UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Iconographies of Faith and Doubt in the Painting of Maurice Denis, the Nabis and their Contemporaries

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in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Iconographies of Faith and Doubt in the Painting of Maurice Denis, the Nabis and their Contemporaries

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Iconographies of Faith and Doubt in the Painting of Maurice Denis, the Nabis and their Contemporaries identifies, describes and examines visual representations of spirituality by a loose group of French artists including Paul Gauguin, Maurice Denis and Paul Serusier working between the later 1880s and the first years of the twentieth century. It interrogates issues of doubt, faith and modernity as France moved toward secularization in the late nineteenth century. Each chapter analyzes paintings that engage with Christian imagery, ranging from the Christological symbology of the Crucifixion and the prefiguring narratives of the Old Testament to the modern iconography of Joan of Arc and the belief systems of French *Spiritisme*. The work of

the ardent Catholic, Maurice Denis and his contemporaries, is central to my inquiry. I argue that they arrive at a somewhat uniform style for depicting religious subject matter, despite their varied relationships to institutional Christianity. I situate the work of well-known and historicized artists such as Gauguin alongside lesser-known members of the late nineteenth century avant-garde by revealing their shared address not only to the forms and meanings of modern spirituality but to a wider culture in which the very notion of public and state-sanctioned religion –as well as the nature and effects of private devotion—were in dispute. I argue that the concept of "Frenchness" that had been tied to the Catholic faith for centuries complicated issues of citizenship and identity throughout the nation. Each chapter navigates a different cultural geography beginning in chapter 1 with rural Brittany, the site of one of the last vestiges of publically performed, community-based Catholicism. I examine competing architectural campaigns in the nation's capital that gave rise to the Eiffel Tower and the Sacre Coeur Basilica (chapter 2); and the antithetical representations of Joan of Arc as secularists in the Third Republic sought to claim her as a soldier for France rather than as a spiritual warrior for the Catholic Church (chapter 3). The final chapter presents a comparative study of French Spiritualist visual art bringing the paintings of Denis alongside those of James Tissot, demonstrating that the visual culture of new and unorthodox spiritualities was, in fact, founded on the iconographical traditions of Catholicism.

Introduction

The Rhetoric of Third Republic Religion

God of liberty, of the people, of courage
Priests and kings conceal your image from us
We want to adore you away from the priests, the kings
We have found your traits in nature
Her voice loyal and pure
Has given us our duties, our culture and our laws
-P.C Cosson, chant civique, 1794[1]

Cosson's song, published in a Revolutionary-period edition of the literary magazine *Mercure de France*, was composed for the Festival of the Supreme Being and called for its singers to "sing, dance and enjoy themselves[2]" as they praise God's image. The Festival of the Supreme Being was revitalized over a century later amidst the dramatic changes occurring around the relationship of the Catholic Church to the French government of the Third Republic. The reappearance of the Festival's message is unsurprising, as citizens of France were reluctant to let go of their spirituality, yet they had grown to distrust the Church and its clergy members. The faith in the Supreme Being operates without kings, without priests, and is available for worship directly, bypassing the complicated politics of religion in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly once the Catholic Church declared a new

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[1] *Dieu de la liberté, du peuple et du courage/Les prêtres et les rois nous voilaient ton image/Nous voulons t'adorer loin des prêtres, des rois/Nous avons retrouvé tes traits dans la nature/Sa voix fidelle et pure/A dicté nos devoirs, notre culte et nos lois,*

[2] *Mercure de France*, (1794), 73.

doctrine of papal infallibility in 1860-effectively giving the pope, the leader of the Church, the same divine rights to make law previously accorded only to God.

The change in the place of Christianity in France around 1791 evident in Cosson's song continues in the writng of Chateaubriand, whose his two-volume text that would find him exiled during the Revolution, *La génie du christianisme* (*The Genius of Christianity*, published in 1802 after the Concordat). In the book he privileges Christianity (and by extension, the Catholicism of his childhood) above all other faiths for its unparalleled contributions to the arts. As he contemplated the violence of the Revolution, Chateaubriand argued that the steady abandonment of religion since the Enlightenment was detrimental to society, and that the "Christian religion is the most poetic, the most human, the most favorable to freedom, to the arts and literature, to which the modern world owes everything."[3] The publication of the text coincided with a general skepticism about the Revolution's outright rejection of religion and the attempts to erase all traces of Christian influence from national memory. The sentimental quality of his writing allowed nineteenth century citizens to accept the contributions of Catholicism as the foundational elements for modern French identity.

This dissertation explores religious iconography in the work of several French painters in the late nineteenth century. I examine how the issues of doubt and faith

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[3] Chateaubriand, François-René. *Essai Sur Les Révolutions; Génie Du Christianisme*. Bibliothèque De La Pléiade 272. Paris: Gallimard, 1978, 57.

are mediated in religious-themed paintings by Maurice Denis, his teachers, friends, and contemporaries, a mix of Catholics, agnostics, atheists and occultists. During my research into the extensive scholarship on painting from this period, I realized that little in the current literature addressed in detail how the visual arts negotiated with the rapid modernization of the country. In order to bridge this gap in scholarship, I have organized the chapters that follow around different aspects of the religious iconography taken up in the work of Denis, Paul Gauguin, Odilon Redon and other painters during the late 1880s and 1890s. The heightened interest in Catholic themes to which they attest can be traced in the painters' education and training, conversations and correspondence. This dissertation explores how the aspects of pictorial form as well as choices of subject matter were influenced by the political shifts in the religious orientation of the Third Republic leading to the separation of Church and State.

Rather than a social history, I intend for this dissertation to be an iconographical study of late-nineteenth century painting that responds to a climate of doubt surrounding the place of religion in general and Christianity in particular in modern French society. My descriptions and interpretations of the paintings within this dissertation are informed by the work of Erwin Panofsky, whose three strata for iconographical interpretation are particularly useful for the examination of Christian imagery and Catholic politics. The first three chapters engages with a particular figure in the Christian tradition: the Crucifixion and Christological symbology; Jacob, the

Old Testament patriarch who represents man's power (or lack thereof) in the face of the divine; and Joan of Arc, whose popularity surged from the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. Denis and Gauguin, in particular, emphasized religious themes in their work with a greater frequency than most of the other avant-garde painters active in this period. My focus is on the nuances of their representations of religious subject-matter and on how they create a visual culture of spirituality that illustrates a general uncertainty about the role of religion at the turn of the twentieth century.[4]

In order to develop my study of the iconography of doubt and faith, I have looked to the numerous existing studies of the history of French Catholicism and the popular and institutional aspects of religion and power and France. Throughout the study I refer to nineteenth century political movements in France to situate the paintings in broader cultural contexts, including the building of the Sacré Coeur Basilica and the laws of Prime Minister Jules Ferry, which affected schools throughout the nation. Colette Beaune suggests that France was late to secularize "because all felt that the French nation belonged to the realm of belief and faith rather than of fact and reason. The sacred blood of kings continued to flow, and the Crown continued to lay claim to privileges in which religion was intimately mixed with

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[4] Panofsky's seminal essay "Iconography and Iconology" created a framework from which to examine Christian art, particularly from the Renaissance by differentiating the primary subject matter (pure form), secondary subject matter (which generally relies on a certain shared cultural knowledge to apprehend) and the intrinsic meaning or content, which is informed by or sheds light upon certain beliefs or attitudes of a particular nation, culture or faith, which determines the significance of a particular figure or symbol.

politics."[5] This assessment is shared by many historical studies of the French Third Republic, which, in its early stages, was not necessarily believed capable of long-term stability.[6] Phillip Varley claims that in the nineteenth century, the French understanding of nationhood was politically determined and disputed. Whereas republicans traced the origins of the nation to 1789, Catholics dated the birth of France to the fifth century.[7]

Jann Pasler's thorough and convincing arguments about national identity in Third Republic France suggest that the structure of Paris itself,[8] including its street names and public statues, reveals that the "*ancien* was not just what the French had inherited, but also what they made for themselves of the past, the perseverance of the past in the present"[9] The proposition that important aspects of French history and identity in the nineteenth century were generated by an ideology based on the country's view of its own past, further complicates issues of national identity as republicans became more influential towards the end of the Second Empire.[10]

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[5] Beaune, Colette. *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation In late-medieval France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 193.

[6] Agulhon, Maurice. *The French Republic, 1879-1992*. English ed. A History of France. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1993, 7.

[7] Varley, Karine. *Under the Shadow of Defeat: The War of 1870-71 in Frenchmemory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 43.

[8] See the Introduction to Jann Pasler's book *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

[9] Pasler, 223.

[10] Pasler, 191.

The complex and nuanced history of religion and politics in France presented by the studies that precede this dissertation reveal a culture that by the nineteenth century was embroiled in a range of disputes over the role of religion in relation to both the state and the individual; and the emergence of a defining dialectic marked out between the secular state and private life and devotion, and between doubt and belief. So, as Maurice Alguhon has noted, issues of personal devotion, for example, generated a certain anxiety among citizens of the young Republic.[11] In order to argue through an iconography of religious doubt, I have engaged with cultural forms—primarily paintings—that exemplify the climate of reformulated devotion and and traditional piety. I also engage with the literature of nineteenth century France and its commentaries on the role of religion in the modern state, as well as with the textual production of artists. Denis, for example, wrote extensively about the aesthetics of religious art, calling for paintings that were reverent and beautiful expressions of religious sentiment. As an ardent Catholic, Denis felt called by God to create devotional images that would rival those of the Italian primitives, who he frequently cited as the source of his inspiration. Denis' *History of Religious Art* (1939) provides a solid foundation for my analysis of religious iconography at the end of the Third Republic. Denis believed that painting itself was imbued with religious significance,

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[11] In Alguhon's words: "Above all, it should not be forgotten that, in the depth of French society, in the provinces, among the grass roots, the struggle between the conscious elements of the right (counter-revolutionary) and the left (or the Republic, it was all one then) was nearly always wrapped up in religion. [...] Everyone's convictions were tinged with intransigence and passionate feelings. Whether or not to enter a place of worship, to eat or fast on Fridays, etc., were urgent and significant choices." 7.

claiming in the introduction that "Figurative painting is at its origin the transmission of mystic thought: it is a religious act, a rite, a magical instrument."[12] In this view, art and worship were inseparable; regardless of the faith of the painter or the subject matter of the painting, and his comprehensive text, written just four years before his death, offers a summation of Denis' life-long preoccupation with the Christian implications of art, as recorded in his diaries since 1884.

English language scholarship has paid scant attention to Denis, although interest in his painting is gaining momentum in North America, as evidenced by the major retrospective held at the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montreal in 2007. The catalogue raisonné of Denis' work is currently being assembled in France, under the direction of Claire Denis and Fabienne Stahl, making this an ideal time for fresh scholarship on this influential artist and writer. In his other theoretical writing and correspondence, used throughout this dissertation as a primary source for interpretation of the paintings, Denis identifies certain qualities that make religious art "sacred" or otherwise effective. Despite his own predilection for colorful compositions, for example, he expresses a preference for more somber palettes in the religious art of certain other painters.

In addition to Denis' writings, this dissertation builds upon published research in French studies and art history. Two studies have been particularly useful: the first is Lynn Sharp's book *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth*

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[12] Denis, Maurice. *Histoire De L'art Religieux*. [Paris 1939.], 1939, 3.

Century France (2006), which examines the intersections between faith, modernity and post-Enlightenment intellectualism.[13] Sharp offers an especially illuminating account of how developments in scientific knowledge and technological progress affected the rise of non-traditional religious movements. The second is Michael Driskel's *Representing Belief: Art, Religion and Society in Nineteenth Century France*, one of the first sustained art historical studies to address the issues of religious art in modern France.[14]

These and related studies suggest that although France was shifting towards secularization in the last third of the nineteenth century, this did not mean that French citizens were willing to move away from belief entirely. Before the secular state of France was confirmed by law, several fringe religious groups formed, ranging from an extreme version of Roman Catholicism to occultist belief systems that eschewed traditional Christian faith. The development of these groups indicated that, despite the strong Republican push to sever the ties of religion to government, many actively sought different forms of spiritual sustenance—thus retaining a connection to divine or higher powers. The absence of Catholicism's and strict ideas about the nature of God allows for the development of what Lynn Sharp has called "secular spirituality."

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[13] Sharp, Lynn L. *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-century France*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.

[14] Driskel, Michael Paul. *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-century France*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.

Sharp, and others,[15] point out that anticlericalism does not necessarily mean anti-religion, claiming that a particular religiosity existed in nineteenth century France that registered somewhere between secularism and Catholicism.[16] In addition to this "secular spirituality" and the systems of belief that existed outside of the Church's institutional power, there were instances of Catholic revival throughout the arts at the end of the nineteenth century. In what Pasler refers to as an "ironic religious revival" many composers produced religious music in the 1890s in response to Pope Leo XIII's *Bull Rerum novarum*[17] "as if it constituted an invitation to revive music for the Church."[18] The music of respected composers, such as Saint-Saëns, was also used to promote secularism and create a republican agenda.[19]

The present study is somewhat differently predicated than Pasler's examination of established French composers. Although there was an increase in the demand for religious music following the Pope's call to accept the republic, the call for religious-themed paintings—especially for young, avant-garde painters who were

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[15]Alguhon defines "clericalism" as "the direct influence of the Catholic Church on the state, the negation of the principle of secularism in society and the rejection of the philosophical neutrality of government." 13.

[16] For more information, see Lynn Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006, especially the introduction

[17] 1878 marked the beginning of the pontificate of Leo XIII and a new direction for papal involvement in French politics. Admiring the efforts of the French Republic from his seat in Rome, the Pope spoke out in 1890 about a possible reconciliation between religion and government. In 1891 he issued the *Bull Rerum Novarum*, an indictment of unrestricted capitalism and its effects on the urban poor. See Pasler, p.614 and Agulhon, 59.

[18] Pasler, 614-616.

[19] Pasler, 307.

still in school, as was the case for many of the Nabis working in the late 1880s and early 1890s—did not appear to be underwritten by a similar surge. Even an ambitious work such as Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon* (1888), discussed in chapter two, was rejected when offered as a gift to a local Brittany church. Whereas Gauguin took advantage of the connections of Theo van Gogh[20] to move his more sellable art work, making a profit from painting was not the primary concern of Denis and Sérusier, who had just begun to seek their place in relationship to other modern painting styles and the masters whom they so admired, such as Fra Angelico and Puvis de Chavannes.

With the exception of Gauguin, most of the painters discussed in this dissertation are among the lesser-known affiliates of the French visual avant-gardes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is not my intention to examine their relationship to the broader history of modern French painting, but rather to present and interpret the connections between them—concentrating on style and subject matter—in relation to particular iconographies of religion and spirituality. Throughout the chapters that follow I refer to several better-known painters and established movements in order to sketch some art historical contexts that connect the work of Denis and others to the traditions of Romanticism, Impressionism, and Post-impressionism. I am also endebted to historical studies, such as Phillip Nord's

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[20] Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 17, 267.

discussion of republicanism in nineteenth century France, which examine the connections between modernist painting and the politics of the era. Nord focuses mostly on Impressionist (and some Post-impressionist) artists and the images they produced of prominent people and notable events from the 1870s, arguing that this "new painting" was intertwined with republicanism,[21] in both subject matter and the social arena of the avant-garde, and as such gained a certain respect or recognition in republican circles, evidenced by the erosion of the traditional Salon jury system which helped validate the projects of the Indépendant artists.[22]

I examine works of literature that question the role of religion in modern society, particularly popular novels published earlier in the nineteenth century, such as Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (1830), Balzac's *The Atheist Mass* (1836), and *Father Goriot* (1835), all of which describe the difficulties of remaining a faithful and pious Christian during a modernizing era where the Church is characterized by corruption and hypocrisy. Later works, such as Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863), Zola's *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* (1875)—key key to my discussion of the perceived weakness of the Church and clergy in Chapter One—and Edouard Schuré's *The Great Initiates* (1889), are examples of critical literature of the period that interrogate

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[21] Nord states that many of the artists, critics and dealers tended towards republicanism, and specifically mentions Bazille, Renoir and Monet as republicans, and explains in detail the uncertain politics of Pissarro, Morisot, and others. Nord, Philip. *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*. Harvard University Press, 1998, 161, 167, 172.

[22] Nord claims that the *jeune école* benefitted from Jules Ferry's decision to change the jury system of choosing paintings to be displayed in the Salon, which he describes to be a more "democratic" practice. Nord, 139-141.

Christian spirituality and the development of organized religion. Schuré's books were read widely throughout France, and many of the Nabi painters knew Schuré personally and were aware of how issues of modern religiosity were being examined in other branches of the arts.[23]

By engaging color theory, artist's writings, biblical narratives and the rhetoric of the Catholic Church, I attempt to provide a new lens through which to view the work of Denis and his contemporaries—concluding that they are painters of a modern world unconvinced of the role of faith in contemporary society, who express this doubt through their interpretations of common Christian iconography.. To this end, I have chosen certain critical issues in French politics from the 1880s and 1890s: modernization, unification efforts, and patriotism in France. The chapters map out a specific trajectory of art historical and socio-political analysis, interrogating the intersections between Catholic traditions and French identity.

In chapter one I investigate the origins of Denis' painting practice in Pont-Aven, Brittany in 1888 and 1889. As young students of Gauguin, Denis and Paul Sérusier developed a Nabi aesthetic that engaged symbolic interpretations of Christian imagery using innovative formal and compositional techniques. I argue that their interest in Christianity, particularly the Crucifixion, derived in part from their

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[23] Allison Morehead notes that Schuré's *Les Grands Initiés* was an "enormously popular book in Symbolist circles of the 1890s," "Symbolism, Mediumship, and the 'Study of the Soul that has Constituted Itself as a Positivist Science.'" *RACAR* [*Revue d'Art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review*], XXXIV, no. 1, 2009, 80.

living among the Breton inhabitants of Pont-Aven who, despite the rapid modernization of the region, held on to the traditions of a folk Catholicism that had defined the region for two centuries. The daily life of Pont-Aven was punctuated by Catholic tradition and ritual, and this intense piety coupled with the colorful, rural environment of the Breton village informed an important series of Crucifixion paintings that used a broad range of saturated colors to depict the figure of Christ as a symbol of France's culture of religious doubt.

Pont-Aven attracted many visitors during the second half of the nineteenth century, when a great deal of government attention was directed towards Brittany. Enforcing the laws of Jules Ferry, Third Republic officials oversaw the imposition of a certain "Frenchness" on Brittany's population which included an eradication of the Breton language and a shift away from regional religious authority figures. In an attempt to record a culture whose uniqueness was threatened by modernization, artists flocked to Brittany's coasts to take advantage of the rural environment, picturesque coastlines, and accommodating locals. Denis had been attracted to the region since his adolescence and wrote about his desire to live and work in Brittany in his personal diaries. In addition to Denis' journals, the opening chapter analyzes travel narratives about Brittany that were published in the late nineteenth century during the Celtomania trend that brought tourists intrigued by the region's earlier history from within France and abroad. France's generally nostalgic view of Brittany at the period and the subsequent spike in tourism coupled with the Breton landscape and the beliefs

of its inhabitants to offer crucial contexts for the artists' depictions of the martyrdom of Christ.

Chapter one establishes a trajectory for the young painters' interpretations of Christian subjects in the face of national secularization, localized in a region that was among the last in France to sever its ties with the country's religious history. In chapter two I focus on Paris and how the push for the separation of church and state affected public space through the architectural programs of the late nineteenth century state and the Catholic Church. Through a comparative analysis of several paintings and Abrahamic narratives, I argue that the Old Testament figure of Jacob, son of Isaac and founder of the twelve tribes of Israel who wrestles an angel in order to prove his worth, may be considered as a patron saint of secularization.

In Christian exegesis, the narratives of the Old Testament prefigure the events of the New Testament, thereby validating the canon of the Christian religion by presenting the life of Christ as the true fulfillment of the ancient scriptures and prophecies that comprise the first half of the Christian Bible. The most obvious and ubiquitous example of this in Christian art is the juxtaposition of the near-sacrifice of Isaac with the Crucifixion. This association, among others, appears on Nicholas of Verdun's enormous, gilded Gothic Klosterneuberg Altarpiece (1181). New Testament scenes occupy the center of the three registers, with Old Testament scenes appearing above and below. By placing images from the Old Testament around the scenes from the life of Christ they prefigure, the piece presents a visual argument that, in the

Sacrifice of Isaac/Crucifixion example, the selflessness and faith with which Abraham nearly killed his beloved son is directly related to the sacrifice of God's only son, Jesus, to save the Christian people.

My examination of Jacob imagery in the painting of Gauguin, Denis and Redon suggests a somewhat analagous allegorical reading of a religious narrative. In the book of Genesis, Jacob, son of Isaac pursues his destiny with ruthless ambition. After stealing his brother Esau's birthright and deceiving his weak, sickly father into bestowing upon him an inheritance due to Esau, he sets out on a journey to establish himself as the patriarch of the land that will become Israel. On the way, he is approached by a powerful man, an agent of God generally assumed to be an angel, who wrestles him for hours before letting Jacob go, informing the mortal that he has wrestled with God and emerged victorious. This legend from the book of Genesis was a popular subject for nineteenth century painters, each of whom interprets the fight differently: some show that Jacob is clearly in control of the struggle, others depict the angel dominating Jacob, while others still show man and angel equally matched. I connect the artists' interpretation of this struggle between man and the divine to their views on secularization and the diminishing role of the Church in France.

Chapter two examines the changing topography of Paris during the nineteenth century through another variant of the lens of secularization. The multi-decade restructuring program, begun by Georges-Eugène (Baron) Haussmann and

culminating in the concurrent construction of the Sacré Coeur Basilica and the Eiffel Tower transformed the capital city into a site of modern wonder. I argue that the competing architectural paradigms of the secular government and French Church leaders are evidence of the secular and religious conflict throughout the nation. In the late 1880s and 1890s, the French broke ground on the Eiffel Tower, which was the Third Republic's testament to France's future in technological development; and the Sacré Coeur, which was the Church's privately-funded, grandiose apology for what was seen in some quarters as France's godless greed which occasioned both a loss of pride and the surrender of territory to Germany. Both buildings were reviled by a significant portion of the population.

I continue the discussion of citizenship and faith in chapter three, which examines images of Joan of Arc and the rhetoric of French nationhood. Joan, whose valiant efforts changed the course of the Hundred Years War and made her an important figure in French history for centuries, was beatified in 1909 and canonized eleven years later. Despite her notoriety throughout Europe dating back to the fifteenth century, Joan was rarely depicted in accordance with one standardized iconography. Rather, her image was constantly manipulated in order to serve particular political purposes, either as a secular warrior for the integrity of France, or a religious visionary and soldier for the church. I have organized these images of

Joan as a series of antithesis: Joan as secular/Joan as religious, masculine/feminine,[24] peaceful/bellicose. These antithetical representations bear witness to Joan's malleability as a public symbol in the contest between the power of the Church and the power of the new secular government.

The final chapter provides a comparative analysis of Denis' Catholic painting and the Christian-themed works of James Tissot, whose artistic practice was informed by Spiritualism, a late nineteenth century movement that originated in the United States after the Civil War. Tissot was raised a Catholic but became intrigued by Spiritualism while living in England. This chapter will explore how Tissot's Spiritualist paintings of Christ made in the 1880s and 1890s contrast with the Catholic images of Denis. Chapter four thus commences what might be a larger research project that could follow-on from this dissertation: a comparative examination of the art of Christianity and the art of the less mainstream religious and spiritual movements that were developed in the later nineteenth century in France.

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[24] The intersections with critical gender studies, particularly notable in chapters two and three, which focus on the androgynous bodies of the archangels and the morphing gender of Joan of Arc, respectively, could be opened up into a future, longer project.

Chapter One

Christ en couleur: Painting Pont-Aven

Brittany has made a Catholic of me again, capable of fighting for the Church. I was intoxicated by the incense, the organs, the prayers, the ancient stained glass windows, the hieratic tapestries.[25]

-Émile Bernard

Émile Bernard arrived in the Brittany region of northwestern France in August of 1888 to collaborate with Paul Gauguin and to create a new school of painting, one that would emphasize rhythm and harmony, a style that had to be, above all, pleasing to the eye. The same year, he completed one of his best-known pieces, *Breton Women in the Meadow* (See Figure 1.1). A preparatory sketch from 1886 of Bernard's flat and mysterious work, the first in a series of paintings of Breton women in traditional dress interacting with their natural surroundings, indicates that Bernard had begun studying the unique mannerisms and dress of the fervently Catholic Breton people of the Finistère département at least two years before joining Paul Gauguin[26] in the small, southern village of Pont-Aven (See Figure 1.2).

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[25] Ford, Caroline. *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, 73.

[26] Controversy arose in 1888 when Gauguin unveiled his canvas *Vision of the Sermon*, which the twenty-year old post-Impressionist Bernard claimed was plagiarized from Breton Women in the Meadow which had been completed a few months earlier. This issue will be examined in more depth in the following chapter.

In *Breton Women in the Meadow* small groups of figures engage in conversation, some seated, others standing, with children, the only figures not dressed in black robes and elaborate white headdresses, in tow. Bernard's round, energetic brushstrokes emphasize the roundness of the women's faces, and the flatness of the composition suspends the figures in a chartreuse plane. The lack of depth and complete disregard for scale in the picture make some of the women appear larger than life, while others shrink away. At the bottom right corner, a Breton smiles at the viewer, her upturned mouth mitigating some of the uneasiness created by her lopsided facial features.

The Pont-Aven school, gathered around and Gauguin and Bernard, encompassed painters (by religion, a mix of Catholics, agnostics and atheists) who, in addition to more secular subjects, produced images of Christ in an offbeat spectrum of dominant colors: green, yellow, white, and orange. The focus on Crucifixion scenes of the members of the Pont-Aven group suggests the powerful influence that the folk Catholicism of Brittany had on the visiting painters. In the work of students Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier in particular, the Breton landscape and the beliefs of its inhabitants offered crucial contexts for the artists' depictions of the martyrdom of Christ. I will argue here that some of the intensity caught up in the prosecution of faith in rural Brittany translated into the strikingly counter-naturalist palette of the religious-themed paintings produced there.

Although the painters of the Pont-Aven school held varied beliefs about the existence of a higher power, each contemplated issues of spirituality in their work and religious themes were pervasive throughout the artistic community working in Brittany. Bernard, along with Gauguin and Sérusier, founded and named The Nabis (*nabi* is "prophet" in Hebrew). By calling themselves "prophets" they established that they were men who saw the future of art. The loose series of crucifixion pictures painted by Gauguin, Denis, Sérusier and others in the years around 1890 came at a time when the power of the Catholic Church in France was being challenged in fundamental ways. By the end of the nineteenth century, France had become an increasingly secular nation due to the efforts of Third Republic politicians attempting to shake-off historical, royalist ties to the clergy. This change happened more quickly in Paris and the larger French cities than in the northwestern region of Brittany, where a disavowal of longstanding connections to the defunct monarchy was not necessarily accompanied by any relinquishment of devout Catholicism.

In 1886 a penniless Gauguin decided to move to Brittany, find a pension, and paint. He quickly found Pont-Aven to be amenable to all of his needs; the people were friendly, the rent was cheap, and people bought his paintings.[27] He also enjoyed the non-Breton community, full of artists, mostly foreigners, whom he could talk to. At first, he believed that Brittany possessed a certain quality unmatched throughout the

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[27]Le Paul, Charles-Guy. *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*. 1st American ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1987, 54.

rest of France, as a region frozen in time that had managed to escape the quick modernization of industrialized Europe. The connection between the Breton people and their natural environment spoke to Gauguin as well; he came to Brittany to absorb the landscape and the atmosphere, writing "I love Brittany. It is here I find the wilderness, the primitive."[28] These two qualities, untamed nature and the people who inhabit the surrounding towns or villages, would inform Gauguin's practice for decades to follow. Since the untamed landscape was allowed to remain a focal point of the topography of Breton cities, painters had plenty of raw material to work with. After extended stays, Gauguin began to realize that its culture was not as naive and unrefined as he had originally thought. Despite this realization, however, he failed to communicate to his family and friends that Brittany had modernized on its own terms.[29] By 1891 he left his Breton subjects behind, opting instead for the unique landscape and people of Tahiti.

Gauguin was attracted to Brittany because it allowed him to work quietly and cheaply in a rural setting. In addition to its artistic charm, Brittany held special appeal as a vacation destination for French city-dwellers in the 19th century. Parisians

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[28] Le Paul, 24.

[29] Stephen Eisenman identifies several aspects of late 19th century Breton culture that demonstrate its modernity. According to Eisenman, the famous black and white local dress, complete with elaborate headwear for women, was more a sign of modern Breton ethnic identity than evidence of its primitivism, and its well-known and often depicted penitential ceremonies (pardons) were performed partly with tourist revenue in mind. He further points out that the much of religious art of the region dates from the 14th century and after-hardly the Dark Ages. He states, "Gauguin's Breton exoticism thus depended upon an ignorance of historical and cultural facts and details that was difficult to sustain, especially since his exposure to cultural difference was intimate and of relatively long duration." *Gauguin's Skirt*, 36.

had several options when it came to sun-drenched destinations, from the warm Mediterranean cities of Marseille and Toulon to the northern beaches of the Normandy coast. Brittany provided a quieter experience than Normandy or Provence, and its legendary status as the setting of the King Arthur adventures drew unprecedented tourism in the 1800s, largely the result of *celtomanie (*Celtomania), a fashionable preoccupation with all things Celtic that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1840, people of all economic classes were flocking to Brittany, not only to enjoy its beautiful beaches, but also in search of a getaway to the romanticized Celtic history of the area. The resulting surge in tourism was later examined in a 1996 retrospective at the Université Rennes 2 in the heart of Brittany entitled *Cent ans de tourisme en Bretagne*: *1840-1940.*[30]

Brittany was an ideal region to study encroaching secularism and modernization in rural France. Celtomania and popular tourism indicate that France experienced a Brittany "moment" during the nineteenth century,[31] and the work of the Pont-Aven school at the end of the century reflects this renewed interest in the region. The Nabis took themes and subjects common in Breton life and used them as a foundation for aesthetic development. Pierre Tuarze, in a study of Pont-Aven's role as

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[30] Nathalie Richard, *Cent ans de tourisme en Bretagne: 1840-1940* (Rennes: Ed. Apogée, 1996), p 10. The authors suggest that the writing of Chateaubriand had influence. Arthur Bell in 1906 claimed that Brittany's Celtic history was a large part of its allure: "it would be difficult to imagine a more deeply interesting subject from many a different point of view, than the ancient province of Brittany, which, through all the political vicissitudes of the country to which it geographically belongs, has retained its own individuality combined with the unmistakable impress of the remote past." Quoted in Williams, 1.

[31] Pasler, 657.

an art town, cites the celebrated sculpted *Calvaire* (Crucifixion scene) at the Chapelle de Tronoën as a source of inspiration for artists (See Figure 1.3). Created during the mid-fifteenth century, the base of the sculpture depicts scenes from the life of the Virgin and Christ, ranging from before the birth of Jesus to after his death. According to Tuarze, the residents of Brittany identified with every character in the sculpture.[32] The piece is crowned with a high-rising cross, drawing the eye upward to the Crucifixion scene high in the air. Each religious figure represents a different aspect of an individual's personality: love, sin, temptation, weakness, repentance, and redemption. The stories of these saints and the figure of Christ, in selfless martyrdom, are designed to draw attention to human shortcomings.

Gauguin's examination of religious themes in the 1890s was a result of his skepticism of the Catholic faith, coupled with a self-identification with Christ.[33] In *Self Portrait with Yellow Christ* (1890-1891), a three-quarter-profile Gauguin gazes towards the viewer (See Figure 1.4). In his writing and correspondence Gauguin rejected the central Christian belief that Jesus was fully human and fully God, yet affirmed his interest in the Christ figure, admirable for his leadership. He aligned two images of himself with the crucifixion and emphasized the mortal qualities of Christ, depicting Jesus as a flesh-and-blood man (like Gauguin himself) with no divine attributes. Clearly the devout Breton Catholicism had little effect on Gauguin's own

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[32] Tuarze, Pierre. *Pont-Aven, Arts Et Artistes*. Paris: la Pensée universelle, 1973, np.

[33] Silverman, 131.

spiritual inclinations, but he used Catholic subjects to visualize the struggles of human life. Deborah Silverman's study claims that "Gauguin defied conventional religion even as he transposed to the domain of art the core of spiritual tasks that had been hitherto dined by the institution of the Catholic Church, exploring, in visual form, the central questions of human existence and eternity."[34]

The immersion in the Brittany region where faith and life were linked provided Gauguin with ample source material for his pictures. Both the original *Yellow Christ* (1889, see Figure 1.5) and this *Self Portrait* were painted during visits to Brittany. The figure of Jesus in *Yellow Christ* is almost doll-like, flat and unexpressive. His elongated body and the way his feet do not seem to actually touch the foot-support on the crucifix recall the stylized figures and treatment of space of the small, sculpted marble panels and painted icons of the Byzantine period. The colors are primarily warm, orange trees and shrubs appear throughout the landscape and the yellow of Christ's body matches almost exactly the yellow of the hills in the background.[35] The colors seem to situate the scene in mid autumn, and the oranges and yellows accentuate the blue dresses worn by the Breton women who sit on the ground around the base of the cross, and are gathered to the left side of the canvas,

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[34] Silverman, 373.

[35] Silverman suggests that the yellowness may result from the wood of the sculpture upon which *Yellow Christ* is based, which is "really more ivory-colored than yellow but appears yellowish against the bluish walls of the chapel." 279.

heads bent in prayer.[36] The Crucifix, which Silverman has identified as a depiction of the 8 foot-tall wooden sculpture from the Chapelle de Trémalo in Finistère, occupies a large portion of the canvas, seeming to grow out of the ground and reach into the sky. Gauguin has painted the bottom of the cross so that it appears almost transparent, and has severed the top, suggesting that the crucifix stretches infinitely into the heavens. The women in the foreground and the figure in the background who appears to be jumping over a stone wall, are treated with more realism than the figure of Jesus. They have a fullness and solidity that the Christ figure does not, suggesting viewers might be witnessing a moment of religious vision, in which Christ takes on the kind of apparitional form that might be associated with Breton piety (Gauguin, of course, believed that Bretons were often "simple" and superstitious which allowed them to accept suffering, death, and the promise of an afterlife).[37]

In the *Self Portrait*, the figure of the artist is flanked by a close-up view of his *Yellow Christ* and a ceramic piece that depicts a distended face—the latter identified as a tobacco jar that Gauguin fashioned in his own likeness.[38] In the *Self Portrait*, both faces are characterized by a large nose, wide eyes, and slightly open mouth. The

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[36] Similarly, in *Vision of the Sermon*, Gauguin crowds the Breton women to the left side of the picture. For more detail, see chapter two.

[37] SIlverman, 283

[38] Naomi E Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 122. Mauer states that, Gauguin identified with the medium of ceramics, which he believed "suggested truths about human experience." He saw the kiln as a symbol of hell-on-earth, and the object inside it takes on its characteristics as it succumbs to the extreme heat of the fire.

artists' head is turned away from the Crucifixion, and his face appears besides the ceramic head. Clearly the central portrait is Gauguin, but we can also identify his features with the ceramic object.[39]

It would seem that the artist is suggesting that the depiction of Jesus is a sort of self-portrait as well, an attempt to translate this viewpoint into painting. In a response during an interview, Gauguin said that in *Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ* he identified with Christ's suffering and loneliness at the end of his life.[40] *Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ* belongs to a tradition of self-portraits as Christ or with Christ-like attributes that has existed since the Renaissance. An obvious example is Albrecht Durer's *Self Portrait* from 1500 (See Figure 1.6). The resemblance between the portrait and earlier representations of Christ is striking; the long wavy hair and full beard are traditional features of Christ, and his right hand makes a gesture similar to that of blessing in portraits of Christ, such as Hans Memling's 1481 work *Christ Giving His Blessing* (See Figure 1.7). Durer, unlike Gauguin, is turned directly to the viewer, a deviation from his earlier self-portraits from 1493 and 1497 where Durer sits in three-quarter profile. Gauguin felt the *Self Portrait With Yellow Chris*t was "fated to be misunderstood" because of the complicated identification Gauguin makes between himself and Christ. He said, "I have painted my own portrait...But it also

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[39] According to Maurer, Gauguin used the medim of ceramics to express his grim outlook on life, having suffered years of no money, no family, poor health and no certain future as a successful artist.

[40] Ibid, 128.

represents the crushing of an ideal, and a pain that is both divine and human. Jesus is totally abandoned; his disciples are leaving him, in a setting as sad as his soul."[41] He sees in Christ a kindred spirit, someone alone and suffering as he was at the time.

Gauguin's destitution during his years in Brittany has been well-documented. By 1889 he was often bedridden with dysentery. The illness prevented him from working as much as he would have liked, which had a profound effect on his finances. Much later, during his second stay in Tahiti, he painted the *Self-Portrait near Golgotha* (1896, See Figure 1.8). The background painting includes variations of chocolate brown with auburn and olive accents that suggest a garden scene, the gnarled trunk of a tree frames the left. Gauguin, wearing a bright white garment reminiscent of the traditional Christ figure, stands out against the darkness. He smiles slightly at the viewer, his eyelids lowered into a warm, calm glance. This differs significantly from earlier self-portraits as Christ, where he usually hangs his head in melancholy or death. The thick application of paint and use of palette knife recalls the work of his contemporary Paul Cézanne, who in his own self-portrait from 1880 used a similar technique and palette.

The passionate religiosity in the Brittany region motivated the Pont-Aven artists' interpretations of Christian imagery, and each painting is a reflection of individual religious inclination. The exalted presence of Christ on the cross is common on church grounds throughout Brittany, and Gauguin's 1889 painting *The*

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[41] Ibid.

Green Christ: The Breton Calvary (See Figure 1.9) features the Calvaire of the Nizon Church in Pont-Aven. A bright composition of pink, blue, and viridian, *The Green Christ* shows modern Breton life, punctuated by the overwhelming presence of the dead Christ, green with lifelessness. In the back left of the painting Gauguin creates a triangular dip in the composition, emphasizing the blue sea between the grass-topped hills. A small fishing boat has pulled ashore, and a thin figure carrying a fishing net over his shoulder walks away with his catch. In the foreground a woman tends to her sheep. Although the large Calvary statue dominates the composition, none of the figures pay it any attention. The shape of Christ's lifeless body seems to lie almost directly on the shepherdess below, causing her to strain her neck and lean on her knee. This woman absorbs the weight of the body about to tumble right to the ground, suggesting this image of Christ is more of a burden than a source of religious inspiration. The mossy greens and overall cool colors of the stone monument show dead Jesus as a decaying relic, contrasting sharply with the warmer palette of the landscape.

The coding system of green in the late nineteenth century as a symbol of decay and putrefaction related to the absinthe epidemic among the working class. Eva Lajer-Burcharth's analysis of Manet's *Absinthe Drinker* (1859) recontextualizes the painting and the culture of absinthe addiction as a phenomenon of modernity, referring to Baudelaire's claim that absinthe (and alcohol in general) was the only

solace available to the urban poor.[42] The sparse green accents throughout the painting illustrate the green color the liquor took on when treated with certain chemicals, a practice customary in Paris where between five in the afternoon and seven in the evening was referred to as "the green hour" in the bars and cafés, as the city dwellers would imbibe the strong alcohol between the end of the work day and dinner time. Although this was the sanctioned time for the middle class to enjoy the drink, the poorer population drank absinthe more regularly, leading to panic over the threat of rampant alcoholism in the capital city.[43] Alphonse Allais' green monochrome painting *Some Pimps Laying in the Grass Drinking Absinthe* (1884) associates decadence (reference to pimps), absinthe and the color green, illustrating the same sentiment of his poem *Absinthe*: that the consumption of absinthe leads only to incoherent, pathetic drunkenness, not artistic inspiration.[44]

Whereas Gauguin's *Green Christ* is indicative of his ambivalence towards Christianity, Catholic Denis' depiction of the *Calvaire* (also from 1889) reflects his beliefs that Christ is a living deity, and his interpretation of the subject is considerably more somber and muted than Gauguin's piece (See Figure 1.10). The dramatic

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[42] Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa. "Modernity and the Condition of Disguise: Manet's 'Absinthe Drinker'." *Art Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 1, 1985): pp. 20-22. See also: Young, Marnin. "Heroic Indolence: Realism and the Politics of Time in Raffaëlli's 'Absinthe Drinkers'." *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 2 (June 1, 2008), 235–259.

[43] Phil Baker identifies several ways the color green was associated with absinthe culture, including the moniker "Green Muse" which referred to the practice of drinking absinthe excessively by artists, musicians and writers who were seeking inspiration. Baker, Phil. *The Book of Absinthe: A Cultural History*. Grove Press, 2001, 107-111

[44] Adams, Jad. *Hideous Absinthe: A History of the Devil in a Bottle*. I.B.Tauris, 2004, 81.

diagonal composition of Denis' work is created by the group of faceless, shapeless nuns who follow Christ through the Passion. The figure of Jesus, also featureless, has fallen to his knees. One of the nuns is attempting to help him raise the cross, as a shadowy mob of figures, most likely Christ's persecutors, approach. The painting has a mood of desperation and sadness; the nuns and Jesus are aware of his imminent and terrible fate. The encroaching crowd creates urgency and tension, driving forward Jesus' inevitable death. Whereas Gauguin's treatment of the *Calvaire* colors the statue as a relic of the past, in Denis' painting the Crucifixion is beginning to take place. The figures are alive and in motion, not frozen in a statue. Christ is clothed in orange with hair the same pumpkin hue, complementing the murky green horizon to emphasize his figure.

Denis greatly admired Gauguin and engaged with his work in a direct and personal way from the beginning of his career. In 1890, at age 20 Denis painted *Christ vert* (*Green Christ*, 1890, see Figure 1.11) as a response to Gauguin's *Green Christ* and *Yellow Christ* (1889). The influence of the older painter is demonstrated by Denis' use of the same hues as Gauguin throughout the work. However, Denis changes the color scheme and abstracts the forms of *Yellow Christ*. In the Gauguin work, the Crucifixion scene is mourned by three women in modern dress, most likely representing the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Veronica, three figures who appear in the bible at Christ's death, burial and Resurrection. Denis has translated these figures into small greenish tufts of plant material that punctuate the yellow

ground and the orange trees on the horizon and create a rising red solid mass behind the cross. Using the bright green color in sketchy vertical brushstrokes, Denis depicts the body in an advanced state of death and decomposition; the figure has absolutely no sense of life. Perhaps this derived from the grayish spots of colors that Gauguin uses on his Christ figure, small hints of death placed around the otherwise still living yellow flesh.

Gauguin, Bernard and their students were not the first to establish their style in Pont-Aven. The small coastal town in lower Brittany had been welcoming small groups of artists for decades without becoming overrun by casual visitors. English travel writer Henry Blackburn lauded Pont-Aven as an ideal city for artists eager to develop their craft, largely due to its status as "terra incognita" for tourists when compared to other parts of Brittany. It had an agreeable climate and a modest number of foreign visitors in the summer,[45] making it a quiet destination for young artists who wished to escape city life to work in a calm country setting among pleasant people where "the surroundings are delightful" and where an artist can find everything he needs "in an easy way that will sound romantic and impossible in 1879."[46] Blackburn found the picturesque qualities of Brittany particularly striking in Pont-Aven, where everything looked brighter and more colorful "under a more southern sun than

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[45] Gauguin commented that the foreign element added to the charm of Pont-Aven.

[46] Henry Blackburn, *Breton Folk: an Artistic Tour in Brittany,*. London: S. Low Marston Searle & Rivington, 1880.

England."[47] He also remarks that the natives of Pont-Aven are particularly amenable to posing for artists in traditional Breton dress. Blackburn also appreciated the potential for artistic inspiration in Brittany:

> Brittany is essentially the land of the painter. It would be strange indeed if a country sprinkled with white caps, and set thickly in summer with the brightest blossoms of the fields, should not attract artists in search of picturesque costume and scenes of pastoral life.[48]

He goes on to stess Brittany's superiority over Normandy because of its "wildness" which provided more unique material for the painter. Its kind citizens and historical remnants of Celtic buildings allowed for a picturesque view of a land half modern, half rooted in its medieval history. For Blackburn, Pont-Aven provided an ideal environment for artists to settle, and his descriptions prefigure the works of Bernard, Gauguin, Denis, Sérusier and others soon to come.

Pont-Aven's appeal was multifaceted: it was rough and wild and simultaneously bucolic and welcoming. These dichotomies appealed to writers and painters of the nineteenth century, who were responsible for creating an image of Brittany that would remain its legacy for the next two centuries through stories of a region steeped in its Celtic history, threatened by the encroaching policitcal desire for homogeneity and modernization in France. Celtic and French studies scholar Heather

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Blackburn, Henry. *Artistic Travel in Normandy, Brittany, the Pyrenees, Spain and Algeria.* London: S. Low Marston and Co., 1892, 63.

Williams claims that Brittany was "invented" in the nineteenth century as remote, beautiful, and nostalgic and, yet, still accessible. She attributes the prolific art production of Brittany by the non-Breton French (such as Balzac's *Les Chouans*) to a mid-nineteenth century Parisian craze for Celtic culture. Brittany satisfied the continuing Romantic trend towards visualizations of the exotic at the same time providing a contemporary narrative on indigenous human traditions sacrificed for the longevity of the nation as a whole.[49]

Beginning around 1850, Pont-Aven became a popular artist destination for painters such as Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henry Moret, Maxime Mofra and Gustave Loiseau. These painters traveled to Pont-Aven and other towns in Brittany to continue the project begun by the Impressionists. Monet had painted extensively in Normandy, but many younger painters working in the Impressionist style diverged from his example and chose Brittany as their muse. The countryside offered endless material for artists seeking the effects of light on the natural world away from the bright lights of Paris. Nearly three decades later, Pont-Aven remained an alluring site for painters to escape from the distractions of the city.[50]

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[49] For a more complete understanding of how the image of Brittany was constructed in the nineteenth century, see Heather Williams' book, *Postcolonial Brittany: Literature Between Languages*, which examines why Brittany and the Breton language are treated as colonial acquisitions rather than a part of France.

[50] Today, the Breton town continues to welcome artists to the Pont-Aven School of Contemporary Art, an international art program that entices applicants with its picturesque landscape and relaxed ambiance.

Although the small Breton city offered an atmosphere distinct from cold, industrial Paris, Pont-Aven was not an exclusively rural town. By the end of the 19th century it offered plenty of modern comforts: hotels, restaurants, shops, and cafés. These conveniences and the town's welcoming atmosphere led Gauguin to choose Pont-Aven as a site of artistic dialogue and training: a place where he could share ideas with artists concerned with the themes of modernity and faith. The lure of the exotic "other" was common in French painting of the 19th century; Romantic artists, such as Eugène Delacroix, exploited the fantasies of a viewing public enchanted by stories of France's imperial conquests abroad. Throughout modern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the visual arts imagined foreign places where the rules of modern Europeans did not apply.[51] France enjoyed rich depictions of all things Eastern: tapestries, turbans, wild animals, and snake charmers. The exotic canvases of Delacroix, Jean-Léon Gerôme, and Anne-Louis Girodet imagined a world uninhibited by the enlightened awareness of civilized Europe. A famous example is Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827, Figure 1.12). The Assyrian king orders all of his prized possessions destroyed before the enemy can capture his palace, some of which are women who are painted to look more like typical auburn-haired Parisian girls than Middle Eastern women. Even Sardanapalus looks remarkably like a light-skinned Western man, save for his long beard and bejeweled turban. These images project European viewers into a mythical construct, allowing them to feel as if they

[51] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient" in *Art in America*, May 1983.

had slipped into a fantasy world full of exotic women, garments and animals. These depictions of the East are distant subjects intended to titillate viewers, not create a sense of nostalgia for French history.

Brittany was viewed in a similar fashion to the colonized empires of the east, yet the view of Breton life was markedly different from Romantic orientalism. Karine Salomé's study of the Brittany islands examines how Brittany and its people were viewed by the rest of France, concluding that, beginning in the eighteenth century, the accord among the residents and the connection between people and the environment was seen as different from the relationship of people and landscape in modern regions.[52] Since Louis XIV, the absolutist monarchs of France emphasized control over nature as part of their divine right to rule. This was best exemplified by the gardens of the Versailles palace, perfectly manicured to create an ideal environment for the court. Artists such as Gauguin were intrigued by the symbolic possibilities of depicting the natural world at a time and place where the contrast between the political desire to control nature and the provincial desire to live symbiotically with nature was particularly apparent.

Not all artists who came to Pont-Aven left with the distinctly modern and symbolic understanding of the Breton milieu projected on it by Gauguin and the Nabis . Henry Moret first visited in 1886, the same year Gauguin arrived in Pont-

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[52]Karine Salomé, *Les îles bretonnes: une image en construction, 1750-1914* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 100-101.

Aven, making friends and contacts in the local art scene, enjoying a successful career in the area, and eventually settling there. Heavily influenced by the Impressionists in Paris, Moret brought the bright color palettes and short brush strokes of Monet and Camille Pissarro to Brittany. Although he met and worked alongside Gauguin and Bernard, Moret's interpretation of the Breton landscape deviates significantly from the Symbolist canvases created at the same time.[53] His 1901 painting *La Baie du Pouldu* is an example of how earlier Impressionism influenced his work (See Figure 1.13). It depicts white-crested waves crashing upon rocks. The scene is picturesque, composed of a range of cool pastels and warm oranges. The paint is thick and applied heavily to the canvas, and Moret has created a perspective that allows miles of visibility, rather than using the compositional flatness of Denis and Gauguin's work. The light of dawn rises far in the horizon, a mixture of pale pinks and yellows. In the foreground Moret has provided a small patch of land from which the viewer can imagine he is looking over the endless expanse of coastline.

Denis' painting *Seashore* (1891) demonstrates the early style of he Nabis (See Figure 1.14). Although it depicts a stretch of Normandy coast, the content is similar to Moret's Brittany. Denis executed the image with characteristic flatness, and rather from the viewpoint of a person looking out onto the ocean, as in Moret's picture, Denis adopts a viewpoint typical to Japanese prints. Denis positions the viewer as if

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[53] Gustave Loiseau and Anderson Galleries (Beverly Hills, Calif.), *Trois amis à Pont Aven: Gustave Loiseau, Henry Moret, Maxime Maufra.* (Beverly Hills Calif.: Anderson Galleries, 2005), 4.

he or she were looking over the side of the cliff, contemplating the sublime scene of crashing waves and jagged rocks below. The deep blues and greens of the ocean and shore are highlighted by the white crests of the waves, and the only warm color in the composition is assigned to the two figures that stand on the shore. The figures have no distinguishing features, they exist only in silhouette, miniscule in comparison to the sea. Although the painting is a small, rapidly-executed cardboard work, Denis succeeded in depicting the effect of the sublime qualities of nature.[54]

Another of these early pictures from Denis takes on the Brittany coast as the subject, but *Breton Landscape, In Yellow* (1892) has a much warmer palette (See Figure 1.15). The yellow sky reflected on the water and the smoky brown shadows over the adjacent farmhouse suggest twilight. A lone figure clothed in a black garment tends to a cow in the foreground, which fades into the shadows of the evening light. The white, veil-like garment on the figure's head reflects traditional Breton dress and draws the eye to the figure, who stands outside of a rustic brick cottage. Again Denis differs from Moret, because the Impressionist technique of using small patches of brighter color to depict scintillating light is absent. He also continues with the elevated viewpoint, placing the viewer slightly above the scene, a less dramatic effect than in *Seashore*.

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[54] Denis, Maurice, Musée d'Orsay, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, and Museo d'arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto. *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943: Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 31 Octobre 2006-21 Janvier 2007, Montréal, Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Montréal, Pavillon Michal Et Renata Hornstein, 22 Février-20 Mai 2007, Rovereto, Museo Di Arte Moderna E Contemporanea Di Trento E Rovereto, 23 Juin-23 Septembre 2007*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006.

Religious ritual incorporated into everyday life had been characteristic of Breton society for centuries, rooted in the polytheistic history of the region. Breton writer Jacques Cambry stated, "religion has guided man in this region even more than in the rest of the country."[55] Due to an aggressive strategy that associated Christian mythology with existing rites and rituals of the Breton people, the Jesuits successfully converted the inhabitants of Brittany in the seventeenth century. Every day in Pont-Aven, well into to the turn of the 20th century, the Angelus was rung and working men returned home to pray and share a meal with their families. Each morning with breakfast, each afternoon for lunch, and in the evenings for supper, bells were rung for the entire town to hear, and daily life was regimented by prayer. The fervent Christianity of Brittany has been attributed to several factors, such as the important role of the priest in village society and the geographical isolation of Brittany relative to more urban, quickly secularizing regions of France.[56]

From the 1820s on, politicians pushed for a thorough "frenchification" of Brittany, in order to "improve" the region. Beginning around 1880, Brittany was forced to curtail Breton instruction in the classroom. The political push to eliminate the Breton language began in the Renaissance but picked up considerable momentum

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[55] Quoted in Caroline Ford, *Religion and rural politics in France: social Catholicism in Lower Brittany, 1890-1926*, 1987, 58.

[56] Ibid, 58-60.

in the nineteenth century.[57] The standardizing laws created by Ferry (1881-1882) affected education throughout France, particularly the provinces where indigenous, non-French based dialects were commonly spoken. By the beginning of the 20th century, Breton had been banned from all schools, and students heard speaking Breton were punished with a scarlet letter of sorts, called the *symbole*.[58] Policies like the *symbole* draw attention to the strange dichotomy that existed in French society concerning Brittany. On the one hand, the nineteenth and twentieth century Celtic revival drew large crowds to the region in curiosity and celebration of its antiquarian charm. On the other hand, any sincere attempt by the Breton people to preserve their culture was punished and shamed. In a particularly modern and unexpected move in the 1890s, the priests of the department of Finistère (where Pont-Aven is located) chose to turn to a form of social Catholicism that was more sympathetic to republican principles. Finistère was the most earnestly Catholic area of Brittany, and due to the strong relationship between Breton parishioners and their clergy, the transition from royalist Catholicism to social Catholicism was relatively smooth.[59]

Brittany was seen as a relic of the past, an area unrelenting to the pressure to become fully "French."[60] Judy LePaul has already examined the artist influx into

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[57] Heather Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany: literature between languages* (Oxford [England];New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 10.

[58] Ibid, 11.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Mayon McDonald's book *We Are Not French!: Language, Culture, and Identity in Brittany*. London; New York: Routledge, 1989, examines efforts to preserve Breton culture in France.

Brittany in the nineteenth century, finding that the region provided an escape from the significant influence the traditions classical antiquity held over artists at the end of the eighteenth century. Brittany's medieval past remained embedded in its topography, whereas in Paris all traces of an earlier age had been erased through the Second Empire's modernization plan, centered on Haussmann's restructuring of the capital.[61] According to LePaul, the artists who flocked to Brittany sought a backdrop for their artistic experimentation, not a site to copy or record in objective landscape painting.[62]

In 1891, André Gide wrote about traveling in Brittany, marveling at the region's capacity for artistic inspiration. "I had wanted to be able to paint" he wrote, so that he could attempt to record for himself the landscape of Brittany that he had never seen reproduced. Possibly, he wondered, because "the shimmering water where the reflected mountains and the algae at the bottom of the ocean become one, the transparent stem, the mysterious shadows, of colors that, once approached, create revelations" may be irreproducible.[63] Gide also critiques painters' attempts at replicating the sights of Brittany, including Denis' works. Gide does not say that Denis has perfectly captured Brittany in his work, but he finds the paintings admirable because of Denis' sagacious composition techniques. "No bluff, no parade,

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[61] According to Anthony Sutcliffe, it was Henry the IV who began the modernization of Paris through urban planning; ordering the creation of urban plazas to assert the new modern face of France after the end of the Wars of Religion. *Paris, An Architectural History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 19-21.

[62] Le Paul, 7-9.

[63] Andre Gide, "Notes d'un voyage en Bretagne" in Gide, André, and Louis Martin-Chauffier. *Oeuvres complètes d'André Gide;* [Paris: N[ouvelle] r[evue] f[rançaise], 1932, 8.

no leaving the work to an easy improvisation by the paintbrush. His harmonious reasoning guides and tempers a pure and smiling sensuality."[64]

Gide's admiration for Denis' landscape painting led to a collaboration between the two men on Gide's 1893 publication *Le Voyage d'Urien*. They began to correspond on the matter in 1892, when Gide sent Denis excerpts of the text, requesting that he depict the landscapes according to the sentimentality of the specific part of the poem. In the first part, the landscape is perceived as sumptuous and forbidden, like a modern Garden of Eden. In the second, a gloomy landscape sets a mood of boredom and disinterest. After giving these parameters Gide offers a caveat that he is so absorbed in his own writing that he cannot help but share his thoughts, however vague they may be. Denis responds with enthusiasm, telling Gide that he was "enchanted" by his poetry and offers a few of his preliminary ideas for the illustrations (See Figures 1.16 and 1.17). He is reluctant, however, to speak to his ideas about color for the works, since he was, at the time, conflicted about how to select the colors, and the appropriate palette eluded him. The final result of this collaboration has been called one of the finer achievements of literary illustration.[65]

In his study of religious art and politics in the nineteenth century Michael Driskel identified works of art that formulate a visual response to the struggle

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[64] Gide, "Maurice Denis" in Ibid, 420.

[65] Savage, Catharine H. "Gide's Criticism of Symbolism." *The Modern Language Review* 61, no. 4 (October 1, 1966), 601–609.

between faith and government during the period. Looking at the long nineteenth century and focusing on Napoleon III's Second Empire, Driskel situates religious art as an important facet of cultural production. The paintings described in his book relate to the oscillating views of the public towards the Church and the conflicting ultramontane and naturalist beliefs that were on the rise throughout France. One of the more striking examples to which Driskel points is a painting by Jean-Paul Laurens, *Le Pape Formose et Etienne VII* (1870), depicting what Driskel claims must be "the most grotesque moment in ecclesiastical history"[66] as the exhumed body of the dead pope Formosus stands trial for causing trouble among Italian emperors in ninth century Italy (See Figure 1.18). By illustrating this historical episode, Laurens is indicting the contemporary papacy as a dead institution, where old men, practically cadavers, rule their constituents without a lively approach to contemporary society. Formosus, dead and rotting in his complete papal regalia is still paying for his sins a millennium later, representing all of the problems with Catholicism in France.

By providing healthy competition for the best teachers (members of the clergy seeking lucrative posts) and attracting cash from private donations to finance their efforts, parish schools were able to supersede their lay counterparts during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, according to Curtis, Church-based teachers enjoyed more support from their congregations than non-religious instructors received from

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[66] Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-century France* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 51.

pre-Third Republic governments. Recruiting better skilled teachers and paying them high wages allowed the Church to instill its ideals in French citizens, beginning at a young age. Under the guise of protecting children from the evils of the quickly secularizing and modernizing world, the clergy accrued control of almost every aspect of student's lives. Whenever children moved, ate or spoke it was within the permissions of the Church. This kind of strict control, usually deemed unacceptable by adults when exercised upon them by religious or governmental institutions, was extremely popular among parents of the diocese, as all teachers attempted to show that "social problems could be solved by reforming people, rather than society" and primary schools were the means to these solutions.[67]

The influence the Church had on the everyday existence of the French people was extensive until Jules Ferry took the office of Prime Minister in 1880 and began the official laicization of France. Dedicated to making education secular,[68] Ferry was responsible for a series of laws that extended to all schools throughout France, challenging or undermining any authority the Church previously had in education. The Ferry laws established free education in 1881 and mandatory and laic education in 1882, creating the *école républicaine* which effectively destroyed the dual system of church and state schools. Not only did Ferry's laws take away the power the

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[67] Curtis, 102.

[68] It is important to note that Ferry's dedication to secular education was by no means an indictment of Catholic faith or believers, which included his sister, with whom he was very close. For Ferry, faith and devotion were personal and private issues. Alguhon, 30.

Church had in the schools, they instituted a new curriculum that included a suspicious view of Catholicism and its clergy, critiquing its superstitious, controlling, and narrow-minded points of view. Using the same technique the Church had previously employed, Ferry's laws ensured that by the late 1880's young French citizens were taught to be wary of the religious institution and its teachings.[69]

This culture of uncertain faith and distrust of the clergy is clearly apparent in Émile Zola's *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* (1875), a biting commentary on the Church's ineffectiveness and destructiveness. Serge Mouret is sent to lead a provincial parish in a small town where nearly none of the inhabitants are interested in his sermons. Zola paints the priest as a nervous figure who is unusually devoted to the Virgin Mary and eventually suffers a nervous breakdown and subsequent amnesia. While unable to remember who he is or his station in the Church, he begins a relationship with his caretaker Albine, a simple, pure and beautiful girl who is intensely in love with Serge. At the moment they consummate their love, they are discovered by another village priest and Serge's memories instantly return to him. He abandons Albine and returns to the Church in an attempt to rehabilitate himself under the purview of God. His love, alone and confused, begs for an audience with him-he rejects her, causing her to commit suicide in the garden where the couple had spent their courtship. Zola's novel was critical of the Church's relationship to the government, as well as the

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[69] For a more detailed discussion of the impact of republicanism on schools, including the textbook reform and the training of new teachers (including women) that occurred in the 1880s, see Pasler, 315-316.

general respect received by the clergy which he believes to be unearned. Despite casting him as a devout cleric while in his right mind, Zola's characterization of Mouret shows clear signs of disillusionment with the church and its ability to reach people as he is unable to preach to the Artauds who appreciate neither his mission nor his church. Throughout the novel, Zola depicts the clergy as impulsive, neurotic and weak. Catholicism, religion in general, and particular members of the clergy are described in feminizing terms.[70]

For Denis, a staunch Catholic his whole life, Pont-Aven was an ideal place to combine his enthusiasm for religious painting and colorful landscapes. It was not beyond the means of many of the art-going public to visit the region: Parisians could take long weekends or summers in the area. Denis had spent time in Brittany as a youth with his family on summer vacations. In the summer of 1885, he wrote in his journal about how Brittany provided a setting amenable to painting. The fifteen year old imagines moving there to work on his art, after he becomes a famous, accomplished artist: "I love Brittany. Without the evil Couesnon (river), which divides Brittany from Normandy, I would be Breton also. It is also my dream, still, to go to the Brittany. I hope, after my Prix de Rome and five years in Italy, having known scorn, discussion, and admiration of my saintly canvases, to calmly retire to

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[70] "La religion s'en va des campagnes, parce qu'on la fait trop bonne femme." p 57 "La religion n'est pas une fille pour qu'on la mette dans les fleurs et dans les dentelles." 109.

the land of saints and old customs."[71] He was accepted at the Pont-Aven school five years later, after a trip to Italy, but unfortunately without a Prix de Rome.

In a journal entry from 1888, the seventeen year old Denis contemplated the words of Fra Angelico. Fra Angelico, an artist whom Denis admired greatly had said, "In order to paint the matters of Christ, one must live with Christ." Denis, seeking to become "pure and saintly," wished to live his life as one with Christ; however, he pursued this goal in an unusual way. Rather than join a monastery, Denis would transform the artist studio, in his view associated with debauchery and frivolity, into a site where the teachings of heaven and earth would unite into a divine artistic practice, one that would encompass the diversity of the sacred and the secular.[72] According to Denis, Fra Angelico had accomplished this in the mid fifteenth century, and as "the most pious Master painter of Christian humanism" successfully integrated flesh and blood man into scenes of religious ecstasy. Giorgio Vasari states that Fra Angelico earned his nickname because the coloring of his *Coronation of our Lady by Jesus Christ in San Domenico* (1430-1432) "could well be the work of one of the angels or saints themselves"[73] (See Figure 1.19). Denis later wrote in his *Historie de*

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[71] Maurice Denis, *Journal: 1884-1943*. Paris: La Colombe, 1957, 44 (26 aout). "Sans le maudit Couesnon, qui met le ont en Normandie, je serais Breton aussi. C'est aussi mon reve, la Terre bretonne; et ce l'est bien encore. J'esperais, apres mon prix de Rome et mes cinq ans en Italie, connue deja-bafoue, discute, admire, par mes toiles de saintete, me retirer tranquillement dans le pays des saints et des vieilles coutomes."

[72] Ibid, 68.

[73] Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Artists: A Selection*. Reprinted with minor revisions. The Open University Set Book, Arts Foundation Course. Harmondsworth, Middlesex; New York: Penguin Books, 1971, 202.

l'art religieux (1939) that Fra Angelico, through his brilliant and sublime colors, achieved the true essence of human emotions, ranging from despair over the death of Christ to joy in his resurrection.[74]

Denis' theories on art and how one must derive the subject of a work of art began when he was in his late teens, and his journal provides the foundation for understanding his artistic practice. As his thoughts on Fra Angelico show, Denis sought to bring color, nature, and Christianity together as a testament to his own unrelenting beliefs. Aside from the overtly religious themes of his journals (nearly every entry mentions God in some fashion) it is clear that, from an early age, Denis was dedicated to becoming the kind of artist who could inspire devotion through line and color. After viewing an exhibition of Puvis de Chavannes' work in 1887, Denis fixated on the colors of Puvis' work, stating that the variation of hues and size of the murals create an air of mystery, one that Denis later translated into his own religious decoration. He followed his visit to the exhibition with a walk through the Louvre to admire the Italian masters, comparing the "harmonies" of Botticelli with those of Puvis. Jennifer Shaw's study of Puvis' effect on French art claims that he paved the way for painters looking to move beyond Impressionism. His non-Academic style was characterized by flatness and unique arrangements of lines that offered a his style as the new French national art. Shaw argues that the Indépendant artists of the 1880s and 1890s saw Puvis' art as a model for their project, and that the fin-de-siècle

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[74] Denis, Maurice. *Histoire De L'art Religieux*. Paris: 1939

moderns "called into question the opposition between mind and body that had dominated French academic theory for more than a century." His painting also offered a political purpose as a national art that appealed to the citizens of the Third Republic as much as academic art had to monarchists in the past.[75]

To the more devout young moderns such as Denis, the political purpose of Puvis' murals was less interesting than their potential to function as devotional objects. From a young age Denis felt he knew the purpose of art: a colorful, religious expression, recalling Bernard's contention that art, before all else, should be pleasing to the eye. He is less interested in making work for art's sake, as in the exercises of understanding nature so central to the Indépendants, but rather an art that will bring him closer to sainthood, closer to the purity of spirit he had seen in his devout Italian predecessors. He realized in his youth that his love for women and desire to have a family would keep him out of the cloisters, and indeed he married his wife Marthe in 1893 at age 23 and the couple raised seven children. Instead, his dedication to painting was his religious expression, his service to God, and he charged himself with finding the most effective way of ministering the Catholic message to every person who would view his art.[76]

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[75] Shaw, Jennifer Laurie. *Dream States: Puvis De Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 191, 197.

[76] Denis, *Journal*, 1888.

Denis' early writings and his analysis of Vasari's biography of Fra Angelico indicate that a bold and effective use of color was necessary to become a great artist. If Fra Angelico could earn his saintly moniker through his coloring, so could Denis. His theories began to center on the importance of form over content. By 1890, 20 year old Denis had already stated his famous caveat: "remember that a painting, before being a battle horse, a naked woman or some anecdote or another, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[77] The painter's well-known theoretical work has a tendency to overshadow his own practice, and 30 years after Denis made this statement, he had already begun to regret it.[78] He claimed that he made this comment "under the influence of Gauguin and Sérusier" and placed more emphasis on content in his twentieth century work.[79] Bouillon calls the early period of Denis' work the "belles icônes" partly because he finds the paintings of the 1890s to be "appealing" and partly because Denis' nickname among The Nabis was *nabi des belles icônes* (Nabi of the Beautiful Icons). *Icône*, (which was, like *nabi*, appropriated from Hebrew) was also the general term used for painting by the Nabis. [80]

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[77] Denis, "Definition of neo-traditionalism" *Arts et critique*, 1890.

[78] Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: le spirituel dans l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 23.

[79] Denis, *Théories* 1920 4th. Ed.

[80] Bouillon, 23.

Denis' quote, although privileging form above content, does not completely ignore the importance of content altogether. He was strictly in favor of representational art, but the content could not overshadow the formal elements of the picture, such as color, line, and flatness. The majority of his paintings throughout his career depict either religious scenes or family members. There are a few rare exceptions, such as *Sunlight on the Terrace* (1890), which appears to be an exercise in the effects of sunlight just outside of his Saint-Germain-en-Laye home (See Figure 1.20).[81] The painting, thought to be inspired by the work made in Pont-Aven by The Nabis over the two preceding summers, borrows its rich, warm colors from the work of Gauguin. The canvas is bathed in a deep red, reminiscent of Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon* (1888, see Figure 1.21). The sunlight has transformed the scene into near abstraction; Denis' arabesque lines suggest forms and figures that cannot be identified. The red mass in the background could be a group of figures enjoying the sunlight. The trees that line the terrace are identifiable by their trunks on the right edge of the composition; as they curl around the back edge of the work, they lose any sense of roots or branches. The green leaves create a curtain in the background, breaking up the orange and red tones. In the middle ground stands a solitary figure, motionless, frozen into the picture plane that couples Byzantine flatness with the elevated perspective and lack of depth seen in the Japanese prints exhibited throughout France in the late nineteenth century.

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[81] *Earthly Paradise* p 122.

An early secular work, *Sunlight on the Terrace* is an exercise in saturated color and suggested line and form through natural light. It qualifies as an early Symbolist work in its flatness and in its slight air of mystery characteristic of Denis' *belles icônes*. The effects of passing light had been thoroughly explored by artists such as Monet, Renoir, and Signac. Outdoor light in Impressionist paintings is dispersed throughout the painting in bursts, emphasizing the filtration of light through clouds or tree and the transient nature of natural light. *Sunlight on the Terrace* provides a symbolic representation of sunlight-the large planes of warm color suggest a sunny afternoon a nonrealistic way. The piece does not have the overt religious subject matter commonly found in Denis' oeuvre. Denis never titled the picture or sold it, suggesting he considered the piece more of a sketch than a completed painting. It remained untitled in the artists' collection until well after his death.[82] Denis believed that his art, from its very foundation, was fundamentally different from the Impressionist project in terms of how he viewed the landscape as an actor in his paintings. In 1934 the critic Raymond Cogniat organized an exhibition at the Société des Amis d'Eugène Delacroix entitled *Gauguin, ses amis, l'école de Pont-Aven et l'Académie Julian*. In the introduction to the catalogue, Denis described his experience of Pont-Aven painting as extraordinary, because the "heavily decorated, powerfully colorful" canvases surpassed the mere copying of nature vaunted by the

[82] Musee d'Orsay Documentation on Maurice Denis

earlier Indépendants.[83] Again this recalls Bernard, who stated in 1881 that Impressionist painting lacked an emotional and psychological component essential to successful art making, stating that the Impressionists were "impotent," caught up in endless observation, pushing color theory to the point where it became "the negation of art."[84]

Denis was disturbed by Third Republic moves towards the separation of church and state, and his work interrogates the legitimacy of faith in a modern, secularized world.[85] He felt that even the Catholics of France were ignoring the potential that modern painting had for ensuring the perpetuity of the faith, that they had dismissed Puvis' work by not giving him "walls to proclaim the truths of Faith." The Church's failure to recognize Puvis discouraged him, although he earned a large commission for the Church of Sainte-Croix in Vésinet. As a child he loved going to services, and he wrote in his journal "I adore church ceremonies, that's where my artist's soul and my Christian heart come together."[86] Art and Christianity were inseparable in Denis' mind, but in a world that moved increasingly away from God,

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[83] Maurice Denis "L'epoque du symbolisme" in Raymond Cogniat, *Gauguin: ses amis, l'École de Pont-Aven et l'Académie Julian, exposition... Février-mars 1934. Catalogue par Raymond Cogniat... [L'Époque du symbolisme, par Maurice Denis.].* (Paris: Éditions "Les Beaux-arts," 1934). "Quel eblouissement d'abord, et ensuite quelle revelation! Au lieu de fenetres ouvertes sur la nature, comme les tableaux des impressionistes, c'etaient des surfaces lourdement decoratives, puissament coloriees, et cernees d'un trait brutal, cloisonnees, car on parlait aussi, a ce propos, de cloisonnisme, et encore de japonisme." np

[84] Denis, "Théories sur la nouvelle peinture" notes from 23 november.

[85] *Earthly Paradise,* 122.

[86] Denis, *Journal*, 14.

this connection was threatened. Refusing to accept the apathetic nature of his colleagues towards religion, he continually stressed Catholic beliefs through his art and his theories, eventually convincing his friend Sérusier to return to the Church in 1903.

Sérusier, later assigned the moniker "Nabi of the glowing beard," was several years older than Denis and was the first to work with Gauguin. A Catholic by birth and theosophist in practice, Sérusier felt he was answering a "celestial calling" by seeking a "brotherhood of pure souls" with whom he could share his theories on art. His theosophical inclinations led him to Brittany, where he could further explore the connection between nature and spirituality, or "the fundament of the sacred in the tangible and visible world of matter."[87] Although as an adult Sérusier was ultimately unconvinced of the relevance of organized religion, his Catholic upbringing sensitized him to Christian ideology and he held an overall favorable view of the faith, despite his critical view of Church politics during his adult life .[88]

Sérusier's fascination with world religions informed his leadership of the Nabis. The men met weekly for dinner and discussion, where Sérusier attempted to create a strong theoretical basis for the group's work. Denis called him one of the greatest painters and theoricians of their generation and the "principal author of the

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[87] Nancy Davenport, "Paul Sérusier and Theosophy" *Religion and the Arts* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 2007), 174.

[88] Boyle-Turner, Caroline. Paul Sérusier. Studies in the Fine Arts. the Avant-Garde. Vol. 37. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983, 5.

theories of the Pont-Aven school."[89] His celebrated work *Talisman* (1888) was an exercise in the stylistic ideas that Gauguin was trying to teach his Pont-Aven students. Denis later called *Talisman* a "misshapen landscape built up in the Synthetist manner" referring to the style created by Gauguin and Bernard in the 1880s (See Figure 1.22).[90] Although the oil on cardboard picture was considered more of a sketch or exercise in new technique than a fully finished painting, the title of the work indicates that it was nonetheless viewed as a prophecy of their nascent style.[91] *Talisman* is a brightly colored, abstract landscape that depicts the sensations Sérusier felt looking at the Brittany landscape, following Gauguin's advice to ignore naturalism in the landscape and instead focus on the pure colors he saw *en plein air*. While Sérusier was working on *Talisman*, Gauguin guided him: "How do you see that tree? It's green? Well then, make it green, the best green on your palette. How do you see those trees? They are yellow. Well then, put down yellow. And that shade is rather blue. So render it with pure ultramarine. Those red leaves? Use vermillion."[92] Gauguin's supervision of Sérusier's painting is indicative of the intimate teacher-student relationships developed in Pont-Aven. Brittany-born French writer Charles Chasée

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[89] Denis, commentary in Sérusier, Paul. *ABC de la peinture*, reprinted 1995.

[90] Denis, *Théories*, 1912, 161.

[91] Boyle-Turner, Caroline. *Paul Sérusier*. Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1983, 15.

[92] Clement, Russell T. *A Sourcebook of Gauguin's Symbolist Followers: The Nabis,Pont-Aven, Rose + Croix*. Art Reference Collection no. 27. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004, 15. "Comment voyez-vous les arbres? Ils sont jaunes, eh bien mettez du jaune, cette ombre plutôt bleue, peignez-la avec outremer pur, ces feuilles rouges? Mettez du vermillion."

appreciated the discipleship of the Pont-Aven group, stating that Sérusier was the "Saint Paul to Gauguin's Christ."[93] The religious aspect of this comparison is intentional; as Maurer pointed out, in addition to his self-identification with Christ, Gauguin was regarded as a Christ-like figure by The Nabis. *Talisman* was the first painting to result from Gauguin's tutelage, and it became the charm of the young Nabi painters.

Despite the influence Gauguin had on Sérusier's work, and how they collaborated to begin the Nabi movement, Sérusier was not as convinced of Gauguin's genius as he had been before going to Brittany to study. In a letter to Denis from 1889, he complains that Gauguin is not actually "the artist of my dreams" and is, in fact, an illogical and argumentative man who lacks delicacy in conversation. Although Sérusier does not mention Gauguin's illness in the letter, the elder painter was suffering from dysentery throughout Sérusier's first visit, leaving him bed-ridden and irritable.[94] The constant disagreement between the two men left Sérusier lonely, missing the company of his friends and colleagues. Denis responds with compassion, reminding Sérusier that despite Gauguin's current health and disposition, he remains a valuable resource for the younger painter, mentioning Gauguin's major achievements in painting, particularly of Breton subjects.[95] In view of Denis' essay, "The Influence

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[93] Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier,* 93.

[94] Gauguin fell especially ill in the summer of 1888, just before Sérusier's arrival.

[95] Correspondence between Maurice Denis and Sérusier, reprinted in Sérusier, *ABC de la peinture*.

of Paul Gauguin" written in 1903 as a sort of eulogy after the older painter's death, it would seem that Sérusier's letter was an emotional response to the isolation he experienced in Brittany and not a complete disavowal of Gauguin's significance.[96]

At Sérusier's insistence, The Nabis regularly met with a Dominican monk to discuss religion. Caroline Boyle-Turner suggests that these discussions, which began in 1890, had little effect on Sérusier's early painting. After a couple of years leading The Nabis, Sérusier began to distance himself from the group to spend more time in Brittany, returning to Paris less often. Over the years Sérusier's enchantment with the bright colors of Brittany began to wane, and he focused instead on the difficult rural life of the region. His palette darkened considerably, and his depictions of the Breton people became studies of "a simple people whose harsh life left them free from the sophisticated and learned trappings of the people of Paris."[97] He found their religious devotion intriguing, and admired their steadfast belief in God.

Like Denis, Sérusier felt inspired by the paintings of Fra Angelico, and a 1904 trip to Italy left him self-conscious about his own abilities as a religious painter. Ultimately deciding that Christian art had been declining since the Renaissance, Sérusier's style changed in favor of the work of the Italian primitives. In his talks with the Benedictine monk Didier Lenz, Sérusier became convinced Christ's divine nature was not compatible with humanistic depiction, and that images of Christ

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[96] Maurice Denis, "The Influence of Paul Gauguin" *Occident*, 1903.

[97] Boyle-Turner, *Paul Sérusier*, 86.

should be stylized and symbolized. An example of his later work, *Le Christ blanc* (*White Christ*, 1913) from the Church of Chateauneuf-du-Faou takes its cue from medieval and Byzantine-style depictions and also continues a trend begun by Puvis and his colleagues in Pont-Aven (See Figure 1.23). The title indicates the bright, white garment that Jesus wears in a relatively traditional fashion. A similar brightness is seen in another piece from the Church interior, *Christ with angels* (1913), in which Christ is surrounded by a sea of floating heads, all of which appear to be female (See Figure 1.24). These flat, stylized figures are characteristic of Sérusier's style during the last two decades of his life. In addition to the project at Chateauneuf-du-Faou, Sérusier decorated the interior of his home with Christian imagery, reflecting his late-in-life return to the Church.[98]

The influence of Sérusier's *Talisman* on Denis' early painting is evidenced by the wide planes of saturated color and perspectival flatness of Denis' work in the 1890's. In *À la fenêtre du train* (*The Train Window*, 1890), Denis collapses the secular and the religious in a multicolored figure who turns from an outdoor landscape to stare at the viewer (See Figure 1.25). The lack of depth in the background makes the view from the train window look more like a painting on a wall. One half of the figure's face is grayish blue, the other glowing in orange, suggesting a shadow although there is no explanatory lighting in Denis' image. The flesh of the left side of the figures face is bluish and bloated as if it were slowly decaysing as the outside

[98] Ibid, 132.

views pass by, the healthy and lively orange flesh graying and rotting. The figure[99] has an odd burst of yellow around his head as if he had the same halo as Christ in Denis' other paintings. This could be viewed as merely the abstracted, colorful view of a patron on a train posing for a picture; however, it is likely that the similarities with his religious paintings are intentional. Whereas Sérusier applied Gauguin's teachings to his landscape work, Denis attempted to use similar techniques to combine secular and religious painting styles.

Also in 1890 Denis painted *Christ orange*, which combines the abstraction of *Christ vert* with the pumpkin orange of *Calvaire* (See Figure 1.26). The nuns from *Calvaire* have reappeared; but in the overall abstracted style of *Christ orange*, the women have become large black masses. Although the figures look similar to the nuns of Calvaire, they also bear a resemblance to Breton women in traditional costume, usually a black garment with a white headpiece. Slight variations in tone around the crucifix make it seem as if Christ is floating in air, an apparition witnessed by the women below, similar to the scene in Gauguin's *Yellow Christ*. The deep, bright colors intensify the mysterious scene and grant the Christ figure a celestial quality, as if he is the source of all life: the sun. By equating Christ with a necessary, life-sustaining force, Denis further establishes his artistic platform-as investigating the intersections of faith and modernity.

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[99] In the English version of the Musée d'Orsay's exhibition catalogue, "Earthly Paradise" the author claims the figure is a young boy, although there is no evidence offered thereof. *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943,* 124.

Sérusier, like Denis, stressed the importance of harmony in painting. Baudelaire had theorized the connection between color and harmony long before the Symbolist painters picked up their brushes. Through an extended metaphor of painting and music composition in his commentary on the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire claimed that in color resides the rhythm and melody of a work of art. Sérusier, half a century later, embraced Gauguin and Bernard's idea of Synthetism, believing that it managed to achieve complete harmony through a marriage between color and line, rejecting Baudelaire's claim that an artist is either primarily a colorist or a draftsman.[100] Sérusier claimed that in a successful work of art, "the harmony of lines must correspond with a rigorous harmony of colors, a harmony that is not empirically found in connections that are more or less happy, but constructed deliberately by the artist."[101] For the two painters, *harmonie* was the perfect balance between a judicious use of saturated color and arabesque line resulting in a painterly expression of the natural world that, while grounded in reality, provides a sense of fantasy, a subjective view of the artists' perception of nature informed by psychological sensations that were not a part of the Impressionist project.

An art teacher in his later years, Sérusier penned the textbook *ABC de la peinture* in 1921 to outline what he thought were the most important elements of great

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[100] Batchelor, David (ed), *Colour*. Documents of Contemporary Art. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008, 25.

[101] Sérusier quoted in Tuarze.

art: the perception of nature, geometric proportions and their relationship to divinity, and color. In section A, "Art et la nature," Sérusier tells his students to think of vision as a three-part process. We receive information from each eye, and our spirit creates the third view. This third image, a personal and subjective image, brings a psychological element to the painting, which can satisfy a viewer's intelligence, as well as their senses. A picture must be more than a visually arresting, technically well-executed piece. The true work of art, Sérusier wrote, must be composed of signs that translate the artists' own experiences of love, beauty, and repulsion into sensations any viewer can understand. These are the foundations of the "universal language of art" that Sérusier introduced to his students.

The connection that Sérusier drew between art and nature stems from his experience with Gauguin in Brittany. After watching Gauguin at work and listening to his advice on how to properly capture a subjective and symbolist depiction of the landscape, Sérusier revisited Brittany several times (with stays in Pouldu and Chateauneuf-du-Faou, as well as Pont-Aven) to experience the colors of the Breton landscape and the part-Celtic, part-Christian mysticism he found there. In 1973 the Société de Peinture de Pont-Aven[102] held an exhibition celebrating the influence Brittany had on Sérusier's work. In the catalog, Nicolas Pesce claimed that Brittany "is powerfully structured to fully satisfy [Sérusier's] taste for Syntheticism. The tree-lined hillsides, the valley that offered him warm and cool grays throughout the

[102] Today, The Musée des Beaux-Arts de Pont-Aven

seasons, which he held dear in his artwork, the beautiful greens, golds, pale to russet, and the sulphurous yellows that would be the treasures of his palette."[103] Pesce's analysis focuses too narrowly on the direct translation of nature into the picture, as it seems that Sérusier and others were providing a view of the natural world that was more symbolic in nature, and could not be apprehended through the formal elements alone. Not surprisingly, Sérusier was not the only artist who returned to Brittany repeatedly to work.

In his own writing, Maurice Denis emphasized the inspirational properties of the natural world, how, in the mind, nature is more than what the eye can process, giving rise to religious experience. Like Sérusier he emphasized the emotional quality of nature and its importance in a work of art, stating, "I repeat, it is essential to to transpose the emotion that the nature gives us onto the plane of the work of art."[104] Denis then associated this approach with Christianity, saying that representing emotions through symbols and translating religious feelings onto the canvas is "to work from our most intimate background, to free the clear figure of our faith from the mysteries of our inner life. Thus, from the religious experience of the artist, his personal experience, flows forth the work of art."[105] Written between 1914 and 1921, this quote from Denis' *Nouvelles théories sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré*

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[103] Sérusier quoted in Tuarze.

[104] Maurice Denis, *Nouvelles théories sur l'art moderne, sur l'art sacré, 1914-1921* (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1922), 189.

[105] Ibid.

demonstrates his continuing allegiance to a pure Christian art, the same goals he mused over in his journal three decades earlier. His emphasis on the existence of an inspiration that "flows forth" when the visual experience of the natural world is coupled with the artist's faith affirms his view that Christian artists have the potential for the highest success. An artist with unquestioning faith in God can create, according to Denis, true art.

The scenery experienced by Denis and Sérusier, under the guidance of Gauguin, inspired them to create colorful explorations of the place of Christianity in modern culture. In 1903, just after Gauguin's death, Denis wrote an essay reflecting on the nascent Nabi movement fifteen years earlier. He wrote that *Talisman* represented a moment of revelation, the painting that showed the younger students of the Académie Julian a new, "fertile" concept: that experience and sensation could be effectively communicated through a flat surface covered with color.[106] Depth, perspective, and outline were priorities of the old tradition. Denis, Sérusier, and their colleagues, working from what Gauguin taught them, sought to create a new tradition. The resplendent landscape of rural Brittany continued to inform religious compositions of the painters who spent their early careers learning there.

This chapter has begun to explore how modernization and secularization affected visual art of the Post-Impressionist period, particularly the Nabi school

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[106] Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 83.

during their time in Brittany. Brittany, in sharp contrast to Paris, held on to its traditions and faith despite the trend throughout the country to move away from the influence of the Catholic Church. By depicting Crucifixion scenes, Gauguin, Denis and Sérusier interrogated the central Christian belief: that Jesus was an earth-treading God, a deity that had to die in sacrifice in order to save his people. Images of Christ, however, were not the only religious subjects brought to the forefront in the late 1880s and 1890s. The next chapter will further establish the climate of secularization in nineteenth century France, and investigate how Old Testament imagery similarly reflects the declining influence of religion in the modern state.

Brittany provided a religious oasis in secularizing France, where artists looking for a visual language with which to comment on spirituality developed a common style that brought together rich, non naturalistic color and unrealistic perspective on canvases divided into planes of intense color. These pictures represent a somewhat uniform style despite the artists' varied viewpoints on Christianity and the opposition of secular and religious issues within the French state. The emotions that underlie this type of religious art are expressed through line and color, a more stylistic than iconographical development in Crucifixion imagery.

Chapter Two

Jacob and Tobias: Man Meets God

The previous chapter began to examine the climate of secularization in the French Third Republic, with a focus on Brittany and its relationship to Catholicism. This chapter offers a parallel narrative of the effects of secularization on visual culture, beginning with topographical changes in the capital city and leading to an analysis of pictures of Old Testament figures that contrast with the distinctly Christian images made in Pont-Aven. The simultaneous construction of the Sacré Coeur Basilica and the Eiffel Tower mirrors the appearance of the coextending biblical stories of Tobias and Jacob in visual art of the period between the 1880s and the turn of the century. As the new government strove to propel France into the technological future, the Catholic Church pushed back in an attempt to anchor the country in its religious past.

The fundamental role of Christ and the Crucifixion in Christian art has persisted since the inception of the faith. In Catholicism, the visual arts have functioned as the primary form of communication, inspiration, and conversion between faith leaders and congregants while simultaneously acting as a mechanism of control and moral judgment. Depictions of Jesus in art are intended to instruct Christians on how to lead their lives in his image, but what about the pre-Christ narratives that compose the first half of the Bible? An unexplored avenue of

Christian art involves paintings that deal with Old Testament figures and their encounters with the divine, particularly paintings made by artists with no professional connection to the church whatsoever. These works were not made for worship in churches, but rather to express the artist's sentiments towards the role of religion in the modern world. Moving beyond the Crucifixion scenes of the early Nabis school, this chapter will continue to discuss the separation of church and state in France through an examination of angel iconography in Old Testament narratives.

I argue that the revitalized interest in these two particular biblical stories, both of which involve man's face-to-face encounters with divine agents of God, reflects the Third Republic's culture of secularization, as the importance of the Church in France and the rhetoric of God's omniscience decline. Focusing on the Old Testament characters of Jacob, who wrestled an angel during his journey towards founding the twelve tribes of Israel, and Tobias, a traveler who was guided to his future by the archangel Raphael, I will show, through comparisons of paintings by Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon, Paul Gauguin, and Paul Sérusier, that these figures are symbolic embodiments of the secularizing political climate. In each biblical tale, the protagonist unknowingly comes into contact with an angel who guides him on the path to righteousness. Jacob receives the strength and confidence to found the twelve tribes of Israel after wrestling the servant of God, and Tobias is united with his wife and future mother of his children and ensured a happy future due to Raphael's intervention. Jacob's story of deception and struggle represents the antagonistic

relationship between the religious and the secular, whereas Tobias' angel provides protection and guidance, reflecting a more favorable view of Catholicism's tenacity.

Four years after his time with the Nabis in Brittany, Maurice Denis painted *Sacré coeur crucifié* (*Crucified Sacred Heart*, 1894), which, like *Green Christ,* shows an obvious nod to *Yellow Christ* and touches on controversial issues of the visibility of Catholic power in Paris (See Figure 2.1). Denis takes a non-realistic approach to the Crucifixion, a rejection of the Impressionist notion that nature must be the basis of interpretation in painting. The solid planes of color seen in *Green Christ* are absent in *Crucified Sacred Heart*. Instead, Denis seems to be looking to early Italian primitive paintings of the Passion, many of which occur in fictional architectural spaces, such as Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* from San Marco (1438-1445, see Figure 2.2).[107]

The stippling technique in *Crucified Sacred Heart* is more post-Impressionist in style than the solid, flat, and heavily pigmented brushstrokes characteristic of the Symbolist school.[108] The rounded arches in the background, as well as the wall seen on the left side of the work suggest this, it also seems as if this scene is occurring on

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[107] Ex. Cat. *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943: Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 31 Octobre 2006-21 Janvier 2007, Montréal, Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Montréal, Pavillon Michal Et Renata Hornstein, 22 Février-20 Mai 2007, Rovereto, Museo Di Arte Moderna E Contemporanea Di Trento E Rovereto, 23 Juin-23 Septembre 2007*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006, 174.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Denis in his personal journal makes several references to the influence of Fra Angelico's painting on his own art. See Denis, *Journal*, Volume 1.

[108] Generally, Symbolism involved a turning away from nature as the foundation for a work of art as painting itself became the subject of painting. Maurice Denis, "Definition de néo-traditionnisme" *Art et critique*, 1890 and Shaw, Jennifer Laurie. *Dream States: Puvis De Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 3-12.

the roof of a building as the red sky in the background barely illuminates the buildings below. Nuns, most of whom are clad in pinkish, shapeless garments, surround the giant cross that rises through the center of the painting and clasp their hands together in prayer or awe at the sight before them. It has been suggested that the two figures raising their arms toward Christ with their backs to the viewer, although dressed similarly to nuns in traditional black habits, represent the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.[109] The placement of the women figures forms the viewers' connection to the painting. Their backs are to us, faces unseen, so the viewer can enter the work, accepting Denis' invitation to join the sisters and witness the mysterious event.

Although a departure from his earlier style, Denis' picture continues a long tradition of Catholic art. The prevalence of Crucifixion imagery has been consistent since early Christianity, where the image of a dying god was intended to create empathy in the minds of Christians persecuted under the pre-Constantine Roman Empire who looked forward to redemption and peace in the afterlife. To Christians of all denominations, the Crucifixion is a symbol not of death and destruction of the body, but rather of triumph over death and suffering.[110] I have already discussed in the preceding chapter how changes to the traditional Crucifixion imagery reflected

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[109] Ex. Cat. *Maurice Denis*, 174.

[110] It is worth mentioning that the Crucifix imagery is fairly unique to Catholic iconography. Other, particularly Protestant-based branches of Christianity rarely display crucifixes, opting instead for the plain cross.

not only stylistic changes in the beginnings of the Nabis school, but also the political issues surrounding the role of the Catholic church in Third Republic France.

Denis' *Sacre coeur crucifié* leads us to consider how the topography of post-Commune Paris was caught up in the secularization debate. This particular work was painted around the same time as the construction of the Sacré Coeur Basilica, a hotly debated project in Paris in the 1880s and 1890s. The plan for the great white church began around the 1870s with the aftermath of the French Commune. The decidedly secular Communards had been effectively silenced and the building of a new basilica, the Sacré Coeur, became a symbol of the Church's reactionary nature. The Sacré Coeur (which officially became a basilica in 1919) boasts an ostentatious design; a testament of the Catholic desperation to return God's good favor to France. Throughout the history of religious building practice, there is a pervasive belief that the larger and brighter the testament of faith, the more likely its constituents were to have God on their side. The construction of the basilica caused many problems in France, as it was set to be built upon the butte of Montmartre, the home and gathering place of anarchists, artists, and atheists.[111] Intentionally placed at the highest elevation point of the city, its thick, white towers topped with rounded spires pierce the sky. The centrally-planned, Greek-cross foundation makes the building appear massive and intimidating, and the bright stones assert the purity of Jesus' Sacred Heart.

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[111] Gabriel P Weisberg. *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

The iconography and design elements inside and outside the building cleverly link France's prideful past with its Catholic history. Residents of the 18th district cannot help but look up at the church, gleaming above the sinners, dominating the skyline of the rive droite. The exterior is adorned with equestrian statues of Joan of Arc, martyr for Christ and patron saint of France, and Saint King Louis IX, whose valor as a Crusader inspired the Bourbon kings to take his name. These same Bourbon kings were close bedfellows with politically involved clergymen throughout the Ancien Regime and during the Restoration. In addition to its arresting exterior, the Sacré Coeur's interior apse mosaic, *Christ in Majesty,* recalls the great traditions of Byzantine art (See Figure 2.3). The image of Christ exalted continues the Christian legacy of asserting Christ's omniscient power through a hierarchy of scale—the figure of Jesus towers above the figures of Mary, Joan of Arc, and the archangel Michael. The piece is among the largest apse mosaics in the world, befitting the church's function as a grandiose testimony of God's infinite power to punish and forgive.

Richard Burton discusses the meaning of the Sacré Coeur Basilica in *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris*, calling it the "least loved of the major Paris monuments."[112] The unpopularity of the Basilica, despite its impressive and towering design, reflects that issues of spirituality were complicated in Third

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[112] Burton, Richard D. E. *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, 174.

Republic France; republicans were at odds with the rich Catholic history of the country and were confronted with the task of mitigating such a history with a more stable, modern, and secular government. The general disdain towards the new building project could also stem from the fact that Paris already had a large church, Notre-Dame Cathedral, situated on the Île de la Cité in the center of the capitol. Notre-Dame was a respected historical monument, a relic of the city's Gothic past when most French identified themselves as subjects of God and the Church. An ostentatious and expensive monument to Catholic power would have been met with ambivalence, at best.

The plan for the great white church began in 1873 in the aftermath of the French Commune and just before Adolphe Thiers, prime minister of the Second Empire, was forced out of office. The basilica, built entirely from raised funds through national subscription, was intended to be a symbol of France's commitment to the Catholic faith and an act of penance for its miserable failure against Prussia.[113] It also was expected to serve as holy insurance against future problems in France. Construction on the church began on 16 June 1875, the same day that Pope Pius IX, in "a gesture of cosmic inclusiveness," dedicated the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.[114] Burton argues that the animosity around the placement of Montmartre was

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[113] Jonas, Raymond Anthony. *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart an Epic Tale for Modern Times*. Studies on the History of Society and Culture 39. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 180-181.

[114] Burton, 175.

largely due to the ostentatiousness of the gesture of France's devotion to Catholicism. Two photographs of the church, one while under construction in the 1870s, the other taken in 1919 just after its consecration, emphasize its overbearing elevation. The young, Republican new government and its supporters naturally took offense to the allocation of funds for such a grandiose religious building, especially considering the Third Republic's secularist platform.

In the midst of the Church's angling to regain power in France, the republicans developed a plan of their own as part of a campaign to lift spirits after the fall of Commune. Republican leaders promoted events such as the 1889 Universal Exposition to ignite national pride. By building (and keeping) the Eiffel Tower, the Third Republic made its own lasting mark on the physiognomy of Paris, remaining optimistic in France's future as a modern leader in technological progress. This optimism is visualized in Henri Rivière's 1889 photograph of a worker on the Eiffel Tower (See Figure 2.4). This photograph glorifies the position of the worker, as he flies high above the city, looking down at the camera's lens. Working on the tower, as opposed to on the railroads or in coal mines, is seen as a noble and dignified profession, one that literally elevates its workers to new heights. An etching made in 1889 just after the completion of the Eiffel Tower emphasizes its dominance over the city and position it as the ultimate symbol of France's modern future. The Eiffel Tower was a symbol of the progress anticipated by the French. The nature of this progress was of course technological, but in light of the construction of the Sacré

Coeur the Tower, acted as a symbol of social progress towards the separation of church and state desired by the Republicans.

Thus began, according to Burton, a "battle of symbols," a continuation of the protracted dispute about the religion question that had existed since the Revolution. The post-Commune trauma permeated the country, and many French citizens were looking for a scapegoat. Church leaders, military leaders, historians, philosophers, members of the left and the right all engaged in theological mudslinging; anti-Semitism was on the rise as were attacks on members of the clergy, such as the Jesuits. Fringe Catholic groups gained strength during this troubled period in France, as their members were eager to turn to a divine solution.[115] Bound by guilt over the nation's military aggression, greed, and increasingly immoral policy decisions, the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus[116] implored Christ's heart to save France. The gleaming white monument towers above the section of the city conservatives considered to be the most sinful, a hotbed for crime, prostitution, and unmitigated revelry. Rather than a monument to Christianity's unwavering presence in French life, the Basilica instead remains today a symbol of the Church's manic last recourse to remain relevant in a modernizing world. In contrast even today, the Eiffel Tower acts

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[115] Lynn L Sharp's book, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* examines the shifts in Catholic belief in nineteenth century France. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006)

[116] The cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was a small Catholic group particularly focused on the purity of Christ's heart. Raymond Jonas' book gives a thorough history of the development of this group through French history, including its influence on the building of the Sacré Coeur.

as a metonym for the city, demonstrating the power and pervasiveness of the Republican obsession with scientific progress during its struggle for legitimacy.[117]

The controversy surrounding the much-maligned Basilica was symptomatic of the population's general fatigue with the messy relationship between religious and political institutions vying to influence citizens. Corresponding with the spread of secularization throughout modern Europe, mid-nineteenth century Semitic and Christian literary studies saw a resurgence of scholarly interest in biblical hermeneutics, particularly concerning the Genesis narratives. The Jacob cycle, a branch of the broader Abrahamic tradition that forms the foundational texts for monotheistic faiths, has been studied critically within the disciplines of linguistics, literature, and theology. Through the available critical works, the similarities between this widely-accepted religious text and the book of Tobit, a Catholic addition to the Old Testament becomes apparent. Both figures, in particular Jacob's protagonist, appear with increased frequency in French paintings during this period of

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[117] Charles Taylor's 2007 book *A Secular Age* explores the origins of the contemporary secular state, identifying certain roots in nineteenth century European thought. The first two categories of secularization described in the introduction, the removal of religious symbols in public areas and a social trend towards atheism, were clearly seen in post-Industrial, post-Enlightenment England and France. According to Taylor, one of the first visual signs of a secularizing society is the disappearance of religious iconography in public spaces. The appearance of the Sacré Coeur was an attempt to reverse this, to permanently alter the Parisian skyline to include Catholic imagery. Secondly, secularization tends to inspire a trend in turning away from God; it becomes fashionable and widely accepted to refuse belief in any god or ties to any religious institution. Taylor states that in France, in particular, there was a connection between the monarchy, Catholicism (faith) and order, as if the intimidating power of God coupled with the absolute power of the sovereigns. Religion had, for an extended time, defined the nationhood of France. Acknowledging the control of a secular government required a dramatic change in how the French viewed themselves as citizens of a state no longer tied to the Church.

secularization and following the exposure to Breton folk Catholicism and Nabis theological discussion examined in the previous chapter.

Tobit, like Genesis begins with a genealogy of its titular protagonist which culminates in the birth of his son, Tobias. The book describes Tobit as a righteous and pious man, who, in an interesting parallel to Isaac, father of Jacob, has become blind over the years. Miserably ill and begging God for a merciful death, he sends his son on an errand to collect money owed him. The angel Raphael disguised as a man named Azariah is asked to accompany Tobias. The Nabi painters took interest in the story of Tobias, his wife Sara and the archangel Raphael. The Book of Tobit, a text accepted only in the Catholic versions of the Bible is considered apocryphal by other Christian traditions.

Although not quite as popular a source for artistic inspiration as Jacob wrestling the angel, there are several canvases depicting Tobias and his angel that date before the Renaissance. Maurice Denis painted two pictures based on the book of Tobit, both of which emphasize the guardian angel characteristics of Raphael. *Tobie et l'Ange* (1920), appears to be set on the Normandy coast (See Figure 2.5).[118] The angel holds Tobias' hand with his right hand and carries a walking stick with his left. Although Raphael does not reveal his true identity as an angel until the end of the

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[118] The only documentation currently available on the painting is from a sale catalogue from George V in Paris on 7 November, 1990. It is likely that the painting was sold on that date and entered a private collection; it was not a part of the 2006 retrospective exhibition, making it unlikely that it remained within the Denis family. Until completion of the catalogue raissonné currently in production, it is impossible to know its exact location. Catalogue de vente: La Documentation Musée d'Orsay.

narrative, this image portrays him with full white wings and a gleaming white, flowing garment. Tobias appears in modern dress and drags a large fish behind him; he wears white shorts and a blue polo shirt reminiscent of the nautical-themed outfits worn by Denis' own children, aged five to twenty-four, in family photos from the 1920s.[119] Next to Raphael, the tall angel with the masculine build, Tobias appears to be a child no older than eight or nine, considerably younger than the biblical character. The exaggeration of Tobias' youth in this painting is puzzling when compared to a similar work from a year earlier, *Le retour du jeune Tobie* (1919, see Figure 2.6).[120] The earlier painting is also set on a modern French beach; a family of five (perhaps Denis' family in 1901-1906, after the birth of his first three children) occupies the foreground of the picture. Tobias is only as tall as Raphael's shoulder. Both figures excitedly throw their arms out toward a figure dressed in white who welcomes them. The death of Marthe, Denis' beloved first wife, in 1919 may have inspired the nostalgic nature of this picture. Perhaps the figure welcoming Tobias and Raphael home is Marthe, with Tobias representing Jean-Paul, Denis' firstborn son who died just four months after his birth. Denis has combined the two narratives: his

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[119] A recent (Spring 2012) exhibition from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the Phillips Collection in Washington DC, *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*, brings together family photographs of several Symbolist and Nabi painters. The candids from Denis' family focus on his children playing at the beach-the similarities with the two Tobias pictures are clear. Easton, Elizabeth Wynne, Clément Chéroux, Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum, Phillips Collection, and Indianapolis Museum of Art. *Snapshot: painters and photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2012, Cat. 65-67, 112-114.

[120] Similar to *Tobie et l'Ange*, the documentation on *Le retour du Jeune Tobie* ends with its sale catalogue. It was advertised for the 29 November 1995 Impressionist and Modern sale at Christie's London. Catalogue de vente: La Documentation Musée d'Orsay.

family on vacation at the beach and Tobias' happy return from his journey, creating a guardian angel to watch over his family and highlighting his commitment to God and Catholicism.[121] The theme of religion and family permeated Denis' work, sentiments ranging from the nostalgia of the Tobias pictures to the anxiety and excitement found in *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, which will be discussed below.

In Sérusier's *Tobias and the Angel* (1894), fisherman Tobias is a nude young man being followed by a female figure clothed in a flattened, profile version of a gown from Botticelli's *Primavera* (See Figure 2.7). Depictions of the archangels as slightly androgynous is common, but Sérusier has translated the traditionally male figure into a woman who lacks any halo or other identifying marker that she is somehow divine, except for her feet. She floats above the ground and glances to the side, looking out at the viewer and reaching her right hand in Tobias' direction. The childlike figure of Tobias strides forward, dragging a fishing net behind him. In some traditional representations of Raphael in visual art, he is seen carrying a pharmacist's jar or other type of medicinal vessel.[122] In the story, Raphael instructs Tobias on how to use the liver of a fish they caught to create a special smoke that will ward off demons, and Raphael himself uses the gallbladder to cure Tobit's blindness. Raphael steps in to heal Tobit and to lift the demon Asmodeus's curse on Sarah, after which

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[121] In his journal from the month of Marthe's passing, Denis, although grieving for his wife's suffering, remains faithful to the belief that this misfortune is, for whatever reason, part of God's plan.

[122] See Biagio d'Antonio *The Archangel Raphael with Tobias* (1435) Museo de Arte de Ponce, Pier Francesco Foschi, *Tobias and the Angel* (1545) Galleria Borghese and Jan van Hemessen *Tobias Restoring His Father's Sight* (1555) Louvre.

the couple can be happily married and Tobias may return to heal his father. The angel Raphael finally reveals his identity as an angel of God, proclaiming, "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One."[123]

Tobias, a grown man in the Biblical tale and reduced here to a nude child, is a symbolic representation of faithful Catholics, made childlike and vulnerable in the presence of a crushing institution of faith. The young boy is in need of guidance, provided by Raphael, who has been translated into an angelic woman characteristic of Sérusier's stylization of religious figures. The Byzantine-like flatness of the figures is also indicative of this shift in style, which continues much throughout the rest of his painting career.

It is worth noting the gendered language with which scholars have treated both the Jacob cycle and the Book of Tobit, perhaps accounting for Sérusier's substitution of feminine physical attributes for the traditional androgynous or masculine traits assigned to the archangels since the early Renaissance. Delacroix's *Tobias and the Angel* (1863) shows Raphael as a large masculine figure coming to Tobias' aid as he grapples with a large fish (See Figure 2.8). Johnson, paraphrasing the Jesuit Luigi Gonzaga, states, "the departure of Tobias from his father's house, once Tobit has secured Raphael as the boy's companion, corresponds to our own

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[123] Tobit 12: 11-22

departure from the womb."[124] The story posits the angel, and therefore God, as a mothering, protective figure who carefully guides man through life, providing him with the knowledge and experience necessary to live on his own. The maternal, other-like, feminine qualities of the angel may have been inspired by Lippi's *Tobias and the Angel* (c. 1475) in which an angelic figure slightly on the female side of androgynous walks alongside Tobias (See Figure 2.9).

The Archangels, in the Catholic tradition, are seven angels of high rank; three are regularly mentioned by name in the Catholic Bible. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (who appears only in the Book of Tobit) are the names given to particular angels who are charged with important divine tasks that generally include involvement in the lives of mortals. Raphael is a central character in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, acting in a crucial messenger role, charged by God to warn Adam against eating from the tree of knowledge. Raphael accompanies Tobias to guide, help, and save him, not to fight him. Whereas Jacob has to incessantly fight and deceive in order to achieve his full potential, to live out his birthright, Tobias is watched over.

The importance assigned to the archangels in Catholic tradition was established by the seventeenth century Jesuits who believed in the omnipresence of angelic forces. Trevor Johnson's research has shown that "there was a long tradition

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[124] Trevor Johnson, "Guardian Angels and the Society of Jesus" in Marshall, Peter, and Alexandra Walsham, eds. *Angels in the Early Modern World*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 196.

that angels assisted at Mass, venerated the sacrament, and could even distribute it."[125] This suggests that, for the Jesuits (and later most Catholics),[126] angels served a quasi-clerical function in overseeing and invisibly conducting religious services. Furthermore, the writing of Francesco Albertini asserts the angel's role as arbiter of God's justice and mercy—educating, chastising, correcting, and guiding humans.[127] The helpful and nurturing attributes ascribed to angels evolved at the end of the Renaissance, as God became more benevolent and less judging and fearsome. The Jesuit rhetoric of guardian angels permeated Europe, making its way to England by the end of the 1600s. Substituting, as Johnson claims, the guardian angel for the Holy Spirit, the angels became "both a metaphor for and the mechanism of God's assistance and cooperation with man's free will."[128] Thus, Catholic free will is never entirely "free" as the faithful are watched and critiqued at every pass, allowed to make human mistakes but also consumed by anxiety of disapproval and punishment. In a way, the Jesuit commitment to guardian angel imagery in their churches was a baroque continuation of the centuries-old Catholic ability to steer issues of morality and conscience in their constituency.

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[125] Ibid, 194

[126] Ibid, 209

[127] Ibid, 209.

[128] Ibid, 196.

Biblical scholars have made several connections between the Book of Tobit and the Book of Genesis, wherein we find the Jacob cycle of narratives.[129] Likely written for a similar audience, the later book takes on similar plot elements and structure to Genesis, which is considered one of the fundamental texts for all Abrahamic religions and creates a direct lineage from God to his "chosen people" through Abraham and his descendants. Isaac, Abraham's beloved, nearly-sacrificed son, the father of Jacob, is old and frail at the end of his life, allowing for dissent between his twin sons, instigated by his wife Rebecca. One of the more popular (and undeniably cruel) scenarios of the Abrahamic narratives prefigures the sacrifice of God's son Jesus (according to the Christian reading of the bible) and haunts the Old Testament patriarchy throughout Genesis: the near sacrifice of Isaac. Isaac, the only son of Abraham and his wife Sarah, was his father's pride and joy.[130] In a particularly brutish test of faith, God calls Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son upon an altar. Abraham, devastated, dutifully marches Isaac to the temple and raises a dagger above him. Just then, an angel intervenes, bringing the imminent sacrifice to a halt and saving Isaac's life. A grateful Abraham sacrifices a ram to God in gratitude for sparing his son, and all is seemingly well. Although this Genesis 22 tale is commonly read as a testament of Abraham's unwavering faith, modern scholarship has addressed

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[129] Two notable examples: Novick, Tzvi. "Biblicized Narrative: On Tobit and Genesis 22." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 755–764 and Abrahams, I. "Tobit and Genesis." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 1893), 348–350.

[130] Abraham had at least one other son with his servant, Hagar, who was not considered to be a suitable heir for the ancestral promise.

the residual fear and paranoia in Isaac's character, and connected it to his narrow escape from a grisly death at the hands of his own father. Certain scholars claim that it is because of this event that Isaac, the father of Jacob, ages into a weak, blind man readily manipulated by his wife and son.[131] An angel spared his life on behalf of God, but did not provide him with any of the opportunities or benefits of the great ancestral promise that his son Jacob would later receive after his own angelic encounter.

Tension among family members, trickery, and deceit are themes of the Genesis stories that culminate in the Jacob cycle. At the end of Isaac's life, Jacob and his twin brother Esau battle each other to inherit the family reigns rightfully due to Esau, the elder twin. A number of exaggerated physical characteristics are used by the Genesis writers in order to distinguish Jacob, a kind of Biblical anti-hero described to have smooth skin and a relatively small build, from Esau, a larger, brawnier man whose thick body hair and dark skin give him a hyper-masculine, nearly animal-like appearance. Critical readings of the Jacob cycle from a gender studies perspective are not uncommon in the realm of Biblical exegesis, Jacob is seen by many scholars to exhibit traits more commonly found attributed to female figures in the Bible. For example, his deception of his father instigated by his mother echoes the Fall of Man tale from Genesis 3, wherein God scolds Adam for "listening to his

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[131] Schneiderman, 269.

wife" and Eve and must suffer the expulsion from the paradisal garden created for them.[132]

As Belinda Thomson has noted, the crisis of the Catholic Church as it dealt with a modern society determined to allow its citizens to choose their own faith, coupled with Paul Gauguin's own critique of the institution, formed the atmosphere for his paintings in Brittany. Gauguin's frequent visits to Brittany inspired a series of canvases depicting religious themes as a means of examining human existence, and his *Vision of the Sermon*[133] (1888) offers one mode of articulating religious experience. Gauguin's image complicates the conflation of the real and supernatural realms in the scene (See Figure 1.21). A thick tree slices the composition into two parts. To the right of the diagonal line of the tree's trunk is the wrestling scene, where the angel seems to have the upper hand on first glance as he holds Jacob in a headlock. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Jacob has craftily ensnared the angel's leg in his arms, preparing to flip him over and win the fight. To the left, Breton women pray and the viewer is left to determine if these women have stumbled upon this scene and are experiencing a collective vision or if the two events are

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[132] On this topic: Ḳlitsner, Shemu'el. *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*. 1st ed. Jerusalem: Brooklyn, New York: Urim Publications; Lambda Publishers, 2006, Sawyer, Deborah F. *God, Gender and the Bible*. Biblical Limits. London; New York: Routledge, 2002, Soskice, Janet Martin. *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, and Streete, Gail Corrington. *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

[133] Belinda Thomson in the exhibition catalogue for the National Galleries of Scotland's *Gauguin's Vision* has traced the various permutations of the painting's title settling on *Vision of the Sermon* as the most authentic. Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2005.

entirely separate. Seeing the painting as a religious work, Gauguin offered to give the picture to a church in Pont-Aven, who rejected it.[134] This picture, considered to be Gauguin's first masterpiece, is the best-discussed picture of Jacob wrestling an angel, and has been the subject of much attention, analysis, and interpretation, most notably during the 2005 exhibition of the work along with others that inspired it at the National Galleries of Scotland, which permanently owns the piece. These discussions, however, focus largely on the left side of the painting, where the Breton women gather. Several historians have focused on the plagiarism controversy between Gauguin and Emile Bernard, or on Gauguin's fascinations with Breton people. The study of Jacob and the angel as an iconographic motif, however, is only briefly touched upon in Thomson's catalogue and largely ignored elsewhere.

The story of biblical patriarch Jacob wrestling a servant of God, sometimes

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[134] Paul Gauguin quoted in *Gauguin's Vision*. Although Thomson interprets Gauguin's letter to Theo van Gogh to mean that he always intended the work to be a religious picture, the letter states only that he finds it to be appropriate for a church upon its completion, he does not indicate he painted it for the church.

described as an angel,[135] has appeared in visual art since at least the sixth century. Chapter 32 of Genesis has inspired an entire genre of representation from the sixth century to the twentieth. Jacob, in an attempt to earn the birthright he stole from his twin brother and to win back Esau's favor, stays with his uncle Laban while he acquires his own assets. He receives word that Esau is coming to confront him the following day with one hundred men, and must prepare for conflict. Jacob, desperate and frightened of his stronger brother, prepares gifts for Esau and nervously anticipates the imminent fight. That night, he is approached by a man (an angel in Hosea) with whom he wrestles until the break of daylight, at which point the man/ angel strikes Jacob in the hip, leaving him with a permanent limp. The angel is unnamed, but later some writers have attributed these actions to the archangel Michael, whose name means "who is like God" and represents a special entity that is

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[135] The story of Jacob wrestling the angel comes from chapter 32 of Genesis and chapter 14 of Hosea, where Jacob is given his destiny as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel after he wrestles a mysterious being for hours. Ultimately this "man" or "angel" admits defeat in the match and gives him his new name. Generally translations will describe the being as a "Man" in Genesis and an "angel" in Hosea.

From the New King James Translation: Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the light of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."
But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?"
He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel;[b] for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray."And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. Genesis 32: 24-29

Hosea 12: 3-7 "The Lord has a grievance against Israel; he shall punish Jacob for his conduct, for his deeds he shall repay him. In the womb he supplanted his brother, and as a man he contended with God; He contended with the angel and triumphed, entreating him with tears. At Bethel he met God and there he spoke with him: The Lored, the God of hosts, the Lord is his name! You shall return by the help of your God, if you remain loyal and do right and always hope in your God."

nonetheless humbled by God's power.[136] After striking Jacob's hip, the angel renames Jacob "Israel" stating "for you have contended with the divine and human beings and have prevailed.[137] This story was popular among nineteenth century painters for whom the Jacob tale acts as a metaphor for the confusion about man's connection to God; it describes the immateriality of an angel, matched against the strength of one man in a struggle between the real and the imaginary.

For Gauguin, who retained a particular fascination with religious imagery, the hint of Jacob's inevitable triumph indicates the artists' assurance in the greatness of a secular world. In a secular, modern state man's innate moral code and free will trumps the will of God, passed to the people by an arbitrary (and often corrupt) network of clerical officials. Other paintings from the same period offer varied takes on the struggle between Jacob and the angel, each reflecting a different state of dominance by either the terrestrial (Jacob) or celestial (angel) entity. *Vision of the Sermon* clearly places Jacob in a position of power, of cunning; he uses his intellect to outwit the angel and claim his agency as a man. For Jacob to have prevailed over God in Old Testament rhetoric has complicated meaning, Jacob is one of the few biblical

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[136] Scholars have postulated that the angel represents one of the fallen angels or some other figure symbolic of hell such as Uriel or Satan, or even possibly a spirit of Esau. Anderson, John Edward. *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: a Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*. Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 5. Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2011, 150-151.

[137] Genesis 32: 29.

characters who is met with a physical manifestation of the divine,[138] allowing him to become a kind of patron saint of secularization. Jacob, although a major figure in biblical literature, is not the typical servant of God who blindly follows the laws of God, accepting what comes his way as the grace of his almighty, but rather a man who eschews tradition and honesty in favor of power and prestige. The patriarch, making decisions for himself based on his own desires rather than on the traditions of his faith, parallels the modern, enlightened citizen who will soon be allowed the final freedom denied the French: freedom of religion.

There was a sharp increase in depictions of Jacob between 1850 and 1910 in French painting, and art and literature from nineteenth century France are replete with passing references to the Jacob cycle, particularly his battle with the angel. The resurgence in popularity of the subjects is due to the political issues that arose concerning religious and spirituality in the mid-1800s, such as the fallout from the Franco-Prussian war, the involvement of Rome in French politics, and the building of the Sacré Coeur. Although the story has been depicted in art since the foundational centuries of Christianity in the eras following the Edict of Milan, the number of depictions of Jacob had began to decline between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The climate of secularization and the shift to personal choice of religion

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[138] Jacob's grandson, Moses, is another biblical character who has more face time with God and his agents in the Old Testament. Schneiderman, 269.

provided a rich breeding ground for new interpretations of a willful patriarch who sees and defeats an agent of God.

Manipulating the Jacob and angel story as a means of commenting on the role of religion in the modernizing world has roots in Baroque painting. Mid-seventeenth century Dutch Republic politics involved an earlier form of struggle for freedom of religious expression. The Dutch people wished to reject Spanish-enforced Catholicism in favor of the more austere, disciplined Calvinist Protestantism. Echoing the conflict between the two factions of Christianity, one flamboyant and filled with imagery, the other solemn and controlled, Rembrandt's 1658 *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* depicts the two figures in what appears to be a loving embrace, rather than a wrestling match (See Figure 2.10). The angel's features are soft and feminine; he looks down at Jacob with a warm, friendly and almost forgiving look as Jacob lifts him up. Rembrandt, as Catherine B. Scallen has discussed, strove to make religious art that could appeal to both Catholic and Protestant audiences, focusing on themes of contrition and humility before God.[139] There are no openly Catholic references in the image to avoid the aesthetic of the devotional objects eschewed by seventeenth century Protestants. Although Jacob "wins" the fight in the Genesis tale, Rembrandt choses to depict a tender moment, where the angel is placed high above Jacob,

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[139] Scallen, Catherine B. "Rembrandt's Reformation of a Catholic Subject: The Penitent and the Repentant Saint Jerome." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30, no. 1 (April 1, 1999), 71–74.

Jacob's head resting in the crook of his elbow, to suggest that God was in control of the struggle from beginning to end.

The resurgence in popularity of the Jacob story in French painting begins nearly two centuries later amidst the Romantic movement. It has been suggested that Eugène Delacroix's mural *Lutte de Jacob avec l'ange (Battle of Jacob and the Angel,* 1857, See Figure 2.11) in the Église Saint-Sulpice helped precipitate the revived interest in Jacob wrestling the angel.[140] In the painting, the intense movement of the bodies implies an intense physical struggle. The invocation of the sublime in the landscape through loose brushstrokes gives the trees an electric quality, described by George P. Mras to contribute to "the spiritual and imaginative power generated by [Delacroix's] visualization as a cosmic battle between supernatural forces."[141] The fight occupies the lower right quadrant of the painting, a thick lush landscape that recalls other of his Romantic works. It seems as though Jacob has thrown himself at the angel in a hope to overpower the much taller and more strongly built opponent. At the time of the mural's unveiling, several critics likened the subject of Jacob and the angel with conflicting theories regarding matter and spirit that had emerged

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[140] Thomson, 72-73.

[141] Mras, George P., *Eugène Delacroix's Theory of Art*. Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology 37. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1966, 23.

during the first half of the nineteenth century. There was also disagreement as to which figure would prevail in the struggle as portrayed by Delacroix.[142]

Although Thomson suggests that the Delacroix mural inspired the series of Jacob and angel paintings that followed, this does not necessarily prove that the artists who would later tackle the subject viewed Delacroix's interpretation of the subject to have resulted in an exceptional painting. Gustave Moreau, who painted his own version of the story in 1874 (See Figure 2.12), claimed that Delacroix's picture fell short of the subject's potential to comment on the broader themes of secularization in late nineteenth century France. Stating that the story of a man wrestling an angel was a symbolic struggle between physical force and divine intervention, Moreau denounces Delacroix's mural as a crude, superficial understanding of the true meaning of the narrative.[143] Moreau's interpretation of the subject emphasizes the struggle of Jacob against the angel, rather than any mutual engagement in the combat. Jacob has his back to the angel and stretches both of his arms out to his right side, as if he is attempting to push aside an invisible entity. The angel, standing behind him and looking out to the viewer,[144] appears casual and relaxed as he deflects Jacob's

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[142] Hannoosh, Michele. *Painting and the Journal of Eugène Delacroix*. The Princeton Series in Nineteenth-century Art, Culture, and Society. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995, 192-194.

[143] Khandekar, Narayan, Stephan Wolohojian, and Teri Hensick. "Gustave Moreau's 'Jacob and the Angel' Re-Examined." *The Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1225 (April 01, 2005), 253.

[144] Khandekar, Wolohojian and Hensick examined the changes made to the painting as revealed through x-ray analysis, including a prevous draft of the painting that had the angel looking down at Jacob, rather than out at the viewer, which would have created "an intimacy between the two figures." 255.

strike. The immateriality of the angel is apparent here, Jacob's ineffective gesture reflects a man lost in the darkness, reaching out towards a voice or sense of movement, yet reaching nothing. Perhaps the angel was once at his side, but vanished and reappeared behind him, suggesting the futility of Jacob's efforts.

Another painter inspired by the tenets of French Romantic painting, Gustave Doré painted *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* (1855), in which the angel is clearly in control of the fight (See Figure 2.13). Nigel Gosling has noted that the declining power and fear of God in the nineteenth century led to an emphasis on the power of nature in visual art. Painters like Doré transferred the pre-secularization awe and terror afforded to God's wrath onto the sublime powers of nature.[145] Doré's previous forays into Christian-themed art, notably the illustrations for the *Imitation of Christ* and *The Lives of the Saints*, also emphasize the landscape, not unlike Delacroix's mural. The *Jacob* painting is set on the edge of a cliff as the angel maintains his ground as Jacob pushes against him, trying to avoid being pushed over the side. The body language and relative size of the figures emphasizes the angel's dominance; Jacob is tense, his back thrown back in a desperate attempt to hang on, whereas the angel stands perfectly straight, sure-footed, pushing Jacob back with unmatched force. In both images Jacob is clothed in bright red, and functions as the focal point of the painting. Both angels have lighter skin and lighter clothes than their adversary.

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[145] Gosling, Nigel. *Gustave Doré*. New York: Praeger, 1974, 21.

Jacob is strong and passionate, but ultimately no match for the agent of God, who is shown bathed in brightness.

The story of Jacob could be read, as S.H. Smith suggests, as a story of sexual prowess and power of a man consumed by ambition. The gendering subtext of Jacob and the angel stems from earlier conflicts in Jacob's life, particularly that with his older brother, Esau. By deceiving his old, withering father, Jacob steals the birthright rightfully due his brother, therefore taking from him the Abrahamic procreative power so thirsted for throughout the Genesis stories.[146] As such, Smith offers a psychological reading of the story, and suggests that Jacob's wrestling match with God's messenger is representational of his struggle for power over his brother.[147] Smith further offers an interpretation of the angel's hit to the "hollow of Jacob's" thigh as further proof that the struggle is truly about male dominance and power. He claims, through a linguistic analysis of biblical Hebrew that the angel has struck Jacob's genitals, in order to assert that Jacob's triumph and "the divine promise in which the inheritance of the land was bound to the pledge of procreative power"[148] and "by striking Jacob on the *kp hyrk* (Hebrew for 'hollow of thigh'), God asserted his power over Jezreel's procreative power. But, once Jacob had acknowledged God's strength as supreme, God allowed him to inherit the Abrahamic promise, so

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[146] Smith, S. H. "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives." *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (October 1, 1990), 470.

[147] Ibid, 471.

[148] Ibid, 467.

that children sprang freely from the very loins over which God had asserted his dominance."[149] This continues another theme of Genesis (and other Old Testament narratives) in which God continually challenges and emasculates his faithful servants, in order to assure their undying loyalty and devotion. Psychoanalytic interpretations of the Jacob cycle suggest that the blackmail of Esau and deception of Isaac weaken his masculinity. The angel engages Jacob in a wrestling match, a physical fight between two men, yet ultimately injures or symbolically castrates him to ensure God's male dominance in spite of Jacob's cunning.[150] Of course an actual castration would defeat Jacob's ultimate purpose as deigned by God, yet he still must be taught a lesson. Jacob must reclaim his own sense of "manliness," to prove his own masculinity after cheating his brother out of his blessing and birthright.[151] Stuart Schneiderman claims that the angel appears in the form of a man (recall that in the Genesis version of the wrestling match the term "angel" is never used) to demonstrate his own "angelic virility" and force Jacob to earn his birthright through wrestling.

By the turn of the century, the relative size of Jacob to the angel he wrestles reflected each painter's personal views on what an encounter of man and God might look like. Maurice Denis' *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* (1893) is the most unique and

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[149] Ibid, 469.

[150] Schneiderman, Stuart. *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided*. New York: New York University Press, 1988, 266.

[151] As Schneiderman has pointed out, the birthright given Jacob (rightfully Esau's) is a permanent "mark"-even though Jacob received it through dubious acts, it can never be erased. Therefore he must some how prove himself worthy of the privilege that was never rightfully his, but can never be taken away from him. 266.

enigmatic, given the other examples from the period (see Figure 2.14). In his painting, the figures of Jacob and the Angel (identifiable only by the title that describes the scene) are of nearly equal height and build. They are only distinguished by hair color, the figure on the left has reddish locks while the other man is raven-haired. Both figures are cloaked in blue, and neither figure has wings, making it nearly impossible for the viewer to determine which figure is the mortal and which is the angel. In terms of technique, Denis has looked back to Jean-François Millet and Paul Signac, and the scintillating color and smaller brushstrokes of *Jacob* create a near pointillist image. In the painting, it is unclear what stage of the match we are looking at, although it seems to be early in the fight. It has been suggested, in the Musée d'Orsay's catalogue on the latest large-scale exhibition of Denis' work, that this painting reflects the painter's recent marriage and the struggle between professional and family life. He refuses to show dominance on either side, and acknowledged in his journal Jacob's need to acquiesce to a strong God, to work together rather than to fight.

Of this series of paintings, Jacob appears the weakest in Odilon Redon's picture, *Jacob and the Angel* (1905, see Figure 2.15). Redon was unconvinced of the tenets of Christianity, and his painting inquires into Catholic ideas: martyrdom, temptation and the divine humanity of Jesus. He was friends with many Catholics, and close to Eduoard Schuré, author of *The Great Initiates*, a book that claims that the major figureheads of all the world religions had somehow accessed a higher

understanding of life. The esotericism of Schuré, a champion of nineteenth century theosophy, influenced Redon's painting, evidenced in Redon's pictures from the 1890s and early 1900s that conflate the image of Christ with that of the Buddha.[152] His skepticism of institutionalized religion is clear in his writings, and at times, he is critical of religious imagery, particularly religious art that glorifies the Catholic faith. Nonetheless, he made several paintings of religious subjects, and seemed to appreciate the pre-modern tradition of religious art for its contributions to the history of art as he contemplates a church cemetery covered in flowers:

> Oh divine unknown, mute face, fear without name, majestic immobility, how great is your beauty. Men religiously decorate your sacred field; here are flowers on your stone, art, decorum, ceremonious worship; on the marble of the mausoleums, large and lofty thoughts for all times [153]

Here, in his journal, Redon creates an image that recalls the garden that claims the life of Albine at the end of Zola's 1875 novel, *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*. Flowers are a common motif among Redon's color works of the 1890s and later. In the painting *Cyclops* (1898), the lower right side of the image shows a nude female figure being swallowed into a landscape flush with colorful vegetation (See Figure 2.16). The tumbling, colorful landscape of *Cyclops* is repeated in the veil of the notorious biblical femme fatale in an undated painting of *Salomé*. The cool palette of the veil

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[152] Barbara Larson, "From Botany to Belief: Odilon Redon and Clavaud" in *Odilon Redon: As in a Dream; [in Conjunction with the Exhibition "Odilon Redon", Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, January 28 - April 29, 2007]*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007, 98.

[153] Odilon Redon. *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art, and Artists*. New York: G. Braziller, 1986, 72.

contrasts with the warm coloring of the figure; her red hair and peach skin, set against a yellowed background, fade behind the veil, and our eyes are drawn to the large blood stain beneath the severed head of John the Baptist. The space between Salomé's right arm and hip is also filled blood-red, as if he blood from the living woman flows onto the platter, surrounding the disembodied head. Redon's work exists in liminal space, the art of a man incompletely convinced of either science or religion. He writes about scientific and technological developments, such as electricity, with the same oscillation between fascination and mistrust he shows religion.

The entire world of Redon's depiction of *Jacob and the Angel* is a scene of fantasy, where pink skies rise above dark blue mountains. The natural elements in the composition are difficult to discern except for the tall tree that frames the right edge of the picture that reaches out with a tiny gnarled branch. Redon greatly admired Delacroix, and would have been familiar with the older painter's *Jacob* mural, as well as his embellished landscapes.[154] The orange-red object in the sky could be the sun, telling us that day has broken and Jacob has nearly completed his task, or it could be a non-specific celestial body that burns the sky representing a deified presence that overlooks the scene. Color and brushstroke are essential to the odd character of the painting, as is the figure of the angel who overpowers Jacob, swallowing the man in his large wings. The angel's enormous wings engulf the small man, and the angel,

[154] Larson, 82.

like in Doré's image, is entirely unaffected by the fight. Redon had also studied Rembrandt's work in depth, from his early art education in Bordeaux to his trips to Holland to view the exhibitions of the Dutch master's art, likely informing his placement of the two figures and the underwhelming physical power of Jacob. In his determination to overpower his mortal opponent, the angel pushes forward, forcing Jacob into pathetic submission as he desperately tries to barrel his head through the angel's chest.

Gauguin, Denis, and Redon use Jacob as a metaphor for secularization—who will ultimately win this new, distinctly modern spiritual struggle: man or God? Sérusier and Denis used Tobias and a stylized archangel to comment on both the comforting attributes of spirituality and the infantilizing aspects of organized religion. The climate of secularization impacted visual art of the Old Testament just as it had scenes of the Crucifixion painted by the Nabis group in the late 1880s. The next chapter will examine how the figure of Joan of Arc, given new life in the late nineteenth century, became a non-biblical figurehead for the Catholic traditions of French politics in a country turning away from the influence of God and religion.

Chapter Three

Jeanne d'Arc: A Medieval Martyr for Modern France

But since God had commanded me to go, I must do it.[155]
Joan of Arc, age fifteen

This chapter examines the representation of Joan of Arc in visual art in late nineteenth and early twentieth century France. During this period artists of the Symbolist and Art Nouveau movements were impassioned by Christian imagery and a sense of national history. Jeanne d'Arc emerged as a new saint in the 1800s, decades before her official canonization in 1920. Inspired by writings such as Catholic biographer Henry Wallon's 1876 monograph on the saint, as well as the recent political turmoil resulting from the Franco-Prussian War and subsequent Commune, the artists of the Third Republic chose her as a kind of "patron saint of humiliated France"[156] who had broad appeal: republicans and monarchists all appreciated her as a renewed and durable historical figure to represent their country.[157]

The legendary story of Joan of Arc's rescue of France during the Hundred Years War transcended the traditional, hostile division in French patriotism between

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[155] Pernoud, Régine. *Joan of Arc: By Herself and Her Witnesses*. 1st ed. Scarborough House, 1990, 11.

[156] *Images de Jeanne d'Arc: hommage pour le 550e anniversaire de la libération d'Orléans et du sacre: exposition... [Paris, Hôtel de la monnaie, juin-septembre 1979].* Paris: [Musée monétaire], 1979, 85.

[157] This chapter focuses on Joan in visual art, although the revitalization of her image was not unique to painting and sculpture. Pasler investigates the role of Joan of Arc in Third Republic music, and how the saint became what Pasler calls a "symbol of national reconciliation." Pasler, 321, 662-664.

the religious and secular histories of the country. Joan of Arc became a literary character used to further the agendas of the author's political sympathies as Catholics and republicans fought to "claim" Joan for their side. The Third Republic's narrowly defined conception of the citizen was exclusionary in nature: women, conservatives and Catholics were among the groups undeserving of the term.[158] As James Lehning has stated, "republicans of all shades agreed that Catholic influence was one of the principle barriers to their vision of the republican citizen."[159] In an unusual gesture of inclusiveness, Maurice Barrès, a Lorrainer like Joan, amplifies her spiritual and patriotic traits in his biography of her as an exceptional case: a figure around whom the entire country can rally. He quotes Déroulède's statement: "Republicans, royalists, Bonapartistes are first names; French is the last name."[160]

Joan is a public figure, displayed and honored in public space, who survived the slow eradication of Catholic influence in political affairs. The previous chapters of this dissertation focus on religious imagery painted by the French avant-garde artists of the 1880s and 1890s to demonstrate the complicated issues of faith and spirituality at the turn of the century in visual culture. The images of Christ and Jacob belong to the religious sphere; arguably many French citizens would have remained unmoved by the nuances of the depictions of religious subjects. Joan of

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[158] Lehning, James R. *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, 42-44.

[159] Ibid, 36.

[160] Barrès, Maurice. *Autour De Jeanne d'Arc*. Paris: E. Champion, 1916, 67.

Arc cannot be truly considered a religious figure until 1920; before her canonization her story belonged to medieval European history, despite her divine calling. The rise of patriotism in the early years of the Third Republic caused a rift between Catholics and republicans over Joan's allegiance to either God (and by extension, the Catholic Church) or to the French nation (and by extension, the secular, republican government).

My analysis focuses on the pre-World War One period for several reasons. First, many scholars have thoroughly and convincingly examined Joan's role in visual culture during the First and Second World Wars,[161] and Nora Heimann's study, *Joan of Arc in French Art and Culture* aims to close a critical gap in scholarship between the Middle Ages and the Restoration. Secondly, the official decision to canonize Joan of Arc came in 1869, the last year of the Second Empire, although she had been considered "saintly" long before the end of the nineteenth century.[162] Finally, as chapters one and two have demonstrated, 1871 to 1905 was a period of political turmoil and confusion in France, and the resurgence of popularity of Joan of Arc is undoubtedly related to the issues of secularization during the Third Republic. This

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[161] Some of these publications include: Snipes-Hoyt, Carolyn. "Jeanne d'Arc Visits Paris in 1912: Dramatis Personae and Personification." *The French Review* 73, no. 6 (May 1, 2000): 1141–1154 and Eric Jennings, "'Reinventing Jeanne': The Iconology of Joan of Arc in Vichy Schoolbooks, 1940-44." *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (October 1, 1994), 711–734.

[162] In M Charles Crapelet's late-eighteenth century biography of Joan, he refers to her as "la sainte jeune fille" nearly a century before canonization began, 2. For a detailed examination of how Joan was described as a saint before her official recognition by the Catholic Church, see Ellen Ecker Dolgin's text, Modernizing Joan, chapter 1 "The Historical Joan" which includes a lit review of texts where Joan makes a particularly holy appearance.

chapter will focus primarily on pictures of Joan created during this thirty-year period and the issues of nationalism and patriotism that concerned the new government.

How did the image of one young woman, whose documented life amounted to about two years, become a powerful symbol for several groups with competing ideologies? Since the first images of Joan appeared in the fifteenth century her representation had no set style or iconography, and her story was just as manipulatable. François Michaud-Fréjaville suggests that during the seventeenth century Joan of Arc ceased to be a person and developed into a symbol with an undetermined purpose, divided among the competing conceptualizations of French nationhood. Martha Hanna's research into the use of Joan's image by the Action Française between 1908 and 1931 suggests that Joan's "pliable legend" was ripe for idealization and interpretation, depending on whose message she was being used to communicate.[163] In this chapter I will argue that her figure in visual art of the post-Commune through the outbreak of the First World War interrogated the bridge between the Catholic France of the past and a new, decidedly modern and secular image.

Before her calling to save France came, Joan's short life began in the small peasant town of Domrémy, where she began hearing voices around age thirteen. Joan of Arc's life is one of the best-documented from the Middle Ages. There is a wealth

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[163] Hanna, Martha. "Iconology and Ideology: Images of Joan of Arc in the Idiom of the Action Française, 1908-1931." *French Historical Studies* 14, no. 2 (October 1, 1985): 215–239, 216-217.

of books about her life, ranging from historical to fictional tales based on her legend. Many biographies gloss over her early life in the peasant village, whereas others romanticize her upbringing, such as Guy Endore's 1931 *The Sword of God: Jeanne d'Arc* which emphasizes her unique and unfaltering piety: "In morality and religion her curé taught her what the Catholic faith prescribes, but it must be that the love of God and man was innate in her for never did a curé have a more apt and docile pupil or one who carved his teachings to so glorious an end."[164] She identified these voices as belonging to St Catherine of Alexandria, St Margaret and St Michael, well-established Catholic figures who represented women and the military, respectively. More specifically, Saints Catherine and Margaret were considered by the Church to be "sacred virgins" who implored Joan to keep her virtue.[165] Joan claimed that these voices called her to deliver France back to its people, that it was God's will for the French to fight in order to rectify the "pitiful state of the Kingdom of France."[166] After several years of hearing these voices while she quietly attended her daily chores, Joan decided to accept her fate as a prophet.[167] Apparently Joan was not the

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[164] Endore, S. Guy. *The Sword of God: Jeanne d'Arc*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, incorporated, 1931, 7.

[165] In fact, Joan was betrothed before she left Domrémy. When she broke the engagement in favor of following her voices' wishes, her family was sued for a breach of contract. When brought to testify, Joan claimed she did not want to marry because she believed her calling from God was to remain a virgin. She won over her judges and the case was dismissed.

[166] This is how St. Michael referred to the current state of the French crown, embroiled in war with the English, who continued to encroach on French territory, for several decades. Trask, Willard R. *Joan of Arc: In Her Own Words*. New York: Turtle Point Press, 1996, 6.

[167] As the oft-cited research of Deborah Fraioli asserts, Joan's self-promotion as a female visionary was not a unique occurrence, but rather a continuation of a long standing tradition of female prophets.

only one who anticipated her future in battle; her father also had premonitions of Joan heading off to war. According to some accounts, her father was so frightened at first that he threatened to have his daughter drowned rather than see her go to battle. Claiming to be visiting a pregnant cousin in a town near Vaucouleurs, Joan left home in search of Robert de Baudricourt, the right-hand-man of the dauphin Charles. An audience with de Baudricourt facilitated the spread of the idea that Joan had been appointed by God to reclaim Orléans in the name of the French and ensure the installation of Charles VII as king.

Joan was subjected to several rounds of questioning during her brief public life; but the first interrogation conducted in order to determine whether she was truly hearing the voices of saints, if she was practicing witchcraft, or if she were to be disregarded completely as unstable. This interrogation, of which no complete record exists, was conducted at Poitiers by de Baudricourt and others of the dauphin's men, who were unsure of what to make of this simple yet headstrong country girl claiming she was the answer to France's political and military troubles. After the dauphin's men were sufficiently convinced of her sincerity, she was brought to meet Charles, who hid among other men gathered at the court. Joan instantly recognized the dauphin and identified him as her rightful king, even in the absence of royal regalia and never having seen a likeness of Charles. Impressed by this feat of recognition, it was decided that she should be believed, that she was indeed sent by God. She joined the French army, was given a group of men to lead to Orléans and sent out into battle.

Several successful campaigns let to the legitimatization of the Dauphin who became King Charles VII.

After she and her men fought valiantly to gain considerable ground against English forces in the Hundred Year's War, a conflict that France had been in danger of losing for some time, a series of losses found Joan captured by the Burgundian army. Charles VII, the king who without Joan would not have his crown, decided not to pay the Burgundians a ransom for her return, so she was to be sold to the highest bidder. The court of Henry VI gladly paid the Burgundians for her, and she was sent to be tried by the English in Rouen. At this time another series of investigations into her voices began, and this series of interrogations was characterized by hostility as the English sought to determine how they might execute the young woman, in a Catholic court as a witch who had claimed private revelations from God, or in a secular court for treason.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, artists manipulated everything from her hairstyle to body size to communicate different aspects of her role as a national symbol. These iconographic nuances within the compositions reveal Joan's function as a public figure, a model for the true French patriot as well as a model for independent Christian women. They also allow vying political groups to claim ownership of her story, leading to two sets of antitheses that characterize her roles in nineteenth century painting: Joan as masculinized warrior or feminine, virginal shepherdess; Joan as religious icon or secular war hero and patriot. I begin at

the end of the Bourbon Restoration and continue to 1920, in order to examine how the neoclassic and romantic trends of the period inspired the later, independent works of Maurice Denis, Odilon Redon and Jules-Eugène Lenepveu's paintings in the Panthéon.

The manner in which Joan of Arc has been portrayed in the visual arts diverges significantly from the historical accounts of her appearance, most of which confirm her insistence on wearing men's clothing, and having her hair cut into a short, pageboy style. According to several sources, Joan was fitted with a suit of armor, a type of war banner called a standard, and a sword, and when not in battle dressed as a man, to fit in with the other knights.[168] The revisionist approach to her attire seems to date back to the first images of Joan, typically in the form of illuminated manuscripts, small medals and coins. To date, the most comprehensive examination of Joan of Arc in visual art is the exhibition *Images de Jeanne d'Arc* held at the Hôtel de la monnaie in Paris in 1979. The extensive catalogue presents Joan iconography spanning five centuries and diverse media, and comments on her changing image as a reflection of the influence of religion on government, particularly between the Restoration and World War One.[169] Bruno Foucart notes that the nineteenth century was the "golden age of Joan of Arc iconography" because competing ideologies

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[168] Pernoud, Régine. *Jeanne d'Arc*. Paris: Fayard, 1986

[169] Ziff, 69.

attempted to adopt her likeness to represent their cause.[170] The exhibition makes two facts clear about the history of Joan's image: artists were incredibly prolific with her likeness since the fifteenth century, and this collection of images is not only formally and materially diverse, but politically determined.

One of the earliest known portraits of Joan comes from an unknown French or Flemish artist of the second half of the fifteenth century (see Figure 3.1). Joan is clad in a feminizing suit of armor that cinches at her waist and accentuates her hips. Her small, dainty hands and delicate face betray the heaviness of body the armor implies. Her high forehead, small features and wavy auburn hair bear striking resemblance to the attributes of the Virgin Mary in other painting of this period and region, such as in the work of Hans Memling. Although Joan holds her sword against her right shoulder, this illumination emphasizes her spiritual qualities, as her banner floats around and behind her head, mimicking a halo. Three angels are perched in prayer by her left ear, and to her right are three fleurs de lys, similar iconography to that described throughout the transcripts of Joan's trials. The suit of armor and sword represent Joan's role as a soldier for France, whereas her standard with angels signify her loyalty to the Christian God. Her hips, delicate features and hands, and long hair reveal the young woman beneath the heavy armor.

This early portrait marries several iconographic elements but overall emphasizes her historical and secular character. Similarly, the illuminated manuscript

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[170] Foucart, *Images de Jeanne d'Arc,* 85.

of the *Vigiles du roi Charles VII*, a poem from 1483 recounting the Hundred Years War, is a rich source for fifteenth century depictions of Joan as woman warrior. Throughout the manuscript there are several images of Joan from various events of her public life, all of which depict her in long feminine skirts rather than men's clothing or armor. In her first appearance, Joan looks innocent and virginal in a long white gown as she greets the Dauphin while the kings' men look on (see Figure 3.2). She dons the same garments in an image that comes later in the poem where she is escorted to meet her inquisitors at Chinon (see Figure 3.3). In battle scenes she is wearing armor with long pieces of red fabric that resemble a skirt, her hair in buns over her ears (see Figure 3.4). In another illustration Joan ferociously drives away a group of women, identified as prostitutes, who were following the soldiers and offering their services (see Figure 3.5). The poem depicted Joan as moral and fearsome, leading the armies and chasing away disreputable women, and at the same time feminine and waif-like with her slim, elongated figure, long hair and garments.

Joan's non-battle clothing in this early manuscript illustrated and helped perpetuate her image as a virginal saint, one whose purity of body would become her defining feature in the mind of the Catholic Church. Nora Heimann points out that the Church categorizes its saints into three divisions: martyrs, confessors, and virgins. Technically Joan qualifies as all three, yet the Church decided to formally classify her a holy virgin. This sense of virtue is tied to her status as a holy figure as well as a national figure, fulfilling the legend that a virgin would save France. The fifteenth

century images laid the foundation for the iconographic standards that allowed for nineteenth century artists to shape Joan into a symbol. Her figure shifts through a spectrum of postures and attitudes from hard to soft, mature and determined to youthful and innocent. Two sculpted examples demonstrate the extreme differences in interpretations of Joan in public space. Joan looks her youngest, most feminine and spiritual in François Rude's 1852 statue (see Figure 3.6) created for the Luxembourg gardens.[171] She is clothed in a long dress and her suit of armor hangs from her left hand, dragging on the ground. Her head tilts toward her left shoulder and she raises her right hand to hear ear as if to amplify the sounds of her guiding voices. Her soft, youthful and feminine appearance is atypical of modern sculptures commissioned to commemorate Joan of Arc. By contrast, Hippolyte Lefebvre's bronze statue for the Sacré Coeur emphasizes Joan's secular and masculine qualities: she is mounted Joan is on horseback, in full battle dress, her face stern, her sword brandished (see Figure 3.7).

Several statues of Joan were erected in town squares and churches in France from her martyrdom in 1431 to well into the twentieth century. Paintings of Joan of Arc, however, were relatively rare during the First Empire, but slowly regained popularity starting at the time of the Bourbon Restoration. Biographer Timothy Wilson-Smith claims that by the end of the eighteenth century citizens outside of Orléans lost interest in the celebrations of her feast day, which were stopped entirely

[171] The sculpture was exhibited at the Salon of 1852 and is currently housed in the Louvre.

during the Revolution. Just when Joan was in danger of becoming a forgotten historical figure, a petition to Emperor Napoleon led to the reinstatement of the Joan of Arc national festivals, after which she was much better known by the French public.[172] The publication of Jules Quicherat's thorough archive of primary documents *Procès de Condamnation et de Réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc* in the 1840s continued the momentum. Alexandre Dumas called her the "Christ of France" in 1842 and Michelet's 1858 biography *Joan of Arc: The Maid of Orléans* solidified the ideal that Joan "symbolized the nation at its best."[173] Norman Ziff claims that the Joan pictures from the Restoration intended to assert the authority of the Catholic monarchy, "recently reinstalled yet still uncertain" of its staying power.[174]

The reappearance of Joan of Arc in painting and public space reflected the Third Republic's desperation to establish authority as a secular government in the post-Commune chaos. The new Republic struggled to achieve a balance between active citizen participation in government and disorder; officials were concerned about maintaining order over a nation that had very recently descended into anarchy immediately following the dissolution of the Second Empire.[175] The preceding chapter examined the climate of secularization, engaging with Taylor's study of

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[172] Wilson-Smith, Timothy. *Joan of Arc: Maid, Myth and History*. Stroud: Sutton, 2006, 176.

[173] Wilson-Smith, 179-181

[174] Norman D. Ziff, "Jeanne d'Arc et l'art de la Restauration Française," *Images de Jeanne d'Arc*, 69.

[175] Lehning, James R. *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, 65-67.

secularization in which he identifies the disappearance of religious iconography from public space as an indicator of a secularizing state. The frequent repurposing of the Panthéon provides an architectural example of how the shifting governments performed their political platform in the center of the capital. The Pantheon of Paris was originally built as a church to honor St. Genevieve during the height of popularity of neoclassical architecture in France. Construction began in 1758, but it took until 1789 for the building to be completed. The church was transformed into a secular mausoleum shortly after construction concluded. Since the Revolution, the Panthéon was consecrated, decommissioned and reconsecrated as the various nineteenth century governments dealt with church and state issues.

The Third Republic secularized the Panthéon again, and a series of paintings of Joan of Arc by Jules Eugène Lenepveu were commissioned and completed between 1886 and 1890. The series highlights major events from Joan's life, in a chronological sequence, and incorporates all of Joan's antithetical roles: masculine/ feminine and secular/religious. The story begins in Domrémy with a a young, feminine Joan in *Joan of Arc as Shepherdess* (see Figure 3.8). Joan is depicted barefoot and tending to her flock, her long dark hair tied up at the nape of her neck to resemble the pageboy cut Lenepveu gives her in the other three paintings. Joan, walking down the center of the canvas, stands out against her gray-green surroundings wearing a dress colored in rich plums and bright white sleeves. Just above her head a ghostly, transparent apparition of Saint Michael appears,

brandishing his sword and spreading out his arms as if he is about to grab join and forcibly remove her from her humble beginnings.

This coupling of Joan's background and history with her spiritual qualities appears in Jules Bastien-Lepage's 1879 pre-Raphaelite inspired canvas, *Joan of Arc* (see Figure 3.9). The painting captures Joan in a moment of private revelation during her childhood in Lorraine and simultaneously foreshadows her military career and eventual martyrdom. Bastien-Lepage uniquely interprets Joan's hairstyle: her dark locks are long yet tied up in a low chignon that falls to the nape of her neck, resembling a page cut. Joan stares dreamily at the sky as she leans on a nearby tree and reaches forward, seemingly unaware that behind her an illusion has appeared on her house: a large figure of Joan in full armor, facing front, arms outstretched, body language eerily reminiscent of the crucifixion. Saints Catherine and Margaret kneel in prayer to Joan's right. Joan's expression suggests that she sees her future and understands that she, like Christ and the saints before her, will have to sacrifice her life for her faith.

Several other pictures from the last quarter of the nineteenth century assert Joan's spiritual or ethereal qualities. Odilon Redon's pastel *Head of a Young Woman Turned to the Left, Joan of Arc* (c. 1890) depicts a youthful, yet sad looking Joan in three quarter profile (see Figure 3.10). The woman looks off into the distance, as if she is searching for the source of her voices. Redon has focused entirely on the face of Joan, eschewing all reference to the common iconographies of any of the other

Joan paintings of the period. Perhaps the Redon belongs to a grouping of visionary paintings of Joan, like Bastien-Lepage's interpretation which alludes to Joan's voices through spiritual apparitions. Similarly, Eugène Carrière's *Joan of Arc Listening To Voices* from the last quarter of the nineteenth century captures Joan in a moment of ecstasy (see Figure 3.11). Her hands are clasped together in prayer, her eyes are closed and her head is cocked back as light flames emanates around her evaporating into a amorphous, smoke-like cloud. The variations in tone around the saint's head give the impression that her voices have physically materialized upon her shoulders. Nadia Margolis states that Joan's "spiritual effectiveness as protective saint of France eventually equated and even surpassed that of St. Michael in modern times, during her Country's moments of gravest self-doubt and despair."[176] Neither of these paintings include obvious iconography to indicate Joan's religious status, but rather assert her role as a visionary woman, an inspiration for the secular avant-garde.

Despair and fragility characterize Paul Delaroche's Joan in the painting *Joan of Arc in Prison* (1824), which is focused on the later interrogations led by the Catholic Church, intended to bully Joan into recanting her claims that the voices of saints led her to raise the siege of Orléans (see Figure 3.12). Joan appears much younger and weaker than in the *Vigilies du roi* or Ingres' painting. The center of the composition is focused around by the cardinal who interrogates her; his bright red

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[176] Margolis in *Joan of Arc and Spirituality*. The New Middle Ages. New York, N.Y: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 27.

robe jumps out against the dark background as he stares sternly at Joan. The only light in the composition seems to emanate from the Joan herself, who clasps her hands in prayer as she looks upward. Her cell is bare and austere; her wooden bed padded with straw sits on broken concrete floors against thick concrete brick walls. The straw spilling off her bed (to which she was apparently chained during the trial leading to her execution) catches the light and shines gold, attracting the viewer's eye. Perhaps Delaroche is making a reference to the manger where Christ was born, often depicted as stuffed with golden straw, to draw a comparison between Jesus and Joan and assert Joan's saintliness in the face of certain death. Shown in the Salon of 1824, the painting was remarkable for its new interpretation of Joan as "no longer the inspired figure who saved France but instead a weak and suffering creature."[177] This pitiable Joan is a rare choice for the nineteenth century, as later paintings tend to show her proud and triumphant.

The most consistently masculine interpretations of Joan appear in battle scenes, and provide a sharp visual contrast to the paintings of her as a shepherdess. In another Panthéon work by Lenepveu, *Joan of Arc in Armor Before Orléans*, Joan commands her army as knights fall around her (see Figure 3.13). Lenepveu has created a small platform in the cobblestone street so that Joan appears taller and larger than the other figures in the painting. Although fighting and death surrounds her, Joan holds no weapon, instead she waves her standard which serves as the focal point

[177] Aufrere, 66.

of the composition-the viewer's eye is drawn to the flag, then down the red flagpole to highlight Joan as she fills an oval void in the composition. Although Lenepveu has taken care to ensure that Joan is not a combatant, the battle appears to revolve around her. According to some documentation, although Joan always carried a sword, she preferred to direct her soldiers rather than to fight herself, because she did not want to kill anyone.[178]

Like the battle scenes of the *Vigilies du roi* and the Panthéon, paintings of Charles VII's coronation tend to emphasize Joan's secular role, her strength and her determination by exaggerating her body size and royalist regalia. However, Joan's presence at the coronation, while decidedly secular, oscillates between masculine and feminine according to the painters' interpretation. Joan of Arc's importance as a symbol of the monarchy is of course connected to her determination to install the Dauphin on the throne; in fact her conquest legitimated Charles VII as God's chosen king.[179] The legitimization of the court of Charles VII forms the apex of Joan of Arc's career between her unremarkable childhood and her brutal execution in public. Lenepveu has made Joan extraordinarily masculine in *Joan of Arc at Reims for the Coronation of King Charles VII* (see Figure 3.14). She stands behind Charles, gazing towards the heavens (as in most depictions of the coronation) her hair is cut short and

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[178] Interestingly this statement seems to contradict others Joan made during her trial, particularly that she would "cut of the head of a Burgundian" although quickly adding "if it pleased God."

[179] Beaune, 186

her facial features are not nearly as soft and feminine as in the *Shepherdess* picture. In *Shepherdess* Joan looks like a different woman than the figure in the other three pictures.

The feminine Joan also appears at the coronation, and the influence of neoclassicism in paintings of Joan of Arc is particularly visible in the work of Jean-Dominique Ingres, who approached the subject with dramatic yet naturalistic techniques. Ingres' painting *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII at the Cathedral of Reims* (1854), focuses on Joan's glorious moment of victory and satisfaction after the reinstallation of the French king. Joan commands the entire composition, standing tall and proud, brandishing her standard (see Figure 3.15). The king himself is nowhere to be seen; the figures that bow to the left of Joan appear to pay her homage, not Charles. Her face is in three quarter profile, and she boasts smooth peaches and cream skin, idealized for a peasant girl who has spent the past two years at war. Her eyes are trained slightly upward, which is a common iconographical reference to the voices she claimed to hear.[180] Her knight's mask and helmet are set aside, atop a deep blue fabric embroidered with fleurs-de-lys, identically matching the backdrop curtain behind Joan, emphasizing her royalist sympathies. To exaggerate her holy virtue, in place of the helmet, a thin white halo surrounds her head. The plaque at the bottom left reads "her stake will become a

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[180] McEachren, J. W. "Joan Interpreted by Art." *Fine Arts Journal* 19, no. 12 (December 1, 1908), 8.

throne in heaven"[181] demonstrating another allusion to her regal position in heaven, her saintliness, fifteen years before the beatification process began.

The strength of Ingres' Joan was not appreciated by Denis, who denounced academic painting with religious themes in his *History of Religious Art*. Although at a young age Denis was concerned about the secularization of France and its impacts on Catholic spirituality, by the time he completed the 1939 publication he had decided that the connections between the church and the Academy had done a great disservice to religious painting. Claiming that the cross influence of the Academy and the Church had produced a nineteenth century aesthetic of religious art that was completely devoid of any real religious sentiment, he specifically mentions Ingres' image of Joan as evidence of how a religious figure can be stripped of all passion, stating that her expression, rather than one of devotion to God, is "as metallic as her armor."[182]

To attempt an image of Joan free from academic influence and imbued with passionate religious expression, in 1920, the year of Joan's official canonization, Denis painted *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII* (see Figure 3.16). This painting and one of his earlier Joan canvases, *The Communion of Joan of Arc* (c. 1900-see Figure 3.17) both show Joan in her suit of armor with a gray piece of fabric attached to give the impression of a skirt without creating a full dress as Ingres did.

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[181] *et son bucher se change en trône dans les cieux*

[182] Denis, Histoire de l'art religieux, 269-272.

Joan looks youthful and boyish with her dark pageboy haircut, diverging from the long-haired Joans of Ingres and Delaroche. Both paintings are filled with figures and regalia, the positioning of Joan asserts her spiritual qualities; she raises her eyes to the heavens and holds her hands in prayer beneath her chin. In *Communion*, she opens her mouth to receive the host from the priest while other armor-clad soldiers look on. Denis has manipulated the composition to emphasize Joan despite her smaller stature relative to the other figures in the painting. Although Joan is kneeling, making her significantly shorter than the men who surround her she stands out against the oval-shaped form of negative space around her created by the altar boy's candle, the sword and the banner pole held by the knights to the right of the painting. In the *Coronation*, Denis again leaves negative space around Joan although in this picture she is one of the tallest figures. Joan is the focal point of the composition, it seems as though the trumpets are playing in her honor. In fact, the actual coronation event is barely noticeable; Charles VII is a tiny figure nearly devoid of facial features relegated to the background. Joan herself pays no attention to the crowning of the Dauphin; she prays, clutching her standard.

The conservative style of Denis' two paintings coincides with an odd hallmark of many French avant-garde painters (for example, André Derain) whose later works tend to be more moderate than the pictures from their early careers. Whereas the paintings of Bastien-Lepage, Carrière and Redon represent a secularization of the visionary by stripping Joan of any obvious religious connotations, Denis' in his two

paintings pulls the visionary figure back to the Church. In the *Communion* picture, Joan's head is tipped back, her mouth slightly open, recalling images of St. Teresa, known for her physical experience of Catholic love. Joan's legible religious ecstasy was easily recognizable to a Christian audience, for whom the saints were models of human behavior and unwavering faith.

Joan's martyrdom epitomizes her role as Christian saint in visual art, her religious significance is maximized in Lenepveu's *Joan of Arc Burned at the Stake* (see Figure 3.18). Again the bright white reappears-she is wearing a long white gown while tied to the stake-to emphasize Joan's purity, saintliness and virginity. She clutches a large cross and again gazes upwards, perhaps about to mutter her last cries of "Jesus! Jesus!" as the flames consume her. The diagonal movement of the composition draws the eye up the figure of Joan to the skies as the clouds part above her. Lenepveu provided a comprehensive view of the saint, as if in an attempt to suture her different avatars into a cohesive narrative. Joan's body is elevated as the crowd stares up at here, similar to many images of the Crucifixion, again drawing parallels between Joan's martyrdom and Christ's death. Similar compositions will be examined in the next chapter, in which I discuss the visual art of a secularizing France examines new religious traditions that emerged in the nineteenth century and their connections to Catholicism. The use of white paint in all four pictures carefully punctuates the most important elements of the compositions, and most likely references Joan's purity of soul and body, a matter of discussion during the 1890s

surrounding her canonization. Joan appears the most feminine in the first and last of the paintings, as a shepherdess in Lorraine and as a martyr, tied to the stake in a white dress.

Karine Varley examines how martyrdom acted as a central theme to both republican and clerical attempts to recover from the embarrassment of the Franco-Prussian war. French Catholics felt compelled to apologize to God for their greed-driven, misguided military debacle and build the Sacré Coeur basilica. As Varley puts it, "the Catholic Church articulated a very clear theological explanation for the recent misfortunes, it defined republican experiments as a betrayal of the nation's divinely ordained mission as eldest daughter of the Church and an assault on the very heart of French national identity."[183] The saintly martyrs of the Christian canon were reinvigorated and respected for their defiance, a trait republicans naturally attached to their own cause of resistance which had also been reinvigorated from Revolutionary fervor.

During her trial, it became apparent that Joan was to become a political martyr as well as religious one, and life in prison was the lightest sentence offered. While holding Joan in captivity awaiting trial, the English were particularly offended by Joan's tendency to dress in men's clothing, which she felt was part of her destiny as a solider of God. During the trials she stated, "when I have done that for which I am sent from God, I will put on women's clothing" and "if I were at the place of

[183] Varley, 41, 152.

execution, and I saw the fire lighted and catching and the executioner ready to build up the fire, and if I were in the fire, even so I would say nothing else, and I would maintain what I said at this trial until death."[184] Despite this tenacity, the nineteen year old momentarily succumbed to pressure to renounce her voices and recanted her entire story in the face of the death penalty. Presented with the abjuration she said "I would rather sign it than burn"[185] and her sentence was commuted to life in prison, on the conditions that she dressed like a woman and permanently retired her references to the voices of the saints that led her to war.

When Joan withdrew her abjuration and prepared to face the fire; she made several statements which reflected her loyalty to the French nation and sense of patriotism. Sentenced to death by burning, Joan begged for a different method of execution. She felt that her revocation of her original claims that she was sent by God to crown the rightful king of France was a crime against the state, in her words, "treason." Whether it was due to abuse in prison[186] or guilt over renouncing her faith, four days after her abjuration she stated: "What I said, I said for fear of the fire. They [the voices] told me that God, by Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret, gave me to know the great pity of the treason that I consented to by making that abjuration and

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[184] Trask, 137, 132.

[185] Trask, 135.

[186] Anne Llewellyn Barstow suggests that Joan may have been gang-raped in prison, providing an impetus for the recanting of her statement. See "Joan of Arc and Female Mysticism." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (October 1, 1985), 46.

revocation to save my life, and that I was damning myself to save my life."[187] Thus, in order to maintain her loyalty to God and by extension, her loyalty to France, she reclaimed her calling from God and the guidance of her voices and was burned at the stake.

Most of the saints canonized by the Catholic Church were martyred for their beliefs, yet none but Joan are remembered for their patriotic tenacity. The rhetoric of nationalism surrounding her life and death distinguish her from other saints as a prominent political figure, a saintly heir to King Louis IX who was canonized at the turn of the fourteenth century. Joan had been charged by God with freeing France from the encroaching power of the English, not necessarily with preaching the Christian message as so many of the other saints felt compelled to do. England was, after all, also a Christian nation (although notably not the Most Christian, the term reserved for France) and the crux of the Hundred Year's War was the battle to become the most powerful crown in Europe. With England's attempt to overtake France after the end of the Capetian dynasty, European nationalism was born as nations began to define themselves by competition with surrounding countries. The pride of France grew out of its citizens' hatred for England, and vise versa. This idea, coupled with the extensive records taken of Joan of Arcs life, military campaign, trial and death, has led to her status as a national symbol. Despite the four hundred fifty years she

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[187] Trask, 139.

was a national symbol, by the late 1880s the iconography associated with her was as fluid as ever, ripe for interpretation by republicans and royalists alike.

The patriotism associated with Joan is unique; although her story has drawn comparisons with the biblical figures of Esther and Judith, who also took on masculine roles for the good of their country, Joan's purity of heart and body sets her apart as a non-sexualized heroine ever at odds with the common nineteenth century typecasting of women as femmes fatales in visual art.[188] In all of the depictions of Joan, so thoroughly catalogued in the 1979 Paris exhibition, she is dressed modestly and never positioned in a sexual way. Rather, as Metzler illustrates, she is often depicted as a maiden, often submissive and dreamy, with a strong masculine form.[189] The only instances where Joan's sexuality is at the center of the narrative created around her come from literature, the most infamous example being Voltaire's poorly received *Maid of Orleans* which was officially published (although unfinished) in 1899.[190] Although its formal publication was at the turn of the twentieth century, according to Nora Heimann the poem had been dismissed decades earlier. It was last published in 1945, and remains one of Voltaire's least popular works.[191] The poem was intended as an indictment of the Catholic Church, evidenced by the monk

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[188] Péladan, Joséphin. *Le secret de Jeanne d'Arc*. Paris: E. Sansot, 1913, 15.

[189] Metlzer, 2-4

[190] Voltaire had begun writing the text in the first half of the eighteenth century, but it was never finished or published during the author's life.

[191] Heimann, Nora M. *Joan of Arc in French Art and Culture (1700-1855): From Satire to Sanctity*. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005, 31.

character who rapes Joan, rendering her powerless, as much of the story around Joan bespeaks the "power and importance" of her virginity.[192]

Joan of Arc represents a female figure of French national identity, one that could be revitalized and convey the ideals of a modern nation. Although Joan was not the only female figure who had embodied a sense of national pride in French history, she stands apart from the figures of Marianne[193] and Liberty, who had served revolutionary purposes but were not coded with the same mutable religious significance as Joan. The many faces and bodies of Joan of Arc from the post-Commune period of French art underline the versatility of her image and story as a

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[192] As Heimann points out, the Catholic Church categorized its saints into three groups: martyrs, confessors and virgins. Although Joan fits all three groups, the Church holds her virginity in highest regard, as if remaining a virgin was a greater testament of faith than her gruesome death. For more on the sexual politics of saints, see page 38.

[193] For a comparative discussion of other feminine images of French identity, including the importance of Joan of Arc in 20th century France, see McWilliam, Neil. "Conflicting Manifestations: Parisian Commemoration of Joan of Arc and Etienne Dolet in the Early Third Republic." *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 2 (April 1, 2004), 381–418.

means to establish a sense of French identity and nationalism.[194] The political world of 1871 and after was dramatically different to that of 1431, yet she was modern and relevant enough to become the face of a nation. May 8th is still celebrated as St Joan of Arc day, and statues dedicated to her adorn the streets and buildings of Paris.

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[194] Joan's appeal was not unique to France; she became an important symbol throughout the United States and Britain in the centuries following the Hundred Years' War. Ellen Dolgin's study *Modernizing Joan of Arc: Conceptions, Costumes and Canonization* focuses on literary representations of Joan used to assert political platforms of the English-speaking world of the twentieth century. Dolgin cites several examples, such as posters advertising *The Suffragette* newspaper from 1912. To think of Joan of Arc as a symbol for British nationalism is especially absurd considering her emphatic condemnation of the English and their sympathizers during her trial. The relevance of her spirited dedication to delivering her king to her country and to fight for righteousness outweighed her fifteenth century Anglophobia, especially considering that after the first decade of the twentieth century, Britain and France were fighting on the same side against a common enemy, Germany. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, Joan, who was born and raised in the Lorraine region of north eastern France, was used as a symbol of righteousness on both sides of the Franco-Prussian War, since her lineage could be effectively traced back to either country. Although Joan fought for the French nation and the liberation of its capital, arguably by nineteenth century geography her native Lorraine belonged to the territory argued over by the Germans and the French. In the 1880s, Lorraine was German territory, threatening Joan's "Frenchness" and her effectiveness as a national symbol, especially after the dismantling of her image done during the Revolution. Further complicating matters, German scholars in the first quarter of the nineteenth century began to show interest in the extensive Joan of Arc documentation in France's libraries, which had been forgotten since the late 1400s. The threat of German theft of Joan's story fueled the interest of French historians and biographers, eager to beat their eastern neighbors to the archives. This led to publications like Catholic writer Charles Péguy's play *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc* (1910).

Chapter Four:

The Artist as Medium: Tissot's Spiritualist Translation of the Catholic Image[195]

Spiritualism, a fringe religious movement of antebellum America, yielded a unique aesthetic to illustrate its claim of spiritual immortality. It appealed to many as a compromise between organized religion and atheism that offered comfort in its ability to facilitate connections to loved ones who have passed on, easing apprehension over death. As the movement spread throughout the world,[196] it offered followers an alternative to the traditional and conservative religious mainstream without a complete materialist disavowal of the "world beyond," and assurance that the soul can conquer death. In France, Spiritualism arrived at a time of high tension between secular and religious government officials, attaching itself to residual Catholic sympathies without requiring allegiance to the institution of spirituality. James Jacques Joseph Tissot[197], one of the more prolific producers of religious-themed art at the turn of the century, was a Frenchman who spent years following Spiritualism in Britain and upon his return to his home country brought his visions to the world of French painting, turning traditional Catholic iconography on its head.

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[195] A version of this chapter will appear in the forthcoming anthology *Spiritualism*, edited by Christopher Moreman, to be published by Praeger.

[196] The influence of Spiritualism in several countries has been well examined. For Brazil, see: David J Hess, *Samba in the Night: Spiritism in Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). England: Georgina Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England, 1850-1939*, Studies in modern British religious history v. 25 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2010).

[197] Tissot's name given at birth was Jacques-Joseph Tissot, although he is commonly known by the first name he gave himself: James. The name change came after his time in England, when he became enamored with all things British and wished to have a more English sounding name. Wood, 1986, 21.

Dramatically varied depictions of biblical subjects and martyrdom were popular during the 1880s and 1890s as evidence of the confusion around the Church's shrinking role, relief over France's new more secular status, and Catholicism's panicked response. It also included new iconographies: representations of nascent religious movements such as Spiritualism that made their way into France at this time. This chapter will consider how Spiritualist influence on Tissot's approach to Catholic subjects compares to devout Denis' interpretation of the same subjects in late nineteenth century France. By comparing the artwork of these contemporaries, I will argue that the visual language of Spiritualism in France appropriated familiar Catholic iconography in order to appeal to fin-de-siècle viewers who, regardless of their own belief, had familiarity with these images.

The figure of the medium, as one who sees visions that others cannot, mirrored the figure of the modern artist, who depicted a symbolic world beyond the empirical. Spiritists had claimed that the Church's dismissal of contact with the dead as "evil" or "superstitious" ignored how the saints, trusted and revered figures in Catholicism, often saw visions or spoke with the dead. Allan Kardec, the founder of the French Spiritualist movement and philosopher of heterodoxy, saw the artist as specially equipped to communicate with sprits who took more easily to communication through visual language rather than written. His *Book of Mediums* specifically addresses the "bi-corporeity" of certain Catholic saints including Alphonse de Liguon and Antoine de Padua-both men had ability to be in two places at

once.[198] Furthermore, Kardec insisted on honoring the Christian belief in Christ's divinity in order to broaden his appeal to French Catholics. Nevertheless, staunch Catholics never embraced Spiritism, and their rejection of the movement reflected the pervasive inflexibility of the Church in modern France.

As Kardec's Spiritism attempted to attach itself to modern Catholicism, it is important to note the similarities between Tissot's work and Denis' Catholic painting in the 1880s and 1890s. Tissot had an early expsoure to Catholicism but was impressed by Spiritualism, leading him to abandon the Church. Denis stayed true to his faith and the tradition of Catholic art but used avant-garde formal techniques to translate the centuries-old iconographies into late Symbolist expressions of religious fervor. He firmly believed that his painting practice and his spiritual practice were inextricably linked: through making art he was spreading the message of his beloved faith.

The effects of Spiritualism on visual art were as multifarious as the forms of the movement that developed throughout the world. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of art-historical studies on Spiritualist-informed art, particularly on non North American artists. Charles Colbert applies art historical methodology in his study on Spiritualism in the United States, in which he claims that the movement is largely

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[198] Kardec *Book of Mediums*, 155. Kardec also includes an account of his invocation of St. Alphonse, who provided an explanation of bi-corporeity as an ability of a man who has elevated his soul to God.

responsible for the growing appreciation of the fine arts in 19th century America.[199] He argues that the Spiritualist insistence on meditation during séances was remarkably similar to the quiet and thoughtful appreciation of a work of art expected of sophisticated viewers. Furthermore, Colbert contends that the Spiritualists' appreciation of the fine arts paralleled that of the Catholic Church's longstanding patronage of painters, sculptures, architects and mosaicists.[200] Protestantism, however, which was the more prevalent American Christian denomination, rejected the ostentatious and dramatic visual culture of Catholicism, indicting the Catholics for idolatry and opting instead for austerity. Artists who considered themselves practicing Spiritualists translated different aspects of the movement into a range of artistic expressions: drawings of deceased loved ones or admired master artists,[201] depictions of the afterlife, allegorical figures, and landscapes. Some of the most infamous examples of Spiritualist art in America are the spirit photographs that enraptured the nation in the years following the Civil War. William Mumler, the antagonist in one of the earliest examples of photo manipulation in a court case of fraud, in 1875 took a portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln (See Figure 4.1). In the developed version of the image, her late husband and former President Abraham Lincoln stands behind her, as if he were always there, watching over his widow. With

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[199] Charles Colbert, *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1.

[200] Ibid, 60.

[201] Ibid, 192.

Mumler assuming the role of medium, he makes manifest the spiritual realm which exists parallel, yet invisible, to our own. Generally Catholic art, for example in images of the Annunciation, the spirit or angel arrives suddenly, interrupting the human world with a sense of urgency.

Colbert asserts that Spiritualist art succeeds in its ability to make the spirit world materialize for the viewer in a believable way; the power of the medium was directly related to the skill of the artist: the more talented the artist was, the more convincingly he could render the spirit world manifest for his viewers.[202] Kardec's books discuss several artistic means of communicating with spirits. Music, drawing, or poetry, Kardec claims, can be more accessible techniques of mediation, particularly when dealing with a spirit who speaks a foreign language. The special aptitude of the artist-medium plays a role in the success of the interaction with the spirit world.[203] In his focus on the United States' pre Civil War lack of appreciation of the fine arts, Colbert notes the "affinity between Spiritualist attitudes towards art and those of Catholicism."[204] In Catholic art the spirits (referred to as angels or demons in the faith) seem to suddenly appear on earth, crashing into the human realm in moments of great urgency or importance such as the Annunciation or Last Judgement. In American Spiritualist art the spirit entities occupy the space of the art work in a more

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[202] Ibid, 11.

[203] Kardec, *Book of Mediums*, 276.

[204] Colbert, 60.

subtle way.[205] Spiritualist art intends to convince the viewer that the spirits are among us at all times, existing in an invisible reality parallel to our own. The medium, the artist, clarifies their existence.

Tissot and Denis both painted during the modern period, but their distinct styles are firmly grounded in the history of religious painting. Rembrandt's religious art, with its focus on the effects of light has been described by Colbert as a foundation for Spiritualist art because of its similarity to the Spiritualists' appreciation of nature. The "psychic energies"[206] critical to Spiritualist thought are apparent in works such as the celebrated *Hundred Gilder Print* (1649) in which rays of light emanate from Christ's head as he preaches, illuminating the entire scene (See Figure 4.2). A print of this work, as well as a copy of the etching created in 1873 by Léopold Flameng, owned by the Bibliothèque Nationale,[207] would both have been accessible to French artists such as Tissot and Denis, who likely studied the original during their training. Rembrandt used the medium of etching in order to achieve an overall softness of the composition, as if we were witness to a dream or vision. The figures on the left side of the image are bathed in light, whereas the figures on the right fade into darkness. Rembrandt's experimentation with mezzotint led to the dramatic chiaroscuro of the

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[205] Ibid, 12.

[206] Ibid, 21.

[207] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Inv. W.B. 74.2, Bartsch 74

image which enhances the spiritual qualities attributed to Christ, whose bright figure bursts out of the shadows to comfort the sick.

Rembrandt was a likely source for the development of modern French Spiritualist art, but the connections with Tintoretto's earlier painting should not be ignored. Tintoretto's *Last Supper* (1594) twists standard Catholic iconography and creates a scene where the celestial collapses into the terrestrial (See Figure 4.3). There are two sources of light in the painting: one is the glowing nimbus surrounding Jesus' head, and the other, an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling out of which thick smoke swirls. This smoke, transparent yet texturized, morphs into angelic figures who float over the table, unacknowledged by the participants in the bustling dinner scene below. Although painting over two hundred years before the movement began, Tintoretto has effectively created a Spiritualist picture: the two sources of light represent the coexisting realms. There is no "sudden intervention"[208] common to Catholic iconographies of angels and demons. The oil lamp illuminates the spirit world while Christ illuminates the terrestrial world. Kardec's theories cover several levels or "orders" of spirits, and he claims that angels are no different than the spirits of his philosophy.

> The moderns have represented the angels or pure spirits under the form of radiant beings with white Wings-emblem of purity Satan, with horns,

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[208] From Colbert: 'Traditional angels and devils, one early historian of movement notes, existed outside the realm of human order. They entered the material realm by bending the fabric of time and space. In contrast to these sudden, miraculous appearances, Spiritualist manifestations emerged gradually out of the environment...[as if they] occurred in the natural order" 11-12.

> claws, and the attributes of bestiality-emblems of the lowest Passions; and the vulgar, prone to understand such representations literally, have taken these allegorical embodiments of abstract ideas for real personalities, as they formerly did in regard to the allegorical personifications of the old mythology.[209]

Although both artists were firmly Christian, and working centuries before Spiritualism was founded, Rembrandt and Tintoretto stretched the conventions of their respective eras to provide viewers a glimpse of the spirit world.

During the Third Republic, new spiritual movements bore the traces of Catholic history. Catholicism was not as prevalent in American daily life as it was in France, and when Spiritualism was introduced it became attached to the familiar Catholic symbolism for quicker accessibility to potential followers. Spirituality had been complicated by encroaching modernism, and citizens felt forced to choose between faith and science, to either accept the death of God and embrace secular modernity, or to side with an antiquated clerical regime whose relevance was dwindling. The visual culture of the last third of the century examined the changing role of the Catholic Church during the Third Republic, and paintings of religious subjects reflected the diminished influence of the Church on secular life.[210] Many, but not all artists rejected Church influence, and these polarizing attitudes towards religion represented a comprehensive view of iconographies of belief; work that

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[209] Kardec, The Spirit's Book, 106.

[210] For another perspective of religious art in nineteenth century France, see Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-century France* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

indicts the clergy for its stale and repressive views as well as paintings that glorify the Church and its teachings.

Spiritisme, or Spiritism, as Spiritualism was branded in France,[211] made its way into the country in the mid nineteenth century. As both Sharp and Ann Saddlemeyer have discussed, French Spiritism was a movement independent of but similar to British Spiritualism; Spiritism emphasized the importance of mediation between the terrestrial and the spirit world over the materialization of spirits. In this sense, it was more "democratic": everyone had the potential to become a medium.[212] These changes were largely due to Kardec, whose writings attempted to prove the existence of a spirit realm, heretofore incompletely examined by any of the dominant religions. His first book on the subject, *Le Livre des Espirits* (1857), allowed a simple justification for belief in a higher power:

> To assure ourselves of the existence of God, we have only to look abroad on the works of creation. The universe exists, therefore it has a cause. To doubt the existence of God is to doubt that every effect has a cause, and to assume that something can have been made by nothing.[213]

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[211] For a complete discussion of the semantics of French Spiritualism, see Monroe, 105 and the Introduction to Lynn L Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006). For a history of Spiritualism's introduction into France by means of Mesmerism, see Monroe, particularly chapter 2.

[212] For more information on the democratic nature of French Spiritualism, see Sharp, chapter 3 and Ann Saddlemeyer in Katharine Lochnan (ed), Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 153.

[213] Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 64.

By Kardec's logic, the mere existence of anything that has a purpose proves the existence of God. The rhetoric is clear and direct: the universe exists, and we have no better explanation than "it was created by God," therefore, God created the universe.

Kardec's reasoning would have offered considerable comfort to late nineteenth century French Catholics, who were not prepared to relinquish their eternal salvation and immortality in favor of scientific progress. According to Monroe, "Kardec sought to strike an extremely delicate balance between doctrinal innovation and religious accommodation. He wanted his doctrine to make Catholicism appealing to modern believers."[214] *Spiritisme* offered the promise of a life after death that did not require strict obedience to an institution, and through mediums allowed contact with the spirit world, an immediate gratification for those curious about or skeptical of the afterlife. It also attempted to explain spiritual phenomena in terms of science without negating the divine qualities of the spirit world. It was a kind of *juste milieu* for those who were incompletely convinced by either side of the debate, and Kardec (who had been born and raised a Catholic) and his followers wished to attract a substantial following of people who couldn't commit to a materialist rejection of anything spiritual, or to a Catholic rejection of secular politics.[215] Kardec's claim that spiritism encompassed all religions as well as a scientific method pushed spiritism to occupy the middle ground "between two worlds that became increasingly separate as

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[214] Monroe, 147.

[215] Monroe, 96-99; 140-149

the century wore on: science and religion."[216] Although Spiritism failed at becoming the supplement to Catholicism Kardec envisioned, the similarities between the two faiths carried over into religious artistic practice, making way for a new visual spirituality.

Tissot was born in 1836 in the town of Nantes to a drapery merchant. His Breton mother, with whom he was very close, introduced him to her two passions: fashion and Catholicism.[217] A large portion of his work focuses on ladies' fashion, and Katherine Lochnan has referred to him as a "fashion artist" to whom we are indebted for his accurate recording of Victorian dress.[218] After a brief stint at the École des Beaux-Arts, Tissot became friendly with James McNeil Whistler, the man who would eventually introduce him to Spiritualism.[219] Although he found Spiritualism through Whistler, it was the death of his great love Kathleen Newton that inspired him to attempt to contact the spirit world. Her death also led him back to France and ultimately, back to Catholicism.

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[216] Sharp, 123.

[217] Christopher Wood, *Tissot: The Life and Work of Jacques Joseph Tissot 1836-1902* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986, 20. Tissot's mother attempted on her son's behalf to convince his father that an artistic career would not bring shame upon the family, and that he should be allowed to follow an artistic vocation.

[218] Katherine Lochnan in Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 9.

[219] Whistler's connection to Spiritualism has been well documented. For more information, see: Colbert, chapter 4.

The critical reception of Tissot's painting has been overwhelmingly negative; scholars claim that his hyper-realistic style and choice of high society and histrionic religious subject matter were convenient and superficial. While it is true that Tissot's prints were not the most novel in terms of technique, the works offer a creative perspective which must be examined in relationship to the two "faiths" with which he aligned himself. Many of his paintings employ the imperial viewpoint, suggesting that, like his contemporaries the Symbolists, he was looking to Japanese prints for inspiration. His depiction of Christ's death on the cross, *It is Finished* (1886-1894), provides the viewer with a position several feet above the witnesses (See Figure 4.4). Men holding scrolls over their heads float above ground and form a half-circle at the top of the composition, framing a triangle and the Latin letters INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) which appear mysteriously in the sky. It is likely that Tissot wanted to include the viewer in the group of disciples who create the crown over Jesus' lifeless body, and the smoky lettering, barely discernible from the background, represents Christ's spirit exiting the terrestrial realm. This lettering also recalls Tissot's commentary on another of his Crucifixion paintings, *What Our Savior Saw From the Cross* (1886-1894), in which he refers to the "threatening signs in the sky" that concern the Golgotha spectators, who taunt Christ during his last moments (See Figure 4.5).[220]

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[220] Nancy Rose Marshall et al., *James Tissot: Victorian Life/Modern Love* ([S.l.]: New Haven: New Haven London: American Federation of Arts; Yale Center for British Art Yale University Press, 1999), 180.

Denis' 1894 painting *Sacré coeur crucifié* (*Crucified Sacred Heart*) bears a striking resemblance to *It Is Finished*, particularly in how Denis also positions the viewer above the Crucifixion (See Figure 2.1). A large yellow light bursts from Christ's chest, representing the sacred heart of Jesus, the inspiration for the painting, the Sacré Coeur Basilica built around the same time, and the spiritual bright light common to the earlier Catholic works Denis is surely referencing. In an 1890 work *Le vendange mystique* (*The Mystical Harvest*) Denis further asserts the omnipresence of Christ who appears above the grape vines, his head encircled in a bright yellow nimbus (See Figure 4.6). Silverman has discussed the prevalence of grape harvest imagery in the work of van Gogh and Gauguin, concluding that the differences in the paintings they each produced from memories of Arles vineyards highlight the differences in their theological views: Gauguin's picture is replete with misery, "an opportunity to survey nature as a source of suffering, and the wretched debasement of human agents consigned, irresistibly, to partake of it" whereas van Gogh's picture emphasizes the eventual replenishment of the grape crops.[221] Silverman's analysis of these grape harvest paintings focuses primarily on the issue of recording a memory, and how the two artists who experienced the same event chose to render it to canvas. The Denis picture does not suggest a scene of memory, but rather a scene of vision, an imaginary, "mystical" vineyard wherein women who have pledged their lives to

[221] Silverman, 224-247

God[222] gather grapes under the bright light of the Crucified Christ. Denis painting is undeniably Catholic, emphasizing the liturgy of the Eucharist-the sacrament unique to Catholicism where the faithful consume bread and wine believed to be transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus. Denis' obsession with Catholic mysticism defined his artistic practice, and he produced this work of blinding color and unrealistic space, wherein Christ towers above a world populated by faceless *religieuses* who stand among cypress trees and pick grapes from vineyards. Only the sister in the foreground has facial features, the other women dutifully go about their task without any individuality, dark purplish black robes through which peach oval heads peek. One of the figures has lost the flesh tones entirely as she turns her back to us, she looks nearly machine-like, picking fruit with her sickle-like arms and funneling the grapes into the chalice beside her. The vines that line the path separate the sisters from a fantastic event above, to which none of them pay heed. Growing from the ground and stretching into the sky is an image of Christ, arms outstretched as in a Crucifixion scene although no cross is present. The golden nimbus stands out against his orange hair as Christ has taken the place of the source of all life, the sun.

Whereas Denis' work focuses on the spiritual presence of Christ in the contemporary world, Tissot's paintings focus more on the life and death of Jesus in a pseudo-historical manner. Tissot's creative use of perspective and intangible

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[222] in contrast to the miserable women workers of Gauguin's painting, a foundation for Silverman's sexual interpretation of the subject

phenomena in his paintings was likely strategic: he provoked sentimentality with his naturalistic depictions of the dying deity while allowing the viewer to envision a special connection to the event. For centuries devout Catholics wanted to experience a special connection with the principal characters of their faith, and this was often portrayed through the visual arts. Throughout the Renaissance wealthy patrons had themselves included into important spiritual events, from the Portinari's presence at adoration of the shepherds in Hugo van der Goes altarpiece to Titian's depiction of the Pesaro family's personal introduction to the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus by St. Francis. Tissot, acting as medium, offers a different sort of "way in": a temporary translation of the viewer's persepctive into the figure of Christ himself in *What Our Savior Saw From the Cross*. In this painting, the viewer is vaulted upwards onto the Cross, looking down on the mourners as they watch him slowly die. Traditionally, the figure of Christ is an iconic one, a figure to respect and worship as he heals the sick, helps the poor, or endures the Passion. Rarely, if ever, is the viewer invited to assume the position of Christ moments before his death. Tissot is allowing his viewers to experience the last seconds of material life, consumed by suffering and doubt before he is translated into the spiritual realm and offered a full understanding of God. As Kardec stated, man can only fully understand the divine "when his mind shall no longer be obscured by matter, and when, by his perfection, he shall have brought himself nearer to God, be will see and comprehend Him."[223]

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[223] Kardec, *The Spirit's Book*, 65.

In Michael Wentworth's biting critique of Tissot's Catholic subjects, he quotes Maurice Denis:

> The Christ of Byzantium is a symbol; the Christ of modern artists, even if clothed in the most authentic of *kiffeds*, is nothing more than mere literature. In the one it is the form itself which is expressive; in the other it is merely the imitation of Nature which would like to be so.[224]

Wentworth claims that Denis could have been commenting on the Tissot Bible, maligning Tissot's superficial relationship to Catholicism and his use of Biblical imagery in his work to prey on a wealthy, Christian, art-buying public. According to Wentworth, Tissot's connection to Spiritualism was convenient; he was seduced by the movement after the death of a women he loved dearly and he hoped that mediums could assist him in contacting her spirit.

Wentworth's choice of a Denis quote to assassinate of Tissot's credibility as a religious painter begs a comparison between the two men. Denis, the true believer, maintains his distance from Christ and paints him reverently, employing his signature techniques of flat planes of deeply saturated color to convey Catholic mystery. Tissot, on the other hand, eschews tradition altogether and synthesizes his style and his faith (one part French Catholic, the other British Spiritualist) into the visual recreation of Kardec's philosophy.

The Catholic themes apparent in French Spiritualist art further demonstrate the thesis of this dissertation-that the complicated relationship between spirituality

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[224] Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot*, Oxford studies in the history of art and architecture (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1984), 192.

and modernity in late nineteenth century France created a unique visual culture. The cultural climate of doubt and faith allowed for myriad interpretations of the importance of religion in the modern world, giving birth to a broad spectrum of religious pictures that reflected varying degrees of belief: the unquestioning devotion of Maurice Denis and the profitable and trendy Spiritualism of James Tissot.

Chapter four, in full, is currently being prepared for publication and will appear in Christopher M. Moreman (Ed.), *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World,* (ABC-CLIO, 2013). I, the dissertation author, was the only author and investigator of this paper.

Conclusion

The conlusion to Denis' *History of Religious Art* examines religious art of the first half of the twentieth century, questioning how the the innovations of Puvis de Chavannes, Moreau and Redon attempted to the correct for the "indigence" of religous art at the end of the nineteenth century that occured as a result of academic influence. These artists, according to Denis, brought imagination into their canvases, creating work far more interesting than the stiff, nonexpressive figure painting of academics such as Ingres. Denis claimed that, around 1900, the work of Redon, Puvis and Moreau suggested a reality beyond what was represented in their canvas, a gesture towards the symbolic potential of religious painting.[225]

This dissertation has addressed a number of questions about the visual representation of religious motifs and spiritual themes taken on by several young French avant-garde painters beginning in the late 1880s, including its origins, development and iconographic program. I have outlined the main elements of a visual culture of spirituality pursued in their early years by a loose group whose inheritance and redeployment of Catholic iconography and motifs of secularization in late-nineteenth century France has yet to be examined in detail. Using aspects of the iconographical analyses pioneered by Erwin Panofsky, I focus primarily on the Nabi painter Maurice Denis, tracing his abiding interest in spiritual subjects from his early formation to his late writings on the history of religious art achieved at the end of his

[225] Denis, *Histoire de l'art religieux*, 282-284.

life. This emphasis gives rise to an alternative view of the development of modernist painting from the 1880s through the early years of the twentieth century which supplements canonical accounts of technical innovation, on the one hand, and of a reorientation of avant-garde subject-matter to include images of public and private leisure or bohemian subcultural themes (circuses, parades, brothels, etc.) on the other.

While the association between "devout Catholicsim" and "modernity" is not immediately apparent, the preceding chapters attempt to establish a connection between innovative artistic practice and spirituality. Denis was a devout Catholic whose artistic practice offered a way to profess his faith, which he saw as a continuation of both the traditions of pre-Renaissance Italian painters such as Fra Angelico and the projects of his contemporaries Paul Gauguin and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.

To introduce a broader spectrum of paintings that address Christian themes, I compare the work of Denis with that of a number of his contemporaries, each of whom had a unique experience with Catholicism: Gauguin, with whom he studied in Brittany in his late teens; Paul Sérusier, another Nabi painter who studied with Gauguin before Denis arrived in Pont-Aven; and Odilon Redon, who knew and corresponded with Denis. Although both were raised Catholic, Gauguin and Sérusier moved away from Christian beliefs and rituals in their religious practice, yet investigated Christian imagery, at times profoundly, in their art. Sérusier turned to Theosophy during his adult life, but returned to Catholicism just before his death.

Redon, skeptical about Christianity, nonetheless retained a particular spirituality that fueled his interest in Christian iconography. I argue that despite the wide spectrum of views to which they subscribed at different times, all of these artists adapt the formal elements of their paintings to describe the emotions that underlie religious subject matter in a way that

As their styles developed during the last years of the nineteenth century, certain Christian narratives appeared with more frequency than in the work of earlier artists in the previous two decades. Although I compare these new stylistic choices to those informing other French art movements, my focus on the development of the early style of Denis and others foregrounds the complex issues of doubt and faith in late nineteenth century France rather than simply positioning the style of Denis and his contemporaries in relation to established histories. I also refer to earlier nineteenth century movements, including Romanticism—discussed by Denis in his historical writing—to demonstrate how his painting reflects an understanding of academic religious art from the first half of the century. My discussions and interpretations suggest that the historical traditions of religious iconography and the stylistic innovations of the new avant-garde are overlaid in a series of Christian-themed artworks that viewed together constitute a commentary on modern spirituality twinged with doubt as France moved towards formal political secularization at the turn of the twentieth century.

Each of the first three chapters focuses on a particular aspect of popular Christian iconography. Chapter one examines Christological symbology and its importance to the Catholic faith, particularly in the Brittany region where Catholic ritual retained a significantly heightened role in the everyday life of its inhabitants. I begin with Denis' early career and his study in Pont-Aven, Brittany, under Gauguin in the summer of 1889, arguing thatin 1888 and 1889 the group of which they were leading members sought for a new visual language in order to accommodate and comment on their spiritual aspirations. This gave rise to a number of unique images of the Crucifixion which illustrate their differing degrees of Christian faith yet also represent a move towards a relatively uniform style characterized by non-naturalistic color and the use of planar, unrealistic perspective in which the planes of the canvas are divided into intense areas of color. Inspired by Gauguin's *Yellow Christ*, the series of Crucifixion paintings I examine imagines a rennovated visionary spiritual culture that interrogates both the absence of a physical God and the nature of a religion that relies on the unfaltering faith of its constituents in a better life after death.

Chapter two examines Old Testament imagery, particularly the Abrahamic narrative of Jacob wrestling an angel—later interpreted from the Christian point of view as a symbolic account prefiguring the life of Christ and therefore "proving" that the central beliefs of the Christian faith are fulfillments of the ancient scriptures. My comparison of the interpretations of the Jacob story by Gauguin, Denis, Redon and

others suggests that the figure of Jacob, a strong-willed man who wrestles an agent of God to prove his worth, is an allegorical representation of the issues of doubt that confronted modern French Catholics, many of whom—including Redon—"wrestled" with their own relationship to Christianity. The theme of man-meets-angel also surfaces in paintings of Tobias, a much lesser-known figure, whose story only appears in Catholic versions of the Bible. Presenting a uniquely Catholic view of how angels act as manifestations of divine intervention in the lives of mortals, I present two contrasting views of encounters between man and the divine: whereas Jacob's angel is confrontational and competitive as he forces Jacob to prove himself worthy of the birthright he stole, Tobias' angel quietly assists and guides him toward his destiny. Looking to wider issues in the surrounding culture, I compare the struggle between man and the divine, secularity and religiosity, with the topographical changes in the capital city that resulted in the construction of the Eiffel Tower and the Sacré Coeur Basilica, arguing that these signal projects were architectural manifestations of the visual culture of doubt and faith described in the paintings.

Chapter three shifts the focus of the dissertation from from biblical subjects to examine images of Joan of Arc, another religious figure whose image was revitalized during the nineteenth century, but also symbolized the tension between the Catholic history and the secular future of France, as she herself represented the connections and tensions between fervent Christianity and unfaltering loyalty to the state. I discuss depictions of Joan that demonstrate her adaptability to both religious and

political symbolism, noting how her form is manipulated into contrasting masculine and feminine images, as well as embodying the contrasting images of a peaceful country girl who hears voices with her depiction as a shrewd military warrior of Christian France. Presenting a specifically nineteenth century model for these varied depictions of a French medieval herione, I show how the Third Republic's conceptualizations of "Frenchness" and citizenship and its relationship to the country's Catholic history acted as a crucial backdrop to the creation of these images of Joan of Arc, many of which appeared in public spaces.

If the first three chapters explore the impact of the socio-political climate of secularization in late nineteenth century France on the paintings of artists such as Denis, Sérusier and Redon, the final chapter begins what could be a possible project to follow this dissertation: a comparative examination of Christian-oriented art practices with the art associated with the less mainstream religious and spiritual movements that surfaced in the late nineteenth century in France. Chapter four explores how the Spiritualist paintings of Christ made in the 1880s and 1890s by Tissot contrast with the Catholic images of Denis, and how the visual culture of Spiritualism was in many instances based on preexiting Catholic iconographies. This use of a common visual languge to reach an audience of possible converts had its roots in ancient history, as, for example, when Christianizing Rome adapted the iconographies of its polythestic past to create aclearvisual continuity with what became the new state religion of monotheistic Christianity. Early depictions of Jesus

adopted the forms and attributes of the gods Apollo and Helios to ease the transition of one faith to another. Chapter four opens up some of these questions, but concentrates on Catholicism, while looking to Spritiualism as a model for future comparative studies. Future research might address the visual iconographies of Rosicrucianism, Wagnerism and Theosophy— unorthodox spiritualities that created a modern age refuge for those unwilling to commit to either dogmatic Catholicism or secular atheism.

In the 1880s, Denis described the act of painting as a religious expression, and the examination of religious subject matter by him and his contemporaries paved the way for twentieth century avant-garde painters who also considered the spiritual or religious qualities of art making. The stylistic choices and inoovations made by the Nabi painters and others was futher developed by the artists who came in the decades that followed. In 1908, Henri Matisse wrote that figure painting allowed him to express what he described as an almost religious awe of life, as he articulates each line of a person's face he is depicting his essential qualities and conveying an emotion to the viewer, whcih supercedes the importance of the subject matter. Citing Giotto's work Matisse states "I do not trouble myself to recognize which scene from the life of Christ I have before me, but I immediately understand the sentiment which emerges from it, for it is in the lines, the composition, the color."[226]

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[226] Henri Matisse, *Notes of a Painter*, 1908, np.

The radical phase of the avant-garde that followed was directed by artists outside of France who were all deeply indebted to Christian imagery.[227] Kandinisky used Old Testament imagery of the Deluge and Theosophical ideas to underwrite what he called "The Spirituality in Art." He, like Matisse, speaks of religious awe and how it relates specifically to Christian art, and how depicting religious subjects demands a mature artist who understands the issues of suffering, loss and faith that are contained within "definitely relgious" pictures. Kandinsky connects the work of the Italian early Renaissance (Cimabue) to the French avant-garde, remarking on the depth which which painters such as Gauguin treated the human sentiments of pain and agony associated with the life of Christ. By the time he wrote, Kandinsky found the once promising Denis to have become "a slave to sentimentality" and "left behind" in the forward momentum of spiritual painting begun by Gauguin.[228]

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[227] Kathleen Regier's book examines the Theosophical inclinations of several twentieth century avant-garde artists, including Mondrian and Malevich, who, as the author describes it, used their art as a form of "pilgrimage," a method of investigated the limits of time, space and spirituality. Regier, Kathleen J. *The Spiritual Image in Modern Art*. 1st ed. Quest Books, 1995.

[228] Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Connecting to God, 2010, 7.

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Appendix

Figure 1.1
Émile Bernard, *Breton Women in the Meadow*, 1888

Figure 1.2
Émile Bernard, *Preparatory Sketch for Breton Women in the Meadow*, 1886

Figure 1.3
Sculpted Calvaire at the Chapelle de Tronoën

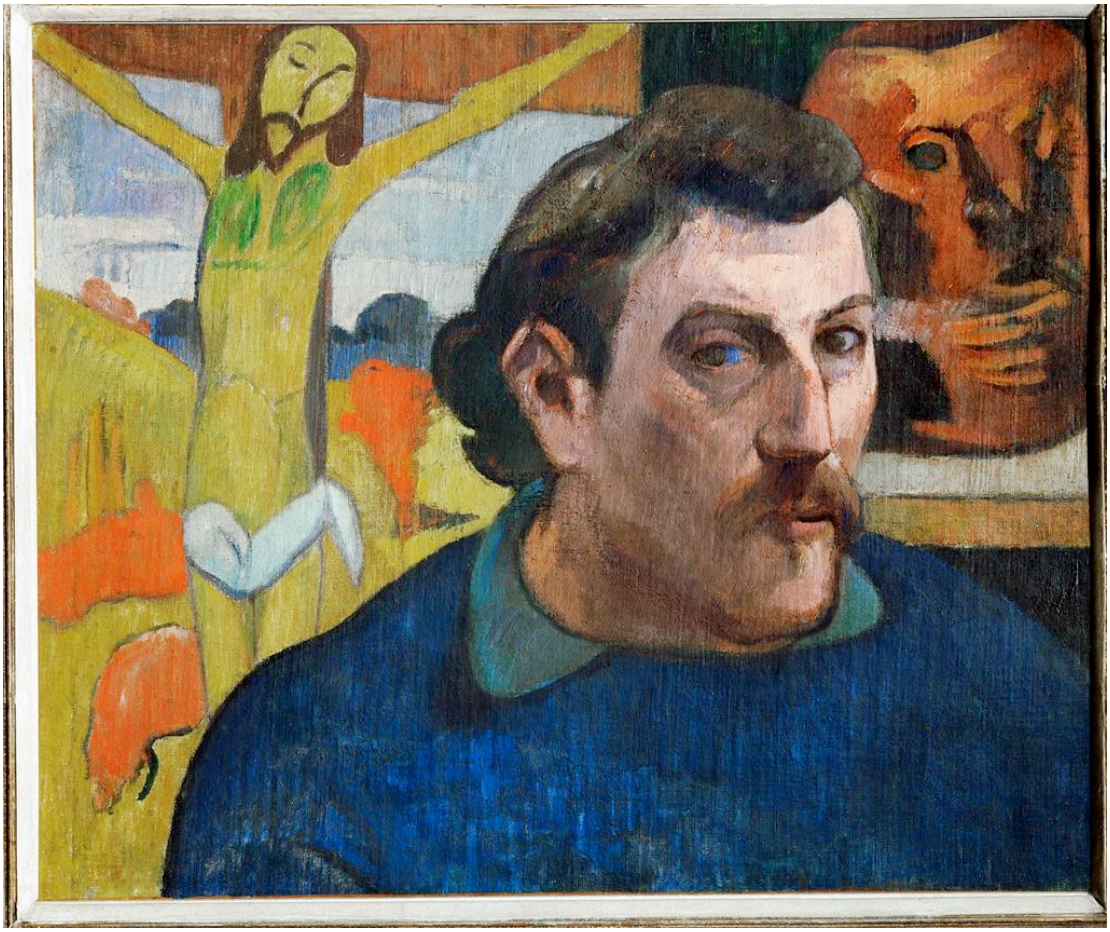

Figure 1.4
Paul Gauguin, *Self Portrait with Yellow Christ*, 1890-1891

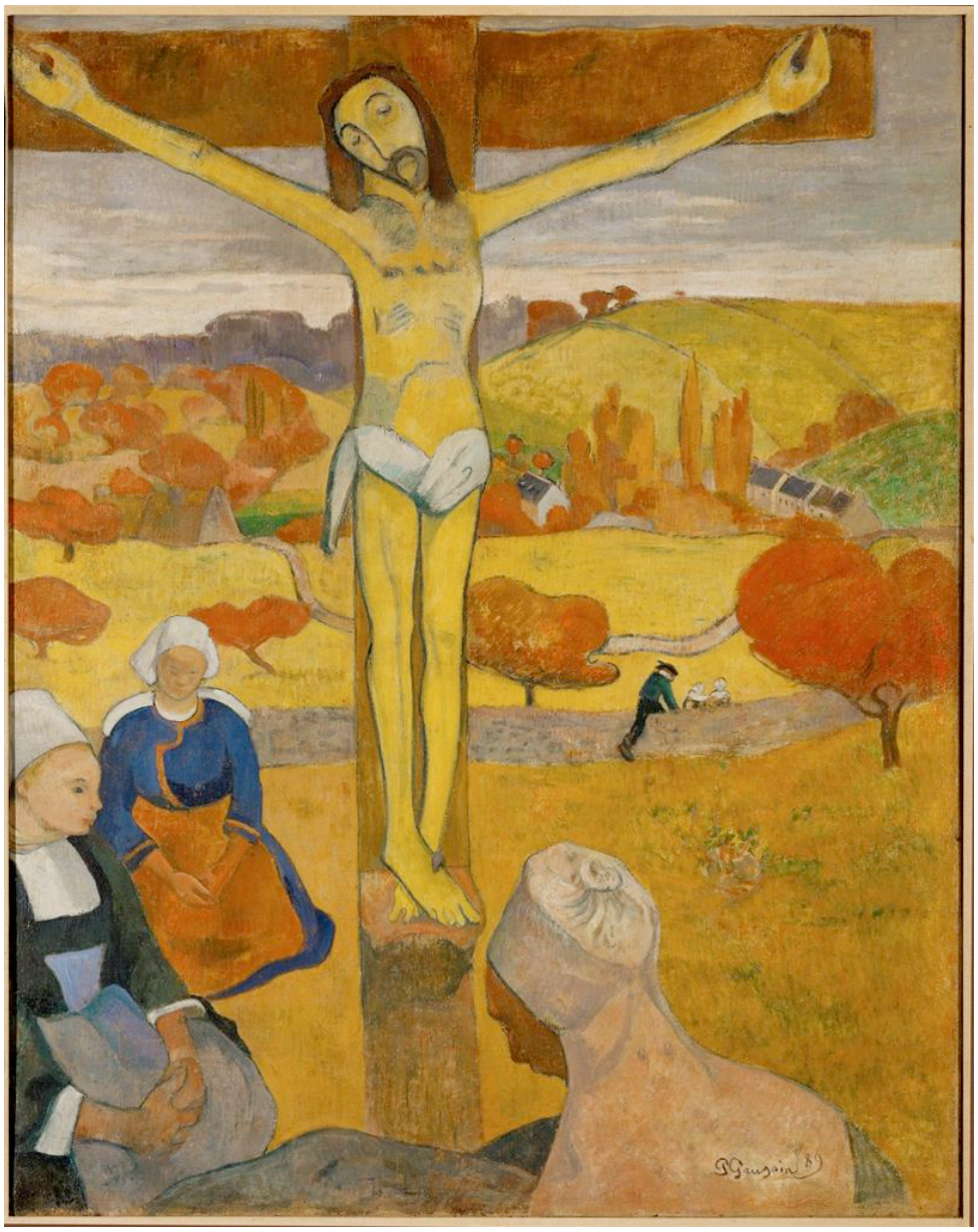

Figure 1.5
Paul Gauguin, *Yellow Christ*, 1889

Figure 1.6
Albrecht Dürer, *Self Portait in a Fur Coat*, 1500

Figure 1.7
Hans Memling, *Christ Giving His Blessing*, 1481

Figure 1.8
Paul Gauguin, *Self Portrait near Golgotha*, 1896

Figure 1.9
Paul Gauguin, *The Green Christ, The Breton Calvary*, 1889

Figure 1.10
Maurice Denis, *Calvaire*, 1889

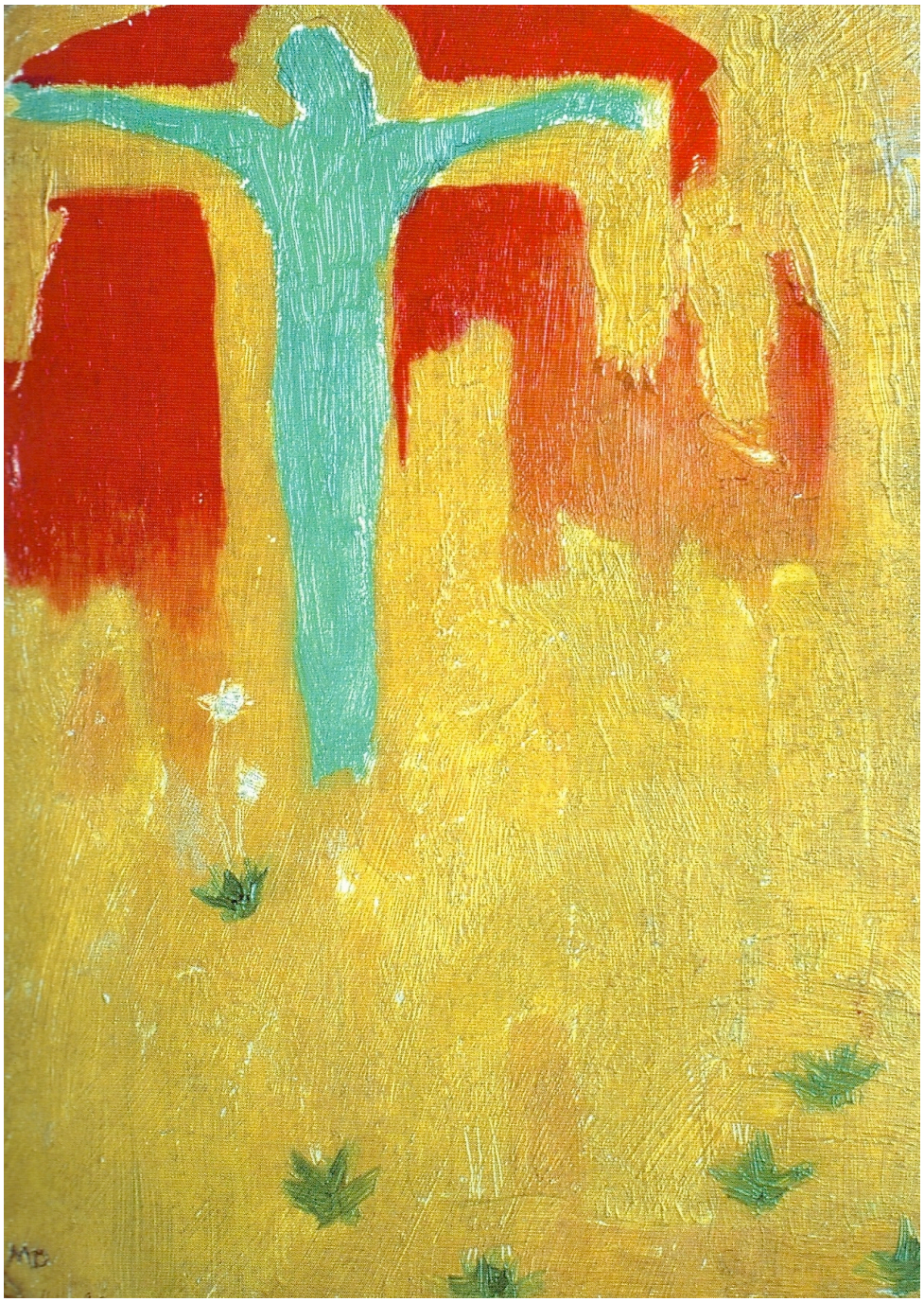

Figure 1.11
Maurice Denis, *Christ vert*, 1890

Figure 1.12
Eugène Delacroix, *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827

Figure 1.13
Henry Moret, *La Baie du Pouldu*, 1901

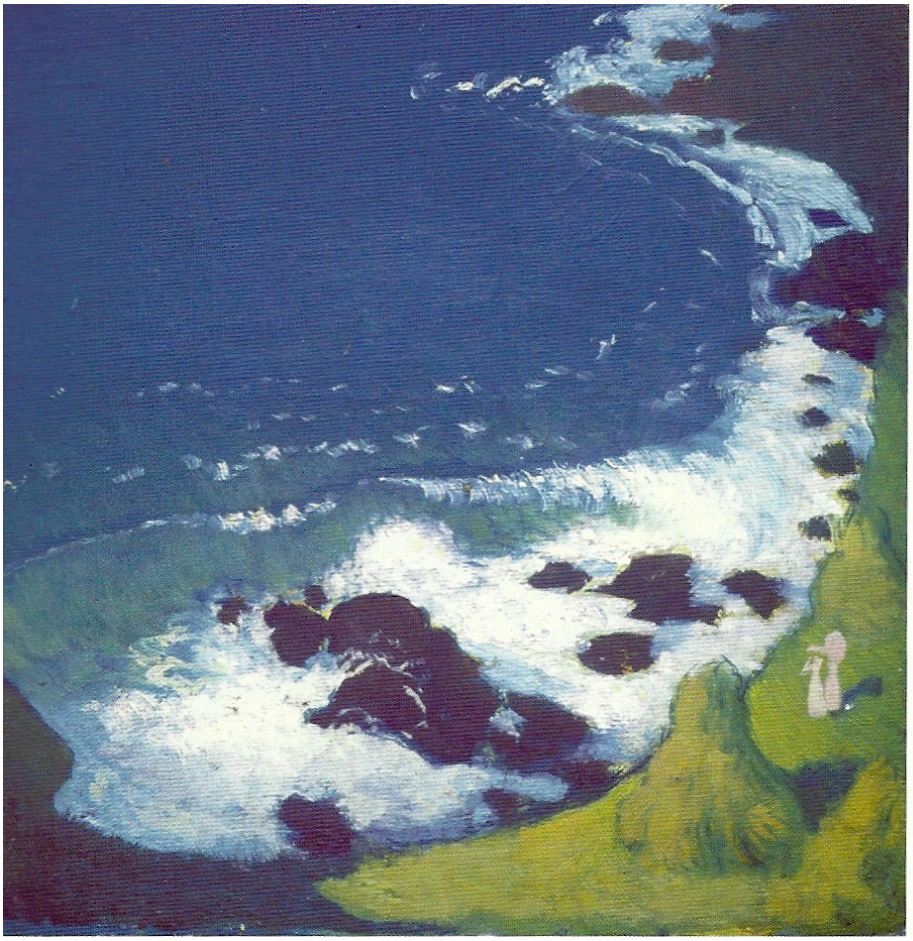

Figure 1.14
Maurice Denis, *Seashore*, 1891

Figure 1.15
Maurice Denis, *Breton Landscape in Yellow*, 1892

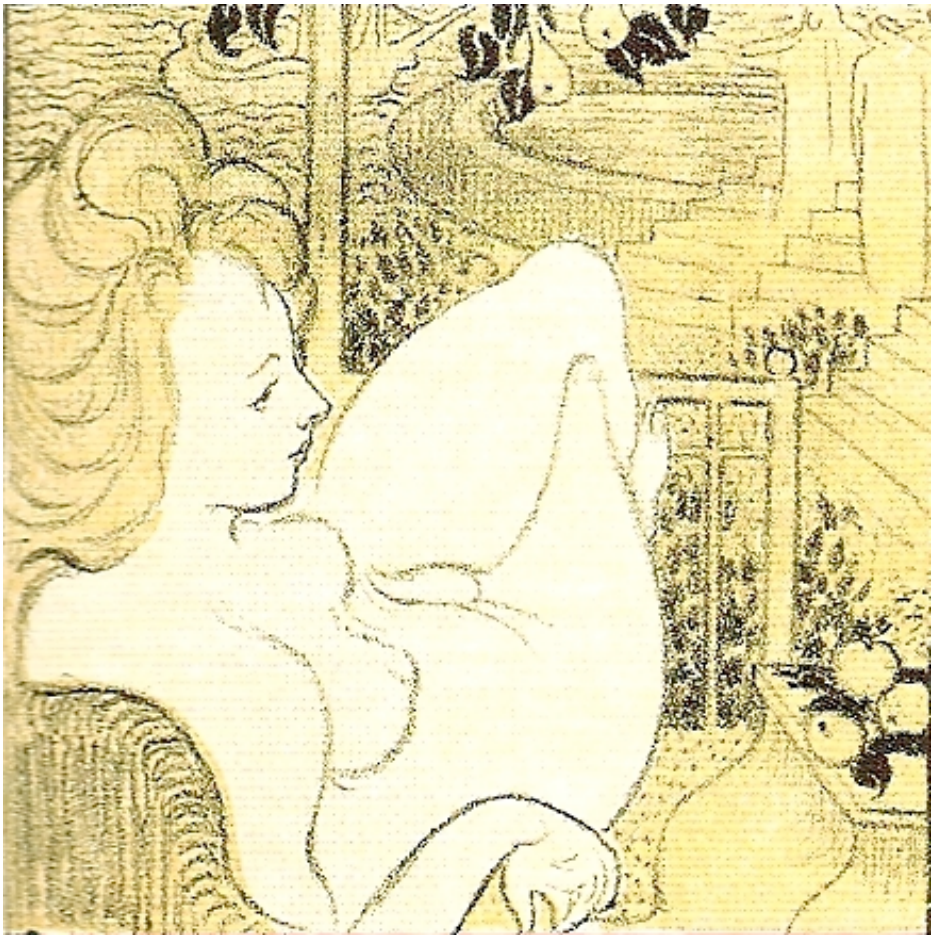

Figure 1.16
Maurice Denis, color lithograph for Gide's *Voyage d'Urien*, 1893

Figure 1.17
Maurice Denis, color lithograph for Gide's *Voyage d'Urien*, 1893

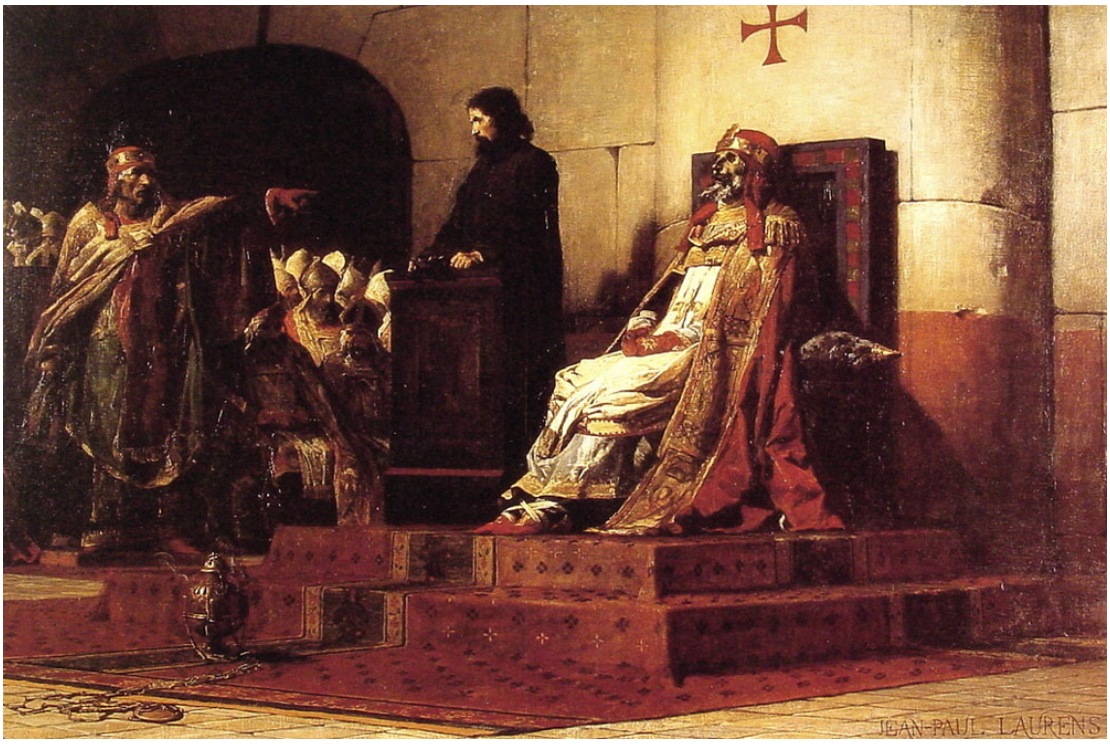

Figure 1.18
Jean-Paul Laurens, *Le Pape Formose et Etienne VIII*, 1870

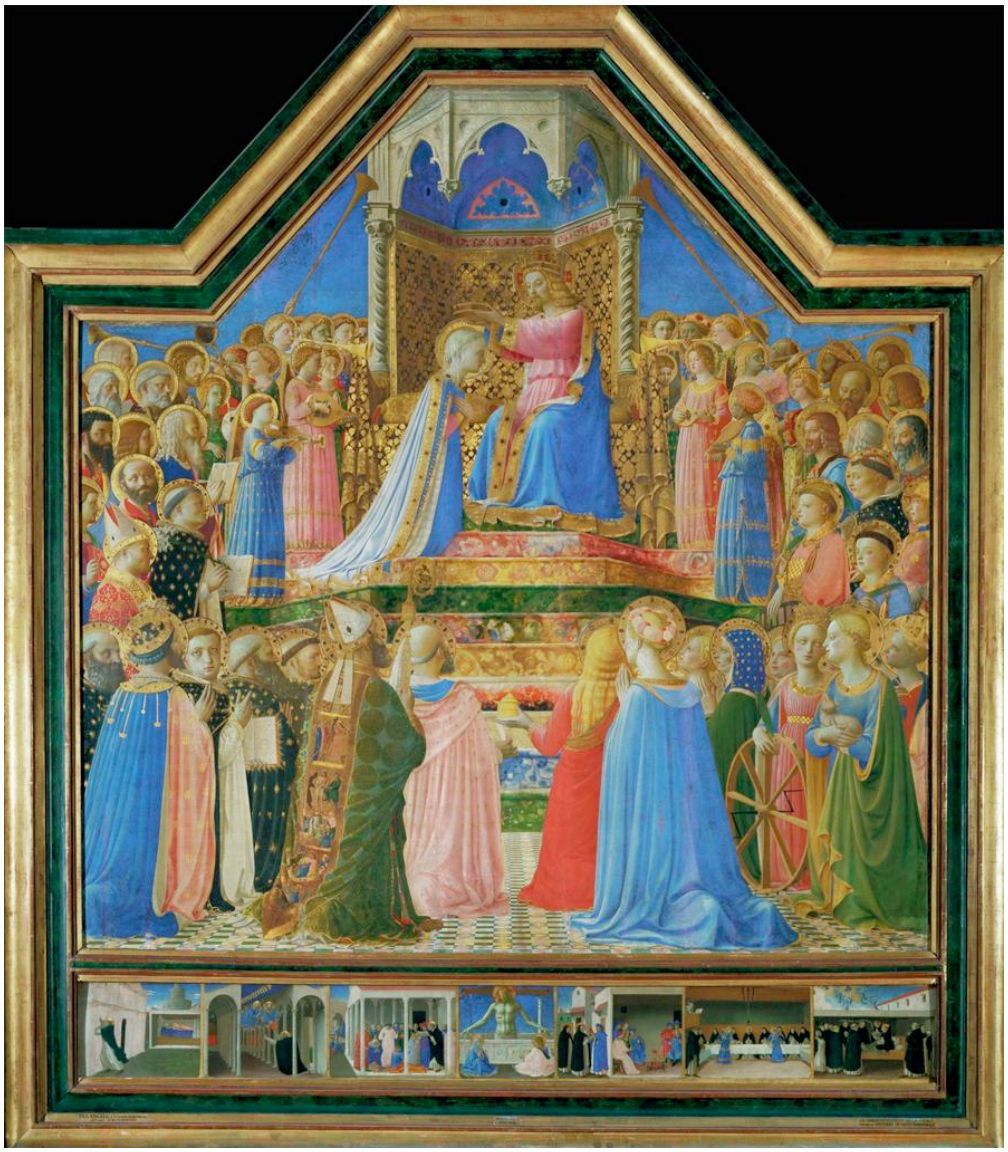

Figure 1.19
Fra Angelico, *Coronation of our Lady from San Domenico*, 1430-1432

Figure 1.20
Maurice Denis, *Sunlight on the Terrace*, 1890

Figure 1.21
Paul Gauguin, *Vision of the Sermon*, 1888

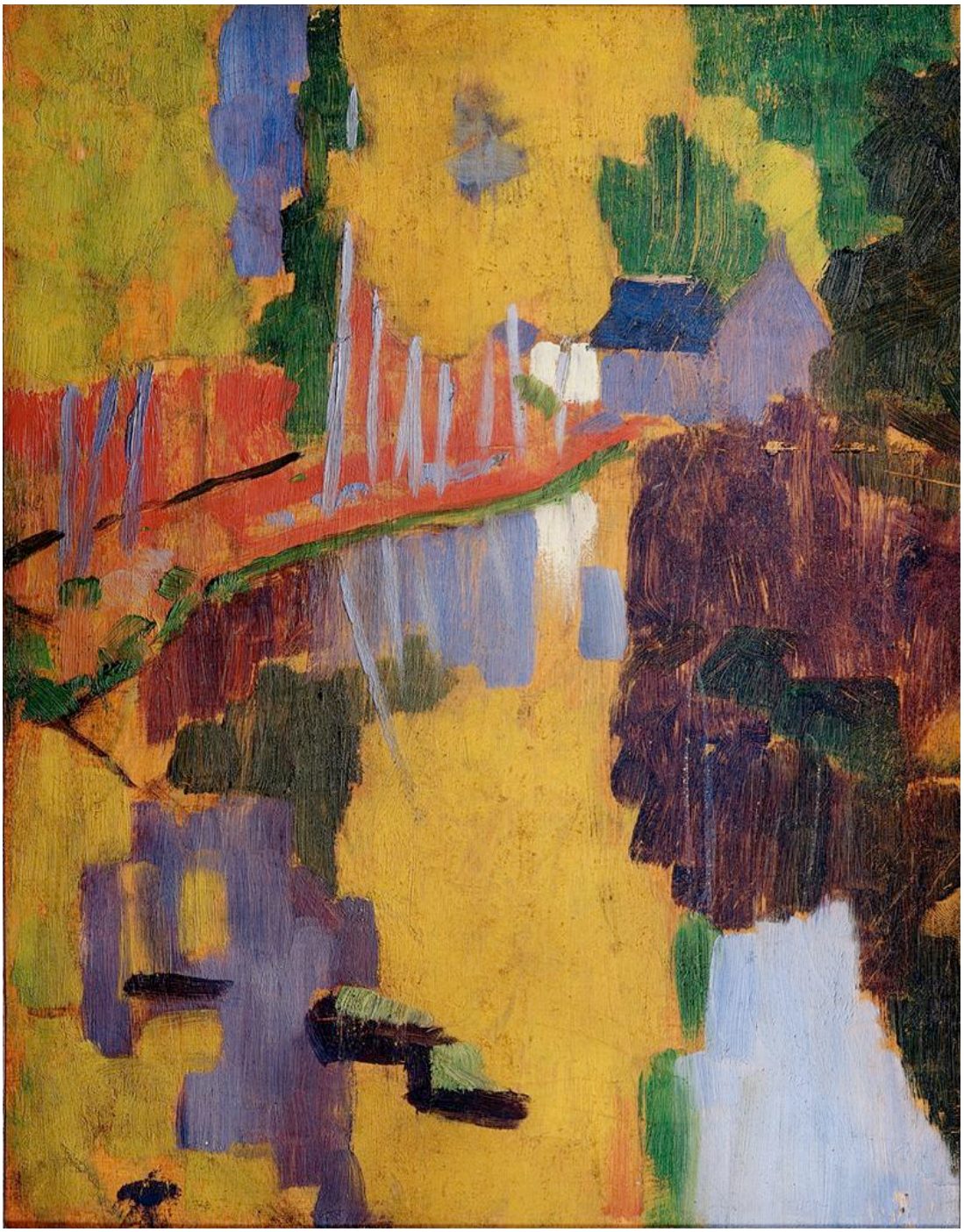

Figure 1.22
Paul Sérusier, *Talisman*, 1888

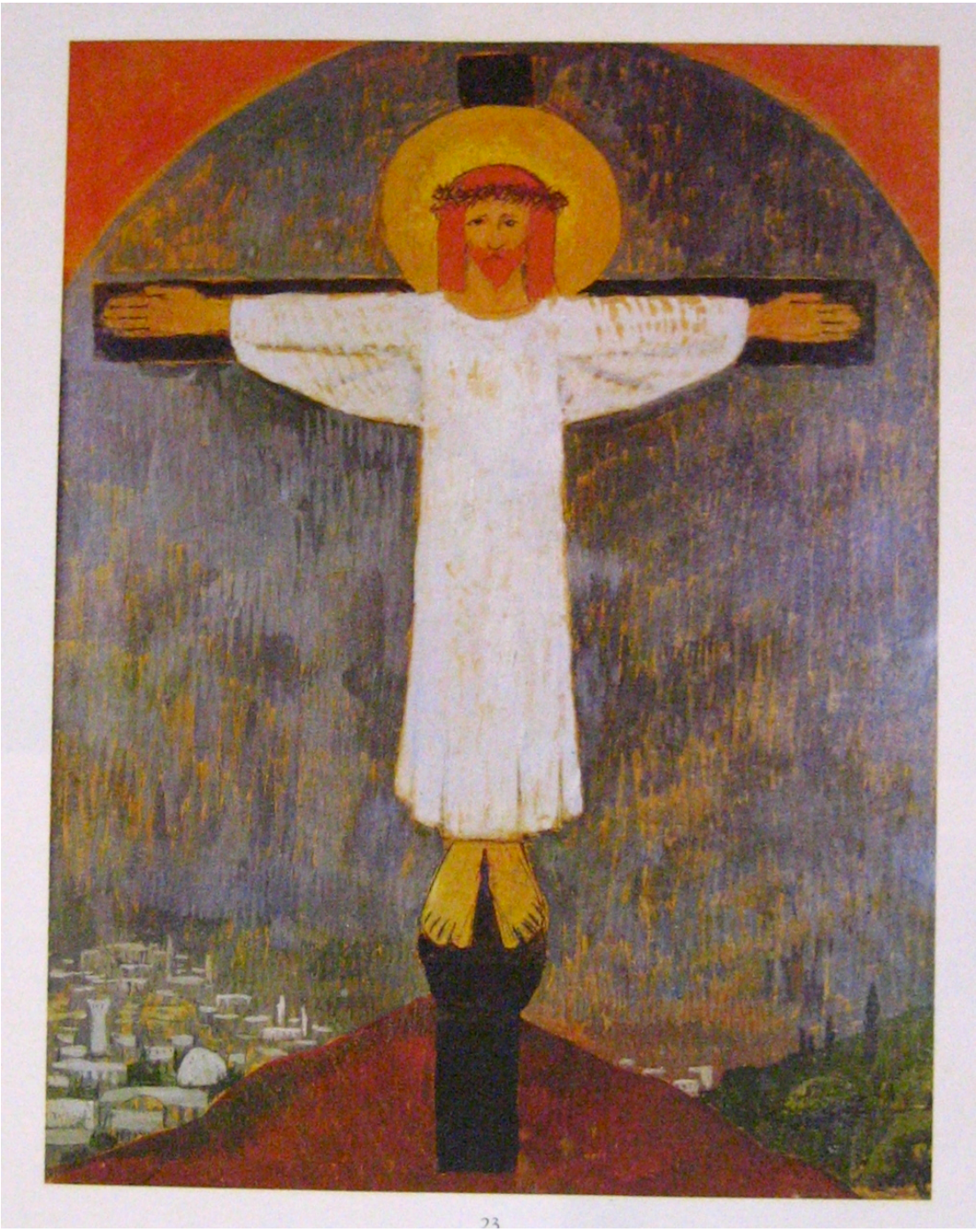

Figure 1.23
Paul Sérusier, *Christ blanc*, 1913

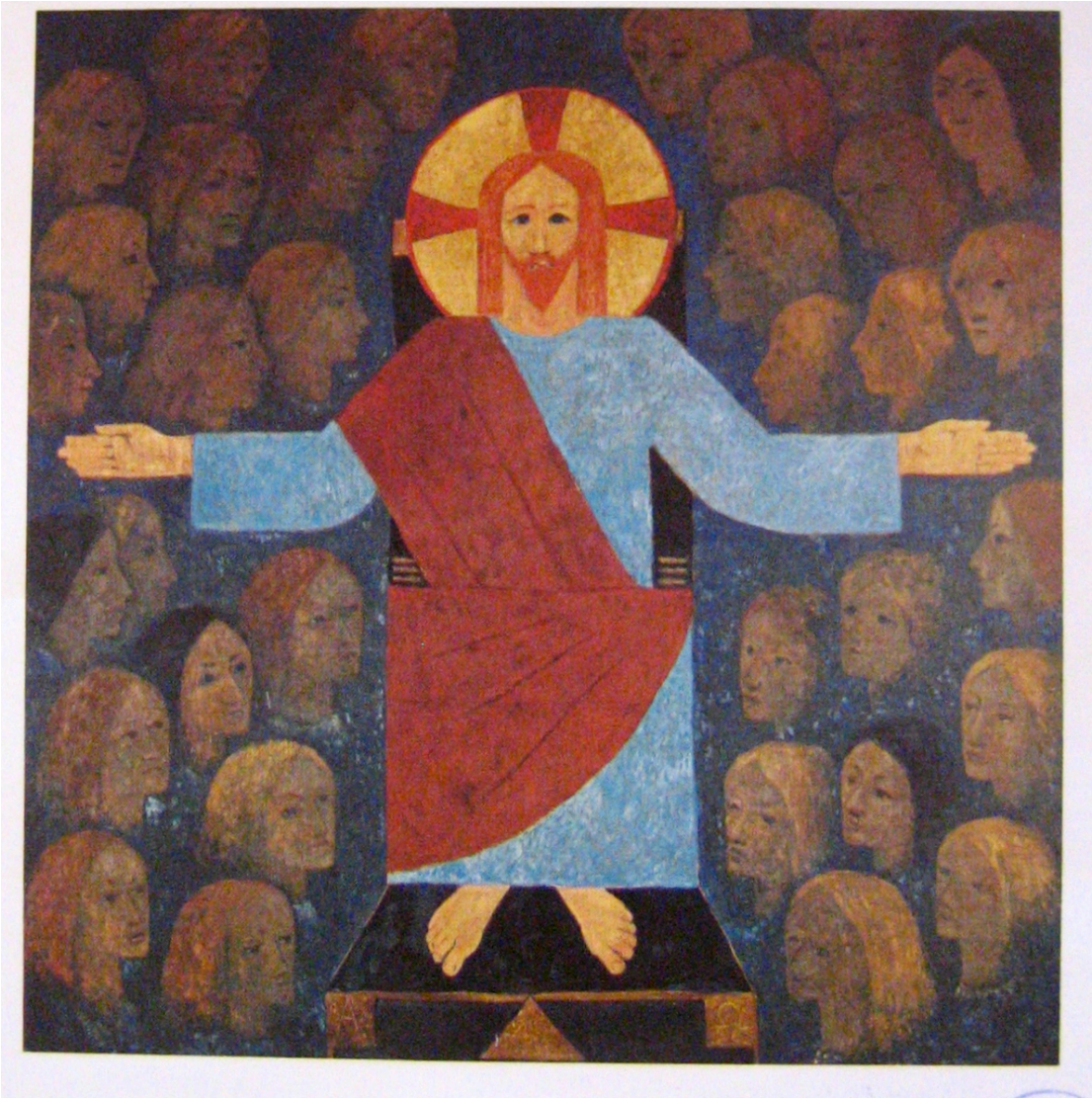

Figure 1.24
Paul Sérusier, *Christ with Angels or Christ Triumphant*, 1913

Figure 1.25
Maurice Denis, *Á la fenêtre du train*, 1890

Figure 1.26
Maurice Denis, *Christ orange*, 1890

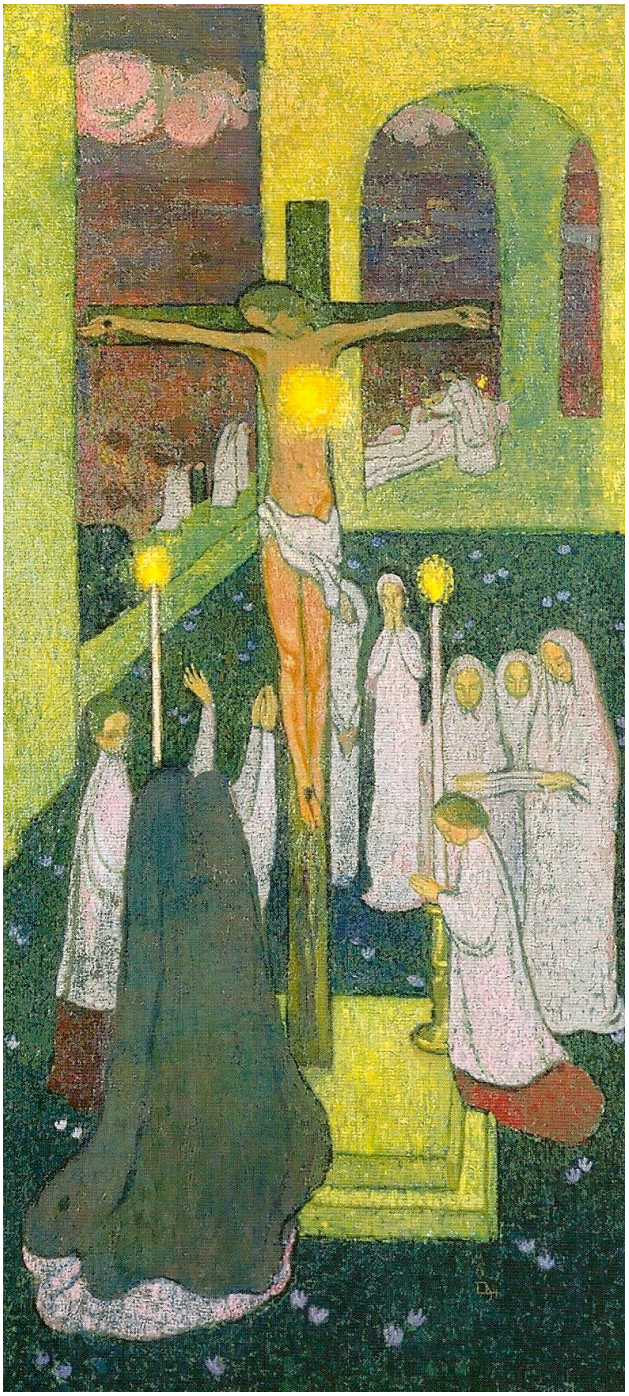

Figure 2.1
Maurice Denis, *Sacré coeur crucifié*, 1894

Figure 2.2
Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, 1438-1445

Figure 2.3
Christ in Majesty, apse mosaic of Sacré Coeur Basilica, Paris

Figure 2.4
Henri Rivière, *Workman on the Eiffel Tower*, 1889

Figure 2.5
Maurice Denis, *Tobie et l'Ange*, 1920

VENTE

DENIS Maurice
(1870 - 1943)

121

DOCUMENTATION

*121

Maurice Denis (1870-1943)

Le Retour du jeune Tobie

signed, inscribed and dated lower right *MAU.DENIS.PERROS 18*, oil and tempera on canvas
19¼ x 27in. (49 x 68.5cm.)

Painted in Perros in 1918

PROVENANCE:
Dr. Renaud, Geneva

The present work depicts the road that leads to Trestignal beach at Perros. The house on the right, which still stands, is "Frou-Frou", a villa built at the end of the last century for Mlle. Josset, a Parisian actress.

Sold with a photocertificate from Dominique Denis and Anne Gruson dated *Gennin, 11 octobre 1995*

Estimate: £14,000-18,000

VENTE
Londres, Christie's
Impressionist and Modern
Paintings, watercolours and
Sculpture (Part II)
Mercredi 29 Novembre 1995
10h 30

Figure 2.6
Maurice Denis, *Le retour du jeune Tobie*, 1918-1919

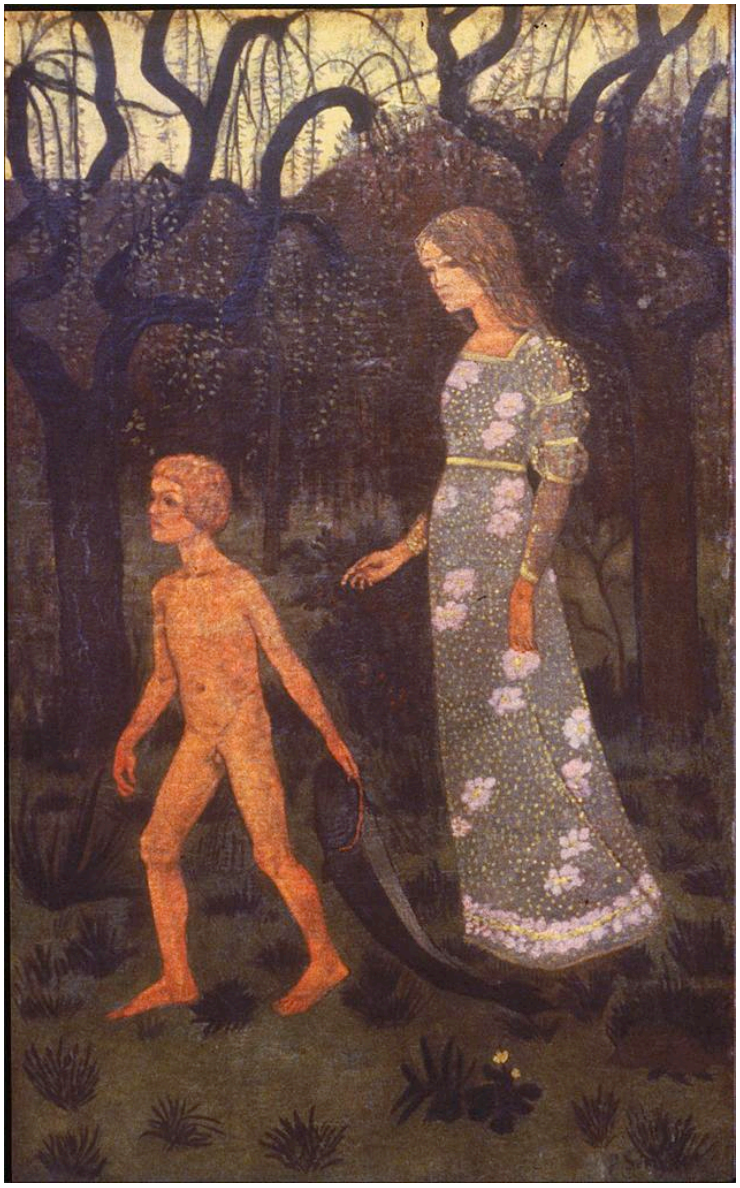

Figure 2.7
Paul Sérusier, *Tobias and the Angel*, 1894

Figure 2.8
Eugène Delacroix, *Tobias and the Angel*, 1863

Figure 2.9
Fra Fillippo Lippi, *Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1475

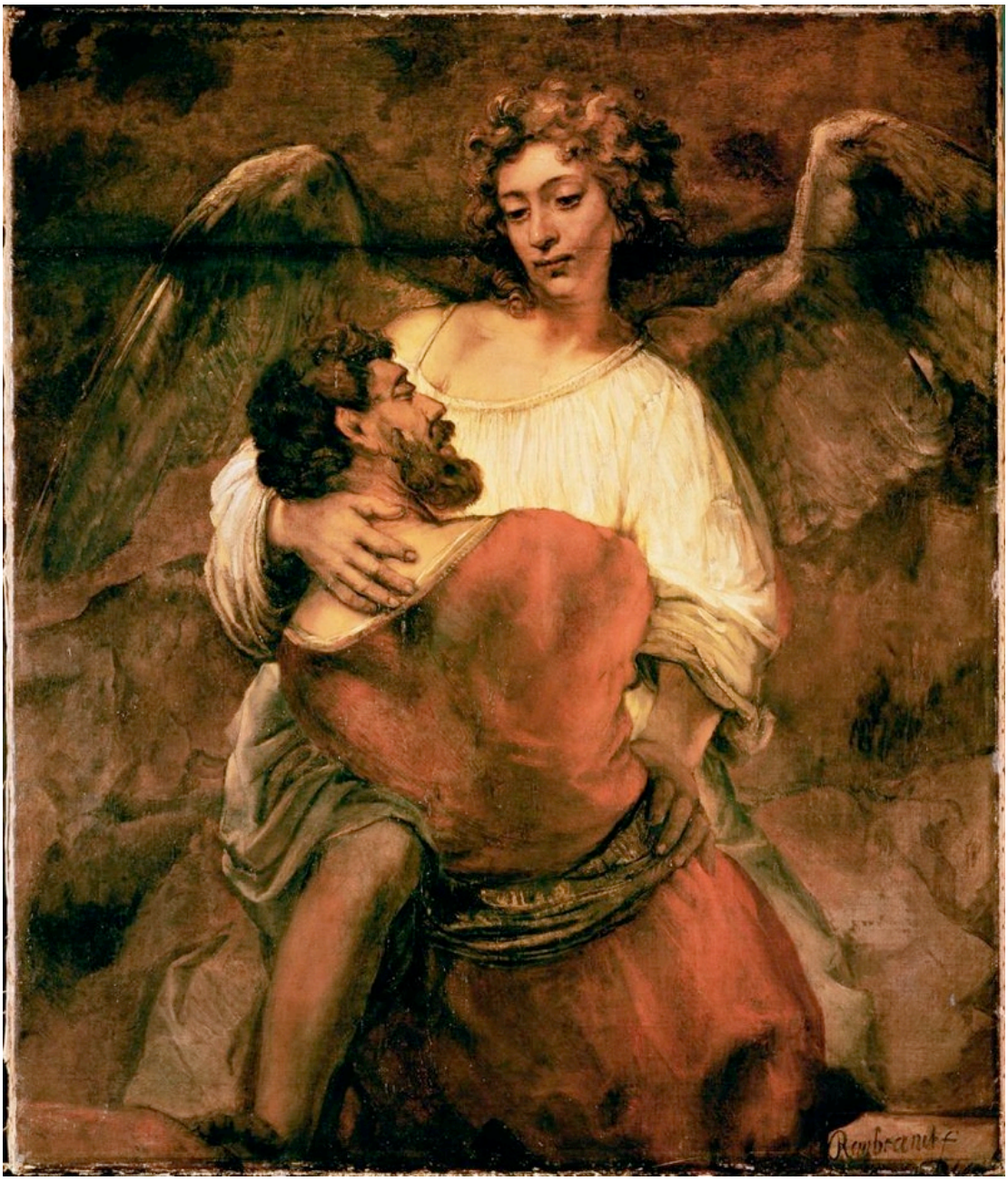

Figure 2.10
Rembrandt, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, 1658

Figure 2.11
Delacroix, *Battle of Jacob and the Angel*, 1857

Figure 2.12
Gustave Moreau, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, 1874

Figure 2.13
Gustave Doré, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, 1855

Figure 2.14
Maurice Denis, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, 1893

Figure 2.15
Odilon Redon, *Jacob and the Angel*, 1905

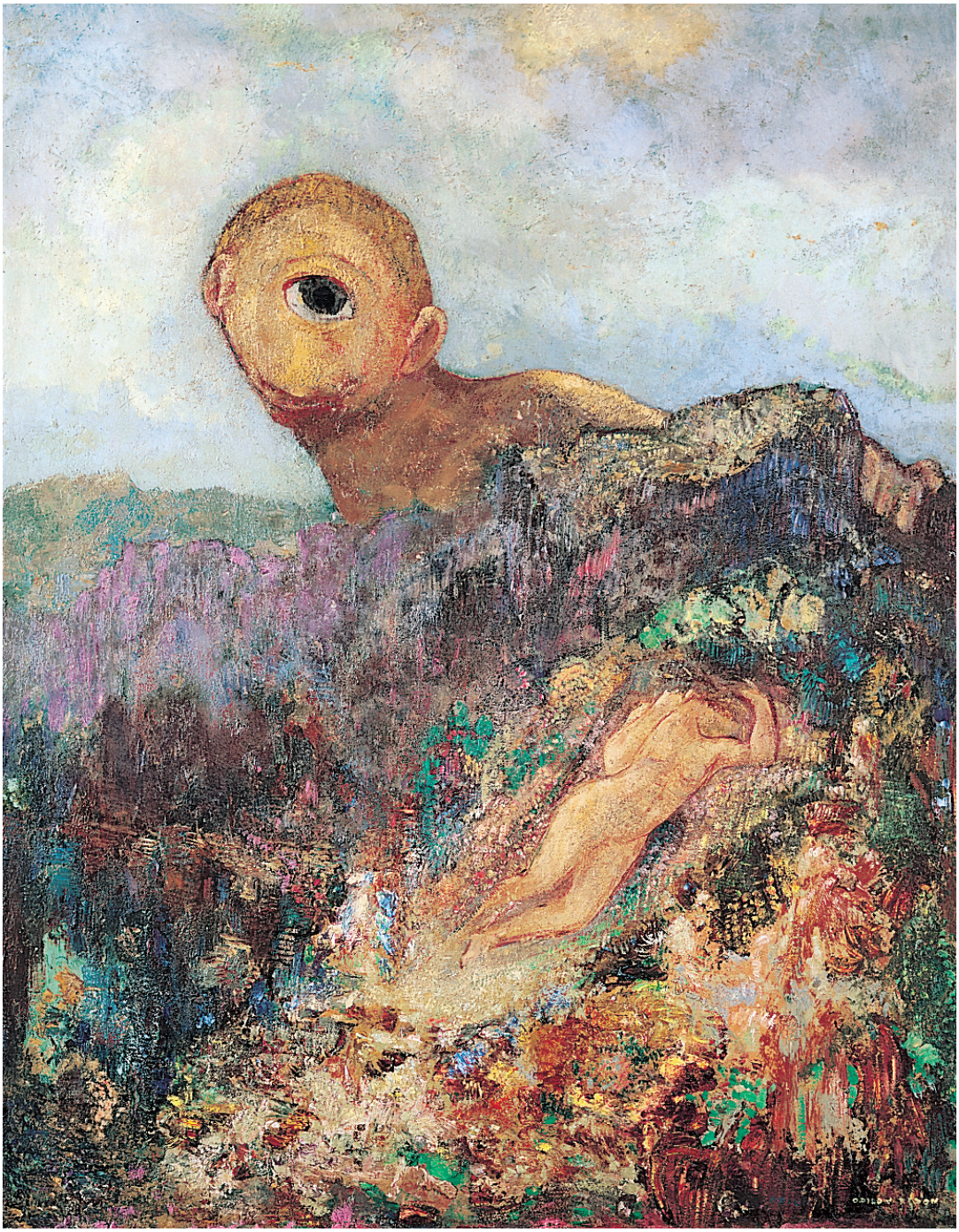

Figure 2.16
Odilon Redon, *The Cyclops*, 1898

Figure 3.1
Anonymous French or Flemish Artist, *Joan of Arc*, illumination, after 1450

Figure 3.2
Joan of Arc meets the Dauphin Charles, from the illuminated manuscript *Vigiles du roi Charles VII*, 15th century

Figure 3.3
Joan of Arc is Driven to her Judges, from *Vigiles du roi Charles VII*

Figure 3.4
Joan of Arc at the Siege of Orléans, from *Vigiles du roi Charles VII*

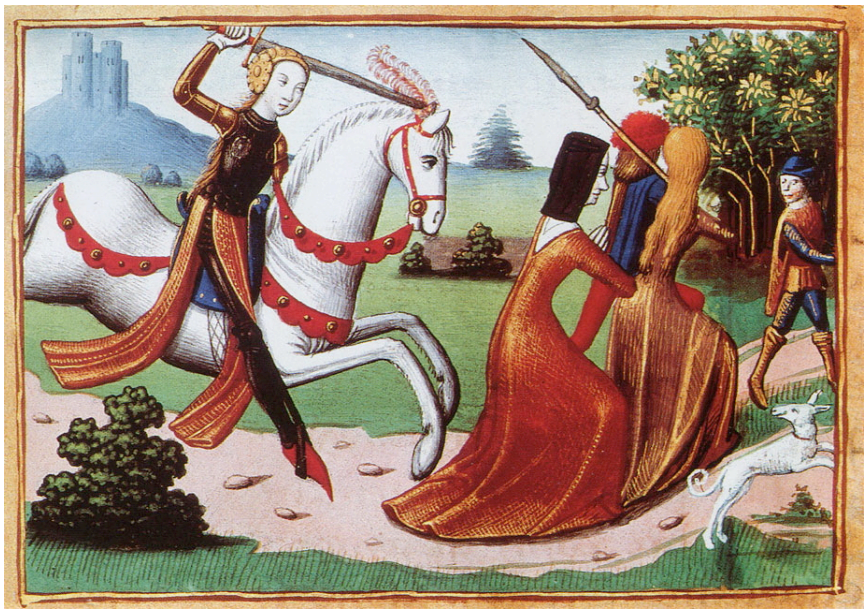

Figure 3.5
Joan of Arc Chases Away the Army's Prostitutes, from *Vigiles du roi Charles VII*

Figure 3.6
François Rude, *Joan of Arc*, 1852

Figure 3.7
Hippolyte Lefèbvre, *Equestrian Statue of Joan of Arc*, 1927
Sacré Coeur Basilica

Figure 3.8
Jules-Eugène Lenepveu, *Joan of Arc as Shepherdess*, 1886-1889

Figure 3.9
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Joan of Arc*, 1879

Figure 3.10
Odilon Redon, *Head of A Young Woman Turned to the Left, Joan of Arc*, c. 1890

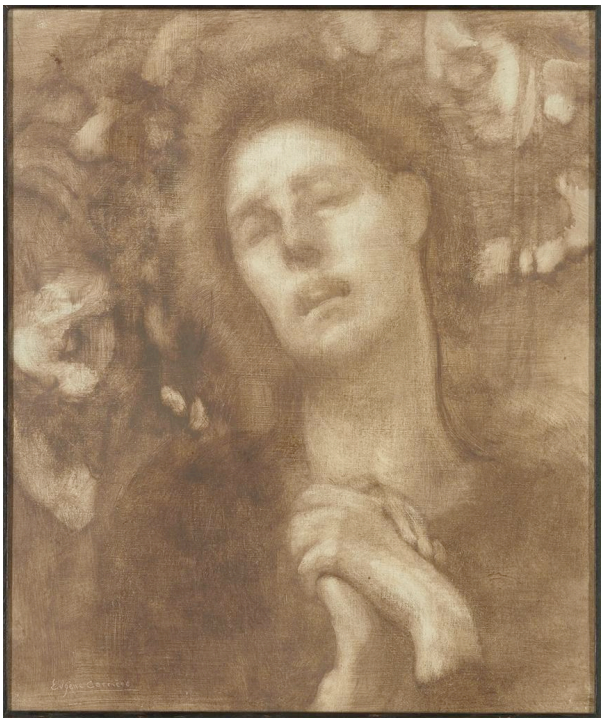

Figure 3.11
Eugène Carrière, *Joan of Arc Listening to Voices*, after 1875

Figure 3.12
Paul Delaroche, *Joan of Arc Interrogated by the Cardinal of Winchester*, 1824

Figure 3.13
Jules Eugène Lenepveu, *Joan of Arc in Armor Before Orléans*, 1886-1889

Figure 3.14
Jules Eugène Lenepveu, *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII*, 1886-1889

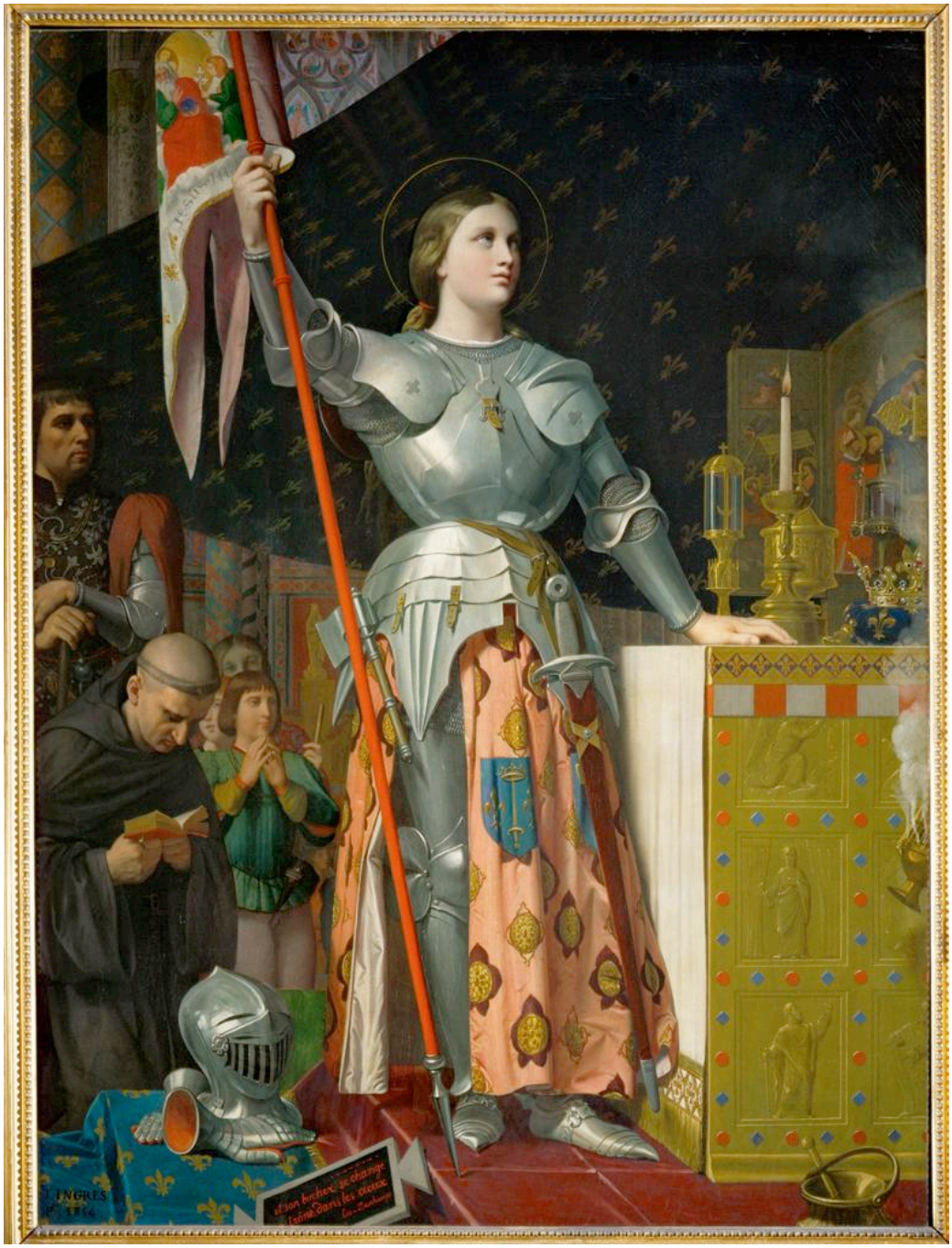

Figure 3.15
Jean Dominique Ingres, *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII at the Cathedral at Reims,* 1854

Figure 3.16
Maurice Denis, *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII*, 1920

Figure 3.17
Maurice Denis, *The Communion of Joan of Arc*, c. 1900

Figure 3.18
Jules Eugène Lenepveu, *Joan of Arc Burning at the Stake*, 1886-1889

Figure 4.1
Spirit Photography of Mary Todd Lincoln, c. 1875

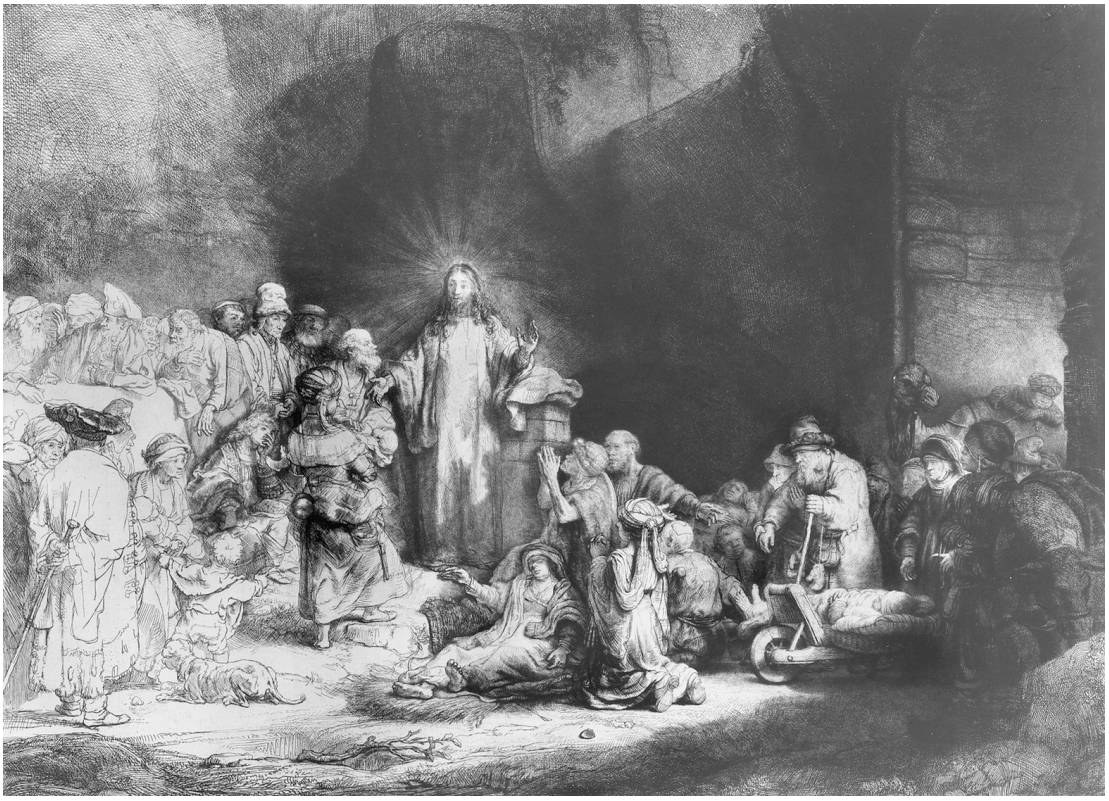

Figure 4.2
Rembrandt, *Christ with the Sick Around Him, Receiving the Children (Hundred Gilder Print)*, c. 1649

Figure 4.3
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*, 1594

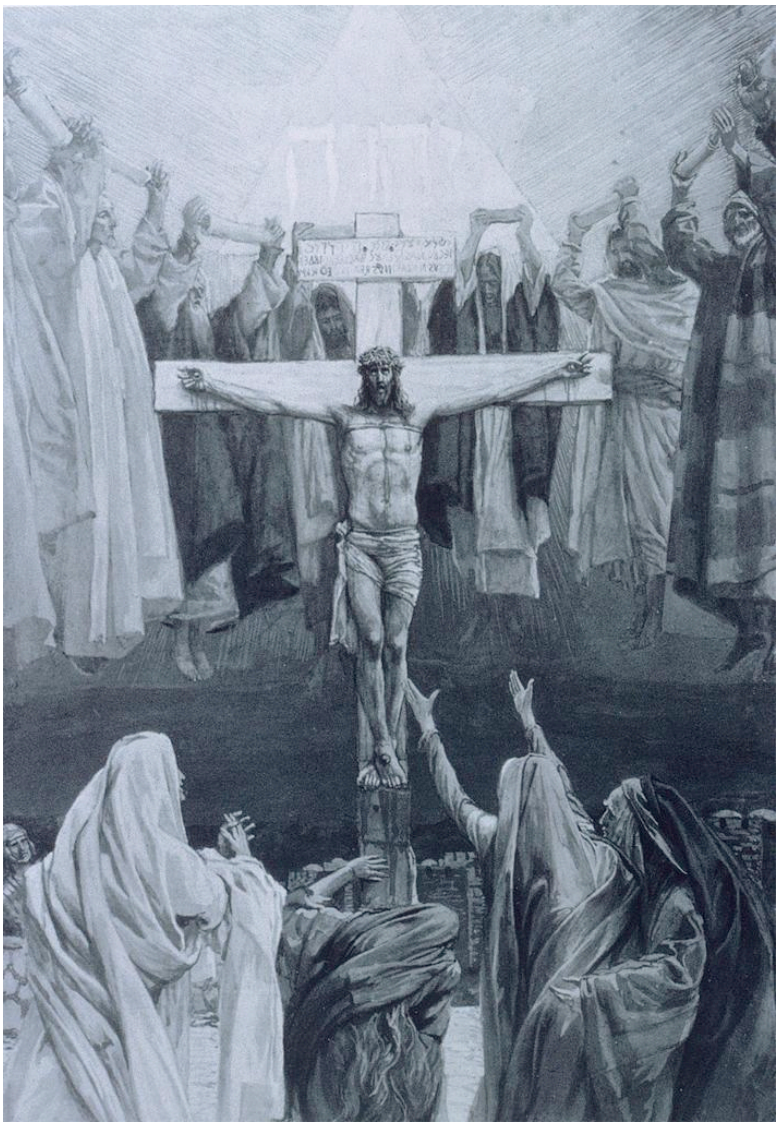

Figure 4.4
James Tissot, *It Is Finished*, 1886-1894

Figure 4.5
James Tissot, *What Our Savior Saw From the Cross*, 1886-1894

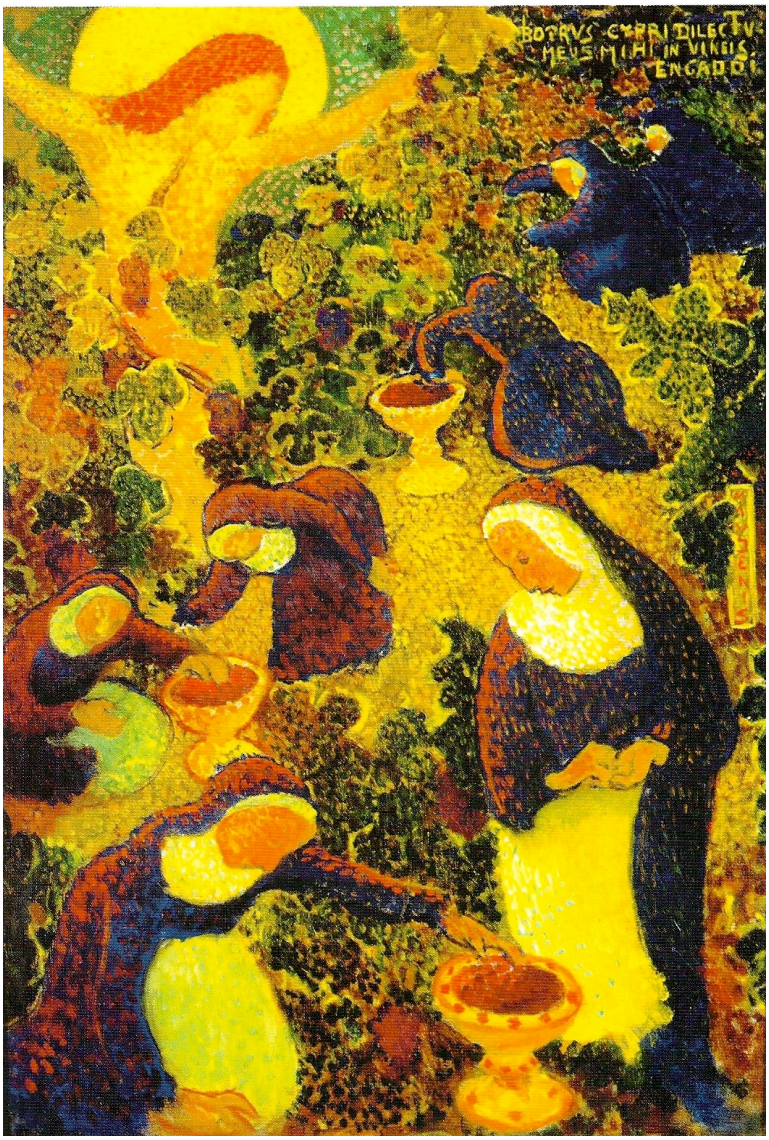

Figure 4.6
Maurice Denis, *La vendage mystique*, 1890