Philosophiae Doctores

Éva Péteri

Victorian Approaches to Religion as Reflected in the Art of the Pre-Raphaëlites

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ
BUDAPEST

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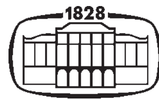

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ, BUDAPEST

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Published by Akadémiai Kiadó
Member of Wolters Kluwer Group
P.O. Box 245, H-1519 Budapest, Hungary
www.akkrt.hu

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PREFACE

Studying Pre-Raphaelite works of art necessarily involves inquiries into the religious matters of nineteenth-century England. Questions of faith, denomination, and moral responsibility are bound to emerge, not only because the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood chose the devotional painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as their ideals to follow, but also because they did so at a time when religious controversies were very much in the centre of public interest. In the middle of the nineteenth century no painting presenting a religious subject could be exhibited without being exposed to fervent scrutiny, and related to one side or the other in the current debates on religious issues. The religious affiliation of the artists, their choice of subject, the method of execution, and the current trends in popular religious feeling were all decisive elements of contemporary critical judgement and evaluation.

However, to talk about Pre-Raphaelite religious art in general is almost impossible. The views of the artists who belonged to the movement were so diverse and they were developed later on in so many different directions that it would be a vain endeavour to define a united Pre-Raphaelite religious standpoint in general terms. Even within the work and thoughts of individual artists and associates like William Holman Hunt or John Ruskin, the changes are so significant that conclusions contrary to each other can quite easily be reached, and each of them with equal justification.

Contemporary critical practice was ideologically heavily charged as a rule, which often led to severe misunderstandings, especially in the interpretation of the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Tension, created by doubt on the one hand and demand for a rigorous observance of theological traditions on the other, induced critics to jump to conclusions about the artists' intentions and the messages attributed to their works, which often resulted in unjust accusations and hostilities. All that had, often enough, a feedback upon the artist's treatment of his subject. Many of these early allegations have too often been taken for granted, and are accepted even today without proper reference to actual data.

Due to the current popularity of the Pre-Raphaelites, publications on the history of the movement and on the life of some of its representatives are abundant. However, most of these writings are intended to provide the general public with a comprehensive, overall picture of the movement, or with a detailed biography of one of the artists, while studies dealing with special aspects and correlations are few and far between. George P. Landow's exhaustive analysis of the typological symbolism of William Holman Hunt's works and John Dixon Hunt's book on the Pre-Raphaelite imagination are among those few, both investigating Pre-Raphaelite art from a particular angle. A comprehensive study of the interrelation of nineteenth-century religious issues and the activity of the Pre-Raphaelites has not yet been made, though hints and references to the theme are frequent. Thus I intended partly to collect and summarise already known details and materials connected to the topic, and partly to complement them with new, so far neglected facts and aspects,

trying to resolve the existing contradictions, as well as giving an unbiased view of the artists and their religious works. For this reason I tried on the one hand to rely as much as possible on the writings and statements of the artists concerned and on the evidence of the events and facts related to nineteenth-century religious life in England, while I treated contemporary as well as present-day critical comments with reserve. On the other hand, I wished neither to give a full account of the religious affairs of the age, nor to present all the particulars that can be known about the Pre-Raphaelites; but to examine those aspects of Church history and Pre-Raphaelite art which affected the other. In the same manner, in my reading of the pictures themselves, I concentrated only on those features that I found relevant to the own theme, never aiming at the comprehensive analysis of the art historian. In this sense I regard my work as belonging most to the studies made on the cultural history of nineteenth-century England and I hope that it can contribute to the understanding of how certain events and ideological changes affected the lives and thoughts of those who lived and worked in England at the time.

INTRODUCTION

Religious Antecedents

In the first decades of the Victorian era the Church of England was divided by parties fiercely fighting one another, each convinced that they represented the only true faith and provided the only possible solution to save the dignity and popular appeal of the Established Church. However, they all agreed in the urgent need to combat the proliferation of what they called 'nominal Christianity'.

Thomas Arnold and his followers, later to be called the Broad Church party, demanded the restriction of the dogmatic articles of the English Church to a necessary minimum in order to make it accessible to a great majority of people. This claim became especially prominent after the astounding results of the 1851 religious census were made public, according to which forty-four per cent of the churchgoing population of England and Wales belonged to the main Protestant dissenting churches.

The Evangelicals, or as they were also called the Low Churchmen, intended to restore the former solemnity of Anglican religion by first of all propagating the true fear of God and deep hatred of sin, and then calling for the fervent and attentive study of the Gospels. At the same time, they were "stronger in sentiment and personal piety than in theology"[1], wishing to affect the heart rather than the intellect.

The Tractarians, or High Churchmen, wanted to consolidate the Church of England rather by the revival of its, as they thought, basically Catholic character; its past enthusiasm as well as its rituals and regalia, monasticism and priestianity. Their renewed attention to the pre-Reformation church and its bygone traditions was coupled with a subsequent interest in medieval art and life, and a longing for the simplicity, devotion, and mysticism of the early Christians.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, as a contemporary writer observed, "the deepest and most fervid religion ... was that of the Evangelicals"[2], which had its origin in the 'evangelical fervour'[3] of John Wesley's movement launched in the 1740s and decisively affecting religious attitude in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. Due to the wide appeal of the evangelical movement, the Low Churchmen represented the dominant force in power as well as in number within the Church of England up to the 1830s. After that, however, they had to reckon with the steadily growing popularity of the High Church party, which was brought by the changes introduced in its style and mentality by some of its prominent leaders, and which initiated the so-called Oxford Movement.

Originally, the High Church party was known as the 'high and dry school' for presenting the learned and sober Anglican tradition as opposed to the Evangelical one, which

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[1] W. H. Hutton in *Social England*, 23.
[2] H. P. Liddon in *Life of Pusey*. Qtd. in *Social England*, 23.
[3] Cf. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 1:5.

relied more on religious sentiment and personal piety than on theology or dogma. In the 1830s three Oxford masters, John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Edward Bouverie Pusey, who became the leading figures of the Oxford Movement, introduced a traditionally Evangelical form of piety to the High Church custom, bringing a sense of awe and mystery, and the power of poetic language to the High Church practice. Keble, though anonymously, even produced a collection of devotional poems on the Sundays of the English calendar, which was published under the title *The Christian Year* in 1827. The profound spiritual need for such an emotional expression of religious affection is clearly shown by the popularity of the book, which gained Keble the professorship of poetry in Oxford in 1831, and by 1868 had sold 265 000 copies.

The change from rigid reasoning and coldness to a more passionate approach gained a lot of followers to the movement. Newman became a highly influential leader, who, displaying passion and learned scholarship at the same time, could satisfy the intellectual as well as the emotional needs of his listeners. Matthew Arnold's recollection from 1883 clearly illustrates Newman's irresistible power:

> Forty years ago, when I was an undergraduate at Oxford, voices were in the air which haunt my memory still. Happy the man who in that susceptible season of youth hears such voices! They are a possession to him for ever. ... The name of Cardinal Newman is a great name to the imagination still, his genius and his style are still things of power. ... Forty years ago he was in the very prime of his life; he was close at hand to us at Oxford; he was preaching in St Mary's pulpit every Sunday; he seemed about to renew what was for us the most national and natural institution in the world, the Church of England. Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St Mary's, rising in the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music — subtle, sweet, mournful?[4]

As their main objective Newman and his followers strove to restore the diminishing esteem of the Church of England. At the same time, they were strongly opposed to giving allowances to Roman Catholics as well as dissenters, and also fought against governmental intervention in religious matters. To prove the independent rights of the Church they turned to the ancient tenet of its divine authority; its apostolic succession. As Newman professed: "Every bishop of the Church whom we behold, is a lineal descendent of St Peter and St Paul after order of a spiritual birth."[5] In this sense, and only in this sense, Newman believed in the Catholicism of the Church of England, meaning its divine authority, and not a supposed dependence on Rome. Turning to the roots of their faith, the Tractarians became fascinated by the tradition of the ancient, undivided Church, which was found pure and powerful as compared to the contemporary practices of the Church of England. As Keble realised, "... the monuments of antiquity may disclose to our devout perusal much that will be to this age new, because it has been mislaid or forgotten, and we may attain to a light and clearness, which we now dream not of, in our comprehension of the faith and the discipline of Christ."[6] The Tractarians also wanted to bring deeper spirituality into the common religious practice. They found that the use of ancient accessories

[4] In Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*, 138.
[5] In Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, 143.
[6] Ibid, 39.

like candles, hymns, and surplices supported and strengthened religious feelings, and attracted more worshippers; so they re-introduced them in their churches.

To advocate their ideas the Oxford men published several Tracts from 1833 on. Despite the fact that these writings were not widely circulated, the Evangelical papers, like the *Record* and the *Christian Observer* severely attacked them, accusing Newman and his friends of popery. The publication of one of Newman's young disciples', Hurrell Froude's *Remains* in 1838 further increased the tension, since it exposed that the author had lived an "unevangelical self-tormenting way of life"[7] and it also expressed a clear hatred of the Reformation, claiming that it was "a limb badly set [which] must be broken again in order to be righted"[8].

While Newman insisted that he proposed the instituted changes only to strengthen the power of the Church of England, the press in general maintained that his teachings inevitably drove the congregation to the arms of the Church of Rome. To convince his opponents of the contrary, in 1839 Newman republished all the statements he had ever made against Rome in the Tracts. Unfortunately, as if to contradict him and undermine his efforts, John Binden, a student of divinity converted to Rome a few months later, publicly claiming to have been influenced to make this decisive step by the teachings of Pusey. More controversy followed when Newman published Tract XC in 1841, in which, dealing with the 39 Articles of the Church of England, he concluded that "... the Articles are the product of one age; and the theological needs of later ages make some readjustment or interpretation inevitable", so "... the wisdom of the early Church must be allowed to speak to the contemporary mind, must not be narrowed and restricted by promulgations drafted when the knowledge of the early Church was less broad and less well grounded"[9]. To Newman the extension of the meaning of the Articles and the claim that they can be compatible with the faith of the ancient, pre-Reformation Church seemed to be necessary in order to save the establishment of the Church of England. However, his assertion of the Catholicism of the Articles proved again to be too prone to misinterpretation. It was a crucial point for attack, and, as it is reflected in the opinion of one of its critics, Newman was thought to claim that the Anglicans were "... all good papist without knowing it"[10].

Several bishops demanded that the Tracts should be officially suppressed, saying that they gave permission to teach the doctrines of Rome in disguise of Anglicanism. The hostility shown against Newman by his own colleagues gradually wore out his patience. Partly because of his disillusionment and partly because of subsequent religious contemplations, he became less and less alien to the Church of Rome. In February 1843 he publicly withdrew his sayings against the Roman Catholic Church, and, in the same year, after the conversion of one of his closest followers and pupils, B. Lockhard, he resigned his post at Oxford.

With Newman's withdrawal to Littlemore, where he had founded a religious community, William George Ward and Frederick Oakley became the most powerful figures of the movement. They represented a less modest form of Catholic sympathy than Newman, which provoked an escalation in attacks, and led to a decrease in the popularity of the

[7] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 1:174.
[8] Ibid, 175.
[9] In Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, 54.
[10] In Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 1:185.

High Church party. Finally, in 1845 Newman, as well as Ward and Oakley became Roman Catholics, and they were followed by many of their disciples. And though many of the ideas of the Oxford Movement lived on, and the Tractarian mode of religious service remained practised in many Anglican churches, these conversions meant that the heyday of the movement was basically over by the end of the 1840s. The Tractarians again became clearly outnumbered by their opponents, while the fear of Catholicism and the hostility against all its manifestations took a dominant position in the popular religious attitude.

Artistic Antecedents

John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood amid such widespread feelings of anti-Catholicism in September 1848, which proved to have a decisive impact on the reception of their first works. Though often seen as a kind of revolutionary breakthrough, the birth of this artistic association was part and outgrowth of a general nineteenth-century tendency. In religion as well as in art or literature there was a powerful move from reason to feelings, from set rules to more individual approaches, a yearning for beauty and sincere enthusiasm. Parallel to it the values of the religion, art and literature of the Middle Ages were re-discovered and set as ideal examples to remember and follow. As the ancient forms of religious worship were brought into practice again by the Tractarians, primitive works of art became admired and even imitated, medieval ballads revived, and Gothic castles built; all parts of the same trend, which actually dates back to the eighteenth century.

In a way the rise of Pre-Raphaelitism can be seen as the artistic counterpart of the evolution of the Oxford Movement. As the High Churchmen at Oxford wanted to revitalise the religious life of the people of England, the young Pre-Raphaelites wanted to bring change into the artistic life and practices of the country. And just as the Oxford professors turned to the ideology and mode of worship of the ancient Catholic Church, the Pre-Raphaelites found inspiration in the art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which was also strongly Catholic in its nature. Though from different approaches and with different aims they were all captured by the genuine purity and sincerity of their predecessors, who had not yet been corrupted by the later conventionalisation of human life.

By Victorian times the English art world was well organised with established rules, powerful institutions and a specific system of education to mould the taste and deploy the ability of the coming generations. Since the foundation of the Royal Academy by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1768 set rules had guided the young and talented to achieve artistic perfection. Compliance was required, and, if accompanied with ability and hard work, it could bring success and appreciation. The rules and practices of academic education were based mainly on its first president's, Reynolds' *Discourses*, but, as years went by, Reynolds' requirement for individual judgement on behalf of the artist was more and more neglected. The emphasis gradually shifted onto the imitation of "... those models, which have passed through the approbation of ages", and which should be considered, therefore, as "perfect and infallible guides"[11] . The more practical rules derived mainly from Carracci, whose works, besides those of Raphael, were taken by the academic schools as the most desir-

[11] In Fleming, 7.

able models to follow. Such rules were, for example, that a composition should be based on an S or triangular form, that the models portrayed should exhibit certain types of beauty and dignity, or that the relation of light to darkness should be constant with the preponderance of darkness by the ratio of three to one[12]. The strict demand for the observance of these rules did not provide much ground for individual designs. Thus the academic pictures were carefully and consciously constructed in order to achieve the desired effect, completely lacking the instinctive sincerity and devotion reflected in the pictures of the early painters. Grandeur replaced the former solemn awe and mystery, and idealised beauty and perfection took the place of natural simplicity.

The same applied to early nineteenth-century religious painting. Charles Eastlake's popular *Christ Blessing Little Children* (1839), for example, displays the artist's thorough compliance with "the academic rules of harmonious composition and balance between lights and darks"[13], and it also shows how the Raphaelesque ideal beauty and grace dominated pictorial presentations. John Martin, on the other hand, was a representative of the grandiose, rather theatrical type of nineteenth-century religious painting, achieving effect by exaggerated contrasts, and spectacular scenes of huge, rocky mountains, low skies, and tiny human figures[14].

When the Pre-Raphaelites decided to "take the Academy by storm"[15], they wanted to do away both with the idealised grace and sweetness of the former example, and with the showy theatricality of the latter one. They were convinced that such works were "trite and affected"[16], and that it was the direct consequence of the Academy's promulgation of the idealising style of Raphael and his followers. The Royal Academy, as Andrea Rose describes, "fostered a tame school of British painters, well rehearsed in the handling of dramatic chiaroscuro, pyramidal composition, histrionic gesture, loose brushwork and standard Italianate landscape, but totally separated from the mental processes which had originally governed such productions."[17]As a contrast, the Pre-Raphaelites aimed at complete fidelity to nature, thus they painted landscape out-of-doors to have the proper colours and light effect, and drew their figures from models. They were also of the opinion that it was necessary to have a sense of commitment to the depicted subjects in order to produce paintings capable of inspiring and elevating the spectator.

However, the Pre-Raphaelites were not the first ones to become disillusioned by the affected quality of academic painting. Fifty years ahead of them William Blake was also strongly critical of it, believing, first of all, in the power of creative imagination, and rejecting the "stereotyped formalism of Raphael's followers"[18]. "Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired. It is Born with us"[19], he wrote in the margins of Reynolds' *Discourses*. The annotations he made to the book reveal his strong dislike of the theory presented in it. His opinion of Reynolds himself was similarly not flattering; as he wrote:

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[12] Cf. Waugh, 24.
[13] Treuherz, 48.
[14] See, for example, pictures like *The Eve of the Deluge*, *Joshua Spying out the Land of Canaan* (1851), *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851–53).
[15] Millais qtd. in William Holman Hunt, 1:129.
[16] Ibid, 48.
[17] Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 6.
[18] John Dixon Hunt, 172.
[19] In Raine, 49.

"This Man was Hired to Depress Art"[20]. The Pre-Raphaelites, especially Rossetti[21], regarded Blake as an important forerunner and kindred spirit, not only for his sharp criticism and rejection of academic painting, but also for his admiration of medieval art, and for his devoted literary interest.

The Pre-Raphaelites' wish to revive the spirit of early Christian art was, again, not a new idea. A group of German artists, the Nazarenes, did probably the most for the revival of early Christian art in Europe. They were also known as the Brotherhood of St Luke named after the patron saint of painting, and also as Pre-Raphaelites, since they wanted to regenerate German religious art by the imitation of the works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially of Dürer, Fra Angelico, Perugino, and the early work of Raphael. Their brotherhood was founded in 1809 by Johann Friedrich Overbeck and Franz Pforr, who, being dissatisfied with the art education at the Academy in Vienna where they both studied, settled in Rome, and started working in the deserted Benedictine monastery of Sant' Isidoro. Establishing a semi-monastic community, they were soon joined by other artists like Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Peter von Cornelius, Wilhelm Schadow and Philipp Veit. The Nazarenes advocated the superiority of pre-Reformation Christianity to nineteenth-century religion, which they found distorted and enfeebled by theological controversies, thus they wished to return to medieval practices both in their art and lifestyle. Overbeck's enthusiasm for early religious painting was so overwhelming, that he even converted to Roman Catholicism, the prime impetus behind the works he so much admired. Though the brotherhood as such disintegrated a few years after its formation, Cornelius leaving for Munich, Schadow moving to Düsseldorf and Overbeck remaining in Rome, its influence was felt throughout Europe for long[22].

The style of Nazarene works, the main features of which are described by Treuherz as "clear, bright colours, uniform lighting, smooth contours, strong wiry outlines and formal symmetry"[23], was adopted by a Scottish painter, William Dyce, and it remained a distinctive, characteristic quality of all his works. Dyce was some twenty years senior to the Pre-Raphaelites, who, while studying in Rome in the 1820s and 1830s, got personally acquainted with the Nazarene painters. Actually, he formed a close friendship with Overbeck, with whom, apart from painting, he also shared a devoted interest in medieval church music. His vast knowledge of medieval and early Renaissance art and his expertise in fresco painting made Dyce an acknowledged artist in great demand, despite the fact that he was well known of his High Church inclinations. In 1844 he got the commission for the

[20] In Murray, 54.

[21] D. G. Rossetti was one of the first admirers and advocates of William Blake. In 1847 he was offered to buy a small manuscript book written and drawn by Blake, which he did not hesitate to buy obtaining the money immediately from his brother, William. Later he became such an authority on Blake's art that after the death of Blake's first biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, Rossetti was asked to complete Gilchrist's unfinished book (*Life of William Blake with Selections from his Poems and other Writings*) and see it through the press in 1863.

[22] In England engravings of Nazarene works were to be found in the *Art Journal* (Bell, 40), and the Nazarene Bible illustrations are also said to have been particularly well known (Dobbs, 39). Apart from many of the British artists the Nazarenes also influenced Ingres (Murray, 315), and their fame was carried as far as Russia, Alexander II commissioning works from Overbeck (Hofmann, 293). The Nazarenes were also known in Hungary, and the Hungarian Ferenc Szoldatits was one of their last representatives. Sándor Nagy and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, the two leading figures of the Gödöllő School of Artists, met and formed a lifelong friendship at Szoldatits's house in Rome. Cf. Gellér and Keserű, 218; Szabadi, 84.

[23] Treuherz, 44.

Westminster Hall decorations, and also accomplished a fresco *The Consecration of Archbishop Parker* in the medieval chapel of the Archbishop of Canterbury in Lambeth Place, London. Though the public reception of his works was by no means unanimously favourable[24], Dyce had become a widely known artist by the time the Pre-Raphaelites formed their brotherhood.

Dyce's success, despite his deviation from the academic rules of painting, was probably mostly due to the support of Prince Albert, who knew and favoured both the early Christians, and the Nazarenes. Being excluded from the political decision-making of his adopted country[25], he became active in the cultural affairs of England. In 1841 he was appointed president of the Fine Arts Commission that was responsible for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament, and later he became one of the most ardent supporters of the organisation of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. His fondness of the Nazarenes is clearly shown by his wish to invite Peter von Cornelius to paint a series of frescoes to decorate the interior of the new Houses of Parliament. The Prince's decision to commission a German artist was probably due to the fact that fresco-painting was not at all common in England in the nineteenth century, its technique having gradually fallen into oblivion after its prime in the Middle Ages. The Nazarenes, however, were well known for reviving this ancient medium of pictorial art. When some of them returned from Rome to Germany through the encouragement of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, they were lavishly employed, getting commissions for painting frescoes in towns like Munich, Frankfurt, and Dresden. Albert was familiar with the murals Cornelius made for the Royal Palace at Munich, and he wished something similar to be done in Westminster. Finally, on Cornelius' advice, the commission for the Parliament decorations went to William Dyce[26].

The other painter in England who was significantly influenced by Nazarene art was Ford Madox Brown. He himself had arrived in England from the Continent just for the Westminster Hall competitions, and, similarly to Dyce, worked at the time under the spell of the Nazarenes, especially that of Overbeck, whom he met in Rome in 1845. Thus, through the work of Dyce and Brown[27], the Nazarene style was transmitted to Britain, exerting its influence on other English painters, like Charles Eastlake, John Rogers Herbert, Richard Dadd, and Joseph Noel Paton as well.

When Brown became Rossetti's tutor in 1848, his Nazarene inclinations were instilled into Rossetti, and through him it also influenced the formation and early work of the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. However, despite the similarities, there were significant differences between the German and the English Pre-Raphaelites. Settling in Sant'

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[24] Ford Madox Brown's account of the public's reaction after the exhibition of Dyce's study for *The Consecration* at Westminster Hall reveals the mixed feelings his style aroused: "Those who knew what Art was held their peace. Babblers pronounced it quaint—it was a copy of some old work—it was papistical—it was German—it was the most abhorrent thing, Christian Art. How could a bishop have it in his place?" In Lottes, 59.

[25] As Queen Victoria wrote to him in one of her letters during their engagement: "The English are very jealous of any foreigner interfering in the government of this country, and have already in some of the papers ... expressed a hope that you would not interfere." In Mancoff, 45.

[26] When Prince Albert invited Cornelius to undertake the work, the German artist replied: "What need have you of Cornelius to come over and paint your walls, when you have got Mr. Dyce?" According to Bickley, the commissioners had never heard of Mr. Dyce before. Cf. Bickley, 108.

[27] Some years later, in 1845–52, Frederick Leighton also came directly under the Nazarenes' influence. Studying at the Stadelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt he was instructed by the ardent Nazarene follower, Edward von Steinle.

Isidoro, the Nazarenes wished to revive the medieval monastic life of the early painters, being convinced that "the religious faith of the artist and his purity of life were vital factors in his art"[28]. Resigning from the world most of them lived a communal life, and practised conventional austerities, some even wore cassocks and rope girdles like monks. As Quentin Bell points out, owing to their devotional, secluded way of life "... all the sublimity, all the sentiment, all the high religious emotion of the earlier Italians and Flemings was preserved [in their art]", but, at the same time, "... all the visual curiosity, the affectionate examination of nature—... in a word, the life—was omitted"[29]. John Steegman refers to the same imitative quality of their works when he says that the Nazarenes worked "in a borrowed neo-classic idiom"[30], which had nothing to do at all with the creed and intuition of the English Pre-Raphaelites.

In an article published in the *Spectator* in 1851, William Michael Rossetti made the Pre-Raphaelites' alienation from the 'modern German school' quite clear. He wrote that while "... the English [painters] recur to the one primary school—nature, as interpreted by their own eyes and feelings; the Germans, [bearing a] strong affinity to the Raphaelesque standard of form and sentiment, [turn to] the purest form of a school ready-organised for them"[31]. As one of the founding members and the chronicler of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, William Michael Rossetti was well aware of the most important principles and aims of his friends. As he wrote in retrospect they all wished "... to study Nature attentively" so as to know how to express their ideas, and "to sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote"[32]. Hunt emphasised the same, saying that "... it is simply fuller Nature we want. Revivalism, whether it be of classicalism or mediaevalism, is a seeking after dry bones."[33]

It means that though the Pre-Raphaelites turned to the simplicity and sincerity of the art of the painters before Raphael, they had no intention whatsoever of imitating them. In presentation they acknowledged only nature as their infallible guide; painting outdoor scenes in the open air, depicting people as well as objects after real-life models, and striving for an overall fidelity concerning the depicted theme as well. Such resolve to truthful presentation probably derived from Hunt's wholehearted enthusiasm for John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and, as it will be seen, it remained a decisive principle to Hunt even at the time when Rossetti and Millais became committed to different approaches.

Just as they did not share the Nazarene's mannerism, the Pre-Raphaelites also lacked the Germans' deep commitment to religion. Whereas the German artists regarded themselves as 'God's Workmen'[34], and wished to promote religious enthusiasm with their works, the English painters had no such intentions. At the time of the formation of the brotherhood two of the seven members, William Holman Hunt and William Michael Rossetti, were unbelievers, and, with the only exemption of James Collinson, they did not really bother about religious matters until they were forced to do so by the criticism of their first religious paintings.

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[28] In Waugh, 28.
[29] Bell, 41.
[30] Steegman, 164.
[31] William Michael Rossetti, "Pre-Raphaelitism", in *Spectator*, 4th Oct. 1851. In Sambrook, 68.
[32] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 11.
[33] William Holman Hunt, 1:87.
[34] Adams, 24.

Chapter 1

THE FIRST RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS

Immediate Predecessors

When in 1849 the Pre-Raphaelites prepared for their first joint exhibition as a group, Rossetti was the only one of them who decided on a religious subject[35] , and started working on *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. Apart from the wish to please his pious mother, whose approval was still very important to him, his choice was probably influenced by the recent works of his young tutors, Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt.

The artistic views of Rossetti's two masters were not as alien to each other as it may seem given Hunt's detestation of Brown's affection for the Nazarenes and their religious sentiment. Being dissatisfied with the conventionality of contemporary academic painting, both of them wished to revive the former glory of pictorial art seen manifested in the simplicity and sincerity of medieval and early Renaissance paintings. In addition, by the second half of the 1840s, they both regarded 'truth to nature' as the basic principle of pictorial presentation. But while Brown's concept of art was formulated by his studies of the early masters and of Nazarene art, which also induced his interest in religious subjects; Hunt's view was affected rather by theory, by his reading of the first two volumes of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*.

Not long before Rossetti asked Brown to take him as a student did the young tutor return from his Italian journey. His recent works, much admired by Rossetti, reflect the decisive influence his trip made on him. The *Study in the Manner of the Early Masters* (1847), which is probably identical with *The Seraphs' Watch*, *Our Lady of Saturday Night* (1847), *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry* (1845–51) and *Wycliffe Reading his Translation of the Bible to John of Gaunt* (1847–8) were all inspired by early Christian art and by the works of the German Nazarenes, especially those of Cornelius and Overbeck. Brown met both Cornelius and Overbeck while he was staying in Rome in 1845, and his exact recollection of his visit to Overbeck's studio some forty-three years after the encounter reflects how strong an impact it had made on him.

> Overbeck I have visited first. No introductions were necessary in Rome at that time. [He] was in a small studio with some four or five visitors. He was habited in a black velvet dressing-gown down to the ground and corded around the waist; on his head a velvet cap, furred, which

[35] Hunt's first Pre-Raphaelite picture *Rienzi* was inspired by Bulwer Lytton's novel *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*, and Millais also chose literary themes; his *Isabella* was based on Boccaccio's story as retold by Keats in "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil", and his *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Collinson exhibited the *Italian Image Makers at a Roadside Alehouse*, a contemporary scene with an Italian narrative subject, which, apart from its detailed execution, shows no common features at all with the early works of his fellow brethren. The three other members did not take part, William Michael Rossetti never becoming an artist, Frederick George Stephens finally deciding on writing about paintings rather than producing them, and Thomas Woolner being a sculptor right from the beginning of his career.

allowed his grey curling locks to stray on his shoulders. He bore exactly the appearance of some figure of the fifteenth century. When he spoke to me it was with the humility of a saint ... I noted that where any naked flesh was shown, it looked exactly like wooden dolls' or lay figures'. I heard him explain that he never drew these parts from nature, on the principle of avoiding the sensuous in religious art. In spite of this, nevertheless, the sentiment was so vivid, so unlike most other art, that one felt a disinclination to go away. One could not see enough of it.[36]

Brown's works shown at an exhibition raised similar adoration in the young Rossetti as the Nazarene pictures induced in Brown. As he wrote in his first letter to Brown in March, 1848:

Since the first time I ever went to an exhibition I have always listened to with avidity if your name happened to be mentioned, and rushed first of all to your number in the Catalogue. The *Parisina*, the *Study in the Manner of the Early Masters*, *Our Lady of Saturday Night*, and the other glorious works you have exhibited, have successfully raised my admiration, and kept me standing on the same spot for fabulous length of time.[37]

As an apprentice in Brown's studio, Rossetti started copying his tutor's *Study in the Manner of the Early Masters* and, though Brown's original is lost, Rossetti's unfinished copy known as *Cherub Angels Watching the Crown of Thorns* (1848) reveals how strongly the simplicity, gentleness, and light tonality of both the early Renaissance and the Nazarene paintings affected Brown's style. Rossetti's work shows two small angels watching the crown of thorns with pious devotion, the hands of the one in the foreground put together as in prayer. The presentation of such religious sentiment was rare in nineteenth-century English art, exercised probably only by William Dyce.

In *Our Lady of Saturday Night* similar sentiment and archaism can be observed, despite the fact that, as Mary Bennett describes, the painting was conceived as "... a contemporary interpretation of the Italian Madonna and Child type in a style quite distinctive from the clear-cut archaisms of, for example, William Dyce"[38]. Brown's own explanation, given in retrospect in 1865, claims this detachment, admitting the Italian influence, but at the same time strongly emphasising the originality of the concept:

... it was little more than the pouring out of the emotions and remembrances still vibrating within me of Italian art. To look at it too seriously would be a mistake. It was neither Romish nor Tractarian, nor Christian art ... in intention: about all these I knew and cared little, it was merely fanciful ... if imitative of Italian art in certain respects, it is original in others. ... In idea the children are modern English, they are washed, powdered, combed, and bedgowned, and taught to say prayers like English Protestant babes.[39]

Brown here draws attention to certain important aspects of his work that point forward to some vital issues in the later history of the religious paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites,

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[36] In the lecture "Styles and Art" published in the *Universal Review*, May 1888. In Newman and Watkinson, 25; and in Lottes, 65.

[37] Rossetti to Ford Madox Brown, March 1848. *Letters*, 1:36.

[38] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 241.

[39] Ibid, 240–1.

especially those of Rossetti. First of all, it shows that though he admired the religious sentiment of the early Renaissance and Nazarene paintings, he did not share the Catholic devotion that stood behind them. Furthermore, such concerns as religious persuasion, let alone denominational espousal were completely outside the scope of his interest. He wished, however, to present a scene familiar to his contemporary spectators, not so much for its reliance on the traditions of pictorial art, but for its affinity with their daily practices. Thus, despite its Italianate setting, he wanted his painting to become reflective of nineteenth-century English domesticity. The image of the mother and child often recurs in Brown's art, like, for example, in *Mrs Madox Brown and Lucy* (1845), in *The Young Mother* (1848), in *Take Your Son, Sir* (1851, 1856–7), in *Waiting: An English Fireside* (1854–5), or in *Pretty Baa Lambs* (1851–9); reflecting the artist's typical Victorian commitment to home and family.

Another theme which greatly fascinated Brown at the time was the history of England and English literature. His interest was raised by the competition for the mural decoration of the new Houses of Parliament, which invited cartoons depicting "patriotic episodes from British history; themes from Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton; or subjects personifying abstract virtues"[40]. The idea for his monumental *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry* came to Brown by reading Sir James Mackintosh's *History of England* in search of a good subject. The middle section of this painting, which presents Chaucer reading his poems to Edward III and his court, became the origin of another work with some religious concern, *Wycliffe Reading his Translation of the Bible to John of Gaunt* (also known as *The First Translation of the Bible into English*). Realising that he was not able to complete his ambitious *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry* by the opening of the 1848 exhibitions, first he thought of painting a small-scale version of it, but finally he was happy to find a very similar, though not identical subject to set about. As if the upper half of his *Chaucer* had been re-produced—of course, with the necessary re-arrangement of the characters—it depicts Wycliffe standing in the middle with an open book in his hands, reading his work to Chaucer and Gower standing on the left and to John of Gaunt and the duchess sitting on the right.

Deriving so strongly from a very similar but purely literary scene, it seems unlikely that Brown would have chosen the subject of his *Wycliffe* for religious considerations in mind. Nevertheless, making Wycliffe the central character and presenting him as a figure of great national importance, the picture suggests an obvious respect for Wycliffe's views and achievements. In accordance with the historical accounts of his life and thoughts he is shown standing barefoot in a simple cassock, which refers to his renouncement of earthly vanities and his institution of the so-called 'poor priests' in 1377. But Wycliffe is also noted for his anti-clerical and anti-papal views, for which he is often regarded as the most important figure of English proto-Protestantism. Brown's painting, however, suggests no religious conflict. In the roundels of the Gothic architectural framework of the painting two allegorical figures are depicted representing Catholic and Protestant Faiths, and both of them bear some resemblance to the central character. On the left, standing for Catholicism, a friar is shown wearing a similar cassock as Wycliffe and bowing his head in humility, while on the right a woman figure is presented displaying an open book, which

[40] In Lottes, 55; and Newman and Watkinson, 18.

reflects the book in Wycliffe's hands and refers to his translation of the Bible through which it became accessible to a wider reading public. As Alan Bowness points out some sort of religious duality is also present in the fact that "[the] subject celebrates, almost aggressively, the Reformation, but the style is Nazarene or early Christian in its simplicity and symmetry of composition, and this would have been immediately associated with the Roman Catholic faith. The neogothic architectural surround confirms this."[41] It is not surprising that after the picture's first display at the Free Exhibition in 1848 it was most praised for its noble subject[42] .

For Rossetti, however, the theme of Brown's *Our Lady of Saturday Night* proved to be more inspiring. In his first oil he depicted a similar domestic scene, and in its presentation he relied on a similar sort of religious sentiment and peaceful domesticity as his master had done. In addition, these features luckily corresponded to Rossetti's personal experiences; his emotional dependence on his pious mother and on the family home.

Apart from Brown's decisive influence, Rossetti's first painting also reflects the effect Hunt's artistic concept made on him. A novice painter himself, Hunt was also still experimenting, and in search of a comprehensive artistic creed to follow. Being "a contemptuous unbeliever in any spiritual principles"[43] at the time, his interest in religious art was raised only in 1847, when a fellow student at the Academy Schools lent him the second volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters,* interestingly enough with the intention of converting Hunt to Roman Catholicism, being convinced that the author of the book professed this faith. He was most probably mistaken by Ruskin's enthusiasm for early Catholic art, and, perhaps, also by the writer's Oxford graduation[44]. Though Hunt was not converted to Roman Catholicism by *Modern Painters*, the book gave him the first significant impetus on his way to religious belief, and it also greatly influenced his artistic conceptions. After reading Ruskin's impressive analyses of the religious works of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century painters, he resolved on attempting to create a new type of religious painting, accessible to his Victorian audience and, while being based on strict realism in presentation, also lending itself to expressing moral messages, spiritual concerns. Ruskin's explication of the symbolism of Tintoret's *Annunciation* came as a revelation to him, since it showed him a possible and effective way of combining realism and abstract ideology. 'Symbolic realism', as Landow refers to it[45], became a decisive principle of Hunt's art and, as it was soon adopted by his friends, it became an important feature of early Pre-Raphaelite art in general.

The first picture Hunt worked on in the spirit of this new determination was the unfinished *Christ and the Two Maries* (1847). It presents the scene when Mary Magdalene and Mary Salome meet Christ on their way to the disciples to report on Christ's resurrection after finding His tomb empty: "And as they went ... behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him." (Matthew 28:9). In accordance with the new principles he was resolved to follow, Hunt tried to envisage the

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[41] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 15.

[42] Cf. Newman and Watkinson, 38; and *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 56.

[43] In Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 6.

[44] When the first volume of *Modern Painters* was published in May, 1843, the author was not named, only referred to as 'a Graduate of Oxford'.

[45] Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, 4, 121–3.

scene as it actually might have happened, thus presenting the Resurrection with as much realism as possible. He decided to abandon his earlier plan to show Christ with a banner in His hand, which would have been incompatible with his realist intentions, and the symbolic meaning of which would have been incomprehensible to most mid-nineteenth-century spectators. So in Hunt's painting Christ appears simply with lifted, wide-open arms, a pose traditionally attributed to the risen Saviour, suggesting glorification as well as benediction[46]. Nevertheless, realism was hard to achieve, especially for a novice painter, in a painting the subject of which was the manifestation of wonder, of divine redemption. Thus Hunt tried to lay special emphasis on the emotional aspect of the scene; he wanted the spectators to "see this Christ with something of the surprise that the Maries themselves felt on meeting Him as One who has come out of the grave"[47]. But he could not even succeed in presenting the bewilderment that the two Maries themselves might have experienced at the sudden encounter. They are shown kneeling on the ground in front of Christ, one of them bending to His feet and embracing them, the other bowing her head and putting her hands together as if in prayer. This second figure especially displays something of the humble devotion with which Catholic representations show the piety of the Madonna, and it strongly recalls the revivalism of William Dyce. So instead of being realistic, the scene visualised by Hunt looks rather affected and theatrical. The painter's intention to represent and evoke genuine emotions has clearly failed. Though unwillingly, his work was becoming much reminiscent of High Church revivalism, and it probably seemed impossible to Hunt to avoid it within the context of the subject at hand. No wonder, therefore, that he abandoned the picture altogether, and later turned rather to other themes of religious history more fitted to his ambitious aims. So finally, it was his student, Rossetti who put Hunt's ideas of true religious painting into practice successfully for the first time in his picture *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.

From Success to Failure: Rossetti's First Two Oils

Rossetti's first painting is an interesting combination of Brown's Victorian domesticity, Hunt's revival of the use of Christian symbolism, and their common practice of truthful, realistic presentation.

The subject of his first oil was very carefully considered by Rossetti. As one of his letters reveals, he even reckoned with the probable reaction of the public, regarding the subject of the education of Mary as a fortunate one, which, belonging to the religious class, "... has always appeared ... the most adopted and the most worthy to interest the members of a Christian community"[48]. The chosen theme also fitted in well with the tradition of religious painting, yet it lent itself to presenting the novel Pre-Raphaelite principle of showing a scene as it might actually have happened.

As there is no reference in the Bible to the childhood of Mary, Rossetti tried to be adequate in the historical sense. As he wrote in a letter to his Godfather, Charles Lyell:

[46] This posture was given an alternative interpretation by Hunt in *The Shadow of Death* in 1870–73, where the cruciform shadow of Christ's body recalls the Crucifixion.

[47] William Holman Hunt, 1:85.

[48] 14 November 1848. *Letters*, 1:47–8.

> The subject is the education of the Blessed Virgin, one which has been treated at various times by Murillo and other painters,—but, as I cannot but think, in a very inadequate manner, since they have invariably represented her as reading from a book under the superintendence of her Mother, St Anne, an occupation obviously incompatible with these times, and which could only pass muster in a purely symbolical manner. In order, therefore, to attempt something more probable and at the same time less commonplace, I have represented the future Mother of Our Lord as occupied in embroidering a lily, — always under the direction of St Anne ...[49]

Rossetti's choice was a very fortunate one. Not only did it correspond with historical truth, but it also agreed perfectly with the established contemporary concept of a girl's proper tuition. In a Victorian guidebook to education Elizabeth Missing Sewell wrote "... girls are to dwell in quiet homes, amongst few friends; to exercise a noiseless influence, to be submissive and retiring"[50]. Contemporary paintings of domestic scenes like Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside* (1854–5) or C. W. Cope's *A Life Well Spent* (1862) show that sewing was regarded as a most desirable and appropriate activity for the female members of the family. Similarly, in most Victorian homes, like in the Rossettis', the education of the children was the task of the mother, and it was also her duty to ensure a harmonious, peaceful, and honourable home for all the members of the family. So *The Girlhood* can easily be seen as the reflection of the Rossetti family parlour with its serene, but creative atmosphere, and with the dominant role and "grave sweetness"[51] of the mother. The parallel is actually so relevant, that Rossetti's mother is portrayed as St Anne, and his sister, Christina sat for the figure of the young Mary.

In this seemingly ordinary domestic scene numerous conventional Christian symbols are hidden which are so ingeniously incorporated into the scene that they do not draw immediate attention and never destroy the overall realism of the presentation. Some of these symbols refer to the Virgin's excellence, such as the books bearing the titles of cardinal and theological virtues, each bound in the colour traditionally associated with it; green stands, for example, for hope, gold for charity and blue for faith. The lamp is an emblem of piety, the lily is that of purity and the dove refers to the presence of the Holy Ghost. Other symbols are used to foreshadow certain biblical events; these are the red cloth beneath the cruciform trellis embroidered with the Tri-point, referring to the Holy Trinity, and the seven-leaved palm and the seven-thorned briar lying on the ground, representing Mary's seven joys and seven sorrows. The grapevine in the background and on the trellis suggests Christ's sacrifice as indicated by the wine of the Eucharist.

Having poetic as well as artistic ambitions, Rossetti wrote two sonnets to accompany his painting, the second one of which actually gives a detailed explanation of most of the symbols depicted in the painting.[52] It was originally inscribed on the frame of the picture,

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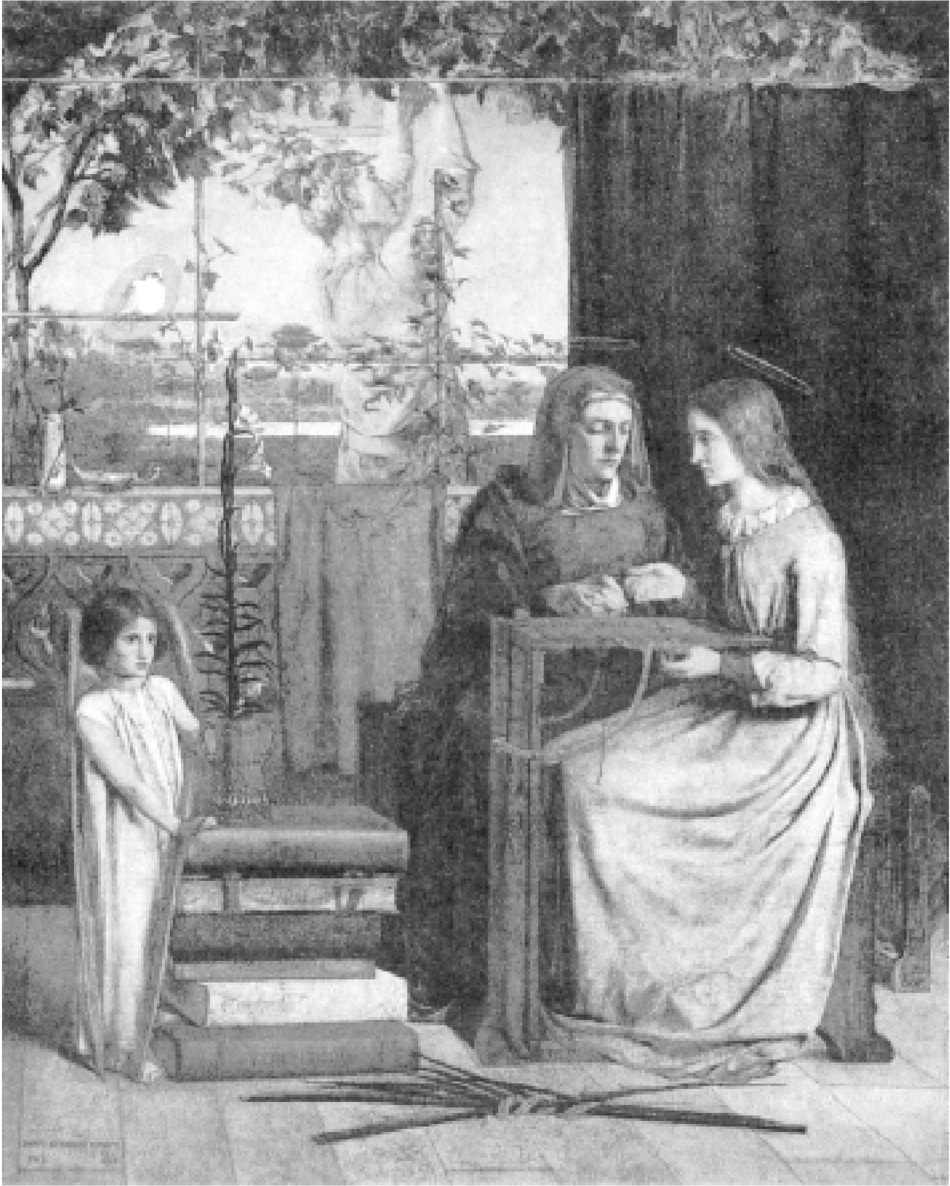
[49] Ibid.

[50] In Mancoff, 76.

[51] Larg, 113.

[52] Whereas the second sonnet, just like the painting, builds on symbols—as Rossetti calls them—in order to refer to events remote in time, the first one gives a chronological account of the most important events of Mary's life. Its last lines point forward to the Annunciation, and thus to Rossetti's second painting, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. However, it reveals a markedly different approach to the theme saying that "... one dawn at home / She woke in her white bed, and had no fear / at all ...", which is obviously different from the image of the embarrassed, fearful Virgin of the painted version.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*
83,2x65,4 cm. Oil on canvas. 1848/1849. London, Tate Gallery

so Rossetti may have felt that such an explanation would help the general understanding of the symbolism of his work. In this sense this sonnet is a supplement to the painting and is subordinate to it, despite the fact that, as Landow observes, it is likewise based on the dual character of symbolic realism[53] .

Notwithstanding the abundant use of this type of symbolism, the underlying feature of *The Girlhood* remains its reflectiveness of the dutiful family atmosphere. It suggests harmony, safety, earnestness, and assiduity; all that were regarded as supreme values in the Victorian age. No wonder, therefore, that the contemporary audience liked the painting. Apart from the scarce accusations of Mariolatry[54] the picture was generally well received, critics could easily pass over its Catholic-inspired symbolism.

At the same time, everyone recognised the picture's resemblance of the early Renaissance paintings, though few were the ones who could actually see such pictures. By the 1840s English art society was on its way to recognise the merits of these works dismissed so far as 'primitive' and unworthy of consideration. In 1846 the second volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and in 1847 Lindsay's *The History of Christian Art* were published both displaying a strong commitment to early Renaissance art. A year later the Arundel Society was founded by the two authors accompanied by other art-critics, the aim of which was to try and preserve a record of some of the early Renaissance paintings, mainly Italian frescoes and to make them known to a wider public. It commissioned various artists to make watercolour facsimiles of the original Italian works and then published the copies. The first publications presented the Fra Angelico frescoes in the S. Lorenzo Chapel of the Vatican, and the Giotto frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua. Besides Lindsay and Ruskin, William Young Ottley, Prince Albert, and the Eastlakes also did a lot to popularise the works of the early Renaissance painters. Ottley, often referred to as 'Lasinio's disciple', was known for his careful drawings of frescoes at Pisa, Florence, and Assisi. Prince Albert's enthusiasm for the 'primitives' was a well-known fact, especially after 1848, when he bought the entire art-collection of Prince Ludwig-Kraft-Ernst of Oetingen–Wallerstein, which included many early works, pictures by Van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden among them, and then put the entire collection on view at Kensington Palace in the same year. Later on, in 1863, many of these early works were given by his wish to the National Gallery by Queen Victoria. By that time the Gallery itself possessed important pictures by Italian, German, and Flemish painters earlier than Raphael, acquired by Sir Charles Eastlake soon after his appointment as director of the Gallery in 1855.

Given the preliminary work of these respected art-connoisseurs Rossetti's *The Girlhood* was acknowledged favourably. Shown at the Free Exhibition in London in 1849 it was singled out as the best picture on display, praised for its "grace and beauty" (*The Builder*), its "sincerity and earnestness" (*Athenaeum*), for the "ineffable sweetness" of the Virgin and her mother (*The Observer*), for its "extraordinary minuteness" (*The Builder*), and "its pure imitation of early Florentine art" (*Art Journal*)[55].

Swelled with pride over the success of his first painting and encouraged by its wide appeal, Rossetti started working on another religious picture for the next exhibition in

[53] Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, 5.
[54] Cf. Steegman, 169.
[55] Cf. Bickley, 155–6; Faxon, 54; Fleming, 103–4; Lottes, 80; and Young, 161.

1850. This time Hunt and Millais, too, decided to present religious themes. Rossetti took the traditional Annunciation theme as his subject and completed *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (also known as *The Annunciation*) as planned by the 1850 exhibition. Since this new painting was conceived in the same spirit and executed apparently according to the same artistic principles as *The Girlhood*, Rossetti expected similar praise and success. In a letter to his aunt, Lydia Polidori, written in May 1849, he speaks about his hope of "... establishing ... some degree of reputation"[56] with his new work. Yet *Ecce Ancilla Domini* received a ferocious storm of hostile criticism. Reviewers attacked Rossetti's technical diabilities, they pointed out the weak perspective of the painting, and claimed that Rossetti lacked the skill of exact drawing and proper painting. The way the picture imitated the so-called 'primitive' painters could not win the spectators' favour either, they regarded it as retrograde, and as a return to 'uncultivated infancy'[57] . Reviewers were also outraged by the revelation of the 'conspiracy' behind the scene; the existence and anti-Academic intentions of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were leaked out just before the opening of the exhibition[58] . Finally, Rossetti's work was seen as 'sadly Romish'[59], as the latest alarming manifestation of the spreading influence of Roman Catholicism.

This kind of abrupt change in the views of the contemporary critics is very peculiar, but there are several factors contributing to this radical shift. Both the quick transition in the public's attitude towards the young Pre-Raphaelites just before the exhibition, and the latent but important differences between *The Girlhood* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* contributed to the devastating attacks on the latter painting in 1850.

On the face of it Rossetti's first two paintings are, indeed, very similar. Each of them depicts a scene from the Virgin Mary's life, presenting therefore a kind of sequence, two episodes of the same theme. The same brown-haired girl can be seen as Mary in both pictures, painted after Rossetti's sister, Christina. The thematic continuity, the serial character is also indicated by the same long red cloth embroidered with a white lily; in *The Girlhood* it is just being worked on while by the time of the Annunciation it has already been accomplished. Though employed to a lesser extent, the symbolism of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* is the same as that of *The Girlhood*; the lily, the dove, and the lamp reappear, and besides the basic colour, white, the colour of purity, Rossetti uses the traditional colours associated with Mary; blue, red, and gold. The date of March written in the bottom left corner of the painting is also symbolic, since it is the time of the Immaculate Conception, the painting actually being completed in April.

Besides the thematic and symbolical connections, the two pictures are also closely related to each other by the unconventional or, at least according to Victorian standards, novel approach with which Rossetti treated his subjects; the strict adherence either to the religious script or to actual reality, and the conscious avoidance of any form of idealisation. In *Ecce Ancilla Domini* Rossetti abandoned all the accessories of the well-established

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[56] To Charlotte Lydia Polidori, May 1849. In *Letters*, 1:52.

[57] In *Blackwood Magazine*, in Grylls, 35.

[58] Rossetti unveiled the secret meaning of the initials PRB to a sculptor friend, Alexander Munro, who passed the information on to a journalist, Angus Reach. Reach wrote an inimical article, "Town Talk and Table Talk", which was published in *The Illustrated London News* on 4th May, 1850, and in which he ridiculed the Pre-Raphaelites for, as he wrote, "devot[ing] their energies to the reproduction of saints squeezed out perfectly flat", and "mak[ing] men and women like artfully-shaped and coloured pancakes". In Grylls, 197.

[59] In Waugh, 51.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *Ecce Ancilla Domini*
72,6x41,9 cm. Oil on canvas. 1849/1850. London, Tate Gallery

representations of the scene, and adhered solely to the script of the Bible, which actually describes Mary as fearful and troubled by Gabriel's saying (Luke, 1:29–31). Rossetti's Mary is a simple young girl, who is sitting in her bed just having been awakened by the messenger of God. Her bed and room are very simple and almost completely white, and she is shown frightened, her shrinking posture and worried eyes reflecting fear and despair. Rossetti's conception of the Annunciation inspired a unique and, in several aspects, very modern image, which, not surprisingly, perplexed its first spectators. As John Ruskin described:

> ... consider ... how the pious persons who had always been accustomed to see their Madonnas dressed in scrupulously folded and exquisitely falling robes of blue, with edges embroidered in gold, ... and reverently to observe them receive the angel's message with their hands folded on their breasts in the most graceful positions, and the missals they had been previously studying laid open on their knees,—consider, I repeat, the shock to the feelings of all these delicately minded persons, on being asked to conceive a Virgin waking from her sleep on a pallet bed, in a plain room, startled by sudden words and ghostly presence which she doesn't comprehend ...[60]

According to the taste and opinion of the Victorian public it was an image unworthy of the sacred subject. They accused Rossetti of abruptness, uncouthness, and defiance of "the principles of beauty and of the recognised axioms of taste".[61]

Rossetti tried to be 'realistic' even when painting the angel, as far as it is possible at all to be realistic about a heavenly messenger. So his Gabriel is also quite unconventional, he has no wings, and he is very earthly, in fact, very masculine. The only indications of his heavenly origin are the flames around his feet and the golden halo round his head. Apart from these and the wings of the little angel in *The Girlhood*, both of Rossetti's early pictures might pass for representations of secular scenes. In this respect it is interesting to note that Rossetti found it the most difficult to paint the angels, and that the halo of Gabriel in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* is a later (1853) alteration.

The basic difference between the two pictures lies in the dissimilar character of the scenes themselves. While, as it was seen, *The Girlhood* is reflective of domestic harmony and peace, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* reflects embarrassment, doubt and fear. Instead of family unity and honour, it shows a solitary young girl being approached by a suspiciously masculine, wingless angel; and instead of productive labour, it pictures perplexed helplessness.

However, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* is as reflective of the Victorian age as its predecessor. Nevertheless, the contemporary audience could not possibly accept it, since it revealed the unpleasant, the consciously concealed concerns of society. And in 1850, when the painting was first exhibited, the Victorian public was not yet prepared to cope with such a disturbing image revealing its hidden problems.

The overwhelming optimism of the Victorians was, for the most part, no more than mere appearance. The nineteenth-century scientific revolution, the quick and vast increase

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[60] Ruskin, "The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism", in *Nineteenth Century*, November 1878. In Fleming, 116.

[61] Frank Stone in the *Athenaeum*, 1 June 1850. In Faxon, 56. Cf. Bickley, 176; Grylls, 35; Lottes, 88; and Wood, 17.

in knowledge had the consequence that the traditional firm belief in the truth of every single word of the Bible and its divine origin was no longer unquestionable. In fact, it was becoming impossible to hold the old credo. The Bible, the base of Protestant religion, was rapidly losing its sacred authority, which, of course, caused grave anxiety for both the Evangelicals and the Broad Church party. In this kind of uncertainty the immediate and instinctive reaction of most people was to stick firmly to all the conventional formalities and customs of their religion, hoping to obtain in this way a firm ground to rely on. Many longed for a strong authority, and the religious leaders, who sensed the danger of the situation, like Samuel Wilberforce or Thomas Arnold, provided the Victorians with the authoritative and dogmatic confirmation and guidance they so badly needed.

Besides the dangers of serious doubt and uncertainty, which could actually lead to agnosticism or even to atheism, Protestants also had to fear the spreading influence of Roman Catholicism. The considerable moral principles and strong authoritative character of the Roman Catholic Church made it popular among those in a state of doubt. As it has already been seen, the charges of Romanism against the Tractarians speedily escalated following the numerous conversions to Rome in the 1840s, and the anti-Catholic opposition was even more inflamed when in 1850 Pope Pius IX issued a Papal brief in which he pronounced the establishment of the archbishopric of Westminster and the division of England into twelve Roman Catholic dioceses. Lord John Russell, current Prime Minister, immediately appealed both to the state and to the Church of England to stop the 'aggression' of Rome and, in a letter to the Bishop of Durham he confirmed his worries not only about the Papal expansion but also about the growing uncertainty and the increasing popularity of High Church practices among the members of the clergy of the Church of England. "Clergymen of our own Church", he wrote,

> ... have been most forward in leading their flocks 'step by step to the very verge of the precipice'. The honour paid to saints, the claim of infallibility for the Church, the superstitious use of the sign of the cross, the muttering of the liturgy so as to disguise the language in which it is written, the recommendation of auricular confession and the administration of penance and absolution, all these things are pointed out by clergymen of the Church of England as worthy of adoption, and are now openly reprehended by the Bishop of London in his charge to the clergy of his diocese.[62]

A fierce offensive was thus launched against those who sympathised with Rome, serious reprisals followed all manifestations of Catholicism. Several advocates of the Tractarian ideas suffered such retribution. In 1844 the degree of W. G. Ward was taken away as the result of the publication of his *The Ideal of a Christian Church* in which the Church of England appeared to be compared disadvantageously with the Church of Rome. Another prominent figure of the Oxford Movement, James Anthony Froude, brother of Hurrell Froude, was forced to withdraw from his post as schoolmaster five years later. Even Newman was forced to resign his position at Oxford being withdrawn from public life by his bishop.

In this hostile anti-Catholic atmosphere Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* had little chance of getting a favourable reception. While the inscription PRB in *The Girlhood* passed

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[62] Lord John Russell to the Bishop of Durham, 4 November 1850. In *Culture and Society*, 38–9.

unnoticed in 1849, by the 1850 exhibitions the existence of the so far secret Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had been revealed to the press. The name itself had an unfortunate Catholic connotation, and suspicion was intensified by its close similarity to the name and intentions of the German Pre-Raphaelites. So when the existence of the brotherhood and its revolutionary intentions came to light, the public obviously and immediately turned against its members. Such a secret organisation of discontented young men had to be subdued, especially at a time when the fear of a possible revolution was much in the air; when the memory of the 1848 revolutions on the Continent and the riots in London in the same year was still very fresh.

Had the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its artistic aims not been concealed, the fear it caused and the hostile rejection it incurred at its revelation would most probably have not been so devastating. In retrospect it seems that at the time the Royal Academy was surprisingly tolerant, and, in most cases, tried to support the talented young artists. Not only were, for example, the pictures of the novice Pre-Raphaelite painters accepted at the 1849 and 1850 Royal Academy Exhibitions, but they were also very favourably hung. But by the opening of the 1850 exhibition the public and the critics had become alarmed by the Pre-Raphaelites' revolutionary attitude and the strong impression of Catholicism in their works.

For the first cause probably Rossetti was responsible by insisting on forming a secret society as well as by revealing it to Alexander Munro two years later, who then disclosed it to the press. Rossetti was obviously fascinated by belonging to a secret, rebellious organisation, since his father had been very much involved in such things in Italy, and enthusiastic discussions about it were held daily in their home. However, he did not really care about delicate religious distinctions. Though he was infatuated with the magnificent and spectacular formalities and accessories of the Catholic ceremonies[63] , and deeply impressed by the profound spirituality of the early Christian paintings, his approach was basically not religious, but artistic and emotional. As his brother remembered:

> … he was, if not most strictly a Christian believer, less definitely alien from the faith than myself. His fine intellect dwelt little on the region of argument ... it was swayed by feelings ... . A thing either impressed him and convinced him, or else it formed no part of his inner experiences.[64]

[63] Rossetti's enthusiasm for the ceremonialism and mysticism of the Catholic mass and for the beauty of Catholic churches is clearly manifested in one of his letters sent to his brother, William, in which he gives an account of his visit to a French Catholic service in Bolougne in 1844: "The evening before last Mr. Maenza and I walked about the principal church of the town during mass or vespers or whatever they call it. What between the fine old Gothic interior, adorned with pictures and images of saints—the music and the chanting—the magnificent groups of old fisherwomen, whose intense devotion has in it something sublime—and the dim religious light of the lamps placed against the Gothic pillars, which glimmered faintly up and struggled through the gathering darkness—the scene was so solemn and impressive that Maria ... might have gone a Protestant, but would most certainly have returned a Catholic." *Letters*, 1:24.

[64] William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, 1:129. In Dobbs, 28. Cf. also Rossetti to James Smetham, 10 December 1865: "… I have no such faith as you have. Its default in me does not arise from want of natural impulse to believe, nor of reflection whether what I should alone call belief in a full sense is possible to me. Thus I know that while discussion on such points with a believer is painful to me, it affords me no counterbalancing profit; and I abstain from it absolutely." *Letters*, 2:582.

Rossetti most probably did not even realise how significant the dissimilarities between *The Girlhood* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* were. Besides the basic difference that *The Girlhood* reflected Victorian harmony, and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* Victorian doubts and fears, they displayed another significant distinctive quality. Irrespective of the Romish ecclesiastical symbolism of the paintings, the first work was basically a Church of England picture, while the second rather a Catholic one. As David Larg points out

> ... the result was brought about not so much by the golden glories and scribblings which offended the Protestant conscience as by the elimination of Frances and the parlour. These two, the woman and the place, suggested things to be taught and examined and understood. *The Annunciation* suggested that teaching and learning were past and that something had to be believed, something not easy to believe, so hard to believe that perplexity steals over the body of the angel and into the face of the Virgin.[65]

In *Ecce Ancilla Domini* Rossetti captured the precious moment of encountering something beyond human comprehension; he pictured perplexed humility and awe as called forth by an unexpected divine revelation. Such emotions, evoked by divine wonder, obviously belonged to the Catholic mode of worship, calling forth again objection instead of appreciation in most of the spectators. Rossetti's lack of concern for such theological connotations proved to be fatal and brought about an obvious opposition.

Alleged Tractarianism: Hunt's *The Druids*

Hunt paid more attention to such concerns. Right from the beginning of their joint work he had fears of a Nazarene-inspired, Romish effect on the art of the brotherhood. This was part of the reason why he objected to Rossetti's proposal of asking Brown to become a member of the brotherhood, and also for his rejection of the name 'Early Christians'. Even the term 'brotherhood' was objected to on the grounds that "it savoured of clericalism".[66] The faint accusations of Mariolatry in connection with *The Girlhood* were the first signs that his early caution to avoid possible suspicions of Romanism was well justified. Nevertheless, for the 1850 exhibition not just Rossetti, but he and Millais too were preparing paintings with religious themes; Millais undertaking *Christ in the House of his Parents* (also known as *The Carpenter's Shop*) and Hunt *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*.

Hunt's idea of his painting was suggested by the Royal Academy Gold Medal contest on the theme of 'an act of mercy', but as the painting was not complete by the deadline of the competition, it was finally shown at the 1850 annual exhibition of the Academy together with Millais' work. Rossetti, fearing again the evaluation of the Selecting Committee of the Royal Academy, sent *Ecce Ancilla Domini* to the exhibition of the National Institution which was opened somewhat earlier than that of the Academy. The ensuing hostility towards Rossetti's picture and the quite justifiable references to its affinity with

[65] Larg, 115.
[66] William Holman Hunt, 1:140–1.

William Holman Hunt: *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*
111x141 cm. Oil on canvas. 1849/1850. Oxford, Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum

Catholic art must have caused grave concerns to Hunt. He might have realised that his painting at hand also displayed certain features which would provoke accusations of Tractarianism. So most probably at this time, just a few days before his own painting was due to be shown, he had obliterated the tonsures of the missionaries in his painting in order to ward off attacks of High Church sympathy. Nevertheless, his efforts proved to have been of no avail. *The Times*, for example, called *The Druids* "a deplorable example of perverted taste"[67], *Fraser's Magazine* reproached it for being "too prone to mannerism"[68], and the *Athenaeum* regarded it simply as "a pictorial blasphemy"[69]. Only the Tractarian *Guardian* praised the work.

The supposed High Church attitude of the painter was seen basically in three features of the painting: in its employment of many early Christian symbols, in the presence of the young boy in fur loincloth at the preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist, which

[67] In Dobbs, 34.
[68] In Bickley, 154.
[69] In Dobbs, 34.

was regarded as a support for the Tractarian view in the so-called Gorham controversy, and in the garments of the missionaries which were mistaken for Eucharistic vestments.

Back in 1847, when reading *Modern Painters*, Hunt realised the importance and inherent potentials of typological, or pre-figurative symbolism in religious painting. He regarded it as a means with which he could effectively combine realism and spiritualism. His first successful attempt at its application can be seen in *The Druids*. Some of the symbols are traditional ones, many of which were re-discovered by High Church revivalism, and thus often used in Tractarian churches as ancient, mystic symbols as well as decorative elements. Therefore, Hunt's employment of the same symbols or types entailed High Church connotations. The burning of candles or oil in a lamp, for example, became part of the High Church rituals, as well as the display of the cross on the altar or on the walls, and both symbols are present in Hunt's painting. The grapevine, the thorn, and the fishing net are less obviously Catholic symbols, but they are usually associated with the art of the pre-Reformation era. Hunt, however, could successfully create some new, entirely original types. The way, for example, the elder woman supports the missionary recalls the Deposition, or the other woman's act of refreshing the missionary by washing his face with a sponge obviously refers to the Crucifixion, when Christ was given vinegar in a sponge to quench his thirst. The two birds on the roof of the hut recall the parable of the fallen sparrows (Matthew, 10:29), in which Christ prophesies the persecution of his apostles.

A bowl of water is shown in the lower left corner of the painting referring, together with the river in the foreground, to baptism. Behind it a boy is squeezing grape juice into a cup suggesting that the Holy Communion is about to be taken, commemorating Christ's sacrifice. The little boy holding the cup wears a fur loincloth, which is a traditional attribute of St. John the Baptist, further emphasising the symbolic reference to baptism. But, however well Hunt incorporated the symbols of baptism and Eucharist into the scene, it was an unlucky choice to connect them in this way, as it recalled in the contemporary audience the bitter debate between High Churchmen and the Evangelicals in the course of the so-called Gorham case.

The Gorham controversy started in 1846 basically between George Cornelius Gorham, vicar of St. Just and Penwith in Cornwall and Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter. Their fierce struggle was launched by Gorham's advertising in the *Ecclesiastical Gazette* for a new curate who should be "free from Tractarian error"[70], which obviously irritated the bishop who was a High Churchman, and who claimed that the attitude exhibited by Gorham only encouraged unnecessary divergence within the Church of England. Thus, when in a few months later Gorham applied for the parish of Brampford Speke, the bishop, after examining the creed of the candidate, declined to institute him, finding him unsound in the doctrine of baptism. As it was revealed, Bishop Phillpotts and High Churchmen in general claimed that man had been unconditionally regenerated in infant baptism, as opposed to Gorham's Evangelical standpoint according to which regeneration was gained only with the heart-renewal of the already baptised man. In June 1848 Gorham turned to the court of arches and asked the court to compel the bishop to nominate him to the parish of Brampford Speke. The dean of arches delivered his judgement in the case more than a year later, in August 1849, in favour of Phillpotts. He declared that he had no doubt about

[70] In Chadwich, *The Victorian Church,* 1:251.

the infant being regenerated in baptism, therefore Gorham had maintained a doctrine opposed to that of the Church of England and Bishop Phillpotts had duly rejected Gorham's appointment. This decision was, of course, unacceptable to the Evangelicals. They appealed to the juridical committee of the privy council for supervision. In the end, its final judgement was announced on 15 January 1850 in favour of Gorham and the Evangelicals, raising doubts in Tractarians not only about the basic nature of the Church of England, but also about the right of the non-ecclesiastical juridical committee to deliver judgement in theological questions. So the debate over infant baptism and regeneration went far beyond the scope of the original theological problem involved. It induced further arguments about the fundamental character of the Church of England, and it incited claims for disestablishment among the Tractarians. And, though a schism in the church was yet again avoided, a number of secessions to Rome from the High Church party followed the final decision.

Not much later than the ruling was announced Hunt's *Druids* touched a raw nerve. The presence of the child holding the cup for the grape juice at the preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist was seen as a clear support for the Tractarian standpoint in the debate.

And there was yet another sign of Hunt's supposed High Church attitude: the robes of the missionaries. Archeologically as accurate as ever, Hunt showed the missionaries wearing white dalmatics and red paenulae that were unfortunately taken for surplices and chasubles over the use of which fierce debates were held among the Anglicans. The ritual controversies of the 1840s and '50s stirred up an even bigger turmoil than the Gorham case, in which basically only the clergy was interested. But the questions of whether to place a candlestick and a cross upon the Holy Table, whether to sing hymns or psalms during the services, whether to allow private confessions or require a priest to wear a surplice were issues affecting common people, everyday churchgoers as well. No wonder, therefore, that in 1842, when Bishop Blomfield of London introduced new regulations in the ritual of the Church of England and ruled, among other things, that the preacher at morning services should wear a surplice, he provoked considerable opposition. Parochial wars and so-called surplice riots broke out in many parishes, and the bishop was accused of Tractarianism. It was again Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter who further fuelled the tension by issuing a pastoral letter to his clergy requiring them to have a weekly collection and also to preach in the surplice, both of which were hardly acceptable to the Evangelicals. The resistance against these new regulations was so vehement that finally the bishop was forced to withdraw the order. Surplices were mostly regarded as accessories of the Roman Catholic ritual, so with the threat of 'Papal aggression' in 1850, the objection to such regalia was still very much on the agenda. In this hostile, anti-Catholic atmosphere Hunt had little chance of convincing the public that the robes worn by the missionaries in his painting were nothing more than the archeologically proper ones.

The Tractarian undertones dissipated Hunt's hope for popular appeal. They won him, however, the support of Thomas Combe, superintendent of Oxford University Press, who was to become the painter's most important patron. Combe, nicknamed by his friends and acquaintances as 'the Early Christian' or as 'the Patriarch', was a devout High Churchman. He first got to know Millais, probably in 1850, being introduced to the young painter by a local art dealer, James Wyatt, as a potential patron. It was thus on Millais' recommendation that *The Druids* was finally purchased by the wealthy uncle of Mrs Combe as a present to Combe himself. Given the tightening link with Combe, Hunt soon became con-

versant with Tractarian ideology, made friends with some of its prominent advocates, and, as it will be seen later on, by reason of these factors some sort of Tractarian influence was to be seen in his paintings in the succeeding years.

‘Pictorial Blasphemy’: Millais’ *The Carpenter’s Shop*

Despite the fierce accusations against the pictures of Rossetti and Hunt, it was Millais who had to bear the brunt of the general contempt and slander poured out against the Pre-Raphaelites in 1850. The choice of the subject of his *The Carpenter’s Shop* proved to be a highly unlucky one. It is taken from the childhood years of Christ, who is presented assisting Joseph in his work, together with Mary, St Anne, the boy John the Baptist, and an assistant. Christ, having wounded his palm on a nail, is being comforted by his mother, who has got down on her knees to kiss her son. The painting was exhibited in 1850 without a title, so the Biblical quotation, which accompanied it, was due to expound its theme: “And one shall say onto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.” (Zechariah 13:6)

With the larger Old Testamental context in view it becomes obvious that the cited Biblical verses refer not at all to Christ and an incident in His life, but to the false prophets, and the end of their deceitful pursuits. The application of these lines to Christ himself is said to have been not Millais’ original idea, but a theme suggested to him during a service he attended in Oxford in 1849[71] . The sermon, which interpreted Zechariah’s words in this unusual, pre-figurative sense, might have been delivered by the eminent Tractarian priest, Pusey himself, from whom this reading is said to have originated.

Pictorial inspiration might have come to Millais from John Rogers Herbert’s *Our Saviour Subject to His Parents at Nazareth*, a painting first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1847. Herbert, who worked at the time under the influence of the Nazarene early Christian spirit, depicted the Holy Family in their secluded home in Nazareth, and showed all the members occupied with ordinary work; Joseph is shown doing carpentry, Mary spinning, and the youthful Christ carrying a flat wicker basket. Besides the similarity of the subjects of Millais’ and Herbert’s works, the overall lightness, and the meticulous precision of the presentation of all the details are also common to them.

An equally important source of inspiration might have been Collinson’s, the fellow Pre-Raphaelite’s poem, “The Child Jesus”. Although the poem was first published in *The Germ* only in 1850, it is obvious from one of Rossetti’s letters[72] that it had already been completed and shown to the other brethren by September 1848. The poem, subtitled as ‘A Record Typical of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries’, presents five imaginary incidents of Christ’s childhood; events which might have pre-figured some of the scenes of his Passion and Crucifixion[73] . Millais’ picture is based exactly on the same idea. Inventing a

[71] The suggestion comes from W. H. Hunt. Cf. William Holman Hunt, 1:194–5.

[72] Rossetti to his mother, September 1848. *Letters*, 1:44.

[73] Besides the reliance on invented pre-figurative incidents of the childhood of Christ—a full description and interpretation of which can be found in Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 141–7—Collinson’s poem and Millais’s painting are also similar in their very detailed, precise and colourful presentation of background details. At the same time, the strong sentimentality, verging on mawkishness, is unique to Collinson’s work.

John Everett Millais: *Christ in the House of His Parents*
86,4x139,7 cm. Oil on canvas. 1849/1850. London, Tate Gallery

scene which might have occurred in the life of the Holy Family, and employing traditional symbols and other pictorial references, he made the scene a visual prefiguration of the Crucifixion.

As a true Pre-Raphaelite, following the jointly set principles, Millais aimed at an overall accuracy in presentation. As the picture depicts a scene not described in the Bible, he concentrated not on literary, but on visual authenticity. Accordingly, his picture was modelled on a real carpenter's shop with all its indispensable accessories, and showed real carpentry work being done. Furthermore, a real carpenter was employed to pose for the figure of Joseph to have the right musculature in the painting. Millais's overwhelming realism in presentation went so far that Joseph is shown with dirty fingernails and frostbitten toes. Similarly, all the members of the Holy Family appear as ordinary people without any hint of idealisation, and with no concealment of the unattractive features. In this respect Millais' approach was definitely far beyond the Nazarene-inspired sentiment of Herbert or Madox Brown, and, given the coarseness of the subject, the Pre-Raphaelite principle of truthful presentation became provokingly apparent, even shocking to the audience. If Rossetti's image of the Virgin Mary in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* was not holy enough to the refined taste of the Victorian spectators, Millais' figures were bound to be seen 'ugly' and 'hideous'. In his famous article published in *Household Words* Charles Dickens described the figure of Christ as "a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-haired boy in a night-gown" and Mary as a "woman so horrible in her ugliness that ... she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or in the lowest gin-shop in England"[74] .

[74] In Grylls, 34–5.

Most of the critics could easily identify the main reason for the instinctive aversion the picture evoked. As *The Times* expressed it: "... the attempt to associate the holy family with the meanest details of a carpenter's shop with no conceivable omission of misery, dirt or even disease, all finished with the same loathsome minuteness, is disgusting"[75]. The *Blackwood's Magazine* shared this view, saying that "... we can hardly imagine anything more ugly, graceless, and unpleasant than Mr Millais' picture of 'Christ in the Carpenter's Shop'. Such a collection of splay feet, puffed joints, and misshapen limbs was assuredly never before made within so small a compass."[76] Another art-critic and Royal Academician also plainly condemned the painting, writing that

> Mr Millais ... has been most successful in the least dignified features of his presentment, and in giving to the higher forms, characters, and meanings a circumstantial art-language, from which we recoil with loathing and disgust. There are many to whom his work will seem a pictorial blasphemy. Great imaginative talents have here been perverted to the use of an eccentricity both lamentable and revolting.[77]

Besides the outrage evoked by the picture's overwhelming realism, the accusations of Tractarianism and the objection to High Church symbolism were relatively rare and insignificant in the case of this painting, though Millais relied on such symbols just as much as Hunt or Rossetti. Some of the symbols are actually the same, like the bowl of water carried by the young John the Baptist to wash Christ's hands with, or the dove in the background. And just like in Rossetti's *The Girlhood*, all the symbols are naturally integrated into the depicted scene. The ladder, the triangular set-square, or the nails are, for example, objects which can be found in any carpenter's shop, and the sheep and the well are parts of an ordinary landscape background. Even Mary's kneeling position, borrowed from the traditional Crucifixion presentations, seems natural in the depicted situation.

Despite, however, the obvious use of High Church symbolism the few cries of Puseyism were aroused rather by the picture's "suggestion of ascetic mortification"[78]. Seen as indecently indulging in the presentation of bodily pain and the affected pity over it, the painting was found repulsive. This objection clearly took Millais by surprise, though he would have thought of it, if he had been more aware of the current attitude toward such religious issues. The hostile reception of Hurrell Froude's *Remains* in 1838 gave a clear indication of the general public repugnance against such works. Published by Newman after Froude's death, the first volume of *Remains* consisted of his journal, his private letters and sayings, which revealed that behind the appearance of a "charming and vivacious" young man there existed "a nervous and overscrupulous, introspective and morbid" person, who was constantly "battling against the flesh, sleeping on the floor, and troubled with dreams and anxious mortifications"[79]. What was seen by Newman and many of his Tractarian colleagues as a welcome contemporary manifestation of the ancient sincerity and submissive devotion, simply affronted the decent public as revoltingly distasteful.

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[75] In Lottes, 89; and Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 42.
[76] In Millais, 37.
[77] Ibid.
[78] In *Early Victorian England*, 162.
[79] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 1:173.

Though asceticism was becoming more common with the spread of Catholicism and the revival of the medieval spirit, Millais himself was never attracted to it. Writing in 1851 in a letter to Mrs Combe he expressed his disapproval of his artist friend Collins' recent self-restraints, ridiculing him for "... mortifying the flesh and becoming so much of an ascetic"[80]. Collins' asceticism went so far that he was even accused of "keeping a whip and being indulged in private flagellations"[81].

Though rejecting Collins' extreme asceticism, Millais, who is also said to have attended Tractarian services[82], was pleased to join him in his visits to Wells Street Church regarding the service there as "better performed than any other"[83]. The two young men also followed with excited attention the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Cardinal Wiseman's appointment as head of it on 30th September 1850. They were prompted to attend a service to hear the second discourse of the Cardinal by Millais' brother's account of his experience of the first. As Millais wrote he expected the Cardinal to preach "in his mitre and full vestment" and also counted on "a great display of pomp as well as knowledge"[84], which shows that his fascination with the issue was more than mere curiosity or a desire to see a display of ecclesiastic glamour. Nevertheless, it seems that it never occurred to him to convert to Roman Catholicism, as he clearly denied its possibility in some of his letters[85]. As compared to his friends, his self-assurance and calmness in religious matters is quite unique, and is probably responsible for the ease, composure, and sometimes even gentle humour with which he could talk about religious matters. And though he lacked not only Collins' devout asceticism, but also Hunt's later prophetic religiosity, he was the one who could provide religious reassurance and wise counsel to Collins in 1853, when the latter suffered from severe doubts. As he wrote to Collins, he was convinced that

> ... it is very rare that very great men are the steadiest Christians, for they are conversant with all existing arguments against Scripture, which are very strong as everything belonging to the devil surely is. ... There is that great mistake in all believers that they do not seem to understand how it is that people doubt. The fact is that they do ..., but [it is only the] entire trust in Christ ... what is principally required of us.[86]

In view of Millais' words it seems that Quentin Bell is right assuming that Millais "... was, perhaps in a rather vague way, sincerely religious, and so had painted a realistic religious work without ... seeing what risks he incurred and without realising that he might be starting a revolution more shocking and more iconoclastic than anything so far dreamt of by his Brethren"[87].

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[80] Millais to Mrs Combe, September 1851. In Millais, 75.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Bendiner, 71.
[83] In Millais' letter to Mrs Combe, 2 December 1850. In Millais, 44.
[84] In Millais' letter to Mrs Combe, 16 December 1850. Ibid, 47.
[85] Ibid, and in Millais' letter to Mrs Combe, 15 February 1853. Ibid, 106.
[86] Millais to Charles Collins, 1853. Ibid, 119–20.
[87] Bell, 72.

Further Accusations: Millais' Works in the Early 1850s

A. P. Oppé's claim that after the repeated newspaper clamour in 1851 both Millais and Hunt refrained from religious subjects[88] is clearly mistaken. Hunt, as it will be seen, was getting more and more involved in religion and in religious presentations, and was already occupied with plans to travel to the Holy Land in search of a better knowledge of the Biblical settings. For a while Millais also considered joining him, but finally abandoned the idea being put off by the possible dangers and inconveniences[89], and probably also by the fact that his commitment to overall authenticity was not so overwhelming as that of Hunt.

Nevertheless, for a few more years, until about the middle of the 1850s, religious subjects for possible pictures were constantly on his mind. A design was made for a painting referred to as the *Repentant Sinner Laying his Head on Christ's Bosom*[90], and another for *The Disentombment of Queen Matilda*, none of which were finally put to canvas. The latter, which presents how the Calvinists violated the tomb of Matilda of Flanders after taking Caen in 1562, shows again how little did Millais at first heed the strong, current feeling of anti-Catholicism. As the design reveals, his sympathies were obviously with the shocked and praying Catholic nuns, who are likened to Christ, the saints, and the martyrs, all shown in the picture in the background wall decorations. Though his immediate source was literary, Agnes Strickland's biography of Queen Matilda in her *Lives of the Queens of England*, the subject had obvious religious overtones. As Strickland describes, "...[the Calvinists] considered the destruction of church ornaments and monumental sculpture a service to God quite sufficient to atone for the sacrilegious violence of defacing a temple consecrated to his worship and rifling the sepulchres of the dead"[91]. Though as Owen Chadwick points out, "... the altered popular attitudes to the Reformation by deepening popular sympathy for the middle ages", and the "... rising sentiment for monastic ruins generate[d] no love for a Reformation which ruined monasteries"[92] , if finished in oil and exhibited to the general public, *The Disentombment* would most likely have been received with similar hostility as *The Carpenter's Shop* had been. But it seems that the merciless attacks on his first major religious work made Millais more cautious, and discouraged him from completing and exhibiting a picture so easy to find fault with. Instead, he turned to more neutral religious subjects, which offered rather moral than denominational issues for consideration.

He intended to paint a picture on the theme of the Flood, a detailed description of which can be found in an early letter sent to Mrs Combe[93]. It is revealed by the description of the planned picture and by the study *The Eve of the Deluge* made for it in 1850 that already at this early stage Millais was ready to part with the early Pre-Raphaelite reliance on symbolism, much earlier, therefore, than Rossetti. At the same time, he wished to be as strongly moralising as Hunt was to become later on, deciding to present the ignorant happiness of a company gathered for a wedding celebration in the foreground of his pic-

[88] In *Early Victorian England*, 163.

[89] He wrote in a letter to Mrs Combe on 15th October, 1851: "I like not the prospect of scorpions and snakes, with which I foresee we shall get closely intimate. Painting on the river's bank (Nile or Jordan) as I have done here will be next to throwing oneself into the alligators' jaws..." In Millais, 65.

[90] In Millais, 66.

[91] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 247.

[92] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 1:174.

[93] 28 ? 1851. In Millais, 52–3.

ture, with the threatening rain and flood seen through a window in the background. As Millais wrote his intention was "... to affect those who may look on it with the awful uncertainty of life and the necessity of always being prepared for death"[94] . Whether this was under the influence of Hunt and through Hunt that of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* is hard to decide, but Millais associated the object of his planned picture with that of a sermon, finding the pictorial presentation even more effective for being able to put "... all at once ... before the spectator without [the] trouble of realisation often lost in the effort of reading or listening"[95].

Although *The Eve of the Deluge* was never executed in oil, Millais' second Biblical painting, *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*, based on the same Biblical story, was completed by the Royal Academy exhibition in 1851. Millais at that time even thought of painting a pendant to it, which was to be called *The Dove's First Flight*, but the idea of this latter work was again eventually abandoned. What is known today as *The Return of the Dove* is a much simplified version of the original concept conceived by Millais. He intended to show three figures; "Noah praying, with the olive branch in his hand", a "young girl ... looking at Noah" with "the dove in [her] breast", and another girl "kissing the bird's breast"[96]. In the background several birds and animals were to be shown, one of which now forms prey to the other. The final version, however, presents only the young, female figures, one holding the dove in one hand and the olive branch in the other, and the other one kissing the breast of the bird. The omission of the figure of Noah and the background animals was probably due to Millais' determination to send the picture in by all means for the exhibition in April 1851, but other considerations might also have contributed to the simplification of the original design. As it turns out from one of Millais' letters written to Hunt[97], the picture was intended for Thomas Combe, with whom the painter had formed a strong, friendly relationship by that time. Already possessing Hunt's *Druids*, Combe wanted to have a choice collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, thus he had bought *The Return of the Dove* even before it was shown to the public, and after the exhibition he also bought Collins' *Convent Thoughts*. This latter work was also well known to him, since Collins painted all the flowers of his picture from nature in Combe's garden at Botley. As the first three Pre-Raphaelite religious pictures of his collection, the *Druids*, *The Return*, and *Convent Thoughts* form a favourable unity both in size and subject matter, which might have already been thought of by the artists concerned during their work in progress. Especially Millais' and Collins' pictures are close in concept, both presenting secluded incidents, where emphasis is laid on pious contemplation rather than on action. While Millais' girls in *The Return* contemplate the olive branch and the promise of divine salvation it carries, Collins' picture shows a nun meditating on a passion flower and on Christ's passion it stands for. The three works together can be seen as a sort of triptych—with the *Druids* as the central panel—presenting the three theological virtues; faith (*Convent Thoughts*), hope (*The Return*), and charity (*The Druids*). Even the dominant colours of the paintings correspond with these abstract qualities; white, green, and red, respectively.

[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] In a letter to Mr. Combe, 28 January 1851. Ibid, 48.
[97] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 88.

Unaware of Millias' deal with Combe over *The Return*, Ruskin also expressed his wish to buy the painting, and much regretted being late with his offer. His whole-hearted admiration for the picture is manifested in the article he sent to *The Times*, praising the painting to the utmost[98]. Nevertheless, even this plain, unsophisticated image was seen by some as propagandistic, and Millais himself regarded as a Roman Catholic by reason of it. As he reported in a letter written in November 1851, he was amazed to encounter such an interpretation of his work:

> My brother was with us today, and told me that Dr. Hesse, of Leyton College, understood that I was a Roman Catholic (having been told so), and that my picture 'The Return of the Dove to the Ark' was emblematical of the return of all of us to that religion—a very convenient construction to put upon it! I have no doubt that likewise they will turn the subject [*The Huguenot*] I am at present about to their advantage ...[99]

As it will be seen later on, the subject of *The Huguenot* was so obviously anti-Catholic that this work, at last, avoided such arbitrary interpretations.

Real Tractarian Spirit: Collins' *Convent Thoughts*

Collins' attachment to Tractarianism was much stronger and more obvious than that of Millais. Though he was never accepted as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he had always been regarded as one of its closest associates. His friendship connected him most to Millais and Hunt, but he was also a frequent visitor at the Rossettis', being in love for a while with the pious Maria Rossetti. He was well known among his friends not only for his asceticism, but also for his attraction to High Church ritualism and piety.

Convent Thoughts clearly shows his High Church inclinations. It dangerously skirts Mariolatry, despite the fact that it presents a nun and not the Virgin Mary herself. The entire concept of the painting is based on the traditional symbolism which has always been associated with Mary; the enclosed garden, the host of different lilies, and the dominant white colour; all referring to the purity of the body as well as the soul, here both of Mary and of the nun. The manuscript book held in the her hand is open at illuminations; one of them presents the Virgin Mary, which provides a more obvious pictorial bond between her and Mary. Besides purity, sacrifice is the other main theme of the picture, correspondingly the other illumination visible in the book shows Christ on the cross. The passion flower, which is in itself regarded as a complex symbol of Christ's Passion[100],

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[98] He writes: "... let the spectator … contemplate … the tender and beautiful expression of the stooping figure, and the intense harmony of colour in the exquisitely finished draperies; let him note also the ruffling of the plumage of the wearied dove, one of its feathers falling on the arm of the figure which holds it, and another to the ground where, by-the-bye, the hay is painted not only elaborately but with the most perfect ease of touch and mastery of effect, especially to be observed because this freedom of execution is a modern excellence, which it has been inaccurately stated that these painters despise, but which, in reality, is one of the remarkable distinctions between their painting and that of Van Eyck or Memling…" In *Culture and Society*, 157.

[99] To Mrs Combe, 22 November 1851. In Millais, 73.

[100] The petals of the flower are said to stand for the shrine, the stamens for the nails, the claspers for the whip, and the stigmas for the crown of thorns.

Charles Allston Collins: *Convent Thoughts*
82,6x57,8 cm. Oil on canvas. 1850/1851. Oxford, Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum

reinforces this reference. 'Sicut Lilium', says the inscription on the frame, connecting the two themes by referring to the Song of Solomon: "As the lily among thorns" (2:2).

To make the contemplation of a nun the subject of his painting was in itself a brave decision by Collins. Nunneries, just like monasteries, were dissolved in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth by the introduction of a law which asserted that such institutions were contrary to the law of Christ. And though, as Owen Chadwick points out[101] , by the nineteenth century no one really believed this claim to be true, the re-establishment of monasteries was generally regarded as undesirable, since monks and nuns were thought to be popish. It was again the rise of the Oxford Movement that called forth the revival of monasteries and nunneries. The first person to take a vow was a lady, Marian Hughes, who, influenced by Newman's writing on the desire for a sisterhood in the Church of England, decided on this momentous step in 1841. The first community of sisters, Park Village West, was founded three years later, undertaking such tasks as the education of pauper children, and providing shelter for orphans. Within a few years several similar sisterhoods were established. Despite, however, the useful services they were dedicated to do, they were not accepted with whole-hearted approval. Suspicion of Romanism grew as many of the newly ordained nuns and monks embraced Roman Catholicism after all. Newman's entire Littlemore community converted to Catholicism in November 1845, which, of course, intensified the general outcry against both Tractarianism and monasticism.

Collins' *Convent Thoughts* thus touched upon a sensitive issue, and heightened the accusations of Romanism against the Pre-Raphaelites. And though Collins never became a Roman Catholic, the High Church influence in his case was undeniable. As Bickley describes, Collins' "... piety, which was that of the Oxford Movement, is the predominant element in the most remarkable of [his] pictures; and it is in them, if anywhere in the work of the English Pre-Raphaelites, that a spirit really akin to Overbeck's is to be found"[102] .

Obviously, such an overt Tractarian spirit could not bring wide success. David Marson aptly expressed the general attitude in his article published in 1852 in *The British Quarterly Review*:

> It is in Mr Collins' choice of subjects generally that we discern something of that paltry affection for middle age ecclesiasticism with which the Pre-Raphaelites as a body have been too hastily charged. ... Puseyite clergymen may like such artistic helps towards teaching young ladies the way to a blessed life; but most decidedly the public is right in declaring that though the painting were never so good, it will not stand that sort of thing ... [103]

The harsh criticism and firm rejection deeply disillusioned Collins. He soon abandoned painting altogether, devoting his artistic talent rather to literature.

[101] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 1:505, 507.
[102] Bickley, 190.
[103] In Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 44.

The Only Catholic Convert: James Collinson

As a matter of fact, there was a real Catholic convert in the Brotherhood. Not long before he was accepted as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had James Collinson, being encouraged by Cardinal Newman, converted to Roman Catholicism. However, he soon reverted to Anglicanism for the sake of Christina Rossetti, so that he could be engaged to her. But his religious uncertainties did not cease to trouble him, so in 1850 he made the final decision to join the Church of Rome, resigning at the same time both his membership of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and his engagement with Christina Rossetti.

The way the Pre-Raphaelites as a body treated Collinson's religious hesitations and consequent decisions is revealing of their own approach to religious issues. First of all, it is noteworthy that Collinson was accepted as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in spite of his Catholicism. Though Christopher Wood suggests[104] that he was invited to join only because of his engagement to Christina Rossetti, it seems unlikely that Hunt would have accepted exclusively personal reasons to agree. According to Hunt's recollection it was on Rossetti's initiative that Collinson was offered to become a member, as he regarded Collinson as a "born stunner"[105], and though Hunt was more reserved in his praise, he admitted that Collinson's *The Charity Boy's Début* shown at the Royal Academy in 1847 displayed "an honest idea" and that its "pencilling was phenomenally painstaking throughout"[106]. Thus the decision to admit Collinson as a member was based as much on artistic considerations as on personal ones. Collinson's Catholicism was well known to the other members[107], yet there is no indication that anyone would have opposed Collinson's membership on religious grounds. His Catholicism was a subsidiary issue, which had nothing to do with the aims and principles of the Pre-Raphaelites as an association of artists. Similarly, though Brown was rejected partly because Hunt feared the Nazarene-inspired Catholic spirit of his paintings, it is also evident that he had strong aversions to Brown's recent works for their artistic deficiencies too. As he recalled in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, when he first visited Brown's studio in August, 1848, just a few days before the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he was entirely disappointed seeing Brown's *Chaucer*, which "... stood before [him] as a recent mark of academic ingenuity which Pre-Raphaelitism in its larger power of enfranchisement was framed to overthrow"[108].

In view of the religious indifference of his fellow brethren it is surprising that, when he eventually embraced Catholicism, Collinson felt obliged to resign his status as a Pre-Raphaelite Brother. As he wrote in a letter to Rossetti in May, 1850:

> I feel that as a sincere Catholic I can no longer allow myself to be called a P.R.B., in the brotherhood sense of the term. ... Perhaps this determination to withdraw myself from the Brotherhood is altogether a matter of feeling. I am uneasy about it. I love and reverence God's faith, and I love His Holy Saints, and I gratify a little vanity, I am helping to dishonour them and lower their merits, if not absolutely to bring their sanctity into ridicule.[109]

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[104] Wood, 18.
[105] Cf. William Holman Hunt, 1:129, 161.
[106] Ibid, 161.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid, 126.
[109] In Larg, 120; and Lottes 96.

The fact that Collinson found Catholicism incompatible with his membership strongly suggests that, though initially his fellow artists did not object to his Catholicism, there was no sympathising among them with the Church of Rome despite their strengthening links with the High Church Movement. Collinson probably also realised that the charges of Romanism would provoke an ardent denial of it on behalf of his friends, and that it would be disturbing to his religious conscience. So after the first attacks on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood he came to the conclusion that he must "cease consciously, as a Catholic, to assist in spreading the artistic opinions of those who are not"[110]. A. C. Faxon suggests[111] that Collinson might also have been troubled by the accusations of sacrilege made against the Pre-Raphaelites for their various down-to-earth portrayals of the Holy Family, which might be supported by his words quoted above. These charges obviously concerned him, since, as Ronald Parkinson observes, the only significant changes he made on the final version of his best known painting, *The Renunciation of Queen Elizabeth of Hungary,* as compared to an earlier detailed study, was the "... greater concealment of certain of the figure's anatomy with drapery—particularly the covering of the soles of the feet of the kneeling figure in the left foreground"[112], probably as the result of the hostile criticism of Millais' *The Carpenter's Shop*.

The Renunciation was produced during the time of Collinson's religious hesitations, and was finally finished in 1851 to be exhibited at the Portland Gallery. Alastair Grieve suggests that Collinson probably started working on the theme as he "... must have felt the ... portrayal of the renunciation of human love and self-control through suffering as strongly applicable to his own problems"[113]. The story of Queen Elizabeth of Hungary had been recapitulated by Montalembert's *Life of St Elizabeth of Hungary* (1836) and Charles Kingsley's *The Saint's Tragedy* (1848), both of which could have inspired the painting. In the exhibition catalogue a long section of Montalembert's work was cited, relating the incident depicted by Collinson, which tells how Elizabeth, being taken to mass, removed her crown and prostrated herself before the crucifix to the great astonishment of her companions. The decision to take the piety and devotion of a thirteenth-century Catholic saint as the subject of his painting and to complement it with a quotation from the book of an advocate of Roman Catholicism were clear signs of Collinson's Catholic sympathies.

Given his final decision to adhere to his chosen religion, Collinson's departure from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and his successive withdrawal from painting probably brought great relief to most of his fellow brothers, since it made the denial of the charges of Romanism much easier than it would have been in the case of Collinson's membership. And, as it soon turned out, their dissociation from the Church of Rome was vital for ensuring the support of important new patrons and the desired turn in the public's attitude towards them. In 1851 at the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy William Dyce, one of the few artists sympathetic to the young Pre-Raphaelites, drew John Ruskin's attention to Millais' *The Return of the Dove*, telling the critic that the picture exemplified just what Ruskin was advocating in his books. At the same time, feeling devastated by and desperate with the ceaseless storm of hostility against their works, Millais and Hunt asked their

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[110] In Grylls, 39; and Lottes, 96.
[111] Faxon, 230 n 5.
[112] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 250.
[113] Ibid.

poet friend, Coventry Patmore to try and persuade Ruskin to write a few words to *The Times* in their defence. Ruskin was won over, and as a result, his letter to *The Times* appeared on 13th May 1851, in which he devoted honest attention to the Pre-Raphaelites and their works, trying to refute some of the accusations poured out against them. A second, more detailed letter followed on 30th the same month, elaborating on some of the ideas referred to in the previous letter mostly concentrating on the accuracy of Pre-Raphaelite presentation and the intention to "... draw either what they see, or what they suppose might have been the actual facts of the scene they desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture-making"[114]. Regarding it as a basically agreeable principle, he could overlook some of the Pre-Raphaelites' 'minor errors', like, for example, the undesirable "commonness of feature" in many of the figures depicted.

He was, however, relentless in finding no excuse for a possible leaning towards Romanism. In his first letter he clearly isolated his defence from a potential encouragement of Romanism or Tractarianism, saying that "...No one who has met with any of my writings will suspect me of desiring to encourage them in their Romanist and Tractarian tendencies"[115], and in the second letter he informed his readers with relief that he gained assurance that such suppositions were unfounded: "I had, indeed, something to urge respecting what I supposed to be Romanising tendencies of the painters; but I have received a letter assuring me that I was wrong in attributing to them anything of the kind."[116]

A letter of thanks was sent to Ruskin, which led to personal acquaintance between the critic and the artists. Ruskin gradually became an enthusiastic advocate of the Pre-Raphaelites, their most important patron, commissioner of several works, and eventually a friend mainly to Hunt and Rossetti. Given his close relationship with the artists, his views on religious art strongly affected their religious pictures, and given his status as the most acknowledged contemporary authority on art, his writings played an important role in the general approach to religious art in Britain, exercising a significant influence on the concept and nature of contemporary religious painting[117] . His view, at the same time, was not as consistent as it may be suggested by the self-assured, authoritative style of his writings. He himself was prey to severe religious doubts, which even had implications for the nature of nineteenth-century religious art in England.

[114] In *Culture and Society*, 152.
[115] Ibid, 151.
[116] Ibid, 158.
[117] Ruskin's view of art was influential in Hungary, too, however, some forty years were needed for his ideas to be transmitted. The writings which most significantly contributed to the popularisation of Ruskin's works in Hungary are Sarolta Geőcze's translation of *The Stones of Venice* (1896), her book on Ruskin's life and work *Ruskin élete és tanításai* (1903), and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch's *Ruskinról és az angol preraffaelitákról* (1905).

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: JOHN RUSKIN ON THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGIOUS ART

Ruskin was, in many ways, a typical Victorian, whose unique intellect and extraordinary sensitivity reveal a world of desperate search for truth, and a person constantly aspiring for stability, for certainty of understanding, and a desire to order and better his world. For Ruskin this search basically meant a mission to be realised in the aesthetic and moral education of the people; he wished to enable them to appreciate God's glorious creation by cultivating their senses. Art and religion became the most decisive issues in his life, two interdependent forces, continually modifying or reinforcing each other.

Ruskin was raised, like many of his contemporaries, in a deeply religious family, in a home of serene morality and sense of duty. His mother, a firm Evangelical lady, who destined her son to the church even before his birth, implanted in him a profound knowledge of the Bible as well as a horror of Sundays, which were associated in the young boy's mind with painfully dull sermons and equally painful cold meal for lunch. The Evangelical strictness of his mother denied him a happy childhood free from care, and embedded in him an oppressive and prevailing sense of guilt, making him pray to God as a child that no day should pass without its proper self-denial. His inherited conformity led him to writing abstracts of the sermons he heard as well as entertaining the guests of his parents at the age of seven with his own noble preaching: "People be dood. If you are dood, Dod will love you; if you are not dood, Dod will not love you. People be dood."[118]

His father, whose hard work in the sherry trade provided the financial background for the family, did not much influence the religious education of his son. Nevertheless, he also greatly contributed to the early development of his son's character. As he was a great admirer of art and an enthusiastic collector himself, he took his family to long journeys in the country each year, visiting all the worthy places and stately homes on their way. The beauty of the countryside as well as the works of art encountered on these journeys formulated Ruskin's love of nature and moulded his taste. The father's enthusiasm for art and the mother's strong religiosity affected most profoundly their son's future life and career. Ruskin's religious belief and his view of art soon became dependant on each other; so right from the very beginning changes in his conviction brought changes in his evaluation of art, and his aesthetic experiences also influenced his attitude to religion.

On one of his first visits to Italy in 1840 the young John Ruskin, just like his mother, regarded the deteriorating condition of the roads approaching Rome, as well as the dirty, idle villages in Northern Italy, as "the natural consequences of Popery", and he found that the Catholic Italians all looked like 'bandits' better not to be trusted[119]. As he later re-

[118] In Harrison, 11; and *Fors Clavigera*, 3:60.
[119] *Praeterita,* 2:12, 44, 75.

called his impressions of this journey he admitted that he had been as prejudiced in his approach to the newly encountered Catholic art as in his view of the country, so the art of the Papist Italians was treated with similar detest. He showed no genuine interest in the works of Fra Angelico, for example, or Perugino, and he despised St Peter's in Rome for the "clumsy dullness of the facade", and the "vile taste and vapid design of the interior"[120] with typical self-confidence. The ceremonials of the Catholic Church could not avoid his sharp criticism either. In *Praeterita* he describes how, after attending a mass in Savoy, he was filled with dismay by the 'false religious sentiments' based on the ceremonial[121], a similarly appalling experience to his strictly Protestant mind as the family's first attendance of a service by candlelight in England[122].

His admiration in art at that time was almost exclusively devoted to the works of J. M. W. Turner. In 1836, when Turner was attacked in *Blackwood's Magazine*, he wrote a vigorous defence of the artist. Later, in 1844, this so far unpublished article became the germ of his creed of art, *Modern Painters*. Mrs Ruskin's efforts to indoctrinate her son with firm Evangelical principles had not been in vain. The young Ruskin's view of the world was deeply determined by his religious conviction, and his enthusiasm for Turner and Turner's art corresponded well with his and his mother's belief. He regarded Turner as a great, even the greatest living artist, mainly because he presented even the tiniest particles of the natural world truthfully, in accordance with their God-given features. At that time Ruskin was mostly interested in landscapes, and he believed that the precise presentation of nature meant the advocacy and glorification of the divine perfection of God's creation. In Ruskin's opinion great works of art could be produced only by artists willing to subordinate their liking to the visible reality of the natural world.

In 1845 Ruskin's early preferences in religion as well as in art were seriously challenged. In the winter, while journeying on the Continent for the first time without his parents, he read Rio's *Poeise Chretienne* and Lord Lindsay's *The History of Christian Art*, and, as he recalls it in *Praeterita*, "the steadily read chapters, morning and evening, with the continual comparison between the Protestant and Papal services every Sunday abroad, made me feel that all dogmatic teaching was a matter of chance and habit, and that the life of religion depended on the force of faith, not the terms of it"[123].

This revelation and Rio's and Lindsay's enthusiastic words about early Italian art enabled him to discover another type of beauty based on a different type of truthfulness. His independence of parental supervision might have been as liberating to him as Rio's and Lindsay's words, and as a result his accounts of this visit reflect a very different view and approach to religious art from the one he had propagated before. His letter to his father sent from Florence reveals the decisive change in his liking: "There is the *Madonna* by Cimabue, which all Florence followed with trumpets to the church, ... there is the great *Crucifixion* of Giotto, there, finally, are three perfectly preserved works of Fra Angelico, the centre one of which is as near heaven as human hand or mind will ever or can ever go."[124]

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[120] Ibid, 44–5.
[121] Ibid, 20.
[122] *Praeterita*, 1: 96.
[123] *Praeterita*, 2:159–60.
[124] In Rosenberg, 3.

Ruskin's new enthusiasm for early religious art is immediately reflected in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, published shortly in 1846. He praises Angelico's *Annunciation* in the sacristy of St. Maria Novella as "the most perfect type of its pure ideal"[125] as well as his *Crucifixion* in the Florence Academy for being "as precious in colour as in all other qualities"[126]. Speaking generally about the "earlier and mightier painters of Italy" he says that they worked

> ... with the childlike, unpretending simplicity of all earnest men; they did what they loved and felt; they sought what the heart naturally seeks, and gave what it most gratefully receives; and I look to them as in all points of principle (not, observe, of knowledge or empirical attainment) as the most irrefragable authorities precisely on account of the child-like innocence, which never deemed itself authoritative, but acted upon desire, and not upon dicta, and sought for sympathy, not for admiration.[127]

The emphasis is shifted from truthfulness to reality, to the sincerity of devotion, from the admiration of God-given nature to that of God-given faith.

As it has already been referred to, by that time Ruskin was not the only person in England who highly appreciated early Renaissance art. Nevertheless, as far as the general public and its taste were concerned, Ruskin's words were not yet familiar. And since the criticism of contemporary artists and the established schools and masters in the first volume of *Modern Painters* aroused fierce debates, the second in the series also received a good deal of attention, and became widely read and disputed. Thus, the book became influential considering its revaluation of the early masters as well as its high praise of a so far not much known sixteenth-century Italian artist, Tintoret. Tintoret's *Entombment* in the Gallery of Parma is described by Ruskin as a work "whose sublimity of conception and grandeur of colour are seen in the highest perfection, by their opposition to the morbid sentimentalism of Correggio"[128], and his *Annunciation* is singled out as one of the greatest achievements of religious art.[129]

His admiration for Tintoret's *Annunciation* originated in his discovery of the 'typical character' of the painting, namely that many of its details implied more than the obvious meaning. As he realised: "The ruined house is the Jewish dispensation, that obscurely arising in the dawning of the sky is the Christian; but the corner-stone of the old building remains, though the builder's tools lie idle beside it, and the stone which the builders refused is become the Head-stone of the Corner."[130]

Among the contemporary artists the volume probably exerted the greatest influence on Holman Hunt. As he wrote in his memoir: "I had great delight in skimming over a certain book, *Modern Painters*, by a writer calling himself an Oxford Graduate; it was lent to me only for a few hours, but, by Jove! passages in it made my heart thrill. He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read."[131] And, as he added in a

[125] *Modern Painters*, 2:323.
[126] Ibid, 368.
[127] Ibid, 197.
[128] Ibid, 323–4.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] William Holman Hunt, 1:90.

conversation with Millais: Ruskin's descriptions of Venetian painting make "you see them with your inner sight, and you feel that the men who did them had been appointed by God, like old prophets, to bear a sacred message."[132] The prophetic vocation of the artist, as it will be seen, was assumed by Hunt as a principle for life.[133]

Ruskin's analysis of the symbolism of Tintoret's art also decisively impressed Hunt. He resolved on creating a similar type of pre-figurative symbolism as the one applied in Tintoret's *Annunciation*, wishing to replace the old symbols, which by that time had become inaccessible to the spectators, with new, more easily understandable ones. Ruskin's disapproval of the presentation of scenes of torture and bodily pain, and his consequent denunciation of such pictorial subjects as 'the massacre of the Innocents' or even the Crucifixion might have been likewise influential, contributing to Hunt's individual approach to these topics; his *The Shadow of Death* (1873) being a unique presentation of the Crucifixion, and *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1887) an untraditional elaboration of the massacre theme.

It is not surprising that Ruskin was mistakenly thought to be a Roman Catholic or at least a Tractarian by some of his readers. As it has already been mentioned, the author of the book was named as 'a Graduate of Oxford', and since Oxford was the stronghold of the Tractarian movement it necessarily brought with it such associations. On the other hand, Ruskin's conviction that great art could be produced only by pious men, whose works were, therefore, the manifestations of their devotion, obviously meant that his book was concerned as much with religion as with art. In addition, Ruskin propagated the works of such painters as Giotto and Angelico, who obviously worked in the spirit of the Roman Catholic denomination. And though it is very difficult to assess the real extent of Ruskin's sympathies with Roman Catholicism, the beauty and simplicity of the early Italian paintings had surely dealt a severe blow to his self-assured Protestantism. From this time on his public and private writings often reveal contradictions, reflecting maybe his rising uncertainties in some matters, or maybe his hesitation to reveal his leanings at a time when Catholic sympathisers were subjected to relentless hostility.

When writing to the public, Ruskin manifested firm and intolerant Protestant bigotry. In a pamphlet called "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds" published in 1851, he vehemently urged the Church of England to unite and take her stand against the growing influence of Rome in England, and against Papal Aggression. In his books published not long after the second volume of *Modern Painters*, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849 and in *The Stones of Venice* in 1851, he displays typical Evangelical zeal in despising the Romanist party. In *The Stones of Venice* he describes the Roman Catholic Church as "the Church of the unholy" and as "carnal and sensual in priesthood and in people"[134], and in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* he claims that "the entire doctrine and system of that [the Catholic] Church is in the fullest sense anti-Christian ... its lying and idolatrous Powers is the darkest plaque that ever held commission to hurt the earth. ... Exactly in

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ruskin's belief in the prophetic mission of the artist also strongly inspired the ideology and work of the Hungarian artists of the Gödöllő Colony. Sándor Nagy's *Mester, hol lakol?* (1899-1900) and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch's *Ego sum Via, Veritas et Vita* (1903) are the most known manifestations of this conviction. See: Gellér and Keserű, 100–1; Szabadi, 82, 86; and Sármány in *A magyar századforduló 1896–1914,* 34.

[134] *The Stones of Venice*, 3:105.

proportion to the sternness of our separation from them, will be not only the spiritual but the temporal blessings granted by God to this country."[135]

He also felt it necessary to dissociate his own enthusiasm for Gothic architecture from that of Pugin, who was not only the main advocate of the Gothic revival in architecture but also a propagator of England's return to the Church of Rome. He is regarded by Ruskin as "one of the smallest possible or conceivable architects"[136], on the face of it only for artistic reasons, but it is hard not to associate Ruskin's opinion with his current anti-Catholic prejudice. Pugin is condemned also for being an easy pray to Rome and letting himself beguiled by Catholic ceremonialism. In *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin shows no understanding whatsoever for Pugin's 'betrayal', saying that

> ... the basest [of all the fatigues] is the being lured into a trap by broken glass; to be blown into a change of religion by the whine of an organ-pipe; stitched into a new creed by gold threads on priests' petticoats; jangled into a change of conscience by the chimes of a belfry. I know nothing in the shape of error so dark as this, no imbecility so absolute, no treachery so contemptible.[137]

Nevertheless, the appeal of High Church and Catholic ceremonialism was on the rise, and Ruskin himself was strongly impressed by it, even if he did not give way to these feelings in his public writings. After attending a Catholic mass at Rouen in 1848 he wrote the following in his diary: "I felt convinced that freed from abuses, this mode of service was the right one, and that ... all these burning lamps and smoking censers, all these united voices and solemn organ peals had their right and holy use in this their service."[138] Ruskin's instinctive inclination to beauty and to the beautiful in art and in nature inevitably led to such an effect.

His letters also reveal that by the beginning of the 1850s his outwardly so unshakeable conviction had already been plagued by severe doubts. An expert geologist, he was well aware of the scientific discoveries of the time, which did a lot to undermine his religious self-assurance. As early as in 1851 he wrote in a letter to his friend, Henry Acland:

> You speak of Flimsiness of your own faith. Mine, which was never strong, is being beaten into mere gold leaf, and flutters in weak rags from the letter of its old forms; but the only letters it can hold by at all are the old Evangelical formulae. If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.[139]

The question of whether the Bible really manifested the word of God or not, caused grave concern for many of the confessed Protestants in the coming years, but the admittance of such doubts in public was yet unthinkable. However, it was not only the geological discoveries that weakened Ruskin's Protestantism. As during their short and sadly ill-fated marriage Ruskin's wife, Effie Gray soon had to realise, her mother-in-law's aggres-

[135] *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Notes, 203–4.
[136] *The Stones of Venice,* 1:379.
[137] Ibid, 378–9.
[138] In Rosenberg, 58.
[139] In Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 266.

sive anti-Catholicism also contributed to her husband's alienation from his inherited conviction. As she wrote in one of her letters: "Mrs Ruskin goes to such extremes of anti-popery that I am really afraid of her tormenting John into being more with them than he otherwise would."[140] For the family it was clear that Ruskin's mind was occupied with distressing questions right from the beginning of the 1850s, and that these thoughts were disclosed only to relatives and close friends. Ruskin spent long years trying to quiet his disturbed conscience, but to no avail. Nevertheless, he went on with his critical work and completed the third volume of *Modern Painters* by 1856.

This volume is the manifestation of Ruskin's desire to provide some kind of order amidst the swirl of questions incessantly disquieting him. His evaluation of religious art is still basically the same here as in the previous volume; he praises Angelico and Tintoret and ridicules Raphael and Veronese, but now he desperately attempts to give a systematic arrangement to his instinctive liking, creating categories and naming schools, trying to find a definite place in his system for every artist mentioned in the book.

Angelico, for example, is singled out as one of the greatest masters of the 'purist' school, who "by purity of life, habitual elevation of thought, and natural sweetness of disposition was enabled to express the sacred affections upon the human countenance as no one ever did before or since"[141]. However, to his advocacy of the 'purist' school Ruskin now adds that the kind of childlike simplicity and overwhelming concentration on the good and the spiritual can only produce a noble result when stemming from instinctive, sincere devotion, and also that the most satisfying works of the 'purist' school are the ones which present the heavenly world.

Again, Ruskin's private writings reveal a stronger departure from his earlier preference for the 'purist' school. His notes in his diary written at about the same time as the third volume of *Modern Painters* are much less enthusiastic about the 'purist' artists. As he says:

> Death, pain, and decay were for them only momentary accidents in the course of immortality. However admirable, their state of mind implies a degree of intellectual weakness. The great artist must not evade the fact of evil but gaze without fear into the darkness. He must not pass on the other side, looking pleasantly up to the sky, but ... stoop to the horror, and let the sky, for the present, take care of its own clouds.[142]

Tintoret is classified by Ruskin as a 'natural idealist', who is concerned with the good and the evil alike, concentrating not only on the divine but also on the human aspects of life. He stands, therefore, at the top of Ruskin's admiration, manifesting both his view of the necessarily religious nature of all great art as well as his increasing interest in man, who finally gets a place in Ruskin's view of God's creation.

This volume is the first in the series which contains references to the Pre-Raphaelites. It is interesting to see that despite the fact that the main inspiration of these young artists came clearly from the early Renaissance masters, Ruskin rejected associating them with the 'purist' school. He claimed that the Pre-Raphaelites were stern 'naturalists', falsely

[140] Ibid, 278 n.
[141] *Modern Painters*, 3: 70.
[142] In Rosenberg, 24.

regarded as purists only because most of the critics had mistaken their simple truthfulness towards nature with morbid 'purism'[143]. Praising the Pre-Raphaelites, he wrote that

> ... [the] perfect unison of expression, as the painter's main purpose, with the full and natural exertion of his pictorial power in the details of the work, is found only in the old Pre-Raphaelite periods, and in the modern Pre-Raphaelite school. In the works of Giotto, Angelico, Orcagna, John Bellini, and one or two more, these two conditions of high art are entirely fulfilled, so far as the knowledge of those days enabled them to be fulfilled, and in the modern Pre-Raphaelite school they are fulfilled nearly to the uttermost.[144]

And, as a contrast to the English Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin often refers to their German colleagues, the Nazarenes, whom he firmly rejects as affectionate, as 'purist' without the vital sincerity in their childishness, as false for displaying mere devotionalism but lacking technical perfection.[145]

Raphael and Veronese, on the other hand, are rejected just for the opposite reason: they are seen as masters parading technical excellence but neglecting the spirituality of intention, the sincerity of expression. Ruskin's famous paragraph on Raphael's cartoon of the *Charge to Peter* perfectly demonstrates his viewpoint as well as his witty style:

> Note, first, the bold fallacy—the putting *all* the Apostles there, a mere lie to serve the Papal heresy of the Petric supremacy, by putting them all in the background while Peter receives the charge, and making them all witnesses to it. Note the handsomely curled hair and neatly tied sandals of the men who had been out all night in the sea-mists and on the slimy decks. Note their convenient dresses for going a-fishing, with trains that lie a yard along the ground, and goodly fringes,—all made to match, an apostolic fishing costume. Note how Peter especially (whose chief glory was in his wet coat *girt* about him and naked limbs) is enveloped in folds and fringes, so as to kneel and hold his key with grace. No fire of coals at all, nor lonely mountain shore, but a pleasant Italian landscape, full of villas and churches, and a flock of sheep to be pointed at; and the whole group of Apostles, not round Christ, as they would have been naturally, but straggling away in a line, that they may all be shown. The simple truth is, that the moment we look at the picture we feel our belief of the whole thing taken away.[146]

Veronese's technical excellence, however, greatly disturbed his mind. As he became ever more engaged in studying beautiful works of art, Veronese's craftsmanship increasingly puzzled him. He regarded Veronese as a wholly impious artist, yet he could not but admire his religious paintings. At the same time, his scientific knowledge was steadily undermining his own religious conviction, so the core of his theory of art, that no great piece of art could be produced by impious men, also started losing ground.

The real climax to which all these feelings and ideas led came in 1858 in Turin, as Ruskin himself recalls it in *Fors Clavigera*:

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[143] *Modern Painters,* 3:73.

[144] Ibid, 29.

[145] His detest of the Nazarenes is even more emphatically expressed in his private writings. As he wrote in one of his letters in 1859: "Of the German art I have no words to express the badness. I never before conceived the possibility of vanity so naive and ludicrous existing in grown persons." (To Lady Waterford, 22 August 1859). In Bell, 40.

[146] *Modern Painters*, 3:52.

I was still in the bonds of my old Evangelical faith; and, in 1858, it was with me, Protestantism or nothing: the crisis of the whole turn of my thoughts being one Sunday morning, at Turin, when, from before Paul Veronese's *Queen of Sheba*, and under quite overwhelmed sense of his God-given power, I went away to a Waldensian chapel, where a little squeaking idiot was preaching to an audience of seventeen old women and three louts, that they were the only children of God in Turin, and that all the people in the world out of sight of Monte Viso, would be damned. I came out of the chapel, in sum of twenty years of thought, a conclusively unconverted man.[147]

Only such a double impact, religious and aesthetic experiences reinforcing each other, was strong enough finally to overcome Ruskin's deep-rooted Evangelical conviction. And though it ended his painful doubts and uncertainties, it also brought the devastating admission that the fundament of his life and work, all he had thought and said so far was false, and had to be re-thought and re-stated. As he wrote in his letters, he felt "an intense scorn for all [he] had hitherto done and thought", that he "was stunned—palsied—utterly helpless—under the weight of the finding out the myriad errors that had been taught" and that he really "did not know what to hope for".[148]

Relieved from the burden of his inherited Evangelicalism, Ruskin's attitude and tone became much freer and far more tolerant, condemning sectarianism and, most of all, Evangelical narrow-mindedness. He became, as he himself later explained in *Fors Clavigera*, an advocate of the religion of humanity according to which man's duty was not in the worship of God's divine creation but in "resolving to do his work well", for "not by our belief, but by what we have done, Christ will judge us"[149] . This new approach necessarily brought with it that the works of the 'purists' had to be of secondary value as compared to the Venetian masterpieces, since the former were not much concerned with man and his mortal life. In the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*, which was published in 1860, Ruskin obviously places man in the centre of the Creation, claiming that "... [the] soul of man is a mirror of the mind of God. A mirror dark, distorted, broken, ... yet in the main, a true mirror out of which alone, and by which alone, can we know anything of God at all."[150]

By this time the Bible, which had been regarded by the Protestant Church as the very word of God and the basic source of getting to know God, finally lost its former infallible authority. Science became an important disruptive force for religion; geological discoveries made the old interpretation of the Genesis unacceptable, and the studies of ancient texts also raised numerous questions not even thought of before. Back in 1854 Ruskin still condemned F. Maurice for his lecture in the Working Men's College in which Maurice questioned the validity of the Song of Deborah as the word of God.[151] But never after his religious unconversion in Turin could he think of the Bible in the traditional Protestant sense. According to Ruskin's new view of the Bible, it lent itself rather to a symbolic interpretation, and his new religious tolerance led him, for example, to help Henry Wentworth Monk with his publication of his highly individual interpretation of the Revelations called *A Simple Interpretation of the Revelation* in 1859.

[147] *Fors Clavigera,* 4:73.
[148] In Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 288.
[149] *Fors Clavigera,* 4:72.
[150] *Modern Painters,* 5:193.
[151] *Praeterita,* 3:21, and Earland, 153.

In 1862 Ruskin greeted Bishop Colenso's *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* with sincere approval, feeling relieved as well as assured in his own conclusions on the nature of the Bible. Bishop Colenso of Natal, who, like many others of the age, was brought up to believe in the literal truth and divine origin of every single word of the Bible, began to question its validity when he started translating and interpreting it to his Zulu congregation. His *Pentateuch* was inspired by C. W. Goodwin's essay "Mosaic Cosmogony"[152], and its claim that "... the first books of the Bible were not scientific history but only human utterances containing some divine truth"[153] served as a starting-point for his studies. Though, as Owen Chadwick observes, "many educated men accepted [this claim] as an axiom by 1860"[154], Colenso's book, being the statement of a consecrated bishop, incited a similar controversy within the Church of England as Gorham's statement on baptism had set off some ten years earlier. This time, however, the battle was fought between the stubborn, conservative members of the Anglican Church and the liberal representatives of the Broad Church party, the former group demanding Colenso's resignation, while the latter insisting on his remaining in office as an exemplary manifestation of the liberty and flexible approach of the Church of England.[155]

According to Landow, Ruskin read both *Essays and Reviews* and Colenso's *Pentateuch* when they were published in the early 1860s[156], but at the same time he accepts Prof. Van Akin Burd's suggestion that Ruskin never gave Colenso any public support[157]. However, in *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin openly condemns the Bishop of Oxford and all the orthodox clergy supporting him for their refusal to permit Colenso to preach in his diocese[158]. He accuses the bishops and the clergy of the Church of England of "preaching a false gospel for hire"[159], being convinced that with the scientific evidence at hand no educated man could sincerely maintain his view of the historical truth of the Bible. He himself felt that after these discoveries there was no way back to his old Evangelicalism saying: "I know no example in history of men once breaking away from their early beliefs, and returning to them again. The Unbeliever may be taught to believe—but not Julian the Apostate to return."[160]

The real extent of Ruskin's alienation from religion is hard to assess. It is often thought that he had never really lost his belief in the existence of God, but it seems that in the most desperate moments, he reached even this depth of hopelessness. As it is retold by William Holman Hunt, in one of their discussions in 1869 Ruskin actually said that the conviction he had arrived at led him "to conclude that there [was] no Eternal Father to whom we [could] look up, that man [had] no helper but himself". And he added that "this conclusion [brought] with it great unhappiness".[161] "I am led to regard the whole story of divine

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[152] It was published in *Essays and Reviews* in 1860.

[153] In Chapman, 282.

[154] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2: 76.

[155] The situation remained basically unsolved, Colenso returning to Natal in 1865, and getting on with his work there until his death in 1883, while in 1869 a new bishop was consecrated by the Church of South Africa, confirming the schism within the church.

[156] Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 271.

[157] Ibid, 271 n.

[158] *Fors Clavigera,* 3:13, 18–9.

[159] Ibid, 19, 118.

[160] In Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 289.

[161] In William Holman Hunt, 2:265.

revelation," said Ruskin, "as a mere wilderness of poetic dreaming, and, since it is proved to be so, it is time that all men of any influence should denounce the superstition which tends to destroy the experience of reason."[162]

Once again a sharp contradiction can be found between Ruskin's view admitted in private conversation and his public work. Hunt relates how astounded he was at Ruskin's confession, as he remembered his address of a contrary attitude made not long before their discussion. Ruskin's explanation shows how even a most 'earnest' Victorian might have felt obliged at times to make compromises:

> When first I was shaken in my faith, in speaking to a lady whose general judgment deserved the greatest respect, I declared that I must publish my change of views to the world. She retrained me from doing so, and made me promise not to act on this impulse for ten years. Being afterwards called upon to lecture, I had to debate with myself in what way I could satisfy the demand without breaking my compact, and I was led to allow the greatest latitude to the possibility that my views might not be permanent. It was wise to test this by reverting to my earlier theories, and I therefore determined to deliver one of my old lectures, which, when written, was heartfelt and thoroughly conscientious.[163]

As Ruskin professed in *Fors Clavigera*, his return to faith was related to an artistic experience:

> I went to Assisi, and there, ... I was allowed to have scaffolding erected above the high altar, ... and thence to draw what I could of the great fresco of Giotto, *The Marriage of Poverty and Francis*. And while making this drawing, I discovered the fallacy under which I had been tormented for sixteen years,—the fallacy that Religious artists were weaker than Irreligious. I found that all Giotto's 'weaknesses' (so called) were merely absences of material science, ... that the Religion in him, instead of weakening, had solemnised and developed every faculty of his heart and hand; and finally that his work, in all the innocence of it, was yet a human achievement and possession, quite above everything that Titian had ever done![164]

It is, of course, not accidental that Ruskin's return to faith was again complemented with an important artistic experience, but it seems to be an oversimplification to identify Ruskin's return to faith with his re-discovery of Giotto's greatness. Here again it has to be taken into consideration, that the letters of *Fors Clavigera* were written to the public to whom Ruskin did not necessarily want to reveal his most intimate thoughts and feelings, even though he was sometimes surprisingly outspoken about personal matters in them. But since Ruskin was obviously aware of the technical disadvantages of the early masters as compared to the later ones, as he clearly stated and referred to this in earlier writings often enough[165], it seems to be quite probable that there is again a divergence between his real feelings and public statements. It seems far more likely that the despair of facing total annihilation after death and the inability to deny the validity of many beautiful works of

[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid, 266–7.
[164] *Fors Clavigera*, 4:75.
[165] Cf. *Modern Painters,* 2:197; 3:29; and Ruskin's lecture "Pre-Raphaelitism".

art inspired by devotion and created in the name of God led him to a return to belief as well as to the renewed appreciation of devotional or, as he called it, 'purist' art.

In a private conversation with Hunt he ascribed his reconversion to "the unanswerable evidence of spiritualism."[166] As Landow explains, on 20th December 1875, Ruskin attended a spiritualist séance at the home of his friends, Mr and Mrs Cower Temple at Broadlands, where the ghost of Rose La Touche—a young lady he wished to marry in 1866 but was refused, and whose death in 1874 deeply pained him—was seen appearing at his side.[167] "I know there is much vulgar fraud and stupidity connected with it [spiritualism]," Ruskin confessed to Hunt, "but underneath there is, I am sure, enough to convince us that there is personal life independent of the body; but with this once proved I have no further interest in the pursuit of spiritualism."[168]

Ruskin's return to faith did not mean a return to his mother's narrow-minded Evangelicalism. Whenever talking about religious matters in the last twenty-five years of his life Ruskin expressed a profound contempt for the hostile intolerance of the Evangelical party. He looked upon their intolerance as so disgraceful that in the 1880 edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* he omitted the parts in which he severely attacked the Roman Catholics, and in 1884 he went so far that in a lecture he represented the spirit of Catholicism with a copy of the *Dream of St Ursula* by Carpaccio while as a Protestant counterpart he showed a drawing of a pig, which was just an "alert animal that knows its own limited business"[169] . His late tolerance towards Catholicism can also be seen in his praise of the beauty and sincerity of the Catholic prayers, and in his opinion that Catholic Madonna worship had a much desirable effect.[170] Nevertheless, he always firmly rejected ever to become a Roman Catholic, his regained faith being above any sectarian affiliation. As he wrote in *Fors Clavigera*:

> Wherever the Christian church, or any section of it, has indeed resolved to live a Christian life, and keep God's laws in God's name,—there, instantly, manifest approval of Heaven is given by accession of worldly prosperity and victory. This witness has only been unheard, because every sect of Christians refuses to believe that the religion of another sect can be sincere, or accepted of Heaven: while the truth is that it does not matter a burnt stick's end from the altar, in Heaven's sight, whether you are Catholic or Protestant, Eastern, Western, Byzantine, or Norman, but only whether you are true.[171]

In his art-criticism he also reached a wider acceptance, esteeming the work of Giotto and Veronese alike, each for its due merits, but he never lost his belief in artistic truthfulness and honest craftsmanship. He remained hostile to works of art in which he saw morally disruptive powers (as he saw in many of the works of Murillo), false or pretentious religiosity (in Raphael), or superficial craftsmanship (in Whistler's paintings). He was one of the last great champions of objective values and authoritative evaluation in En-

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[166] In William Holman Hunt, 2:271.
[167] Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 293–4.
[168] In William Holman Hunt, 2:271.
[169] In Rosenberg, 211.
[170] *Fors Clavigera,* 3:165 and 2:350.
[171] *Fors Clavigera*, 4:297.

gland, representing the traditional approach to art, which was finally, and perhaps inevitably defeated by the verdict of the notorious Ruskin vs. Whistler trial. Ruskin's judgement of Whistler's painting *The Falling Rocket* was overruled, and the validity of even the most basic principles of his evaluation was seriously questioned for the first time. The world passed Ruskin and his generation by, and because of the long years he was allowed to live, he had to witness the disintegration of the orderly world of his childhood and youth.

Chapter 3

‘ENGLAND’S GREATEST RELIGIOUS ARTIST’: WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT

By the 1870s only Hunt of the Pre-Raphaelites remained whole-heartedly appreciated by Ruskin, being the only one of them to whom the two most essential Ruskinian principles, honest craftsmanship and moral responsibility, remained the most important. And though Hunt was often seen as taking sides in sectarian debates, a closer look at his religious pictures reveals a surprising impartiality, akin to Ruskin’s late religious tolerance.

Due to his devotion to religious art and the immense popularity of some of his religious paintings, by the end of the century Hunt became regarded as “England’s greatest religious artist”[172], and reproductions of many of his works are still much in demand.

Still Tractarian Concerns

In the autumn of 1851, when Millais, Hunt and Collins were staying in Surrey being engaged in landscape painting, Hunt met Thomas Combe for the first time, and from this first meeting a life-long friendship and correspondence stemmed between the two. The painter stayed with the Combes in Oxford at Christmas that year, and returned on their invitation the next June. Through his new friends Hunt got acquainted with several Oxford clergymen, among them the Rev. Hackman, chaplain of Christ Church, and the Rev. John David Jenkins, curate of the Tractarian St. Paul’s. Jenkins especially compelled Hunt’s admiration, despite the fact that the painter could not share Jenkins’ beliefs. “I never knew a man more pure in mind and deed than Canon Jenkins...” he wrote on Jenkins’ death in 1876. “—It was a boon to have known him—not less a gain to those who like myself had in so many points different views than to those who could feel the pride in the thought that he added a lustre to their own school of mind.”[173]

Hunt painted Jenkins’ portrait in 1852 on Combe’s commission, and the picture was exhibited in the same year at the Royal Academy Exhibition under the title *New College Cloisters*. Corresponding to the High Church beliefs of the sitter, the painting contains many allusions to Tractarian belief, several probably suggested to Hunt by Combe and the Rev. Hackman. The setting itself, the cloister of New College, refers to pre-Reformation Christianity, since it was built by the grant of a papal bull as early as 1389. Its architectural features indicate the High Church interest in Gothic art, and because of the monastic associations generally attached to cloisters, it provides an appropriate background to the portrait of a Tractarian priest. Jenkins’ garment, a stole of black silk over a surplice,

[172] Cf. Wood, 106.
[173] In a letter to Thomas Combe. In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 106.

is typical of those worn by the advocates of the High Church party, over which the surplice riots broke out in the 1840s. The precious, gilt-edged Bible in Jenkins' hand may also suggest the Tractarian taste for more ornament in regalia and church decoration. The ivy in the background refers to the friendship between Jenkins and the painter, as, according to Victorian flower language, ivy was the emblem of friendship. In Rose's opinion it can also suggest "the tenacity with which High Church Anglicanism was still gripping Oxford"[174], however, as it has already been referred to, compared to the heyday of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, by the time Jenkins' portrait was painted Tractarianism had definitely lost its former power, leaving behind a strong anti-Catholic feeling.

The growing fear of Catholic influence created a strong demand for unity within the Anglican Church. A pamphlet, "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds" written by Ruskin in 1851 reflects this widespread concern. Ruskin severely criticises the divisiveness of the Church of England in it, claiming that

> ... the schism between the so-called Evangelical and High Church Parties in Britain is enough to shake many men's faith in the truth or existence of Religion at all ... But the real difficulty, nowadays, lies in the sin and folly of both parties; in the superciliousness of the one, and the rudeness of the other. Evidently, however, the sin lies most at the High Church door, for the Evangelicals are much more ready to act with Churchmen than they with the Evangelicals; and I believe that this state of things cannot continue much longer; and that if the Church of England does not forthwith unite with herself the entire Evangelical body, both of England and Scotland, and take her stand with them against the Papacy, her hour has struck.[175]

Ruskin's words show the shift which was to be seen in the focus of public attention from the beginning of the 1850s. The expanding influence of Rome and later the alarming increase in the number of sceptics and non-believers generated more anxiety from that time on than the earlier disagreements in ceremonial or meticulous theological issues.

Hunt's following pictures reflect similar concerns. The subject of *The Hireling Shepherd* was originally suggested to the painter by Edgar's song about the jolly shepherd in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Act III, Scene vi), but the title obviously carries Biblical connotations, recalling Christ's parable of the good and the hireling shepherds. But as Hunt was familiar with Ruskin's pamphlet, it could also have an influence on the painter's conception. The moralist point of *The Hireling Shepherd* is described by Hunt as follows:

> Shakespeare's song represents a Shepherd who is neglecting his real duty of guarding the sheep: instead of using his voice in truthfully performing his duty he is using his "minikin mouth" in some idle way. He was a type thus of other muddle headed pastors who instead of performing their services to their flock—which is in constant peril—discuss vain questions of no value to any human soul.[176]

[174] Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*, 51.
[175] Ruskin, "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds", 191.
[176] In Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 39.

Hunt's words as well as his painting are usually interpreted in accordance with Ruskin's "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds", attributing to them references to pointless and divisive church party rows and to the dangerous effect of 'Papal aggression'. On the same basis, Judith Bronkhurst suggests that in the light of Ruskin's firm Evangelical standpoint at the time, Hunt's picture may be interpreted as a manifestation of anti-Tractarianism. She claims that in this case

> ... the shepherdess, attired in scarlet like the recently appointed Cardinal Wiseman, becomes a symbol for the whore of Babylon (Revelation 17) or Roman Catholic Church, with whom the Shepherd is flirting at his peril. The lamb, representative of the vulnerable youth of the country, will die from eating the green, unripe apple, an emblem of dangerous knowledge or seemingly attractive yet ultimately poisonous doctrine. The neglected sheep, representative of the bulk of the Protestant Church, are in this reading symbols of potential converts to Rome, at risk from being allowed to feed on the corn—indeed three animals on the left middleground have already died in this way.[177]

Whether Hunt really wanted to express such anti-Catholic notions by applying these symbols is hard to decide. Notwithstanding, this interpretation implies certain incongruities. Accepting the shepherdess as the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, we must assume the shepherd to be a symbol of the High Church party; but then Hunt's reference to their discussion of "questions of no value", as well as Ruskin's point about the schism of Evangelical and High Church parties, becomes irrelevant. The shepherd can be regarded as a representative of the Evangelical pastors, but then the shepherdess must stand for the Tractarians, since his flirting with her as the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church would otherwise simply make no sense. Therefore, the most justifiable interpretation seems to be that the two represent nothing more than the Anglican clergy and their engagement in pointless discussions, while neglecting their far more important task of minding the sheep entrusted to them. And in this failure both of them seem equally guilty, as the painter's description of the work also suggests: "My fool [the shepherd] has found a Death-Head Moth, and this fills his little mind with forebodings of evil, and he takes it to an equally sage counsellor for her opinion."[178] Furthermore, it also seems unlikely that a green, unripe apple would be used as an emblem of the oldest Christian doctrine, the Roman Catholic. In this case again a more general interpretation would be more effective. The green apples, which are poisonous to lambs, together with the swampy, marshy ground that can cause sheep-rot and the dying and straying sheep, simply refer to the dangers the flock is exposed to as a consequence of the negligence of its pastors. But this danger is not unambiguously specified as solely and necessarily the influence of Catholicism, either Roman or Tractarian. It can also be regarded as the spreading of scepticism or complete loss of faith, which is also mentioned in Ruskin's pamphlet, or as the growing popularity of the different dissenting churches.

So just as the application of High Church revivalist symbols in *The Druids* does not make it a manifestation of Tractarian propaganda, it would be an exaggeration to regard

[177] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 96.
[178] In Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 39.

The Hireling Shepherd as a definite expression of anti-Tractarian publicity.

The same can be said about the next picture, *Strayed Sheep* or *Our English Coasts*, which was commissioned originally as a repeat version of the sheep in the background of *The Hireling Shepherd*. Hunt, nevertheless, decided on a different composition. In his new painting the shepherd is absent, leaving his flock completely on its own; the sheep are shown stumbling on the rocky coasts of the country. The religious message of the work is basically the same as that of the previous *The Hireling Shepherd,* but because it presents no more symbols than that of the abandoned sheep, the picture suggests an even more general view, a concern for man's disposition to aberration.

'Papistical Fantasy' or 'Icon of Protestantism'?: *The Light of the World*

Contrary to Ruskin's gradually weakening faith in the 1850s, Hunt became a firm believer at the time. Embracing Christianity meant a kind of turning point in his art, since from that time on he resolved on the "single-minded application of [his] art to the service of Christ"[179] and decided always to remain the "pictorial chronicler of Christianity"[180]. He thus became the embodiment of the Ruskinian ideal described in the first volume of *Modern Painters* according to which a painter's vocation was like that of a priest, whose appointed mission was "to express and explain every divine truth which can be gathered out of God's revelation"[181] . The first picture conceived in this newly found devotion was *The Light of the World* (1853), an image Hunt "painted with what [he] thought ... to be a divine command, and not simply as a good subject"[182].

Despite Hunt's claims for originality and that he was inspired solely by the text of the Bible there is a stunningly similar nineteenth-century predecessor of *The Light of the World*. The similitude was spotted first by Elizabeth Siddal when she saw *The Light of the World* in Hunt's studio. As Hunt relates:

> [Miss Siddal] called … to tell me that she had just seen a small print in a Catholic book shop illustrating "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock," which was in every particular exactly like my conception of the night effect, the closed overgrown door, the orchard, and the fruit fallen on the ground, even the flitting bat, Christ crowned and robed, with a connecting breatsplate, and carrying a lantern.[183]

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[179] John Dixon Hunt, 2.

[180] Bickley, 241.

[181] *Modern Painters*, 1:59. Cf. also Hunt in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*: "All art is a branch of that spirit of appeal from the Divine to the universe which has been working ever since our kind knew the difference between good and evil, and, like the course of all awakening powers, is beset by deceiving angels, who now, as in earlier times, devise new snares to entrap the careless. In the exercise of her holy function art must sort out the good and beautiful from the base and hideous." William Holman Hunt, 2:460.

[182] Letter to William Bell Scott, 19 August 1883. In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 117.

[183] William Holman Hunt, 1:307.

William Holman Hunt: *The Light of the World*
125,5x59,8 cm. Oil on canvas. 1851–1853. Oxford, Warden and Fellows of Keble College

At the earliest opportunity Hunt went to see the print and was relieved to find that

> ... the only resemblance was in the fact that the Saviour was standing and knocking at a door. The scene was in daylight; the Saviour was uncrowned, He had no priestly robes or breastplate, He carried no lantern, the door was not overgrown, there was no orchard outside and no bat, and in truth all the accessories which had given value in [his] eyes to the subject did not exist at all, but had been transplanted from [his] picture by the imaginative lady to the Overbeckian design.[184]

But it seems that not only Elizabeth Siddal was 'so imaginative'. The similarity of the two pictures were observed by many others too, so finally Ruskin, who enthusiastically praised *The Light of the World* in the third volume of *Modern Painters*[185] , felt obliged to defend Hunt against charges of plagiarism admitting at the same time the existence of a pictorial predecessor. So he added an Appendix to the volume, in which he wrote:

> I have so often spoken, in the preceding pages of Holman Hunt's picture of the Light of the World, that I may as well ... glance at the envious charges against it of being plagiarised from a German print. It is indeed true that there was a painting of the subject before; and there were, of course, no paintings of the Nativity before Raphael's time, nor of the Last Supper before Leonardo's, else those masters could have laid no claim to originality. But what was still more singular (the verse to be illustrated being, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock"), the principal figure in the antecedent picture was knocking at a door, knocked with its right hand, and had its face turned to the spectator! Nay, it was even robed in a long robe, down to its feet. All these circumstances were the same in Mr. Hunt's picture; and as the chances evidently were a hundred to one that if he had not been helped to the ideas by the German artist, he would have represented the figure as not knocking at any door, as turning its back to the spectator, and as dressed in a short robe, the plagiarism was considered as demonstrated.[186]

As Lottes points out[187] the German print in question was a reproduction of one of the Nazarene painters', Philipp Veit's works. No wonder, therefore, that both Ruskin and Hunt, who were equally hostile to the Nazarenes, tried to dissociate *The Light of the World* from the print. Whether Veit's image made an unconscious impression on Hunt's mind, which was evoked while he was reading the Bible, or the two artists just accidentally came to the same idea, is impossible to decide. Nevertheless, Hunt always regarded *The Light of the World* as the manifestation of his own, personal experience of divine revelation, so much so that only in the case of this picture did he think self-expression more important than public interest. As he later referred to it:

> I may say that any occult meaning in the details of my design was not based upon ecclesias-

[184] Ibid, 307–8

[185] "... in Hunt's great poetical picture of the Light of the World, the whole thought and arrangement of the picture being imaginative, the several details of it are wrought with simple portraiture; the ivy, the jewels, the creeping plants, and the moonlight being calmly studied or remembered from the things themselves." (39) "Hunt's Light of the World is, I believe, the most perfect instance of expressional purpose with technical power, which the world has yet produced." (29.)

[186] *Modern Painters*, 3:324–5.

[187] Lottes, 115. Cf. also Höltgen, 179.

tical or archaic symbolism, but derived from obvious reflectiveness. My types were of natural figures such as language has originally employed to express transcendental ideas, and they were used by me with no confidence that they would interest any other mind than my own.[188]

Despite Hunt's claim of 'obvious reflectiveness' one had to be well versed in the text of the Bible to acquire full understanding, to decode the significance of the numerous details incorporated into the scene. Being quite familiar with the Scriptures himself by this time, Hunt could create a pictorial complex full of meaningful, inter-related references, each of which contributed to the his 'priestly' message. To guide the mindful audience and reveal the literary source of the painting a Biblical quotation was inscribed on the frame citing the Revelation: "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20) Thus the central image was explained: Christ arriving, asking for admittance, asking for acceptance. The title comes from the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St John, where Christ declares himself to be the light of the world saying: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) Christ gives guidance to man like a lamp does in darkness, as it is said in the Psalms: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path." (Psalms 119:105) Quite atypically of Hunt's usual insistence on presenting things as they might actually have happened and in contrast with his claim of not relying on the conventions of religious art, he depicts Christ as a crowned king, a portrayal based on tradition, which has its source in Jeremiah's prophecy: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth." (Jer. 23:5) The image of the neglected orchard recalls how the garden of Eden was entrusted to man in Genesis 2:15 ("And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it"), and then, despite the divine charge, abandoned and neglected, as the overgrown briar refers to it in the painting just as it does in the Bible ("And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briars and thorns.") (Is. 7:23) The picture as a whole also recalls the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–13) in the sense that it warns of constant vigilance by presenting man's unpreparedness at the time of Christ's arrival during the night.

Though maybe not to all the spectators, these symbolic references were comprehensible to a select audience; to regular churchgoers and conscientious readers of the Bible. This, however, did not satisfy the aesthetic sense and educating spirit of Ruskin. His genuine enthusiasm for the painting and his desire to gain wider public appreciation to

[188] William Holman Hunt, 1:350. Hunt then gives a detailed description of these types: "The closed door was the obstinately shut mind, the weeds the cumber of daily neglect, the accumulated hindrances of sloth; the orchard the garden of delectable fruit for the dainty feast of the soul. The music of the still small voice was the summons to the sluggard to awaken and become a zealous labourer under the Divine Master; the bat flitting about only in darkness was a natural symbol of ignorance; the kingly and priestly dress of Christ, the sign of His reign over the body and the soul, to them who could give their allegiance to Him and acknowledge God's overrule. In making it a nightscene, lit mainly by the lantern carried by Christ, I had followed metaphorical explanation in the Psalms, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,' with also the accordant allusions by St. Paul to the sleeping soul 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand.'" 1:350–1.

such a valuable work of art impelled him to write an elaborate interpretation of the painting for *The Times*, in which he tried to unveil its Biblical references. As Timothy Hilton points out[189] Ruskin concentrated more on the signs of human ignorance, on the devastation caused by neglect, than on the hope of salvation brought by Christ.[190] Ruskin's Evangelical upbringing–which taught him always to be conscious of man's fallibility and inclination to sin–had probably an effect on his approach, but it was also caused by the fact that some of the more positive devices consciously employed by the painter were so complex and so individual that they were unattainable even by Ruskin's expertise. Though originally Hunt wished "the picture to be left without any explanation"[191], he finally, but only in 1865, resigned to publishing a pamphlet, "An Apology for the Symbolism Introduced into the Picture called The Light of the World" with a detailed description of the painting. In this writing Hunt reveals the meaning of two quite important elements incorporated into his work which might have seemed insignificant.

Both the lamp held in Christ's hand and the clasp which fastens his robe were contrived by the painter, and show his constant striving to provide every single detail of his pictures with symbolic meaning. The lantern was painted after a model designed by Hunt himself and constructed strictly according to his special requirements. A drawing of it reveals that it had seven sides, each of which was formed as a two-light window with differently shaped apertures above them. According to Hunt, they were to represent the seven churches mentioned in Revelation (1:19–20), which appear there as the seven golden candlesticks. The fact that in Hunt's image Christ appears delivering the light of life as shining through a lantern with the emblems of seven churches can be regarded as the painter's belief in the existence of more than one true church.

Hunt's tolerant religious approach is reflected in the symbolism of the clasp or breastplate, too. It consists of three parts, each about the same size but with a different shape. On the left the circular part refers to the heathen priesthoods, since many pagan priests actually bore such symbols.[192] The middle section is cross-shaped, symbolising the Chris-

[189] Hilton, 92.

[190] Ruskin's interpretation of the painting is as follows: "On the left-hand side of the picture is seen the door of the human soul. It is fast barred, its bars and nails are rusty; it is knitted and bound to its stanchions by creeping tendrils of ivy, showing that it has never been opened. A bat hovers above it; its threshold is overgrown with brambles, nettles, and fruitless corn,—the wild grass 'whereof the mower filleth not his hands, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.' Christ approaches it in the night time—Christ in His everlasting offices of prophet, priest, and king. He wears a white robe, representing the power of the Spirit upon Him; the jewelled robe and breastplate, representing the sacerdotal investiture; the rayed crown of gold inwoven with the crown of thorns—not dead thorns, but now bearing soft leaves for the healing of the nations. Now when Christ enters any human heart, He bears with Him a twofold light. First the light of conscience, which displays past sin; and afterwards the light of peace, the hope of salvation. The lantern carried in Christ's left hand, is this light of conscience. Its fire is red and fierce; it falls only on the closed door, on the weeds which encumber it, and on an apple shaken from one of the trees of the orchard, thus marking that the entire awakening of the conscience is not merely to committed, but to hereditary, guilt. This light is suspended by a chain, wrapped about the wrist of the figure, showing that the light which reveals sin appears to the sinner also to chain the hand of Christ. The light which proceeds from the head of the figure, on the contrary, is that of the hope of salvation; it springs from the crown of thorns, and though itself sad, subdued, and full of softness, is yet so powerful that it entirely melts with the glow of it the forms of the leaves and boughs, which it crosses, showing that every earthly object must be hidden by this light, where its sphere extends." In William Holman Hunt, 1:416–7.

[191] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 119.

[192] Referred to by F. G. Stephens in *William Holman Hunt and His Work*, 1860. Ibid.

tian congregations by recalling Christ's crucifixion, the red precious stones, with which it is encrusted, refer to the wounds he suffered, and they correspond with the stigmata shown in the painting on Christ's hands. The third, rectangular clasp is an Israelitish symbol which has the shape and lay-out of the breastplate of judgement made for Aaron as described in Exodus 28:15–24. Although, as the colours of the painting reveal, they are not shown by Hunt in the enlisted Biblical order; their arrangement and number—four rows with three stones in each—are precise. It seems that since the types of these stones did not seem to have symbolic reference in the Old Testament, Hunt, who was otherwise always painstakingly accurate, concentrated only on the presentation of the correct number of the stones, since they were symbolically important, bearing the names of the children of Israel and referring to the twelve chosen tribes. This rectangular plate may be identical with the breastplate of judgement containing the mystic Urim and Thummin (Exodus 28:29–30), with the help of which the will of God could be made known to the children of Israel. This tripartite breastplate, the creation of Hunt's fertile mind, combining the symbols of heathens, Christians, and Israelites, represents the same message as the seven-sided lantern: that the light of the world is accessible to all regardless of denomination. This early and very conscious sign of Hunt's tolerance and open-mindedness in religious matters is often neglected, though such flexibility was by no means in conformity with the current popular feeling. No wonder, therefore, that Hunt did not reveal the meaning of these symbolic objects of the painting till 1865. Even then it was a rare thing to hold such yielding views, but by that time the painting had gained so much in popularity that basically nothing could damage its public reputation. Still, in 1904, when a debate evolved in *The Times* concerning the neglectful treatment of the painting by its then owner, Keble College—it was donated to the College by Mrs. Combe in 1872—it was part of the argument that the picture might have been regarded unfavourably "on religious grounds" being "too liberal in meaning"[193]. Though the warden, Walter Lock denied that that had been the case—even saying that he had no idea what was actually meant by it[194]—a typescript of 1908 proves that the College officials still objected to the painting because of the liberal religious views inherent in its symbolism.[195]

When first exhibited in 1854 the picture did not bring immediate success, despite the fact that the Victorian spectators had not the slightest idea about its more complicated symbols and the liberal view they reflected. The *Art Journal*, for example, disapproved of it for its realisation of the ideal writing that "[t]he knocking at the door of the soul is a spiritual figure of such exaltation that it must lose by any reduction to common forms."[196] To accept Hunt's ambitious attempt to render a highly imaginative and symbolic image in a truly Pre-Raphaelite manner was, at first, difficult for the public. It must be added, however, that Hunt himself admitted to making compromises in this case and deliberately idealising the face of the Saviour because he wanted to add a certain amount of mysticism

[193] Ibid.

[194] "I confess that I entirely fail to understand what is meant by such an assertion, but as the picture never has been regarded unfavourably, it is not worth while to consider the motives," wrote Walter Lock in his letter to *The Times*, 22 March 1904. Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Ibid.

[197] As Hunt wrote in a letter to J. L. Tupper on 20th June 1878, he "... felt very determined to make the figure mystic in aspect". Ibid. At the same time, writing about the picture's symbolism he wrote that it "was designed to elucidate, not to mystify truth." William Holman Hunt, 1:351.

to the image underlining its revelationary nature[197]. But the painter's approach was strongly criticised by Thomas Carlyle, too. Visiting Hunt's studio to see his works he said: "Do you ever suppose that Jesus walked about bedizened in priestly robes and a crown, and with yon jewels on his breast, and a guilt aureole round His head? ... Don't you see that you're helping to make people believe what you know to be false, what y' don't believe yourself?"[198] In Carlyle's view, Hunt offended against what is called by Houghton Victorian earnestness[199] by presenting something that was historically obviously not true. He disapproved of Christ being shown in a "form in which He has been travestied from the beginning by worldlings who have recorded their own ambitions as His repeating Judas' betrayal to the high priests," and called *The Light of the World* a "papistical fantasy".[200] He detected a sense of Catholic sympathy, and the painting was quickly rejected. Despite Hunt's explicit claim that "[t]he suspicion of certain thinkers that 'The Light of the World' was painted to support the Puseyite movement had no justification,"[201] Carlyle, in a sense, was obviously right. Christian mysticism and inspired, enthusiastic visions belonged rather to the Catholic tradition of worship. No wonder, therefore, that this painting was again purchased by the Tractarian Thomas Combe.

Strangely enough, by the 1860s *The Light of the World* had become a celebrated icon of Victorian Protestantism[202] . The Victorians came to see it as it was seen by Bickley, who wrote in 1923 that

> ... [it is] the religious picture of the Protestant. Hunt was, except for his talent, a typical Protestant Englishman of his time. He put all himself into that work, depicting a Saviour solemn and humane, whose aureole signified his holiness but hinted at no Popish mysteries. The picture struck an answering and lingering chord in a million English breasts.[203]

Though in view of his religious tolerance it seems to be questionable whether Hunt was a typical Protestant of his time, it is undeniably true that, in the end, the painting became immensely popular, which was granted partly by, what Höltgen describes as the "reap-

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[198] William Holman Hunt, 1:355.

[199] Houghton, 220–2.

[200] In William Holman Hunt, 1:355.

[201] Ibid, 2:410.

[202] Cf. Crowley, 70.

[203] Bickley, 241.

[204] Höltgen, 179. In most cases contemporary attitude to allegorical art was highly critical, most critics finding it inferior to realistic presentations. As Landow points out, the rise of realism in art made allegorical presentations irrelevant, and the romantic concept of art made it seem "intellectualised, artificial and unimaginative". (*William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 26.) Another important fact which contributed a lot to the general opposition to figurative rendering in painting was that, as William Michael Rossetti observed, "typical art, in its [contemporary] decadence, had ceased to form any broadly considered, and recognisable system." (Ibid, 27.) With Rossetti's view in mind it becomes understandable why so often the Pre-Raphaelites had quotations inscribed on the frames of their paintings, put comments into the exhibition catalogues, or, as it was the case with Hunt, wrote pamphlets to explain their works. "In order to play their spiritual and practical role in the context of a Protestant religion of the word, pictorial allegories require verbal aids, they must be translated into words or sermons ...", writes Höltgen in connection with Rev. Glover's interpretation of *The Light of the World*. (Höltgen, 183.) Similarly, Hönnighausen claims that whereas in poetry it was possible for the Pre-Raphaelites to give a realistic presentation with details endowed with emblematic significance, in painting they had to face the dilemma whether to leave the figures in obscurity and thus renounce the wish to deliver spiritual messages, or to attach some verbal explanation to the pictures. Hönnighausen, as well as Landow, also draws attention to the fact that such alienation from figurative rendering was peculiar to pictorial art, whereas in speech and in writing, especially in sermons, it was still widely used. (Hönnighausen, 63; and Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 11–2, 26.)

praisal of the role of allegory in religious art"[204], and partly by the picture's concentration on the most important problem occupying the public religious mind in the 1860s, the spread of scepticism.

Höltgen points out that in 1862 a tract was published in London written by the Evangelical Rev. Richard Glover, in which the author intended "to translate the mystic symbols of his [Hunt's] sacred allegory into plainer language of human speech"[205]. To justify his concern with the painting Glover wrote that he viewed *The Light of the World* as a "sacred allegory", "a divine parable in paint"[206], which, as he admitted, proved to be more effective in delivering a holy message than a sermon preached from the pulpit. "[N]umbers of people have come to hear ... [this sermon] that never come to hear ours"[207], he wrote, and his proposal to "deliver a series of five sermons on the picture"[208] was probably induced by his wish to make the most of the interest the painting had aroused. Thus Glover's revaluation of allegorical painting was, in all probability, incited by his realisation that Hunt's picture could achieve what he and many of his colleagues could not, that is to call attention to the worrying problem he himself had recognised; that people were turning away from the church and religion in general.

As it was referred to in connection with Ruskin's work, by the 1860s the detestation of Catholicism and fear of Catholic propaganda was pushed into the background by a far more harassing problem; the spread of scepticism, and even the loss of Christian belief altogether. A certain amount of mysticism thus became more easily accepted as long as it served conversion or helped to preserve faith. Hunt's picture warned Christians never to abandon their religious duties, never to discard the love and service they owe to their Saviour. This image, which showed Christ appearing to the living in a very realistic setting could give a much needed reassurance to many of its spectators, and made the work a desirable piece for reproduction to be hung in schoolrooms and family parlours. Though J. Steegman feels that this "... timorous, self-pitying Christ could in no circumstances ... illuminate or save the world"[209], his view was definitely not shared by the crowds who wanted to possess a copy of its reproductions. However, Steegman's claim that the image has an unmistakable sentimental appeal, an early symptom which "... foreshadows the decline of the early, intense, pure Pre-Raphaelitism into a sentimental-romantic other-worldliness"[210] can be easily agreed with. Giving way to idealisation and irrational elements in this picture Hunt moved away from his earlier principles, but only to return to the pure realistic presentation already in his next work.

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[205] Ibid.

[206] As Glover wrote: "Let me, as a minister of God's word, ask you to gaze with me again at that picture today, and look at it in a personal, practical, and spiritual light. We have nothing to do with it in this sacred place as a work of art—we have to do with it only as a sacred allegory. The greatest truths of the picture, remember, were not produced out of the fancy of the artist, but are the truths of God's Holy Word. The picture is a divine parable in paint, a human commentary in colour." In Hönnighausen, 44–5.

[207] In Höltgen, 182–3.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Steegman, 262.

[210] Ibid, 263.

Typological Symbolism:
The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple

In *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* Hunt attempted to achieve an overall accuracy; not just realism in presentation, but also a strict adherence to historical and Biblical facts:

> When I began to determine the composition of my picture, I was continually checked by discovery of my ignorance of Jewish ordinances, and I had to turn to Exodus, Leviticus, and the accounts of the building of the Temple; this led on to the Talmud, Josephus, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and other books of the New Testament; the more I read the greater appeared the responsibility of my undertaking, and the more I felt disposed to reject tradition, religious as well as artistic, not convincingly true.[211]

Elements of mystic nature were completely excluded.

By 1854 Hunt became convinced that in order to present Biblical scenes truthfully he had to go to the Holy Land and acquire a first-hand knowledge of the place and the people he intended to paint. His conception was part of a more general Victorian trend, and he was not the first and only painter in such a pursuit. Sir David Wilkie travelled to the Middle East in 1840, and David Roberts and John Frederick Lewis followed his example in 1842[212]. Hunt finally left England in January 1854. He started working on *The Finding* in the same year, but it took sixteen years till he could regard it as completed.

Since reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in 1847 Hunt wanted to achieve such a complexity in religious pictorial presentation as is shown by Ruskin in Tintoret's *Annunciation*. With *The Finding* Hunt, at last, could fulfil his aim. Breaking away from the mystic nature of *The Light of the World,* he could here successfully present matters of the spiritual world in a highly and solely realistic manner by making the most of pre-figurative or typological symbolism. Highlighting the change in Hunt's artistic approach, Landow points out that while *The Light of the World* "recorded a vision that took form in [Hunt's] own mind, thus creating a pictorial emblem of that spiritual experience, ... the typological works ... gained access to the world of the spirit by means of symbols—types—which partake simultaneously of the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal".[213] Though being bound by the natural limits of visual art and necessarily being able to depict in one painting only a single moment of the Saviour's life, Hunt could extend the scope of his image with the genuinely integrated pre-figurative symbols: important past and future events are referred to, while all are focused on the main incident actually shown.

The Finding basically concentrates on the clash between the old and new religious laws; Christ is shown as the bearer of new faith facing the stiff opposition of the Pharisees, the representatives of the old one. The main theme of rejection —the rejection of Christ and the new law he stands for— is underlined by parallel background scenes. A church-building process is shown on the right; masons are giving the finishing touches to

[211] William Holman Hunt, 1:406.

[212] Hunt, however, dissociated himself from the pursuit of Wilkie and Roberts in the sense that they spent only a few months in the East, made sketches, and worked from these back in England. Ibid, 348.

[213] Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 125.

William Holman Hunt: *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*
85,7x141 cm. Oil on canvas. 1854–1860. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

the headstone while others are considering it and are about to reject it. Here Hunt applies a conventional type taken from the Bible itself, where Christ is referred to by the Apostles as the headstone of the church and the congregation (Matt. 21:42, 1 Peter 2:5–6). Behind this scene, in the far distance, the Mount of Olives can be seen, the place of Christ's betrayal and consequent arrest. In the back of the Jewish temple a lamb is shown as being taken away for baptismal sacrifice, an obvious reference to Christ's own death.

The chief rejecters, the Rabbis, sit in a semicircle around Christ, their discussion with the young boy brought to an end by the arrival of the relieved parents. The doctors are clearly not convinced, not yielding to Christ's arguments. Again, as is usual with Hunt, nothing is accidental in the presentation. In the case of this painting the indispensable detailed explanation is provided by F. G. Stephens, whose pamphlet was vetted by Hunt himself[214]. Stephens claims that each of the Rabbis stands for a certain aspect of the corruption of the old law, and thus, they together show the unworthiness of their faith. The chief of them, a blind old man sitting on the left and clutching the Torah displays blind insistence upon the old, lapsed doctrine. His spiritual blindness is contrasted by the other blind figure of the picture, the beggar, who is sitting at the gate of the temple on the right side of the painting, and whose sight is to be restored by Christ for believing in his teaching (John 9:1–11). The other grey-bearded Rabbi sitting next to the chief and holding a phylactery-box represents the ever-faithful member of any establishment, who is never

[214] Stephens' pamphlet is quoted in Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 87–92, and in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 159–60.

troubled by new ideas. His neighbour displays just the contrary quality; he is argumentative and passionate, but his eagerness is used only to prove his own point. The fourth Rabbi, wearing an unusually broad phylactery-box on his forehead, is an intellectual type, whose expression shows extreme self-satisfaction and self-centredness, while the fifth is concerned only about his physical well-being. The next in the row, inquiringly leaning forward to catch a glimpse of the persons who interrupted the conversation, represents the envious, curios type, while the last one displays repugnant sensuality. The Torah, which contains the five books of Moses, is itself the symbol of the old law, and the young boys surrounding it display the extreme extent of their respect for it; most of them are musicians, one of whom is actually shown kissing the Torah, while another boy is employed to chase the flies away from this precious icon.

As opposed to the group of the Israelites inside the temple, the Holy Family stand at its golden gate. Corresponding to the incident shown in the picture a part of Malachi's prophecy is inscribed in Latin and Hebrew on the gate saying: "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to the temple."(Mal. 3:1) Malachi's prophecy can be found right at the end of the Old Testament, where through Malachi God complains about the ingratitude of Israel (Mal. 1), and the profanation of the covenant by her priests (Mal. 2), and He promises to send His messenger to renew His alliance with the people (Mal. 3). With Christ's appearance in the temple the prophecy is fulfilled, though it seems that nobody realises it except the young Christ himself.

He seems to be absorbed in distant thoughts, paying attention neither to the Rabbis and the discussion he has had with them, nor to his mother, who approaches him with great relief in finally finding her son after three days of search. As Landow suggests[215] the moment shown in the painting is actually Christ's sudden realisation of his appointed mission, an instant in which he may have a foreboding of his fate and his work to do. Tiny, but important details can support this argument. One of them is that Christ is shown tightening his belt, which evokes the biblical descriptions of how Israelites were expected to "gird their loins" before going to battle or when preparing for hard work (Ex. 12:11, 2 Kings 4:29, 9:1), and on the basis of Jeremiah (13:11) it can also refer to the reinforced bond between God and His people. The cross on Christ's belt, referring to his sacrificial death, is another sign of this renewed alliance. Another point to support Landow's idea is Hunt's choice of the quotations inscribed on the frame of the painting. He decided to omit certain lines of the section relating the story in order to direct the spectator's attention to the aspects he found important in connection with his work. The Biblical description of the scene can be found in the Gospel of Luke, and goes as follows:

"And when they found him not they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." (2:45–6) Here Hunt omitted the next verse which says: "And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."(2:47) Then he continued quoting: "And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is that ye sought me? wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business?" (2:48–9) The next part was also left out: "And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them." (2:59) Then

[215] Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 102.

the story as well as the quote is concluded: "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." (2:51)

Probably by reason of the fact that this event is the only one of the youthful years of the Saviour which is mentioned in the New Testament, it has always been a popular subject in religious painting. Traditionally, however, the emphasis was laid on Christ's teaching the doctors, while Mary and Joseph were treated as secondary characters shown perhaps at a far side or in the background of the picture.[216] In Hunt's painting just the contrary happens. The theological debate is pushed to the background, overshadowed by the family's re-union. In certain cases painters depicted the scene with Mary in the centre.[217] These works were conceived in the tradition which regarded the finding of the Saviour in the temple as one of Mary's seven joys as contrasted to the loss of the child in Jerusalem, which was considered to be one of the Virgin's seven sorrows. Hunt's approach is even more striking when compared to this tradition. He does not present the episode as if it was a happy moment for the mother at all. Here Mary encounters a painful experience, a bitter feeling for being rejected for the first time by her son, an affliction which was on her mind and lay heavy on her heart for long. The theme of rejection is repeated here, though with a different meaning.

This sudden and quite ruthless denial of the mother on behalf of the young Christ is the sign of his realisation of his mission. An ignorant child has just turned into a man perceiving and taking on his duties and responsibilities. The painting thus presents an important Victorian concept according to which work was a supreme virtue, the condition of common progress and self-improvement. "Every one who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work", wrote Cardinal Newman[218] . It was man's duty as well as his privilege to find his mission, and the critic of *The Athenaeum* was glad to see that "the idea of duty predominates all" in the painting.[219] "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it and will follow it!"[220] wrote Carlyle, and *The Finding* visualises the exact moment when Christ finds his work, the hardest and noblest ever delivered, as experienced in a sudden self-recognition, a divine message dressed in human form. For this quality of the painting Landow regards it as a Protestant version of the traditional Annunciation theme[221], which eliminates the mystic immaculate conception and delivers the divine message to the conscious intellect of the youthful Christ. Accordingly, Mary appears as a simple earthly mother, puzzled and not comprehending her son's words and behaviour. The elected divine role of Mary is thus abolished, and the traditional Catholic adoration of her is denied. Mary's repudiation both on the concrete and on the abstract levels is seen by Landow as Hunt's rejection of Roman Catholic Mariolatry[222].

To regard the painting as a unique Annunciation can again be justified by small details

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[216] Cf. Bernardino Luini's *Christ among the Doctors*, or Giotto's *Christ among the Doctors*. Hunt's water-colour drawing *Christ amongst the Doctors* also belongs to this tradition.

[217] Cf. Claudio Coello's *The Child Jesus at the Gate of the Temple.*

[218] In Mancoff, 56.

[219] In Bendiner, 66.

[220] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 169.

[221] Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 102.

[222] Ibid.

incorporated in the crowded scene. The doves, for example, the indispensable attributes of the Annunciation scenes are present, traditionally symbolising the Holy Ghost, God acting spiritually. They enter the church together with Christ, enhancing the idea that a divine message is delivered to the Israelites by the appearance of Christ. As Christ, the messenger is rejected by the Pharisees, so are the doves chased out of the temple by a Jewish girl in the background. Also in the background, on the left-hand side, a man is shown lighting a lamp, which can correspond to Christ's rejected message on the basis of the Gospel of St John: "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (1:5), but it can also underline Christ's own illumination.

In such complex symbols like these Hunt could find the proper means to work with. Employing them he could spiritualise concrete facts or details, deliver moral messages, and, in addition, calculate that many of the Victorians would find them relatively easy to understand, since they were widely used in sermons, especially by the Evangelicals.[223] And, though it is very difficult to estimate how much an average contemporary spectator could really comprehend of the picture's abundant symbolism, the outstanding public success the painting enjoyed right after its first display suggests that the method needed for basic understanding was familiar to most of them. In a way *The Finding* is similar to the so-called Victorian 'problem pictures'[224], which invite the spectator to detect clues that can help fuller understanding, thus to 'read the painting' like a book. The basic difference between a problem picture and Hunt's *The Finding* or the later *The Shadow of Death* is that while the former one relies almost exclusively on visual hints and requires only an attentive examination of the painting, the decoding of Hunt's works presupposes literary, mostly Biblical erudition, since they employ symbols and not just visual elements as keys to understanding.

A. P. Oppe attributes the picture's popularity to what he sees as the conventionality of the work.

> [People] flocked in thousands to see the picture which was certainly England's masterpiece and perhaps the world's, not only because it had taken longest to paint and had fetched the largest price, but also because it contained the greatest mass of detail and the brightest colours, with no novelty of conception to puzzle the mind and no disconcerting visual feature of atmosphere or design.[225]

He adds that the painting exhibits "precisely the semi-classical convention which the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had originally set out to replace", and that it was "in effect a criticism of the early Christian affectations displayed by Millais in *The Carpenter's Shop* and, still more, the growing eccentricities of Rossetti"[226]. There is, of course, a difference between the religious sentiment of Millais' and Rossetti's early works and Hunt's reserved moral symbolism. However, they all reflect the same interest in making Christ's life more tangible trying "to actualise the distant and scarcely conceivable", as John Dixon Hunt explains[227]. Millais' wish to present a real carpentry with figures not idealised in his

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[223] Ibid, 106.

[224] Cf. Alfred Rankley's *Old Schoolfellows* (1854), Robert Braithwaite Martineau's *The Last Day in the Old Home* (1861), or George Elgar Hicks' *Woman's Mission, Companion of Manhood* (1863).

[225] In *Early Victorian England*, 170.

[226] Ibid.

[227] John Dixon Hunt, 26.

Carpenter's Shop and Rossetti's aim to show the scenes of Mary's life in a genuine, historically plausible manner in his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* could serve a similar purpose to that of Hunt. In *The Finding* Christ's presentation as a strong Jewish boy as well as the painstaking factual accuracy in providing an authentic setting[228] was part of a general tendency which tried to convince people about Christ's real, historical existence at a time when the credibility of the Biblical stories was challenged by scientific evidence[229].

The Finding in this respect, and painting in general, preceded most of the scholarly or literary attempts which tried to present a verisimilar account of the life of Christ. Apart from Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, which was written in 1835 but published in England in George Eliot's translation only in 1846, there was no such publication till the 1860s, when the writings of Renan, J. R. Seeley, Sir Richard Hanson, Bishop Ellicott, and later F. W. Farrar came out within a short time. And though Strauss' work is regarded as the first startling attempt "to describe Jesus as a human person"[230], it is also considered as an unsuccessful endeavour, which failed for being "too theological to be historical"[231].

In the sense that *The Finding* served as a kind of reassurance for the Christian congregations about the validity of their faith, it has a similar message to the earlier *The Light of the World*. The difference is, though, that the imaginative, visionary character of *The Light of the World* made it less readily accessible to its audience than the more realistic nature of its successor.

Appalling Accuracy: *The Scapegoat*

Though regarded as the most consistent in his artistic principles among the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt never quite repeated himself. The famous *The Scapegoat*, which was produced during the intervals when Hunt had difficulty in carrying on with his work on *The Finding*[232], presents an unparalleled, most unusual religious image. While making use of typological symbolism as he did in *The Finding*, here he singled out one basic type and made it the core of his conception employing some other types only as subordinate ones with complementary functions.

The chosen type is, again, in itself not new; it is taken from the Old Testamental description of the sacrificial goat, which is the traditional type of the Saviour. The surprising thing is, though, that never before Hunt was this type used or shown in visual presentation. When he discovered it as a novel subject for a painting, Hunt thought of offering it as a theme to Landseer, the celebrated animal painter of the time, the favourite painter of the

[228] Apart from travelling to the Holy Land in order to see the place where all these Biblical events actually happened, Hunt examined different sources to find the possible architectural features of an early Jewish temple to show Herod's temple in the painting accurately. He studied, for example, the Alhambra Court of the Crystal Palace, and the Biblical description of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 3:7, 4:12–13). For further details see Bendiner, 73–5.

[229] As Hunt said to Augustus Leopold Egg in a conversation: "… my desire is very strong to use my powers to make more tangible Jesus Christ's history and teaching". William Holman Hunt, 1:349.

[230] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 2:61.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Hunt had great difficulties in finding sitters for his painting because of the interdict forbidding the Jews to work for the painter, and because Hunt insisted on employing only semitic models. For further details see William Holman Hunt, 1:387–8, 2:4, 26–7.

William Holman Hunt: *The Scapegoat*
85,7x138,5 cm. Oil on canvas. 1854/1855. Port Sunlight, Merseyside County Council, Lady Lever Art Gallery

Queen herself, but finally he decided on the execution himself. Landow sees Landseer's *An Offering* (1861) presenting a goat bound and laid upon a pile for sacrifice as a successor of Hunt's *The Scapegoat*[233] , and J. Nicoll finds a possible predecessor to Hunt's work in another of Landseer's paintings, *The Challenge*, which was first exhibited in 1844[234]. Though *The Challenge* is very different in conception from *The Scapegoat*, and not even a religious picture, the scene—a solitary animal in a desolate land with a lake and distant mountains in the background—definitely bears resemblance.

In other respects, however, Hunt's *The Scapegoat* has nothing in common with Landseer's popular, often sentimental animal pictures. Landseer masterfully exploits the characters of the animals portrayed, often endowing these images with human traits as he does in *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (1837), *The Monarch of the Glen* (1839) or in *Dignity and Impudence* (1851). As Treuherz describes, Landseer "brings to animal painting the epic and heroic qualities of high art"[235]. Hunt's exhausted, starving goat has neither dignity, nor sentiment[236]; it generates neither elevated feelings, nor sweet smiles; it is basically repulsive and unpleasant to look at. This is, of course, a great achievement, since that is exactly the moral 'duty' of the picture: to rouse the benign spectator by

[233] Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 110.
[234] Nicoll, 18.
[235] Treuherz, 30.
[236] As in many things in connection with *The Scapegoat* there is a disagreement concerning the sentimental appeal of the painting. While Landow, for example, says that "Hunt has given the animal an almost human expression, which strikes one as ludicrously sentimental rather than deeply moving" (Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 107–8), Hilton claims that "*The Scapegoat* totally fails to make use of the revolution effected by Edwin Landseer ... through which animals could be made to represent human emotions" (Hilton, 110).

showing him how an innocent creature must suffer for his own iniquities.

The intention was noble and the idea was not new, since all the traditional Crucifixion pictures carry the same message[237]. Nevertheless, the painting seems to have been destined to instinctive rejection.[238] As Houghton points out evasion was an important aspect of Victorian hypocrisy[239], which basically meant that people simply wanted to "shut their eyes to whatever was ugly or unpleasant and pretend it didn't exist"[240]. Hunt's picture discomfited many of its Victorian spectators. Rossetti's comment made when he first saw *The Scapegoat* shows his clear insight into the situation; he said that *The Scapegoat* was "a grand thing, but not for the public"[241] . Ruskin, on the other hand, proved to be a typical Victorian in this sense. Already in 1846, in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, he had definitely rejected all pictorial presentations of bodily pain regarding it as morally erroneous[242]. So he was obviously not pleased by what he saw in Hunt's canvas. After the picture's first display at Royal Academy he wrote that "... the mind of the artist has been so excited by the circumstance of the scene, that, like a youth expressing his earnest feelings in feeble verse ..., in his honest desire to paint a scapegoat, he has forgotten to ask himself first, whether he could paint a goat at all"[243]. Whether Ruskin, who had probably never seen a dying Middle Eastern goat, was right or just tried to give justification for his instinctive detestation of such an awful, tortured creature, is hard to tell. Hunt was as firm as ever in his determination to adhere to realistic presentation and tried to capture the agony of the goat as perfectly as he could. So much so, that, always working after real life models, he bought a goat in Usdam and took it to the proper location, where the poor animal had to perish on the altar of high art being starved to death while 'posing' on the infertile shores of the Dead Sea.

Despite the shocking novelty of the image, it seems it was not difficult to understand its symbolic references. As usual, Hunt provided help by placing Biblical quotations as well as other referential signs on the frame. On the upper panel the prophecy of Isaiah can be read: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." (53:4) On the lower part of the frame a passage from Leviticus is quoted: "And the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited." (16:22) The first citation and its reference to Christ's passion were easily understood by the viewers being familiar even if not directly with Isaiah then with the text of Handel's *Messiah*, which was a highly popular piece at the time[244]. This first

[237] Had Hunt painted a Crucifixion it probably would have been more easily acceptable to the public, since that image was so conventional that nobody would have felt offended. But Hunt always wanted to avoid conventionalism, as it is also shown by his unique version of the Crucifixion theme, *The Shadow of Death* painted between 1870–73.

[238] Cf. William Holman Hunt, 2:110–12.

[239] Houghton, 395.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Letter to William Allingham, April 1856. *Letters*, 1:300.

[242] *Modern Painters*, 2:279–80.

[243] In Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 66.

[244] See the letter of Lowell Mason, in Sept. 1852: "Whatever may be the reason, the fact is certain, that in England the *Messiah* is vastly more popular than any other oratorio. The best judges of music, professors and amateurs, the learned and the unlearned, the noble and the ignoble, the great and the little, those who ride in proud carriages, with servants liveried with buff and scarlet, and those who walk through the rain with cotton umbrella, the old and grave, the young and gay, those who love music, and those who do not know whether they have any love for it or not;—all do homage to this mighty production of Handel." In *Culture and Society*, 167.

reference together with the second quote made the painting's central type easy to grasp.

In the symbolism of the picture Hunt basically relied on the descriptions of the Day of Atonement ritual as it is found in the Bible, the Talmud, and J. Lightfoot's *The Temple Service as it Stood in the Dayes of our Saviour* (1649). According to the Hebraic custom, two goats were selected as penitential symbols of human sin on the Day of Atonement, one of which was sacrificed on the altar, while the other was first abused by being beaten, kicked and spat upon, then sent into the wilderness slowly to perish. Thus it carried away the sins of man, which were transferred to the goat beforehand by "lay[ing] both ... hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess[ing] over him the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins" (Leviticus 16:21). It was also part of the tradition that a red fillet was bound about the horns of the goat, and as the sign of God's acceptance of man's offering and His remission of sins the colour of the fillet turned from red to pure white. Accordingly, Hunt's picture shows the goat with a red fillet around his horns, indicating that redemption has not yet come.

The painting perfectly renders the stifling heat and heavy, oppressive air of the hot October eve in Usdam, as the Atonement rituals were traditionally performed in September or October.[245] Total devastation rules the land, where all that lives is doomed to perish, as is shown by the eerie skeleton of a camel in the background. As he talks about it in one of his letters[246], Hunt himself wanted the sense of despair to overweigh the sense of hope; that is why he made certain changes between the first, smaller version and the final, bigger one.[247] The first version suggests more optimism presenting a magnificent rainbow spanning over the desolate land, the rainbow traditionally referring to God's mercy and a renewed covenant on the basis of Gen. 9:8–17. Finding it too dominant and too optimistic, Hunt omitted the rainbow from the second version, and he also changed the colour of the goat. Originally he wished to paint a black goat, which was more common, seeing it as the personification of Azazeel, the evil demon (Leviticus 16:8, 20, 26), but later he opted for the rarer white one in order to emphasise the purity, the sinless nature of the animal, and therefore strengthening its symbolic power as a type of the Saviour.

There are, however, faint but obvious references to future redemption, which sooth a bit the overall despair of the scene. An olive branch shown in the lower left corner represents not just life as a plant but also recalls the story of Noah in Genesis suggesting the coming end of the devastation. The reflection of the full moon on the water shown in the upper left corner appears as a halo round the horns of a scull in the water, which may refer to the other goat already sacrificed in the temple and accepted as an offering. The decorations on the frame also try to counterbalance the overwhelming eerie atmosphere of the picture. The olive branch is shown again on the left frame, and facing it on the right a five-petal rose can be seen, a conventional symbol of the stigmata, out of which four trees grow in the direction of the four cardinal points, together probably standing for the renewal of life acquired through the Passion and sacrifice of Christ. On the horizontal frames a group of seven stars and a seven-branched candlestick are shown referring to the seven churches of Christ and their angels (Rev. 1:20) as they appear in the hands of the Saviour

[245] Accurate as ever, Hunt waited for the right season to paint the background. Cf. William Holman Hunt, 1:447.

[246] Letter to Agnew in 1906. In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 154.

[247] The first, smaller version was started in 1854, but actually finished only in 1858, later than the second, bigger one, which was begun on 17 November 1854 and completed in early June in 1855.

at the Last Judgement, who finally makes them triumphant.

However, these tiny details did not relieve the painting of its terror. And though it was not taken with widespread enthusiasm by the public, Rossetti's appreciation was echoed by other artist friends who regarded *The Scapegoat* as something special, as something matchless in the history of religious art. Charles Collins expressed his enthusiasm, writing to Hunt:

> I was especially struck with the noble idea of the Scapegoat. It is a glorious subject full of wild terror and (much more) one of the strongest and most unmistakable types of Him who bore our sins and was wounded for our transgressions and as that it becomes a theme of the utmost and most touching interest and importance. I envy you the subject, only glad that it has got into better hands than mine.[248]

Millais "approved [and] understood it, and was touched by the pathos of the subject,"[249] and another colleague, Ford Madox Brown wrote that "... Hunt's *Scapegoat* requires to be seen to be believed in. Only then can it be understood how, by the might of genius, out of an old goat, and some saline encrustations, can be made one of the most tragic and impressive works in the annals of art."[250]

Beneath the Surface: Hunt's Flexible Approach to Religion

While staying in the Holy Land and working on *The Finding* and *The Scapegoat* Hunt got acquainted and then made friends with a unique person of prophetic nature, a Zionist and early advocate of world peace; Henry Wentworth Monk. At that time Monk was absorbed in his studies of Revelation, and his thoughts and ideas as well as his individual approach to the Bible made a strong impression on Hunt.[251]

Monk was born in Canada, and was originally trained for the Church of England, but during a serious illness when he was in a trance, he experienced a revelatory vision of God, which entirely changed his view of religion. From that time on he firmly rejected all forms of traditional religious teaching, and started studying the Bible as if it were a record of similar revelations to the one he himself had experienced in his trance. In his studies he relied solely on the text of the Scriptures, disregarding all commentaries, and he came to the final conclusion that the promised millennium was imminent. Besides his Biblical studies, he also stood up for the foundation of an independent Jewish state in the Holy Land, regarding its establishment as his own appointed mission.

Though Hunt could not accept many of Monk's prophetic ideas, he revered his friend's genuineness and vast knowledge and found Monk's missionary zeal akin to his own belief in the priestly nature of art and his own divine mission as an artist. So together with Ruskin he helped Monk to have the fruit of his hard work, an individual interpretation of

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[248] In Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 109.

[249] William Holman Hunt, 2:105.

[250] In Wood, 44.

[251] As Hunt wrote: "His [Monk's] knowledge of history, and his enthusiasm for the progressive thought stored in the Bible, made him of special interest to me." (William Holman Hunt, 1:434.) And also: "He is certainly a man of intellect and with the clearest exposition of the Bible mysteries I have ever heard." (In a letter to Ford Madox Brown, in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 181.)

[252] *A Simple Interpretation of the Revelation* (1858).

the Revelation[252] published in 1858. During the time Monk spent in London preparing the publication Hunt painted a portrait of him, which was to accompany the written work in its propagation of Monk's ideas.

Accordingly, all the details in the picture bear significant references to Monk's views. He is shown in a priestly, gold and brown eastern robe, which refers to his errand to work for the establishment of a Jewish state and which is decorated with golden stars, emblems of heavenly brightness.[253] His missionary zeal and strong determination are suggested by his undeviating expression. The long hair and beard, which were grown under the vow of not cutting them until the kingdom of Heaven was established on Earth, make his appearance that of a prophet. In his right hand he holds a copy of the Greek New Testament open at the last pages: at the Revelation, and in his left he has a sealed copy of *The Times*, referring to the seven seals mentioned in Revelation and suggesting that the time had finally come for them to be broken (Rev. 5). The green glass window, which is made of square panels with bubbles in the middle and which provides the background to the painting, also refers to Monk's pamphlet. It is supposed to recall the sea of glass described in Revelation (4:6, 15:2), which can be identified with the water above the firmament mentioned in Genesis (1:6–8); in both cases referring to Heaven itself. It is also important that Hunt painted the glass of the window opaque, for it suggests that the heavenly world could not yet be clearly seen since the millennium had not yet come. As it is said in the Bible:

> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part,
> But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ...
> For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Cor. 9:10, 12)

Monk's portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860, and, as the sitter's religious views were not familiar to the public, its symbolism became basically unnoticed. In the case of this painting, luckily for Hunt, no one suspected religious propaganda. Monk's pamphlet, just like Hunt's painting, passed unmarked, leaving the sitter and his views in obscurity. Had Hunt's open-mindedness and support for such an independent religious presentation been known, it would probably not have remained without comment and criticism.

The general unconcern for Monk's pamphlet at the time of fervent religious debates may seem peculiar. *Essays and Reviews*, a collection of seven essays concerned with Bible-interpretation[254], set off an excited stir in the clerical world, despite the fact that the liberal views that some of the essays propagated were not entirely new. In general the volume, which was promoted by Frederick Temple, first principle of Trinity College, and Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, was intended to "encourage free and honest discussions of Biblical questions"[255]. In Owen Chadwick's opinion the main reason for the agi-

[253] In the case of these references Hunt relied on Pugin's *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costumes* (1844).

[254] Just like Monk, one of the essayists, Benjamin Jowett, also stood for studying the Bible independently of all traditional interpretations.

[255] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 2:75.

tation that followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 was not so much its content, but rather the fact that the essays had been written by eminent members of the Church of England[256], and "if laymen had written it," writes Chadwick, "it would have fallen dead from the press"[257]. Monk was, on the contrary, an isolated, eccentric prophet, who had nothing to do with the institution of the established church, and who even spent most of his life far away from England. Thus the publication of his individual ideas was seen as no threat to the stronghold of the Anglican Church.

Pictorial Historicism: *The Shadow of Death*

Parallel to the desire to reconsider some aspects of the traditional interpretation of the Bible, there was a popular demand for a historically reliable account of the life of Christ. As it has already been mentioned, the first biography of Christ written in this spirit was Strauss' *Leben Jesu* in 1835, but the real upspring followed only in the 1860s. As Owen Chadwick points out[258], the trend was significantly boosted as travelling became much easier than it had been before, which encouraged ever more people to explore far and exotic countries. Given its sacred appeal the Holy Land had always been a popular destination, and those who could afford the journey obtained a real knowledge of the land and the people of which they had so far only remote and obscure ideas. And as the nineteenth-century Palestine became familiar through personal experiences and written or pictorial accounts, so did the Palestine of the first century started losing its mysticism.

A lively though somewhat idealised image of Palestine appeared in Ernest Renan's famous biography of Christ, *Vie de Jesus*. It was first published in 1863, and though the English translation was not as highly popular as its original French edition, it was widely read, and it also stimulated the English writers to follow suit. The first account of Christ's life from an English author was published quite soon, in 1865. The book, *Ecce Homo* was brought out anonymously[259], which probably contributed to the fact that it soon became a central topic of conversation. Typically of general interest, the peak in its sale came after Lord Shaftesbury's public remark describing *Ecce Homo* as "the most pestilential book ever vomited ... from the jaws of hell"[260]. Notwithstanding, the book was very much in agreement with the general concerns of most churchmen and intellectuals since it drew attention to the importance of Christian morality. The next biography of Christ, Sir Richard Hanson's *The Jesus of History,* was already issued in 1869, and it was followed by F. W. Farrar's *Life of Christ* within just five years. Farrar's work became far the most popular among all the biographies in England. Apart from these complete biographies several pamphlets, studies, and articles were published on the same subject from such prominent authors as Samuel Hinds, former Bishop of Norwich, C. J. Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester

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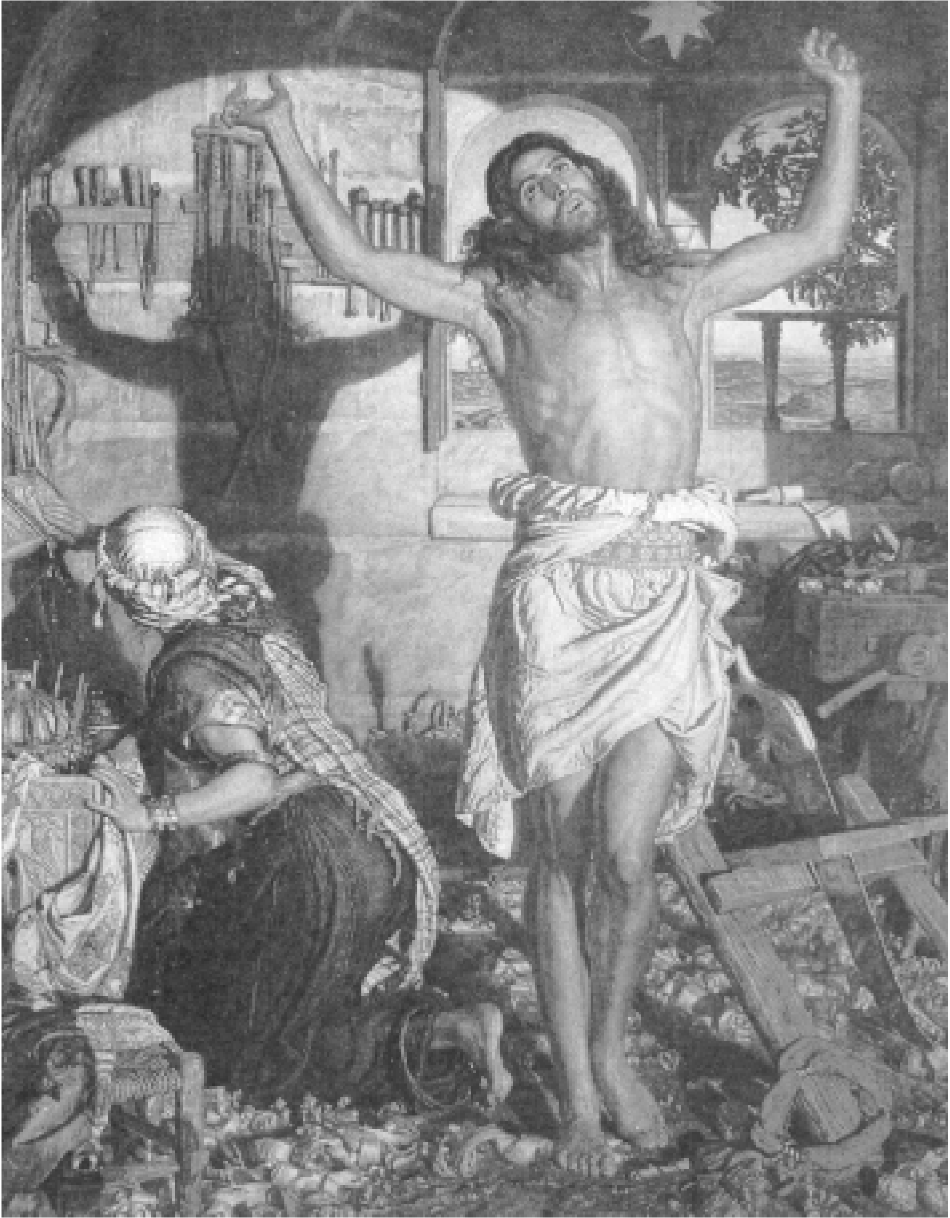
[256] As it has already been mentioned, the only layman among the authors was C. W. Goodwin, the others; Temple, Jowett, Rowland Williams, H. B. Wilson, Mark Pattison, and Professor Baden Powell held important clerical posts.

[257] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* 2:78.

[258] Ibid, 62.

[259] The author later turned out to be J. R. Seeley, professor of Latin at University College, London.

[260] In Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2: 65.



William Holman Hunt: *The Shadow of Death*
214,2x168,2 cm. Tempera and oil on canvas. 1870–1873. Manchester City Art Gallery

and Bristol, and Archbishop Thomson of York.

With his next painting Hunt made a pictorial contribution to the current interest in the history of Christ's life.[261] The idea of *The Shadow of Death* (1870–73) was suggested by such concerns: "… I believed that a picture of Jesus engaged in His humbler duties, anterior to Messianic work, was calculated to make the world realise more fully the value of His example in the perfection of His human life."[262] His concept might have been inspired by his reading of Renan's book in 1869, in which he saw the manifestation of a similar desire for realistic presentation in writing to his own in painting. As he wrote in one of his letters:

> ...with my particular picture [*The Shadow of Death*] and old religious priest teaching I see nothing at all in common, and I should think that so far from any ecclesiological school being pleased with it that it is more fitted by itself for the Renan class of thinkers who have been studying the life of Christ as one particular branch of history— ... my picture is strictly—as the Temple picture was—*historic* with not a single fact of any kind in it of a supernatural nature, and in this I contend it is different for [*sic*] all previous work in religious art[263] .

In its conscientious realism *The Shadow of Death* is obviously a successor to the previous *The Finding*. There is, however, an important novel element in its conception. So far Hunt relied on the pre-figurative symbolism of the Bible itself in his paintings, but here, for the first time, he himself created a type, which was entirely visual, which did not and could not have a written equivalent. Christ is depicted in the painting as a carpenter, who is stretching out his exhausted body after a long day's hard work. With his extended arms his body constitutes a cruciform, the shadow of which is reflected on the wall behind, cast at a wooden rack of tools. The visual images of Christ and his shadow become the pre-figurative symbols of the Crucifixion.

To show the Saviour as a toiling carpenter was in itself a quite novel thing. Christ was sometimes shown assisting as a young boy to St Joseph, who is known to have been a carpenter, but Christ himself is usually not associated with the craft, despite the fact that according to a brief reference in the Bible (Mark 6:3), he had worked as a carpenter until he started his missionary work at the age of about thirty. The timing for Christ's presentation as a labourer was ideal. Showing Christ as a working man, taking on ordinary, manly tasks was a conception which very pertinently reflected the dominant issues concerning the contemporary spectators. The citation inscribed on the frame was again carefully chosen by Hunt to suit his painting and support the message it carried. It is from the Epistle of St Paul to the Philippians, in which the apostle exhorts his readers to follow Christ's example in love, unity, and humility. The depicted lines emphasise Christ's own humiliation as the servant of the Lord, taking on human form and unquestioning obedience:

[261] "It was certain that the time had come when others in the world of thought besides myself were moved by the new spirit, which could not allow the highest of all interests to remain as an uninvestigated revelation. From the beginning of my attempt till this time many thinkers of various schools have devoted themselves to elucidate anew the history treated in the gospels, and the desire for further light cannot be quenched. The conviction I started with, that much of the teaching of Christ's life is lost by history being overlaid with sacerdotal gloss, is widely shared by others." William Holman Hunt, 2:408–9.

[262] Ibid, 273.

[263] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 221.

> ... he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in likeness of men:
>
> And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phi. 2:7–8)

Just like the painting itself these lines emphasise Christ's likeness to man and not his superiority, just as it was intended by Christ's ardent biographers. In addition, the painting displays an explicit reference to the value of labour by associating it with the Saviour. As it has already been mentioned in connection with *The Finding*, work was a key notion for the Victorians, but whereas *The Finding* concentrated on work as a mission or duty, *The Shadow of Death* focuses on its physical nature. The interpretation of work in this sense was more ambiguous, since Hunt had to reconcile the nineteenth-century evaluation of labour with the traditional Biblical view of it, which in itself was equivocal.

Manual labour was held in an unusually high esteem in the second half of the nineteenth century. Generally the Broad Church party was known for its respect for the labourer and his hard work, especially because of the ideas and activities of two of its leading personalities, Thomas Arnold and Frederick Denison Maurice. Carlyle was regarded as the 'prophet of work' believing in and advocating the ennobling effect of both mental and physical work. "All work, even cotton-spinning, is noble; work is alone noble,"[264] He wrote and William Morris and John Ruskin thought likewise. Morris, in utopian novel *News from Nowhere* and in articles like "How We Live and How We Might Live" and "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil", often confirmed his belief in the utility as well as the joy of creative and productive physical work. Ruskin, as Slade, Professor at Oxford University, took his students to build roads finding it a useful complement to their intellectual education.

The respect for manual labour often featured in contemporary painting, too. Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1865), which was conceived under the influence of Carlyle's writings, is known as the pictorial glorification of man's power to do useful work. William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* (1861), Millais's *The Rescue* (1855), and John Brett's *The Stonebreaker* (1858) show similar pride and respect. Even the exhausted, effete, haggard workman was sometimes seen as respectable, as it is shown by Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (1858). Wallis, quite typically, quoted Carlyle in the exhibition catalogue:

> Venerable to me is the hard Hand; crooked, coarse; wherein notwithstanding lies a cunning virtue, indefeasibly royal, as of the Sceptre of this Planet. Venerable too is the rugged face, all weather-tanned, besoiled, with its rude intelligence; for it is the face of a Man living manlike. Oh, but the more venerable for thy rudeness, and even because we must pity as well as love thee! Hardly-entreated Brother! For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy strait limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our Conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. For in thee too lay a god-created Form, but it was not to be unfolded; encrusted must it stand with the thick adhesions and defacements of Labour: and thy body, like thy soul, was not to know freedom.[265]

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[264] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 132.
[265] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 157.

Though Carlyle's view was steadily spreading and the presentation of the defacements of labour in connection, for example, with a stonebreaker became acceptable or even respectable, the same thing probably would not have applied to a painting presenting the members of the Holy Family. Thus while Hunt was as accurate as ever in the presentation of the Middle Eastern workshop, he took care to show Christ as a strong, muscular young man perfect and healthy not just in soul, but in body alike. When twenty-four years earlier Millais had depicted St Joseph in his *Carpenter's Shop* he had shown a real carpenter with all the bodily deformities caused by his hard work, so, in this sense, his work was more realistic and more audacious than Hunt's *The Shadow of Death*. No wonder, therefore, that while Millais' work was found appalling, Hunt's picture was greeted with sincere enthusiasm.

Similarly to the nineteenth-century view of the true worth of labour, the Bible also regards work as a dignifying duty of man. Work is the task devolved on man by God (1 Thes. 4:11); it is the condition of his living, as well as the source of his happiness (Psalms 128:1-4). However, hard daily labour is also referred to as a punishment imposed on man after the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19). Its cessation in the evening is, therefore, an obvious relief. The pamphlet[266], which accompanied the painting at the time of its first exhibition in 1873, pointed out both of these aspects; the dignity of manual labour as well as its burdensomeness and the ease at its cessation.

As Christ's daily work ends in the painting with his stretching, so would his work as the envoy of God on earth be accomplished by his crucifixion. Christ's passion and the Crucifixion are recalled by some other quite original symbols. The reeds on the left, for example, refer to the mock sceptre given to Christ's hands, the red fillet carries all the references explained in connection with *The Scapegoat*, and here it also recalls the crown of thorns. The shadow of the saw appears as a spear pointing to the heart of Christ's shadow image, which is depicted as a plumb-bob hung on the wooden rack. The pomegranates shown on the window sill traditionally symbolise the Resurrection. The semicircular upper section of the window behind Christ appears as a halo around his head, while the star in the middle refers to the prophecy of Balaam (Num. 24:17) and to the star which guided the Magi to the new-born Jesus. The visit of the Magi is also indicated by the presentation of their gifts revealed in the open chest on the left.

Mary is shown opening the chest "to reassure herself that the gifts brought by the wise men were a reality, not the baseless fabric of a vision."[267] Then suddenly noticing the eerie cruciform shadow of her son on the wall, she experiences a moment of disturbing foreboding. Thus the painting can be seen again as a unique version of the ancient Annunciation theme[268], where the divine revelation is carried by the vision of the cross, and where not the birth, but the death of Christ is announced. Mary's kneeling position is reminiscent of the traditional Annunciation scenes, but here she is shown with her back to the spectator, which was regarded by contemporaries as the manifestation of anti-Catholicism[269]. Nevertheless, Hunt's report on how Catholics were forbidden to see his painting

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[266] Supposedly written by Hunt himself. Cf. *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 221.
[267] William Holman Hunt, 2:273-4.
[268] Cf. Adams, 120; Landow, 121.
[269] Cf. *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 223; Adams, 120.

while he was working on it in Jerusalem reveals that he had no such intention:

> Except one party of Latins, who came from Bethlehem, no others of the Roman community appeared among the throng of visitors. A day after, I inquired of an impartial person why this was and heard that the papal dignitaries had decided that the representation of the Holy Virgin with the face hidden was denounced as a Protestant indignity to the Madonna, and they had forbidden all of their Church to come. They had posted sentinels at the Jaffa Gate to caution their members from Bethlehem not to appear, and the party of three who came had remained ignorant of this interdict by coming through the Damascus Gate. I had indeed tried many arrangements in order that the Virgin's face should be shown, but I had rejected all, from conviction that nothing but the direct glance at the shadow gave the tragedy of the idea.[270]

The Shadow of Death, just like the previous *The Finding*, was greeted with general approval, and, for obvious reasons, the painting enjoyed an unusual popularity among the working classes.[271] Despite, however, the success of the historical-realistic approach applied by Hunt in this painting, he was still fascinated by religious mysteries, and returned to its presentation in his next important religious work, *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1876–87).

Return to Mysticism: *The Triumph of the Innocents*

After the relatively easy comprehensibility of *The Shadow of Death, The Triumph* puzzled even the connoisseurs. The reason for the spectators' bewilderment was manifold. First of all, Hunt combined two traditional, originally individual types of Biblical presentations; the 'flight into Egypt' theme and that of the 'massacre of the Innocents'. In addition, the supernatural elements employed in this picture are far more unconventional than the ones, for example, in *The Light of the World*, and whereas *The Light of the World* presents an entire vision as it was envisaged in the painter's imagination, *The Triumph* shows the vision and its seer at the same time, making hardly any distinction between real and visionary. Furthermore, many of the symbols of the painting are so individual that instead of clarifying the overall meaning of the picture, they rather make it even more obscure.

The picture presents the Holy Family's escape from Bethlehem under cover of darkness; Mary, holding the infant Christ, is shown sitting on a donkey, which is being led by St Joseph. So far the image is wholly conventional. It is unusual, however, that the Holy Family is accompanied by a procession of small children; three babies are even shown hovering in the air above the group on the ground. Each of these children is enveloped in a delicate layer of sacred light, otherwise they look just like ordinary human figures. But they are actually spirits, the reincarnations of those children, who have been killed by

[270] William Holman Hunt, 2:308.

[271] "As in Jerusalem, the extreme Church party denounced it as blasphemous, altogether refusing to acknowledge that the record in St. Mark should be read as authority for representing Jesus Christ as Himself a carpenter, but the picture did not long remain there [London, Oxford]. When it was shown in the North it was hailed by artisans and other working men as a representation which excited their deepest interest, so that they came to the agent, asking him to receive subscriptions for the two-guinea print, week by week in instalments, that the idea might always be before them in their own homes. This was exactly what I most desired, the dutiful humility of Christ's life thus carrying its deepest lesson." Ibid, 310.

[272] Discussing the painting in one of his letters and in *Pre-Raphaelitism,* Hunt mentions that the vision is granted to the Virgin Mary; however, it does not become apparent in either version of the painting. Mary seems to be deeply immersed in thought, showing no concern for the proceeding spirits. For Hunt's letter see: Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 130; William Holman Hunt, 2:327–8.

Herod the Great's order in Bethlehem. They seem to be visible only to Christ[272], who smilingly greets them turning and looking back to them, twisting his body in his mother's arms. The fact that Christ catches sight of the other world connects *The Triumph* surprisingly with *The Finding*, though here the revelation is merely visual, and intellectually not comprehended. Mary seems to be immersed in thought, while Joseph is looking back at the distant town they have fled from.

The revived children are shown as the first martyrs whose lives were sacrificed for Christ. They carry the attributes of their sacrifice and their subsequent redemption; garlands of flowers and laurel wreaths are around their waists and on their heads. The different plants in the hands of some of them are all Biblical ones, each conveying a reference to salvation; the blossoming apple branch traditionally symbolising immortality, the red rose martyrdom, while the palm standing for the everlasting victory of those who died for Christ. The olive branch means hope and reconciliation, and the wine refers to Christ's blood in the Eucharist. The ripe ears of wheat in Christ's hand may refer to the bread of the Eucharist, but it can also recall a conventional pictorial version of the flight into Egypt theme, which presents in the background a field that is being put under wheat or where the wheat is being harvested[273]. This type of presentation goes back to the legend according to which, on their flight the Holy Family passed a cornfield just being sown, and by the following day, when Herod's men inquired about the family, the wheat had already been harvested.

Some of the children are endowed with further referential features. The one on the far right, leading the whole group, appears as a priest at the head of a procession. He is the only one who wears a long, brightly coloured dress, a reminiscent of priestly robes, and also the only one looking forward and towards the sky as if following divine guidance. The second child, marching right after him, is holding out a palm branch to the ground in front of the Holy Family, recalling the scene of Christ's entry to Jerusalem, the first stage of his passion and sacrifice. Another little boy in the foreground of the painting is a proper pictorial type of Christ; he is wounded on the chest recalling Christ's spear-wound suffered on the cross, and the pearls of the ruby necklace in his hands are meant to suggest the drops of Christ's blood.

The children proceed along and on a strange watery substance, sometimes as narrow as a string of ropes, sometimes flat and round as a pool, which turns into shiny bubbles, or, as they were called by Hunt, into 'airy globes'[274] when it should cross a real brook. This unearthly surface on which the spirits of the Innocents move on is the stream of eternal life, which is transformed into bubbles since it cannot blend with ordinary water. The two biggest ones of these airy globes present individual pictures within the painting with symbolic references epitomising the Creation, the Fall, and the Redemption. Landow gives a detailed description of these visionary globes[275] relying on Hunt's fifteen-page long explanation in the 1885 exhibition catalogue. According to it the biggest bubble shows Jacob's ladder connecting earth and heaven (Gen. 28:12–17), thus being often used as a type of Christ. In the middle of the globe the Tree of Life can be seen, another pre-figurative

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[273] Cf. Hans Vereycke: *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, or Joachim Patinir: *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*.

[274] In Wood, 104.

[275] Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 130–5.

symbol of Christ, which is often identified with the cross. The lion and the lamb, both symbols of Christ (Rev. 5:5–6), one is for its power and strength, the other for its purity, are also presented. On the right, above the animals, a procession up on the heavenly ladder can be seen, while on the left a woman is shown as if being driven out from the Garden of Eden. The other much smaller globe shows a red serpent approaching Christ's heel, recalling how God cursed the serpent after the Fall saying: "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head; and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). In traditional Christian theology this section is usually interpreted as the Lord's prophecy of Mary's triumph over original sin by giving birth to the Saviour, and of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion.

The inspiration for all these symbols came mostly from Revelation, maybe also from Monk's interpretation of it. Describing the heavenly Jerusalem the Bible says:

> And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.
>
> In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life. ...
>
> And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.
>
> And they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.
>
> And there shall be no more night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Rev. 22:1–2, 3–5)

To connect the bloody act of the massacre of the Innocents with these promising passages at the end of the Bible is highly unusual. The incident has always evoked scenes of torment and brutality; the display of human cruelty and selfishness. Hunt turned the bloodiest subject of religious painting into the celebration of Redemption and immortality.

Ruskin was understandably ecstatic about the painting, declaring that it was "the greatest religious painting of the time"[276]. But his contemporaries were more puzzled than enthusiastic. No one doubted the picture's merits and the painter's creativity in once more producing something new and revolutionary, but most viewers were disturbed by "the strange mixture of real and unreal"[277] in the painting. F. G. Stephens found it, for example, "self-contradictory and puzzling" regarding *The Triumph* as a "noble failure"[278]. Twentieth-century criticism of the painting is also divided; to Graham Hough it is "original and beautiful"[279], while Stephen Adams regards it as "a profoundly idiosyncratic and unlovely flight of fancy"[280], and Christopher Wood as artistically not satisfying[281].

Talking of Hunt's religious works in general, Wood claims that these pictures "... are symbols of Victorian faith; [which] to our sceptical, twentieth-century eyes ... seem too laboured, too sentimental and too evocative of the very kind of Victorian religiosity and

[276] In *Art of England* (1883), qtd in William Holman Hunt, 2:341–2.
[277] F. G. Stephens in Wood, 104.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Hough, 66.
[280] Adams, 120.
[281] Wood, 106.
[282] Ibid.

humbug we have deliberately rebelled against"[282]. Nevertheless, all that these paintings reflect and manifest was, beyond doubt, genuinely thought and felt by the painter, even if by today they definitely seem to be outdated and typically Victorian. At the same time, Hunt's works also reveal that he was unusually open-minded in his approach to religious issues, giving attention to Tractarian, Evangelical and independent views alike, and in this sense he was unlike most of his contemporaries. The fact that, despite his prophetic vocation, he never openly took sides, suggests that he did not think himself belonging to any of the religious parties. He seems to have agreed with Ruskin that "... violent combativeness for particular sects, as Evangelical, Roman Catholic, High Church, Broad Church,— or the like, is merely a form of party egotism, and a defiance of Christ, not confession of Him."[283]

[283] *Fors Clavigera*, 4:296.

Chapter 4

AN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH: DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Orthodox Christianity Revised: Rossetti and Ruskin

As regards the connection of faith and artistic production, the development of Rossetti's career was very different from that of Hunt. Whereas Hunt always kept to a strongly realistic style in Biblical or religious presentations despite the significant change in his attitude to religion after his conversion, Rossetti, whose religious views hardly changed at all, produced Biblical paintings which are, at least in style, hardly similar. Hunt, being an unbeliever in his youthful years, was at the beginning more interested in literary themes than in religious ones, only to immerse himself in Biblical studies and presentations after his conversion. Rossetti, however, who started his work as a painter with two important religious pictures, became more and more alienated from religious subjects undertaking such work mainly under the obligation of commissions. The change in Rossetti's interest was probably caused by the merciless attacks which followed the exhibition of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* by which he was deeply hurt. But never being a devout worshipper, he was offended not as a religious man but as a young and sensitive artist; he was angry with the public which did not appreciate his genius. He swore never to exhibit in public again, and he consistently kept his word.

Furthermore, Rossetti always felt free to do whatever he wanted. He often left pictures unfinished if he lost interest in the subject, and he had no scruples even to take the price of a picture in advance and then make the commissioner wait for years till he finished his work, if he finished it at all. Rarely did he consider his main patron's, Ruskin's advice or a commissioner's request as relevant, he was self-assured and stubborn in his art. And when he had enough of painting altogether, he simply turned to literature, writing as well as translating poems. He was guided in his art mainly by instinct, by inclination, and the same sort of independence and individualism characterised his attitude to religion, too.

His self-consciousness both in art and in religion is more apparent in his early writings than in his first paintings. It seems that his lack of proper painting skills and experience made him less confident in the early years as far as painting was concerned, and that writing made it easier for him to disclose his views on art and faith. The fact that even at this early stage he was well aware of his aims and natural endowments as an artist is revealed best in his only completed short story, "Hand and Soul", which foretells as well as explains the later development of his pictorial art, and, at the same time, it also elucidates his relation to faith and religion.

"Hand and Soul" was written in December 1849, at a time when Rossetti was very much under the spell of the early Christian painters. Accordingly, his story is set in thirteenth-century Pisa, a centre of early Italian art, and is about a gifted and ardent young Italian painter, Chiaro dell' Erma. Just like in the case of his early paintings, Rossetti tries to persuade the readers about the authenticity of his chosen subject and to give credibility to Chiaro's past existence. The information the frame of the narrative contains about the writer's experiences is so exact that it is hard not to believe it; an alleged scholar, Dr.

Aemmster, and his pamphlet on Chiaro's pictures are referred to, and exact dates and places of display are given. However, Chiaro never existed. This Italian painter is, for the most part, the personification of Rossetti's own self, his ideas, and his ambitions.

The story relates the development of Chiaro's career, presenting the important stages in the formulation of his concept of art and of the commitments of the artist. The basic artistic dilemma unfolded in the story is how to reconcile the artist's duty to serve God, his aspiration to delight his fellow men, and his natural desire for fame. At the climax of the story Chiaro feels that all he has created so far as an artist has been unsatisfactory, either failing in its proper service of God, or failing to produce a favourable effect on the spectators. He thinks that by painting his wonderful Madonnas, Saints and Holy Children, which delighted everyone who saw them, he was eager to keep in mind only his own selfish desires, and when he started producing abstract and moralising pictures to please God he lost his earlier public appeal, wasting the power of affecting and bettering his world. Resolution to his devastating feeling of complete artistic incompetence comes in a vision experienced in a desperate and feverish state. The image of his soul appears to him in the form of a beautiful woman, and sets his heart at ease by revealing the true way of serving God as an artist. Just as in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or in Hunt's *The Finding* a divine revelation is presented here, which, in accordance with Rossetti's own search for an artistic creed, is suitable to unveil the duties and the mission of the artist. This special annunciation is mystic and visionary, so in this sense it is closer to the traditional Catholic view of divine disclosures than to Hunt's rather Protestant approach shown in *The Finding*. However, Rossetti, just like Hunt, brings divinity closer to man; for he presents the human soul as the heavenly messenger, as the earthly manifestation of divine wisdom and guidance.

In Rossetti's conception God is wise and yielding, who accepts as faith everything that comes from the heart regardless of whether it is destined to serve Him or not. He does not demand learned and duteous religiosity, but fidelity to one's own inner experience and feelings. Chiaro's didactic morality failed because the images he painted did not come from his heart but were forced by his intellect. And, in order to please God, one's natural, God-given vocation always has to gain ascendancy over any kind of didactic purpose. Chiaro made a mistake by dividing love and devotion to God, since these are inseparable. As the image of his soul explains:

> Be not nice to seek out division; but possess thy love in sufficiency: assuredly this is faith, for the heart must believe first. What He [God] hath set in thine heart to do, that do thou; even though thou do it without thought of Him; it shall be well done; it is this sacrifice that He asketh of thee and His flame is upon it for a sign. Think not of Him, but His love and thy love. For God is no morbid exactor: He hath no hand to bow beneath, nor a foot, that thou shouldst kiss it.[284]

Rossetti, like Chiaro, had a passion for beauty and a desire for fame set deep in his heart, so by accepting these as God-given qualities he could liberate his soul from the oppressive pressures of a strict, orthodox religiosity.[285]

[284] Rossetti, 551.

[285] "You know how free I am … from any dogmatic belief;" he wrote in one of his letters to Algernon Charles Swinburne. 12 May 1870. *Letters*, 2:872.

With such religious flexibility and individual approach Rossetti set himself free from the spiritual obligations which restrained Ruskin, for example, in his views of art and religion for a long time. Nevertheless, Ruskin came to the same conclusion, realising by the 1860s the necessity to change the traditional concept of God and His heavenly world in order to save their conventional appeal. He realised that the image of God needed to be humanised; the authoritative, punishing Lord gradually being replaced by a wise and sympathetic Father. In his desperate search for a better communion with the divine world Ruskin wrote that

> in order to render this communion possible, the Deity has stooped from His throne, and has not only in the person of the Son, taken upon Him the veil of our human flesh, but, in the person of the Father, taken upon Him the veil of our human *thoughts*, and permitted us, by His own spoken authority, to conceive Him simply and clearly as a loving Father and Friend; —a being to be walked with and reasoned with ... This conception of God, which is the child's, is evidently the only one which can be universal, and therefore the only one which *for us* can be true.[286]

As the traditional concept of God's restrictive authority was suspended, so was the old view of the heavenly world reassessed. Earthly matters gradually gaining greater importance than they had possessed before, more attention was given to man, and more effort devoted to attain happiness during the short mortal existence. So the promised bliss of the Biblical and ecclesiastical heaven was not as much desired as before; in certain cases it was rejected altogether, or, in others it was replaced by a different sort of blessed world, which could provide a joy attractive enough to be wished everlasting. Ruskin, for example, who had a profound admiration for the beauty and power of nature, wished to furnish the divine sphere with earthly trees, lakes, clouds, and mountains. As he wrote in one of his letters to his future wife Effie Gray, "the Biblical promise of Golden streets did not appeal to him, [he] preferred an immortality 'among the snowy mountains and sweet valleys [*sic*] of this world'".[287] In *Praeterita* he confessed the same attachment; "... for me," he wrote, "the Alps and their people were alike beautiful in their snow, and their humanity; and I wanted, neither for them nor myself, sight of any thrones in heaven but the rocks, or of any spirits in heaven but the clouds."[288]

While Ruskin continually suffered from a guilty conscience for taking such liberties and redefining his inherited religious views, Rossetti derived unique self-assurance from his emancipated conviction. He overtly manifested in his poem "The Blessed Damozel" as early as in 1847 that earthly attractions were stronger for him than the promised heavenly ones. The poem reflects his unwillingness to accept that the passion of earthly love should be transitory and cease with death, finding it too powerful as well as too pleasurable to do without. The idea for the poem came to him by reading the poems of Edgar Allan Poe and translating the works of Dante and the poets of the Italian 'dolce stil nuovo', in which he frequently encountered the subject of an earthly lover mourning for his dead lady. He decided to reverse the situation and show the lady in heaven yearning for her lost

[286] *Modern Painters*, 4:82.
[287] Rosenberg, 23.
[288] *Praeterita*, 1:164–5.

lover[289]. Rossetti's blessed damsel is praying for the death of her lover, so that they together shall ask the Virgin Mary for her assistance to get to Christ and present her request "to live as once on earth with love". In Rossetti's view heavenly peace can be achieved only in a prolonged earthly happiness. The traditional love of God seems to be replaced by the love of man, and the heavenly unification with the divine spirit by the re-unification of the earthly lovers.

The religious accessories presented in "The Blessed Damozel" are reminiscences of the early Italian poems, for Rossetti, however, they are conveyers of sentiment and mystic beauty rather than religious piety. Accordingly, when he collected his early manuscript poems, Rossetti called them *The Songs of an Art Catholic*[290], which clearly indicates his awareness that though his reliance on such religious accessories was akin to that of the Catholics, he was guided rather by artistic than by religious interest in their application. As John Dixon Hunt observes, when Rossetti celebrates successful love in his poetry, he always uses religious imagery, much of which, however, remains decoration[291]. William Michael Rossetti proposed a similar view. He wrote of "Ave"—at that time called "Mater Pulchrae Delectionis"—, one of these early poems, that it "seems most to indicate definite Christian belief, and of a strongly Roman Catholic type. Such an inference would, however, be erroneous; his [D. G. Rossetti's] training was not in the Roman but the Anglican Church, and by the time when he wrote "Ave" he was more than vague in point of religious faith."[292] Rosseti himself wished to dissociate the poem from the Catholicism implied in it explaining that "[a]rt still identifies herself with all faiths for her own purposes and the emotional influence here employed demands above all an inner standing point."[293]

Rossetti's "... tendency to dwell on the externals of religion as objects of mainly aesthetic contemplation"[294] is even more perceptible in the painting *The Blessed Damozel* produced in 1871–77 to illustrate the written version. The lily, the palm leaves, the stars, and even the angels have rarely anything to do with the traditional Christian meanings usually associated with them. The upper panel, which presents the lady in heaven, shows in its background happily re-united young couples embracing and kissing, being indulged in clearly earthly passions despite their heavenly existence. The lady herself is shown as a very corporeal and sensuous woman, a far cry from the ethereal, lofty images usually associated with the incarnated soul. She is a typical late Rossettian female beauty, with long, wavy, and radiant hair; thick, bright, red lips; and a long, white neck; the whole figure having an evocative, even erotic overtone. So *The Blessed Damozel* has obviously more in common with the painter's famous and so familiar portraits of beautiful, alluring women than with the humble images of Mary in *The Girlhood* and in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.

However, as it is revealed by "Hand and Soul", there is a common denominator in all of Rossetti's presentations of women, whether that be the awe-stricken youthful Mary, the

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[289] As he said: "[Poe] had done the outmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved in heaven." In Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 118.

[290] Cf. Rossetti, 661.

[291] John Dixon Hunt, 82–3.

[292] Rossetti, 661.

[293] In *Letters*, 2:714. n.

[294] Hough, 48.

quasi-religious Blessed Damozel, the entranced Beatrice, the menacing Mnemosyne, the yearning Proserpine, or the sorrowful Pia de Tolomei. As Doughty explains, "Rossetti expressed through the forms of women the experience of his own soul, as he tried to live his myth, his ideal vision, amidst the frustrations of the outer world of reality."[295] Accordingly, as his experiences and views of life changed, so did the ladies and the images he depicted. From the early serene, dutiful child in *The Girlhood* and the hesitant and startled adolescent girl in *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, he got to the self-confident, resolute damsel of heaven. The transition was, however, slow and gradual, presenting during its course some preferences for certain subjects and characters.

'A Simple Jewish Girl': The Virgin Mary

For about eight or ten years after the completion of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* Rossetti's Biblical works were still and almost exclusively[296] concerned with the life of the Virgin Mary, though they were far outnumbered by secular subjects offered by Rossetti's new fascination with the Middle Ages; his absorption in Dante's work, for example, or in the legend of King Arthur. As he took to evoke these sad, yet beautiful tales of fervent love and noble sacrifice in small, wonderfully coloured watercolours, he retreated to his own world of dreams, where ladies were gentle and beautiful, and men were chaste and devoted. His love relationship with the frail and sensitive Elizabeth Siddal became part of this fabled world, where Lizzie became the object of his knightly devotion as well as his source of inspiration. As Madox Brown observed, making drawings of Lizzie became a kind of "monomania" with Rossetti[297], her delicate features being captured as Beatrice, Ophelia, and sometimes as the Virgin Mary, too.

The watercolours Rossetti made in the 1850s on the life of Mary reflect the bliss of his newly found love and enchanting dream-world; the dutiful, serene domesticity of *The Girlhood* being replaced with a more intimate sort of tranquillity. By withdrawing from publicity and liberating himself from the tenets of orthodox Christianity Rossetti enabled himself to create more individual and often very intimate religious pictures, akin maybe only to Burne-Jones's Biblical roundels in *The Flower Book*. His former strong reliance on traditional Christian iconography was also diminishing, which marks an important step in Rossetti's alienation from the Huntian ideal of religious painting. This alienation was, however, slow and gradual. For a while Rossetti still made use of the potentials offered by typological symbolism propagated with so much conviction by his friends, Ruskin and Hunt.

Ruskin had a decisive influence on Rossetti's life during these years. As a matter of fact, it was he whose support made Rossetti's living and independent artistic pursuits financially possible by securing important commissions, and introducing Rossetti to patrons and potential buyers. The humble, peaceful character of Rossetti's watercolours greatly

[295] Doughty, "Rossetti's Conception of the 'Poetic' in Poetry and Painting". In Sambrook, 163.

[296] The small water-colour *Ruth and Boaz* (1855) and the drawing *Joseph Accused before Potiphar* (1860) are the only known exceptions, both of which illustrate the relevant sections of the Old Testament without revealing such an interest in the depicted scenes as it is in the case of Rossetti's pictures of the Virgin Mary.

[297] In Wood, 28 and Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*, 97.

appealed to him, since they embodied all the spirituality he admired so much in the works of the purist painters, yet they concentrated on the presentation of terrestrial and not on celestial matters. Whether it was through Ruskin's influence that Rossetti returned to religious subjects after the ill success of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or not is difficult to decide, but, given his artistic independence, it seems likely that Rossetti would not have been talked into it without having a genuine inclination and personal interest. The same is suggested by the accounts of William Michael Rossetti[298], according to which a design for a future painting on the theme of the Passover had already been made by Rossetti back in 1849, so obviously before any contact was established between the critic and the Pre-Raphaelites. Nevertheless, the execution of the same design in colour was not undertaken till Ruskin gave a commission for it in 1854. By that time two designs for the Passover theme existed, one of which showed the Holy Family preparing for the feast (*Gathering Bitter Herbs*), and the other, the scene of eating the Passover (*Eating of the Passover*). Ruskin commissioned a watercolour of the first version, preferring it probably for its out-of-doors setting[299], and maybe also for its application of typological symbolism.

Rossetti started executing the watercolour at some time in 1855, and his letter written to Coventry Patmore at the time shows how much he was still under the influence of the Huntian and Ruskinian conception of ideal religious presentation. He was proud to find a subject which had an actual and a typical verity at the same time:

> Its chief claim to interest, if successful when complete, would be as a subject which must have actually occurred during every year of the life led by the Holy Family, and which I think must bear its meaning broadly and instantly—not as you say 'remotely'— on the very face of it,—in the one sacrifice really typical of the other. In this respect—its actuality as an incident no less than as a *scriptural* type—I think you will acknowledge it differs entirely from Herbert's some years back, Millais' more recently, or any other of the very many both ancient and modern which resemble it so far as they are illustrations of Christ's life 'subject to his parents', but not one of which that I can remember is anything more than an entire and often trifling fancy of the painter, in which the symbolism is not really inherent in the fact, but merely suggested or suggestible and having had the fact made to fit it.[300]

Besides the obvious topical connection between the *Gathering* and Millais' or Herbert's pictures[301] Rossetti's work shows a strong affinity also to Hunt's works, especially to *The Finding*, the execution of which Hunt had already started by that time in the Holy Land. Though not as large-scaled as *The Finding*, *Gathering* is just as successful in its application of typological symbolism, and its accuracy and adherence to the Biblical text is likewise precise. The picture closely follows the description of the ritual as it is presented in the Old Testament:

> In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house.

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[298] In Rossetti, 668.

[299] This reason is suggested by Alastair Grieve in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 274.

[300] To Coventry Patmore, 1855. *Letters*, 1:276.

[301] The two paintings referred to are, of course, Millais' *Carpenter's Shop* and Herbert's *Our Saviour Subject to His Parents at Nazareth*.

And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls: every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. ...

And ye shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with the fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. ...

And thus ye shall eat it, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand: and ye shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. (Exodus 12:3-11)

Accordingly, Rossetti shows two households performing the ritual, since the Holy Family would have been too few in number for a lamb. Each of the characters is occupied in the preparation for the feast. Elizabeth is lighting the pyre, Joseph is handing over the lamb, which has already been killed. Its blood, collected in a bowl, is being held by Christ for Zacharias, who is sprinkling the lintel with it. John is fastening Christ's shoes, and Mary is shown gathering the bitter herbs. The acts of the ancient ritual itself have obvious prefigurative references, and Rossetti has incorporated some other details which also foreshadow Christ's sacrifice; like the bread and the wine on the table laid in the house, or the cross-shaped wood to which the water cask is attached by the well.

But not just the picture's overwhelming accuracy and its reliance on typological symbolism make the *Gathering* akin to *The Finding*. As it becomes obvious from the sonnet Rossetti wrote to this painting, in his presentation, just like in *The Finding*, Christ experiences a sudden foreboding when he looks at the blood-mark painted on the post: "What shadow of Death the Boy's fair brow subdues / Who holds that blood wherewith the porch is stained / By Zachary the priest?" In Rossetti's painting, however, as compared to that of Hunt, there is nothing to suggest a clear comprehension of the experienced revelation. Rossetti's Christ is markedly younger, a mere boy still belonging to, and depending on, his earthly family, and not a youth perceiving his fate and committing himself to his obligation to his eternal Father. Being a child, his foreboding of future events is based not on understanding, but solely on feeling, on presentiment. So the *Gathering*, in spite of its realistic approach, retains something of the mystery of ancient religious thought, which somewhat disconnects it from the overall Protestant nature of *The Finding*.

This difference also reflects that the two artists were fascinated by typological symbolism for fundamentally dissimilar reasons. Hunt, as it has already been referred to, wished to attain some sort of moral or theological expansion of meaning with its application, whereas Rossetti was more excited by its inherent power of bridging the gap between events remote in time. Analysing the use of typological symbolism in Rossetti's poetry, Landow emphasises[302] that the problems of time and loss are constant concerns in Rossetti's poems, which can also be seen in the sonnet ("The Passover in the Holy Family") he wrote for the *Gathering*:

Here meet together the prefiguring day
And the day prefigured. "Eating thou shalt stand,

[302] Cf. Landow, *Victorian Types and Victorian Shadows*, 187–202.

Feet shod, loins girt, thy road-staff in thine hand,
With blood-stained door and lintel,"—did God say
By Moses' mouth in ages passed away.
And now, where this poor household doth comprise
At Paschal-Feast two kindred families,—
Lo! the slain lamb confronts the Lamb to slay.

The pyre is piled. What agony's crown attained,
What shadow of Death the Boy's fair brow subdues
Who holds that blood wherewith the porch is stained
By Zachary the priest? John binds the shoes
He deemed himself not worthy to unloose;
And Mary culls the bitter herbs ordained.

Accordingly, the scene depicted in the drawing is related to past and future alike, being in itself the 'day prefigured' as described in the octave as well as the 'prefiguring day' as explained in the sestet.

The fact that Rossetti finally left this small watercolour unfinished suggests that after triumphing over the intellectual challenge of creating a religious composition with inherent typological symbolism he simply lost interest in the subject which was chosen by his reason and not by his heart. As the title of his work suggests, he originally wanted to concentrate on Mary's feelings and her part in the ritual, however, the picture finally became a presentation of Christ's presentiment. As Rossetti never turned to the story of Christ as a source of inspiration apart from this unaccomplished work and a few commissioned designs for stained-glass, it seems likely that he was basically not interested in subjects offered by the events of Christ's life. He was attracted rather to the female characters of the Bible, like Mary and later Mary Magdalene, whom he could approach more with awe and empathy. Hunt, on the other hand, always made the Saviour the centre of his attention, never depicting Mary as the main figure. And though it would be exaggerating to regard Hunt as a Protestant and Rossetti as a Catholic painter on this basis, it seems justifiable to say that given Hunt's literariness and reliance on reason his approach was closer to that of the Protestants, while Rossetti's affinity for mysticism and reliance on feeling and intuition was rather Catholic in its nature.

The other design made for the Passover theme also presents the two families feasting together. With the staff in the hand of each person, they are shown standing at the laid table, with the exception of the kneeling figure of Zacharias, who is leading the prayer of thanksgiving. Although as accurate as the *Gathering*, the *Eating* is much less Huntian in conception, since the typological character of the subject is not at all utilised; instead of pre-figurativeness the intimacy of the incident is emphasised. For this reason, this neglected version of the Passover theme marks a new direction in the development of Rossetti's religious art, whereas the *Gathering* points rather backwards, bearing the legacy of a past interest. Other drawings, which similarly have never been attempted as paintings, reflect a similar shift in Rossetti's interest. *The Mary Virgin Being Comforted* (1852) or *St John Comforting the Virgin at the Foot of the Cross* (1852) also completely abandon the earlier symbolism, concentrating solely on human compassion, on the grief and inconsolability of Mary at the time of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion.

The watercolours Rossetti painted of Mary after 1855 show the same tendency. They also correspond with Ruskin's changing view of true religious art presented in the third

volume of *Modern Painters*. As it has already been mentioned, though he remained in favour of typological presentation in religious art since he first discovered its potentials in Tintoretto's *Annunciation* in 1846, by the time Ruskin wrote the third volume of *Modern Painters* his appreciation was extended to the purists' honest simplicity. Rossetti, reading the volume, was obviously inspired and delighted by what he found there, since it clearly reflected his own current view and interest. As he wrote to Robert Browning: "I am about half-way through Ruskin's third volume which you describe very truly. Glorious it is in many parts—how fine that passage in the 'Religious false ideal' where he describes Raphael's *Charge to Peter*, and the probable truth of the event in its outward aspect. A glorious picture might be done from Ruskin's description."[303]

Talking about pictures of the Blessed Virgin and the 'true religious ideal', Ruskin expressed his view that Mary should be depicted as "a simple Jewish girl, bearing the calamities of poverty, and the dishonours of inferior station" and not as she usually had been as "a graceful princess, crowned with gems, and surrounded by obsequious ministry of kings and saints"[304]. Accordingly, Rossetti's new, completed watercolours; *The Annunciation* (1855), *Mary Nazarene* (1857) and *Mary in the House of St John* (1858) all show Mary as a simple girl or mother, plainly dressed and being occupied with ordinary, everyday activities.

Though *The Annunciation* is interpreted in two different ways, they both describe Mary as an undistinguished young girl. According to Marillier and William Michael Rossetti, Mary is shown in the painting washing clothes in a stream, while in the catalogue of the New Exhibition she was described as "stooping with half upraised head bathing her feet in a rivulet"[305]. *Mary Nazarene* presents the Virgin planting a white lily and a rose bush. She is shown dressed to suit her work; her head is covered, and one sleeve of her coarse dress is turned up. Finally, *Mary in the House of St John* shows Mary filling a lamp with oil, as the sun is setting, while John is kindling tinder to light the lamp with.

Though some of the traditional supernatural elements usually employed in religious pictures, like the dove and the haloes, are preserved in the first two works, both of the scenes presented are surprisingly ordinary. In *Mary in the House of St John* even the doves and the haloes are omitted, making the picture even more familiar, presenting seemingly nothing more than a gentle and simple domestic scene.

All three of these watercolours suggest an overwhelming stillness and peaceful tenderness. In *The Annunciation*, for example, the embarrassing elements of fear and defencelessness displayed in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* are left behind, shock giving way to unaffected amazement, and the claustrophobia of the narrow bedchamber to the bliss of a sunny, embracing meadow. The tranquillity of nature dominates in *Mary Nazarene,* too, suggesting a peace of mind while work is being done in its quietude.[306] The serenity and peace of *Mary in the House of St John* is even more telling, its "impression of thoughtful repose", as Simeon Solomon described, "... is most impressive,"[307] The Crucifixion being over and

[303] To Robert Browning, 6 February 1856. *Letters*, 1:286.

[304] *Modern Painters*, 3:47.

[305] In Surtees, Cat. no. 69; Rossetti, 662.

[306] It is interesting to see how different Rossetti's approach to work was as compared to that of Hunt or Madox Brown. Though he shows Mary with a shovel in her hand, a musette with a pruning knife at her side, and a watering can beside her, Rossetti's presentation of physical work lacks all corporeality, no effort of manual labour becoming apparent.

[307] In Surtees, Cat. no. 110.

the Resurrection still being awaited, the picture shows one of the uneventful days of the Virgin, which shows that Rossetti was fascinated not so much by the dramatic incidents, but rather by the more ordinary days of Mary's life which were not reflected in the Biblical descriptions.

Rossetti's intention to present Mary as a simple human being is akin to Hunt's or Christ's biographers' wish to present the Saviour working and living as an ordinary man. There is, however, an important distinctive feature in Rossetti's approach. While his contemporaries were concerned about the historical aspects of the Biblical stories, Rossetti was interested in their spiritual implications. He wanted to see into the thoughts and feelings of ordinary persons approached by the divine, leading his inquires into the matters of soul and heart. So while Hunt's approach to religious art was mostly historical and theological, Rossetti's was basically emotional. Accordingly, Hunt's harsh realism presented facts and statements, while Rossetti's sentimentalism rather evoked questions.

The poem "Ave", which strongly corresponds to Rossetti's pictorial images of Mary's life, reflects the same quality.[308] Addressed to the Virgin, "Ave" searches into Mary's thoughts and investigates the extent of her awareness of the role she had in the divine scheme. It recapitulates all the scenes and events of her life which were depicted as paintings. The scenes of Mary's childhood, the Annunciation, the Passover in the Holy Family, Mary's daily work of watering her flowers and washing her garment in a stream, as well as the hopeful waiting in St John's house are all covered. The poem is full of unanswered questions, all inquiring into Mary's human reactions to a divinely pre-ordained chain of events. She is basically seen, just as presented in the paintings, as an ordinary girl or woman, yet somewhat mysterious in her electedness, in her maybe even unconscious role in God's secret plans. Accordingly, she is referred to in the poem as the "headstone of humanity, / Groundstone of the great Mystery, / Fashioned like us, yet more than we".

As it is shown by all of Rossetti's presentations of the Virgin she is envisioned by the artist as reticent even in her greatest pain. Silence and calmness surround her, making her thoughts and feelings rather susceptible than knowable. This quiet reserve is the source of the gentle mysticism of all of Rossetti's Mary presentations.

Another of the Mary watercolours, a Nativity scene was conceived as the central piece of a study for a triptych commissioned by John P. Seddon, the architect responsible for the restoration of Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff. "I have got … a commission to paint a reredos … for Llandaff Cathedral—a big thing, which I shall go into with a howl of delight after all my small work," wrote Rossetti in a letter in 1856.[309] It was, indeed, a big thing for him, since he had not produced anything in oil and on a large scale since *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. By this time his artistic concept as well as his artistic methods became quite different from the ones acknowledged in the early Pre-Raphaelite creed, and he obviously did not want to return to the manner in which *The Girlhood* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* had been produced. Both the abundant symbolism of these early works and their adherence to literary and historical truth had lost their earlier appeal to Rossetti, so he needed a new

[308] In the explanatory notes appended to the poem in the 1904 edition of Rossetti's works William Michael Rossetti published the early (1847) version of the poem called "Mater Pulchrae Delectionis". Whereas the early version is more like a prayer proper, the final one (1869) is rather a typically nineteenth-century hymn contemplating Mary's awareness and understanding of her divine role. Cf. Rossetti, 661–62.

[309] To William Allingham, 6 March 1856. *Letters*, 1:293.

concept and new inspirations to start the work. Eight years were needed to find his individual style, which, in the end, owed more to the Venetian masters of the sixteenth century than to the early Renaissance painters, who influenced his first Pre-Raphaelite works, or to the medieval style, which affected his watercolours.

Getting the commission in 1856 Rossetti's enthusiasm was enormous. He immediately started the search for a suitable subject, asking his brother William to come round and read the Bible to him, for he, as he said, was too busy to read it himself[310]. Thus *The Seed of David* was conceived, representing David as a shepherd in the left panel, David as a king in the right one, and a Nativity scene in between with the adoration of a shepherd and a king. As Rossetti wrote it was

> ... intended to show Christ sprung from high and low in the person of David, who was both Shepherd and King, and worshipped by high and low—a King and a Shepherd—at his nativity. Accordingly, in the centre-piece an Angel is represented leading the Shepherd and King to worship in the stable at the feet of Christ, who is in his mother's arms. She holds his hand for the Shepherd and his foot for the King, to kiss—so showing the superiority of poverty over riches in the eyes of Christ, while the one lays his crook, the other his crown, at the Saviour's feet.[311]

Though the whole concept was based on an important Biblical type[312], Rossetti consciously dissociated his work both from Hunt's fidelity to the given text and from his historic realism. Concerning his concept of the Nativity scene he wrote that it was "... not a literal reading of the event ..., but rather a condensed symbol of it"[313] . Unlike Hunt, he did not wish the spectator to meditate over his work or 'read' his painting searching for hidden clues or references. He also rejected Hunt's precise authenticity saying that he did "...not care in the least to be wiser than the most ordinary spectator of [his] picture, & for that reason should be perfectly indifferent to elaborate orientalism in Bible subjects."[314]

The basic ideology was the same for the watercolour study as well as the later oil version, though its implementation was highly different in the two cases. The first version strongly recalls the intimacy of the previous images of Mary and the medievalism of the Arthurian watercolours. It is characteristically light in its arrangement and colours, with the dominance of green and gold, and the figures are gentle and humble, dressed in simple, plain apparel. David as a shepherd is tentative and quite feeble, suggesting rather spiritual than physical power. King David looks just like a Rossettian King Arthur, shown in a simple mantle, and with a similarly simple crown and sword. Even the peacock at his feet is 'modest', and also the background, which is painted a plain gold. The watercolour Nativity is the manifestation of tenderness, of gentle and caring love. The way the slim and tall angel is still holding the hands of the old shepherd and the young king whom she has just led into the stable is just as caring and affectionate as the support given to Mary

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[310] "... I'd be much obliged if you'd come down tomorrow evening and read me some Gospel as I want to look up the subject for that altarpiece and I have not absolutely time to read for myself," wrote Rossetti to his brother, 5 March 1856. *Letters*, 1:290.

[311] Letter to Charlotte Lydia Polidori, 25 June 1864. *Letters*, 2:508.

[312] As Landow explains, in this case David prefigures both Christ and all men who will worship Him. Cf. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 157–8.

[313] In Ash, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Plate 9.

[314] In Grylls, 59.

by St Joseph. Even the curious heads of the calf and the ox on the right add to the warmth and intimacy of the image.

The simple domesticity, which is most characteristic of the picture, was not preserved in the final oil version. By the time it was accomplished in 1864 Rossetti's intimate mysticism disappeared from his works for good.

The oil version of *The Seed of David* marks the beginning of a new phase in Rossetti's art, its main features becoming characteristic of all of his later works, like in the case of the already mentioned *The Blessed Damozel*. The new style brought three-dimensionality and rich colouring, the figures becoming more weighty, more obviously rendered from life, and often provokingly sensual. Lavish draperies, the abundance of colourful flowers and bright jewellery became essential parts of the Rossettian oil. In this later Nativity the angels, for example, are more sensual than awe-stricken, they all have red, wavy hair, wear richly pleated red dresses, and have splendid red wings. Despite the fact that even the friendly ox and calf are missing from this version, the stable looks overcrowded because of the heavy bodies and abundant draperies. An angel is substituted for the affectionate St Joseph, so Mary becomes a solitary figure with only strangers surrounding her and her newborn child. The scene has completely lost its earlier warmth and homely character.

The two side-panels were also significantly modified. David the shepherd became an undaunted, muscular youth, and the army in the background more frightening, more powerful. Strength and power had gained supremacy over the previous spirituality. David the king is also armed and dressed for battle, wearing a delicately ornamented coat on top of his hauberk. He is shown sitting on a canopied throne with a pomegranate tree in the background, the earlier simplicity being replaced with colourful exuberance.

While working on the final oil version Rossetti became ever more attracted to the works of the High Renaissance, especially to the paintings of the Venetian masters. In a letter sent to his brother from Paris on 9th June 1860 he expressed his admiration for Veronese's *The Marriage Feast of Cana* writing that it was "the greatest picture in the world"[315]. His enthusiasm for the High Renaissance coincided with Ruskin's change of attitude towards it, and with his new friend's and disciple's, Burne-Jones's rediscovery of its merits. A. Craig Faxon even assumes[316] that the Nativity panel of the oil version of *The Seed of David* was directly influenced by Tintoretto's works, the *Annunciation* (1583–87), the *Adoration of the Magi* (1583–87), and the *Nativity* (1579–81), presuming that descriptions or reproductions of them could have been given to Rossetti by Ruskin. Faxon thinks that Ruskin's direct influence is quite likely in this case, since the Llandaff commission came to Rossetti through Ruskin's aid, so his approval of the painting must have been very important to the artist. However, by the 1860s, especially after the death of Elizabeth Siddal in February 1862, the earlier friendship of the painter and the critic started disintegrating. The increasing sensuality of Rossetti's works was just as unacceptable to Ruskin as the artist's new bohemian lifestyle and licentious relations.

Both of these factors, the change in his artistic interest and the new way of life, drove Rossetti ever more to secular subjects than to religious ones. It meant that after a short-lived interest in the Mary Magdalene theme he abandoned Biblical subjects altogether, returning to them only when making stained-glass designs for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., of which he was a founder member.

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[315] To William Michael Rossetti, 9 June 1860. *Letters*, 1:367.

[316] Faxon, 121.

The Fallen Woman: Mary Magdalene

Even Rossetti's fascination with the character of Mary Magdalene owes at least as much to the contemporary interest in the secular theme of the 'fallen woman' as to the moral and theological aspects of the Biblical story itself. The image of the highly sexual mistress, or the woman of easy virtue was as familiar to the Victorians as that of the respectable, but basically sexless wife. Actually, the codes of honourable behaviour thrust upon women probably contributed to the prevalence of prostitution.

Interestingly, Rossetti's gradual secularisation of the figure of the Virgin Mary coincided with the general tendency to hallow respectable, but ordinary women. The lady of the family home became a sort of "angel in the house"[317], a caring, attentive, and pure companion. She was destined to become the appointed guard of morality, a duty which became more and more important as the church was gradually losing its power and influence from the middle of the century. "The hope of society is in woman," wrote Edwin Hood in 1850. "On her depends mainly the righting of wrongs, the correcting of sins, and the success of all missions."[318] Furthermore, honourable women were also required to be basically asexual. As a contemporary author expressed, a respectable wife was expected to be "serviceable", "...submitting to her husband, but only to please him ... and for the desire of maternity"[319]. Accordingly, passionate love was to be sought outside the bonds of marriage. The custom that young men were not advised to marry before reaching a certain state of wealth also created a constant demand for prostitution, since it meant that rarely did they do so before the age of thirty. As a writer of *The Times* pointed out "... the law of society contradict[ed] the law of God."[320] The corresponding supply of prostitutes was, for the most part, the result of social constraints. The income of a girl or a woman obtainable with proper, honest work was often not enough for living, which involved that many were simply forced to resort to prostitution.[321] For this reason, fallen women were often seen, especially by artists, not as vicious, immoral temptresses, but as innocent victims. Consequently, their rehabilitation was much desired by those who cared, and their redemption was seen as a real possibility.

Rossetti had a long-standing interest in the problem of prostitution. It was first reflected in secular works; an early poem, "Jenny" (1848, 1858–69) marking the beginning, which was soon followed by the drawing *Hesterna Rosa* (1853), and the picture *Found* (1854–81). As these works also suggest, Rossetti was among the ones who felt a genuine sympathy for these women, and no contempt whatsoever. As Thomas Hall Caine remembered Rossetti "... had nothing but the greatest of his compassion ... for the poor women ..., who, after one false step, find themselves in a blind alley in which the way back is forbidden to them"[322].

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[317] Cf. Coventry Patmore's poem, "The Angel in the House" (1854–62), which was much celebrated at the time, presented the Victorian concept of ideal womanhood.

[318] Edwin Hood, *The Age and Its Architects. Ten Chapters on the English People in Relation to the Times*. In Houghton, 352.

[319] William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857). In Mancoff, 87.

[320] In *The Times*, 7 May 1857. In Houghton, 385.

[321] Cf. "Prostitution among Needlewoman" (1849). In *Culture and Society*, I/6/b.

[322] In Faxon, 67.

Found was to become the pictorial embodiment of Rossetti's thoughts on the issue. As the study he made for it in 1853 reveals he wanted to emphasise that repentance was never too late. His view of God as an understanding Father made him believe in the redeeming power of remorse, and in the Biblical tenet of the remission of sins. Accordingly, a fraction of an inscription can be read on a tombstone in the background of the study, which quotes a relevant section from the Gospel according to Luke, which says in full:

> I say unto you, That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.
>
> Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:7, 10)

Given Rossetti's general interest in the problem, it is noteworthy that *Found* was finally left unfinished. Though he returned to it on the impulse of a series of commissions, it seems that the strongly social and didactic character of the concept did not really suit his artistic character. The 'cold moralising' feature of the picture was too close to the one rejected in "Hand and Soul", and it provided no scope to express the spiritual and emotional aspects of the theme, which were for Rossetti of vital importance.

The Biblical story of Mary Magdalene was, however, an appropriate theme in which Rossetti could emphasise the spiritual concerns of the fallen woman subject, and concentrate rather on divine redemption than on social injustice. Three pictures were inspired by the story; a watercolour, *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting* (1857), a small, delicate drawing called *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (1858), and finally an oil, *Mary Magdalene* (1877).

It seems that Rossetti's approach to the figure of Mary Magdalene was, at first, very similar to that of the Virgin Mary. Depicting the awe-stricken, already absolved Magdalene in *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting* he presents the same sort of thoughtful mystery as in the Virgin pictures. Magdalene is shown descending the stairs of Simon's house after having washed Christ's feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with a precious ointment. Her arms are held tightly together in front of her chest with the small alabaster box of ointment in her hands. Her long, unbound hair, which in many of Rossetti's later female portraits refers to sensuality, here rather recalls her humble act. Her posture shows introversion, and her sliding haste suggests embarrassment. Again not the Biblical text and its moral implications were important to Rossetti, but the emotional impact the encounter with Christ made on Magdalene. She has received absolution of her sins, thus she is shown with a halo round her head, which again makes her appearance alike to the Virgin Mary. "[T]he moment taken by me was taken then for the first time in art," wrote Rossetti, "and constituted … the value of my design."[323]

Less reminiscent of the Virgin Mary pictures, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* shows the exact moment of Magdalene's salvation, the instant when her heart turned to Christ on the impulse of a sudden revelation. As the drawing reveals, Rossetti identified this moment with Magdalene's decision to enter Simon's house where Christ was feasting, instead of attending the happy celebrations held in the house opposite. Her inconceivable change of mind is watched with curiosity by her companions,

[323] Letter to Frederick Sandys, 1? June 1869. *Letters*, 2:698.

who, not experiencing the same revelation, are astounded by her behaviour. The sonnet Rossetti wrote for the drawing underlines this significant aspect of the scene. Relating the brief dialogue exchanged between Magdalene and her lover who has "followed her out of the procession and is laughingly trying to turn her back"[324], the poem elaborates on the apparent irrationality of Magdalene's behaviour described by the lover as a 'foolish freak':

> 'Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair?
> Nay be thou all a rose,—wreath; lips, and cheek.
> Nay, not this house,—that banquet-house we seek;
> See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.
> This delicate day of love we two will share
> Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.
> What, sweet one,—hold'st thou still the foolish freak?
> Nay, when I kiss thy feet they will leave the stair.'
>
> 'Oh loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
> That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,
> My hair, my tears He craves today:—and oh!
> What words can tell what other day and place
> Shall see me clasp these blood-stained feet of His?
> He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!'

Like in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* divine revelation is seen and presented here as something beyond human understanding, and accordingly it is delivered to the soul and not to the intellect. Receiving it is a sign of a pre-ordained electedness, which cannot be reversed by human will or persuasion. The picture's resemblance to *Ecce Ancilla Domini* is manifest also in the fact that the divine message delivered does not bring happiness to the one chosen to receive it. As Rossetti's sonnet explains, Magdalene experiences a presentiment of the tragic events to come, which, similarly to that of Christ's in the *Gathering*, is based on an original Biblical type.

The transformation of Magdalene's heart is illustrated by her instinctive gesture of casting the roses from her hair as if freeing herself from her earlier sensuous attachments. Her new betrothal demands no display of such finery. Her sudden illumination is reflected in the momentary mixture of references to her earlier easy virtue and to her purified, reborn self. The whiteness of her bare arms and columnar neck, her thick, wavy hair, and curved, voluptuous lips contrast her devotional gaze and steady pressing towards Christ. The moment of the purification of Magdalene's soul being in the centre of Rossetti's attention, the few details bearing symbolic references in the drawing are all related to this. As the chosen incident is not described in the Bible, Rossetti had to rely on his imagination in its presentation, and it seems that he felt that the inclusion of Biblical references would reinforce his main idea. He shows, for example, a fawn eating the vine in the foreground, which is a clear reference to Magdalene's yearning for Christ on the basis of the 42nd Psalm, which says: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (42:1) The sun-flowers at the door of Simon's house, which

[324] Rossetti's own description in a letter, July 1865. In Surtees, Cat. no. 109; and in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 284.

always turn their heads to light, refer to Magdalene's response to Christ's call. The lily indicates her regained purity, and the fowls, picking up the crumbs of the beggar girl's food, may refer to her new commitment to Christ on the basis of Christ's words addressed to the Pharisees: "...how often would I have gathered the children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." (Matthew 23:37) The above reference is apt also for its indication of the opposition between Christ's forgiveness of Magdalene's sins, and Simon the Pharisee's dismissing contempt for her, which in itself is an important aspect of the Biblical Magdalene story itself.

Whereas in the drawing Rossetti still makes use of symbolic references, the sonnet written to it contains none. However, from the structural point of view, they very much resemble each other. As Hönnighausen observes[325], the drawing follows the division present in the poem, since the octave of the sonnet, which describes the happy celebration at the banquet-house and the joys of earthly love, is depicted on the left, whereas the sestet can be made identical with the right side, which presents Christ and the eternal love and happiness He stands for.

While *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* still contains some Biblical references, by the time Rossetti painted *Mary Magdalene* in 1877 almost all of the earlier literariness disappeared from his work. Presenting barely more than a static half-length portrait of a beautiful girl the image lacks even the earlier links with the Biblical narrative. Only her traditional pictorial attribute, the silver jar of ointment refers to Magdalene's identity. It is inscribed here with the Latin words 'Haec pedes meos', ['Behold, my feet'], which is the only definite reference to her Biblical story. As in the case of almost all of his late female portraits, flower decoration complements the image; here black hellebore is painted in front of the background with its white flowers in full bloom. The contrast of the black background and the white flowers may refer to the contrast between Magdalene's sinful and converted selves, as the green colour of her dress may suggest the hope that sincere repentance can always gain remission of sins.

Compared to Rossetti's earlier Biblical works, this late oil is unique for displaying no religious spirituality at all. Magdalene's face is beautiful, yet relatively emotionless; it reflects neither remorse, nor gratitude, revealing nothing of her feelings or her thoughts. It seems that by this time Rossetti had lost his former interest even in the spiritual implication of the Biblical story, and regarded the Mary Magdalene theme only as a good opportunity to paint yet another portrait of a beautiful woman. Thus *Mary Magdalene* becomes one of these memorable images, its heroine being treated similarly to the numerous secular counterparts like those of *Mariana* (1870), *La Donna della Finestra* (1879), *Pandora* (1879), or *Mnemosyne* (1881). For Rossetti the Bible had completely lost its distinguished status, Biblical subjects becoming considered and employed equally to any other literary sources.

It was Ruskin who first pointed out this important aspect of Rossetti's approach to the Bible as his source of pictorial subjects. Comparing Rossetti's view to that of Hunt he wrote:

> To Rossetti, the Old and New Testaments were only the greatest poems he knew; and he painted scenes from them with no more actual belief in their relation to the present life and

[325] Hönnighausen, 48.

business of men than he gave also to the 'Morte d'Arthur' and the 'Vita Nuova'. But to Holman Hunt, the story of the New Testament became what it was to an old Puritan, or an old Catholic of true blood,—not merely a Reality, not merely the greatest of Realities, but the only reality. So that there is nothing in the earth for him that does not speak of that.[326]

It was, however, Rossetti's literary view of the Bible which was more consistent with that of the learned men of the time, as it was reflected in the outcome of the debates which followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews*. Discussing the Bible, the authors of *Essays and Reviews* claimed that it was time to separate the truth and validity of Christian belief from the belief in the truth and validity of the actual events described in the Holy Book. They were convinced that religious truth did not and should not depend on whether certain incidents described in the Bible really had happened as they were described or whether they had happened at all or not. Jowett, for example, was convinced that in the long term the survival of religious belief actually depended on making it compatible with the newly acquired scientific knowledge. As he wrote in 1861: "in a few years there will be no religion in Oxford among intellectual young men, unless religion is shown to be consistent with criticism"[327].

However, to question the actual verity of the Bible was officially still not acceptable. Such claims were found dangerous for the simple belief and unsophisticated mind of the ordinary parishioner, so the authors were charged with irresponsibility and moral disruption. Just contrary to Jowett's opinion, many political and ecclesiastic personages feared that Biblical criticism might easily lead to the loss of faith. As one of them wrote in an article published in the *Westminster Review*: "Let our authors beware of such excessive candour, and rest assured that when the public once begin to read their Bibles in that spirit, they will soon cease to read them at all, and that the Hebrew Scriptures will take their place upon the bookshelf of the learned, beside the Arabian and the Sanscrit poets."[328] The author was appalled by what he saw in *Essays and Reviews* as a claim that miracles, inspiration and prophecy were "figments, or exploded blunders", and the Mosaic history was a "mass of ill-digested legend"[329].

Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford joined the condemnation of the essayists. Considering the wide implications the book would have, he was worried not only about a possible wavering of belief, but also about the concomitant degeneration of moral standards.

> To attempt to retain the Bible ... as a rule of life; as giving moral precepts; as expressing high and ennobling sentiments; and yet to deprive its voice of the authority of inspiration, and to silence it as to the great doctrines of Christianity,—is to endeavour to maintain unshaken a vast and curiously constructed edifice, when you have deliberately removed all the foundations upon which it is built. ... Remove the theology, and you take away morality. You may feed man's intellectual pride, and gratify the morbid appetite of his fancy with the husks of an empty rationalism, but you will leave him the slave of appetite and the bond-slave of passion: you promise him anew and hopelessly subject to vanity.[330]

[326] In Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 148.

[327] In Chapman, 282.

[328] Frederick Harrison, "Neo-Christianity". In *Westminster Review*, October 1860. In *Culture and Society*, 47–8.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Samuel Wilberforce, "A Response to 'Essays and Reviews'". In *Quaterly Review*, January 1861. In *Culture and Society*, 52.

Thus Wilberforce came to the conclusion that the authors of the essays "could not with moral earnesty maintain their posts as clergymen of the established church"[331].

Though the official opposition was strong, the authors of *Essays and Reviews* did not suffer such retribution as the Tractarians had done twenty years earlier. The outcome of the Gorham case, when the judgement of the dean of arches was overruled by the juridical committee had not been forgotten, so despite their views church officials were reluctant to prosecute. Finally, in 1862 only two of the authors, H. B. Wilson and Rowland Williams were prosecuted, and though they were found contradicting the articles of Anglican religion, many of the charges brought against them were rejected already by Stephen Lushington, the dean of arches. His verdict basically meant the sanction of certain liberties in religious thought, namely that "... [A] clergyman might freely deny the genuineness of any book of the Bible if he did not deny the divine authority; might deny that any prophesy in the Old Testament was Messianic; might interpret all historical narratives as parable, poetry or legend."[332] Thus by the time Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* came out in 1873, the literary view of the Bible it presented had already been professed by many of the educated men of the country.

Rossetti, who never really seemed to care much about theology, did not bother about the arguments concerning the proper interpretation of the Bible. Nevertheless, art and religion had always been strongly related in his thoughts, and, possessing a unique spiritual freedom in his religious views, he was able to take their fusion to its most possible extreme. As Graham Hough observed, while "...Ruskin had tried to show that the right practice of the arts was also a sort of religious worship," Rossetti announced "... a new phase, in which the emotions that had before belonged exclusively to religion [were] transferred bodily to art"[333]. Rossetti's early Art-Catholicism led to the direct worship of art and beauty, making way for a new movement, for Aestheticism, or Art for Art's sake.

[331] In *Quarterly Review,* 1861, 302. In Chadwick *The Victorian Church*, 2:78.

[332] In Chadwick *The Victorian Church*, 2:81.

[333] Hough, "The Aesthetic of Pre-Raphaelitism". In Sambrook, 142.

Chapter 5

RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS BY OTHER PRE-RAPHAELITE ARTISTS

Though other artists belonging to the Pre-Raphaelite circle also produced pictures with religious themes, none of them became as devoted to religious art as Hunt, or was as individual in approach as Rossetti.

Millais, whose *The Carpenter's Shop* caused the greatest stir in the early years, soon adopted a less controversial style, by the end of the 1860s getting rid of most of the emphases used in his earlier treatment of religious subjects. Brown was more consistent, his approach to Biblical presentation remained basically unaltered, thus his late success was due to a more liberal judgement of contemporary religious art in the 1870s than in the previous decades. The painters of the somewhat younger generation, who followed mostly in Rossetti's footsteps, were, in general, more attracted to chivalric and mythological subjects than to religious ones. It was Burne-Jones among them who was the most concerned with religious thought, though by the time he started painting he had already become much disillusioned with theology. Thus the numerous Biblical pictures he produced reflect rather the influence of pictorial examples than his involvement. Other followers, like Sandys, Stanhope, Waterhouse or Stillman were even less interested, rarely turning to the Bible for inspiration, and when doing so, never exhibiting such personal attachment to the subject as the early Pre-Raphaelites had shown.

The Religious Paintings of Ford Madox Brown

Ruskin's defence of the Pre-Raphaelite painters brought relief into the widespread hostility against their works. Brown, however, always remained outside Ruskin's protective support. The opposition between the painter and the critic was consistent and quite unfortunate[334], and deprived Brown of all the benefits provided for the other Pre-Raphaelites by Ruskin's assistance. In 1852, when Millais and Hunt were beginning to gain appreciation and sell their works with ease, both Brown's *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* and *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* were ridiculed and remained unsold for long. Attacked on artistic as well as religious grounds, Brown's works were subjected to relentless criticism. As far as the works' religious aspect was concerned, Brown was convinced of no wrongdoing. He asserted that there was nothing blasphemous in his treatment of the 'washing of the feet' subject, and that *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* had never even been intended as a religious painting.

[334] In the early 1850s Brown joined the current debate in the papers on the National Gallery's 'old master policy', taking objection to Ruskin's authoritative connoisseurship. As he found it was "... no prudent to make such a display about Tintoret merely because a Graduate of Oxford [had] lately made a great fuss about him". Ruskin, who did not like Brown's Nazarene-influenced style anyway, seems never to have forgotten and forgiven Brown's critical remark. Cf. Newman and Watkinson, 43.

In *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* Brown depicted the well-known 'Last Supper' scene, as it is described in the Gospel according to St John:

> He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself.
> After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.
> ... For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (John, 13:4-5, 15)

With the intention of emphasising Christ's exemplary self-humiliation, and, at the same time, taking the Biblical text literally, Brown presented the Saviour stripped to the waist. As a contrast, he painted a golden halo around his head, creating an unfamiliar image; a strange unity of manly and divine, novel and traditional. The concept, however, failed to call forth the sublime thoughts Brown wished to suggest. As he remembered: "... the intention [was] that Jesus took upon himself the appearance of a slave as a lesson of the deepest humility, & with the gold nimbus round his head the impression was very striking. People however could not see the poetry of my conception, & were shocked at it, & would not buy the work—& I getting sick of it painted clothes on the figure."[335]

Clothing the figure of Christ was not the only alteration Brown had resigned himself to make. He thought that more religious feeling had to be added, the Apostles having been criticised for appearing disinterested and too ordinary. And though the idea of adding more aureoles was finally abandoned, the alterations made clearly show that Brown had to make his painting more conventional to make it marketable.

In the case of *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* even such a solution was impossible. The non-comprehension was so strong and the ridicule so vehement, that no alteration could have counteracted them. "All that can be seen and understood of this picture," wrote the *Art Journal*, "is the minute finish of the figures ... but such is the general animus of the work that it is impossible to apprehend its bent. ... it cannot be otherwise accredited than a facetious experiment upon public intelligence."[336] Brown insisted that he intended to show no more than "a lady, a baby, two lambs, a servant maid, and some grass"[337]. However, due to the strong literary character of contemporary painting, let alone Pre-Raphaelite practice, a hidden meaning was suspected, and the only one that the critics could detect was found blasphemous as well as suspect of Catholic sympathy. The pose of the mother and her child, and the presence of the lambs were found reminiscent of the traditional Madonna presentations, and the strong light and radiant colours, which were the results of the Pre-Raphaelite practice of out-of-door painting and using a wet white ground, reinforced this suspicion. Desperate to refute the accusations and prove that the painting had no religious bearings, Brown renamed his picture, calling it later *Summer Heat*, which, as he insisted, was "seriously the subject"[338]. Nevertheless, the painting remained unsold till 1859, when it was bought by James Leathart, who became later a major patron of the Pre-Raphaelites.

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[335] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 100.

[336] Ibid, 94.

[337] In the Piccadilly Gallery one-man show exhibition catalogue, 1865. Qtd. in Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 84.

[338] In Leathart Papers. Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 94.

The misunderstandings surrounding *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* might have discouraged Brown from finishing another Madonna-like composition, *Take your Son, Sir*. It had been started in the same year as *The Pretty Baa-Lambs*, in 1851, and its resemblance to the traditional Madonna presentations is so obvious, that it cannot be unintentional. *Take your Son, Sir* is usually seen as an 'illegitimacy painting'[339], as Brown's treatment of the fallen woman theme; thus the woman shown in the painting is seen as the mistress of the man visible in the convex mirror, and the baby as the result of their illicit relationship. However, it is also possible to regard the painting as a pictorial glorification of family unity and domestic bliss[340], according to which the mother is presenting the child to her husband, who is proudly approaching to get hold of the baby. In this case the painting celebrates a "mystic type of unity, the mother and the father meet[ing] again in the worship of the child," as it was described by the critic of the *Artist* in 1897.[341]

Either a 'haloed Magdalene' or a glorified woman of the family, the mother is clearly associated with the enthroned Madonna, the circular mirror being inserted in a way that it forms a halo round her head. A secular subject has been given the attribute of holiness, which, as it has already been referred to in connection with Rossetti's work, was much reflective of Victorian mentality. The ill success of his religious paintings, however, discouraged Brown from choosing subjects with any sort of religious aspect. And as his paintings with contemporary social themes like *The Last of England* or *Work* proved to be far more fortunate, his interest in religious subjects was raised again only by the Dalziel brothers' commission for Bible illustrations.

In the 1860s many of the Biblical paintings produced in England were inspired by the Dalziels' commissions. The Dalziel brothers were prominent wood engravers, who were responsible for the publication of a number of masterly illustrated books known in general as the 'Dalziels Fine Art Books'. They decided on the publication of an illustrated Bible after the success of Millais' drawings for *The Parables of Our Lord* (1864) and recruited artists for the work. Besides acknowledged Academicians like Leighton, Watts and Poynter, painters of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, were also invited to join as illustrators, Brown, Simeon Solomon, Burne-Jones, Sandys and Hunt finally all agreeing to contribute to the edition. Though the book itself, *Dalziel's Bible Gallery* came out only as late as 1880 and was only a much restricted version of the originally planned volume, the commissions gave incentive to many of the leading artists of the period to think of Biblical subjects, and several designs originally intended as illustrations were worked out later as individual paintings.

Similarly, both Brown's *Elijah and the Widow's Son* (1864) and *The Coat of Many Colours* (1864–6) originated in the Dalziels' commission. Being designed originally as Bible illustrations, both pictures show a conscious adherence to the Biblical text, trying rather to envisage than to interpret the relevant sections. They are, as Mary Bennett observes, "essentially historical and factual"[342], Brown's basic approach being thus akin to that of Hunt at the time. The painter's description of *Elijah and the Widow's Son* clearly illustrates how every single detail was considered to be based on historical fact.

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[339] Cf. Hilton, 155; Rose, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 76 and *The Pre-Raphaelites* 150.
[340] Mary Bennett in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 150.
[341] H. Wilson qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 150.
[342] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 204.

The child is represented as in his grave-clothes, which have a far-off resemblance to Egyptian funeral trappings; having been laid out with flowers in the palms of his hands, as is done by women in such cases. ... The shadow on the wall projected by a bird out of the picture returning to its nest, (consisting of the bottle which in some countries is inserted in the walls to secure the presence of the swallow of good omen), typifies the return of the soul to the body. The Hebrew writing over the door consists of the verses of Deut. vi. 4–9, which the Jews were ordered so to use (possibly suggested to Moses by the Egyptian custom). ... As is habitual with very poor people, the widow is supposed to have resumed her household duties, little expecting the result of the Prophet's vigil with her dead child. She has therefore been kneading a cake for his dinner. The costume is such as can be devised from the study of Egyptian combined with Assyrian, and other nearly contemporary remains. The effect of vertical sunlight, [is] such as exists in southern latitudes.[343]

The same painstaking accuracy guided the painter when he produced *The Coat of Many Colours*. As Brown had never been to the Near East the background was painted after Thomas Seddon's watercolour *The Well of Enrogel*, which had actually been painted on the spot in Palestine in 1854. Camels were studied in the Zoo, and for the costumes Assyrian and Egyptian sources were consulted. As Brown proudly remarked, even the ladder, the traditional attribute of Jacob was "introduced in a naturalistic way"[344] being set against the huge fig tree at the foot of which Jacob is shown sitting. On the upper rung of the ladder the feet of a man can be seen, who is probably picking the ripe fruit, some of which is presented in a basket in the foreground. The introduction of a sheepdog sniffing the bloodstain on Joseph's coat was first found incompatible with the overall factual accuracy of the painting by Hunt, who was by that time regarded as an infallible authority on Biblical presentations. However, Hunt finally conceded it, finding it relevant on the basis of other Biblical sources and also remembering that he had also seen "dogs allowed to exercise their natural instincts as watchdogs"[345].

Though Brown's adherence to factual truth in *Elijah and the Widow's Son* and in *The Coat of Many Colours* corresponded to Hunt's view of the subject, Brown's pictures essentially differ from Hunt's Biblical works for being no more than genuine illustrations, lacking both the strong typological and theological character of Hunt's paintings.

Despite their indifference to religious thought, neither of these pictures brought real appreciation for Brown, the latter one was even found "awkward" and "eccentric and abnormal in style"[346]. Brown's only really successful religious painting was to be the last one, *The Entombment* (1866–8)[347], which was regarded as his masterpiece; praised for its "design of rare dignity, pathos and perfect originality"[348].

It is noteworthy that in 1883 in a note Brown refers to the Bible as a 'divine legend'.[349] It suggests that by this time his view of the Holy Book was akin rather to Rossetti's than to

[343] In the Piccadilly Gallery exhibition catalogue, 1865. In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 203.
[344] Ibid, 206.
[345] In a letter from Hunt, 1865. Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 207.
[346] *Saturday Review*, 1867, and *Art Journal*, 1866. In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 207.
[347] It was painted on the basis of a cartoon made for a stained-glass window in St Olave's Church, Gatcombe.
[348] In the *Athenaeum*, 14 December 1878. Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 216.
[349] "The golden Aurioles or Nimbuses are not intended to represent the facts but rather that traditional glory which for all good Christians attaches to certain of the greater personalities in the divine drama or legend." Note for Charles Rowley, in *Horsfall Papers.* In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 215.

Hunt's. Correspondingly, *The Entombment* is closer to Rossetti's deeply spiritual and emotional Biblical works than to Hunt's reserved moral parables. And though *The Entombment* is stylistically regarded as the herald of Aestheticism[350], its spirituality and 'solemn beauty'[351] definitely point backwards, recalling one of the painter's early works, *Our Lady of Saturday Night*.

In the last fifteen years of his life Brown was occupied with mural painting for the newly built Town Hall of Manchester[352] . In one of these pictures, *The Trial of Wycliffe at Westminster* (1885–6), he returned to the hero of one of his early paintings and presented a late episode of Wycliffe's life. He is shown appearing before the ecclesiastical court being accused of heresy, while an excited crowd is watching the proceedings, eagerly waiting for the judgement of the bishops. As all the other historical paintings Brown made for Manchester, *The Trial of Wycliffe* is full of movement and agitation, which obviously comes from the painter's intention to depict dramatic events "for the instruction of the people"[353] . His Wycliffe, whose teachings was condemned by the church and whose doctrines were censured at Oxford as the result of the trial, stands firm and undeviating amidst the turmoil of the crowded courtroom, representing resolution and dignity. Thus, though the concept and style of Brown's early *Wycliffe* and this late counterpart are fundamentally different, they are similar in the sense that they both can be seen as Brown's tribute to the humble superiority of a great man.

The Late Works of John Everett Millais

In 1852, when Brown's *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* was ridiculed and accused of Catholic sympathy, Millais' *The Huguenot* got an overall praise and was generally welcomed for its anti-Catholic implications.

Already at this time Millais was drifting away from the strong narrativity so characteristic of the early Pre-Raphaelite works. Originally he intended to show no more than "two lovers whispering by an orchard wall" inspired by a line from Tennyson's "Circumstance". Quite typically, it was Hunt who convinced Millais that some moral was needed to be added, thus, with little alteration, the painting became the presentation of a historical scene recalling the massacre of St Bartholomew's Day. The massacre was the bloodiest event of the French war of religion, when thousands of the Protestant Huguenots were slaughtered by order of the Catholic Duke of Guise, who commanded that as a sign of professing the Catholic faith and thus to be spared in the killings, "each good Catholic [should] bind a strip of white linen round his arm and place a white cross in his cap"[354].

Millais' painting presents a Catholic girl, who is trying to tie her white handkerchief round the arm of her Protestant lover, so as to save him from the massacre. The young man, however, is gently pulling it off, "holding his faith above his greatest worldly love"[355]. The idea of the subject came to Millais from Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots*, which

[350] Adams, 111; and Mary Bennett in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 215.
[351] Commented by an artist friend, Frederic Shields. Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 216.
[352] It was built in the Gothic style according to the plans of Alfred Waterhouse between 1868–77.
[353] In Newman and Watkinson, 174.
[354] In the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue. Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 99.
[355] In Millais' own description of the painting, in a letter to Mrs Combe, 22 November 1851. In Millais, 73.

was regularly performed at the time in Convent Garden. The opera itself was quite popular, and the painting proved to be an overwhelming success, "the crowds flocking in huge numbers to see it"[356]. As Quentin Bell suggests, the success of the painting was mostly due to the fact that, at last, "there were no more dark Romanist tendencies [in it], but rather splendid Protestant heroism and tender sentiment"[357].

The right balance between the presentation of loyalty and sentiment was not easy to find. As it is revealed by two sketches made for the same subject, Millais was considering presenting priests too in the painting, which would obviously have made the religious point of his work more deliberate. In one of the sketches they are shown holding up the Crucifix to the Huguenot, trying to persuade him to listen to his lover's entreaty. The other version presents "a priest on either side of the lovers, holding up one of the great candles of the Roman Catholic Church, and a Protestant waving them back with a gesture of disapproval"[358] . Millais' final decision to present nothing more than the embracing couple took the edge off the picture's clerical message, and let the sentimental side dominate, which was obviously beneficial to the painting.

The 'tender sentiment', as Quentin Bell called it, perfectly suited Millais' artistic character, and it also met the taste of many Victorians. No wonder, therefore, that it became the most important feature of Millais' later works, and, strangely enough, it also became the means with which he could best express deep religious feeling. *The Blind Girl* (1854–6), *Autumn Leaves* (1855–6), and *The Vale of Rest* (1858) are in the strict sense not religious works at all, they do not even have a direct contact with a narrative, nevertheless, their sentiment and spirituality convey emotions and thoughts which were strongly associated by Millais with religion.

As compared to the painter's drawing *The Blind Man* (1853), which concentrates on the social plight of the blind, *The Blind Girl* elaborates on the spiritual burden of having no vision, the pain of being excluded from the visual appreciation of the world's natural beauty. At the same time, the vast variety of nature's wonder is called forth by Millais to show how the other senses can provide some appreciation of it even to the blind. The warmth of the radiant sun, the sound of the receding thunder, and the smell of the wet grass and the wild flowers can give the joy over God's creation even to those who are deprived of sight. When Brown called *The Blind Girl* a 'religious picture' Millais wholeheartedly agreed, adding that "God's bow in the sky, doubly [was] a sign of Divine promise specially significant to the blind"[359].

Autumn Leaves is a similarly poetic and melancholy work, which evoked religious thoughts and feelings in another artist friend, F. G. Stephens, who made his religious associations public in an article published in *The Crayon* in 1856. Millais was so moved by Stephens' words that in a letter he revealed his own thoughts and intentions in connection with the painting.

> I have read your review of my works in *The Crayon* with great pleasure, not because you praise them so much but because you entirely understand what I have intended. In the case of

[356] Hilton, 106-7.
[357] Bell, 84.
[358] In Millais, 76.
[359] Ibid, 122.

"Autumn Leaves" I was nearly putting in the catalogue an extract from the Psalms, of the very same character as you have quoted in your Criticism, but was prevented so doing from a fear that it would be considered an affectation and obscure. I have always felt insulted when people have regarded the picture as a simple little domestic episode, chosen for effect, and colour, as I intended the picture to awaken by its solemnity the deepest religious reflection. I chose the subject of burning leaves as most calculated to produce this feeling, and the picture was thought of, and begun with that object *solely* in view ... I cannot say that I was disappointed that the public did not interpret my meaning in the "Autumn Leaves" as I scarcely expected so much, and I was not sanguine of my friends either, as I know I am not the sort of man who is accused of very deep Religious Sentiment, or reflection. However as you certainly have read into my thoughts in the matter I do not hesitate to acknowledge so much.[360]

Stephens quoted two sections of the Bible in his article, a short line from the Gospel according to St John: "For the night cometh in which no man can work" (9:4), and a longer section from Isaiah: "For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest; and shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother" (9:18–9). As Millais mentions the picture's 'solemnity' in connection with the religious feelings it was intended to evoke, it is quite likely that he found the first quotation much more akin to his own view than the more dramatic second one. Though it is not known which section of the Psalms he himself intended to quote, it seems likely that he wished to emphasise the melancholic thought of transience rather than any harsh moral. The same is suggested by Hunt's recollection of Millais saying: "Is there any sensation more delicious than that awakened by the odour of burning leaves? To me nothing brings back sweeter memories of the days that are gone; it is the incense offered by departing summer to the sky, and it brings one a happy conviction that Time puts a peaceful seal on all that has gone."[361]

Thoughts of transience were clearly on Millais' mind at the time; his next painting, *The Vale of Rest* also being concerned with the subject. Though the title itself comes from the song "Ruhetal" of Mendelssohn, the picture was conceived independently from any narrative. The title had been decided on just a few days before the painting was completed, Millais accidentally hearing his brother singing "Ruhetal", which he found so consistent with his painting at hand, that he even quoted a line of the song ("Where the weary find repose") in the exhibition catalogue. The original source of the painting was, however, quite different. Effie, the painter's wife remembered how the idea of the picture came to her husband:

It had long been Millais' intention to paint a picture with nuns in it, the idea first occurring to him on our wedding tour in 1855. On descending the hill by Loch Awe, from Inverary, he was extremely struck with its beauty, and the coachman told us that on one of the islands there were the ruins of a monastery. We imagined to ourselves the beauty of the picturesque features of the Roman Catholic religion, and transported ourselves, in idea, back to the times before the Reformation had torn down, with bigoted zeal, all that was beautiful from antiquity, or sacred from piety or remorse of the founders of old ecclesiastical buildings in this country. The abbots

[360] Qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 139.
[361] In William Holman Hunt, 1:286.

boated and fished in the loch, the vesper bell pealed forth the 'Ave Maria' at sundown, and the organ notes of the Virgin's hymn were carried by the water and transformed into a sweeter melody, caught up on the hillside and dying away in the blue air. We pictured, too, white-robed nuns in boats, singing on the water, in quiet summer evenings, and chanting holy songs inspired by the loveliness of the world around them.[362]

Though the painting finally conceived by Millais is less joyous, it reflects the same pious and peaceful mood, and the same harmony of natural beauty and spiritual devotion. The tragic experience of death is softened into peaceful melancholy, where eternity is referred to by the presence of the nuns and the faith in the everlasting life they stand for.

It is again noteworthy that both Effie and Millais thought so favourably of such manifestations of the Roman Catholic religion as monasticism, fondness of the picturesque and music. Though the Catholic modes of worship, as it has already been mentioned, was never really alien to Millais, Effie's attitude is clearly different from her earlier views, regarding her concern for her first husband's, Ruskin's growing tolerance for Catholicism. The change in Effie's opinion is indicative of the general relaxation in the approach to Catholicism, which permitted that, despite its obvious reference to monasticism, *The Vale of Rest* escaped the critical hostility which followed the exhibition of Collins' *Convent Thoughts*. The sentimental treatment of the subject, and the narrative reference which accompanied the painting also contributed to its more favourable reception.

As Christopher Wood suggests, *The Vale of Rest* was the last truly Pre-Raphaelite picture produced by Millais. In 1863 he was elected member of the Royal Academy, which is usually regarded as the final step in his alienation from the Pre-Raphaelite creed, after which his compliance with the popular sentimentalism of Academic taste became determinant. His pictures showing pretty children attracted a huge and enthusiastic audience, paving the way to a rare success and popularity.

Two of Millais' early children-portraits, *My First Sermon* (1862–3) and its sequel, *My Second Sermon* (1864) have some faint religious reference. The first one shows a girl of about four, sitting in a pew with wide-open eyes, which reflect genuine attention, while the second one presents the same girl in the same pew fast asleep. Both pictures proved to be enormously popular, the second one actually being painted on the success of the first, which shows that by the 1860s such gentle humour, even in connection with religious matters, was not at all objectionable. Even high-ranking church-officials did not resent it, the Archbishop of Canterbury actually greeted the painting as a pictorial warning "of the evil of lengthy sermons and drowsy discourses"[363]. For most of the spectators the charm of the little girl and the wittiness of the second painting far overweighed the critical hint. Humour, as Julian Treuherz observes[364], was becoming a popular means of attracting attention, and the fact that it was not only admissible, but even welcome in religious pictures, too, shows that the religious tension of the previous decades has significantly eased off by this time.

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[362] In Millais, 165.
[363] In Millais, 198–9.
[364] Treuherz, 162.

The Religious Views and Works of Edward Burne-Jones

Though it is barely evident from his works, the Oxford Movement exerted the greatest influence among the Pre-Raphaelites on Burne-Jones. Having received a strict Evangelical education, his first encounter with the spirit and ceremonialism of the movement came as a welcome surprise which decisively changed not just his religious commitment but his view of life in general.

It was Newman himself who first made Burne-Jones acquainted with Tractarian thought. Newman was invited to open the Oratory in an old gin distillery in Birmingham in 1849, an occasion not to be missed even by the Evangelical population of the town. Newman's sermon on 'how to escape the false worship of the world' made such a strong impression on the young Burne-Jones that even in retrospect, when theology had no more importance to him, he regarded it as decisive for life. "When I was fifteen or sixteen," he wrote,

> [Newman] taught me so much I do mind — things that will never be out of me. In an age of sofas and cushions he taught me to be indifferent to comfort, and in an age of materialism he taught me to venture all on the unseen, and this so early that it was well in me when life began, and I was equipped before I went to Oxford with a real good panoply and it has never failed me. … So he stands to me as a great image or symbol of a man who never stooped, and who put all this world's life in one splendid venture.[365]

In those early years Newman's influence was basically religious, arousing Burne-Jones' interest in the objectives and ideology of the Oxford Movement. His curiosity was soon satisfied by John Goss, a young Puseyite clergyman serving at Hereford at the time, where Burne-Jones stayed during a holiday. Goss had been at Oxford in the heyday of the movement, and was still very much under its spell when Burne-Jones met him.

The same holiday brought an important aesthetic experience, too, making Burne-Jones committed to Tractarianism. Just like Rossetti, Ruskin, and Millais, he was captivated by the beauty and mystic atmosphere of the High Church ceremony, by "the acute physical and emotional effect of 'old music' combining with the remoteness of the lamp-lit chancel"[366], as he remembered his first visit to the then Tractarian Hereford Cathedral.[367] His visit to the Cistercian monastery, Mount St Bernard's Abbey proved to be a similarly memorable experience. Though newly built (1839-44), the abbey had a genuine medieval atmosphere due to its architect's, Pugin's expert plans based on the monastic layout of the medieval English college. As the abbey functioned as a real monastery, Burne-Jones could actually see monks walking in silence as they had vowed amid the beautiful surroundings, absorbed in meditation. The abbey's secluded world of peace, spirituality, and beauty

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[365] Burne-Jones, 1:59. Cf. also 2:211.

[366] Burne-Jones' note qtd. in Fitzgerald, 20. Cf. also Burne-Jones, 1:38–9.

[367] Likewise, his attendance at a High Mass in Beauvais Cathedral, 22 July 1855, made a strong impression on him, as his late recollection of the experience reveals: "Do you know Beauvais, which is the most beautiful church in the world? I must see it again some day—one day I must. It is thirty-seven years since I saw it and remember it all – and the processions—and trombones—and the ancient singing – more beautiful than anything I had ever heard and I think I have never heard like since. And the great organ that made the air tremble—and the greater organ that pealed out suddenly, and I thought the Day of Judgment had come—and the roof, and the long lights that are the most graceful things man has ever made." Burne-Jones, 1:113.

became a perennial object of the artist's aspiration, such seclusion and meditative life always appealing to his introvert character.

Inspired by the ideology and religious practice of the Tractarians, Burne-Jones decided to become a priest. Wishing to study at the place where the Oxford Movement originated from, he entered Exeter College in 1853, filled with enthusiasm and wholehearted devotion. However, as it has already been referred to, with Newman's retirement the Oxford Movement had lost its effective spirit, and by the time Burne-Jones got to Oxford only F. B. Guy, a solitary, but 'devoted remnant' of Newman's circle kept its faint legacy alive.

Amid such circumstances, reading supplied the intellectual experience Burne-Jones had originally sought at Oxford. Together with his new friends, William Morris among them, he enthused about Charlotte Yonge's novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and the medievalist poetry of Keats and Tennyson, as well as Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. In the absence of a charismatic leader books gave guidance to the young men in practical matters, too. Hurrell Froude's *Project for the Revival of Religion in Great Towns* incited them to decide on the formation of a "small conventual society of cleric and lay members working in the heart of London"[368], a semi-monastic community which was to spread the tenets of Christianity among the poor of London. They regarded Newman's Littlemore community as exemplary[369], however, their Order of Sir Galahad, as Burne-Jones once referred to their brotherhood[370], was to be less strictly theological, being concerned as much with the social problems of the age as with religion. Despite the early enthusiasm, however, the brotherhood finally came to nothing, failing because of the wavering religious standpoint of its potential members. In May 1855 Morris was reported having gone "questionable in doctrinal points" and Burne-Jones as being "too Catholic to be ordained"[371]. At one point not just Burne-Jones, but Morris too sincerely considered following Newman and converting to Catholicism[372], but finally they both became so unsure of basic doctrinal questions, that neither of them could, in good conscience, assume the priesthood[373]. The loss of faith and priestly destination seems to have been less traumatic for Morris, who simply omitted religion from the issues which concerned his mind[374].

Burne-Jones suffered more from his religious uncertainties, though even he did not reach the level of Ruskin's devastation. "Weary work this is" he wrote,

> —doubting, doubting, doubting—so anxious to do well, so unfortunate—friendly sympathy growing colder as the word broadens and deepens. I am offending everybody with my 'notions' and way of going on in general recklessness in fact, yes I fear I have reached the summit of human audacity now, as to claim forbearance for thinking differently from the omnipotent many, and even of acting honestly by publishing my defection, I shall not grace my

[368] Ibid, 78.
[369] Cf. Poulson, 13.
[370] Burne-Jones, 1:77.
[371] Cormell Price qtd. in ibid, 109.
[372] Ibid, 71, 89.
[373] Morris finally took his degree, but Burne-Jones left Oxford without taking his.
[374] As William Allingham reported on Morris' view giving an account of one of their discussions: "Walking with William Morris from the Society of Arts to Bloomsbury last Friday, we talked, among other things, of believing or not believing in a God, and he said 'It's so unimportant, it seems to me,' and he went on to say that all we can get to, do what we will, is a form of words." In Allingham, 316.

friends now by holding that highly *respectable* position of a clergyman—a sore point that, giving up so much respectability—going to be an artist too, probably poor and nameless and all because I can't think like my betters and conform myself to their teaching and read my bible.[375]

The decision to become an artist soon provided Burne-Jones with the noble and worthy crusade he was ready to live and work for. The aim of their abortive brotherhood to wage a "Crusade and Holy Warfare against the age"[376] remained a lifelong resolution both for Morris and Burne-Jones, even though for both of them this 'holy warfare' had completely lost its religious nature. Morris became a priest of social welfare and everyone's right to a meaningful living, while Burne-Jones, as Christopher Wood explains, "transmuted his religious ideals into artistic ones"[377] , claiming that the only truth was "that beauty is beautiful, and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails"[378].

Since Burne-Jones became an artist at the time when he had already lost his interest in and devotion to religion, most of the Biblical works he produced lack the individual and innovative character of the early works of Millais and Rossetti, or the religious pictures of Hunt. Only as a novice painter did he experiment with unconventional designs, and even these were clearly regretted in his later years.

An early attempt at innovation can be seen in a design of a three-light window for the newly restored parish church at Topcliffe in Yorkshire in 1860. Depicting the Annunciation in one of the lights Burne-Jones showed the Virgin clasping a dove to her bosom[379], which so much angered W. Butterfield, the architect responsible for the restoration of the church, that he wanted the commission to be withdrawn from the artist. As Butterfield argued, the dove was the traditional symbol of the Holy Ghost, so it was sacrilegious and unduly sensuous to present it in the way Burne-Jones had done. The incident remained in Burne-Jones' mind for long, and many years later he regarded the attempt as nothing more than youthful wilfulness.

Once, in the ardour of youth, I tried an innovation. It was a mistake. I drew an Annunciation with Mary taking the Dove to her bosom; and when the architect who had commissioned me (he was a very good architect—Butterfield it was) objected, I wouldn't alter it. So he would never give me anything more to do, and he was quite right—and I lost a chance of a lot of work.[380]

As the artist's words also suggest, in Burne-Jones' case the avoidance of novelty in religious presentations might have been affected by the fact that many of these works were made for commissions and destined for constant public display, so they had to meet the taste and expectations of both the commissioner and the potential audience.

Parallel to the Topcliffe commission Burne-Jones was also working on a watercolour Annunciation, which, though different in composition, presents the dove in the same unusual way. Also unconventionally, it shows Gabriel swinging an incense-burner in his

[375] In Harrison and Waters, 16.
[376] In Coote, 15.
[377] Wood, 112.
[378] In Wood, 112.
[379] Fitzgerald suggests that the idea of presenting Mary holding the dove to her breast might have come to Burne-Jones from the same gesture shown in Millais' *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*. Fitzgerald, 33.
[380] In Harrison and Waters, 31.

right hand, which is probably meant to refer to the expulsion of the evil, which appears as the snake unwinding on the trunk of the Tree of Wisdom in the background. Burne-Jones' reference to the Fall is in accordance with the pictorial tradition, since it is an obvious thematic antitype of the Annunciation. Although the introduction of the incense-burner was, in every respect, appropriate, it was abandoned, together with the embraced dove, when Burne-Jones adopted the design of this very early watercolour for the Annunciation window of the chapel of Castle Howard at around 1870.

Despite the fact that he was still a basically unknown artist at the beginning of the 1860s, Burne-Jones was among the painters commissioned by the Dalziel brothers to make illustrations for their Bible. He made drawings of 'Ezekiel and the Boiling Pot', 'The Eve of the Deluge', 'The Return of the Dove to the Ark', 'Christ in the Garden', and seven small vignettes showing 'The Days of Creation'. Finally, however, only the Ezekiel subject was published in the *Bible Gallery*, as in 1880, when the book was finally about to be published, Burne-Jones beseeched the engravers not to use his early designs, otherwise, as he wrote, "... I shall feel a constant shame whenever the word Bible is mentioned —which must be a distressing reflection."[381]

Burne-Jones' treatment of the subject of 'the return of the dove' is of special interest, partly because it is one of his few untraditional Biblical presentations, and partly because the first Pre-Raphaelite picture he saw was Millais' painting on the same subject, "the freshness and originality" of which struck him as a 'revelation'[382]. In its harsh realism Burne-Jones' presentation of the episode is more akin to Millais' *The Carpenter's Shop* than to *The Return of the Dove*. Envisaging the scene as it might actually have happened, Burne-Jones shows not just the returning dove, but also the flood-water surrounding the ark, and all the corpses of the drowned humans and animals it carries. The image is unusually weird, even repellent, and so uncharacteristic of Burne-Jones' all other works, so contrary to his overwhelming admiration for beauty, that it comes as no surprise that in 1880 he did not want it to be published.

Apart from these very early examples Burne-Jones' religious works rely strongly on pictorial tradition. Quentin Bell's general observation according to which "the second generation of the Pre-Raphaelites took its inspiration not from Nature but from Art"[383] clearly applies to Burne-Jones and his Biblical works, the differences in the character of his early and late religious pictures coming first of all from the changes in his source of inspiration. At first his art was strongly influenced by medieval art, which was gradually to be replaced by a neo-classical ideal in the 1870s. Only in some of Burne-Jones' late works, especially in the small roundels of *The Flower Book* (1882-98) can some originality and personal involvement be detected.

Burne-Jones' early attachment to medieval art can clearly be seen in the religious paintings he made in the 1860s. Two of them, *The Flower of God* (1862) and the triptych *The Nativity* (1862–63) were commissioned by the Dalziels, who, when visiting Burne-Jones for the first time, were so impressed by his works that besides the Bible illustrations they also ordered these watercolours. Working on *The Flower of God* Burne-Jones studied

[381] In Fitzgerald, 86.
[382] Poulson, 13.
[383] Bell, 9.

fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts in the British Museum, deliberately relying on medieval sources in its design. The scarlet and crimson bedroom is said to have been inspired by Carpaccio's *St Ursula*[384], which he saw in the Scuola di Sant Orsola in Venice during his visit to Northern Italy in 1862. Inspired by medieval art, he revived many of the characteristic features of Gothic painting which had been ruled out of 'high art' by the codes of the Royal Academy. In *The Flower of God*, for example, the front wall of Mary's bedchamber is not presented in order to allow a view both inside and outside the building. Another typical feature of early painting, that it often presents two or more successive events in a common space, can be seen in the right side-panel of *The Nativity* triptych, which shows the Annunciation and the Visitation in the same scene. Even the tradition of placing scrolls into the hands of the depicted characters was revived by Burne-Jones, an early example of which can be found in the side-panels of *The Adoration* (1861) triptych he made for St Paul's in Brighton[385]. Though in the middle of the nineteenth century such strong reliance on the legacy of medieval painting was unparalleled, it was part of an all-pervading tendency to turn to the Middle Ages for inspiration.

By the middle of the century the Victorian cult of the medieval had grown to huge dimensions, not just its past culture but even its codes of living being revived in order to have an ennobling effect on the contemporary mind. The ethics of chivalry, which were based on the virtues of Christianity, served as a welcome guide of moral living, filling the gap left by the gradually weakening influence of the church. Accordingly, Kenelm Digby's guide-book on knightly living in the nineteenth century, *Broadstone of Honour, or Rules for the Gentlemen of England* (1822) reached a rare popularity[386], and Burne-Jones too was so enthusiastic about it that he kept it by his bedside for the whole of his life[387].

One of the stories related in Digby's book inspired the watercolour, *The Merciful Knight* (1863). The picture presents the miracle which is said to have happened to a Florentine knight, St John Gualberto, after he had spared the life of his brother's murderer. According to the legend, as the knight was praying at a way-side shrine, the wooden figure of Christ bowed down from his cross and embraced the knight, as a reward for his act of forgiveness. As the story itself reflects, chivalric generosity was equated to Christian charity.

Despite the fact that *The Merciful Knight* was based on a story the concept of which was congenial to many Victorians, its critical reception was not at all favourable. Ignoring the picture's content, reviewers found fault with Burne-Jones' presentation of it, the *Art Journal* describing it as "absolutely abhorrent"[388], the *Spectator* condemning its "affectation of ungainliness ... and grimace"[389]. *The Times* complained that "Mr Jones dwells and works in the 14th and 15th centuries. ... His figures are queerly drawn, stand in contorted attitude, [and] show neither bone, muscle nor curvature of flesh under their robes, while the accessories display utter contempt for keeping or probability"[390]. Even the old con-

[384] Fitzgerald, 86.

[385] The side-panels of the triptych depict the Annunciation; Gabriel is shown in the left panel, and Mary in the right. In D. von Schleiniß, 38.

[386] Cf. Mancoff, 33.

[387] Cf. Burne-Jones, 2:56.

[388] In *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 295.

[389] Ibid.

[390] Ibid.

demnatory label ‘papistical’ was put on it by some of the members of the Old Water-Colour Society[391], the institute responsible for the organisation of the exhibition. By this time, however, such an accusation was obviously outdated, and mostly due to the notoriously stubborn conservatism of the Old Water-Colour Society.

Even in specifically religious matters such stigmatisation was no longer current. In 1864, the same year when *The Merciful Knight* was exhibited, Newman’s *Apologia*, his account of the history of the Oxford Movement and his conversion to Rome, was published and received with surprising impartiality. Newman was found “marvellously generous”[392], and his *Apologia* described as a book which did the most “to make Protestant Englishmen understand that Roman Catholic Priests might be human and English and large-hearted”[393].

Despite the rather cool official reception, *The Merciful Knight* and Burne-Jones’ other exhibits attracted important patrons, and won him the appreciation of an even younger generation, who became later his devoted followers. As one of them, Walter Crane remembered the effect Burne-Jones’ works had made on him: “The curtain had been lifted, and we had a glimpse into a magic world of romance and pictured poetry ... a twilight of dark mysterious woodlands, haunted streams, meads of deep green starred with burning flowers, veiled in a dim and mystic light.”[394] This mystic, often dreamy character became maybe the most decisive feature of Burne-Jones’ mature works remaining dominant even when the medieval character was wearing off, giving way to a classical ideal.

While the influence of medieval art and literature was naturally favourable to religious subjects and themes taken from Christian legends, the classical revival brought the dominance of mythological themes in Burne-Jones’ art. Accordingly, as his sources of inspiration changed, so did his preference of subject matter, his mythological paintings far outnumbering the Biblical ones from the 1870s.

Among Burne-Jones’ religious works the first signs of the influence of classical art can be seen in an early pen and ink drawing, *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins* (1859). Though the picture strongly relies on Rossetti’s *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, some of the details of Rossetti’s work actually being repeated by Burne-Jones, the influence of classical Greek sculpture can already be seen in “the weight and grace of the figures, their frieze-like arrangement and repetitive drapery forms”[395]. The love of classical beauty and the admiration for the Italian High Renaissance was conveyed to Burne-Jones by George Frederick Watts, and reinforced later by Ruskin, who became not just a generous patron and supporter, but also a close friend and advisor. John Christian’s suggests[396] that in the case of *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins* the religious subject was chosen by Burne-Jones mainly for Ruskin’s high opinion of it, and, accordingly, Burne-Jones’ illustrative treatment of the theme shows no personal interest whatsoever.

Another Biblical picture, *The Annunciation* (1879), which shows the influence of the Italianate classical style, is said to have been painted at Watts’ suggestion. It revives the conventional ‘Mary at the well’ type, which is based not on the Biblical account of the

[391] Cf. Fitzgerald, 91.
[392] In Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:414.
[393] Richard Holt Hutton in the *Spectator*. Ibid, 415.
[394] In *An Artist’s Reminiscences* (1907), qtd. in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 295.
[395] John Christian in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 289.
[396] Ibid.

events, but on the description of the apocryphal Book of James. As in his early *Annunciation* (1860), the Fall is referred to in this late work, shown as a decoration in the frieze of the background building.

The most individual of Burne-Jones' religious works of the time is *The Days of Creation* (1876), a series of six individual panels, originally designed as a stained-glass cartoon in 1870. It also has an immediate pictorial predecessor, in this case, however, it is not a religious work, but a Tarot-card engraving attributed at the time to Mantegna. The engraving, which Burne-Jones first saw in the British Museum in around 1865, shows an angel figure holding a sphere full of stars. In like manner, Burne-Jones' painting depicts angels with crystal balls in their hands, which present the visions of the events of each day of the Creation.

Typically, in all of these works, as indeed in all of Burne-Jones' other paintings of the time, the depicted figures are basically expressionless, or, at least, they show no distinctive features when compared with each other. The reason is given by Burne-Jones himself, who reckoned that "the moment you give what people call expression, you destroy the typical character of heads and degrade them into portraits which stand for nothing"[397]. This approach, which applied to Biblical, literary and non-narrative pictures alike, indicates that for Burne-Jones the subject itself was of secondary importance, a mere pretext to present and contemplate on something more universal, and far more important. As May Johnson expressed, "the subject-matter [of Burne-Jones' works], so often based on poetry and legend, seemed to indicate allegorical sources, the pursuit of eternal truth and the cult of beauty"[398]. These two, the 'pursuit of eternal truth' and the 'cult of beauty', were inseparable for Burne-Jones. To him beauty did not exist for itself, as art could not exist just for its own sake. Thus the theory of the Aesthetic Movement was only partially acceptable to Burne-Jones, who believed in art's superiority over nature, but never conceded to Walter Pater's view that "a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor"[399]. Though many of his works show a strong relation to the paintings of the aesthetic school, the resemblance is merely formal, which does not imply a common ideological standpoint. Among Burne-Jones' late Biblical works, *Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre* (1886) shows the influence of aestheticism, especially that of Whistler and Albert Moore, the rhythmic arrangement of the sitting angels and the standing figures of Magdalene and Christ, the repetitive wave of the draperies, and the dominance of white colour recalling Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 3.* (1865–67) and Moore's *Dreamers* (1882).

When he was nearing the end of his life, Burne-Jones' paintings became even more detached from the literary sources which inspired them. All the scenes taken either from Malory, Greek mythology, or from the Bible were becoming parts of the same dream world created by the artist's longing imagination. The same unrealistic, magic woodland and flowered glade appears surrounding the Holy Family in *The Star of Bethlehem* (1888–91) and in *The Nativity* (1888), the bride of Lebanon in *Sponsa de Libano* (1891), and the knights of the Round Table in *The Summons* (tapestry, 1898) or in *The Arming and De-*

[397] In Ash, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones*, Plate 36.
[398] In *Burne-Jones, All Colour Paperback*, Introduction.
[399] In the essay "The School of Giorgione" (1877). Pater, 84.

parture of the Knights (tapestry, 1898). The depicted figures indicate types rather than present characters, the same bearded man appearing, for example, as Joseph in *The Star of Bethlehem*, as the king in *King and Shepherd* (1888), and as one of the attendants in *The Wedding of Psyche* (1894–95). Even whole situations are sometimes equated, Mary becoming an enchanted Sleeping Beauty in *The Nativity*, and her sleep shown being minded by gentle, ethereal attendants just as King Arthur's in *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1891–98). These similarities suggest that Burne-Jones' late Biblical paintings have no more religious contents than any of his other pictures produced at the time.

Given Burne-Jones' apparent lack of interest in matters of religion, it is surprising that many of *The Flower Book* roundels are concerned with religious thought. Produced only for his own amusement and never intended for public display, these watercolours are highly personal and in certain cases entirely original, revealing the artist's most intimate thoughts and emotions. *The Flower Book* consists of thirty-eight small gouache pictures inspired by ancient names of flowers, but the plants themselves have no connection at all with the evoked images. In most cases old, familiar themes, such as that of the Sleeping Beauty (*Wake, Dearest!*), Arthur in Avalon (*Meadow Sweet*), or the beguiling of Merlin (*Witches' Tree*) recur, while some of the pictures, like *The Key of Spring*, *Morning Glories*, or *Comes he not?* are wholly original.[400]

Accordingly, apart from *Fire Tree*, which depicts Moses putting off his shoes in front of the burning bush, and *Adder's Tongue*, which shows the Fall, those pictures which present religious subjects are basically non-narrative, and even the Biblical ones rather indicate than illustrate the scriptural events. The only non-figurative work of *The Flower Book*, *Arbor Tristis*, is perhaps the most detached from the Biblical narrative it is due to evoke. Recalling the Crucifixion it presents the foot of the cross, standing ghastly and solitary above the dark houses of Jerusalem. As Gabriele Uerscheln suggests[401], the tiny, lighted windows of the houses in the background appear as eyes looking on the tragic scene with inhuman indifference. Only the light of the approaching sunrise alleviates the overall despair of the scene, which is so strong that it makes *Arbor Tristis* a most desperate image.

Black Archangel, *The Flower of God*, and *White Garden* are similarly indicative, none of them bearing much reference to the Biblical or protoevangelical texts which they recall. The *Black Archangel* shows the static figure of the enthroned Lucifer, only the dark colours and the flames behind him revealing the figure's identity and referring to his Biblical story. *The Flower of God* and *White Garden* depict the Annunciation, in each of them a homogeneous background, a field of lilies and of corn, respectively, covering all the space around the simple figures of Mary and the winged angel, which renders the event independent of space and time.

The Nativity plates, *Traveller's Joy* and *Star of Bethlehem* are also quite unusual, since neither of them shows Mary and the newborn Christ, in both pictures the Magi's journey being in the centre of attention. Robed in yellow, blue and red, the three men are sugges-

[400] As the artist's wife, Georgiana Burne-Jones wrote in the preface of the first publication of *The Flower Book,* Burne-Jones held that a picture "... should be no faint echo of other men's thoughts, but 'a voice concurrent or prophetical'. It was easy enough ... merely to illustrate, but he wanted to add to the meaning of words or to wring their secrets from them". In Hönnighausen, 66.

[401] Uerscheln, 72.

tive of the elements earth, water and fire, together representing worldly existence. In *The Star of Bethlehem* an angel, dressed in white, supplements the fourth element, air. She is shown holding a bright star in her hands in front of her, which is followed by the three figures at a distance. In Burne-Jones' other works the angels are usually leading the elect by the hand, an attitude first shown in Rossetti's watercolour version of *The Seed of David*, so the distance here may be of importance, suggesting perhaps that no tangible connection between earthly and unearthly is thought to be possible. Shown from a reverse angle, *Traveller's Joy* presents the Magi's first glimpse of the stall in the distance, which stands solitary in the rocky landscape. What is in the stall cannot be clearly seen, which suggests that the travellers still cannot be certain that their journey will come to a successful end. Nevertheless, the hope that the vision of the star did not deceive them stands now stronger than ever.

Keeping in mind that Burne-Jones painted *The Flower Book* roundels in his advanced years—at times when he was incapable of working on his huge canvases due to ever more frequent bouts of illness—it is not surprising that some of these pictures reflect his concerns about the mystery of afterlife. Rossetti's thoughts on the same in the poem "The Blessed Damozel" may have inspired his *Golden Greeting*, in which the earthly and the heavenly spheres are shown being united in the embrace of a living man and the soul of his lover. *The Ladder of Heaven* and *Welcome to the House* present the ascension of the human soul to heaven, the former depicting a winged figure advancing upwards on a rainbow, while the latter shows how the blessed soul is received by an angel at the gate of heaven. These highly personal visions of *The Flower Book* reflect a serene optimism, which seems to suggest that though he had early lost his orthodox belief, Burne-Jones retained a hope for a world more beautiful and more sincere than the one he was living in. "I never doubt for a moment the real presence of God", he wrote in one of his letters, adding that "I should never debate about it any more than I should argue about Beauty, and the things I most love."[402]

The enclosed, fairy-tale world, which appears in all of his late works, assumed an unusual significance to Burne-Jones, it became the manifestation of all the values worthy to live for, and an object of his unceasing aspiration. As Russell Ash observes, "[having] decided against a career in the church, the myth and mystery of his art became a substitute for religion in Burne-Jones's life."[403]

Religious Paintings by Some of the Pre-Raphaelite Followers

Apart from Burne-Jones many other artists became inspired by the 'freshness and originality' of the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Some of them came under their influence only for a short while like Henry Alexander Bowler, Robert Braithwaite Martineau, or Joseph Noel Paton; while others like Arthur Hughes, Simeon Solomon, or the landscape painter John Brett were more decisively affected.

In the short term the strict realism of the early Pre-Raphaelite works was highly influential, which inspired mostly modern-life pictures like Martineau's *The Last Day in the*

[402] Burne-Jones, 2:325.
[403] Ash, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones*, Plate 18.

Old Home (1861) and such romantic subjects as Paton's *The Bluidie Tryst* (1855). As regards religious pictures, Henry Alexander Bowler's *The Doubt: 'Can these dry bones live?'* (1855) stands as a singular noteworthy example, which is also unique for being the only known attempt at a pictorial presentation of Victorian religious doubt. The title itself comes from the first lines of Ezekiel 37, which describes how the valley of dry bones was shown to the prophet, and how, by the might of the Lord, 'breath was caused to enter' these bones. Bowler fastened on God's question put to Ezekiel to represent the religious doubts of his contemporary world, using the question independent of its Biblical context.

The painting depicts a young lady leaning against a tombstone in a country churchyard, while gazing at the unearthed bones of the man on whose gravestone she is leaning. Meditating on the question posed in the title she seems to find no answer. The spectator, however, is assumed to understand some of the details of the picture as the painter's affirmative answer. The inscription on the tombstone reveals that the bones are the mortal remains of a man once called John Faithful, a name deliberately chosen to indicate his Christian conviction. The hope that his trust in resurrection might have been rewarded is suggested by the inscription 'RESURGAM' on the grave slab next to his tomb, and by the germinating chestnut depicted on it. In addition, a butterfly, the traditional symbol of resurrection, is shown resting on his skull, basking in the warmth of the autumnal afternoon sun.

In spite of the Victorians' fondness for pictures of girls in churchyards[404], Bowler was never able to find a purchaser for the painting[405]. It seems that no one wanted to have a picture which would have acted as a constant reminder of the encroaching doubt as to whether there was an afterlife or not.

The sentiment of *The Doubt* shows affinities with Millais' pictures painted at about the same time, its rendering of the effects of the autumnal sunshine and its reflection on the theme of transience recalling Millais' *The Vale of Rest* and *Autumn Leaves*.

Hunt's painstaking realism and strong moral attitude to religious art did not attract many followers. John Roddam Spencer-Stanhope's *I Have Pressed the Winepress Alone* (1864) maybe regarded as a rare example of Hunt's influence[406], its presentation of Christ strongly recalling *The Light of the World*. Its detailed realism and typological character, the mystic winepress traditionally referring to Christ's Passion, are much reflective of Hunt's works, and, at the same time, quite uncharacteristic of Stanhope's other paintings.

Among the founder members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood it was Rossetti whose work was most influential. The poetic mood and mystic beauty of his pictures, and his slow, but steady detachment from strict narrativity appealed to many of the younger painters. And though mere decoration and complete non-narrativity was hardly possible in the case of Biblical works, a steady shift in emphasis can be observed in their case too, a gradual alienation from the strictly factual approach of the early Pre-Raphaelites to a more poetic, and sometimes even decorative character. The works of one of Burne-Jones' studio assistants, Thomas Matthew Rooke, are the only noteworthy exceptions which

[404] Cf. Wood, 68.

[405] The painting was finally given to the Tate Gallery by the artist's family in 1921.

[406] In Harrison and Waters it is suggested that the picture's construction of the boxed-in space is reflective of Burne-Jones' *The Merciful Knight*. They also refer to the fact that the two artists were working on these paintings at the same time, while staying together in Cobham, Surrey. Harrison and Waters, 72.

much rely on the Biblical narratives, often depicting the Biblical stories in a series of panels, like *The Story of Ruth* (1876–7). Some of these works enjoyed a memorable success at the time[407], but in retrospect they are regarded as dated and rather unoriginal[408].

The works of an early follower, Arthur Hughes already reflect the direction that Pre-Raphaelite art was to take. His pictures are usually distinguished for their 'elegiac mood' and for the display of 'a sensitivity to feeling without sentimentality'[409], while Hughes himself is described as a 'born follower'[410]. Nevertheless, his works possess a childlike artlessness and sensitivity unattainable by Rossetti's self-confidence or Millais' sentimentalism. No wonder that Hughes became a highly appreciated illustrator of children's books after the second half of the 1860s, when his early career as a painter was more or less over. His *The Nativity* (1858) would likewise have come from an illustrated children's Bible, both Mary and the assisting angels bearing the features of innocent childhood. Its pendant, *The Annunciation* (1858) has less childish naivety and is less intimate, but it is similarly poetic and its simplicity and thoughtfulness are very characteristic of the painter.

Another early follower of Rossetti, who was captivated by the spirituality of his works, was Simeon Solomon. He produced numerous religious pictures in the early 1860s, illustrating Biblical stories as well as depicting scenes of the traditional Jewish ceremonies. His *Finding of Moses* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860 brought him an early success and appreciation[411] which notoriously collapsed thirteen years later when the painter was convicted of homosexual offences. Solomon's early works like *Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego Preserved from the Burning Fiery Furnace* (1863), or *Isaac and Rebecca* (1863) are noted for their 'mystical intensity'[412] and 'enigmatic beauty'[413]. Similarly to Burne-Jones, Solomon turned to classical themes in the middle of the 1860s, and remained under their spell till the breakdown of his career in 1873.

Frederick Sandys' *Mary Magdalene* (1858-60) is an early attempt at a relative independence from the biblical narrative. It is the half-length portrait of a young woman, shown clasping a pot to her bosom in front of a decorative brocade background. Though it is said to have been inspired by Rossetti's *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting*,[414] it is definitely different in its abstraction from the Biblical event itself, and shows affinities rather to Rossetti's late *Mary Magdalene*. Half-length portraits of beautiful women became Sandys' favourite type of painting; he soon took to subjects taken from mythology and other literary sources creating numerous images of beautiful femme fatales like *Morgan-le-Fay* (1862–3) or *Medea* (1868).

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[407] Cf. Spalding, 20.
[408] Harrison and Waters, 178; Treuherz, 92.
[409] *Hughes*, 6.
[410] Hilton, 112; and Wood, 52.
[411] Treuherz, 144.
[412] Wood, 131.
[413] Treuherz, 144.
[414] In a very tactful letter to Sandys (1? June 1869) Rossetti pointed out the resemblance claiming that he was the first artist ever depicting Mary Magdalene in the given moment. *Letters*, 2:698.

CONCLUSION: SECULARISATION AND RECONCILIATION

The fact that most of the Pre-Raphaelite artists turned away from Biblical subjects some time around the 1860s suggests that apart from the individual reasons there had to be common causes, too. One of them might be found in the more and more candid acknowledgement that the centuries-old foundations of Christian belief were shaking, which meant that religious themes less unanimously commanded the interest of the public. As a sharp contrast to Rossetti's opinion at the end of the 1840s, Frederick Leighton, the future president of the Royal Academy wrote in a letter in 1862 that by that time the public obviously preferred decorative paintings, showing no interest in Biblical subjects at all:

> I think I may confirm the report made to you of the success of my pictures, particularly the 'Odalisque' and [Sea] 'Echoes' ... nobody has yet asked for the price of the 'Eastern King' [The Star of Bethlehem] ... There is no mistake now about what people in this country like to buying point ...[415]

Obviously, there were exemptions to this general observation. As it has already been referred to, some of Hunt's religious works attained rare popularity, and when shown on tours Joseph Noel Paton's rather monumental religious paintings also attracted huge audiences.[416]

Leighton called his non-narrative, decorative paintings like *Odalisque* (1862) and *Sea Echoes* (1862) 'potboilers', regarding them as inferior in subject matter to the spiritually uplifting Biblical and historical works. The Royal Academy, the official 'guardian of national taste' shared the same view. However, as it is also suggested by Leighton's words quoted above, the wish and taste of the buyers—who by that time often acted independently of the official judgement of the Royal Academy—became an ever more determinant factor regarding an artist's choice of subject. A new group of patrons emerging from the prosperous manufacturers and merchants, who usually did not have the classical education of the nobility, took to buying non-narrative pictures, preferring in general the impressive, decorative types rather than the classical or religious ones.

Another reason for the unpopularity of religious themes in painting after the 1860s was that both the classical revival and English Aestheticism emerged at the time, both of which pushed Biblical subjects into the background, the former one giving a preference to mythological themes, and the latter turning away from narrative subjects altogether. The classical revival and the aesthetic movement were closely related in England, so

[415] In *Leighton*, 126.
[416] Cf. Morgan, and Wood, 77.

closely that Christopher Wood actually regards the former one "only as another aspect"[417] of the latter. The close affinity between the two movements derived from the mid-Victorian reinterpretation of the classical ideal as "the expression of a harmonious, luxurious ideal of beauty in repose"[418], which, as Richard Ormond observes[419], was fundamentally different from the heroic character of the early nineteenth-century classicism. It concentrated above all on the display of beauty and sensuality, which is reflected in many of the paintings of Leighton, Watts, and Albert Moore. As Crowley points out[420] , in England the nineteenth-century interest in classical art rooted in the Palladianism of the previous century, but it was significantly boosted by the display of the Parthenon and Erechtheion sculptures, generally known as the Elgin Marbles, at the British Museum in 1816[421]. In 1865, when the marbles were re-displayed after restoration, they were given renewed attention. However, by that time they were viewed with the new aesthetic approach in mind, transmitted from France and quickly gaining ground in England. As already mentioned, among the Pre-Raphaelites the art of Burne-Jones and Simeon Solomon was significantly influenced by the classical movement, and the late follower, John William Waterhouse[422] was even more decisively affected.

Being independent of the classical ideal, English Aestheticism had an even wider appeal. Stressing "poetic imagery and mood at the expense of single narrative, sensuousness of form and colour, and the idea of beauty for its own sake"[423] , its aesthetic is manifested in Rossetti's haunting female portraits, in Whistler's 'symphonies' and 'nocturnes', and in Leighton's 'potboilers' alike. Though the Aesthetic movement had emerged in the 1860s and was quickly gaining ground, real public recognition of its strength came only at the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877. The Grosvenor was intended to challenge the authoritative power of the Royal Academy; its founder, Sir Coutts Lindsay inviting artists like Burne-Jones, Moore, Watts, Tissot, and Whistler—who did not belong to the Academy—to exhibit. Though in the long term the Royal Academy far outlived the Grosvenor Gallery, which was mainly due to Leighton's expert and devoted presidency between 1878–96[424], at the time of its opening it demonstrated beyond doubt that by that time significant changes had taken place in the view of art in England.

[417] Wood, 95.

[418] Treuherz, 136.

[419] In *Leighton*, 26.

[420] Crowley, 65.

[421] The marbles were taken to England and sold to the British Museum for a fraction of its real value by Lord Elgin, England's ambassador to Constantinaple.

[422] Although his monographer, Antony Hobson claims that Waterhouse has wrongly been regarded as a Pre-Raphaelite, the general opinion is that he has quite significantly been affected by Pre-Raphaelite art. Wood mentions that Millais' retrospective exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1886 is known to have been admired by Waterhouse, and that it might have inspired his works depicting scenes from Tennyson's and Keats' poems, like "The Lady of Shalott" (1888) and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1893). Cf. Hobson, 9; and Wood, 141, 143.

[423] Richard Ormond in *Leighton*, 24.

[424] As the president of the Royal Academy Leighton manifested an unusually open-minded approach. Trying to make the Royal Academy more representative of the English art world in general, he wished to enrol as members as many of the leading artists of the day as he could, even if he personally could not agree with the theory some of them stood for. From the Pre-Raphaelites Millais was already in, but Rossetti, Hunt, Brown and Burne-Jones were notably missing. Burne-Jones was finally won over in 1885, but he resigned eight years later, never really feeling that he truly belonged there.

The old and new concepts of art dramatically clashed in the notorious Ruskin vs. Whistler trial, which followed Ruskin's critical comment made on Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (c.1874) put on view for the first time at the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery. Ruskin, who still firmly believed in the moral, spiritual and professional commitments of the artist, wrote in *Fors Clavigera* that "Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the Gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen much of cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."[425] Whistler responded to Ruskin's words by suing him for libel and demanding damages of £1000. The hearing became an absurd debate on artistic philosophy, to which Burne-Jones, who was the chief exhibitor of the gallery and thus regarded as the leading artist of the Aesthetic school, was also called in as a witness on Ruskin's behalf, while William Michael Rossetti appeared in court to support Whistler, both of them obeying a call of friendship rather than an urge of aesthetic conviction. Even so, many years later, Burne-Jones was still convinced that his decision to stand up for Ruskin was the right one. As he wrote in a letter remembering the case: "... I let myself put in a pillory to help [Ruskin] at Whistler's trial ... and even thought him wrong and Whistler right. ... and yet I was right. He had lifted all England by his life and given himself and wasted himself: it would have been a shame not to have been on his side."[426]

The legal result of the trial was ambiguous; the court deciding in Whistler's favour, but ordering Ruskin to pay no more than a ridiculous one farthing damages. It left Whistler financially ruined given the costs the trial incurred, and impaired Ruskin's reputation as a result of which he resigned his Oxford professorship, and withdrew to the isolation his Brantwood home provided him.

Despite all its noble aims, Ruskin's theory of art was no more a potent force in the English art world. Instead of *Modern Painters* artists took inspiration from the writings of Walter Pater, works like *The Renaissance* (1873) and "The School of Giorgione" (1877)[427], in which, contrary to Ruskin, the author claimed that art was superior to nature, and that the essence of a painting was its form and not its subject. This new ideology obviously did not encourage painters to opt for Biblical or religious themes, thus the lack of public demand for religious paintings just coincided with the lack of interest on the side of many of the most productive painters of the time.

Corresponding to the general tendency, religious works by the late followers of the Pre-Raphaelites are few and far between. The rare examples, however, manifest that basically nothing of the early Pre-Raphaelite attitude to religious art was thought to be of importance by the end of the century. Among the few religious works Waterhouse's *The Annunciation* (1914) is the most reminiscent of early Pre-Raphaelite art in its unaffected treatment of the theme, but it definitely lacks the emotional veracity of Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Edward Reginald Frampton's *The Annunciation* (undated) is more reflective of the late, highly decorative phase of Pre-Raphaelite art. Disregarding verisi-

[425] *Fors Clavigera*, 4:141.
[426] In Harrison and Waters, 128.
[427] "The School of Giorgione" was added only in the third edition of *The Renaissance* in 1888. It was first published in the *Fortnightly Review*, XIII, October 1877.

militude as well as historical truth the painting is rather a condensed symbol of the 'Annunciation' as a traditional pictorial type, incorporating all its basic versions; it presents Mary at a well, with an open illuminated book on her knees, and a red thread in her hand. Mary herself appears as an early twentieth-century equivalent of the conventional serene, slightly smiling type of the Virgin, a type from which Rossetti wanted his Mary to be completely different. Frampton's work shows the most affinity with Burne-Jones' late works; it possesses the same enigmatic beauty, conveying a sense of deep spiritual involvement.

As if to display the nature of the changes which had affected Pre-Raphaelite religious presentation, Maria Spartali Stillman's *The Convent Lily* (1891) stands as a telling late nineteenth-century counterpart of Collins' early *Convent Thoughts*. Instead of an austere, thoughtful nun Stillman depicts a young girl in her full, radiant beauty; her head is uncovered, her hair unbound, and wearing a voluminous, richly pleated dress. Though there is an illuminated religious book open in front of her, a rosary on her wrist, and a lily in her hand, they are used, as in Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, to convey sentiment rather than Christian piety. Likewise, contrary to Collins, who depicted the nun in the seclusion of an enclosed garden, Stillman shows her leaning on the stone-bar of the convent and gazing rather longingly at the outside world. She seems more day-dreaming than meditating on religious precepts, another important difference as compared with Collins' conception. As the title itself reflects, Stillman's approach to the basically same religious subject was significantly different from that of Collins forty years earlier; the concern for religious thought and dogma being replaced by a basically emotional and aesthetic approach to religion.

Religious issues in general were given far less attention in the 1870s than in the preceding decades. As the debate over *Essays and Reviews* was over, religious agitations were dying down. In 1868, when the Tractarian Gladstone became Prime Minister, he nominated Frederick Temple, one of the authors of *Essays and Reviews* for the see of Exeter, and, though not without opposition, Temple was consecrated bishop in December next year. Willing neither to withdraw his statements made in *Essays and Reviews*, nor to condemn what was written by the other authors, the only concession Temple was ready to make to his opponents was that he agreed that his essay would not be published in the future editions of the volume. As Lord Shaftesbury commented in his diary in December, 1869 the fact that the Church of England now had a bishop who wholeheartedly supported such liberal views as Temple's was a turning point in the ecclesiastical and theological history of England.[428]

But there was another important sign of the religious reconciliation taking place in England at the time. Urged by clerical demand, the Convocation of the Church of England entrusted some distinguished scholars with the production of a new translation of the New Testament in 1870. By that time the text of the King James Bible was seriously questioned in the light of the newly found and freshly studied manuscripts and of the recent development in the methods of linguistic studies; thus many learned theologians found it ever more difficult to preach doctrines the absolute truth and accuracy of which they were no longer wholly convinced. The new version was completed by November 1880 and pub-

[428] In Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:90.

lished a few months later. It was followed by a commission to retranslate the text of the Old Testament, the new version of which was published in 1885. Apart from the desire to please their clergy, church officials also intended to bring the Scriptures closer to its readers by providing them with a more easily readable text[429]. It soon turned out, however, that the ancient text of the Bible rang so familiar in the ears of the worshippers, and it became such an indelible part of religion itself, that people relentlessly adhered to it. They loved the music and poetry of its language so much that, as it was said, "most Englishmen ... would have preferred a committee to rewrite Shakespeare."[430] And, as the accounts of the Oxford University Press show, the revised versions proved to be surprisingly unpopular.[431]

The public's reaction in this case was very similar to the way they received the early Pre-Raphaelite religious pictures. It seems that religion, religious attitude, and religious worship subsisted more on tradition and usage than on reasonable conviction. As most Victorians insisted upon the beauty and reverence reflected in conventional religious painting, so they stuck to the old, poetic text of the Bible regardless of factual veracity in both cases. Religious art as well as divine texts were regarded as bearing a touch of sacredness, which put an obstacle even to well-disposed and reasonable alterations.

As the Victorians themselves realised, in the 1870s they witnessed the beginning of the secularisation of their lives, which, as Owen Chadwick explains, meant that "... public life was ... influenced less, or not at all, by religion."[432] They have become accustomed to the idea that "the quality [of God was] incomprehensible, and [His] plans inscrutable,"[433] and that as far as faith was concerned "it [was] impossible to arrive at anything definite, [but] those who [did] not trouble their heads about the matter [could] get on as well as other people."[434] As it is revealed by a contemporary article,[435] forty years after the first display of Millais' *The Carpenter's Shop* people could not understand the agitation it had caused in the middle of the century. The search for historical and spiritual truth reflected in the first religious paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites did no more revolt the spectators, but it did not excite them either.

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[429] It must be added, however, that Elizabethan English was ordered to be used by the translators. Cf. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:50.

[430] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:43.

[431] As the accounts of the Oxford University Press reveal, the number of copies sold of the old version far outnumbered that of the new one. Cf. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:55.

[432] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:423.

[433] William Allingham in his diary. Allingham, 318.

[434] Ibid, 317.

[435] Published in the *Guardian* in 1886, 99. In Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2:68.

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