

THE RELIGIOUS PRINT

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RELIGIOUS ART HAS HELD OUR fascination and devotion for centuries. Art with religious subject matter has told us stories about who we are, what we believe, and what we feel. As visual and emotional beings, we have often found art to be as perfect an expression as possible of God's grace and beauty. Whether from a natural human yearning for spirituality or due to the influence of organized religion in culture and society, much art throughout the history of human civilization has been religious. Prior to the early modern period in Western history, a great percentage of art was religious; as secular imagery became more pervasive in Western art from the sixteenth century onward, some types of religious subject matter did decline but by no means were diminished or overcome by secular art. Religious imagery has even been fervently renewed in later centuries, and secular and religious themes are often combined in an intriguing interplay. By retelling familiar biblical stories through the visual arts, poetry, or literature, Christians continually reassert and redefine their beliefs about their place in the world and their sense of spirituality. After all, religious stories are essentially about origin and culture as much as devotion, and great value can be gleaned from nonreligious components of religious art as well. Many different cultures and religions in the history of the world have expressed their beliefs through art; this catalogue and the Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art focus on Jewish and Christian themes.

The Thrivent Collection represents a significant gathering in the United States of solely religious works on paper and paintings from the thirteenth through the twentieth centuries, simultaneously preserving and sharing the rich, varied history of Western art, religion, and culture as much as theological and spiritual tenets. Amassed from eight centuries, the collection's more than eleven hundred works delight and inspire. Through them, we can trace interesting trends, stylistic and cultural developments, and, above all, the enduring messages

of Christianity. Because the Thrivent Collection primarily comprises works on paper, this catalogue concentrates on the artistic media of prints and drawings.

Printed images are important in the history of art and have a distinct history separate from other media. Invented in northern Europe during the fifteenth century, Western printmaking offered a new and efficient way to make and reproduce visual information. Book illustrations, along with text, could be quickly and consistently created with a printing press, rather than by painstakingly hand-copying each page. Printed images were affordable and more accessible to a broader segment of the population, especially those unable to purchase or even see paintings or illuminated manuscripts. The popularity of printed images quickly increased, and as early as the sixteenth century collectors began accumulating both secular and religious prints. Printmaking offered early modern artists an opportunity to be recognized as stylistically innovative outside the older disciplines of sculpture or painting. Albrecht Dürer, for example, was an excellent painter, but his extraordinarily skillful woodcuts and engravings make him truly exceptional in a survey of Western art. Similarly, in the seventeenth century, despite the fame of his painting, Rembrandt van Rijn was able to achieve in his etchings a level of spontaneity, whimsy, and emotional drama and intimacy that surpassed nearly all previous printmaking accomplishments. The history of the religious print, including shifts in function, meaning, and execution, is a complex topic that cannot be fully explored in this brief survey. *Faithful Impressions* highlights works from the Thrivent Collection to illustrate aspects of this rich history.¹

Through the centuries, source material for artists producing religious subject matter was diverse. The primary source has long been the canonical Scriptures, the accepted collection of Holy Scriptures in the Christian church. The exact canonical Scriptures

changed through time as books and materials were added or removed for political and theological reasons. The Old Testament (also called the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament compose this historical source called the Holy Bible. Different translations of the Bible were used in different regions and at different times.

Apocryphal and noncanonical writings and tradition constitute another major source of religious subject matter. Over the centuries the Bible developed from more books than are included in the accepted canon. Books and stories not in today's Bible would have been familiar to many Western artists; such stories were widely known and believed, and the church even taught them at times. Passed down through oral tradition, they became deeply ingrained in society and would have been known to many individuals at any given time. One important example, *The Golden Legend or Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, was a medieval sourcebook first published around 1260 C.E. that compiled centuries of existing and detailed oral tradition and writings about the lives of the saints. This book, and its stories, was immensely popular for hundreds of years and was reprinted multiple times in several languages. Many religious prints derive their subject matter directly or indirectly from *The Golden Legend*, since accounts of the lives of the saints were not included in the accepted canon of Holy Scripture.

Individual artists and their patrons are another source of religious art through commissions. The church has historically been the primary patron for the design and execution of such art, which often decorated churches. Wealthy, elite members of society also became significant historical sponsors of religious art. Whether paintings, sculpture, stained glass, frescoes, mosaics, or works on paper, ecclesiastical and private commissions of religious art have long expressed and been intended for spiritual devotion, theological teachings, advancement of technical skill, and aesthetic enjoyment.

THE ORIGINAL PRINT

Original prints differ significantly from the photographic reproductions most common in our contemporary era.² Printmaking has long embraced new technology, often with highly positive results, but in response to widespread misconceptions and questionable practices related to “prints” after the advent of photographic reproduction, organizations devoted to the practice and study of original prints attempted to specify a

clear definition of an original print. The Print Council of America published the pamphlet *What Is an Original Print?* in 1961, which outlines the following criteria:

An original print is a work of art, the general requirements of which are:

- The artist alone has created the master image in or upon the plate, stone, woodblock or other material, for the purpose of creating the print.
- The print is made from the said materials, by the artist or pursuant to his direction.
- The finished print is approved by the artist.³

This definition should not exclude the fact that printmaking can be a collaborative process that may involve more than one person. The artist may not always directly participate in the creation of the matrix, the block or plate, but the conceptual intention of the artist and the work's content should be of an original nature.⁴

The original print has the potential to be a powerful, personal object. To hold a piece of paper in one's hand, or gaze on it in a book or album, can elicit a close connection. The subject depicted on paper can be tangible and solid but also intimate — seen only by the eyes of one particular viewer, or small group of viewers, in a given moment. Because of this personal and individual relationship, works on paper can be very influential and persuasive communicators of ideas. Admiring a glorious stained glass window in a vaulted cathedral or examining a large-scale painting or fresco is often moving and fulfilling, but the immediacy of the experience of enjoying a print or drawing is altogether different. The touch of the paper; the faintly sweet, sometimes musty scent; thick ink settled permanently into the richly textured or feather light paper — all of these sensual qualities enhance the viewing of a work on paper. Prints delight for their aesthetic, visual qualities; inspire with their myriad meanings and interpretations; and astound with their intricate, stunning technical qualities. Collectors have been captivated by this nuanced and varied media throughout history.

Prints and drawings also appeal for their accessibility. Prints are available to viewers not only in a physical, touchable sense but monetarily as well: they have always been more affordable and available for more people

to view than other media. Essentially pieces of paper, prints are likewise highly transportable; they are capable of expressing an idea or image (religious or otherwise) across the world simultaneously. Although religious subject matter is highly important in the history of art and Christianity, the religious print or drawing was never only about religion or theology. As time went on, secular components or little details from daily life were depicted within religious scenes, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. These features reveal much about the art but also about life at the time of the work's creation.

EARLY PRINTS: THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

Before the advent of printed woodblock images (c. 1425) and the printing press (1453) in Europe, hand-painted miniatures and illuminated manuscripts were the popular artform on paper for religious and secular subjects.⁵ Works ranged in quality and function, but the finest could be embellished or illuminated with gold or silver and painted with rare and expensive pigments. These books and manuscripts might require years to produce and were commissioned by wealthy members of society, often including clergy. Such images illustrated religious and musical texts, as well as small and large-format devotional books. The earliest artwork in the Thriver Collection is *St. Helena with the True Cross* by a late thirteenth-century Italian Master, c. 1290 (Plate 1): this miniature is an example of the common church-centered religious imagery of the medieval period, often restricted in use or viewing only to clergy or the elite.

Relief printing developed from the long-standing practice of stamping woodblock images onto textiles, combined with the growing popularity of paper after the existence of paper mills in Europe since the thirteenth century.⁶ The first printed religious images in Europe appeared by the second quarter of the fifteenth century in central Europe and southern Germany.⁷ These woodblock prints were made from a relief printing method. Intaglio printmaking, the other primary method, likely began in the 1430s in Germany.⁸ These early prints were prevalent years before the printing press was invented.

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Germany became the center of print culture. The printing press had the most profound effect on Western civilization as any invention up to that time. One of the first books printed with moveable type in a press was a Latin Bible completed in 1454 in Mainz, Germany, by Johannes

Gutenberg. By the end of the century, hundreds of cities and towns across the continent had printing presses. The intense growth in printed literature was aided by the concurrent development of humanism, a philosophical and intellectual movement with Italian origins that migrated to Germany by the late fifteenth century.⁹ Valuing knowledge, language, and classical ideals in art and literature, humanism emphasized the individual over medieval dogma.¹⁰ The thirst for knowledge inspired by humanism and the reproduction of the printed word and image from the printing press had a transformational cultural effect and opened exciting avenues for the creation of prints.¹¹ A middle class emerged during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and the medieval guild system began to be replaced by individual enterprise.¹² The ability to rapidly disseminate new ideas through print media was immensely influential, and this period in Europe was characterized by artistic realism and detail, great interest in nature and science, and a strong reshaping of ideas about the individual's place in the world.

Martin Schongauer was the first printmaker to develop the medium of engraving into one able to stand "independent of the arts of the goldsmith or even the painter."¹³ Two prints by Schongauer in the Thriver Collection, *Christ before Pilate* and *Christ in Limbo* (Plate 6), evince this artist's technical mastery and innovation. Schongauer transformed the religious print into a more engaging, dense, and lifelike medium that was capable of eliciting deeper devotional potential as well as admiration for the technical components of the engraving.

The early modern print workshop was a bustling center of creation and commerce. Workshops were businesses as much as they were sources of great art; innovation and expression were central aims for many artists and workshops, but so was making money. Artists of every level of reputation and skill belonged to this system at this time, whether as the master, apprentice, or craftsman. The master in a workshop was the name and the draw for commissions, but many others would also touch a work. The earliest woodblock prints in Europe, simpler in form and technique, were likely created in each stage of production by one artist, but from the fifteenth century the artist/master/printmaker would create a print's original design, then the artist or another craftsman would transfer the original drawing onto the matrix before it would ultimately be cut, etched, or

engraved, and finally prepared and printed by different people. Some artists were more involved than others in the complete process of artistic creation and production.

Prints have layered meanings and functions that often changed over time. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, their uses were both practical and profound, as “devotional or intellectual aids; talismans; decorations for furniture or walls; playing cards; announcements of local events; explanations of portents, such as a two-headed calf or a bright comet; satirical or polemical commentaries; and, of course, works of art.”¹⁴ The print also reproduced other works of art. Most early prints were not made as a result of specific patronage; rather, they were created for the open market.¹⁵

Many printmakers promoted and sold their prints and sets of prints to other artists and craftsmen. Sets of religious prints depicting the Apostles, the Virgin, or the Passion could become models for iconographic programs for other artists’ work.¹⁶ Religious subject matter endured as the most common and popular type in various artistic media, and workshops could greatly benefit from sourcebooks or models about how to depict such figures and events. Prints depicting saints in open space with their iconographic attributes, such as Israhel van Meckenem’s *St. Stephen* (Figure 8), demonstrated to other artists traditional artistic representation of specific religious figures.

Collectability was another primary function for prints. Many early printmakers marketed their print sets or series to be sold in full or with the expectation that a collector would ultimately buy the entire set, thereby appealing to a range of economic incomes.¹⁷ Serious and amateur print collectors could be enticed to acquire a complete series or gradually work toward this goal. Some single-sheet prints and sets were expensive; sometimes artists would create different versions of a print or series—some small in format and lower in price, some large and more sophisticated and technically impressive, accompanied by a higher price. Albrecht Dürer’s *Engraved Passion* (Figure 9, Plate 11) was a refined series of the highest quality that was made with a more elite clientele in mind. Prints were still a much more affordable artform for collectors at any level. For example, six sets of Dürer’s *Engraved Passion* sold for three florins, slightly more than what he paid for a “portmanteau [large suitcase] for two florins, four

stiver.”¹⁸ Dürer famously dispatched his wife and mother to sell his prints at fairs across Germany, and he sold or gave away many of his prints during travels throughout Italy and the Netherlands. Scholars are increasingly recognizing that these cultural and economic aspects of early printmaking contribute significantly to the understanding and history of Western culture.

The most obvious and perhaps enduring function of religious prints is as devotional media. Early print artists were often working from their own agenda and probably seriously considered the potential salability of a print. Yet the church and other religious entities such as monasteries were vital patrons for religious prints. A monastery or particular pilgrimage site might commission prints to their specifications to commemorate a religious event or for pilgrims to purchase as a souvenir from their visit. Such prints could operate not just devotionally but also as a conduit for conferring God’s grace, offering a vehicle for the imagination of the early modern viewer to, for example, experience immersive empathy for Christ in his agony during the Passion. Through the literal act of empathetically looking at these prints, a Christian could find redemptive power, grace to combat sinful nature, and avoid eternal damnation. A simple image of the Madonna holding the Christ child could be equally powerful to the pious viewer in facilitating meditation and prayer (see Figure 10).

The power of the human gaze on such religious prints was very real to early modern viewers: to look upon an image of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint was to communicate through prayer and worship. Religious mysticism and spiritual pilgrimage had long been essential devotional practices in Western Christianity. Demand for devotional prints was high in part because many individuals could not read.¹⁹ One member of the clergy clearly expressed the spiritual passion and action such prints might inspire: “in a published sermon of the late fifteenth century, a famous preacher of Strasbourg Cathedral, Johann Geiler von Kaisersberg, urged his audience, ‘If you cannot read, then take one of those paper images on which the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth is painted. You can buy one for a penny. Look at it, and think how happy they were and full of hope, and come to know that in your faith! Then show your extreme reverence for them; kiss the picture on the piece of paper, bow down before it, kneel in front of it, call upon the Virgin, give alms to a poor person

for her sake!”²⁰ Inexpensive religious prints offered vital means of devotion and even theological education, as the imagery could serve as universal language. Devotional prints used for personal prayer and reflection were common and had positive benefits for the creation of religious imagery, though naturally such quotidian practice meant that many papers did not survive.²¹

Printed by the thousands, inexpensive early religious woodcuts that usually depicted saints or relics were sold at pilgrimage sites and church festivals.²² At a time when many Christians believed veneration of an icon or relic had redemptive or curative powers, prints also served as surrogates for the original objects.²³ A large woodcut of Christ’s head, crowned with thorns, by Sebald Beham c. 1520 (Plate 21) draws on this tradition and expresses a powerful devotional potential.

As the intaglio printing techniques of engraving and etching developed, religious prints started to compete with painting in complexity and quality. Although still less expensive than a painting, very fine intaglio prints commanded the attention of collectors among an elite class of royalty, scholars, merchants, and artists. Wealthy and well educated, this group delighted in masterful, innovative representations of religious scenes, and printmakers such as Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden flourished in the early modern period.

Dürer’s *Apocalypse* series (1498; Plate 8) and three *Meisterstiche*, or masterpieces — *St. Jerome in His Study* (1514; Plate 13), *Melencolia I* (1514), and *Knight, Death, and the Devil* (1513; Plate 12) — highlight a turning point in religious printed imagery and were momentous examples of the spectacular technical advances and complex compositions that this artist presented to the world. Dürer valued each element involved in printmaking and culturally elevated the medium’s entire professional process and output. His oeuvre reflects huge shifts in Western culture through humanist ideals, major theological changes, and careful study of the natural world, and his influence and innovation in printmaking is perhaps matched only by Rembrandt van Rijn in the seventeenth century.

Educational and devotional functions for the religious print often intertwined. Print series were an ideal format to teach theological and scriptural concepts. Series that depicted scenes from the Passion may have included devotional text or prayers and

could inspire compassion in devout viewers as they contemplated Christ’s suffering. The ability to tell lengthy stories in series format combined with the accessibility and transportability of prints to make a medium well suited for religious instruction. Noncanonical and apocryphal stories and ideas were also often recorded and retold in religious prints.

The Protestant Reformation in Germany was successful in large part because of advances in print culture. Central changes in religious art at this time include the wider emergence and growth of secular imagery, shifts in portraiture, and the patronage of works. The market for art expands as there are more buyers from the emerging merchant or middle class. Specific theological and cultural issues debated during this period led to major changes in art. Prints were employed to promote political and theological propaganda, both mild and extreme, on all sides of the Protestant Reformation. Portraits of Reformation figures (several of which can be seen in this catalogue) became important not only for the contemporary religious movement but also in the history of the religious print. Images of saints and relics in religious prints declined and shifted from the time of the Reformation due to concerns over misdirected worship of them. But such imagery experienced renewal during the Counter Reformation as proponents revived the imagery of the cult of the saints.²⁴

Woodcuts could be printed hundreds or even a thousand times before serious wear on the block appeared. Imagine the enormous influence one woodcut (let alone hundreds) could have on any number of cultural or political issues compared with the former method of creating works on paper by hand. Engravings and etchings could also be printed many times before significant breakdown in the plate, although their multiple potentiality was less than that of a woodblock. Highly portable and distributable, prints circulated the same ideas and images across Europe, encouraging discussion and extending the dissemination of ideas and change in a rapid new way.

Not all prints in the history of the medium have sought to explore new interpretations of subject matter, offer social and moral commentary, or even illustrate texts. Some religious prints were executed, at least in part, to demonstrate technical mastery of the artist and to publicize artistic styles. By the end of the fifteenth century, printmakers were imitating the

prints of other artists. The “reproductive” print is not a photomechanical reproduction in the modern sense but rather a type of original print that is replicative because it reproduces or copies another original artwork.

The monumental example of Agostino Carracci’s *The Crucifixion* (Plate 32) remains a complex model of the reproductive print. Some artists creating a different type of reproductive print sought not to copy an earlier work but instead hoped to emulate or pay homage to one or to its artist. At the end of the sixteenth century, Hendrik Goltzius engraved a series of six prints that he called the *Meesterstukje*, or master engravings, as a tribute to his technical virtuosity and to establish himself as next in a line of great printmakers.²⁵ *The Circumcision* (Plate 47) from this series shares many iconographic elements with Dürer’s version of the same subject and imitates Dürer’s composition and handling of the burin.

THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

Many reproductive prints were produced in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century. This was also a time of extraordinary innovation and brilliance in nonreproductive religious and secular prints, in particular as seen in the work of Rembrandt van Rijn. The Baroque era in the Netherlands is called the Golden Age: by the seventeenth century, incredible wealth, extraordinary artistic talent, and prosperous commerce were realities in the Dutch Republic. The rising merchant class was altering many aspects of culture and society—and had income to spend on art. Innovations in art included the expanding genre scene and the Dutch landscape tradition, often portrayed with a new defined sense of atmospheric space, realism, and increasing secular imagery, as well as religious imagery with secular components. Rembrandt and his contemporaries made numerous religious works of art; indeed, religious controversy²⁶ in the Dutch Republic contributed to the creation and popularity of certain kinds of religious subject matter.

Rembrandt filled his works with psychological depth and masterly light and shadow. At the height of his career, he was the most successful artist in Holland. He depicted beggars and street merchants as often as he did wealthy individuals or the Virgin Mary and Christ. His prints express emotion, action, and humanity in a way that elicits feeling rather than simply looking, and he presents the human and divine so flawlessly that we are left wondering which is which. Rembrandt’s influence within the history of art, and specifically in the

history of printmaking, is so imposing it can scarcely be articulated. His originality and innovation are astounding, and history will undoubtedly continue to laud his legacy.

Rembrandt created a remarkable number of religious works, many of which were inspired by earlier artists and traditions. He was an extremely experimental etcher who made varied, stunning prints, many of which are examined in this catalogue. His prints illustrate how religious subject matter shifts in this period in northern Europe. Scripturally based subject matter flourishes, likely due to the dominance of Protestant denominations and their adherence to Scripture as the main authority for Christianity.²⁷ Rembrandt is also responsible for bringing a highly personal quality to the religious print, which would develop further in later centuries. As secular imagery became more prevalent, the potential variety and influence of new interpretations of religious subject matter also expanded. Rembrandt merges divine subjects with everyday secular ones, making the material more accessible and offering fresh interpretations of traditional subjects (see Plate 61, his *Flight into Egypt*). Like artists centuries before him, Rembrandt draws not only on Scripture for his source material but also on noncanonical sources, including Jewish traditions and Scripture and apocryphal Christian texts and traditions. The religious print in the seventeenth century dramatically incorporates secular components, fresh interpretations of traditional subject matter, greater realism, and the resurgence of strong biblical topics. Technical innovation in the medium of etching (including Rembrandt’s use of drypoint and etching) forever changes the look and execution of prints. New visual textures and new meaning for private devotion of the religious print for the wealthy merchant class further alter the function of religious prints, and — as we will see even more in the nineteenth century — the religious print becomes more personal.

Also in the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, an elegance of line and a lyrical sense of grace are conveyed in many Italian religious prints, beautifully appropriate for conveying many theological themes and seen in the work of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (Plate 34), Guido Reni (Plate 36), Bartolomeo Biscaino (Plate 35), and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (Plates 39 and 40).

MODERN RELIGIOUS PRINTS

While it is true that the religious print’s popularity wanes

in certain areas from the eighteenth century on as a result of the overall secularization of Western culture, strong and expressive examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious works on paper abound. During the modern period, religious prints continue to change in style and function. They reflect avant-garde movements or styles, including a move toward greater abstraction and reduction of form and composition. Technical advances in modern printmaking are substantial and frequent, including the introduction or expansion of lithography, the aquatint, mezzotint, and a revival of etching. Realism continues to progress in art, especially for prints. The advances of photography as well as the Impressionist and Postimpressionist movements further affect the development of modern prints and printmaking. Biblical literalism, along with new translations, influences the interpretation of Scripture. Thematically, religious prints become much more personal, often expressing the artist's own religious beliefs rather than those of the church or overarching theological doctrines. While religion was challenged by the growth of modern science and secularization, numerous religious and spiritual revivals in the modern period contribute to the creation of religious art.²⁸ War and great social and cultural changes in Western society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries encouraged some artists to create religious imagery as a response to contemporary problems.

The devotional image holds new meaning in the nineteenth century. The image of the suffering Christ, prevalent in the history of devotional prints, becomes more tangible and nuanced by social issues. Édouard Manet's rare etching and aquatint *Dead Christ with Angels* (Plate 73) with its stark forms and hauntingly realistic depiction of the body of Christ was possibly seen by nineteenth-century viewers to represent "a devotion to a new icon of social justice, the image of the suffering people."²⁹

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many religious prints and drawings push the iconographic boundaries further by looking to the past while concurrently introducing stylistic and technical innovation. Many avant-garde movements review the past in pursuing their progressive artistic and social aims. For example, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an English artistic and literary movement of the mid-nineteenth century, sought to reawaken the past through inspiration from the classical, medieval, and Renaissance periods. The

idea of promoting and eliciting social and philosophical change through the arts was a very appealing concept to many artists and arts circles, and often this was achieved through religious art. The large stained glass window study by Pre-Raphaelite artist Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *St. Matthew* (Figure 12, Plate 74), the *Book of Job* series by William Blake (Plate 67, Figures 56–59), and a later lithograph by Pablo Picasso, *David et Bethsabée* (Plate 89) all draw on this notion of looking to the past in progressiveness.

Another influence on the religious (and nonreligious) modern print was the highly collected Japanese woodblock prints with their thick black lines and asymmetrical compositions, as well as their exoticism in Western culture. James J. Tissot's series *The Prodigal Son in Modern Life* (Figure 13, Plate 76, Figures 60–63) exemplifies aspects of Japonisme. Non-Western, African, and Oceanic arts and culture equally influence modern art through many artists' visits to islands and the collection and study of art objects from distant lands. Referred to as primitivism, and evident in multiple examples of twentieth-century art in this catalogue (see "The Twentieth Century"), truly avant-garde styles pushed formal boundaries of art history and facilitated aspects of expressionism through which artists could convey their own personal religious beliefs.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, politics and the effects of materialism and industrialism elicited new avenues of expression for artists who celebrated and lamented modernity. Many artists found renewal and inspiration in the print medium and its historical ties to handmade craftwork and cultural heritage. Prints were ideal for the expression of emotion and spiritual concepts. Later, the devastation brought on by the World Wars profoundly affected artists who served in battle, lost loved ones, and experienced political upheaval and economic hardship. Modern artists explored ideas of spiritual renewal through religious subject matter and attempted to address their concerns and aspirations. Artists of this period utilized bold color, primitivism, and abstracted forms to create modern impressions of the present and future.

During the early to mid-twentieth century, German expressionist artists and printmakers found stylistic and thematic inspiration from German artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Partly nationalistic, partly personal, these artists sought to revitalize the raw

graphic strength of the woodcut medium. Emil Nolde's woodcut *Prophet* (1912; Plate 82) is a powerful example: this somber face implores us to reflect on the deep faith of this prophet. Nolde enhances the contemplative mood by technical means, exploiting and exposing the wood grain to create a textural viewing experience and a strong reference to the German woodcut tradition.

Faithful Impressions and the Thrivent Collection both demonstrate the vitality of the print series in the history of religious prints. Its multiple format is ideal for the telling of many scriptural episodes, and the repetitive nature of the series is well suited to the strong devotional aspect of prints. The religious print series continues in decidedly modern form with Max Pechstein's set of twelve large-scale woodcuts, *Das Vater Unser* (*The Lord's Prayer*, 1921; Plate 81, Figures 5 and 65–67). On the title page of the series (Figure 65), three men sit humbly in prayer, forming a traditional triangular composition—yet this is the only traditional art historical element about this strongly graphic series, with its thick black lines, non-Western influences, and judicious use of bold color. This powerful series can be thought of as a modern version of the small medieval devotional prayerbook that incorporated images and text. Pechstein's series reflects many modern and progressive characteristics: the large size of the woodcuts allows full visual immersion, and the centrality and style of the text is reminiscent of contemporary advertising posters and avant-garde Cubist collage. The poster size format of this series is a brilliant reinvention of a traditional religious and artistic devotional experience. Pechstein was a devout Christian, and the crucial role of his faith in his life is evident in *Das Vater Unser*.

The connoisseurship, or discerning appreciation, of works on paper has been a vital aspect of their study for centuries. Thanks to the efforts of print and drawing collectors of the past we have many examples of catalogues raisonnés and scholarly references on aspects of print study such as paper watermarks, collector's marks and accompanying biographies, and notes on the quality and record of various prints' impressions, states, and editions. Each of these elements assists in determining the attribution, art historical significance, and meaning of such works. A distinguished collector may be a scholar of a particular artist or style and may aid in determining the artist or quality of a print or drawing. The collecting by historical and present-day connoisseurs also influences the

study and cultural perception of the artworks. Those who appreciate and collect prints and drawings (i.e., individual collectors, dealers, art institutions, private collections) help scholars learn more about them as they also preserve these precious examples of art history. The discerning eye and careful care of the passionate collector or art collection is invaluable to the preservation and study of works on paper. This essay has focused on the religious print, but it must be noted that many original drawings are in the collection as well. Drawings are discussed in each section of the catalogue. Drawings are crucial in the artist's creative process, commonly functioning as studies to aid in composing another artwork, including prints, and share a close relationship with printmaking in the graphic arts.

The pieces of paper featured in this book have been steadfastly held, studied, and prayed on as much as they have been admired and cherished as collectable objects and works of art. Each work on its own expresses aspects of the complex history of the religious image on paper; together, these works, nuanced with the beliefs and traditions of those who created, commissioned, and viewed them, form a collective lineage of the transformations and endurance of the religious image in the West.

Notes

1. Both single-sheet printed images and printed book illustrations are relevant to our discussion. They often commingled function and influence, though their differences must be noted as their creation and collection exhibit many distinctions.
2. Photographic or facsimile reproductions available since the twentieth century are problematic to the modern understanding and marketing of original prints. As Linda C. Hulst discusses in *The Print in the Western World: An Introductory History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), the ability to create countless numbers of such reproductions, with no alteration whatsoever in the quality of the image, and then even sign and edition such "prints," undercuts and bears false witness to the nuanced, unique nature of the original print itself (8–9).
3. Print Council of America, *What Is an Original Print?* (New York: Print Council of America, 1961), n.p.
4. Hulst, 9.
5. Before paper was in widespread use in Europe, specially prepared animal skins, called vellum, served as the support for certain kinds of artwork, such as miniatures, books, and

illuminated manuscripts. Vellum was usually prepared from the skin of young calves or sheep.

6. Jeffrey Chips Smith, *The Northern Renaissance* (London: Phaidon Press, 2004), 242.

7. Peter W. Parshall and Rainer Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1. Printed images from woodblocks existed in other cultures and areas of the world centuries prior to the development of the woodblock print in Europe.

8. Ibid.

9. Christiane Andersson and Charles W. Talbot, *From a Mighty Fortress: Prints, Drawings, and Books in the Age of Luther, 1483–1546* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), 32.

10. Ibid., 32–33.

11. For a thorough discussion of the impact of printmaking on Western society, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, “Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report,” *Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 1 (March 1968): 1–56.

12. Andersson and Talbot, 30.

13. Michel Melot, Antony Griffiths, and Richard S. Field, *Prints: History of an Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 139.

14. Smith, 242.

15. Ibid.

16. Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134.

17. Ibid., 137.

18. Albrecht Dürer, *Dürer's Record of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, ed. Roger Fry (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 40, 55.

19. Many religious prints do appear to have been made for a largely literate audience, as evidenced by the frequent incorporation of text, often Latin. Peter Schmidt, “The Multiple Image: The Beginnings of Printmaking, between Old Theories and New Approaches,” in Parshall and Schoch, 43.

20. Smith, 243–44.

21. Ibid., 244. The “privatization of piety” has long been cited as an originating cause for the emergence of the printed image in Europe. Prayer and worship in a private space, with the aid of such early religious prints, was certainly a significant component to the development of the print; Peter Schmidt, however, argues such devotional practice happened as often in a church as in private spaces and that this thesis of origin for the print is inadequate (Schmidt, 50–51).

22. Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 16–18.

23. Parshall and Schoch, 62.

24. Schmidt, 47.

25. Hults, 125.

26. Shelley Perlove and Larry Silver extensively discuss the religious climate and *Rembrandt's involvement in it in Rembrandt's Faith: Church and Temple in the Dutch Golden Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

27. Prior to the Reformation, the Catholic church stressed the equal importance of Scripture and church tradition (encompassing oral tradition, clerical teachings, and noncanonical source material) as the authority for Christians. Martin Luther, with other reformers, emphasized that Scripture alone ought to inform the Christian's life. Scripturally based subject matter certainly becomes more prevalent after the Reformation, but Protestant denominations took different positions on the subtleties of such theology, and the European Counter Reformation also had an enormous effect on the religious image in art.

28. Tim Barringer notes in *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) that in England, despite modern challenges to religion, “the Victorian age remained profoundly Christian...Protestantism was central to English national identity” (109).

29. Hults, 550. Critics harshly commented on the cadaver-like Christ in the painting (also by Manet) that this print was made after. Some stated that the image represented the “death of the proletariat” (547–49).

Opposite: Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Hundred Guilder Print*, c. 1648 (detail; see Figure 11). Etching, drypoint, and engraving.

Left: Albrecht Dürer,

The Man of Sorrows, from the Engraved Passion (detail; see Plate 11), 1509. Engraving.

FIGURE 8. Israhel van Meckenem, *St. Stephen*, c. 1480. Engraving.

FIGURE 9. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ before Pilate*, from the *Engraved Passion*, 1509. Engraving.

FIGURE 10. Albrecht Dürer, *Virgin and Child Crowned by One Angel*, 1520. Engraving.

FIGURE 11. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Hundred Guilder Print*, c. 1648. Etching, drypoint, and engraving.

FIGURE 12. Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *St. Matthew*, 1873. Black and colored chalks, pencil.

FIGURE 13. James J. Tissot, *The Prodigal Son in Modern Life: In Foreign Climes*, 1881. Etching.