WHAT DID JESUS LOOK LIKE?
RECLAIMING JESUS THE JEW IN ART AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Introduction

No one knows what Jesus of Nazareth looked like. No descriptions of Jesus' physical appearance are offered in the New Testament, aside from some incidental mentions of his clothing. Multiple images of Jesus exist but none can be dated to eyewitness accounts of those who encountered him. Jesus of Nazareth is the most rendered subject for artists in history, yet none of these representations is based on any primary source. The absence of primary sources has allowed artists to portray Jesus based on questionable criteria. Paradoxically, his image is better known - and interpreted - than his teachings: "while the teachings and words of Jesus may not be universally known, and are not universally followed, it seems that images of him have become omnipresent" (Blum, 2019, p. 32). These realities present religious educators with challenges when presenting Jesus of Nazareth. The dominant images of Jesus presented by artists represent him in European terms, and as a prototypical Christian, rather than as an observant Jewish male of the first century CE. Religious educators require some context for understanding the reasons for this development, as well as a range of educational tools to interrogate and critically appraise artistic representations of Jesus. The following discussion seeks to provide educational resources for presenting Jesus of Nazareth.

The Physical Appearance of Jesus in the Gospels

The overriding obstacle in producing a portrait of Jesus is the absence of any contemporary description of his appearance. Scholars accept that no descriptions of Jesus' physical appearance are included in the gospels, aside from some incidental mentions of his clothing (Pemberton, 2006; Taylor, 2018). Even the precise style of Jesus' clothing is little understood from the gospels or from historical sources since "Jewish clothing of the first century is quite an understudied topic" (Turner, 2015, p. 224). No scholarly consensus exists concerning the reasons why the gospel authors do not record descriptions of Jesus' appearance (Blum, 2018).

The silence of gospel authors contrasts with the practice of biblical authors who consistently featured commentary on the appearance of Jesus' biblical ancestors. Moses was "a fine baby" (Exodus 2:2), a view affirmed by Luke who says that when Moses was born "he was beautiful before God" (Acts 7:20). Joseph was "handsome and good-looking" (Genesis 39:6). Saul "was a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he" (1 Samuel 9:2). David, the future king, possessed "lovely eyes and a handsome appearance" (1 Samuel 16:12). Physical attractiveness continues down the Davidic line with Absalom: "In all Israel there was no one to be praised for his beauty so much as Absalom" (2 Samuel 14:25), and Adonijah: "He was also a very handsome man" (1 Kings 1:6).

Commentary on the physical appearance of prominent leaders and acknowledgment of their handsomeness seem to be consistent features of Jewish sacred literature completely omitted in the gospel accounts of Jesus. Psalm 45:2 offers one indication why the description of physical appearance

might be significant in the identification of Israel's leaders: "You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever". Male leaders are handsome because they are the recipients of God's grace; biblical authors recognised this outward sign of physical attractiveness as an indicator of divine favour and fitness for leadership.

Despite this consistent feature, the gospel authors do not follow suit in describing Jesus' physical appearance. Perhaps the reason for their silence is that Jesus "was average in every way, and there was nothing distinctive about his appearance that made it worthy of comment" (Taylor, 2018, p. 194). Or, maybe the gospel authors followed the prediction of the prophet Isaiah that the suffering servant would have "no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). Or, maybe the authors relied for their information on others who shared their lack of interest in Jesus' appearance. The gospels "fall within the broad parameters of ancient lives, which were not always interested in people's appearance either. Secondly, they are Gospels. What does Jesus' appearance have to do with, for example, the validity of Jesus' atoning death, or salvation for Gentiles? Nothing" (Casey, 2014, pp. 110-111). Or, maybe the gospel authors pursued a "literal understanding of the Second Commandment" (King & Stager, 2001, p. 130) that directed: "you shall not make for yourself an idol" (Exodus 20:4). One scholarly guess is as good as any other; none has proven persuasive.

Smith (2007, p. 24) thinks "this strange omission conforms to the New Testament depiction of Jesus generally" since little is revealed in the New Testament about his personal life or relationships, apart from some information about his immediate family. One consequence of this silence has been the capacity for succeeding generations to literally and figuratively paint Jesus in the colours and tones of their own ideological preferences: "Jesus scholars will invariably see their reflection at the bottom of a deep well" (Crossley, 2015, p. 69). European Christian artists have tended to follow the path established by theologians, presenting Jesus in their own image, as will be discussed below.

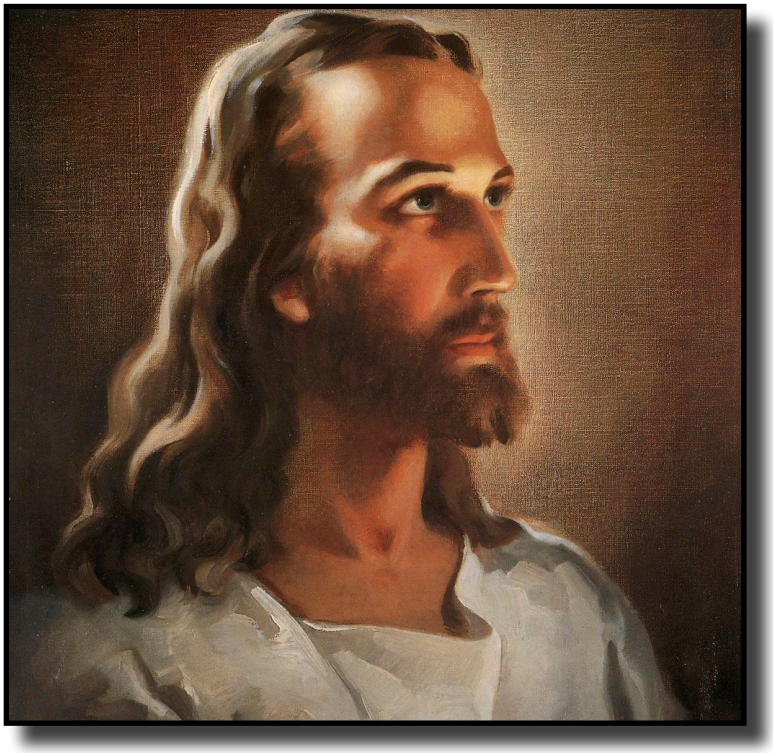
Creating a European Jesus

The images of Jesus presented in artworks that have attained dominance in the minds of Christians are based on northern European norms: "medium height, with medium brown hair, a short brown beard, and piercing blue eyes…delicate features and a strong and well developed physique that, outside the baptism scene, remains hidden under voluminous robes" (Reinhartz, 2007, p. 48). This stereotyped portrayal of Jesus has been amplified and solidified by influential images. Chief among these are Warner Sallman's, *Head of Christ*. More recent images of Richard Hook's, *Head of Christ* and Jack Jewell's, *The Risen Christ by the Sea* have added modern variations on the consistent theme of the European Jesus.

Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* is ubiquitous in the Christian world: "with the possible exception of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, no picture of Jesus is etched so deeply into our imaginations than the *Head of Christ* painted in 1940 by Warner Sallman" (Prothero, 2004, p. 118). Over 500 million reproductions have been sold since it was painted by the Chicago-based artist. Sallman was the son of Scandinavian immigrants. His portrait of Jesus relies heavily on his northern European ancestral roots for its physical features. The image has appeared on framed prints, holy cards, bookmarks, calendars, Bibles, buttons, lamps, clocks, china, stickers and stationery (Lundbom, 2015, p. 1). U.S. servicemen and women were given prints of the image during WWII and the Korean War, with profound effect (Lippy, 1995, p. 185). Adele Reinhartz has observed how "most cinematic Jesuses…reflect the stereotypical Jesus image made popular by Warner Sallman's iconic image of 1940" (Reinhartz, 2013, p. 125). This was especially evident in the selection of Robert Powell in Franco Zeffirelli's 1977 made-for-TV series, *Jesus of Nazareth* which was subsequently "imitated by most American portrayals of Jesus" (Reinhartz, 2007, p. 49).

Sallman's Jesus became the template for the global communication of the presumed physical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. Sallman appropriated techniques of portrait photographers and

commercial artists of the 1930s who produced headshots of celebrities and ambitious individuals, characterised by a half-turned face, dramatic lighting, and air-brushed elegance (Morgan, 1998). His version of photorealism aimed to convince the viewer of the direct correspondence between the historical subject and the painting's subject (Prendiville, 2000). Photorealism appears to accurately capture a moment in time, "just as photography is considered to. It tricks the viewer into believing what they see exists or existed just as it is shown" (Klebes, 2015). The photographer and the artist share the ability to manipulate the truth of their subject. The artist seeks to convince the viewer that Jesus of Nazareth really looked like this! Artists arrange hair, clothing, lighting, background and any accompanying props in ways that signal to the viewer images of class, ethnicity and social status (Oost, 2001). In the case of Warner Sallman, the artist could represent Jesus in the style of the aspirational, middle-class males who sat for similar portraits in the United States in the 1930s.



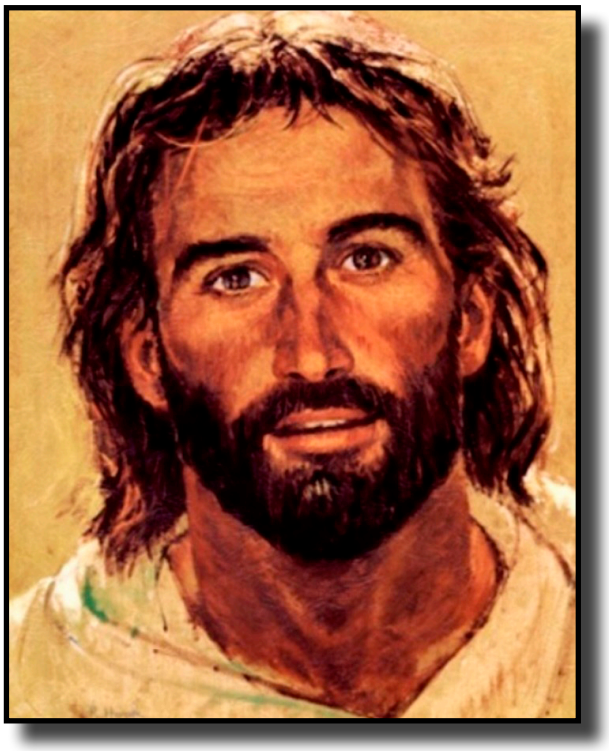
Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ*, 1940

Subsequent artistic renderings of Jesus mimic Sallman's work, though with some revision. Richard Hook's, *Head of Christ* was a conscious response to the purported effete qualities of Sallman's portrait. Hook presented a more masculine visage, whose fair complexion was sunburned and rugged, his hair golden, casually styled, windswept and 1960s-contemporary - and certainly not effete. A Google search for "Surfer Jesus" returns Hook's *Christ* as the first option. While Sallman's Jesus does not return the viewer's gaze but "looks humbly upward, towards his father...in passive submission to his father's will" (Morgan, 2005, p. 5), Hook's *Christ* fixes the viewer with a front-on stare. The appeal is direct, invitational and personal. It was created to appeal to the sensibilities of 1960s Christians and others who related to his good looks, personable allure and direct invitation.

A similar chord was struck by Massachusetts seascape artist Jack Jewell whose 1990 image of *The Risen Christ by the Sea* presented a smiling, affable Jesus portrayed against a backdrop representing the Sea of Galilee. This portrait aimed for cultural context with Jesus grasping a fishing net while standing on the lake shore, but still managed to present Jesus in European appearance. Jewell's *Risen Christ* is happy, well-groomed and attractive. He is someone modern viewers would be content to be around, and not fearful of encountering. The image, in the words of the official website that markets and distributes the image, presents "the face of Jesus - full of Easter joy and healing love - that appears on the covers of many church bulletins of all denominations on Easter Sunday. It is the face of hope, the face of the light shining

in the darkness of our times" (*The Joyful Noiseletter*, 2020). Commentators have recognised the ambivalent reception associated with Jewell's image which is widely popular yet "often mocked in sophisticated religious and academic circles" because it is considered not to be "high art" (Martin, 2011, p. 55).

These and similar contemporary renderings of Jesus revealed the late twentieth century fixation on the humanity of an approachable, friendly Jesus (Prothero, 2004, p. 297). While Sallman's *Christ* and similar renditions looked away, pensively allowing the viewer to glimpse the implied relationship between Jesus and God the father, the later depictions drew the viewer directly into the gaze of Jesus, inviting a personal engagement and response.



Richard Hook, *Head of Christ,* 1966

Separating Jesus from Jews and Judaism

These images and their multiple variations - each according to their own lights - represent the *idea* of Jesus rather than the *identity* of Jesus as an actual historical person who lived and died in a concrete human existence (Siker, 2007, p. 26). They impose the artist's own ideas of Jesus and his place in his own culture. They reflect the era in which the artist created them, with its concerns, its responses to artistic ideas from preceding eras, and its dominant theological conceptions. What Nguyen (2010, p. 192) says of Jesus filmmakers can be applied equally to other visual artists: "portraits of Jesus in the Jesus film genre essentially are not reflecting the Jesus of the Gospels but a Jesus of the time and culture of the filmmaker".

The artists who took up the challenge of visually representing Jesus of Nazareth followed the lead of historians and theologians in the nineteenth century who undertook a search for the historical Jesus: "by means of critical scientific scholarship, European theologians began to search for an image of Jesus that could be meaningful for enlightened Christians, that could serve as a model of moral piety and religious perfection suitable for their own age" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 13). Persistently, the results of these modern investigations meant that they "tended to craft an image of him in their own likeness; various theories as to who Jesus was and what he taught helped to legitimate modern theologies and movements" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 13). One solution offered by liberal Christian theologians to the challenges of a re-discovered Jewish Jesus was to "sketch a picture of Palestinian and Pharisaic Judaism that was as negative and as bleak as possible, thereby sharpening the contrast between Jesus and his

opponents" (Kelley, 2002, p. 71). This strategy served to separate Jesus from his Jewish context and show him as radically opposed to Jewish ideas. The image of Jesus which emerged from the pens of these theologians was a person who "stood in absolute opposition to his shallow, hypocritical, unspiritual, literal, Jewish opponents" (Kelley, 2002, p. 71).

Artists were in lock step with these predominant European Christian cultural presumptions: that is to say, they portrayed Jesus in a way that persuaded viewers to accept that he was not actually Jewish. They showed him to be an enemy of Jews and Judaism, who had sought the destruction of Jewish religion. Artworks tended to pursue European Christian interests, distanced Jesus from his Jewish culture and religion and, by the mid-twentieth century, distanced Jesus from the biblical narratives which may have provided some visual clues to the Jewish environment in which Jesus existed. In contrast to earlier eras of Christian art, "twentieth-century popular Christian images do not dwell on the history and stories of faith. There are few episodes of Christ's passion, no notable crucifixions, and little that is overtly liturgical or catechetical" (Prescott, 1995, p. 72). The modern artistic preference is for a focus on the person of Jesus and away from the narratives of his life and career reported in the gospels. The viewer is invited to a personal encounter with Jesus. To promote this personal engagement, modern artistic representations revise images created in previous eras: "if medieval pictures of Christ were too stern, distant and concerned with coming judgment, our own popular pictures seem too nice, too bland, too much one of us". And, it should be noted, too "noticeably Nordic" (Prescott, 1995, p. 73).

The images share an effort to mis-represent Jesus' ethnicity, and in some rare instances, even his gender. Jeffrey Siker (2007, p. 27) has observed the temptation for "each particular human group to show, implicitly or explicitly, how their distinctive group markers can be associated with the particularity of Jesus. Not only are they like Jesus, Jesus is like them". Jesus was shown as malleable, "congruent with the ideals of any cultural group that embraced him" (Maan, 2004, p 100). Demands to portray Jesus of Nazareth as "non-white" flourished after Black Lives Matter protests around the world in June 2020. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, claimed the "Anglican church should reconsider the way statues and other representations of Jesus portray him as white in the light of the Black Lives Matter protests" (McDonald, 2020). Welby commented that on his travels to churches around the world, he did not see a white Jesus: "You see a black Jesus, a Chinese Jesus, a Middle-Eastern Jesus - which is of course the most accurate - you see a Fijian Jesus" (McDonald, 2020).

Janet McKenzie, *Jesus of the People*, 1999

Susannah Heschel (2008) has identified a paradox in the production of an artistic smorgasbord of Jesus images noticed by Welby. These artworks emerged in the post-WWII era which was marked by movements for promoting gender, class and political liberation as well as European de-colonisation. These images merged biblical narratives of Jesus with local indigenous culture. Heschel (2008) says that "artistic depictions of colonized groups of a black, yellow, female, or even Jewish Jesus were flawed efforts not so much to claim that Jesus was black, yellow, female, or Jewish, but to claim white maleness for the racially subjugated group via Christ" (Heschel, 2008, p. 28). Attempts by artists to picture Jesus in a range of skin tones runs the risk of falling into the same trap as those who portray a European Jesus: they can tend to simply *invert* rather than *subvert* traditional ideas about Jesus' racial/ethnic identity (Anderson, 2016, pp. 86-92). As a result, the "ruling metaphors (white, black, brown) simply shift rather than being ultimately subverted" (Siker, 2007, p. 50). The consequent "message to the people in the pew is not only the (good) message of racial inclusivity; it is also the (bad) message that their sense of Jewish xenophobia is confirmed" (Levine, 2014, p. 217). Ultimately, the same challenges confronting religious educators when presenting Jesus of Nazareth remain, now complicated by a multiplicity of ethnic, class and gender configurations.

Jesus Art and Capitalist Economics

The main source of popular visual imagery of Jesus of Nazareth during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the United States. Blum and Harvey (2012) have pointed to the influence of economic power on the production of culturally specific images of Jesus. The United States had the technical capability and economic strength to create, market and distribute images of Jesus nationally and internationally; "making Jesus visually and marketing him throughout the land took time, capital, and freedom" (Blum & Harvey, 2012, p. 17). The production of images is one example of the commodification of religious symbols, experiences, rituals and beliefs - a process that ultimately leads to the conviction that "the voice of consumerism is the voice of God" (Rossi, 2011, p. xviii). It lends dual credibility to any commodified religious image: divine approbation and consumerist desirability. It teaches that consuming and religious belief are interchangeable: God wants what is fashionable. Lofton (2017) has explained the impact of a consumerist ideology on religious understanding: "the seduction of such an ideology results in you (as worker, believer, or consumer) being alienated from the real material facts of things, consequently, from real awareness. You may *feel* conscious, but you are not" (Lofton, 2017, p.11).

And, geographic imagination played a role in determining the content of artistic images of Jesus produced in the United States: "What Americans thought about Israel of biblical times affected what they imagined Jesus to look like". But, by the mid-twentieth century, travel to Israel was rare among people from the United States: "few had seen the place or the people" (Blum & Harvey, 2012, p. 18). Simple ignorance of the historical and geographical context helps to account for the production and reception of the mass-produced, inauthentic images of Jesus of Nazareth. These observations provoke consideration of the extent to which presentations of Jesus' physical image are determined by the biblical text, or by the dictates of fashionable and profitable cultural agendas. This distinction provides one possible lens for religious educators to evaluate with their students' images of Jesus: to what extent are contemporary cultural agendas apparent in a particular artwork? How do these cultural agendas conspire with the biblical evidence, if at all? To what pre-existing sentiments and expectations in the viewer is the artist appealing?

These images can act as an especially powerful emotional trigger for people's own religious identity. Despite evaluations of these images as kitsch, commercial, low-grade art "people have used these cheap, commodified images to make and maintain their worlds....it has been the likes of Sallman's *Head of Christ* that have actually formed people in their faith and shaped their religious practices" (Hawkins, 1998, p. 295). For many Christians, these images provide the content and interpretation of

vital meanings concerning their religious needs and interests. Morgan (1998) argues that, in the absence of any information in the bible as to the physical appearance of Jesus, Christians "have learned from childhood to regard them as illustrations, as untrameled visualizations of what they profess" (Morgan, 1998, p. 1). One example that underlines this point is offered by the experience of a sociologist who asked a young African American boy what Jesus of Nazareth looked like. The boy responded: "Pictures I've seen of him are all white so I just took for granted he was a white man" (Blum & Harvey, 2012, p. 17). Religious educators need to be aware that these popular images of Jesus create deep spiritual reverberations and are not easily or willingly dislodged in the face of evidence that questions the historical authenticity of their subject matter.

The Role of Art in Teaching Christians about Jesus

Scholars of the visual arts have conducted a lively debate about the role of kitsch art in presentations of religion, especially portrayals of Jesus of Nazareth. These discussions are one avenue for understanding the role of the visual arts in religious experience. The concept of kitsch art will be used in the following discussion to analyse and evaluate portraits of Jesus.

The description of any artwork as kitsch is loaded, and like any artistic judgment, rests in the eye of the beholder: tastes differ, often quite broadly. The meaning of the term, kitsch, is contested; no satisfactory definition exists. The term is thought to be derived from German, but its precise origins are unknown (Scruton, 1999). Scholars agree the word has negative connotations. A consensus describes kitsch as comprising judgments about the cheap and inauthentic tasteless quality of artistic works. Scholars debate whether "bad" art is equivalent to "bad" religion, whether poor art can fulfil the responsibility of depicting holy objects. Some think that bad art is an inappropriate vehicle for representing sacred images; others regard "popular" representations "as a legitimate and meaningful channel for communication with the divine" (McIntyre, 2014, p. 87). Scruton (1999) sees many artistic works that "lapse into sentimentality" that induce a "yuk feeling that is our spontaneous tribute to kitsch in all its forms". For him, "kitsch is advertising, just as most advertising is kitsch" (Scruton, 1999).

Yet, Kulka (2010, p. 19) observes a paradox - kitsch objects appeal to large sections of the population: "people like it; at least many do....The mass appeal of kitsch has been exploited by advertising agencies to promote commodities, just as it has been used by political parties to promote their ideologies". The same goes for religious communities who utilise kitsch artforms to solidify their preferred ideologies. Cilliers (2010) has described the way kitsch imagery acts as a "lure" for religious people, though a flawed one: "kitsch cannot endure life's struggles. It avoids theodicy like the plague. It cannot exist in the tension of the quest for meaning. It rather becomes a type of souvenir kitsch, souvenir faith: like sentimental figurines and artefacts it bypasses reality, also the reality of suffering, poverty and being truly human" (Cilliers, 2010, p. 4). Kulka (2010, p. 26) argues the reason for the existence of this paradox - bad art/popular appeal - is that kitsch artworks are "all highly emotionally charged". These works trigger in the viewer an uncritical, unreflective emotional response. The aim is not to create new needs and expectations; the aim is to satisfy existing needs and expectations.

Kitsch art calms, soothes and refuses to challenge accepted ideas. Kitsch art can provide a soporific effect in the lives of believers. Morgan (2014) provides a case study of this paradox in the reports of findings of his study of Christians' responses to Sallman's *Head of Christ*. People who displayed this image in their homes, "spoke fondly of the image as the 'portrait' even 'photograph'(!) of their 'best friend'". When pressed to elaborate, they indicated that this picture of Jesus corresponded to "their intimate relationship with their savior....they saw Jesus who consoled and comforted them, to whom they addressed their deepest wishes, to whom they prayed, indeed, the very face of the person they expected to see one day when entering heaven". Their responses to Sallman's picture of Jesus were grounded in feelings of "affection, reliance, and comfort" (Morgan, 2014, p. 487).

McIntyre (2014, p. 84) has described characteristics that identify a religious object as kitsch:

a) ambiguous/blurred distinction between sacred and profane
b) commodification - the artwork is a product widely marketed and sold
c) used in everyday/domestic contexts, not officially sanctioned contexts
d) imitation/repetition - image conforms to previous renderings of the same subject
e) deliberate and easy manipulation of emotions
f) agency of the believer in the construction of meaning of the object

A brief consideration of Sallman's *Head of Christ* provides a case study of McIntyre's (2014) categories. Morgan's (2014) research discussed above points to the blurred distinction between the sacred and profane in the minds of viewers, as well as the strong appeal to the emotions of the viewer who assigns strong messages of loyalty, attraction and devotion. This artwork has been turned into a commodity that has been traded in multiple forms and displayed in multiple domestic contexts. It has not been given official sanction by Church authorities. It has imitated the forms for depicting Jesus dating back to medieval times and continued in the modern era. Many critics have noticed an uncanny resemblance between Sallman's *Christ* and the 1892 painting by Leon Lhermitte, *The Friend of the Humble (Supper at Emmaus)*. Whether a conscious copy or a coincidental likeness, Sallman is firmly located in the established European art traditions. Since Sallman's image has omitted any direct Jewish references, the viewer does not - because they are not invited by the artist - see any Jewish context for Jesus as the subject of the image.

Works by Sallman and others prefer an emotional appeal in the presentation of their subjects rather than an intellectual one. Solomon (2004) has rehearsed prominent criticisms this can mean for artworks that are popular and influential. He claims many critics have registered poor reviews of works that express the emotions, especially softer, sentimental feelings. Some, according to Solomon (2004, p. 3), argue that "sentimentality might actually promote fascism and racism, if only by blunting any critical response". He describes a common criticism of sentimental works as bearing "connotations of 'too much'...too much feeling and too little common sense and rationality" (Solomon, 2004, p. 12). These objections to kitsch art call to mind the efforts in Nazi Germany of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life to "de-judaise" Jesus. German theologians "revised the New Testament to demonstrate that Jesus was not a Jew but an Aryan" (Heschel, 2008, p. 50). Members of the Institute promoted artistic representations of Jesus as an "heroic, aggressive, manly warrior". His appearance was aryanised in art and "archaeological finds were interpreted as demonstrating his purported 'Nordic' appearance" (Heschel, 2008, p. 49).

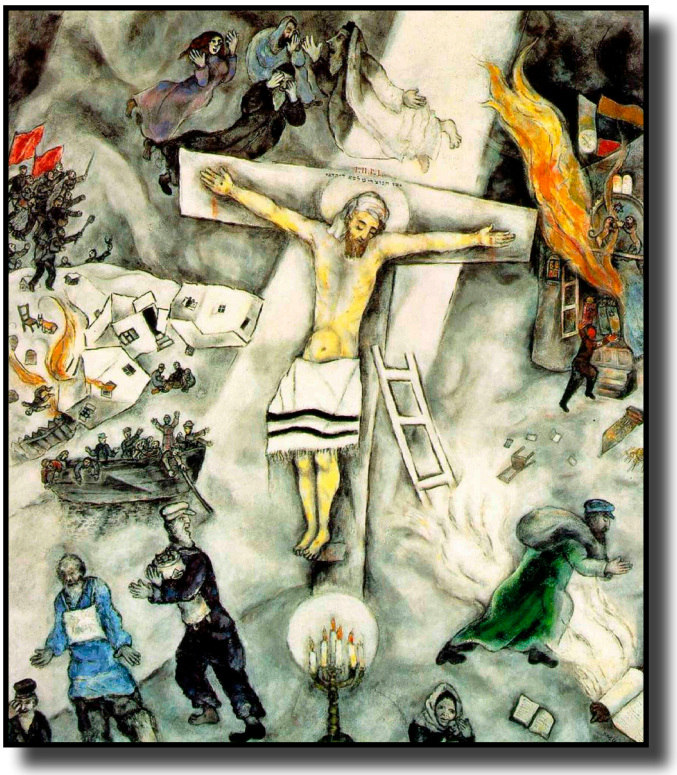
The function of kitsch art is to appeal to emotion and increase the devotion of the viewer. These artistic representations deal "only in gentle, positive sentiments rather than the controversial, confrontational points of serious discourse" (McIntyre, 2014, p. 94). Bad art does not demand intellectual effort or engagement. It raises no questions in the minds of the viewer; it provokes no further discussion. It heals no wounds.

Re-Covering Jesus the Jew in Art

From the late 1700s, Jewish thinkers increasingly grappled with the forces of modernity. One focus of these intellectual endeavours was a reconsideration of Jewish responses to Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus became a "mirror through which Jewish thinkers could reflect their own ideological or spiritual vision; they could relate to Jesus on some level as a kindred spirit, proud or persecuted, nationalist or universalist, reformer or redeemer" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 2). One outcome of this Jewish re-engagement with Jesus as a fellow Jew was the production of images of Jesus depicted within Jewish contexts that matched the ideological commitments expressed by Jewish intellectuals. Amitai Mendelsohn (2017) credits Mark Antokolsky as

the first modern Jewish artist to show Jesus as a Jew in his 1876 sculpture of Jesus, *Christ Before the People*, with sidelocks and wearing a yarmulke. Other Jewish renderings of Jesus followed.

A key figure among Jewish artists representing Jesus of Nazareth was Marc Chagall (1887-1985). During his career, he produced several paintings of Jesus, the best known of which are *White Crucifixion* (1938) and *Yellow Crucifixion* (1943) both created in the era of Nazi upheaval. *White Crucifixion* shows Jesus on the cross dressed only in a tallith - a Jewish prayer shawl - and surrounded by multiple signs of destruction and corruption. *Yellow Crucifixion* shows Jesus on the cross with a large, green Torah scroll sharing the central focus. Chagall's Jesus did not follow established representations by Christian artists. His Jesus was not a redemptive figure but "a victim on the cross surrounded by chaos and suffering. Chagall was not simply recycling a Christian symbol, but using it in a new way....Chagall changes the meaning of the cross, which has helped both Christians and Jews to see it in a different way" (Hayman, 2009, p. 11).



Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*, 1938

Mary Boys (2000) has noted the contemporary trend among artists to depict "Jesus with Semitic features. Sometimes they portray him with Jewish accouterments, such as the tefillin, the cubical black boxes (called phylacteries in Greek) worn while praying - an appropriate detail, since we know Jews of Jesus' day wore tefillin" (Boys, 2000, p. 87). This attentiveness to time and place is an essential dimension for artists wishing to portray Jesus of Nazareth. Advice given to those staging dramatisations of Jesus' Passion by the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1988) is equally relevant for visual artists: the use of religious symbols should be carefully evaluated in case their inappropriate placement tended to "isolate Jesus and the apostles from 'the Jews', as if all were not part of the same people" (Bishops' Committee, 1988, B,3,h). Also, "displays of the menorah, tablets of the law, and other Jewish symbols should appear throughout the play and be connected with Jesus and his friends no less than with the Temple" (Bishops' Committee, 1988, B.3,i). Religious educators can assign their students the task of analysing the placement of Jewish symbols (or their absence) in artistic representations of Jesus. They can make judgments about the extent to which all Jews in the pictures share a Jewish identity. They can offer amendments to the original artwork in order better to reflect contemporary contexts.

A striking example of more recent portraits of Jesus was created by retired University of Manchester medical artist, Richard Neave, using the techniques of forensic anthropology to reconstruct the likely head of Jesus using available evidence. His image was popularised in the BBC-TV series *Son of God*. Neave retrieved three male skulls from the Galilee region dating to the first century CE and used his artistic skills to reconstruct his version of the face of an adult male who lived at the same time and in the same place as Jesus of Nazareth (Fillon, 2020). Neave's image created controversy fuelled by those who did not accept the disruption that his image created to settled notions of a Nordic Christ-figure.

A similar image of Jesus has been created by Dutch photographer Bas Uterwijk who employs artificial intelligence technologies to generate hyper-realistic, photography-like portraits of historical figures using a collection of paintings and sculptures to identify common features and qualities. In this process, some artistic judgments are required and necessary to complete the image, such as skin tone, eye colour and hair length.

Educational Responses to Artistic Representations of Jesus of Nazareth

Gabriel Moran (2016) has drawn attention to the importance of art and artist in the religious education of Christians. He believes "art transforms the soul and awakens the realization that we are members of a single human community....The lack of appreciation of artists left the modern church with some bad art....Church leaders, like many politicians, prefer art that is nice, meaning art that is banal and simply an instrument for moralizing" (Moran, 2016, pp. 42-3). Moran's antidote to the use of bad art in religious education is the production and selection of good art, which is to say, art that goes beyond moralising, and which challenges and transforms. This will involve religious educators in the critical survey with their students of the artistic renderings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Richard Neave, *Son of God*, 1990s

The images of Jesus produced by generations of artists provide insight into the cultural context of the artist and the era in which they were produced. This makes the images - good, bad, or indifferent - suitable artifacts for study in religion classes, if they are presented critically. The images can be located within the time and place of their composition. They can be appreciated for what they reveal about the insights and commitments of the artist and his or her intended audience. The student viewing and appraising paintings that make claims for photographic realism "must carefully weigh its claims...

some of which obscure the truth, some of which reveal it" (Oost, 2001, p. 155). Students can analyse and evaluate the ambivalence that artworks portraying Jesus of Nazareth are likely to evoke.

Roger Scruton (1999) has expressed similar sentiments to Moran's, albeit more bluntly. He believes the sustained use of kitsch artworks in religious communities "is an attempt to have the life of the spirit on the cheap". Indeed, religious communities were leaders in introducing the world to kitsch art in the creation of "the plaster saints and doe-eyed madonnas that sprang up during the nineteenth century in every Italian church, the cult of Christmas and the baby Jesus that replaced the noble tragedy of Easter and the narrative of our hard-won redemption" (Scruton, 1999).

An educational response to criticisms expressed by Moran (2016) and Scruton (1999) is to apply critical evaluative judgments of artistic representations of Jesus of Nazareth. McIntyre's (2014) criteria discussed above offer one framework for a systematic analysis of religious artworks. The images can be compared with biblical texts that provide context and critical distance for the artist's work. Religious educators can employ the distinction between the *idea* of Jesus in contrast to the *identity* of Jesus to assist in the evaluation of images: students can identify, analyse and evaluate the elements of the artwork that convey ideas about Jesus and his time and place, as well as the intended audience for the work. They can determine the extent to which the work conveys aspects of Jesus' own time and Jewish culture.

One example of an instructional approach to study artistic images of Jesus is offered by Jaime Clark-Soles (2005, p. 282) who begins an exploration of the image of Jesus in her teaching by asking her students to record their responses to these questions: "when you picture Jesus, what do you see? What color is his skin, his hair, his eyes? Is he tall or short, clean or dusty? Describe his demeanor". She then shows students a series of slides of artistic portraits of Jesus, asking them to select those that best approximate their own previously stated image. Then follows a discussion of students' reactions and responses: what influenced their ideas? Students discuss their understanding of Jesus' class, religion, ethnicity as it is portrayed in art. In selecting her images, she uses Pelikan's (1997), *The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries* and Josh Simon's (1994) *Life* magazine article, "Who Was Jesus?" as well as images located using an internet search engine.

Religious educators require a foundational understanding and appreciation of Jesus in his Jewish context. Mark Chancey (2003) has been persuasive in his evaluation of the Jewish character of Jesus' home region of Galilee. He points to evidence of a minor presence of Gentile residents, traders and travellers in the Galilee in Jesus' time. Scholars' "myths" about a Gentile Galilee have tended to distort understandings of Jesus:

> Scholarly reconstructions that de-emphasize the Jewish character of Jesus's ministry or the Jewish roots of early Christianity by de-Judaizing Galilee distort Jesus, the Jesus movement, and their Galilean context. The evidence, both literary and archaeological corroborates the Gospels' depictions of Jesus as a Jew preaching to and working primarily among other Jews. (Chancey, 2003, p. 182)

Freyne (2009, p. 291) provides an affirmation of Chancey's insight that is usefully pithy: "the largely village culture within which Jesus' ministry was conducted was thoroughly Jewish in ethos, affiliation, and practice". These insights are given specific content in the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (1985, III.1) notes on presenting Jews and Judaism: "Jesus was and always remained a Jew, his ministry was deliberately limited 'to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15:24)". The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, paragraph 531) teaches that "his religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God, a life in the community". Jesus was fully a man of his time, and of his environment - the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes which he shared.

While religious educators are directed to present Jesus in the context of his own time, Crossley (2015) draws attention to the way modern perceptions of Jesus are conditioned by the present context.

Crossley (2015) claims that the perspectives of modern audiences are shaped by the pervasive influence of neo-liberal capitalism and post-modernity with its emphasis on "eclecticism, multiple identities, indeterminacy, depthlessness, scepticism towards grand narratives and so on" (Crossley, 2015, p. 80). Crossley (2015) thinks these influences have resulted in a marketplace of multiple, sometimes competing, Jesuses. These perspectives direct the viewer of artworks of Jesus of Nazareth to attend to the biblical texts to sharpen perception and insight.

None of these above critical evaluations of Jesus artworks negates the value and effectiveness of apposite artworks for presenting Jesus of Nazareth. Official Catholic Church teaching has affirmed that "the production of representational artwork...confirms that the incarnation of the Word of God was real and not imaginary" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, paragraph 1160) and that "Christian veneration of these images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, paragraph 2132). Because Jesus assumes a "true humanity...the human face of Jesus can be portrayed" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, paragraph 476). Modern textbooks and resources have incorporated these insights in critical teaching and learning materials to present a Jewish Jesus beyond stock kitsch imagery (Ryan & Petersen, 2020).

Conclusion

Paul Ricouer often observed that "we live what we imagine" - he thought if you wanted to change the way people acted, thought and believed, you needed to appeal to the imagination. In order to make sense of human life, Ricoeur argued that one needed to "move from an initial understanding to greater understanding on the basis of critical reflection and an appeal to the imagination" (Pellauer & Dauenhauer, 2000). If we continue to imagine Jesus in the guise of a European Christian, we run the risk of missing and/or misunderstanding key aspects of his life and message. This is detrimental to Christian self-understanding and to the possibilities for Christians to relate to Jews and Judaism. If we are to re-imagine Jesus of Nazareth more accurately in his authentic historical context, we need to critically appraise the images we utilise to represent Jesus, and to discover and/or create images in the light of renewed understandings provided by scholarly investigations.

Mary Boys (2000) has affirmed the necessity to visualise Jesus of Nazareth in his Jewish context. But, she adds a warning that such changes in the repertoire of religious educators, though necessary, are insufficient. She believes that however such visual representations locate Jesus in his context, "they do not sufficiently situate him in the complexities of the first-century Jewish world. Seeing Jesus as a Jew is necessary but insufficient. We require more knowledge of Judaism at that time, and how it might have shaped the teaching of Jesus" (Boys, 2000, p. 87). For Boys (2000), the danger is that culturally appropriate images of Jesus are merely superimposed over inadequate Christian understandings of the complexity of first-century CE Judaism and how the Christian Church emerged from it. Consequently, "we truncate our understanding of both Jesus and the church" (Boys, 2000, p. 87).

> Amy-Jill Levine (2012) proposes a related point:
>
> Today, the greater problem in the church, and to some extent in scholarship, is that while pretty much everyone agrees that Jesus was a Jew...there remains a lack of agreement, or even awareness of what that label "Jew" means. To characterize Jesus as a Jew should mean more than simply an ethnic definition. Jesus was a Jew not only by descent, but also in practice, in discourse, and in his reception by his fellow Jews. (Levine, 2012, p. 11)

A picture may be worth a proverbial thousand words, but many more words are needed in addition to culturally appropriate pictures to uncover buried layers of meaning in our perceptions of Jesus the Jew. Attentiveness to appropriate presentations of the physical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth is an educational catalyst for a broader and more complex presentation that explains and explores the Jewish

context in which Jesus existed and the implications of these studies for Christians throughout history and the Church today.

An understanding of Jesus the Jew contributes to Christian self-understanding. Gabriel Moran thinks that "understanding Christianity implies a background understanding of Judaism". One suggestion for achieving this understanding is that "Jewish voices might be brought into the discussion of the logic and concepts of Christianity". He believes that no Christian is religiously educated today without some knowledge of Judaism (Moran, 2016, p. 226). A starting point for this sustained study is a critical examination of representations of Jesus of Nazareth.

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Online Resources

The following list provides religious educators with digital locations for the artworks mentioned in this article.

Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ*

https://www.warnerpress.org/churchsupplies/warner-sallman-art-collection.html

Richard Hook, *Head of Christ*

http://sacredartpilgrim.com/collection/view/106

Jack Jewell, *The Risen Christ by the Sea*

https://www.joyfulnoiseletter.com/risen_Christ.asp

Richard Neave, *Son of God*

https://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/mar/26/bbc.broadcasting1

Marc Chagall

White Crucifixion https://www.marcchagall.net/white-crucifixion.jsp

Yellow Crucifixion http://www.pneuma.org.uk/art/marc-chagall-the-yellow-crucifixion

Mark Antokolsky, *Christ Before the People*

https://arthive.com/artists/66015~Mark_Matveyevich_Antokolsky/works/405339~Christ_before_the_people

Leon Lhermitte, *The Friend of the Humble (Supper at Emmaus)*

https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31032

Bas Uterwijk, *Jesus of Nazareth*

https://www.basuterwijk.com/portfolio/GooooWVKM6MbiIAc

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