# Liberation through Salvation:

# The Medieval Western European and South African

# experiences (1860 to 1994) compared through a

# selection of religious iconography

by

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I declare that "Liberation through Salvation: The Medieval Western European and South African experiences (1860 to 1994) compared through a selection of religious iconography" is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


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**DUNCAN MALCOLM ARTHUR**                    **DATE**

**Abstract**

The medieval period (approximately 800 to 1300 AD) in Western Europe is noted for its rich tradition in religious Roman Catholic iconography. Frequently the only art works to be produced in the period, or to have survived, are religious icons of the period reflecting the dominant nature of the feudal structure of society and the oppressive circumstances that led to their execution. The works can be seen as a means of escape – although in an afterlife – or they might also be interpreted as a protest against the oppressive nature of the condition of the artist. The "rigidity" of a medieval existence and the utilisation of religious art as a means of expressing unhappiness with that existence may, as it is argued here, be interpreted as a means of protest. Rigid and oppressive political structures are not isolated to any particular historical period. South Africa too was an oppressive society where the material and political advancement of the majority of the population was stifled through discriminatory legislation and similar means making meaningful protest difficult, if not dangerous. This dissertation argues that religious art too became a means of protest in a manner intended to reflect the religious viewpoints of the artist but with political intentions and subtext. Similar themes in modern South African iconography (from approximately 1850 to 1994) and medieval prototypes are therefore discernible.

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Sancte Michael Archangele, defende nos in praelio.  Contra nequitiam et insidias diaboli esto praesidium.  Imperet illi Deus, supplices deprecamur. Tuque princeps militiae caelestis, Satanam aliosque spiritus malignos, qui ad perditionem animarum pervagantur in mundo divina virtute in infernum detrude.

Amen.


St Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle,

Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil.

May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, Thrust into hell Satan and all the other evil spirits who roam through the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.

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**Chapter One**

**Introduction to the study, its Scope and Methodology**

**1.1     The Study**

The research question for this study is presented as:

*"Are aspects of medieval existence, particularly oppression, which resulted in the art characteristic of that age, apparent in modern South African religious art? Can modern South African religious iconography be seen also as a result of oppressive experience?"*

In this study I have attempted to identify and highlight aspects of modern South African religious art from the nineteenth century until the establishment of the democratic order in 1994 that appear to have themes or other characteristics in common with medieval religious art.

The study suggests the validity of Jeffrey Cohne's contention[1] that the dominance of western culture at present makes it difficult not to believe that the medieval period is directly influential on every person in every culture directly influenced by the European. There can be little doubt that the medieval period was oppressive and violent in many respects. The 'common' man or woman was severely limited in whatever freedoms or opportunities were available. Religious faith however allowed an outlet for protest through the production of religious art that further entrenched religious faith. A comparable position in terms of the oppressed state of the majority and lack of scope for immediate escape for many individuals exists all too frequently in many places across the globe today. The closest analogy to the South African observer of the medieval period would perhaps be the situation of the majority of black South Africans under the colonial and apartheid social and

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[1] JJ Cohne (ed), <u>The postcolonial Middle Ages</u>, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000), p 2.

political orders before democratisation in 1994. Archbishop Jabulani Nxumalo holds that the average black South African Catholic's answer to the oppression he or she endured as a consequence of the apartheid system, if violence was not an option and neither was aligning oneself with communists – because of Canon Law restrictions, can be summarised as 'liberation through salvation'. [2] My study attempts to highlight many similarities between the position of common people in medieval Western Europe and pre-1994 South Africa, and understand how the concept of a 'liberation through salvation' arose in both instances.

In both periods, the production of religious icons and religious art as a means of effective protest arose as an answer to the oppressive nature of the dominant social, religious and political circumstances of the respective histories. These works of religious art can be contrasted to reveal common historical themes in response to the relevant status quo. In many instances, for whatever reason (often as a result of limited opportunity and artificial social barriers), medieval prototypes served as examples and inspirations for South African equivalents, thus highlighting the commonality in responding to oppression through artistic means and, it is recommended, reinforcing the direct impact of the medieval period on modern South Africa.

An icon is seen to participate actively in the holiness it represents, achieving a unity of the corporeal and divine. Thus, unlike other things created by man, it is seen as more than a mere representation of something else, but as imbued with the Holy Spirit. Although human hands form it, it is also a sacred manifestation of holiness. The anonymity of the artist may be viewed as part of this process. Icons are essentially an offering, a prayer of sacrifice.

Not all works of art in the medieval period were religious and neither was all protest art religious in emphasis. Religious themes do occur frequently however, giving insights into the religious circumstances -- particularly

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[2] J Nxumalo in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid South Africa, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1982), p 145.

socialisation and education) of the artists -- and, I propose, this allows for a valid comparison across the two periods.

My study investigates the research question through an introduction to Roman Catholicism – as well as including the position as regards the nineteenth-century Catholic-centred trend (principally led by the Community of the Resurrection) within High Anglicanism in South Africa.  The study seeks to show the effect of the embracing of icons (and other facets of Catholic liturgy and belief) and their impact on apartheid South Africa, and how the medieval world, the nature and characteristics of iconography and religious icons, and Roman Catholicism in South Africa have had a significant influence.

## 1.2    The origins of Christian iconography

Read holds art to be the essential element in the development of human consciousness, an attempt to deliver the visible and invisible world into the human mind.[3]  Art is essential to culture and becomes an inherent aspect of the individual.  Iconographic art, and perhaps Christian art in its totality has its roots in Christ's Passion and the suffering He endured in the last hours of His life when Veronica mopped Christ's brow with a cloth and His image was reflected thereon.

The Shroud of Turin in which Christ's body was laid after the Crucifixion is venerated as having assumed an outline of Christ's body and face.[4]  The Legend of the Icon of the Face,[5] whereby the Holy Spirit is said to have intervened to give humanity icons as a means of devotion, is interpreted as further spiritual approval of iconography.[6]  The legend holds that a painter sent by the biblical King Abgar, a contemporary of Jesus, to capture the likeness of Christ was unable to do so because of the brightness of Christ's

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[3] H Read, <u>Icon and idea</u> (Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1955), p 17.
[4] L Ouspensky, <u>Theology of the Icon</u> (St Petersburg, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), p 10.
[5] G Galavaris, <u>The icon in the life of the Church</u>, (Leiden, EJ Brill, 1981), p 3.
[6] Ibid.

face.  Christ, seeing the predicament of the painter, took a piece of linen and rubbed it against Himself and produced an icon.[7]

The belief in the participation of Christ in the production of icons in both instances hastened their acceptance into Catholicism and veneration as divine.[8] Further items listed by Edward Martin as being propounded by the Catholic Church to be divinely inspired (and thereby a justification for the veneration of icons), include a painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) reportedly commissioned by St Luke, and a statue of Mary that resisted all attempts by Julian the Apostate to destroy it.  Egbert further describes how two angels disguised as pilgrims created a cross, later donated to the Cathedral of Oviedo in 808; the ornate beauty of the icon defied a conventional understanding of its commission.[9]

## 1.3    South African art – a manifesto?

My research question requires that certain artistic output be recognisable as African – or South African specifically.  Although Africa is vast, certain traits in terms of commonality as regards art do exist across the continent or parts thereof.  Aspects of artistic output that make them recognisable as 'African' – as opposed to 'Oriental' or 'contemporary North American' - for instance – are apparent.

Traits that are put forward as being common across the continent include the use of mythology and a focus on communitarian themes.[10]  Christopher Roy identifies the anonymity of the output (as with medieval works) as being a common trait, in addition to a reliance being upon the use of traditional means of expression, such as woodcarving.[11]

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[7] E Martin, A history of the iconoclastic controversy, (London, AMS Press, 1978), p 22.
[8] D Farmer, Oxford dictionary of saints, (Oxford, Oxford university Press, 1997), p 489.
[9] V Egbert, The medieval artist at work, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967), p 19.
[10] M Ngenya, in Frontline States, Art from the frontline, p 47.
[11] C Roy, The Chronology of African Art, http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/teachers/Chronology.html, 5 September 2006.

African art, in addition to sharing common elements as regards execution, further, according to Stephen Williams,[12] has suffered universally as a result of much of its best output being exported.  Religious buildings frequently are the only vestiges of African storage places for locally produced artefacts.  In addition, economic hardship has seen artistic development decline in the wake of the need of people merely to subsist.

Art recognisable as South African certainly exists.  Williams holds that artistic expression in Southern Africa is deeply influenced by the rock paintings left behind by San peoples.[13] Frequently, the means of decoration are also apparently common – such as the painting of huts and etching of bones and utensils.  In addition to the influence of the San, the history of South Africa has inevitably deeply affected the subject matter of the art works and the circumstances of the artists.  Sometimes even religious art, such as Ntshalintshali's *Last Supper*, exhibits brand names (such as Castle Lager) that are immediately recognisable as South African.  Marion Arnold describes South African art as having a universal characteristic of affirming the human spirit, despite lacking a homogeneous presentation, [14] presupposing that art more recognisable as South African and capable of being understood more quickly, or even more deeply, by someone with a South African frame of reference, does exist and reinforcing the notion of the existence of a composite South African identity and frame of reference.

Michael O'Brien, an American artist and writer, holds that oppression inspires the commission of religious art.  He argues that the oppressed are more in touch with their spiritual natures and artists are forced to seek refuge in prayer and contemplation while confronting real fears of destitution and harassment.[15] O'Brien goes further and suggests that political oppression is translated by artists into works that are superior technically and spiritually to those commissioned in periods where a lack of oppression exists.[16]   In

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[12] S Williams, in Frontline States, <u>Art from the frontline</u>, (London, Karia Press, 1990), 1990, p 40.

[13] S Williams, in Frontline States, <u>Art from the frontline</u>, p 37.

[14] M Arnold, <u>Women and art in South Africa</u>, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p16.

[15] S Williams, in Frontline States, <u>Art from the frontline</u>, p 37.

[16] M O'Brien, <u>The decline and renewal of Christian art</u>, http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/arts/a10035.html, 12 October 2004.

support of O'Brien, the journalist Eric Elie Lolis contends that oppression serves as a catalyst for the production of artistic output amongst the oppressed and utilises the culture of the descendants of slaves in the southern United States (jazz music in particular) in support of the contention.[17] The English anarchists Esther Leslie and Ben Watson add that all art is necessarily political -- politics must influence art. The execution of any artwork is inherently political and will reflect the artist's 'relationship to totality'.[18] The unique history of South Africa, I contend, makes for a rich series of artistic output detailing the diversity of oppressive experience and works that are recognisable as South African and African.

## 1.4    Methodology type selected

The methodology of investigation I have utilised is qualitative. The qualitative approach taken by this study does not claim to identify truth. The approach and method utilised instead has the objective of exploring what we already assume, as reality is believed to be constructed rather than discovered. The study takes a narrative approach to research and is thus interested in the analysis of narratives.

## 1.5    Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy (as opposed to a random sampling strategy, whereby I have attempted to identify themes common to both the medieval and South African art studied) is utilised. Purposive (or judgmental) sampling strategies are characterised by researchers utilising their judgment in determining what particular cases will best enable the answering of research questions. I have endeavoured to investigate those samples whose relevance I believe is dependent upon the research questions and objectives highlighted. This is best illustrated through apparent examples of a direct

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[17] EE Lolis, <u>Oppression gives birth to great art 04/19/04</u>, <u>http://nolassf.dev.advance.net/newsstory/elie_19.html</u>, 17 August 2006.
[18] E Leslie & B Watson , <u>Art and politics – some theses. Delivered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 13 October 2002, at '25 years after Stammheim,</u> <u>http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/opticysyn/art-pol.htm</u>, 17 August 2006.

comparison, which include those below of Bonnie Ntshalintshali's *Nativity*. Figure 1.1, according to O'Brien, an American artist and writer, was directly influenced by the *The Annunciation* in Figure 1.2. In Figure 1.1, the angel – whose spirit nature is denoted by the presence of wings - delivers the message of the annunciation to the Mother of Christ with his arms crossed just below his shoulders. This gesture symbolises truth in a southern African context.[19] Figure 1.2 shows further supplication on the part of the angel (who is bowing instead of revealing its back in a straight-up position) than its African counterpart.

Ntshalintshali grew up surrounded by medieval and medieval influenced works[20] and her work has been called an interpretation of iconographers.[21] Her output - as illustrated in Figure 1.1, frequently shows the subjects reflecting respect and supplication, the depictions utilising obvious religious symbolism via their gestures (such as the angel crossing its arms to indicate that the message it tells does not emanate from it). In Ntshalintshali's world, where deadly sickness and dire poverty were an aspect of daily life, it is perhaps understandable that she could identify with the subjects of medieval works she viewed whose artists lived in a similar reality.

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[19] H Brookes, 'A repertoire of South African quotable gestures', http://www.aaanet.org/sla/jla/jla14_2_brookes.htm, 1 February 2007.
[20] A Verster, Standard Bank young artist award 1990, (Johannesburg, Standard Bank, 1990), p 14.
[21] M Arnold, Women and art in South Africa, p 16.

**Figure 1.1**

*Depiction:*          Detail from *Nativity,* 1989
*Construction:*        Wood, paint
*Location:*           Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*            Bonnie Ntshalintshali
*Photographed by:*   Andrew Verster
*Biblical reference:*  Luke 1

**Figure 1.2**

*Depiction:*      The Annunciation
*Construction:*    Mural
*Artist:*         Fra Angelico
*Photograph:*    http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060206/danto

Angelico was so named because of his apparent angelic qualities. He received his training in the medieval, and by then declining art of illumination. Angelico openly wept when painting an icon dealing with an aspect of the suffering of Christ. He only began a work (of which the majority are frescoes) after an intense period of prayer and meditation as demanded by the Dominican Order.[22]

Angelico's baptised name of Vicchio di Mugello is rarely used - an indication that his audience has come to believe that his works are the creation of the Divine,[23] as Angelico believed that his hand was guided. On this basis he refused to amend a work once he had finished it, holding that doing so would

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[22] A Danto, <u>Soul eyes. review of the Fra Angelico show at the Met,</u> http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060206/danto, 18 February 2006.
[23] W Hood, <u>Fra Angelico at San Marco</u>, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993), p ix.

have amounted to an interference with the message that the Divine intended to communicate.[24]

Angelico's works, like the medieval art influencing his output, have been described as being simultaneously pietistic while utilising glory as the predominant theme.[25]  The identification of Christ's resurrection and victory over death and evil is personalised for communities – as with depictions of the crucifixion and cross – through the use of features or clothing particular to that group.  Through depicting Christ with the features of a certain group or population, the suffering, glory and compassion depicted by Angelico -- and his medieval predecessors – are personalised for members of that group.

Ntinshalintshali, in further support of the view that direct comparisons between her work and the medieval are viable, makes frequent use of gargoyles in her works.  Gargoyles are a medieval curiosity in art in that they do not celebrate the beauty of the corporeal – as most medieval art does – and despite their utilitarian purpose serving as conduits for the dispersal of rain water, at least one medieval saint is known to have publicly despaired as to why the monstrous statues should so frequently form part of churches and religious buildings.[26]  Andrew Verster identifies Ntinshalintshali's gargoyles as being copies of those adorning the cathedral in Rheims.[27]

The use of the following categories for the analysis of icons and religious art identified are made:

## 1.6    Selection criteria

A purposive selection criterion is utilised.

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[24] Ibid.
[25] A Danto, <u>Soul eyes. Review of the Fra Angelico Show at the Met,</u>
<u>http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060206/danto</u>, 18 February 2006.
[26] MP Foley, <u>Why do Catholics eat fish on Friday?</u> (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p 51.
[27] A Verster, <u>Standard Bank young artist award 1990</u>, p 14.

The subject matter of the study focussed upon a selection of icons representing African themes using a recognisable medieval example – or exhibiting recognisable aspects of medieval experience or existence such as the use of imagery of the Sacred Heart -- as far as possible. The subject matter may be photographs of the icons or the icons themselves.

Primary research in the course of the study principally consisted of gathering and collating information gained from persons who have knowledge of icons – through an intimate association resulting from their careers as artists or clergy -- fitting the medieval prototype and the African themes required. [28]

## 1.7 Data Gathering

Data was gathered through contacting various institutions potentially housing collections of African religious icons including as many Catholic parish churches as could be contacted. Data surrounding the exploration of the research question in the light of various icons was gained from libraries and other available sources such as the Internet.

## 1.8 Method of Analysis

Content analysis was utilised in the study. Simply put, after looking for the works, I examined them and analysed their content.

According to Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach and Tamar Zilber, content analysis is one of various ways of analysing narrative material.[29] Content analysis must depart from a hypothesis (in this case the research question). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber clarify the concept of content analysis further by referring to its categorical and content elements. In a categorical (as opposed to a holistic) approach, the object of study or account is dissected and categories are formed from sections of the objects of study.

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[28] A schedule of interviews is attached as Annexure A.

[29] A Lieblich, R Tuval-Mashiach, & T Zilber, Narrative research: reading, analysis and interpretation, (London, Sage, 1998), Chapter Three.

These categories were to a large degree predetermined by the interview schedule. By focusing on the content (as opposed to the form), attention is drawn to explicit content, or the meaning imparted.

Earl Babbie holds content analysis to be relevant as a means to study human communications, whether they comprise laws, texts or artistic output such as paintings.[30] Content analysis, according to commentators, is concerned with the characteristics of messages, and the detection of the important structures of contents utilised for communication. Klaus Krippendorff[31] holds that a content analysis must begin by addressing the following issues:

## 1.9    Which data are analysed?

In the study, the data analysed comprises those instances of African religious art (principally Roman Catholic inspired, but in a few instances High Anglican) that appear to reflect a medieval origin, theme or collection of themes as an inspiration, the circumstances surrounding the commission – or spontaneous creation -- of the artefact (as far as they are ascertainable) and supporting evidence as to why the work results from historical oppression, which is a purported reality of the medieval period.

The graphic data I have presented is in an image format. It should be noted that it was not always possible for me to increase the size of some of the images because of restrictions such as the poor quality of photographs sourced. Where possible, the size of the image and current location is given. The nature of construction (tapestry, wood, painting for example) will be discussed for the comparison of both the medieval prototypes and African examples against an investigation of their backgrounds in terms of historical context.

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[30] E Babbie, The practice of social research, (Belmont, California, Wadsworth, 1989), Chapter 1.
[31] K Krippendorff, Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology, (Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2004), Chapter X.

## 1.10   How are they defined?

The objects of study are defined in terms of the definitions utilised by historians and art historians in their descriptions of icons, particularly those from Western Europe in the medieval period.  Leonid Ouspensky sees icons particular to the period as artistic works venerating Christ and the Crucifix, Mary, saints and angels.[32]  Richard McBrien holds that art from the period reveals subjects in a transfigured state, somehow emphasising their divinity whilst simultaneously deploring the baseness of much of human existence (such as sexuality).  In its extreme, McBrien suggests that the gaze depicted in icons can be interpreted showing the holy figures uninterested in this world.[33]

Peter Kidson believes that medieval art characteristically lacks naturalism, ignoring the use of proportion and depth.  As discussed, dull colours (because of the age of the works and the poor quality of materials frequently available) are characteristic.  Other features include the use of religious symbolism (such as lambs and chalices), the anonymity of the artist typically and the utilisation of regional practices to influence the artistic piece.  The use of light in a manner to reflect from the subject, instead of from another source, is a further characteristic of art from the period, as is the frequent inclusion of text to convey various meaning and levels of meaning.  Symbolism, as indicated, is also frequently utilised.  These characteristics of religious iconography are expanded in Chapter Three.

## 1.11   What is the context relative to which the data are analysed?

The two contexts relevant to the data are both instances of extremely rigid social structures that legally and structurally deprived most individuals of any sort of advancement.

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[32] L Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, Chapter III.
[33] R McBrien, Catholicism, volume I (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1980), p 379.

Both contexts were historically oppressive and allowed, through the means of religious art, the expression of a longing for emancipation (either spiritually, or both spiritually and politically). Both contexts furthermore evolved against a background where the commission of an icon may be interpreted as an act of protest against colonial or apartheid-inspired racial policies or an environment offering very little in terms of opportunity for social or political upliftment.

**1.12   What are the boundaries of the scope of this study?**

The scope of this study as regards African icons is limited to those artefacts created between the late nineteenth century (approximately from 1860 onwards when the first permanent and influential Roman Catholic presence in South Africa was effectively established) and the late twentieth century (at the end of the era of political apartheid in 1994).

The scope is limited to African religious art works with recognisable medieval prototypes. Where later prototypes (such as those of the Renaissance, the age following the medieval period and held to have begun between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries) are known to have drawn closely on medieval icons in their style and depiction, they were utilised if appropriate.

**1.13   Conclusion**

In this chapter I defined a research question – principally that both periods investigated demonstrated that religious art became a means of protest. The notion that oppression often spurs the production of religious art was introduced. I evaluated the origins of Christian iconography in addition to some aspects of iconography (such as it lacking naturalism – which will be expanded upon during the course of the study) while attempting to justify that a category of art recognisable South African art does exist. Utilising Cohne's contention[34] that the dominance of western culture at present makes it difficult not to believe that the medieval period is directly influential on every person in

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[34] JJ Cohne (ed), The postcolonial Middle Ages, p 2.

every culture directly influenced by the European, I introduced the methodology utilised in the study. By using a narrative analysis, the objects of study  (religious artworks themselves) are selected according to which fits the research question best.   The circumstances of their commission are highlighted in order that themes across the two periods of history can be identified and analysed in support of the research question.  To illustrate how this would be achieved, I reproduced aspects of the works of Fra Angelico and Ntinshalintshali.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**Aspects of the histories of the periods and how they contributed to the production of religious iconography**

## 2.1    Introduction

In this chapter I have endeavoured to compare two diverse periods of history with a view to framing the context necessary for investigating the research question.  Through investigating the periods of history, I hope to establish that the oppressive societies gave rise to contexts whereby religious art would be created as a means of protest.

The characteristics of the medieval period are presented with a view to highlighting the oppressive political nature of medieval society throughout most of Western Europe, the region from which the examples of art are drawn.  In the medieval period, faith allowed an outlet for protest through the production of religious art.

South Africa prior to 1994 was characterised politically and socially by institutional racial discrimination and its subsequent cultural, legal and social consequences.  Colonialism and apartheid, as the dominant political and social systems (as feudalism had been during the medieval period), set the stage for the oppression, leading to the output of much religious art as protest art.

As disastrous and disruptive as apartheid was to its victims, the system could not undo the rich cultural tapestries in many fields that had been built as a result of the interaction of South Africans from across the spectrum and became part of the collective conscious, or prevent the further production of religious art works, before the Soweto riots of 1976, art as a means of protest was peripheral, its relevance questioned and its proponents divided along racial lines.  As will be highlighted, after the riots, religious art emerged as a means of protest more widely recognised – the role of artists becoming more pronounced, dynamic and influential.

## 2.2    Characteristics of the medieval world

The medieval period was the product of those persons in Europe who lived directly after the fall and disintegration of the Roman Empire (which is widely held to have collapsed in 476) and who failed in attempts at re-establishing the overarching centralised authority that had characterised the Roman Empire.  The period gave rise to 'Christendom', a term which John Randall, perhaps contentiously, highlights as synonymous with Western civilisation.[1] For the great majority of people, a medieval existence was a bitter toil for subsistence.  Feudal structures mostly excluded any chance of advancement for commoners while the nobility typically did not advance at all except through violence, good fortune (often via inheritance) and cunning.

The ultimate goal of medieval people across all classes and from all backgrounds, beyond mere subsistence, was the attainment of eternal life and salvation from the toil and suffering of their present existence.  The immediate surroundings of people were interpreted as the stage for an ongoing battle between good and evil.  Liberation from this unhappy existence was frequently only possible through salvation.  In addition to the oppression of everyday existence, as will be highlighted through the investigation of certain icons below, the threat of oppression via Muslim invaders and conquerors was very real for many medieval Western Europeans.

The epic battle between good and evil, as interpreted against the writings of the most influential Church Father at the time, St Augustine, was personalised for medieval people.  Augustine's description of the Cities of God and Man (whereby the grand conflict between good and evil was formalised in terms of classical philosophy) was the prevailing philosophy.  Augustine's writings - a platonic interpretation applied to reality, describe one city where the damned dwell, and another elevated level where those destined for salvation functioned and lived their lives under the guidance of the Church.  As with

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[1] J Randall, <u>The making of the modern world</u>, (Columbia, Columbia University Press, 1976), p 10.

Plato, Augustine did not believe the absence of alienation to be possible in this world. No distinction between philosophy and Christianity in Western Europe would exist until the thirteenth century. [2]

In the medieval world, God was perceived to be very close.[3] The punishments awaiting the damned and rewards awaiting the saintly, considering the precarious state of life and familiarity with death, were held to be very near. Life was on average much shorter and frequently ended by violence or disease. Educated medieval people viewed the earth as centre of the universe, which was the centre of God's creation in terms of the Scriptures, and around which all planetary bodies revolved.

A principle characteristic of the feudal system is its cost effectiveness.[4] The system was consolidated through the economic regression that followed the disappearance of the limited centralised controls of the ancients preceding the period. Morris Bishop identifies the lack of capital (which in rural areas ultimately led to the loss of many standards of economic measurement outside of monasteries) as the driving force behind the constant need of petty feudal nobility to wage battles with each other.[5] Feudalism is a balance between the needs of the strong for power and influence and the needs of the weak for subsistence and protection. Feudalism as a total organisation of society (especially in England where William the Conqueror and his Norman invaders after 1066 were able to dictate much of the structure of society), was reliant upon personal communication and relationships as opposed to correspondence. The system stresses the position of the community over that of the individual. Whereas government was only part of the life of an Ancient Roman citizen, feudalism and the rule of a manor or religious institution encroached upon every aspect of a person's life, defining every relationship.[6] The decentralised nature of feudal social life and the monopoly held on education by the Church and the nobility – which together placed a

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[2] G Evans, <u>Philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages</u>, (London, Routledge, 1993), p 3.
[3] Ibid.
[4] R Bishop, <u>The Penguin book of the Middle Ages</u>, (London, Penguin, 1971), p 124.
[5] Ibid.
[6] C McEvedy, <u>The Penguin atlas of medieval history</u>, (Middlesex, Penguin, 1961), p 9.

strong emphasis on moral behaviour -- reinforced the subservience of the lives of the majority.[7]   The Church's position was entrenched through the growth of monastic orders that were established by papal decree, outside of the jurisdiction of the local bishop and generally responsible to Rome alone.

Peace, in a society where the physical possession of material objects (and not their monetary equivalents) was the only measure of wealth and drove a desire in order to accumulate these objects, brought poverty.   Objects very often could only be accumulated by force.   Feudalism, in addition to other contributing factors, began to decline during the High Middle Ages after 1000 as a direct result of money becoming more common[8] and goods being available in more convenient ways than conflict.

The vast majority of medieval people lived their entire lives except for the odd military adventure required by their feudal masters in the pursuit of private war, within a few square kilometres.   Medieval people were subsequently insular in terms of their outlook and lost most of the learning as regards the world common during the classical period that ended with the fall of Rome.[9]   The medieval period was characterised by the almost complete erosion of any significant central secular authority.   Where secular authority did exist, it frequently drew its legitimacy from the divine right of kings.   Jacques Boussard holds the breakdown of central authority to amount to a de facto abolition of the concept of the secular state.[10]

## 2.3    Social aspects of the medieval period

There was little prospect of advancement for common people during this period. Through the authority of the individual fiefs, commoners were tied to the land and often could only escape their lot through joining the clergy. As with all aspects of their existence, such an escape was dependent upon the

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[7] Contamine in G Duby (ed), <u>A history of private life II</u>, (Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press,1988), p 306.
[8] C McEvedy, <u>The Penguin atlas of medieval history</u>, p 9.
[9] J Boussard, <u>The civilisation of Charlemagne</u>, (Verona, World University Press, 1968), p 9.
[10] Ibid.

goodwill of their overseer. Poverty, subsistence living and illiteracy were typical of most people living at the time, with extended family being an important means of support.[11]

In addition to a formalised legal code based on Roman Law, the Church had an additional means of protecting itself. Excommunication was a powerful ecclesiastical tool for controlling both the nobility and laity. Whole families and communities could be excommunicated.[12] To be excommunicated effectively condemned the sentenced person to hell unless the necessary reconciliation and penance were performed before death. It led to alienation from society for commoners and, frequently, starvation. The Church could further enforce discipline through interdict and anathema (whereby the sinner was forbidden from participating in sacramental life).

The Church, because of its position as a centralised, effectively organised institution, accumulated wealth through gifts, tithes and bequests. This gave it a unique position amongst feudal institutions in that its permanence was more assured. Through tireless and gifted missionaries who selflessly evangelised the migrating Germanic tribes in the face of great personal danger, the Church was aided in the consolidation of its authority.[13]

## 2.4    South Africa: colonial conquest to 1948

Nigel Worden identifies racial discrimination as the key issue in South Africa's history since the arrival of the first permanent white settlers in 1652. The various territories that were to be amalgamated into the Union of South Africa in 1910 were not empty of people as colonists arrived and encroached inwards. The colonists had initially arrived to establish a refreshment station for ships of the Dutch East India Company (requiring replenishment on their

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[11] Contamine in G Duby (ed), A history of private life II, revelations of the medieval world, pp 87-89.
[12] E Vodala, Excommunication in the Middle Ages, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986), Chapter III.
[13] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02467b.htm, 26 November 2005.

way to company possessions in Asia) and their interaction with indigenous peoples. [14] The arrival of colonists, the later arrival of further Dutch colonists – and those from other European nations, and the interactions between these groups and the indigenous peoples frequently took on a violent nature. Leonard Thompson describes the arrival of settlers and their colonisation of the land as 'invasion' – a series of deliberate attempts to deprive local peoples of their political rights and freedoms in order to draw them into a subservient state where they would serve their new European masters. [15] Although the aborigines might not have been enslaved, they were certainly not embraced by the colonists as social equals.

Whether the coastal colonies or internal territories (that at times were Boer republics with varied degrees of independence from the coast or Crown, colonies or parts thereof) were under the control of the descendants of Dutch settlers (with significant infusions of Huguenot and other European blood lines), or the Crown, the two broad settler groups, with few exceptions, appeared united in their discrimination against non-Europeans, possibly influenced by the same mid-nineteenth century social-Darwinist ideals that made the mission of 'civilising' non-Europeans a justification for colonialism. [16]

The mineral revolution of the mid-nineteenth century began a series of relationships where white domination and economic prosperity was dependant upon a cheap and reliable source of black labour. Institutional and increasingly systemised racial discrimination became the principal means of ensuring the supply of labour. [17] Thompson contends that the discovery of minerals and deposits of precious stones (which dramatically increased the amount of capital invested in South Africa and hastened moves of settlers towards the interior) began a process of urbanisation of black South Africans. [18] These moves were sometimes as a result of rural overpopulation in the face of the seizure of farmland or frequently, the need to acquire funds to pay

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[14] N Worden, The making of modern South Africa, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p 2.
[15] L Thompson, A history of South Africa, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.
[16] N Worden, The making of modern South Africa, p 74.
[17] N Worden, The making of modern South Africa, p 38.
[18] L Thompson, A history of South Africa, p 115.

taxes imposed by the settlers with a view to forcing black South Africans into the labour market.

By the time of the end of Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902 (which the discovery of minerals had contributed to by making the South African Republic and Orange Free State suddenly attractive potential colonies to the Crown), the victorious British were able to consolidate the four former provinces of South Africa into a Union without much thought being given to the black majority - except in so far as the discriminatory status quo could be maintained and entrenched.

As overarching discrimination continued and became further entrenched, political life in South Africa continued to be a mostly white affair with the interests of Afrikaner and South Africans of British descent assuming the dominant focus. Although the African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912, a lack of a constitutional forum frustrated the organisation and its membership. As with the Middle Ages, opportunities for meaningful political protest were scarce. Faced with limited opportunity and the instruction of immigrant clergy schooled in the production of religious art according to medieval convention and eager to decorate churches, schools and seminaries, the conventions took hold.

The growth of Afrikaner nationalism (culminating in DF Malan's pro-apartheid National Party winning the 1948 general election amongst the whites only electorate), the First (1914 to 1918) and Second (1939 to 1945) World Wars and the economic ravages of the Great Depression (1929 to approximately 1936), dominated South African politics.

## 2.5    Apartheid South Africa: 1948 to 1994

After the triumph of Afrikaner nationalism in 1948, apartheid legislation was introduced. In many respects, the statutes merely codified discriminatory

practices that either existed in practice or colonial law books. At the same time, as result of the emergence of the Soviet Union after the Second World War (1939 to 1945) as a military superpower, communism was gaining ground and posing both a threat to the interests of organised Christianity and the western powers. The South African government framed its ideology as closely as it could in terms of the ideological framework against the communist bloc. White political parties in opposition to the government, representing those Afrikaans and English speakers opposed to apartheid, weakened steadily and eroded the effectiveness of the parliamentary opposition.

Apartheid's laws were characteristically rigorously and brutally enforced. The government showed little concern for the misery and dislocation caused to its victims. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) forbade marriage across the colour line. The Group Areas Act (1950) separated the living spaces of the races geographically. The Bantu Authorities Act (1950) divorced the day-to-day administration of government between white and black. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 (which perhaps would influence Catholic missions in South Africa more directly than any other piece of apartheid legislation) relegated the education of black South Africans to a second-class effort designed to restrict them intellectually from ever challenging white domination. [19]

The dramatic institutionalisation of racial discrimination into the apartheid statutes provided the impetus necessary in the 1950s for the African National Congress to gain momentum in making the voices of its constituents heard. The declaration of the Freedom Charter (uniting many anti-apartheid groupings to a degree not seen before), various campaigns, particularly the Defiance Campaign) against the carrying of pass books (entitling blacks to be present in white areas) and the clearing of the Sophiatown area west of central Johannesburg – which was one apparent centre of black resistance to apartheid [20] -- added to this momentum.

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[19] L Thompson, A history of South Africa, p 119.
[20] L Thompson, A history of South Africa, Chapter 6.

In the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre (March 1960) that began as a protest against laws forcing black South Africans to carry pass books, the ANC was banned. An era of show trials, akin to those ordered by Stalin in the Soviet Union, of those ANC leaders who had not fled into exile followed.[21] Clifton Crais contends that parts of South Africa came under conditions akin to permanent military occupation during the immediate aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre, a description more frequently applied to South Africa during the turbulent 1980's and early 1990's – adding further to the oppressive nature of South African society.[22] The success of the heightened levels of oppression and unprecedented levels of economic growth brought about another period where white conservatives might have come to believe that their efforts were paying off. South Africa, as it became an international pariah, became more isolated and inward focused.

The Soweto riots of 1976 – which were sparked by government insistence that black school children receive instruction in Afrikaans -- altered the course of South African history. A new consciousness entered the minds of the oppressed. Worden describes -- as a consequence -- the 'virtual civil war'[23] of the 1980s. The events of 1976 affected South African artists profoundly.[24] A new social context saw artists emerge as people with a message that demanded hearing, a message for audiences beyond artistic circles. [25] The dissonance between the messages conveyed in religious art and what was happening in reality became more apparent. Works became talked about more, often the objects (along with their creators) of banning orders and forced exile. Catholic and other religious artists would not identify with communist orientated anti-apartheid groups and rejected the use of

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[21] F Welsh, A history of South Africa, (London, Harper Collins, 1998), Chapter 17.
[22] C Crais, The politics of evil – magic, state power and the political imagination in South Africa, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), Chapter 3.
[23] N Worden, The making of modern South Africa, p 1.
[24] The importance of the change of conscience brought about in South Africa through the riots is immense. S Williamson (Resistance art in South Africa, p 8) contends that before 1976, artistic output formally exhibited gave almost no insight into the complex issues faced by South Africa on almost all fronts with the racial divisions that existed between artists almost collapsing.
[25] Johannesburg Art Gallery, Images of wood. Aspects of the history of sculpture in twentieth century South Africa, (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1989, p 19).

violence.[26]    Protest centred around notions of exploiting the dissonance referred to above, looking to create works that conveyed hope and protest through religious consciousness and activity, like their medieval predecessors – liberation through salvation.

## 2.6    Catholicism, South Africa and apartheid

As in the medieval period highlighted above, faith during the apartheid era allowed an outlet for protest through the production of religious art.   The uncomfortable relationship between Church and State in the medieval period arose in South Africa after 1948 under an entirely different set of circumstances.

Afrikaner nationalist intolerance of Catholicism and its outputs, such as religious art, was not new.   In the Boer Republics of the late nineteenth century, Catholics had been forbidden from holding state teaching positions or for applying for jobs within the civil service.[27]   In 1949, a motion at the newly elected National Party's provincial congress to reintroduce the ban – and extend it to the provinces where it had never applied – was defeated.[28] Trevor Verryn holds that the National Party government harboured a 'concomitant fear' of the notion of popery.[29]   If popery was not to be encouraged, neither were its sacramental outputs in the form of statues, stained glass and tapestries.   John De Gruchy holds that Calvinism as practised widely in white South Africa (with its acceptance of the doctrine of predestination where the race of the person could clearly delineate whether they were predestined or not at all destined) and Catholicism (which inherently draws upon the doctrine of free will), especially in a South African context, are diametrically opposed in terms of their view on the world and

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[26] Ben Ngubane, former premier of KwaZulu-Natal and a Roman Catholic, holds that the ANC's liberation struggle was deeply debilitating for South African social structure and has contributed to a society where the values upheld and those practiced vary, a factor in his decision never to join the ANC – B Ngubane in RW Johnson, Interview: Ben Ngubane, http://www.hsf.org.za/focus_10/F10_ben_ngubane.html, 11 October 2004.
[27] JW De Gruchy in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid society, Chapter V.
[28] J Brain in R Elphick & R Davenport, Christianity in South Africa, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1997) Chapter XI.
[29] T Verryn, in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid society, p 54.

man.[30]   The 'Roman danger' (or *Roomse gevaar*) assumed a prominent position alongside the *swart gevaar* (the danger of the black majority to the white minority) in the National Party's propaganda.[31]

As in the Middle Ages, church buildings in black areas during the 1976 riots and later (often being the only suitable type in terms of size) continued to be sanctuaries where Catholic culture was predominant.   Artistic works challenging the ideology of state, effectively a form of protest, greeted visitors. The Regina Mundi church building in Soweto, Johannesburg is an example of such a sanctuary. The building (which can accommodate 7000 people) became known as the 'Parliament of Soweto'.[32]  When political meetings were banned at various times during the apartheid era, the meetings went ahead as masses with the political content included in homilies.

Where church buildings were not available, 'peace gardens' sometimes arose in inland townships.   The gardens became centres of artistic expression where discarded materials and anything on hand could be used to provide an escape from the misery of life under apartheid and the lack of anything much aesthetically appealing.  The garden in Alexandra, Johannesburg, seemingly incorporated aspects of church buildings, such as a discarded stained glass window (Figure 2.1).  The security forces, under the pretext that they were being utilised to conceal arms, ultimately destroyed the gardens.[33]

[30] JW De Gruchy, in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid South Africa, Chapter V.
[31] D Hurley, The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference: a potted history, http://www.thesoutherncross.co.za/features/SACBC.htm, 11 October 2004.
[32] Johannesburg News Agency, 'Regina Mundi Church', http://www.soweto.co.za/html/ven_regina_mundi.htm, 3 April 2006.
[33] S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, (London, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1989), p 89.

**Figure 2.1**

*Depiction:*        Peace Garden, Alexandra, Johannesburg, 1980's
*Reproduced from:*   Williamson, S, <u>Resistance art in South Africa</u>, p89.

## 2.7    Conclusion

The characteristics of the medieval period were presented in order to highlight the oppressive political nature of medieval society throughout most of Western Europe.  In the medieval period, faith allowed an outlet for protest through the production of religious art.  South Africa prior to 1994 was characterised politically and socially by institutional racial discrimination and its cultural, legal and social consequences.  Colonialism and apartheid, as the dominant political and social systems (as feudalism had been during the medieval period), set the stage for the oppression leading to the output of much religious art as protest art.

In Chapter Two, I attempted to explore the diverse political and social surroundings of the medieval in Western Europe and colonial and apartheid

eras in South Africa with a view to highlighting realities from both that illustrate how escape from oppression, and opportunity to do so, were limited. Both periods, with the common variables being Roman Catholicism and the production of religious art, seemingly as a means of protest acknowledging the unfortunate circumstances of the artist, whilst at the same time revealing a higher power in whom a hope of liberation from their present circumstances could be placed.

**Chapter Three**

**Iconography Introduced.  Icons Celebrating the Old Testament and Roman Catholic Saints**

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter characteristics of iconography are introduced with reference being made to selected medieval and South African icons - as is be done in the remaining portion of the study.  Simultaneously, themes common to both periods and backgrounds to the eras of oppression that may have contributed to the creation of the icons will be introduced and explored.

In this chapter selected icons from events depicted in the Old Testament are introduced. In medieval iconography depictions inspired by the Old Testament are rare because Christianity focuses more on the New Testament while Judaism forbids the creation of graven images.  The veneration and honouring of the saints through asking for intercession, the use of relics and pilgrimages, within the medieval period was widespread and remains a characteristic of Catholic faith.

## 3.2 Characteristics of iconography

Sir Read notes that medieval art (including iconography) reflects an inability to differentiate between imagination and intellect.[1]  Art, including the output of the Middle Ages, is the ultimate output of all higher human faculties.[2] It constitutes the primary function of human culture.  Bishop contends that although icons in the medieval period sought original expression, they are notably influenced by ancient conventions and practices as diverse as

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[1] H Read, <u>Icon and idea</u>, p 87.
[2] Ibid, p 18.

Russian, Celtic and Byzantine.[3]  Eastern European and Celtic iconography of the early Christian period are perhaps the best examples of this phenomenon.

The terms 'image' and 'icon' appear to have been interchangeable to the medieval artist – as they apparently do to modern South African artists.  The creator of an icon was often referred to as an imageur -- no distinction apparently being made between the works itself and the messages intended to be conveyed to the mind of the viewer.  Steven Schloeder is of the opinion that this perspective was especially true of Catholicism in the medieval period.[4]  Gillian Evans suggests that the differences in approach may be because of the heightened role of mysticism in Orthodox tradition.[5]  Orthodox worship continues to attach much mystical importance to the utilisation of religious icons in its liturgy and religious life.  George Galavaris reinforces that religious icons are not works of art - they are divine.[6]

Schloeder interprets the Catholic view of iconography in the Middle Ages as being comparable to what is upheld by the Orthodox Church today since the end of the Iconoclast controversies.[7]  Icons were largely the only art sanctioned by the Church in the medieval period. Monasteries, which offered relative peace and security, were one of the few locations where art could be commissioned and survive.  Artists were not professionals but clergy.  Brother Aidan holds that iconographers, as opposed to other artists, must demand a great deal of anonymity. The manufacture of an image is prayer in itself and subjugation before a higher being.[8]  Figure 3.1 reflects an altarpiece in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Johannesburg, highlighting construction as an act of worship worthy of where the re-enactment of the passion and death of Christ can take place.

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[3] R Bishop, The Penguin book of the Middle Ages, pp 317-321.
[4] SJ Schloeder, Architecture in Communion, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1998), p 146.
[5] Evans, Philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages, p vii.
[6] G Galavaris, The icon in the life of the Church, p 3.
[7] SJ Schloeder, Architecture in Communion, p 146.
[8] Brother Aidan, http://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMELIBR/SACICON.TXT, 2 March 2005.
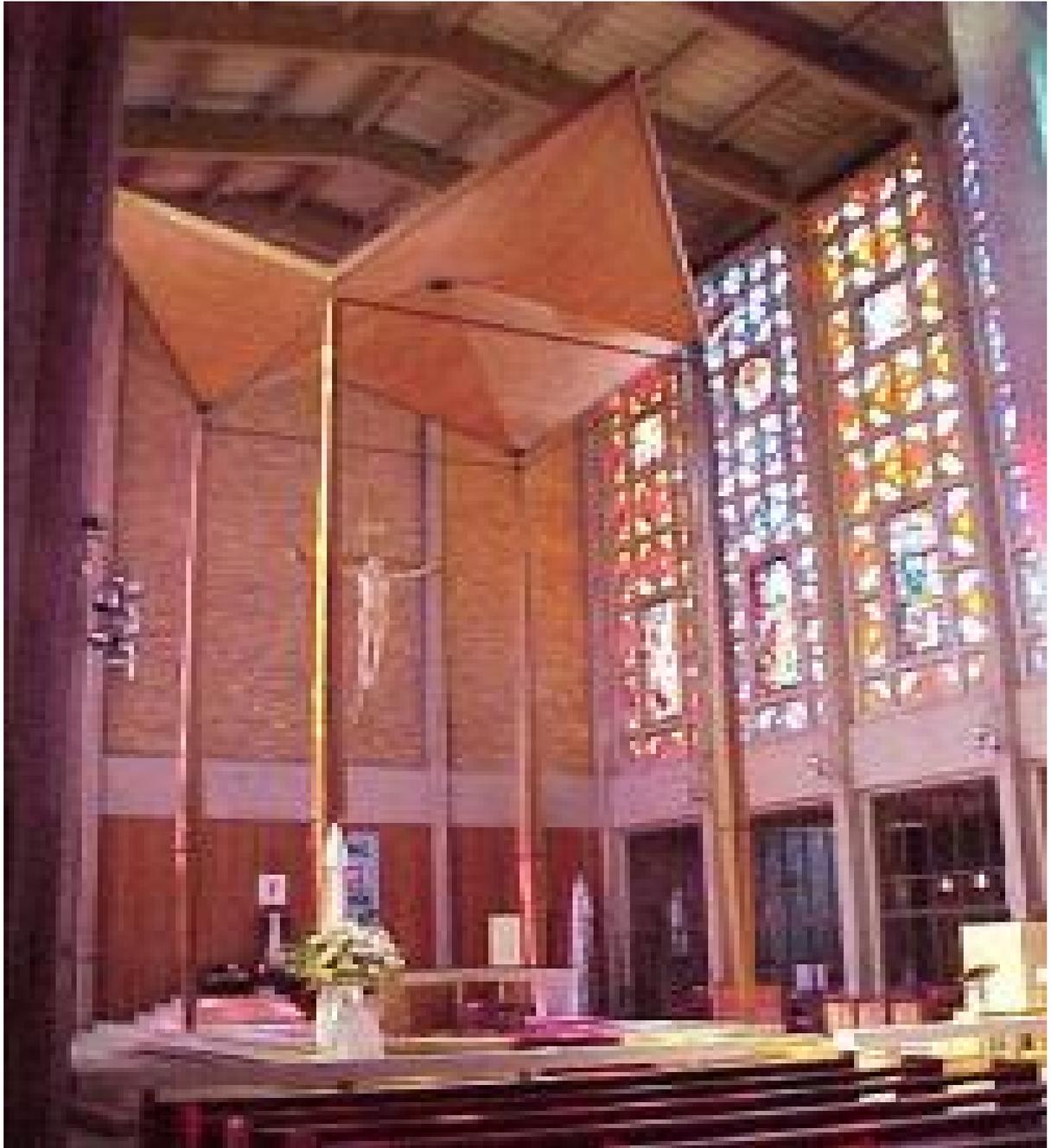
**Figure 3.1**
*Depiction*: Main Altar
*Location:* Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, Johannesburg
*Photograph:* Diocese of Johannesburg - http://www.catholic-johannesburg.org.za/

As medieval artists were rarely professionals, another characteristic of icons – particularly those of the medieval period – is the almost total anonymity of the artist. Although examples do exist where well-known artists commissioned religious works that are venerated as icons (particularly in the period of the transition towards the early Enlightenment), the vast majority of icons carry few clues as to the personal identity of their creators.

Ouspensky offers a description of the medieval prototype of an icon. It is seen as an artistic work venerating Christ and the Crucifix (the cross gained an early important place in the minds of Christians because of its use in ritual),[9] the BVM, saints and angels -- as approved by the Church at the Seventh Ecumenical Council (which met in 787).[10]

Prototypes were utilised because the medieval religious experience involved the emulation in worldly life of saints and the Holy, or those perceived to have attained an existence that appears to be godly. Emulation of the Godly was extended to art.[11] The subjects do not often convey emotion in their representations, and they are usually depicted facing forward, revealing a serene gaze. McBrien notes that art in the period reveal their subjects in a transfigured state.[12] Similarly, Kidson believes medieval art characteristically lacks naturalism; the artists are not overly concerned with proportion and depth.[13] Subjects are typically depicted as youthful. Frequently, the subjects appear to have the light portrayed in the icon emanating from them.[14]

Virginia Egbert characterises the colours used in art of the period as noticeably dull. Only natural dyes were available to the medieval artist and the works are likely to be as dull now to the viewer as they were soon after their commission. The artists were challenged to convey as much meaning

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[9] A Fortescue, 'Veneration of images', http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/07664A.htm**, 10 January 2006.**
[10] L Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, chapter X.
[11] VW Egbert, The medieval artist at work, p 21.
[12] RP McBrien, Catholicism (volume I), p 379.
[13] P Kidson, The medieval world, (London, Paul Hamlyn, 1967), Chapter IV.
[14] A Grabar, Christian iconography. A study of its origins, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p 34.

as possible with relatively little in the way of means.[15]  Colours convey a striking uniformity of symbolism that is reflected too in African religious art: gold frequently representing heaven's radiance, red the blood of martyrs and blue or white, purity.

## 3.3 Icons & geography

The production of icons in particular areas frequently led to the adoption of styles of artistic representation particular to a specific area but still reflecting the conventions of iconography – such as periods of meditation before execution and the utilisation of oils to anoint the icon upon completion - universally recognised as being essential for the production of an icon.  This chapter intends to show how the conventions of iconography introduced above came to be applied in South Africa during the period of the study.

Artistic convention is often borrowed.  Roman art, despite the Roman practice of rejecting the legitimacy of other conventions in most aspects of life (except where they might make governance easier) was, perhaps inevitably, influenced by foreign cultures.  The later part of the Western Roman Empire (approximately 300 to 476) saw a decline in the exact proportioning common in Greco-Romano art. Medieval statues, like examples from Ancient Egypt, frequently indicated rank by depicting those considered holy as being larger in size than those around them.  Gothic art from the period of 1145 to the 1200's frequently depicts oversized faces of the holy.[16] Statues were frequently painted in the medieval period to give them a greater appearance of life.

South African works detailing the inclusion of African themes into medieval prototypes of icons include those identified in the writings of Guy Butler. [17] Butler traces the history of aspects of Anglo-Catholicism in South Africa through exploring the lives of selected members of female orders.  In his

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[15] VW Egbert, The medieval artist at work, p 20.
[16] G Cowles, Cowles Comprehensive Encyclopaedia, (New York, Cowles Educational Books, 1966), p 1487.
[17] G Butler, The prophetic nun, (Johannesburg, Random House, 2000), p 17.

investigation, Butler describes a number of icons apparently drawing on the medieval prototype but represented with African themes.[18] South African art frequently reflects the Western European conventions. Frank Brown, reinforced by Duricy, holds all Catholic and Protestant artistic traditions to show strong regional and ethnic variations in style that aid in the establishment of a sense of identity amongst these groups.[19]

In keeping with the focus of the research question, I intend to illustrate that art is frequently a product of an oppressive society. [20] Feudalism, as discussed above, was oppressive in nature. The absolute rigidity of social structures, private war and the near-constant threat of pestilence and starvation, were the common experience, and they are largely entirely absent today from the area where feudalism was once so rooted. The following icons help illustrate the point further.

If art is the principle purpose of human functioning and the most worthy product of civilisation as advocated by Read,[21] and every civilisation is characterised according to its relationship with God, it is proposed that it follows that South African religious iconography will reflect medieval themes because of the influence of the Catholic Church in South Africa and the manner in which oppression under apartheid emulated the medieval condition of seeking salvation as the ultimate goal of every Catholic individual as a means to escape oppression.

Cohne is of the opinion that all society, no matter how removed from Europe geographically or historically, will be influenced by the medieval period because of the importance the age played in the development of the culturally dominant western civilisation – because of the expansion of European culture via colonialism well beyond the territories of Europe.[22]

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[18] This particular icon was located in the Sophiatown Church of the Holy Trinity. When the black population were forcibly removed form 1955 onwards, the church became a Dutch Reformed Church and the fate of the icon is unknown – G Butler, The prophetic nun, p 113.

[19] M Duricy, http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html, 7 April 2006.

[20] M O'Brien, The decline and renewal of Christian art, http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/arts/a10035.html, 12 October 2004.

[21] H Read, Icon and Idea, p17.

[22] JJ Cohne, The postcolonial Middle Ages, p 5.

The Catholic template utilised for missionary work in South Africa in the nineteenth century was the same as that used in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire – 'inculturation'.[23] Inculturation involves the adaptation of the message being conveyed culturally to expedite the process of conversion amongst the target population. This was done by establishing schools, hospitals and missions staffed by members of religious orders who offered admittance to all, regardless of their religious persuasion. Inculturation as a missionary practice has been suggested as being a driver for the replacement of Latin as the use of the language of Catholic liturgy in favour of vernaculars. The practice also requires that the missionaries approach their target populations with a degree of empathy and sympathy towards their established beliefs and learn their way of life. [24]

Penny Dransart, by referring to the work of the anthropologists George Marcus and Fred Myers,[25] who contend that no such thing as a 'clean' anthropological community, uninfluenced by another existing community, for study can exist any longer, reinforce Cohne's contention. Because of the nature of iconography, their medieval counterparts must influence South African iconographers. The example of the spread of the cult of St Dominic (circa 1170 to 1221), founder of the Dominican order in the early 13th century, appears to vindicate these views. St Dominic is credited with having delivered the rosary to the faithful after an apparition of the Madonna instructed him to do so. The devotion, involving a formalised recitation of prayers counted on a string of beads, probably developed gradually amongst commoners as a substitute for the recitation of the psalms. [26] Dransart has explored the apparent ease with which rosaries have been absorbed into South American devotion and culture in the Andes because of their immediate accessibility

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[23] NE Thomas (ed), Classic texts mission and world Christianity, (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1995), p 169.

[24] P Schineller, A handbook on inculturation (New York, Paulist Press, 1990), p 5 & Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (now Pope Benedict XVI), "Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures", **Origins** 24:41 (March 30, 1995), p682.

[25] G Marcus & F Myers in P Dransart, Concepts of spiritual nourishment in the Andes and Europe: Rosaries in cross cultural contexts, pp 1 and 2.

[26] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13184b.htm, 17 November 2004.

and simplicity of use.  She concludes that while the use of the rosary in the Andes remains similar to what it was intended for in Europe, certain aspects of local culture have infiltrated the saying of the rosary and Catholic imagery in the area.[27]  Images of the rosary in modern South African iconography, in terms of the examples consulted, appear rare.

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[27] P Dransart, Concepts of spiritual nourishment in the Andes and Europe: Rosaries in cross cultural contexts, p 1.

**Figure 3.2**

*Depiction:*       Daniel and Seven Lions, circa 6th century
*Construction:*    Carved stone
*Location*:        Moone, Republic of Ireland
*Artist:*          Unknown
*Photograph:*http://www.leafpile.com/TravelLog/Ireland/HighCross/HighCross.htm
*Biblical reference:*   Daniel 6:12 to 6:20

**Figure 3.3**
*Depiction*:              Daniel in the Lion's Den, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*          Wood, nails and paint
*Location:*              Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*                Bonnie Ntshalintshali
*Photographed by:*       Wayne Oosthuizen
*Biblical reference:*    Daniel 6:12 to 6:20

In highlighting aspects of oppression and geographic influences upon the production of iconography, I encountered the following in the course of the study. During the Babylonian Captivity (which began circa 537 BC), the Hebrew people were forced to relocate to an area now part of modern Iraq after the capture of Jerusalem and its surrounding areas captured by Babylonian forces.

Once relocated, the refugees faced a difficult task – as all colonised peoples do – in keeping their religious and cultural frameworks from being ultimately dramatically reshaped or made extinct by an imposed dominant social regime. Various prophets and religious leaders, including Daniel, assumed the role of attempting to ensure that the Hebrew people did not lose their religious and cultural identity. Diaspora is a common theme in both medieval and South African history. In the medieval period those that were not tied to the land frequently migrated to avoid the onset of plague or marauding invaders. In nineteenth-century southern Africa, the rise of the Zulu Empire had the effect of displacing many weaker groups who were forced as far away as what is now southern Malawi. The forced migrations under the threat of Zulu conquest made their way into the lore and legend of the affected groups.[28] Ntshalintshali attempts to link the two periods of history, however superficially.

Daniel gained access to the conquering Babylonian king, Nabuchodunosor, and was increasingly influential in lobbying Nabuchodunosor on behalf of his people. A few of the royal consorts became jealous of Daniel's access to their king. They conspired to have Nabuchodunosor reluctantly order that Daniel be confined in a den of lions. Daniel, through divine intervention, emerged unharmed and his accusers replaced him within the den.

Figure 3.3 reveals an Africanised Daniel by Bonnie Ntshalintshali in the embrace of a lion that appears to be smiling. The analogy between the oppressed and dispossessed at the time of the Babylonian Captivity and pre-

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[28] P Miller, Myths and legends of southern Africa, (Cape Town, TV Bulpin, 1979), p 19.

1994 South Africa is apparent through the representation of Daniel as an African.

The Irish icon, depicted in Figure 3.2, would also have seen repeated colonisation of Ireland by the English, suppression of Catholicism and ravaging of the population through repeated famine and sickness. In much African legend, lions are not only fierce and ferocious, they are cunning and are credited with having earned their unrivalled place in the animal world through outwitting other animals and acquiring their best attributes (such as their ability to roar) at the expense of their competitors.[29] Lions are so respected and feared that some cultures believed that dead headmen could choose to have their spirits housed in a lion's body.[30]

Ntshalintshali depicts that faith can overcome the very strong. Even the dispossessed, colonised (as the Hebrew people were during the Babylonian Captivity), poor and sick can, with religious faith, resist and win over the mighty and powerful.

In the century when the Irish icon was created, the European continent was being torn by warfare and unrest between the various Germanic tribes vying for control of the continent that ultimately result in Charlemagne's consolidation of power in 800. Many of the clergy sent to Christianise Ireland would have been from territories directly affected. In addition to what must have seemed like the threat of a continental war, increasingly bold Islamic invaders were shaking Europe, forcing much of the continent onto a war footing and resulting in the requisition of crops, horses and provisions. Opportunities for oppression and the creation of an icon in which to seek religious solace were apparently common.

Ntshalintshali's life was characterised by extreme poverty. She suffered from polio as a child, was handicapped as a result, and was destined to become a

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[29] Ibid, p 265.
[30] Ibid, p 260.

farm labourer.[31]   Until winning a corporate sponsorship in 1990, her ability to support herself as an artist was extremely precarious.[32]   Ntshalintshali used local artistic methods (such as the utilisation of clay and wood), frequently carving a series of figures from one piece and brightly painting the end result in the execution of her works.[33]   Ntshalintshali ultimately succumbed to HIV/Aids in 1999.

Lion cubs (lions are notoriously protective of their young) adorn Daniel. Daniel's arms are raised in a gesture of trust and surrender that may be interpreted as a sign of faith.   George Gaskell holds that lions symbolise power and might. [34]   St Mark the disciple is symbolically represented as a lion in many medieval icons.[35]   David Farmer notes the personal courage of St Mark in accompanying both Saints Peter and Paul in their evangelising missions under severe persecution by the conservative Jewish Temple and Roman authorities.[36]

In Figures 3.4 a and b, the procession of the animals into the ark God instructed Noah to construct,[37] is revealed.  Noah was commanded by God to build an ark whereby a core of the animals in existence and his family could seek refuge from a devastating flood that would destroy the rest of creation as a punishment for its wickedness.  The animals in the depiction are African, and reflect pairs of rhino, hippo, lion, wild birds, turtle and giraffe.  Distinctions between the male and female of each pair are apparent, with the males being larger and the lion having a generous mane.  The utilisation of only wild animals may be interpreted to highlight that wild animal's are under God's protection while domestic animals are the responsibility of man.  Noah and his

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[31] C Smart, Ntshalintshali museum, http://www.artsmart.co.za/visual/archive/1098.html, 3 November 2004,

[32] S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 55.  The practice might be compared to that of patronage in the Middle Ages and Renaissance where a wealthy backer would pay the expenses of an artist, often in the form of a stipend.

[33] In many respects, Ntshalintshali's work is reminiscent of other artists from the former Venda Bantustan, particularly the area surrounding the town of Giyani, who have utilised painted wood or painted clay: S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 4.

[34] GA Gaskell,  Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, (Avenel, NJ, Gramercy Books, 1981), p 454.

[35] M Ceplecha, Painting angels: saints and their symbols, http://www.crisismagazine.com/april2004/ceplecha.htm, 2 February 2006.

[36] D Farmer, Oxford dictionary of saints, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), p 332.

[37] Genesis 8.

wife are depicted larger than any of the animals, even the pair of elephants, perhaps in an attempt to highlight the greater importance of man in religion. The work is indicative of a pastoral existence over which man has little control. The ark symbolises a vessel that brings its occupants to safety, reminiscent of the role of Jesus in Christianity.

The veneration and honouring of the saints through the asking of intercession, the use of relics and pilgrimages, within the medieval period was widespread and remains a characteristic of Catholic faith. St Francis (1182 to 1226) was much venerated during the medieval period because of his embracing of poverty as dignified, discipline in confronting issues he felt to be unfair or enemies of the Church and suffering the stigmata, or Holy Ecstasies whereby his body would show the wounds of Christ and bleed from an unknown source.[38]

Many stigmatics have been held to be able to accept the suffering of another weaker person or the punishment for their sins.[39] This ability may have made the saint as attractive to certain oppressed South Africans before 1994 as it did during various stages of turmoil in Western Europe. The saint's holiness was rumoured to be so great that during his lifetime stories arose of his being able to converse with birds and wolves. St Francis, as revealed in Figure 3.6 conveyed a patient and kind demeanour to all who encountered him. St Francis' order cared for the poor and Church leaders frequently found themselves strongly reprimanded if the saint believed they were not doing enough to ease the burden of the poorest of society through charity. Even before his calling, St Francis had perplexed his father and brothers by continually mocking their pursuit of wealth and the respected conventions of their business. Figure 3.5 reveals St Francis suffering the stigmata via rays of light in amongst the mine dumps of Johannesburg that were once a common feature of the city. The utilisation of a scene so typical of Johannesburg illustrates the applicability of the message and comfort of the medieval saint to the poor and disposed of Johannesburg. The light in the work emanates from

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[38] D Farmer, Oxford dictionary of saints, p 191.
[39] Ibid, p 193.

the large cross revealed in the sky (a sign that God is present) and the saint himself. Lambs are depicted at the feet of the saint while black worshippers watch the scene. The saint is wearing white, the Christian colour of purity, his hands and arms are raised in a gesture commonly interpreted in South Africa as meaning 'well done'.[40] The poor quality of the image available appears to give it an eerily similar feel to that of the aged Italian medieval icon to which it is compared. The area around the saint appears crowded and chaotic (perhaps a reference to the chaos of the time), seemingly enhancing the calmness of the religious ecstasy he encounters.

The painting was hung in the chapel of Christ the King, Sophiatown, where forced removals from areas designated by the government as 'white' were being cleared.[41] Ironically the white of the saint's garments symbolising purity was replaced by seekers of another kind of 'purity' with regard to a concept of 'white'.

As with the Regina Mundi church in Soweto, during the time of the 1976 Soweto riots, the Sophiatown Church of Christ the King became a meeting place and centre for community action in the face of the threatened removals. Once the area had been cleared, the church building became a Dutch Reformed church with the icons presumed to have been destroyed.[42] The patience and courage of the parishioners, in imitating the saint as called for by the work in Figures 3.5 and 3.6, appears to have been rewarded. The church building has now returned to the Anglican Church.[43]

Figure 3.7 reveals St Francis (who is the patron of animals), interpreted by Bonnie Ntshalintshali preaching to the birds, many of whom are recognisable as over-sized doves. The birds are stacked in the work, in a manner that goats and sheep sometimes climb upon each other's backs in kraals. St Francis, because of his legendary ability to communicate with animals, is

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[40] H Brookes, 'A repertoire of South African quotable gestures', http://www.aaanet.org/sla/jla/jla14_2_brookes.htm, 1 February 2007.
[41] G Butler, The prophetic nun, p 105.
[42] Ibid.
[43] G Butler, The prophetic nun, p 113.

frequently depicted preaching to them.[44]  The saint's left arm is seen raised authoritatively, communicating his God-given authority over the animals to which he is ministering.  Doves in southern African culture are frequently seen as an omen of good luck, akin to the widespread English superstition of bees being the bearers of good luck.[45]  In Figure 3.8, St Francis is seen in a medieval depiction feeding the birds, the birds being symbolic of being able to touch the heavens (and thereby God) and highlighting the favour accorded to someone able to associate with them.

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[44] D Farmer, <u>Oxford dictionary of saints</u>, p 191.
[45] P Miller, <u>Myths and legends of southern Africa</u>, p 260.

**Figure 3.4 a and b**
*Depiction*:           Noah's Ark and animals
*Construction:*       Dark wood
*Location:*           Private collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*             Unknown
*Photographed by:*   Researcher

**Figure 3.5**

*Depiction:*        Saint Francis of Assissi
*Construction:*     Paint on board
*Location:*         Lost, presumed destroyed
*Artist:*           Sister Margaret, CR
*Photographed by:*  Reverend Dominic Whitnall, CR

**Figure 3.6**

*Depiction:*          Saint Francis of Assissi
*Construction:*     Mural
*Location:*            Sacro Speco, Subiaco, Italy
*Artist:*               Unknown
*Photographed:*   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi

**Figure 3.7**
*Depiction*:          Saint Francis preaching to the birds, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*      Wood, nails and paint
*Location:*          Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*            Bonnie Ntshalintshali

**Figure 3.8**

*Depiction:*          Saint Francis of Assissi
*Construction:*    Mural
*Location:*          Unknown
*Artist:*             Unknown

South African religious icons, like their medieval prototypes, appear to reveal their subjects in a transfigured state.

Articles that share a common role of importance in medieval (or the Biblical scene they depict) and African customary life appear to be emphasised to a great deal in modern South African religious iconography.  Like medieval art, modern African icons appear to be frequently commissioned or spontaneously created by artists who are not professionals.  Given the role of apartheid in denying the majority of the population the freedom to pursue their chosen occupations, this is perhaps not surprising.  Frequently, the modern artists, because of the limitations described in the discussions surrounding African art above, largely did not enjoy the luxury of being able to devote all of their time to their artistic labours.[46]

As with medieval iconography, examples of the symbolism used in South African iconography include halos and various corporeal articles -- again stressing the relationship between iconography and the veneration of relics -- that have become holy through contact with holy individuals.  African icons, like the medieval appear to represent those things indirectly, which cannot be represented directly. [47]

Many of the icons highlighted in this study were made by members of religious orders or amateurs. The icons created, like their medieval counterparts, frequently lack naturalism and depict the miraculous.  They are often unsigned and replicate the anonymity that their prototypes exhibit.  Although much of what is held in common with the medieval period may be apparent superficially in modern South Africa (such as patriarchal structures, extreme poverty and widespread illiteracy), it is evident that through the

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[46] Nelson Mukhuba, who held his work to be the result of a clash between first and third world cultures – thereby inviting comparisons to Picasso – worked as a sangoma and farmer.  In February 1987, he slaughtered his family after burning down his orchards and committed ritual suicide – S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 48.  Mukhuba's life and death can perhaps be seen as encompassing elements of the mystical scholars such as V Egbert contend is in evidence around icons and iconographers.

[47] L Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, p 21.

efforts of the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church in varying degrees in South Africa (especially as regards education), aspects of medieval life are apparent (although these have been tempered by the influence of local culture as Dransart witnessed in Latin American Catholicism and its production of icons)[48] and these tenets of medieval thinking and living have surfaced in the manner in which icons are commissioned.

## 3.4 Icons & education

Egbert describes the production of icons as being didactic, a tool against heresy.[49] Pope St Gregory I is reported to have stated that icons are the books of the illiterate.[50] Icons, according to the saint, are a useful means of educating the spiritually weak and entrenching their faith. Avery Dulles holds that liturgical symbols have the ability to convey meaning to a person without that person ever needing to have acquired the ability to speak.[51] Pope St Gregory is recorded as having been impressed by the manner in which images were effectively used as a means of instruction within pre-Christian European pagan belief systems.[52]

Iconography, as the outward reflection of medieval learning, according to Maurice De Wulf,[53] was often the only means available directly of instruction from art – and a reflection of the prevailing philosophy. The literati in Western Europe were also dependant upon iconography to a degree as the rate at which translations of Greek classics could be made into Latin and the rarity of books stifled learning.[54] Icons often contained text and could be used by the literati as a means of grasping subtleties behind religious events or occurrences. Icons consequently required communicating at a number of levels and expressing themselves in terms of a narrative.

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[48] P Dransart, <u>Concepts of spiritual nourishment in the Andes and Europe: Rosaries in cross cultural contexts</u>.
[49] V Egbert, <u>The medieval artist at work</u>, p 21.
[50] EJ Martin, <u>A history of the iconoclastic controversy</u>, p 23.
[51] A Dulles, <u>Models of revelation</u>, (Garden City, NY, 1983), Chapter II.
[52] EJ Martin, <u>A History of the iconoclastic controversy</u>, p 1.
[53] M De Wulf, <u>Philosophy and Civilisation in the Middle Ages</u>, (New York, Greenwood Press, 1969), p 9.
[54] GR Evans, <u>Philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages</u>, p 22.

Icons were used to transmit Catholic culture through devotion. What the principally illiterate medieval person digested in terms of their understanding of icons and the themes they represent became their principle tool (together with ritual) of comprehending the world. Before the arrival of the first European settlers in South Africa, there was no means of recording information through writing. The keeping of histories was dependant upon oral tradition. Frequently these traditions were linked to a physical object or natural phenomenon, such as a season, in order to be remembered. Robert Moffat, the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary, noted that South Africans were unique in his experience as no idols appeared to exist. [55]

Rankin[56] notes that before the 1970 establishment of the first department of fine arts in a historically black South African university, mission schools (both Catholic and Anglican) were the only centres where South African fine art was fostered. The efforts of particular teachers, without or without a formal training in fine art, were largely the drivers of the process – as opposed to the efforts of an institution. Rankin singles out Roman Catholic and Anglican schools and does not mention any contribution that may have been made by other denominations, such as the Lutheran. [57]

Rankin records that despite the assault of the apartheid government on independent religious schools, informal mentoring – and the production of religious art -- continued.[58] Markets for religious art continued to flourish and new church buildings, both in South Africa and abroad continued to require icons for decoration and as objects of veneration. The funds of well-meaning donors (including multinational companies invested in South Africa seeking to establish corporate art collections) and the prosperity of independently funded artists continued to ensure that religious artistic traditions grew. On Sundays, churchgoers were greeted by the output of previous religious artists who had

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[55] R Moffat, in JW de Gruchy, <u>Christianity, art and transformation</u>, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p 11.
[56] E Rankin, <u>The role of the missions in art education in South Africa, Diversity & interaction: Proceedings of the 5th Annual South African Association of Art Historians,</u> University of Natal, 1989, p 1
[57] Ibid.
[58] E Rankin, <u>The role of the missions in art education in South Africa</u>, p 5.

mixed European and African traditions. The works remained part of the consciousness of the viewers that apartheid could not undo entirely.

Catholic education, regardless of where it is delivered, conforms to a standard philosophy and implementation that places an emphasis on the history and role of the Church (including its role in the medieval period). Many members of the Catholic teaching profession have traditionally been members of European-based religious orders. These schools had transplanted many of the practices of the production of religious art.

Pupils in mission schools were frequently shown photographs of European artefacts by their European tutors and encouraged to use them as prototypes.[59] Within a short while the works were reflecting Africanised interpretations of the themes. Rankin identifies a depiction of the *Mother of Sorrows* expressing her grief through the Zulu means of covering her mouth for instance.[60]

In 1951 the first report on how the implementation of The Bantu Education Act would be implemented was published. The Church, as it did in most countries with even a tiny Catholic population (such as India), operated a large number of schools (at the time about 15 per cent of all black schools, the majority of whose students were not Catholic)[61] and was faced with the dilemma of either racially segregating its schools or closing them entirely. The final decision to keep as many of the schools as possible operational within the restrictions of the system was made. Catholic education segregated itself (the 1953 Act forbade the teaching of any non-Catholic black pupil by the Church in addition to the racial elements discussed), in those instances where the schools were not forced to close due to financial constraints.

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[59] E Rankin, The role of the missions in art education in South Africa, p 5.
[60] E Rankin, The role of the missions in art education in South Africa, p 6.
[61] B Flanagan in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid society, p86.

Catholic orders and congregations resisted attempts to reconstitute along racial lines (although apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act often had the effect of ensuring that they did so).

**Figure 3.9**
*Depiction*: The Devil's Party, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:* Wood and paint
*Location:* Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:* Johannes Mashego Segogela
*Photographed by:* Standard Bank Gallery

To illustrate the apparent ease with which religious art can communicate a message, I have included Figure 3.9. It reveals the suffering of a soul under Satan's direction with the scene by an artist (who received no formal training whatsoever depicted as a braai) complete with Cadac branded gas canister and an acacia tree. The Devil, who apparently gets his enjoyment from the same kind of distractions as mortal man and who obviously relishes his work, taking great pleasure in it in another shocking warning to errant souls a direct message available to any viewer.

## 3.5 Conclusion

In Chapter Three I have attempted to highlight the salient features of religious iconography while showing that icons are frequently the products of oppression surrounding the geographical location of their creation or context of their creating artist. In addition to being decoration, icons are themselves acts of prayer and participate in the holiness they represent. Icons may be didactic and protection against heresy. Icons further reveal their meaning at different levels - from symbolism to expressing an immediate message. Icons typically represent the cross, the BVM, saints and angels. Medieval icons usually display their representations in a transfigured state, somehow emphasising their divinity whilst simultaneously deploring the baseness of much of human existence. Icons further characteristically lack naturalism; the artists not being overly concerned with proportion and depth, the subjects frequently appearing to have the light portrayed in the icon emanating from them.

Geography, as an extension of the missionary practice of inculturation, influences the content of icons and the methods used to represent the depictions. Inculturation involves the adaptation of the message being conveyed culturally to expedite the process of conversion amongst the target population. In the medieval period, prototypes for icons were used to direct artists. It appears that South African religious art also draws either directly or indirectly upon these prototypes. Pupils, according to Rankin, were frequently shown photographs of European artefacts by their European tutors and

encouraged to use them as prototypes. Circumstances in both periods highlighting oppressive environments were introduced and evaluated as to how they might have spurred on the creation of the religious artworks explored.

The wider definition of Catholic iconography, as opposed to the Orthodox was explored and a series of icons from the Old Testament (which are relatively rare in terms of medieval convention) examined. Common themes identified in terms of the icons researched include forced exile, hope, the looking for sanctuary and a communication of the need to look for a protector away from oppression.

**Chapter Four**

**Iconography celebrating the Life of Christ**

## 4.1 Introduction

As the primary focus of Christian life is Jesus Christ, it is perhaps inevitable that a large number of icons, if not the majority, celebrate events in Christ's life as revealed in the New Testament. Roman Catholicism[1], as are the other Christian groups involved in the production of religious art and icons, is monotheistic and Trinitarian in nature, whereby Jesus Christ is the Son of God whose death and resurrection, in fulfilment of prophesies of the Old Testament - has made salvation possible.

In this chapter, I introduce a selection of icons highlighting aspects of Christ's life and the medieval and African interpretations of the events. Aspects of iconography – such as the revelation of the subjects in a transfixed state and the use of certain colours and objects to convey symbolism are utilised. Where significance differences are apparent, they are explored and elaborated upon. Common themes highlighted include serenity whereby individuals may ascend above their environment, liberating themselves.

## 4.2 The icons

Examples of religious art revealed in a transfigured state, a convention of religious icons, include the South African-produced representation of the nativity below which is heavily influenced by Tanzanian artistic convention.

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[1] The term 'Catholic' in respect of the Roman Church has been used since at least 107 AD, http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-21.htm#P2233_373220, 4 April 2006.

**Figure 4.1**
*Depiction*:        Nativity Scene
*Construction:*      Dark wood
*Location:*         Private collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*            Unknown
*Photographed by:*  Researcher

The nativity scene in Figure 4.1 utilises dark wood to illustrate the solemnity of the persons present (even the baby Jesus) and the occasion. The artist is apparently a Tanzanian immigrant living in Johannesburg. Although the figures are recognisably the type typically sold in Tanzania as tourist souvenirs, the depictions above are more luxuriant and substantial, perhaps indicating that wood as a raw material is more readily available in South Africa than Tanzania. As with the other nativity scenes featured in the study, the subjects are shown in a transfigured state according to the medieval prototype - serene and seemingly unaffected by the filth of the stable of a crowded inn (compounded no doubt by the recent birth), the mortal danger for the mother and baby that used to accompany birth (and still does in much of Africa) against the backdrop to the terror that the visitors to the stable suspected that King Herod the Great was likely to unleash (which he did, a massacre commemorated as The Slaughter of the Innocents), through having heard of the birth of a Jew of Royal blood who could likely challenge his position as the Roman supported leader of the region. The serenity and removal of the factors that made (or make) childbirth so dangerous and difficult indicate that the nativity reflects a birth that was no normal birth. This message, perhaps in the African context where birth continues to be an ordeal, is more accessible to African iconographers.

**Figure 4.2**

*Depiction:*           Nativity, circa 1400
*Construction:*        Tempera on Walnut
*Location:*            Museum of Art, Vienna
*Dimensions:*          41 x 29,5cm
*Artist:*              Master of Salzburg
*Photograph:* http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/m/master/zunk_au/nativity.html
*Biblical reference:*  Luke 2

**Figure 4.3**

*Depiction:* Adoration of the Magi
*Construction:* Stone pillar
*Location:* Clunic Abbey Church of Saint Pierre, France
*Artist:* Unknown
*Photographed by:* Dr M. Alison Stones
*Biblical reference:* Luke 2:16
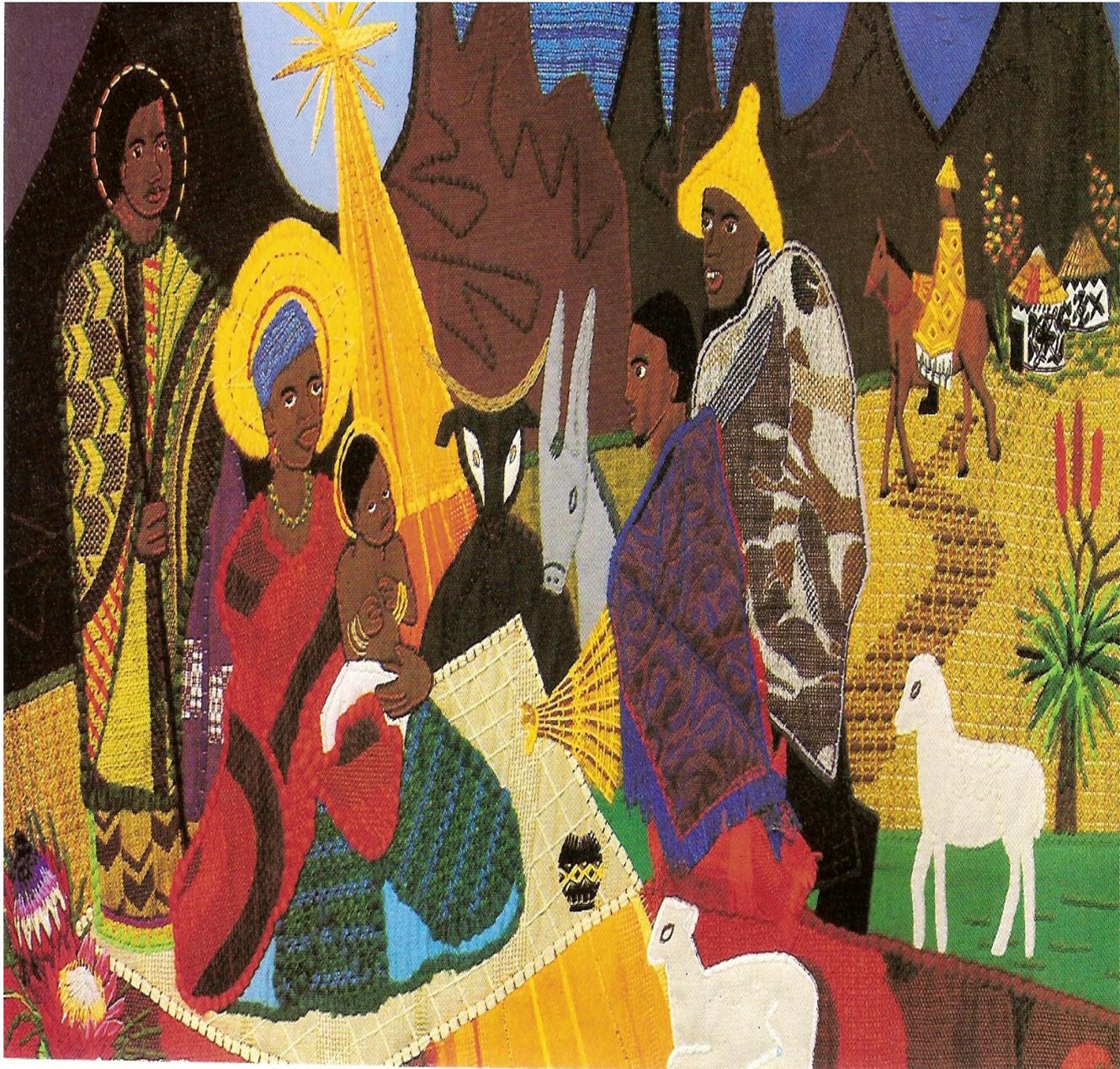
**Figure 4.4**

*Depiction:*      Sotho Nativity, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*   Tapestry
*Location:*        Mariannhill, KZN
*Artist:*          Sister Gereon

**Figure 4.5**

*Depiction:*      Zulu Nativity, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*   Tapestry
*Location:*       Mariannhill, KZN
*Artist:*         Sister Gereon
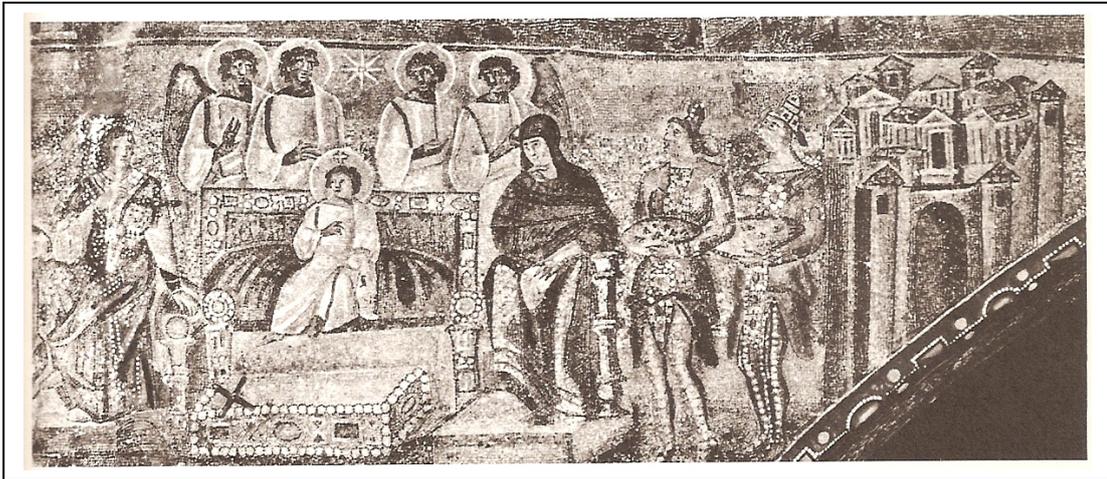
*Figure 4.6*

*Depiction:* Adoration of the Magi
*Construction:* Mosaic
*Location:* Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
*Artist:* Unknown
*Photographed by:* Department of Antiquities, Italy
*Biblical reference:* Luke 2:16



**Figure 4.7**
*Depiction*: Nativity
*Construction:* Painting
*Artist:* Jesusmafa.com

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 offer what may be termed traditional medieval renditions of the birth of Christ and visitors to pay homage shortly thereafter. As with African depictions, the birth is noteworthy in each instance for its lack of trauma. Figure 4.2 offers some interesting insights into the medieval understanding of rulers - as the Holy Family would be seen: firstly, there is apparently no shortage of servants to attend to the Madonna and Child - despite the birth having happened in a lowly stable. Secondly, the Child (who is not depicted as a helpless baby, unable to even support it's own neck) appears to be as far away from crying as any newborn possibly could and, thirdly, the swaddling clothes are visible within the manger that a donkey and horse continue to eat out of. Although a remarkable work of art in many aspects it is probably safe to conclude that the artist, who was most likely a monk, had not been present as an adult at any live birth. During the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, what became Austria (the work having been created in Salzburg) was ravaged by frequent conflicts between proto-German speakers, Slavs and Poles. Austria too was frequently threatened by Turkish invaders able to exploit the divisions amongst Eastern Europeans. It is likely in the circumstances that the work could have been intended as a means of stirring up religious passions against the Muslim Turks or Orthodox Slavs. Similarly, the abbey in which Figure 4.3 is located, although deep in France, was routinely sacked by marauding forces, the most notable being that of the English noble Simon de Montford (who obtained a license from the English Crown to tear through France as a pirate might) in 1212 when the building was almost destroyed.

The two African nativities (one Sotho and one Zulu with the respective KwaZulu-Natal and interior landscapes used as backgrounds) are reflected in Figures 4.4 and 4.5. The work is a tapestry produced by Sister Gereon Custodis and a team of local women trained by her, of Marianhill KwaZulu-Natal. In the 1980's and early 1990's the region was ravaged by a low intensity civil war between proxies of the apartheid government and ANC. As a result, security force presence was large and individual freedoms limited, thus giving much opportunity for the production of art as a means of protest. Although European-trained, Sister Gereon (who is originally of German origin,

but has spent almost all of her adult life in South Africa), utilises African material almost exclusively. Her principle means of creating religious works (including liturgical vestments) are through tapestry.[2] Sister Gereon attempts to utilise iconography to highlight the inclusiveness of Catholic theology. The use of bulls prominently within both nativity scenes highlights this inclusiveness. Bulls in San legend were seen as animals with mythical powers, even to the extent of being able to bring rain in some circumstances.[3] In many South African cultures cattle are a sign of wealth and are used as currency in important transactions, such as the payment for a bride or the settling of a dispute. Kings traditionally held more cattle than their subjects – as European feudal kings held more land. The presence of the bulls might highlight Christ's birth as a descendant of the royal line of the Old Testament King David, the greatest of all Jewish rulers and the kind of messiah many Jews expected: a military leader who would rise against the Roman occupiers. The shield in the Zulu nativity denotes high rank according to Zulu custom.[4] Penny Miller holds that a kraal is a sacred place where no woman other than a daughter of the house may enter. The BVM, as a member of the House of David, has her status highlighted via the representation.

Figure 4.7 comprises part of a series of images utilised across Africa as a staple for Catholic religious instruction and education. The Jesusmafa images are very popular, despite their West African and Francophone orientation (they in turn are based upon French religious artistic conventions derived from the Middle Ages), and are common in southern African Catholic church buildings. The chances of Ntshalintshali and other artists influenced by European art having come across – and having been influenced to a degree -- by at least some of them is very high considering the extensive use of the images in catechism classes across Africa.

Sister Gereon's depictions as the Holy Family as Zulu royalty (they are depicted on ground raised above the visitors and surrounding animals while

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[2] G Custodis, 'Personal communication', 14 November 2004.
[3] P Miller, Myths and legends of southern Africa, p 19.
[4] Ibid.

the halos appear to resemble crowns with other paraphernalia denoting royalty – such as Zulu royal shields) would undoubtedly in certain instances be viewed as confrontational.  Christ, as a descendant of the House of David, would not only be African through the depiction but so, by extension, would the chosen people of the Old Testament.  In a South African context, the relationship to traditional royalty and tribal authority structures becomes more apparent when it is remembered that the government attempted to manipulate these structures as a means of control.  Albert Luthuli famously had his chieftainship revoked by a banning order for not complying with the will of the apartheid government.[5]

Christopher Slaters holds that symbols represent realities larger than themselves.  A symbol can lack an intrinsic (or otherwise obvious) connection with its referent.[6]  Maria Stella Ceplecha describes, among the symbols used frequently to depict angels and saints (even today): St Mark represented as a lion, the stigmata in depictions of St Francis of Assisi and the use of palm branches to depict victory.[7] Other frequent symbols include the use of a halo to display holiness, a dove representing the Holy Spirit, and a lamb representing Christ.  The image of the lamb would be familiar to agrarian dwellers in both periods and would assist the potential convert to identify with the object of adoration.  Biblical analogies between people and sheep requiring a shepherd or being members of a flock are common and were frequently used by Christ himself in His ministry.  Bishops carry crooks in honour of this association.  Gaskell holds that lambs are a symbol of divine sacrifice.[8]  Before the Christian era, lambs played a prominent sacrificial role in Jewish Passover rites.  The use of sheep in African imagery – sheep do not after all fulfil the same important functions as cattle do in indigenous rites and cultures – may appear alien.  The animal has however made its way into local lore and superstition across southern Africa.  A Shona belief holds that the

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[5] F Welsh, A history of South Africa, p 445.
[6] CM Slaters, Symbols as God's self-communication in Roman Catholic liturgical worship, p 6.
[7] M Ceplecha, Painting angels: saints and their symbols, http://www.crisismagazine.com/april2004/ceplecha.htm, 2 February 2006.
[8] GA Gaskell, Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, p 441.

birth of a lamb in kraal hind legs first is an evil omen and the lamb must be killed immediately if bad luck is not to plague the kraal.[9]

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[9] P Miller, Myths and legends of southern Africa, p 259.

**Figure 4.8**

*Depiction:*        Birth of Christ '77
*Construction:*      Linocut on paper
*Location:*         Johannesburg Art Gallery
*Dimensions:*      60,7 x 43,5 cm
*Artist:*           John Ndevasia Muafangejo
*Photographed by:*  Neglected Tradition

Figure 4.8 was created during the tumultuous events following the 1976 riots. *The Birth of Christ in 1977* draws on the events of 1976 and draws an analogy between the birth of a new consciousness and the birth of Christ. The Holy Family is depicted as black, hands clasped in prayer as if aware of the divinity of the Child and thankful for His birth after a holy intercession. The Child appears as an adult, wise and mature beyond His years – as in many medieval icons. The Holy Family, except for the presence of the mytholologically powerful bulls is alone, reflecting the isolation of the period. The night sky looks disturbed and busy, an analogy between the star that accompanied the Birth of Christ and the chaos of fires and armament explosions that accompanied the riots in 1976. An attempt to link the Slaughter of the Innocents following Herod the Great's (despite his title, Herod was a puppet ruler installed by the Romans, as were many of the black leaders – such as those of the Bantustans, imposed upon the black population during the apartheid years) rage at Christ's birth with the death of the Soweto school children in 1976 might be made through the representation of the chaos depicted in the background. Olive branches, visible on both sides of the depictions in the top corners, are traditional symbols of eventual peace.

The icons reproduced, two of which (Figures 4.9 and 4.10) originated from the Roman catacombs during the period of the persecution of Christians, expand upon the theme of divine sacrifice (through Christ's crucifixion) and the longing for a protector. The images are contrasted with a Sister Gereon work (Figure 4.11). The use of an image of a shepherd is applicable to early Christianity before the fall of Rome, the medieval period of Western Europe and South Africa's missionary era. It is put forward that, because of the predominant agrarian nature of the times of the targets of missionaries. Christianity is a religion extolling the meek and exploited (the very type of person Bantu Education under apartheid intended to create) and the use of the job of a menial labourer -- who in certain instances would have been a slave – would have appealed to those looking for liberation from their current predicament through the association thereof with the Divine. As slaves were

in a hopeless position in terms of the Roman experience (slaves in very few instances could become free citizens), Christianity offered a liberation through salvation with the promise of the meek inheriting the earth.

**Figure 4.9**

Depiction:         Christ the Shepherd, circa 225
Construction:      Mural
Location:           Priscilla Catacombs, Rome
Photographed by:  Department of Antiquities, Italy

**Figure 4.10**

*Depiction:*          Christ the Shepherd, circa 225
*Construction:*     Statue
*Location:*           Priscilla Catacombs, Rome
*Photographed by:*  Department of Antiquities, Italy

**Figure 4.11**

Depiction:             Christ the Shepherd, late 20th century
*Construction:*       Tapestry
*Location:*            Mariannhill, KZN
*Artist:*               Sister Gereon

Churches and cathedrals in the medieval period served as community centres (they were frequently the only sufficiently large and the only permanent buildings), thereby enforcing the notion of churches and the Catholic culture they disseminated as pivotal to existence within the Middle Ages.

The practice of evangelising in Europe consisted primarily of establishing an institution where the poor, neglected or sick -- regardless of religious persuasion -- could seek refuge. In so far as the manpower available in South Africa allowed, the early Catholic missionaries attempted to emulate this example. Those who sought religious instruction were encouraged. Icons served, as they did in Western Europe, as a means of conveying a multiplicity of meanings – such as the literal and deeper interpretation of a gospel - depending upon the level of familiarity of the convert or catechist with

Catholicism and being similar in narrative style to the oral traditions of pre-colonial society.



**Figure 4.12**
*Depiction*:              The Sermon on the Mount, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*           Wood and paint
*Location:*               Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*                 Johannes Mashego Segogela
*Photographed by:*        Standard Bank Gallery
*Biblical reference:*     Mathew 5-7

Figure 4.12 reveals an interpretation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount.  The scene is interpreted frequently as the defining moment in which Christ instituted the New Covenant between God and Man, overturning the Old Covenant of the Old Testament and effectively sweeping away the entire old order.  An angel appears to be recording the event on a camcorder, perhaps highlighting the applicability of the message to modern listeners.  The figures present all sit on a lower level than Christ to acknowledge, as in African custom, His superior rank.  In the prayers at the foot of the altar after a traditional low mass, the priest similarly kneels a step above the servers.  Christ pointing heavenwards, surrounded by the twelve apostles, dominates the work, indicating the reward of the covenant – salvation and liberation.  Judas Iscariot appears to be the apostle in green next to the angel, his hand over his mouth as if covering up a lie he is telling.  In the depiction of Christ teaching in Figure 4.13, Christ's hands are open to show his all encompassing embrace while many have turned their backs on Him and His message.  In Figure 4.14, Christ washes the feet of a disciple, revealing the extent to which He, as God incarnate, will go to express humility and love in a symbolic cleaning away of sin.

**Figure 4.13**
*Depiction*:          Jesus teaching
*Construction:*     Painting
*Artist:*              Jesusmafa.com

**Figure 4.14**

| | |
|---|---|
| Depiction: | Christ washes an apostle's feet |
| *Construction:* | Painting |
| *Artist:* | Jesusmafa.com |
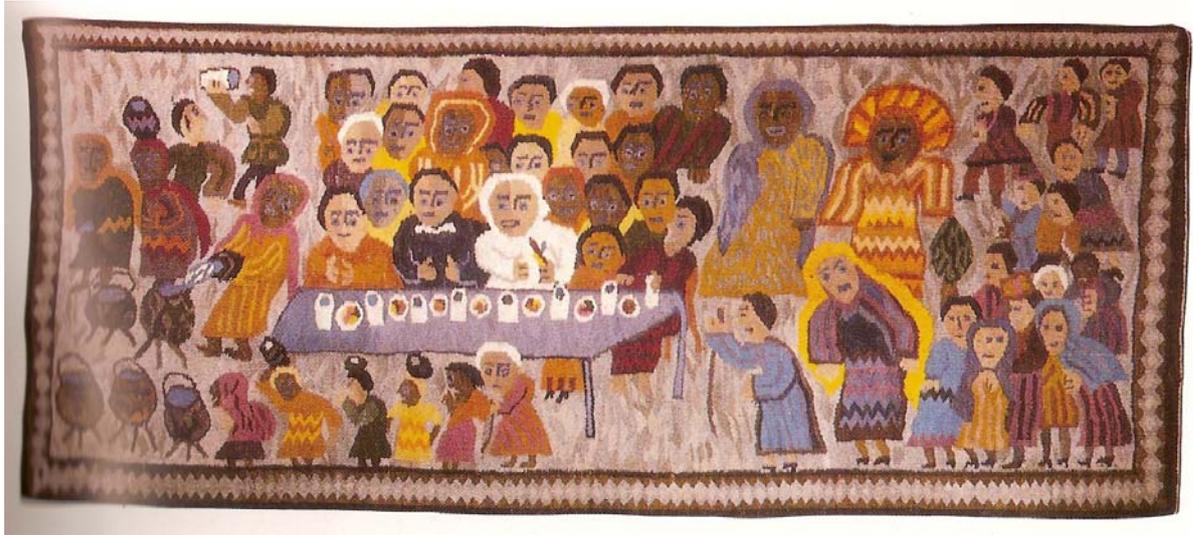
**Figure 4.15**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction*: | Marriage at Cana, late twentieth century |
| *Construction:* | Wool tapestry |
| *Location:* | Pretoria Art Museum |
| *Artist:* | Esther Nxumalo |
| *Photograph:* | Johannesburg Art Gallery, <u>The neglected tradition, 1988.</u> |

*Marriage at Cana* (Figure 4.15) reveals a South African interpretation of Christ's first documented miracle. The work is a tapestry, lacking the clear definition of Sister Gereon's work but utilising more detail. Again, the scene is immediately recognisable as South African – the thoroughly racially mixed congregation (which would be unlikely elsewhere in Africa where white minorities are rarer – and much smaller - than in South Africa) and the use of cast iron pots communicate the South African context. Unusually, Christ and Mary (the larger figures towards the right of the picture) are represented as black while the couple whose wedding it is (located behind the table) appear to be white. The tapestry appears to utilise the early medieval convention of having the heads of the holy oversized in religious depictions. The un-conventiality of the setting in this regard, despite the rarity of mixed social gatherings during the apartheid era (the work was created at some point before 1988) denote that the tapestry is intended to challenge the social conventions of the time and be a work of protest art.

Catholic worship through the medium of a relic or icon (the Latin *Cultus sacrarum imaginum*)[10] is not mutually exclusive. Both have their origin in the view that matter can become Spirit. The principle of the unity of the corporeal and the Divine is present in the Catholic sacrament of Mass, in which the bread and wine offered become the Body and Blood of Christ through the mystery of Transubstantiation while retaining their original physical form. The Mass involves a priest leading a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice for mankind with particular emphasis being placed on the Last Supper.[11] The Last Supper, as revealed is a particularly poignant theme in the hands of artists such as Ntshalintshali. The Mass is a ritual drawing on elements icons, relics and the enactment of reality in the event (principally the Last Supper) leading to Christ's (and man's) triumph.

Ntshalintshali's *Last Supper* (Figure 4.16) – in addition to being recognisable as the Biblical event -- reveals a typical Zulu feast.[12] The scene is immediately recognisable as South African: Castle Lager and Coca-Cola bottles grace the table near a goat's head and plate of pap porridge. A dog's bowl beneath the table indicates the intimacy of the occasion, as do the gestures of the apostles present. Christ wears a crown to communicate His superiority. The apostles link arms in a friendly manner. Though the scene might be described as looking like a gathering at the aftermath of a soccer game[13] (the clothes worn are certainly colourful enough although still reminiscent of the type worn in Biblical times and upon which modern Roman Catholic clergy base their dress), the majesty and spiritual importance of the scene is represented through the crowning halo above the Christ figure's head and its dominance in the work in utilising a gesture revealing the altar in the post Vatican II Rite of the Eucharist. The gesture appears to indicate that the meal presented on the laden (it is in fact bowed) table is for everyone who will accept His message.

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[10] A Fotescue, Veneration of images, http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/07664A.htm, 10 January 2006, & R McBrien, Catholicism (volume II) (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1980), p 379.
[11] Mathew 26:17-29; Mark 14: 12-25: Luke 22: 7-23.
[12] M Arnold, Women and art in South Africa, p 16.
[13] A Verster, Standard Bank young artist award 1990, p 14.

**Figure 4.16**
*Depiction*:             Last Supper, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*       Wood, nails and paint
*Location:*             Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:*                 Bonnie Ntshalintshali
*Photographed by:*  Andrew Verster
*Biblical reference:*  John 13,19 & Mark 14

As introduced above, the use of gargoyles in Figure 4.16 is an obvious medieval reference. Ntshalintshali frequently claimed to have been influenced by existing religious artwork, some of which was medieval. In Figure 4.16, a West African depiction of the Last Supper is revealed. The distinctive clothes worn, in comparison to Figure 4.16, highlight the distinctly South African nature of the former. In Figure 4.17 Christ is adorned in red, a colour worn by Catholic clergy during the season of Pentecost to symbolise fire or at the feasts of martyrs to denote the shedding of blood, hence the light in the picture appearing to emanate from Christ. The figure of Judas Iscariot (who at the time had already decided to betray Jesus and was well underway with his plans to do so) is apparent as the disciple in blue on the far right hand side, who appears angry and (unlike his compatriots) uninterested in the holiness of his surroundings and outside of the light. The intimacy revealed in Ntshalintshali's *Last Supper* is absent. The significance of the animals in Figure 4.16 is intended to convey the earthliness of the gathering, the depiction of Christ above the animals, even the domestic dog whose bowl is visible under the table, is a reinforcing of the religious notion that humans are superior to animals and His sacrifice epitomises triumph of our religious being over our animal instincts that lead to sin and imperfection. Figure 4.17 reveals a very informal last supper underlying Christ's kinship with his disciples and all humanity.

**Figure 4.17**
*Depiction*:        Last Supper
*Construction:*    Paint
*Artist:*            Jesusmafa.com

**4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, icons celebrating events in the life of Christ, the central focus of Christianity, were reproduced. The conversion of matter to divine spirit – as Christ being born a man involved, is central to the principle of icons participating in the holiness they represent. The events typically associated with the life of Christ – birth, growing up and the attending of milestone ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, are easily adapted to South African contexts, revealing similar themes of hope, compassion and glory. Serenity whereby individuals may ascend above their environment, liberating themselves, is another common theme identified. Conventions in religious iconography explored in the chapter include the revelation of the subjects in a transfixed state and the use of certain colours and objects to convey symbolism are utilised. Although diverse in terms of the images reflected and the periods in which they were created, oppression and the fear of oppression in different circumstances whether during the persecution of Christian in Ancient Rome in the second century or as a result of the conflict in Kwa Zulu-Natal during the 1980's and early 1990's, it appears that oppression does not stop the production of religious art or the expression of that art is longing for a liberation through salvation by appealing to a protector.

**Chapter Five**

**Icons reflecting the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ**

**5.1 Introduction**

In terms of Roman Catholic belief, it is through Christ's Passion and Crucifixion that mankind is redeemed. Without the Passion, Crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection, Christianity would be a very different religion. Depictions of the Risen Christ in medieval iconography convey triumph.[1] Without the triumph of the Resurrection over death, Christianity would lack what many see as if defining characteristic. The importance of the event is commemorated in the Church daily with every event of the Church calendar building up to a culmination of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

In this chapter, I explore aspects of icons reflecting the events leading up to Christ's death and its aftermath. In communicating triumph against impossible odds (the conquering of death), I propose that the types of icons revealing these aspects were of particular importance in their example to the oppressed under apartheid. In addition this chapter introduces aspects of High Anglicanism as they relate to the production of religious art and religious art in South Africa. The activities of missionaries in SA and their considerable impact upon the production of religious art and how they emerged in support of the research question is discussed.

**5.2 The icons**

Figure 5.1 is a typical depiction drawing on the medieval prototype completed in the fifteenth century. As the medieval period was drawing to a close and some of the conventions that had been established were beginning to fade, we know the creator of the work in Figure 5.1 to have been Fra Angelico. Figure 5.1 may further be interpreted as an artistic work epitomising the end of the medieval period, a triumph over a period of oppression. Through

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[1] G Galavaris, <u>The icon in the life of the Church</u>, p 23.

artistic work depicting the Resurrection or Risen Christ the theme of glory is apparent in both the medieval prototypes and South African examples.

Figure 5.2 reflects Sister Gereon's depiction of Christ's Ascension. The wounds of Christ convey the pietistic nature of His message in that His mission had been fulfilled with man capable of redemption. As with many medieval depictions, the light in the work emanates from Christ's body, His Sacred Heart in particular and Holy Face – two practices of adoration that have their roots in the medieval period. The veneration of the Sacred Heart, often reinforced - according to Mitchell - independently in African culture, [2] involves the physical Heart of Jesus as an object of devotion using Christ's Heart to symbolise His love for all mankind and is based entirely upon the symbolism of the Heart with The Heart traditionally represented as wounded. [3] Sister Gereon focuses much of her output on the Sacred Heart. Mitchell holds that the heart in African culture, as in European, has independently emerged as a source of compassion and love.[4] Sister Gereon reveals an inspiration similar to that frequently recorded by medieval iconographers in her periods of prayer and meditation before commissioning a tapestry.[5] Brother Richard Maidstone, a Cape Town Redemptorist monk who works mainly on the theme of the Image of the Holy Face, follows a similar ritual.[6] Sister Gereon's work and that of the people aiding her is sometimes compared with the role of monasteries and convents in the medieval period as places where the production of holy images was carried on and taught to a new generation of artists.[7] Mariannhill, the site of Sister Gereon and her aides, like the medieval centres of the church in remote and violence plagued areas (as Kwa Zulu-Natal was for the greater part of the 1980's and early 1990's) during the early medieval period of Christianity, have utilised religious art as a means of didactic evangelisation.

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[2] J Mitchell, 'Personal communication', 21 February 2004.
[3] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07163a.htm, 10 June 2005.
[4] J Mitchell, 'Personal communication', 21 February 2004.
[5] G Custodis, 'Personal communication', 14 November 2004.
[6] D Gahlen, 'Liturgical vestment department', http://sn.apc.org/users/mariannhill/litvest.htm, 3 November 2004.
[7] Ibid.

Both Figures 5.1 and 5.2 indicate rays of light illuminating the darkness, as per the medieval convention, the light emanating from the sacred person portrayed, a hand signal pointing towards the heavens utilised to communicate that Christ has a message from above for all who will listen.

Figure 5.3 reveals a depiction very different to the others sampled or viewed during the course of the study. Unusually, no gesturing or tilting of the head (typically done to reveal supplication, mercy or emotion) is present. The figure communicates that simply being is enough, as simply not being white would have been enough to not be excluded from the ambit of Christ's message and salvation. The confident, even at the expense of the usual degree of humility normally portrayed, erect posture of the figure with its sense of directness and truth reiterates this message, the hands (like the head, unusually in depictions of Christ), convey no intention.
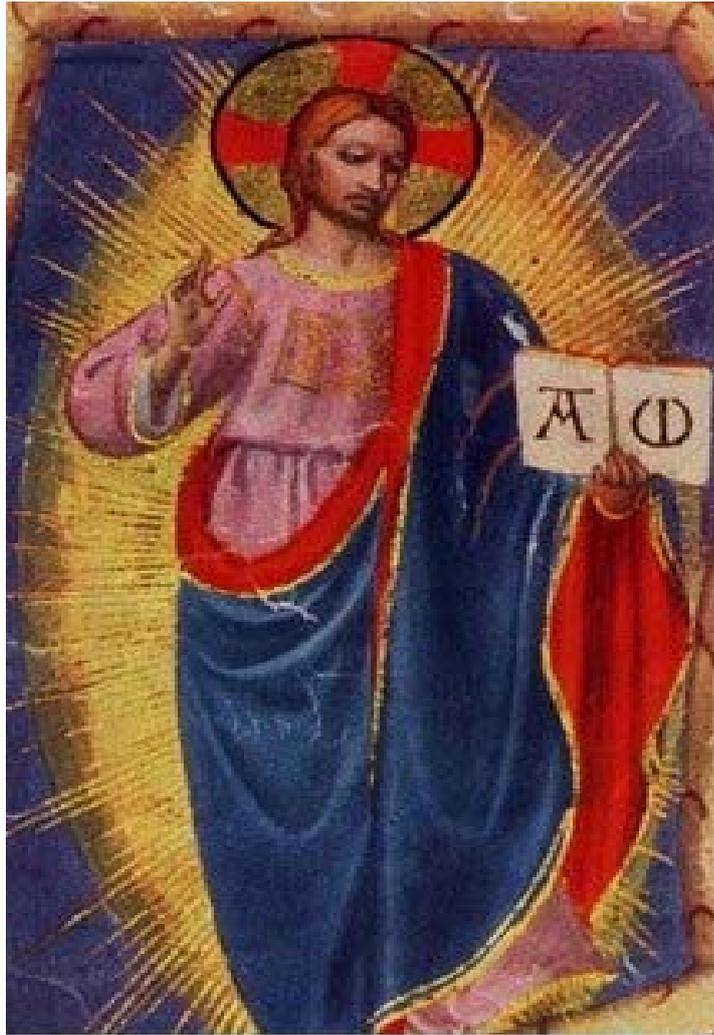
**Figure 5.1**

*Depiction:*          Risen Christ
*Construction:*     Mural
*Artist:*               Fra Angelico
*Photographed by:*   http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060206/danto
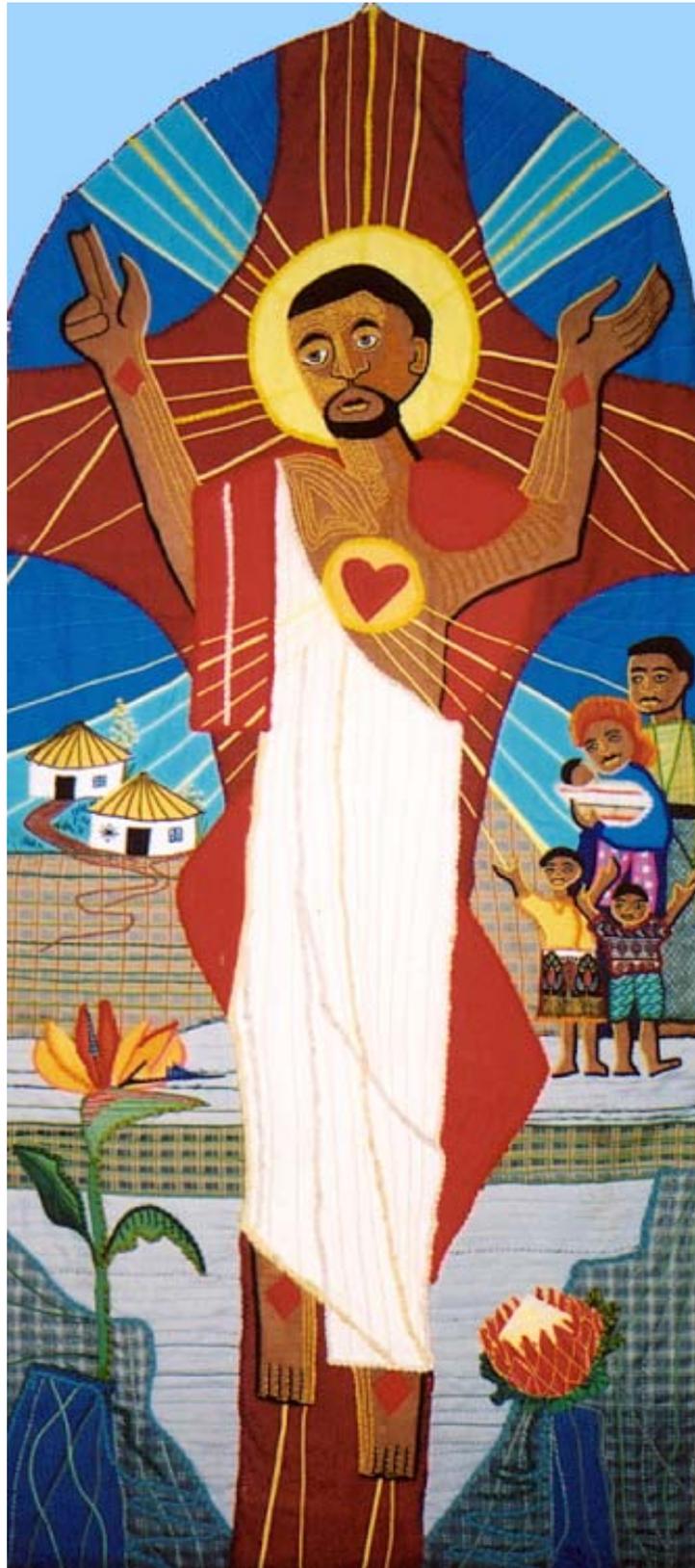
**Figure 5.2**

*Depiction:*     Risen Christ revealing Sacred Heart
*Construction:* Tapestry
*Location:* MSC Chapel, Johannesburg
*Artist:* Sister Gereon
*Photographed by:* Father Mitchell, MSC

**Figure 5.3**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Risen Christ |
| *Construction:* | Wood |
| *Location:* | Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg |
| *Artist:* | Nelson Mukhuba, 1996 |
| *Photographed by:* | Wayne Oosthuizen |

**Figure 5.4**

*Depiction:*  Risen Christ, 1974
*Construction:* Stained Glass
*Location:*   University Chapel, University of Pretoria
*Artist:*    Leo Theron
*Photographed by:* Researcher

**Figure 5.5**

*Depiction:* African Risen Christ, 1950's
*Construction:* Indigenous wood
*Location:* Johannesburg Art Gallery
*Artist:* Job Kekana
*Photographed by:* Reproduced from Butler, 2000
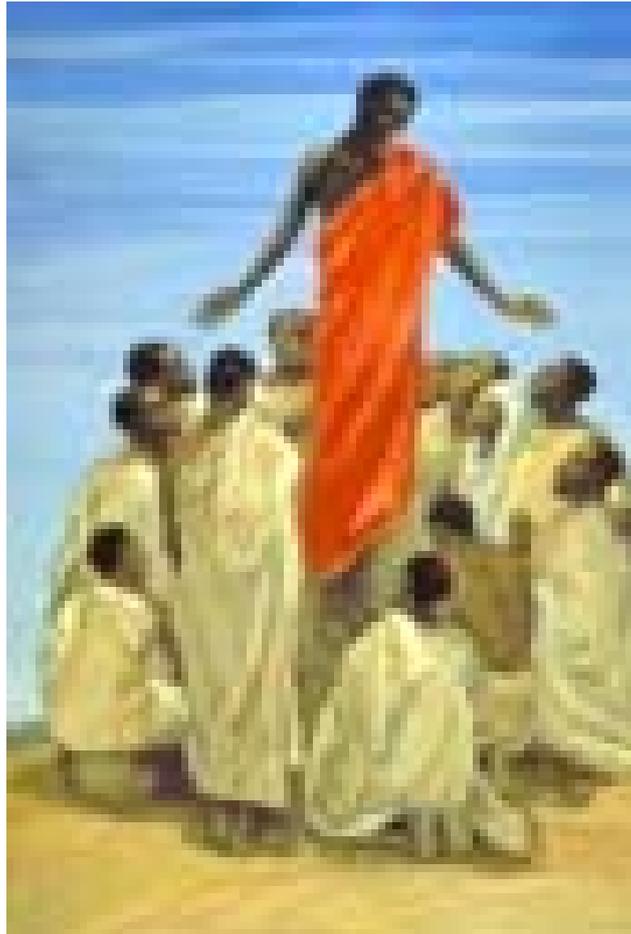
**Figure 5.6**
*Depiction*:              Christ's Ascension
*Construction:*         Painting
*Artist:*                    Jesusmafa.com

Figure 5.4 highlights a black Christ revealing the wounds of His Passion and Crucifixion.[8] The work is mounted in the University Chapel of the University of Pretoria.[9]  Although the artist is white and Afrikaans, seen in the context of the time of its commission, the work is political.  The Catholic Church in South Africa was approaching having a black majority, and mixed congregations (although the Group Areas Act would ensure that racial segregation of

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[8] The work is a 1974 product of Leo Theron, a prolific Pretoria based liturgical artist who is descended from a Huguenot family.  He uses a French method of staining and joining glass termed *dalles de verre sous beton.*  Theron's works decorate 137 places of worship – Leo Theron, http://www.econupf.es/~michael/m-song/pages/leo.htm, 4 April 2006.
[9] The chapel, built in the 1920s, was formerly a component of a Redemptorist monastery.  Its location – especially concerning its Romanesque architecture and rich Catholic decoration -- on the campus of a university formerly closely associated with the National Party is ironic.  The now deconsecrated chapel is utilised for a traditional Latin Mass every Sunday and is a popular wedding venue.

congregations effectively remained to a degree, the parish in question never having a black majority before its closure), despite apartheid restrictions, were becoming more common.[10] At the time of the work's commission, the building housing the work was not yet part of the University of Pretoria (which was aligned to the apartheid government), [11] but next to it. It is put forward that under the unusual context of the commission of the work, the work itself is a political protest and identification with the oppressed at the time. The hand gesture of the right hand of the Christ figure (the hand held out in front of the body with the forefinger pointing down) may be interpreted in terms of southern African convention as communicating the intention of the Christ figure to return.[12] At the point of Christ's return in terms of Christian belief, justice will reign and all suffering for the deserving faithful end. The depiction of Christ as black in the window and the location of the window within the context of the study make the work notable. The utilisation of natural light in stained glass has been worked, in this example, to give the appearance of the light emanating from the Christ figure, giving the message of the icon the appearance of being reinforced by the natural order.

Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 depict as their subject matter Christ after His resurrection. Figure 5.5 conveys the message that although Christ had risen from the dead, He was still a man, and man is simple in comparison to God, thus again highlighting God's love for man in His willingness to lower Himself in order to come to Earth as a man. The identification of African man with Christ's existence as a man is reflected via the very Spartan and African nature of the depiction. It could be argued that Figure 5.3 attempts to convey the same message by utilising simple driftwood in an attempt to convey the resurrection of man and Christ's conquest of death. Figure 5.3 reiterates the message in Genesis that man was created from earth and that Christ (having descended to Hell after His death), would rise from the earth itself. The driftwood used, discarded within nature and moulded by the water into which it came contact, reinforces that Christ emerged from the lowest possible of all

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[10] J Nxumalo, in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid society, p 145.
[11] L Thompson, A history of South Africa, p 185.
[12] H Brookes, 'A repertoire of South African quotable gestures', http://www.aaanet.org/sla/jla/jla14_2_brookes.htm, 1 February 2007.

places – a position many victims of apartheid no doubt felt themselves confined to.

All of the figures reproduced, it is suggested, embrace the African element of Christ's message and reflect the intimacy and hope of salvation and liberation from suffering (which in Christ's sacrifice was very real) behind the message. Figure 5.6, part of the Jesusmafa series, reflect the exact point of this salvation for the faithful, ascension into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Figure 5.7 reproduces a Cuban anti-apartheid propaganda poster utilising a theme identifiable as a variation of the Sacred Heart in support of the global communist cause. The figure further utilises colouring common to the medieval period and depicts the subject in a transfigured state in line with the medieval convention. The choice of theme utilised, it is proposed, adds to the contention advanced that certain themes of medieval art have become universal – or at least widely recognisable – in protest art. The figure represented displays a definite aggressive quality not found in any of the other depictions reviewed. The stance: intense stare and positions of the hands, give the impression that the figure is intent on conflict and confrontation. Frequently, icons coming into being as a result of conflict very often do not survive that conflict.

**Figure 5.7**

*Depiction:* Communist Cuban propaganda poster, 1982
*Artist:* Rafael Morante
Produced by the Organisation of Solidarity of the people of Asia, Africa & Latin America, reproduced from http://www.ospaaal.com/africa4.html

Catholicism, in its spread across Europe, had to compete with existing pagan concepts of art and religion held by Germanic tribes. In its development of the human consciousness towards a Catholic reality, iconography from an early period assumed a form that would aid evangelisation, which was the zealous preaching of conversion of pagans to the Church.

Paganism stressed the miraculous and suffering, as opposed to theology, emphasising the study of the nature of God and religious truth. Iconography responded by similarly stressing the miraculous[13] -- such as St Michael's role in Satan's defeat or the depiction of Christ after the Resurrection, revealing the wounds of His Passion. The depiction of Christ's suffering is furthermore a development that can be traced to the medieval church and is largely unique to Catholicism.[14] Miracles and suffering appealed to a potential convert's existing spirituality. They were subsequently common topics of illustration in religious iconography.

The cross is universally recognised as a symbol of Christianity. Through Christ's death, salvation is possible and the instrument of that death – although crucifixion was a brutal and humiliating death usually reserved for the lowest form of criminals and the treasonous by the Romans – has become a symbol of triumph over death. The incidents leading to Christ's execution are traditionally meditated over during Lent and Easter in the Church calendar. The Stations of the Cross are used universally within the Catholic Church (and some Protestant denominations to a degree) to focus the faithful upon these events and to highlight Christ's perfect sacrifice. [15]

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[13] JM O'Brien, The medieval church, (New York, Littlefield, Adams & Co, 1968), p 32.
[14] A Fotescue, 'Veneration of images', http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/07664A.htm, 10 January 2006.
[15] The Stations of the Cross are the decorations within a church depicting the facing hours of Christ's life leading up to His death upon the Cross using a wide variety of presentation including sculpture, mural and painting. The fourteen stations are traditionally meditated upon and require a spiritual pilgrimage of the person praying in an attempt to highlight Christ's sacrifice. The practice is held to have been established by St Francis of Assisi before being adopted across the medieval world - Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15569a.htm, 26 January 2008.

Gaskell holds that suffering symbolises bondage.[16]  Through utilising religious art as a means of protest to oppression, the oppressed are identifying with Christ's sacrifice and the certain promise that through salvation, all oppression (whether brought about by a rigid social structure and miserable existence or an imposed racial order touching nearly every aspect of day-to-day life) shall be overcome.

Figures 5.8 and 5.9 reflect traditional medieval depictions of the Crucifixion. Through the imagery – such as the three Marys (the BVM, the Magdalene and the mother of Zacharia) witnessing the act at a time when women could not be proper witnesses at all to legal transactions in Jewish law[17] – the nature of the new covenant as radically different from the old is symbolised.  Figure 5.8 reflects a common facet of medieval iconography.  In what looks like an ominous puddle underneath the cross (it is in fact a grave), the outline of a white skull (sometimes a death's head is used) is visible.  According to medieval legend, Christ was crucified on the spot at Calgary where Adam was buried, thereby triumphing over all sin in undoing the power of the Original Sin in bringing eternal life.  Despite much searching, I have been unable to locate any African icon, even amongst those who acknowledge utilising medieval prototypes closely, with a comparable symbolism.  I have come to the conclusion that the depiction of bones (especially a skull) in accordance with widespread South African mythology would signify evil or witch craft and could therefore be seen by local artists as incompatible with the message holiness, hope or salvation from bondage or oppression that they intended to convey. Figure 5.8 was created at a time when Europe was again being shaken by violence and oppression. In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Islam, thereby placing the survival of Eastern Christianity in doubt.  The regions now known as modern Serbia and Herzegovina fell soon afterwards.  Heresy appeared to be sprouting all over Europe, resulting in the burnings of many alleged heretics, including St Joan of Arc in 1431.  The brutal Hundred Years War was devastating France while rival claimants to the papal throne emerged.  As Christianity appeared to be haemorrhaging, in Spain it was being

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[16] GA Gaskell, Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, p 728.
[17] R Bultman, Primitive Christianity in its contemporary setting, (London, Collins, 1956), Chapter 2.

consolidated. The Moors had been driven from the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish Inquisition began its often gory role of ensuring that the population remained Catholic in 1481. Figure 5.8 reflects buildings in the background that have a marked Islamic influence – such as the flat roofs and arched windows. It is possible that this particular icon, and that of Figure 5.9, were intended to propagate against Islam.

The spear visible in many depictions of the Crucifixion, the Spear of Destiny perhaps, symbolises a divine ray of life and end to illusion, according to Gaskell.[18] Although Gaskell highlights this symbolism as Ancient Egyptian in origin, it has a bearing on the subject matter in that a spear was used to check that Christ had died by a Roman centurion through a piercing to His side. In terms of scriptural authority, Jesus' body could not be broken. Had Christ not died, He would have suffered the breaking of his legs by heavy weights to hasten death through shock. The spear is instrumental in the works (as well as being a recognisable African artefact) in that it helps to fulfil the prophecy of Christ's death and contributes to the attainment of eternal life through Christ's death.

Figures 5.10 to 5.15 reveal depictions of Christ as immediately recognisable as black. These depictions illustrate the identifying of the suffering of Christ by the artists. While medieval depictions of the crucifixion frequently attempt to mute the emotional reaction of those present, showing them as disturbed by stoically witnessing the events unfolding (figure 5.8 is a good example of this convention). African depictions on the other hand are not afraid to reveal what is probably the truer reflection. Figure 5.10 reveals a particularly emaciated Christ, perhaps highlighting to the viewer something of the hunger faced by the artist (which many medieval predecessors could have identified with), reiterating that Christ's message has historically appealed to the meek and begging the question as to what period of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's history saw the creation of the work – and under what circumstances. In Figure 5.14 the person at the base of the crucifix (probably the Madonna or

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[18] G Gaskell, Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, p 712

St Mary Magdalene) is reflected in absolute despair, her hands covering her face, unable to bear the events unfolding. The Christ figure in Figure 5.15 breaks even further from the standard convention in depicting the crucifixion without the use of a cross. The artist leaves little doubt that the figure is attached to the cross but has created the work in such a manner, through the use of posture and other medieval conventions – such as the crossing of the feet, that no cross is necessary to reveal a crucifixion. Both artists of the works lacked formal training and only began producing religious works after fortuitous meetings with Catholic priests hunting for items with which to decorate churches. [19]

Figure 5.11 is a depiction by the contemporary Cape artist Portchie. Portchie utilises oils to convey a Christ who is closer to the persons at the base of the cross, the saved humanity, than is typically depicted. The figures, all of which female with their heads covered, a sign of reverence, resemble women in traditional Afrikaans dress. The depiction of what is recognisable as a typical crucifixion piece of art in the medieval tradition contrasted with what is often associated with strong Calvinism undertones, reiterates the inclusiveness of Christ's message and saving grace.

Figure 5.12 reveals a common misconception (repeated in Figure 4.13 and all the medieval depictions included in the study) that the nails used in the crucifixion would have been driven through Christ's hands. To support a body, the nails would need to be driven through the wrists of the victim, a notion supported by archaeological evidence. Figure 5.12 is further noteworthy in that Jerusalem behind the execution is depicted as being comprised of grass huts. In addition, the 'city' is much closer than the Scriptures indicate – perhaps again highlighting the closeness of Christ to the faithful. As with all of the African icons depicted in the study, the seasons (in this case an autumn sky is visible) surrounding the event depicted have been swapped to match what is commonly associated with the period of the year in which the event is commemorated instead of that of the European.

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[19] Johannesburg Art Gallery, Images of wood. Aspects of the history of sculpture in twentieth century South Africa, (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1989), p 105 and 117.

The representations within Figures 5.16 borrow from the traditional depiction of Stations of the Cross but attempt to link the suffering of Christ directly with that of black South Africans under apartheid through the illustration of those present at the crucifixion as recognisably African or the depiction of the event as having happened within an obviously African context.  Although the artist is not identified, it is most probable that it is John Muafangejo.[20]  Muafangejo frequently tackled historical tales and legends in his work in order that they are retold in a context sympathetic to anti-colonial interpretation.[21]  In the fourth illustration, a man in a hat is seen watching the unfolding crucifixion from the top right hand corner, his inability to do anything to stop the violence is reflected in his grimace while his posture perhaps indicates his wishing to protect those behind him, who might be family, from the events unfolding.

The Stations themselves are open to artistic interpretation.  They include aspects of Christian belief that are extra-Biblical (such as the account of St Veronica wiping the face of Christ) but had become popular at the time of their inclusion into the liturgy)[22] – hence their complete rejection by Protestant denominations with a strong emphasis on Scripture as the only source of divine truth.   The figures reveal the Roman soldiers dressed in uniforms reminiscent of the colonial armies that helped colonise Africa.  The soldiers are black, not white.  This may be a comment on the participation of some black South Africans in the exploitation and suffering of their fellows for whatever reason.  In the scene where the figure of Christ is best revealed, the black face is left blank; an invitation to the black viewer to view themselves under these circumstances and dare to hope for triumph over the oppressive situation.

In addition to the use of the cross as a means of execution, one frame details a noose (the notorious means of state execution in pre-1994 South Africa)

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[20] Muafangejo was a Namibian forced to work because of economic circumstances in South Africa as a semi-skilled labourer in addition to being an artist.  He died in 1987, thus missing the advent of Namibian independence in 1991: S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 48.
[21] S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 17.
[22] D Farmer, Oxford dictionary of saints, p 489.

being used by a guard, perhaps to link the suffering of those sentenced to death in South Africa with Christ's sentence and execution. A spectator covers her mouth in the first frame to express her grief, the Zulu gesture identified by Rankin.[23] The stations conclude not with the crucifixion as is traditional, but with reconciliation between white and black. Laurels, denoting victory, are also apparent. In some of the frames figures wearing what looks like a Muslim fez are apparent while the sole figure immediately identified as white (the majority of the people being black could be interpreted under the circumstances as meaning that was the portion of the population with the most to gain through Christ's message at the time of the work's commission) looks like a rabbi – perhaps again reiterating that Christ came for all mankind. The final scene, the only one where any of the individuals reflected (again, who are all black) can be seen to be smiling, includes the three female figures shown as taller than everyone else in another conveying of triumph next to a tree intended to symbolise comfort and knowledge.

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[23] E Rankin, <u>Diversity & interaction. Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual South African Association of Art Historians</u>.
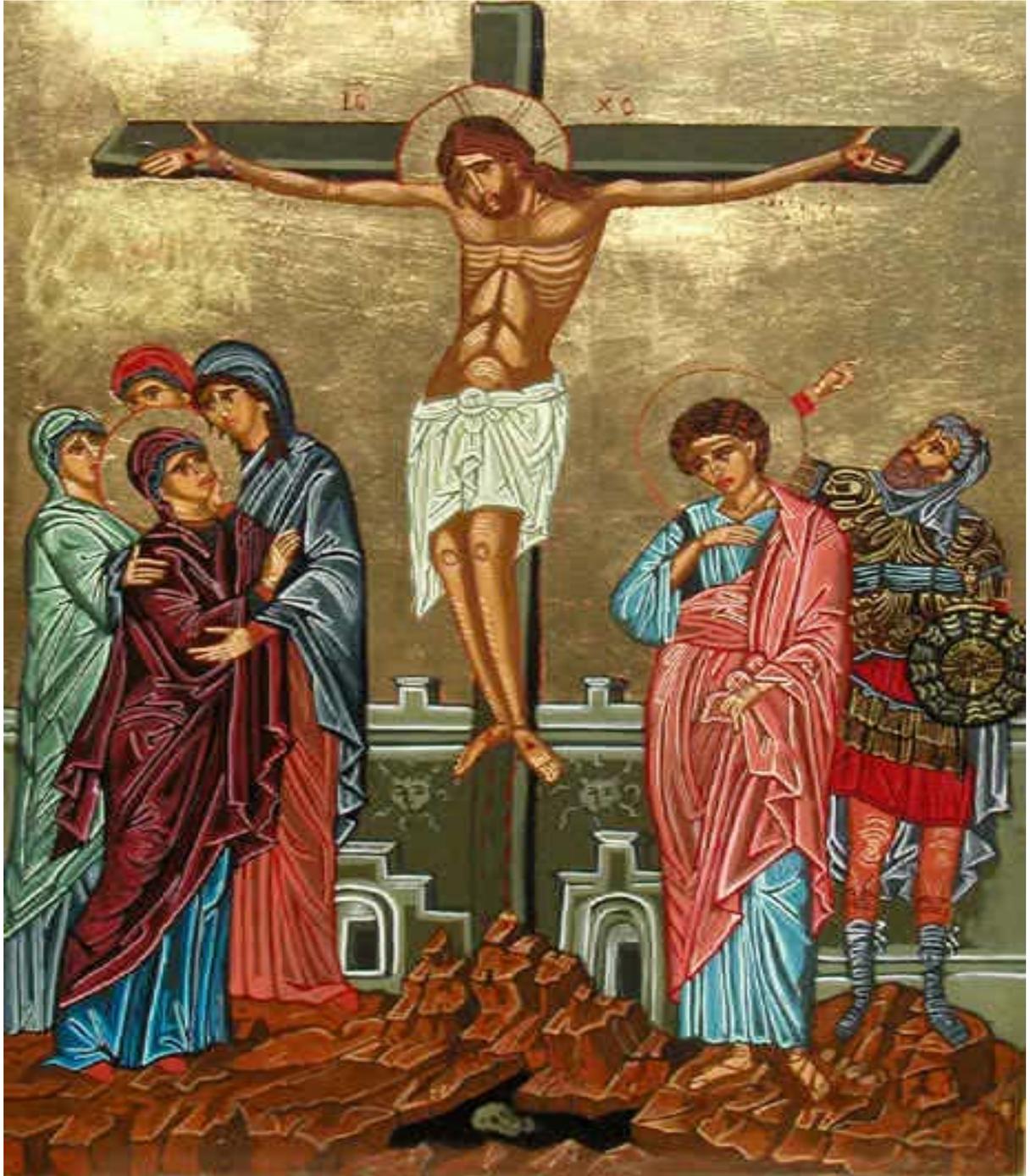
**Figure 5.8**

Medieval depiction of crucifixion, approximately 13th century.
http://www.golfelix.com

**Figure 5.9**

Depiction:          Crucifix
Construction:       Wood, nails, paints
Location:           Barcelona, Spain
Artist:             Unknown
Photographed by:    Researcher

**Figure 5.10**

*Depiction:*          Crucifix (DRC), possibly 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*     Wood and nails
*Location:*            Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Dimensions:*      31,8 (h), 15,5 (w), 7cm (d)
*Artist:*              Unknown
*Photographed by:*   Wayne Oosthuizen

**Figure 5.11**

*Depiction:*      Crucifixion
*Construction:*   Oil on canvas
*Location:*       Private collection
*Artist:*         Portchie
*Photograph:*     http://www.portchie.com/cv.htm
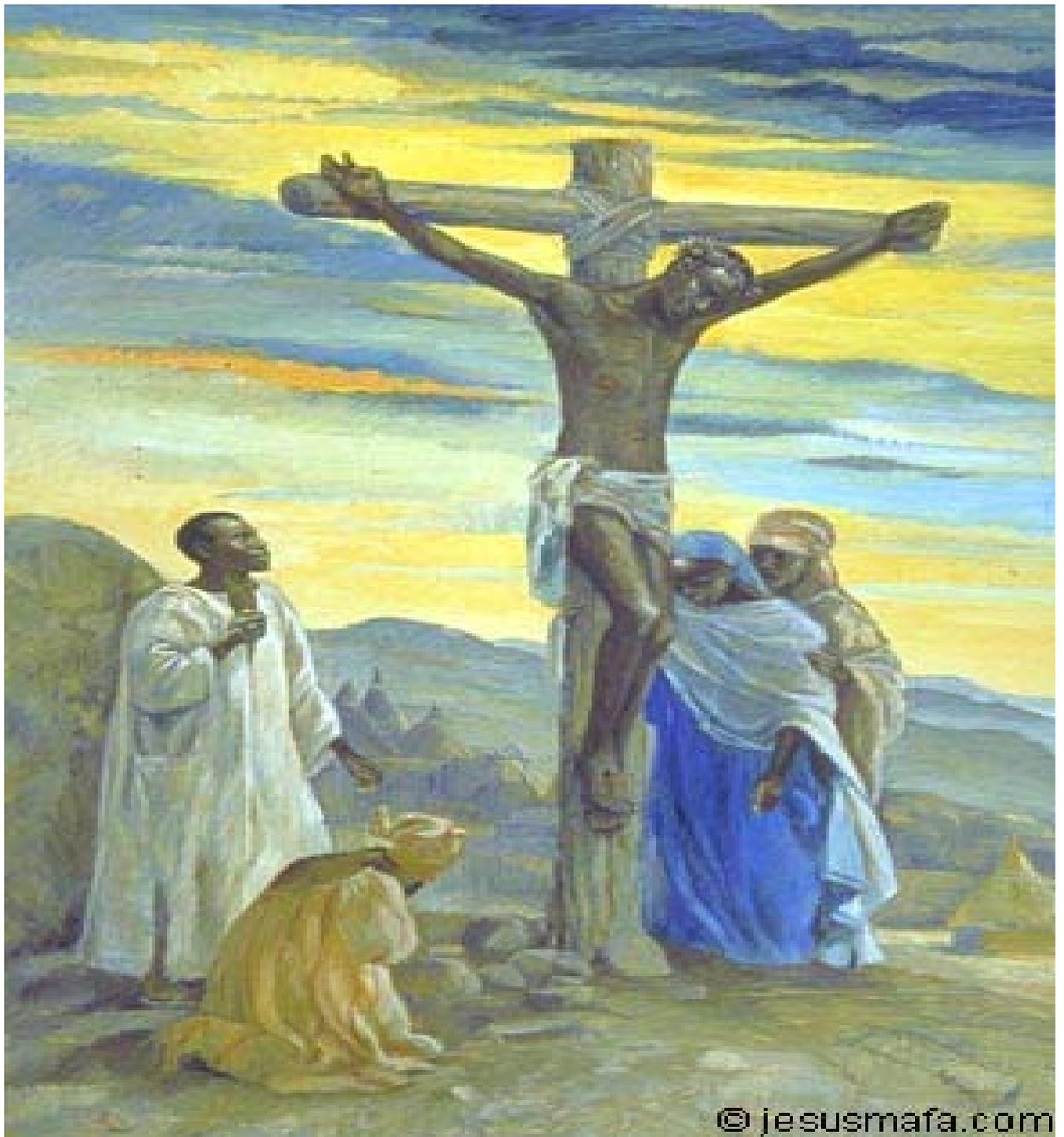
**Figure 5.12**
*Depiction*:          Crucifixion
*Construction:*    Painting
*Artist:*               Jesusmafa.com

**Figure 5.13**

*Depiction:*       Christ on the Cross, 1973
*Construction:*    Wood and metal
*Location:*        Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg
*Dimensions:*      126,8c (h), 46 (w), 19,4cm (d)
*Artist:*          Nelson Mukhuba
*Photographed by:* Researcher

**Figure 5.14**

*Depiction:* Crucifix
*Construction:* Burmese teak
*Location:* Private collection of RAL Cordoun
*Dimensions:* 58 x 16 x 10cm
*Artist:* Bernard Muntwenkosi Gcwensa
*Photograph:* Images of Wood, p 105
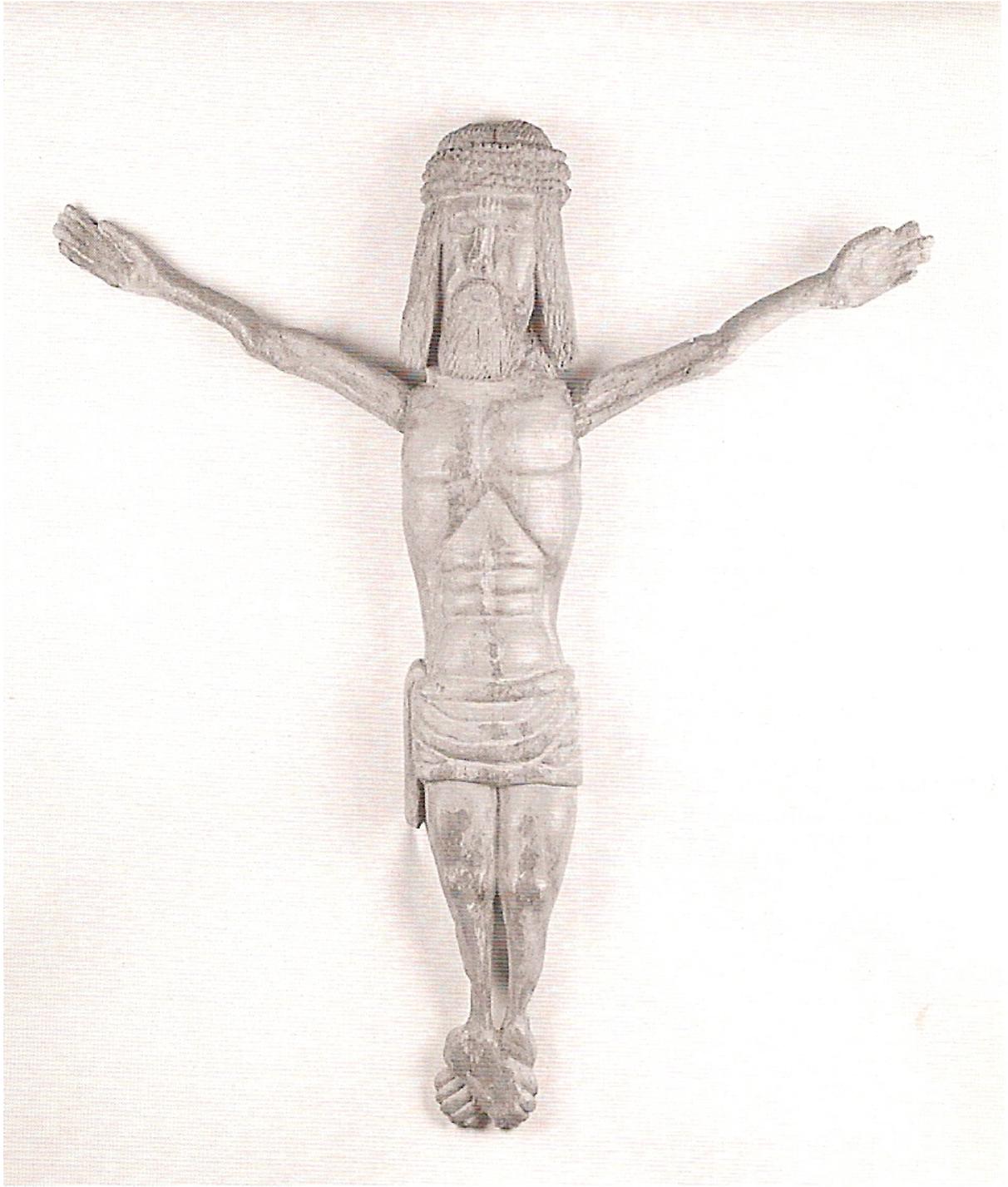
**Figure 5.15**

*Depiction:*        Crucifix
*Construction:*     Possibly jarrah wood
*Location:*         Private collection of JE Proctor
*Dimensions:*       120 x 118,5 x 12cm
Artist:             Unknown
*Photograph:*       Images of Wood, p 117.

12/50                    Azaria Mbatha 72
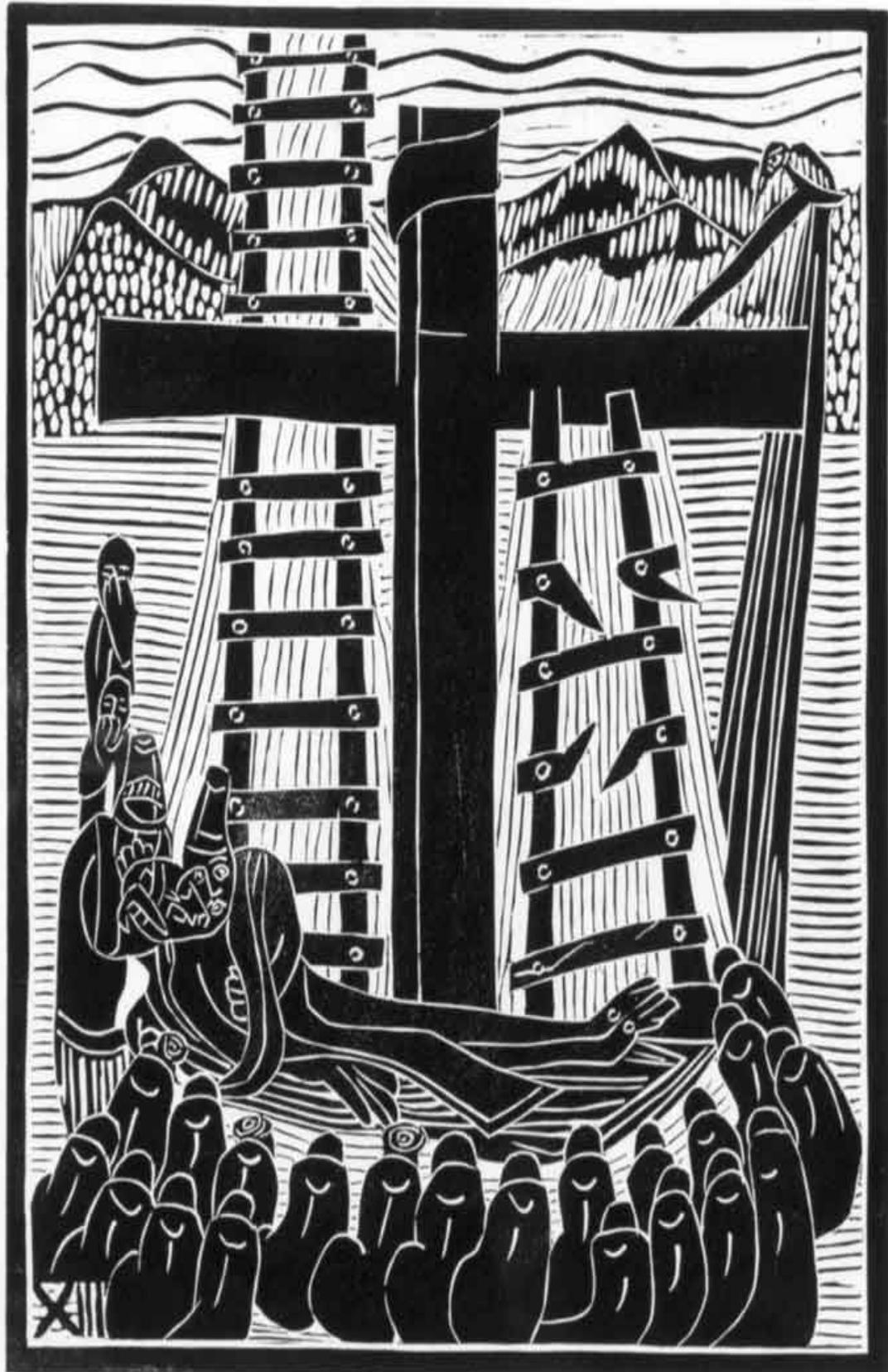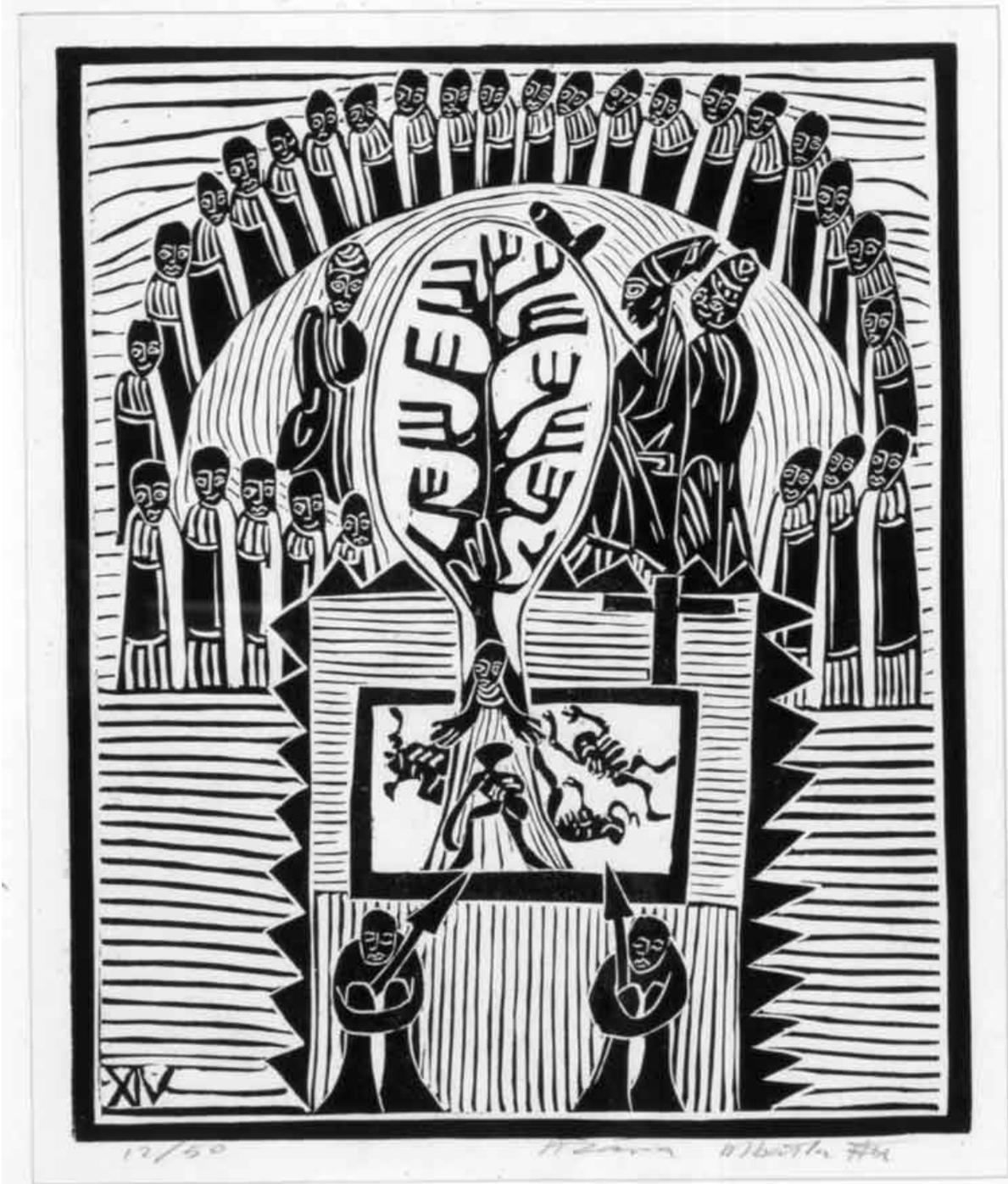
**Figures 5.16 a to g**

*Depiction:* Selection of Stations of the Cross
*Construction:* Linocut on paper
*Location:* Gauteng Government Collection, Johannesburg
*Artist:* Unknown
*Photographed by:* Gauteng Government

Figure 5.17 depicts a stylised interaction of an Africanised Christ and the BVM attempting to highlight the suffering of the Madonna in losing her Son at the crucifixion. The sereneness of the depiction communicates a degree of trust in fate despite the oppressive events immediate up to the subject of depiction. The wounds Christ obtained prior to His crucifixion and during the course of it are not revealed on the painting. In addition, the cross appears out of proportion to that of typical renditions in that it is much shorter. The omission of the suffering and ability of the BVM to reach Christ and touch Him attempts to convey the connection between Mary and Christ and its ability to transcend suffering and pain. In Figure 4.17, the unusually un-bearded Christ looks like a young Nelson Mandela. The artist was perhaps inspired by the Figure in 5.26 and sought to transpose those characteristics of a political figure he admired upon a religious work of art in a deliberate work of protest. When the painting was executed, probably in the 1980's when the only images of Mandela available were already twenty years old and a subject of this age would have been depicted. The un-bearded Christ can be seen to recognise the suffering and sacrifice of the BVM, a notion perhaps communicated by the Madonna's proximity to Him in the work, the emotion able to transcend the cross.

Figure 5.17 is indicative of the Pietà detailing the BVM's suffering at the execution, of which Figure 5.18 is a well-known example. Pietà depictions attempt to convey compassion through identification with Mary.[24] The role of the Virgin as the personification of human suffering is a common theme in Catholic culture and one frequently represented in Catholic and Orthodox iconography. The identification of the BVM as the mother of sorrows in the wake of Christ's crucifixion is common as an artwork detailing a 'pietà', Italian for 'compassion'. The term has come to be applied to any artwork detailing suffering – such as the celebrated photograph, termed the 'American Pietà', of a policeman and fire fighters carrying the body of a fallen comrade from the debris in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks on the World

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[24] J Pope-Hennessy, <u>Italian Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture</u>, (London, Phaidon, 1996), p 10.

Trade Centre in New York.[25]   In pietà depictions, the mourning of the Madonna and the presentation of her suffering, personified by Christ's limp body.

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[25] Blogger, http://xrysostom.blogspot.com/2005/08pieta.html, 2 February 2006.

**Figure 5.17**

*Depiction:*       Virgin and Crucified Christ
*Construction:*    Oil on canvas
*Location:*        MSC, Johannesburg
*Artist:*          Unknown
*Photographed by:* Father Mitchell, MSC
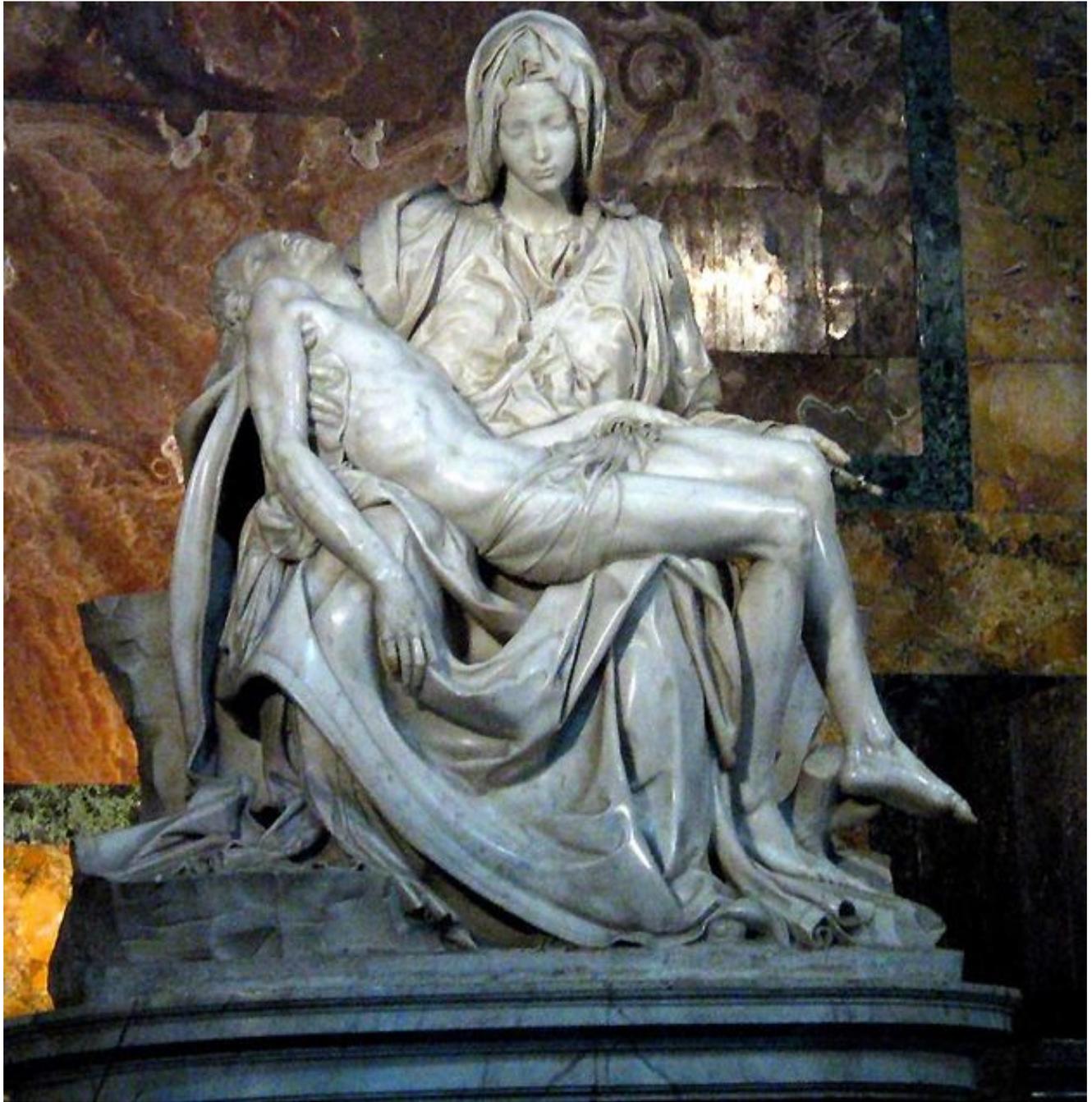
**Figure 5.18**

*Depiction:* Pietà
*Construction:* Sculpture, marble
*Location:* 174 cm (h), diameter at base 195cm
*Artist:* Michelangelo
*Photograph:* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieta

**Figure 5.19**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Pietà portion of religious sculpture, *The Resurrection* |
| *Construction:* | Wood, nails and paint |
| *Location:* | Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg |
| *Artist:* | Bonnie Ntshalintshali |
| *Photographed by:* | Researcher |

**Figure 5.20**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | The Resurrection |
| *Construction:* | Wood, nails and paint |
| *Location:* | Standard Bank Art Collection, Johannesburg |
| *Artist:* | Bonnie Ntshalintshali |

**Figure 5.21**

The body of Hector Pieterson is carried school pupils, 16 June 1976, Soweto.  Photograph by Sam Nzima,

**Figure 5.22**

*Depiction:*        Pietà
*Construction:*    Paint on stone
*Location:*        Cape Town Castle
*Artist:*          Kevin Brand
Photograph:
http://www.cama.org.za/CAMA/webcomponents/php/gen_Artist.php?id=191

**Figure 5.23**

*Depiction:*          Mieliepap Pietà
*Construction:*      Fibre glass epoxy with mielie meal
*Location:*          New York, USA
*Artist:*             Wim Botha
*Photograph:*      http://www.artthrob.co.za/03apr/artbio.html

Figure 5.19 is an Africanised depiction of the Pietà by Ntshalintshali, which forms part of a larger work. In addition to the Pietà, various stages of Christ's life are depicted in a manner reminiscent of a layered wedding cake. As with the other component parts of the work (Figure 5.20), the layers are based on medieval examples and closely follow the order of events reflected in Christ's life and the liturgy of the Mass.

Figure 5.22 reflects a work by Kevin Brand[26] entitled *Pietà* whereby a famous depiction (Figure 5.21), where the body of Hector Peterson is 'presented' and mourned instead of that of Christ during the June 1976 riots was produced on the Leerdam wall of Cape Town Castle. As the headquarters of the defunct South African Defence Force (which aided the police in the enforcement of apartheid legislation) in the Western Cape – and possibly the only government building where the pre-1994 South African flag (in addition to various colonial flags) is still flown, the choice of venue to confront the compassion worthy of the June 1976 massacre is apparent.

Figure 5.23 reveals Wim Botha's *Mieliepap Pietà*, an interpretive copy of the work depicted in Figure 5.18, constructed of mealie meal and fibreglass epoxy.[27] As mealie meal is the staple food of poorer South Africans,[28] the artist thereby attempts to identify the sufferings of the Virgin with the indigent and dispossessed of South Africa.

As discussed, frequent, analogies between Christ's suffering and that of the black population were made during the apartheid years. In one extreme example, the Anglican coloured artist, Ronald Harrison's, 1962 *Black Christ'*

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[26] S Williamson categorises Brand's work as communicating 'confrontation and resistance. Brand came to prominence in the 1980s using simple materials to convey an artistic response to what he termed 'pandemonium'. Brand's ' celebrated *19 Boys Running* depicted the 1985 'Trojan Horse Massacre in Langa, where 19 boys were shot by hiding security police, according to Justice Kannemeyer in his official inquiry into the incident, mostly in the back: S Williamson, Resistance art in South Africa, p 125.

[27] Wim Botha (a non-Catholic) grew up in the wealthy eastern suburbs of Pretoria. He draws frequently from icons of the previous apartheid order closely associated with the city -- such as the Voortreker Monument -- and elements common to domestic life during the apartheid years, such as stuffed animal head hunting trophies that seemed to adorn so many households. The BVM is a frequent subject of Botha's work is his attempts to display contemporary observations while drawing on traditional forms – S O'Toole, W Botha, http://www.artthrob.co.za/03apr/artbio.html, 11May 2006.

[28] G Branford, A dictionary of South African English, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1978), p 147.

(Figure 5.26) depicted Albert Luthuli as a crucified Christ with Prime Ministers HF Verwoerd and his then Minister of the Interior and later successor, BJ Vorster, serving as Roman guards.[29] The identification of the two ministers with the oppressive Romans and their brutal means of dispatching criminals was intended to highlight the increasingly brutal oppression of the majority of the country's population in the application of apartheid legislation. That the painting is signed (unlike the majority of religious works throughout the two periods reviewed), reinforces that it is intended to be a brave work of protest in that the authorities would know exactly who to go to when ordered to arrest the artist, highlights the painting's true objective. While the Christ figure is certainly black and African in characteristics, Mary appears to remain white, as in most depictions. This might perhaps highlight the artist's view of the arbitrariness of racial classification as practised during the apartheid years, especially in light of the artist's view that all South Africans, regardless of race were created by and potentially redeemed through the same God. In Harrison's depiction, the Christ figure looks heavenwards, invoking the memory of Christ's example of forgiving those that tortured and executed Him right at the moment of anguish and torment, while at the same time reminding the viewer of a better place where justice prevails. The light shining from the halos appears to be answering the light from the heavens, in support of this contention. The sign above the crucifix proclaiming the king of the Jews and placed there to mock Christ, is indicative of the artist's view of Luthuli being divinely appointed as the real leader of South Africa (in a manner reminiscent of the medieval belief in the divine right of kings), and perhaps a comment on the empty gesture of the apartheid government in trying to have Luthuli's status as a chief revoked because of his ANC activities.

The work was hung in St Luke's Anglican Church, Salt River, for a period. After it's banning – and the arrest and torture of the artist by the security police -- it was moved to London where it was used in charity drives for liberation movements. When the security police arrived to confiscate the painting (it was later returned to the artist on a legal technicality – it had not

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[29] JW De Gruchy, Christianity, art and transformation, p 230.

been properly seized -- before it could be destroyed), the security police were forced to remove people kneeling in prayer before it in a similar veneration reserved for icons in medieval Catholic and Orthodox tradition. [30] The work continues to attract attention and is still exhibited. Political commentators, as illustrated by the work of the cartoonist Zapiro [31] below in Figure 5.27, still use the image to comment on post-apartheid South African politics. Upon the sacking of the popular former Deputy Minister of Health Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge who won many accolades for avoiding the unpopular apparent stance of the President, Thabo Mbeki and the Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang that anti-retroviral medication to fight the HIV/Aids virus is harmful and can be substituted by good nutrition. Figure 5.27 reflects Madlala-Routledge crucified on an Aids-awareness ribbon with the President and Minister of Health now assuming the roles of the Roman guards in deliberately drawing out the suffering of the majority of South Africans by striking out at a person who epitomises hope.

Ironically, perhaps the best series of events highlighting the role of iconography in Catholicism can be found within a Protestant context, one which resulted in a swing towards Catholic conservatism and an embrace of icons, resulting in an increased focus upon the role of images in worship. Anglicanism went into schism when Henry VIII passed the Act of Supremacy in 1534 that established himself, instead of the Pope, as head of the English Church.

The beliefs held by the Anglican Communion are: scripture (as the basis of the Christian message); the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds; the doctrinal statements propounded by the four Councils of the early church -- Nicaea, Ephesus, Constantinople, and Chalcedon; the Thirty-nine Articles; and the Book of Common Prayer are prescriptive. Unlike the rigid control exercised over doctrine in Catholicism, Anglicans appear not to be compelled

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[30] JW De Gruchy, Christianity, art and transformation, p 230.
[31] 'Zapiro', or Jonathan Shapiro, is a prolific Cape Town-raised and based political cartoonist who was born in 1958 into a Jewish family - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapiro, 3 September 2007.

to follow the Articles, with Article XXIV excusing non-compliance.[32]
Anglicanism allows for a belief in Predestination (Article XVII).

John Cosin (1594 to 1672), summarised the differences between Anglican
and Catholic belief as being Anglican rejections of the notions of papal
supremacy, that seven sacraments were instituted (Anglicanism takes the
lead of other Protestant denominations in only recognising two sacraments --
baptism and the Eucharist), that Christ is present in the celebration of the
Eucharist, that purgatory exists, that the Catholic Church has the power to
canonise saints, that the use of relics in worship is godly, that the adoration of
the BVM and other formal rites of worship particular to Catholicism are
divinely inspired and -- most notably for the focus of this study -- that icons
can represent an act of worship, or can in any way aid in the salvation of a
soul. [33]

During the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, of whom
the greatest protagonist was John Henry Newman (1801 to 1890), gained
substantial influence.[34]  Newman (later a Catholic Cardinal) and his followers
sought to position the Anglican Church closer to Rome through the publication
of a series of pamphlets entitled 'Tracts for the Times'.[35]  Newman's
motivation centred on a growing feeling among his supporters that
agnosticism was gaining ground in England.  Newman and his followers
attempted to illustrate that the Articles did not deny Transubstantiation,
promote predestination and were more Catholic in orientation than previously
acknowledged.[36]  The Oxford Movement systematically attacked the
differences between the two denominations highlighted by Cosins. Tract XC
argued that purgatory existed, indulgences were possible, Christ's presence
at the Eucharist is real and Transubstantiation exists.  Tract XC expressly
states that the use of icons and relics in worship is entirely justified.[37]

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[32]Ibid.
[33] J Cosin in H Bettenson (ed), Documents of the Christian Church (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1946), p 414.
[34] G Faber, Oxford apostles, (London, Faber & Faber, 1974), Chapter I.
[35] RH Hutton, Cardinal Newman (London, Methuen & Co, 1905), p 138.
[36] G Faber, Oxford apostles, p 83.
[37] Cardinal Newman in Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, p 435.Chapter I.

Anglican chapels influenced by the Oxford Movement during the period and afterwards were decorated in a style closer to that of the Roman than the plainer Protestant examples with a distinct Calvinist influence which had proliferated since the time of the Reformation. As the Oxford Movement stressed the legitimacy of Anglicanism through its perceived status of being closer to the early Roman Church, the Romanesque school of architecture was popular. Romanesque architecture frequently imitates the Ancient City of Rome, utilising wide arches, columns and horizontal lines.[38] These structures often went further to include aspects of Catholic decoration that were unquestionably medieval inspired, such as the inclusion of icons depicting the Stations of the Cross.[39] New and restored stoups (receptacles for holy water) and containers for relics also abounded[40] -- although these had long-established their positions as aids to worship in Anglicanism.

Newman's advocacy led to a revival of Catholic inspired methods of worship (including the use of icons).[41] If Transubstantiation existed and Anglicanism retained its Apostolic Succession, the notion that the material could become divine again became a mark of English religious art.[42]

Figure 5.25 reflects an Africanised depiction of the Stations of the Cross that is strikingly similar to that of Figure 5.24 in terms of its execution. The works exhibits a halo that would have required painting onto the stone after the completion of the sculpture, thereby highlighting the essence of holiness conveyed as per the medieval practice of painting statues.[43] The initial depiction is from the Catholic Cathedral of Westminster (consecrated during the nineteenth century at the same time that the Oxford Movement was shaking Anglicanism to its roots) while Figure 5.25 adorns an Anglican chapel

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[38] J Parker, A concise glossary of architectural terms,(London, James Parker & Co, 1896), p 123.
[39] In L Joubert, The history of St Martin's School, (Johannesburg, St Martin's School, 1998), details of the Romanesque Chapel completed in the early twentieth century clearly reveal the inclusion of Stations of the Cross. Other South African Anglican Romanesque church buildings such as that of St Martin's, Irene, Pretoria, lack the Stations of the Cross despite being built at much the same time.
[40] A Parker, A concise glossary of architectural terms, p 228.
[41] G Faber, Oxford apostles, p 412.
[42] RH Hutton, Cardinal Newman, Chapter XV.
[43] V Egbert, The medieval artist at work, p 46, 47, 50 & 51.

in Johannesburg's southern suburbs.  The differences between the depictions at St Martin's School and the cathedral principally concern the substitution of Roman soldiers by African warriors and the depiction of all persons involved as African.  The medieval influence of a work exhibited in a cathedral built in the nineteenth century requires explanation.   The Cathedral was commissioned immediately after the Catholic Church was allowed to reorganise in England.  Due to the activities of the Oxford Movement, it was widely believed that England would be won back to Rome.[44] Catholic architecture and artistic output appeared to carry on from where it had been abandoned during the Reformation with the works in Westminster Cathedral celebrating the triumphs of the high point of English Catholicism – the medieval period and its conventions.[45]   The cathedral further includes Byzantine type mosaic, indicating that the decorators also hoped for a Catholic re-domination of eastern Christianity.

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[44] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10794a.htm, 3 March 2006.
[45] SJ Schloeder, Architecture in Communion, p 146.

III. JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

**Figure 5.24**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Third Station of the Cross |
| *Construction:* | Sculptured fresco |
| *Location:* | Winchester Cathedral, London |
| *Artist:* | Unknown |
| *Photographed by:* | Reproduced from Schloeder, S.J, Architecture in Communion, 1988. |

**Figure 5.25**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Eighth Station of the Cross, 1942 |
| *Construction:* | Sculptured fresco |
| *Location:* | St. Martin's School, Rosettenville |
| *Dimensions:* | Approximately 90cm (w) by 40cm (h) |
| *Artist:* | Zacharia Sekgaphane |
| *Photographed by:* | Researcher |

The establishment of orders in the Anglican community shocked so many of the more Protestant-inclined members of the denomination that a complaint was received by the Bishop of Oxford in 1842 that the Newman's community in Oxford, and presumably its emulators, were 'under the guidance of Rome' and that Newman and his supporters were already received as Catholics and were working from within the Church of England with papal authority to sow dissent. Such was Newman's success and the alarm of his adversaries that he earned for himself the title of the 'most dangerous man in England'.[46]

Like Jewel, initially Newman had intended to illustrate that Anglicanism was closer to the early Catholic Church because of its efforts to expunge extra-scriptural influences. During the course of Newman's studies, he became convinced that Catholicism retained its position as God's instrument on earth and all that the church promoted and held as true was justifiably so -- an argument contained in his 'Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine'.[47] Ultimately, Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845 with the majority of his supporters following later.[48]

It was during the period that the Oxford Movement was at the height of its influence that a great number of South African Anglican churches were built, decorated or otherwise emulated,[49] indicating that the similarity between the depictions reproduced in Figures 5.24 and 5.25 is not unintentional but a deliberate attempt to highlight the medieval influence of iconography, perhaps as a result of the comparable social circumstances of the two ages resulting from the oppressive natures of the societies.

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[46] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10794a.htm, 3 March 2006.
[47] RH Hutton, Cardinal Newman p 162.
[48] RH Hutton, Cardinal Newman, chapter X.
[49] G Butler, The prophetic nun, p 13.
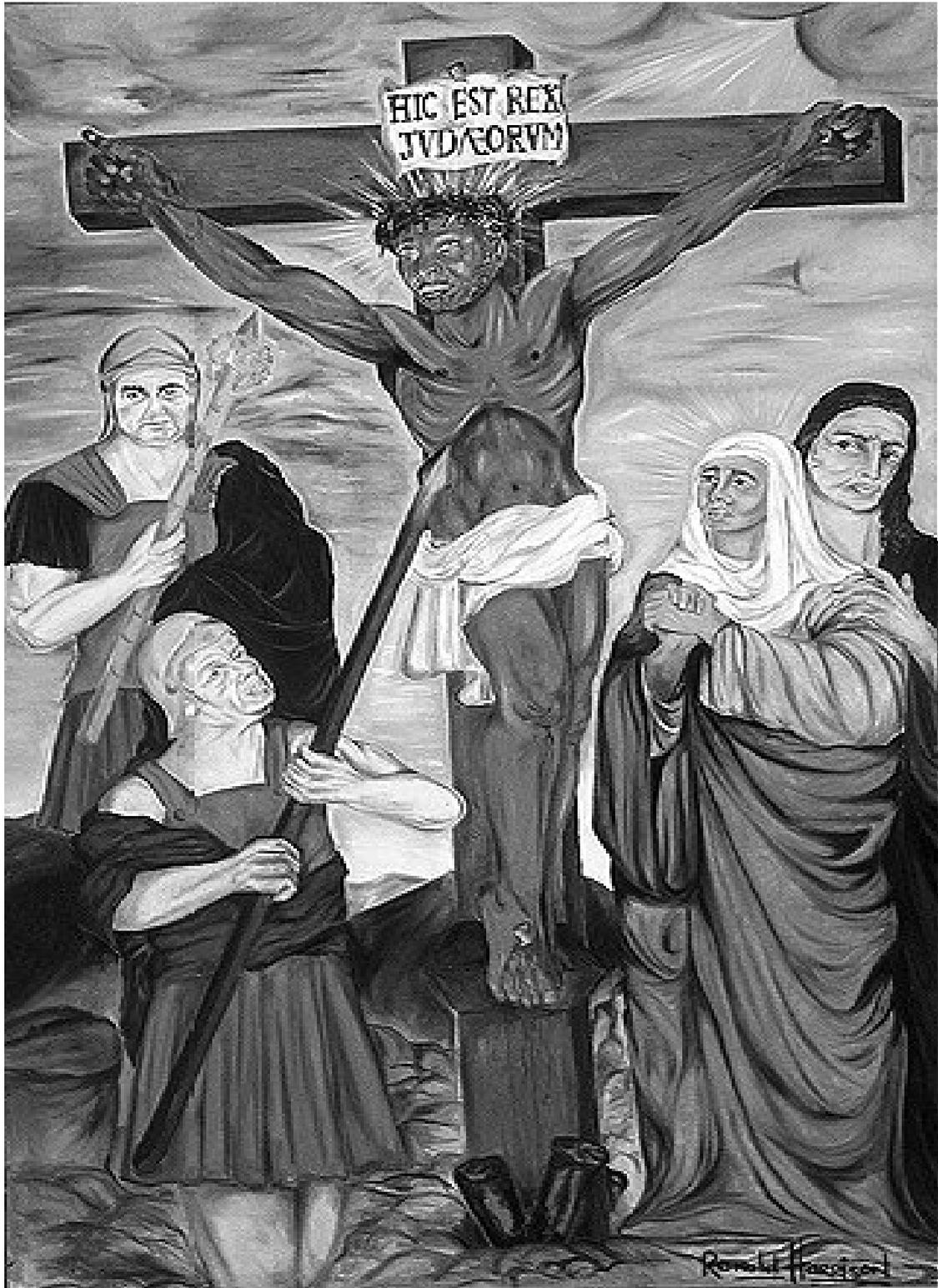
**Figure 5.26**

*Depiction:* Black Christ
*Construction:* Oil on canvas
*Location:* South African National Gallery
*Artist:* Ronald Harrison
*Photograph:* stlukesaltriver.org/ black%20christ.html

**Figure 5.27**

*Depiction:* Crucifixion of Nozizwe Madlada-Routledge, August 2007
*Construction:* Cartoon
*Artist:* Zapiro
*Photograph:*
http://www.thetimes.co.za/SpecialReports/Manto/Article.aspx?id=543721

In Figures 5.27 and 5.28 I have selected two depictions of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. [50] Although breaking the proper chronology of His life as revealed in the gospels, I chose to end the series on icons revealing Christ with a pair based on the event commemorated at the start of Holy Week. The entry represents Christ's triumphant procession through the city. The entry was a necessary requirement for the fulfilment of prophesies that anyone who rightly claimed to be the Messiah would be welcomed into Jerusalem. The fickleness of the crowd was illustrated a few day's later during Christ's Passion when the mob demanded His execution. The event is celebrated in the Christian calendar as Palm Sunday. Both figures reveal the palm leaves to retain its Biblically symbolic conveying of triumph.

The medieval icon is perhaps the finest example of the art produced in the study. The proportion stresses the importance of the persons reflected, to the extent that the city walls and gates barely cover the heads of those present. The Christ figure and disciples are haloed, text is utilised to convey a multiplicity of meanings and the ordinary people – the fickle who would welcome Christ at one point but demand his crucifixion (most likely at the hill in the background) within a week - are revealed as small - an indication of both their stature within society and general lack of holiness in comparison with the haloed. The artist appears to have overcome the difference of opinion amongst the writers of the gospels as to whether Christ rode a colt or a donkey by depicting an animal that appears to either or neither – a white horse with the ears and muzzle of a donkey. The palm leaves and tree reveal the occasion.

The revelation of the triumph would again have happened at a point in European medieval history when the threat of Islamic conquest was very real. At about the time that the icon was created, the hold of the Moors over the Iberian Peninsula was consolidated by the founding of Lisbon as a massive citadel. To many observers, it must have appeared that the region was

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[50] Mark 11:1 to 11, Matthew 21: 1 to 11, Luke 19: 28 to 44 and John 12: 12 to 19.

permanently lost to Christianity. The portrayal of an unquestionable triumph – and perhaps one that also reveals the fickleness of humanity was perhaps urgently needed.

Figure 5.28 reveals a South African depiction with the principle characters being revealed as black and Jerusalem having taken on the appearance of a traditional village. Like its medieval counterpart, the intended viewers were no doubt also in need of an inspiring triumphant depiction. The linocut is arranged in such a way that the Christ figure is the focus, immediately drawing the attention of the viewer with the message of the occasion being immediately apparent. Bearing in mind the limited scope available with linocut, the horse is also reflected as black. The message appears to be that this is a black triumph, Christ is one of the depicted person's own and that the triumph is as inevitable as the original message reflected in the gospels. Unfortunately the details behind the artist were not obtainable (the image reproduced is a photograph from a poster advertising an exhibition in Johannesburg in the 1980's). The work is reminiscent in terms of style and presentation reflected in Figures 5.16 a to g.

**Figure 5.27**

*Depiction:* Medieval depiction of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, circa 1150
*Construction:* Oil on canvas
*Location:* Corpus Christi, Jerusalem
*Artist:* Master of Palermo
*Photograph:*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Meister_der_Palastkapelle_in_Palermo_002.jpg
*Biblical reference:* Mark 11:1 to 11, Matthew 21: 1 to 11, Luke 19: 28 to 44 and John 12: 12 to 19.

**Figure 5.28**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | African depiction of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, late twentieth century |
| *Construction:* | Linocut on paper |
| *Location:* | University of the Witwatersrand Art Collection, Johannesburg |
| *Artist:* | Unknown |
| *Photographed by:* | Researcher (photograph of photograph) |
| *Biblical reference:* | Mark 11:1 to 11, Matthew 21: 1 to 11, Luke 19: 28 to 44 and John 12: 12 to 19. |

**5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the role of missionaries in directly transplanting the production of religious art, with its medieval origins and conventions, was evaluated. South Africa is fortunate in having had two transplantations – the Roman Catholic and High Anglican – that built upon the description of the utilisation of prototypes for religious iconography described in Chapter Four.

The roots of Passion and Crucifixion depictions may be in pagan art that stresses the miraculous and suffering. The Passion, allowing a great deal of artistic interpretation in its typical depiction via Stations of the Cross, as revealed via those held by the Government of Gauteng have, I propose, been useful in adding to the reinforcement of the research question. Depictions of the Crucifixion, because of the violence portrayed, and the violence of both eras (which saw again the threat of Islam and rise of the Spanish Inquisition in Europe) within the study, are perhaps the most easily recognised as being compatible with the research question. The medieval icons surveyed, in addition to their African counterparts, revealed the creation of works in backgrounds steeped with violence, oppression and uncertainty. The Crucifixion gave an opportunity for one artist in particular to directly utilise religious art to criticise the apartheid government, a form of protest whose effectiveness was immediately picked up upon and punished. The Cross is a symbol of triumph of life over death and suffering. As suffering symbolises bondage, the contention that the works are works of protest is enforced.

## Chapter Six
## Icons celebrating the Blessed Virgin Mary

### 6.1 Introduction

During the medieval period, the BVM, who – though human – gave birth to the Divine, was frequently hailed as having come to the aid of artists.[1]   As the frequent first choice of who to turn to times in anguish amongst Catholics, it is highly likely that South African Catholic artists and others suffering during the apartheid period requested the intercession of Mary. [2] Depictions of the BVM appear, on the basis of the works viewed for the study, to be as common in African iconography as they are in the medieval.

In Catholic culture, the BVM is seen as a saint and the living person most able to intercede upon the request of the faithful with prayers directed to God. Marian devotions are s a distinguishing characteristic between Protestant and Catholic worship and she is described in  various sources as the personifying the prototype of the Catholic church.  [3]

As highlighted in Chapter Four, Christ - by enriching human nature with divine life and divine beauty, enabled that matter may be redeemed or become spirit. The represented becomes, under the right circumstances, present through the existence of the icon.  Brother Richard Maideville believes the commissioning of an icon, particularly in the Orthodox tradition, to be akin to a sacrament -- or physical manifestation of the divine.[4]   The legends surrounding the first commission of religious icons that support their use in religious devotion all highlight their holiness as a result of the process of incarnation whereby they became divine.

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[1] VW Egbert, The medieval artist at work, p19.
[2] Catholic Encyclopaedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464b.htm, 21 January 2008.
[3] Ibid.
[4] R Maideville, 'Personal communication', 25 April 2005.

The conventions and themes, as will be highlighted, appear similar in terms of the art of both eras. In addition, depictions of the Virgin seem to allow a great deal of scope for geographical interpretation, as elaborated upon in Chapter Three, as applied to icons. Besides pagan traditions that frequently utilise mother and child depictions to indicate fertility, illustrations of the BVM and Child are essentially hopeful in the message they convey.

## 6.2 Black Madonnas and black Madonnas

Duricy defines Black Madonnas as Marian statues from the mediaeval period (many of which survive from the early medieval period) whose dark skinned depiction is not always easy to determine the origin of while black Madonnas are any dark skinned depiction of the Madonna. [5] Apparent comparisons between attributes of Celtic and African Christian art may not appear exaggerated. This is the case especially when viewed in the context of the movement disputing whether what is traditionally seen as European art is actually European – and not borrowed from African and an oriental influence. Certain theorists suggest that as Judaism was influenced by African cultures during its many Diasporas, Christianity – which emerged initially as a Jewish sect – would also adopt these conventions. The conventions, the theorists suggest, would ultimately be propounded as European.[6] The approach sees Black Madonnas (of which there are approximately 500 in Europe)[7] as having been heavily influenced by either African art styles. Certain of the images were blackened by materials such as candle soot. Others, beyond doubt, were created with the deliberate intention of reflecting the features a viewer would regard as African.[8] European Black Madonnas may exhibit either African or European facial features. Black Madonnas are frequently credited with having miraculous powers of healing and intercession. The statue reproduced in Figure 6.1 is an example of such an image. [9]

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[5] M Duricy, http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html, 17 July 2007.
[6] S Benko, The virgin goddess. Studies in the pagan and Christian roots of Mariology, (New York, EJ Brill, 1993), p 213.
[7] M Duricy, http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html, 7 April 2006.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Proponents of the approach that the images were made intentionally black typically attempt to tie the image of the BVM with African pagan sources such as the Egyptian goddess Isis or other sources – although stressing that the veneration of deities such as Isis is not the same phenomenon as Mariology.[10] Further explanations include that Black Maddonas were inspired by the commentaries on the Song of Songs – 'I am black but beautiful'[11], or were an attempt to equate blackness with the oppressed.[12]

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Song-of-Solomon 1:5.
[12] M Duricy, http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html, 7 April 2006.

**Figure 6.1**

*Depiction:*      Our Lady of Monserrat, early Christian period
*Construction:*   Wood, nails, paint
*Location:*       Catalonia, Spain
*Artist:*         Unknown
*Photograph:*   Michael P. Duricy
http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html

**Figure 6.2**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Virgin and Child, late 20<sup>th</sup> century |
| *Construction:* | Tapestry |
| *Location:* | Wembezi, KZN |
| *Artist:* | Sister Gereon |

**Figure 6.2**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction:* | Virgin and Child, late 20th century |
| *Construction:* | Tapestry |
| *Location:* | Wembezi, KZN |
| *Artist:* | Sister Gereon |

Depictions of the BVM represent the miracle of Christ's Incarnation as human and the purity of the Virgin. The appeal of motherhood figures, together with the calmness of the scene and characters depicted, appears to transcend cultural barriers. Figure 6.1 reproduces *Our Lady of Monserrat*, a Black Madonna of Western European origin whose colour is as a result of aging. [13] The work exhibits the theme of oppression through its aging having been hastened by its frequent moving throughout its existence, firstly as an attempt to protect it from pagan looters and later in attempting to protect it from Protestant iconoclasts intent on destroying religious images. The figures are shown in the gold costume and trappings of secular rulers of the time, complete with sceptre, thrown and orb. There is little doubt that Figure 6.1 is intended to convey that the individuals represented are rulers and are meant to be viewed as such.

Figure 6.2 is a Sister Gereon depiction of a crowned black Madonna and Child against a hilly KwaZulu-Natal setting. As with many images produced by Sister Gereon and her team, a king protea is included in the imagery to denote the royalty of the subject matter. The BVM and Child are intended to be viewed as rulers of the natural world, protectors of the family (as shown in the left hand side of the depiction) but immediately approachable – in contrast with the regal nature of the subjects in Figure 6.1. The inclusion of the sun and moon in the background remind the viewer of Mary's crowning as Queen of Heaven and Earth. The Christ Child's arms are raised in triumph. The use of royalty depicted as black may be interpreted as an affront against the strongly republican ideology of the apartheid rulers and their widely held religious belief that only they in were part of the Calvinist inspired elect – that part of the population God deemed worthy of salvation.

Figure 6.3 is frequently referred to as *The Black Madonna of Soweto*.[14] Properly, the 'black' should be spelt with a small 'b'. Like its surroundings in the Regina Mundi Church and the church building itself, perhaps because of it

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[13] M. P Duricy, Black Madonnas, http://www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/blackmdn.html, 7 April 2006.
[14] Soweto.co.za, Laurence Vincent Skully, http://www.soweto.co.za/html/p_scully.htm, 4 April 2006.

being one of the few local locations capable of holding a sizeable crowd and having been previously sympathetic to its use for anti-government protest, the icon became closely associated with the political riots of the 1970s in Soweto and subsequent turmoil in the township before democratisation in 1994. The icon is unusual in its colouring. Strong blue tones depart from the colouring schemes typical of later medieval prototypes whereas in earlier conventions the colour was associated with purity. Gaskell contends that blue symbolically denotes understanding on a higher plane than that around the subject.[15] Michael Foley describes blue within a Catholic context as the anticipation of a new and better day.[16] Considering the events that were to unfold within the close proximity of the work, the use of blue was opportune. The 1976 Soweto Riots that began within earshot of the icon and ultimately ushered in the changes that would end apartheid were certainly a fulfilment of a promise of a better day to the parishioners of Regina Mundi.

The absence of correct proportioning of the Child harks back to medieval convention and is intended to convey the importance of the Child over the BVM whilst at the same time remaining typical of the children of Soweto. [17] The artist intended the moon with two hands to symbolise unity, while the 'eye' at the bottom of the painting was intended to capture aspects of life in Soweto at the time, outlining the identical houses with their zigzag rooftops and football stadiums. The forks are symbolic of the oppressive forces of apartheid, representing hands attempting to pull the community apart while the interior of the 'eye', the church itself, is seen as a protecting force.

The artist, Lawrence Vincent Scully (1922 to 2002) who was paid for this work from a grant from the wealthy Oppenheimer family, was an emigrant of poor Irish heritage, worked as a journalist strongly opposed to the National Party government. Scully was subject to constant government harassment and threats of banning orders in terms of security legislation. Scully believed that the best way to overcome racial divides was through integration and a better

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[15] Gaskell, Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, p 116.
[16] MP Foley, Why do Catholics eat fish on Friday? (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p 51.
[17] N Gardner, 'History meets fashion – the Black Madonna of Soweto', The Citizen newspaper, 10 April 2007.

understanding of each other. Like many medieval icons, a multiplicity of messages is conveyed through the icon. On one level, via the text, the work is intended by Scully to commemorate the 1973 death of a Soweto resident as recorded in the writing surrounding Mary.[18]

Figure 6.4 depicts a Black Madonna and Child. I contend, in the absence of a direct reference, that Job Kekana created the work.[19] My contention is supported through the work being similar in terms of its facial features matching another depiction (also in terms of time of commission in the 1940s) of the BVM in the 1950s created by Kekana for Father Dominic Whitnall, CR, and was in the possession of the now defunct St Peter's Priory, Johannesburg.[20] At the establishment of the forerunner to the school that now houses this work (the earlier institution being forced to close in 1955 as the government would not tolerate a black school in an area reserved for whites [21]) religious art manufactured by the black students was sold in order to raise desperately needed funds.[22] In Figure 6.4 the viewer finds the typical subjects of religious icons reflected with African facial features and dark skin colour instead of European but clothing traditionally associated with depictions of the BVM and Child. The Madonna in Figure 6.4 appears downcast, humbly looking upon the Child. The depiction is extremely life like and human, showing the focus of the BVM to be Christ while He, with the intelligence of an adult, looks compassionately outwards at the world. Frequently, the Virgin holds the Child with a single hand in medieval and African icons, indicating that her control is one of love and perfection, not absolute control – thereby denoting her subservience to Him.

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[18] Soweto.co.za, Laurence Vincent Skully, http://www.soweto.co.za/html/p_scully.htm, 4 April 2006.
[19] Kekana was a pupil of St Peter's School Rosettenville. He showed a talent and created many of the statues that now decorate St Martin's School – the successor to St Peter's School. Little is known of his life.
[20] A photograph of the image used for comparison can be found on page 65 of G Butler, The prophetic nun.
[21] L Joubert, St Martin's School, p 26.
[22] Ibid.

## 6.3 The Blessed Virgin Mary in selected iconography

Figure 6.5 is a carved rendition by a parishioner of the BVM and Child in indigenous wood located outside a rural chapel of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in an impoverished and HIV/Aids stricken area of the North West Province. The scene in the Figure is serene, with both Virgin and Child recognisably African and dressed in contemporary clothes. The viewer is reminded that through the Incarnation, Christ became human and would have interacted in a typical human manner. Again, the applicability of Christ with Africa and the message of the universality of His message and attainment of salvation are conveyed via the scene from everyday life represented. The sculpture conveys oppression and the burden of the Madonna, probably immediately recognisable in the area, and the sacrifice and patience of the BVM pervading the depiction with calm.

Figure 6.6 reveals a yellowwood carving of Mary and Child, both again depicted as black. The wood is extremely difficult to work, making the fine detail of the folds of the clothes quite remarkable. The detail of the work, it is proposed, reveals a true adoration of the subject matter by the artist. Supplication and reverence with an unconditional willingness to embrace servitude and worship are communicated by the sculpture, while again reminding the viewer of the humility conveyed. In the carving, the subject appears to be clutching something resembling a crown, very likely the Crown of Thorns with which Christ was crowned by mocking Roman guards. The pain of the BVM – together with her Faith – are again conveyed in a message of hope that must have struck many of its viewers at the time of its commission while racial segregation and the growth of Afrikaner nationalism towards legally entrenched white supremacy and the alienation it would bring those who could not identify with it.

The African icons reflected utilising the Madonna and Child as a subject continue the medieval practice of picturing the Child with a wisdom and understanding (as revealed in figure 6.3) one would usually only associate as being attainable by someone much older. Unlike the medieval examples

however, the African artists appear more inclined to show affection between the BVM and Child.  Figure 6.7 illustrates the nurturing nature of the Madonna towards Christ.  Although, as highlighted, the object of her caress appears to be the Crown of Thorns with which He was tortured,[23] the arms held close to the chest indicate a nurturing uncommon in medieval icons.

The principle message frequently behind depictions of the Madonna and Child is hope, hope of compassion and reward for one's suffering, reinforced through the example of someone who suffered more – liberation through salvation.

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[23] Mathew 27:29.

**Figure 6.3**

*Depiction:*      Black Madonna of Soweto, 1973
*Construction:*  Painting
*Location:*       Regina Mundi, Soweto
*Artist:*         Laurence Vincent Scully
*Photograph:*  http://www.soweto.co.za/html/p_scully.htm

**Figure 6.4**

*Depiction:*        Black Madonna and Child, early 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:*     Wood nails and paints
*Location:*         Saint Martin's School, Johannesburg
*Dimensions:*       Approximately 30cm high and 15cm in diameter
*Artist:*           Unknown
*Photographed by:*  Researcher

**Figure 6.5**

*Depiction:* Virgin and Child, late 20<sup>th</sup> century
*Construction:* Wood and nails
*Location:* Sacred Heart chapel, North West Province
*Artist:* Rathildi
*Photographed by:* Father Mitchell, MSC

**Figure 6.6**

*Depiction:*  Black Madonna, 1929 - allegedly the first SA Black Madonna representation with the Virgin as black and barefoot
*Construction:*  Yellowwood
*Dimensions*:  80x22x17cm
*Location:*  Johannesburg Art Gallery
*Artist:*  Unknown
*Photographed by:*  Reproduced from Butler, The prophetic nun, 2000

**Figure 6.7**
*Depiction*:          Virgin and Child
*Construction:*    Painting
*Artist:*             Jesusmafa.com

In keeping with the message of sacrifice, the dove (a common biblical means of sacrifice) is frequently utilised to depict the Holy Spirit.  This is often done with scenes depicting the Annunciation, as in Figure 6.8.  A dove in southern African mythology frequently symbolises an all-knowing spirit and an omen of good luck.[24]  As with Figure 6.3, the icons, whether medieval or modern, display the love and absolute devotion of the Virgin to the Child and her sacrifice to protect and nurture Him (indicated in Figures 6.6 and 6.7 by Him being wrapped in her robe)

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[24] P Miller, <u>Myths and legends of southern Africa</u>, p 260.
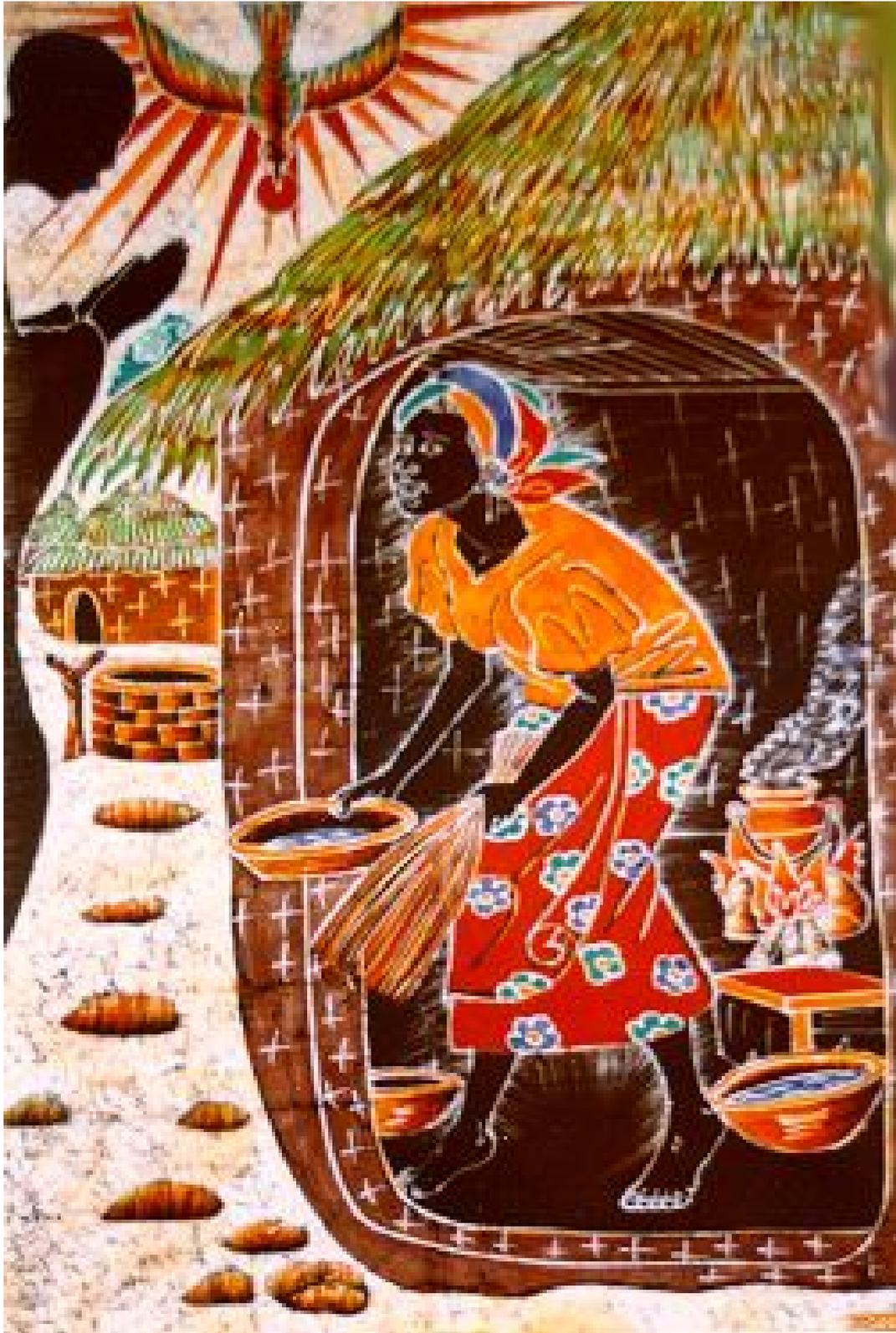
**Figure 6.8**

*Depiction:*         African Annunciation
*Construction:*    Batik wood, paint
*Location:*          Marianiste Generalate, Rome
*Artist:*              Unknown
*Photographed by:*  University of Dayton;
http://www.udayton.edu/mary/news99/0622.htm

| **Figure 6.9** | |
|---|---|
| *Depiction*: | The Annunciation |
| *Construction:* | Painting |
| *Artist:* | Jesusmafa.com |

The Annunciation, whereby the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Madonna and announced to her that she was to bear the Son of God, is a frequent representation in Catholic and Orthodox religious iconography.[25]  It is a further manifestation of the *Cultus sacrarum imaginum.*  Figures 6.8 and 6.9 reveal an Africanised interpretation that draws upon the medieval prototype.  The African Annunciation depicts the visit of the Archangel Gabriel, depicted as young black man (in Figure 6.9, the conventions for displaying an angel – wings, a halo and similar – are omitted), to Mary.  The depictions of the BVM convey a message of complete trust and purified emotion.    The barefoot Virgin appears ecstatic at the message of the angel.  The Madonna in the

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[25] VW Egbert, The medieval artist at work, p 19

depiction (as in Figure 6.9) barely looks old enough to have children, a humble girl (which, in terms of Scripture, she was), highlighting the enormity of her sacrifice and trust. The BVM is shown as a humble house worker (humility is universal in most depictions of the Madonna), happy to receive the message of the Incarnation of Christ. In the African icons she appears to be surprised whilst doing the most menial of household tasks, again an indication and reinforcement of her youth and low station (in contrast again to medieval icons where She is frequently depicted as royalty).

In Figure 6.8, a dove (symbolising purity)[26] holding a consecrated host, thereby revealing the real presence of God through the miracle of Transubstantiation – dominates the top left hand corner of the image together with the angel. The element of humility is again conveyed through the medieval icon depicted in Figure 6.10 where the angel has features that look more European, as does the seating of the BVM. The medieval icon relies, like many of its era, on depictions of Mary as nobility whereas the African examples utilised take the opposite approach and attempt to reveal the Annunciation in as common a context as possible. Medieval and South African iconography, especially as regards depictions of the BVM, attempt to convey as much of the dignity of the subject as possible. Dignity in the face of oppression is an act of protest in that it denies the oppressor total control. One cannot be dehumanised and dignified simultaneously.

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[26] GA Gaskell, Dictionary of all scriptures and myths, p 229.

**Figure 6.10**

*Depiction:*         The Annunciation
*Construction:*    Silk fabric
*Location:*          Museo Sacro, Vatican City
*Artist:*             Unknown
*Photographed by:*  Department of Antiquities, Italy

As Mitchell indicates, many of the concepts reflected in African religious art reflect gestures and symbols that have African meanings independently corresponding to the European notions surrounding those symbols, or embellishing upon them.[27] The news with which the birth of a first son across many African cultures is met with joy perhaps also influenced the artist in their depictions Figures 6.8 and 6.9).

Figures 6.11 and 6.12 reflect African ideals of the Madonna. In Figure 6.10, all European conceptions of beauty are discarded in the work by Jean Doyle. Thickset legs and hands highlighting the utility of these parts of the body in a pastoral existence (which would have been shared by the majority of contemporary medieval viewers of icons), conflict with the other genteel depictions of the typical Mary. The Child too is carried as a child (unable to properly support itself) would be and does not gaze at the audience. The figure is wearing armbands, indicating that she is married. In traditional religious art, it is very uncommon for the BVM to show any signs of having entered into the sacrament of marriage, as recorded in Scripture.

Figure 6.12 reflects the Madonna and Child entirely unclothed. The only covering on either is a hat on Mary, possibly meant to be interpreted as a halo and highlight the holiness, regardless of what the subject might look like. The use of red dye on the work might highlight this factor, making the work not immediately identifiable to anyone in particular. In the depiction, the Child is reaching for the breasts, showing its absolute reliance upon the Mother and reinforcing the importance of the Madonna in the Christian message, In addition to highlighting that the Christian message also applies regardless of poverty, it shows the humility and human nature of the objects depicted, communicating the spiritual nourishment emanating from the BVM.

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[27] J Mitchell, 'Personal communication', 21 February 2004.

**Figure 6.11**

*Depiction:* African Madonna
*Construction:* Paint
*Artist:* Jean Doyle
*Photograph:* http://www.doylebronzes.co.zaafmadonna.htm

**Figure 6.12**

*Depiction:* Madonna
*Construction:* Wood and red pigment
*Location:* Standard Bank Art Collection
*Artist:* Unknown

## 6.4    Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the special role of the Madonna – who is frequently credited directly with having come to the aid of iconographers - in Roman Catholicism, from the regal to the entirely familiar and approachable. Common themes of trust, serenity and dignity were revealed.  The concepts of Black Madonna and black Madonnas in iconography were defined and elaborated upon, highlighting that the exact origins of medieval depictions that deliberately revealing the Virgin have origins that are ancient and lost.  Dignity in the face of oppression is an act of protest in that it denies the oppressor total control.  One cannot be dehumanised and dignified simultaneously

**Chapter Seven**
**Conclusion**

In determining the answer to the research question as to whether aspects of medieval existence, particularly oppression that resulted in art (religious icons of the period frequently reflect the dominant nature of the feudal structure of society and the oppressive circumstances that led to their execution) and determining if modern South African religious art can be seen also as a result of oppressive experience, Cohne's contention[1] that the dominance of western culture at present makes it difficult not to believe that the medieval period is directly influential on every person in every culture directly influenced by the European was adopted.

South Africa too was an oppressive society where the material and political advancement of the majority of the population was stifled through discriminatory legislation and similar means making meaningful protest difficult, if not dangerous. Archbishop Jabulani Nxumalo holds that the average black South African Catholic's answer to the oppression he or she endured as a consequence of the apartheid system, if violence was not an option and neither was aligning oneself with communists – because of Canon Law restrictions, can be summarised as 'liberation through salvation'.[2]

The notion that oppression often spurs the production of religious art as a means of protest with a hope of liberation, was introduced. The methodology utilised in the study, a narrative analysis, involving the objects of study (religious artworks themselves) being chosen according to what I believed would best aid in answering the research question was the focus of the analysis. The circumstances of the work's commission were investigated with a view to understanding and identifying what aspects (oppression) of their particular context may have required a liberation from oppression.

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[1] JJ Cohne (ed), The postcolonial Middle Ages, p 2.
[2] J Nxumalo, in A Prior (ed), Catholics in apartheid South Africa, p 145.

Two very diverse periods of history required study and description for framing the context necessary to investigating the research question. In Chapter Two, I explored the diverse political and social surroundings of the medieval in Western Europe and apartheid and colonial eras in South Africa with a view to highlighting realities from both that illustrate how escape from oppression, and opportunity to do so, were limited. Both periods, with the common variables being Roman Catholicism and the production of religious art, seemingly as a means of protest acknowledging the unfortunate circumstances of the artist whilst at the same time revealing their placing of trust in a higher power who could reveal a better future through a liberation from their circumstances.

In Chapter Three, I highlighted the characteristics of iconography, showing that icons are frequently the products of oppression surrounding their geographical location or artist. In addition to being objects of decoration, icons are themselves acts of prayer and participate in the holiness they represent. Icons may be didactic and protection against heresy. Icons further reveal their meaning at different levels - from symbolism to expressing an immediate message. Icons typically represent the cross, the BVM, saints and angels. Medieval icons frequently display their subjects in a transfigured state. Icons characteristically lack naturalism; the artists not being overly concerned with proportion and depth; often, the subjects appear to have the light portrayed in the icon emanating from them and need not rely on external sources of light as with non-religious art.

Geography, as an extension of the missionary practice of inculturation, influences the content of icons and the methods used to represent the depictions. Inculturation involves the adaptation of the message being conveyed culturally to expedite the process of conversion amongst the target population. In the medieval period, prototypes for icons were used to direct artists. It appears that SA religious art also draws on these prototypes. Art pupils were sometimes shown photographs of European works by their European tutors with a view to using them as prototypes. I attempted to build on Verster's contention (as highlighted in Chapter One) that the personal circumstances of South African religious artists (such as their education and

upbringing) will draw upon the premise that medieval artists influenced the producers of South African art. Common themes identified in Chapter Three in terms of the icons researched, in support of the research question, include forced exile, hope, the looking for sanctuary and a communication of the need to look for a protector.

Icons celebrating events in the life of Christ, the *sine qua non* of Christianity, were analysed in Chapter Four. Their analysis against a highlighting of the phenomenon in Christianity (whereby matter may be transubstantiated into the to divine spirit – as Christ being born a man involved) should be borne in mind as icons participate in the holiness they represent. Themes analysed in the chapter included the revelation of the subjects in a transfixed state and the use of certain colours and objects to convey symbolism. The apparent ease with which icons depicting events from the life of Christ may be transposed across the two periods of history with the identified themes remaining in place appears to illustrate that oppression does not stop the production of religious art or the expression of that art is a longing for a liberation through salvation by appealing to a protector more powerful than the oppressor, was explored.

In Chapter Five the role of missionaries, whether Roman Catholic or High Anglican, in directly transplanting the production of religious art, with its medieval origins and conventions, was introduced and analysed, consolidating upon the discussion of the utilisation of medieval prototypes for South African religious iconography described in Chapter Four against environments that were oppressive. Depictions of the Crucifixion, because of the necessary violence, and the violence highlighted within both periods of history, are perhaps the most easily recognised as being compatible with the research question. The Cross in iconography is a symbol of triumph of life over death and suffering. As suffering symbolises bondage, the contention that the works are works of protest is enforced. The medieval icons surveyed, in addition to their African counterparts, revealed the creation of works in backgrounds steeped with violence, oppression and uncertainty. The Crucifixion gave an opportunity for Ronald Harrison in his *Black Christ* to directly utilise his religious art to criticise and challenge the apartheid

government, a form of protest whose effectiveness was immediately acknowledged and resulted in a brutal counter action. The power of Harrison's statement still has political mileage today, as was illustrated by its use as a template in current day post apartheid South Africa upon the firing of the former Deputy Minister of Health.

Chapter Six framed the extraordinary role of Mary in Roman Catholicism, revealing themes of trust, serenity and dignity were in the depictions across the two periods of history. Dignity in the face of oppression is an act of protest in that it denies the oppressor total control, a person cannot be dehumanised and dignified simultaneously. The notions matter becoming spirit, or divine, and the influence, borrowing on conventions across different schools of art, reinforced the principle message frequently behind depictions of the BVM and Child - hope, hope of compassion and reward for one's suffering, reinforced through the example of someone who suffered more (as the Madonna did at the foot of the Cross) – liberation through salvation.

Throughout the study, I have attempted to highlight upon the role of iconography with specific reference to incidents of medieval and apartheid history, how the works of art reflect these historical events and utilise similar conventions in producing works that are effectively works of protest. Common themes of oppression, suffering, identifying with Christ and the BVM or saints and the portrayal of human dignity in the face of oppression were highlighted and explored against dramatic historical events such as the Babylonian Captivity and 1976 Soweto Riots.

I propose that both periods produced artistic conventions as regards religious artworks where the colonial and apartheid period in South Africa drew upon the medieval era of Western Europe in terms of convention and both produced protest art in support of the idea of liberation through salvation"[3]

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[3] Ibid.

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**Annexure**

**ANNEXURE A – PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERVIEWS**

**Custodis, G, Sister, conducted via letter (14 November 2004)**

*Researcher:* How do you choose the topics you depict? The Crucifixtion, Ascension and the depictions of Christ seem to fit the medieval Catholic prototypes very neatly (especially as regards the use of haloes, the Sacred Heart, etc). Are you inspired by medieval iconography? Similarly, how do you select the African themes (family, etc) that you utilise?

*Sister Gereon:* The topics of the hangings are often put by the customer who likes to have it in his church, hall or private room, also the size they need. As I have been trained first overseas in the iconography of religious symbols and icons, I try to incorporate the African style and the surrounding areas as is fitting. Also, I try to counteract the sentimental and 'kitsch' aspects of American religious art which the African people appear to like and are bombarded with. To train local people in the production of true religious art is a lengthy process. In 1970 when I arrived in South Africa from Germany, I hardly found any African artists using their own designs; I tried to create a style which I thought might be fitting in this country, especially on vestments and stoles. We use a lot of beadwork, African ornaments and motives). I found much of the decoration first on huts or weaving. I add African crosses. These symbols are not only used in Catholicism, but all Christian churches. The Sacred Heart is more a symbol of Catholicism. I also made the Last Supper, Good Shepherd, Zulu and Sotho nativities, Our Lady and other designs, using African features in faces, dress, local plants and flowers. The protea is of course a very special symbol for South Africa.

*R:* Were you professionally trained as an artist?

*SG:* I finished a BA in Fine Arts through Unisa in 1986. Before that I was trained in embroidery and vestment making in Germany.

*R:* Many medieval artists felt that the BVM or Holy Ghost aided them in the commission of their work.  Have you?

*SG:* When I start a new design, I always try and meditate about the theme.

*R:* Your works, like the medieval often were, appear to largely unsigned.

*SG:* I do sign most of them, below or on the back.  On the printed copies you have, it might not be clear.

*R:* How do you decide on the colours you use?

*SG:* The colours depend on the design, how it fits in the intended church or room, in which it has to be hung.  I make use of the fabric materials I have and use them to make a colourful display.  I am inspired by the bright African colours.

**Esposito, A, Father, Priest of the Society of St Pius X, conducted at Our Lady of Infinite Sorrows, Roodepoort (22 June 2005)**

*Researcher:*  Have you noticed a decline in the use of iconography in your career?

*Father Esposito*:  Not just iconography, just about everything Catholic.  It isn't uncommon to see new churches that are supposedly Catholic and have absolutely nothing in them, like Protestant churches.  It's the same with relics and much else.

*R:*  Is iconography a dying art?

*FE:*  It may be.  Maybe with the new pope, things will change.  He seems to be making the right sort of moves towards restoring the church.  You know what they say about one sparrow not making a spring!

*R:* I notice that here at the priory, much is made of the use of icons.

*FE:* That's right.  They're an important part of worship.  Did you see the statue of St Philomena in the library.

**Maideville, R, Brother of the Redemptorist Order, conducted via telephone (25 April 2005)**

*Researcher:* Many medieval artists felt that the BVM or Holy Ghost aided them in the commission of their work.  Have you?

*Brother Maideville:*  I begin every work after an intense session of prayer and motivation.  My work is God's.

*R:* Were you professionally trained as an artist?

*BM: Yes.*

*R:* How do you decide on the colours you use?

*BM:*  You'll notice that I typically work with images of Christ.  I am very drawn to images of hands, His hands.  Within these parameters, I am limited to flesh colours and colours typically those colours that traditionally go along with the subject.  That's not to say that I won't do anything else, what I do is my preference.

*R:* Do you sign your works?

*BM*: Mostly.

*R:* Do you believe that icons are an act of worship?

*BM:* Definitely.

**Manderson, L, conducted via e-mail correspondence (22 June 2006)**

*Researcher:* To what extent is medieval history taught as part of the modern (high school history) curriculum?

*Lynne Manderson*: Almost not at all. It never was my favourite period of history and it is only brought in to explain some background to another topic, such as the Renaissance.

**Mitchell MSC, J, Father, Priest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, conducted by letter (21 February 2004)**

*Researcher:* Where did you get the collection of icons you have for the holy cards?

Father Mitchell: I'm often struck by the beauty of African centred religious art while I travel and take care to photograph where I can what I see. The objects are often profound and deeply spiritual.

*R:* Are the works mostly anonymous?

*FM*: Very frequently. It is also interesting that much of the work is found is found in areas that are really poor. I've included a photograph for you of a beautiful depiction of the Virgin at one of our chapels.

*R*: Do you notice parallels between traditional Catholic iconography and what you find in the pieces you photograph?

*FM:* I do. What's interesting is how concepts such as the Sacred Heart appear to have sprung up on their own, independently emerging as a source of compassion and love but still relevant in terms of the wider concepts of religious art or add to them.