A SEARCH TOWARD CREATING CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY
THROUGH ELEMENTS OF DESIGN AND SYMBOLISM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christian art has been customarily defined as depiction of religious subjects and scenes derived from Biblical story. As a rule, emphasis is placed on the portrayal of Biblical characters appropriate to places of worship that serve in a conventional manner the interests of the church. Such iconography causes representation to become repetitive. Repetition causes much of the symbolic content to lose the vitality of its message eventually, and it becomes weak and dead. Because of this, there is justification for creating a new Christian iconography. Such is the object of this thesis.

The average mind, including that of the artist, is a pawn shop of reused, old and worn out Christian images: of nightgowned figures in sentimental poses, full of expressive gestures and exaggerated emotions of implicit anguish and sorrow. The artistic mind, too, turns away in an attitude of nonacceptance from these persistent associations; and as a result the great majority of artists today simply do not contemplate working on Christian subjects or themes.

The writers of the Gospels did not try to present a personal image of the Christ for the artist to stereotype
in paint. They tell nothing of His personal features, His voice or how He dressed. This lack of interest in the physical features of Jesus is not surprising when one realizes that the evangelists were not concerned primarily in writing His biography but were vitally concerned with proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Whether He was tall or short, dark or fair was irrelevant to their purposes.

Yet art has always been intimately bound up with the presentation of Christ in visual terms—either in drawing, painting, sculpture, stained glass, mosaics, or tapestry. The subject of these works of art was either the person of Christ seen in one of the incidents from His recorded life, or some other Biblical event from the Old or New Testaments. For such to be the only acceptable art of the church is to limit Christianity itself to a time and place. Christianity is not limited to any historical time or place. The relevancy of its message is just as important today as it was in the past. When an artist limits himself to a Christ-figure on a crucifix, a St. John the Baptist, or a Madonna and Child, he immediately limits Christianity to an association with events and people and he neglects the possibility of imagery that can be associated with Christ's teachings—the very heart of God's message to mankind.
CHAPTER II

VINCENT VAN GOGH—

BREAK FROM TRADITIONAL IMAGERY

Since time began, the artist has always been capable of perceiving and setting forth relationships of which most men are oblivious. His special act has been the making of forms which adequately express and carry personal meaning common to himself and others. When the traditional and familiar forms of art, which have been socially shaped and have persisted, no longer meet with the changing experiences of the present moment, a tension is consciously felt within the mind of the artist. From this tension he creates a synthesis; he must make new forms for content, because old ones somehow seem inadequate for today.

Van Gogh rejected any visual portrayal of Christ which was and is the natural culmination for all traditional Christian painting. With full intent he refrained from painting a likeness of Christ, and twice he destroyed a study which he had begun. His refusal did not spring from contempt for the person of Christ, for he saw in Him "an incomparable Figure, as a greater artist than all other artists. . . .

He made neither statues nor pictures, but worked in living
flash, making living men immortals."¹ Van Gogh felt that
he could not create a true picture of Christ, which to even
a small degree could radiate some of His humble majesty and
reflect some of the hopes for the future which, of necessity,
are bound up with the idea of Christ. Life to Vincent held
so much beauty, while at the same time so much loneliness,
pain and suffering, that he was forced to divorce himself
from the world of traditional religious images. Instead,
he sought to depict the teachings of Christ through his own
personal forms and impressionistic colors. A desire to
teach and comfort sparked his quest to create the beginnings
of a fresh, new symbolic iconography. He did not undertake
the futility of reviving old and obsolete symbols, but began
to create a new kind of Christian symbolism, based on the
experiences and needs of his own life and time and taken
from the world around him.

¹Vincent Van Gogh, The Complete Letters of Vincent
Van Gogh, V. W. Van Gogh, ed. (Greenwich, Connecticut:
New York Graphic Society, 1953), 88 (11), CXI, 495.
CHAPTER III

VAN GOGH PHILOSOPHY OF
ART AND LIFE

Vincent's career as an artist began in the summer of 1880. At that time he was living in the house of a miner, Charles Decrucq at Guesmes, Belgium. He was given one little room which he set up as his first studio. A longing and a desire to be of some good to those around him and find a purpose for living, made him write when he had found his calling, "And in a picture I want to say something comforting, as comforting as music is comforting." There he began his first original drawings of miners going to work in the early mornings.

Vincent's desire to serve and comfort humanity began two years earlier, at the age of twenty-five, when he was commissioned as a lay preacher to the Borinage, a mining district in Belgium. He was commissioned by the Belgium Evangelical Church. At the Borinage Vincent sought to bring encouragement and cheer into the lives of the miners by preaching the Gospel. In a letter to his brother Theo, he referred to the miners as being laborers, fatigued and

sorrowful, who needed "the Master who can comfort and strengthen because He is the great Man of sorrows who knows our ills."¹

All the misery and poverty of the miners' life became known to Vincent as he took part in the miners' struggle to better their existence, devoting himself especially to the care of the sick and the sound. Literally practicing the teachings of Christ, Vincent gave away everything, to help those in need—his money, clothes and even his bed. He slept on the floor and wore the same kind of clothing as the miners: rough jute sacks. When the church authorities found him in this condition, they considered him unfit to represent them and ended his employment. So much zeal in being "a friend to the poor like Jesus was,"² had completely gotten out of hand. Such conduct was unbecoming as a representative of the church; his actions were totally unauthorized and beneath the dignity of his position as a pastor.

Now in July of 1879 Vincent was without a job. The ensuing days to come were the most bitter of his life. He wandered about full of cares, depressed and defeated and very much alone. It was at this time that he wrote

¹Ibid., I, 184, (L127).
²Ibid., I, 225, (L143a).
two very strikingly beautiful letters to Theo that revealed the inner personal needs of all men, which later as an artist, he began to express through his own symbolism. He wrote the first letter from Wasmes, disclosing his extreme loneliness in making known to his brother how much a recent visit from him meant.

When I saw you again and walked with you, I had the same feeling which I used to have more than I do now— as if life was something good and precious which one must value; and I felt more cheerful and alive than I have for a long time, because gradually life has become less precious, much more unimportant and indifferent to me—at least, it seemed so. When one lives with others and is united by a feeling of affection, one is aware of a reason for living and perceives that one is not quite worthless and superfluous, but perhaps good for something . . . like everyone else, I feel the need of family and friendship, of affection, of family intercourse; I am not made of stone or iron, like a hydrant or a lamp post, so I cannot miss these things without being conscious of a void and feeling a lack of something, like any other intelligent and decent man.1

With Theo, Vincent could exchange the most intimate of thoughts, for he knew that Theo was one human being who was concerned about him. In another letter, which was soon to follow, Vincent reveals his frustration in being now idle and jobless. A case of unavoidable circumstances seems to hopelessly imprison him and one senses an inward consuming desire for action that will lead to a productive and purposeful life.

1Ibid., I, 191, (L132).
A caged bird in spring knows quite well that he might serve some end; he is well aware that there is something for him to do, but he cannot do it. What is it? He does not quite remember. Then some vague ideas occur to him, and he says to himself, "The others build their nests and lay their eggs and bring up little ones," and he knocks his head against the bars of the cage. But the cage remains, and the bird is maddened by anguish.

"Look at that lazy animal," says another bird in passing, "he seems to be living at ease."

Yes, the prisoner lives, he does not die; there are no outward signs of what passes within him--his health is good, he is more or less gay when the sun shines. But then the season of migration comes, and attacks of melancholia."But he has everything he wants," say the children that tend him in his cage. He looks through the bars at the overcast sky where a thunderstorm is gathering, and inwardly he rebels against his fate. "I am caged, I am caged, and you tell me I do not want anything, fools! You think I have everything I need! Oh! I beseech you liberty, that I may be a bird like the other birds!"

A certain idle man resembles this idle bird.

And circumstances often prevent men from doing things, prisoners in I do not know what horrible, horrible, most horrible cage. There is also--I know it the deliverance, the tardy deliverance. A justly or unjustly ruined reputation, poverty, unavoidable circumstances, adversity--that is what makes men prisoners.¹

The above two letters reveal the empty cavity of his heart, where there is such a deep longing for sympathy and kindness, and such a deep need for friendship and understanding. For Vincent, the present annoyance of being penniless and without work, combined with his own personal loneliness

¹Ibid., I, 197, (L133).
to augment his frustration to the breaking point, where he literally cries out, "My God ... is it for all eternity?"\(^1\)

Reference is made within this same letter as well as in others, as to what is needed to give deliverance and liberty to the friendless, the lonely, and the adversed.

Do you know what frees one from this captivity? It is every deep, serious affection. Being friends, being brothers, love, that is what opens the prison by some supreme power, by some magic force. Without this, one remains in prison!\(^2\)

Love is a force of God's opposed to the dark and evil and terrible things of the world and the dark side of life; it is a force of resurrection stronger than any act and a ray of hope which gives consciousness and security to the depths and the secret of the heart.\(^3\)

For Vincent, love possessed the necessary power to give inward hope and security. Love was Vincent's answer for all the problems of man, and this was what he had sought to give and to bring into the sick, destitute lives of the Borinage miners. He had often spoken of love as being the foundation and light of the Gospel. Love from above, was for Vincent something very special; a love that was imperishable, that could suffer and endure all things. This love was the "Light of the World," the Biblical symbol of Christ.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Ibid.
\(^2\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Ibid., I, 145, (L111).
\(^4\)Ibid., I, 147, (L112).
You know how one of the roots or foundations, not only of the Gospel, but the whole Bible is "Light that rises in darkness," from darkness to light. Well, who needs this most, who will be receptive to it? Experience has shown that the people who walk in darkness, in the center of the earth, like the miners in the black mines, for instance, are very much impressed by the words of the Gospel, and believe them, too.

Vincent's one vocation had been to teach and preach the Word. He would speak of the need to be born again to eternal life, to the life of Faith, Hope, and Charity. The heart of man, to Vincent, was very much like the sea with its storms, its sorrows and frustrations. Rest and peace from the storms of life could only be found by looking to the One who was the Comforter and the Savior of men.

The heart that seeks for God and for a Godly life has more storms than any other--have you not heard, when your heart failed for fear, the beloved well-known voice with something in its tone that reminded you of the voice that charmed your childhood--the voice of Him whose name is Saviour and Prince of Peace, saying as it were to you personally: "It is I, be not afraid, Fear not. Let not your heart be troubled." And we whose lives have been calm up to now, calm in comparison of what others have felt--let us not fear the storms of life, amidst the high waves of the sea and under the grey clouds of the sky we shall see him approaching, for whom we have so often longed and watched. Him we need so--and we shall hear His voice: It is I, be not afraid.

The culmination of being loved, accepted, and understood, was for Vincent, synonymous with his understanding of God. Vincent believed love to be the attribute of God; He

1Ibid., I, 177-178, (L126).

2Ibid., I, 83-91, (excerpt from Vincent's sermon).
was the comforter, the creator, the maker of all things, the
One above, who gave life, hope and happiness to the human
heart.

God knows us better than we know ourselves, for He
made us and not we ourselves. He knows of what things
we have need. He knows what is good for us. May He
give us His blessing on the seed of His word, that He
has sown in our hearts. God helping us we shall get
through life.

Vincent's dismissal in July of 1879 along with various
other incidents combined to undermine his faith in the church.
The behavior of the Synod had deeply disappointed him. His
ecclesiastical superiors had made him aware of the vast dif-
ference that can exist between the letter and the spirit of
the Gospel. The lack of understanding and the icy unconcern
of the church showed Vincent quite clearly that their
religion was a false one. Even his father's lack of under-
standing resulted in many a bitter argument. On one occasion
the Pastor cursingly told Vincent to leave the home. Vincent
had worshipped his father at one period in his life and now
he was much disillusioned. The un-Christian behavior of his
father and of the church convinced him that their whole
system of religion was horrible.

Vincent had never been able to resist the temptation
to draw and it soon became a liberation for him. His inter-
est and devotion to art were as sincere as his love of Christ,

Ibid.
and it blossomed into a new religious vocation. The aim remained the same only the means had changed. His art became the vehicle through which he expressed "true" Christian concern, compassion and love for his fellow man.

The letters that followed within the months and years to come, held many written inferences relating to the purpose and objectives of his art. Here are only a few excerpts taken from his many letters.

Our purpose is in the first place self-reform by means of a handicraft and of intercourse with nature, believing as we do that this is our first duty in order to be honest with others and to be consistent—our aim is walking with God . . . it is our first duty to fix the heart on high, and this feeling forces me to recommend to you, brother to brother, friend to friend, preparing yourself for a life based on simpler principles.¹

Last year I wrote you a great many letters full of reflections on love. Now I am too busy putting those same things into practice.²

It seems to me a painter's duty to try to put an idea into his work. In this print I have tried to express (but I cannot do it well or so strikingly as it is in reality; this is merely a weak reflection in a dark mirror) what seems to me one of the strongest proofs of the existence of "quelque chose la-haut" (something on high) in which Millet believed, namely the existence of God and eternity—certainly in the infinitely touching expression of such a little old man, which he himself is perhaps unconscious of, when he is sitting quietly in his corner by the fire. At the same time there is something noble, something great, which cannot be destined for the worms, Israel's has painted it so beautifully. In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the most beautiful passage is perhaps the one where the poor slave, sitting with his wife for the last time, and knowing he must die, remembers the words,

¹Ibid., II, 192-193, (L337), (The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh).
²Ibid., I, 361, (L195).
"Let cares like a wild deluge come,  
And storms of sorrow fall,  
May I but safely reach my home,  
My God, my Heaven, my all."\(^1\)

An artist needn't be a clergyman or a churchwarden,  
but he certainly must have a warm heart for his fellow men.\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Ibid., xi, 495, (L239).

\(^2\)Ibid., xi, 476, (L240).
CHAPTER IV

VAN GOGH SYMBOLISM

Everyone can recall past experiences that are reminders of tragedy, sorrow, and disappointment, remembering times of loneliness and depression, and the seeming futility and meaninglessness of existence. Because of these universal experiences, Vincent's art relates in a very personal way to the problems and needs which confront all of mankind. His paintings portray an inner situation known to all men, with its impulses, urges and yearnings, its impediments and frustrations. There is however, much more expressed in his work than the problems and needs of man, for alongside the problem, there would often be the plausible solution. Vincent's gospel transformed his solution of love into the symbols of faith, hope, and charity. This was his answer for a confused and needy world, directing those who walk in darkness to look above, to seek the Light, the Source and Giver of life and love.

Like any man there were times of a wavering faith, of doubt and defeatism, but a long walk under an open sky amidst the handiwork of the Master Artist, would soon renew his faith and bring hope to his heart once again. After many of these walks he would write to his brother about his feelings concerning what he had seen. It was as if Vincent
looked upon all of nature to be symbolically linked with the struggles of the poor, the needy and the lonely, the quest for God, and the recognition of the eternal and the infinite.

Sometimes I have such a longing to do landscape, just as I crave a long walk to refresh myself; and in all nature, for instance in the trees, I see expression and soul, so to speak. A row of pollard willows sometimes resembles a procession of almshouse men. Young corn has something inexpressibly pure and tender about it, which awakens the same emotion as the expression of a sleeping baby for instance.

The trodden grass at the roadside looks tired and dusty like the people of the slums. A few days ago, when it had been snowing, I saw a group of Savoy cabbages standing frozen and benumbed, and it reminded me of a group of women in their thin petticoats and old shawls which I had seen standing in a little hot-water-and-coal shop early in the morning.

When one is in a somber mood, how good it is to walk on the barren beach and look at the grayish-green sea with the long white streaks of waves. But if one feels the need of something grand, something infinite, something that makes one feel aware of God, one need not go far to find it. I think I see something deeper, more infinite, more eternal than the ocean in the expression of the eyes of a little baby when it wakes in the morning, and coos or laughs because it sees the sun shining on its cradle.\(^1\)

Life with its miseries, its burdens and sorrows, was for Vincent, testimonial to his belief concerning the Genesis account of original sin, the fall of man and its consequences. In a few of his letters he referred to the laboring man as an allegorical representative of the Genesis recording of man's fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

\(^1\text{Ibid., I, 482-483, (L242).}\)
For Vincent, the laborer was seen as a direct descendant from a disobedient Adam, who fell from Paradise.

... Who are those that show some signs of higher life? They are the ones who merit the words, laborers, your life is dreary, laborers, you suffer during life, laborers, you are blessed; they are the ones who bear the signs of a whole life of struggle and constant work without ever faltering.1

... I prefer to see diggers digging, and have found glory outside of Paradise, where one thinks more of the severe: "Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow."2

To give further insight into this last remark, the following is an excerpt taken from Genesis, Chapter 3, which concerns the event and verses to which Vincent has referred. Adam and Eve had sinned by disobeying God's one command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because of this, the world was altered and became no longer a Paradise, and man, no longer perfect, was to labor for his food. Now he became susceptible to pain, old age and death.

To the woman he (God) said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam, he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I have commanded you, you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.3

1Ibid., I, 164, (L121).  2Ibid., XI, 36, (L236).  3The Bible, (King James Version).
The Christian, like Van Gogh, relates the Genesis account of man's fall to his present imperfection; the after effects are seen in man's inability to control the good and the bad forces which seem to war within him. These forces can either work for peace, love, and respect of the individual and his worth, or they can threaten man's very existence. Symptoms of this conflict—confusion, fear and loneliness, and the inability to love—prevail today to an even greater extent than ever before.

Vincent's art, however, does not solely dwell upon the forlorn and the problematical aspects of life; his main purpose was to uplift those who were troubled and downtrodden of spirit. His art did not seek to undermine or to corrode the values of life, but sought to bring hope, with the purpose of renewing man's contact with the Divine. His symbols were a bridge that could unite this world with the world beyond.

Vincent's symbolism, or the recognition of it began before his career as an artist, when he was between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-four. At Amsterdam, in 1877, he was making preparatory study in order to pass a state examination for admittance into a university. There with further training, he could be properly ordained for the ministry.

Here, the first written inferences appeared in letters sent to his brother Theo, that denoted the sun as being synonymous of God and his blessing.
I get up very early in the morning; when the sun rises over the yard and the workmen come pouring in after a while, the sight from my window is so beautiful, I wish you were here. Will it be given me to sit on such a morning writing a sermon on, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good," or "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

This last phrase, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," is very significant in relation to a painting Vincent completed just three months before his suicidal death. The interpretation of the sun as a God symbol, is confirmed by this painting. He entitled it "The Resurrection of Lazarus," (Figure 1). Vincent had lifted his composition from a fragment taken from the lower right hand corner of a Rembrandt etching (Figure 2). Notice that the Christ figure plays a very prominent role in the Rembrandt etching. The richest darks and blacks are found within the shadowed folds of His garments. These darks attract the eye immediately to His person and relate to His importance. In Vincent's painting, Christ has been entirely omitted. He has been replaced by a tremendous sun. Its exaggerated size and brilliance bathes the entire scene. Such a heavy predominance of light and yellow in the absence of Christ, can only signify the sun's importance as a God symbol.²

¹Van Gogh, op. cit., I, 130, (L103).
Figure 2. "The Resurrection of Lazarus" by Rembrandt van Rijn. (Reproduced from H. R. Graetz, The
Vincent's gospel of love found expression in an encompassing variety of symbols. The twilight of an evening sky, the moon, the stars, the sighting of a village church, and the burning light of a lamp or candle, were all symbolically linked to the teachings of Christ. But to discuss them here is of little value or importance, for they have no significant role within this author's work. There are, however, two other Van Gogh symbols which do need to be mentioned.

Vincent called "the good" in life, the "rayon blanc." This was everything that brought beauty, joy and happiness to the human heart.\(^1\) The "rayon noir," was just the opposite. They were the "black" or evil representatives of sorrow, pain, loneliness, frustration, etc.\(^2\) The most predominant symbol in Vincent's art that gave expression to man's struggle against the "rayon noir" was the tree. The tree, with its branches outstretched against the sky like the gesticulating and struggling arms of a man, personified Vincent's own struggle to overcome the winds and storms of personal poverty, adversity, loneliness and misunderstanding. The trees which he drew and painted in the process of his work, from the willows of the Dutch plains to the fruit trees, the olive

\(^1\)Van Gogh, op. cit., XI, 206, (L339a).

\(^2\)Ibid., XI, 237-238, (L347).
trees, and the cypresses in the south of France, all strikingly express through the graphic gesture of his brush, an inner world of turmoil.

When absorbed in the study of trees, Vincent often spoke of them as if they were living beings, possessing feelings, traits and characteristics of humans.

Now I have finished two larger drawings. First, "Sorrow," in a larger size—only the figure without any surroundings. . . . The other, "The Roots," shows some tree roots on some sandy ground. Now I tried to put the same sentiment into the landscape as I put into the figure: the convulsive passionate clinging to the earth, and yet being half torn up by the storm. I wanted to express something of the struggle for life in that pale, slender woman's figure, as well as in the black, gnarled and knotty roots.¹

I saw a dead willow trunk. . . it was hanging over a pool that was covered with reeds, quite alone and melancholy. . . .²

I went to see her (Christine) immediately, that is as soon as I could . . . I found her looking as though she had withered—literally like a tree which had been blasted by a cold, dry wind, with its young shoots withering; and to make things complete, the baby was sick too, and looked shrunken.³

. . . The wind first struck the row of country houses with their clumps of trees. . . . Those trees were superb; there was drama in each figure I was going to say, but I mean in each tree.⁴

¹Ibid., I, 360, (L195).
²Ibid., I, 423, (L220).
³Ibid., I, 549, (L268).
⁴Ibid., XI, 127, (L319).
Vincent's early "Willow," drawn in 1882 (Figure 3) was typical of his feelings for trees. Notice that the tree's knotty broken branches and conspicuous twigs stab into the surrounding sky. Its isolation, being away from any other high standing tree or bush characterizes an atmosphere of despondent loneliness. Such a visual presentation of isolation, loneliness and frustration, denoted by its broken stump-like form, could have been characteristic of Vincent's own, during the time in which this canvas was painted. The overcast sky speaks so clearly of impending gloom sadness and sorrow. This tree symbol, poor and broken, often took many other forms in Vincent's art. Sometimes it was seen with its branches full and outstretched, reaching for the sun; at other times, it was bare among other flourishing trees, or further yet reduced to just a stump or a broken branch upon the ground. While the light from above, the sun, symbolized his gospel of faith and love, the gnarled, knotty tree expressed his struggle, and the broken branch or stump symbolized his defeat and frustration.¹

Movement was another principal element in Van Gogh's art which was used to express the "struggle" in life. Vincent's paintings were never static, even in his earlier works; there was always a close relationship between movement

¹Graetz, op. cit., pp. 21-23.
and space in them. It was as if his painted stretches of land, mountains, clouds, orchards, and little figures or objects—a cart, a train, the rays of the sun, were all in motion. But it was a natural movement, rather serene and cheerful which seemed to undulate rhythmically, like music across his canvases. This movement, however, increased to a convulsive writhing and churning in 1889 after his entry into a mental hospital at St. Remy.

Olive trees and cypresses were Vincent's favorite subjects in the countryside of St. Remy. The cypresses always preoccupied him, he wrote to Theo, and he painted them many times. Big and massive trees dominate his "Cypresses" (Figure 4) which he did in June. They were built of curling spirals which visually seem to impetuously writhe in almost neurotic agitation. The same swirling agitated brushwork is carried into all sections of the painting; from the foreground they continue up into the mountains and rise with the trees high into the undulating clouds in countless curved lines. One recognizes not only the organic objects within the painting, but also a multiplicity of line possessing characteristics expressive of almost uncontrolled neurotic anxiety and frustration. When Vincent used a line possessing these characteristics to paint his landscape of trees, bushes, mountains and sky, he communicated to the viewer

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 184-187.}\]
Figure 4. "Cypresses" by Vincent Van Gogh.
meaning beyond just his recognizable objects. One sees not just the painted objects, but objects communicating the qualities of the twisted, jagged, nervous lines used to create them. With each object expressing its own apprehensiveness and frustration, the entire canvas becomes a reflective mirror of Vincent's own tormented emotions.

Vincent never accepted life as it was; he was always looking for that better and happier tomorrow, where there would perhaps be found a little bit of sympathy, a little bit of kindness shown, the discovery of a friend. Though his difficult character generally prevented him from finding this, he always kept hoping and longing for somebody with whom he could reside and work. Always wanting to live for somebody, he was hopeful of finding a wife and having children of his own. These were treasures which he continually sought, but never found. There was however, always the distant but hopeful future which was to come. This "hope" for a better tomorrow became, lastly, another very important symbol to be found in his art. It was the one important symbol needed to complete his gospel of love; it was needed for the completion of a Biblical expression.

Vincent's gospel was now symbolized in paint; symbols which could form a New Testament message of faith, hope and love.

The flourishing newness of spring and its budding was, for Vincent, very symbolic of hope. "Hope" was seen in
the tender growth of young wheat, the freshness of green
turnips, and particularity in the sprouting of young tree
shoots. The newness of spring was symbolic of a new and
better day, a new life which could grow in the light of His
love; a new creation wholly dependent upon God's mercy and
goodness for continued life, growth and strength.

... When the first years of life, life of youth
and adolescence, life of worldly enjoyments and vanity
will perforce wither—and they shall, even as the
blossom falls from the tree—vigorous new life shoots
up, the life of love unto Christ....

It is true there is a withering and budding in love
as in nature, but nothing dies entirely. It is true
there is an ebb and flow, but the sea remains the sea.
And in love, either for a woman or for art, there are
times of exhaustion and impotence, but there is no
permanent disenchantment.

... A man, who finally produces something poignant
at the blossom of a hard difficult life, is it a wonder,
like the black hawthorn, or better still, the gnarled
old apple tree which at a certain moment bears blossoms
which are among the most delicate and most virginal
things under the sun.

... That's the artistic element. It seems to be
weak now—but that new shoot will sprout and it will
sprout quickly. I am afraid the old trunk is split up
too much, and I say, sprout in an entirely new direc-
tion, otherwise I am afraid the trunk will prove to lack
the necessary vitality.

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1 Van Gogh, op. cit., I, 80, (L82a).
2 Ibid., I, 539, (L226).
3 Ibid., XI, 220, (L343).
4 Ibid., XI, 172, (L333).
CHAPTER V

SYMBOLISM OF THE AUTHOR

In the beginning, all that was created upon the face of the earth, held within the morphology of its structure or being, elements of the eternal and the perfect. Life was not limited to seventy or eighty years, but was for all unending time. Man had total freedom to do and will as he pleased. There was only one restriction, one law that he was to obey. He was not to eat of the tree that possessed the knowledge of good and evil. With the eating, however, came expulsion from Paradise, separation from God, and eventual death. The eternal constituent within all forms of life was somehow lost. Life was no longer an unquenchable everlasting flame, but a frail flicker that could easily be blown out by the susceptible ills of sickness, old age and death. Death became an interwoven integral part of life which all would eventually face, and face alone. One sees the lifeless results of death all around, but there is no participant who can tell of the actual experience. Death is a shrouded and mysterious thing, but to the Christian it is not oblivion, but a doorway to the Paradise that was lost. There restitution from the misery, the suffering, and the bestiality of life can be found.
Death, however, still holds an experience of the unknown which man, for the most part, does fear. His mind rebels from dwelling soberly upon the dilemma of death, even when it can be very near, when it involves a loved one who suddenly passes away. Since death is a part of the whole of existence, it always is eventually reckoned with, but many times one feels that the participator was hardly prepared.

If Christian art is to loyally teach the truths of Scripture, it must also play a part in man's redemption, where the issue of death must be faced. Alongside the love of God and the hope one has in Christ, there should also be seen the reality of awaiting death and the penalties from which one can be redeemed. An image such as this, however, must be handled discreetly, in order for the viewer to contemplate beneath the surface to the harsher realities within. The choice of a death symbol must not approximate too closely the real thing, as to repel or make the viewer too uncomfortable. Death that is found within nature certainly is disconnected enough from the coffin and the funeral home to be successfully used as a means of drawing the mind towards a death situation. When crossing a field, one does not normally shudder at the sight of a dead tree, or cringe when stumbling upon the bones of a bull. Just the recognition of "bone" itself can be sufficient enough to arouse feelings of death. Bone formation that does not rely too heavily upon
the human could successfully be used. In fact, any reference
to bone, muscle, tendon and inner body functioning that is
anatomical in rendition, can also be simulative of death.
Anatomy and its depiction of the human body normally is not
that closely connected with death to awaken ill feeling. Or
what about combining human and animal bone formations together
into one body or structural whole? Such an image would cer-
tainly create a divorcement from the normal association one
has with death. Not only would it voice the inevitable death
of all men, but of the animal as well, that death can infect
all of nature with its poison.

Being ransomed from the grave is certainly one impor-
tant facet of redemption, but redemption has a twofold pur-
pose. There is also deliverance from the penalties of sin.
Though sin condemns, the sacrifice of blood redeems, for
without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.¹
One escapes from the Hell of unquenchable fire only through
the cross. This aspect of redemption needs also to be
expressed. What would be a good symbol? What could express
this penalty from which one is redeemed? Hell has always
been associated with fire and flame. Fire, in its uncon-
trollable state, is frightening and dangerous. It bespeaks
plainly of extreme pain and suffering. Why not use it then

¹The Bible, Hebrews 9:22.
as a hellish symbol? A suggestive image of fire and flame could be incorporated amidst a death symbol of bone forma-
tion. One would then see an implied envision of hell itself.

These proposed redemptive symbols in conjunction with Vincent's, will now be artistically used to express the "whole" of Scriptural teaching.
CHAPTER VI

ICONOGRAPHIC SYMBOLS FOR A
BIBLICAL EXPRESSION

Symbols presented within this thesis have related to one of three things. They are:

1. The consequent problems of man since his fall from grace. (Symbols of man's loneliness, sorrow, pain, adversity, frustration, the struggle to overcome, death, the evil of life, the fear of damnation, the punishment of Hell)--The knotty gesticulating tree, the anatomical formation of bone, the suggestive image of fire or flame, and the writhing churning movement of form within space.

2. God's love shown through Christ, His teachings, and the cross, gave all men access to Himself and a means of solving their problems. (Symbols of God's love to man, one's personal faith in Christ, man's need to love and be loved, warmth, kindness, acceptance and understanding, all that which the heart longs for, the good and desirable)--The sun or light which is above, that which is above and beyond.
3. The hope of redemption from the grave and the penalty of sin. (Symbols of resurrection, of redemption, of a new day, a brighter better tomorrow, the newness of awakening life, to sprout and grow in the light of faith despite surrounding obstacles)—The delicate fresh flourishing growth of spring and its budding, particularly the sprouting of young tree shoots.

The latter two catalogued groups of symbols combine to form basically the "whole" of the New Testament. When Group 1 is brought into union with Groups 2 and 3 there is also formed a "biblical whole." The problematical life originating from the Genesis account of man's fall in combination with New Testament teachings, form the very "entity" of Scripture.

To simplify what has been said, the essential Christian thought of this thesis to be expressed through symbolism is simply a restatement of fundamental theology which is:

1. God created the world and man to have fellowship with Him, but because of man's self-will and disobedience, fellowship was broken and man's nature was altered from Divine perfection to human frailty and death.

2. Life became difficult and problematical because man now was imperfect, subject to pain, loneliness,
irritability, worry, frustration, poverty, fear, etc. The earth no longer freely gave of itself to benefit man. (Genesis 3:16-19) "In toil you shall eat the plants of the fields. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken."

3. **God loves the world** for He used his Son as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind. Christ became the mediator or the means by which contact was restored between man and God. The entire life of Christ was an outward expression of God's love to man, openly shown through his healing the sick, the lame, and the blind; He taught them to do unto others as they would have others do unto them and to love one another. Christian love was a solution for conquering the problems of the world.

4. **His resurrection gave man hope** for a better life, a life eternal, besides new hope in this life for He said, "All things work together for good to them that love God," "Ask and you shall receive,"

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1. The Bible, Matthew 7:12.
2. Ibid., John 15:17.
3. Ibid., Romans 8:28.
4. Ibid., Matthew 7:12.
"Whatever you ask in prayer believe that you shall receive it, and you will"—etc.\(^1\)

The following chapter will symbolically illustrate this Christian philosophy of life in a number of graphic, painting and sculptural works.

\(^1\)Ibid., Mark 11:24.
When dealing with people, Christ used parables continuously for illustrating and instructing them in the things that pertained to the spiritual. He used familiar everyday objects or incidents to illuminate His teachings. Christ's narratives of the sower,\(^1\) the lost sheep,\(^2\) the sown tares amongst the wheat,\(^3\) and the growth of the mustard seed,\(^4\) are but a few of His parables to be found within the gospels. He made use of them to veil the truth from those who were not willing to see it. Those who really desired to know, would not rest until they had found out the meaning.

The following series of graphics are also a type of "visual" parable, for like the spoken Word hidden within an allegorical narration, these works hold the Word within graphic images of symbol. One may ask then, how does the average mind decipher the meaning behind such symbol imagery? It should be said that much can be ciphered from the images alone; however, for full understanding, some verbal explanation is needed. In this instance, the author prefers to use

\(^1\)The Bible, Matthew 13:3-9.  
\(^2\)Ibid., Matthew 18:12-14.  
\(^3\)Ibid., Matthew 13:24-30.  
\(^4\)Ibid., Matthew 13:31-32.
a poem as a means of clarification. It will serve as a key to opening the doors of understanding to the viewer. The poem (Figure 5) will unlock the symbolic content of the drawings. The symbolism now should not be difficult to understand.

The majority of these drawings are approximately fifteen by twenty-four inches in size. They are rendered in the medium of ink, conte crayon and charcoal. All express basically the same content; only the image is varied. Because of this, there will be no need to discuss each individually, but only a chosen few. The first drawing that was completed within this series is seen in Figure 6. Here all the superficialities of life have been cut away and one stands alone to face the real values and issues of life. Swirling agitated formations of bone stretch upward. One can sense a desire for release, for escape from the envelopment of blackness. Here is a world of death, but is it death? There is not the restful repose of eternal sleep, but the stance to fight and struggle. A feeling of unfulfillment, of longing and desire seems to permeate restlessly throughout the entire image. Bone, muscle, and tendon, though crowded together, seem so isolated. Each bewails his own state of loneliness, frustration, the want of release from life's many problems. One feels the wish of being found, of being restored to completeness, to wholeness of the physical, the social, and the

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1 The author, Margaret Mae Armagost, had specifically dedicated this poem to the writer of this thesis in 1972.
DARKNESS, LIGHT, DEATH AND LIFE

These bones of the living dead cry out.
Son of Man, can these bones live?
In pain, they toil
   In sorrow, they writhe
   Reaching for the
   The unknown God knows.
Our dwelling is the darkness
   House of the damned
   Damned to living
   Always reaching to see,
   But never seeing.
Who shall give us light?
We have only the brightness of our burning
   The valley of the shadow of death
   Alive with frozen flames.
Give us light!
Let us see!
   I am the light of the world.
   The people that have wandered in darkness
   Have seen a great light... 
But here from this darkness,
   Seeds to sunlight
   We strive to grow,
   Only growing
   Old.
As the grass withereth,
   And the flower fadeth,
   Even so--old
We die.
   We are entombed.
   Dust wrapped in wood and steel
   And sculptured stone
   And buried.
Thy dead men shall live!
   My people, I will open your graves
   And cause you to come up
   Out of your graves.
I am the resurrection.
   He that believeth in me,
   Though he were dead,
   Yet shall he live.
Oh, grave, where is thy victory,
   Oh death where is thy sting?
I am the light of the world,
   The resurrection,
   And the life.

--Margaret Mae Armagost

Figure 5. Poem, "Darkness, Light, Death and Life."
Figure 6. Drawing No. 1. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink.
Size: 12" x 24"
Figure 7. Drawing No. 2. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink.
Size: 13" x 24."
spiritual. If all this were to come true, then such a dark world would become bright with the light of happiness. There is no suggestion of it happening here, however, for this is a world outside of Divine union and fellowship, a world fallen from grace, and banished from Paradise.

Figure 8 basically contains the same expression, except for a few additions. Once again Van Gogh's content is felt through the upward reaching of two bull skulls. Here also one feels that deep, desperate emotion is on display. Humans do not generally share or express such strong feelings of unhappiness, but usually try to hide or suppress such feelings within the self. Emotion as forceful and personal as this would be very difficult to adequately express through an acceptable human image. Strong emotion mirrored through a human representation could cause embarrassment for the viewer. He could too easily identify with it and seeing himself would become self-conscious. Within this drawing, feeling that is deeply human as well as personal, has been projected upon the animal. One can still feel with the emotions of the animal, but it becomes less personal. Identification with the death object and the struggles of its existence becomes less intimate when viewed through animal formation. Human form is enveloped within the animal, but the abstractive quality of the whole encourages identification loss and psychological distance. Stylization and abstraction always promote
distancing and lack of identity.¹

Notice that this drawing does not express the hopelessness of the other. Even though the formations of bone are fundamentally dark and forlorn, the surrounding space is filled with light. Sunshine floods in through the window, and with it comes a note of warmth and cheer. The warmth of God's love and concern is for all who would come and believe. Such symbolism is easily understood if one only takes the time to read the introductory poem. The poem reveals the light to be synonymous with Christ and also speaks of Him being the resurrection. He reigns above all, restoring peace, happiness, and life everlasting to the believer.

One other item needs to be mentioned. Within this drawing there can be found four embryonic formations of new and growing life. The reason for this will be explained. Within the totality of life's experience one sees not only death but the creation of new life as well. While death continues to take its toll, there is always new life to take its place. Life continues to perpetuate itself from generation to generation. The sprinkling of embryonic form amidst that of bone is simply a means of expressing this continuing cycle of life and death.

Figures 11-15 have additional redemptive content which heretofore have not been discussed. In all five

Figure 8. Drawing No. 3. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink.
Size: 18" x 24."
Figure 9. Drawing No. 4. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon, and ink. Size: 24" x 18."
Figure 10. Drawing No. 5. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 24" x 18".
drawings one finds some recognizable form of crucifix or image that relates strongly to Christ's death. One does not see a crucifixion, but symbols that speak of its event. There is no desire to concoct or reconstruct a staged crucifixion where "you are there" as a participant. Instead, there are pointing reminders. Reminders that say to bear in mind the cross with its cruelty. It is the only means by which atonement is made for the sins of mankind.

The true meaning of redemption, expressed in its completeness, can be seen in Figures 12-14. Alongside the death images of Christ and His cross, one also sees the incurring judgment that awaits the unbeliever. Where there is disbelief there is no remission of sin and without the pardoning of Christ there is the penalty of damnation. Damnation is easily envisioned within these three drawings. One sees bone, muscle, and tendon gradually being consumed and transformed into flames of fire. There is sensed pain so severe that it twists and deforms. One can almost feel the agony of their burning. Each tortured form screams and cries for deliverance. While in their agony, they struggle upward, to reach, to grasp that which can give escape--the Christ symbol of atonement.

In drawings 4-6, (Figures 9-11), the human element has the dominating role over that of the animal. The human body is approached through the academics of anatomy, but
Figure 11. Drawing No. 6. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 18" x 24."
Figure 12. Drawing No. 7. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 24" x 18."
Figure 13. Drawing No. 3. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 24" x 18."
Figure 14. Drawing No. 9. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 24" x 18."
Figure 15. Drawing No. 10. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink. Size: 23½" x 18"
Figure No. 11. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink.
Figure 17. Drawing No. 12. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink.
Size: 13" x 24"
handled with freedom. The liberty to depart from true body structure is necessary in order to express through form the content that this thesis presents. Man here is seen stripped of all outward adornment. He stands alone and naked, possessing nothing. One views the body in stages of dissection. Dissection begins through the skin and ribs to open cavities that eventually lead to the back vertebrae. The total physical being of man is in a sense on display. One sees not the perfect Adam of Paradise, but something very mortal. The particular mortal seen in Figure 11 seems so unprotected, so susceptible to hurt and pain, loneliness and sorrow, sickness and death.

Figure 18 is the only drawing that comes comparatively close to being portraiture. The purpose of the work, however, was not to recapture another shallow sentimental Christ in the natural but to present His image through symbol. The line used to create the total image is tense and apprehensive. This tension is easily felt. There is also sensed a feeling of sadness, fear, and great anxiety. This is the Christ of Gethsemane who could foresee the onslaught of the cross. One can see His face take upon itself the very image of that cross. The arms of a cross can be seen extended along the brow line. Its upright post is at right angles to the brow, crossing the transversal. It extends up into the forehead and also down along the nose. His thoughts seem to be
Figure 18. Drawing No. 13. Medium: charcoal, conté crayon and ink. Size: 18" x 24."
directed inward, contemplating upon the frightening task that lays before Him. It is as if foreknowledge tells Him of the awaiting pain and the awesome burden of sin that is to be laid upon Him. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."¹

The last two symbols to be presented graphically within this thesis are those derived from Van Gogh. First, there is the tree. Vincent saw it as the typifier of his own personal strugglings. The second symbol is spring. Its new buddings was for Vincent the symbol of renewal, hope, and resurrection. Both of these symbols can be seen in Figures 16 and 17; the tree symbol can also be seen in Figure 20. Notice the tree in Figure 16. It seems to have certain outstanding human characteristics. At first glance one sees only a burned out stump. With closer examination, one notices that two of its broken branches resemble uplifted arms that reach heavenward. The stump's top also resembles that of a head looking upward. Within the head there is an eye-like socket that is attached to a long snout-like projection. One also sees the semblance of a mouth, large and open. Here is man personified, struggling upward, crying out, reaching in belief for the One who alone can resurrect the dead to new life, to health and happiness. That resurrection of new life can be seen in the palm of the

¹The Bible, John 1:9.
tree's most predominant branch. New little shoots rise from that which seemingly is dead. At the left of the burnt tree there stands a man. The feeling of extreme age is felt in the clothes that he wears. His jacket, sweater and pants all have the same gnarled root and bark quality that is found in the old dead stump. On the right lay the remnants of a large broken branch. It reminds one of an ostrich who has its head buried in the sand. The darkest branch, which rests upon the ground and moves up into a large knotted form, could resemble the bird's head and neck. The top stubby branch that repeats the hand form on the burnt tree could also resemble the bird's tail feathers. This is Van Gogh's expression of defeatism and disbelief. One notices that no new life or resurrection comes from it. It has no faith to believe. The drawing as a whole then bespeaks of ageing, eventual death, and new resurrected life for the believer.

Drawing 12 (Figure 17), is a further variation of this same theme. However, within the tree there can be found additional content which could use an explanation. One notices that many of the tree's branches tend to resemble a variety of animal formation. A cat-like figure can be seen at the lower right. On the left side of the drawing some type of antlered animal can also be seen. It lies on its back. The head resembles that of a hog or deer. Just above that, one finds a branch that has the appearance of being some sort of
bird's leg, upturned in a position of death. The one human element found in the drawing is hardly noticeable. Within the dark recesses of the tree's trunk, there emerges a face. Even though the eyes are totally concealed in darkness, the nose becomes visible as it projects into the light. One sees the mouth as one large open cavity lined with a suggestion of teeth. Finding all of such content within one broken tree symbol suggests more than death and the struggle to overcome. It speaks of death as an encompassing thing, a disease of the environment which spreads its infection not only to the human but to plant, animal and all of life. Once again the symbol of hope and resurrection can be seen in the tree's uppermost branches. Shoots of new life rise up from that which is dead.

The tree symbol takes a different form in the last drawing, Figure 20. It is seen as a piece of driftwood on a sandy beach. The struggle to overcome is again felt through the restless agitation of its knotted form.

Paintings 16-18 (Figures 21-23) need not be examined. They carry no new symbolism which warrants written attention. Their symbolic content has been previously discussed in the drawing series. The last painting, Figure 24, continues with the tree symbol being in the form of driftwood. Beneath a bridge overpass, one sees a large tangled mass of driftwood stranded upon the sand. Beneath this dark overpass there is sensed no light or warmth, only the wet stench
Figure 26: Drawing No. 15. Medium: charcoal, conte crayon and ink.

Size: 14 x 22
Figure 21. Painting No. 1. Medium: acrylic polymer emulsion.

Size: 28" x 42."
Figure 22. Painting No. 2. Medium: acrylic polymer emulsion.
Size: 23" x 36"
Figure 24. Painting No. 4. Medium: acrylic polymer emulsion.

Size: 29 1/2" x 42"
of rot and decay. Outside the sun shines bright. It glistens upon the water where all is clean and fresh. The difference is quite contrasting, the difference between life and death. When viewed in this light, the underpass becomes a net for entombing the dead. The flowing water beyond, becomes a God symbol, a restorer of life, liberty, and happiness.

Further steps toward creating contemporary Christian iconography can be seen in Figures 25-28. Chairs, picture frames, gathered bits and pieces from sofas and tables all combine to create these two pieces of sculpture. Here again is symbolism that deals with life, death and resurrection. In both examples, a multitude of furniture forms are encased in a type of box that has the semblance of a coffee table. This box also has a resemblance to that of a hotbed which can be found in any greenhouse. It is usually a bed of earth covered with glass and heated by the fermentation of manure, for the forcing of plants. With this knowledge in mind, the various uprisings of furniture form could then be seen as growing plants. Notice the title given to each piece of sculpture, Resurrection I and Resurrection II. They are both basically the same and give reference to the same verses of scripture, 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15, Verses 35-38 and 42-44. It reads as follows:
But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

These verses not only confirm the previous line of thought but also are a help in opening new avenues of thought for symbolic content. Meaning which may have been concealed up to now has no more excuse for being indecipherable. The title in combination with the just-quoted verses give the viewer all the necessary information needed in order to understand the full symbolic content that is held within these two pieces of sculpture. There is no questioning or doubting, only verification that these boxes of dismembered furniture are symbols of plant organisms. To help increase this visual representation of resurrected growth, brown paint has been applied to the furniture bed and green has been applied to the developing furniture plants. Of course black and white photographs are unable to show the color difference. A transitional change in greys from dark to brighter lights can be seen in the detail photos of Resurrection 1.

1The Holy Bible, New Testament.
and 11, (Figures 26 and 28). Notice particularly the lighter changes in some of the uprisings and "budding" casters. All the furniture forms of growth are covered with this lighter, fresher green. Their color in combination with the verticality of their stance, speak of many things. Feelings of newness, of being reborn, of being restored to life seem to flow from this green. Here is hope and faith, renewal and resurrection--life newly freed from the bondage of winter. Notice the contrast between the verticle greens and the dark horizontal browns. Brown becomes the color of fall, bringing soon the encroaching death of winter. Notice the brown beds of both sculptures. They seem to be littered with the horizontal dead of last year's growth. Even though these horizontal death symbols resemble the furniture-risings of spring, there is no suggestion of stretch or upward reach. They lie broken and brown upon the ground, unbelieving and defeated.

The use of brown and green paint is also a help in discovering the awareness of certain relationships. With closer examination, it is felt that there can and does exist an organic relationship between the structuring of plants and certain forms that can be found in furniture. For example, in the upturned leg of a Chippendale, a Queen Anne, or a Victorian chair, the form of a plant can easily be recognized. When placed in this upside down position, the
leg's foot becomes a large bud, resting on a slender stem. From the bud, the leg begins to swell in curves, moving downward into a thick and heavy trunk. The leg typifies the growth movement of a plant. The Duncan Phyfe, the Sheraton, the French Provincial--in fact, just about any style can be found to possess certain characteristics which relate to the plants' organic form.

Once again, return to the verses previously quoted. What is the author's purpose in referring to the sown seed--the fact that it must die before the body can rise in the fashioning of its kind? He uses it as a parable. As the seed must die before it quickens to new life, so must man's physical body die before he is resurrected to new life. Like the seed bears no resemblance to its radiant "resurrected" body, so likewise man's weak and perishable body will have little or no resemblance to his perfect spiritual body. This speaks of symbolism beyond that of the plant. The dead seed becomes the symbol of man's death and the new body that grows from it becomes the symbol of man's new resurrected body.

Here is a second level of symbolism. The first level of symbolism was that of the growing plant--symbolized by verticle pieces of furniture within a hotbed box. The second level of symbolism is that of man--the seed and plant being symbols of his death and resurrection. The sculpture then bespeaks of both.
Figure 25. Title: "Resurrection l." Medium: painted wood construction.
Size: 28" x 51½." Height: 22."
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This thesis has purposely tried to present Christian art that is originally fresh and contemporary. There has been an honest try to create iconography that is new and yet still theologically sound. It is felt that the iconography within this thesis does accomplish this. Such iconography was created solely upon the foundations of scriptural teaching. There has been a breaking away from traditionalism. It is felt that much traditional iconography of the church today has become weak in its communication. This happens when the church limits itself to accepting only that which is traditional iconography: iconography that depicts its foundational beliefs through conventional themes that usually surround first century events. This restriction of the church has kept the artist repeating the themes that have become so familiar that one becomes weary with such repetition and repetition can only lead to communication loss. When traditional iconographic symbolism has no longer the freshness or capability to carry the full import of its message to a modern world, then it is time to create new iconography.

Out of accepting the Christian idea of the fall, the universality of sin and its effects upon the world and with
the desire to point man to his God, this thesis attempts to make steps toward creating that new iconography. The desire was to express spirituality and religious feeling through new symbols that could better relate to man in his present world. Such representatives of the spiritual were not taken from the past. They were creations that sought to express a scriptural whole. Emphasis was placed upon the totality of the Word and not upon events normally associated with Biblical story. The art work presented, clearly illustrates this. Purpose and idea have provided a new direction. The symbolic use of light, the upward reach of a tree, death formations of bone and wood, the ugly disharmonious use of line, shape and movement have all combined into one vehicular structure for a fresh spiritual and emotional expression.

Hopefully, this thesis will make a small contribution towards the search for Christian iconography that is meaningful and "now."
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