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## Christian Iconography: A Search for Form in the Paintings of Kaul and Others

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*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY: A SEARCH FOR FORM IN  
THE PAINTINGS OF KAUL AND OTHERS

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by

Marlin R. Kaul

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A Creative Study  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education  
Mankato State College

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Mankato, Minnesota

June 1967

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Plant Introduction Station

Subject

*Handwritten text, possibly "Ficus religiosa"*

1952

## LIST OF SLIDES

This creative study is supplemented by slides of the writer's personal paintings. These paintings are discussed in Chapter IV.

### SLIDE

1. The Last Judgment
2. The Entombment
3. St. Michael and His Horn
4. The Annunciation I
5. St. Michael Wrestling
6. Last Judgment II
7. Creation of Adam
8. It Is Finished
9. Moses and The Brazen Serpent
10. Gray Veiling
11. The Sixth Hour
12. My Cross
13. The Descent From the Cross
14. Black Cross Station
15. Veils



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Objective and subjective reality can be recorded in many different ways. One might ask, however, how or to what extent objective reality is separated from the object. It is known that the object can be treated as a formal element, without free invention. It is also known that the object can be picturesquely descriptive if it is reduced to relationships of volumes and tones organized in accordance with the requirements of the canvas.

In contemporary works of art, a reference to material things in which the object is neither stylized nor distorted, but reduced to a sign or a hieroglyph, can be observed. Most often, the beholder is unaware of the source in reality that is present in the paintings. Probably one of the most important reasons why nonrepresentational art is so widespread and so persistent within a culture that was in no way prepared for it is that there is no limit to the independent form and color signs that can be invented.<sup>1</sup>

In the writer's opinion, the artist must be in contact with nature and must have awareness of the interaction between perception and expression. The problem consists of developing a sensation into an expression of an idea that can go to any remarkable degree of abstraction but relates nevertheless to the original object.

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<sup>1</sup>Marcel Brion and Others, Art Since 1945, (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1962), p. 18.

## I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The vastness and diversity of the problems confronting a painter when he chooses to depart from traditional representation results in many different and valid solutions. Each painter must choose a discipline that corresponds to his own thinking and means of expressing his own thinking.

The writer creates paintings having cosmic-like feelings, in which the object is transposed into pictorial constructions; natural forms become energetic forms. The color neither describes nor suggests the object but discovers essences. An abstract quality is being developed which is directly from nature, reducing the object to a highly personal perception. "This attempt to arrive at the soul of the universe through emotions, without traditionally representing the objects, leads to an art which may be called religious in a narrow sense."<sup>2</sup> The abstract form can express the sacred, the divine, because it has shed the objectivity of the traditional and has taken a new form expressing emotions, by varied means, relating to the religious object.

The writer has selected the problem, Christian Iconography: A Search for Form in the Paintings of Kaul and Others, because the writer has developed a personal statement that is not only a visual or esthetic aspect of religious art, but is an attempt to find and give form to the truth of existence. "It is the painter's duty to search his inner

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.



being for inspiration and to render visible those impressions and conceptions not themselves visible."<sup>3</sup>

## II. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The artist in search of form in any subject must use his personal empathy with themes which directly involve his own consciousness and his own spirit. The artist, then, must rely on his personal feelings and his constructive imagination, through which controlled and significant interaction with spiritual content is translated into creative works of art.

## III. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The writer will present only selected aspects dealing with the historical development of Christian art from early Christian art through the Christian art of the Renaissance. Also, the writer will consider only psychological, spiritual, and symbolic aspects which have appeared throughout history in Christian art and which are applicable to the writer's statement. It should be noted that no works of the writer prior to 1966 will be considered. It was not until early 1966 that the artist really discovered the potential of the religious form statement. From this time, the artist developed a personal direction in his effort to pursue significant Christian themes.

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<sup>3</sup>C. R. Morey, Christian Art, (New York: W. W. Horton and Company, Inc., 1935), p. 55.

#### IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

In the subsequent chapters the writer will relate (1) the historical significance of Christian art and show relationships of philosophies as to content and form in religious paintings; (2) the inclusion of an analysis of his paintings in relation to Christian Iconography and a discussion of the extent to which historical content and symbolism have influenced his work; and (3) observations of his work compared with contemporary painting.

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN ART

The treatment of a universal theme in contemporary art, such as Christian Iconography, had its beginnings early in Western Civilization. It is necessary to understand some of the familiar symbols of Christian art as they have appeared since antiquity, and as they apply to this study.

The earliest Christian art was not a style in a technical or chronological sense, but a borrowing of existing pagan forms. Pagan converts to Christianity used old motifs, changing only the context and not the outward form of the emblem. Converts to Christianity acted as intermediaries between pagan and Christian ideas, helping to develop a new single expression. The figurative art of the classic tradition was taken over by the early Christians, but the use by the early Christian artist of the figure revealed an absence of robustness and lack of sensitivity.<sup>3</sup> This was probably due to the fact that the attitude of the Christians was toward earthly things. Old Testament themes were used most frequently at first, for they were better known than New Testament themes. The New Testament was scarcely written when Christian art began. The Old Testament had been translated into Latin long before the Christian era; its themes were known and its stories told in the Jewish colonies of every city of the Roman world.

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<sup>3</sup>Jean Anne Vincent, History of Art (in The College Outline Series. New York: Barnes and Nobel, Inc., 1955), p. 48-49.

Because of their hope for the resurrection of the body, early Christians favored the custom of inhumation rather than the classical custom of cremation.<sup>4</sup> Burial in catacombs became a vital area in which artists could maintain their work. The paintings were executed by unionized groups of decorators--men who painted only a certain aspect of a painting such as a head or a tree. As a result there is repetition of image types; the Oran--soul of the dead entering into eternal life, the grape harvest signifying change in nature and the theme for the resurrection, the Peacock--favorite symbol of eternal life, and the healed paralytic taking up his bed and walking. Magic wand motifs such as Moses striking water from a rock and Christ raising the dead Lazarus were consistently popular. The paintings in the Christian catacombs became a highly decorative art after neglecting perspective in favor of patterned concentric circles and trapezoidal fields.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the West, beginning in the fourth century, became Byzantine. The reasons for this were twofold: the Iconoclastic Controversy and a standardized treatment of Old and New Testament themes. The standardizing of the themes of the New Testament coincided with the standardizing of its text. Both processes were the result of the pressure of the Graeco-Asiatic church upon the rest of the Christian world. The source of authority for Old Testament iconography was Alexandria, while for the New Testament it was nearer Asia. This produced a difference in the two

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<sup>4</sup>Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 49-50.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50-51.



sections of Biblical illustration that was never completely obliterated, the one preserving its spiritual and picturesque landscape, and the other inclining toward a neutral setting for the Gospel episodes which finally issued in the plain gold background of Byzantine mosaics.<sup>6</sup>

The Iconoclastic Controversy involved the basic issue of the relationships of the human and divine in the person of Christ, while socially and politically it reflected a power struggle between state and church. Had the Edict been enforceable, it might have dealt art a serious blow. It did succeed in increased production of sacred images. During the Iconoclastic Controversy one of the chief arguments in favor of sacred images was the claim that Christ himself permitted St. Luke to paint his portrait. These original "true" sacred images were supposedly the source of later man made ones. This helps explain how men came to believe in the origin of sacred pictures. Because of the veneration in which they were held, icons had to conform to strict formal rules with fixed patterns that were repeated over and over again. As a result, the majority of the icons became known for exacting craftsmanship rather than for artistic inventiveness.

At its best, Byzantine art is the richest expression of Christian dogma, not faith, for it was based upon intellectual and Greek concepts rather than upon purely emotional apprehensions. Byzantine art is one of the great creative styles, despite aspects which seem reduced to mere formulas.

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<sup>6</sup>C. R. Morey, Christian Art, (New York: W. W. Horton and Co., 1935), p. 13.



The amalgamation of barbarian traditions working upon Christianity is typified in Romanesque art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. There was, surprisingly enough, inter-communication among the arts. Due to the influence of the monastic orders, these centuries constitute a creatively unified period. In general, the greatest artistic achievements of this era are the manuscript illuminations, in which total decorative patterns diminished in contrast to literal interpretations or illustration of the Byzantine period. While not having any set standards or characteristics, Romanesque art began to flourish over a wide geographical area, reflecting purely religious aspects of life. It expressed the naturalistic traditions and demonstrated the great energy inherent in the wandering people before they settled down and formed nations.

The growing wealth of the towns, the power and patronage of the church and nobility, and a new secular vitality combined to create the Gothic art.<sup>7</sup> Many factors influenced the balance that made Gothic the culmination of the medieval and Christian style in art.

Three periods comprised the Gothic era bringing it from the magnificence of the cathedral through a period of decline leading to superficiality to a period of Gothic realism in which the emphasis changes from a congregational point of view to that of the individual, and from a symbolic setting for natural objects to a real one.<sup>8</sup>

The style discussed in the following paragraphs is based primarily

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>8</sup>Morey, op. cit., p. 56.

on the Italian Renaissance. The art of the preceding period may not be ignored, however, for it is at this time that the great traditions of the Italian Renaissance were formed and gained momentum.

The "schools" of painting that developed in the High Renaissance were based largely on important artistic personalities. One should consider the High Renaissance in terms of individuals rather than geographical locations. The two giants of the High Renaissance were Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

It was da Vinci's mastery of the technical and theoretical artistic problems which made him create new style and form. The "Last Supper" synthesized all the artistic problems in the art of painting. It remains the most inspiring religious expression of the Renaissance.

Michelangelo identified God with the creative artist in the Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco. His artistic style is based upon the craft and esthetics of sculpture, and was the basic principle motivating his painting, for both had plastic rather than pictorial qualities.

Religious themes continued to flourish as the basis for most painting. The problems of Iconography, during the Renaissance in particular, are interesting in that early writers suggest classical art was overthrown at the beginning of the Christian era, and that it did not revive until it served as the foundation of the Renaissance Style.<sup>9</sup>

The Reformation had a very significant influence on painting. Protestants were critical of the church's veneration of its numerous

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<sup>9</sup>Albert E. Elsen, Purposes of Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), p. 22.

martyrs. To affirm the sacred act of the martyr and to encourage world-wide missionary work, Roman Catholic artists were enjoined to recount the historical sacrifice of the martyrs.<sup>10</sup>

When artists painted religious subjects they were attentive to the spirit of the theme. So important was the counter-Reformation concept of the religious union that an increasing number of churches had their vaults painted in grandiose compositions that permitted the faithful to look upward directly into heaven, the message being that to the faithful, heaven is directly accessible. It was necessary to give the common man direct knowledge of his God. Caravaggio intended his painting for the least sophisticated and humblest viewer. The miraculous can occur without angels, halos, or an opening of the skies. He involved the viewer more intimately in the scene through foreshortening of gestures and precarious balance of objects in his paintings. Many church officials, and it would seem the general public, found Caravaggio's painting vulgar, lacking in decorum, and unnecessarily impoverishing the holy personages. Caravaggio's work was also condemned for not being self-explanatory.<sup>11</sup> To those unacquainted with the story, the "Last Supper" may have seemed like a secular event. And, in fact, the seventeenth century was to see a further obscuring of the lines that separated religious from secular painting.

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<sup>10</sup>Vincent, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>11</sup>Eisen, op. cit., p. 111-112.



## CHAPTER III

### ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN ART IN THE MODERN WORLD

Secular painting resists strict limitations. It may overlap into spiritual art, allegory, or historical painting.

The art of the modern world, despite its individualistic variety, forms a distinct unit quite apart from pagan art of the ancient epoch and the Christian expression of the Middle Ages.

There are certain unifying characteristics of the art of the modern world despite the prevalence of remarkably individual forms within a given style. There is a parallelism between the great currents of thought and the currents of artistic creation, a parallelism that characterizes all periods in the history of art. It is a natural, biological, and spontaneous parallelism that is interpreted through two tendencies of contemporary art. One is dramatic realism, whose subject is the spectacle of human situations, and the other is abstraction, creating an absolute and absolutely new reality, freed from real objectivity.<sup>12</sup>

Another feature coordinating the art of the modern world is the artist's knowledge of, interest in, and dependence upon the artistic productions of the past and of other cultures. This element is as important today among most contemporary artists as it was in the Renaissance, perhaps even more so.

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<sup>12</sup>Marcel Brion and others, Art Since 1945 (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), p. 15.

Artists have preconceived ideas relating to religious themes because associations are made with already existing paintings. The writer finds, then, that artists must rely on their personal feelings and constructive imagination in which controlled content and significant inter-relationships are established.

The artist must have a message to convey. Mere mastery of form should not be his goal, but rather the adaption of form to inner content. Every great work of art comes out of inner necessity.<sup>13</sup>

The artist may use any form to express himself. All means are sacred when called upon by inner necessity. The artist is not only justified in using any form necessary for his purposes, but it is his duty to do so. What impels an artist to work in a form statement derived from Biblical texts? The question arises as to whether a "pure" art exists, an art generally conceived in the subconscious resources of the artist, and of whether he need ever refer to visual objects for his inspiration. In other words, is the artist dependent on perception for the creative act? The answer must be left open.

When drawing upon Biblical associations the artist is working against tradition and preconceived images and ideas. The artist must not let his vision simply decide what is to be, but let the emotions dictate the feelings of the artist. "Painting is a mystery, a form of communication with the subconscious drawing toward a visual imagery the

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<sup>13</sup>John Dewey, Art as Experience, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), p. 326.



artist never knew existed."<sup>14</sup> The "creation" itself is a mystery. Each painting should be a statement of one's own inner needs, desires and personal associations. Styles in painting grow out of the necessities of mood and imaginative content. Form is merely the shape taken by content. Where content is subjective and personal, new forms will emerge.

It is necessary to give thought to the mysteries and accidental areas that confront the artist in a painting. The writer gives serious thought to such areas and treats them as matters for exploration. Patterns are studied, and shapes, forms, and moods emerge from out of them into a personal statement.

In an obscure and puzzling way, the artist develops a work of art. As it gains a life of its own, it becomes an entity, an independent spiritual life . . . It is, therefore, not simply a phenomenon created casually and inconsequentially indifferent to spiritual life. Instead as a living being, it possesses creative active forces. It lives, has power, and actually forms a spiritual atmosphere . . . If it is too weak in its form, it is impotent to cause any kind of spiritual vibration.<sup>15</sup>

Form is the shape of content.<sup>16</sup> Numbers have symbolically been used as an expression of form. The number three appears everywhere in religious art. When the trinity arose in Christian theology, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, it was a new form-generating concept. The vastness of the iconography of the number three alone is staggering: the

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<sup>14</sup>Brion, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Ben Shahn, The Shape of Content, (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 80-81.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

trptych, the trefoil window, three angels interwoven, three fishes interwoven, three legs interwoven, three horses interwoven, the division of churches into three, the division of hymns into three, and the effort to compose pictures into threefold design.<sup>17</sup>

The numbers alone would be a vast and immense study as they arose out of Christian legend. Consider, however, the iconography in the Lion for Mark, the Ox for Matthew, the Lamb, Serpent, Phoenix, and Peacock, each of which has special meaning. Symbols of keys and daggers and crosses all challenge the artist to new kinds of invention.

Religious art has manifested itself in styles between Neo-realism and Symbolism. Alfred Manessier said, "It is to the extent that the artist bans himself in his own essential, spiritual reality that he arrives at and revitalizes the external reality of the world."<sup>18</sup> Since the liturgy of many Christian religious services consists of a succession of moments in which intimate contact is established between the worshiper and the Sacrament, between man and God, the plastic projection of the emotional state determines Manessier's forms and colors. He represents epiphany, a supernatural revelation.

The artist, in search of form in Christian religion, must use his personal associations with themes which directly involve his own consciousness and his own spirit. Themes are accessible to us through long

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Maurice Grosser, The Painter's Eye, (New York: The New American Library, 1951), p. 87.

associations and traditions, as well as through the paintings of others.

True art is founded upon constructive imagination in which controlled content and significant interrelationships are established. Art belongs to the spirit and partakes of the nature of religion. Creation in art is as unexplainable as creation in nature.<sup>19</sup>

A painter mingles with the world about him. As a participant he moves sleepwalker like, in and through and with the forces of its reality, submitting to the experiences with the deep and terrifying forces of the inner spirit, of its magnitude at one time overpowering, sustaining and elevating, demanding and creating in him courage and faith, then when he finds himself in the pit--in the arena--the spectator as well as the gladiator, before a frightening spectacle, at once terrifying and magnificent, how can he help the manifestation of his terror, anguish, and suffering and how these interpenetrate, one with another. It is then that the great impact must be transposed into a created vision--ennobled, solemnized, ordered and impregnated by the qualities of his sensibilities into color related to color, to light, to line, and all of it directed toward some majestic form, a symphonic structure, the metaphoric transfiguration of it all.<sup>20</sup>

Painting, then, becomes a very difficult thing; it absorbs the whole man, body and soul.

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<sup>19</sup>Brion, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Grosser, op. cit., p. 87.



The design of the study. The preceding chapters have included discussion of many facets of religious art. No attempt was made to analyze works, only to introduce philosophies of content and their relationships to form. In the next chapter the writer's work will be analyzed in relation to symbolism, content, philosophies and similarities that have occurred in the works of others.

Each section will be divided into several parts: (1) the theme or content of the painting, (2) the technique of the artist, and (3) a discussion of each painting, comparing the form statement and its spiritual content.

William de Kooning said:

Painting holds up the mirror to man's life, not only to that of the artist but to the spectator as well. The painting of our century has nothing to envy the painting of past centuries. The younger men take over from their elders, assimilating their lessons, but modifying and enlarging on them all the while, as they work out a style of their own aspirations and themselves make history.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Brion, op. cit., p. 322.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL PAINTINGS

The following chapter contains an analysis of fifteen of the writer's major works of art. It should be noted that all information concerning symbolism in Christian art was obtained exclusively from Signs and Symbols in Christian Art by George Ferguson, Oxford University Press, New York, 1961.

All of the major works of art discussed in the following chapter have been recorded in slide form and can be obtained from the Art Department for the reader's benefit.

The Last Judgment. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. The Nicene Creed, the statement of Christian belief, asserts that Christ shall return in glory to judge both the living and the dead. In art, the last judgment has been shown from the simple Biblical scene of the separation of the sheep and the goats to the highly imaginative interpretations of later Renaissance paintings. Usually two stories are depicted. Heaven: Seated upon banks of clouds, the ranks of the elect are introduced to the everlasting happiness of eternal life in a richly flowered garden. Hell: Hell was sometimes shown as a dragon's mouth into which demons and lost souls were descending. At times the Infernal City was shown filled with fire and smoke. Frequently, Heaven and Hell are shown as separate compositions. The writer has attempted to show both concepts of Heaven and Hell through the use of advancing forms and receding shadows. The



color yellow dominates the whole composition. Its symbolic meaning is twofold. A golden yellow suggests the Divinity, symbolizing the sacredness of that which is depicted. On the other hand, yellow in a muted shade suggests degradation and infernal light. Red has been suggested in areas of the painting to associate the color with fire, which in the church's season of Pentecost, commemorates the coming of Christ. The painting is composed of bone forms which are the dead; shadows which signify the damned and linear outlines of the living. All are gathered together by Christ with a sweeping motion of his arm. The arrows are used to suggest a spiritual weapon, dedicated to the service of God. In this case, the downward arrow suggests the fall of the soul, and the upward pointing arrow suggests deliverance from the grasp of damnation.

The Entombment. 1967. Acrylic on canvas. This scene describes the actual burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathaea. Some versions also show Nicodemus present at the burial, in accordance with the Gospel of St. John. The place of burial was a new tomb hewn out of rock. St. Matthew states that it was a tomb which Joseph had prepared in anticipation of his own death. After the entombment, the sepulcher was closed by a great stone which sealed it.

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and departed.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>The Holy Bible, (New York: Collins' Clear-Type Press, 1949), p. 32.

The colors in the painting are primarily browns and whites. The brown suggests the hewn rock and also suggests spiritual death. White, especially when it is used in the body of Christ, suggests purity and holiness of life. In the early Christian period the clergy wore white. This color has remained in liturgical use for Christmas, Easter, and Ascension. The cloth that Christ is lying on represents the scarlet robe, the emblem of Christ's suffering and death.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe . . . and led him away to crucify him.<sup>23</sup>

The monogram, XP, contains the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ. The combination of the two letters of the monogram gives the form of a cross, illustrated in Figure 1. It was painted in reverse to suggest the back of the robe or underside. The geometric



FIGURE 1

A GREEK MONOGRAM WHOSE LETTERS GIVE  
THE FORM OF A CROSS

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 31.



design that appears on the right side of the painting is derived from decoration on an early Christian tomb mosaic.

St. Michael and His Horn. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. St. Michael is an archangel. Archangels are often used in scenes of the Last Judgment because they are the protectors of the church militant on earth. In this painting, Michael is blowing his horn to summon the "quick and the dead" for final judgment. Michael is usually shown as a majestic figure and richly robed. His wings are large and many colored. His right hand is extended in salutation and benediction. The colors have no special symbolic meaning except the many colors suggest the confusion and turmoil that certainly will be prevalent on that day.

The Annunciation I. 1966. Ink on bristol board. This ink painting contains three figures. St. Gabriel, the archangel; Mary, the mother of Christ; and Joseph, the husband of Mary, are all portrayed. Gabriel is the angel who is called the angel of the annunciation, in the Bible:

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came unto her, and said, Hail, thou that are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.<sup>24</sup>

Gabriel has taken the shape of a lily as the symbol of the purity of the virgin. The Virgin is the more prominent person and the superior

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

being. In many earlier scenes of the Annunciation painted during the Renaissance, the Archangel, Gabriel, holds a lily. Because of this, the lily has become an attribute of the Archangel Gabriel. In ancient times, unmarried women wore their hair loose and long. This is suggested in the left portion of the painting to symbolize the virginity of Mary. Joseph appears in the background as a lesser person. He too was told by Gabriel that Mary was with child.

St. Michael Wrestling. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. St. Michael is the guardian of the redeemed in Christendom against his old adversary the Prince of Hell. The representations of St. Michael, the archangel, in the Renaissance era were many. He is usually depicted as young and beautiful, and most often clothed in a dazzling coat. Most frequently he is doing battle with Satan, who is sometimes represented as a serpent. The painting of St. Michael Wrestling is a painting made up of segments. St. Michael is shown in the left area as a person clothed in white, a symbol of purity and holiness, while Satan's angels are portrayed in red, symbolic, in this case, of hate. Satan's head appears in the lower portion of the painting as a detachment from any earthly body. This would suggest that he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. St. Michael carries the sword of a warrior to symbolize the victory over the Prince of Hell.

Last Judgment II. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. This painting is similar to the Last Judgment I explained in the preceding pages. However, several differences can be noted. Christ, here, is still

gathering the bones and shadows of the dead, as he did in the earlier painting. A hand extends out from the bottom center of the painting to suggest a gathering of the viewer as well. In the early days of Christian art the presence of the Almighty was frequently indicated by a hand issuing from a cloud that hid the majesty of God, which "no man could behold and live."<sup>25</sup> The hand is sometimes shown closed or grasping some object, but is often shown open with three fingers extended, the symbol of the trinity. The center of the painting contains a circular motif suggesting the everlasting God, "Who was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end."<sup>26</sup> This circular motif contains the fleeting figures of living persons. This would suggest that the Resurrection will be for the living as well as the dead. Wheat is portrayed in the left area of the painting to symbolize the bread of the Eucharist.

Creation of Adam. 1967. Ink on bristol board. The creation of Adam, the first man, is thus described in Genesis, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."<sup>27</sup> This painting is one of a series depicting the creation and especially the creation of man. Adam, here, is emerging from the earth, the vines and the clay that constituted

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 8.



his body are still clinging to him. He has taken definite form in certain areas while some areas still remain vague and disorganized. Adam is portrayed as having a struggle as well it might be. Man, from the day of creation, has had to struggle to escape the bonds of damnation and the bonds of destruction. Life, then, as is art, is a struggle that is never ending. There is no known symbolism in this painting, but rather a growing and expanding statement.

It Is Finished. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. This painting is not as literal in its presentation as the earlier works discussed. It intends to evoke a feeling that the writer feels when reading about the last hours in the physical life of Christ. There is no intended symbolic meaning in the forms or their placement. However, the colors were chosen for their immediate impact. The dark areas represent a void, a darkness from which there is no escape. Darkness has always been used to depict the unsuspecting or the mystery of life. The red, of course, suggests the eternal flame of Christ and his suffering. The sfumato technique was employed to suggest the mystical and the spiritual soul of Christ. It is interesting to note the large hollow head form in the center. This was an accidental development that does suggest emptiness, loneliness, and a highly personal feeling of inadequacy on the part of the artist, not inadequacy in the technique of painting, but rather one that is spiritual.

Moses and The Brazen Serpent. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. During the course of their wanderings, the people of Israel came to the land of

Edom. They were much discouraged because of the long and difficult way that they had traveled. There even were murmurings against God and against Moses. In punishment, the Lord set a scourge of fiery serpents that bit the people, and many of them died. But Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said:

Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.<sup>28</sup>

This painting is contained within a circle. This represents the perfection of God and His everlasting life. The serpent that intertwines through the painting represents, in general, the wily tempter that betrays man into sin. Moses is portrayed as a figure in the midst of confusion. His arm is sweeping to and fro as to suggest his torment at the unworthy actions of his followers.

This painting is currently on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Gray Veiling. 1967. Acrylic on canvas. A rich black field dominates this painting. It must be noted that the gray veiling that appears in the painting suggests the concealment of Christ's crucifixion and his forgiveness. A veil normally is used for concealment. In this case, it becomes a barrier for us to travel past with a suggestion of better things on the other side of the veil. A purple band stretches

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

across the upper portion of the painting symbolizing God the Father. A large green form flows through the upper portion suggesting the triumph of spring over winter, or of life over death. Red is a suggestion of the sacrifice of Christ, while white, which dominates the sweeping arc in the left portion, is the color of light and remains as the symbol of the soul with purity and holiness of life. The gray veil stretches across the painting and acts as an obstacle to cross. It represents man and his wanderings into the depths of sin. Our eyes can travel beyond the gray veil but we cannot enter into the painting as a whole. The forms and colors were chosen instinctively and constructed into a disciplined order. This becomes, for the artist and the beholder, a kind of epiphany, a supernatural revelation. The abstract forms express the sacred, the divine, because they have shed the material garb, the weight of the body, and the opaqueness of a face. This becomes a highly personal statement derived from association with the subject at hand.

This painting won the Lawrence Samuel Gregory, Jr. Award at the 1967 Fifth Annual Minnesota Artists' Biennial at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

The Sixth Hour. 1967. Acrylic on canvas. This painting represents a period in the life of Christ when emotion was at a high pitch. "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour."<sup>29</sup> Certainly emotion was at a high level because this sixth

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



hour was near the middle of the day, and yet it was dark. This painting shows a quality that can be compared to a meditation. It suggests repose, in the use of greens, and yet it has forms growing and moving about to suggest the mood of the hour. Strong emphasis has been placed on the hard edge or linear treatment of the composition. In this manner, a completeness or unity can be felt. Letters appear in this painting for the first time. A and W, Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letters in the Greek alphabet, are frequently used as the symbols of God the Son. Various letters have been used from early Christian times to identify Christ, or to stress the identity of some individual or object with Christ. This particular usage is based upon Revelation which states: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord . . ." <sup>30</sup> It is hoped that the viewer will establish the same feeling that the artist had when painting it.

My Cross. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. This painting, as the slide suggests, is square, composed into a cruciform. My Cross is further divided into areas of overlapping humanoid forms to suggest the human suffering that took place on the cross. The cross is one of the oldest and most universal of all symbols. It is, of course, the perfect symbol of Christ because of his sacrifice upon it. In a broader sense, however, the cross has become the mark or sign of the Christian religion. The cross in the painting can be compared to the Greek cross. This cross

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 222.



has four equal arms and is used more to suggest the church of Christ than to symbolize his sacrifice.

My Cross, currently on loan, hangs in the Little Gallery at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

The Descent From the Cross. 1967. Acrylic on canvas. The Evangelists have described how Christ's body was taken down from the cross. This scene is frequently called the Deposition. It was common to leave the crucified on the cross to be exposed to the elements and the birds. However, Joseph of Arimathaea asked Pilate for the body of the dead Christ. Joseph then took him from the cross and wrapped him in linens. This painting is predominantly made up of grays, blacks, and whites. The color black is, of course, a symbol of death and is used as a liturgical color for Good Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion. Gray is the color of ashes, signifying mourning and humility. The painting is dominated by sharp angles and vertical thrusts. Christ's body is twisted and broken to emphasize the death with a strong emphasis placed upon a linear treatment of the total composition. A ladder is frequently shown in scenes of the descent from the cross along with many helpers, however, it is worth noting that the Bible suggests that only Joseph of Arimathaea was present on this night. Small areas of red are suggested in the body of Christ to symbolize the passion and the blood he shed as his total sacrifice.

Black Cross Station. 1967. Acrylic on canvas. In religious art, Christ's journey to Calvary is usually divided into fourteen scenes or

stations of the cross. The twelfth station is Jesus dying on the cross. All four versions of the Gospel describe the crucifying of Christ, but these accounts vary considerably in detail. In a variety of paintings of the crucifixion, therefore, it is not unnatural that a number of different aspects and variations of the scene should be represented. This painting is composed of two large crosses. The left portion of the painting contains a black cross, symbolic of Christ's suffering. A red portion within the cross suggests a robe containing early Christian decoration. This cross is in the Greek style, having four equal arms. It suggests the church of Christ and his sacrifice for mankind. The right portion of the painting contains a grayed, Latin styled, cross. The Latin style has a longer upright than its crossbar. This cross is used to symbolize the passion of Christ. In a broader sense, however, it is the symbol of salvation and redemption through Christianity. A veil drapes over the grayed cross and partially covers the black cross itself. In ancient times, the cinture, which rests on the veil, served as a belt and as an ornament. Christ used it to symbolize preparation for any service that might be required of his children, of all mankind. Here, the cinture represents the joining of man with Christ, and his suffering and salvation. The number one on the cinture symbolizes unity between God and man.

Veils. 1966. Acrylic on canvas. This painting was painted with no conscious symbolic influences. The grayed tones were developed to suggest a spatial quality in the work. Modulated colors, in some areas, make shapes stand out against others. The grayed tones are

painted in contrast to the brighter areas which tend to recede in certain areas. The emphasis is on subtle nuances of color and not on pure color. The shapes are suggestive of human forms, but it is basically a non-objective work. The negative space plays as important a part in the composition as the positive areas and contrasts with these forms. All the forms arrive from the subconscious and were articulated somewhat representationally.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

The problem, *Christian Iconography: A Search for Form*, is a continuous process which the writer has pursued faithfully in order to reach his potential. Through the study of various techniques, both current and from earlier art, the writer often selects areas of exploration and experimentation which have been pursued by others, in order to gain an insight into his own personal statements. To develop personal philosophies, the artist must be acquainted with various philosophies, convictions and intents of others. To summarize the influence of others upon the writer's work would be an impossible venture. Many artists have been a direct influence, but no one artist has been the model for the writer's personal work.

In surveying the religious art of the past, the writer found constant themes that remain distinct. The Crucifixion, the Entombment, the Last Judgment, the Annunciation, the Resurrection, all remain as personal statements, even though many artists have conveyed different impressions. It was suggested that in the Byzantine era, art had to conform to basic rules and orders. Painting in the years since has reached a high level of accomplishment through personal style and individual conviction. "Every period must have its artists who express and represent it for the future," says Bernard Buffet.<sup>31</sup> Abstract art is the representative of

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<sup>31</sup>Marcel Brion and others, *Art Since 1945*. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), p. 17.



our time. Painting has adjusted itself to a simplicity of volumes. Religious art has discovered, in abstract painting, forms freed from all literal attachments with forms, becoming pure vehicles of the spirit. The endless variety of expressive means available to abstract painting, makes art the language of the supernatural and the spiritual.

In abstract painting, the conception of space and its representation raise problems that did not exist before. Forms are no longer enslaved by subject matter; but they live as separate elements in space and are controlled and produced with the artist's esthetic sensibilities. Each painter must be faithful to his inner impulses and his personal vision. This is not to say that a development like this involves no dangers. Inner impulses could lead to technical complacency, to an attainment of purely decorative effects, and to a spirit of self rationalization. The valid work of art is the one expressing an intense inner life. If the expression is authentic it translates the spirit and the imagination of the artist into accord with rich contemporary expression.

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