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Violette-Anne Onfroy-Curley
University of Dayton

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THE *QUERELLE DE L'ART SACRÉ* AND THE CHURCH OF ASSY:
RENEWAL OR DENIAL OF THE SACRED IN ART?

Thesis

Submitted to

The School of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of
Master of Arts in Theology

By

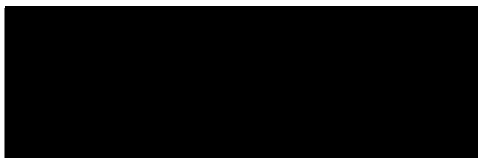
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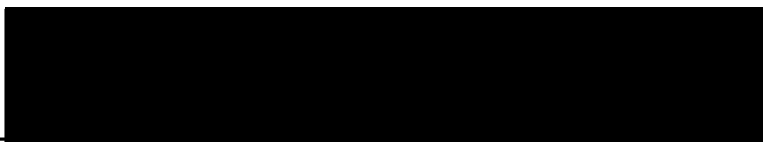
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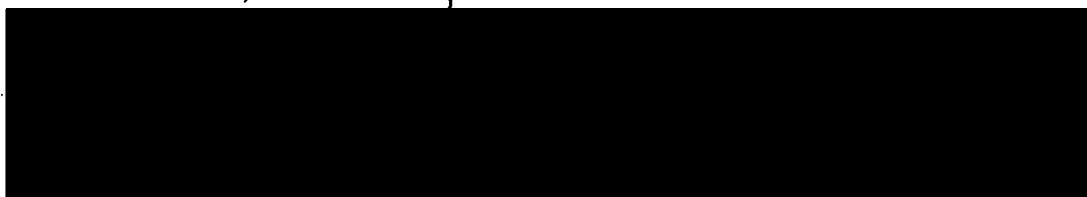
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2009

ABSTRACT

THE *QUERELLE DE L'ART SACRÉ* AND THE CHURCH OF ASSY: RENEWAL OR DENIAL OF THE SACRED IN ART?

Name: Onfroy-Curley, Violette-Anne
University of Dayton

Advisor: Fr. Johann G. Roten, S.M.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the French public's satisfaction with artistic creations in academic and Saint-Sulpician styles was castigated by a Catholic intelligentsia eager to foster a renewal of true sacred art. Father Couturier's invitation to abstractionists and secular art masters to work for the Church led to the unique and highly contested decoration of the church of Assy in France. I will analyze the arguments for and against this collaboration via the study of the contemporaneous critiques (1950-1952) written about the church's crucifix sculpted by Germaine Richier, and the review of the Holy See's tradition-based response to the scandal. In conclusion, I will show how Father Couturier's disillusioned assessment of the Assy experiment and the Vatican's stand on the issue put an end to the artistic collaboration between modern art masters and the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

In the period between the two world wars, the French arts scene saw an explosion of new ideas, especially in literature and in the visual arts, where authors and artists looked at society in unprecedented ways. They created a swirl of cultural transformations by letting go of traditions and embracing radical changes essential to the renewal of life after a devastating war. The religious art world was not spared from the harsh criticism voiced by an intelligentsia eager to upset the traditional artistic expressions of life. French Catholic literary figures expressed their disgust at the Church's complacency regarding its architecture and choice of art. Following Joris-Karl Huysmans' denunciation of decadence in the aesthetic world of Catholicism, and supported by Léon Bloy's incisive writings, in 1919 the influential Catholic poet and art critic Paul Claudel virulently attacked the churches built in the previous fifty years as being "heavily laden confessions," whose ugliness was the "demonstration to all the world of sins and shortcomings, weakness, poverty, conventions and formulae . . . worldly luxury, avarice boasting sulkiness, Pharisaism and bombast."¹ He attributed the atrophy of Christian sacred art to "the divorce, which has come about during the past century, between the propositions of faith and the artist's powers of imagination and feeling."²

This aversion toward late nineteenth-century church art seemed, however, to have been the exclusive concern of the intellectual elite of the day, who condemned the lack of authenticity and meaning in the Christian art in vogue, compared to the vibrancy of the buoyant developments on the contemporary secular art scene. The arts intelligentsia rejected the three styles of religious art favored by a large majority of the public in the first half of the twentieth century. The first one, academicism, dubbed “the aristocratic branch” of the decadence,³ had William Bouguereau as its most famous and successful representative, whose work was inspired by the Renaissance artist Raphael. The second style, called art of Saint-Sulpice or kitsch art and defining “the popular branch,” focused on industrialized versions of sentimental and realistic images. The third style, a historical art form, celebrated what was perceived as the golden age of Christian art, adopting neo-Romanesque, neo-Byzantine, and neo-Gothic forms and subjects. None of these styles took their inspiration from the revolutionary discoveries that occurred in secular art in prior decades, but instead emphasized their faithfulness to artistic tradition.

Canon Jérôme Labourt dated the appearance of the gap between church art and modern art back to the 1830s, when romanticism became the *raison d'être* for many artists. The lyrical aspect of this movement had translated into a kind of ‘love of the past’ in thought and in art, based on the idealistic superiority of former times. As a result, the style used for new and restored church art was said to be *à la Viollet-le-Duc*, a proponent of modeling works after roman and

gothic styles, which led to an art of imitation lacking sincerity.⁴ Since the advent of the Third Republic, the success of positivism in intellectual and cultural milieus and the push for a separation of Church and state,⁵ had caused the Christian public to associate modernity—in its meaning of what was contemporaneous—with anti-religious pursuits. The faithful became opposed to modernity's expressions, most specifically in art where the new forms exhibited seemed incomprehensible. Conversely, many secular art masters felt disconnected from a Catholic religion that rejected, on several levels, a modernity they embraced,⁶ prompting them to ignore religious themes from which they felt alienated.

Three more immediate factors help explain the divorce between the art of modern masters and the religious public for the past century.⁷ First, the Institute of Fine Arts in Paris, which set the gold standard for fine arts, only accepted artists who followed the rules established by the famous artists of their time like Louis David and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. These painters were themselves proponents of the mastery of Antiquity and Italian Renaissance styles, which they established as perfection in beauty. Second, the success of industrialization meant a sharp decrease in the viability of craftsmanship at the individual level, and the easy profitability of serial production based on the copy of older popular artworks. Third, the popularity of photography fueled a general taste for 'literal realism', a liking for life-like resemblance that Saint-Sulpician art exploited in its imagery.

The disparity in taste regarding church art initiated a debate in which the terms sacred art, religious art, and Christian art, were used somewhat interchangeably to describe the field where art and religion met. The notion of Christian art, and to a large extent religious art, covered several categories according to the purpose of the artwork: "didactic images that taught the faith; liturgical objects used for ritual worship; devotional visions that nurtured prayer and contemplation; decorative entities whose beauty elevated the soul to the spiritual realm; symbolic forms that revealed coeval objective and subjective meanings; works combining any or all of these categories."⁸ The concept of sacred art, however, was the subject of different interpretations during the 1950s when modern art was introduced into Catholic churches. The core purpose of sacred art had traditionally been in service to the liturgy—Pope Pius XI called the sacred arts "the noblest handmaids at the service of divine worship"—that was accomplished by translating the divine mysteries into a visual language. For the defenders of a traditional approach to sacred art, it was an "art which, inspired and formed by Catholic faith, reflect[ed] the deeply sacred, liturgical and worshipful content of the divine mysteries."⁹ But for the advocates of a renewal of sacred art, there was more to its role than demagogy:

[The objects and decor of churches] must compose with [the cult] a homogeneous and indissoluble *whole*. . . . More precisely, the role [of liturgical artworks] . . . is to help the faithful *contemplate* the realities hidden in the Eucharistic mystery.¹⁰

The nineteenth-century definition prevalent among the faithful mostly granted the appellation 'sacred' to artworks with a religious subject; but with the

disappearance of subjects in realistic forms, the public inferred the non-existence of the sacred in works of modern art.¹¹ Abstract art was rejected from the realm of the sacred by several Catholic thinkers as well on pedagogical and theological grounds. Maurice Denis contended that "the main objection to abstract art lays in the fact that religious art has a double goal, to be representational and apologetic; it must be intelligible to the majority of the faithful."¹² Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier at first condemned abstract art, before he became one of its best defenders:¹³ "An art born in its entirety of the Incarnation of the Word has barely anything to gain from schematizations, abstractions which too many contemporary artists confuse with the spiritual."¹⁴

The question debated about balance between the spiritual versus the sacred was based on the Church's fundamental demands of sacred art which comprised a rejection of excessive realism and excessive symbolism, an obligation to speak a universal language, and the satisfaction of the deepest needs of the faithful.¹⁵ The need for universality originated in the communal nature of the liturgy and became a major argument against allowing the contemporaneous masters to work for the Church, as they were perceived to favor their own personal intuitive response in the creative process. Even though proponents of modern sacred art agreed that "the sacred work of art must . . . be a means of the communion that is accomplished in the liturgical celebration,"¹⁶ they also believed in an "art [that] generate[d] its effectiveness by its own means,"¹⁷ and in the indefinable percipience at work in the artist:

This eye of the painter open onto the world is more and more . . . a look inward, an examination of conscience. . . . The subject is underneath [the stained glass] and what streams on the faithful is not an empty play of lines of colors. It is neither a 'subject'. It is the artist's emotion in front of these 'subjects'. . . . What is left is a man overcome by his object, who, humbly, with his heart and hands, must express the ineffable.¹⁸

Religious art is simply and uniquely an *act*, manifested in the world as it is experienced by the senses. It is a means by which the person looking at the work can be made more conscious of himself, and thus be drawn closer to his creator.¹⁹

This personalization of interpretation corresponded to a more inspirational understanding of the sacred, which led artists like Henri Matisse and partisans of a modern church art like Father Couturier, to expand the sphere of sacred art:

You can only tell [if a work of art is sacred] by considering the work. Does it induce a mood of calm and recollection? Is it conducive to spiritual uplifting? If yes, call it sacred art. The artist is the one who can express.²⁰

The 'religious' [here in the sense of sacred] nature of a work does not necessarily, not even principally, stem from the representation of a sacred subject, but, much more deeply, it stems from the nature, the *quality* of the plastic forms. And that 'quality' comes to [the artists] directly, spontaneously, from the inner dispositions of the mind and of the heart—not from the subject represented or some more or less hieratic formula.²¹

The general disregard for abstract art as a viable sacred art form in churches lost some ground during World War II, when life in exile brought together artists and intellectuals. The need for reconstruction and the start of a new era carried hopes for a revitalization of artistic creation, including in Catholic churches. For some, modern art, especially in its abstract form, embodied the best potential executor since the best artists of the time already embraced its versatility to express the mysteries of humanity. The decoration of a small Catholic church in eastern France exemplified this new approach when great modern art masters were called upon to participate in translating the sacred. The

completion of this project, however, was not welcomed by all. One of the works commissioned for the church, a crucifix by Germaine Richier, became emblematic of the intellectual and creative gap exhibited by some of the religious audience towards modern abstract art. The ensuing controversy, dubbed the *querelle de l'art sacré*, involved many contributors (artists, art critics, the faithful, the Holy See) who debated the necessity of an inspirational sacred art to restore the relevance of church art, and the adequacy of secular abstract art to achieve this renewal.

Several authors have dealt with this subject since the completion of the church, each approaching the *querelle* from a different angle. William S. Rubin was the first to write a book solely on the church of Assy in 1961.²² After briefly describing the Dominicans' view on the pre-World War II state of sacred art, the history of the commissioning of the church, and the question of the relation between faith and art, he focused on providing a critique of each artwork, as an art connoisseur looking back on the debate on sacred art. He concluded that "the decorations at Assy constitute neither a resumption of the centuries-old tradition of sacred art nor a new beginning of artistic experience that can be assimilated into the spirit of the liturgy,"²³ favoring an aesthetic assessment of the church itself over a theological evaluation. The only other book on the specific topic of the church of Assy was written by Lai-Kent Chew Orenduff²⁴ and published in 2008. Most of her work is centered on Father Couturier and his thinking, grasped mainly through the study of his unpublished journals. She tackles the scandal around Richier's Christ by way of a historical account of the Catholic Church's

traditions in dealing with the arts. She contends that the Church rejected the Crucifix for two main reasons: first, "its iconic form, the crucifix, that traditionally inspired the expected contemplation of spiritual matters, now elicited strong feelings of ambiguity, diversity and doubt."²⁵ Second, "[the Church's] opposition to the Richier work was motivated from the fear of loss of power and control,"²⁶ as the new forms of abstract art "had the power to transform lives" in ways out of the Church's influence. She does not include Father Régamey's work alongside that of Father Couturier's, and her coverage of the Richier scandal relies heavily on secondary sources.

Two authors have addressed the roles of Father Couturier and Father Régamey in the *querelle de l'art sacré* through the detailed analysis of the periodical *L'Art Sacré*, making the church of Assy just one of several examples of modern sacred art presented. Sabine de Lavergne in *Art sacré et modernité: Les grandes années de la revue L'Art Sacré* (Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1992), studies the theological aspects of the Dominican Fathers' orientations on the subject between 1945 and 1954, concentrating on the periodical as the main witness of their evolution of thought. Françoise Caussé wrote her article on the same subject,²⁷ but her approach deals in depth with the influence of the French Catholic literary movement at the beginning of the century on the two Dominican Fathers, and she argues that the *querelle* was not one of aesthetics, but one of the suitability of the artwork for the liturgy.

In this thesis, I have narrowed the scope of modern sacred art to one of the churches for which Father Couturier commissioned art masters: the church of

Assy is indeed unique in the number of artists involved in its decoration, in the variety of mediums used for the works, and in the fact that it was the first achievement of its kind. I have deliberately focused on only one artwork inside this church, the Crucifix by Richier, as I thought it embodied all facets of the criticisms expressed about the appropriateness of abstract art for the decoration of Catholic churches, and of the artwork created by non-believers for the Church. I have gathered the wide range of opinions on these topics that were expressed at the time of the scandal in periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, including reactions of the general public that transpired through responses to several national surveys. I have analyzed Father Couturier's change of heart about abstract art and the sacred and Father Régamey's complementary literary work, as well as the historical view of the Vatican on the subject and its 1952 answer to the *querelle*. Studying these focal points and using mainly French-language primary sources, I have brought together the different approaches mentioned above to give a more complete account of the *querelle de l'art sacré* around the church of Assy, addressing both its aesthetic and spiritual challenges.

In 1950, that church, Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce on the Assy plateau, stood as the result of a unique project among modern churches of the first half of the twentieth century. The church owed its particularity to several elements: the multiplicity of artists involved in the decoration, the participation of acclaimed secular and Jewish art masters alongside Catholic artists, and the prominence of semi-abstract art. This thesis will focus first on the years of intellectual gestation

of the concept behind the Assy experiment (1937-1950), and second on the years of the controversy around Assy's crucifix through the study of primary sources (1950-1952). It will raise the following questions: Would Richier's Crucifix reinforce the proponents of modern sacred art, especially Father Couturier, in their assertions of finding the sacred where art was most alive? Would it substantiate, in their eyes, the appropriateness of converting a personal spiritual artistic journey into a manifestation of the universal sacred?

The first chapter will describe the Christian art scene in France between the two World Wars, presenting the different forces at work in the struggle to define Catholic sacred art of the twentieth century. The first part will analyze the popularity of academic and Saint-Sulpician art in the French Catholic churches and with the public, as well as these styles' association with a "dead art" among the Catholic intelligentsia. The second part will review the ideas and actions of Father Couturier who became one of the principal agents for the renewal of a true sacred art, particularly in his change of heart regarding abstract art after the Second World War. The third part will study Fr. Pie-Raymond Régamey's extensive writings on the subject, and his affinity with Father Couturier's vision.

The second chapter will focus on the 1950 church of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce in Assy, France, whose liturgical space constituted a concretization of Father Couturier's efforts to bring back significant, dynamic living art in the Church. First, it will trace the church's artistic conceptualization, including the revolutionary call for the contribution of non-Christian artists, and give an

overview of the art works that resulted from this invitation. The second part will deal exclusively with the sculptress Richier and the crucified Christ she created for the church of Assy.

The third chapter will recount the specifics of the subsequent *querelle de l'art sacré* during the early years of the 1950s. The first part will retrace the steps that led to the removal of Richier's Christ from the church, and present the opinions of those condemning the artwork. The second part will give voice to the supporters of the Crucifix and their view of its intrinsic value, as well as its meaning for the future of sacred art in the Church. The third part will be devoted to the study of several surveys, involving experts and the public, on the suitability of modern art (and its corollaries) for the Church.

The fourth chapter will present the evolution of the Holy See's stand regarding the purpose of sacred art in the face of changing times and new art forms up to its 1952 Instruction. The first part will review the history of the Church's rulings on art, and the role conferred to tradition. The second part will specifically address the response elaborated by the Vatican concerning the *querelle de l'art sacré*.

To conclude, I will first show how the masters' individualized response to the sacred became controversial in terms of its universal purpose. Second, I will explain the reasons behind Father Couturier and Father Régamey's ultimate disillusionment over the renewal of true sacred art. Finally, I will relate the changes in the Vatican's stance on contemporaneous art in the 1960s and the fate of Richier's Crucifix in light of the new artistic sensibility within the Church.

I. THE DETERMINANTS OF THE *QUERELLE DE L'ART SACRÉ*

Popularity of academic and Saint-Sulpician art in French churches

1. The prestige of academicism

The first half of the twentieth century in France witnessed continuing admiration, shared by a large majority of the public, of the art sanctioned by the Fine Arts Academy. The Academy extolled the artistry of the Italian High Renaissance as perfect art, and admired neo-gothic architecture as the ultimate in beauty. The favorite painters of the Catholic public were the winners of the Academy-supervised competitions of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, whose highest award, the *Prix de Rome*, required the entries to be about Biblical or classical literature themes (Figure 1). Successful styles imitated the works of Ingres and Bouguereau, who themselves emulated styles of the past. Bouguereau characterized the spirit of the Academy when he said: "There is no symbolic, social, religious art, there is only the art of representation of nature."²⁸ According to Rafael Cardos Denis and Colin Trodd, the Academy imposed a set of values and practices based on "past pictorial traditions, and its unsqueamish appropriation of canonical motifs and compositions, both visual and textual, putting them to new uses in often eclectic combinations."²⁹ These values and practices included the mastering of perspective, the consecration of the human

body as the apex of artistic rendering, the purpose of art as incarnating the beautiful, the historical attainment of expertise in ideal forms, and the beautification of nature.

Citing the academic artistic traits held in contempt by critics, Albert Boime considered academicism entrenched in stereotypes of classical poses, in the exaltation of clear, calculated creations over inspiration, and in the submission of colors to linear design to achieve the *fini*. In other words, the artwork was created to appeal to the mind rather than the senses.³⁰ This kind of disparaging assessment had already been voiced at the beginning of the twentieth century, when academicism was associated with purely illustrative or literary styles, to its followers' dismay.³¹ Because academic art sought to "abstract, codify and universalize," admirers of the artistic avant-garde, who longed for dynamism and authenticity, accused it of sterile idealization.³² Its many depictions of religious subjects were endearing to a Catholic public who admired the beauty of the theme as well as the idealized forms and the polished finish. However, reformulating Bouguereau's affirmation, the art critic Joseph Pichard claimed that the only difference between a secular academic painting and a religious one was that Christian art was 'dressed',³³ pointing out the lack of religious feeling emanating from the artwork:

We find [in academicism] a series of technical qualities learnt by imitating the old masters, qualities whose merit we do not contest, but what a degradation of the mind! The faithful observance of traditions only appears in its most superficial aspect, whereas the lack of vitality and the incomprehension of the virtues that once animated the work of art result in emptying the artwork of its spiritual energy.³⁴

By stressing the value of copying the art of High Renaissance to master what was thought of as the historical achievement of the most perfect style, the Academy inadvertently stifled both the creation and appreciation of any art embedded in the emotional and intellectual advancement of its time. Notwithstanding the extraordinary transformations of artistic styles during the first half of the twentieth century, academic art still enjoyed a successful aura in the Church for its embodiment of styles reminiscent of the Church's artistic grandeur during the Renaissance.

2. The appeal of Saint-Sulpician art

As much as academicism commanded an ennobling respect and admiration among a majority of the Catholic public, this art could not provide the many new churches built in the second half of the nineteenth century and between the two world wars, with affordable and readily available art. The Catholic churches turned then toward a more humble kind of art which exhibited several styles ranging from Rafaelesque compositions to softened realism. This art came to be known as Saint-Sulpician art, after an area of Paris where many vendors of religious art were established.³⁵ They offered devotional objects for domestic worship, but also catered to the needs of churches for decoration by providing modern, sentimentalized versions of original sacred works. Priests of rebuilt, restored or new churches welcomed this opportunity to encourage their faithful's piety by granting them access to an art approaching the sacred through imitation.

Typical Saint-Sulpician imagery depicted a white-skinned Christ with brown wavy hair flowing down to his shoulders, thin lips surrounded by a short beard, an affable gaze and gracious feminine hands (Figure 2). The statues, made of plaster, were first sold in the natural shade of their material, but by the 1860s, were mostly hand-painted in bright colors, due to the popularity of the colored models which seemed to bring the statues to life by stressing their realism.³⁶ Many clerics thought that this kind of church art filled two important requirements: it was cheap in a time of meager means, and parishioners found it conducive to fervent praying.

The commercial success of Saint-Sulpician art in French churches drew criticisms as early as the 1870s for the poor quality of the art displayed. In 1872, La Société de Saint-Jean pour l'Encouragement de l'Art Chrétien was founded in Paris to counteract the tendency to approve Saint-Sulpician art as a valid and acceptable reflection of modern Christian church art. The denunciation of this art became virulent among Catholic thinkers and artists after the First World War. As previously mentioned, prominent Catholic writers like Claudel, Huysmans and Bloy decried the affront made to the glory of God by an art without imagination, emotional depth or connection to the modern world.³⁷ Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières founded one of the most active ateliers of sacred art in 1919 in search of a new symbolic art worthy of God.³⁸ In the early 1920s, the Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain joined the chorus of offended voices appalled at the staleness and tastelessness of Church art:

Just about everything has been said about what is called the *art of Saint-Sulpice* . . . ; about the diabolical ugliness, offensive to God and much more harmful than is generally believed to the spread of religion, of the majority of the objects turned out by modern manufacture for the decoration of churches.

. . . One sometimes sees [the parish priests] driven to fall back in despair upon the art of Saint-Sulpice. Why? Because these products of commercial manufacture, when they are not too disgusting, have at least the advantage of being perfectly indeterminate, so neutral, so empty that we can look at them without seeing them, and thus project onto them our own sentiments.³⁹

The most vocal and pro-active individuals on this subject in the late 1930s, were two Dominicans, Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier and Fr. Pie-Raymond Régamey.⁴⁰ During these years, Saint-Sulpician art also became known as kitsch art, which the art critic Clement Greenberg described as "a debased copy of genuine culture that operates through formula, vicarious experience, and faked sensations."⁴¹ Conscious of the powerful impact of images on the definition of one's spirituality, Father Couturier shared the same concern Maritain had about the repercussions of the weaknesses of this art on the relevance of the Christian experience in modern times, acknowledging that "the kind of spirituality embodied in kitsch was both limited and limiting."⁴² By constantly offering the path of less resistance via maudlin adaptations of past styles, Saint-Sulpician art compromised both the awareness of the difficult road to be traveled in understanding higher spiritual mysteries, and potential receptiveness to new forms of sacred art. Father Régamey shed light on this longing for the sacred art of the past:

Because for many faith was a complex of inferiority, because it was insufficient to protect from pagan contamination, even more incapable to act on the modern world, . . . faith's only visible effect was to maintain the people in a confessional, timid state of mind, whose artistic translation could only be of forms systematically distinct from the ones

elaborated by the surrounding life. Anachronistic state of mind, which demanded that art, to be 'religious', be a reflection of the past.⁴³

He castigated religious kitsch art as not simply a style at the bottom of the scale of artistic achievement, but as the negation of all value.⁴⁴ He designated demagoguery as the culprit for the invasion of Saint-Sulpician art in French churches since it had set the spontaneous liking of the faithful as the norm for choosing appropriate artworks for the communal place of worship.⁴⁵ One of the official purposes of church art was that it 'helped to pray,' but kitsch art seemed to induce more a sensation of evasion than the elevation of a purified heart toward God.⁴⁶ Kitsch mistakenly assumed an equivalence between the simplicity of a soul and the mediocrity of aesthetics: "Our contemporaries, like their fathers before them, find again in these images their conception of holiness through a simple ideal to the size of their imagination."⁴⁷ By ignoring the requisite for sacred artwork to hold a sense of mystery that demanded time to decipher and appreciate, kitsch art validated the belief that nothing should disturb the faithful's expectation of finding reassurance in and through art. Father Régamey objected to this demagoguery which spared the faithful from the 'unavoidable and temporary difficulties' encountered in seeing the unfamiliar, as it denied them the experience of feeling what they did not know they could.

Other critics acrimoniously condemned the perceived amorality of kitsch art, emphasizing the public's responsibility in its pursuit of a saccharine religious experience:

Kitsch corresponds to a pseudo-interest for spiritual realities, a pseudo-hope, a pseudo-independence toward the work, the search for a contentment found in pseudo-religious compensations for earthly deceptions, instead of coming to terms with our condition on earth and overcoming it.⁴⁸

The great success of Saint-Sulpice art resides in its constant thrust to promote the laziness of the mind, the laziness of meditation, the laziness of the heart. Religion is considered like a series of rites taking place in the middle of immutable images that end up becoming abstract symbols.⁴⁹

Even though Saint-Sulpician art had few active proponents among the ecclesiastical intelligentsia, some members of the clergy spoke up in its defense for the sake of the worshipers who admired and chose it as a complement to their faith. They put forward the soothing quality of these images as a good counterweight to the tragic-laden art emanating from contemporary artists:

"[The statues in Saint-Sulpice art style] do not compromise faith. They are a kind of *images d'Epinal* that pleases the simple soul; they translate in their own way, by their very lack of [true] expression, the mystery of the Beyond in its non-illustrative aspects: serenity, simple joy, the child-like life of the celestial Jerusalem."⁵⁰

Moreover, they felt that the arcane intellectual and emotional demands made on viewers by modern art styles and abstract representations justified using instead an accessible, reassuring, and straightforward commercial art.⁵¹

In the polemic over the value of kitsch art, the Vatican adopted a position of compromise. It expressed its discontent with Saint-Sulpician art only in so far as it was manufactured and reproduced in series, a mode of execution that excluded any rendition of an artist's genius and faith. But it did not condemn the style *per se*, implying that an artisan's work in that style would be acceptable.

According to the art historian William S. Rubin, the Vatican's stance on the subject seemed rooted in kitsch art's "lack of power to move or to challenge . . . it can never arouse sentiments which the Church might find questionable,"⁵² an attribute that would address a prevalent concern of the Church hierarchy since the Council of Trent and the issue of *insolitus* art.

Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, academicism and Saint-Sulpician art reflected the tastes of a majority of the French Catholic public, an artistic appreciation that was embraced in many churches throughout the country. Imitative in their styles, stereotypical in their depictions of religious subjects, and isolated from new forms of art, their ecclesiastical use called into question the existence of a sense of the sacred in contemporaneous church art. This early twentieth-century dichotomy between a familiar art pleasing to the eye and the absence of an expected sacred character paved the way for the post-1945 maturation of the *querelle de l'art sacré* with the completion of the church of Assy.

Father Marie-Alain Couturier, a leader in the renewal of sacred art

1. The sacred art ateliers

Father Couturier, an artist himself, was one of the more adamant representatives of the movement among the Catholic intelligentsia to wage an open literary war against what they believed was the vapidness of a pseudo-sacred art popular since the middle of the nineteenth century. For Georges Braque, who took part in this battle notably by agreeing to participate in the church of Assy experiment, the eschewal of commissioning artisans for church art debased the art to a point where it could no longer be sacred. The creative intensity and sincerity of a free artist was rejected in favor of an unchallenging predictable art that was sure to please a majority: "We do not speak about an art of the people anymore, so we try to make an art for the people."⁵³

In response to this sterility of academic and industrial art, France saw a multiplication of sacred art ateliers after the First World War. Maurice Denis, artist and art theorist, led the campaign to bestow on sacred art the value and significance it once had. He based his initiative on the realization that the cultural background of society had changed tremendously: "Everybody can read nowadays, the religious painter is not a painter of stories anymore: what is important is the fervor of the emotion he communicates."⁵⁴ In 1919, Denis and Georges Desvallières founded Les Ateliers de l'Art Sacré, a communal studio for artists, which functioned as a center of Catholic life. It worked like a medieval or Renaissance apprentice shop, promoting collective works of art, even citing

Michelangelo in the by-laws: "I believe it is necessary for the artist to lead a very Christian life or even a saintly life if possible, so that the Holy Ghost would inspire him."⁵⁵ Indeed, for Denis, the Christian character of a work of art stemmed from the depth of the artist's Catholicism and his/her trust in the spontaneity of the creative process.

Other groups of Catholic artists⁵⁶ formed around the same conviction that there did not exist a specific Christian style one should imitate in order to produce sacred art. Although most of these artists considered art of the Middle Ages the truest sacred art, since every aspect of medieval life intertwined with Christian values, they shunned resorting to archeological pastiche for restored churches and to the mere copying of past styles as conceiving "artistic lies." Instead, they strove to create new sacred works heeding the essential objective of understandability of forms, clarity, and simplicity. Their vocation was to institute an alternative to academic or Saint-Sulpician art for Church commissions by nourishing a creativity based on a unique combination of their Christian faith and their artistic intuition.

Yet, these efforts for a renewal of sacred art were "much more ideological than aesthetic, more conceptual than truly plastic."⁵⁷ While such art groups struggled to live their vision, another current developed on the margins of the sacred art world with Georges Rouault, Albert Gleizes, Jean Bazaine and Alfred Manessier. Individualist artists, they lived their faith as a form of mysticism, a highly personal experience reflected in their work. They did not believe that the

creation of a work of art to order, with an imposed subject and a deadline, could translate into a sacred work, because it lacked what should be a “perfect correspondence between expression and sentiment,” respecting the limit of what one felt.⁵⁸ For them, the difficulty in creating a sacred image resided in its double purpose: it was both an art product and a cult object. The artist, then, had to satisfy a specific function while still being true to his/her sense of creation, and absorb the resulting tension to create something that conveyed the sacred. Being part of the living art scene, an artist reflected the *Zeitgeist* of the profane world, and expressed existential questions transferable to the religious mysteries. But taking part in the creative energy of the living arts was not a counter-point or a substitute to being a Christian artist. S/he too should strive to feel the depth of society’s longing and to translate it as s/he saw fit. Rouault, for example, thought that he could not make the work of an authentic and sincere Christian without first taking in the responsibility of his time, with its sins and its miseries.⁵⁹ For Manessier, his paintings were a testimony of something he had experienced with his heart, not with his eyes; abstraction allowed him to express the inner prayer of man and the religious and cosmic impression of man in front of the world.⁶⁰ For these artists, living art and sacred art both gained from their interaction as they completed and transformed one another in the achievement of their task. But due to the nature of the artists’ plastic forms—which elicited an intense emotional response through unique techniques—this kind of sacred art found itself scorned both by the ecclesiastical world and the general public.

The ateliers ran out of creative steam and commissions shortly before the Second World War.⁶¹ Assessing their artistic output, Father Couturier criticized the Christian art corporations—enterprises he had once approved of and been part of—for increasingly specializing in a Christian art isolated from the rest of the art world:

In a world where the meaning of life is not religious any more, neither could art be religious. Thus, anyone who isolates oneself from the art current, now profane, is always in danger of cutting oneself from its vitality and of artificially singularizing its talents. They will quickly exhaust their energy.⁶²

Aware that the movement for the renewal of sacred art in France needed to find a second wind, he accepted the challenge of revitalizing this undertaking on the levels of theory, practice, and education.

2. Father Couturier's pre-war position on sacred art

In 1937, Father Couturier became literary director of *L'Art Sacré*, a Dominican periodical that had the potential to be a platform for the edification of primarily, but not exclusively, ecclesiastics about sacred art.⁶³ During these early years, he presented in the journal's bimonthly issues examples of a modern religious art that was still close to traditional models of the past. He mainly featured religious artists who were active in one of the ateliers of sacred art, still undersolicited by priests in need of sacred art for their church. Denouncing the lack of creativity in the field, Father Couturier believed that the main factor behind the death of true sacred art in France lay in the radical change of religion's place in society. Sacred art needed artists and religion to flourish; since there were

creative contemporary art masters, the scarcity of good sacred art had to be due to the missing part of the equation, religion:

The main reason for the decadence of sacred art is not of the artistic order, but of the religious order. This decadence is due to the regression of the Christian spirit in the western world . . . there is no Christian art possible when there is no Christian civilization.⁶⁴

The Middle Ages were often regarded as the golden age of sacred art because society—including its artists—was permeated with the tenets of the Catholic Church. But this kind of art could not be reborn in the twentieth-century world as it faced the disintegration of Christian culture and the secularization of modern life. For Father Couturier in the late 1930s, the creative principles proper to sacred art could not be adopted by contemporary artists since the values they were based on had ceased to be part of the artists' understanding of life:

"Modernity cannot be reduced to a collection of forms; it has its logic, its own spirituality from which faith is absent; it constitutes a whole."⁶⁵ Therefore, famous modern artists, be they abstract or representational, were ill-equipped to meet the requirements to fulfill the significance of sacred art:

Any work of sacred art implies an essential reference to another world: the people, their gestures, and their expressions do not yield all their meanings on this earth; they are not here quite for what they do, not even for us; they barely exchange signs with us: but they are signs for us. They belong to another world—and this belonging, which should be not only inferred from the subject, but obvious, sensitive, palpable, and which still cannot be defined nor achieved by any recipe nor any specific means, this belonging, substantially linked to each of the elements of the work, must confer an immediate character of testimony (at least for the times that witness the birth of that work).⁶⁶

Before leaving for North America in 1939, Father Couturier was convinced that artists such as Henri Matisse or Pierre Bonnard could never serve the needs of sacred art because what they expressed in their painting was limited to their immediate intuition of sensitive beauty.⁶⁷ He also rejected Pablo Picasso as a potential contributor to the field of sacred art. Even though he thought that the artist was the best of his time in his ability to fully and truly translate the transformations of modern minds, he admitted wanting to look away, like many, from all the ugliness and bestiality displayed, to go back to flowers and motifs of smiling faces.⁶⁸ Father Couturier saw cubism as a school of thought that failed to carry any hope of being religious:

Non-representative art is also, despite authentic values, essentially anti-religious: if religious art is characterized by its reference to the supranatural world, how could this art, which does not even refer to the natural world, which withholds inside itself its causes for joy, which withdraws into itself all of its extent and meaning, be religious?⁶⁹

His perception of a dichotomy between modern and sacred art extended even to the in/famous Georges Rouault. In an article on this Catholic artist, Father Couturier stressed that, even though Rouault's paintings were deeply religious, they offered "excessiveness and brutalities" which drove priests and the faithful away.⁷⁰ He held Rouault responsible for cultivating artistic esotericism that made his art inaccessible to the public. The director of *L'Art Sacré* hoped that the renewal of sacred art would come from simple Christians ready to tell the story of God with all their hearts. The artistry of the resulting humble works of art would be a rejection of trendy styles, and these artists' only goal would be to reserve the beauty of their craft for portraying true human values.⁷¹

3. Father Couturier's post-war vision for a modern sacred art

Father Couturier was in North America delivering a series of lectures on modern sacred art when the outbreak of World War II prevented him from returning to France, and he made New York City his new home in exile. By 1941, he had already met several European intellectuals and artists like Jacques Maritain, Fernand Léger, Marc Chagall, and Salvador Dali, who had temporarily emigrated there to escape the war. Meeting these proponents and actors of a living modern art would have a strong impact on his view of modern sacred art.

The first hint at a reversal from his previous assertions appeared in his book *Art et Catholicisme*,⁷² in which he reflected on the relationship between artistic creation and revelation of God: "Are contemplation and the love of beauty, . . . , in themselves, likely to engender and foster the love of God in the artist?"⁷³ Is there a "royal road" for art to follow in order to inspire thoughts of and devotion to God? For Father Couturier, there was indeed such a road, but it was deserted at that time. He identified two historical tendencies in the fields of religion and art that explained this state of anemia in sacred art. First, as the place of religion in the daily social functioning and personal lives of Christians waned dramatically, artists searched for other sources of inspiration, allowing art and religion to drift apart. This divergence of paths reached a critical point in the twentieth century when the two contemporary fields could no longer substantiate a common approach to humanity's existential queries. The only hope for a sacred art revival

rested in cooperation with secular art trends whose buoyant vitality would generate a renewed and energized interest in creating sacred art:

As diverse as it can be, all art forms of an era are like a great living body: anything that separates itself from the unity of life, like a sick limb, wanes, withers, and finally decays. To each era there is a living art reflecting its time, and it is this common and indivisible life that the Christian faith should seize and transform to its own ends.⁷⁴

Second, the art world underwent a deep transformation in the past century. It had succeeded in breaking away from the long-established ideal of Renaissance art, an ideal that had hindered the process of artistic innovation; at the same time, it longed for a return to a primitive sensibility, to the power of a raw consciousness in the act of creation. This new approach to art called for a radical diversification of the viewer's expectations toward a newly educated sensibility amenable to finding the sacred in unfamiliar forms:

In ancient art, the importance of the subject, the willingness to express it, forced the artist to surpass his work of art: these external conditions somewhat directed his soul, somewhat kept his reason in control. . . . But the art of our time does not quite work that way anymore: on one hand, the 'subject' . . . is of barely any importance, the artistry has been reduced to the simplest means . . . of expression; on the other hand, the activity of the powers of intuition and sensitivity has been raised to a prodigious purity and acuteness.⁷⁵

Father Couturier had conceded that faith alone could not make up for the absence of talent in an artist trying to create sacred art. He then realized that the spiritual intuitions of a great artist could make up for the inadequacy of his/her faith: "the sacred character of a religious work of art has its origin in the very attitude of the artist in the face of realities and in front of his work."⁷⁶

His new position on faith and artistic talent provided a platform for the acceptance of abstract art and non-believing artists into the realm of sacred art. However, he and Father Régamey determined three potential theological objections that could prevent this synergy from becoming mainstream:⁷⁷ first, modern artists tended to express the tragic environment of their time instead of the divine peace that a liturgical setting should convey. Second, the religion of Incarnation would seem to need figurative images to translate the mystery of Christ. Third, there could be a risk of false interpretations in accepting artworks created by non-Catholic artists or by artists belonging to a political party promoting atheism. Artistically, the difficulties encountered concerned the lack of appreciation by the clergy and the faithful of abstract forms of expression, and the uncertain cultural viability of sacred art in a de-Christianized world.

In order to overcome these obstacles, Father Couturier presented several lines of reasoning in favor of abstract art, exhibiting its multi-faceted value for sacred art. He replicated Kandinsky's idea about the spiritual in art by making an analogy with the abstract nature of sacred music:

Music proves that an abstract art form, i.e., non-representational, can have religious value. This therefore implies that a reference explicitly outside the order of sacred realities is not necessary, that the religious or profane character of a work stems from the work itself, its quality of sounds and rhythms. Why could this not also hold for colors and lines in paintings?⁷⁸

His earlier argument against the compatibility of abstract art with the religious had purported that abstract works contained in themselves all their meaning, whereas sacred art implied a reference to another reality, another world.⁷⁹ But

since the realistic representation of a sacred subject was not, after all, necessary to the presence of the sacred, as music and architecture demonstrated, he suggested that the sacred character of a work of art must belong to the very quality of the plastic forms, which came from the artist's mind and heart. The belief that one should represent the things of this world in order to express the things of God seemed suddenly counter-intuitive. Indeed, these were the realities that often led people away from God because they brought to mind emotions and feelings that distracted the viewer from the higher purpose at hand. Subsequently, "abstract art could be purer and therefore more spiritual than representational art. It offered a detachment from the carnal sensuality normally associated with representational art."⁸⁰ He even went so far as to say that a certain abstraction was always necessary to sacred art, and that 'realistic art' foreclosed, by definition, the potentiality of a sacral character:

'Consecration', in its literal sense, means subtraction from the natural order and transfer to the spiritual order. Thus, it is the 'realistic' or naturalistic art that, by opposing this transfer because of its very principle, is anti-religious; whereas abstraction, on the contrary, creating a transfer from the natural to the plastic order, already eliminates barriers, cuts ties and confers to abstract art an aptitude, a real disposition to this consecration, which is essential to all religious art.⁸¹

Inspired by his own artistic conversion to the spiritual depths of modern forms, Father Couturier seized the opportunity of his co-directing *L'Art Sacré* to use the journal as a teaching tool to restore visual sensitivity for all concerned (the Christian public, ecclesiastics and artists), and reform the common mind-set on the subject.⁸² Each issue had a specific theme on which several authors wrote

critical essays, and presented a section on modern liturgical furniture, clothing and objects, plus a section on contemporaneous sculptures or paintings. For the restoration of visual sensitivity, Father Couturier stressed the importance of the first impression, favoring the use of pictures without explanatory comments to let the images be absorbed into the viewer's sensibility: "In art, it is not the intellect that judges and discerns, it is the senses. Or to be exact, the sensitive intuition and not the reasoning."⁸³ For the reformation of ideas, he exposed the reasons behind the decadence of sacred art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a gradual event that ended a long tradition of fruitful alliances between the great artists of the times and the Church as patron of the contemporaneous arts. He listed four causes for this dissociation:⁸⁴ first, the dechristianization of Europe kept the Church away from the renewal of culture and life in general; second, clerics could not keep in touch with the artists' intellectual and cultural environment because their attention was needed elsewhere; third, the Academy of Fine Arts' definition of beauty prevailed in the clerical milieu, which meant that priests favored the academic style to best represent the glory of God; fourth, the evolution of the art world was so rapid and dynamic from 1850 on, that the new art became quite puzzling and enigmatic for the public, who dissociated itself from the Masters' works. Directing his solutions to priests confronted with difficult decisions in matters of art, he recommended they adopt an attitude of suspicion of works in provenance of the Academy, since no true worth could come from it; and he urged them to look for the best artists of the time and offer them the opportunity to work for the Church.⁸⁵

Father Couturier often chose the pedagogical genre of the debate to discuss his ideas, by articulating claims, objections, and refutations.⁸⁶ To the objection that commissioning an original work of art was too costly, he argued that the original statues of Fatima or Lourdes, for example, had also been very costly even though their artistic quality was poor; moreover, artists were generous when aware of the dignity of the piece to be created, as was the case for the church of Assy and the Chapel at Vence. To the objection that artists were set on their design and refused to change it to match what the commissioner had in mind, he declared that this was actually for the best, since artists had a deeper and better inspiration than a patron's limited imagination could supply. To the objection that an artist who did not have faith in Christ could not create a work of sacred art, he advanced that even though being an art genius did not necessarily lead to faith, artistic inspiration could be very similar to mystical inspiration; and "who could tell where the Holy Spirit blew?" Nonetheless, artists needed to be chosen carefully, as some were better suited for a certain theme or medium, depending on their experience and sensitivity at that point in their lives. The priest had the very important role of inspiring artistic genius by requesting specific themes, giving background information helpful for the mastery of the subject, and describing the disposition of the congregation for which the work of art was destined, all while knowing where his task ended and where the artist's began:

The artist himself will give form to these ideas. And in the working-out of the forms we have absolutely no right to interfere. Something is being born: our role at that time is to protect its ever-vulnerable freedom, purity, and weakness, by our unfailing friendship, respect, and prayer.⁸⁷

For Father Couturier, the potential success of the renewal of sacred art resided in the coming together of three separate endeavors: the clerics trusting the artists' mystical inspirations, the great artists opening their creative powers to the Catholic mysteries, and the public learning to appreciate new forms of modern art.

Father Pie-Raymond Régamey, a didactic voice for modernity in sacred art

During his campaign for a regeneration of French sacred art, Father Couturier had a valuable ally in Father Régamey, the co-director of *L'Art Sacré* since 1937.⁸⁸ They shared the same dedication to educating the public and ecclesiastics about the potential for a unique sacred art to be created in symbiosis with modern trends of the time: "Our age has been obliged to coin the phrase *living art*, a pleonasm which implies that we have with us a large quantity of 'dead' art."⁸⁹

If their ideas were similar in content, their way of presenting them to their audience was quite different. To Father Couturier's use of the 'silent treatment' for art images, Father Régamey preferred a didactics-based approach. He explained at length the value of each artwork presented in *L'Art Sacré*, often making a comparison with other works of art and always providing detailed

captions to match each representation. Pictures of similar religious subjects from different eras and/or different coetaneous artists served as case studies to teach how to discern the good from the bad, the sacred from the fake.⁹⁰ Father Régamey also believed in extending opportunities to open up the discussion to all parties involved in the field of church art. He organized three yearly meetings, from 1948 to 1950, gathering the clergy, artists, art critics, and religious objects sellers to share their aspirations and stay informed of the developments on the art scene. But these were discontinued after Father Couturier objected that the group efforts would in actuality have a negative impact on the renewal of sacred art, as shown by the ateliers' experience earlier in the century: the multiplicity of expectations made the ultimate goal unattainable, and the collaborations even became counterproductive as they tried to satisfy everyone by falling back on the pursuit of the lowest common denominator.⁹¹ Compromising on his visual presentation and group communication theories, Father Régamey devoted his teaching abilities and clear writing style to the advancement of the cause for a true modern sacred art, complementing Father Couturier's convictions.

1. Father Régamey's analysis of the divorce between the public and modern art

According to Father Régamey, the decadence of French sacred art over the last century was due to two main factors: the public's expectations, challenged by the agitated intellectual life of modern times, and the misunderstanding of the purpose and forms of sacred art. The influence of industry over the whole culture brought a rapid change in the priorities of

intellectual life. Rationality and practicality became over-emphasized, to the detriment of spiritual intuitions; at the same time, passions "dried up the heart and the sources of goodness . . . which feed the genius."⁹² Because of these conflicting signals, the modern person felt "disjointed," having to choose between photographic, sentimental or abstract art, but rarely finding works of art harmoniously combining the forces involved: "When the intuitions of sensitivity, mind and heart come together [to create art], it is their *conflicts* that they express. The most humane works in our times are not elated, but full of dissonance and pathos."⁹³ The sources of dissensions in the realm of sacred art seemed to be rooted in the chaos of the intellectual revolution rather than in the diversity of tastes:

The problem of modern Christian art is a lot deeper than one of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the compatibility of the recent plastic forms with Christian themes and the faithful's demands: the problem lies in the psychology of the man of today, down to the subconscious from which the creating genius emerges and feeds. It comes from the difficulty for modern man to become the new man of the Scriptures.⁹⁴

The reigning confusion about defining the scope of modern art added to the difficulty of expounding its intrinsic value. The term 'modern art' was used to cover a vast spectrum of creations, from in-depth original works to pseudo-modern pastiches, a uniform labeling that undermined attempts to educate the public about how to assess the genuineness of an art piece. Some Christians were looking for a style formula that they could apply to a specific work to determine its viability in translating the sacred; but "a 'style' is an *effect*, it can never be a goal. Valid, that is to say concretized in living works, [style] is only

ever the result of very complex historical factors."⁹⁵ Others wanted what they believed was good for them, which was an art that would foster and support their religious devotion. This desire raised the question of the true intention behind the devotion, an intention often characterized by unrealistic expectations, which associated sentimental and compensatory imagery with the form of the sacred.⁹⁶

Father Régamey agreed to some degree with the critics who exposed the public's responsibility for its own dissociation from and obtuseness in response to new art forms:

The masses do not have the wisdom, in art, of withholding their judgment in front of what they do not understand, and trust the people who are competent in that field. In short, the reasons for the divorce between art and the public are then pride and laziness."⁹⁷

But he also underscored the influence of Christian culture on the development of artistic tastes. He felt that the restrictive reforms of the mid-sixteenth century had led to a sclerosis of the religious art world:

The orthodox reaction determined by the Council of Trent was translated on the practical daily level into a conformism in all things. Caravaggio was rejected . . . Rembrandt scorned. Theological conformism—pious, social, intellectual—led to artistic conformism."⁹⁸

Still prevalent among the public was the belief that sacred art required, and its aesthetic value was proportionate to, photographic exactitude in drawing and coloring, clean and perfected lines, and the presence of sentiments. Art masters, though, had retired the value of these artistic skills for over a century, the new standard of accomplishment lying in the ability to translate emotions through

plastic means. In order to understand this transformation and be part of a true modernization of sacred art, Father Régamey urged the public and the ecclesiastical body to overcome their dismayed impressions in the presence of the new art, to allow time for the eye to accommodate to the unconventional, and to expand their artistic sensibility through contemplation and education.

He spread the blame for the public's superficial grasp of abstract art on modern masters as well, who tended to impose their own sensibilities and conception of the subject commissioned in disregard of the needs of the faithful for which the artwork was ultimately created. The recipients felt like the artist lost sight of the destination of the work, to focus on his/her own raw reaction, "throwing his[/her] emotion into people's faces."⁹⁹ Modern artists were also found guilty of being irresistibly drawn to the hopelessness of the human condition, which attracted them to the Christ of dolours, but prevented them from translating the triumphal Christian message of resurrection and hope:

The civilization from which art feeds itself spontaneously, subconsciously, is too corrupt. The modern man does not believe enough in the invisible realities to easily offer a visible equivalent of them. For him, *supernatural* means unreal and *religious*, in opposition to life.¹⁰⁰

2. Father Régamey's expanded definition of a modern sacred art

Father Régamey defined sacred art as "a life of reference to the invisible in and through sensitive things."¹⁰¹ Addressing the particular environment of the interior of a church, he narrowed the scope of his definition to take into account the specific needs of the liturgy:

The decoration [of churches] must explicate the praise that it gives to God and that it contributes to render for the sanctified people. It must dispose the faithful to better celebrate the holy mysteries. In doing this, it has a role of *predication*.¹⁰²

As the nature of the educational needs of the faithful shifted, the past requirement of readability seemed intellectually outdated and artistically limiting:

[Demanding readability in sacred art] equates to dispelling any impression of mystery. It equates to eliminating the supernatural and vital nature of the realities of faith by cause of the injudicious presentation of these realities in conceptual systems and their materialization. . . . Today, the creation . . . of an 'atmosphere' conducive to the celebration of the cult undoubtedly prevails over the role of catechesis when considering the true needs of the faithful or asking what possibilities the arts have to offer.¹⁰³

Even though church decoration should remain edifying, according to Father Régamey, it should be so in a manner similar to the liturgy. Its ultimate goal was not to educate in the classical sense of the word, but rather to help the faithful contemplate the mysteries for themselves within an art congruous to the cultural environment of the times:

[The arts used by Christianity]'s function is to act as links between the liturgy and the changing pattern of space and time. . . . Whatever permanent and unchanging demands faith may make of them, they will always take the form of concrete and contemporary manifestations, involved in a particular place and time."¹⁰⁴

Since true living art involved a temporal aspect in its choice of plastic forms, revealing timeless Christian beliefs demanded that the work of art "guide the mind to what is contained therein—the substance of things hoped for."¹⁰⁵

The emphasis on contemplation in defining the purpose of sacred art opened the door to accepting modern art forms in the Church and widening the circle of artists fitted to create such works. Father Régamey set the limits of sacred art between "the heights of God and the depths of humanity," as these were the inspiration and life principle of Christian art.¹⁰⁶ Within those limits, the fields of expression were endless, a concept that quashed the idea of a linear development whose apex had occurred in the glorious past and condemned artists to an art of imitation in hope of attaining the same degree of sacredness. This expansion of the domain of artistic translations applied to both subjects and styles. Because the transcendence of Christian revelation lent itself to a broad conception of its mystery, and this conception took place in an infinite number of human contexts, a great variety of styles were needed to fulfill as many combinations as possible.

Acknowledging that modern society could no longer foster sacred art within the same parameters established so successfully in centuries past, Father Régamey and Father Couturier embraced the new forms of art and foresaw in master artists of the times a great ability to express the sacred:

I have the impression that, in some great artists, the power of intuition, of creative inspiration, make up for everything. It is disgusting, but that is the way it is.¹⁰⁷

First of all, we do not know what goes on in the most secret recesses of the heart, nor what substitutes for faith the intuitions of genius may suddenly bring to bear. Genius does not give faith, but between the inspiration of the mystics and that of heroes and great artists, there is an analogy so profound that the presumption must be in their favor. . . . Every true artist is inspired. By nature and temperament he is predisposed and prepared for spiritual intuitions, then why not for the coming of the Spirit Himself who after all breathes where He wills? You hear His voice . . . But you know not from whence it comes nor whither it goes.¹⁰⁸

Father Régamey believed that the inclusion of non-Catholic great masters among the circle of artists worthy of working for the Church counterbalanced two regrettable tendencies: first, the sentimentality of the Christian artists' faith, which, through the influence of "involuntary deviations," had become "a mixture of mediocre devotion, anemic ideas and a piety which is either affected, forced or totally lacking in character";¹⁰⁹ second, the powerlessness of faith in the artist to be in itself an assurance of the making of a work of sacred art:

Religious values, as any other element in art, ought never to be willed as an end. They can only be received as a gift. A schema wherein religious art emanates directly from the artist's faith usually involves the unfortunate fancy that faith must dominate the artistic media."¹¹⁰

The artist could only expect the sacred character of his/her work to "come from his fidelity to the inner voice, the impulse from the depths of his soul," as it could not be sought deliberately: "it must come as a gratuitous gift, an overflow, a definite grace."¹¹¹ Therefore, involving the spiritual sensibility of non-believers could well elevate the artistic and intellectual discourse of sacred art:

Can the theme become amalgamated, so to speak, with [the artist's] own essence in such a manner that the vital obligation to create, this enigmatic 'interior order', may find consistency, direction, and efficacy in the theme?¹¹²

The disparaging appraisal of the sacred art output from the nineteenth century up to the First World War called for a renewal of creative energy in French church art. Father Couturier and Father Régamey recognized the difficulty of generating a true sacred art when the society that produced it was no

longer religious. They sought to breathe new life into such an art by involving the new art masters who spoke a language reflective of, and relevant to, their time, a language that could reach mystical depths. Though they differed on the necessity of keeping all parties involved in defining a new direction for sacred art, and on the benefits of a 'silent' versus 'informed' reading of the art, they both considered receptive contemplation as essential to understanding and experiencing the sacred present in unfamiliar forms of modern art.

Father Couturier, with the support of Father Régamey, shouldered the challenge of concretizing his assertions on sacred art by assisting in the selection of the secular art masters invited to work for the church of Assy. The ensuing debate about the church's semi-abstract Crucifix propelled the issue of modern sacred art onto the national French scene and onto the Vatican's agenda.

II. THE ASSY EXPERIMENT, TRIGGER OF THE QUERELLE

The commissioning of art for the church of Assy

1. The search for worthy artistic modernity

The opportunity to apply Father Couturier and Father Régamey's concept of a living sacred art came in March 1939 when Canon Devémy asked Father Couturier to help him direct the adornment of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, a church under construction situated in Passy, a small French town on the Assy plateau in the Alps region. Canon Devémy was the chaplain for the sanatorium of Sancellemoz, in an area where several convalescence hospitals had contributed to the growth of the plateau's general population. To address the increase in religious needs for the sick and employees alike, he had argued for the erection of a church for this parish. Bearing in mind the successful novelty of Notre-Dame du Raincy imagined by Auguste Perret in 1922, Canon Devémy wished for a 'modernistic' church that was "honest, sincere, functional, well integrated in the landscape."¹¹³ In 1937, he entrusted the conception of the church plans to the architect Maurice Novarina. He opted for a modern architecture that blended the edifice in its natural environment, was functional and utilized local materials (green granite and gray marble) in its construction, which was finished in 1946. Its interior was ready for completion by the time Father Couturier came back from

America following World War II, eager to work on the task he had enthusiastically accepted before his exile. Father Couturier first sought to secure the assent of the Church hierarchy for his unusual decoration project:¹¹⁴ in the spring of 1946, he went to Rome to give a lecture for the benefit of cardinals and bishops on the divorce between art and the public, and on the lack of artistic creation in the Church during the previous two centuries. While there, he had an audience with Pope Pius XII, who blessed his project to commission art from contemporary masters for the church of Assy; he also obtained the promise of financial support to complete the project. Having received authorization from the Pope and the bishop of Annecy—who was, by Church law, directly responsible for the project—Father Couturier could implement his vision without hierarchical objections or interference.

Canon Devémy and Father Couturier selected artists for the church of Assy (Figure 3) based on their reputed talent in the living art world, but also on their potential connectedness with the subject offered to them, and their willingness to treat it with “solemnity and respect:” they were “meeting genius halfway.”¹¹⁵ Canon Devémy chose André Derain to paint Saint Dominic¹¹⁶ because of the religious paintings he had created after his Fauvist period. But Derain withdrew his acceptance of the commission, so Canon Devémy turned to Pablo Picasso based on two considerations: the artist was considered the best representative of modern art, and he shared with the subject a common Spanish origin. The cleric visited him in his Parisian studio to ask him to paint a Saint

Dominic for the church. Picasso, pointing to a finished painting resting against the wall, thought that particular piece would do well for the Saint. When Canon Devémy differed, Picasso picked another completed work saying that that one too would satisfy his request. Canon Devémy clarified that he was not looking to apply a concept to a pre-existing artwork, but rather for a painting that the artist would make specifically with the Saint and the church in mind. The two could not find a common ground and the offer was withdrawn.¹¹⁷ The commission for a Saint Dominic was ultimately offered to and accepted by Henri Matisse.

Advising Canon Devémy, Father Couturier first elected Catholic artists who were active in the renewal of sacred art to design stained glass windows for the church: Marguerite Huré, Maurice Brianchon, Paul Bony, Adeline Hébert-Stevens,¹¹⁸ Paul Berçot, Jean Bazaine, Georges Rouault (Figure 4) and himself (Figure 5). The other commissions were entrusted to non-believing and Jewish world-acclaimed artists.¹¹⁹ The non-believing artists had themes selected according to their artistic medium and affinity for the message to be conveyed. Fernand Léger, a Communist, was awarded the frontispiece of the church for a mosaic mural on the theme of the litanies of the Virgin, which would suit both the dedication of the church to Mary and the artist's predilection for materiality (Figures 3, 6). Jean Lurçat, a Marxist, was first asked by Canon Devémy to make a tapestry representing a Virgin in Majesty for the sanctuary; but Father Couturier changed the subject to the cosmic struggle from the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse as more appropriate to the artist's convictions (Figure 7). Henri Matisse, non-affiliated, did a variation of the Saint Dominic he was working on for

the Chapelle du Rosaire at Vence (Figures 7, 8). Georges Braque, who admitted that he believed in God but refused to define Him because "He was a Mystery,"¹²⁰ conceived the relief for the door of the tabernacle in symbolic forms (Figure 8). Pierre Bonnard was entrusted with the painting of Saint Francis of Sales (Figures 7, 9), patron saint of the region of Assy, after Raoul Dufy, a Catholic and a friend of Canon Devémy, could not be reached. The two Jewish artists involved were asked to decorate the baptistery. Jacques Lipchitz sculpted a Virgin for the baptismal font, which he signed on the back with an explanation of his collaboration with a Catholic church: "Jacob Lipchitz, Jew, faithful to the religion of his ancestors, has made this Virgin to foster understanding between men on earth that the life of the spirit may prevail."¹²¹ Marc Chagall created a mosaic of the Parting of the Red Sea for the baptistery wall, a scene he completed with a Crucifixion portraying Mary at the foot of the Cross. In 1949, the commission for a bronze Crucifix was given to Germaine Richier, a Catholic by birth who turned toward a more animist view of the divine later in life.¹²²

2. Father Couturier's apologia of the non-believers' participation at Assy

Accused of snobbery for choosing independent artists who were at the forefront of the modern art scene, Father Couturier justified his gesture by exposing the powerful creativity of these artists who were "the most alive, because in them, life and the gifts and the greatest chances abounded."¹²³ Since desire and talent for artistic innovations seemed to have evaded the Christian faithful of the time, the alternative became to "bet on the artists of genius,"¹²⁴ be

they estranged from the Church. He also defended his choice to trust artists who were affiliated with communism, even though communists were considered traitors to western culture and particularly to the Church because of their atheism. For Father Couturier, artists embraced communism out of love for the poor and to promote social justice, two initiatives central to Christian values: therefore, "we must free [the communist artists] to work for us, give them the right to paint on our walls, and they will tell our great story."¹²⁵

From the perspective of the artists involved with Assy, some, like Richier and Bonnard, credited their achievement there to experiencing both a deeper understanding of their own life and a special connection with their work.¹²⁶ The latter, for example, had asked Canon Devémy to send him information on Saint Francis of Sales in order to know the saint better and thus provide a true rendition of what he really stood for. After the artwork was finished, Bonnard thanked Canon Devémy for "allowing me to make this work that interested me immensely, and that taught me so much, for my profession."¹²⁷ For Father Régamey, the gathering of all these exceptional artists regardless of their professed faith or absence thereof, testified to the auspicious rebirth of sacred art:

In each of the elements for which he was responsible, the artist invested this fundamental *gravity* that makes the heroic nobility of the living art: the gravity of the one who says nothing beyond what he really feels, of the one who engages himself whole in the slightest line, the slightest touch. . . . In this fidelity at all costs to the artist's profound intimate demands [the 'inner order' mentioned by Rouault], the artists have cut off the *profane* part of themselves, they were given what each was capable of conceiving of the sense of the divine transcendence, and because it was in the very acts of their creation that they tended towards the *sacred*, they really accomplished sacred works.¹²⁸

The idea behind the Assy experiment was to put into practice the convictions professed in *L'Art Sacré* by its two directors. Their goal was to show that modern art forms were suitable for church art, and that secular art masters could participate in the renewal of interest in, and relevance of, the sacred. The diversity of the artists' religious backgrounds and plastic expressions attested to the sincerity of the Dominican Fathers' far-reaching appeal and the readiness of great artists to be inspired by the divine mysteries. The church of Assy was a success in manifesting the possibilities offered by modern art to express a facet of the sacred, but the lack of a unified practical vision for the church revealed the absence of a true overarching concept behind the experiment.

The sculptress Germaine Richier and her Crucifix for the church of Assy

Germaine Richier was the final artist to be commissioned by Father Couturier for a work at Assy. Her official lack of religious faith and her deeply organic style did not disconcert him, but, on the contrary, compelled him to see the affinities between the figure of Christ on the cross and Richier's artistic and emotional transfigurations. In the art world, she was labeled 'post-war existentialist', as her work reflected the tenets of the new existentialism. The existentialist style was one where "the abstract elements, such as shape, proportion, and texture reinforce the message of the content, and even may be

said to be themselves both message and content.”¹²⁹ Each asperity of an existentialist sculpture was an integral part of the work, carrying as much weight as the theme represented by the whole. Existentialism was also a translation of a particular frame of mind, which struggled with a tortuous hidden spirituality in a world in search of its humanity:

Existentialism sponsors what the poet Hölderlin called ‘a holy emptiness’ which turns its atheism into a wistful stretching out for reality, a noumenal hunger, a movement of the spirit which keeps a sensitive openness upward toward the God who must reveal Himself if He is to be known.¹³⁰

1. Richier’s unique hybrid compositions

Even though Richier was officially included in the existentialist camp, she developed an extremely personal style during the Second World War, striving for a symbiosis between the worlds of nature, animals and humans through the creation of hybrid beings:

Everything depends upon the relationships one proposes to establish between the volume and what is called the subject. Although unpremeditated, my ‘subjects’ belong to the world of metamorphosis . . . they are the fantastic creatures of an age that we are incapable of recognizing but which is ours. . . . Sculpture’s superlative function is to rediscover the meaning of the world and of the hybrid.¹³¹

Her artistic training had been in more ‘classical’ sculpture, having learned, alongside Alberto Giacometti, from Antoine Bourdelle. She had studied and practiced the analysis of the forms for several years, making busts and nudes in a classical manner to master the foundations of sculpture. Even after she established her own style, she returned to working on busts from time to time, as

she liked the “discipline of execution” they required and their connection to reality, teaching her humility.¹³²

She was most famous for the tortuous contours of her sculptures, impressing on the viewer a sense of a hollowed and torn flesh:

Their [her creations'] hacked forms have all been conceived whole and complete. It is afterwards that I have excavated and torn them, so that they would be varied on all sides and have an aspect that is changing and alive. I love life, I love what moves. [But] I do not try to reproduce a movement. I try rather to make one think of it. My statues must give the impression both that they are immobile and that they are going to move.¹³³

The violence seen by some in her works stemmed from her character and sensitivity: “I like the tense, the nervous, the dry, the olive trees withered by the wind, the breaking wood . . . I am more attracted by the trunk of a dead tree than by an apple tree in full bloom.”¹³⁴ She also defended this violence as a feature of the modern world, a trait she considered not a weakness to overcome, but an engaging emotion in its full right:

Our age, when you consider it, is full of talons. People bristle, as they do after long wars. It seems to me that in violent works there is just as much sensibility as in poetic ones. There can be just as much wisdom in violence as in gentleness.¹³⁵

The forcefulness behind her compulsion to tear her wholly wrought creations apart gave her sculptures a momentum, as of life overcoming disintegration. As one critic described it: “Richier brings matter to the point of dissolution only to hold it all the more firmly together. In the very process of committing an act of assault and battery, her hands transmit to their victim an energy that will ensure

its remaining whole."¹³⁶ For the sculptress herself, the fractured appearance of her works was key to their meaning:

What characterizes sculpture, in my opinion, is the way in which it renounces the full, solid form. Holes and perforations conduct like flashes of lightning into the material which becomes organic and open, encircles from all sides, lit up in and through the hollows. A form lives to the extent to which it does not withdraw from expression. And we cannot conceal human expression in the drama of our time.¹³⁷

From the hybridism of Richier's sculptures emanated an impression of a long-lost affiliation to an interconnected world now estranged, but which was waiting to re-emerge through the deepest longing for a meaningful life:

Her work induces strange emotions in us, making us experience those primordial fears, and passions that a 'civilized' way of life has deadened in us. Lacerated voluptuously, their material substance, this living bronze, communicates an anxious expectation, a fear, and trembling. It does literally palpitate.¹³⁸

2. Genesis of the Crucifix of Assy

In 1948, upon hearing about the artistic experiment being conducted at Assy, Richier expressed the wish to take part in it. Her assistant Claude Mary, herself from the area, invited Father Couturier and Canon Devémy to Richier's studio for a visit that ended with their request for a Crucifix for the church.¹³⁹ She first turned down the subject of the crucifixion, wanting to make something more of a "pure abstract sign";¹⁴⁰ but at the insistence of her visitors, she agreed to create the bronze sculpture. She traveled to the church to absorb the character and atmosphere of this specific house of worship. She felt that this sculpture had to take form under an impulsive intuition or a sort of revelation:

I don't want a sculpture analyzed inch by inch, I want the result of a conception, a knowledge, an audacity, the whole thing very alive if possible. . . . I don't anticipate a sculpture worth several months of work, I want to go straight at it if possible.¹⁴¹

The artist first used Nardone¹⁴² as the bodily model for Christ, but she was not satisfied with the bulk and stockiness of his figure for such a representation; she then chose another professional model, Lyrot, whose very slim stature fit Richier's idea of the Christ on the cross. Even though Father Couturier and Canon Devémy had approved her model in clay portraying Christ with the shoulders away from the cross and extra long arms merged with the cross, she rejected this first maquette because she found it too static and large for its intended space. After Lurçat's tapestry—which was to be the visual background for the Crucifix—was hung in the choir, she came back from her second visit to the church with a better sense of the necessary proportions and dimensions for her sculpture. Her second maquette already had the body of Christ looking like craggy, weathered wood, in keeping with her newfound style. It also curved inward, so that the legs, upper torso, and head were detached from the support of the cross. The lengths of Christ's legs were uneven, with no apparent feet. The arms, terminated by stumps, were distinct from the transversal crossbar, even though they fused with it at their ends. Hints of a face and drapery around the waist were barely suggested in the working of the plaster. Richier, however, modified this plaster model to achieve what would be the final work to be cast into bronze: she sculpted in more details the articulation of the torso, made the legs the same length, and added recognizable feet and hands. The latter

constituted the terminal points of the crossbar suggesting that "the cross has been taken with the suffering into the flesh."¹⁴³ She imprinted a hint of a face by forming two small holes for the eyes, a ridge for the nose, and a horizontal incision for the mouth, explaining later that "there is no face because God is the spirit and faceless."¹⁴⁴ Once the bronze cast was made, she worked on the metallic surface with abrasives to create the pitted, tortuous look she favored, a technique manifesting that "the external space is not repelled by a smooth, armored surface but allowed to penetrate and interplay."¹⁴⁵

When Father Couturier saw the Crucifix (Figures 7, 10), he thought of Isaiah 53.2-3: "He grew up . . . like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity."¹⁴⁶ He decided to have the biblical passage engraved on a plaque near the work afterwards, an addition to the artwork to which Richier did not object. She, herself, had experienced a strange feeling while working on the sculpture: the subject matter, at first, had not aroused a special inspiration in her, but she felt as the work progressed that "unconscious things of a unique kind were being translated."¹⁴⁷ This spiritual admission comforted Father Couturier and Father Régamey in their conviction that since "no one knows where the Holy Spirit blows," the Church should not reject *a priori* non-believing artists from its sanctuary.

Richier had thought that her Crucifix might not be accepted because of its departure from classical forms in addressing such a traditional religious theme—shattering preconceptions and expectations. After the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, she wrote about going through a kind of rite of passage concerning the official acceptance of her Crucifix: “The press releases have been good and I believe that my conversation with the Christ of earth, of wood, and of conviction has produced good results . . . and personally, I am glad that the mountains do not have to watch me with a worried look.”¹⁴⁸ Her relief would be short-lived as opposition to her Crucifix grew, leading to the removal of the sculpture from the church a few months after its installation. Though shocked by the scandal she had sparked, she would find in the intensity of the controversy a confirmation of the power and relevance of her sculpture: “All in all, this battle of Assy is appropriate enough. All these people who came out violently on one side or the other, it goes well with my sculpture. Nothing happens by chance.”¹⁴⁹

The church of Assy experiment was a necessary test of the viability of a renewed sacred art in the post-World War II era. It brought together an impressive array of artists who demonstrated that translating the sacred through modern art forms could lead to its own epiphanies, as Richier and others openly confessed afterward. Choosing the sculptress and her organic plastic expressions for the crucifix had been a radical move, especially considering that the figure of Christ on the Cross was subject to some of the most uniform expectations by the religious public. The extensive debate that followed allowed

artists and the public to realize that the sacred in art was neither lost nor degraded but could be incarnated in new forms.

III. THE VOICES OF THE *QUERELLE*

The voices against Germaine Richier's Crucifix

1. The onset of the *querelle de l'art sacré*: the tract of Angers

The project of integrating modern works of art in a Catholic church without resorting to any neo-styles of Christian art came to completion with the blessing of the church of Assy by the Bishop of Annecy on August 4, 1950. The *querelle de l'art sacré* around Assy's crucifix would start a few months later on the occasion of a public event organized by the newspaper *La Tribune Angevine*.¹⁵⁰ The editor had asked Canon Devémy to give a talk on the significance of the Assy experiment for the future of church art. The lecture, entitled "Does the church of Assy contribute to the renewal of Christian art?" was held in Angers on January 4, 1951. Upon hearing that Canon Devémy was to speak in their town, some of the local media expressed their opposition to the theory behind the experiment at Assy, dismissing modern art as a "vast fakery put in motion by art dealers who fill their pockets by means of human stupidity . . . a plot which has its end, the destruction of the old order founded on the trinity of family, country, and religion."¹⁵¹ On the day of the lecture, a vocal minority disrupted the Canon's presentation and started a riot to the shouts of "Insult!" and "Sacrilege!" at the showing of a slide of Richier's Crucifix. A tract was distributed at the site of the

lecture, calling the church of Assy an “infamous profanation,” an “insult to God’s Majesty,” and a “scandal for Christian piety,” hinting at the artists’ atheism and questioning their title as “artists.” The tract also reproduced a picture of Richier’s Christ next to a Saint-Sulpician image of Christ from a Spanish church under the heading “Let God not be mocked.” On the back of this tract, its authors, signing as “a group of Catholics,”¹⁵² vehemently denounced the artists who adopted the new styles of modern art: borrowing words written earlier by Cardinal Celso Costantini of the Vatican,¹⁵³ they condemned “these deformations and perversions of the human figure which do not even spare the images of Christ, the Virgin or the Saints and become, therefore, visual blasphemies.”¹⁵⁴ Their accusation alleged that these artists sought to annihilate the unique link between God and the human race by taking away the literal meaning of “being made in the likeness of God”:

They throw at your face the prestigious name of a Rouault or of an art school like the one of the Communist Picasso. . . . Time has come to reveal the fraud of this spurious art, which is simply the rejection of the human and the refusal of the divine, the art of nothingness where man goes to the point of denying his own image.¹⁵⁵

Set in motion by the first tract of Angers, the campaign against the church of Assy and its crucifix intensified in February and March 1951. Charles du Mont, editor of *L’Observateur de Genève*, took the lead in turning the emotional outrage into action: he called for a deluge of letters to be sent to Monseigneur Cesbron, Bishop of Annecy, demanding the removal of Richier’s Crucifix from the sanctuary, as her work epitomized the use of modern art in the subversion and desacralization of the Catholic Church.

2. The critiques against Germaine Richier's Crucifix

Urged to take action by the indignant comments and demands he received, the Bishop of Annecy went back to the church in April 1951 to settle the fate of Richier's Crucifix. After studying the incriminated piece, he declared that the crucifix was "a caricature representing nothing . . . It had no cross, but only a green bronze, faceless figure cast roughly in the shape of a cross."¹⁵⁶ He ordered it removed from the altar area, and had it placed in the sacristy.¹⁵⁷ The bishop's decision echoed Rev. Richard James Douaire's assessment¹⁵⁸ following his earlier pilgrimage to Assy, which compared the crucifix to a 'found object,' and 'bronze drippings on a stick,' making it more strange than beautiful.¹⁵⁹ The critic also stressed the incongruity of the statue within its liturgical space: "the almost crude agitation of the bronze in its rendering" contrasted negatively with the soberness of the altar and the diagonal of the arms clashed with "the horizontals of the altar and tapestry."¹⁶⁰ Lauding the bishop's decision to remove Richier's Christ from Assy, Cardinal Costantini lent his voice to the mounting indignation surrounding the sculpture: "In [Richier's Crucifix] we no longer recognize the adorable humanity of Christ. . . . It is an indecent pastiche . . . and insult to the majesty of God . . . a scandal for the piety of the faithful."¹⁶¹ Its most adamant detractor was Gabriel Marcel,¹⁶² who, after describing it as "resembling a scrawny branch covered with a kind of mold," ranted against the artist's presumed sickened creative mind:

What is intolerable . . . is to pretend offering to the faithful's contemplation, in the name of a dogmatism based on what psychoanalysis would certainly identify as impotence and resentment, the still-born fruits of a withered cerebrality.¹⁶³

The critiques directed at Richier's work attacked its aesthetics as well as its lack of doctrinal appropriateness. Her Christ's physical representation was judged to be both repulsive to prayer, and denying the triumph of Christ over death and sin. Victor-Henry Debidour¹⁶⁴ compared it to another suffering Christ, the Dévot Christ of Perpignan, France, dated from the early fourteenth century, to underline the difference between improper and befitting art. He considered the late medieval Crucifix within the limits of church art because in his "macabre hideousness," he still projected 'the peace of *consummatum est*':

Timelessly crucified and in a way metaphysical, [the Dévot Christ] is at the edge where the triumphant divine majesty would cease to be able to be humanly depicted in art.¹⁶⁵

He wondered then if Richier's Christ benefited from the same "unutterable and almost intangible peace which saved the Dévot Christ?"¹⁶⁶ He answered in the negative, describing Assy's Christ as "conceived like a withered sacrament, and rotten, good to pitch in the fire or to float between two waters in the swamp."¹⁶⁷ Even though he conceded that it might have converted a few souls, he stressed that it foremost brought forth feelings of disgust in many people, causing it to serve merely as an object of curiosity.¹⁶⁸ He defended the bishop's decision to remove Richier's Christ as his right and duty to determine the appropriateness of art pieces in the church:

But wasn't he [the Bishop of Annecy] entitled to think that there was a contradiction for the Church to celebrate mass in front of a rendering of Our Lord which did not present

another image than the one which appeared to the Jews and mocking Romans, or which haunted the despaired disciples, before Emmaus and before Pentecost?¹⁶⁹

For Debidour, the importance of the crucifix in the liturgy made the artistic display of triumph, or lack thereof, a critical aspect of the issue at hand. Even Father Régamey, who wrote in favor of Richier, first admitted the possibility of differences of opinion on “the rightness of so pathetic a work for its liturgical function.”¹⁷⁰

The Christ of Assy not only attracted censorious criticism for its artistic style and its alleged dogmatic shortcomings, but also became the embodiment of all that was deemed wrong with the validation of abstract art and non-believing artists as translators of divine mysteries. It stood as a sort of synecdoche for a panoptic *querelle de l'art sacré*. For Richier's detractors, her sculpture incarnated the unacceptable in modern sacred art: it was anti-traditional, individualistic, unsubmissive, and unpredictable. The virulence of their reactions seemed to stem from their misconstruction of the significance of the Assy experiment as setting a new standard for church art. Father Couturier, though, never presented Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce as an archetype for future churches: the Assy experiment was always meant to be just that, an experiment.

3. The case against abstract art in Catholic churches

A second tract, also distributed in Angers, targeted a lecture given by Father Régamey in December 1951. This tract's diatribe was directed against the international art market that exploited snobbery and public credulity for financial

gain. It also implicated Father Régamey as the organizing force behind the international media's commendation of pseudo-masterpieces made by "psychotic imaginations," a trend the tract's authors dismissed as a scandalous passing infatuation:

In fifty years, who will remember Father Régamey, Father Couturier, all their vacuous, naïve, and profitable admirations in front of ghastly works, sometimes baroque, sometimes ludicrous, sometimes monstrous, sometimes satanic.¹⁷¹

As this second tract of Angers attested, the expansion of abstract art since the beginning of the twentieth century had led to a growing misunderstanding of the modern artistic implications. The plastic and intellectual break that took place in the arts during that time was such a radical change from the appraised ideas of the earlier era, that the sanity of these modern artists was questioned. Their conceptions of art were viewed as threatening the equilibrium of the human psyche, so conceptually revolutionary were their experiments. When some of these artists were invited to work for the Church, their overthrow of the traditional means of expression was suspected to also overturn the sacred relationship between humanity and its Creator. The criticism voiced against Richier's Christ was extended to abstract art in general, accusing Father Couturier and Régamey of running a 'vast enterprise of subversion of morals and traditional thoughts:'

[Their aim] is the destruction of the foundations of the mind, the negation of all learning, contempt for the slow works of humanity. A kind of illuminism wants us to believe that humanity will completely regenerate itself out of a necessity of natural evolution.¹⁷²

For critics of modern art, the new paradigms of thought and expression represented a step back from centuries of linear development in Christian thought, an alienation from enlightenment and a return to a primordial illusion:

The brutal images that Assy and Audincourt [church with abstract works by Bazaine and Léger] offer, reject the classical notion of forms associated with clear ideas, distinct and orderly, of the humanist culture. . . . People are called to forget the human form. . . . Thanks to the new religious imagery, the Church, drawn to be in line with current tastes, will find again its primitive naïveté, conducive to the birth of a new world from which the art of fetishes and wizards will rise again.¹⁷³

Guy-Jean Auvert, in his book *Défense et Illustration de l'Art Sacré*,¹⁷⁴ extended the condemnation of abstract art to its use in the world of the sacred, on the basis of the alleged aberration of the abstract mind:

We will never find the hand of God in a deranged, surreal and 'abstractist' art, in which human reason becomes delirious and on which human nature shatters.¹⁷⁵

Rejecting natural transposition, abstraction defied the Christian centrality of the incarnation, and thus rendered itself unfit to echo the divine mysteries:

Any art that is not respectful of the forms and harmonies of nature is incapable of illustrating the supernatural revelations. If God came down to us donning our human nature to accomplish the mystery of Redemption, the only way faith can lead us back to Him is through the supernaturalism of nature itself which the Redeemer chose as the ideal means of his manifestation to humanity. The art of the faith will then be the most natural art.¹⁷⁶

Auvert called abstract art 'scribbles' and judged it unsuitable for sacred works destined for the Church, a body who assembled everyone without distinction of class or intellect. Church art needed to be understandable by all faithful, in a way

that spared them from wondering what a work was meant to express.

Furthermore, he considered abstract art materialistic in its forms because of the supremacy given to geometry, and in its thoughts because of the emphasis on individuality. Even though he admitted that some modern works of art could be sacred for their author, an art he labeled "the psychological sacred," he advocated for an art of the "sacred of tradition" involving both didactics and a sense of mystery, a combination successfully executed by the masters of Byzantine art and gothic cathedrals, and by artists like Rembrandt or Fra Angelico:

Contrary to a simple profane art piece, a work of sacred art should lead to the understanding of such or such teaching [of the Church] while preserving in its appearance its share of silence and the inexpressible. . . . And the more the mystery will be pronounced in the works, the more the impression of the sacred will seize us.¹⁷⁷

For Auvert, this sense of divine mystery, which elevated the faithful to positive feelings of joy and serenity, could not be translated by abstract artists who seemed to revel in expressing the distress of the world. He believed that what people longed for in the aftermath of the war was an escape from such atrocities and a clear path to grace and truth, a comforting image of humanity and of God's presence. This approach to art's purpose, as a diverter from reality instead of a revealer of it, was also embraced by Debidour:

Christianity—therefore Christian art—must be concerned with providing a testimony *in* the century that is not *of* the century. One must be in step with the times; but this requirement for Christianity can only be met so: to give to the present times, not that of which the world abounds and becomes intoxicated with, but that of which it lacks, it thirsts for. . . . Today, because of our anguish, [we thirst for] serenity.¹⁷⁸

For the opponents of modern art as sacred art, Richier's Christ embodied both the ugly aesthetics of abstract art and the torturous mindset of secular artists. The sculptress was singled out because the central significance of her subject matter exacerbated feelings of incomprehension, and because, in the eyes of the faithful, she represented the case par excellence against offering non-believers commissions for sacred works in churches.

4. The case against allowing non-believers to work for the Church

To better refute them,¹⁷⁹ Father Régamey summed up the justifications, put forth by an array of critics, for disallowing non-believing artists to participate in the renewal of sacred art:

If this external honor [to make sacred arts] is to be in harmony with the entire Divine liturgy and not be a discordant lie in the eyes of God, it ought to represent that interior celebration which springs from faith. It is even more certainly a flagrant impropriety, a kind of sacrilege, to entrust religious work to artists who make an open profession of their materialism.

The meaning that [the non-believing artist] gives to his work is only accidentally what the Church requires and is in great danger of exalting his pride.

The artist tends more and more to value solely what he receives from his innermost self; he subjects himself to his creations more than he wills them into being.

Without faith the artist does not understand the true needs of the Christian community and follows sentiments that are all too personal.

When their [religious art works made by a non-faith artist] inspiration does not remain vague, they express some aspect which, too humanly, has struck the artist, and exaggerate it so much that it contradicts the purer aspects of the Mystery in question.¹⁸⁰

In accord with the first, most popular objection, critics brandished the fact that the Christian faith was supernatural, not an intellectual concept that could be

apprehended by sheer will and intelligence. Faith was related to the experience of grace, and therefore, someone who rejected God's grace could not properly translate the mysteries at the heart of the Christian religion. Even religious artists confused religious feeling with true faith. Lacking even this religious feeling, non-believing artists could only offer a cerebral exercise from which an understanding of the faith was entirely absent:

Even admitting that [non-believing artists] are able to do works of a superior artistic quality, they can only give us an intellectual satisfaction. They can paint Christ without talking about Christ but of a dead man, as we paint a still life which subject does not interest anyone but for the way it allows a balance between forms and colors.¹⁸¹

The prominent Christian artist and writer Henri Charlier also denied the benefit of religious conversions for non-believers creating works of art for the Church, declaring that these pseudo-revelations dismissed the essentiality of catechumenism: "We do not know anymore what a Christian society is and what its formation demands; we want to ignore that art, after the glorification of God, has social callings and a social role."¹⁸²

After condemning Richier's Christ, the campaign against the crucifix of Assy devolved into a general denunciation of abstract art as a vast farce, and of the unworthiness of non-believing artists for sacred art. Both issues, however, acquired fierce defenders endorsing Father Couturier's "bet on genius."

The voices in favor of the Christ of Assy

Counteracting the negative reactions to the Christ of Assy, some critics forcefully reproved the harsh criticisms against it and its removal from the church. The show of support expanded to include opinions in favor of the sculpture itself, in opposition to Saint-Sulpician imageries, and in furtherance of abstract art.

1. The merits of Richier's Christ

The debate that took place between the first tract of Angers and the removal of the crucifix from the church was quite subdued, involving a few priests and laymen. Thereafter, it evolved into a full-blown controversy. The actual removal of the artwork, months after being blessed as part of the whole church, provoked more scandal on the national scene than the presence of the sculpture in the church in the first place.

The Catholic press reported that the removal of Richier's Crucifix had been ordered to address the uneasiness felt by the parishioners of Assy confronted by such a representation of Christ, which some referred to as "evil." But several letters published in the secular media seemed to show that many parishioners were asking to have the sculpture placed back near the altar, because as sanatorium residents, they could relate to and pity a suffering Christ. Embracing the figure's image of agony as a testimony to the years of war atrocities, the French Minister of Culture André Malraux proclaimed that Richier's Crucifix was "the only modern Christ before [whom] one can pray."¹⁸³ Bernard

Dorival, curator at the national museum of modern art in Paris, agreed that this Christ "affirmed a love welcoming all distresses, and detaching himself from the cross, he was leaning fraternally towards those who came to implore him."¹⁸⁴ It appeared to be the perfect Christ to resonate with an audience of tuberculars, reflecting Isaiah's prophecy inscribed in the church, "a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity."¹⁸⁵ Father Régamey rallied to this point of view, after rejecting his first impression of a too pathetic Christ image. This particular Christ had not been conceived for a general audience, but indeed for the congregation of a sanatorium, whose residents lived in suffering themselves. He declared that the only scandal about Christ was "the mystery of Calvary, which [Richier] had evoked for the eyes, by allying abjection and triumphal outburst."¹⁸⁶ Others too were moved by the emotional depth evoked by the Crucifix:

Recent churches do not cry loudly enough the price paid for the good news. . . . [Madame Richier's piece] is of a hallucinatory theological and scriptural truth. . . . It enters our skin like a red hot iron.¹⁸⁷

The Eucharistic mystery is by itself quite disconcerting for our imagination and our sensibility so that this crucifix offers to these sensitive faculties the concrete and immediately perceptible nourishment they need to sustain our faith.¹⁸⁸

Immense and eloquent, pitiful and superhuman, heir of the Christs of dolor from the fifteenth century and of the Byzantine Pantocrators . . . first image not too unworthy of its subject that the art of sculpture had to offer since the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁸⁹

Brother to the *écorchés* of the French Renaissance but brother equally to the fleshless cadavers of the concentration camps, the Christ of Assy shrieks the decadence and the malediction of the body.¹⁹⁰

Never has art mortified art to this level. We are at the outer limits. Excessiveness, no doubt, but free from artifice and representing a spontaneous reaction of the conscience against everything that the cult of art for art's sake and of the form for the form, of the passion for the pretty or the decorative, has produced in the last two centuries of academism. Reaction of the truth in the darkness of the senses.¹⁹¹

Addressing the criticism that she was an atheist incapable of understanding what Christ meant to Christian believers, Richier insisted that, even though she did not adopt a specific faith, she believed in a transcendental presence that allowed her to be open and receptive to rendering the sacredness of the higher mysteries:

Be assured, Father, of my conviction and my faith. I have not always been a disciplined believer, but I have always been a believer! That faith has never waned. I would never have accepted the work you entrusted to me if in my heart there had been any doubt.¹⁹²

The removal of the crucifix from Assy particularly upset her because she felt that all the defamation desanctified her Christ:

Great was my deception to see, after those long months and those no less great promises, this poor Christ exposed to the winds, to the curiosity of the passers-by. . . . I pledge to keep this crate [containing the Crucifix] without using it in any way, but in my studio he will be sheltered from any curiosity, from any malicious thoughts. It is important to me and it is the only place where normally he must come back to, to preserve the peace he needs.¹⁹³

2. Superiority of Richier's art over Saint-Sulpician art

The scandal around Richier's work for Assy became a springboard for the denunciation of the artistic poverty and shame induced by the low taste reflected in the Saint-Sulpician art style in French churches. Yves Florenne, famed writer and art and literature critic, accused the public and the ecclesiastics of imparting "a passive benevolence, or even an active complacency towards the pious industry":

A work of modern art—and as such *debatable*—can lead to scandal and interdict, whereas the shame—itself *indisputable*—that is displayed in our churches, is tolerated, digested, blessed, or when it is reproved, it is futilely and without sanctions. The scandal is not in the presence in one church of a disconcerting work of modern art, but in the invasion of the temple by merchants of cheap junk.¹⁹⁴

He found the interest in kitsch imagery problematic because of the limited Christian values it seemed to portray. It emphasized only certain parts of the Christ story, hiding from view, and therefore from the faithful's minds, the reality (and ergo the reason) for Christ's suffering: "What is of great concern is that the Christ of bleeding and torn flesh be always judged improper, worrisome, mainly excessive; and the sugar-coated Christ always desirable, or tolerated."¹⁹⁵ The longing for a comprehensive, true Christ called for the rejection of the Saint-Sulpice style which negated that very aspect of it:

Nowadays, profane art is the one that is sincere, lyrical, spurring, whereas sacred art lies. . . . We live in a pseudo world (see the pseudo naïve, the pseudo modern, the pseudo gothic present in today's religious imagery) and when an artist dares to be sincere, when he/she disconcerts and moves us deeply, we call it a sacrilege and we drive Germaine Richier out of the sanctuary.¹⁹⁶

In contrast to Saint-Sulpician art, Richier's depiction was seen by its supporters as calling the faithful to be "at the foot of the Cross at Golgotha with him, in a manner that the traditional representation, too habitual and ornamental, could not achieve."¹⁹⁷

3. In defense of abstract art

Although the positive critiques on Richier's sculpture stressed the powerful impact of its aesthetics on the viewer, the problem lay in the fact that many a

beholder could not translate the physical qualities of the work into the spiritual message intended by the artist. The rapid evolution of art along the path of abstraction left the average audience in need of sensitization to the new art language and its potential for evoking the sacred:

When one does not perceive the quality of a plastic language, and that this language expresses certain spiritual values, one does not perceive these either, and then one accuses the unappreciated artworks of subverting spiritual values.¹⁹⁸

The faithful were not ready to see their churches invaded by this esoteric language, this means of communication which marked such a dramatic departure from standard sacred art. However, Father Couturier believed in the power of first impressions to bring about a quiescent enlightenment, which could not occur amid a deluge of explicative words since "in understanding too much, one ends up not feeling anything any longer":

Any true masterpiece demands a silence that an explanation and its concepts always risk to break. . . . Words stop us halfway. . . . A masterpiece demands a sense of the unfamiliar.¹⁹⁹

Agreeing that, ideally, meditation in front of an art piece was the best approach to modern art, Father Régamey nevertheless recognized that this was not always in the best interest of educating the masses: "Do we necessarily hinder the 'unfamiliar' experience of those who have access to it, when we also care to appease those who are incapable of it, those for whom poetry, as Father Couturier lightly put it, 'is a personal insult'?"²⁰⁰ For him, Richier's Christ was a case in point: in the black and white photograph used by *L'Art Sacré* in its issue

on the church of Assy (September-October 1950), the Crucifix appeared on a black background that amplified the starkness of the contrast between the harsh light projected on the bronze and the dark backdrop (Figure 11); for Father Régamey, the fact that this picture appeared without a corresponding artistic exegesis, or at least an acknowledgment of an understandable initial feeling of shock, did more harm than the display of the sculpture itself:

When I saw the picture without a caption in *L'Art Sacré*, I sensed the tragedy right away. It was its very nature of being abrupt, of being a work of *rupture*, and violently so: it would be sheer nonsense not to complement it with any 'considerations'. Actually, the whole scandal came about not because of the work of art itself at Assy, but from this picture.²⁰¹

In fact, many of the voices against Richier's Christ had never seen the work in person, but had only looked at a photograph before passing judgment. This was very unfortunate, for given a traditional subject matter such as a crucifix, and in view of the unique technique used by the artist, time spent in contemplation in the actual presence of the work was essential to apprehend it fully.

The intense debate around Richier's Christ allowed for a closer look into the compatibility of abstract art with church art. There was an awareness that non-figurative art did not fit the traditional role of church art as story teller, describer or teacher, but rather that it espoused a role of coetaneous witness to transformations in societal consciousness. By refusing the new tendencies of modern art, the Church risked losing both its capacity to comprehend the psyche of the time and its relevance to new generations:

In a world desperately closed, isn't the Church closing itself off too? . . . The wrong does not reside in the choice of artists or works, it resides entirely in the judgment, or rather the prejudice, that makes them separate what is "moderate" from what is "revolutionary," in the election of the "happy medium" and the reprobation of the extreme. Even though creation is always extreme; even though the Church was created to live in the extreme.²⁰²

There is, in the refusal by the church to accept modern art, a kind of resignation from the present that is a lot more critical for those who believe in it than the attacks by their adversaries, because this voluntary resignation by the parties concerned is a sign of weakness more worrisome than the exaggerations (if there are any) due to an excess of vitality.²⁰³

The changes in modern society left no choice but for modern artists to search for "some plastic sign language that [could] embody at the same time [the] perceptible world, precisely as felt, and the spiritual world as ultimate revelation."²⁰⁴ The abstract artist did not so much see the world, as decorticate it to sense its underlying principles, a very religious undertaking in itself. Where detractors of abstract art saw disorder and randomness, proponents of it exalted the abstractionists' ability to potentially reach realms beyond the visible, a goal pursued by all divine mystery seekers: "non-figurative art is such that it invites the mind to a pure contemplation, while ignoring the indiscreet discourses of reason and of trite common sense."²⁰⁵ Opponents also argued that these artists only cared to communicate through their creative power with a small elite of initiated, leaving the vast majority of the public unable to participate in the exchange. For Fernand Léger, both parties shared a responsibility in the widening gap of understanding: on one hand, museums and art galleries tended to cater to a privileged few who could afford the time to meditate in front of an artwork to become enlightened. On the other hand, the rest of society, a majority, was inclined to *a priori* dismiss modern plasticity, along with the artists' contributions to the mental enrichment of all:

Painting does require, like anything intellectual, a period of adaptation. There is a quite disagreeable preliminary period of confusion, during which taste and selection must take shape, must be carried out. This takes more than five minutes. It takes longer than choosing a necktie.²⁰⁶

The intense debate between the partisans of a renewal of sacred art through abstract art and the proponents of a return to the traditional sacred, grew to include art and religion experts as well as lay people in an attempt to delineate the true impact of a novel representation of the sacred on a French society emerging from intellectually and emotionally turbulent years.

Surveys of the public's opinions on modern art in French churches

The removal of Richier's Christ from the church of Assy triggered an interest in increasing the number and diversity of participants to the *querelle de l'art sacré*. Within a year, three different publications summed up the ongoing debate by reporting on the variety of positions taken by a wide range of people on the subject of modern sacred art.

1. Responses to Cogniat's article on the removal of Richier's Christ

Raymond Cogniat wrote an article in the weekly secular magazine *Arts* after the unexpected removal of the crucifix from the church of Assy.²⁰⁷ In this article, he observed that this event had changed the nature of the controversy to

a “real fight.” For him, the scandal lay in the removal, not the presence, of Richier’s Christ from the sanctuary, a decision that was “too categorical, too late.” He deplored that the bishop did not exercise his right to disallow the sculpture before it was installed in the church, before being consecrated by him with the rest of the church in 1950, as its late removal raised even more doubts about the “possibilities to express the Christian ideal using contemporary forms.” He admitted, though, the difficulty of accepting something so estranged from the normative expectations regarding such a conventional art subject, and of deciphering a sign of the sacred through it.

His article caused quite a stir among readers, which led him to share in a follow-up article some of the letters he received which reflected a multiplicity of view points expressed by a portion of the public in tune with the arts.²⁰⁸ Among the respondents, some could see the emotionally moving quality of Richier’s Christ, but still thought that his place was not in a church because his hybridity called to mind pagan myths rather than Christian mysteries: “He looks like a tortured piece of wood. . . . I would like to meet him in the countryside, on a path fit for meditation.”²⁰⁹ A reader also granted the artistic merit of the Crucifix, but pointed out that his “body torn by vultures” did not corroborate the dogma of Christ’s cross as an augur to his “glorious Resurrection.”²¹⁰ Others could not reconcile the physical aspects of Richier’s Christ with the time-honored symbolic features sanctioned by the Church. The artist’s rendition of the body of Christ was deemed a gesture of appropriation banned by ecclesiastical traditions: “This tradition [of the images’ structure] does not come from the painter (only Art

belongs to him) but from the ordinance and the disposition of the holy fathers who built it."²¹¹

However, a majority of the responses Cogniat received were supportive of the Crucifix; these readers sensed that Richier's physical rendering of Christ's emotional plea resonated with the sick parishioners of the nearby sanatorium:

He was pitiful and merciful. He symbolized the state of our lost souls who, sometimes, can't see the true form of people and things. He was our Christ, in all different from the Christ of our chapels.

. . . Christ devoid of all artifice, simple, pitiful, like us, it felt that we were in a closer communion. If He had to be taken away from us, you should not have let Him incorporate Himself so much in our church and our needs.²¹²

An appeal was made to the bishop to take into consideration, even though the disgruntled voices were the loudest, the many quiet parishioners who liked Richier's Christ, or at least were ready to give him a chance. The reintegration of the sculpture in the church, at a different place than the altar, would be a healthy reminder of the depth of Christ's message:

This disfigured, tortured, sorrowful effigy had the merit to make one think. And at a time when, for so many Christians, religion has become a kind of comfortable, not too annoying, weekly habit, this merit is not small.²¹³

The reactions to Richier's Christ soon turned into a wider reflection on the validity of a modernization of sacred art, the implications of which were the focus of the next two surveys.

2. Debidour's compilation of lay opinions

Debidour directed a survey concerning modern art and religion addressed to the readers of principally religious publications.²¹⁴ He then published a compilation of the results as well as essays on sacred art by several authors.²¹⁵ His inquiries covered two main issues: Was the presence of faith in the artist's life necessary to create sacred art? Was abstract art capable of conveying the sacred?

A few of those surveyed condemned the invitation extended to non-believers to create art for Christian houses of worship. But most respondents conceded that even though this situation was not ideal, it could be acceptable under certain conditions: unsuspected Christian thoughts from the artist' subconscious could be surfacing and guiding his/her inspiration;²¹⁶ the spontaneous offering of the artist' services could constitute an "involuntary act of faith";²¹⁷ and, just as an atheist could validly baptize someone if he/she considered the meaning of the act accomplished, so could a non-believing artist express truly sacred art.²¹⁸

The answers concerning the appropriateness of abstract art as a valid medium of sacred art covered a wide range of convictions, from modern art being a snobbish trap to embodying the excellence of the purity of the sign: some denounced it as cerebral, intellectual, and haughty, while others accused it of being emotional, sensitive, and impulsive. A few readers pointed out that Christian art's purpose per se was "not to *represent* and *teach* dogma and love, but to be *inspired* by them and to make them *shine*."²¹⁹ Indeed, the meditation

paths taken by the artist and the onlooker might be different, but they could very well arrive at the same revelation. One opinion reflected the most balanced approach, understanding the tremendous asset of abstract art in translating the sacred, while being aware of its contemporary ambiguity:

[Abstract art] liberates itself, to the ultimate degree possible, from the servitude of the sensitive, the temporal and the material, from the anecdotal. It is made to relieve the soul. . . . Abstract art, by its absence of figuration, would well be, in the absolute, the religious art *par excellence*. It opens up immense perspectives to contemplation, and does not impede the piety of the faithful, but, to the contrary, promotes inner contemplation. . . . But, there again, we should not be mistaken, because current abstract art rests for the most part on subjectivism and only leads to the confession of the ego. . . . It does not suffice to let go of the body to immerse in the Spirit.²²⁰

Father Régamey took the opportunity to be part of the survey as one of the essays' authors to defend the generous spirit that guided the artistic collaboration at the church of Assy. He celebrated the fundamental earnestness of the artists who listened attentively to the commands of their 'inner order' and intuition, separating themselves from their profane selves, and aspiring to the sacred as creators.²²¹

For Debidour, the Assy experiment was a 'legitimate and necessary' attempt at artistic cooperation between the masters of the day and the Church. His verdict about Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce was mixed: he liked the architecture, Braque's tabernacle, and the stained glass windows by Rouault and Couturier, but he did not appreciate much else. He deemed Fernand Léger's mural 'indefensible' with his Virgin harboring a "fat face and empty eyes."²²² He felt that Matisse's Saint-Dominic was "traced as if by a clumsy finger dipped in

Indian ink,” and that Bonnard’s Saint-Francis “looked like the vague designs that humidity spots make on an old wall.”²²³ He did not care for Bazaine’s stained glass windows which “seemed as far removed from Gregorian harmonies as possible.”²²⁴ Finally, Lurçat’s tapestry was somewhat problematic because it seemed that the beast had a more prominent place than the Virgin, who “had a kind of malevolent air like an idol.”²²⁵ Overall, though, he argued that there was more beauty than aberration at Assy: “‘Independent’ art . . . has a disconcerting and aggressive nature. This is not a criticism, *when it is beautiful*.”²²⁶ But he refused to subscribe to the presumed correspondance between aesthetic quality and spiritual quality.²²⁷

3. *La Croix*’ survey of artistic, literary and religious figures

Another survey on sacred art was conducted the following year by the daily French Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, who invited ‘qualified’ people such as priests, art historians, and Catholic artists to answer Maurice Brillant’s questions.²²⁸ The topics discussed ranged from the divorce between the public and modern art to the potential—if any—of abstract art for a sacred environment to the prevalence of fake styles in churches.²²⁹ The personal views expressed in these responses reflected those previously gathered by Debidour. Two priests²³⁰ and the ex-director of the Beaux-Arts, Paul Tournon, stood against the presence of abstract art in churches: this art was qualified as just “a juxtaposition of lines or colors whose objectivity only lay in the imagination of their authors,”²³¹ an art whose “abstruseness, systematic deformations, and excessiveness . . .

constitute the most serious obstacles to unanimous acceptance by the clergy and the faithful who ask of art to instruct and move them in simplicity and clarity."²³²

Among the artists participating, Jean Bazaine proved the most adamant about promoting the use of non-figurative styles for church art, defending their artistic relevance and propensity to translate the sacred:

Our 'modern' churches [from the 1920s] are mostly hateful, because their ugliness is moral, because they became like huge abscesses of fixation of our hypocrisies, our cowardice, our lies; humans can recognize themselves at their worst. Is this what we want?

. . . The sacred nature of a work of art is not in its 'figuration'; . . . *Do we demand that these works* [masterpieces from the Middle Ages, such as the stained glass windows in Chartres' cathedral] *be legible*? But the subjects are *underneath*, and all that the artist has brought in fervor, in sensitivity, that's what shows: life, the inner *animation* of the form.²³³

In his response, Rouault dismissed the controversy between figurative and abstract art as merely a subjective application of labels. It took a gift of sensitivity to colors and forms to fully feel and, therefore, appreciate modern art. For him, the only way art should go into a church was "on its knees, in silence."²³⁴

This survey produced a representative sample of positions according to one's profession, as seen in other articles published on the subject of the Christ of Assy. Most priests tended to be conservative in regard to the tradition of sacred art, reluctant to accept the end of a long era of successful Christian art masters and a rebirth based on counter-traditional postulates. Catholic artists working with new plastic forms trusted that their creative process, as well as the one experienced by their secular peers, was an expression of a deeper, transcendental power leading to the sacred.

Overall, the rejection of abstract art from the field of sacred art stemmed from its immediate incomprehensibility, an attribute that contradicted the traditional paths to the sacred of literal reading and engrained symbolism. It was fitting then, that the *querelle de l'art sacré* should start with Richier's Christ, a sculpture that was untraditional, both physically and intellectually.

IV. THE HOLY SEE'S RESPONSE TO THE *QUERELLE*

Art patronage, a tradition of the Church

1. Overview of the history of sacred art in Catholic churches

In the early church, Christian art consisted mostly of symbols because Christians feared persecution in a hostile environment and wanted to distance themselves from a pagan religion that practiced idolatry.²³⁵ When Christianity became the official religion, the spread of representational images was still tentative due to fears of idolatry and of representing God in a sacrilegious manner. The subject of church art became part of the papal domain under Saint Gregory the Great who advocated the non-idolatrous use of images in churches. The benefits of images were threefold: they helped memorialize the events of the life of Christ and the Saints; they promoted adoration by triggering emotions conducive to religious experiences; and they served a didactic objective.²³⁶ The Church sanctioned the Gregorian purpose of sacred art by adopting similar directives at the Council of Constantinople in 692:

We must be able to contemplate the whole sublimity of the Word through his humility. The painter must lead us, as by the hand, to the memory of Jesus alive in its flesh, suffering, dying for our salvation and acquiring thus the redemption of the world.²³⁷

The second Council of Nicaea in 787 reaffirmed the importance of the presence of images in churches, in response to the underlying threat of iconoclasm. The Council referred to their traditional functions: remembrance of historical events, stimulation of the will to imitate the exemplary actions of the people represented, and veneration.²³⁸ It also emphasized that images were to be honored but not adored, hence their conception should be the result of a combination between the artist's talent and the church's established guidelines:

The composition of religious pictures is not to be left to the initiative of artists, but is to be laid down by the principles of the Catholic Church and the tradition of religion. . . . Art belongs to the artist, and the composition of the picture belongs to the Fathers.²³⁹

In the eleventh century, the cross became a crucifix, as the vision of the suffering body of Christ was thought to further contemplation of His humanity.²⁴⁰ This contemplation through visual images, though, was devalued by some, like Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who rejected such images for the clergy in favor of an inner contemplation of the written Word. He nonetheless tolerated them as a teaching tool for the uncultured: "We must resort to material ornaments to bring to devotion a carnal people over whom spiritual matters have little hold."²⁴¹

By the fourteenth century, images filled churches because they represented a public manifestation of the art commissioner's piety and social prestige. They were considered a channel for prayer, a means of salvation, and a depository of miraculous power.²⁴² The role played by images in the Christian cult only grew in importance with the rediscovery of artistic perspective: at the

end of the fifteenth century, the sense that the images' beauty reflected the perfection of divine creation gave rise to the belief that divine reality was best made actual by way of plastic representations over predication of the Scriptures.²⁴³ For Braque, though, this Renaissance sentiment produced an art exalting temporality and skills over the search for the sacred:

Renaissance is an act. . . . In that period, spirituality was replaced with ideality. . . . All Renaissance art is pure virtuosity: its purpose is to do trompe l'oeil, to deceive. It is obviously contrary to a sacred art.²⁴⁴

Reacting to the Reformation's condemnation of images in Churches, the Council of Trent addressed in 1563 the issue of a sacred art seemingly gone astray. The Council first referred to Nicaea II to reinforce the legitimacy of using images in the liturgical space. Then it assigned priests the role of educating the faithful about the true meaning of images in order to avoid doctrinal errors in interpretation and dispel any belief in the thaumaturgic quality of images.²⁴⁵ Finally, the Council empowered bishops to regulate the presence of "unusual" images in their churches to ensure the purity of the Christian message itself over the display of human emotions. In 1642, Pope Urban VIII reinstated the ban on *insolitus* art in the hope of quenching the abuse denounced a century earlier, and emphasized the traditional purpose of accredited images as fostering veneration, devotion, piety, and a deepening of the faith.²⁴⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, church art had gone through the Baroque style and had turned toward an art of idealization and conventionalities: Eugène

Delacroix, for example, was criticized for his depiction of angels at the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, because the angels' faces harbored expressions of scorn rather than of traditional cherubic contentment.²⁴⁷ During that time and through the beginning of the twentieth century, sacred art lost its former vitality as it rested upon a gratifying sentimentality sought by the faithful who could not reconcile the secular master artists' individualized visions of transcendence with the Catholic Church's teachings on the divine.²⁴⁸

2. The Church's pre-1950 official texts on sacred art

In the twentieth century, the Vatican's first official act in the realm of church art was to create on September 1, 1924, the Diocesan Commissions for Sacred Art and the Rome-based supervising Central Commission. These Commissions were comprised of clerics and laity acting as consultants to their bishops; the members were required to be both experts in art and active participants in the Christian faith. Their mission was to promote sacred art through a variety of initiatives: keeping an inventory of the art treasures in the diocese; helping to organize and administer diocesan museums; judging designs for new buildings as well as artworks for existing church property; and educating the faithful in matters of artistic taste and culture by writing articles and giving lectures on sacred art.²⁴⁹ This new emphasis on artistic knowledge was facilitated by the introduction of art history in the curricula of priestly formations and the publication of periodicals like *L'Art Sacré*, which offered a thorough look at sacred art.

The first official papal allusion to modern art *per se* occurred in a speech given by Pope Pius XI at the dedication of a new Vatican Picture Gallery on October 27, 1932. The Pope's message settled the two main questions at hand: first, the Church would benefit from a renewal of art forms on the condition that they were at least as beautiful and good as the old ones.²⁵⁰ The Pope appealed to Christian artists to take up the challenge of creating sacred art for the present times, an endeavor historically successful for the Church:

Open wide the portals and give cordial welcome to every good and progressive development of the approved and venerable Christian traditions, which, in so many centuries of Christian life, in such diversity of circumstances, have given such proof of their inexhaustible capacity to inspire new and beautiful forms, whenever they have been called upon or studied and cultivated by the twofold light of genius and of faith.²⁵¹

Second, he rejected new art styles espoused by secular artists as unsuitable for the adornment of churches since they "revert[ed] to the crude forms of the darkest ages,"²⁵² and did not abide by the limits on expression referred to in the texts of Canon Law:

Canon 1164, paragraph 1: Ordinaries shall insure, taking counsel of experts if necessary, that in the construction and remodeling of churches, forms of architecture from the received Christian tradition and laws of sacred art are used.

Canon Law 1279, paragraph 2: No one may place, or cause to be placed in churches, any unusual image unless it has been approved by the Ordinary.

Canon Law 1296, paragraph 3: Concerning the form and material of sacred furnishings, these must follow liturgical prescription and ecclesiastical tradition and be made in the best way possible according to the laws of sacred art.²⁵³

Pope Pius XII confirmed his predecessor's opinions in his influential encyclical *Mediator Dei et Hominum* of November 20, 1947, which elaborated on the concept of sacred arts as "noblest handmaids at the service of divine worship."²⁵⁴ For him, the new art forms, in their avant-gardist expressions, were incapable of serving in such capacity due to their cryptic style, which compromised one of the traditional purposes of sacred art as an illustrative teaching tool:

We cannot help deploring and condemning those works of art recently introduced by some, which seem to be a distortion and perversion of true art and which at times openly shock Christian taste, modesty and devotion, and shamefully offend the true religious sense. These must be entirely excluded and banished from our churches, like "anything else that is not in keeping with the sanctity of the place."²⁵⁵

Nevertheless, he indicated that modern art was not to be "universally despised and rejected through prejudice,"²⁵⁶ in the name of preserving the holiness, universality and nobility of all liturgical services. Even though early Christian celebrations included rites that fulfilled the needs of that time period, rites evolved to meet the development of the understanding of the faith. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to return to a style that was legitimate in its time, but which had lost its relevance in the present. Art needed to find a renewal of styles fitting the demands of both the liturgy and the parishioners:

What we have said about music, applies to other fine arts, especially to architecture, sculpture and painting. Recent works of art, which lend themselves to the materials of modern composition, should not be universally despised and rejected through prejudice. Modern art should be given free scope in the due and reverent service of the church and the sacred rites, provided that they preserve a correct balance between styles tending neither to extreme realism nor to excessive "symbolism," and that the needs of the Christian community are taken into consideration rather than the particular taste or talent of the individual artist.²⁵⁷

Critics capitalized on the Holy See's guidelines to legitimize the disparagement of Richier's Crucifix and its removal from its prominent place at the church of Assy. Following the official criteria, they remonstrated against the sculptress' excessive use of symbolism in the incomplete and faceless body of her Christ, and against her immoderate depiction of Christ's unbearable suffering which overshadowed the transformation of Christ's resurrection to come.²⁵⁸

3. The debate over the role of tradition in sacred art

The uproar caused by the dramatic changes in the unwritten rules of sacred art, brought the subject of tradition in church art back in the spotlight. The notion of tradition held even more prestige in sacred art than in other arts because it was itself the product of two other traditions: traditions of the Catholic Church based on its rites, interpretations of biblical texts, and dogmas, and traditions of the fine Arts from its canons of beauty and style. To many, modern art, especially abstract art, seemed to be founded on a principle of repudiation of traditions. Some critics saw in the modern rebellion against these traditions the pitfall of the new narcissistic focus of modern artists, contributing to the debauchery of a stylistic free-for-all and an art developed merely for shock value: "Tradition demands what the modern artist rejects: discipline, conformity, humility."²⁵⁹ By foregoing the innate value of tradition, modern artists were seen as unable and unworthy to embody the Catholic intent of sacred art in their work.

Others advocated a blend of tradition and new ideas to achieve a harmonious style that would embrace both the wisdom of the past and the energy of the present:

Tradition signifies, [not paralysis or powerlessness, but] to the contrary, the power of projecting far in front of us, beyond horizons still unlit by progress and science, the luminous teachings from the past so that the greatness and the prestige of the creative principles of art can live on . . . through the evolution of aesthetics. Tradition will be the torch, smoldering but ardent,²⁶⁰ that will allow artists to find their way again in the obscure labyrinth of new creations.

Tradition was the springboard from which artists could build anew, eliminating worn elements to make room for new inspirations, assimilating the *Zeitgeist* without losing permanent truths:

Tradition is a foundation and not a superstructure; a means and not an end; an element we cannot see but which animates and supports the artwork. . . . Tradition is for the arts what grammar and syntax are for literature.²⁶¹

The apparent dichotomy between modern or abstract art and tradition betrayed a superficial reading of the contemporaneous works, since their authors had studied traditional styles and symbolism, an unalterable basis for their artistic explorations of new art forms. Richier herself continued to create busts of classical forms as an exercise essential to her dexterity for the execution of her 'existentialist-style' sculptures. Traditions were incorporated in the artist's plastic fundamentals as a base to explore from, not a rigid frame to stay within.

The Vatican's post-1950 position on modern sacred art

1. Initial reaction to post World War II modern art

Soon after the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Pope Pius XII addressed the issue of abstract art and its admittance to the Church on the occasion of the first International Congress of Catholic Artists held in Rome in September 1950. Condemning the new direction taken by modern art both in its goals and its styles, he specifically targeted art for art's sake, a trend that aspired to "lower and enslave the spiritual powers of the soul to carnal passions."²⁶² But he also defined what art had been and should still be in its sacred purpose as a mediator between God and humankind:

[Art must have] expressive value, lacking which it ceases to be true art. To say as much is not superfluous in our day when all too often, among certain groups, the work of art is not sufficient in itself to render the thought, to externalize the feelings, to lay bare the soul of its author. Yet the moment it needs to be explained in verbal terms, it loses its value as a sign and serves only to afford the senses a physical joy rising no higher than their own level or else it affords the mind merely the pleasure of subtle and useless play. . . . Hence all the schools of thought that cause art to forfeit its sublime role profane it and make it sterile.²⁶³

The Congress gathered artists from twenty countries to exhibit and present their stand on specific issues regarding modernity, the arts and the Catholic Church. Even though prominent French artists and architects refused to attend the Congress, a conservative delegation from France participated and called for the Church to disseminate precise rules "to place manacles on the artists."²⁶⁴ Other delegations disagreed and the United States presented a motion embracing modern art within the directives given by the Pope in *Mediator Dei*:

The difficulty, in this case, would be to state rules that would be applicable in a universal sense, and we feel that any such rules would merely be the expression of one particular school of thought. . . . The world is too large, and the various needs of peoples in the world must be met in a normal and intelligent manner, based on liturgical requirements and a sense of tradition. . . . Fanaticism, in matters of sacred art, is an attitude that can lead us to a decadence more sterile even than the one we are all endeavoring to overcome."²⁶⁵

Shortly after his address to the Congress of artists, Pius XII issued *Menti Nostrae* on the sanctity of priestly life, in which he restated the inappropriateness of most modern art and the veto power of bishops in the field of the arts:

118. The age in which we live suffers from serious errors indeed: philosophical systems which are born and die without improving morals in any way; monstrosities of art which even pretend to call themselves Christian.

119. We are far from holding that the apostolate must not be in keeping with the reality of modern life and that projects adapted to the needs of our time should not be promoted. But since the whole apostolate carried on by the Church is by its essence under the control of the Hierarchy, new forms must not be introduced save with the bishop's approval.²⁶⁶

This papal exhortation also alluded to priests who exhibited "a certain spirit of novelty . . . diffused in an ever graver and more disturbing manner";²⁶⁷ according to Rubin, this was an oblique reference rebuking Father Couturier and Father Régamey's vision of enticing art masters of the time to put their talents to work for the Church, even if not professing the faith.²⁶⁸

Other officials in the religious art world expounded on the different aspects of sacred art mentioned by the Pope in his addresses. For example, the importance of readability was stressed by Mgr Touzé, director of the Chantiers

du Cardinal in Paris, as a requirement for an art deserving of its place in a church.²⁶⁹

All the more reason [that trends fade and disappear] for our priests to demand of artists that they provide them with balanced works, works that are immediately understandable to their people and to themselves; tasteful work, at last, where all will find an emanation of Beauty, true Beauty. Is that too much to ask?²⁷⁰

Fr. Henri de Montrond, a religious art critic, demonstrated how *Mediator Dei* and the Pope's 1950 allocution concerning the arts applied to famous works of church art.²⁷¹ "Extreme realism," said de Montrond, could be seen in the Christ of Limpas, Spain.²⁷²

A realist imagery, this servile imitation of a spectacle is not a work of art, no transcendence emanates from it, and the four rays of gilded wood, fixed behind the sculpture's head, do not bestow upon it a religious character.²⁷³

"Excessive symbolism," he continued, would be a label befitting Richier's Christ at Assy. Even though her work of art had much merit, he felt that the Church's ultimate message took a backseat to the artist's personal feelings:

Without stopping at the anecdotal aspect of the Crucifixion, in which the Spanish sculptor [of the Christ of Limpas] reveled—silver nails and real crown of thorns—Germaine Richier translates with far more truth the suffering and prostrate nature of the Redemption mystery. Poignant, her crucifix overwhelms us infinitely, it elevates us above the profane and let us sense transcendence. Isn't that the essential function of art? . . . [But] she expresses less the sacrifice of Christ than her own confusion in the face of contemporary suffering. Her language takes a confidential turn and translates much more her personal sentiment than the profound thought of the Church.²⁷⁴

Father de Montrond insisted that he respected artists like Richier, Matisse and others as reflectors of contemporary individualism; but he felt that, as such, their

works could not embody the universality of Catholic teachings. For him, contemporaneous art could find its rightful place in churches only if it accepted the helpful guidance of its artistically illuminated clerics who followed the papal directives of propriety. Even though Father Couturier and Father Régamey were qualified in regard to their artistic knowledge, by leaving the artists to their own devices they failed to guide them toward fulfilling the needs of the faithful as a community of Catholic worshipers.

2. The 1952 official interpretation of modernity's place in sacred art

In 1952, Pope Pius XII wrote two major texts on the subject of determining what place should be given to modern styles and contents in the field of sacred art. The first text was his address to a group of Italian artists on April 8, 1952. He presented himself as the successor in a line of popes who had been acting as patrons of the arts, providing inspiration through Catholic teachings and holding out the Catholic Church as a place for the best art to flourish and be preserved as a testimonial of humanity's gifts to the glory of God. His definition of art focused on its transcendental aspects:

The function of all art lies in fact in breaking through the narrow and tortuous enclosure of the finite, in which man is immersed while living here below, and in providing a window to the infinite for his hungry soul.

There is not, either in life or in art—be it intended as an expression of the subject or as an interpretation of the object—the exclusively “human,” the exclusively “natural” or “immanent.”²⁷⁵

He reminded his audience that Christian artists living their religion embodied the perfect combination of contemplation, truth seeking, and God-given talent to stir

the world toward the infinite, especially in treating religious subjects, but also in expressing the secular if or when inspiration called in that direction. He celebrated the artistic medium as the perfect complement to a religion of the Word: art educated in a universal language, converted Christian truths to a deep emotional experience, and was effective in leading the soul on the right path.

In France, a few days after Pope Pius XII's address to the artists, the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral, Liturgy, and Sacred Art issued directives approved by the French Bishops Conference. The Commission stated that sacred art was a living art, corresponding to its time in its techniques and choice of materials. Masters of modern art were welcome to work for the Church as long as they allowed their inspiration to be infused by a religious spirit. It cited *Mediator Dei* as the reference in matter of guidelines to avoid artistic experiments that could be offensive to the intended audience, and emphasized the importance of the readability of the message portrayed. However, the Commission took great care to warn against rushed criticism concerning new art styles:

IX. One must always take into account that a new art, breaking off more or less with familiar styles, could only, most of the time, be truly understood and appreciated in hindsight; and that a work of art could only truly be judged in its intended exhibition place, environment, light.²⁷⁶

This paragraph seemed to allude particularly to the Richier scandal at Assy, as the Crucifix was first berated solely on the basis of a photograph without the benefit of an *in situ* exposure. The text also condemned the industrial production

of pseudo-religious art, calling for the removal of these 'degrading' pieces from churches.

The second text issued by the Vatican that year abandoned the moderate stand of both *Mediator Dei* and the French Commission for Sacred Art, for a more restrictive interpretation of the compatibility of abstract art with the vision of the Church. The Instruction of the Holy Office, *De arte sacra*, promulgated on June 30, 1952, aimed at tightening the previous guidelines on sacred art set in Canon law and in *Mediator Dei*, and ending the debate about the suitability of contributions of both non-figurative arts and non-Christian artists to church art. It was acclaimed by abstract art detractors for "sav[ing] art from a radical dissolution in a time when moderation is lost."²⁷⁷ Their fear of "dissolution" stemmed from the wish by the avant-garde art movements to move beyond the linear-story approach to expression:

In various tendencies of modern art one or the other combination of these inhuman characteristics [brutal, cruel, vulgar, obscene, monstrous, mechanistic] appears. For example, in cubism, emptiness dominates; in expressionism, spiritual chaos; in surrealism, cold demonism of the deepest hell.²⁷⁸

The Instruction defined sacred art in terms of its function:

It is the function of sacred art, by reason of its very definition, to enhance the beauty of the house of God and to foster the faith and piety of those who gather in the church to assist at the divine services and to implore heavenly favors.²⁷⁹

In order to fulfill its function regarding both content and audience, artists were asked to balance their style, their understanding of religious truths in the present environment, and the universality of the Church. Independence in thought and

experience was accepted as long as it was channeled toward “the typical and symbolic”:

Neither subjective devotion, nor the individual religiosity of the artist, nor the thoughts of the beholder are characteristic of sacred art. It is characterized by objective piety, determined and formed by ecclesiastical and liturgical norms.
... Finding the way back from the isolated devotional picture to the cult picture of the Christian community must become one of the main missions of contemporary sacred art.²⁸⁰

The Instruction stressed the importance of content over style, restricting forms of expression “only in so far as the holy, the sacred or divine, is distorted, desecrated or twisted, and the religious understanding of the people harmed.”²⁸¹ Added to the Augustinian definition of beauty as the splendor of order, the vision for a true sacred art seemed to exclude any modern artistic trait:

Lack of order, harmony, form and moderation do not encourage devotion but constitute an inadequacy, an experiment which may prove interesting but which has no sacred character.²⁸²

Going against abstract art’s best asset, the Instruction dismissed the importance of creating art in harmony with the emotional quality of the time:

The objection raised by some that sacred art must be adapted to the needs and circumstances of changing times, is of no weight. For sacred art, which originated with Christian Society, has its own ends from which it can never diverge and its proper function which it can never abandon.²⁸³

However, it did not exclude all forms of modern art from entering churches, nor did it advocate only one style of church art. It recognized the value

of native expressions and the need for a modern rendition of Christian themes in order to ensure the continuous vigor of such an art. It demanded that suitable modern art strive to find a harmony between two rules:

Its first rule [is] to hold on to the Church's traditions, and its second rule, to speak the language of the times. The first rule guarantees eternally valid values; the second assures progress, the indigenous and the timely.²⁸⁴

In order to achieve all three characteristics of true sacred art—contents, forms and perfection built on tradition—the Instruction called for artists to excel at their respective art and allow their mind to be open to the Christian faith, which in turn would enable them to translate the Christian message:

Let there be commissioned works of painting, sculpture and architecture only from those who are remarkable for their competence and who are capable of expressing a sincere faith and piety, the goal of all sacred art.²⁸⁵

The 1952 Instruction of the Holy Office put an official end to the *querelle de l'art sacré*. The bold and controversial collaboration between modern art, especially abstract art, and several French churches,²⁸⁶ waned dramatically after the Instruction's publication and Father Couturier's death in 1954.²⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

The Church of Assy was said to be “a practical laboratory in which to experiment with the new theories of ecclesiastical art being explored by the Dominicans in *L’Art Sacré*.”²⁸⁸ Father Couturier and Father Régamey’s theories were based on the observation that there was a lack of great modern Christian artists able to match the vitality of past masters who thrived under the Church’s patronage. The two Dominican Fathers acknowledged the widening gap between secular society and Christian life, which had led to a mutual incomprehension and a long spell of artistic poverty in sacred art. Lowering expectations in church art undermined the overall willingness of the hierarchy to turn away from Saint-Sulpician art and promote a true art created to elevate the contemporaneous soul toward the Transcendant. The aspiration behind commissioning the works of Assy aimed to counteract the rising danger of catering to the public an art devoid of challenges, which shortchanged the viewer, the arts, and the Church itself. Maurice Denis recounted a true story about a nun who came into the house of an assiduous Christian artist to help care for the sick artist. She thought it odd that there were no pious images in the house of such a devout Christian. When told that most pictures on the walls represented religious subjects, she retorted that true as it were, they were not pious imagery.²⁸⁹ Like the nun in this anecdote, the

public tended to expect their religious ideal to look familiar, and breaking the habit of the eye proved to be a tremendous task:

We use the past as an excuse [to perpetuate the same images], but we don't realize enough the tyranny of the eye: for the profane, it is the already-seen that is beauty.²⁹⁰

Even though new plastic forms were unpopular with a majority of the public, Father Couturier encouraged the participation in church decoration by artists using contemporaneous art forms. In this way, the Church could still be relevant in a time of societal secularization:

I would say that [the] failing [of the Church] in the area of the arts is serious, not so much because it marks the loss of a territory, a decline of Catholic culture, but mostly because it seems symptomatic of a negative state of mind which is, in itself, absolutely contrary to the essential exigencies of Catholic culture and thoughts as such.²⁹¹ . . . Catholic thought, because catholic, cannot accept that some areas of the mind be closed worlds, because it is precisely in its mission to live in symbiosis, in communion with the whole life of the world. . . . The essential of the Catholic thought is also defined . . . by this will of universal engagement.²⁹²

Father Régamey believed that the inspirational nature of the new approach to the sacred could be well served by non-figurative styles, which were conducive to a meditative contemplation:

Church art must edify and instruct, but it must do so in the same way that the liturgy does—with an intention not so much to educate as to help us contemplate for ourselves.²⁹³

For the two Dominican Fathers, the depth of the artist's engagement toward his/her work, searching for an inner trace of a transcendental presence, prepared him/her to express a particular vision of a higher power:

For lack of a rebirth of a truly sacred art, I believe in the appearance among us, and particularly in France, of artistic works created from a very pure 'religious' inspiration, but of a strictly individualistic nature and generally fortuitous, of works born spontaneously and as if by chance, where no one expected them, and even where one prepared them the least. Which is to say that I believe in miracles.

In the realm of the mind, the most promising chances are always found where the risks are the greatest.²⁹⁴

The emphasis put upon the artist's otherworldly emotions and, therefore, upon his/her personal interpretation of an undefined revelation, over the depiction of a recognizable religious subject, seemed a natural development given society's and Christianity's individualization:

To the collective and liturgical faith of which the cathedral was the spectacular expression, was substituted a new relationship between man and the divine. Christ does not speak to us all anymore, but to each one of us.²⁹⁵

Critics of the concepts behind Assy condemned the praise given to the artist's externalization of a personal sensibility, as it seemed to defeat the purpose of the communality of sacred art, a purpose thought best achieved with a more literal or objective rendition of religious subjects. Some accepted the claim that a certain spirituality emanated from the new art masters, but these critics differentiated the latter's 'psychological' sacred, fit for an exhibition space but not for a church, against the 'ecclesiastical' or 'traditional' sacred from which radiated the strongest collective sense of mystery in accordance to the liturgy.²⁹⁶

For Father Couturier, however, individuality and the universal calling of the Church were not dichotomous, but on the contrary, complementary:

In art, it is the maximum of singularity, the maximum of individualism that ensures the maximum of universality. Nothing in art touches as profoundly and universally as what has come out of the most secret, the most personal in a being.²⁹⁷

He was aware, though, that several obstacles had to be overcome for the alliance of these two forces to work: the public needed to accustom itself to new forms and a new approach to the artistic experience; non-believing artists had to open themselves up to a sense of the sacred beyond their own awareness; and the Church must realize the ability of abstract art and its artists to open new "windows onto the infinite."

Father Couturier's assessment of the experiment at Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce conceded that the church owed its worldwide celebrity "not to the fact that it was a masterpiece of the genre, but to the fact that it had been born out of the right idea."²⁹⁸ The true lesson of Assy consisted, he believed, in accepting the idea that the "buoyant, violent, generous life of modern art was offered as the best homage to Christ,"²⁹⁹ and that Assy, Audincourt and Vence (chapel decorated by Matisse), were just "specific successes, works of circumstance and born of fortuitous circumstances,"³⁰⁰ with no pretensions to impose themselves as new prototypes for all Catholic churches.

As enlightening and necessary as the appeal to the great secular masters was, Father Couturier and Father Régamey could only feel disillusioned about finding a solution to the dissociation of the modern plastic arts and the Church:

You ask me what I think of the 'tendencies of modern sacred art.' To tell you the truth, I do not detect any such 'tendencies,' and I do not even believe in the existence or the

possibility of a modern sacred art: to expect a truly sacred art from a materialistic society, and especially a Christian art from nations who went back to being practically pagan, seems to me a fantasy.

Sacred art implies certain essential elements that are of the collective and communal order: forms of sensitivity and imagination that are truly shared by the whole community. And these forms are only produced in types of societies radically different from the contemporary western societies: societies where religion embodies the totality of the life of the group.³⁰¹

... We will not resolve the problems of sacred art, they are the problems of Christianity. When one has understood that, one has understood the essential; the ills of sacred art are the ills of Christianity made visible like wounds appearing on a face.³⁰²

What "harvests" are there to hope for our successors before several long centuries? ... Little is possible. We have been, for the last century, in a kind of glacial period. ... The conditions in the "modern world" offer the mind too few chances.³⁰³

Until Vatican II, the Church continued to reinforce its conservative position regarding sacred art in spite of, or because of, other modern churches in France being inaugurated in the wake of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce. In 1955, Pius XII condemned, in *Musicae sacrae*,³⁰⁴ the participation of non-Catholic artists in Church decoration:

Consequently the artist who does not profess the truths of the faith or who strays far from God in his attitude or conduct should never turn his hand to religious art. He lacks, as it were, that inward eye with which he might see what God's majesty and His worship demand. Nor can he hope that his works, devoid of religion as they are, will ever really breathe the piety and faith that befit God's temple and His holiness, even though they may show him to be an expert artist who is endowed with visible talent. Thus he cannot hope that his works will be worthy of admission into the sacred buildings of the Church, the guardian and arbiter of religious life.³⁰⁵

A new era of wider collaboration between the Church and contemporary artists at large emerged with the work of the Vatican II Council. The adoption of the constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on December 4, 1963, first reaffirmed some of the earlier points made: the need to remove from

the churches the industrial, unworthy, over-proliferating statues and images; the need to educate priests in the field of the arts so they could make informed decisions about accepting or rejecting a work of art; the definition of sacred art as “works destined to be used in Catholic worship, to edify the faithful, and to foster their piety and their religious formation.”³⁰⁶ But the main contribution of this constitution resided in the new position of the Church on modern art forms as valuable assets and testimonials of the changing of the times:

The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved. The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men in times gone by.³⁰⁷

Pope Paul VI continued to preach the new openness of the Church toward modern art thereafter, as in his allocution *Le nobili espressioni*, on May 7, 1964, in which he invited artists from all backgrounds to put previous differences aside and rekindle the unique partnership between the two entities:

We have caused you trouble because we have imposed on you as a first canon that of imitation, on you who are creators, vivacious people, spurring a thousand new ideas and a thousand innovations. . . . We have placed a lead hood over you. We may as well say it, pardon us!³⁰⁸

It would be several years after the adoption of the constitution on sacred liturgy before Richier’s Crucifix could be moved back near the altar in the church

of Assy. During those years, another work of hers, a secular one, was also the subject of mockery and scorn: when *The Runner*, a bronze statue for a Parisian sports stadium, was unveiled, it was received with snickers and an offended rebuttal against installing it in a prominent location as originally planned. The work, instead, was relegated to a hallway where athletes used it as a place to hang their towels.³⁰⁹

Richier's crucifix, however, received a better ending. In 1969, one of the priests of Assy, Father Caille, retrieved the crucifix from the Mortuary chapel to position it near the altar during Holy Week. He then wrote to the Bishop of Annecy to obtain permission to permanently reinstate the sculpture at the altar. The request remained unanswered, and Richier's Crucifix remained in place at the center of the choir. It was placed under the French government's protection on March 15, 1971 when it was identified as a historical monument and part of the French national heritage. This designation acknowledged the extraordinary significance of this sculpture for the insight it offered on the intellectual and artistic currents of its time.³¹⁰

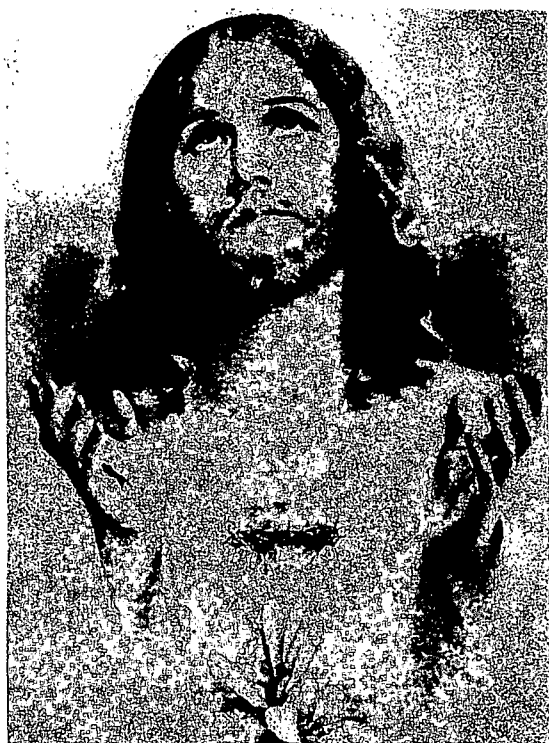
Father Couturier and Father Régamey believed that the inner process of creation in art masters compared to a spiritual journey whose outcome could be perceived as a close substitute to the sacred in a secular society. But the results from the church of Assy experiment disappointed them because of the lack of cohesion within the commissioned artwork, the public's violent rejection of the works testifying to an inability to see the spiritual value of abstract art, and by the

Vatican's condemnation of the original concept of opening the Church's sanctuaries to the creative works of non-believing artists.³¹¹ In response to their disillusion, both Dominicans favored a return to their pre-World War II stance on sacred art: it was best to sanction artisanal simplicity executed in faith until Christianity could be reconciled with modern society. Even with the overture to secular artists called for by Pope Paul VI, and the recognition of Christian sacred art's cultural importance by the French government, artistic creations by modern art masters for the Catholic Church continued to be quite modest until the last decade of the twentieth century.

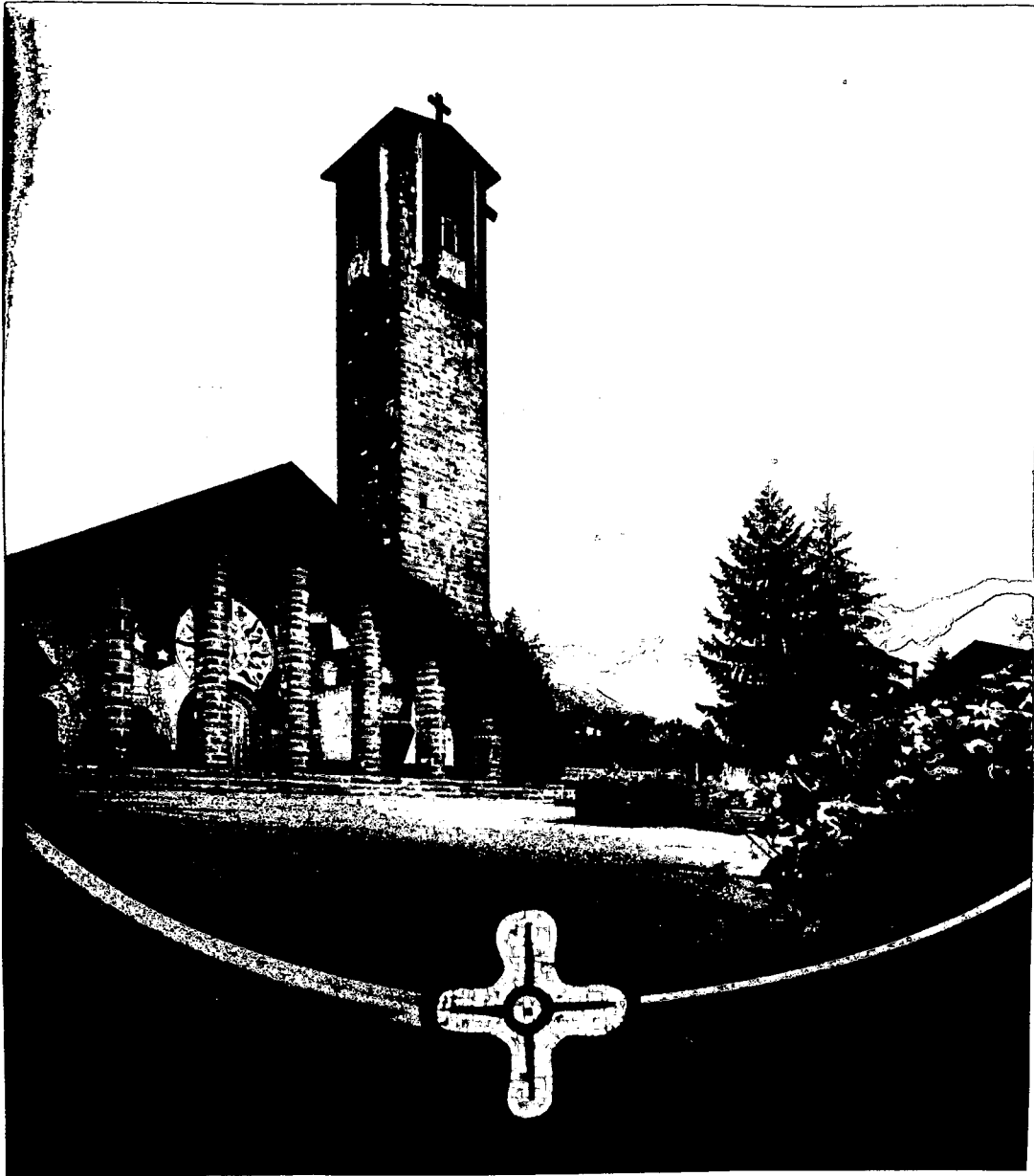
ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Nenno Barabino, *Madonna and Child*, winner of the 1950 Prix de Rome.
Reproduced from William S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy*.



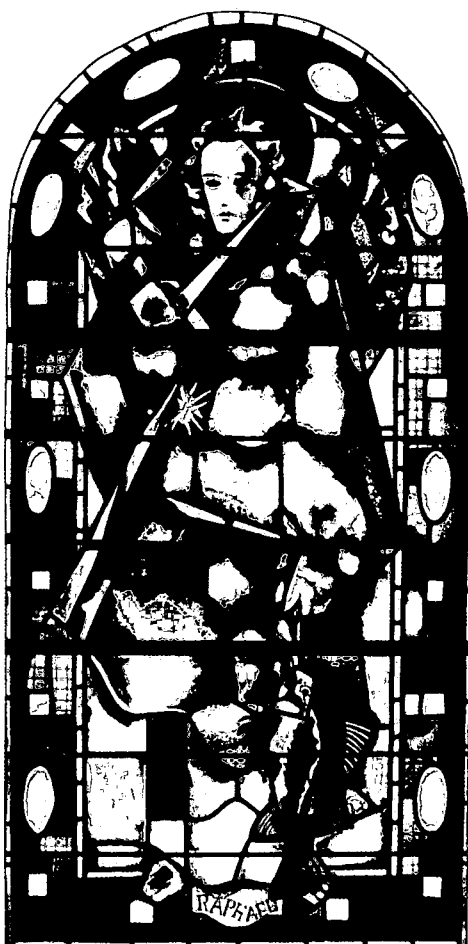
2. Typical Saint-Sulpician Christ. Reproduced from William S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy.*



3. Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Plateau d'Assy, exterior. Also known as the church of Assy. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



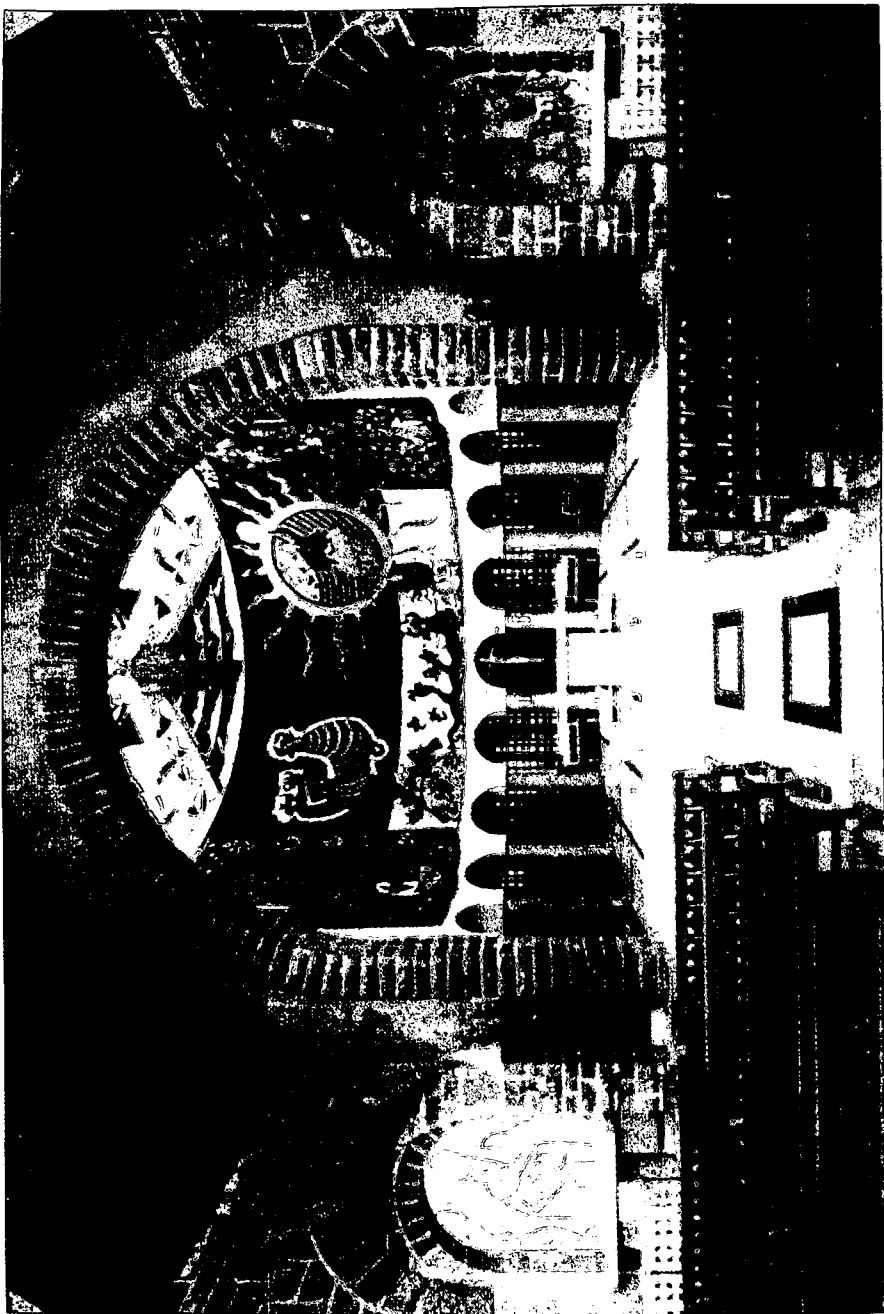
4. Georges Rouault, *Christ de la Flagellation*, church of Assy. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



5. Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier, *Saint Raphaël*, church of Assy. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



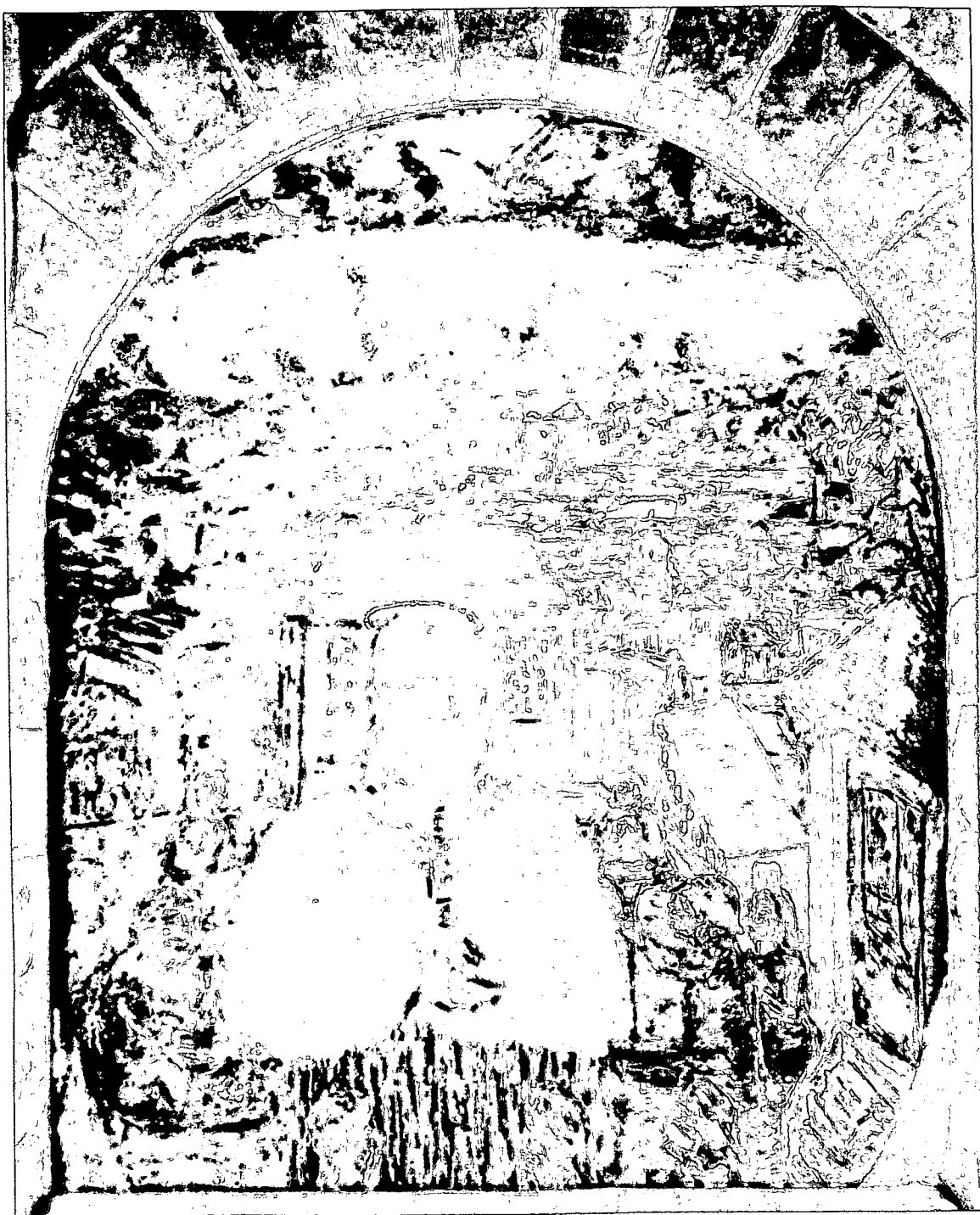
6. Detail of Fernand Léger's mosaic, *The Virgin of the Litany*, façade of the church of Assy. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



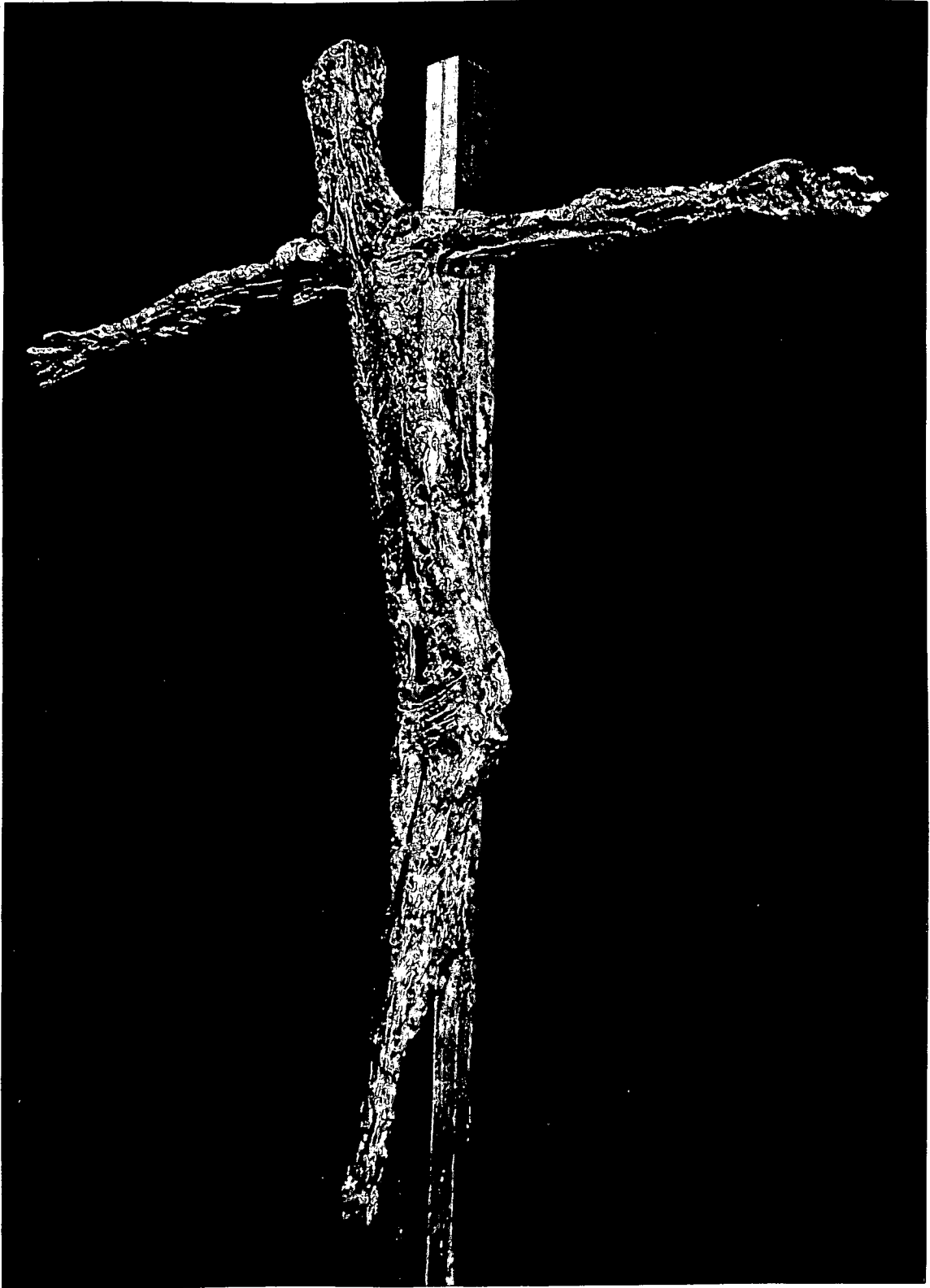
7. Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, interior. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



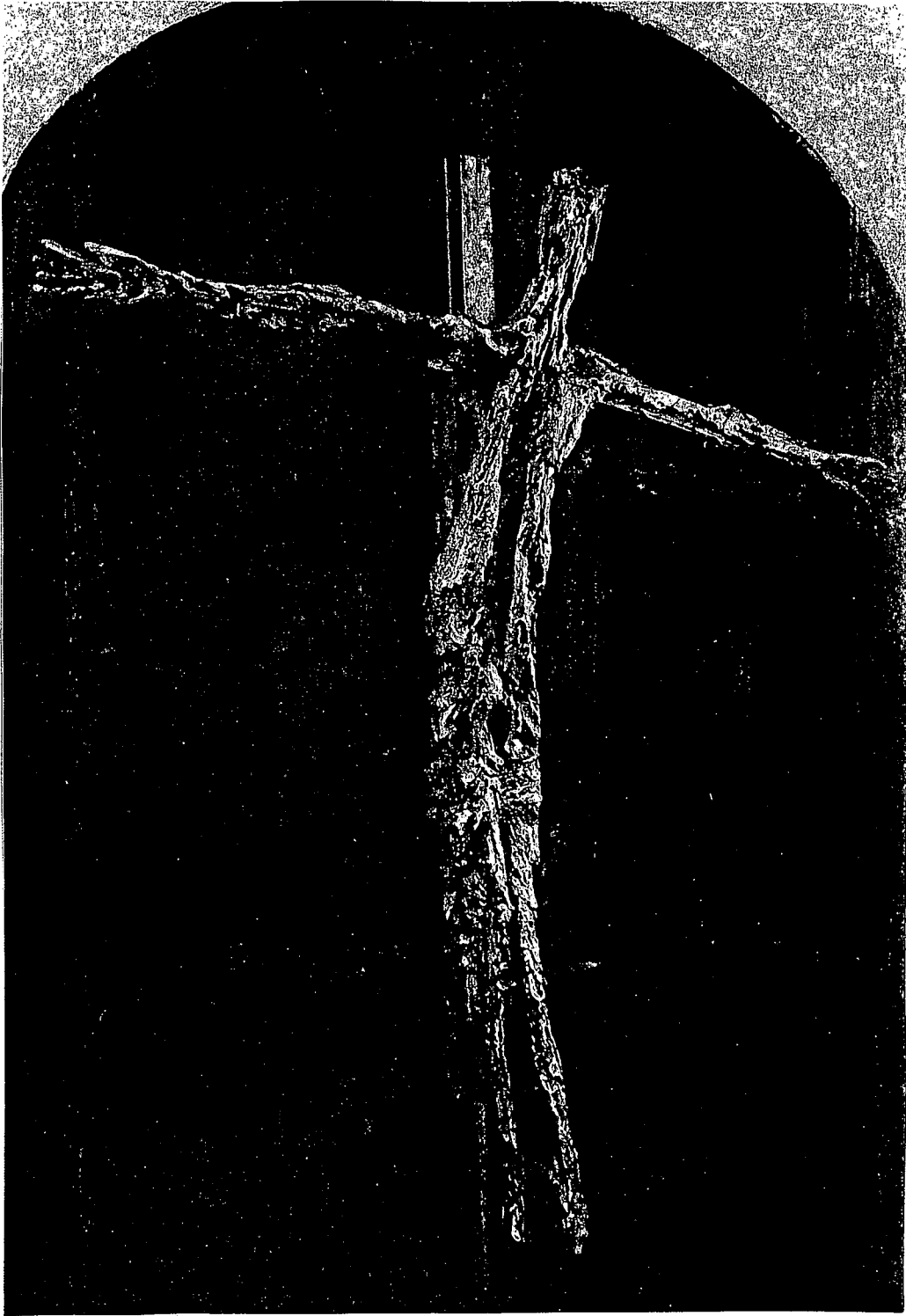
8. Henri Matisse, *Saint Dominique*, church of Assy. Reproduced from *Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Plateau d'Assy*.



9. Pierre Bonnard, *Saint François de Sales*, church of Assy. Reproduced from *Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Plateau d'Assy*.



10. Germaine Richier, *Crucifix*, church of Assy. Photograph by Fabrice Piraud.



11. Germaine Richier, *Crucifix*, church of Assy. Reproduced from *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1950).

NOTES

¹ Paul Claudel, "Lettre à Alexandre Cingria," in *Positions et propositions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), 226, quoted in William S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 7.

² Claudel, 223, quoted in Fr. Pie-Raymond Régamey, *Religious Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 88. Originally published in 1952.

³ The labeling of the three branches of decadant art are the ones used by Rubin, 15.

⁴ Canon Jérôme Labourt, President of the Paris diocesan commission on sacred art and liturgy, in *La Croix* (Paris), May 10, 1952, 5.

⁵ The separation of Church and State became French law on December 9, 1905.

⁶ See Pope Pius X and his anti-modernist statements from 1907, especially the encyclical *Pascendi Domini Gregis*.

⁷ Bernard Dorival, "Le divorce de l'art et du public au XIXe et XXe siècles," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 5-6 (January-February 1951): 5-8.

⁸ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Beyond belief: The artistic journey," in *Beyond Belief: Modern art and the religious imagination*, ed. Rosemary Crumlin (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998), 21.

⁹ Karl Borromaeus Frank, *Fundamental Questions on Ecclesiastical Art*, trans. M. Margretta Nathe (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1961), 23. Originally published in 1953.

¹⁰ *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1952): 20. All quotes taken from French-language sources are my translation, unless noted otherwise. "[Les objets et les décors des églises] doivent composer avec lui un *tout* homogène et indissoluble. . . . Plus précisément, leur rôle, . . . est d'aider les fidèles à contempler les réalités cachées dans le mystère eucharistique."

¹¹ Marie-Céline Laurent, introduction to *Valeur chrétienne de l'art* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1959), 7.

¹² Maurice Denis quoted in Frank Debié, *Urbanisme et art sacré: Une aventure du XXe siècle* (Paris: Critérion, 1992), 81. "Les objections principales que l'on peut faire à l'art abstrait sont que l'art religieux a un double but représentatif et apologétique; il doit être intelligible au plus grand nombre de fidèles."

¹³ See chapter one for an account of Father Couturier's reversal of opinion on abstract art.

¹⁴ Couturier in Debié, 81. "Un art né tout entier de l'Incarnation du Verbe n'a à peu près rien à attendre des schématisations, des abstractions avec lesquelles trop d'artistes de notre temps confondent le spirituel."

¹⁵ Fr. Pie-Raymond Régamey, co-director of the journal *L'Art Sacré* with Father Couturier, in *Religious Art*, 124.

¹⁶ "L'art sacré et son public," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 3-4 (November-December 1950): 29. "L'œuvre sacrée . . . doit . . . être un moyen de la communion qui s'accomplit dans la célébration liturgique."

¹⁷ Couturier quoted in Lai-Kent Chew Orenduff, *The Transformation of Catholic Religious Art in the Twentieth Century: Father Marie-Alain Couturier and the church at Assy, France* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 117.

¹⁸ Catholic artist Jean Bazaine, *Audincourt* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1957), 22, quoted in Laurent, 83-84. "Cet œil du peintre ouvert sur le monde, il n'est de plus en plus, à mesure que nous avançons, qu'un regard vers l'intérieur, un examen de conscience. . . . Le sujet est dessous et ce qui ruisselle sur les fidèles, ce n'est pas un jeu vide de lignes de couleurs. Ce ne sont pas non plus des 'sujets'. . . . Il ne reste plus qu'un homme débordé par son objet et qui pauvrement avec son cœur et ses mains d'homme doit exprimer l'inexprimable."

¹⁹ Catholic artist Albert Gleizes, *Art and Religion, Art and Sciences, Art and Production*, trans. Peter Brooke (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 1999), 34. The book is a transcription of a lecture first given in Paris on March 21, 1931.

²⁰ Henri Matisse quoted in Georges Mercier, *L'Art abstrait dans l'art sacré: La tendance non-figurative dans l'art sacré chrétien contemporain* (Paris: Editions E. De Boccard, 1964), 8. "Il n'y a qu'à voir l'œuvre. Invite-t-elle au recueillement, à la paix? Est-elle une élévation spirituelle? Si oui, appelez-la art sacré. L'artiste est celui qui peut exprimer."

²¹ Couturier, "Léger et le Moyen-Age," in *Fernand Léger: La forme humaine dans l'espace* (Montréal: Les Editions de l'Arbre, 1945), 18. "Le caractère 'religieux' d'une œuvre ne tient pas nécessairement, ni même principalement, à la représentation d'un sujet sacré, mais bien plus profondément, elle tient au caractère, à la *qualité* même des formes plastiques. Et cette 'qualité-là' leur vient directement, spontanément, des dispositions intimes de l'esprit et du cœur—et non pas du sujet représenté ou de quelque formule plus ou moins hiératique."

²² *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy*. Rubin will be the director of the New York Museum of Modern Art's department of painting and sculpture in the 1970s and 1980s.

²³ *Ibid*, 166.

²⁴ *The Transformation of Catholic Religious Art in the Twentieth Century: Father Marie-Alain Couturier and the church at Assy*.

²⁵ Orenduff, 152.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 163.

²⁷ "Les rapports des Dominicains avec l'art sacré: La revue *L'Art Sacré* des Pères Couturier et Régamey," in *Architecture et vie dominicaines au XXe siècle: Félicien Ninguarda, 1524-1595, nonce et réformateur catholique* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1999). This article is adapted from her doctoral dissertation: "Les artistes, l'art et la religion en France: Les débats suscités par la revue 'L'art Sacré' entre 1945 et 1954."

²⁸ Bouguereau quoted in Joseph Pichard, *L'Art sacré moderne* (Paris: B. Arthaud, 1953), 17. "Il n'y a pas d'art symbolique, social, religieux, il n'y a que l'art représentation de la nature."

²⁹ Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd, "Introduction: academic narratives," in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 8.

³⁰ Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 20.

³¹ For example, artist and critic C. E. Hallé who deplored that "latter-day art [impressionism], we are told, [is] the only painting nowadays permissible; any other is called academical and photographic." Quoted in Paul Barlow, "Faux loathing of the academic, or just what is it that makes the avant-garde so different, so appealing?" in Denis and Trodd, 22.

³² Barlow, 23.

³³ Pichard, 13.

³⁴ Bernard Champigneulle, "L'art religieux et le peuple fidèle," in *Problèmes de l'art sacré*, ed. Victor-Henri Debidour (Paris: Le Nouveau Portique, 1951), 121. "Nous trouvons [dans l'académisme] un ensemble de qualités techniques apprises chez les anciens dont on ne saurait contester la valeur, mais quelle dégradation de l'esprit! La fidélité aux traditions ne se manifeste alors que sous son aspect le plus superficiel tandis que le manque de vitalité et l'inintelligence des vertus qui animaient autrefois l'œuvre d'art aboutissent à vider l'œuvre d'art de son énergie spirituelle."

³⁵ The church of Saint-Sulpice gave its name to this quarter of Paris.

³⁶ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and popular culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 168.

³⁷ In *Les Foules de Lourdes*, published in 1906, Huysmans presented Saint-Sulpician art as the incarnation of the Devil's vengeance for having been vanquished by the Virgin Mary: "I [the Devil] will find a way to have you insulted ceaselessly through the continuous blasphemy of [artistic] monstrosity." Quoted in *Histoire de la France Religieuse*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and René Rémond (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992), 114. "Je [le Diable] m'y prendrai de telle sorte que je vous ferai insulter sans répit par le blasphème continu de la laideur."

³⁸ See section on the sacred art ateliers (pages 18-21) for more details.

³⁹ Jacques Maritain, "Some reflections on religious art," speech given at the *Journées d'Art Religieux* on February 23, 1924, <http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/artapp2.htm> (accessed October 23, 2009).

⁴⁰ Their teachings will be reviewed in the sections bearing their names (pages 21-38).

⁴¹ Clement Greenberg quoted in Colleen McDannell, 163.

⁴² Joanna M. Weber, "Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier and *L'Art Sacré*: Expression of the soul," *Christianity and the Arts* 3, no. 2 (1996): 27.

⁴³ Régamey, "Les conditions de l'art sacré dans le monde moderne," *La Vie Intellectuelle* (December 1948): 23. "Comme chez beaucoup la foi était un complexe d'infériorité, comme elle était insuffisante à les préserver des contaminations païennes, plus incapable encore de réagir

sur le monde moderne, . . . elle n'avait guère d'autre effet visible que de les entretenir dans un état d'esprit confessionnel, craintif, dont la traduction artistique ne pouvait être que des formes systématiquement distinctes de celles qu'élaborait la vie ambiante. Etat d'esprit anachronique, qui exigeait qu'un art, pour être 'religieux', fût un reflet du passé."

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁵ Régamey, "Ni snobisme, ni démagogie," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 7-8 (March-April 1952): 3-14.

⁴⁶ *L'Art Sacré*, no. 3-4 (November-December 1950): 29.

⁴⁷ Mercier, 157. Not the author's conviction. "Nos contemporains, comme leurs pères, y retrouvent leur conception de la sainteté à travers un idéal simple et à la taille de leur imagination."

⁴⁸ F. Demenge, "Le 'kitsch' dans l'art et la vie des Chrétiens," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 3-4 (November-December 1950): 26. "Le kitsch correspond à 'un pseudo-intérêt pour les réalités surnaturelles, à une pseudo-espérance,' à une pseudo-indépendance à l'égard du monde, à la recherche d'un contentement pris dans des compensations pseudo-religieuses aux déceptions terrestres, au lieu d'assumer la condition de la terre et de la surmonter."

⁴⁹ Addendum to *Exposition d'art sacré: 28 juin – 20 juillet 1947* (Nantes: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1947). "Le formidable succès de Saint-Sulpice réside justement dans cette prime constante à la paresse de l'esprit, à la paresse de la méditation, à la paresse du cœur. La religion est considérée comme une suite de rites se déroulant au milieu d'images immuables qui finissent par devenir des symboles abstraits."

⁵⁰ Rev. Rouquette, *La Croix*, August 25, 1951, quoted in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1952): 12. "[Ces statues] ne compromettent pas la foi. Sortes d'images d'Epinal et qui ne déplaisent pas aux simples, elles traduisent à leur manière, par leur absence même d'expression le mystère de l'au-delà dans ce qu'il a de non-représentable, la sérénité, la joie simple, la vie d'enfant de la Jérusalem céleste."

⁵¹ Labourt, *La Croix*, May 10, 1952, 5.

⁵² Rubin, 12.

⁵³ Georges Braque, *Zodiaque* (January 1954), 17. "On ne parle plus de l'art du peuple. On veut faire de l'art pour le peuple."

⁵⁴ Maurice Denis, "Conférence à la Revue des Jeunes," *Nouvelles théories de l'art moderne et de l'art sacré, 1914-1921* (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1922), quoted in Mercier, 40. "Tout le monde sait lire [aujourd'hui], le peintre religieux n'est plus qu'un peintre d'histoire: l'important c'est la ferveur de l'émotion qu'il communique."

⁵⁵ *Catalogue de l'exposition L'Art sacré au XXe siècle* (Boulogne-Billancourt: Editions de L'Albaron – Société Présence du Livre, 1993), 20.

⁵⁶ For example: L'Arche, founded in 1917, under the direction of Valentine Reyre and Maurice Storez, and later joined by Henri Charlier and Dom Bellot; Les Artisans de l'Autel, founded in 1919 by Paul Croix-Marie. But academicists too stood for an end to Saint-Sulpician art: Les Catholiques des Beaux-Arts, founded in 1919 by Paul Regnault, defined themselves as "a corporate, moral and religious group whose goal is Beauty." See *Catalogue de l'exposition L'Art sacré*, and Maurice Brilliant, *L'Art chrétien en France au XXe siècle: Ses tendances nouvelles* (Paris: Librairie Bloud et Gay, 1927?) for more details.

⁵⁷ Paul-Louis Rinuy, "Le renouveau de l'art sacré dans les années 1945-1960 et la 'querelle de l'art sacré,'" <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid46365/le-renouveau-de-l-art-sacre-dans-les-annees-1945-1960et-la-querelle-de-l-art-sacre.html> (accessed October 23, 2009). The intellectual reflection on sacred art occurred more in periodicals like *L'Artisan Liturgique*, *L'Art Sacré*, *La Vie Catholique*, *Les Cahiers Catholiques*, and *Les Cahiers Thomistes*, than in the creations coming out of the ateliers. "Le renouveau est beaucoup plus idéologique qu'esthétique, conceptuel que réellement plastique."

⁵⁸ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 194-95.

⁵⁹ Pichard, 33.

⁶⁰ André Boulter, "Un siècle d'art religieux au musée d'art moderne," *Etudes*, no. 268 (January 1951): 80.

⁶¹ Les Ateliers de l'Art Sacré, the strongest group among them, will close down in 1948.

⁶² Couturier quoted in *Catalogue de l'exposition L'Art Sacré*, 25. "Dans un monde où le sens de la vie n'est plus religieux, l'art ne saurait l'être. Dès lors quiconque s'isole du courant, devenu profane, de l'art, risque toujours de se couper de sa vitalité et de se singulariser artificiellement ses dons. Ils s'y épuiseront vite."

⁶³ *L'Art Sacré* was a journal of religious art founded in July 1935 as part of the program put forth by The Office Général d'Art Religieux. Created in 1934, OGAR's purpose was to "federate several artistic groups, give work to artists and inform the clergy of new artistic productions." *L'Art Sacré*, under the direction of Joseph Pichard, promoted ancient art as the best religious art, and deplored the lack of beauty in modern art styles. It was bought in the winter of 1936-37 and given to the Editions Dominicaines du Cerf. Father Couturier was the co-director of publication, with Father Régamey, from 1937 to his death in 1954. See Françoise Caussé, "Les rapports des Dominicains avec l'art sacré: La revue *L'Art Sacré* des Pères Couturier et Régamey," 173-74.

⁶⁴ Couturier, "Sur Picasso et les conditions actuelles de l'art chrétien," *L'Art Sacré* (April 1937): 99. "Les causes principales de la décadence de l'art sacré ne sont pas d'ordre artistique, elles sont d'ordre religieux. Cette décadence est liée à l'abaissement de l'esprit chrétien dans le monde occidental . . . il n'y a pas d'art chrétien possible quand il n'y a pas de civilisation chrétienne."

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 100. "Car la modernité ne se réduit pas à une collection de formes, elle a sa logique, sa spiritualité à elle, d'où la foi est absente, elle forme un tout."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* "Toute œuvre d'art sacré implique une référence essentielle à un autre monde: les personnages, leurs gestes et leurs expressions n'ont pas toute leur portée ni leur sens ici-bas; ils ne sont pas là tout à fait pour ce qu'ils font, ni même pour nous, c'est à peine s'ils nous font des signes: mais ils sont pour nous des signes. Ils appartiennent à un autre monde—et cette appartenance, qui doit être non point seulement conclue d'après le sujet, mais évidente, sensible, palpable, et qui ne peut pourtant pas être définie ni obtenue par aucune recette ni aucune manière, cette appartenance, substantiellement liée à chacun des éléments de l'œuvre, doit lui conférer un caractère immédiat de témoignage (au moins pour le temps qui voit naître cette œuvre)."

⁶⁷ Father Couturier would recant this statement after 1945, as will be explained further in this chapter (pages 24-30).

⁶⁸ Couturier, "Sur Picasso," 101.

⁶⁹ Ibid. "L'art non-représentatif est lui aussi, en dépit d'authentiques valeurs, essentiellement antireligieux: si l'art religieux se caractérise par sa référence au monde surnaturel, comment cet art qui ne se réfère pas au monde naturel, qui garde en soi-même toutes ses raisons de joie, qui referme sur soi toute sa portée et tout son sens, pourrait-il être religieux?"

⁷⁰ Couturier, "Rouault et le public ecclésiastique," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 33 (September 1938): 245.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Couturier, *Art et catholicisme* (Montréal: Editions de l'Arbre, 1941).

⁷³ Ibid., 26. "La contemplation et l'amour de la beauté, au degré où il sont requis pour être dans l'artiste principes efficaces de l'art, sont-ils par eux-mêmes de nature à faire naître et à favoriser en lui l'amour de Dieu?"

⁷⁴ Ibid., 64. "Si divers qu'il soit, tout l'art d'une époque est comme un grand corps vivant: tout ce qui s'isole, tout ce qui se retranche de l'unité de la vie, comme un membre malade, s'anémie, se dessèche, finit par se décomposer. A chaque époque il y a 'l'art vivant de ce temps-là' et c'est de cette vie commune et indivisible que la foi chrétienne doit se saisir et qu'elle doit pour ses fins propres transformer."

⁷⁵ Ibid., 34. "Dans l'art ancien, l'importance du sujet, la volonté de l'exprimer, obligeaient l'artiste à dépasser son œuvre: ces conditions extérieures orientaient un peu son âme, elles maintenaient un certain empire de la raison. . . . Mais il n'en va plus tout à fait de même dans l'art de notre temps: le 'sujet' . . . ne compte à peu près plus, le métier a été réduit aux moyens les plus simples . . . de l'expression, et par contre, l'activité des puissances d'intuition et de sensibilité a été portée à une pureté, à une acuité prodigieuses."

⁷⁶ Couturier, *La Vérité blessée* (Paris: Plon, 1984), 277. "Le caractère sacré d'une œuvre religieuse a sa première origine dans l'attitude même de l'artiste devant les réalités et devant son œuvre."

⁷⁷ See Sabine de Lavergne, *Art sacré et modernité: Les grandes années de la revue L'Art Sacré*, 194.

⁷⁸ Quoted from Couturier's 1945 "Notes sur l'Abstraction," in Joanna M. Weber, "Couturier's vision of the transformative power of art," *Arts* 2, no. 2-3 (winter-summer 1989-1990): 20.

⁷⁹ Couturier, "Sur Picasso," 101.

⁸⁰ Couturier quoted in Weber, "Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier and *L'Art Sacré*," 28.

⁸¹ Couturier, "Léger et le Moyen-Age," 19. "Qui dit 'consécration', au sens propre, dit, en effet, soustraction à l'ordre naturel et transfert à l'ordre surnaturel. Dès lors c'est l'art 'réaliste', l'art naturaliste qui, en s'opposant de par sa loi propre à ce transfert, est par la-même antireligieux, alors que l'abstraction au contraire, réalisant un certain transfert de l'ordre naturel à l'ordre plastique fait déjà tomber des barrières, tranche des liens et confère ainsi à l'art abstrait une aptitude, une disposition réelle à cette 'consécration' qui, sous une forme ou sous une autre, est essentielle à tout art religieux."

⁸² Couturier, "Pour les yeux," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 5-6 (January-February 1950): 3.

⁸³ Ibid. "En art ce n'est pas l'intelligence qui juge et discerne, ce sont les sens. Très exactement l'intuition sensible et non pas le raisonnement."

⁸⁴ See Father Couturier's article "Aux grands hommes, les grandes choses," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1950): 3-6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6. Translation by Granger Ryan in Couturier, *Sacred Art* (Austin: University of Texas, 1989), 36. "Personne ne peut donc dispenser le prêtre de fournir des idées, et des idées très précises. De ces idées l'artiste, lui, 'fera des formes.' Et c'est dans cette élaboration des formes que nous ne devons à aucun prix intervenir. Il s'agit d'une naissance: notre rôle est alors d'en protéger la liberté, la pureté, la faiblesse toujours vulnérables, et cela à force d'amitié, de respect et de prière."

⁸⁸ Father Régamey was the sole director of *L'Art Sacré* from 1939 to 1945 while Father Couturier was in exile in North America.

⁸⁹ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 130.

⁹⁰ The difference in style between the two directors would prompt Father Régamey to suggest in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1954), that the scandal about Germaine Richier's *Christ* was probably triggered by the absence of a caption or explanation under the picture of the work. For details, see chapter three.

⁹¹ Caussé, 181.

⁹² Régamey, "Les conditions de l'art sacré," 9. "Ces passions dessèchent le cœur, le durcissent et tarissent ces sources de bienveillance, . . . qui rendent fécond le génie."

⁹³ Ibid., 10. "Lorsque les intuitions de la sensibilité, de l'esprit et du cœur sont ensemble de la partie, ce sont leurs *conflits* qu'elles expriment. Les œuvres de notre temps ne sont pas euphoriques, mais pleines de dissonances et de pathétique."

⁹⁴ Ibid. "Ainsi le problème de l'art chrétien est-il beaucoup plus profond que celui d'une convenance ou disconvenance des formes plastiques récentes avec les thèmes chrétiens et avec les exigences des fidèles: il se pose dans la psychologie de l'homme d'aujourd'hui, jusque dans cet inconscient d'où émerge, où s'alimente, le génie créateur. Il tient à la difficulté qui existe pour l'homme moderne de devenir l'homme nouveau de l'Evangile."

⁹⁵ Régamey, "Exégèse de quelques lieux communs en matière d'art sacré," *Problèmes de l'art sacré*, 111. "Un 'style' est un *effet*, il ne peut jamais être un but; valable, c'est-à-dire concrétisé en des œuvres vivantes, il n'est jamais que la résultante de facteurs historiques très complexes."

⁹⁶ See Demenge.

⁹⁷ Dorival, "Le divorce de l'art," 8. "La masse n'a pas la sagesse, en art, de suspendre son jugement en face de ce qu'elle ne comprend pas et de faire confiance aux gens compétents. Somme toute, les raisons du divorce entre l'art et le public sont donc l'orgueil et la paresse."

⁹⁸ Régamey quoted in Rubin, 8.

⁹⁹ Régamey, "Les conditions de l'art sacré," 15. This expression is taken from Maritain's book *Art et scolastique* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art Catholique, c1920). "Ils vous jettent à la figure leur prétendue émotion."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 17. "La civilisation où l'art, spontanément, inconsciemment, s'alimente est trop corrompue. L'homme moderne ne croit pas assez aux réalités invisibles pour en donner aisément un équivalent visible. Pour lui, *surnaturel* veut dire irréel et *religieux*, opposé à la vie."

¹⁰¹ Régamey quoted in Sabine de Lavergne, 73. "L'art sacré [est] . . . une vie de référence à l'invisible dans et par les choses sensibles."

¹⁰² Régamey, "Les rôles de la décoration," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1949): 3. "La décoration [des églises] doit expliciter la louange qu'elle rend à Dieu et qu'elle contribue à faire rendre au peuple sanctifié. Elle doit disposer les fidèles à mieux célébrer les saints mystères. En cela, elle joue un rôle de prédication."

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4. "C'est dissiper toute impression de mystère. C'est évacuer le caractère surnaturel et vital des réalités de la foi par l'indiscrétion avec laquelle on les présente en système conceptuels et on les matérialise. . . . Aujourd'hui la création . . . d'une 'ambiance' favorable à la célébration du culte l'emporte sans aucun doute sur le rôle de catéchèse, soit que l'on considère les besoins véritables des fidèles, soit que l'on se demande quelles possibilités offrent les arts."

¹⁰⁴ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁶ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ Couturier, *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1954): 18. "J'ai l'impression que chez certains grands artistes, la puissance de l'intuition, de l'inspiration créatrice, supplée à tout. C'est dégoûtant, mais c'est comme ça."

¹⁰⁸ Couturier, *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1950): 6, 17-18. Translation by Granger Ryan in *Sacred Art*, 36, for the first paragraph. "D'abord nous ne savons pas ce qui se passe dans le secret des cœurs—ni quelles suppléances les intuitions du génie peuvent brusquement apporter. Le génie ne donne pas la foi, mais il y a entre l'inspiration mystique et celle des héros et des grands artistes, une trop profonde analogie pour que le préjugé favorable ne soit pas d'emblée en leur faveur." Translation by Weber in "Couturier's vision," 22, for the second paragraph. "Tout artiste vrai est un *inspiré*. Déjà par nature, par tempérament, il est préparé, prédisposé aux intuitions spirituelles: pourquoi pas à la venue de cet Esprit lui-même qui souffle, après tout, où il veut? Et tu entends sa voix. . . . Mais tu ne sais ni où il va ni d'où il vient."

¹⁰⁹ Régamey, "The modern artist and religious art: Christian possibilities in artists without faith," *Cross Currents*, no. 3 (spring 1951): 57.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 57-58.

¹¹¹ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 42-43.

¹¹² Régamey, "The modern artist," 60.

¹¹³ "Fondateur de l'église, le chanoine Devémy se rappelle," *Le Chanoine Devémy et ses amis parlent de l'église d'Assy* (Association des Amis du Plateau d'Assy, 1985), 6-7.

¹¹⁴ Father Couturier's stay in Rome is described in "La vie profonde," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1954): 31.

¹¹⁵ Couturier quoted in Rev. Richard James Douaire, "Pilgrimage to Assy—an appraisal," *Liturgical Arts* 19, no. 2 (February 1951): 30.

¹¹⁶ The church was entrusted to the Dominican order between 1941 and 1994.

¹¹⁷ Picasso explained his unavailability for such a commission by declaring that "streams do not flow back to their source." Quoted in "L'église du plateau d'Assy: Le miraculeux destin d'un lieu culte," *Figaro Magazine* (Paris), June 26, 2004, 68.

¹¹⁸ These four artists were members of the Ateliers d'Art Sacré and their work reflected a more traditional figurative representation of the biblical themes assigned to them.

¹¹⁹ Father Couturier had met Fernand Léger and Jacques Lipchitz in exile in New York, and had talked to them about the experience in progress at Assy.

¹²⁰ Braque did not want to define God because he was afraid the idea would replace the thing; he did not want of "a little God with hair, a moustache, a beard." See his interview in *Zodiaque* (January 1954): 10-17.

¹²¹ Quoted in Rubin, 126-127.

¹²² See Valérie Da Costa, *Germaine Richier: Un art entre deux mondes* (Paris: Editions Norma, 2006), 96. The account of how and why Germaine Richier was commissioned will be presented in the next section (pages 47-50).

¹²³ Couturier quoted in Weber, "Couturier's vision," 22.

¹²⁴ Famous expression uttered by Delacroix and adopted by Father Couturier.

¹²⁵ Couturier quoted in "Art for God's sake," *Time*, June 20, 1949, 63-64.

¹²⁶ Richier's experience will be seen in the next section (pages 59-60).

¹²⁷ Pierre Bonnard quoted in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1950): 9. "C'est moi qui vous remercie de m'avoir permis de faire ce tableau qui m'a tellement intéressé et qui m'a appris tant de choses, pour mon métier."

¹²⁸ Régamey, "L'église d'Assy: Chef-d'œuvre ou scandale? Lettre à V. H. Debidour," *Ecclesia*, no. 34 (January 1952): 115-116. "Et en chacun des éléments dont il était chargé chaque artiste a mis ce sérieux fondamental qui fait la noblesse, pour ainsi dire héroïque, de l'art vivant: le sérieux de qui ne dit rien au-delà de ce qu'il sent, de qui s'engage tout entier dans le moindre trait, la moindre touche, de qui va jusqu'au bout de ce que lui commande, comme dit Rouault, son 'ordre intérieur'. En cette fidélité, coûte que coûte, à l'exigence intime, ils ont opéré la rupture avec la part profane d'eux-mêmes, ils ont eu ce que chacun était capable de concevoir du sens de la transcendance divine, et parce que c'était dans les actes mêmes de leur création qu'ils tendaient vers le sacré, ils ont accompli effectivement des œuvres sacrées."

¹²⁹ Frank and Dorothy Getlein, *Christianity in Modern Art* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1961), 159.

¹³⁰ Carl Michalson, *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 22.

¹³¹ Germaine Richier quoted in Henri Peyre, "Painters and Sculptors of France today," *Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale French Studies, 1957): 69.

¹³² See *Germaine Richier: Rétrospective, 5 avril - 25 juin 1996* (Fondation Maeght, 1996), 21.

¹³³ Richier, *Ibid.*, 33. "Leurs formes déchiquetées ont toutes été conçues pleines et complètes. C'est ensuite que je les ai creusées, déchirées, pour qu'elles soient variées de tous les côtés et qu'elles aient un aspect changeant et vivant. J'aime la vie, j'aime ce qui bouge. . . . Je ne cherche pas à reproduire un mouvement. Je cherche plutôt à y faire penser. Mes statues doivent donner à la fois l'impression qu'elles sont immobiles et qu'elles vont remuer."

¹³⁴ Richier quoted in Jean Grenier, "Germaine Richier, sculpteur du terrible," *L'Œil* (Paris), September 1955, 30. "J'aime le tendu, le nerveux, le sec, les oliviers desséchés par le vent, les bois cassants. . . . Je suis plus sensible à un arbre calciné qu'à un pommier en fleurs."

¹³⁵ Richier quoted in Paul Guth, "Encounter with Germaine Richier," *Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale French Studies, 1957), 82.

¹³⁶ David Sylvester, "On Germaine Richier," *Germaine Richier: October 6 - November 5, 1955* (London: The Hanover Gallery, 1955), 2.

¹³⁷ Richier quoted in Frances Morris, *Paris Post War: Art and existentialism, 1945-1955* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 162.

¹³⁸ André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Germaine Richier: October 6 - November 5, 1955*, 4.

¹³⁹ See Valérie Da Costa, "Germaine Richier et le Christ d'Assy," *Bulletin du Centre de Recherche et d'Etude sur l'Histoire d'Assy* (C.R.E.H.A.), 2001.

¹⁴⁰ Richier quoted in Rubin, 160. The information on the steps taken by Richier to make the Crucifix are taken from Rubin, 161-162, and Da Costa, *Un art entre deux mondes*, 92-96.

¹⁴¹ Da Costa, "Un art entre deux mondes," 93-94. "Je ne veux pas une sculpture analysée au demi-centimètre carré, je veux le résultat d'une conception, d'un savoir, d'une audace, le tout si possible très vivant. . . . Je n'envisage pas une sculpture de plusieurs mois de travail, je veux aller directement si possible."

¹⁴² Nardone had been the model for the famous—or infamous—statue of Balzac executed by Rodin. Richier used him for several of her sculptures.

¹⁴³ Richier quoted in "Removal at Assy," *Time*, April 23, 1951, 68.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Morris, 162.

¹⁴⁶ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, new revised standard version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁷ Richier quoted in Rubin, 160.

¹⁴⁸ Richier quoted in *Germaine Richier: Rétrospective*, 74. "La presse est bonne et je crois que ma conversation avec le Christ de terre, de bois et de conviction a donné de bons

résultats . . . et personnellement, je suis heureuse que les montagnes n'aient pas à me regarder d'un œil inquiet."

¹⁴⁹ Richier quoted in Paul Guth, 84.

¹⁵⁰ The incident is described in Rubin, 49-50.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Rubin, 49.

¹⁵² The group was headed by Dr. Pierre Lemaire. It would evolve into an extremist traditionalist movement. See Rinuy, "Le renouveau de l'art sacré."

¹⁵³ Published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 13, 1949. Cardinal Costantini was the Vatican's secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

¹⁵⁴ Text from the tract itself. My translation.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Rubin, 50.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in *Time*, April 23, 1951, 68.

¹⁵⁷ The Crucifix would later be moved to the presbytery, and then to the mortuary chapel in the church.

¹⁵⁸ Rev. R. J. Douaire was an art critic active in the American periodical *Liturgical Arts*. Will be combined with the next note in the final version of the thesis.

¹⁵⁹ Douaire, "Pilgrimage to Assy," 30.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 10, 1951, quoted in Rubin, 54.

¹⁶² Well-known philosopher described as 'Christian existentialist.' His judgment of the Crucifix was based on a photograph of the work, as did Cardinal Costantini's.

¹⁶³ Gabriel Marcel, "Lettre à la Table Ronde sur le Christ de l'église d'Assy," *La Table Ronde* (July 1951): 181-182. "Ce qui est intolérable . . . c'est de prétendre offrir à la contemplation des fidèles, au nom d'un dogmatisme à la base duquel la psychanalyse n'aurait aucune peine à découvrir trop souvent l'impuissance et le ressentiment, les fruits mort-nés d'une cérébralité desséchée."

¹⁶⁴ V.-H. Debidour was a French literary and art critic.

¹⁶⁵ Debidour, "Autour d'un sujet brûlant: Réflexion sur l'église d'Assy," *Ecclesia*, no. 33 (December 1951): 37. "Crucifié intemporel et en quelque sorte métaphysique, [il] est à la frontière où la triomphante majesté divine cesserait d'être humainement représentable."

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* " . . . indicible et presque insaisissable paix qui sauve le Dévot Christ."

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* " . . . conçu comme un sacrement desséché et pourri, bon à jeter au feu ou à flotter entre deux eaux dans un marais."

¹⁶⁸ Debidour complained that visitors were going to the Rosary Chapel in Vence, designed by Henri Matisse, between their bath time and their cocktail hour.

¹⁶⁹ Debidour, "Autour d'un sujet brûlant," 38. "Mais n'était-il pas en droit de penser qu'il y avait contradiction pour l'Eglise à célébrer la Messe devant une figure de Notre-Seigneur qui ne traduit point de Lui une autre image que celle qui apparaissait aux Juifs et aux Romains ricanants, ou qui hantait les disciples désespérés, avant Emmaüs et avant la Pentecôte?"

¹⁷⁰ Régamey quoted in Rubin, 163.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1952): 19. "Dans cinquante ans, qui se souviendra du R. P. Régamey, du R. P. Couturier, de toutes leurs admirations béates, naïves et fructueuses devant d'affreuses productions tantôt baroques, tantôt burlesques, tantôt monstrueuses, tantôt sataniques?"

¹⁷² Henri Charlier, "A propos du Christ de l'église d'Assy," *Les Ecrits de Paris*, September 1951, 55. "[L'entreprise des décorateurs de l'église d'Assy] vise à la destruction des bases de la pensée, à la négation de tout apprentissage, au mépris des longs travaux de l'humanité: il s'y mêle une sorte d'illuminisme portant à croire que l'humanité va se renouveler complètement, par une nécessité d'évolution naturelle."

¹⁷³ Henri Charlier, *L'Observateur de Genève*, 15 décembre 1951, quoted in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1952): 16. "Les images brutales que proposent Assy et Audincourt rejettent la notion classique des formes associées aux idées claires, distinctes et ordonnées de la culture humaniste. . . . Il ne faut plus que les hommes se souviennent d'une forme humaine. . . . Grâce à la nouvelle imagerie religieuse, L'Eglise, mise au goût du jour, va retrouver sa candeur primitive, propice à l'avènement d'un monde nouveau d'où pourra ressurgir l'art des fétiches et des sorciers."

¹⁷⁴ Guy-Jean Auvert, *Défense et illustration de l'art sacré* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1956).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25. "Jamais nous ne trouverons la main de Dieu dans un art déséquilibré, surréel et 'abstractiste', dans lequel divague la raison de l'homme et se brise la nature humaine."

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 32. "Tout art qui n'est pas respectueux des formes et des harmonies de la nature est incapable d'illustrer les révélations surnaturelles. Si Dieu est descendu jusqu'à nous en se revêtant de notre humaine nature pour accomplir le mystère de la Rédemption, il n'y a pas de raison pour que la foi nous fasse remonter à lui autrement que par le surnaturalisme de la propre nature dont le Rédempteur a fait le moyen idéal de sa manifestation au genre humain. L'art de la foi sera donc l'art le plus naturel."

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 24. "A la différence d'une simple réalisation profane, une œuvre d'art sacré doit donner à comprendre tel ou tel enseignement tout en réservant à ses apparences la part du silence et de l'inexprimable. . . . Et plus le mystère s'accusera dans ses œuvres, plus l'impression du sacré nous saisira."

¹⁷⁸ Debidour, "Autour d'un sujet brûlant," 37. "Le Christianisme—donc l'art Chrétien—se doit de porter *dans* le siècle un témoignage qui n'est pas *du* siècle. Il faut être avec son temps: mais cette exigence pour lui ne peut se résoudre qu'ainsi: donner à son temps, non pas ce dont celui-ci regorge et s'enivre, mais ce dont il manque, ce dont il a soif. Hier ce pouvait être l'inquiétude (mais joyeuse . . .). Aujourd'hui, sur notre fond d'angoisse, c'est la sérénité."

¹⁷⁹ The refutation will be presented in the next section.

¹⁸⁰ Régamey, "The modern artist," 55-57.

¹⁸¹ Henri Charlier, "A propos du Christ," 51. "En admettant qu'ils soient capables de faire des œuvres d'une qualité artistique supérieure, ils ne peuvent que donner une satisfaction intellectuelle. Ils peuvent peindre le Christ sans parler du Christ mais d'un homme mort, comme on peint une nature morte dont le sujet n'importe aucunement à personne sinon qu'il permet un équilibre de forme et de couleurs."

¹⁸² Ibid., 52. "On ne sait plus ce que c'est qu'une société chrétienne et ce qu'exige sa formation; on veut ignorer que l'art, après la glorification de Dieu, a des devoirs sociaux et un rôle social."

¹⁸³ André Malraux quoted in Rubin, 51. "C'est le seul Christ moderne devant lequel quiconque peut prier."

¹⁸⁴ Bernard Dorival, "Malheurs et heures de la sculpture sacrée française contemporaine, 1945-1968," in *Catalogue de l'exposition L'Art sacré*, 160. "[Le Christ de Richier] affirmait un amour accueillant en toute détresse et que se détachant de la croix, il se penchait fraternellement vers ceux et celles qui venaient l'implorer."

¹⁸⁵ Isaiah 53:3.

¹⁸⁶ Régamey quoted in Da Costa, "Germaine Richier et le Christ d'Assy." "Le seul 'scandale' était celui même du mystère du calvaire, que le sculpteur avait évoqué pour les yeux, en son alliance d'abjection et de surgissement triomphal."

¹⁸⁷ Denise Kohler quoted in Rubin, 164.

¹⁸⁸ Father Roguet, *Art Chrétien*, no. 24 (1961): 39, quoted in Mercier, 126. "Le mystère eucharistique est par lui-même assez déconcertant pour notre imagination et notre sensibilité pour que ce crucifix apporte à ces facultés sensibles l'aliment concret et immédiatement perceptible dont elles ont besoin pour soutenir notre foi."

¹⁸⁹ Dorival, *Médecine de France*, no. 18 (1950): 32, quoted in Mercier, 128. "Immense et éloquent, pitoyable et surhumain, héritier des Christs de douleur du XVe siècle et des Pantocrators byzantins . . . première image pas trop indigne de son objet que la sculpture nous ait donnée depuis la fin du Moyen-Age."

¹⁹⁰ Morvan Lebesque quoted in Rubin, 56.

¹⁹¹ R. P. Ignace André-Vincent, "Pour une théologie de l'image," *Civilisation de l'Image: Recherches et Débats du Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français*, no. 33 (December 1960): 175. "Jamais l'art à ce point n'osa mortifier l'art. Nous sommes aux limites. Outrance sans doute, mais dénuée d'artifice et qui représente une réaction spontanée de la conscience contre tout ce qu'a pu produire au cours de deux siècles d'académisme le culte de l'art pour l'art et de la forme pour la forme, la passion du joli ou du décoratif. Réaction de la vérité dans la nuit des sens."

¹⁹² Germaine Richier, letter to Canon Devémy, 1954, quoted in Da Costa, *Un art entre deux mondes*, 97. "Soyez rassuré monsieur l'abbé de ma conviction et de ma foi. Je n'ai pas toujours été une croyante disciplinée, mais j'ai toujours été une croyante! Cette croyance n'a jamais failli. Jamais je n'aurais accepté l'œuvre que vous m'avez confiée si dans mon cœur il y avait eu un doute."

¹⁹³ Ibid., 99. She agreed to have her Christ transferred to the mortuary chapel instead of shipped back to her studio. She even suggested to re-patinate the bronze as well as put a gold, green or purple brocade on him so that "this Christ of misery could become again a Christ of peace." In 1954, she remarried in the mortuary chapel of Assy in the presence of her Christ. "Ma

déception était grande de voir, après de longs mois et de non moins grandes promesses, ce malheureux Christ exposé aux quatre vents, à la curiosité des passants. . . . Je m'engage de conserver cette caisse [où le Christ est mis] sans en faire *aucun usage*, mais dans mon atelier il sera à l'abri de toute curiosité, de toutes pensées malveillantes. J'y tiens et c'est le seul endroit où normalement il doit revenir pour lui conserver le calme dont il a bien besoin."

¹⁹⁴ Yves Florenne, "Revue des revues: Deux querelles; Schisme et croisade de l'art sacré," *Le Monde* (Paris), November 22, 1951, 9. "Toute la question pourtant est en ceci qu'une œuvre d'art moderne—et comme telle *discutable*—peut conduire à invoquer le scandale et appeler l'interdit, alors que la honte—elle, *indiscutable*—qui s'étale dans nos églises, est tolérée, digérée, bénie, ou quand elle est réprouvée, c'est platoniquement et sans que la réprobation entraîne la moindre sanction! Or le scandale n'est pas dans la présence en une seule église d'une œuvre moderne déconcertante, mais dans l'envahissement du temple par la pacotille des marchands."

¹⁹⁵ Yves Florenne, "Le Christ interdit," *Le Monde*, June 17, 1951, 1. "Ce qui me paraît grave, en somme, c'est que le Christ de chair saignante et déchirée soit toujours jugé inconvenant, inquiétant, excessif surtout; et toujours souhaitable, ou bien toléré, le Christ de sucre fondant."

¹⁹⁶ Jean Onimus, "L'imagerie religieuse en notre temps," *Civilisation de l'Image: Recherches et Débats du Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français*, no. 33 (December 1960): 108. "De nos jours, c'est l'art profane qui est sincère, lyrique, jaillissant et c'est l'art sacré qui ment. . . . Nous vivons dans le faux [le faux naïf, le faux moderne, le faux gothique présents dans l'imagerie religieuse actuelle] et quand un artiste s'avise d'être sincère, quand il nous trouble et nous secoue nous criions au sacrilège et chassons Germaine Richier du sanctuaire."

¹⁹⁷ *Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce, Plateau d'Assy*, 3rd ed. (1963), 11. ". . . devant [cette] image qui nous met davantage au pied de la croix du Golgotha que son traditionnel reflet, trop habituel et ornemental pour nous toucher encore."

¹⁹⁸ Régamey, "L'église d'Assy," 116-117. "Lorsqu'on ne perçoit pas la qualité d'un langage plastique, et que ce langage exprime certaines valeurs spirituelles, on ne perçoit pas davantage celles-ci, et l'on va jusqu'à accuser les œuvres méconnues d'une subversion des valeurs spirituelles."

¹⁹⁹ Couturier quoted in *L'Art Sacré*, 9-10 (May-June 1954): 40. "Tout vrai chef-d'œuvre réclame un silence que risque toujours de briser l'explication et ses concepts. . . . Les paroles nous arrêtent à mi-chemin. . . . Le chef-d'œuvre exige un dépaysement."

²⁰⁰ Régamey, *Ibid.* "Empêche-t-on forcément le 'dépaysement' de ceux qui y ont *droit*, lorsqu'on se soucie d'apaiser aussi ceux qui en sont incapables, ceux à qui la poésie, comme le Père [Couturier] le disait d'une certaine fantaisie, 'est une injure personnelle?'"

²⁰¹ Régamey, *Ibid.* "Lorsque j'en vis la photo sans une légende dans *l'Art Sacré*, je pressentis tout de suite le drame. C'est son caractère même d'être abrupt, d'être œuvre de *rupture*, et violemment: ce serait un contre-sens que de l'accompagner d'aucune 'considérations'. De fait, tout le scandale est venu, non pas de l'œuvre elle-même à Assy, mais de cette photo."

²⁰² Yves Florenne quoted in Debié, 120. "Dans un monde désespérément fermé, l'Eglise est-elle en train de se fermer à son tour? . . . l'erreur n'est pas dans les artistes ou dans les œuvres, elle est tout entière dans le jugement, ou plutôt le préjugé qui pousse à séparer ce qui est 'modéré' de ce qui est 'révolutionnaire'; dans l'élection du 'juste milieu' et la réprobation de l'extrême. Alors que la création est toujours extrême; alors que l'Eglise a été créée pour vivre dans l'extrême."

²⁰³ Raymond Cogniat, "Malheur à celui par qui le scandale arrive," *Arts* (Paris), April 6, 1951, 1. "Il y a dans le refus de l'art moderne par l'Eglise une sorte de démission dans le présent qui est beaucoup plus grave pour ceux qui le pratiquent que les attaques des adversaires, car cette démission volontaire des intéressés est un signe de faiblesse plus inquiétant que les exagérations (s'il y en a) dues à un excès de vitalité."

²⁰⁴ Régamey, *Religious art*, 216.

²⁰⁵ Régamey quoted in Auvert, 104. "L'art figuratif est tel qu'il incite l'esprit à la pure contemplation sans tenir compte des indiscrets discours de la raison et du banal bon sens."

²⁰⁶ Fernand Léger, "A propos du corps humain considéré comme un objet," *Fernand Léger: la forme humaine dans l'espace*, 71. "La peinture demande tout de même, comme toute chose intellectuelle, une durée pour l'adaptation. Il y a une période préliminaire de confusion assez pénible dans laquelle le goût, le choix doivent se former, se réaliser. Cela ne se fait pas en cinq minutes. C'est plus long que de choisir une cravate."

²⁰⁷ "Malheur à celui par qui le scandale arrive," 1. Raymond Cogniat was a well-known art critic who would become the founder of the *Biennale de Paris* in 1959 under the direction of André Malraux.

²⁰⁸ Cogniat, "Documents en manière de conclusion," *Arts*, June 8, 1951, 1, 3.

²⁰⁹ Mme Marguerite Jacquier-Lepelletier, *Ibid.* "Il représente un tronc d'arbre torturé. . . . J'aimerais le rencontrer à la campagne, au tournant d'un chemin propice à la méditation."

²¹⁰ M. Gérard Philbert, *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹¹ M. Praxiteles Zographos, *Ibid.* "Ce plan et cette tradition ne proviennent pas du peintre (à qui n'appartient que l'Art) mais de l'ordonnance et de la disposition des saints pères qui les ont bâties."

²¹² A sick at Assy, *Ibid.* "Il était misérable et miséricordieux. Il symbolisait l'état de notre âme désemparée qui, parfois, ne sait plus voir la forme vraie des hommes et des choses. Il était notre Christ, en rien semblable à celui des autres chapelles. . . . Christ dépourvu de tout artifice, simple, misérable, comme nous, nous nous sentions en communion plus étroite. S'il devait nous être repris, il ne fallait pas le laisser s'incorporer tellement à notre église et à nos besoins."

²¹³ Excerpt of a letter addressed to the Bishop of Annecy, *Ibid.* "Cette effigie douloureuse, défigurée, torturée avait pour certains, au moins un mérite, celui de faire réfléchir. Et à l'heure où, pour tant de chrétiens, la religion n'est plus qu'une sorte d'habitude confortable, hebdomadaire et pas trop gênante, ce mérite n'est pas mince."

²¹⁴ The questionnaire was published in the spring of 1951 in *France Catholique*, *Témoignage Chrétien*, *Ecclesia*, and *Le Figaro Littéraire*. One in every thousand readers responded. Debidour purposely did not solicit the opinions of art journal or magazine readers because he believed that sacred art was supposed to satisfy the faithful, not art lovers. See Debidour, *Problèmes de l'Art Sacré*, 164.

²¹⁵ Victor-Henri Debidour, ed., *Problèmes de l'Art Sacré* (Paris: Le Nouveau Portique, 1951).

²¹⁶ Anonymous, *Ibid.*, 223.

²¹⁷ Mr. De Plinval, *Ibid.*, 222.

²¹⁸ Mr. Savaux, *Ibid.*, 223.

²¹⁹ Debidour, *Ibid.*, 267-8. "On n'a pas demandé à l'art chrétien, en tant qu'art, de représenter et d'enseigner le dogme et l'amour, mais d'en être *inspiré* et de le *rayonner*."

²²⁰ M. Hénard, *Ibid.*, 256. "[L'art abstrait] s'affranchit, à l'ultime degré de ce qui est possible, des servitudes du sensible, du temporel et du matériel, de l'anecdote. Il est fait pour délester l'âme. . . . L'art abstrait, par son absence totale de figuration, serait bien dans l'absolu, l'art religieux par excellence. Il ouvre des perspectives immenses à la contemplation, et ne met aucun obstacle à la piété du fidèle, mais, bien au contraire, favorise la contemplation tout intérieure. . . . Mais, là encore, il ne faut pas s'y méprendre, car l'art abstrait actuel repose en majeure partie sur le subjectivisme et ne mène qu'à la confession du Moi. . . . Il ne suffit pas de lâcher le corps pour baigner dans l'Esprit."

²²¹ Régamey, *Ibid.*, 302.

²²² Debidour, *Ibid.*, 288.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 290.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 292. "La Vierge, engoncée de jaune, a je ne sais quoi de maléfique comme une idole."

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 293. "L'art 'indépendant', dans ses facilités ruineuses comme dans ses hautes beautés, a un caractère déconcertant et agressif. Ce n'est pas un reproche, *quand il est beau*."

²²⁷ Debidour presented this identity as being an assertion put forward by Father Régamey, *Ibid.*, 308.

²²⁸ Maurice Brillant was a Catholic writer and art critic.

²²⁹ In another newspaper, *Le Figaro* (Paris), André Warnod had asked several personalities to share their thoughts about the new tendencies of contemporary sacred art after the inauguration of the church at Audincourt (published between September 1951 and March 1952).

²³⁰ Canon Jérôme Labourt; Mgr Chevrot, author of a book on virtues.

²³¹ Labourt, *La Croix*, May 10, 1952, 5. "[Si art non-figuratif veut dire] juxtapositions de lignes ou de couleurs qui n'ont d'objectivité que dans l'imagination (à leur avis géniale) de leurs auteurs, j'y suis opposé."

²³² Paul Tournon, *La Croix*, May 13, 1952, 5. "L'hermétisme, les déformations systématiques, les outrances de certaines œuvres d'art moderne sont les plus sérieux obstacles à une acceptation unanime du clergé et des fidèles qui demandent à l'art de les instruire et de les émouvoir dans la simplicité et la clarté."

²³³ Jean Bazaine, *La Croix*, May 14, 1952, 5. "Nos églises 'modernes' sont le plus souvent haïssables, parce que leur laideur est morale, parce qu'elles sont devenues comme d'immenses abcès de fixation de toutes nos hypocrisies, de nos lâchetés, de nos mensonges; l'homme s'y reconnaît à chaque pas dans ce qu'il a de pire. Est-ce cela que nous voulons? . . . Le caractère sacré d'une œuvre n'est pas dans sa 'figuration'; . . . *demande-t-on à ces œuvres* [verrières de Chartres par exemple] *d'être lisible*? Mais les sujets sont *dessous*, et tout ce

que l'artiste a apporté de ferveur, de sensibilité, c'est cela qui transparaît: la vie, *l'animation* intérieure de la forme."

²³⁴ Rouault, *La Croix*, May 11-12, 1952, 5.

²³⁵ Daniele Menozzi, *Les Images: L'église et les arts visuels* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1991), 14.

²³⁶ Ibid., 20.

²³⁷ Text of the Council of Constantinople quoted in Madeleine Ochsé, *La nouvelle querelle des images* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1952), 41. "Il faut que nous puissions contempler toute la sublimité du Verbe à travers son humilité. Il faut que le peintre nous mène, comme par la main, au souvenir de Jésus vivant en chair, souffrant, mourant pour notre salut et acquérant ainsi la rédemption du monde."

²³⁸ Menozzi, 25.

²³⁹ Text of the Second Council of Nicaea quoted in Régamey, *Religious art*, 100.

²⁴⁰ Menozzi, 30.

²⁴¹ Saint Bernard quoted in Ochsé, 56. "On doit recourir aux ornements matériels, pour porter à la dévotion un peuple charnel sur lequel les choses spirituelles ont peu de prise."

²⁴² Menozzi, 31.

²⁴³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴⁴ Georges Braque, *Zodiaque* (janvier 1954): 12, 14. "La Renaissance fait de la mise en scène. . . . À la Renaissance on a remplacé la spiritualité par l'idéalité. . . . Tout l'art renaissant est pure virtuosité: il s'agit de faire du trompe-l'œil, de faire illusion. . . . Mais c'est évidemment tout l'opposé d'un art sacré."

²⁴⁵ Menozzi, 41.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁴⁷ Ochsé, 69.

²⁴⁸ Pichard, 10-11.

²⁴⁹ R. Kevin Seasoltz, *The House of God: Sacred art and church architecture* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963), 38-9.

²⁵⁰ Fanny Dugeon, "L'Eglise et l'abstraction: Intégration ou profanation? L'exposition 'libri e oggetti d'arte religiosi,' Rome, 1950," http://hicsa.univ-paris1.fr/documents/pdf/CIRHAC/La%20Profanation_%20Dugeon.pdf (accessed October 23, 2009).

²⁵¹ Pius XI quoted in Susan J. White, *Art, Architecture, and Liturgical Reform* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990), 161.

²⁵² Ibid., 160.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ *Mediator Dei et Hominum*,
www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei_en.html (accessed October 23, 2009), paragraph 196.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., paragraph 195.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ See critiques in chapter III.

²⁵⁹ Herbert Read, "Art tradition and the contemporary visual arts," in *Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts*, ed. Finley Eversole (N.Y., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 43.

²⁶⁰ Auvert, 67. "Tradition signifie [non pas paralysie ou impuissance, mais] au contraire la puissance de projeter loin devant nous au-delà des horizons encore obscurs du progrès et de la science, les enseignements lumineux du passé afin que se perpétuent la grandeur et le prestige des principes créateurs de l'art . . . à l'évolution de l'esthétique. La tradition sera la torche, fumeuse mais ardente, qui permettra aux artistes de se retrouver à leur place dans le labyrinthe obscur des créations nouvelles."

²⁶¹ Ibid., 70. "La tradition est un fondement, non une superstructure: un moyen et non une fin: un élément qui ne se voit pas mais qui anime et soutient l'œuvre. . . . La tradition est ainsi pour l'art ce que sont pour les lettres la grammaire et la syntaxe."

²⁶² "Pope condemns art in abstract forms," *New York Times*, September 6, 1950.

²⁶³ Pius XII, "The Sovereign Pontiff's Address To the First International Congress of Catholic Artists (September 5, 1950)," *Liturgical Arts* 19 (1950): 3-4.

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Maurice Lavanoux, "Preliminary Report, First International Congress of Catholic Artists," *Liturgical Arts* 19 (1950): 6.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Issued on September 23, 1950. Quoted on
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12CLERG.HTM> (accessed October 23, 2009).

²⁶⁷ Ibid., paragraph 116.

²⁶⁸ Rubin, 48.

²⁶⁹ Mgr Touzé was the main figure behind the construction of new churches in France during the years 1931-57.

²⁷⁰ Mgr Touzé, editorial to *CBN*, Bulletin des Chantiers du Cardinal, 1952, quoted in Debié, 115. "Nos prêtres n'en ont que plus de raisons [de se méfier des modes qui passent] pour exiger des artistes qu'ils leur donnent des œuvres immédiatement compréhensibles à leur peuple et à eux-mêmes; des œuvres de goût, enfin, où chacun retrouvera une émanation du Beau véritable. Est-ce là trop demander?"

²⁷¹ De Montrond, "Art sacré et théologie," *Etudes*, no. 271 (December 1951): 314-321.

²⁷² This statue by an unknown Spanish artist dates back to 1755, and has been venerated worldwide since 1919 when it was reported that the Christ's eyes moved and blood poured out of his wounds.

²⁷³ De Montrond, 316. "Image réaliste, cette servile imitation d'un spectacle n'est pas une œuvre d'art, elle ne laisse pressentir aucune transcendance, et ce n'est pas les quatre faisceaux de bois doré, fixés derrière la nuque du personnage, qui lui confèrent un caractère religieux."

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 316-17. "Sans s'arrêter à l'aspect anecdotique de la crucifixion, dans lequel s'était complu le sculpteur espagnol—clous argentés et couronne de véritable épines—Germaine Richier traduit avec autrement de vérité le caractère de souffrance et d'anéantissement du mystère de la Rédemption. Poignant, son crucifix nous dépasse infiniment, il nous élève au-dessus du profane et laisse pressentir une transcendance. N'est-ce pas la fonction essentielle de l'art? . . . [Mais] c'est moins le sacrifice du Christ qu'elle exprime que son désarroi devant la souffrance contemporaine. Son langage tourne à la confidence et traduit beaucoup plus sa sentimentalité personnelle que la pensée profonde de l'Eglise."

²⁷⁵ Pope Pius XII, "The function of art," (paragraph 5 and 6)
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/P12ART.HTM> (accessed October 23, 2009).

²⁷⁶ "Directives de la Commission Episcopale pour la Pastorale, la Liturgie et l'Art Sacré approuvées par l'Assemblée des Cardinaux et Archevêques de France," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1952): 30. "Enfin, il faut toujours tenir compte qu'un art nouveau, rompant plus ou moins avec d'anciennes habitudes ne pourra, en général, être vraiment compris et apprécié qu'avec un certain recul; et qu'une œuvre d'art ne peut être vraiment jugée que sur place, dans son cadre, dans sa lumière, surtout s'il s'agit d'une œuvre décorative."

²⁷⁷ Frank, 8.

²⁷⁸ Hans Sedlmayr, 1951, quoted in Frank, 9.

²⁷⁹ *De arte sacra*, quoted in Seasoltz, 18.

²⁸⁰ Frank, 19-20.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 26.

²⁸² Ibid., 51.

²⁸³ *De arte sacra*, quoted in White, 163.

²⁸⁴ Frank, 43.

²⁸⁵ *De arte sacra* quoted in Aidan Nichols, "The Dominicans and the journal *L'Art Sacré*," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1013 (January 2007): 41.

²⁸⁶ Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce in Assy (1950); le Sacré Cœur in Audincourt (1951); la Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence (1951); l'église Saint Michel in Les Bréseux (1952).

²⁸⁷ Before his death, Father Couturier sponsored the choice of the architect Le Corbusier for Notre-Dame du Haut in Ronchamp (1955) and for Sainte Marie de la Tourette in Evreux (1960). But these sanctuaries did not involve the collaboration of master artists in their decoration.

²⁸⁸ Rubin, 35.

²⁸⁹ Story told in *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1951): 17.

²⁹⁰ Abel Fabre, *Manuel d'Art Chrétien*, 416, quoted in *Catalogue de l'exposition L'Art sacré*, 58. "On argue du passé, mais on ne sait pas assez la tyrannie de l'œil: pour le profane, c'est le déjà-vu qui est le beau."

²⁹¹ Father Couturier explained what these exigences were in another part of the text: "[The exigences are based on a] rule, essential to the Catholic thought, that demands that this thought knows, feels obliged to, by vocation, be engaged, be invested, in any human thought, any human issue." "[Les exigences sont la] loi, essentielle à la pensée catholique comme telle, qui exige que cette pensée se sache, se sente, par vocation, engagée, 'intéressée', dans toute pensée humaine, dans tout problème humain."

²⁹² Couturier, *Art et Catholicisme*, 80-81. "Je dirais que [la] carence [de l'Eglise] dans ce domaine [de l'art] est grave, non pas tant parce qu'elle marque l'abandon d'un territoire, un recul de la culture catholique, mais surtout parce qu'elle paraît symptomatique d'un état d'esprit négatif qui est, lui, absolument contraire aux exigences essentielles de la culture et de la pensée catholiques, comme telles. . . . La pensée catholique, parce que catholique, ne peut accepter que certains domaines de l'esprit lui soient des mondes fermés, car il est justement dans sa mission de vivre en symbiose, en communion avec toute la vie du monde. . . . L'essentiel de la pensée catholique se définit . . . aussi . . . par cette volonté d'universel engagement."

²⁹³ Régamey, *Religious Art*, 37.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ André Malraux, *La Métamorphose des Dieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 285, quoted in Laurent, 116. "A la foi collective et liturgique dont cette cathédrale était l'expression éclatante, s'est substituée une nouvelle relation de l'homme avec le divin. Le Christ ne s'adresse plus à tous, mais à chacun."

²⁹⁶ Auvert, 26. Even though Pichard was, to a certain point, in favor of using modern art forms in churches, he too made the difference between the two sacred, 'individual' and 'traditional', 87.

²⁹⁷ Couturier, *L'Art Sacré*, (May-June 1954), 28. "En art, c'est le maximum de singularité, c'est le maximum de l'individualisme, qui assure le maximum d'universalité. Rien en art, ne touche profondément et universellement que ce q ui est sorti du plus secret, du plus personnel d'un être."

²⁹⁸ Couturier, "La leçon d'Assy," *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1950): 16. "D'où vient à cette église de montagne cette universelle et subite gloire? D'être un chef-d'œuvre? Non, mais d'être née d'une idée juste."

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 17. "Cette vie débordante, violente, follement généreuse de l'art moderne allait donc être . . . offerte au Christ comme le plus bel hommage?"

³⁰⁰ Couturier, *L'Art Sacré*, no. 9-10 (May-June 1953): 27. "Il ne faut pas s'exagérer l'importance de ce qui fut fait à Assy, à Audincourt ou même à Vence: réussites particulières, œuvres de circonstance et nées de circonstances fortuites, elles ne prétendraient ni s'imposer ni imposer quoi que ce fût."

³⁰¹ Couturier, "Tout est miracle," *Le Figaro*, October 24, 1951, 8. "Vous me demandez ce que je pense des 'tendances de l'art sacré moderne.' A vrai dire, je ne discerne pas de telles 'tendances', et même je ne crois ni à l'existence ni à la possibilité d'un art sacré moderne: attendre un art proprement sacré d'une société de type matérialiste, et spécialement un art chrétien de nations redevenues pratiquement païennes me paraît chimère. Tout art sacré implique certains éléments essentiels qui sont des éléments d'ordre collectif et communautaire: des formes rigoureusement communes de la sensibilité et de l'imagination. Et ces formes ne se produisent que dans des sociétés d'un type radicalement différent des sociétés occidentales contemporaines: des sociétés où la religion fait corps avec la totalité de la vie du groupe."

³⁰² Couturier, *L'Art Sacré*, 9-10 (May-June 1953): 27. "Nous ne résoudrons pas les problèmes de l'art sacré, ce sont les problèmes de la Chrétienté. Du jour où on a compris cela, on a compris l'essentiel; les maux de l'art sacré sont les maux de la Chrétienté devenus visibles comme ces plaies qui apparaissent sur un visage."

³⁰³ Régamey, *L'Art Sacré*, no. 1-2 (September-October 1953): 28-29. "Quelles 'moissons' espérer pour nos successeurs avant de long siècles? . . . Très peu est possible. Nous vivons depuis environ un siècle comme dans une sorte de période glaciaire. . . . Les conditions faites à l'esprit par le 'monde moderne' lui laissent trop peu de chances."

³⁰⁴ Proclaimed on December 25, 1955.

³⁰⁵ *Musicae sacrae*, paragraph 27,
http://212.77.1.246/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25121955_musicae-sacrae_en.html (accessed October 23, 2009).

³⁰⁶ Constitution on the sacred liturgy, chapter VII, paragraph 127,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed October 23, 2009).

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 123.

³⁰⁸ Paul VI quoted in White, 164.

³⁰⁹ As told by Bernard Epin in a book on St-Ouen edited in 1982. References not available.

³¹⁰ The church of Assy and all its contents received their 'historic monument' label in 2004.

³¹¹ Father Régamey will be asked to resign from his editor's position at *L'Art Sacré* in 1954.

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