby controlling the river movements from the Swiss Confederation to the North of Europe and fully profiting of its connections with nearby France and Germany. It was not anymore the true identity of Jesus that was now sought, the questions had proved to have no answer, only speculations, but nevertheless Basel kept to their beloved Holbein's view. Art and religious feelings had crystallised once more to immutable ideas and concepts of beauty, but however well Böcklin epitomised these, he could not find appreciation on Basel. Still, when Hans Holbein made a picture of raw death, Arnold Böcklin painted a scene by which later generations could imagine the sorrow of the Magdalene over Christ's body as an equally unforgettable and now classical picture of human tragedy.

*Other Paintings:*

**Dead Christ with two Angels**

Francesco Zaganelli (1460-1532). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1515.

## *The Legend of the True Cross*

### **The Legend of the True Cross**

Piero della Francesca (ca. 1410-1492). The Basilica of San Francesco. Arezzo.

Ca. 1450-1460.

The true story of the Holy Cross is one of the longest and most fantastic legends of the 'Golden Legend'. It is told in two separate chapters, one entitled 'The Finding of the Holy Cross' and the other 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross'. Piero della Francesca made a series of frescoes of this legend in the main chapel of the San Francesco basilica of Arezzo. The Bacci family commissioned the frescoes for their chapel, first to an artist called Bicci di Lorenzo who only painted two scenes namely the four Evangelists and a Last Judgement, then to Piero. Bicci di Lorenzo died in 1452 and Piero della Francesca was asked to finish the work from then on. Piero painted in Arezzo until around 1466 but the frescoes may have been all done long before that date. Piero painted in fresco ten episodes of the 'Legend of the True Cross' as told in the 'Golden Legend'. It is the foremost example of a complete series fully based on the medieval compendium.

Adam's son Seth was offered a shoot from the tree of mercy and ordered to plant it on the mount of Lebanon. It was a branch of the tree under which Adam had committed his sin. Adam had informed Seth that when the branch bore fruit, his father would be made healthy again. Piero painted his first scene as the 'Death of Adam'. Adam is seen in agony and talking to Seth who is leaning on a staff. Seth planted the shoot over Adam's grave. The shoot grew to a tree and it was still standing there in the times of Solomon<sup>G49</sup>.

Solomon admired the beauty of the tree. He had the tree cut down for the building of his forest house of which is also written in the Old Testament. The beam never fit in a right place however, so that it was abandoned and thrown over a pond to serve as a bridge.

The Queen of Sheba was about to pass over that bridge, but she saw in a vision suddenly that the Saviour of the world would one day hang from the wood. She therefore refused to go over it and knelt down and worshipped it. Piero's second fresco thus was the 'Adoration of the Holy Wood' in which the Queen of Sheba is seen worshipping the wood after her vision of a saviour.

The Queen told her dream or vision that the kingdom of the Jews would come when a man would hang from this wood to King Solomon. 'The Meeting of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon' was Piero's third scene. The 'Queen of Sheba worshipping the Wood of the True Cross' and the 'Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba' are however in the same fresco, two scenes of different moments in time caught diligently in the same picture.

Solomon feared the prophecy. So the wood was thrown into the pond. Sacred animals came here to bath and the sick were healed at the pond. Piero made another fresco of this, 'The Transfer of the Holy Wood'.

When Jesus's time of passion was drawing near, the wood floated up and the Jews remarked it and used it to make Jesus's cross. After Jesus's Crucifixion, the cross laid hidden underground.

The East-Roman Emperor Constantine was attacked by hordes of Barbarians along the Danube. He could only beat the Barbarians back when an angel showed him a sign of a cross in flaming light. This was the occasion for Piero della Francesca's fifth painting, 'The Dream of Constantine'. An angel falls down from the sky at night over the tent of the emperor. Constantine is sleeping and so is his servant, but guards in heavy armour stand to the watch. Piero had an example of the cycle of the 'Legend of the True Cross'. Already around 1380 to 1390 Agnolo Gaddi had made frescoes of certain scenes of the legend in the church of Santa Croce of Florence. The 'Dream of Constantine' is Piero's fresco that resembles most Gaddi's. Piero has used almost the same composition but reversed the scene. Gaddi's paintings are more gentle and elegant than Piero's. In the comparison we feel the stern geometric, systematic hand of Piero at work instead of a warmer feeling hearth like Gaddi.

Constantine won the battle and believed in Christ. He converted to Christianity and due to the grandeur of the Constantines, Byzantium would be renamed Constantinople, thus also indicating the transition from heathen gods to Christianity of the East-Roman empire. Piero diverted from the 'Golden Legend' to follow another tale of Emperor Constantine. A biography of the emperor written by Lactantius told that Constantine was asked in a dream to put the sign of Christ, the chi-rho letters on his shield. The next day Constantine won a battle against Maxentius. Piero painted the fresco of 'The Battle at the Bridge' as the battle between the emperors Constantine and Maxentius. In the two battle scenes of the frescoes Piero slightly deviated from the original story of the 'Golden Legend'. This battle scene is one of the most admired frescoes. Powerful horses and the armies with flying pavilions and frightful long lances held high are poised for battle. Constantine indicates the direction of Maxentius whose army is seen fleeing on the other side of the river.

At the death of his father, the younger Constantine sent his mother Helena to Jerusalem to recuperate the cross.

The Queen asked the Jewish scholars about the place where Christ had been crucified. But the Jews refused to answer for fear of the Emperor. Helena threatened them all to die by fire. The Jews then handed over one of them, Judas, and said that he would answer since he was the son of a just man and a prophet. But the Jews had told Judas to yield nothing to the foreign Queen unless forced to. So Helena had to threaten again and she threw Judas in a dry well. Judas was tortured and of this scene Piero again made a panel in the chapel, his 'Torture of Judas'.

After seven days without food and drink, Judas promised Helena to show where the cross was. Judas took Helena to a place where stood a pagan temple of Venus. Helena had the temple razed and the site ploughed up. Then Judas himself started to dig and found three crosses, which he showed to the Queen. A way had to be found to prove which of the three crosses was the one on which Jesus had been crucified. The crosses were placed in the centre of the town. A body of a young man was being carried past and Judas halted the cortege. When Judas held the third cross over the corpse, the young man came back to life. The true cross was thus identified. This became one of

the most important scenes of Piero della Francesca, the 'Finding and the Proof of the True Cross'.

Judas was later baptised and given the name Quiriacus. Still later he was ordained bishop of Jerusalem.

Helena also wanted to have the nails of the cross. Quiriacus went to the place of the burial, prayed and the nails appeared miraculously on the surface. Helena brought a piece of the cross and the nails to her son Constantine who had one nail inserted in his crown. Other parts of the cross remained in Jerusalem.

Still later, Emperor Julian the Apostate had Saint Quiriacus tortured and put to death.

In 615 Chosroës, king of the Persians, subjected all the earth's kingdoms to his rule. When he came to Jerusalem, he took the part of the Holy Cross that Helena had left there, built himself a huge tower and stayed there with the piece of the wood. He relented power to his son and decreed that he himself was God now.

The Christian Emperor Heraclius of Constantinople marshalled a large army and laid battle to Chosroës' son near the river Danube. The two men agreed to fight in single combat on a bridge over the river, the victor to take over the empire and thus sparing both armies. Piero della Francesca made a panel of the battle between Heraclius and Chosroës' son, usually explained as the battle between Heraclius and Chosroës himself. This battle scene shows an old, defeated Chosroës knelt before his throne. Piero della Francesca has, as happened in many medieval pictures, shown two scenes of different moments: the battle on the left and Chosroës' demise on the right. This battle scene is better preserved so again it is an image of Renaissance armies that has been reproduced many times. The black eagle flag of Heraclius prevails and also a flag with the cross of the Resurrection is held above the armies.

Heraclius won, so all the people of Chosroës acknowledged Heraclius as their Emperor and all were baptised.

Heraclius now journeyed to Jerusalem to confront Chosroës himself. He found the 'god' seated on his golden throne and decapitated him.

Heraclius brought the rests of the Holy Cross back to the Mount of Olives, mounted on his royal palfrey and arrayed in all his imperial regalia. He rode through the same gate through which Jesus had passed on his way to Crucifixion. But the stones of the gateway fell down and blocked the road. An angel carrying a cross in its arms came down and announced that when Jesus had passed here he wore no royal pomp. Whereupon the angel disappeared. Heraclius now shed tears, took off his royal garments and stepped forward thus humbled. The gateway raised itself from the ground to allow passage. The truly devote Emperor thus praised the Holy Cross and brought it back to its rightful place. This was the subject of Piero's last fresco, the 'Exaltation of the True Cross' in which the angel suggests the Emperor to enter the gate in humility.

Piero della Francesco added a magnificent 'Annunciation' on a fresco of the left wall of the basilica, which only apparently has no connection to the other stories. The

Queen of Sheba saw a saviour on the Cross. The whole story of the New Testament is the life of Jesus, which ended on the Cross and started with the Annunciation. The Cross is the everlasting symbol of Jesus's life, and Jesus's life was announced by an angel to Mary.

All the frescoes of the legend in Arezzo's basilica are fabulous. They are the images filled with the wonder of centuries, an ode to the main symbol of Christendom. The 'Finding and Proof of the True Cross' is one of the largest frescoes in the church. Two scenes are depicted in the same one picture. To the left, Judas has indicated the place of the burial of the crosses. Judas stands next to the hole that was dug. He shows the Cross to Queen Helena who is accompanied by her court, which includes a dwarf. Men with shovels stand next to the pit and a man heaves the Cross from the ground, out of the earth, to Helena and Judas. Behind the rocks of the Mount of Olives rises Jerusalem, which is an idealised view of Arezzo.

In the scene on the right Helena has knelt in the middle of the town. A deceased youth is brought forward in his coffin. Judas holds the True Cross over the corpse and the young man is seen to come miraculously to life again, to exalt the Cross. Helena is accompanied by her ladies in waiting whereas the funeral party consists of men mostly.

Piero della Francesca's paintings are a good example of the tremendous frescoes, or 'affreschi', that adorned Italy's churches. One recognises the separate areas painted in one colour each. These effects are natural in the fresco technique, in which it was almost impossible to paint one colour over the other to obtain all kinds of hues of various colours within each other. The areas of one sole colour had to be juxtaposed in frescoes, adding to the impression of quiet dignity that emanates from the paintings. And Piero painted in light colours, with shadows only to be seen on the ground. Although filling the enormous surfaces was a long work, Piero della Francesca cared for every detail. He painted many figures, all his figures are different, all are variously dressed, and all wear different hats or headdresses. Piero della Francesca's scenes are always static and remain so also in this panel, even though a story is told. Piero succeeded in showing the story in a lively manner without leaving his personal style. Action is mainly indicated by the two oblique lines, on the left and right, formed by the Cross. In both subscenes the Cross is heaven from the ground and rises out of the mass of figures and these lines bring the liveliness in the composition. In other scenes also such as the battle scenes, the oblique lines that rise out of the mass of figures give an impression of nervousness, of movement, energy and epic exaltation.

Piero della Francesca's style is very apparent in the Arezzo paintings. Piero is the artist of tranquil dignity, of quiet force, of powerful silent expression, and of static testimony. He was a painter of strict geometric lines as can also be seen in the horizontality of his composition, and in the exact perspective demonstrated in the receding lines of the buildings on the right. This strictness is also present in the pure forms of the façade behind the scene of the proof of the True Cross. The façade is made up of rectangles, of triangles and of circles alone without any ornament. This is one of the best expressions of Piero's mathematical and ordered mind. Piero's light colours, his judicious creation of space in the picture and the all-pervading eerie light of his scenes make him stand out from all other major Italian artists of his time.

Piero placed his figures in front of an austere city scene thus confronting people with an almost alien environment of cold marble. He pictured flesh and blood in front of cold stone. Only the people are in soft round forms, which contrast with the hard lines of their background. The coolness that is thus generated lends the viewer an impression of the heavenly eternal within which move the human figures.

Piero della Francesca's frescoes in the basilica of Arezzo can be considered to be among the major works of art of the past centuries. Among these we can name the 'Holy Lamb' of the Van Eyck brothers, the San Marco murals by Fra Angelico, the altarpiece of Matthias Grünewald in Colmar, the Maestà altarpiece of Duccio di Buoninsegna in the cathedral of Pisa, the frescoes of the Arena Chapel in Padua made by Giotto and the Sistine Chapel frescoes by Michelangelo.

In the thirteenth century Saint Louis, king of France, bought a large piece of the cross and the thorn crown of Jesus from Emperor Balduin II of Constantinople. The King built a chapel for the relics, which is now the splendour of Gothic art of Paris, the 'Sainte Chapelle' or Holy Chapel. The relics are still in Paris, in the Notre Dame cathedral not far from the Sainte Chapelle. A special French Order, called the 'Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem', jealously guards them.

### *Other paintings*

#### **The Finding of the True Cross and Saint Helena**

Giambattista Tiepolo (1696 – 1770). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1743.

#### **The Victory of the True Cross**

Nicola Monti (1780-1855). The Modern Art Gallery in the Pitti Palace. Florence.

#### **The Story of the True Cross**

Agnolo Gaddi. Frescoes in the church of Santa Croce. Florence. Around 1380-1390.

#### **The Battle of the Milvian Bridge**

Giulio Romano (1499-1546). Palazzo Vaticano. Rome.

#### **Constantine receives the Instruments of the Passion**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625). Musei del Castello Sforzesco. Milan.

#### **The Legend of the Holy Cross**

Barthel Beham (1502-1540). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1530.

#### **Chosroës, King of Persia, demands to be worshipped**

Master from Bavaria. Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1475.

#### **Saint Helena finds the True Cross**

Master from Bavaria. Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1475.

#### **Emperor Constantine hands over the Holy Cross to his Mother Helena**

The Master of the Passion of Darmstadt. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1455.

#### **The Battle of Constantine and Maxentius**

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée Municipal. Château-Gonthier. Ca. 1660-1661.

#### **Constantine receiving the Instruments of Christ's Passion**

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan. Ca. 1620.

#### **Saint Helen and Saint Constantine with Saint Roch and Saint Sebastian**

Jacopo Negreti called Palma Vecchio (ca. 1480-1556). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1545.

**Saint Helen, Saint Barbara, Saint Andrew, Saint Macarius, a Saint and a donor  
adoring the Cross**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1560.

## *The Intercession of Jesus to God the Father*

### **The Intercession of Christ to God the Father**

Ambrosius Holbein (ca. 1494 -1519). Kunstmuseum Basel – Basel. Ca. 1514-1515.

Ambrosius Holbein was the son of Hans Holbein the elder and the brother of Hans Holbein the Younger. He was born in Augsburg around 1494 and worked soon in his father's workshop of painting. He painted alone from around 1514 so that the 'Intercession of Christ to God the Father' might have been one of his first truly own pictures. He moved to Basel in 1515, together with his younger brother. From after 1518 or 1519 no pictures have remained of him so that one might assume that he died around that time or stopped painting altogether.

Ambrosius Holbein's 'Intercession of Christ to God the Father' is a simple devotional picture. Holbein was a gifted artist, but he did not have the genius of his younger brother. Thus we see a painting with an easy composition. Holbein placed Jesus in the lower right corner and God the Father opposite, along the right diagonal of the frame, in the upper left corner. Christ sits on a rainbow, with one foot on a glass ball that could represent the fragile earth. It was known since a long time that the earth was round. Pythagoras and Aristotle suspected already that the earth was a sphere. But it was only the same year that Ambrosius Holbein painted his 'Intercession of Christ to God the Father' that Niklaus Copernicus published a small monogram in which he argued that the earth actually moved around the sun. The little book was only spread among a few friends and became widely known only many years later.

Jesus is shown as a man of sorrows, naked but for a flimsy, transparent cloth, holding his hands in prayer to God. Jesus is painted against the dark sky that came upon Jerusalem at the moment of his death. Jesus is a strong, well-muscled man but he keeps his head inclined in suffering and thus also pleads to the Father. Golden rays emanate from his face.

God the Father blesses Christ. He holds the cross of Jesus's Crucifixion and he is surrounded by the vague assembly of heavenly souls. The souls form a kind of halo around God, but one might also see the heads in this light as skulls. Holbein painted God the Father as a benevolent and wise man with soft eyes and a long beard. His cloak is in warm, red colours. The viewer senses that God is well willing to acknowledge the pleading hands and pitiful head of his Son. Between the two is the pigeon, the symbol of the holy Spirit, so that the painting also represents the Trinity. According to Christian theology, Father, Son and Spirit are but one aspect of the same God but Ambrosius Holbein represented them in the easier, naïve and human understanding of the relations.

Between the two main scenes, Ambrosius Holbein painted about twenty-four putti, little angels, which appear from out of the clouds and which carry the instruments of Jesus's Passion. We recognise in the left lower corner the column against which Christ was tortured and the lance that struck his side while on the cross. Other instruments shown here are the whips with which Jesus was flagellated, the wooden hammer for the cross and the nails, the thorn-bushes from which his crown of thorns

were made, as well as the cross itself. In the upper part we find the pincers and hammer of iron used to make the cross. Here also are the rods or long wooden branches that drove down Jesus's crown on thorns into the flesh of his head.

There is a powerful tradition in all churches of Western Europe, but mostly in Germany and France, to show the instruments of the Passion of Jesus. Often we find them imitated in real objects, disposed against a wall of the churches or hung on a wooden beam, adorned with the emblem of the Crucifixion. This wooden beam then crosses the church in its width and hangs before the main altar. Ambrosius Holbein's painting has not much artistic value, but it is a fine example of this tradition of devotion to the Passion of Jesus.

## **Resurrection**

## *The Resurrection*

### **The three Maries at the open Sepulchre**

Jan (ca. 1390-1441) and Hubert Van Eyck (ca. 1370-1426). Museum Boymans-van Beuningen – Rotterdam. 1430.

### **The Resurrection**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon. Around 1494-1498.

## *Resurrection*

When the Preparation Day was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said to him, “Your Excellency, we recall that this impostor said, while he was still alive, “After three days I shall rise again.” Therefore give the order to have the sepulchre kept secure until the third day, for fear his disciples come and steal him away and tell the people, “He has risen from the dead.” This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.” Pilate said to them, “You may have your guard; go and make all as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the sepulchre secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.<sup>G38</sup> Only Matthew tells this part in the Gospels.

According to the Gospel of Mark, when the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Mary Salome, brought spices with which to anoint Jesus. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. They had been saying to each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” But when they looked they saw that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right-hand side, and they were struck with amazement. But he said to them, “There is no need to be so amazed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen and he is not here. See, there is the place where they laid him. But you must go and tell his disciples and Peter, “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; that is where you will see him, just as he told you.”” And the women came out and ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.<sup>G38</sup>

Matthew’s story is quite similar, but he dramatises the visit to the sepulchre. He said that when the women came to the tomb, there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. The guards were so shaken by fear of him that they were like dead men.

Luke’s account is equally similar, but he features two men in brilliant clothes that appeared suddenly at the side of the women. And Luke tells of Mary of Magdala, of Mary the mother of James and John and of Joanna. Nobody seemed to believe the women, but Peter went off to the tomb, running. He bent down and looked in and saw the linen cloths but nothing else; he went back home, amazed at what had happened.<sup>G38</sup>

John tells that only Mary of Magdala came first to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away. She ran to Peter and John. John does not name himself, but tells of 'a disciple whom Christ loved'. He also calls himself the 'other disciple'. John said that Peter set out with the other disciple to go the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but he did not go in. Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple also went in, he saw and he believed.<sup>G38</sup>. In John's story only Mary Magdalene sees two angels somewhat later as she was standing outside the tomb.

The importance of the Resurrection for Christian religion cannot be over-emphasised. One might say that the Christian religion was born from the Resurrection. Therefore Easter is the most important feast of the Christian Catholic liturgy. During Jesus's passion he was humiliated, abandoned all his powers and was seemingly abandoned also by God the Father. He was ignominiously executed in a way that for the Romans was a deliberate insult intended for political criminals. Before his death Jesus had disciples who followed him but who mostly wanted him to become King of Israel, who did not understand his spiritual messages, but who continued nevertheless to accompany him on account of his miracles. The movement started by Jesus might have stopped at the moment of Crucifixion and all the apostles were in disarray and in panic. But then came the Resurrection. The Resurrection offered the final, definite proof of the divinity of Jesus. It induced in the disciples the courage they needed to start the missionaries. From Easter on they truly became believers and the Church was founded. Artists understood well the importance of the meaning of Easter and made some of their grandest works on the themes of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.

### *Van Eyck*

Jan and Hubert Van Eyck were probably born in Eyck on the river Meuse, hence in a town of Northern Belgium now called Maaseik or 'Oak on the Meuse', in the province of Limburg. The name of Van Eyck is still quite spread in Belgium. Hubert must have been born around 1365, Jan much later around 1390. Very little is known of Hubert, who worked mostly in Gent and who died there around 1426. Of Jan is known a little more because his name is mentioned in several court archives. He first worked in The Hague of the Northern Netherlands at the court of the count of Holland, Jan van Beieren. In 1425 a civil war broke out in Holland, and probably because of that Jan seems to have joined his brother Hubert in Gent. But Jan was called to the court of the Dukes of Burgundy, to whom belonged the Southern Netherlands and Gent in particular in that period.

The Dukes of Burgundy were among the richest and thus most powerful lords of Europe. They were the masters of Bruges and Gent, the wealthy towns of Flanders. But the Dukes of Burgundy were also engaged in the Hundred Year War, as allies of the English against the Kings of France and that would ultimately lead to the end of their house. Jan worked for Philip II of Burgundy at a moment when the court was at

its highest splendour. The Dukes knew the value of a genius like Jan Van Eyck. Jan was more than a painter for he received the title of 'Valet de Chambre', one of the main direct servants of the Duke, and he took part in diplomatic missions. Most of what is known of Jan comes from the archives of the Dukes of Burgundy. Jan Van Eyck accompanied diplomatic missions to Spain and Portugal around 1428-1429. In Portugal he made a portrait of Isabella of Portugal, the future wife of the Duke. Around 1430 Jan worked at the court of Lille, also a border town now in France, and then remained in Bruges until his death around 1441. The painting of the 'Three Mariés at the open Sepulchre' dates from around 1430, so Jan Van Eyck must have painted the largest part, but a tradition of naming the two brothers together for this work has remained.

The painting of the 'Resurrection' of the Van Eyck brothers is a very narrative work. The central theme is an open sarcophagus around which are grouped various figures. The large stone slab is turned away, but still on the sarcophagus, so that the tomb is opened. Tomb and slab thus take the form of the cross on which Jesus died. An angel is sitting on the slab of stone with a golden staff in his hand. He represents the authority of God. His wings are magnificent. They are golden in the interior and with peacock colours on the outside. The wings are deployed to show the wonderful colours. Remark the masterpiece of detail in the folds of the white robe of the angel.

Next to the tomb are the three Mariés. Mary Magdalene, clothed in her traditional red robe has knelt down. The lady in blue, looking sadly, is Mary the mother of Jesus. Mary Salome, the sister of the Virgin, stands somewhat shyly a little behind. Usually only Mary Magdalene brings a vase of ointment, but in this picture all three Mariés have brought balm, so that the scene can also be referenced to the 'Adoration of the Kings' where three kings or magi bring presents to the young Jesus. The Resurrection of Christ is indeed a rebirth, the reference is well taken and one of the many puzzles Jan Van Eyck loved to introduce in his pictures. Note the contrast between the pure colours of the three figures. Mary Magdalene is in red, the Virgin Mary in bright blue and Mary Salome in green. These are the basic colours of the rainbow, the covenant between God and humanity. The angel seems mainly to address Mary Magdalene, which is coherent with the Gospel stories since Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene.

Three soldiers are sleeping on the ground. These are the soldiers that Pilate had accepted to guard the tomb. A soldier on the left is entirely lying on the ground, his arms crossed under his head. He wears an oriental pin hat and his cloak is golden yellow, another pure colour. The middle soldier wears an iron cuirass that is shining so much in the morning light that the surrounding landscape is reflected in it. The third soldier on the right is dressed in a green cloak, the same colour as Salome on the other side. He wears a hat that may be more foreign. The three soldiers may represent the three known continents. In scenes of 'The Adoration of the Kings', the African or Moorish king stands behind. So does Mary Salome whose cloak is the same colour as that of the soldier on the right. These are conjectures of symbolism. It is always very difficult to know whether or not the Van Eycks deliberately introduced such puzzles. But the tradition to have three figures around Jesus, three like the Trinity, was always very strong. There were three Magi, often three shepherds, three Mariés. Christ's Resurrection took place on the third day after his passion. In the 'Golden Legend' is told that the Mount of Olives was also called the Mount of the Three Lights. Because

from the west the light from the Temple fell upon it by night, for a fire burned continually on the altar. In the morning it caught the sun's rays from the east before they reached the city and the hill's olive trees produces a plentiful supply of oil, which fed light. The Van Eycks were immersed in this symbolism and early fascination of numbers that is also so strongly present in the 'Golden Legend'.

All soldiers are heavily armed, but the arms have been stylised in a mannered way so as to turn them into symbols more than in real arms. They look terrifying enough, though. Van Eyck may have added touches of embellishment here for the arms have been painted to almost ceremonious devices, an element of style he used also frequently. Thus the soldier on the right wears lances that resemble large arrows. A lance pierced Jesus's side on the cross and Mary was warned early that seven arrows of sorrow would pierce her hearth. Again one of those plays of symbols of which one cannot know whether the association is voluntary by the painters. Near the cuirass lies a golden or copper helmet with a dragon form. Such symbols make us think of Saint Georges who fought dragons and Jan Van Eyck made another painting in which Georges was figured. Dragons represent evil, Jesus fought evil. Look also at the long fighting axe, the halberd, on the left. Its axe forms are very complex. Shields in strange forms also lie around.

Jan or Hubert Van Eyck painted rock formations to the right and left background. The 'Resurrection' did happen on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The hills open to a splendid view of Jerusalem. The two brothers Van Eyck were probably never in Jerusalem, though we cannot be sure of that, especially since we know so little of Hubert Van Eyck. The presentation of the town as seen from the Mount of Olives is fairly accurate though, with the famous round cupola of the mosque of Omar in the middle and also several other details being more or less right, such as a reference to the Golden Gate of Jerusalem<sup>N1</sup>. Either at least one of the Van Eycks had travelled to the Holy Land, which was by no means so difficult as to be improbable, or the brothers used drawings made by other artists brought back from their trips.

The whole picture is painted in meticulous, realistic detail and brilliant colours. The artists wanted to impress the viewers by their display of skills and this expertise of course was the delight of the commissioners. This was what the Van Eyck brothers were famous for. They were superb colourists. They had an enormous sense of detail, a very precise eye and hard patience. Their professional knowledge was considerable to picture in all the details of robes, weapons, cuirass, headdresses, and wings of angels. The Van Eycks were also superb landscape painters as shown in the complex view of Jerusalem.

The painting is well balanced. The composition of the picture is based on the two diagonals. The diagonals are obvious in the picture. They are seen in the lines of the rock formations on left and right. The direction of the soldiers' lances and the long stone slab of the sarcophagus enhance the right diagonal. The use of diagonals was long known before Caravaggio started to use them as the basis of movement. Here the diagonals are used to separate the frame in four quarters, which are filled separately with volumes. In the left quarter are the three Maries. In the right quarter is a sleeping guard in the green colours and here also is the right rock formation. The two sleeping guards fill the lower quarter. The upper quarter then is filled with the landscape of Jerusalem. The diagonals open magnificently to this landscape. The diagonals finally

centre on the white angel, who is thus really the visual centre and the symbol of both Christian spirituality and authority. He really should be the centre and the focus.

The Van Eycks were not too much concerned with perspective of lines. The two reclining sides of the sarcophagus are parallel instead of converging and also the direction and length of the slab is not geometrically right. The Van Eycks knew foreshortening, of course, obvious in the landscape. They were concerned with the tastes of their period and its pictorial style of Gothic elaborate decoration. They worked in the very centre of the lands where Gothic was invented. They saw the most splendid Gothic cathedrals and buildings everywhere. All figures of this painting thus are also stylised with a special attention and love given to the long gowns of the ladies.

The painting is of a static scene, with almost no movement. Only Mary Magdalene has a weak gesture of surprise and the angle holds a hand in warning or greeting. Ornamental elements are used in profusion. There are for instance Hebrew letters painted in gold around the seams of the cloaks of the women and also on the hat of one of the guards (these bear no meaning however<sup>N1</sup>). The armoury also definitely has a ceremonial character. Compare the details of the cloaks and of the arms, the intricate detail, with the complex patterns of the windows and altars of Gothic cathedrals. Jan Van Eyck was a miniaturist. There are of course direct similarities between miniatures and this way of painting. One can consider these pictures to be large miniatures from which oil painting could further evolve in Flanders.

There is no other special symbolism apparent in the picture except the narration and the decorative representation of a scene of the Gospels. The 'Three Maries at the open Sepulchre' is thus an interesting and beautiful picture of the beginning of northern Flemish Primitive art. Especially admirable is the skill of the painters in obtaining the marvellous hues of their colours, which have not lost their splendour over the centuries. The Van Eycks had mastered the use of oils and the technique of applying more or less oil, more or less pigment, and of covering the surfaces with either one thin layer of pure colour or several layers so as to obtain gleaming effects and splendid colour combinations. When several layers were applied, light was changed also by the passage through the underlying layers so that the resulting colour was not always just the shade of the top layer. The Van Eycks had discovered these effects and they used them especially to form shades and shadows on figures and objects.

The painting is a hymn to Christianity. It shows solemn respect for the message and scenes of the Gospels. The Van Eycks were children of their times and uncompromisingly dedicated to their beliefs in the word of God as written in the Gospels.

### *Pietro Perugino*

Pietro Perugino was born between 1445 and 1458 as the son of a very poor man called Cristofano of the village of Castello della Pieve near Perugia<sup>G46</sup>. Pietro's parents were so poor that according to Vasari he was given as an errand-boy to a painter in Perugia. Pietro dreamt of getting out of this state of poverty, so he left for Florence to seek his

fortune. Vasari tells Perugino slept in a box in Florence. But gradually the excellence of his works became known and he grew famous.

The young Perugino was a pupil to Andrea Verrocchio and gradually he saved enough funds to found a workshop in which numerous famous painters of the next generation learned the arts. Foremost among his students was Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael and even Raphael's father Giovanni di Santi. Another student of Perugino's was Pintoricchio who was also a Perugian by origin. The lesser known painters who worked with Perugino were Rocco Zoppo, Monteverchi, Gerino da Pistoia, Baccio and Francesco Ubertino, and a Spaniard called Lo Spagna. There was Andrea Luigi of Assisi called l'Ingegno, Eusebio di Jacopo di Cristofano, Domenico di Paride Alfani, Orazio di Domenico, Giovanni Nicola di Paolo Manni and Giovanni Battista di Bartolommeo as well as others. These are the names mentioned by Giorgio Vasari in the 'Lives of the Artists' At this list one wonders about the important industry of painting in Florence and about the influence Pietro Perugino had on the subsequent generation of artists in the town.

Giorgio Vasari tells of Pietro Perugino that 'Peter was a person of very little religion, and he could never be brought to believe in the immortality of the soul, instead, using words in keeping with his pigheadedness, he obstinately rejected every good argument. He placed all his hope in the gifts of Fortune, and he would have done anything for money' <sup>G46</sup>. Pietro Perugino did get rich, even though he not always had success. Success did not come easy, but Perugino worked hard for it. Much success and rapidity in the end leads sometimes to burnout. It happened to Pietro Perugino. He was in lack of inspiration of scenes and subjects, in lack of imagination and inventiveness. He had to leave Florence after one of his works for the Servite Friars was considered of less quality and its figures the exact remake of others he had painted elsewhere. The good Friars were furious and Pietro was blamed for negligence. Pietro returned to his hometown Perugia then.

Though Perugino was a man of 'very little religion' who did not believe in the immortality of the soul, he painted a 'Resurrection' in Perugia. He was commissioned so by the Black Friars of Perugia for the church of San Pietro, or Saint Peter, the church of one of their abbeys. We do have the few suggestions of Vasari as to Perugino's character. He was not an easy man. He worked hard and knew the value of delivering quality. When he had not delivered quality but had painted too rapidly his reputation had suffered. He was not a religious man but could not but have had his doubts and be confronted with the seduction of the message of Christ, as he lived in a time impregnated by religion. He may have been a believer but a man who was disappointed from being born so poor, angry with God and the heavens and thus a cynic. His very ardent desire to escape from poverty did not leave his mind. Yet, Perugino had a dream of an ideal world and it was a very aesthetic image he had in his mind to strive for. It was a clear view of elevated, sublimated vision, of towns architected for the elevation of the spirit, of landscapes that were made to ease and clear the mind. Pietro Perugino may have slept in a box on a street and seen the lowest of Florence, but nowhere in his pictures do we find neither the suffering of his fellow men nor faces of hardship. Perugino had escaped the world of the poor and he painted his dream of the spiritual environment created for meditation. No other painter thus epitomised better the ideal image of the Tuscan Renaissance and its believe in a sparkle of divinity in man.

The 'Ascension of Christ' was painted around 1495 to 1498. It must have consisted of fifteen panels. The panels we present are the two central pieces, which are today in the Museum of Lyon in France. The panels arrived in Paris because they were requisitioned by the Revolutionary Commissars of the French Army that had taken Italy. The panels were dispersed over several Museums of the country, according to a new French policy to create local interest in the arts. After the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, France had to return the pictures. Those of the Louvre indeed were given back, but the people of Lyon asked to keep their central panel and the Pope acquiesced as a token of gratitude for the devotion to the Papal cause of the town of Lyon<sup>F5</sup>. The Lyon Museum of Fine Arts obtained the second, upper panel through an exchange. Three other panels, among the most beautiful, are in Rouen. The rest is back in Rome in the Vatican, and in the original church of Saint Peter of Perugia.

Pietro Perugino created once more a masterpiece with the altar panels, which all assembled together and throning on the main altar of the Perugian church, must have been one of the magic wonders of Italy. In the lower central panel, Perugino has shown an idealised, elegant, harmonious scene. The resurrected Jesus is depicted in a double oval made of wood or of reeds, decorated with winged heads of angels. On the top of the frame further angels are playing heavenly music on various stringed instruments, a violin, a harp, a lute. Two flying angels support Jesus. Beneath the ascension of Christ stand two groups and figures, and directly underneath is Jesus's mother Mary. We recognise Paul with a sword and the Book, the image of the defenders of the faith. The Popes had become fighting monarchs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. So Perugino gave some credentials and his support to the Popes for their more violent actions.

Pietro Perugino was one of the most wonderful colourists of Florentine painting. He had the secret of the greatest variety of pure tones. He used bright red, ultramarine blue, splendid greens, as well as various shades of rose, of purple and of grey, all set in marvellous harmony. Perugino deliberately used shadows in the figures to obtain just the necessary, delicate effect of volume. Look at the wonderful green grass below. Look at the delicate blue mountain range in the far landscape and at the changing blue tones of the serene sky. Perugino's composition of the figures is also symmetrically balanced and as always his figures are stylised: all persons have the same height and the same volume for instance.

Pietro Perugino and other Florentine artists like Botticelli, Filippo Lippi and also Andrea Mantegna painted their view of an idealised, noble, elegant, courteous society. Pietro Perugino did this as no other. The ideal of an almost passionless and static world of beauty of Pietro Perugino does seem cold and distant. So were the white marble statues of Greek and Roman antiquity that the Renaissance scholars admired so. Perugino exercised his skills in harmony to the utmost in the 'Ascension of Christ'. His panels must have inspired beyond belief for their splendours in colour and elevation of expression. The picture lacks warm communication of emotion though; it lacks the love of Christ. But as Vasari told, Perugino was concerned with his reputation to offer an impressive painting and he was concerned with money more than with emotions. Perugino built up a picture on symmetries, on idealised forms, on imaginary fabulous architecture, on perfect harmony to generate eternal images. He

delivered the ultimate view of an aristocratic world and offered it to be accessible for all.

How and why did a very poor young craftsman come to such imagery? The real answer will always be elusive. We can only give conjectures. Maybe Perugino had this aesthetic image burnt in his mind. This could have been his dream of peace when he slept in a box, the dignity he sought to escape to. Maybe he thought this was the kind of representation his commissioners liked and maybe he wanted to deliver just what they asked. Then this could be the view and aspirations of Florentine Renaissance society. But the reason whereby Perugino just depicted these scenes to please seems doubtful. Pietro Perugino would have been a cheat. One cannot cheat picture after picture with such conviction.

Perugino had a consistent view throughout his life. The only explanation can be that even the poorest can have a spark of eternity in their mind and can and do cherish the most elevated aesthetic vision possible in a human being. They can dream of rationality, of purity, of clear ideals, of dignity and of integrity. They can be of a nobility of character absent in the wealthy and educated. This demands reflection on the social responsibilities of anyone. It also enhances the core of Jesus's teaching, which addressed specifically the love necessary to bring forward the best talents in everyone and which preached respect and love for all creations. Thus the oeuvre of Pietro Perugino is an example and maybe the finest of the longing for light from the darkness. And it may explain some of the attractiveness of Jesus's ideals to people.

Perugino defended his views. When late in his life Michelangelo drew the cartoons for the 'Battle of Cascina' in which the image was a mass of nude men, the soldiers bathing in the river Arno before the battle between the Florentines and the Pisans, Perugino attacked Michelangelo. The two men disputed ardently and the Gonfaloniere Soderini had to intervene. Perugino accused Michelangelo in the courts of justice of slander. Pietro Perugino's concepts of art were filled with the hopes of transcendence whereas Michelangelo was showing the immanent divinity in man. The two concepts were not to be conciliated but the images remain among the most wonderful the Renaissance has birthed.

*Other paintings:*

### **Resurrection**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

### **The Entombment of Christ**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

### **The Resurrection**

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1495.

### **The Resurrection**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 1596-1610.

### **The Resurrection of Christ**

Master of the Altarpiece of Wittingau. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. 1380-1390.

**The Resurrection**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1578/1581.

**The Resurrection**

Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). Ca. 1715-1716.

**The Resurrection of Christ with Saints**

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). Church o Santa Maria Novella. Florence. 1568.

**The Resurrection**

Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Resurrection of Christ**

Marco Basaiti (ca. 1478-1530). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*Noli me Tangere***Noli me Tangere**

Master of the Codex of Saint Georges. The Bargello Museum – Florence. Around 1320.

**Noli me Tangere**

Antonio Allegri called Correggio (ca. 1489-1534). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1534.

The theme of ‘Noli me Tangere’ comes from the Gospel of John. John tells that when Jesus showed himself after the Resurrection, it was first to Mary Magdalene. Jesus called her and she turned round and saw him. But Jesus did not want her to touch him. He said literally to her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my father and your Father, my God and your God.”<sup>G38</sup>. The theme has always remained somewhat mysterious because the words of Jesus are difficult to comprehend. Did Jesus not want Mary Magdalene to touch him because she had been a sinner or because any human could retain him from ascending to the heavens? We may have here also a central theme of love. When two persons touch in souls they are caught, cannot withdraw and stay together. Jesus may have given an allusion to this intimacy with humans and feared the effect. The ‘Noli me Tangere’ or ‘Touch me not’ is a symbol of the need for distance. This is the same feeling as expressed by Michelangelo in the ‘Creation of Adam’ in the Sistine chapel, where angels are seen to cling to God and draw him away, away from touching Adam. Michelangelo understood the duality of Jesus and thus of God very well and presented this to us in a genius’ way. God creating man and thus being involved in mankind, reaching out so as desiring to be part of his creation yet torn to remain the deity is a tragic cosmic theme. The ‘Noli me Tangere’ is a similar theme of longing and unfulfilment. There is no more tragic love and of course no greater love than of two beings unable to reach each other, since such a love eternally remains unblemished.

The ‘Noli me Tangere’ is a very old theme. Testimony to that is a diptych in the Bargello Museum of Florence that has on its left panel the scene with Mary Magdalene. The panels are in the Carrand room. Louis Carrand was a French antiques dealer who in 1888 left his private collection of Gothic and Renaissance objects to Florence on the express condition that it be shown in the Bargello. The panels that represent ‘Noli me Tangere’ and the ‘Coronation of the Virgin’ are attributed to an anonymous master called the ‘Master of the Codex of Saint Georges’. This was a painter and foremost illuminator of which the style was discovered in manuscripts made for the Popes of Avignon. He must have been a follower of Simone Martini, the most gifted Italian artist who worked for the Popes during their exile in Avignon. The panels date from the first half of the fourteenth century.

The panel of ‘Noli me Tangere’ shows the open tomb in the form of a rectangular sarcophagus, which reminds us of Jan Van Eyck’s picture. An angel is equally seated on the tomb. This panel is much older than Van Eyck’s picture though, so that we can surmise that the Van Eycks used symbols and presentations that were much older. They knew the traditions of earlier paintings. Around the tomb are the three sleeping guards holding their long, slender lances. The soldiers look like malicious devils

hiding behind the tomb. To the right Mary Magdalene is knelt and she stretches imploring hands to Jesus. Jesus however, has a gesture of refusal and withholds her from touching him. The panel is richly decorated in a golden background and in the green grass grow white and golden flowers. Naively painted full lobed trees form the last decorative element of the picture. Mary Magdalene is dressed in the wonderful red cloak in which also Simone Martini showed her in his Orsini altarpiece, which he painted in Avignon at the court of the Popes. Jesus is enveloped in a bright blue cloak. He holds a banner with the white flag and red cross of his Resurrection. This panel does remind of illuminated manuscripts in its naïve depiction of the scene and the pure colouring. There is no perspective, no real sense of foreshortening and a very primitive sense of space in this picture. Later paintings of the theme depicted the same position of Mary Magdalene and the resurrected Christ.

### *Correggio*

Antonio Allegri called Correggio made a picture of 'Noli me Tangere' in the sixteenth century, so much later than the Bargello picture. Correggio was called after the village where he was born in 1489 and where he also died in 1534. The picture is one of his very last, painted approximately in the year the artist died. Correggio worked in Parma in the north of Italy, but his imagery possesses all the sweetness of Raphael's pictures. He applied also the smoothness of Leonardo da Vinci and Leonardo's way of having lines disappear in gentle colour shades, the 'sfumato'. Much of this style can be discerned in Correggio's 'Noli me Tangere'.

Mary Magdalene has come at dawn so that a fresh yellow light rises over the horizon. She is dressed as an Italian noblewoman in a luxurious yellow robe. She has knelt before Jesus and looks at him in adoration. Jesus however does not want her to touch him. With one hand he retains Mary Magdalene, with the other arm he points to the sky. This gesture also was a very old theme in imagery of paintings that was frequently used by Florentine and Tuscan painters like Leonardo da Vinci. Often one can find it in John the Baptist, in scenes of the Madonna with Jesus and John. John then seems to indicate with one finger upwards that the true greatness comes from who ordained all the New Testament to happen, that is God the Father.

The painting is made in soft colours. The two predominant colours are Mary's yellow robes and Jesus's blue toga. These are two complementary colours, a feature that suits well the theme with its opposition between earth and spirit. We can point to the subjective use of colours here, which Correggio instinctively used. Jesus is in blue, a colour that creates a distance, a sense of movement away from the viewer. The golden yellow of Mary Magdalene attracts attention and is a warmer colour. In this same concept Jesus seems to move upward, whereas Mary Magdalene has knelt closer to earth. Correggio has used the diagonal of the frame to enhance the effect of Jesus's élan to the sky. The diagonal goes over Mary Magdalene to the movement of the two arms of Jesus and the reclining tree that grows to the upper right corner then still enhances this line. This diagonal is a style technique of Baroque painting even though the line was used already by many painters before Correggio. Even Raphael for

instance painted a 'Holy Family with the Lamb', also in the Prado Museum, in which this diagonal is followed as an evolution of the pyramid form of portraits and compositions of figures.

Correggio depicted Jesus as a noble youth, which is gently talking to Mary Magdalene. His features are noble and so is his half-nude body. The contrast between the pale colour of the chest of Jesus and the blue toga draws the attention to the Christ figure, whereas the rest of the picture is in darker or more subtle and subdued hues. The upper half of the frame is a delicate landscape with elaborate pictured trees, bushes and rock formations and blue mountains in the far. Correggio painted a superb, delicious picture that guides the eye of the viewer from Mary Magdalene on to Jesus, to the heavens. The picture is an invitation to the spiritual elevation of the mind.

*Other paintings:*

**Noli me Tangere**

Jacob Cornelisz. (1470-1533). Gemäldegalerie. Kassel.

**Noli me Tangere**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). The National Gallery. London. Around 1511-1515.

**Noli me Tangere**

Bernardino Luini (c.1480-1532). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Milan.

**Noli me Tangere**

Alonso Cano (1601-1667). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. Around 1648.

**Noli me Tangere**

Bramantino (1465-1530). Castello Sforzesco. Milan. 1507.

**Landscape with the 'Noli me Tangere'**

Flemish Painter of the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Galleria Colonna. Rome.

**Noli me Tangere**

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1609.

**Noli me Tangere**

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Collezioni Zerbone. Genoa. Ca. 1700.

**Noli me Tangere**

Luca Mambelli (ca. 1518-after 1580). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*Emmaüs***The Supper at Emmaüs**

Jacopo Carrucci called Pontormo (1494-1556). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1525.

**The Emmaüs Pilgrims**

Harmensz Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1648.

Luke tells in his Gospel how two disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaüs, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking about all that had happened. And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side. But their eyes were prevented from recognising him. He said to them, “What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, their eyes downcast<sup>G38</sup>.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him; “You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.” He asked, “What things?” They answered, “All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not at all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.”<sup>G38</sup>

Then he said to them, “You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?” Then starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.<sup>G38</sup>

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, “It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, “The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of the bread<sup>G38</sup>.

*Jacopo Pontormo*

Jacopo Pontormo was a Florentine painter born in 1494. He died in 1556. His real name was Jacopo Carrucci, but as so many Italian artists he was called Pontormo after the village where he was born. He was a student of Leonardo da Vinci, Mariotto Albertinelli, Piero di Cosimo and Andrea del Sarto, but he never stayed long with the same master either because they went to other towns and closed their shops, or because Pontormo's character did not agree with his teachers. He was already a very individual and headstrong artist. From 1512 or 1513 on he started to work on his own. He painted in the sweet Baroque, suave style learnt from his masters and mainly from Andrea del Sarto, in fine colour tones. Pontormo was skilled in pleasing with figures of vivacious movement, with complex scenes and he had a vivid imagination. He dared to introduce such eccentricities in pictures as were unseen before. He pleased, surprised and he was successful. He took Agnolo Bronzino as pupil and this excellent painter became virtually his adopted son. They worked together on very many commissions. Pontormo was connected by his works to the Borgherini family and from there to the Acciaiuolo since the lady Borgherini was born an Acciaiuolo. In 1522 there was once more an outbreak of the plague in Florence, so Jacopo fled from the town and found refuge together with Bronzino in the Certosa del Galluzzo, a charterhouse of friars, founded by an Acciaiuolo a century and a half before.

Jacopo Pontormo made several paintings for the cloister and he liked the peaceful surroundings so much with his own melancholic nature that even after the plague he frequently returned there to paint. He stayed thus four years in the Certosa. Vasari told however in his 'Lives' that something disastrous had happened to Pontormo. Pontormo had discovered engravings made by Albrecht Dürer before fleeing from Florence. Dürer was the outstanding painter from Nuremberg in Germany and Pontormo seemed to have been truly influenced by the intensity, power and veracity of Dürer. He adapted his style to Dürer's vision of representation. Pontormo's figures became less mild, more rough, less idealised and Pontormo took examples from everyday people. He changed his tender colouring to harsher, yet harmonious and more equal tones so that his palette simplified. He went back to the sources of life instead of painting his elevated, intellectual scenes. Pontormo had liked capricious representations and all his life he painted to new ideas that came suddenly to his mind for colouring, composition of scenes and elements of themes. He liked to experiment and Dürer must have struck him as something alien and so utterly different to what he had seen from Florence art, that he felt naturally attracted to try out this style too. Later still, Pontormo's style gradually softened again. He was presented with some cartoons made by Michelangelo and commissioned to paint them. Michelangelo had Pontormo in high esteem, so this collaboration continued for a few paintings. Michelangelo's designs plus Pontormo's colours were very much appreciated. Jacopo Pontormo then changed his style once more and composed himself scenes of nudes from antique themes as he had seen the power of Michelangelo's nudes.

Jacopo Pontormo and Agnolo Bronzino continued to work together on various religious frescoes. Pontormo's greatest work was the frescoes for the main chapel of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence, on which he painted for eleven years. These pictures showed all the eccentricities and mannered attitudes of figures as only Pontormo could imagine. Vasari wrote that he, Vasari, would drive himself mad to become embroiled with these extraordinary figures, just as Jacopo would look at the paintings. Pontormo had changed the correct measures of the torsos; he had changed the proportions of the heads to the bodies; the bodies were contorted to impossible

poses and the figures were painted in weird colours. But Pontormo relished in his exaggerations. He seems to have been a lonely, visionary genius who was the main proponent of Mannerism in Florence after Michelangelo. Florentine Mannerism was the style to which Michelangelo had led in his later years and Pontormo had picked it up and enhanced it from out of his own unusual character. Pontormo led Mannerism about as far as it could go. His students and mostly Bronzino continued the style, but soon again softened the exaggerations.

Jacopo Pontormo's picture of the 'Supper of Emmaüs' was made for the Certosa del Galluzzo, for the charterhouse where the painter had fled to from the plague outbreak in Florence. Pontormo made several frescoes there of Christ's life. The scene of the Emmaüs supper is executed like a 'Last Supper', with Jesus seated at the middle of the table facing the viewer. Jesus blesses the disciples and he is breaking the bread. Vasari wrote that Pontormo had made portraits of the Galluzzo monks for these figures and indeed, several monks are standing to the right and left of Jesus. The friar on the left would be Leonardo Bonafé, the prior of the Galluzzo<sup>113</sup>. We see here Pontormo's direct return to everyday reality in the portraits of the friars. The scene is painted with a lucid and limpid composition, built of symmetries of figures around Christ. Two disciples are seated in front of each other; two are standing and a few heads appear on the sides. The figures are elongated beyond natural proportions. The faces are equally long and slim. This style element is characteristic for Pontormo's Mannerism and especially for pictures of Pontormo's Galluzzo period. Parmigianino later enhanced the style element. The painting induces a strange impression of primitive art and indeed, Jacopo Pontormo succeeded maybe unknowingly to reach an art that is closer to the images of for instance old Egyptian art in which the same style elements of elongated arms, legs and necks of figures were used. Pontormo brought the viewer back to a raw sensation of earthiness that was lacking in pictures of Florentine art, which was not conform to aesthetic ideals of Vasari and the like, and close to Dürer. Jacopo Pontormo had gone to the core of Dürer and then designed his own pictures based on the essentials of the great German's art.

Pontormo portrayed the monks of the Certosa. He painted ordinary people and in doing that left the idealised views of Florentine art behind him. These views had emphasised the transcendental nature of man. Pontormo just showed the human nature and merely that, thereby joining northern views. Pontormo drew the Emmaüs theme down to reality instead of elevating the theme to the realm of ideas. Vasari obviously did not like this development and found it a betrayal of Florentine concepts of art and beauty.

Pontormo created space by showing the oval form of the table and he painted several zones of figures in the front, middle and back. The viewer's position is suggested as being somewhat low, but very close to the scene. Pontormo added details of genre painting like a dog and a cat under the chairs. Together with the realism of the scene and but for the lighter colours, one could imagine a Spanish picture of the seventeenth century here. Pontormo's colours are subdued however. The light browns and yellow are dominant. Pontormo created nice harmony and a surprise of colouring in the three pure tones in the red cloak on the left, in Jesus's blue cloak in the middle and the green gown on the right. Except for these areas, all colours are cloister tones of

broken white and light browns. Pontormo created thus a mood of tranquil meditation. The harmony of colours renders to the picture a sweet, melancholic undertone.

Jesus looks like a man of pity and love. He looks gently to the far, straight to the viewer, but through the viewer. Jesus is pondering while blessing the disciples, lost in his own thoughts. He is not in this world. This contrasts with the interested, intense expressions of the two friars aside Jesus. They are very present and they are the real people of our practical earth. The friars are posing in an austere, protective stand. Pontormo here also created a very personal view of Jesus, which was in line with his own character. The absence of details in the background make of this painting a very frugal, depleted scene not unlike the old icons.

Jacopo Pontormo's 'Supper at Emmaüs' is thus a surprising picture amidst Florentine art. We understand that Giorgio Vasari found this digressing of the Florentine principles of clear lines and idealised, elevated forms disastrous. Yet Pontormo has made a picture full of spiritualism and direct reality. Jesus was amongst the Galluzzo friars too and Pontormo's vision was the sincere representation of his impressions of the life at the Certosa.

### *Rembrandt van Rijn*

The Emmaüs theme seemed to be important for the Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn because he made several versions of the scene. And there are similarities between the handling of the theme by Jacopo Pontormo and by Rembrandt, even though Rembrandt may never have seen Pontormo's painting. Rembrandt's picture dates from 1648. Rembrandt, born in 1606 in Amsterdam and working there, was forty-two years old and had already many life's miseries behind him. He knew the vagaries of life and was certainly beginning to comprehend fully the illusions of a human thrown here and there by fate.

The Emmaüs theme has several important lessons.

Firstly, the story once again stressed the double nature of Christ. Jesus had resuscitated and hence become a spirit, unified with God, but he had come back and showed himself in his human form. These appearances are extremely important for the scriptures because they opened up again the expectations that had ended with the death of Christ's body. And Jesus once more explained the true meaning of his suffering and gave the credentials from the prophets that all this was ordained. Again he stressed the message that his kingdom was not on earth.

Secondly, the Emmaüs narration is a tale of life after death and inspired the more in Christians the quest for transcendence, for eternal life and the immortality of the soul. This quest was already part of the European spirit so that this story justified and even enhanced the drive so strongly existing in Europeans for surpassing oneself. Without Emmaüs and the other apparitions, something would have been missing in the global story of Christ's life, a crucial element that other religions lacked: a sense of continuance after life and a higher-order justification of common acts.

Thirdly, tales of the resurrected Christ were unavoidable. Jesus had been a prophet and a great teacher as the Emmaüs pilgrims themselves asserted. But this worldly Jesus had died piteously on the cross, the ultimate shame that could befall a Jew. To people's minds this meant that Jesus had failed miserably, even though he testified many times that all this was ordained and that his kingdom was not of the earth. The re-appearance to various people after his Entombment re-asserted with high power of imagination all what Jesus had predicted. Here was a new, last sign that Jesus had died as a human but that his death had been a mystery for he possessed the power of Resurrection.

Fourthly, Emmaüs consists of two stories in one. In the first part, Jesus accompanies the pilgrims on their walk. Many painters have taken up also this part of the story. Later, Jesus takes his supper with the Emmaüs pilgrims before revealing himself. He repeats the acts of the Last Supper, then suddenly disappears. Many painters have represented the scene of this supper, as a more intimate and humble version of Jesus's Last Supper. This part is less important than the walk. For the message given in the first part is that 'Jesus walks with us'. Here is the message of the personal God that accompanies each of us in our daily tasks. This idea was the attraction and moral teaching that painters also tried to express.

Rembrandt's picture more than Pontormo's stresses this ultimate aspect, the link between the resuscitated Jesus and the pilgrims. The Emmaüs pilgrims have arrived at an old inn. They are seated in the semi-darkness of the evening. They are being served in a simple everyday scene. Although the picture is dark, all attention is drawn immediately to the radiant Jesus. Like in Pontormo's picture we see a compassionate, tenderly loving Christ. Here also Jesus breaks the bread. Rembrandt has brought more warmth of feeling and more intimacy in his painting than Pontormo. The theme suited Rembrandt's dark style of painting wonderfully. Rembrandt relished in applying thick layers of paint and then use the brilliance of his lead-whites in the few areas that he wanted to break out of the dark to lend his particular artistic attention. He drew of course in this way our view to the essentials, here to the figure of Jesus. Remark the strong, stable composition based on restful horizontal and vertical lines. Jesus is seated against a niche, shown as a Roman arch. One finds these arches in old Romanesque churches. The niche rises far upwards, a feature Rembrandt used in several of his pictures to denote the grandeur of the heavenly nature of Christ and the smallness of humans. The two sides of the Roman arch continue in the two seated figures. Obvious horizontal lines further render the impression of solidity in the painting. These are the horizontals of the chairs, the table and the lines of the stones. The story happens in an inn, but Rembrandt has given it monumentality by placing Jesus in front of the arch. The general impression thus is one of graveness. For this was the exact moment before the departing.

The colours that Rembrandt applied are sombre tones, as we are used of him. These pictures always give the impression as if they are drawn out of far memories, as if they are sudden remembrances that are drawn to light again. The effect suits the subject, which tells a story from the beginning of the era. The solid Romanesque elements also underscore these impressions. We feel the sympathy of Rembrandt for the compassionate, still suffering Jesus in the way the artist painted Jesus's face. Jesus will be leaving immediately and some of the pain of the departing is in Jesus's look.

Rembrandt longed for the compassion and for the company of Jesus, as is the true message of Emmaüs.

The Emmaüs theme seems a small, casual story in the scriptures. Yet, Luke who always was short in his tales, elaborates on this one. The profound meaning of the story has not escaped most painters. So the theme was taken up by many. The message was that God walked with us, side by side, invisible and unknown until he can reveal himself in us. This again was a message of hope for the lonely. The story stressed the pilgrimage and the walking. The road, the search was important even more than the finding. The epic pilgrimages would become a major feature of European life during the Middle Ages and in later centuries.

A French priest who was to be called 'Abbé Pierre' in the 1960s was outraged at the lack of housing for the poorest in his rich and marvellous country. He started a movement to find lodgings and clothes for them. He called the movement 'Emmaüs'. The charity movement has grown into a renowned organisation and the Abbé Pierre became one of the most popular figures of France, the modern symbol of compassion and charity. Abbé Pierre was even chosen during parliamentary elections as a 'Député', a Representative of the People. He thought he could thus obtain more funds from the political elite and acclaim more awareness for his movement in France. In this he was disappointed, but his organisation of 'Les Compagnons d'Emmaüs' still exists and is a solid feature of charity in France.

*Other paintings:*

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Vicenzo di Biagio Catena (ca. 1470-1531). Galleria degli Uffizi. Florence. 1520-1530.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1645-1665.

**The Emmaüs Disciples**

Mathieu Le Nain (1608-1677). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1645.

**The Emmaüs Pilgrims**

Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1559-1560.

**The Walk to Emmaüs**

Lelio Orsi (1511-1587). The National Gallery. London.

**Kitchen Scene with the Road to Emmaüs and the Supper at Emmaüs**

Workshop of Joachim Beuckelaer (ca. 1533-1575). National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1565.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1570-1610). The National Gallery. London. Around 1595-1600.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1570-1610). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1605 - 1606.

**The Emmaüs Disciples**

Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651). Le Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. 1622.

**Landscape with Christ and the Men of Emmaüs**

Henri Blès (ca.1480-1550). Museum Mayer Van Den Bergh. Antwerp.

**The Walk to Emmaüs**

Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). Schack Galerie. Munich. 1870.

**The Walk to Emmaüs**

Ippolito Scarsella called Scarsellino (ca. 1550-1620). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1590.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871). Pinacoteca Comunale. Faenza. 1807.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656). Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture. Grenoble. 1656.

**The Supper at Emmaüs**

Vincenzo Catena (ca. 1470-1531). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Incredulous Thomas*

### **The Incredulity of Saint Thomas**

Polidoro da Caravaggio (1492-1543). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries – London. 1531-1535.

Thomas was an apostle who is mentioned only a few short times in the Gospels. John calls him the Twin. He is known mostly for having been the apostle who doubted Jesus's appearance after the Resurrection. Thomas had to touch Jesus's wounds to believe. After the Ascension of Christ, Thomas evangelised the Partians, Medes and Persians. He travelled probably as far as India. The Christians of Malabar claim to have been converted by him and they guard his tomb in Mylapore near Madras, Chennai.

The 'Golden Legend' adds of course a wondrous tale, stating that he was in Caesarea when Gundofor, king of India, had sent his provost Abbanes to find an architect. Thomas was miraculously introduced as an architect and Abbanes and Thomas set out for India. Thomas drew up the plans for a magnificent palace and Gundofor gave Thomas money to build it while he was away. But Thomas spent all the money on the poor. When the king returned, he threw Abbanes and Thomas in a dungeon. But the king's brother had a dream of the marvellous palace of gold, silver and precious stones that Thomas had built for Gundofor. Gundofor and his brother then understood what Thomas had done; they threw themselves at the feet of the saint and released him<sup>G49</sup>. Since Thomas was thus known to have built a palace for an Indian king, even be it a spiritual one, he became the patron saint of architects.

His relics seem to have been brought according to the 'Golden Legend' from India to Edessa by Emperor Alexander. There, Abgar, king of Edessa, had received a letter written by the hand of the Lord. Nobody could harm that city because if insurrections were stirred up, a baptised child only had to read the letter standing upon the city walls and thanks to the relics of Thomas the enemy would go away or make peace. From Edessa the relics may have been brought to Ortona in the Italian Abruzzi. But most of these stories are legends, stories that were told over the centuries and of which fragments were written down.

Thomas is the sceptic in the Gospels, not just because of the scene of Jesus's appearance, but also because in another story of John Thomas says, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how would we know the way?'

Pictures of Saint Thomas invariably show the scene of the apostle touching Jesus's stigmata and in particular the wound of the lance thrust in Jesus's side. Two different painters raised in the village of Caravaggio made such pictures. Polidoro Caldara was born there, near Milan, in 1492. He died in Sicily, in Messina, in 1543. His picture of the 'Incredulity of Saint Thomas' dates from around 1531 to 1535. It is a large panel, showing Jesus and the saint in full. Jesus is on the left of the panel, still enveloped in the shroud in which he was put into the tomb. He wears the long banner of the Resurrection, a red cross on a white flag. The staff of the banner also is in the form of a crucifix at the top. Jesus invites Thomas to touch the wound of the lance in his side. Thomas is drawn as a still young man, clad in a red cloak not unlike Jesus's toga.

Thomas touches the wound. The poses of the two figures are noble and Polidoro da Caravaggio has intelligently painted the benevolent curiosity in which both the figures are holding their heads inclined. Jesus's face is well expressed. It is a young face also; it is a sad face that is almost complaining about the suffering of the body. Polidoro has painted Jesus with a muscular body, in full life in order to stress the human appearance. The picture is respectful and dignified by the composition of the two lean men facing each other. It depicts the intimacy of the close act of the incredulity and the touch that finally brought them together. This may well be the only human who touched Jesus after the Resurrection since Jesus warned Mary Magdalene in the 'Noli me Tangere' scene not to touch him lest he be retained on earth.

Somewhat less than a century later the other painter called Caravaggio made a similar picture. This Caravaggio was Michelangelo Merisi. He would become one of the very greatest artists. He may have seen the picture of his namesake. This Caravaggio's picture is more powerful and more intimate, so as to be sensual. Thomas is really probing into the wound and two apostles look as incredulous as Thomas himself. Four heads are locked to close contact in this picture, intent on the act of Thomas. This painting is even more intimate than Polidoro's picture, concentrated totally on the very act of Thomas' incredulity. For this Caravaggio only the real sense of the scene counted and other feelings or considerations were set aside. Whereas Polidoro made a picture for a church, a picture that had to show the dignity of the characters more than the act.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Thomas**

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Around 1625-1630.

**The incredulous Thomas**

Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1570-1610). Stiftung Schlösser and Gärten Potsdam Sanssouci. Potsdam. 1599.

**The Incredulity of Saint Thomas**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. 1613-1615.

**The Incredulity of Saint Thomas**

Gian Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). The National Gallery. London. Around 1621.

**The Altarpiece of Saint Thomas**

The Master of the Altar of Bartholomeus (active 1470-1510). Wallraf-Richartz Museum. Köln. Around 1498-1499.

## *Pentecost*

### **Pentecost**

Juan de Flandes (1465-1519). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

The theme of Pentecost is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles.

When Pentecost day came round, they had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound of a violent wind, which filled the entire house in which they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves.<sup>G38</sup>

The Pentecost scene marks the beginning of the missions of conversion to Christianity of the lands around Palestine. The disciples were suddenly able to speak different languages, a fact that was further stressed as a major miracle in the Acts. Peter makes a long speech that gave the sign of the spreading of Jesus's message.

Juan de Flandes worked in Palencia in Spain. Although immersed in the Spanish tradition, he may have been born in Flanders, as his name could indicate. He may have been born around 1465; he died in Palencia in 1519. He worked at the court of Spain from 1496 to 1504, that is in the period when the reconquista of whole Spain over the Islamists was finished.

Juan de Flandes made a panel of the Pentecost scene, which originated from the Saint Lazarus church of Palencia. The painting shows the Holy Virgin seated as a throning Madonna, in the habits of a nun. She wears the blue maphorion and a white headdress. This headdress is in the same style as the early Flemish painters like Rogier Van Der Weyden and the entire work of de Flandes is very much in this style. A dove, representing the Holy Spirit hovers above the throne of the Madonna and sends its rays over all the figures around, who are not just the apostles but a complete church congregation. All heads are turned upwards to the Holy Spirit. Some figures hold their hands in wonder, others in praying. The Virgin keeps her folded hands straight up, also in a gesture of prayer.

The message of Pentecost was addressed to all people of the earth, so several of the persons present in the scene wear turbans. The Spanish painters knew Islamists intimately, for many were of course still present in Spain in the fifteenth century. Most of these had converted to Christianity and become Moriscos. But they had retained some of their former culture; they continued to wear turbans and veiled their women. By their presence, Juan de Flandes seems to have given a gentle, soothing message of peace and tolerance. Remarkable in this painting also is the non-conformist element of a square column to the left of the frame. By this element one feels to be in a church, so the element adds to the solemnity of the event, but it diverts attention somewhat from the real centre image of the Virgin. The picture is of interest for the historical studies of the evolution of Spanish painting.

Pentecost ended the story of the life of Jesus Christ. Another story started from this point: the story of Christianity. For after Pentecost the disciples were sent out to all corners of the known earth. The early Christian community grew and recorded the extraordinary events of Jesus's life. It will probably always remain a mystery how many of the stories that came to us in the Gospels were historical events and how many were created for the needs of the religious movement itself. We have seen works of artists who arduously believed the New Testament as being the life of a realisation of God. We have seen artists who may have believed less, but who anyhow lived intensely into the scenes that were commissioned to them. Art was Christian for these painters and each gave his vision of the events, be these visions very human or very idealised, showing reality or showing the idea behind the theme. We followed throughout this book these two visions.

*Other Paintings:*

**Pentecost**

Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1526/1527.

**Pentecost**

Andrea Cordeliaghi called Previtali (ca. 1480-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Descent of the Holy Spirit**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

## **Epilogue**

## *Jesus Christ*

### **Face of Jesus**

Georges Rouault (1871-1958). *The Collection of Modern Religious Art – The Vatican, Rome. 1946.*

Jesus Christ remains a mask. A mask of impenetrable mystery. After two thousand years of reflection, of teachings by theologians of various religions, of intense intuitive search into the soul of the events by many artists and after centuries of devote praying the mysteries of Jesus's figure remain.

Who was the Jesus from before Easter, the historical figure? What was he like, how did he move and what moved him? The Jesus from after Easter remains even more elusive. For if we still have tangible images and writings about his public life, his presence after the Resurrection is the central mystic of the Christian religion and exactly this presence founded Christianity. After Easter started the church and the church added meanings after meanings, dogmas and beliefs that were again put to tests and sometimes demolished in history.

Of Jesus remains an outline; of him remain the dark strokes of features of which testify only legends from the beginnings of our times. Nothing more can be expressed than the simple features that come to us from out of the darkness of periods that have left no definite proofs. The artist can only express this mystery and agree that the central theme of Christianity is the question 'Do you believe without historical proof the testimony of a few people whose credibility cannot be challenged anymore with the means of our modern science'.

The face of dark lines comes out of the colours of history. We are not certain what face this is. The features of Jesus were described in a letter written by the Roman Governor of Judaea Publius Lentulus but that letter surfaced only in the fourteenth century. The face of the Sudarium of Veronica might be the right face but there are several Sudarii that are candidate for the true one and the most famous one, the one of the Vatican, may be a false one or a copy. The face might be the face of the mandylion of Edessa but there are also various pictures that could claim to be the mandylion. The Turin Shroud might be this mandylion but our modern science proved the cloth to be of the fourteenth century and no other claim has been peer reviewed. The face of all these images is made of combinations of legends and of credulous hopes assembled over centuries.

It was the face of God and the face of a man.

Jesus was a man. He was first a historical personality that really existed. The writings of his life were compiled from eyewitnesses and from stories added in the first century. Fifty years passed between his death and the first accounts. The writings were of a community of zealous men, all won for the cause, who needed their cause to be popular and to grow. Yet, these scriptures were accepted as divinely inspired first by the Roman Catholic Church and then by all Christians, by most of the Protestant congregations and innumerable sects. The Protestants were most sceptical and open to inquiry, critics, investigation and formulation of hypotheses that diverted from Roman

Catholic dogma. But overall they also venerated the scriptures. From the first century on the faith conquered Europe. For the face of the God was the face of man. The face was known or guessed, the life of the man was a historical truth. The man had claimed to be the Son of God.

Europe accepted the faith eagerly. It offered transcendence, spirituality, hope and solace for the suppressed and the poor. The new faith acclaimed extraordinary, epic feats. It supported conquest and expansion. European man was not alone on his travels or strives. The Emmaüs theme of the personal God that accompanied always the isolated idealist allowed man to surpass himself. Europeans were allowed in the name of Jesus and his mighty apostle James to fight the infidel and that meant an outlet for its energies. The Popes required conversion to Catholicism. This only enforced and legalised the Europeans' drive for adventure and conquest of territories, the urge that had remained in the people that had wandered over thousands of kilometres to settle in the continent of dramatic landscapes open on all sides to the seas. Europeans navigated over all the unknown seas, confiding their hopes in their God. In the God that had become a personal God and thus was ever present, always accompanied anyone on the perilous voyages. All the navigators threw their lots to the transcendent God Jesus and set off, confident that they were seeking God in the India to which the apostle Matthew had preceded them and to Africa where Prester John had founded a kingdom.

All the conquests were made in the knowledge of the unambiguous message of love of Jesus. This message had appealed to the masses that were in misery. Throughout the centuries, no feeling appealed more to the Europeans; no feeling more seemed out of this world and thus inspired by God. Love meant transcendence of the highest level and Jesus told only that one feeling could save. Many cruel wars were fought on the continent. The Hundred Year War, the Thirty Year War, the wars of Louis XIV, the Napoleonic Wars, the First and Second World War. Endemic plague and misery killed millions. Only the teaching of love helped sustain the masses. The face of mystery promised love and love always was sought after, the emotion that would in the end always prevail and be craved for. For no society can thrive, support and enforce itself without love. Far more than any other aspect the love appealed to Europeans. That is why there are far more pictures of the Virgin Mary than of any other theme of spirituality. Love meant mutual support, the believe in a better and sweeter world of peace. Love meant compassion and social institutions like the Venetian scuoli. It meant the glue that kept society together. It was the protective maphorion under which all could find shelter.

The figure of God was very present, clear and powerful in the first books of the old Bible. Then its voice waned, the actions and the involvement of God in the great conquests of people less obvious. After centuries of silence, recounted in Jewish history, centuries during which the cries of the Prophets became ever more desperate and their longing for a Messiah ever greater, suddenly God came again on the scene amidst an oppressed society of pious believers. Before the advent of Jesus it was as if the reasoning and logic of the Greek Philosophers and the Roman practical engineers and politicians pushed the myths in the background. But in historical times the face of God appeared in a person who called himself the Son of God. Suddenly for many there was again the clear and bright face. Then came the centuries of dogma, of

exaltation and glorification without restraint and doubt. The face was known by then and portraits witnessed. These were the Sudarii and the mandylions.

Then the face of God retreated once more in the shadows.

Our modern reasoning, logic and scepticism prevailed since the Enlightenment period. Scientific and historical investigation examined the portraits and checked the historical veracity of the accounts. Scientists enforced with the authority of objectivity, doubted all, proved nothing and disproved nothing but explained the processes of how man could have been urged to believe in myths, needed a God image for personal comfort and as a psychological anchor to drive his adventures. Religion was explained as being the expression of man's own needs for social co-existence and these needs were maybe imposed in his gene information by an evolution of thousands of years. Transcendence and spiritualism were not necessary anymore. The face became stripped of its most marked features. It was the face of the moral messages, but secular humanism also could define a solid basis for morality. It was the face of protection but the materialism of the late twentieth century years could provide for all in a European and North American welfare society and thus it was proven that man himself could build such a protected society. In a world of growing welfare a personal God of solace was less and less necessary.

The face of Jesus had proclaimed love to be the highest transcendental value, but also this feeling was relativised and recuperated finally by the lay philosophers who introduced it in their writings. What remained were the dark outlines of a face that contained no power but that was the face of a god reclining in the darkness. And of course, the existence of a god was no longer necessary in the minds of materialistic wealthy societies of man who started to conquer space. So the face again receded to the background so that as in Georges Rouault's picture only the dark lines remained as a few black strokes, as a far memory.

Whether one believes in a God and in Jesus Christ is an act of faith. The existence of God cannot be proven and cannot be disproved by our science and our reasoning and logic. Faith is an act of individual intuition. Maybe people with the greatest sensibility feel the presence more clearly than others do. Among these were certainly the great genius artists that made images of their personal Jesus.

Georges Rouault was one of those artists who believed. He was born in Paris in 1871, in a France that was ever more secularised but in which faith also continued to be lived passionately. At fourteen years old he was apprenticed to an artisan who worked with glass and who restored medieval stained glass windows. One may have remarked how Rouault's face of Jesus was painted with the thick black lines of the lead linings of gothic stained glass cathedral windowpanes. Rouault was a Christian and a Roman Catholic. He was deeply influenced by the spiritualism of Gustave Moreau, a French Symbolist painter. A well-known episode of Rouault's life was his stay in 1901 in the monastery of Ligugé. Ligugé was probably the oldest monastery of France, even though its buildings are modern now. Ligugé still exists today, it is situated just south of the city of Poitiers and it has a workshop of enamel jewellery and works of art that still produces Rouault's designs.

Rouault was not recognised at first, his expressionist art too alien and new. He prepared scenes and costumes for the ballet 'The Prodigal Son' of Serge Diaghilev, and here at least is a small connection with Chagall. Rouault had to wait until the middle of the 1920's before large exhibitions were organised of his work. He designed stained glass windows for the Church of Plateau d'Assy and his 'Holy Face' was reproduced in a tapestry for the Chapel of Hem. Slowly, Rouault's art was accepted and he became famous. He died in 1958 in Paris.

One of the major works of Georges Rouault is a series of fifty-eight drawings in black and white. He made the series during a crucial period of his artistic production, from 1922 to 1927. The inspiration of his drawings may originate from the horrors of World War I, but Rouault handled all subjects in figures. The first part consisting of thirty-three drawings is called 'Miserere', the following twenty-five ones are called 'War' but the whole series is now presented under the first name in the Museum of La Rochelle. One of the major Catholic works of our era is thus most cherished in what was once the most fervent Protestant town of France. 'Miserere' was made from 1922 to 1923, 'War' mostly from 1926 to 1927. Many drawings were modified subsequently and Rouault only presented them to the public in 1946-1947, even only after World War II. Miserere is a reflection on God. It is a confrontation between God and the human nature. God and man are shown in suffering, in pain and in passion, drawn in only the fast thick, black strokes of mind-images. 'Miserere' is a work full of humanity, a cry for help and humble recognition of the bewilderment of man confronted with the suffering of life. 'Miserere' is the ultimate work of the artist faced with the impossibility to understand the nature of a God of love confronted with human suffering. This hearth-tearing fight inspired also other artists to large series of works of art. The greatest artist of all was probably Francisco de Goya y Lucientes who made his 'Caprichos' and 'Desastres de la Guerra'. Like Goya's drawings, Rouault's work is all bitterness, but Rouault's drawings always carry a hope that Goya had abandoned. Therefore the title of Rouault's work was 'Miserere Nobis', or 'Help us Lord'.

Why have all the qualities that made Jesus Christ for centuries the leader of European man's thoughts and of European society disappeared? The belief in the leadership of the image and of the Christian churches has waned. The predominance of the clergy lay in its claim of managing more information than common man manages. The church clergy knew more than its members did. Its hierarchy claimed intimate knowledge of the spiritual world so that priests and bishops and monks received some of the divine qualities. But that difference in knowledge has disappeared and thus the additional quality. The information gap was closed by the philosophers of the eighteenth century who forced man into knowledge by science and rational thinking. A contemporary individual cannot believe anymore that a church hierarchy knows more about God than he or her. Each of us as individuals of the twenty-first century knows about as much about God as the church priests and bishops. This may be a powerful thought. But it means also that each stands alone without the comfort of a teacher and of a leader. We are confronted each for himself or herself with the decision to believe or not in a religion, in the Bible, in absolute freedom. We have to live in the certainty that there is no priest with the absolute certainty.

It may well be that the number of believers in Christianity or in any other religion dwindles because of fear of that freedom and of its consequences. It is easier not to

believe than to believe because the consequences of not to believe are more simple and more easy. In any case more simple than believing a Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God because that means living to super-human rules and principles as proclaimed by Jesus. No man or woman can be such a saint. But one thing is certain. With the disappearance of the information gap between the church hierarchy and common man the role of that hierarchy has to change from the traditional roles. The role of teaching, of promulgating and of distributing the information remains. But that role will have to be exercised in humility and steadfastness.

What then remains of the appeal and of the truths of Christendom? The belief or lack of belief remains. In the absolute freedom of choice for the believers lie a glory and a beauty that is as compelling as it was in the fifteenth century.

In the end, in our modern society of absolute freedom of choice the only differentiation in any choice will be aesthetics. Aesthetics of thoughts increasingly leads young people to religion as an individual choice. In this book we have shown some of the aesthetics that were linked with Christianity, not just in images, but also in thought. The greatest painters of the centuries from 1200 to the present demonstrated the aesthetics of the beliefs and thoughts, of the marvellous ethics of Christian religion by which could be lived. The Italian Renaissance idealised and divinised man more than any other period and that spirit shaped European civilisation more than the more realist, earthy images of northern Europe.

Pope Julius II was right after all. Here was a figure of overpowering genius who understood fundamentally how the most forceful appeals to humans, beauty and art, would and could lead to Christianity. He had used the sword, money and the word but in the end he must have understood that only aesthetics, the beauty led the people in the most effective way to God. He called to him the greatest artists of his century and by a strange chance of fate these proved to be the greatest geniuses of history. But in doing that Julius II and other Popes also created the largest schism that Christianity would know for the excesses that were needed to realise the glory of European Catholicism in beauty proved too expensive, too un-human. These Popes gave dominance to ideas and the realist spirit of northern Europe clashed with the southern culture.

Where then does the freedom come from? Christians have an answer that also explains the mystery of Christ. Freedom is because God has not entirely revealed himself. If the revelation had been complete there would have been no freedom. How free would we have been in the absolute certainty of the existence of a God interfering in our lives and our decisions?

If Jesus Christ had appeared in our times he would have been examined with all the artefacts and methods of our modern science. He would have been dissected in flesh and thoughts. It would have been established without a logical doubt whether God sent him or not. Jesus appeared in a moment of history when these modern tools of investigation did not yet exist, but at the same time when humanity had evolved far enough for history writing and written accounts. And he appeared in a people, the Jews, with a tradition of historical writing. But again, herein lies no proof of Jesus's divine nature for Christianity may have occurred exactly then because the time was ripe for it. Many other religions sprang from these centuries.

Jesus lived in times from which we have a picture, a written mask made by the people who lived with him. That picture and mask comes out of the dark but it has clear outlines as Rouault's visages of Christ.

A well-known description of the face of Jesus was given in a Latin text dating from the thirteenth century. The text was supposedly written as a letter by a man called Lentulus, a Roman official of Jesus's times, written during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. The letter describes Jesus as a tall and handsome man, with long, smooth hair the colour of unripe hazel-nut, falling onto Jesus's shoulders and parted in the middle in the fashion of the Nazarenes. His face was fair, though it could be reddened by the sun. Jesus had a beard, forked a little at the chin, but not a long beard, and of the same colour as his hair. His face looked mature and he had flashing, clear, grey eyes. Jesus never laughed. He was grave and reserved in talk. The letter is most probably a legend, but it shows how people thought of Jesus in the Middle Ages and this image has remained real in our mind. Rouault showed a more vague, inner picture of emotions.

If you don't believe in a God and in Jesus, you may have gained several insights from this book. You may better understand how important the influence of Christian religion was on society and how this influence continues through some of the most beautiful messages of goodness and solidarity. You may have gained respect for the emotions of the artists. You may have grasped the importance of Christian spirituality in the European societies from 1200 to 1700 certainly and then its diminishing role until our times. For the period after 1700 you may have read about the constant struggles between spiritualism and materialism, between State and Church. But you may still have seen how spirituality and transcendent values such as love never disappeared, always remained present in the minds of artists and thus of society. You will enjoy the grandeur of the visions humans can have, as you may have seen how artists also brought images of Jesus in everyday life. You may not have found God but you may have followed a path of reflection and of spirituality. You will know the marvellous poetic images that extraordinary humans can bring to life when they have a generous belief. And maybe you will find comfort in knowing that the artists created paradigms of thought that influenced generations. You may better understand the power of the values proclaimed by Jesus and how these influenced our history.

If you believe in a God you will probably feel comforted in the knowledge that you stand in the company of some of the most marvellous and intelligent people of history. You will like it to know that you can stand next to Michelangelo Buonarroti, Tiziano Vecellio, Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, Charles Le Brun, and Georges Rouault. You who have read and admired until this page will very probably know that these painters also thought and doubted their religion and their image of God but always chose the exaltation in the end. You will know that you need not be ashamed for your belief and you can relish the sensitivity expressed in the pictures. You will have the spirituality of feeling united with nature as an added force. You will know that the values proposed and offered by Jesus and the early Christian community form a powerful basis to arrange your life by, just as the artists expressed altruism and

goodness far more than ugliness and violence. Love is the only value and only love is enough.

*Other Paintings:*

**The face of Christ**

Master Bertram (1330/1340-1414/1415). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Madrid. Ca. 1395-1410.

**The red Christ**

Lovis Corinth (1858-1925). Pinakothek der Moderne. Munich. 1922.

**Salvator Mundi**

Marco d'Oggiorio (ca. 1475-1530). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1500.

**Salvator Mundi**

Baccio della Porte called Fra' Bartolommeo (1472-1517). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**Man of Sorrows**

Hans Pleydenwurff (ca. 1420-1472). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

**The Head of Christ**

Antonio Allegri called Correggio (ca. 1489/1494 – 1534). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1525-1530.

**The Face of Christ**

Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1431-1506). Museo Civico. Correggio. Ca. 1493.