

Comparative Study of Icon of Buddha and Christ

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Of all religions, visual illustrations of Buddha and Christ have had a profound influence on both Eastern and Western Art. Conveying religious meaning more clearly and completely than words, these images share a long history of conventionalized treatments that invite us into the very heart of each religion. By observing specific visual traditions, such as medieval mosaics and stone relief sculpture, this manuscript will juxtapose the various illustration techniques utilized in Christian and Buddhist art to reveal striking differences and profound similarities in their visual and religious representations. These observations will further our iconographical understanding of how images are constructed of highly revered Lords.

The functions of images, painted or sculpted have caused a widespread debate in religious communities on deciding whether or not they were forms of idolatry. In the 13th Century, Johannes Balbus created a compilation of widely accepted traditional beliefs, which remained in use throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was finally printed in Venice in 1497, showing art's religious manifestations. As Balbus (who was following earlier writers such as St. Thomas Aquinas) explained, images had three functions: to instruct the ignorant and unlettered, to keep the memory alive of the mysteries of the faith and the examples of the saints, and to act as means of exciting devotion.¹ It was this idea of the narrative as a teaching aid and a tool for public instruction, whether it is in the form of an illustrated tale of the biblical text or a winding sculpture of the saints, is what drives a large portion of Christian Art.

¹ Welch, Evelyn. Art and Society in Italy 1350-1500. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 137.

Visual representations of Buddhist legends began at the start of the first century. Roughly four hundred years before these narrative images, the Buddhist scripture was narrated orally. Soon after the death of Buddha around the year 483 B.C., a vast body of literature known as the *Tipitakas*, or “Three Baskets,” began to be composed. It was written in the language of the people, *prakrit*, as distinct from the courtly refined language, *Sanskrit*. From this Buddhist canon, several times the size of the Old and New Testaments put together, artists concentrated on presenting two sets of legends.² The first one was of the life of Prince Siddhartha, who renounced the world and achieved supreme wisdom, being known henceforth as Buddha or “Enlightened One.” The second documents the 550 prior lives of Buddha in which he came into being through a variety of forms of animals and humans. His rebirth as Prince Siddhartha marked the end of his cycle of rebirth and serves as the narrative source for the works discussed in this manuscript.

One thing is certain: every image of Buddha and Christ visually summarizes the life of the Lord it represents. In the (FIG. 1) *Dream of Queen Maya* (1st-2nd Century B.C.) from the Indian Museum in Calcutta and Ghiberti’s (FIG. 2) *Annunciation* (c.1403), we are given two visual representations of Buddha and Christ’s miraculous conceptions from two vastly different time periods. Historically, each man was born in a relatively remote area: Gautama probably in Kapilacatthu in the Himalayan foothills of southern Nepal; Jesus, contrary to tradition, probably in Nazareth of Galilee, a small province on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. Their birth dates also lack certainty. Gautama’s has usually been placed around 566 B.C., but most modern scholarship suggests about

² Dehejia, Vidya. *On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art*. Art Bulletin, 1990, 374.

480 as more plausible. Almost five centuries later Jesus was born, contrary to another general assumption, sometime shortly before the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.³ They both have royal lineages as well: Buddha's father was King of the Saykas, Jesus is of King David's bloodline.

Ghiberti's *Annunciation* emphasizes the particular scene of Mary's conception with Christ. It is a deeply carved bronze relief sculpture on the North Doors of the Florence Baptistery in Italy. As described in the biblical text, an angel informs the Virgin Mary that she will give birth to a son. Christ is conceived when the Holy Spirit in the form of a white dove enters Mary's ear.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favored, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* you among women.

And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God...The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:26-36).

Here, Ghiberti manages to capture both elements in a single panel. Mary is suspended in an anxious pose as she leers from the mystical angel and the soaring dove

³ Elinor, Robert. Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 23.

(representing the Holy Spirit), which is sent from a transcendent figure jutting out of the bronze surface. Ghiberti creates a strong engagement with the viewer through his deep carving of relief sculpture, lending a strong sense of three-dimensionality to the piece. Throughout Ghiberti's composition- in every figure and drapery fold and even in the rocks- curving rhythms create an effect of continuous melody.⁴ The figures have more substance by implying that the folds in the drapery go all the way around the bodies of the figures. The flowing lines draw our attention to them. The bodily curves and poses of the angel and Mary compliment each other, rhyming with the Quattro foil frame while at the same time creating a sense of visual harmony and movement. Both figures are grounded, taking place on a platform with a subtle hint of an architectural interior.

In *Dream of Queen Maya*, Buddha descends from one of the heavens into Maya's womb as she dreams of a white elephant entering her side. It is a stone relief sculpture that concentrates on the essential elements of the story with very few figures. Buddhist legends were narrated orally for at least four hundred years before the appearance of the earliest surviving visual narratives that were monoscenic and in the medium of stone. The monoscenic narratives center around a single event in a story, one that is generally neither the first nor the last, and which introduces a theme of action. Such a scene is usually an easily identifiable event from a story, and it serves as a reference to the narrative. This system of representation functioned well in India, as it did in the classical world, where tales were generally familiar to the viewer. The outcome of the story was known prior to its oral telling and prior to viewing its depiction in sculpture or painting.⁵ In this particular work, one will notice that there is certain majesty to Maya in the manner

⁴ Hartt, Frederick. *History of Italian Renaissance Art*. New Jersey: Pearson, 2007, 178.

⁵ Dehejia, Vidya. *On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art*. *Art Bulletin*, 1990. VI. 122, 378.

in which she is posed while sleeping on her bed. There is also a hierarchal sense of size with Maya carved proportionately larger, juxtaposed to her smaller scaled servants who look on adoringly at her side, emphasizing her prominence.

Monoscenic narratives must, of course, contain sufficient narrative content to stimulate the story-telling process in the mind of the observer. The viewer is introduced to the story in the middle of the action, and the coupling of key figures and scenic details must be unmistakable if the viewer is to complete the narrative.⁶ The artist accomplishes this through the royal adornments that are worn by the figures and the subtle objects that are placed throughout the scene. There are vases and exquisite shaped torch stands that convey a sense of royalty to the viewer. Much similar to Ghiberti's *Annunciation*, each figure echoes the curves of the circular shaped frame in which the scene takes place. Both artists capture a sense of motion in their representation of both the skyrocketing dove and the mystically soaring elephant. These visual devices serve as a strong storytelling element, guiding the viewer's eye toward the essential subjects. By observing both works and studying the scriptural text, the incarnation of both Buddha and Christ requires the absence of the fathers, Suddhodana and Joseph, as Buddha and God make themselves manifest through Maya and Mary.⁷

The deliveries of both infants occur while their mothers are on a journey. Queen Maya retreated to Lumbini to give birth to her son and Mary fled to escape King Herod's order to execute all the young male children in the village of Bethlehem to avoid the loss of his throne to the newly born King of the Jews. In juxtaposing the (FIG. 3) *Birth of*

⁶ Dehejia, Vidya. *On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art*. Art Bulletin, 1990. VI. 122, 378.

⁷ Elinor, Robert. Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 48.

Buddha (18th Century) and the medieval mosaic, (FIG. 4) *Birth of Christ* (c.1143), one can see the strong compositional similarities in the life cycle of these two Lords. In *Birth of Buddha*, as told in the scriptures, Buddha is born in a beautiful garden near the palace, Christ in a stable far from home. Maya, accompanied by a retinue of servants, stands, grasping the branch of a tree, as the Buddha springs painlessly from her right side. Gods catch him in a golden net. Streams of water fall from the sky to bathe him, the earth quakes, flowers bloom out of season, he takes seven steps in each of the cardinal directions and declares that this is his last birth.⁸ The artist doesn't stand back in terms of the visual excitement of the piece from the coloristic richness to the cluttered crowd of servants and smaller figures and animals. There is also a strong emphasis of line and contour, drawing the figures closer to the viewer. Queen Maya remains the central focus of the work, retaining the hierarchal sense of size. She towers over her servants as she effortlessly raises her right arm and gives birth to the infant Buddha. The heavens appear as if to open, giving the viewer a voyeuristic look into the celestial realm where gods stand amongst the clouds and joyously celebrate the miraculous birth below. Linear sequenced lotus flowers guide the viewer's eye to the smaller scene underneath where Buddha takes his first steps, creating a sense of progression.

In the *Birth of Christ*, there too is a certain hierarchal sense of scale with Mary serving as the largest and central figure of the mosaic. The infant Jesus is wrapped in her arms; their piercing stare directly engages the viewer. Over the Christ child a star shines, an ox and ass attend, angels proclaim his birth to shepherds in the fields, and wise men

⁸ Elinor, Robert. Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 48.

come from the East bearing gifts.⁹ The journeying kings are illustrated in the midst of their quest at the top left corner, guiding the viewer's eye to the angels above who present the whole family to the genuflecting shepherds at the far right of the composition. Lastly, below the central scene, the viewer is visually guided to Mary washing the infant for the first time, much similar to the smaller scene of the infant Buddha taking his first steps.

The figures also are closely packed together with a rush of activity due to the multiple scenes and figures. It is important to note that in both the *Birth of Buddha* and the *Birth of Christ*, there is a conscious intention to flesh out these stories through this activity with real narrative and storytelling to make the overall piece coherent. Both representations are highly animated, leaving one hardly able to keep his or her eye still and are highly spirited scenes in their representation. The figures in the *Birth of Christ* are overtly stylized and angular with no clear definition of body below the garments. However, the infant Lords are portrayed with a lack of particular qualities that are identifiable with a baby, appearing more like miniature men.

Among the most popular subject for Buddhist artists were the bodhisattvas. Owing to the qualities of compassion and sacrifice the bodhisattvas possess, their function in the Buddhist pantheon might most nearly be compared with that of the saints in Christianity. The bodhisattvas (bosatsu in Japanese) are an important element in the Mahayana pantheon of deities. They are enlightened beings, but in their selfless compassion they forgo entering the state of full extinction (Nirvana) to intervene on behalf of the faithful in seeking salvation.¹⁰ The Bodhisattva was male in ancient Indian Buddhism, but turned

⁹ Elinor, Robert. *Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness*. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 48.

¹⁰ Fischer, Felice. *Japanese Buddhist Art*. 1991, 8

into female in China, particularly the Tang Dynasty, after later being regarded as the God of Mercy. Most of the statues of the Bodhisattvas are in the image of a luxuriously dressed figure. When looking at the (FIG. 5) *Buddha and Bodhisattvas* altarpiece of the Sui Dynasty (c.597 AD) and Orcagna's (FIG. 6) *Enthroned Christ with Madonna and Saints (Strozzi Altarpiece)* (c.1354-57) one can observe a comparison in their compositional elements.

In both works, Christ and Buddha are now portrayed as men, not children. During the cult of the virgin, which lasted from the 13th to the 14th century, the Virgin Mary had assumed unprecedented prominence in medieval visual representations. Christ was often depicted as a youth. However, in this work, Mary is wrapped up, her crown glistening, as she gives over her authority of the altarpiece to her son. Christ floats forward in the center of the piece as he hands the keys of Heaven over to his most loyal disciple, St. Peter. He is surrounded by a host of saints, each holding an object that is iconographically attributed to their martyrdom. The setting is not of an earthly realm. Orcagna creates a gilded gold background similar to early medieval altarpieces, creating an infinite extension into space. Buddha's body is gold; Christ's body is surrounded by it.

Buddha and Bodhisattvas is a gilt bronze sculpture stand with a historical Buddha flanked by two bodhisattvas, from Northern China. In the center, Buddha holds his right hand in the *vitarka mudra* gesture and his left in the *varada mudra* gesture. The bodhisattva on the Buddha's left holds an open lotus blossom and the other holds either a lotus bud or what is a likely representation of the Buddhist jewel. The Buddha appears in a monastic dress looking elegantly plain, while in contrast the bodhisattvas wear flower headdresses, long floating ribbons, and jeweled chains. All three figures have "peach-

shaped" halos that are inclined slightly forward, which contributes to a sensation that the figures are drawn together in some form of human interaction. A religious servant of their faith accompanying the sides of their lords is a common compositional tool in emphasizing the hierarchical relationship between Lord and disciple. The Lord is always at the center, symbolizing the apex from which the faith stems while the servant or apostle remains at his side to symbolize their true embodiment of the teachings of the faith.

Both Buddha and Christ are niched in an oval shaped halo (mandorla), singling out the two figures from the rest of the ensemble. Apart from traditional features, relative, size, and narrative context, we recognize Christ through the mandorla he shares with the Buddha, the deep blue of this robe (the color of divine life), his hand gesture, and what he occasionally holds.¹¹ In this particular work, Christ isn't holding any specific item, rather he points to the biblical text of his teachings that is held open by a subjugating saint. Conventionally, Buddha and Christ are dressed in a robe-like garment on a body without ornaments and a mandorla behind the back.

The mandorla is an almond shaped halo that is intersected by two circles with the same radius. It is especially used to frame the figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary in Romanesque and medieval art, as well as depicting other sacred moments such as the Transfiguration and the Resurrection. It is found in early images of Buddha as well, often with an aureole enveloping the whole body. When enveloping the entire figure, it generally appears as an oval or elliptical in form. The mandorla itself is most frequently used to designate the brilliance round the heads of sacred personages and revered lords of faiths.

¹¹Elinor, Robert. Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 92.

The hand gesture is an exceptionally vital trademark of both Lords with many variations that have endured through the visual history of Buddha and Christ. It lends a communicative composition that is rhetorical to the viewer, enabling the speech gesture to visualize the written and spoken word. It commands the viewer. One hand raised has been one of the most prevalent gestures in the ancient world. (FIG. 7) *Augustus of Prima Porta* (1st Century) is one of these manifestations. This white marble sculpture suspends the Roman ruler in a rhetorical pose, as if to be addressing the crowd. It was created with the intention of being publically displayed to reinforce all the virtues Augustus possessed that made him worthy of governing the Roman Empire. His anatomical structure is highly idealized with naturalistic details. The same attention is given to his garments and breastplate, which is carved in relief with numerous small figures, placing him into the flux of history.

Early Christian artists heavily borrowed from this visual tradition. In (FIG. 8) *Christ Pantocrator* (c. 726), mosaic of Saint Catherine's Monastery in Mount Sinai, Jesus raises in right hand as universal ruler. It serves as the oldest known icon of *Christ Pantocrator* with two different facial expressions on either side to emphasize Christ's dual nature as God and man. In this frequently repeated image from the end of the third century, Christ is seen from the waist up, wears a philosopher's cloak, holds a scroll in his left hand or the New Testament, and raises his right hand in this oratorical gesture. He who said "I am the truth" expounds holy wisdom. Finally, in transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, Christ begins raising his hand in blessing. Two extended fingers may

signify his dual nature as well. All Christians see in the raised hand the assurance of God's grace.¹²

In 1536, some twenty-five years after completing the ceiling, the sixty-one-year-old Michelangelo once again took up his paintbrush in the Sistine Chapel. The western wall behind the altar was to be decorated with a fresco of unprecedented size showing the (FIG. 9) *Last Judgement*: a theme that certainly lent itself to such an awe-inspiring project.¹³ At the central zone of the scene, a magnificent Christ is enthroned with a golden glow with his mother Mary to his right. Saints and angels surround them both while below them the souls of the damned descend towards hell. The elaboration of the figures and the swirling and sustained dynamism of the overall image are utterly unprecedented.¹⁴ Michelangelo gives the revered Christ an iconic, unfaltering hand gesture. Christ raises his right hand and lowers his left seemingly to set the events taking place around him in motion and reinforce his omnipotence as the *alpha* and the *omega*. There is a certain powerful athleticism to Jesus' figure as well, which has been compared with that of Jupiter.

For Buddha, in meditation (*dhyana mudra*) the hands rest together in his lap, fingers extended, palms upward. Earth Touching (*bhumisparsa mudra*) signifies his enlightenment: calling the earth to witness his triumph over the temptations of Mara, the fingertips of his right hand extend over his right knee, his left hand resting palm upward

¹² Elinor, Robert. Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 92.

¹³ De Rynck, Patrick. How To Read A Painting: Lessons from the Old Masters. New York: Abrams, 2004, 134.

¹⁴ De Rynck, Patrick. How To Read A Painting: Lessons from the Old Masters. New York: Abrams, 2004, 134.

in his lap. His teaching “turns the wheel of Dharma” (*dharmarakra mudra*), the motion of a wheel suggested by both hands held before his chest, forefingers touching thumbs to form two circles. Reasoned argument (*vitarka mudra*) is similar to turning the wheel of Dharma, but usually only one-hand gestures, forefinger and thumb curled to touch. In dispelling fear (*abhaya mudra*) he raises his right hand, palm outward – or, being perfectly ambidextrous, his left hand or both hands – in the blessing of protection and assurance. Lastly, in giving or vow fulfilling (*varada mudra*), his hand points down, palm outward, in the gesture of generosity.¹⁵

Visual narratives of their ministries seldom simply illustrate scripture. The power of their pictorial element is much greater. In these particular images Buddha and Christ are portrayed as transfigured Lords. The viewer bears witness to the demonstrations of their divine power, where he/she is not to emulate but to venerate these men.

Both walked on water, healed the sick, the mad, and have tales of fighting temptation. One of these episodes is represented in the stone relief sculpture, (FIG. 10) *Buddha Subduing the Mad Elephant* (2nd-3rd Century). The legend relates how a jealous cousin of Buddha tried to kill him by releasing a notorious mad elephant, Nalagiri, as the Buddha was about to leave the village. Trumpeting wildly, the enraged red-eyed beast charged the Buddha and was about to trample him. But suddenly the elephant felt his presence and came to an abrupt halt, then knelt in submission before the great sage. Then Buddha put out his hand to touch the top of Nalagiri’s head in blessing.¹⁶

The work is a monoscenic narrative, caught at the maximum point of action within the tale. Nalagiri bursts from the left of the composition in a vicious frenzy as a helpless

¹⁵Elinor, Robert. *Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness*. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 90.

¹⁶ Stratton, Carol. *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand*. New York: Serindia, 2003, 43.

victim dangles out of the scene, implying something has taken place prior to this event. Depicted in the midst of Nalagiri's violent charge, the viewer finds him/herself instantly engaged within the action. There is a sense of chaotic geometry and frenzied activity from the crowd of frightened onlookers urgently racing for safety. Their arabesque curves vibrate against each other, lending a sense of motion and dynamism to the overall piece. Figures appear from the windows above, anxiously watching the sequence below. Another figure is seen desperately clinging to life as Nalagiri fiercely hurls him with his trunk. The artist utilizes a vital storytelling device by representing Nalagiri twice within the relief at different points within the legend: appearing first in his charging fit and lastly humbly genuflecting at the bottom right. This visual progression of the character not only gives the panel momentum, but also aids in directing the viewer to the far right of the composition where they are abruptly confronted by the awesome presence of the masterfully composed Buddha, as he expresses a gesture of blessing. Power of gesture commands the viewer.

Returning to the North Doors of the Florence Baptistery, one can see how Lorenzo Ghiberti's bronze relief sculptures build upon these monoscenic narratives of Buddhist Art and incorporates them in the evolution of visual storytelling in Christian art. There are twenty panels in total and they cover roughly the same episodes of the life of Christ as Giotto's renowned Arena Chapel. Ghiberti even has implicit criticisms of one of Giotto's most successful scene; the (FIG. 11) *Raising of Lazarus* (c. 1403). Like *Buddha Subduing the Mad Elephant*, he broadly follows conventional formula, which he reverses.

Yet, somehow Ghiberti is more successful in conveying the impression that Lazarus has just ‘come forth’ out of the cave-tomb to Jesus’ words and is actually alive.¹⁷

The primary focus and first thing to catch the viewer’s eye is Martha on her knees desperately pleading with Jesus to heal her brother Lazarus. Jesus responds simply by looking into her eyes in profile, while the other characters are suspended in complete and total concentration. Unlike Giotto, Ghiberti does not show Jesus issuing his injunction to Lazarus. Only the bearded man’s raised hand and startled expression, as if he were seeing a ghost, directs our attention to Lazarus, who is, indeed, from behind the heavy folds of his hood gazing dolefully back at him. Even though Lazarus is still wrapped in his winding sheet, the folds seem to be loosening, and depending upon the different angles from which one views him, his limbs seem to be stirring with life, emerging from the mummy-like wrapping.¹⁸

Ghiberti also creates a rocky landscape that not only grounds the characters of the scene but is subtle in its carving yet successful enough in establishing where this is all taking place. The rocks on which they stand protrude beyond the relief, engaging the viewer, bringing the world of the relief into the realm of the real. The figures are less distinct in the background, suggesting the illusion of a deeper space and recession. Ghiberti not only exceeds in scenes of action and expression, but also in the psychological expression of internal thoughts. The artist makes each gaze of his figures infinitely more expressive by delicately incising the line of the cornea and dot of the pupil. This treatment of the eye underscores other new optical qualities evident in

¹⁷ Lubbock, Jules. *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. Singapore: Yale University Press, 2006, 163.

¹⁸ Lubbock, Jules. *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. Singapore: Yale University Press, 2006, 164.

Ghiberti's sculpture. Near the beginning of the second *Commentary* he says, "*Nessuna cosa si vede senza la luce*" ("Nothing can be seen without light"), and in his relief gilded surfaces send light flowing across delicate textures or reflect into shadows. In almost all of Ghiberti's sculpture, the eye is delineated in this new way, conferring a vivid individuality to human expression.¹⁹

Finally, one small detail- there is a loop of drapery overlapping the edge of the coffin attached to Lazarus' feet to indicate that he has, indeed, just a moment earlier, 'come forth' from the cavernous gloom of the cave. This is also evident in *Buddha Subduing the Mad Elephant*. All this provides one with an even more subtle sense of the transition of Lazarus from death to life, and of the recognition of the miracle by the spectators. Ghiberti was attempting to improve upon an ingenious and excellent work of art, tightening up the pictorial composition, thinking the scene through again.²⁰

In the scriptures of both faiths, the followers of Buddha and Christ remain steadfast in their testimony to the power and uniqueness of the characters of both men.

*Never before was seen by me
Nor heard by anyone
A master so sweetly speaking (Mahavagga I.II)*

There was division amongst the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have you not brought him? The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man." (Matthew 28:19-20)

¹⁹ Hartt, Frederick. *History of Italian Renaissance Art*. New Jersey: Pearson, 2007, 179.

²⁰ Lubbock, Jules. *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. Singapore: Yale University Press, 2006, 165.

There have been many such charismatic people. But Buddhists do not take refuge in Guatama the sage, nor do Christians worship Jesus the Rabbi. Neither Buddha nor Christ has lived primarily as a historical figure. Pictures of transcendent Buddhas far out number those of Guatama, just as Christ the holy child, vicarious sacrifice, triumphant judge, and glorious redeemer is pictured far more frequently than the Galilean teacher.²¹

During the Post Impressionist movement of the 19th Century, artists such as Vincent van Gogh found most religious painting uninspiring, even silly, and argued that Christ himself would scorn much of the art and literature that he inspired.²² However, his contemporaries continued to paint traditional religious images and Vincent expressed himself vehemently. He envisioned a Christ that shunned embellishment and ruse.

In a letter to fellow artist, Emile Bernard, Vincent was in the development of reevaluating Christian Art.

Christ lived serenely, *as a greater artist than all other artists*, despising marble and clay as well as color, working in living flesh. That is to say, this matchless artist . . . made neither statues nor pictures nor books; he loudly proclaimed that he made *living men*, immortals.

. . . This great artist did not write books either . . . [but] he surely disdained the spoken word much less – particularly the parable. (What a sower, what a harvest, what a fig tree! Etc.) These spoken words . . . which he did not

²¹ Elinor, Robert. *Buddha and Christ: Images of Wholeness*. New York: Weatherhill, 2000, 93.

²² Sund, Judy. "The Sower and the Sheaf: Biblical Metaphor in the Art of Vincent van Gogh." *The Art Bulletin*: Vol. 70, No. 4 (Dec. 1988), pp. 660-676, 667.

even deign to write down, are one of the highest summits – the very highest summit – reached by art, which becomes a force there, a pure creative power.²³

Much like Christ, Buddha used parables, similes, irony, and hyperboles in his teachings, instructing a way of thoroughly transforming lives through commitment to an absolute eternal reality. To fully understand Buddha and Jesus Christ, the teachers, one must look beyond the surface qualities of these visual treatments and deliberately rethink the conventions of religious art. When reevaluating these works with a new perspective, it enables one to move closer towards the communication of the larger feelings and emotions that come from the mind of these artists and scriptural texts that have inspired mankind for centuries.

²³ Sund, Judy. “The Sower and the Sheaf: Biblical Metaphor in the Art of Vincent van Gogh.” *The Art Bulletin*: Vol. 70, No. 4 (Dec. 1988), pp. 660-676, 668.

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FIG. 1

Dream of Queen Maya, 1st-2nd century B.C.



FIG. 2

Annunciation, Ghiberti, C. 1403.



FIG. 3

Birth of Buddha, 18th Century

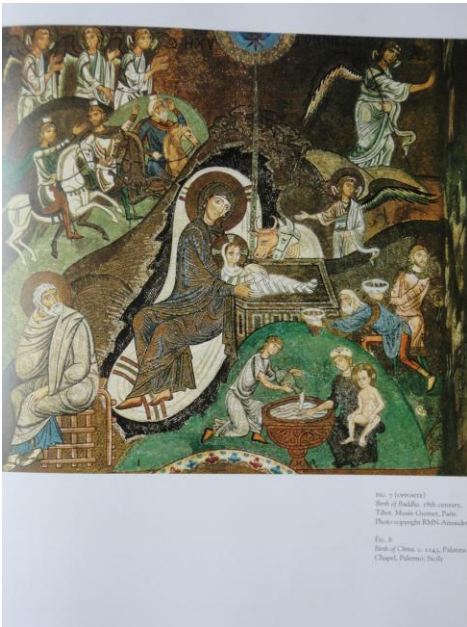


FIG. 4

Birth of Christ, C. 1143



FIG. 5

Buddha and Bodhisattvas, c. 597 A.D.

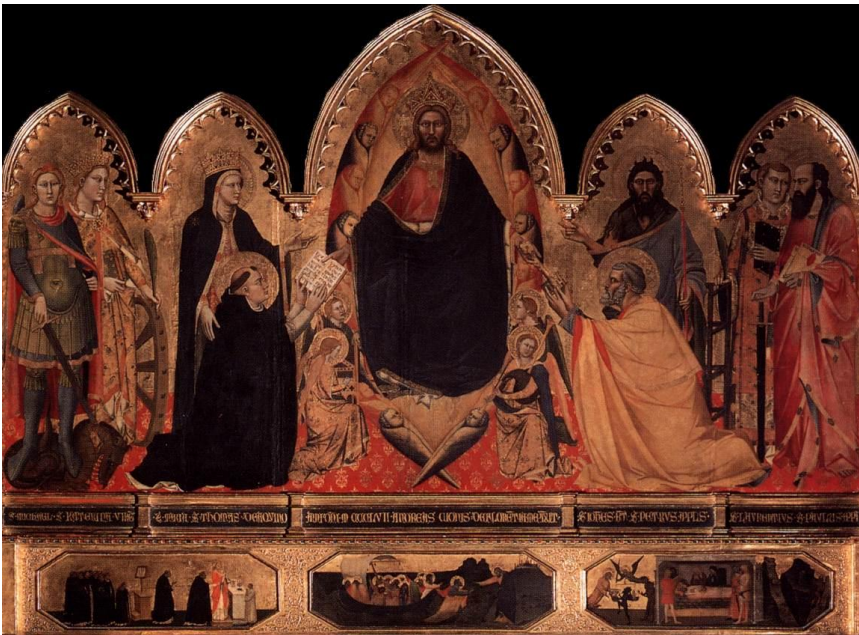


FIG. 6

Enthroned Christ with Madonna and Saints, Orcagna, c. 1354-57.



FIG. 7

Augustus of Prima Porta, 1st Century

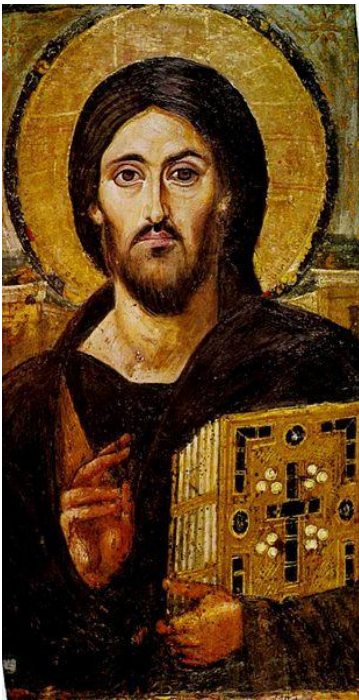


FIG. 8

Christ the Savior (Pantocrator), 6th Century



FIG. 9

The Last Judgment, Michelangelo C. 1536 (detail)



FIG. 10

Buddha Subduing the Mad Elephant, 2nd-3rd Century



FIG. 11

Raising of Lazarus, Ghiberti, C. 1403.