Spring 5-15-2018


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Canonizing Modernism:
An Avant-Garde Legacy in France’s Sacred Art Movement, 1937–1958
by
Heather Renee Read

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2018
St. Louis, Missouri
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<td><em>JF</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>SMH</em></td>
<td>Service des Monuments Historiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>SOL</em></td>
<td>Service d’Ordre Légionnaire</td>
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Acknowledgments

This dissertation developed from the master’s thesis I completed at the University of Oklahoma in 2010 on the subject of Henri Matisse’s Rosary Chapel in Vence. Like Matisse, I think of this project as the culmination of years of “exclusive and assiduous research”: an imperfect but much-loved feat that I hope will generate a productive conversation about modernism’s interest in sacred space. Many people have helped me along this path. My committee chair, John Klein, guided this project from its earliest stages and has remained a veritable font of knowledge, a careful reader, and staunch advocate. I am forever grateful for his patience. I am equally indebted to Elizabeth Childs for her enthusiasm and boundless support. Her unique gift for seeing the larger art historical value of even the smallest idea is a source of constant inspiration. William Wallace taught me the art of sprezzetura, while Angela Miller impressed upon me the importance of always remaining critical. I am also thankful to Vincent Sherry for welcoming me into his Mellon Dissertation Seminar, “The Great War and the Historiography of Modernism”; our exploration of the concept of watershed enabled me to see these churches with new eyes. I also benefited greatly from the support Nancy Rubin, administrator extraordinaire, and unflagging encouragement of Ila Sheren. At the University of Oklahoma, I wish to thank Susan Caldwell, Victor Koshkin-Youritzin, W. Jackson Rushing III, and Mark White.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the funding I received from the Department of Art History and Archaeology and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. I am also grateful to Wanda de Guébriant and Georges Matisse of the Archives Henri Matisse in Paris, who provided me with insight, direction, and sandwiches. The staff at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris archives kindly assisted in
deciphering several vital but illegible letters in their files. Likewise, the staff at the Menil
Foundation in Houston guided me through Marie-Alain Couturier’s voluminous archives. I am
deeply thankful for the archival staff at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Centre Georges Pompidou,
Paris). I may not know your names, but thank you for running one of the most efficient archives I
have ever encountered.

I could not have accomplished this dissertation without a substantial support system of
colleagues, friends, and family. My mother, Mary Snodgrass; my sister, Brooke Honea; my
father, Michael Read…thank you for your patience. Theresa Huntsman and Aliya Reich
provided crucial edits. My graduate colleagues at Washington University in St. Louis—Jennifer
Padgett, Anna Franklin, Kirsten Marples—made the lonely task of writing a dissertation
bearable. I am particularly grateful to have friends in Mia Laufer and James Anno. I did not
expect to find such stalwart friends in the graduate program here, but you have seen me through
good times and bad. Thanks for hanging in there.

The person I most wish to thank is my partner, Jordan Bernath. Words fail me, so let me
say simply, I dedicate this to you.

Heather Read
Washington University in St. Louis
May 2018
For Jordan.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Canonizing Modernism:

An Avant-Garde Legacy in France’s Sacred Art Movement, 1937–1958

by

Heather Renee Read

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History and Archaeology

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor John Klein, Chair

This dissertation offers a critical reassessment of modernist involvement in the Sacred Art Movement, the highly controversial Catholic art renaissance undertaken by the French Dominican Order between 1937 and 1954. Marie-Alain Couturier and Pie-Raymond Régamey, the Dominican co-editors of the influential religious art journal *L’Art Sacré*, led the Sacred Art Movement by arguing that to reveal the timelessness and universality of Catholic themes in the modern world, “it would be safer to turn to geniuses without faith than to believers without talent.” Far less understood are the motives that compelled these same “geniuses without faith” to create art for the Catholic Church at such a tense political moment.

I bring new insight to modernist interest in religious space by reframing the three sites at the center of the Sacred Art Movement debates as sites of international art pilgrimage that helped to promote the “avant-garde” character of the French tradition. I argue that the scandals that surround Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy, Henri Matisse’s Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence, and Pablo Picasso’s *Temple of War and Peace* in Vallauris obscure a pressing, post-traumatic
desire by older modernists to leave an enduring record of their legacy in the illustrious tradition of Catholic monumentality. Willing to set aside their ideological differences for the sake of their ambition, this older generation of French modernists sought to create a religious monument along the lines of Giotto, Michelangelo, and Bernini, and to claim a similar rank within the art historical canon. This dissertation therefore elucidates the shared, historicizing impulse behind these sites to tell a new story of the Sacred Art Movement, the story of modern art’s “canonization.”
Introduction: Canonizing Modernism

In the fragile period that followed the Second World War, French modernists became involved in a most unusual endeavor: the Sacred Art Movement in France. Marie-Alain Couturier (1897–1954) and Pie-Raymond Régamey (1900–1996), the Dominican co-editors of the influential religious art journal *L’Art Sacré*, spearheaded the Sacred Art Movement between 1937 and 1954 with the aim of beginning a renaissance in Catholic art. The Catholic Church had relinquished its once vital role as great artistic patron over the past century, amidst state secularization and the rise of an independent art market. And in the gap that now existed between mainstream and religious art movements, Couturier and Régamey saw a metaphor for the growing marginalization of faith in secular society. The Sacred Art Movement was intended to end this “divorce” by inviting renowned modern artists, regardless of their religious or political beliefs, to design or decorate new Catholic churches. By the time it ended in 1954, the Sacred Art Movement had yielded five major projects: Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy (1937–1950; figure 1), Henri Matisse’s Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence (1947–1951; figure 2), Fernand Léger and Jean Bazaine’s windows for l’Eglise du Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt (1949–1951; figure 3), Le Corbusier’s Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp (1955; figure 4) as well as La Tourette, a monastery in Éveux (1953–1961; figure 5). Each of these projects was undertaken in the belief that talent, not faith, could reveal the timelessness and universality of Catholic themes to a modern audience.

But even though the Sacred Art Movement featured some of the most celebrated figures of French modern art and architecture, the motives behind their participation remain misunderstood. As I argue next, most scholarship focuses upon the ecclesiastical controversies that brought the Sacred Art Movement to an end in 1954. This interpretive framework takes
modernist interest in religious space as a given, which begs the question of why Jewish, Protestant, atheist, and Communist artists created art for an institution for which they otherwise showed little affinity.

State of the Field

Until recently, the story of the Sacred Art Movement was inextricably bound to that of Marie-Alain Couturier and Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Couturier directed the iconographic program of this Alpine church between 1939 and 1954, and in that time, he would garner commissions from Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Matisse, and Georges Rouault. Nevertheless, it is Couturier’s life that provides the Sacred Art Movement’s dramatic story arc because the ecclesiastical controversies surrounding his choice of artists ultimately lead to his excommunication and death in 1954.¹

Because this mythic narrative provides the framework for so much Sacred Art Movement scholarship, I will describe it briefly here.

A Misleading Narrative

In 1954, Marie-Alain Couturier was excommunicated from the Catholic Church because of his role in the Sacred Art Movement. Upon receiving the letter, he suffered a fatal asthma attack. It was the dramatic dénouement to the querelle de l’art sacré or sacred art quarrel that

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¹ There is substantial debate over whether the Dominican’s fatal asthma attack was prompted by news of his excommunication. Nicholas Weber and Richard Dunlap have recently settled this argument with his discovery of a letter from Le Corbusier to his mistress, which reads: “[Couturier] died very suddenly in the hospital […] following the violent shock he received when Rome took her dramatic decisions against the “worker priests….”” Le Corbusier to Tjader Harris, 6 October 1956, cited in Richard Stockton Dunlap, “Reassessing Ronchamp: the historical context, architectural discourse and design development of Le Corbusier’s Chapel Notre Dame-du-Haut,” (PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science [LSE], 2014), 32.
supposedly brought the Sacred Art Movement to an end. The mythic narrative tends to go something like this: in 1945, Couturier resumed his work at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce following a six-year wartime exile in the United States. Before leaving for the United States in 1939, he only offered commissions to practicing Catholics; but his time in America had a profoundly liberalizing effect upon his beliefs, so now, he sought the most-celebrated artists in France, regardless of their religious or political beliefs. Church officials, in typical fashion, were skeptical. They protested that these artworks defied theological orthodoxy, and they claimed that artists who were Jewish, atheists or Communists—as so many of the artists in question were—could not seriously engage with Christian themes. Outrage therefore followed when Couturier unveiled a crucifix he had commissioned from Germaine Richier (1949; figure 6). The controversy reached the very heights of the Vatican and in September 1950, Pope Pius XII issued a *Menti Nostrae* condemning the “monstrosities of art which even pretend to call themselves Christian,” as well as the “priests [that] allow themselves to be led astray by the mania for novelty.” But Couturier refused to halt his crusade, and in 1954, he was excommunicated. Responding to the vehemence of the Vatican response, the French newspaper *Arts* wrote: “the scandals accompanying the first days of modern art were nothing compared to this.”

There is something oddly familiar about the way Couturier battles institutional complacency to express a modern sensibility. From initial controversy to condemnation, his narrative fulfills all the requirements of the avant-garde myth, except he replaces the artists as

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2 On September 23, 1950, Pope Pius XII handed down his *Menti Nostrae*, a condemnation of the “monstrosities of art which even pretend to call themselves Christian,” as well as the “priests [who] allow themselves to be led astray by the mania for novelty.” *Pope Pius XII, Menti nostrae, apostolic exhortation of Pope Pius XII to the clergy of the entire world. On the development of holiness in priestly life* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1951), 33.

heroic protagonists. To fully exploit the dramatic potential of the papal reprimand, the historian must minimize the artists’ role considerably and set the entire sequence of events within a strictly clerical context. With its hagiographic focus upon Couturier, this “avant-garde” narrative has yielded a narrow and inaccurate understanding of the Sacred Art Movement’s goals and achievements.

This interpretive framework developed under William Rubin in his landmark study of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy* (1961). Rubin interprets the church as Couturier’s apologia for the Vatican’s refusal to condemn fascism. Couturier, he argues, was one of many liberal Dominicans who became involved in the French Resistance and developed Communist sympathies. By commissioning religious art by modern masters at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Couturier drew attention to their attempt to chart a new course for the faith through increased social work and liturgical reforms. Narratively, Couturier’s role in the *querelle de l’art sacré* provides the catharsis that the artistic side cannot. He becomes the heroic protagonist in a story that simply and inaccurately describes the Sacred Art Movement as an anti-Vatican movement. In so doing, Rubin assumes that the politically coded binary between modern and academic art could still divide liberal French Catholics from conservative. Nevertheless, Rubin’s analysis remained the most definitive treatment of the Sacred Art Movement until recently because it productively illuminated the long-standing political fault lines that led to the sweeping reforms of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. It was then solidified by Dominique de Menil, Couturier’s protégé and patron of the Menil Foundation, who kept the Dominican’s legacy alive through exhibitions (*Paris 1937–1957, Centre Georges*  

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4 Rubin 1961, 23.
Reconciling Couturier’s Hagiography

The difficulty in reconciling this “avant-garde” interpretive framework with reality lies in the fact that Couturier’s hagiography emerged early and was, to a certain extent, self-crafted. He was the undeniable figurehead of the movement. In 1939, Pope Pius XII supposedly named him as “person charged with building or decorating churches—hic et nunc.” Moreover, and unlike his co-editor at *L’Art Sacré*, Pie-Raymond Régamey, Couturier enjoyed the limelight, and with his firebrand rhetoric, he quickly became a favorite of the press. It was therefore Couturier’s passion, vision, and eloquence that seemed to motivate this renaissance in Catholic art. Not long before the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, the priest and art critic, François Stahly joined the many voices in praise of the church, writing that Couturier had “enfolded in the church’s wide-stretched arms all those artists who by the power of their genius and inspiration were unknowingly brushing against the divine” [my emphasis].

According to Mark Wedig, Régamey solidified the “Cult of Couturier” not long after the Dominican’s death in 1954 by quickly publishing his diaries and letters. In the end, however, Couturier’s was just one of many voices in a larger effort to bridge the gap between religious and mainstream art. As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, Canon Jean Devémy’s role at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce has been overshadowed by Couturier. The same

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6 “…d’homme chargé de faire bâtir ou décorer des églises—hic et nunc.” The Pope reaffirmed that position in 1946 by giving Couturier benediction “to involve modern artists in the decoration of Assy.” However, Françoise Caussé doubts whether Couturier was actually given this title. She notes that the only source of the claim is Couturier himself. Ibid., 244. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation are my own.
can also be said of Régamey, Couturier’s co-editor at L’Art Sacré; Joseph Pichard, the journal’s founder; and François Mathey, chair of the Sacred Art Committee of Besançon. Of all these voices, Régamey’s is the most underrated and important. Before taking the cloth, Régamey was an art historian and Louvre conservator specializing in nineteenth-century art. Régamey’s historical training and professional standing enabled the magazine to become a radical, yet informed, advocate of modern religious art.

Over the last three decades, historians of religious art have challenged Rubin’s interpretive framework, and as a result, a more complete picture of the Sacred Art Movement has begun to emerge. In the beginning, these studies tended to be recovery projects aimed at addressing Régamey’s less-visible but equally important role at L’Art Sacré. Sabine de Lavergne led the charge in her 1989 dissertation and subsequent 1992 book, L’Art Sacré. Art sacré et modernité: Les grandes années de la revue ‘l’Art Sacré.’ De Lavergne’s analysis does not delve into the Sacred Art Movement’s various projects. Instead, it is a literary reassessment of L’Art Sacré that proves that Régamey played a much more important role in the magazine than Couturier.

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9 Revisionist analyses of L’Art Sacré have suggested that Régamey played a far more influential role in the journal’s development than Couturier. Similar attempts to redress the directorship of the Sacred Art Movement’s churches have met with varying degrees of success. Interestingly, however, Richard Dunlap has suggested that Couturier’s practical influence at Le Corbusier’s Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp has been unfairly diminished, due to the misleading nature of the available evidence. His analysis of Couturier’s letters and diaries suggested that Couturier was the object of close Vatican scrutiny when work on the church began. Fearing the presence of papal spies, his colleagues on the project hid and even destroyed evidence of the Dominican’s role. Ibid., 15–20.
10 Caussé 2010, 247–262.
Françoise Caussé’s book, *L’Art Sacré: Le débat en france sur l’art et la religion (1945–1954)* is by far the most important reconsideration of the Sacred Art Movement since Rubin.\(^\text{13}\) Caussé’s expansive yet thoughtful examination encompasses both the journal *L’Art Sacré* and the Sacred Art Movement’s various churches, effectively relating the journal’s rhetoric to its material outcomes.\(^\text{14}\) Her discussion of Régamey’s involvement in government-funded religious art projects is significant in this regard because it demonstrates that Couturier was not the only one to play a practical role in the Sacred Art Movement.

Isabelle Saint-Martin’s recent book, *Art chrétien, art sacré: regards du catholicisme sur l’art, France, XIXe–XXe siècle* (2014) is likewise notable for transcending the avant-garde framework that defined studies of the Sacred Art Movement for so long.\(^\text{15}\) She productively suggests that the Sacred Art Movement was not the logical continuation, rather than the rejection, of nineteenth-century Catholic art philosophy. She suggests that the Sacred Art Movement drew upon a nineteenth-century medievalism conversion strategy known as *conversion par l’art*, which used lay fascination for medieval churches to encourage deeper engagement with the faith. Furthermore, and with more concision than Caussé, she challenges the pervasive idea that the Sacred Art Movement was primarily a postwar movement by showing that even conservative members of the clergy began to embrace modern art prior to World War II. This includes Couturier, who, as Robert Schwartzwald has convincingly shown, was a monarchist and member of the deeply conservative *Action Française* before leaving for the United States.\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^{14}\) Caussé 2010, 566.

\(^{15}\) Saint-Martin 2014, 207–284.

\(^{16}\) Robert Schwartzwald, “Father Marie-Alain Couturier, OP, and the Refutation of Anti-Semitism in Vichy France,” in *Textures and Meanings: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Department*
Studies by Caussé and Saint-Martin have opened the door to a broader discussion of the Sacred Art Movement’s relationship to the French government. In France, churches are highly charged, nationalistic symbols in secular and religious circles alike. The French government lays claim to any religious monument with artistic, historic, or patrimonial value for that reason.17 Because building or modifying a French Catholic church is, by its very nature, an institutional endeavor, the sites considered in this dissertation can hardly be considered “avant-garde.” In fact, from 1947 until 1973, he served on the art acquisition and conservation council for the Conseil des musées nationaux (French National Museums’ council).

The Sacred Art Movement anticipates a current initiative by the French government to replace irreparable stained-glass windows in the nation’s most famous churches with designs by modern and contemporary artists, including Pierre Soulages (St. Foy de Conques), Robert Morris (Maguelone Cathedral) and Jean-Pierre Raynaud (Noirlac Abbey). This program reflects the Sacred Art Movement’s extensive legacy and suggests that modernist interest in religious space transcended the movement. Almost immediately after the Movement’s end, Georges Braque, Joan Miró, Alfred Manessier, and Jean Cocteau decorated or constructed religious structures. Several historians have begun to relate the Sacred Art Movement to this program: Christine Blanche-Vacquet in her dissertation, “De l’Église à l’État, la commande des Vitraux religieux en France: de 1945 à 2000” (2004); Céline Frémaux in Architecture Religieuse au XXe Siècle, Quel patrimoine? (2007); and Fanny Drugeon and Isabelle Saint-Martin in an edited volume, L’Art Actuel dans l’Église (2012).

However, the question of modernist involvement is lost in the blind spot that exists

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17 Until the 1905 Separation of Church and State, government committees directed all Catholic art commissions.
between the two distinct fields of religious and modern art history. Indeed, historians of modern art still conflate the Sacred Art Movement with Couturier’s hagiography. Romy Golan, for instance, characterizes Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as Couturier’s “apologia” for the Vatican’s inept response to the Holocaust. While not completely incorrect, such statements do oversimplify the church’s complex wartime history. Sarah Wilson is one of the few historians to grapple with the Sacred Art Movement’s artistic implications. She published two essays relating to the subject: “La bataille des ‘humbles’? Communistes et Catholiques autour de l’art sacré” (2008) and “Germaine Richier: Disquieting Monarch” (2005). Wilson situates the Sacred Art Movement within the brief Liberation-era détente between Catholics and Communists. Her thoughtful analysis comes closest to creating an accurate picture of the artistic goals. However, the narrow scope of her essays, necessitated by their brevity, prevents broader analysis.

**Dissertation Question**

One of the primary reasons for the current lacuna in Sacred Art Movement scholarship can be attributed to a general tendency to take modernist interest in religious space for granted. This is a substantial oversight in my estimation because the Sacred Art Movement is such an idiosyncratic chapter in the history of modern art. Secular modernists of Matisse and Bonnard’s generation, which I refer to as “canonical” for reasons detailed below, had never actively sought a religious art commission before this moment, nor did they ever suffer from the lack of clerical patronage. The independent art market, ever hungry for stylistic innovation and unique personalities, provided ample financial rewards for their individuality. For that reason, even the

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deeply Catholic Georges Rouault refused to accept a religious art commission in 1937, citing the damage it might do to his reputation.\textsuperscript{19}

Modernist involvement in the Sacred Art Movement was also a politically fraught prospect given the Vatican’s inept reaction to World War II and continued anti-Communist agenda. Indeed, while many in the French clergy embraced Communism in the postwar period, the memory of wartime collaboration was by no means been forgotten. André Breton’s ridiculed his peers’ involvement in the Sacred Art Movement for that very reason:

Is there any scandal worse than Matisse declaring…that the decoration of a chapel in Vence is his ‘life’s work’? Similarly, what is more repugnant than the contortions of this emporium bully [Léger] who…after a spectacular evolution from Pétanism to Stallinism via Gaullism—finds the wherewithal to ‘girdle’ the walls of a new church with stained-glass windows and at the same time hang from the pegs of the Maison de la Pensée Française, under the title The Builders, a few workers’ caps crowning the radical absence of thought and life! … According to the latest reports, [Joan] Miró himself—doubtless with the same beautiful pansexual graffiti that made his name—would seem to be about to decorate the Baptistery at Audincourt!\textsuperscript{20}

Breton’s savage indictment makes it clear that churches were by no means politically neutral sites. He interpreted Matisse, Léger, and Miró’s interest in religious space as support for an institution that was actively involved in their persecution. Nor was Breton the only one to think that way. Picasso flew into a rage when Matisse agreed to build the Vence Chapel. “You're crazy to make a chapel for those people,” he reportedly said. “Do you believe in that stuff or not? If not, do you think you ought to do something for an idea that you don't believe in?”\textsuperscript{21} And in response, Picasso transformed a twelfth-century Romanesque chapel into the defiantly anti-

\textsuperscript{19} See Chapter 1 of this dissertation and Rubin 1961, 96.
clerical *Temple of War and Peace* (1950–1958; figure 7). One might therefore wonder why, given these objections, an established modern artist with little affinity for the Church might risk his reputation for the sake of its future.

This dissertation examines three sites most associated with the Sacred Art Movement controversies—Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy, Matisse’s Vence Chapel, and Picasso’s *Temple of War and Peace*—to understand the practical appeal and political drawbacks of creating a religious space. Indeed, while Couturier and Régamey embraced the idea of non-religious artists creating Catholic artworks as early as 1938, a preliminary examination of the Sacred Art Movement’s chronology suggests that the first commission of that kind would not be accepted until 1942.\(^{22}\) In other words, World War II was most likely the catalyst behind modernist interest in religious space and therefore the Sacred Art Movement.

Through the efforts of Laurence-Bertrand Dorléac, Sarah Wilson, and Natalie Adamson, a more nuanced, sensitive picture of how the canonical avant-garde responded to the Second World War has begun to emerge. Golan made an important first step in furthering art history’s understanding of the monumental impulse in modern art with her book *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (2013). Golan describes the Sacred Art Movement as part of a larger postwar attempt to rescue monumentality from its fascist-era associations. Her focus upon tapestry leads her to conclude that the “desire to produce works integral to the wall and wedded to architecture was pointedly abandoned in favor of precariousness and

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\(^{22}\) In a September 1938 editorial, Couturier and Régamey wrote: “Our readers are certainly persuaded like us that the ideal is to have contemporary artists work for the Church. We do not think that there is any reason to express in general terms the fight for this cause because it has, thank God, already won and the real question is to discern the authentic artists.” Couturier and Régamey shared the belief, pervasive among Catholic modernists at this time, that talent was a divine gift and genuinely spiritual artistic expression could exist even in the case of a non-religious artist. Religious art commissions at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce were offered to Georges Rouault, André Derain, and Pablo Picasso between 1938 and 1941; however, Pierre Bonnard would be the first to accept in 1942. Pierre-Raymond Régamey, “*Au lieu des statues *‘Saint Sulpice,’” *L’Art Sacré* 9 (September 1938): 261.
impermenance…Only thus could one dispel the problematic association with a monumental art that had often been produced in the service of regimes that aspired to last into the next millennium.”23

This dissertation takes issue with Golan’s bold and wonderfully conceptual argument by arguing that modernist interest in monumentality was firmly rooted in a need to maintain the permanence and visibility of their art. Unlike previous generations of artists, Matisse and his fellow French modernists made their careers on canvas: a medium that recommended itself over installation painting through cheaper production costs and increased marketability. That portability, however, also rendered their art more vulnerable to external factors. The most significant artworks of French Modernism, which now hung in museum galleries across the world, could be moved to less advantageous positions, relegated to storage as their popularity waned, or even destroyed in political attacks. Artworks installed in churches, by contrast, tend to be permanent, particularly when the name of the artist carries historical weight. By relating modernist interest in religious space to fascist iconoclasm and the black market, I will make a larger statement about the correlation between war-related trauma and a desire for permanence.

My analysis shows that one of the advantages of creating a church was its potential to become a historic monument. With the 1905 Separation of Church and State, the French government affirmed its legal right of possession to any Catholic church constructed prior to that year as well as any church that possessed sufficient “artistic, patrimonial, or historical value.”24 As a result, most Catholic churches were effectively nationalized and placed under the custodianship of the Service des Monuments Historiques (SMH). The SMH is charged with

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protecting, preserving, and restoring France’s material patrimony. It is, in other words, the
administrative framework that manifests and reinforces the invisible bonds of nationhood by
means of France’s material patrimony. SMH standards are famously rigid; it is a challenge to
obtain historic monument status for a site and even more difficult to modify an existing
monument. The SMH is a common source of tension with the clergy, who are often prevented
from modifying their churches in a way that would facilitate modern worship practice.25 But to
the modern artist who wishes to maintain the visibility of their art, the SMH’s stubborn devotion
to historical accuracy is infinitely appealing.

My use of the term “canonical avant-garde” further underscores the complex situation
that prompted modernist involvement in religious art projects. I use the term as a collective
shorthand for an older generation of modern artist (e.g., Bonnard, Matisse, Picasso, Léger,
Rouault) whose art historical relevance seemed assured by the 1940s. My use of this term could
be considered ironic or even oxymoronic, given that “canonical” and “avant-garde” are, on the
surface, opposing concepts. While the avant-garde artist forges ahead or seeks to destroy the
established order, “canonical” artists are the aesthetic order, having already been admitted to the
art historical pantheon through market success, critical consensus, or mainstream popularity. My
use of the term could also be considered inaccurate, given that the artists in question were so far
from the cutting edge of modernist production. Matisse, Picasso, Léger, and Chagall, for
instance, were featured in a Life Magazine article entitled “The Old Men of Modern Art: Their
Passing Will Mean the End of a Memorable Era.”26

25 Indeed, one of the Sacred Art Movement’s true successes was to facilitate a working relationship between the
SMH and the clergy, who often resented the state’s authority over Church property. Kevin D. Murphy, Memory and
Modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vézelay (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), and Saint-
Martin 2014, 211.
26 “The Old Men of Modern Art: Their Passing Will Mean the End of a Memorable Era,” Life (12 December 1949):
87-92.
My use of the term “canonical avant-garde” highlights the “avant-garde” posture that many artists assumed after World War II in response to their transition to the canon. Much like the avant-garde, the canon is ever-changing: it fluctuates according to the needs and tastes of the time. As older artists with considerable life experience, Matisse, Picasso, Léger, and Bonnard were deeply conscious of the canon’s constant changes. Matisse, for instance, often said that an artist would fall into art historical oblivion if future generations have no use of his art. New artistic movements—Art Brut, CoBrA, Abstract Expressionism—saw a lack of spiritual engagement in their predecessors’ art; they sought to eschew the avant-garde/arrière-garde cycle that they saw as an expression of a corrupt, bourgeois society. Artists of the “canonical avant-garde,” Matisse and Picasso in particular, believed that the younger generation’s foray into non-figurative abstraction would derail the modernist project. I suggest that the canonical avant-garde’s art historical anxieties prompted their involvement in the Sacred Art Movement.

This dissertation therefore posits modernist interest in religious space as a defense against political and market upheaval and a desire to preserve one’s art historical accomplishment in the permanent, legally protected, and historically resonant space of a Catholic church. I suggest that in the wake of fascist iconoclasm, the emerging Cold War, and the rise of a younger, spiritually engaged avant-garde, modernists began to recognize that the visibility of their art was subject to changes in public and curatorial taste. By rooting their interest in monumentality in a practical desire for permanence, we can arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what modernists

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27 Some historians, most notably Hal Foster, refer to these modernists as the “historical avant-garde” in order to maintain their chronological and epistemological remove from the more current, postwar “neo-avant-garde.” The construct of a “historical avant-garde” acknowledges that this generation’s accomplishments on the radical forefront of cultural production, while significant, are now past. However, viewing the older generation as a “historical avant-garde” disengages artists such as Matisse and Picasso from the artistic dialogues of the postwar period and suggests that they were not affected by the changing nature of avant-garde practice. Furthermore, this construct problematically implies an end to a specific iteration of the modernist project and perhaps even gives it a sense of resolution. Hal Foster, The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
hoped to achieve through their exploration of religious space.

Methodology

My study takes as its starting point Pierre Nora’s contention that “Tradition is memory that has become historically aware of itself.” Tradition maintains collective identity through the selective deployment of symbols—places, moments, monuments, objects, ideas—particularly at times of crisis. Much like memory, tradition is highly malleable; the meaning of these markers can change according to the needs of the collective. But tradition is rarely conditioned by the collective. Françoise Choay suggests that social institutions manipulate tradition to discredit collective memory, which threatens their survival. They do so by valorizing certain monuments and patrimonial objects over others: “It implies increasing at once the accessibility, legibility and beauty of the patrimonial items on behalf of the visitors’ enjoyment, and also their attractiveness.” She continues to say: “Narrative commentary and anecdotal illustration, or more precisely, banal chatter about the works, cultivate the public’s passivity, discouraging it from looking or deciphering with its own eyes, allowing meaning to escape through a sieve of hollow words.” Drawing upon this idea, I argue that it is fitting—and not entirely coincidental—that the three sites at the heart of the querelle de l’art sacré should be remembered as “avant-garde.” What better way to represent French modernism’s legacy within the illustrious tradition of Catholic art than an avant-garde church?

I therefore analyze Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, the Vence Chapel, and the Temple of

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30 Ibid., 147.
War and Peace using Nora’s concept of “sites of memory” (lieux de mémoire). Sites of memory are symbols—material and immaterial—that perpetuate collective identity in mass, pluralistic societies. They conjure constructed narratives that were once based in fact but have gradually drifted from historical reality through a constant process of retelling and refashioning. For instance, the American flag is still associated with Betsy Ross even though her role in its creation is debatable. Sites of memory, such as the flag, are key functions of civic religion—the religion of patriotism—because they inspire self-motivated loyalty to the collective or state. By scrutinizing nationalistic symbols as operations in memory, we can better understand whom they serve, what they serve, and what they obscure.

The Sacred Art Movement provides rare insight into the institutional machinations and aims behind changes in tradition. For hundreds of years, belief in the eternal grandeur of France provided the foundation for its sense of pride, which manifested itself most clearly in its political, religious, and artistic institutions. But World War II brought the relevance of France and her institutions into question. Years under German occupation followed by divisive collaborationist trials and épurations weakened the country’s international standing. Subsequently, the nation’s leaders sought to counteract the effects of the burgeoning identity crisis by promulgating the myth of La France Résistante, which suggested that the French population was not a nation of collaborators but resistors. Thus, while the process of assimilating modernism into the art historical canon began in the 1930s, it intensified after World War II, as the nation’s institutions attempted to distance themselves from fascist aesthetics and ideology. The French tradition was now understood as innately avant-garde: a reflection of the

31 Henry Rousso uses the term la France résistante to describe the Gaullist myth, which minimized the impact of Marshall Philippe Pétain’s National Revolution and therefore the collaboration that occurred under the wartime Vichy government. Henry Rousso, Le Syndrôme de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours (Paris: Seuil, 2nd ed. 1990).
enduring spirit of *La France Résistante*.

It is therefore no coincidence that Couturier’s battle against Vatican anti-modernism takes on a uniquely avant-garde character. Myths such as the *querelle de l’art sacré* helped France to distance itself from its recent history of defeat, occupation, and collaboration. Indeed, when Couturier responded to the papal condemnation of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce by claiming that “modern art will have had three enemies: Hitler, Stalin and the Pope,” he used the contrast with the conservative aesthetic programs of the Vatican and the Soviet Socialist Realism to distance the Sacred Art Movement from its prior associations with fascist-era nationalism. But rather than reject this “avant-garde” framework, I use it to highlight the institutional motives behind the Sacred Art Movement and therefore the complexities of modernist involvement. Like Matisse, Picasso, or Léger, Couturier drew upon avant-garde themes to occlude the institutional character of his endeavor and promote the enduring prestige of French culture at a moment of crisis. And in Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, the Vence Chapel, and the *Temple of War and Peace* (which, again, uses an abandoned, twelfth-century chapel as its setting)—we can see how this avant-garde narrative was put to work in the service of the tourist economy.

Tourism has become a burgeoning area of art historical inquiry. Its ability to address a broad range of issues—socioeconomic, philosophical, political, and cultural, just to name a few—has made it useful to understanding the power structures behind artistic production. Kenneth Silver, James Herbert, and Rosemary O’Neill are the most influential in this regard. Each effectively describes how a complex social network influenced French modernist production. Silver and O’Neill have also written compelling comparative analyses of Matisse,

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32 Jean Cassou paraphrasing an unnamed “distinguished Dominican reverend father.” Cassou was good friends with Couturier; therefore, this quote probably came from him. Jean Cassou, “Religious Art vs. Modern Style,” *ARTnews* 50, 2 (1951): 57.
Picasso, and Cocteau’s chapels by situating them within the context of postwar reconstruction. My study furthers this dialogue by considering how the Sacred Art Movement facilitated modernist interest in creating new sites of international art pilgrimage.

Indeed, to find modernists involved in the culture industry is a fundamental measure of their canonical status. In his theory of modern tourism, Dean MacCannell interprets sightseeing/tourism as an act of social differentiation intended to “subordinate other peoples to its values, industry and future designs.”

Tourism is therefore an accurate barometer of a nation’s political economy, because cultural exchange requires established transnational networks. Taking MacCannell’s logic further, it is possible to say that French modernists operated for much of their careers as consumers within a pre-established tourist dynamic.

Matisse’s sojourn in Morocco, Paul Klee’s visit to Tunisia modernism’s most enduring tales of cultural encounter feature the artist in a dominant, colonialist position. After World War II, however, modernists shift from consumer to producer in the tourist dynamic. This shift is not only a testament to their canonical status, it is also indicative of an attempt to resist the threat of Americanization as France struggled to reassert its place on the international stage.

Sites of Artistic Pilgrimage

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33 Tourism is therefore a political act undertaken by individuals seeking to increase their own domestic personal capital. MacCannell argues that the modern tourist is akin to the social scientist, in that both engage the cultural “other” through pre-defined structures. The social scientist views culture through the framework of scholarly method and theory, while the tourist employs superficial cultural experiences. Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 13.

A canon from Nice, who attended a service in the Chapel, wrote to say how moved he was. He tells me that recently an Englishman who had just arrived in Vence was asking everywhere, 'Please, where is the chapel of Saint Matisse?' I trust that you're well despite this canonization, mon cher Maître…

—Letter from Father Marie-Alain Couturier to Henri Matisse, 19 October 1951

To understand how tourism inspired and shaped the Sacred Art Movement, we need look no further than its emblem, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Found high in the Alps, the construction of this eclectic church began in 1937 as part of a collaborative endeavor between the archbishop and the regional government to build typically “French” churches in high-traffic tourist areas, thus giving new towns like Assy a well-established appearance. For Couturier and his team, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce offered an opportunity to create an église-musée (church-museum), where artworks by celebrated modernists would prompt deeper lay engagement with the faith. This idea continued to drive the church’s decoration after World War II, as we can see in a 1946 letter from the parish priest asking Henri Matisse to paint the Saint Dominic altarpiece:

…I ask you to consider if, outside the rooms of a museum…or of the galleries of collectors, if great works of art by masters of modern painting would not live better in a living church where thousands of sick would see them, or [where] the crowd of amateurs who traverse the roads of the Alps will come. There, the genius of our masters would be better expressed than anywhere else.

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35 Father Couturier to Henri Matisse, 19 October 1951. Henri Matisse et al. 1999, 393.
36 See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
37 Isabelle Saint-Martin argues that the église-musée had its roots in a nineteenth-century clerical strategy known as *conversion par l’art* (conversion by art), which used the Gothic craze as an opportunity to rekindle the laity’s religiosity. As one abbot wrote, “We have achieved our purpose if the contemplation of the marvels of Christian art, resplendent in our churches, which are the vestibule to paradise, awakens in us the notion of the contemplation of heaven, and inflames more and more our desires and our hopes for our true homeland.” Abbé Jean-Jacques Bourassé, *Les Plus Belles Églises du Monde, notices historiques et archéologiques sur les temples les plus célèbres de la chrétienté* (Tours: A. Mame, 1857), xvi; quoted in Saint-Martin 2014, 99. Her discussion of Couturier and Régamey’s concept of the église-musée can be found on page 211 of that same book.
38 “…je vous demande de considérer si, en dehors des salles des Musées…ou des Galleries des Collectionneurs, de grandes œuvres des Maîtres de la peinture moderne ne vivront pas mieux dans une église vivant où des milliers de malades se succèderont, où la foule des amateurs qui sillonnent les routes des Alpes accourront; et là le génie de nos
As the reference to “masters of modern painting” suggests, canonical modernists were used as Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s point of appeal. Because of its potential to become a new site of international art pilgrimage, the French government provided Couturier with a grant to complete the church in 1947.

In Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Matisse’s Vence Chapel, and Picasso’s Temple of War and Peace, we see modernists contributing to a larger effort to demonstrate the strength and independence of postwar France by exploiting the contrast with the conservative aesthetic agendas of the Vatican and Soviet government, and by participating in and affirming the strength of a nationalistic artistic tradition that dated back to the Romanesque.

Tourism became the mainstay of the French postwar economy as the nation struggled to modernize its antiquated industrial complex. Through U.S. financial support packages such as the Marshall Plan, a concerted effort was made to rebuild France’s tourist infrastructure in a way that appealed to American tourists. Thus, during this fraught era, when, as one French critic put it, “art is the only religion we have left,” the tenuous provisional government attempted to demonstrate its progressive character by recognizing the patrimonial value of established, perhaps even arrière-garde strands of modernism by means of monuments and museums (e.g., Musée National de l’Art Moderne, 1947). With nearly 6,000 churches under the government’s care either damaged or destroyed during the war, modernists were given ample opportunity to participate in postwar reconstruction.39 Through the efforts of the state and the clergy, churches

39 “Près de 6000 églises sont endomagées en France entre 1939 et 1945: chiffre de la Fédération nationale des groupements d’églises dévastées.” Semaine religieuse de Lille, 7 September 1947, as cited in Céline Frémaux, “Le Symbole ou la Fonction? La reconstruction des églises protégés après la Seconde Guerre mondiale,” in Living with
by well-known modern artists have proliferated across France.\textsuperscript{40}

After World War II, modernists found ample opportunities to create Catholic art because the SMH loosened its famously strict reconstruction policies.\textsuperscript{41} Now, ruined structures or damaged windows could be replaced by new, modern designs (such as Le Corbusier at Ronchamp) instead of replicas.\textsuperscript{42} Established modern artists, including Picasso at the \textit{Temple of War and Peace}, found ample opportunities to create new sites of international art pilgrimage using medieval monuments as their setting.\textsuperscript{43} Because the government even became involved in Church projects beyond the cause of reconstruction, most notably Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Matisse’s Vence Chapel was eligible to receive funding from the government’s Beaux-Arts council.\textsuperscript{44} In so doing, the Sacred Art Movement became an opportunity to create not just a church, but a monument. I therefore highlight the various legal and administrative steps that


\textsuperscript{41} The 1905 Separation of Church and State gave the French State legal possession of any “building of public worship (cathedrals, churches, chapels, temples, synagogues, archbishop’s palaces, bishop’s houses, presbyteries, seminaries)… exhibiting, in whole or in part, artistic or historical value.” Churches became the property of their local commune while the national government took possession over all other religious property. The Third Republic essentially nationalized religious property at a fundamental level. Tsivolas 2014, 36.

\textsuperscript{42} Frémaux 2011, 156–157.

\textsuperscript{43} In 1950, the city of Vallauris gave Pablo Picasso a deconsecrated Romanesque chapel to renovate and paint with floor-to-ceiling murals. Chagall painted several murals for the Calvary Chapel in Vence from 1950–1966, but the panels were given their own space in the Museum of the Biblical Message. Jean Cocteau’s Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem in Fréjus was constructed posthumously in the 1970s. Les Bréseux counted as Alfred Manessier’s first stained-glass window project and would be followed by several others throughout his long lifetime. Georges Braque contributed a stained-glass window featuring a dove to the chapel built by Aimée Maeght on the grounds of the Fondation Maeght, and another of the Tree of Jesse for the twelfth-century church of St. Valéry in Varengeville-sur-Mer (1953). Joan Miró’s abstracted stained glass can be seen in Notre-Dame-de-Senlis. Jacques Villon and Chagall contributed to the cathedral at Metz. In 1953 and 1954, Léger contributed stained glass window designs for the renovated eighteenth-century church at Courfaivre. Since the 1970s, the Fifth Republic has commissioned well-known artists to replace irreparably damaged medieval stained glass with windows of their own design, among them Pierre Soulages (Conques), Maria Helena Vieria da Silva, and Jean-Pierre Raynaud (Noirlac Abbey). \textit{Architecture religieuse au XX siècle: Quel patrimoine} (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), and Christian Heck et al., \textit{Conques: Les Vitraux de Soulages} (Paris: Seuil, 1994).

\textsuperscript{44} As I argue in the third chapter, Matisse was very much in favor of obtaining Beaux-Arts funding because he believed it would increase the Vence Chapel’s potential to be classified as a national monument. No application was ever made, however, due to the nuns’ fears that State ownership would result in their expulsion.
modernists took to obtain national monument status for their churches to argue for the monumental aspirations that prompted their interest in religious space. In his very first meeting about the Vence Chapel, for instance, Matisse said: “The project is interesting in itself. Is it going to be declared a public monument?”45

By considering how the prospect of a tourist audience and possible government-involvement motivated the three sites at the center of the querelle de l’art sacré (Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, the Vence Chapel, and the Temple of War and Peace), this dissertation posits that modernist involvement in the Sacred Art Movement derived from the monumental potential of religious space. As sites that function in expectation of divine encounter, churches facilitate extended contemplation, creating an alternative display to the museum or gallery context, where the viewing experience is often momentary and less deeply reflective. By working within the tradition of the Romanesque, Giotto, Michelangelo, or Bernini, they expected tourists to encounter their work on similar art historical terms. Churches therefore enabled canonical modernists to create an enduring, legally protected statement of their art historical accomplishment in the illustrious tradition of Catholic monumentality. The Sacred Art Movement, I argue, enabled canonical, modern artists to create a monumental religious artwork along the lines of Giotto, Michelangelo, and Bernini, and to claim a similar rank within the art historical canon.

Chapter Outlines
Chapter 1 and 2 Summary

Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce of Assy is widely regarded as the emblem of the Sacred Art Movement and thus the first blow in the Dominicans’ postwar battle against academic

convention. Indeed, the eclectic, rather haphazard character of the church’s decoration has long been seen as a marker of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s revolutionary nature. Father Marie-Alain Couturier, the Dominican co-editor of the journal *L’Art Sacré*, supervised the iconographic program from 1945 until 1950, and during that time, he commissioned artists based on reputation rather than faith and gave them free reign to choose their subjects. The stylistic diversity of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce has thus come to represent the defiance of a status quo both ecclesiastical and political. I challenge that assumption in the first two chapters of this dissertation by arguing that, in its aesthetic dissonance, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce bears formal witness to the thirteen years of political upheaval taking place beyond its walls. My examination of this chronology is therefore spread over two chapters in order to distinguish between the initial conservative phase and liberal postwar phase.

Chapter 1: Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce (Phase I), The New Medieval

In the first chapter, I describe Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as part of a diocesan mission to build churches in high-traffic tourist areas. In its iconographic program, we can see an attempt to appeal to the tastes of Assy’s wealthy population of transient health tourists through modern religious art. Conservative politics informed the church’s development from the very beginning, however. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce would embody the idea of a New Medieval Age, which would see France united as it had been a thousand years before. Clerical commitment to this idea meant that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was complicit with the aesthetic policies of the Nazi-supported Vichy regime.

Chapter 2: Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce (Phase II), Vision of Postwar Collectivity
In this chapter, I examine the memory operation that enabled Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to become a *lieu de mémoire* of clerical resistance in the postwar period. Couturier commissioned artists associated with the *École de Paris*—a once antagonistic label for the ethnic and stylistic diversity of the French modern school—to create the modern counterpart to a Romanesque church. In so doing, he evoked a revised vision of the New Medieval Age: a utopian vision of France that welcomed difference.

Chapter 3: Henri Matisse, The Accidental Medievalist

Between 1947 and 1951, Henri Matisse devoted the whole of his energies to creating the Chapel of the Holy Rosary, a Dominican convent chapel in the Riviera village of Vence. Tucked into a Riviera hillside, this Dominican convent chapel enables tourists from nearby Cannes and Nice to experience his artwork in three dimensions. Warm Riviera sun filters through delicate colored glass and illuminates the black-and-white murals, giving credence to his well-known statement: “I do not paint things. I paint only the differences between things.” The Vence Chapel satisfied Matisse’s long-held desire to create an artwork along the lines of Giotto, but by bringing that relationship to life through stained glass and ceramic tile, he aligns his oeuvre with the nationalistic tradition of the French Romanesque.

In this chapter, I argue that Matisse’s interest in the Sacred Art Movement stemmed from a desire to create a permanent, public (in this case, touristic), protected statement of his art historical accomplishment. Faced with the instability of his oeuvre, and the potential end of the French modernist moment, he was anxious for a permanent measure of visibility. I maintain that the Sacred Art Movement provided Matisse a patrimonial framework that enabled him to execute

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and promote the chapel as an art-historical object as well as an administrative route to becoming an official French historic monument.

Chapter 4: Pablo Picasso, Modernism’s “Sorcerer”

Pablo Picasso’s *Temple of War and Peace* in Vallauris (1950–59) seemed to be an act of rebellion, a rejection of the Gaullist government, restrictive Communist aesthetic policies, and, above all, his peers’ involvement in the Sacred Art Movement. Pablo Picasso considered it a political, if not a moral betrayal for non-religious and Communist modernists to be involved in Catholic art projects. In a cheeky riposte to the light-filled Dominican convent chapel that earned Matisse the title of “Modernism’s Pope,” Picasso transformed a deconsecrated Romanesque chapel in his adopted village of Vallauris into a dark primeval grotto, where larger-than-life figures sprawl across the barrel-vaulted ceiling like the cave paintings of Altamira or Lascaux. But the *Temple of War and Peace* is perhaps best remembered as an expression of his “sorcerer”-like abilities. Even though he finished the murals in 1954, he kept the space closed until 1959 in an apparent attempt to harness their talismanic power. When it finally did open, however, it was as the Musée National Picasso *La Guerre et la Paix*.

In this chapter, I examine the institutional reality behind the *Temple of War and Peace* commission to suggest that Picasso shared his peers’ desire for spiritual and art historical validation. Contrary to popular belief, the *Temple of War and Peace* was part of a nearly decade-long initiative to create a pottery museum in Vallauris. I therefore consider how Picasso used the inevitable delays that emerge from modifying a valuable site of French patrimony to build a legend around the work: a legend that would solidify his reputation as “modernism’s sorcerer.”
Introduction Figures


Figure 2. Henri Matisse, La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–1951. Vence, France.
Figure 3. L’Eglise du Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt, 1949–1951. Audincourt, France.

Figure 4. Le Corbusier, Notre-Dame du Haut, 1955. Ronchamp, France.
Figure 5. Le Corbusier, La Tourette, 1953–1961. Éveux, France.

Figure 6. Germaine Richier, *Christ*, 1949.
Chapter 1: Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce (Phase I), The New Medieval Age

The emblem of the Sacred Art Movement, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce of Assy can be found nestled in the remote French foothills of Mont Blanc (1937–1950; figure 1.1). Designed in 1937 by Maurice Novarina, this somewhat standard example of Alpine neo-regionalism suggests no ambition toward becoming one of the twentieth century’s most controversial churches. The eaves of its A-frame edifice reach toward the earth, while a soaring bell tower mirrors the lofty mountainside on the left. With its roughly hewn gray stone exterior, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was built to appear as though it has emerged from the mountain slowly and organcially like a rough stone outcropping. However, this architectural metaphor for the solidity and endurance of the Catholic Church is disrupted by Fernand Léger’s brightly colored façade mosaic. Léger’s mosaic has long marked a dramatic shift in Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s development; one that would see the French clergy favor artists of “talent” over artists of “faith.” I argue, however, that a more complete understanding of the church’s development would reveal that the incongruity between the architecture and Léger’s mosaic speaks more to a shift in modernist attitudes towards religious art than it does a clerical revolution.

Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce is the most powerful lieu de mémoire, or site of shared memory, of the Sacred Art Movement, and more particularly, of Father Marie-Alain Couturier’s struggle against the Vatican. Couturier, the Dominican figurehead of the Sacred Art Movement, directed Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s decorative program from 1939 until his death in 1954. Some even believe that his excommunication resulted from the scandals surrounding a crucifix he commissioned from Germaine Richier (figure 1.2). Because the story of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce has become an expression of Couturier’s hagiography, our understanding of its development is often conflated with his “evolving” theories of modern art.
The mythic tale of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce begins in 1939. The church was, at that point, something of a blank canvas because construction on the structure was not yet complete. Couturier, however, left on a lecture tour of the United States and found himself unable to return when Germany invaded France. As a result, work on Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce stalled while Couturier spent the next six years abroad, working for the stateside resistance and making connections with well-known artists. In that time, his thinking about religious art underwent a profound change. Prior to the war, he was only willing to commission artists of faith, but now it seemed that to rekindle the long tradition of great Catholic patronage, he would need to commission religious artworks by modern masters, regardless of their faith, political persuasion, or even style.

With contributions by artists of various religions and stylistic tendencies, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s rather eclectic interior still recalls Couturier’s resistance against the Vatican’s dogmatic aesthetic policies (figure 1.3). Jean Lurçat’s *Apocalypse* tapestry dominates the upper apse (figure 1.4). This sea of deep forest green and burgundy tones punctuated by gold hybrid monsters overwhelms the two side-altars below. On the left, Henri Matisse’s faceless *St. Dominic* altarpiece is depicted with spare black lines against a vibrant ochre background (figure 1.5). Inset with a bronze tabernacle by Georges Braque (figure 1.6), it stands bold contrast to the soft pastels of Pierre Bonnard’s *St. Francis de Sales* (figure 1.7). Further stylistic disjunction can be found in the assemblage of stained-glass windows. On the façade, Georges Rouault’s grim figuration (figure 1.8) stands in juxtaposition to Jean Bazaine’s second-generation cubist style (figure 1.9), while more conservative designs by artists trained in Maurice Denis’ Ateliers de l’Art Sacré line the walls of the nave (figure 1.10 and 1.11). Meanwhile, Jacques Lipchitz’ bulbous *Notre-Dame de Liesse* flanks the interior side of the entrance (figure 1.12). And in a
separate, white-walled room just to the side of the entrance is a baptistery with Marc Chagall’s sapphire-toned frescoes and mosaics (figure 1.13).

Stylistic dissonance at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce has come to represent the defiance of a status quo both aesthetic and political.⁴⁷ In his definitive study of the church, William Rubin describes Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as a “practical laboratory in which to experiment with the new theories of ecclesiastical art being explored by the Dominicans in L’Art Sacré.”⁴⁸ Likewise, Jean Cassou, director of the Musée Nationale d’Art Moderne in Paris, defended its “uneven” results: “Are not the great monuments filled with incongruities? .... [an] era must run the risk if it wishes to merit the label ‘civilization,’ and ours must too.”⁴⁹

The group of artists represented at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce is indeed remarkable to find outside the walls of a museum, let alone a church in this remote, Alpine region. Current scholarly understanding of its development, however, overlooks several key facts. Work on the church did not cease during the war because Couturier was not the only priest directing the iconographic program. Moreover, as Françoise Caussé argues, the priests behind Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce actually began to embrace the prospect of non-religious artists creating Catholic art prior to the war. And yet, even the deeply religious Georges Rouault would refuse a commission until 1945. By recovering a precise chronology behind the church’s development, we can come to a better understanding of how World War II generated modernist interest in religious art projects. My examination of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce will therefore take place over the next two chapters.

⁴⁷ The correlation between revolution and dissonance emerged with the controversy. Rubin also echoed this sentiment in 1961: “Esthetically less perfect a whole than the subsequent Matisse chapel at Vence or the Corbusier church at Ronchamp, the church at Assy was nevertheless the first and by far the most ambitious of those sponsored by the Dominican-led Sacred Art Movement.” Rubin 1961, 2.
⁴⁹ Cassou 1951, 57.
In this chapter, I argue that the interior dissonance at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce tells another story beyond that of the defiance of the status quo; through it a story unfolds about a new resort village and a church that became increasingly vital to sustaining the region’s tourist-based economy. In the 1920s, the Plateau d’Assy became home to the nation’s most innovative tuberculosis treatment centers, prompting an expansion from fewer than two dozen farm-based inhabitants to almost five thousand extended-stay residents within the span of a decade. Assy’s prominence as one of France’s premier health destinations continued well into the 1960s. I argue that a broad understanding of the laity as a dislocated population of wealthy, urban *malades* with advanced aesthetic tastes made Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce a site of highly conceptual aesthetic experimentation from the start. Consequently, this first phase of the church’s development complicates the conventional assumption that the clergy did not embrace modern art until the postwar period.

This phase also challenges our understanding of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as a site of liberal, clerical resistance. This church, I argue, was part of a conservative pastoral mission where modernism was used to appeal to the transient population of urban “neo-pagans.” Through the harmonious collaboration between architect and artists, the church would reflect conservative aspirations for a *nouveau moyen âge*, or a “new medieval age,” that would see France united under the Catholic faith as it had been a thousand years before. This idea was a key component of Catholic Personalist philosophy, and it inspired many in the French clergy to become early supporters of the Vichy regime. I therefore explore the possibility that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce may have been a site of Vichy-era complicity, if not a site of collaboration. In so doing, we can better understand why Catholic art projects remained a fraught prospect amongst modernists after World War II.
The New Village of Assy

Assy is a small hamlet located on the Plateau d’Assy, high up in the Sallanches Mountains. This area was famous for its “good air.” Air so good, in fact, that in the heyday of tuberculosis treatment (1920s–1960s), the neighboring village of Passy became home to the most innovative sanatoriums in France. As La France Active reported in 1933, “The village-sanatoriums of Passy, in Haute-Savoie, can be cited as the most modern and best organized.”

Assy officially came into being in April 1930 when Passy was designated an official Station de Cure, or climate cure center. The government designated Assy as a tourist zone, a contamination-free area that could accommodate health and nature tourists as well as employees from the neighboring sanatoria. In this section, I suggest that Assy’s tourist-based economy prompted Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to become a site of aesthetic experimentation from the beginning. To that end, I describe Assy’s tourist identity derived from its geographical situation as a transitional space between the neighboring sanatoria and nearby Alpine ski resorts.

For centuries, the Plateau d’Assy was home to no more than a few dozen inhabitants. Too high in altitude for farming, but too low to accommodate ski slopes, Passy finally found its calling in the 1920s, when France declared tuberculosis a national health emergency. Rates of the disease, already amongst Europe’s highest, spiked during World War I. As a representative from the American Red Cross reported in 1917: “…if the war were to end now, there would be between 400,000 and 500,000 cases of tuberculosis to be cared for, and practically no facilities to

51 For instance, Rubin refers to Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy, but Françoise Caussé—as well as the local tourist board—describes it as Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Passy. The village began to disappear from maps beginning in the 1970s. Because Assy’s existence is inextricably tied to that of Passy, sanatorial patients are by and large portrayed as Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s audience. Caussé briefly corrects this view by noting that Passy was the fourth-largest agglomeration in Haute-Savoie. Caussé 2010, 311–312.
deal with them.” French sanatoria were rare and, due to the high cost of transportation, Swiss and German Alpine sanatoria tended to be the reserve of the wealthy. The outbreak compelled the Mission Rockefeller to act. With the promise of matching funds, the Mission Rockefeller—an offshoot of the Rockefeller Foundation dedicated to eradicating tuberculosis—successfully lobbied the government to provide a national system of sanatoria, rural dispensaries, and research centers. And it selected Passy as the site for an experimental model of tuberculosis care called the village-sanatorium. Its dry desert air and protection from snow and the northern wind seemed to provide the optimal environmental conditions for halting the spread of the disease. The Mission Rockefeller had envisaged not one but several sanatoria for Passy, and to that end, it began an independent village-sanatorium association to execute those plans and foster subsequent growth.

The Mission Rockefeller’s influence helped to make modernism something of an indigenous architectural grammar. Its village-sanatorium was modeled upon the egalitarian American sanatorium. Swiss and German models grouped patients according to their religion, income, and/or social rank, but American sanatorial wards were organized by gender and disease severity to reduce promiscuity and the spread of the disease. In other words, the American sanatorium was a microcosm of society. Patients from various social classes mixed in common rooms, dining halls, and the non-denominational chapel. Those egalitarian values are visible in the architecture of Passy’s sanatoria as well (figure 1.14). With little there in the way of a built environment in Passy, the Mission Rockefeller was free to build structures in a modern style. Pol Abraham and Henri-Jacques Le Même were the primary architects behind Passy’s sanatoria,

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53 The Mission Rockefeller made it policy for sanatoria to be built in the local architectural grammar to reinforce their accessibility. Paul Overy, Light, Air & Openness: Modern Architecture Between the Wars (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 20.
and their designs appealed to the spirituality, cleanliness, utopian vision, and social commitment that already characterized architectural modernism in interwar Europe. In particular, their structures demonstrate the substantive influence of Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*, an architectural model for a new, modern society that stemmed from the notion that mediated encounter with light and nature could counteract the unhygienic conditions of the urban environment. The modern architecture of Passy’s sanatoria functioned as a visual metaphor for the innovative medicine practiced inside (figure 1.15).

Not everyone in Haute-Savoie welcomed the sanatoria. Tourism functioned as “one of the two pillars of the Alpine economy,” and many feared that that the threat of contamination would alienate their well-heeled clientele. The Mission Rockefeller, in keeping with their egalitarian ideology, intended Passy’s sanatoria to serve the urban lower class, which had been hardest hit by the disease. It promised to subsidize the cost of care, lodging, and even transportation to ensure that treatment in Passy would cost no more than that of a regional sanatorium. After numerous hearings, the sanatoria were allowed to proceed, in part because the *village-sanatorium* association argued that visitors to the afflicted would bring in additional tourist revenue:

As for believing that the establishment of Plaine-Joux will frighten the tourists and cause them to desert our stations, bringing them ruin, our good hoteliers should be reassured.

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54 Paul Overy writes: “The aim of the sanatorium movement was to demonstrate that the human body could be rested, relaxed, and returned to health and potency through a period of separation from the unhygienic living conditions of much urban and rural life and exposure to fresh air and sunlight.” Ibid., 22.
57 Rendu 1933, 96.
They will lose some bacillary clients, but will gain the non-contagious clientele of family members of the sick.58

With twenty sanatoria built in Passy between 1923 and 1938, the predicted boost in regional tourism proved true. However, growth came at the cost of the Mission Rockefeller’s progressive concept. Travel to the Alps, even when subsidized, was prohibitively expensive. And by the late 1920s, Passy’s sanatoria shifted their focus to a wealthier demographic. The first village-sanatorium, Praz-Coutant, added expensive communal villas in 1928. Three neighboring facilities quickly followed suit. Then, in 1931, Sancellemoz became the first sanatorium to be constructed specifically for an elite clientele (figure 1.16).

Assy was an expected, and to a certain extent, planned product of that growth. The village was originally intended to provide family and worker accommodations, but with the influx of wealthy health tourists to Passy, it became something of a health resort instead. Suffering urbanites from Paris and Lyon flocked to Assy to take advantage of its numerous preventatoria, maisons de cure, and specialty health clinics (figure 1.17). Some even made it their secondary residence. Assy’s distinct status was solidified in April 1930, when the French government officially recognized the Passy as a station de cure and designated Assy as the tourist zone.59

To sustain the interest of a wealthier clientele, Passy’s village-sanatorium association founded le Syndicat d’Intérêt Local du Plateau d’Assy in 1934. Its purpose was to “make our visitors stay more profitable, more comfortable, and to create the most effective advertising.”60

58 Conseil Général de la Haute-Savoie, Rapports et Délégérations et Procès-Verbaux des Séances, Première Session Ordinaire de 1923 (25 April 1923), 328.
To that end, the Syndicat created programs to attract tourists from outside the region and abroad (free stays in local health hotels, ski passes, railway tickets). The director of Passy’s sanatorial association justified these expenditures thusly:

Assy counted, in 1925, about a dozen inhabitants for about ten houses; now, more than 1800 people are staying on the plateau, divided between 20 new buildings, the whole costing nearly 150 million. This progress can only be accentuated by the acquired workforce, but it must be remembered that hasty growth requires a great deal of care. If the inhabitants of Assy now enjoy greater material comfort than before, a more active trade, and a considerable increase in the value of the land, it must not be forgotten that this will only last if our clientele, attracted by the value of our doctors, are pleased by their stay.61

In short, a well-rounded tourist experience, replete with resort accommodations and cultural events, was essential to sustaining Assy’s growth. The Syndicat d’Initiatives de Passy (Passy Office of Tourism) likewise worked to bolster the town’s cultural reputation by staging plays, poetry readings, scholarly lectures, and even a weaponry demonstration by a Native American Indian chief.62 As I show next, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was part of this larger plan to transform Assy into a world-class health resort.

Assy’s New Church

In 1929, Canon Jean Devémy (1896–1891) arrived in Assy from a sanatorium in the Puy-de-Dôme. A tuberculosis survivor himself, he was now entrusted with the “spiritual life” of both

61 “Assy comptait, en 1925, quelques dizaines d'habitants pour une dizaine de maisons; maintenant, plus de 1800 personnes séjournent sur les plateaux, réparties entre 20 bâtiments neufs, dont l’ensemble a coûté près de 150 millions. Cette progression ascendante ne peut aller que s’accen
tuant par la force acquise, mais il faut se rappeler que les croissances hâtives demandent beaucoup de soins. Si les habitants d’Assy bénéficient déjà d’un confort matériel plus grand qu’autrefois, d’un commerce plus actif, d’une plus-value des terrains considérables, il ne faut pas oublier que cela ne pourra durer que si nos hôtes, attirés par la valeur de nos médecins, trouvent sur le plateau un séjour qui leur plaise et qui continue à leur plaire pendant tout leur séjour.” Maurice Piraud, “Le Syndicat D’initiative De Passy,” Cahiers du plateau (April 1936): n.p.
the wealthy Sancellemoz sanatorium and the village of Assy. He was given that role by his former doctor, François Tobé: founder of the Sancellemoz and prominent member of Passy’s village-sanatorium association. Strangely, Assy was still in its nascent state in 1929; in fact, he would not ask the Bishop of Annecy for permission to build a church for another five years.

Details about Devémy’s life are sketchy, but little suggests that he was in any way suited to building a new church in Assy. He would later profess to having no knowledge of art whatsoever. Of course, it was as common then, as it is now, for priests with no art training to oversee the construction of a new parish church. Devémy, however, seems to have compensated by relying upon the tastes of the deeply conservative Bishop of Annecy, Florent de la Villerabel. As I demonstrate in this section, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce belongs to a larger collaborative effort by the clergy and commercial sector to build churches in high-traffic tourist areas of the Alps. This initiative fomented an active modern art and architecture dialogue in Haute-Savoie that we can use to understand the conservative cadence of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s initial development.

Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and Alpine Neo-Pagans

The lines of the A-frame, while modern and unadorned, slope gently down to ground the church into its surroundings. Meanwhile, the bell tower on the right mirrors and balances the

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63 This opinion was not shared by Passy’s anti-clerical mayor. Devémy recounted a conversation Tobé overheard in the mid 1920s between Passy’s mayor and Camille Chautemps: the Popular Front minister who nationalized the French railroad system to promote tourism. The mayor was pointing to the Plateau d’Assy and describing his plans for future projects when Chautemps interrupted: “Vous verrez, cher monsieur le maire, ils vous foutront une église!” Isabelle Lafet-Cartier and Ladislas Kijno, eds., Le Chanoine Devémy et ses amis parlent de l’Eglise d’Assy (Lyon: Imprimerie Lescuyer, 1985), 5.

64 As a tuberculosis survivor, however, he had come to know the right people. He contracted the disease while in seminary and was sent to the Durtol sanatorium in the Puy-de-Dôme in 1921. After he recovered, his doctor, François Tobé, asked him to stay on as chaplain. The two formed a bond, and when Tobé founded Sancellemoz in 1929, Devémy accompanied him. Tobé, it should be noted, was a prominent specialist in tuberculosis care, and was already on the board of Passy’s village-sanatorium association. Christian Sorrel, “Jean Devémy,” in Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine, ed. Jean-Marie Mayeur and Yves-Marie Hilaire (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 162.
steep mountain slope on the left, preventing the church from completely blending into the
mountain panorama. The negotiation between nature and the man-made, tradition and modernity,
enables Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to suggest a long-standing Catholic presence in a town that
only came into existence a mere decade before.

Neo-regionalist architecture places Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce firmly within the Bishop
of Annecy’s church-building initiative. Today, the deeply conservative Florent de la Villerabel
(1877–1951) is most remembered for being one of the few French bishops to be successfully
tried as a collaborationist after World War II. But before that, he was widely admired for his
expansive church-building initiative. His pastoral mission had distinct political aims. Three years
after assuming the miter in 1922, Villerabel restructured the diocese so that new churches would
be built in small, working-class communities where the Communist Party had recently come to
power.65 The architecture of Chedde’s Église St. Joseph (1929–1934; figure 1.18) is indicative of
the political drive behind Villerable’s initiative. Built in an austere neo-Romanesque style, it is an
imposing reminder of Catholicism’s authority and historical endurance.

Bishop Villerabel’s initiative also encompassed Alpine resort areas, in part because he
was encouraged to do so by Pope Pius XI. In 1923, Pius published a treatise called the Scritti
Alpinistici in which he praised Alpine sports for their benefits to the spirit and body. Not long
after, he sent Bishop Villerabel a letter urging him to consider winter sports as a pastoral
initiative: “In contemplating the immensities and the splendors that one discovers on the Alpine
summits, the soul lifts without pain towards God, author and lord of nature.”66 In other words,

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Lumi è re Lyon 2, 2009).

66 “À contempler les immensités et les splendeurs que l’on découvre des sommets alpins, l’âme s’élève sans peine
vers Dieu, auteur et seigneur de la nature.” Christian Sorrel, “Une nouvelle montagne sacrée? Catholicisme,
tourisme et sports d’hiver en Savoie au XXe siècle,” in Montagnes sacrées d’Europe: actes du colloque “Religion et
Alpine sports offered an immersive, meditative experience of God through nature. This idea appealed to Villerabel, who frequently complained about the influx of “neo-pagans” who chose sport over Sunday Mass.

Thus, when Devémy initially proposed building a church in tourist-centric Assy in May 1934, he was entirely confident that the Bishop would approve. At that point, he could have justified the need for a church by citing the village’s rapid growth. Assy’s population had just increased to 6,000 permanent and part-time residents, while its residential clinics, often referred to as “health hotels,” could accommodate an additional 2,000. As a 1941 article from the La Croix newspaper observes, the need for a new church derived from Assy’s tourist population:

The mountain-based inhabitants of the capital already have their church, the workers of Chedde formed another parish in the valley, and the patients of Praz-Coutant have constructed a little gem of a chapel and are served by their chaplains at the summit. There lacks, however, a real church and parish for the city of Assy, which has gradually emerged from the earth with her stores, her hotels, and villas, a thousand meters of altitude from the sanas of Assy and of Sancellemoz.

The Assy described in this passage is a bustling tourist center with stores, hotels, and villas. It is therefore distinguished from the neighboring sanatoria and the blue-collar modalities of Chedde not only by geography, but by socio-economic factors as well. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce would reach the growing number of urban bourgeois who came to Assy for health and, indeed, spiritual respite. But while Devémy describes the Archbishop as enthusiastic, the plan was not

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69 “Les montagnards du chef-lieu avaient déjà leur église, les ouvriers de Chedde formaient une autre paroisse dans la vallée et pour les malades de Pratz-Coutant un bijou de petite chapelle desservie par leur aumôniers avait été construite tout au sommet. Il manquait cependant une véritable église et une véritable paroisse pour la cité d’Assy, peu à peu sortie de terre avec ses magasins, ses hotels et ses villas à mille mètres d’altitude des sanas d’Assy et de Sancellemoz.” Assy was also the name of a sanatorium. “Une Nouvelle ‘Paroisse des Malades’: Notre-Dame-de-Toute-Grâce du Plateau d’Assy (Haute-Savoie),” La Croix (19 October 1941): 4.
approved until 1937: just a year after the village became the newest stop on the Col d’Iseran. At that point, the Bishop not only approved the parish, he also helped to purchase the land.

Villerabel’s reversal can be attributed to a shift in priorities following the Popular Front government’s passage of the congés payés. According to Yves Tyl, this legal guarantee of two week’s annual paid vacation was intended to support “social tourism” amongst the urban middle-class. The Popular Front government believed that an annual dose of outdoor exercise, country air, and contact with la France profonde would produce more dutiful citizens. Villerabel disagreed. He claimed that the congés payés encouraged material decadence. In private, however, he seems more concerned by the class of visitor that the congés payés might bring. He complained that the Alps would be infiltrated by the “less good…the teachers, the postal workers, the holiday-makers, all the Popular Front, [it is a] sad world not only from a religious and moral point of view, but also a behavioral one as well.”

Indeed, to facilitate domestic travel for the urban middle-class, considerable investments were made in domestic infrastructure, including a system of new highway routes that facilitated travel. Haute-Savoie was a particular focus of this effort because it was already an established resort area. In the mid-1930s, work began on the first trans-Alpine highway, the Col d’Iseran autoroute. The Col d’Iseran enabled the middle-class to reach areas of the Alps that tended to be the sole province of the wealthy because they were accessible only by train. The congés payés thus prompted Villerabel to intensify his church-building initiative in high-traffic tourist areas. New churches, it seemed, would ensure that this new, lower class of visitor would

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70 Social tourism is a form of domestic tourism that encourages citizens to discover and connect with their own country.
71 Tyl 1990, 120.
72 “moins bonne…instituteurs, des postiers, des congés payés, tous Front populaire, triste monde non seulement au point du vue religieux et moral, mais aussi tenue.” Sorrel 2005, 369.
not skimp on their religious obligations. As the officiating priest said when he laid the first stone of Iseran’s Notre-Dame de Toute-Prudence in 1937: “No one can say that they missed Mass because they couldn’t find one.”73

Surprisingly, given his objections to the influx of neo-pagans, Villerabel’s pastoral mission quickly found a partner in the commercial sector. A church, it would seem, was essential to imbue a new, tourist-centric village with a sense of authenticity.74 For instance, the church in the Alpine village of Le Fayet was founded after Villerabel received complaints that the continuing absence of a church would “gravely compromise” the town’s hotel industry.75 In return for his blessing, Villerabel received the commercial support necessary to build churches in towns where anti-clerical sentiment ran high. He therefore gave the Marquis de Blissy, president of France’s Automobile Club and financier of the Col d’Iseran, a seat on the diocesan art and architecture committee in order to ensure his continued support. As a result, Blissy found an opportunity to build churches in areas where he had a distinct financial interest.

Blissy may have been the deciding factor in Villerabel’s decision to build Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, because his enthusiasm for the project intensified in 1937: one year after Assy became the newest stop on the Col d’Iseran. The village was selected because it promised one of the most picturesque views of Mont Blanc in France. In fact, a decade later, just after the war ended, the village took legal steps to register its mountain vista as a historic monument, arguing that the view was vital to the local tourist industry.76 Contemporary tourist guides now lauded the health and spiritual benefits of a hike in Assy. Le Touring Club de France highlighted the village

73 “Personne ne pourra dire qu’il a manqué la messe parce qu’il ne l’a pas rencontrée.” Mgr. Grumel, quote from speech given at 1937 groundbreaking of Notre-Dame-de-Toute-Prudence in Maurienne. Quoted in ibid., 374.
74 Ibid., 369.
75 Quoted in Deloche 2009, 299.
76 A 1946 lawsuit attempted to classify the area with the Service des Monuments Historiques, thereby preventing any new construction from blocking the view.
in the October 1936 issue of its magazine, *L’Escargot*. Assy is described as a place of natural beauty with “glacial” waters, trails of varying difficulty, and friendly wildlife. The author regales readers with a story of a lively mountain-side picnic interrupted by a tribe of curious goats: “…in the mountains, the tradition is to share food with hungry newcomers. We therefore share our food with these animals, who seem enchanted by the manna that rises from the valley.”\(^{77}\) The mystical quality of Assy’s landscape was also palpable to Edith Thomas, the author of the syndicated tourism column, “Connaître la France”. Thomas recalls a hike on the Plateau d’Assy where she met social tourists, Catholic clergy, and families of sanatorium patients in equal measure. She writes that the encounter with “tourists of life” and “tourists of death” amplified the spiritual nature of her experience.\(^ {78}\)

Because of the autoroute, Assy was becoming increasingly popular amongst the very neo-pagans that caused Villerabel concern. Thus, the appeal of building a church in Assy increased when the population expanded to include those who sought spiritual sustenance from the landscape, rather than from the church. Indeed, not only did he approve the parish, he also helped to purchase the land.

We can see this attempt to capitalize upon the landscape’s transcendent potential in the architecture of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Its neo-regionalist architecture stands in dramatic the juxtaposition between the church and the daring modernism of Passy’s sanatoria that loom in the near distance (figure 1.19). As I noted above, Passy’s sanatoria were built in the International Style in order to assert the Mission Rockefeller’s modern, egalitarian values. Notre-Dame de

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Toute-Grâce, by contrast, represents an attempt to negotiate between modernity and tradition.

The sense of incongruity did not go unnoticed. A 1944 article from *Le Matin* observed:

> Assy is a brand new town. So new that even a little while ago it did not yet have a church. But it was a delicate problem to give a church to this modern city—whose architecture is the spiritual daughter of Le Corbusier. In the midst of this new world of white cubes, a church with a Romanesque nave or a Gothic aisle is a disagreeable anachronism.\(^{79}\)

But such was the intent behind Villerabel’s church-building initiative. Indeed, when Devémy held a contest to decide an architect in 1937, his choice of Maurice Novarina was probably a foregone conclusion. Novarina had only recently completed an apprenticeship with the well-known architect Auguste Perret, but he had already designed two churches funded by the Marquis de Blissy: Notre-Dame des Neiges of La Féclaz and Notre-Dame-de-Toute-Prudence of Iseran. Both churches feature a generic brand of Alpine neo-regionalism frequently employed at the region’s newest ski resorts. According to Jean-Paul Brusson, this architectural grammar was intended to lend villages “a certain sustainability, a certain continuity, a certain [sense] of duration…”\(^{80}\) In fact, Novarina’s proposal for Notre-Dame des Alpes in Le Fayet (figure 1.20) was chosen over that of a more established architect for that very reason. The diocesan art and architecture committee wrote that his design “presents a happy homogeneity of modern architecture” and harmonizes “very well with the local context.”\(^{81}\)

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\(^{79}\) “Assy est une petite ville toute neuve. Tellement neuve même qu’il y a peu de temps elle ne possédait pas encore d’église. Mais c’était un problème délicat que de doter d’une église cette cité moderne dont l’architecture est fille spirituelle de Le Corbusier. Une nef romane ou un vaisseau gothique au milieu de ces cubes blancs d’un nouveau monde eût été un fâcheux anachronisme.” Bouvier 1944, 1.


Because Novarina’s churches found favor with the Bishop, Devémy went forward with Novarina despite his own reservations about the architect’s skill. He said, “I was impressed by the church at Fayet, despite certain imperfections...”82 Nevertheless, Devémy instructed Novarina to create “a traditional church, inspired by traditional savoyard chalets, stocky, protected, wrapped in roofs that overflow everywhere.”83 The exterior, he said, should “blend well with the landscape.”84 Achieving this effect was expensive. The stone needed to be imported from several miles away and proved extremely difficult to mine.85 To go to such lengths to ensure the construction of Novarina’s neo-regionalist design in an emphatically modernist architectural milieu situates Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce firmly within Villerabel’s conservative pastoral agenda. In the next section, we will consider how those complexities manifest themselves in the first phase of the church’s development.

Prewar Conservatism

Construction on Assy’s new church began in May 1938. Work progressed with a sense of urgency, as the prospect of another war became more likely. Even though the church was nowhere near complete, Novarina suggested that artists should be commissioned quickly, so that the stained glass could be installed as soon as the walls were erected. But Devémy hesitated. As someone with little art historical education or knowledge of contemporary modern art, he preferred to rely upon the judgment of others. Novarina proposed calling upon the Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice, the same artistic collective that he had hired to decorate Notre-Dame-des-

82 “L’église du Fayet m’avait impressionné malgré certains défauts, certaines erreurs que je suis enfin arrivé à faire admettre à Novarina, mais les vitraux de Cingria étaient très beaux.” Lafet-Cartier and Kijno, 1985, 6.
83 “…une église traditionnelle, s’inspirant des chalets typiquement savoyards, trappus, enveloppés dans leurs toits débordants partout, protégés.” Ibid.
84 “…cadrant bien avec le paysage.” Ibid.
85 Initially, Novarina suggested that rock remaining from excavating the church’s foundation could be incorporated into the façade. However, the mayor’s office demanded that the parish pay to use the excavated material. Ibid.
Devémy quickly supported the idea. Despite “certain errors” by Novarina, he was impressed by Notre-Dame-des-Alpes because “Cingria’s windows were quite beautiful.” In fact, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce may well have become a close approximation of Notre-Dame-des-Alpes had illness and war not prevented Alexandre Cingria from undertaking the stained glass. This initial attempt to create another Notre-Dame-des-Alpes is deeply revealing of Devémy and Villerabel’s political and religious ideology. Notre-Dame-des-Alpes embodied Cingria’s Catholic Personalist vision of a “New Medieval Age,” which would see France spiritually united as it had been a thousand years before. While Personalists ostensibly tried to chart an alternative or “third road” between liberal capitalism and National Socialism, its emphasis on populism allied its adherents closely with Philippe Pétain’s National Revolution and the Vichy régime.

In this section, I explore Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s initial development by placing it within the context of Haute-Savoie’s emerging religious art dialogue. I argue that the surprising presence of modern sacred art in Villerabel’s churches speaks to the extent to which the Catholic right adopted a counterculture stance in order to articulate their opposition to mainstream Third Republic culture. This background, I suggest, is essential to understanding what the church represented during the war, and how it garnered its postwar momentum so quickly after Liberation.

“Modern” Sacred Art in the 1930s

The idea of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as an expression of right-wing ideology is somewhat difficult to reconcile with its standing as a lieu de mémoire of Couturier’s “avant-garde” struggle; therefore, before delving into this issue, let us first briefly address how the

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86 Caussé 2010, 312.
church accrued that reputation. In the postwar period, Couturier often defended the church by juxtaposing modern art with academicism and the kitsch, over-sentimentalized religious art produced in the factories surrounding St. Sulpice in Paris. In doing so, he suggested that the politicized set of aesthetic codes that governed Catholic art in the nineteenth century were still active. According to Michael Paul Driskel, the binary between modernism and academicism spoke to the division between Gallicans and Ultramontanists. Ultramontanists—French Catholics who looked “beyond the Alps” to the authority of the Pope—tended to favor academic art. Images that were clear, didactic, and hieratic did not prompt the laity to question ecclesiastical authority. By contrast, Gallicans—French Catholics who insisted upon the autonomy and authority of the Gallican Church—tended to favor modernism because it challenges viewers, prompting them to consider the larger theological implications of the image. Therefore, by calling upon this binary in his defense of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Couturier imbued the church with a nationalistic and liberal cadence.

Like any firebrand, Couturier oversimplified the situation in order to garner support for his cause. Of course, “modern” Catholic art in the late 1930s was at a far remove from its secular counterpart. The artworks produced by Catholic art’s “avant-garde,” which included Alexandre Cingria’s *Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice*, Valentine Reyre, and Marguerite Huré, were, at best, an academicized form of fauvism and cubism. Significantly, however, as Isabelle Saint-Martin rightly asserts, the politicized division between modern and academic began to dissipate in the twentieth century. She writes: “Without a doubt, this purist [aesthetic] line remains a

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reference, but one cannot understand the complexity of these Catholic positions by aligning them too closely to political parallels.”88 Indeed, by the late 1920s, and certainly by the late 1930s, the Catholic right embraced not only modern religious art, but also the prospect of Catholic artworks by non-religious artists. Surprisingly, Villerabel, Devémy, and even Couturier each fall into that category.

The most important political force behind the conservative clergy’s adoption of modernism was the Action Française, a far-right political party that responded to the perceived individualistic decadence of the Third Republic by espousing a return to the Middle Ages and restoration of the French monarchy. For them, the Middle Ages represented a harmonious feudal society where France was united under a single faith.

This idea was by no means new; in fact, nationalistic medievalism prompted Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières’ to begin the religious art collective, the Ateliers d’Art Sacré, in 1919, with an aim “to supply churches with religious works which are at once aesthetic, traditional, and modern.”89 Denis was a market-proven modern artist and devout Catholic who sought to bridge the gap with mainstream art movements. But this mission did not stem from a liberal notion of progress. Like other Catholic conservatives, Denis looked to the medieval cathedral as a symbol of a harmonious feudal society built upon Catholic values, a metaphor for a feudal synthesis of art, life, and faith. For him, the easel painting was a product of Renaissance-era individualism. Students in the Ateliers were apprenticed in artisanal crafts—stained glass, sculpture, and fresco—with the goal of reviving the medieval tradition, and more specifically,

88 “Sans doute la ligne puriste reste-t-elle une référence, mais on s’interdirait de comprendre la complexité des positions catholiques en les alignant trop strictement sur des parallèles politiques.” Saint-Martin 2014, 147.
the Christian Gesamtkunstwerk, or “total work of art.” For that reason, Françoise Caussé describes as the Ateliers d’Art Sacré as “bathed” in the Action Française.

Denis took his cue from the dominant mode of Third Republic art history. For him, modernism’s formal affinities with the Romanesque spoke to an enduring and resonant French tradition. Consequently, most fin-de-siècle histories of art begin their chronology in the medieval period and end in the modern. As Charles Blanc claimed, “Our art had existed for a long time when the Renaissance rang out.” Denis reinforced this view, although he rooted the tradition in the Byzantine: “Byzantine art, properly speaking, ended with Cimabue, but its influence extended throughout the Middle Ages and the symbolist idea that it propagated remains imprinted in all truly modern art.” Abstraction was therefore suited to expressing Christian themes because it related to the medieval search for spirituality through form. Indeed, for Denis, modern sacred art possessed the very real power to “open a path to the spirit” much like its medieval counterpart. And it was hoped that such art could be a viable avenue to making Catholicism an essential part of French society once again.

In addition to fomenting a taste for modern art amongst the clergy, the Ateliers d’Art Sacré created an entire generation of modern religious artist committed to bridging the gap with secular art. But by the 1920s, many of these artists—including Couturier, the Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice, Huré, and Reyre—had formed their own avant-garde. It is worth repeating

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90 Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin-de-siècle France (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 54.
94 Driskel 1992, 237.
again that their artworks would not be considered “avant-garde” in secular art circles. Their avant-garde posture derived instead from their rejection of the Ateliers, which they perceived as no better than the mass-produced art of St. Sulpice.

Alexandre Cingria of the Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice exemplified this attitude. Cingria was a Swiss artist who, according to the poet Paul Claudel, had overcome the “divorce between faith and the power of the imagination.” He came away from the Ateliers d’Art Sacré believing that the Ateliers had not bridged the gap with mainstream modern art movements, as it had promised to do. This rather pointed critique of the Ateliers stemmed from its increasingly industrialized character. Students were now trained to blindly copy Romanesque and Gothic motifs in order to keep up with production demands. To Cingria, this atmosphere stymied creative expression and the medieval spirit of collaboration, thus furthering the divide between religious art and mainstream modernism. He founded the Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice with the aim of erasing the stubborn division between artist and artisan.

This generation’s avant-garde posture can also be credited to the pervasive influence of Catholic Personalist philosophy. Also known as non-conformism or communitarianism, Personalism advocated an apolitical spiritual revolution that would give way to a New Medieval Age that, as noted above, would see France united once again under the Catholic faith. In this utopia, individuals would work side-by-side, using their unique gifts for the spiritual good of the larger collective. A New Medieval Age would not begin until native-born Frenchmen regained spiritual contact with their traditional, communal roots. According to Emmanuel Mounier, editor of the Personalist journal *Esprit*, art was one way to catalyze this spiritual reform because it

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served an intermediary between the spiritual and earthly realm. Social cohesion could therefore be achieved through the collective production and experience of art.96

From Mounier’s point of view, medieval cathedrals illustrated this point. The rise of an independent art market had led to the commodification of French craft. Consequently, the present state of French art was both a measure of, as well as a factor in, the country’s moral decay. Indeed, while Personalists ostensibly tried to chart an alternative or “third road” between liberal capitalism and National Socialism, the philosophy’s emphasis on populism allied its adherents most closely with the New Right. Interestingly, as I show in Chapter Two, Personalism will transition into a secular philosophy in the postwar period, thus providing the rhetorical basis for many sacred art projects by non-Catholic modernists.

And in this regard, Devémy’s attempt to emulate Notre-Dame-des-Alpes in Le Fayet becomes all the more important, because it was a testing ground for Cingria’s vision of a New Medieval Age (figure 1.21). Alongside his stained-glass windows are frescoes by Paul Monnier, mosaics by Theodore Strawinsky (son of Igor Stravinsky), and wooden ambos by local carver Constant Demaison. The harmonious union between artist, artisan, and architect served as a metaphor for social and religious collectivity. The diocese praised the result by saying, “art, that in the most beautiful modern style, will elevate the house of God: large and luminous.”97 As noted above, Devémy was also impressed by the decorative program.98 Upon the priest’s request, Novarina hired Cingria, Theodore Strawinsky, and Constant Demaison. But in the end, only

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98 Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 6.
Strawinsky and Demaison’s commissions came to fruition. Strawinsky completed the crypt mosaics (figures 1.22 and 1.23) and Demaison carved the roof beams (figure 1.24).\(^99\)

Notre-Dame-des-Alpes was just one of many churches to include artworks by artists who had rejected Denis’ Ateliers. But the most relevant example for our purposes actually comes from Devémy. One of his first duties upon arriving at Sancellemoz in 1929 was to commission artists for the on-site St. Anselm chapel. His choices there reflect, at the very least, a tacit understanding of modern sacred art. He commissioned Valentine Reyre, co-founder of the modern Catholic art society, L’Arche, to paint the chapel’s murals (figure 1.25) and Marguerite Huré, a Parisian stained-glass artisan, to create the windows (figure 1.26). Interestingly, when Devémy was pressed about why artists from L’Arche and the Ateliers d’Art Sacré were not represented at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, he accused the artists of being “marchands” (businessmen), implying that their workshops were now profit-driven factories.\(^100\)

Devémy is a good bellwether for gauging the state of modern Catholic art in the 1930s because his aesthetic decisions were largely informed by context and outside opinion. Moreover, as someone who claimed to enjoy the Bishop’s “confidence,” he becomes part of Villerabel’s canny, politicized effort to align Catholic art with mainstream art movements.\(^101\) Such was the impetus to hire Couturier, as I argue in the next section.

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\(^99\) Caussé is the source of this chronology. Caussé 2010, 315.

\(^100\) Devémy made these statements in a 1981 series of interviews with the painter Ladislas Kijno. At that point, his role in the project had been eclipsed by Couturier, in part, because Devémy was moved to another parish not long after the querelle de l’art sacré and had remained relatively quiet about his involvement ever since. Devémy’s account is, on the whole, reliable, but moments such as this suggest that it was offered with the benefit of hindsight. Indeed, he sometimes takes credit for commissions that Couturier offered, while omitting those that might find him in an unfavorable light. The Groupe Témoignage commissions are a significant occlusion because of their wartime associations with the Vichy régime. As I argue below, their absence from his account is notable, particularly since he makes no mention of his wartime activities. Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 14.

\(^101\) Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 6–8.
Couturier and the New Medieval Age

Early 1939 saw the completion of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s crypt. This meant that part of the church would soon be usable; a good thing given that many thought the imminent war would put work on the upper church on indefinite hold. Devémy was under immense pressure to commission an artist for the crypt’s stained-glass windows, but Novarina had already left to join the military. Unsure of how to proceed, Devémy called upon Couturier.

Father Marie-Alain Couturier was a World War I veteran who, before taking the cloth, trained as a stained-glass artisan in the Ateliers. Devémy met Couturier in 1932, when the Dominican moved to St. Anne, a small hamlet not too far from Assy, to receive treatment for his chronic asthma.102 Couturier stayed on as chaplain until the late 1930s, even though he spent most of his time in Paris and Rome espousing the cause of modern sacred art. By that time, he had already gained a reputation as an outspoken advocate for modern sacred art.

Couturier found a platform for his ideas when he and Pie-Raymond Régamey, a fellow Dominican, were selected as co-editors of the journal L’Art Sacré in 1936.103 In an editorial co-authored with Régamey, Couturier warned that mediocre artists were more likely to specialize in religious art than great artists.104 Such would not be the case in a religious society like France in

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102 Caussé 2015.
103 Régamey, a trained art historian, was more accepting of art from other periods. Before taking orders in 1928, he worked as a Louvre conservator and published extensively on Prud’hon, Géricault, and Monet. In 1931, the Louvre published his essay on Delacroix’s chapelle des Saints-Anges in conjunction with its landmark monographic exhibition on the artist. The essay, which Bruno Foucart cited as one of the most insightful discussions of Delacroix’s religious art, was written during Régamey’s novitiate year. From 1947 until 1973, he served on the Conseil des musées nationaux. But even before that time, Régamey’s concern for the art historical legacy of twentieth-century religious art was evident from the start of his co-editorship of L’Art Sacré. His stake in the L’Art Sacré’s 1938 call for religious art by modern masters cannot be underestimated. I would also argue that the administrative concerns that manifest themselves at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce demonstrate Régamey’s influence. He was already familiar with Assy, having spent most of 1935 in the nearby Mont Blanc sanatorium. Caussé 2010, 247–288.
104 Françoise Caussé convincingly argues that his rejection of art produced in Denis’ Ateliers followed the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques. Part of the exposition included an exhibition of l’Art Indépendent at the Petit Palais organized by Raymond Escholier. Of the 1,500 artworks by contemporary French masters the vast majority dealt with secular themes. To Couturier and Régamey, the exhibition highlighted the divorce between
the medieval ages, but France today was secular; therefore: “Anyone who isolates from the artistic current, which has become profane, will always risk cutting himself off from his vitality and will artificially isolate himself from his gifts. They’ll run out on him quickly.”

They concluded that the formulaic sense of mysticism that Denis’ Ateliers infused into their artworks was no better than commercialized art of Saint-Sulpice. This skepticism informed the belief for which Couturier and Régamey are best known; namely, that Christian art must “be art first and Catholic second.”

Their approach to modern art reflect the theories of Jacques Maritain: the ecclesiastical theorist and later French Ambassador to the Vatican. Like Maritain, Couturier argued that modern artistic expression was acceptable as long as the artist was a Catholic.

But while Couturier’s views on art were undeniably progressive, his politics were not. He lived much of his life in hope for the restoration of the French monarchy. This desire for a feudal restoration developed early and can be attributed to his early involvement in the right-wing political movement, Action Française. His conservative politics only continued to take shape under the influence of Catholic Personalist philosophy.

We can see how the Personalist concept of a New Medieval Age is at work a full year before Couturier left for America. In February 1939, just a month before he assumed the direction of the iconographic program, he featured a photograph of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s still undecorated crypt in L’Art Sacré (figure 1.27). He praised the church as “a signal example of what sacred art should be…an art common to the place and time in which one lives”


and said that it would soon come to feature “a homogenous team of painters, window makers, and sculptors.” Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce would thus overcome the loaded distinctions between religious and secular, artist and artisan, avant-garde and arrière-garde in an effort to portray a vision of a new, unified France.

In fact, Couturier was already involved in the project by this time, having recommended Marguerite Huré to design and execute windows for the crypt (figure 1.28). As noted above, Huré was a stained-glass artisan whom Devémy had already hired to complete the windows at the Sancellemoz chapel. Although largely forgotten today, she found widespread acclaim in the first half of the twentieth century by translating the non-figurative compositions of Albert Manessier, Jean Bazaine, and Jean Le Moal into stained glass. Huré trained in the Ateliers and even created some of the windows for Le Raincy (1922–1923) alongside Maurice Denis. By the late 1920s she had struck out on her own. Between 1939 and 1941, Huré would design and execute sixteen crypt windows for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, each on a different aspect of the Eucharist.

In March 1939, Devémy asked Couturier to take over the entire direction of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s iconographic program. Progress had come to a standstill. Cingria had fallen ill and with Novarina away, the Canon was unsure of how to proceed. He did so knowing that the Dominican’s opinions on modern sacred art were becoming increasingly radical.

Indeed, while it is often said that Couturier’s wartime American sojourn compelled him to embrace modern religious art by non-religious and mainstream modern artists, Isabelle Saint-Martin and Françoise Caussé argue that this ideological shift began to occur in 1938. In a

September 1938 editorial, Couturier and Régamey wrote: “Our readers are certainly persuaded like us that the ideal is to have contemporary artists work for the Church. We do not think that there is any reason to express in general terms the fight for this cause because it has, thank God, already won and the real question is to discern the authentic artists.”¹¹⁰ Couturier and Régamey shared the belief, pervasive among Catholic modernists at this time, that talent was a divine gift. They represented a small but vocal minority who suggested that genuinely spiritual artistic expression could exist even in the absence of religiosity on the part of the artist. They espoused this idea in the hope of ending the “divorce” between mainstream and religious art.

Thus, when Devémy hired Couturier, he knew that he was already on a self-described “mission” to reinvigorate religious art. However, later he would insist that “Assy is not a manifest of art; Assy has not pretended to give a lesson; Assy has not wished to create a prototype.”¹¹¹ He would claim that all he had wanted to do was to create “a modest mountain church” and “something completely traditional and in good taste.”¹¹² These statements were likely made in the interest of self-preservation; at that time, Couturier was being threatened with exCOMMUNICATION.

Ultimately, the desire to set Assy’s church apart from its neighbors compelled Devémy to commission Couturier and high-profile modernists to create the interior. In fact, Couturier’s entry into the program signifies a key moment when the stylistic cohesion at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce begins to break down. And it can be attributed largely to his unavailability. Devémy knew that the Dominican would probably not handle most of the day-to-day operations.

¹¹⁰ “Nos lecteurs sont certainement persuades comme nous que l’idéal est de faire travailler pour l’Église les artistes contemporains. Nous ne pensons pas qu’il y ait lieu de batailler pour cette cause exprimée en termes généraux, parce qu’elle est, Dieu merci, gagnée et que la vraie question est de discerner les artistes authentiques.” Pie-Raymond Régamey, “‘Au lieu des statues ‘Saint Sulpice,” L’Art Sacré, no. 9 (September 1938): 261.
¹¹¹ Rubin 1961, 32.
¹¹² Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 19; Rubin 1961, 32.
Couturier’s connections mattered more. Consequently, much of the incongruity we find at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce derives from Devémy’s persistent attempt to compensate for Couturier’s absences by making choices in his stead.

And in this regard, the commercial dimension of the project emerges once again. Assy was a site of health pilgrimage, a place for suffering urbanites to recover their well-being in the peace and tranquility of the mountains. The very fact that they were urbanites—and that Assy was replete with sanatoria, health spas, and second homes—meant that their artistic tastes were above those of the average montagnarde. Thus, in a regional milieu predisposed to tourist activities, Couturier set the groundwork for an intensely mystical—not to mention controversial—version of conversion par l’art: the “Église-Musée.” As he wrote in 1939: “One comes to Assy expecting to find a museum,” he writes, “and one receives the shock of the sacred. It’s because the decisive works there are born from the silent depths.”

In this statement, Couturier posits superior artistic talent as an expression of the divine. Neither the artist’s faith nor Catholic iconography is a guarantee that the artwork will be religious. A meaningful experience of form thus provides the layperson a powerful and direct conduit to the divine. Therefore, until the New Medieval Age arrived, Couturier was willing to engage in the independent art market to carry out his mission.

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113 “On vient à Assy en croyant trouver un musée et l’on reçoit le choc du sacré. C’est que les œuvres décisives y sont nées des profondeurs silencieuses.” Ibid.

114 Anagogy, or the encounter of the divine through the material, had been described in the twelfth century by Abbot Suger. I would argue that the idea is just as likely rooted in the high formalism of Henri Focillon. In his celebrated La Vie des Formes, Focillon describes stylistic development as an innately guided evolution facilitated passively by intuitive artists. Couturier and Régamey both took classes from Focillon as students and maintained contact with him thereafter. It is therefore plausible that they understood stylistic development—with its connotations of a deus ex machina—as divinely inspired. Erwin Panofsky published the first full translation of Abbot Suger’s diaries in 1942, but selected passages by other translators emerged most notably in Arthur Kingsley Porter’s Medieval Architecture (1912). Panofsky writes that Henri Waquet completed an unabridged French translation in 1925. Abbot Suger, Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures, trans. Erwin Panofsky, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), xi.
“Une Belle Chose”

In June 1939, Couturier co-curated an exhibition entitled “Vitraux et Tapisseries Modernes” at the Petit Palais in Paris. The exhibit was intended to challenge the contemporary assumption that monumental formats were strictly reserved for sacred themes. To that end, Rouault, Henri Matisse, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Joan Miró were given the opportunity to translate their work into stained glass and tapestry. To Couturier, allowing established artists to explore the possibilities of craft within the established conditions of the independent market was the first step to a sacred art renaissance. His fellow curator, Jean Hébert-Stevens, convinced Rouault to translate Christ aux outrages (The Mocking of Christ; figure 1.29) into stained glass specifically for display in Vitraux et Tapisseries Modernes. The acquisition of a Rouault marked a fundamental turning point at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in terms of bridging the gap between Catholic art and mainstream art movements. Of interest here are the market conditions behind Rouault’s commission, which set an example for those subsequent commissions.

Rouault was a devout Catholic who explored the rigors of modern life through an empathetic Christian lens. Christ features prominently in his oeuvre alongside clowns and prostitutes, a fact which did not exactly endear him to Catholic clergy. That being said, Rouault was not particularly anxious at this point in time to see his work in a religious setting. He shied away from religious art commissions, believing that creating for a “communal” medium would prompt him to slip into “sullen convention.” He argued that religion was a deeply personal

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115 Couturier curated the exhibition with Pauline Peugniez and Jean Hébert-Stevens.


117 He wrote: “dans ces contacts se trouve une de nos chances pour le renouveau de l’art religieux.” Couturier 1939.

118 Rubin declined an offer to design windows for the Alpine church of Tavaux-Cité for just that reason. Rubin 1961, 96.
experience best expressed on canvas. However, Rouault was not opposed to recreating his designs in other media.

Couturier brought Dévémy to the exhibit on its weekly day of closure. Dévémy later said that he was in search of “one beautiful thing” and had the “audacity” to speak to Rouault about purchasing *Christ aux Outrages* for the church.\(^{119}\) Although it is clear that Couturier facilitated the transaction, Dévémy was responsible for measuring the window. Dévémy did not take into account the dimensions of the window before purchasing, but in what he would later call “the miracle of Assy,” Rouault’s window fit perfectly.

This miracle must be placed in context because it highlights the mediated nature of the commission. The hand of the craftsman who translates the form to stained glass first displaces the intimacy between artist and subject found in Rouault’s original *Christ aux Outrages*. In their purchase, Dévémy and Couturier then impose a further remove and bring a new level of meaning to the work based on their first-hand knowledge of its intended placement. In this way, Couturier and Dévémy assume the artistic agency that would have otherwise gone to Rouault, had he visited the site and made a design based on that encounter. Dévémy’s interest in the artwork must therefore be interrogated because it aligns with his touristic aspirations.\(^{120}\) From Dévémy’s standpoint, “une belle chose” was a means to distinguish Assy’s church from neighboring tourist stations.

For Rouault, mediation provided a comfortable level of detachment from the actual act of creating a religious artwork. Of the four stained-glass windows he eventually contributed to the interior of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, *La Grand Vase* (1946; figure 1.30) was the only one not

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\(^{119}\) Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 7–8.

\(^{120}\) In this regard, Assy stands in direct contrast to the church at Audincourt, which idealistically put modern art in the service of the everyday working man.
translated from an oil painting. By that point, many of his peers had become involved. Nevertheless, his presence made the prospect of creating a religious artwork for the church more palatable for other market-proven artists. As we shall see in the next section, conditions during World War II fomented the necessary circumstances for more direct interaction with mainstream artists.

*Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce Phase II: The Church in Wartime*

Scholarship has yet to account for the wartime phase of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s development. Indeed, it is often assumed that work on the church ceased in Couturier’s absence. Couturier left France on 30 December 1939 to preach a series of Lenten Masses at the Dominican monastery of St. Vincent de Paul in New York and remained there for the duration of the war. However, the narrative I provide here demonstrates that Devémy continued to commission artists during World War II. In this section, I will argue that his choices reflect the church’s status as a site of complicity with Vichy-era policies.

*Savoyard Pétanisme*

Haute-Savoie’s geographical situation as the “frontier” between France and Italy made it particularly vulnerable to being annexed by Mussolini, an event that eventually occurred in November 1942. Savoyards were deeply conscious of that possibility in 1939. In her amble through the Plateau d’Assy, Edith Thomas noted a local priest’s steadfast insistence that “Savoy isn’t for Mussolini.” The end of the Phony War therefore brought a sense of relief to Haute-Savoie because it ensured that, for the moment at least, they would remain French.

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121 In a letter to Marcel Jouhandeau, Couturier described the (rather meager) premise for his trip: “On m’a demandé cela, j’ai accepté, sachant qu’il n’y avait vraiment personne d’autre, actuellement.” Other letters from this period make it clear that he did not leave for the United States in order to escape the war. Cited in Caussé 2010. Also see Schwartwald 2004, 145.
122 “…la Savoie n’est pas pour Mussolini.” Thomas 1939, 19.
The Chief of State under Vichy, Maréchal Phillipe Pétain, achieved mythic status in Haute-Savoie after ensuring that this border region would remain French after the 1940 defeat. His actions were consistent with the reputation he garnered for saving as many soldiers as possible during World War I, which had taken an enormous toll upon Haute-Savoie’s population in particular. As a result, the Savoyard chapter of the Légion des Anciennes Combattants, a veterans’ organization charged with providing moral support for Vichy, counted over forty thousand members, the highest per capita percentage of any other region in the Free Zone. Moreover, the idea of a National Revolution resonated in this largely agricultural and Catholic region.\textsuperscript{123} Savoyard support for the Third Republic derived only from their opposition to Royalist candidates; otherwise, they shared in Pétain’s opinion that corruption and decadence had brought about France’s defeat. His popularity was on display during his official visit on 23 September 1941, when he was greeted with an immense outpouring of public support.\textsuperscript{124}

Of course, the programs Pétain proposed as a means of rebuilding the country’s moral fiber, particularly “la montagne morale,” also promised financial benefits for Haute-Savoie. Vichy propaganda espoused the population’s regular contact with the countryside as a cure for the decadence that characterized life under the Third Republic. The Alps featured prominently in this effort to rebuild French society through social tourism. Core French values were said to be transmitted to the individual through the cool mountain air. These programs targeted youth; hundreds of children were sent to Haute-Savoie during the war to enjoy the Alpinisme (winter sports, mountaineering, general rough-housing) offered by Le Club Alpin français and Jeunesse

As a result, the “montagne morale” campaign sustained the Alpine economy while most of the country suffered.

Passy’s economy likewise benefited from Pétain’s “montagne morale.” This rhetoric became something of a marketing strategy in a poster from January 1942, which promotes the “station climatique de cure” of Passy and the Plateau d’Assy as “La Route de la Santé” (figure 1.31). A road winds its way up the mountain landscape, from the red barren plains of the foreground to the cold blue hills and snow-capped mountains in the background. The Plateau d’Assy is an essential stop on this metaphorical journey from illness to health. Its red-roofed cure houses occupy the lush green forests in the middle ground.

Meanwhile, life in Assy seemed to return to normal. In a 1940 report to the Académie du Faucigny, Roger Michel described an Assy little changed by the war:

There aren’t many or even a few people who originated from this area. It’s a group of people come from every corner of France, even from foreign countries, and who, having no other link between them than a disease, soon constituted a true community that immediately absorbs each newcomer as soon as he’s arrived.126

Assy’s tourist board continued to market the village with reassuring statements: “All establishments open. Provisions and communications assured. Moderately priced.”127 and “…situated in non-occupied territory, [everything] operating like before.”128 In fact, Assy’s

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The economy continued to thrive for much of the war because many high functionaries in the Vichy government maintained second homes in the village.

However, because the Plateau d’Assy was technically a medical establishment, the sanatoria and its employees complied with the demands of both Vichy and the Axis occupiers even as area resistance activity intensified. One source amusingly notes that the names associated with Assy’s resistance group all began with “un D. ou un L.” (referring to the grammatical articles Le, La, De, etc., which tended to denote the French aristocracy). On the surface at least, Assy was a site of Vichy compliance. And we can see that reflected in its church as well.

*Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce under Vichy*

The Catholic Church played a key role in “montagne morale” ideology because Vichy’s pro-Catholic stance was good for business. Villerabel’s initial reservations about the “neo-paganism of winter sports” subsided because religion was an important element of outdoor youth programs. He used the political capital gained through his touristic pastoral initiative to transfer to the larger diocese in Aix in June 1940. He was replaced by Léon-Augustin Cesbron, whose ill-health prevented him from any proactive expressions of loyalty to Vichy. After the dissolution of the Free Zone, Cesbron urged the clergy in his diocese to remain neutral. Thus, with the tourist economy still active, work on Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce quickly resumed.

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129 It is again important to distinguish the sanatoria from the rest of the population. As noted above, doctors often took advantage of the isolated nature of sanatorial life in order to help Jews cross the border to Switzerland. Pierre Dupraz, *Bientôt, la liberté: une chronique de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale à Passy, Saint-Gervais, Les Contamines et Servoz* (Passy: P. Dupraz, 1997), 108.

130 Sorrel 2005, 369.

131 This move was part of his unsuccessful bid to become a cardinal. He remained Bishop of Aix until Liberation, when he fled the country to escape charges of collaboration. Deloche 2009, 278.
Devémy was under intense pressure to make Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce operational. A report of the event in *Le Croix* explained the rush to inaugurate the crypt noting that the “concern for souls has rendered urgent its opening to the faithful.” The reporter then added that construction had begun with a 16,000ff gift from Pope Pius XI, while this recent phase was funded from a 10,000ff donation from Pope Pius XII. The church was placed in the charge of the Dominican Order early in 1941. That October, the crypt was consecrated so services could take place while work on the upper church and bell tower continued.

Because progress continued at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce throughout the Occupation, we must first define, if possible, collaboration. Doing so is a challenge, even though France was pervaded by the same nationalistic sentiments, same prejudices as Germany. Despite General Charles de Gaulle’s claims that France was a nation of resisters, collaboration was a more common stance. French complicity in the Holocaust cannot be ignored. Portraying France simply in terms of collaborationists and resisters, however, ignores the complexity of the situation. There was, as Jean-Paul Sartre suggested, a Republic of Silence.

Devémy’s silence makes it difficult to tell whether he supported the Vichy régime. Unlike many of his peers, he never made claims of resistance involvement and his name does not feature in the list of clergy involved in the *Maquis* (which originated in Haute-Savoie and dominated most of the region’s resistance activity). His position at Sancellemoz would have made any covert activities difficult to execute. After the sanatorium was accidentally bombed by

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132 “*Le souci des âmes rendait urgent son ouverture définitive à la piété des fidèles.*” “*Une Nouvelle ‘Paroisse des Malades’*” 1941, 4.

British airplanes in August 1943, it was requisitioned by the Germans as a medical facility for the rest of the war.\textsuperscript{134} His work at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce suggests that he was, at the very least, neutral. We can see that in his continued adherence to Catholic Personalism. Despite claims to being “neither right or left,” Catholic Personalism took on a distinctly conservative cadence under Vichy, which borrowed its rhetoric to tout the French defeat as the dawn of a New Medieval Age. This idealistic, retrogressive vision of a strong, spiritually cohesive France was intended to gloss over the realities of Occupation by focusing upon the nation’s regeneration.\textsuperscript{135} Consequently, many Personalists were wartime collaborationists.

At the crypt consecration, Cesbron presided over a large audience of sanatorial staff, architects, construction workers, illustrious clergy, and civil servants. French prisoners of war receiving care at neighboring sanatoria were also present, as was a significant contingent of the Légion des Combattants and their section leader. The Légion’s emphatic presence at this church consecration suggests a village united in faith, nationalism, and allegiance to Vichy. And in this regard, Assy seemed to embody the social and religious cohesion of the New Medieval Age. Devémy evoked this new era in the speech he gave at the consecration ceremony, according to La Croix: “He praised the united art of architects, entrepreneurs, carpenters and workers, who permitted Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to figure with dignity in the flock of chapels and cathedrals that sing the glory of the Virgin in France.”\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{136} “Il loua l’art réuni des architectes, des entrepreneurs, charpentiers et ouvriers, qui permettra à Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce de figurer avec dignité dans le cortège des chapelles et des cathédraux qui chantent sur la terre de France la gloire de la Vierge.” “Une Nouvelle ‘Paroisse des Malades’” 1941, 4.
Personalists in general aligned with Vichy early on. Mounier was appointed cultural advisor of *Jeune France* (JF): a youth arts organization founded for “the regeneration of French culture in an era of moral decay.” Although technically an independent organization, JF was supported under the auspices of Vichy’s Secrétariat-Général à la Jeunesse because it emphasized the collective practice of traditional French art forms: namely, artisanal craft, theater, and music. Vichy also supported JF, at least at first, because of its apolitical character. Indeed, Personalists believed that society’s natural aristocratic order would reemerge after the spiritual revolution and bureaucracy would be rendered useless. But as the charade of national revolution became evident, JF became a hotbed of resistance activity. Mounier was arrested in July 1941 and JF was disbanded a year later. Still, Devémy remained committed to the Personalist vision of a New Medieval Age initially advocated by Vichy.

Before going into details, it should be said that the canon’s account often fails to align with the historical record. He reports to have made offers to Bonnard, Matisse, Bazaine, André Derain, Raoul Dufy, and Pablo Picasso. Yet, of these artists, only the first three can be confirmed. Moreover, a letter from Devémy to Matisse dated 8 June 1946 suggests that the canon offered him the commission after the war, not before, as he later claimed. Of course, some inaccuracies are inevitable when discussing events that took place some thirty years before, but Caussé argues that there is something self-serving in Devémy’s chronology. She suggests that

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137 It is possible that Devémy contacted Dufy. The two had become acquainted at ecclesiastical college several years before, and Devémy maintained that Dufy never received his letter because he mailed it to the artist’s Paris studio not knowing that he had fled South. Devémy claimed to have written Dufy with a request to paint an altarpiece of St. Dominic in late 1941. After hearing nothing for a few months, he supposedly approached Picasso with the commission because St. Dominic was also a Spaniard. He reports to have travelled to Paris to make the offer in person, just after the lines of demarcation between the unoccupied and occupied zones were officially lifted on March 1, 1943. Although one could well imagine Picasso jocularly refusing a Catholic commission, I have been unable to find any other source to corroborate Devémy’s story. Immediately after Picasso reportedly refused, Devémy claims to have written Matisse, who waited several years to respond. An account of Devémy’s meeting with Picasso can be found in Chapter 4. See Caussé 2010, 316 and Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 10.

138 Caussé 2010, 316.
the canon deliberately skewed his account to be painted with the same Resistance-era brush as Couturier, and therefore, to fall on the right side of history. And certainly, as I show next, many of the artists I have been able to confirm would have objected to the church’s postwar direction.

What is less known, perhaps, is that Devémy handed the rest of the decorative program over to Groupe Témoignage: a religious art collective on the more conservative end of the spectrum that was vocal in its support of Vichy. Unsurprisingly, when the war ended, Couturier and Régamey canceled all the contracts that Devémy offered Témoignage. Still, these commissions are still worth considering because they reveal something about Devémy’s wartime political stance. Ultimately, his choice of artists sheds light upon the transformation of Personalist philosophy during wartime.

Bonnard’s Saint Francis de Sales

Bonnard’s Saint Francis de Sales altarpiece (1942; figure 1.32) marks another key moment in the Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce narrative because, unlike Rouault, Bonnard created his artwork specifically for the church. And in this respect, the contribution of an established modern artist with no experience painting religious subjects signals the point when the church becomes, to borrow Devémy’s phrase, a real “artistic event.” But it is also highly problematic. Bonnard accepted the commission in 1942, largely out of necessity. Commodities grew increasingly scarce as the war progressed, and as a resident of Haute-Savoie, the so-called “bread

139 It is also possible that these inaccuracies were intended to relieve Couturier of some of the pressure he was receiving from the Vatican. Devémy begins to take credit for some of Couturier’s commissions in the early 1950s: just as the Querelle de l’Art Sacré began to emerge. Richard Dunlap has made a convincing case for such measures being taken at Ronchamp. There, following the controversy of the proposed Ste. Baume project, Couturier’s plan for an underground church complex designed by Le Corbusier, the Dominican “took a more covert approach to patronage.” To maintain a low profile, Couturier took extreme measures to shift the responsibility (and credit) for Ronchamp to François Mathey, head of the art sacré committee in Besançon add accent and inspector for Monuments Historiques. It would not be out of the realm of possibility, then, to suppose that Devémy claimed to have sought out these artists in an effort to protect Couturier. See Dunlap 2014, 22–25.
basket” of Vichy France, Devémy could provide the artist with basic food staples. Bonnard’s commission therefore assumes far more conservative appearance than previously assumed. Moreover, it suggests that his involvement, which inspired other celebrated artists to contribute and made Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce a site of “resistance,” was achieved under the duress of wartime.

Devémy’s choice of subject bears out the sense of complicity that pervaded clerical circles at this time. Saint Francis de Sales was patron saint of the Service d’ordre légionnaire (SOL): the paramilitary branch of the Légion des Anciennes Combattants. The Légion, as noted above, made a notable appearance at the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. The SOL is best understood as the French counterpart to Mussolini’s Blackshirts. As “chevaliers de la France pure,” its members used violence to enforce Vichy’s anti-Semitic, nationalist ideologies. The organization became active on a largely informal basis in the south of France, and Nice in particular, in summer of 1941. Regional membership to the Légion des Anciennes Combattants steadily shrank that winter, as the SOL became more of a repressive force.

And in this regard, Devémy’s choice of artists also proves to be problematic. In a later interview, he said that he initially offered André Derain the chance to paint the St. Francis de Sales altarpiece in late 1941. He reports that the artist accepted, then declined for another opportunity. However, representatives from Derain’s estate have found no letter or written evidence to suggest that the artist ever received such an offer.\footnote{Personal email communication with Genviève Taillade of the Centre André Derain. 29 January 2016.} Still, the suggestion says much about Devémy’s aspirations at the time. Derain was a key pawn in Vichy’s propaganda mission: an artist whose recent production embodied French nostalgia for a medieval “golden age.”\footnote{Romy Golan, Modernity and Nostalgia: art and politics in France between the wars, Yale publications in the history of art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 162; Dorléc 2008, 208.} For
that reason, Derain was sent to Germany in October 1941 as part of a cultural exchange with the Nazis. Devémy’s chronology suggests that Derain’s acceptance may have occurred around the time of his ill-advised Berlin trip. The veracity of his account is tested, however, by inaccuracies and a lack of evidence. Regardless, Derain’s refusal would have been expected because he went into a veritable state of hiding after his highly-publicized meeting with Nazi officials.

Devémy offered the commission to Bonnard in late January 1942, several days after Pétain officially recognized the SOL as an official branch of the government. Aside from name recognition, Devémy probably chose the artist because he was favored by Vichy. Louis Hautecoeur, Vichy’s director of Beaux-Arts, lauded Bonnard as an exemplar of the true French tradition and purchased a number of his works for state collections. Pétain was also an admirer: in 1941, his functionaries “climbed the mountain” to ask the artist to paint the Maréchal’s portrait. While sources report that Bonnard refused the commission point-blank, the artist himself told *La France Libre* in 1943 that he had accepted, telling Pétain’s officials: “I have need of only two things: charcoal and milk…” before adding, “As for this portrait, if Marshall Pétain is a good model, I will do it, but I reserve the right to destroy the work if it doesn’t please me.”

The officials were not pleased with the latter condition and did not return. Nevertheless,

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143 Devémy’s version of the chronology at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce appears after January 1951. First, in a lecture “Does the Church of Assy Contribute to the Renewal of Christian Art?” and then in the newspaper article, “L’Eglise d’Assy et l’Art Sacré.” He repeated the chronology in interviews with Rubin and Ladislas Kijno, the latter of which was published in pamphlet form in 1985.
146 “Je n’ai besoin que de deux choses: du charbon et du lait…quant à ce portrait, si le Maréchal Pétain est bon modèle, veux bien le faire, mais je me réserve de détruire mon oeuvre si elle ne me convient pas.” André Giverny, “Bonnard,” *La France Libre* 6, 31 (15 May 1943): 58.
Bonnard’s apoliticism meant that he was still have been considered a safe choice by Vichy and Personalist standards.

Devémy also had the advantage of using his own connections to facilitate contact with the artist. Bonnard’s niece lived in Assy because her son, Jean Terrasse, was co-founder of the Sancellemoz sanatorium. She provided Devémy with a letter of introduction in late January 1942, unaware that Bonnard’s wife, Marthe, had just died. In fact, the day Devémy appeared on the artist’s doorstep, Bonnard assumed that he was there to conduct the funeral.147

Bonnard was hesitant to accept Devémy’s offer. He told the canon that he was not religious, had no experience painting Catholic subjects, and knew nothing about the saint. Devémy stated his case: “I consider Saint Frances de Sales one of the greatest French writers of his time, and as you are, you, one of the greatest painters of the twentieth century, I believe that you were made for each other.”148 Devémy also cited the fact that Rouault had recently contributed an artwork. Bonnard was intrigued, particularly when Rouault was mentioned, but countered by saying he had no materials. Nevertheless, he asked for a few days to think about it. Devémy returned the next week as requested, this time with a book about the saint’s life, canvas for painting, and meat.149 Although Bonnard later claimed that he undertook the commission for

147 The year in which the commission was offered is somewhat in question. Devémy asserted that his meeting with Bonnard took place in 1943, even though Marthe died in 1942. The political iconography of St. Francis de Sales makes the date incredibly important. Here, I rely upon Bonnard’s catalogue raisonné, which dates sketches for the commission to 1942. Jean Dauberville and Henry Dauberville, Bonnard: Catalogue Raisonné de l’Oeuvre Peint 1940–1947 vol. 4. (Paris: Bernheim-Jeune, 1974), no. 1666.


149 The symbolism of this gesture is further intensified by the fact that Haute-Savoie “fed” France during the war. Indeed, most beef came from the areas surrounding Passy. However, by the end of the war, due to extreme rationing, government supply mismanagement, and a thriving black market, Haute-Savoie’s resources were all but exhausted. This made the situation for those in the sanatoria, with very little mobility, extremely serious. Abrahams 1992, 272.
the sake of his niece, I would argue that his acceptance was a matter of necessity. In letters to Matisse, Bonnard aired his frustrations about Allied bombings and wartime food shortages. It is therefore significant, given the conditions Bonnard made upon accepting the Pétain commission, that Devémy brought meat and canvas with him on his next visit to the artist.

Bonnard suffered a severe bout of pulmonary congestion shortly after Devémy’s visit. He spent the next few months in recovery, drawing nativity scenes in preparation for the altarpiece. In that time, the saint’s political iconography became increasingly problematic. In April 1942, following a day of SOL practice maneuvers in Annecy, a tree planted to commemorate Pétain’s visit was cut down and a statue of St. Francis de Sales—the SOL’s patron saint—was splattered with red paint. This act of vandalism, which is now regarded as the first public display of resistance by the Maquis, only reinforces the saint’s associations with wartime collaborationism.

Subject matter never seems to have been an issue for the artist, nor was blind to the implications of accepting a religious commission under Vichy. This becomes apparent in the painting’s references to Images d’Épinal. Épinal images were brightly colored popular prints

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150 Michèle Cone cites Bonnard’s letters to Matisse to argue that he was a support of Pétain’s National Revolution. Such complaints, however, might be better attributed to a seventy-five-year-old man’s annoyance and fear. Cone 1992, 116–130.

151 In retaliation, a few members of the organization dragged François de Menthon, a vocal opponent of Vichy with no apparent connection to the incident, from his bed and threw him in the fountain. There were immense political ramifications to the Affaire Menthon. Vichy heaped unreserved praise upon the SOL for its actions, and culled the local government of anyone they deemed disloyal. In reaction, hundreds of regional SOF members—already disturbed by the fascist turn of the organization—resigned. Meanwhile, the ranks of the fledgling resistance quickly expanded. H. R. Kedward, Resistance in Vichy France: A Study of Ideas and Motivation in the Southern Zone, 1940–1942 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 87. See also Michel Germain, La vie quotidienne à Annecy pendant la guerre 1939–1945 (Montmérian: La Fontaine de Siloé, 2005).

152 Some historians, most notably Michèle Cone, have argued that Bonnard was sympathetic to Vichy. In letters to Matisse, Bonnard aired his frustrations about Allied bombings and wartime food shortages in terms that have been interpreted as support for the Axis. These complaints, however, might be better described in terms of a 75-year-old man’s annoyance and fear. Cone 1992, 180.

of “morally good” subjects, including saints’ lives, fables, and important moments in French history. During World War II, they promoted the religious veneration of Maréchal Pétain. As Romy Golan argues, their “freshness and naïveté” was the preferred aesthetic of the Vichy régime.\textsuperscript{154} For Bonnard, Épinal images furnished a model by which he could venture into the unfamiliar territory of Catholic iconography. In fact, Bonnard changed the composition in deference to the devotional nature of the image:

> When I drafted the sketch that you know, the castle was too important…and the saint wasn’t important enough…Then I arrived at the obvious. This canvas must dominate the altar because mass will be celebrated there. The faithful will pray before it…but a saint is a saint, by devil… When one comes to pray at the chapel, one is in a particular state. Serious and exceptional circumstances may have brought you there. The character must capture all the attention…the rest is just accessory and documentation. I started all over…It was necessary!\textsuperscript{155}

We can see how the devotional context of the work prompted Bonnard to change the composition in a series of sketches dated from 1942 (figure 1.36). As he says in the above quote, the saint becomes disproportionately large to transcend narrative and facilitate the viewer’s interaction with the saint. Bonnard never traveled to Assy, so he rendered the purple-caped Saint Francis de Sales against the backdrop of the Mediterranean Sea as seen from his villa, Le Bosquet.\textsuperscript{156} In the final image, the saint stands as high as the neighboring buildings, dwarfing the people who surround him with their hands clasped in supplication.

\textsuperscript{154} Golan 1995, 163.
\textsuperscript{156} The Côte d’Azur was particularly affected by the wartime automobile shortage. Bonnard rarely traveled outside of Le Cannet as a result; his visits to Matisse in Vence were facilitated by his nephew or fellow artists.
The fraught iconography of the commission therefore suggests that necessity prompted Bonnard to adapt to the new political climate of wartime France. That present sense of vulnerability is communicated in Henri Cartier-Bresson’s photographs of the artist at work on the painting in February 1944 (figures 1.33, 1.34, and 1.35).\(^{157}\) A worn fishing hat and thick layers of ill-fitting clothing accentuate the frailty of Bonnard’s already slight frame. The painting has been pinned to the wall of his light-filled studio, several feet above the floor, adding a sense of instability to his actions.\(^{158}\) Its placement could also have been an aesthetic choice on Brassaï’s part. He shows Bonnard standing precariously on a ladder, a brush in one hand and the other pressed against the surface of the painting for balance. In another image, he stands on a balcony, contemplating the painting from above. And in the last, he stares off into the distance, rubbing his hands together for warmth, with the edge of the painting visible in the background.

Even though Bonnard may have undertaken the painting under the duress of war, its reception shows why religious art commissions appealed to modernists in the postwar period. When the war ended, Bonnard exhibited his *Saint Francis de Sales* in retrospectives at the Galerie Maeght in 1945 and the Orangerie in 1947. By this time, the biographical resonance of the painting was so strong that critics overlooked its political and religious iconography. Few even mention that it was intended as an altarpiece. Instead, in articles entitled “*La Saintété de Bonnard*” and through epithets including “Modernism’s Monk,” and “*Le Solitaire* of Le Bosquet,” the painting was treated as an avatar for the artist’s grief and saint-like devotion to his art.\(^{159}\) Father Verkade, a fellow Nabi, noted the resemblance of Bonnard’s depiction with

\(^{157}\) A few monographs on Bonnard erroneously date these photographs to 1945. Cartier-Bresson placed the session in February 1944, a claim substantiated in the chronology given in Dita Amory, ed. *Pierre Bonnard: The Late Still Lifes and Interiors* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 173.

\(^{158}\) The elevated position of the canvas might be explained by the fact that Bonnard thought the artwork would be installed in the apse, rather than the side altar. I discuss this idea again shortly.

\(^{159}\) BVAP Bonnard, MNAM Archives, Paris.
Édouard Vuillard, while Devémy and Bonnard’s nephews claimed that the nun on St. Francis’ right was modeled after the artist’s recently deceased wife. Likewise, in an article for L'Art Sacré, Devémy claimed that Bonnard kept the completed painting by his side during the Allied bombings “as his protector.” Indeed, while many suffered far worse calamities during the war, such anecdotes inspired sympathy for the artist and helped to solidify his status as a national symbol.

And in this regard, Bonnard’s commission brought out the complexities of hiring a well-known artist for a sacred art project. Seen in secular contexts, the devotional purpose of the St. Francis de Sales fell behind its biographical meaning. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, according to Saint-Martin, “the expression ‘sacred art’ is employed in reference to the subject or even the consecrated space in which it is situated, and not to sacralize the art itself.” In other words, “sacred art” specifies subject and context because a painting cannot be sacred in and of itself. The space of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce thus rendered Bonnard’s artwork sacred. Removed from the church context, the artwork would, once again, become an art object. It could even be sold on the art market. As we shall see, these market connotations would prove extremely controversial by the end of the war, as the idealistic vision of a New Medieval Age began to transform.

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160 BVAP Bonnard, MNAM Archives, Paris.
161 Devémy 1950, 9.
163 This probably could not happen with Bonnard’s altarpiece. In 1948, the canvas was affixed to the stone wall of the church with permanent adhesive. This prevented the work from being exhibited in the exhibit Chefs d’Oeuvre d’Art Religieux at Versailles in 1952. Letter from Raymond Nacenta to l’Abbé Devimy [sic], 25 November 1952; Raymond Nacenta to R. P. Ceppi 25 November 1952; R. P. Ceppi to Raymond Nacenta 29 November 1952. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, B17. MNAM Archives, Paris.
Le futur de la tradition française

Having successfully garnered a contribution from Bonnard, Devémy seems to have now set his sights on artists associated with Témoignage and la Nouvelle École de Paris (New School of Paris): two groups collectively known as the Jeunes Peintres de la Tradition Française (Young Painters of the French Tradition). Bazaine’s involvement can be attributed to Huré, who recommended the artist after Devémy offered her the chance to create the windows for the tribune. Novarina, meanwhile, recommended Témoignage because he had exhibited with them in their 1941 Paris show. Collectively, this young generation of artists perceived Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as a vision of a spiritually based and socially cohesive postwar France. Their commitment to this vision initially put them in sympathy with Vichy (at least at first), making them a viable option for Devémy. That vision of the New Medieval Age undergoes dramatic changes during the war, which, as we shall see, will have dramatic consequences for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s iconographic program.

Jean Bazaine

When Huré declined Devémy’s offer to design the windows for the nave, she suggested her neighbor, Jean Bazaine, in her place. Bazaine was an influential figure who articulated, both in paint and in print, the Personalist belief in the New Medieval Age. In fact, of all the artists considered in this study, Bazaine is perhaps the closest to Couturier in terms of ideology, politics, and aesthetic. As I argue in this section, his work at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce reflects how Personalist philosophy changed during the war.

Bazaine was the leader of the Nouvelle École de Paris: a conservative group of artists who sought to reconcile modernism with the French tradition in expectation of a “nouveau moyen âge.” Like Couturier, Bazaine considered the modern sacred art produced in Denis’ Ateliers to be devoid of spiritual substance. In 1934, he wrote that sacred art’s futility “began the
day where it named itself as such, that is to say, it became a form of art, and no longer the complete expression of the life and preoccupations of man.”\(^{164}\) As a Personalist, he used the aesthetic affinities between Romanesque and modern art to suggest the imminent arrival of a New Medieval Age. In a 1942 *Comoedia* article entitled “La Peinture d’Aujourd’hui,” he argued that “French art, in ten centuries, has completed a closed cycle.”\(^{165}\) To Bazaine, modernism signaled the end of one tradition and the rediscovery of another. This tradition, the medieval tradition, was stripped of its spiritual substance under the Renaissance, and robbed of creativity by arbitrary academic pictorial codes. Thus, the critical motive behind his generation of painters was to recover the French tradition by using Fauvism and Cubism to explore sacred themes. Modernism offered the most viable route to truly relevant art: that is to say, art with spiritual resonance. In his view, the modernist project had failed because artists had been fighting for ideas, rather than searching for lost spiritual values.

Bazaine therefore welcomed Vichy’s “national revolution.” As Natalie Adamson astutely observes, he came to view the 1940 defeat as a “crucial rupture with a corrupt and disappointing society that had run its course.”\(^{166}\) Bazaine took a position with Vichy as head of the JF’s “plastic arts section in the Northern zone.”\(^{167}\) But it quickly became apparent that Pétain’s government would not be able to deliver on its promises. In fact, after initial overtures towards acceptance, the government began to take a hard line against modernism. His criticism of the régime emerged quickly thereafter. In an art review from April 1941, Bazaine wrote:


\[^{166}\] Adamson 2005, 122.

Every war drags behind it its contingent of amnesiacs, but that is not enough to explain why all those in France who still have a little courage and freedom of thought seem to have suddenly forgotten that for the last thirty years French painting was our only effective presence in the world and one of the rare living ferments of our time…. Our military defeat should not admit by extension a general rout of all the best things our civilization has produced.

Bazaine followed up this critique by organizing an exhibit entitled the *vingt peintres de la tradition française* at the Galerie Braun.\(^\text{168}\) In it, he displayed abstract/cubist artworks by French Catholic artists in order to “defend openly, and apart from all politics, strong and true French values.”\(^\text{169}\) Despite harkening back to Personalist apoliticism, Bazaine intended the exhibition as an act of resistance. He sought to demonstrate that the French modern tradition could thrive even in the midst of Nazi occupation and repression. To that end, figurative abstraction in a blue, white, and red *tricouleur* palette dominated the exhibit. However, it is far more likely, as Natalie Adamson suggests, that Vichy was Bazaine’s primary target.\(^\text{170}\) Shortly thereafter, he finally resigned his position in the government out of opposition to its censorship of modern art. Despite all this, Bazaine’s relationship with the régime remained ambiguous for some time. In January 1942, around the time Devémy asked him to create windows for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, he accepted an offer from the Beaux-Arts administration to decorate a chapel.\(^\text{171}\) The offer was rescinded later that year, probably due to his increasing anti-Vichy sentiment.\(^\text{172}\) Yet, he

\(^{168}\) Disappointingly for Bazaine, the German military officials who visited the exhibition took no action to close it down when it opened on 10 May 1941. Michèle C. Cone, *French Modernisms: Perspectives on Art before, during, and after Vichy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

\(^{169}\) Jean Bazaine quoted in ibid.


\(^{171}\) Perhaps that of Chapelle Saint-André. Maquette purchased by the State on 27 December 1942. See Dorléac 2008, 265.

\(^{172}\) Natalie Adamson claims that the state retracted its offer in light of Bazaine’s criticism of the French art scene, which was perceived by a few high-ranking officials as a personal attack. Natalie Adamson, “To Regenerate Painting: Letters, 1934–48, between Jean Bazaine and André Lhote,” *The Burlington Magazine* 150, 1262 (2008): 320.
continued to display his art in contexts both official and unofficial, leading Michèle Cone to interpret his attitude as one of quiet complicity.

Devémy have have encountered Bazaine’s work at the 1939 *Vitraux et Tapisseries modernes*, where he also saw Rouault’s *The Mocking of Christ*. Couturier saw potential in his work being translated to stained glass, and asked him to create a window for the exhibit, ultimately the *Instruments of the Passion*. As an independent artist with strong Catholic ties and a desire to marry the Romanesque with the modernist tradition, Bazaine would have been an attractive prospect to Devémy. But the canon might have also considered Vichy’s begrudging approval of the artist an advantage.

Bazaine was commissioned to create stained glass windows featuring King David, Saint Cecilia, and Saint Gregory sometime in early 1942 (figures 1.37, 1.38, and 1.39). The following year, anxious to learn the stained-glass *métier*, he began working with Huré to execute his designs. Each of his subjects is traditionally associated with music, making them altogether appropriate for placement by the pipe organ. Bazaine’s rendering, however, makes it difficult to discern their individual identities. Slivers of deepest red, blue, and gold are organized methodically into a vertical rhythm that overwhelms the figure’s symbolic attributes. King David’s harp extends from his shoulder and torso like an extension of his body. Saint Cecilia, unburdened of her customary violin or harp, lifts her eyes and hands to heaven, as if to conduct a celestial choir. Finally, a monk emerges from the lower right side of St. Gregory’s pictorial

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173 Huré also suggested the subjects of Bazaine’s commission as well. Caussé 2010, 317, n. 1; David 2002, 18; Greff 1994, 165.
174 The windows were finally completed in 1945, but found to be of the wrong dimensions due to an error on Devémy’s part; as a result, they were placed in the Saint-Sacrament chapel at the Saint Jacques convent in Paris. By that time, Bazaine had moved to non-figurative abstraction. Nevertheless, he executed a second, identical set of windows between 1946 and 1948. They were finally installed at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce towards the end of 1949. Caussé 2010, 318.
175 King David is known as the Musician King, Saint Gregory is associated with Gregorian chant, and Saint Cecilia is the patron saint of musicians.
frame: the vertical ovoid of his mouth and face mimics the circular rhythm of the pope’s robes. In this way, iconography becomes submerged by insistent compositional structure and, perhaps more importantly, deeply saturated color.¹⁷⁶

Bazaine’s iconographic de-emphasis was inspired by medieval stained glass:

Nobody takes in all the details of the windows at Chartres (except with binoculars and a guide, which are not indispensable accessories of the Christian). But the subject is ‘there’ all the same, and what sinks into the faithful is not just an empty play of lines and colours, nor is it the stories themselves, it is the emotion of the artist who dealt with the stories, the sum total of the love they aroused in him.¹⁷⁷

Art historians had long situated the naturalism of the high gothic style as the basis of France’s realist tradition. However, in the 1930s, advocates of modernism pushed that teleology back to the Romanesque, arguing that abstraction, not naturalism, defined true French tradition. Sarah Wilson has observed that this tendency intensified under Vichy because of the Personalist admiration for the early Middle Ages.¹⁷⁸ For Bazaine, this entailed a re-valuation of the twelfth-century concept of anagogy, as formulated by Abbot Suger at the royal church of Saint Denis. His gradual shift towards non-figurative abstraction was premised in a belief that color was a more effective spiritual conduit than narrative.

Unlike the church commissions Bazaine undertook later in his career, the stained-glass windows he created in the 1940s and early 1950s tended to be part of a collective effort involving a number of distinct artistic personalities.¹⁷⁹ At the Église Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt, for example, another Sacred Art Movement project, he designed the windows for the baptistery.

¹⁷⁶ However, of the three designs, only Saint Cecilia was finished during the war. The other two were completed in 1947. I will return to this point shortly.
¹⁷⁸ Wilson 2008, 452.
¹⁷⁹ Adamson 2005, 123.
(1948–51; figure 1.40). There, his talents were combined with those of Léger, Jean Le Moal, and the local community of Peugeot factory workers, who worked on the edifice in their free time. He would later say: “I had the marvelous sentiment of really working for and with a collective.”\textsuperscript{180} Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was not only an opportunity to create art that would provide spiritual sustenance to a distinctive community, it was also a chance to be featured alongside Bonnard: the artist with whom he closely identified. For Bazaine, Bonnard’s recent foray into religious art justified his belief that French painting, like French society, was en route to a New Medieval Age. All that was needed was the appropriate “pictorial catalyst.”\textsuperscript{181}

In his adherence to Personalist philosophy, desire for a New Medieval Age and (initial) acceptance of Vichy, Bazaine could very well be seen in the same vein as Témoignage. In fact, Témoignage was well represented in the Vingt Peintres exhibit. The two are distinguished from one another in Bazaine’s ability to adapt to Personalism’s changing political stance. By the end of the war, Personalism itself had undergone a fundamental change. The apoliticism that once compelled Personalists to collaborate with the Vichy regime now provided a means for bipartisan dialogue. As John Hellman argues, the philosophy “was repackaged after World War II as a daring, progressive ‘new theology’ suitable for dialogue with communists and helping to inspire the Second Vatican Council.”\textsuperscript{182} For that reason, Bazaine was allowed to proceed with the other two artworks when the war ended. As I argue in the next section, Témoignage was not.

\textsuperscript{180} “...j’ai eu le sentiment merveilleux de vraiment travailler pour et avec une collectivité.” It should be noted that the Église Sacré-Cœur was built under an entirely different set of circumstances. Far from being a site of tourism, Audincourt’s church would serve the workers at the local Renault factory. We can therefore see how Personalism transitioned to accommodate Communism in the postwar period. Georges Bernier, “Propos d’un Peintre: Une entrain au magnétophone avec Jean Bazaine,” \textit{L’Oeil} (15 April 1955): 43.

\textsuperscript{181} Adamson 2005, 122.

Groupe Témoignage

Groupe Témoignage was a Catholic art collective that had its heyday during Occupation. In fact, half of the artists represented in Bazaine’s *Vingt Peintres* exhibit belonged to Témoignage. Even though they were entrusted with the façade, apse, and a sculpture for the baptistery, the role of Témoignage at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce has only been recently acknowledged in scholarship. Indeed, their commissions seem to have been altogether forgotten for decades. As a group, Témoignage reflects the complicated situation that many religious artists faced during wartime. Their deeply mystical brand of Catholicism and commitment to the French tradition made them favorites of the Vichy régime. But like so many Personalists, Témoignage preferred to remain apolitical. This apoliticism, I suggest, further complicates Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s reputation as a site of resistance. Consequently, as I argue here and at the beginning of the next chapter, their dismissal is key to understanding how the church’s “avant-garde” reputation was achieved.

Like their counterparts in the Nouvelle École de Paris, the artists of Témoignage were adherents of Catholic Personalist philosophy. Their interpretation of a New Medieval Age, however, was influenced by *Le Poids du Monde*: a journal of deeply esoteric Catholic thought edited by Marcel Michaud in Lyon. Even the group’s name, which translates to “testimony,” evokes its deeply evangelical purpose. Témoignage was premised in the belief that art was “un simple langage, une écriture qui a son utilité pour une fin spirituelle.”\(^{183}\) Any art that did not serve spiritual ends was deemed materialistic. Their search for universal symbols led them into the realm of highly esoteric medieval symbols because “compared to the Western civilizations of the Middle Ages and to civilizations of all times, contemporary Western civilization [was]  

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lamentably mediocre.” They believed that modernism, despite its resemblance to medieval aesthetics, reflected Western decadence and exemplified the rupture between art and spirit. They wanted “in humility, to pick up where the grand spiritual currents had left off and...begin again.”

Like Bazaine, the artists of Témoignage initially believed that the defeat was the dawn of a New Medieval Age. However, as Jean-Christophe Stuccilli argues, the group quickly became disillusioned by Pétain’s revolution. Some even joined the Resistance. Therefore, the Témoignage commissions further reinforce the precarious apolitical line that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce trod during Occupation.

Témoignage owed its commissions to Novarina. He had exhibited architectural plans in their 1939 Paris show and again in 1940 following demobilization. Whether he was sympathetic to the group’s views is difficult to tell because he was not a regular member. In all likelihood, he probably commissioned Témoignage to remain true to his original vision of the iconographic program, which was initially entrusted to another religious art collective, Cingria’ Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice. Devémy, meanwhile, willingly agreed, seeing Témoignage as the most expedient means to completing the church. Therefore, in early 1943, Consequently, Étienne-Martín, a sculptor, was asked to create a pietà for the baptistery; Zelman, a painter, was to design and execute a fresco for the façade (figure 1.41); and Jean Le Moal would paint the apse. Devémy also claimed that the painter Albert Manessier was on track designing the rest of the windows until Couturier returned and cancelled the commission. However, no documentary evidence exists to support this claim.

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185 Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac describes Témoignage as having a “solid connection to the Révolution nationale.” This was in contrast to the other group represented in Bazaine’s exhibit: les indélicats. Ibid., 243.
186 Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 14
Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was set to become a veritable manifesto of the Témoignage. Together, through their individual researches, they sought to “rediscover the meaningful general and eternal language.” It would show that the French medieval tradition had not been defeated. Indeed, they saw the church’s lack of aesthetic harmony as an ideal opportunity to create a modern counterpart to the Romanesque church. It would embody their vision of a “nouveau moyen âge.” But by 1943, the composition of the group had changed entirely. Those that remained saw upon Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as an opportunity for Témoignage to be “reborn” as “an ideal community close to oblature.” In other words, the church was a means to reaffirm the group’s underlying principles. But Zelman fell ill and stopped work on the façade fresco. In June, Le Moal received a contract with Galerie Drouin and left the project. And, in December, Zelman died of a cardiac event at Sancellemoz. Consequently, Le Moal suggested that Idoux and Le Normand put the finishing touches on his design (figure 1.42). The project hit its first stumbling block when, after a site visit in summer 1943, Étienne-Marcel wrote to Devémy with an upwardly revised cost estimate. Devémy responded with evident frustration. On letterhead that announces papal sanction of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, he wrote:

... I must tell you at once that I must renounce this project [Le Moal-Zelman fresco] immediately in light of the considerable figure it has reached - and I deeply regret it - and I very much hope that the examination of the works of sculpture that I would like to entrust to you are compatible with the, alas, mediocre resources that the charity of the faithful gives me - for I do not have available to me, unfortunately, the official budget for financial expenses of public administration.... I know that the artist lives by his art. I hate to haggle so far into the work, [but] I only have limited financial resources, so I will have to study the quote at the fair price in order to avoid the disappointment I had with your

187 That problem is compounded further by chronology. The group accepted the commissions in 1943, when the failure of Pétain’s “revolution” became clear. However, his argument stops short of indicating whether this rebirth was a way for Témoignage to distance itself from Vichy or reaffirm its allegiance. Ultimately, I argue, the very fact that these ambiguities exist suggest that Couturier may have wanted a clean break from the group entirely. Jean-Christophe Stuccilli, “À l’Image de Dieu: Marcel Michaud et l’Art Sacré,” in Le poids du monde: Marcel Michaud, 1898–1958, ed. Laurence Berthon (Lyon: Fage, 2011), 164.
Devémy’s letter highlights several essential points, the most important of which being that the church was under considerable financial strain. This passage would certainly suggest that Devémy had at least considered the possibility of State funding to bring the project to completion. Such was the case with Jean Lurçat and Fernand Léger’s commissions. But in the meantime, Devémy did not possess the funds necessary to pay Témoignage for their work. However, despite his own reticence to “haggle,” it would appear that Devémy nevertheless seeks to use the idea of cancelling the fresco to leverage a better price for Étienne-Martin’s sculpture.

With one commission cancelled and the other under threat, Témoignage quickly revised their estimates, though not without complaint. Shortly after receiving Devémy’s letter, Étienne-Martin wrote anxiously to Marcel Michaud, the group’s founder, arguing: “The men who built with their hands what we love in the past were simple and disinterested men who earned their living like all workers and not artists at gallery prices.” Nevertheless, Étienne-Martin

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188 “…Je dois vous dire tout de suite que j’ai du renoncer aussitôt à ce projet [Le Moal-Zelman fresco] devant le chiffre considérable qu’il atteint—je le regrette infiniment—et je souhaite vivement que l’examen du travaux de sculpture que je voudrais vous confier vous permette de me faire des propositions […] compatibles avec les ressources hélas médiocres que me procure la charité des fidèles—car je n’ai pas hélas à me disponibilité le buget officiel des administration publiques pour financer ces dépenses… je n’ignore pas que l’artiste vit par son art. J’ai horreur de marchander dans ce part de travaux, je ne dispose que de moyens financiers limités—aussi il faudra étudier le devis au plus juste prix afin de m’éviter la déception que j’ai eu de procurer avec vos amis peintres.” Letter from Jean Devémy to Étienne-Martin, 6 August 1943. Étienne-Martin Archives, Musée Art Moderne de Ville de Paris (MAMVP).

189 Vichy modified legal statute to make all French churches—not just those with historic value—eligible for State funding. Consequently, the decoration of a new church such as Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce would have been paid for by the Department of Beaux-Arts. State funds may have been unavailable, however, because the Beaux-Arts budget was being secretly funneled into Germany’s war chest. This policy remained in effect after Liberation, which made the prospect of creating a Catholic church appealing to Henri Matisse, as we shall see in Chapter 3. For discussion of Vichy-era Jean-Marie Mayeur, La Séparation des Églises et de l’État (Paris: Editions de l’Atelier, 1991), 202.

190 “…les hommes qui ont construit de leurs mains ce que nous aimons dans le passé étaient des hommes simples et désintéressés qui gagnaient leur vie comme tous les ouvriers et non des artistes à prix de galerie.” Letter from Étienne-Marc to Marcel Michaud, 11 August 1943. Marcel Michaud archives, Musée des Beaux Arts Lyon (MBAL). Cited in Stuccilli 2011, 264.
recommended that Témoignage concede to Devémy’s demands: “It is essential, despite
everything, that this work remain in the hands of this group.”

Michaud successfully intervened on their behalf, and by spring 1944, Devémy expressed
confidence that the church could be completed by the end of the year. This goal seemed
achievable at that point because peace finally seemed within reach. *Les Forces Français de
l’Intérieur* (an organization representing the combined efforts of several resistance groups) began
to regain control of Haute-Savoie. June found the *Maquis* leading parades of brass bands across
Passy. On August 19th, when Allied forces landed in Normandy, *les Forces Français de
l’Intérieur* successfully liberated Haute-Savoie.

However, the change in political landscape also brought an end to Témoignage’s
commissions. When Liberation came, Régamey resumed publication of *L’Art Sacré*. And in so
doing, he decided to assume the direction of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce until Couturier’s
return. In the *Oeuvres Nouvelles et Artistes Nouveaux* issue, published at the end of the year, he
included an optimistic update about the church’s progress with a picture of a near-complete
Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce (figure 1.43) and the caption:

> It is in this church that one finds Bonnard’s St. Frances de Sales, Rouault’s window, two
stained-glass windows by Bazaine. It is under this porch that Lenormand and Idoux will
paint a Sermon on the Mount. Here is a church which, thanks to the intelligent and
generous initiative of Canon Devémy, will be one of the rare sanctuaries of high quality
modern Christian art.

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191 “Il faut absolument que malgré tout ce travail reste entre les mains du groupe.” Ibid.
192 “C’est dans cette église que se trouvent le saint François de Sales de Bonnard, le vitrail de Rouault, deux vitraux
de Bazaine. C’est sous ce porche que Lenormand et Idoux peignent un Sermon sur la Montagne. Voilà une église
qui, grâce à l’intelligente et généreuse initiative de M. le chanoine Devémy va être un des rares sanctuaires d’un art
chrétien moderne de haut qualité.” Pie-Raymond Régamey, “Église de Assy-Passy,” *Cahiers de l’Art Sacré* 1,
His optimism quickly dissipated, however, when he met with Novarina and Devémy to review
the revisions Lenormand and Idoux’s had made to Zelman’s design. Zelman’s composition,
already a dense array of obscure iconography, was thus rendered more complicated and more
intricate by the addition of obscure symbols around the areas around the doors. Devémy was
rather pleased with the result, but Novarina and Régamey were not enthusiastic. In early August,
disregarding Devémy’s enthusiasm for their work, Régamey delayed installation of the fresco.
He then refused Étienne-Martin’s Pietà altogether, reasoning that Témoignage “…reduces
Christianity to esotericism.” He went on to exclaim: “How can Michaud call this art for the
‘collective’ when it can only understood by a small number of initiates!” The esotericism that
garnered Témoignage success during wartime was incompatible with Régamey’s inclusive vision
of postwar society. And when Couturier finally returned from America in September 1945, he
cancelled the fresco project and asked Léger to create a mosaic for the facade instead.

But Témoignage would not go quietly. Two years after their dismissal, the group’s
leader, Marcel Michaud, was still decrying Couturier and Régamey’s handling of the project in
the widely-read newspaper Arts. He complained that this group of faithful Catholics had been
passed over for “a freemason and a second-hand Communist” [Léger and Lurçat] because they
lacked name recognition. He described Régamey’s actions as “demagoguery” and likened

193 Stuccilli 2011, 266.
194 “…réduisent le christianisme à un ésotérisme”; “Comment Michaud peut-il recommander comme ‘collectif’ un
art compris seulement d’un petit nombre d’initiés!” Ibid., 258.
195 “un franc-maçon et un communiste d’occasion”; “la demagogie dans l’église”; Ibid., 263.
Couturier to one of the merchants of the temple. Gino Severini and Albert Gleizes soon joined the public fray by accusing Couturier of acting more like an art dealer than a clergyman.

The uproar that followed Groupe Témoignage’s dismissal anticipated the *querelle de l’art sacré* that led to the Pope’s condemnation of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in 1951. But I would suggest instead that these initial post-Liberation controversies inspired the church’s postwar direction. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce would take another five years to complete, and in that time, the most notorious artworks of the iconographic program, including Germaine Richier’s *Christ*, were commissioned. By deliberately courting controversy, Couturier and Devémy distanced themselves from Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s conservative roots. They did so, however, while remaining true to the original goal of the church: to represent France. Only now, in the initial glow of Liberation, France was transformed into *la France résistante*.

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197 Their dispute speaks to a difference in monastic allegiance. Régamey and Couturier were, of course, Dominican while Severini and Gleizes were adherents of Benedictine theology. The Dominicans tended to be more liberal than the Benedictines. Brooke 2001, 250.
Chapter 1 Figures

Figure 1.1. West façade, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1937–1950. Maurice Novarina, architect; Fernand Léger, façade mosaic. Plateau d’Assy, Haute-Savoie, France.

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Figure 1.37. Jean Bazaine, *St. Grégoire*, 1945–48.
Figure 1.38. Jean Bazaine, *Le Roi David*, 1945–48.

Figure 1.40. Jean Bazaine, Baptistry for L’Eglise du Sacré Coeur, 1949–51. Audincourt, Doubs.

Figure 1.41. Zelman, study for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce façade mosaic, 1943–44.

Figure 1.42. Idoux and Normand, study for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce façade mosaic, 1944.
Figure 1.43. Pie-Raymond Régamey, "Eglise De Assy-Passy." *Cahiers de l'Art Sacré* 1, Oeuvres Nouvelles et artistes nouveaux (1939–1945): 41.
Chapter 2: Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, A Vision of Postwar Collectivity

In 1951, Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée Nationale d’Art Moderne, responded to the growing controversies surrounding Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy in the American art journal ArtNews. He argues that this Alpine church is a vital contribution to the French monumental tradition:

When monumentality is achieved, an era becomes a period in art history. The creations of its artists are accepted and integrated as they are permitted to work on large public or private buildings. Only then do invention and craft fuse into style. The monument is a synthesis of the arts at a historical moment; it becomes the moment’s symbol, its supreme and total expression.\(^{198}\)

Cassou suggests that France has a historical obligation to allow modern artists to express themselves on a monumental scale because modernism was so poorly represented in the nation’s monuments. For that reason, he urges his readers to look kindly upon Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce at Assy, despite its “uneven” aesthetic: “Are not the great monuments filled with incongruities? .... [an] era must run the risk if it wishes to merit the label ‘civilization,’ and ours must too.”\(^{199}\)

And yet, if, as Cassou would have it, a monument carries the legacy of an entire culture, perhaps it is no coincidence that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce embodies the French avant-garde tradition. Cassou remarks that the scandals that surround the church are “…but another aspect of a tragic dilemma. Modern art must still fight for its right to become a part of society.” He paraphrases a nameless but “distinguished Dominican reverend father,” who declared that by the time the uproar around the church died down, “…modern art will have had three enemies, Hitler,

\(^{198}\) Cassou 1951, 19.
\(^{199}\) Ibid., 58.
Stalin, and the Pope.” In short, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce is not just a clerical battle against the Vatican; it is a monument that embodies the spirit of *La France Résistante*.

In this chapter, I will examine how a need to assert the continued strength of the French tradition influenced Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s postwar development. The extent to which the nation’s diminished cultural status influenced the choice of artist and subject remains vague, even though this is the phase in which the church garners its “avant-garde” reputation. In 1949, the halls of the Vatican began to echo with complaints from anti-modern, ultra-right-wing conservatives known as “Integrists.” The Integrists objected not only to the inclusion of Communist, atheist, and Jewish artists, but to the use of modern art in general. It seemed that contemporary modes of expression were incompatible with the Christian spirit. When Marie-Alain Couturier, the project’s director and the aforementioned “distinguished Dominican reverend father,” unveiled the crucifix he commissioned from Germaine Richier (figure 2.1), the Integrists caused a firestorm. They protested the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in August 1950 by distributing copies of the now infamous pamphlet known as “The Tract of Angers” (figure 2.2). The following month, Pope Pius XII issued a *menti nostrae* condemning the “monstrosities of art which even pretend to call themselves Christian” as well as the “priests [that] allow themselves to be led astray by the mania for novelty.”

The controversies eventually led to Couturier’s excommunication in 1954.

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200 William Rubin posits the Sacred Art Movement as an expression of tensions between the Integrists and French Dominicans. Religious art scholars have challenged that idea by showing that this revolution was, on a national level, not so revolutionary, as I did in the first chapter. The French Catholic clergy began to embrace modernism prior to World War II. Nevertheless, Rubin’s compelling analysis remains the most definitive treatment of the Dominican-Integrist controversies. For the purposes of this dissertation, his study provides vital, though unintentional, insight into the way Couturier and the press cultivated the Sacred Art Movement’s “avant-garde” image. Pope Pius XII 1951, 33.
It is difficult to think that anything but a genuine love of modern art motivated the rebellion that took place at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. And certainly, my aim in this chapter is not to diminish Couturier’s actions, particularly the gravity of the consequences. At the same time, however, his unexpected dénouement may have occluded the parallels between Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and larger, Resistance-era cultural narratives. This chapter illuminates those connections by relating Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to a broader, institutional effort to promote an innately “avant-garde” French tradition in an attempt to maintain the prestige of French culture at a moment of economic and social crisis. In so doing, we can reach a better understanding of what the Sacred Art Movement represented to modernists, how it informed their interest in religious art, and perhaps even the theological basis for Couturier’s rebellion.

I laid the foundation for this analysis in Chapter 1 by demonstrating that the French clergy began to embrace modern art and its avant-garde themes by the 1930s. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce originated in 1937 as part of a conservative pastoral mission to proselytize to Alpine tourists. A surprisingly progressive aesthetic program characterized the church from the beginning, not only in an attempt to suit the advanced tastes of Assy’s elite population, but because of a genuine interest in modern art. I argued that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce reflected the conservative rhetoric of a “nouveau moyen âge,” or New Medieval Age, where a spiritual revolution, an apocalypse, would produce a new and united Catholic society that welcomed individual expression. The avant-garde’s struggle against the French Academy resonated with many Catholic clergymen in the 1930s as an analogy for their battle against the Third Republic, prompting many, including Couturier, to embrace the French defeat in the Phony War and Philippe Pétain’s “National Revolution.” Therefore, the eclecticism of the church’s iconographic
program, which has long represented the defiance of a status quo both aesthetic and political, actually speaks to deeply conservative prewar rhetoric.

This chapter builds upon those findings to elucidate how a transformed notion of the New Medieval Age enabled Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to encapsulate the liberal postwar spirit of La France Résistante. Six years had now elapsed since the start of construction, and in that time, the French political landscape changed dramatically. Surprisingly, so did the New Medieval Age. The New Medieval Age appealed to the innate eschatological dimension of the modernist project because its arrival would bring long sought after institutional recognition. Moreover, it enabled modernists to situate their art within the innately “modern” art historical tradition of the Romanesque. Following years of Occupation, when modern art was vulnerable to fascist iconoclasm, this older generation of modernists welcomed the opportunity to leave a lasting record of their art historical accomplishment within the legally-protected context of a French church. I therefore explore Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s development between 1945 and 1950 to elucidate the cultural conditions, institutional rhetoric, and historical framework that facilitated modernist interest in Catholic art projects thereafter.

Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and the Apocalypse

On 10 February 1944, an image of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce—its still-incomplete bell tower ensconced in scaffolding—was featured on the front page of Le Matin, accompanied by the bold headline: “A HUMBLE SAVOYARD CHURCH DECORATED BY THE GREATEST PAINTERS” (figure 2.3). The reporter, Marguette Bouvier, had traveled to Assy to see Georges Rouault’s stained-glass window, The Mocking of Christ, installed in the choir. It was something that had to be seen to be believed. Celebrated modern artists, even faithful Catholics like
Rouault, did not create religious art. And so she was impressed to learn that Pierre Bonnard and Raoul Dufy had also accepted commissions. But, then again, why not commission the nation’s greatest painters to create Catholic art? She remarks: “For who else should decorate a church of a very new type, a church destined for a special category of parishioners: tuberculosis sufferers from each of the five continents. Assy, for them, must represent France.”

She therefore implores Rouault to design the remaining façade windows:

Dear monsieur Rouault, I pray you, do not refuse. Don’t speak of your age, of your paintings that need finishing… Agree to make these six windows for this façade so that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce will bring together a group that remains a testament to a period when France, diminished and mutilated, was still the homeland of very great artists.

However, Assy’s local population of health tourists became less a consideration in Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s postwar development, even though the town’s economy was under considerable strain at the end of the war. In 1943, the Germans requisitioned the sanatoria and hotels de cure, and the patient population shifted from an international elite to injured military personnel. Liberation brought hope that paying guests would return and revive the flagging economy, particularly since the sanatoria had suffered only negligible damage. Ultimately, this was not to be. Tuberculosis was rampant amongst prisoners of war, and most of the sanatoria remained auxiliary military hospitals until late 1946. Tourist revenue therefore remained low.

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201 “Par qui faire décorer une église d’un style très nouveau, une église destinée à une catégorie spéciale de paroissiens: des tuberculeux venus des cinq continents. Assy, pour eux, devait représenter la France.” Bouvier 1944, 1.
202 “Cher monsieur Rouault, je vous en prie, ne refusez pas. Ne parlez pas de votre âge, de vos tableaux à finir…Acceptez de faire ces six vitraux de cette façade pour que Notre-Dame-de-Toute-Grâce groupe un ensemble qui reste comme le témoignage d’une époque où la France amoindrie et mutilée était tout de même la patrie de très grandes artistes…” Ibid.
because so much of the area had been requisitioned for military use. By the time the military finally left, an effective antibiotic treatment of tuberculosis had been discovered and the sanatorial population gradually began to diminish. Consequently, the revenue deriving from a steady influx of wealthy health tourists never returned to its prewar levels and Assy was re-assimilated into Passy in the late 1970s. Still, with Liberation seemingly imminent, it seemed only a matter of time before health tourists once again flocked to Assy for the pure mountain air. Devémy therefore gave the remaining commissions to Groupe Témoignage in order to see the church completed by the end of the year.

Couturier and Régamey, however, had other plans for the Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. With commissions by Rouault and Bonnard already underway, the church was an ideal model for postwar reconstruction. Nearly 6,000 churches were either damaged or destroyed during the war. And through new historic monuments laws passed between 1940 and 1941, the State was no longer obligated to reconstruct churches à l’identique. Couturier and Régamey therefore used Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to advocate for a progressive approach to rebuilding French churches, particularly in high-traffic tourist areas. Bouvier’s article is therefore a particularly apt place to begin our inquiry into Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s postwar phase. Because tourism became increasingly important to the French economy in the postwar period, many of the nation’s churches would soon be asked to “represent France.” Instead of a France “diminished and mutilated,” Couturier and Régamey sought to represent La France Résistante.

In this section, I examine how Couturier adapted the idea of a New Medieval Age to fit the spirit of La France Résistante. For Couturier and his co-editor, Pie-Raymond Régamey, the pervasive use of apocalyptic themes by modernists and the provisional postwar government suggested that this New Medieval Age had arrived. I will also argue how themes of Resistance
shaped Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s postwar direction and culminated in its standing as a lieu de mémoire (site of shared memory) of Couturier’s rebellion against the Vatican.

Resister of the First Hour

When Couturier left for America in 1940, his politics were fairly conservative, rooted in Royalist beliefs and shaped by his participation in the right-wing political movement, the Action Française. Like so many clergy, Couturier initially viewed the fall of the Third Republic with optimism, although he viewed it as a missed opportunity for the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty. He wrote to his brother Jean: “For a moment I had thought that the monarchic restoration was going to take place, and it seemed to me this would be the truly wise solution, assuring a maximum of stability and making possible certain audacities indispensable even to a vanquished people.”204 Unable to return to France, he remained at the St. Vincent de Paul monastery where he had been invited to preach months before. During that time, as Robert Schwartzwald demonstrates, Couturier quickly became disillusioned by Philippe Pétain. He joined the stateside resistance group Free France in June 1940 after hearing Charles de Gaulle’s call for resistance on the radio. Then, in October 1940, after several months of clandestine work, he gave a homily that encouraged his fellow Dominicans to join the Resistance and was banned from the monastery as a result. From that point forward, he became known as a “resistor of the first hour.”

As a clergyman with progressive views on modern art, Couturier was already a popular figure in French expatriate circles. But his legend was all but assured after his forced departure from monastic life.205 He preached across the United States and Canada, taught painting, and gave lectures on modern art at well-known museums. Henri Focillon, Couturier’s former

204 Undated letter from Marie-Alain Couturier to Jean Couturier, quoted in Schwartzwald 2004, 145.
205 A concise summary of this period can be found in Caussé 2015.
professor at the Sorbonne, founded the École Libre des Hautes Études with Jacques Maritain in 1942 and asked Couturier to head the Baltimore branch of its Institut Français d’Art Moderne. The “atelier Couturier” would feature alongside the “école Ozenfant, atelier Léger,” and “atelier Zadkine.”

The Institut never came to be, but in its preparation, Couturier made valuable contacts with Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipchitz, Marc Chagall, Salvador Dali, Meyer Schapiro, and John and Dominique de Menil. Contact with this diverse group of fellow expatriates fundamentally changed Couturier’s views on art, race, and politics. But, above all, it also changed his views on the New Medieval Age.

In the previous chapter, I described how adherents of Catholic Personalist philosophy like Couturier lived in hope of a spiritual revolution, an apocalypse, that would culminate in a New Medieval Age. Many therefore looked upon the Vichy Régime’s “National Revolution” as an expression of that struggle; it expressed their own dissatisfaction with the Third Republic as well as their eschatological aspirations for a New Medieval Age. But in the wake of the German Occupation, it became clear that the Nazis were the true evil force to be defeated, Couturier’s views on the New Medieval Age fundamentally changed. In a letter dated 5 April 1942, he wrote to his brother Jean:

As concerns the Jews, I beg of you, remember that you are Christian, that charity tolerates no anti-Semitism, and that even if certain measures seem politically inevitable among those who have been conquered, at least let us maintain the integrity of our hearts. Justice and clarity first of all—but anti-Semitism offends them both. I know very well that these ideas are not fashionable in the world today, but Christianity is Christianity … As for me, I have admirable Jewish friends and fully intend to be loyal to them.

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207 Letter from Marie-Alain Couturier to Jean Couturier, 5 April 1942, quoted in Schwartzwald 2004, 149.
To find a former member of the Action Française condemn legally sanctioned anti-Semitism in France is surprising. But it reflects his belief that the Resistance was the true spiritual battle against evil that would culminate in a New Medieval Age.

Couturier was not alone in this idea. Personalist philosophy compelled many in the clergy to join the “Spiritual Resistance”: an underground clerical network that fought to liberate France through nonviolent action, including prayer and underground publications. The “Spiritual Resistance” would be transformed by Henri-Marie Ferét’s 1943 book, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean: vision chrétienne de l’histoire* (1943). Drawing upon scripture, Church history, and unnamed contemporary events, this Dominican theologian reinterpreted the Book of Revelations to suggest that St. John had prophesied a threefold, preordained divine plan for the earth. Ferét argued that the first two phases of this divine plan had already elapsed. Now, the world was experiencing the Apocalypse that would culminate in the new religious era: the New Medieval Age.208 Ferét’s book provided the growing “Spiritual Resistance” with the theological basis necessary to take military action by joining the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). Féret continued to influence Personalist thought after Liberation. As I show below, he was even interviewed by Régamey in a 1944 issue of *L’Art Sacré*.

Unsurprisingly, given the continued prevalence of Personalist philosophy, Couturier believed that Liberation signaled the dawn of the New Medieval Age. But as befitting the editor of *L’Art Sacré*, he found proof in modern art. In a 1945 essay entitled “Léger et le moyen âge,” he recalls how that moment of realization occurred at an exhibition of Léger’s work at the Paul

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208 Joseph Flipper describes Ferét’s reading of the phases in this way: “First, the Book of Revelation marks a period of persecution by the Roman Empire that ends in the demise of the Empire and the triumph of the church. The second period, our present time, is a time of ongoing struggle between the power of evil in this world and the power of the gospel. Third, a time during which the truth of the gospel rules the earth.” Joseph S. Flipper, *Between Apocalypse and Eschaton: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2015), 59.
Rosenberg Gallery in New York in 1942: “that day, I had the sudden, unforeseen feeling that something disappeared since the Middle Ages was resuscitating amongst us.” 209 Using anagogical terms, he goes on to recall a transformative experience in which he finally understood modern abstraction:

“…the ‘religious’ character of a work is not necessarily retained within a sacred subject; much more deeply, [its religious character] is due to very quality of the plastic forms. And this “quality” comes directly, spontaneously, from the intimate dispositions of the mind and the heart: not from the subject represented or from some more or less hieratic formula. For if it were not so, how could arts that do not involve the representation of a subject, such as music or architecture, be religious and sacred?” 210

For Couturier, this experience revealed that abstraction is innately religious because spiritual content is actually buried deep beneath the substrata of the visible world. In Léger’s art, he sees similarities with the “great medieval masters” who see the world metaphorically and use art to find spiritual stability at a time of chaos. 211 He therefore encourages the participation of celebrated modernists in the work of reconstructing French churches, regardless of their faith or politics: “We must rebuild churches in France. Above all in Normandy where Léger was born:

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210 “…le caractère ‘religieux’ d’une oeuvre ne tient pas nécessairement, ni même principalement à la représentation d’une sujet sacré, mais bien plus profondément, elle tient au caractère, à la qualité même des formes plastiques. Et cette ‘qualité-là’ leur vient directement, spontanément, des dispositions intimes de l’esprit et du coeur—et non pas du sujet représenté ou de quelque formule plus ou moins hiératique. Car s’il n’en était ainsi, comment des arts qui n’impliquent pas représentation d’un sujet, comme la musique ou l’architecture, pourraient-ils être religieux et sacrés?” Ibid., 18-19.

211 “…chez Léger comme chez les maîtres anonymes du moyen âge, tout cela qui tend à soustraire les formes plastiques à l’instabilité perpétuelle du monde mouvant où nous vivons les fixe sur un plan intemporel qu’il ne faut évidemment pas confondre avec celui des réalités éternelles, mais qui a du moins avec lui ce caractère commun d’être de soi soustrait aux changements indéfinis de la durée.” Ibid., 17.
may we see there some admirable frescoes and windows that we can expect from the gifts of such a great artist.”

It is curious that this revelatory account of seeing Léger’s art transforms into something of an artistic manifesto. One might well wonder why it was necessary, given that he had already espoused the cause of involving non-religious artists in the Sacred Art Movement prior to the war. Indeed, given that the New Medieval Age was intended to be a new age of religiosity, why should Couturier continued to privilege canonical, non-religious artists over the younger, spiritually engaged avant-garde? At Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, for instance, he rejected the idea of asking Alfred Manessier to design the windows for the nave. This former member of the Resistance only converted to Catholicism in 1943. What better way to signal that the arrival of the New Medieval Age?

I would argue instead that the New Medieval Age counterintuitively operated mainly as an art historical framework: a way to retrospectively articulate the accomplishments of the École de Paris using the watershed language of apocalypse. Couturier was not alone in using this innately forward-looking idea to articulate a past historical moment. Couturier’s co-editor at L’Art Sacré, Pie-Raymond Régamey, was thinking along those lines. In fact, Régamey used the urgency of reconstruction to begin a new series of L’Art Sacré, the Cahiers de l’Art Sacré, without Couturier in 1944. The third issue, Oeuvres Nouvelles et Artistes Nouveaux (New Artworks and New Artists), exemplifies his revised New Medieval Age belief. In it, Régamey featured Ferét’s commentary on Georg’s Angel of the Apocalypse (figure 2.4; 1943). Régamey suggested: “This work is made moving by its modern anguish, and more particularly the years of

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212 “Il va falloir rebâtir des églises en France. Surtout dans cette Normandie où Léger est né: puissions-nous y voir quelque jour les fresques et les verrières admirables que nous pouvons attendre des dons d’un aussi grand artiste.” Ibid., 23.
defeat and abjection in which it was realized.” Ferét disagreed with Régamey’s interpretation, arguing that Georg had obscured the hope and optimism of John’s prophecy because the artist relied upon the colloquial sense of the term “apocalypse.” Nevertheless, he agreed with Régamey’s belief that modern art would be essential in the New Medieval Age, saying: “Only artists—and first of all theologians—can render unto the laity the sense of the Resurrection and the victories of Christ!”213 I therefore suggest that Couturier’s inaccurate use of the concept can therefore be attributed to the involvement of canonical modernists who were necessary to publicizing his cause.

Churches, however, are never unilateral efforts; therefore, it is interesting to consider why a New Medieval Age may have appealed to non-religious and non-Catholic modernists in the postwar period. Did they recognize the inaccuracy of the concept? How did they reconcile themselves with its religious implications? In the next section, I will consider how the shift towards a historical mode of artistic production prompted celebrated modernists to embrace this problematic idea.

*The Apocalypse of Liberation*

In the previous chapter, I examined the circumstances behind Rouault and Bonnard’s contributions to Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to demonstrate that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s postwar momentum was somewhat incidental. A stained-glass artisan asked Rouault for permission to translate the painting, *The Mocking of Christ*, into a window and then sold it to Devémy at an exhibition. Only after the war did the artist agree to design the remaining façade.

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213 Ferét said: “In the common opinion of our time, even the word Apocalypse is evocative of catastrophe. There is [in Georg’s artwork] a deformation of St. John’s message, which is above all a message of light and of Heavenly Jerusalem. From this point of view, medieval interpretations (the Saint-Sever manuscript, the paintings of Saint-Savin and Berzé-la-Ville, the Angers Tapestry) are more faithful to St. John.” Henri-Marie Féret, “L’Apocalypse et le Job de Georg,” *Cahiers de L’Art Sacré* 1, 3 (1945): 9.
windows. By contrast, wartime necessity compelled Bonnard to paint the *Saint Frances de Sales* retablo.\textsuperscript{214} And in the end, Bonnard would create the artwork without ever seeing the church in person. Thus, as passive contributors to Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Rouault and Bonnard can be said to have had no investment in the church or its conservative New Medieval Age ideology.

The passive character of their commissions was by no means unusual. The clergy had never been the only barrier to modernist involvement in Catholic art projects. After all, there were the artists themselves. The divide between religious and secular France was so deep that even Rouault, a devout Catholic, refused to create art for the Church because abiding by Catholicism’s manifold iconographic restrictions would compromise the authenticity of the artist’s voice. It is therefore unsurprising that non-religious modernists should refuse a Catholic art commission because it conflicted with their own beliefs.

Politics exacerbated the situation. At the heart of the enduring conflict between Catholics and Communists lay a basic ideological conflict. Religion, which dealt in vague concepts of the ineffable, was a dangerous fantasy to the Communists. It was the “opiate of the masses” that distracted from the realities of the class struggle. The belief that art should only deal with that which is tangible, real, and socially relevant prompted Gustave Courbet to comment: “Show me an angel and I will paint you one.”\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{214} The symbolism of this gesture is further intensified by the fact that Haute-Savoie “fed” France during the war. Indeed, most beef came from the areas surrounding Passy. However, by the end of the war, due to extreme rationing, government supply mismanagement, and a thriving black market, Haute-Savoie’s resources were all but exhausted. This made the situation for those in the sanatoria, with very little mobility, extremely serious. Abrahams 1992, 272.

\textsuperscript{215} Linda Nochlin has constructively revised art historical understanding of Courbet’s infamous quote: “The question of whether it was possible to create religious paintings in the traditional sense at all in the mid nineteenth century, when the very conception of reality upon which such art had been premised had been so radically altered, was an important one for the period…. For Courbet the answer was an unqualified negative. ‘I cannot paint an angel because I have never seen one,’ he frankly declared.” Linda Nochlin, *Style and Civilization: Realism* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 1991), xxx.
I suggest that it took the peculiar political conditions of World War II to make this genre a viable prospect in modernist circles. For hundreds of years, belief in the eternal grandeur of France provided the foundation for its sense of pride, which manifested itself most clearly in the nation’s political, religious, and artistic institutions. But years under German occupation severely compromised French autonomy and brought the contemporary relevance of those institutions into question. World War II, in other words, seemed to signal the definitive end of the French cultural epoch. However, many welcomed Liberation as a *tabula rasa*, or a clean slate, from which a new, unified society would emerge. I argue that the idea that Liberation was a clean slate led many modernists to believe that the *arrière-garde/avant-garde* cycle of the previous century had finally been broken. The Sacred Art Movement was therefore a way to express that triumph.

**Jean Lurçat’s Apocalypse**

In 1944, Jean Lurçat, a high-ranking member of the Maquis Resistance, went through his contacts in the Resistance underground to accept Canon Jean Devémy’s offer to create an apse tapestry for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce (figure 2.5). His acceptance is odd not only because he was an atheist and a Communist, but because he had refused a Sacred Art Movement commission twice before. He had received the last offer from Devémy while working a clandestine radio in 1943. In an interview with William Rubin some time later, Lurçat recalled that he changed his mind after hearing about Couturier’s stateside efforts for Free France.\(^{216}\) Although Couturier’s reputation was undoubtedly a factor in Lurçat’s decision, the subject of the

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\(^{216}\) Devémy’s recollections again prove problematic here. He reports to have asked Novarina to contact Lurçat (through the intermediary of a colleague) after seeing the artist’s tapestries at the Palais des Papes and in *Formes et Couleurs*. This, he claimed, occurred after Novarina was demobilized in 1940. As Caussé points out, 1943 is a far more likely date because the magazine did not mention Lurçat until March 1941, and then only in passing. Lurçat was featured more prominently in an article from July, and later that year, the magazine dedicated an entire issue to his work. Caussé also argues that no tapestry exhibits were held at the Palais des Papes during the war and that Devémy probably confused the venue with the Musée des Augustins de Toulouse. Caussé 2010, 320.
tapestry, *Apocalypse*, provides insight into the unique set of post-Liberation conditions that, ultimately, opened the door to increased modernist participation in the Sacred Art Movement.

In the original Greek, apocalypse translates to the “lifting of the veil” and refers to the revelation of divine knowledge. In the New Testament Book of Revelation, John of Patmos describes apocalypse as the process by which God destroys the earth in preparation for the Heavenly Jerusalem:

> And the nations were angry: and thy wrath is come. And the time of the dead, that they should be judged and that thou shouldest render reward to thy servants the prophets and the saints, and to them that fear thy name, little and great: and shouldest destroy them who have corrupted the earth.\(^\text{217}\)

Apocalypse is a defining theme of the French Resistance. It spoke to the catastrophic level of destruction needed to overthrow not only the Nazis but the entrenched, nationalistic political institutions that had fomented two World Wars and enabled fascism to grow unchecked. For many in the Resistance, World War II was a “metaphysical event,” a divine struggle against a dangerous political ethos.\(^\text{218}\) Apocalypse therefore articulates the need for a *tabula rasa* that would yield a new, unified France and a Europe built upon consensus.

Apocalyptic themes pervade retrospective accounts of the Resistance fight, particularly with regard to the Liberation of Paris in August 1944. Resistance and Allied fighters used guerilla tactics to expel the Germans, and after six days, the skies of the capital were murky with the smoke of homemade weapons and German machinery. Lucie Aubrac, a key Resistance

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\(^\text{217}\) Chapter 6 verse 1 & 2.

fighter, described the German retreat as “…apocalypse. Alongside the roads for hundreds of kilometers the German army had abandoned military equipment half-destroyed by bombardments. Wrecked tanks, armed cars, burnt-out lorries.”

For Aubrac, the almost instantaneous disappearance of German forces from French soil was akin to the divine reckoning, one that would give way to a new era of renewal.

On the anniversary of the Paris insurrection, Jean-Paul Sartre fell back into apocalyptic metaphors to glorify the aims of Resistance forces in his essay, “The Liberation of Paris: a week of apocalypse”:

Most of the FFI…had in August 1944 an obscure sense of fighting not only for France against the Germans but also for man against the blind powers of the machine. We had been told often enough that the revolutions of the twentieth century could not be like those of the nineteenth, and that it would take only one plane, only one big gun to put down a rebellious mob…. Facing an enemy clad in steel, they [the Resistance] became intoxicated with the feeling of freedom and the lightness of their movements…. They tested, and made us test, the naked power of man. Yes, it was the triumph of the apocalypse, of that apocalypse which is always defeated by the forces of order and which for once, within the narrow limits of this street fight was victorious… So what we’re going to commemorate this year, officially and in an orderly manner, is the explosion of freedom, the disruption of the established order, and the invention of a spontaneous and effective order.

This retrospective account was written in the wake of the bombing of Hiroshima, which replaced one political machine (fascism) with that of another (America). And yet, Sartre remains optimistic about the future because of France’s liberation. Drawing upon the supernatural dialectic between good and evil, he uses the spontaneity, chaos, and vulnerability of the

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219 In Aubrac’s account, apocalypse operates colloquially to evoke the immense scale of the war’s destruction, but I consider it relevant given her postwar political role. Siân Rees, Lucie Aubrac: The French Resistance Heroine Who Defied the Gestapo (London: Michael O’Mara, 2015).

Resistance fighters to explain their triumph over the ordered and seemingly impenetrable force. France had been delivered from evil by a collective act of martyrdom, an apocalyptic event insofar as its spiritual resilience forever legitimized the power of the people.

Retrospective accounts of the war often portray the Resistance as a community of men and women who set aside their political differences for the sake of the revolution. Of course, the reality of the situation was quite different. From the outset, the Resistance was characterized by partisan squabbles between Gaullists and Communists, only in June 1944 were the country’s various Resistance movements united under the FFI. One myth about the Resistance community proves true: it fostered productive dialogue between Catholics and Communists. During this fraught era, these two political opponents discovered a shared messianic desire for a *tabula rasa*, a mutual emphasis on communitarianism, and a common enemy in fascism. In fact, many Catholics emerged from World War II sympathetic to the Communist cause and were excommunicated as a result. 221

Lurçat’s *Apocalypse* elucidates further points of commonality between Catholics and Communists in modernist circles. Couturier and Lurçat shared a medievalizing desire for a *tabula rasa* that would see modern art become a communal practice. This tapestry therefore commemorates a moment of harmony between these two politically opposed groups that would ultimately prove to be all too brief.

Like Catholics, and the Personalists in particular, French Communists looked back to the Middle Ages as an era of social cohesion, and the Romanesque as the first truly populist art. 222 Jean Lurçat was a firm proponent of this idea. His interest in tapestry derived from his

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Communist belief that modernism had failed in its duty to make art relevant to everyday life.

From the beginning, he commented, “I had always been most anxious to find a more architectural means of expression than was to be found in easel painting.” In the mid-1930s, he began exploring media beyond the canvas out of frustration with the state of modern painting: “[t]he tricks of intellectualism, the execution of pure plastics, were beginning to get on our nerves…” Then, in 1937, he discovered the *Apocalypse d’Angers* (figure 2.6):

> This extraordinary hugger-mugger of fears, of anticipations, of cataclysms, of men bowed down in worship or in prayer; these tendernesses and massacres of the *Apocalypse* seemed to me like a demonstration that painting can, and should without any doubt, sound the very depths of passion, hope, sorrow, or the aspirations of men… I came back from this visit more convinced than ever of the validity of the methods that I had seen and put in hand up till now…. I was finally persuaded that it was only by a close collaboration with architecture and the architect that the painter could find a solution to his present difficulties.

To Lurçat, the *Apocalypse d’Angers* encapsulated an ideal moment when art served a true social role. Because its execution was a collective effort, the tapestry reflected and assuaged the anxieties of a chaotic age. He therefore espoused the harmonious union between artist and architect as a means to bring art down from its rarified place in contemporary society.

Lurçat’s admiration for medieval communitarianism could, theoretically, have provided the common ground necessary for him to create religious art in the prewar period. But that quickly proved not to be the case. In 1936, he gave a lecture on French modernism at the Sancellemoz sanatorium as part of an arts and culture series put on by the Syndicat d’Initiative.

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224 Ibid., 8.

de Passy (Passy commerce office). Couturier was in attendance. Inspired by the young man’s belief that modern art could revive the great tradition of French tapestry, Couturier asked Lurçat if he would display a few of his designs in the *Vitraux et Tapisseries Modernes* exhibit he was planning in Paris. As I noted in Chapter 1, Couturier saw the exhibit as the first step in his sacred art renaissance. He believed that inviting secular artists to explore the aesthetic potential of monumental media—tapestry, murals, stained glass—might prompt them to become interested in the sacred themes typically associated with those media. In many ways, Lurçat was an ideal candidate; although he had specialized in tapestry for well over a decade, he had yet to explore religious subject matter due to his own Communist-driven atheism. For that reason, according to William Rubin, Couturier “endeavored to persuade him to essay a sacred theme, observing that religion provided a ‘collective’ iconography of the sort that was especially suitable to tapestries, and that a church building was one of the few architectural settings that needed such decoration.” But the artist refused to entertain the idea, arguing: “Suppose you wanted me to make a Christ. I would simply make a man whereas you would expect me to make a God.”

As we saw above, however, the artist changed his mind about Couturier after hearing about the Dominican’s work for the Resistance. Lurçat himself had held a high post in the Maquis since the early days of the Occupation. He had left Paris for Aubusson in September 1939 with a commission from the Ministry of National Education to create a series of tapestry

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226 “Enfin, Jean Lurçat, le 21 mars, terminait cette brillante série de conférences par la plus intelligente et la plus compréhensive des causeries. Peinture moderne, art abstrait, cubisme, rapports de l’esthétique et du social, Jean Lurçat édifa devant nous, comme un merveilleux prestidigitateur fait surgir du plateau un palmier ou une danseuse nue, théories séduisantes, étincelants paradoxes et perspectives d’avenir. La solidité de son argumentation nous a laissés pleins d’espoir dans l’école française de peinture moderne dont il est l’ambassadeur le plus précieux et le mieux qualifié.” Piraud 1936, n.p.

He joined the Maquis not long after the defeat, using his studio as a cover for his Resistance activities. In addition to some rather dangerous reconnaissance work, Lurçat edited two influential Resistance newsletters, *Le Partisan, Liberté* and *Les Étoiles du Quercy.* Lurçat used his tapestry workshop as a cover for his Resistance activities. Vichy, in its anxiousness to support artisanal French craft, gave him a stipend and continued to provide him with a studio. In 1943, he was given a major exhibit at the Palais des Papes and profiled in a special issue of *Formes et Couleurs* (figure 2.7). It was through the Palais des Papes exhibit that Devémy learned of Lurçat’s art.

Devémy went through clandestine channels to offer Lurçat the commission in 1943 but heard no response. In an interview with Rubin, Lurçat noted that he refused the commission at first because he “was not in the least religious, and…had already discussed such matters with Father Couturier (though not specifically with regard to Assy).” Lurçat then went underground. Nearly a year later, in 1944, Lurçat asked his contacts in the Resistance to quietly put him in direct contact with Devémy. Liberation was not far off and he had heard of Couturier’s work for Free France.

Lurçat seems to have considered the fact that Couturier’s name was attached to the project enough reason to accept. In a message to Devémy, he said that he hoped they could come

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230 Rubin 1961, 104.
231 Devémy probably considered Lurçat a safe choice because he was still allowed to exhibit. However, he was undoubtedly aware of the artist’s resistance work because he conveyed the offer through Louis Moynat, a colleague of Maurice Novarina. Moynat, I have found, was in the Resistance because he was arrested by the Gestapo in late 1943. Michel Germain, *Le sang de la barbarie: chronique de la Haute-Savoie au temps de l’occupation allemande, septembre 1943–26 mars 1944* (Montmélian: La Fontaine de Siloë, 1995), 97. Moreover, Lurçat reports to have received the letter while operating a clandestine radio. Rubin 1961, 103.
up with a subject that he could “feel [because] to embark upon such an important work could generate for me large production costs (design, etc.).” Lurçat insists that the subject must contain some personal resonance because the tapestry would consume him, his employees, and his finances for the next two years. When Devémy suggested the theme of the Virgin Mary in honor of the church’s namesake, Lurçat hesitated just as he had years before. He recalled: “I knew nothing about this church and when Devémy requested a tapestry of the Virgin, an image of Saint-Sulpician art came to my mind.” The commission remained at an impasse until Couturier returned to Paris in September 1945. The Dominican, according to Rubin…

…recognizing the inappropriateness of the theme of the Virgin, suggested that he do a tapestry based on the vision of John. Lurçat agreed, and also accepted Couturier’s suggestion to do contiguous panels representing paradise and the Jesse Tree. When Lurçat remarked that he would be unable to represent God convincingly in the panel, the priest replied simply: ‘Leave Him out.’

The decision to downplay the presence of the divine (either through Christ or God) in Lurçat’s tapestry is typically interpreted as Couturier’s way to assuage the discomfort of his non-religious artists. However, I argue that for Lurçat, this was an opportunity to depict an allegory of war in a way that would articulate collective hopes for a postwar tabula rasa.

Lurçat was just one of many artists to adopt Catholic iconography to articulate his experience of World War II. Gertje Utley even calls it the lingua franca of the postwar period.234

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232 “C’est pourquoi, il conviendrait, mon cher ami, que nous fussions mis par votre entremise en relation directe, ne serait-ce que pour discuter du sujet. Il va sans dire, que nous discutions le doyen et moi de cette question. Un sujet que je puisse ‘sentir’, pour m’embarquer dans un travail aussi important et générateur pour moi de gros frais d’atelier (dessinateur, etc). Une telle ampleur et la qualité des coéquipiers (peintres, architectes, etc) engage sévèrement la responsabilité du tapissier.” Undated letter, Jean Lurçat to Louis Moynat, cited in Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 15.

233 Rubin 1961, 103.

234 She observes: “the symbolism of Christian imagery has rarely occupied a more prominent place in secular art than during the postwar era because it offered a means of literalizing transcendental ideas of expressing suffering.” Gertje Utley, Picasso: The Communist Years (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 76.
Communists, atheists, and Jews often appropriated the iconography of Christ’s crucifixion at this time to make sense of the war’s atrocities. François Gruber’s painting Job (1944; figure 2.8), for instance, expresses the suffering of Parisians under Occupation. That same year, Boris Taslitzky painted a stirring image of the crucifixion for the Saint-Sulpice chapel at the internment camp in Clermont-Ferrand (n.d.; figure 2.9). Taslitzky later drew upon images of Christ’s deposition to depict his wife’s in the Buchenwald concentration camp in The Death of Danielle Casanova (1951; figure 2.10). These three images demonstrate how non-believers appropriated Christian imagery to give redemptive meaning to an otherwise senseless tragedy.

To Régamey, these artworks suggested that World War II had revealed the timelessness of Christian themes to modern artists, which made it possible for them to create religious art. Lurçat treated the subject of Apocalypse in a series known as the Apocalypse des Mal Assis series (1943–45; figure 2.11). Here, he evokes apocalypse in its general, non-Biblical sense. These surrealist scenes are comments on collaboration and the coming revolution. Broken chairs float against desert landscapes with erupting volcanoes and exploding mortar shells. The chairs and gloves represent Vichy bureaucrats who governed France as Nazi puppets: “The seat, the chair, the easy chair. All that allows you to prop up your buttocks and your conscience.” The barren, seemingly passive landscape revolts by destroying the agents of its exploitation.

Lurçat picked up the subject of apocalypse again at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in order to create an “Apocalypse de nos jours” (Apocalypse for our era). To that end, he chose a scene from Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation, which describes the beginning of the Apocalypse:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars: [2] And being with child, she cried

travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. [3] And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads, and ten horns: and on his head seven diadems: [4] And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered; that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her son. [5] And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with an iron rod: and her son was taken up to God, and to his throne.

Catholic theology holds that the Woman of the Apocalypse represents either the Virgin or the Church, her son is Christ, and the Dragon signifies Satan.237 Angels sweep up the child and deliver him to God before the dragon devours him. Meanwhile, the woman flees into the desert. The ensuing war culminates in the dragon’s expulsion from heaven. In the immediate aftermath of Occupation, this scene from John’s vision was an appropriate analogy for the German defeat. He told Rubin that he wanted to situate the relentless brutality of the twentieth century into historical terms: “We [the men of my generation] were baptized at Verdun. Just as soon as we had gotten over that came the war in Spain, and hard on its heels the Germans.”238

Lurçat may have also chosen this subject knowing that it would resonate with the postwar government, which he intended to rely upon for financial assistance. Tapestry manufacturers already depended upon financial assistance from the government, and so in his first letter to Devémy, Lurçat suggested that a Beaux-Arts grant might be obtained to help defray production costs. He betrayed a bit of insider knowledge as a prospective member of de Gaulle’s postwar government when he wrote that Louis Hautecoeur “will not always be Director General of Beaux-Arts and I have good reasons to be a hundred percent certain that his eventual successor

237 Douay-Rheims Bible.  
238 Rubin 1961, 110.
will be at least, if not more, favorable to my personal effort.”

Although he does not refer to Hautecœur’s successor by name, he was almost certainly discussing Robert Rey, the director of French National Museums. Rey became interested Lurçat’s work prior to the war, and as the artist predicted, he offered Couturier and Lurçat a one million franc grant to cover the costs of execution.

Rey was not just interested in the artist but in the deeper aspirations of the project as well. Like Couturier, Rey was a “resistor of the first hour.” After serving as the General Inspector for the Department of Beaux-Arts from 1936 until 1940, he was demoted by the Vichy administration to the role of curator at the Louvre. He likely joined the Resistance at the same time as his supervisor, Jacques Jaujard, then director of Musées Nationaux. After he was given the high post in the Department of Beaux-Arts, he helped to fund several projects that conflated the French spirit of resistance with the French artisanal tradition: thus imbuing resistance into the national narrative. Indeed, as a State commission, Lurçat’s tapestry has always been the

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239 “Si l’église avait les fonds nécessaires aux frais d’exécution (tissage) non compris le carton, on pourrait mettre en route la chose. Conjointement à cette première action, si cette demande recevait un accueil favorable, prouvé clairement par une lettre officielle, que la subvention portera sur le budget d’une seule année ou de deux années, je ferai le travail. Par une lettre privée, adressée au doyen, je le déchargerais de toute responsabilité, si pour une raison ou pour une autre, la subvention n’était pas réalisée ultérieurement.” Letter cited in Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 15.


241 The details and chronology of Rey’s resistance work are vague. Some scholars have argued that he was as a member of the “Phalanx”: a group of high Vichy functionaries who were asked by FFI to oversee the transition after Liberation. He may have also headed a division of the Cohors line and funneled state funds to the Maquis. After the war, he was cleared of collaboration. See Gildea 2015.

242 Philip Nord offers a thoughtful examination of how the Vichy-era emphasis on quality informed arts production across all media as “the legitimizing principle of a new état culturel...its inner demons laid to rest by a public-spirited Resistance elite that reconceived the good, the true, and the beautiful in democratic terms as the cultural
property of France. In this regard, the subject of the apocalypse becomes all the more potent because, as a retrospective theme of the Resistance, it speaks to the way artists and the State commemorated World War II and set out a vision for the future.

However, the final product lacks the optimism one might expect. Unlike the broken chairs of the Apocalypse des Mal Assis, where momentary suspension reinforces the transience of the title, Lurçat renders his personifications of good and evil as isolated but permanent beings. The dark background reinforces the void between the dragon and the Woman of the Apocalypse, reinforcing their enduring polarization. The looming, eternal presence of evil may reflect recent events in Lurçat’s family life. His adopted son, a special agent for the OSS, was arrested for sabotage, sent to a concentration camp, and executed in March 1945. Lurçat apparently learned of his son’s death while creating preliminary sketches for the dragon in early 1946. But I argue that this rather dystopian image reflects Lurçat’s fading hopes for a collective tabula rasa. The French political landscape had changed dramatically in the two years it took Lurçat to finish the design. In May 1947, just before weaving began, De Gaulle expelled the Communist Party from the French government, all but ending its hopes to rebuild France as a socialist utopia.

However, the government continued to draw upon the Resistance-era symbolism of Lurçat’s artwork even as the country lapsed into familiar political divisions. The Apocalypse

243 Devémy seems to have been somewhat bitter about this. When asked about the conditions Lurçat imposed, he said “J’étais en principe d’accord. Le Père Couturier est intervenu pour obtenir des Beaux-Arts, après la guerre, une commande d’État. La tapisserie ne m’appartenait pas, malgré ma participation de 2000 F pour dépassement de budget. La part de l’État était environ un million francs de l’époque.” Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 16.
244 Rubin 1961, 111.
tapestry was installed in the church in 1949. That July, the Pope condemned Communism amongst Catholic clergy, all but ending the already troubled “main tendu” policy between French Catholics and Communists. And yet, in 1950, the state-owned tapestry was removed from the apse and displayed at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris as part of the *Modern Sacred Art* exhibit.245 This was done at the behest of the museum’s chief curator, Jean Cassou, a “resistor of the first hour” and author of the article discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Through the contrast with the Vatican’s restrictive aesthetic policies at the National Museum of Modern Art, Cassou helped to solidify Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s reputation as a site of institutional resistance.

*L’Art Sacré and Postwar Reconstruction*

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, scholarship tends to portray the Sacred Art Movement as a unilaterally clerical postwar endeavor. This idea contradicts the reality of what it is to build or modify a Catholic church in France. With the 1905 Separation of Church and State, the French government reaffirmed its right to ownership over any Catholic church constructed prior 1789. That definition expanded was expanded in 1917 to any church with patrimonial, historic, or artistic value. Laws passed under Vichy in 1940–41 subsequently gave the state custodianship over any Church built after 1905. Because the State plays an active role in the administration of French churches, the Sacred Art Movement was a cross-institutional endeavor by necessity. In this section, I examine how the threat of Americanization contributed to growing institutional ambivalence towards the *tabula rasa*, making it all the more necessary to assert the true spirit of *La France Résistante*. By doing so, I describe how Notre-Dame de Toute-

245 Caussé 2010, 321.
Grâce and other Sacred Art Movement projects began a more enduring interest in sacred space amongst modern artists.

General Charles de Gaulle’s government-in-exile likewise drew upon apocalyptic imagery to unite France. In a speech given from the balcony of the Paris Hotel de Ville on 25 August 1944—the day the Germans abandoned the city—General Charles de Gaulle phrased the Resistance “victory” in eschatological terms. He proclaimed: “Paris! Paris outraged, Paris broken, Paris martyred, but Paris liberated! Liberated by herself, liberated by her people, with the help of the whole of France, that is to say of ‘la France combattante,’ the true France, eternal France.” Omitting the Allied role in the struggle, de Gaulle solidified the myth of a nation liberated by its own blood sacrifice. Liberation, he suggests, had united France and enabled her to rediscover her true spirit.

Institutional response to the apocalypse and to the tabula rasa became increasingly ambivalent in the postwar period as a burgeoning crisis in national identity replaced the glow of Liberation. This was the case for Jean-Paul Sartre. He claimed that proof of the end of French culture could be found in the contrast between the 1945 postwar moment and that of 1918. After 1945, literature described French civilization in historical rather than eternal terms. To counter the looming “identity crisis,” the provisional government advocated for cultural continuity. In a 1945 Bastille Day address, de Gaulle stated: “The Future of France depends in large measure on the way in which we rebuild our institutions.”

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246 Pierre Nora writes: “When Liberation came...a ravaged country had to be made to believe that it had liberated itself, virtually unaided, by virtue of the battle it had waged inside and outside its borders; that country’s ‘rank’ had to be restored by making sure it had a place in the councils of the conquerors; it had to be persuaded, by means of a selective, controlled purge of collaborators, that apart from a small minority of misguided individuals and traitors, the vast majority of Frenchmen had never wanted anything but what was best for France.” Charles de Gaulle quoted in Nora and Kritzman 1996, I, 218.

was innately modern. Thus, one of his first acts as president of the provisional postwar government was to repeal the anti-progress laws enacted under Vichy, thereby suggesting that the nation’s natural progress-driven trajectory had only been derailed.

The French “identity crisis” was particularly harmful to the cause of asserting the nation’s autonomy in light of growing American influence. Five years of “retour à la terre” policy had done considerable damage to the French economy. Nostalgia for self-sufficient, medieval society led to a commercial emphasis on traditional, artisanal craft, resulting in neglect of the industrial complex. Meanwhile, French agricultural resources were exhausted through the effort of supplying the Nazi empire. War-related damage placed the country under further economic strain. By the end of the war, and well into the post-war period, the nation could not provide basic services for its own population, let alone compete on the global market. To help, the United States began sending financial assistance to France in 1945 (the Marshall Plan came into effect in 1948). American aid, however, brought the risk of Americanization.

Churches were one means for the government to assert French autonomy amidst growing American influence. As powerful secular symbols, churches were necessary to demonstrate the continued vitality of French culture. But they were also important to maintaining the integrity of the historical landscape as the nation rebuilt its tourist infrastructure. As early as 1944, American policymakers recognized that tourism could bolster France’s political and economic reconstruction with the reciprocal benefit of sustaining an American political and economic

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249 Marquardt 2015, 16.
presence in Europe. French officials were aware of tourism’s economic importance, seeing it as an opportunity to close the gap between the dollar and the franc.\textsuperscript{250} The American middle class was seen as key to bringing foreign tourism back to pre-Depression levels. Considerable investments were made to elevate accommodations, attractions, and infrastructure to “American standards” in high-traffic tourist areas.

Churches were a high priority in postwar reconstruction.\textsuperscript{251} Over 6,000 French churches were either severely damaged or destroyed during World War II. However, the approach would be drastically different than World War I. Because of the 1940–41 Historic Monuments Act, the Service des Monuments Historiques (SMH) was now willing to replace a ruined structure with a modern building that could better accommodate the liturgical needs of the church community, or replace damaged windows and ecclesiastical furniture with new, modern designs.\textsuperscript{252} Much like the conservative French clergy from the first chapter of this study, the postwar government saw modern art as an opportunity to negotiate between tradition and modernity. Above all, however, it was a way to promote the enduring prestige of French culture after a disastrous war.\textsuperscript{253}

The Sacred Art Movement played an active role in this effort because Couturier and Régamey’s goals aligned with those of the state. Modern art was already a way for France to maintain its cultural autonomy amidst growing American influence because it was one of the few

\textsuperscript{250} As the world’s great creditor nation we have a tremendous stake in making it possible for American residents in ever-increasing number to travel abroad; for the dollar credits they transfer help to protect our investments, sell our export surplus, and put a solid economic foundation under peace.” Quote from Brookings Institution report, cited in McKenzie 2007, 112-113.

\textsuperscript{251} Romy Golan has written extensively about modernism’s postwar interest in monumentality; however, because of the conceptual emphasis of her study, she does not discuss modernist involvement in postwar reconstruction. Golan 2009, 183. Several relevant discussions of postwar reconstruction between 1914 and 1964 can be found in Bullock and Verpoest 2011.

\textsuperscript{252} Frémaux 2011, 156.

\textsuperscript{253} “For French officials, tourism offered an ‘efficacious instrument’ for ensuring international prestige. The head of the French Commissariat général au tourisme, Henry Ingrand, lamented the ‘almost vertical’ decline of France as a tourist destination. In 1928 France had received more tourists than any other country in Europe. In 1938 it was fifth behind Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy.” McKenzie 2007, 112–113.
international arenas where the country still dominated. The postwar government was anxious to involve modernists in postwar reconstruction to demonstrate its progressive sensibility. As Georges Salles, director of French museums proclaimed, “Today ceases the divorce between the State and genius.” In order to capitalize upon the international popularity of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, and others, the French tradition continued to be defined by the same medieval-modern teleology that had emerged prior to the war. However, it should be said that the modernists in question had already been admitted to the art historical canon. Even though the up-and-coming generation of artists embraced the tabula rasa as an opportunity to escape the arrière-garde/avant-garde cycle, the State remained hesitant to recognize anyone but established artists. This undeniably canonical version of modernism retained its avant-garde caché, despite the emergence of new stylistic tendencies, because it stood in contrast to the strict aesthetic policies of totalitarian régimes, namely fascism and Communism.

I argue that the state’s role in the Sacred Art Movement would ultimately prove to be its selling point to modern artists. And in this sense, it is worth considering how Régamey laid that groundwork in the issues he edited before Couturier returned from the United States.

L’Art Sacré and Reconstruction

In 1944, Régamey used the urgency of reconstruction to begin a new series of l’Art Sacré, the Cahiers de l’Art Sacré, mere months after Liberation. He did so alone. The Cahiers were intended to arm Catholic clergy with the art historical knowledge necessary to rebuild the

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255 “Aujourd’hui cesse la divorce entre l’État et le génie.” Quoted in Monnier 1987a, 26.
country’s churches in a way that would move sacred art forward. Indeed, in one of the Cahiers, he draws upon the highly charged political language of the day to claim “religious art is in need of an épuration.” Two of the four issues from that first year received the subtitle Reconstituer les Églises, signaling their instructional function as art and architectural guides for the clergy. Régamey published these guides because he was intent on not repeating the mistakes of the past. In the first postwar issue, Régamey explains: “The great work of reconstruction must not be a missed opportunity, as it was after the last war, and it must be based in a serious inquiry of information and reflection.”

When World War I ended, France faced the herculean task of rebuilding and repairing thousands of Catholic churches. At that time, the Third Republic had been reluctant to allow modernists the opportunity to decorate the churches under its care, fearing an ecclesiastical backlash. So rather than commission artworks that would facilitate active liturgical practice, the Service des Monuments Historiques (SMH) was instructed to reconstruct churches à l’identique, as if war had never taken place, oftentimes leaving walls, vaults, even windows completely unadorned. However, under the 1940-41 Historic Monuments Act it became possible to replace or severely damaged or destroyed structure with a completely modern building.

Régamey exerted significant influence in the way French churches were reconstructed, but not just because of his role at L’Art Sacré. Because of his experience as an art historian, he

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259 Kevin D. Murphy’s analysis of Viollet-le-Duc and nineteenth-century restoration is useful background to the underlying touristic dimension of the Sacred Art Movement. Isabelle Saint-Martin’s brief discussion of tourism and L’Art Sacré is brief but insightful. Kevin D. Murphy, Memory and Modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vézelay (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), and Saint-Martin 2014, 211.
served as an ecclesiastical advisor to the SMH immediately after the war. He occupied that post for the next twenty-eight years and, in that capacity, he helped to establish the administrative connections necessary for the Sacred Art Movement’s success. Without his influence, for instance, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce might not feature artworks by Lurçat or Léger. He also proved instrumental in granting Matisse’s Vence Chapel and Picasso’s *Temple of War and Peace* the title of *monument historique*. I suggest that modernists may not have been as interested in the Sacred Art Movement had it been a strictly clerical endeavor. For that reason, Régamey’s postwar editorship of *L’Art Sacré* is important to acknowledge because by involving the State, he paved the way for greater modernist involvement in religious art projects.

Indeed, one of the more fascinating aspects of the postwar series of *L’Art Sacré* is the official sanction it received from the French state. An impressive array of notable art historians and high functionaries from within the provisional government’s arts administration contributed articles to the 32-page brochure that preceded the *Cahiers*. It featured an article by Henry de Ségogne, General Commissioner for Tourism, that suggests that French churches as an essential part of the tourist industry and parish priests should not hesitate to capitalize upon the financial potential of their churches.²⁶⁰ René Perchet, director of SMH, and Yves-Marie Froideveaux, architect-in-chief at SMH, contributed an article with practical advice on successfully navigating the state bureaucracy. Régamey, meanwhile, more generally encouraged productive relationships with government departments including “Reconstruction, Beaux-Arts, Monuments Historiques, Tourism…” so that parish priests could reconstruct their churches in a way that was both legally

²⁶⁰ Caussé 2010, 98.
and ecclesiastically sound. He described postwar reconstruction as “an action to save, clean, and present our churches with dignity…”

The construction or restoration of a French church is never a unilaterally clerical endeavor, but it took two world wars for the clergy to come to this realization. Thus, much of the Sacred Art Movement’s success can be attributed to the fact that its leaders refused to take an antagonistic stance towards the state’s involvement in decorating French churches. Régamey, for instance, was willing to acknowledge that churches held immense secular symbolism and played an important role in the French tourist economy. Through Régamey’s historical rhetoric, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and other Sacred Art Movement projects assumed a patrimonial character; artists now had an opportunity, perhaps even an obligation, to contribute to the long lineage of Catholic monuments.

We are therefore left with the question of how one represents the spirit of La France Résistante. In the next part of this section, I argue that the haphazard, tourist-driven development we saw in the first phase worked to Couturier’s advantage. As the eclectic, modern counterpart to a Romanesque church, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce stood in contrast to the classicizing uniformity of the German Gesamtkunstwerk, or “total work of art.”

Couturier and the École de Paris

“The church of Assy isn’t a masterpiece,” Marie-Alain Couturier wrote in a 1950 issue of L’Art Sacré:

It is far from being without fault, as one can see in its architecture, decoration, and windows. We would have liked a more rigor. Despite the eminent works here

261 Régamey quoted in ibid., 79.
wonderfully, miraculously gathered here, as nowhere else in the world, we still regret certain absences and weaknesses. If only we could start again. ²⁶²

As I noted in the previous chapter, work on Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce progressed considerably during Couturier’s wartime absence. He left France in December 1939 to preach a series of Lenten Masses at a Dominican monastery in New York and found himself in unintended exile with the French defeat. The priest who initiated the project, Canon Jean Devémy, commissioned artworks from Pierre Bonnard and several members of Groupe Témoignage. Couturier was immensely displeased with the church’s aesthetic direction, but in the end, he only dismissed Témoignage from the project. In fact, that was his first act upon returning to France.

In this section, I will discuss how Couturier’s time in America shaped his political views and determined the postwar direction of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Témoignage’s esoteric brand of Catholicism was completely incompatible with the Resistance-era spirit that Couturier now sought to evoke. By rejecting the nationalistic criterion that had determined his choice of artist prior to the war, Couturier brought to life an equally transformed notion of the École de Paris as a progressive and diverse artistic community.

Couturier’s contact with the French expatriate circle in New York profoundly shaped his religious, political, and art historical beliefs, particularly with regard to the École de Paris. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the École de Paris served as a pejorative label for foreign artists

practicing French modernist styles. It was, in short, a byword for the cosmopolitan (most often, Jewish) contamination of the French tradition. Before the war, Couturier was likewise anxious to distinguish the École de Paris from the French tradition; for that reason, he was only willing to commission native-born Frenchmen. In an article from September 1938, Couturier wrote that despite “…the admiration that we have for Picasso, we don’t think it worth waiting to see if the Christian renaissance will come from his art.” However, during wartime exile Couturier came to believe that the École de Paris was a spiritual community; one that proved that France had the right to be called “the height of western civilization.” Couturier wrote:

> If the Germans are in Paris it’s because Paris, for the last century, was in effect, the only village in the world where the air was pure enough for Matisse and Bonnard, Braque and Picasso could breathe and live. The great artists are always like those wild plants that only flower in certain lands, in certain seasons. The fulfillment of their gifts, their slow and uncertain growth asks for the liberty and the limpidity of a spiritual climate where everything can be admitted, understood, but not judged.

Although Couturier’s notion of the École de Paris was deeply spiritual, it still reflected the way historians in the 1940s began to use its foreign composition to positively describe the impressive clout of the Parisian avant-garde.

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264 “…quelque admiration que nous ayons pour Picasso, nous ne croyons pas pouvoir rien attendre pour la renaissance chrétienne...de son art....” Marie-Alain Couturier, “Rouault et le Public Ecclésiastique,” *L’Art Sacré* 9 (September 1938): 245.


266 “Si les Allemands sont à Paris c’est peut-être parce que Paris, depuis un siècle, était en effet, la seule ville au monde où l’air fût assez pur pour que Matisse et Bonnard, Braque et Picasso puissent respirer et vivre. Les grands artistes sont toujours semblables à ces plantes sauvages qui ne poussent et ne fleurissent que dans des certaines terres, à certaines saisons. L’épanouissement de leurs dons, leur lente et incertaine croissance demandent autour d’eux la liberté et la limpidité d’un climat spirituel où tout puisse être admis, compris, mais jugé.” Ibid., 102.

267 Kate Kangaslahahti argues that by focusing on its exclusionary function, art history has essentialized the complex significance of École de Paris “as a way of defining—and defending—a pre-eminent, modern French tradition.” Kate Kangaslahahti, “Foreign Artists and the École de Paris: critical and institutional ambivalence between the wars,” in *Academics, Pompieri, Official Artists and the Arrière-Garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900–1960*, ed. Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 86.
Couturier’s idea of the École de Paris was shaped by Henri Focillon’s theories about the continuity of form. Focillon used the apparent “evolution” of western art to suggest that artistic form possessed an innate intelligence. Artists were, in this line of thought, mediums that helped to perpetuate this evolution. Couturier reiterated this idea in his 1945 book, *Chroniques de l’Art*. He argued that art was driven by “the progressive elimination of the subject,” resulting in painting that emphasized humanity’s “essential and shared characteristics.” Focillon’s belief that art followed a single self-motivated trajectory invalidated the pervasive idea that some national schools were superior to others. For instance, in 1938, Charles Sterling noted that “…the idea of a national art corresponding rigorously to the political frontiers of a nation is today replaced by a conception more supple and true: that of an art corresponding to a particular culture elaborated by a people, the frontiers of which can be very different from the political.” Because Focillon’s theory eliminated the notion of foreignness, the École de Paris enabled a distinct set of styles (namely, Fauvism and Cubism) to positively denote a moment when Paris was the capital of the Western art world. As I show below, Couturier would rely upon this idea to assert the survival of French culture at a moment when France was itself in turmoil.

Indeed, despite his attempt to reject a nationalistic reading of Western art, Focillon’s theories enabled an entire generation of French art historians to claim the enduring prestige of their culture through the correlation between the medieval and modern École de Paris. Henri Bouchot distinguishes the École de Paris as one of a handful of regional Gothic painting styles shaped by “social, physical, and ethnographic conditions.” He writes: “While Cimabue and his

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contemporaries were trying to enlarge the size of miniatures by Oriental monks, and condemning
themselves to repetition, the artists of the Île de France, without the direction of tradition,
emancipate themselves and seek models within their reach.” Because the Île-de-France was
centrally located and politically liberated, its artists could develop a style based on whichever
aesthetic models suited them, whether Dutch, Sienese, or Roman. Moreover, the Gothic
naturalism of illuminated manuscripts, statues, stained glass, and architecture attests to aesthetic
development in every possible medium. The stability of the Valois monarchy fomented an
interest in creating art based on natural appearances; Bouchot argued that, with no propagandistic
agenda to serve, there was no need to idealize or conform to convention. Once established, these
aesthetic innovations were diffused throughout Europe. The resulting teleology therefore enabled
Paris’ reputation as true birthplace of the European tradition to operate even as national
typologies fell out of favor.

Despite some of the more obvious rhetorical maneuverings, the historical record would
have supported their assertion that Paris had been endowed with a distinct artistic spirit.
Willibald Sauerländer argues this reputation derives from thirteenth-century Valois propaganda:
“At the origin of the fame of Paris as Mecca of the arts and as a teacher of European taste stands
a political, administrative and even ideological process, which was fundamental for the course of
French history: centralization.” This image continued to operate after the fall of the monarchy,
particularly under the Second and Third Republic, in the context of a trans-European competition
to have one’s country recognized as catalyst of the Italian Renaissance and thus the Western

270 “Alors que Cimabue et ses contemporains s’ingénient à grandir au carreau les miniatures des moines orientaux, et
se condamnent aux redites, les artistes de l’Île de France, sans direction traditionnelle, s’émancipent et se cherchent
des modeles à leur portée.” Henri Bouchot, L’exposition des primitifs français; la peinture en France sous les Valois
(Paris: Librairie centrale des beaux-arts, 1904), ii.
271 Willibald Sauerlander, “Medieval Paris: Center of European Taste. Fame and Realities,” in Paris, Center of
tradition. Art historians across Germany, England, and France scoured their country’s architectural patrimony to prove their right to that title. As one critic noted in 1945, the modern *École de Paris* was “a short-cut in the history of art in France. From the Middle Ages, celebrated foreign artists...have worked in Paris.”272 Because its culture was so accessible to foreigners, the Parisian *zeitgeist* was international in composition.

During World War II, the *École de Paris* became a way to tout a tradition that stood in contrast to fascism. In a book written in 1941 and published in 1946, Pierre Francastel proclaimed: “The *École de Paris* owes nothing to German culture and she will be, I’m sure, for all the arts, the source of new formulas that allow the art of tomorrow to escape the morbid enterprise of Germanism.”273 A few pages later he reiterated this notion of stylistic continuity by evoking the Romanesque: “I believe that I showed elsewhere [his 1942 book, *L’Humanisme Romane*] that the art of tomorrow is rooted greatest works of the Middle Ages.”274 To Francastel, the *École de Paris* represented an artistic tradition with firm historical roots and a clear stylistic future. Natalie Adamson attributes this transformation to “the heartfelt desire to see Paris and its artists once again the world’s supreme creative force became a messianic, redemptive narrative identity.”275 The foreign/national paradox, once a disparaging sign of the *École de Paris*’ foreignness, thus came to represent “the reconciliation of the republican universalist ideal (embracing internationalism and cosmopolitanism) with a fundamentally national culture

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274 “Je crois l’avoir démontré ailleurs à propos de l’art du moyen-age et que c’est dans les plus grandes oeuvres d’une époque que se fonde l’art du lendemain.” Ibid., 158.
275 “…phantasmal, discursive entity …[sustained by] the hopes, doubts, propositions, opinions and memories concerning the tradition of painting and its functions. In other words, the *École de Paris* displays the characteristics of a complex: an idea, or set of ideas, both conscious and unconscious, about a community of artists sited in Paris and constituted materially by the practice of painting and by the postwar struggle to define its own aesthetic and political parameters.” Adamson 2009, 3.
beholden to essentialized markers of origins.” The École de Paris’ associations with a supposedly free and democratic French medieval society definitively conditioned its postwar transformation into a signifier of French modernism’s diversity, influence, and relationship to the national tradition after World War II.

The concept of a transnational École de Paris therefore became more plausible because regional schools could no longer be defined by political boundaries. But with Couturier, this new community had a distinctly spiritual cadence. He wrote that the École de Paris “didn’t grow from a geographic or national reality, it grew from a spiritual reality. That which reigns in Paris isn’t the imperial authority of a race, of a nation, or even a doctrine; it was a certain spirit.”

To prove his point, he used the example of Canada, where…

…lived again the spirit and the life that reigned in Paris. Or to speak more exactly, it’s precisely because they were true to the spirit and to this life that they could be independent, personal, diverse. In this sense, good painting, in Canada, is still the painting of the School of Paris.

For Couturier, the École de Paris exists as a spiritual community joined in a common search for universal values. Thus, while the École de Paris represented the spirit of France herself, that spirit could exist outside French borders. As such, its international clout reinforced the prestige of French culture at a moment of crisis.

Like Régamey, Couturier sought to define France’s legacy within the tradition of Catholic monuments. He regarded the medieval and modern École de Paris as pendants in a

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276 “ne s’agit pas d’une réalité géographique ou nationale, il s’agit d’une réalité spirituelle. Ce qui régnait à Paris ce n’était pas l’autorité impériale d’une race, d’une nation ou même d’une doctrine: c’était un certain esprit.” Couturier 1945a, 167.

277 “…relevaient et relèvent encore de l’esprit et de la vie qui régnaien à Paris. Ou pour parler plus exactement, c’est précisément parce qu’ils étaient fidèles à cet esprit et à cette vie qu’ils ont pu être indépendants, personnels, divers. Dans ce sens-là la bonne peinture, au Canada, c’est encore de la peinture de l’École de Paris.” Ibid.
historical continuum. Couturier therefore rejected the nationalistic criterion that had once determined his choice of artist because to adequately “represent France,” the church would reflect the inclusivity, diversity, and modernity of the École de Paris. To make that happen, Couturier asked Jacques Lipchitz for a sculpture (Notre-Dame de Liesse, 1947–49), Germaine Richier for a crucifix (Christ, 1949), Henri Matisse for an altarpiece (Saint Dominick, 1948), Léger for a façade mosaic (Litany of Loretto, 1946–48), and Marc Chagall for Baptistery decorations (Moses Parting the Red Sea, 1956; figure 2.12). As these names suggest, the church’s postwar development was characterized by the same haphazard, name-driven acquisition style of wartime. Now, however, that diversity enabled Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to become the modern counterpart to a Romanesque church, as Couturier sought to demonstrate the strength and continuity of the French tradition at a moment of crisis.

In the next section, I examine artistic involvement in Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce to understand what the Sacred Art Movement represented to modernists in the postwar period. Due to a persistent misunderstanding of the church’s development, Léger, Lipchitz, Lurçat, and Richier’s contributions are often seen in tandem with those of Rouault and Bonnard. A more accurate chronology, I argue, suggests that Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was an opportunity to tout modernism’s triumph in the wake of the Second World War. An inscription on Lipchitz’ Notre-Dame de Liesse is instructive in this regard: “Jacques Lipchitz, Jew, faithful to the religion

278 Interestingly, Couturier extended the invitation to Chagall even though he was not particularly fond of his work. In 1948, Jacques Maritain wrote a letter Couturier asking him to give Chagall a commission: “I know that you like him less than I do. But this isn’t a matter of personal taste. He has nostalgia for Christ, his dream is to decorate a church. We must help him. And between us, in terms of poetry and authentic religious spirit, he is infinitely above Léger.” After resisting the suggestion for over a year, Couturier began actively courting Chagall. Ultimately, however, and quite contrary to Maritain’s characterization of the artist’s interest, Chagall held out until 1956. “Je sais que vous l’aimez moins que je le fais. Mais ce n’est pas une affaire de goût personnel. Il a la nostalgie du Christ, son rêve est de décorer une église. Il faut l’aider. Et entre nous, en fait de poésie et de sentiment authentiquement religieux, il est infiniment au dessus de Léger.” Letter from Jacques Maritain to Marie-Alain Couturier, 8 July 1948. Couturier Archives, Menil Foundation, Houston.
of his ancestors, has made this Virgin to foster understanding between people on earth so that the
life of the spirit may reign.”

Lipchitz

Couturier’s interest in portraying the École de Paris as a progressive community of
artists, joined together by the distinctive French spirit, prompted him to ask Jacques Lipchitz to
create a sculpture for the baptistery. The two had become acquainted through the French
expatriate circle in New York. Unlike Couturier, Lipchitz chose to remain in America after the
war’s end; therefore, he was a powerful reminder of the École de Paris’ impressive clout not
only because of his Jewish faith, but because he represented French sculpture in the United
States. Couturier ultimately left it to Devémy to decide whether or not to offer Lipchitz the
commission (figure 2.13). The artist was visiting France for an exhibition in 1946 when Devémy
asked him to create the sculpture. “Do you know that I am a Jew?” the artist asked. Devémy
replied: “If it doesn't bother you, it doesn't bother us.”

The Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce commission came at a time when Lipchitz was
immersed in the question of the place that Jews would occupy in a post-Holocaust world. Jewish artists often responded to the Holocaust through Christian iconography because it
provided a way to relate the tragedy’s religious overtones without engaging in idolatry. In this
particular case, Notre-Dame de Liesse, or Our Lady of Joy, was intended to highlight the
commonalities between Christianity and Judaism in order to foster greater understanding.

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between the two faiths. Lipchitz created several versions of the sculpture: the most notable of which can be found at the Roofless Church in New Harmony, Indiana.

Richier’s Christ

Germaine Richier’s Christ (figure 2.14) has often been seen as the source of the querelle de l’art sacré; however, as we have already seen, that controversy began several years before when Couturier and Régamey dismissed Témoignage from the project. Still, Devémy and Couturier were undoubtedly testing the limits of acceptability by commissioning this artwork, which evokes images of emaciated concentration camp survivors.

Richier was an artist of considerable repute in the postwar era. A student of Antoine Bourdelle, she arrived at her characteristic style through a prolonged interest in Romanesque sculpture. Thus, while she is often held up as a follower of Alberto Giacometti, the formal similarities between their works are purely coincidental. Sarah Wilson notes that Richier had a far greater presence in the international art world than her Italian counterpart. What we are dealing with, then, is an artist who, until her premature death in 1959, showed every promise of being one of the great French artists of the up-and-coming avant-garde.

Because Richier was an established artist, she would have held considerable appeal for Couturier and Devémy. Moreover, she worked in the Romanesque tradition, and even though she was an atheist, she was intensely interested in Catholic iconography. As Wilson notes, the bark-like surface of the Assy crucifix speaks to its basis in Isaiah 53: “For he shall grow up…as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness…He is despised and rejected of men…a man of sorrows.” This was, in other words, a deliberate, existential response to the Holocaust. It

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283 Ibid., 65.
was an image that obviously resonated. Like Lipchitz, she sold several copies of the sculpture for use in churches.

One can therefore say that the artists who contributed to Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in the postwar period were not motivated by a need to test the boundaries of religious art. Instead, much like Lurçat or Lipchitz, Richier saw Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce as an art historical event; an opportunity to reflect upon a crucial episode in Western history in the historically resonant space of a Catholic church. As I show next, Fernand Léger’s motives are somewhat different. For him, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was a chance for institutional legitimacy.

*Léger’s Litany*

Fernand Léger’s commission for the façade mosaic, the *Litany of Loreto* (1946–48; figure 2.15), is often cast in similar terms as Lurçat’s *Apocalypse* tapestry. Both artists were Communists and atheists who would justify their involvement at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce through the neo-medieval rhetoric of apocalypse. But I argue that, for this established artist of the mature avant-garde, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was an opportunity to solidify French modernism’s art historical legitimacy. As we shall see in the next two chapters, the need to “canonize” modernism’s art historical accomplishment will be the Sacred Art Movement’s most enduring legacy. His commission thus provides insight into the anxieties that also motivated Matisse and Picasso to become involved in, or respond to, Catholic art projects.

Léger was amongst the first wave of French artists to seek exile in America after the war with Germany began. American exile was extremely productive for Léger. Removed from the privations of war, he was immersed in an energetic “new” culture and treated like a modern master. His time there was something of a paradigm shift. To Léger, it was like witnessing the rise of the “American” epoch first hand: “These young ones [American artists] are, without a
doubt, still under the influence of the École de Paris. All is still only in the intention. I am
nevertheless persuaded that the Americans are on the route to a great artistic epoch. It’s already
been announced.”

Léger’s time in America awakened in him an art historical consciousness that he sought
to express in monumental terms, as we can see in “Nine Points on Monumentality”: a 1943
article he co-authored with Sigfried Giedeon and Josep-Lluís Sert. The first three points are
particularly relevant here:

1. Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals,
for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which
originated them and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link
between the past and the future.
2. Monuments are the expression of man’s highest cultural needs. They have to satisfy the
eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. The
most vital monuments are those which express the feeling and thinking of this collective
force: the people.
3. Every bygone period which shaped a real cultural life had the power and the capacity
to create these symbols. Monuments are, therefore, only possible in periods in which a
unifying consciousness and unifying culture exists. Periods which exist for the moment
have been unable to create lasting monuments.

This veritable manifesto of modern monumentality reflects Léger’s belief that modern art could
serve a vital social role, and even become a form of collective expression, if freed from the
confines of the canvas. Equally significant, Léger and his co-authors embrace the prospect of
monuments that reflect current aesthetic tastes. Romy Golan has usefully extrapolated the

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284 “Sans doute ces jeunes, sont-ils encore sous l’influence de l’École de Paris. Tout n’est encore que dans
l’intention. Je suis persuadé cependant que les Américains sont sur la voie d’une grande époque d’art. Elle
s’annonce déjà.” Quoted in Léon Dégand, “Le retour d’un grand peintre,” in Les Lettres françaises 103 (12 April
1946), 1.

political implications of this idea; she suggests that the authors sought to rid monumentality of its fascist connotations by rejecting aesthetics that were intended to last a thousand years.\textsuperscript{286} One can therefore see why the idea of a New Medieval Age appealed to Léger, given its use as an art historical framework. It enabled him to articulate his cultural epoch in a historically resonant medium.

In fact, medieval art had long furnished a comprehensive model for Léger’s aesthetic and political goals. The painting on canvas was, for him, a Renaissance conceit that encouraged bourgeois individualism. He told a Swiss audience in 1932:

\begin{quote}
Easel painting, born with individualism, has become the current form for most pictorial work. It was the advent of individualism that imposed this form upon us….The masses are full of good intentions. Get in touch with them. The Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals were for them…Color and sculptural form simultaneously achieved beauty and a collective meaning, for the whole work is a unity…Our cathedrals are the result of intelligent and sensitive collaboration.\textsuperscript{287}
\end{quote}

Unlike a painting on canvas—a medium he considered as the distinct province of the elite—monuments could be considered on nationalistic terms because they reflected the values of the collective. For Léger, medieval cathedrals were collective efforts that facilitated individual expression in its most pure and abstract form.

Léger’s nostalgia for a pre-Industrial, pre-capitalist social condition was not unusual at this time. It was part of a larger attempt to democratize culture by evoking collectivity as an authentic characteristic of the French tradition. Such was Gustave Cohen’s aim in reviving two

\textsuperscript{286} Golan 2009, 181.\textsuperscript{287} Golan makes the significant point that Léger published these remarks in an Italian pro-fascist architectural journal. An Italian journalist responded to his article enthusiastically: “We Italians, Fascists, and revolutionaries…recognize in Léger an artist of the first order, as he recognizes in Fascism a climate of spiritual urgency totally suitable to the significance of his own art.” Quoted in Romy Golan, \textit{Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 42.
medieval plays, *Adam and Eve* (1934) and *La Naissance de la Cité* (1937), which describe the creation of a new utopian society in an Edenesque landscape. Léger designed the backdrops for both productions. For him, collectivity was a spiritual state. Hence, the medieval cathedral embodied the spiritual unity of French society:

In the eleventh, twelfth century of the Christian era, Jesus, the Christ, gives the strongest social movement: it is a social liberation. The Church, which is built up, knew how to adapt admirably. Since men can neither read nor write, the image takes on considerable importance: cathedrals, convents, are entirely decorated.

His various sacred art projects were thus attempts to integrate that medieval sense of unity into the modern social idiom. Medieval art therefore furnished Léger an aesthetic model as he began to explore art’s utilitarian potential.

Léger’s interest in medieval art was solidified through his contact with Meyer Schapiro. In 1935, the medieval art historian brought Léger to the Morgan Library to view the Beatus Manuscript of Gerona. Schapiro would later argue that the morning spent there exerted a profound influence upon Léger’s art. He wrote: “The Beatus manuscripts make us realize how limited is our conception of the artistic process, and how much it depends upon the values of art.

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289 “Aux XIe, XIIe siècles de l’ère chrétienne, Jésus, le Christ, donne le plus fort mouvement social: c’est une libération sociale. L’Église, que s’édifie, a su s’adapter admirablement. Les hommes ne sachant ni lire ni écrire, l’image prend une importance considérable: les cathédrales, les couvents, sont entièrement décorés.” Léger, “Peinture murale et peinture de chevalet.” Fernand Léger, unpublished essay, 1950. BVAP Léger, MNAM Archives.

280 Léger often worked with Le Corbusier during this period because architecture offered the chance for artistic synthesis. However, these collaborations were for individual homes. Some of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s appeal was its utilitarian function.
and social life today.”

Schapiro also saw a formal shift take place in Léger’s work as a result of the encounter; namely, an increased schematization with regard to its “plastic” quality.

For Léger, Vichy’s disastrous end was a testament to the corruption of a seemingly-defunct era in French culture. Liberation brought about an opportunity to rebuild French society based on its uncorrupted medieval essence. Now, art would be created by the collective it served.

But in 1947, Léger observed that some features of the pre-war society had reemerged:

We live in a dangerous and magnificent era in which desperately tied to the end of one world is the birth of another—a confusion apparent in its immediate appearance. But behind this anxious and tormented figure, a few flowers timidly rise out of this complex mass of decadent elements and primitive relations. It is necessary, I think, to excavate the Middle Ages to find such dramatic times.

Léger complicates the typical language of watershed by noting the current confusion. He insists that the temporal rupture was not a clean break and the persistence of outmoded cultural attitudes posed a significant danger to the creative spirit of the new era. In his 1950 article for L’Art Sacré, entitled “Entre Giotto et Nous, je ne vois rien” (“Between Giotto and Us, I see No Difference”), Léger observed:

Since the beginning of the 1920s, and certainly since the 1930s, we have constructed a genealogy of French art that unrolls less a history of art in France than it aims to build, for the benefit of living artists, a memory where they can find the benchmarks that establish the permanence of French art.

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291 “I do not think that I am fanciful in seeing in certain of Léger’s works, painted during his stay in New York in the 1940s, the effects of his enthusiasm for this Spanish manuscript.” Meyer Schapiro, “The Beatus Apocalypse of Gerona,” ArtNews 61 (1963): 50.


293 “Depuis le début des années vingt, depuis surtout les années trente, on s’évertue à construire une généalogie de l’art français qui déroule moins une histoire de l’art en France qu’elle vise à constituer au profit des artistes vivants
Léger was keenly aware that French modernism’s accomplishments were primarily on canvas. The allusion to Giotto in the title reinforces the need for modernism’s “primitive” aesthetic at the beginning of a new artistic era. He therefore sees monuments, including churches, as an opportunity to create a new artistic ethos based in collectivity and monumentality. By rooting modernist abstraction in the medieval tradition—which, again, was widely considered to be the last uniquely French style—Léger could justify its existence in media beyond the canvas, thus countering any accusations of Renaissance contamination. Now redeemed, modernism would chart a forward course for French art in the new cultural epoch.

A need for art historical solidity motivated Léger to design a façade mosaic for Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. In fact, Léger had collaborated with Couturier on several projects because the Dominican shared his fascination for the Middle Ages. In 1945, Léger asked Couturier to write an essay for his latest exhibition catalogue. He had already determined the subject: “For you, dear friend, I would like to collaborate with you on the gothic and Romanesque tradition that you have perfectly sensed in my work.” It was in that spirit that they planned to create an underground church complex in Chicago with poet Paul Claudel in 1943. Even though the Chicago project came to naught, Léger continued to harbor enthusiasm for a sacred art commission.

294 “Pour vous, cher Ami, j’aimerais que votre collaboration porte sur la tradition gothique et romane que vous avez parfaitement sentie dans mon travail.” Quoted in Couturier 1965, 292.
295 Couturier seems to have been fascinated with underground churches. Upon his return to France, he immediately began work on Ste. Baume, an underground church complex to be constructed outside of Lyon where Mary Magdalene is said to have ministered. Couturier is said to have commissioned a design from Le Corbusier and artworks from Léger, Matisse, and Georges Braque. The project was mired in controversy from the beginning and eventually abandoned. Discussion of the Chicago project can be found in a letter from Léger to Couturier, as found in ibid., 291.
Léger quickly accepted Couturier’s invitation to create a façade mosaic in late 1945. He visited the church in early 1946 and spent the next year designing the composition. His subject, the Litany of Loreto, is a prayer of devotion to the Virgin Mary; in fact, it is the only Marian prayer to be recognized by the Catholic Church. Medieval in origin, it was approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1587. The supplicant asks for the Virgin’s intercession by evoking her symbols, titles, and roles.

Léger’s struggle with the subject is evident in the numerous drafts he composed. He began by depicting the Virgin rising above a mountain landscape with a few of her Old Testament titles etched into the land and sky (figure 2.16). In the second version, the mountainous landscape is schematized like a map (figure 2.17). The number of titles is increased; each occupies its own composed area on the right side of the composition, just below a dark-haired, crowned Virgin. To the left the sun rises over amorphous swaths of green vegetation. In the third state, Léger eschews the Virgin and her titles, opting instead for long-stemmed black and white flowers against a multi-colored and segmented background (figure 2.18). The Virgin returns in the fourth composition (figure 2.19). The circular frame of the aureole is repeated in the diagonal swaths of alternating blue and gold. In the fifth and final version, Léger assimilated aspects of each preceding draft, then added symbols Old Testament

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296 Dominique de Menil, journal entry, “Visite à Bazaine avec Helene Lasalle,” 29 June 1978. Menil Archives, Houston. Later, Devémy and Novarina would both take credit for giving Léger the commission. Devémy said that Léger topped the list of artists in the funding request that he supposedly sent to Hautecoeur (this was likely Couturier’s doing). Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 19.

297 Dominique de Menil recalls that Léger struggled with the Virgin’s appearance because he had no experience painting “beautiful women” and he thought the Virgin must be beautiful. At one point, perhaps at this stage in the composition, Léger gave her “des anglaises”—referring to English curls—in order to heighten her beauty. De Menil Journal entry, 19 June 1978, Menil Foundation Archives, Houston.

298 Some of Léger’s struggle can be attributed to the architecture of the porch. The massive stone columns block the façade—and hence the composition—at regular intervals. Zelman had similar difficulties, and Régamey and Couturier cancelled Idoux and Normand’s design relates to their inability to space the composition in a satisfactory way.
symbols thought to prefigure her existence: the Mystic Rose; the Vase of Honor; the Morning Star; the Ark of the Covenant; the Tower of David; the Mirror of Justice; the Throne of Justice; the Closed Garden; and the Sealed Fountain. The Virgin is pictured in above the door, a solemn face surrounded by an aureole of black, white, silver, and gold tesserae (figure 2.20). The final state of Léger’s composition speaks to the museological aspect of the Sacred Art Movement. Drawn to the church by Léger’s name, the audience would learn about the ecclesiastical significance of the artwork and its subject. It thus fell upon Léger to make the relationship between the Virgin and her titles evident through symbol.²⁹⁹

Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce was the first of many sacred art commissions Léger would accomplish in his career. This struck many critics at the time as disingenuous. His façade mosaic had already drawn fire from the Catholic Right because it supposedly prompted the dismissal of Groupe Témoignage. But his detractors also include fellow comrades from the Communist Party. André Breton was particularly harsh about the apparent contradiction in Léger’s involvement in L’Église Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt:

…what is more repugnant than the contortions of this emporium bully who, not content in having successfully imposed himself as the master of the abstract, the inexpressive, and the bestial—after a spectacular evolution from Pétainism to Stallinism via Gaullism—finds the wherewithal to “girdle” the walls of a new church with stained-glass windows and at the same time hang from the pegs of the Maison de la Pensée Française, under the title The Builders, a few workers’ caps crowning the radical absence of thought and life?³⁰⁰

Breton describes Léger as an opportunist; having failed to make a reputation based on talent, he associated himself with various political causes in hopes that one would help guide him to fame.

²⁹⁹ The written evocation of her titles in addition to the pictorial symbol can also be attributed to an attempt to avoid the esotericism of the Idoux and Normand composition. See Chapter 1.
³⁰⁰ Breton 2000, 72.
There was something self-serving about Léger’s sacred art projects. The church in Audincourt, which was constructed by the community of Peugeot autoworkers, was originally to feature Léger, Braque, and Mirò. However, by 1951 Léger was the only one left. He sent Couturier regular updates about the nearly completed church at Audincourt, but he seems to have been more excited about the publicity. In these letters he describes sending design maquettes on tour to the United States and arranging photographers to meet the high demand by magazines for images of the work. He was particularly excited about a meeting with the director of the Department of Beaux Arts and the chief inspector at the SMH. And in this regard, the publicity surrounding the project speaks to the rather awkward line Léger drew between social project and work of art.

But more than that, their presence speaks to the extent to which the Sacred Art Movement had become a high-profile patrimonial endeavor, one that was increasingly marketed to an American audience. We will consider this idea in greater detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say for now that the publicity surrounding Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and other Sacred Art Movement projects provided a means for late career modernists to reassert their relevance.

*Matisse*

Devémy used the idea of an event to his advantage to promote the project to other artists. This is evident in the way he offered Matisse the Saint Dominic commission in June 1946 (figure 2.21). He writes that the church “…will enclose artworks of the highest quality and will constitute a real artistic event.” He then lists the names of its better-known participants—


Rouault, Bonnard, Bazaine, Lurçat, and Léger—alongside a brief description of their commission. Collectivity, but more than that, art history is his marketing tool:

…I ask you to consider if, outside the walls of museums…or of the galleries of collectors, the greatest artworks by the masters of modern painting would not find a better life in a living church where thousands of sick people would stand in line to see it, where mobs of enthusiasts would traverse the Alps just to crowd around it; the genius of our masters would be expressed better there than elsewhere.303

Despite Devémy’s evident conviction, Matisse set the letter aside. He was bothered by the fact that he would have no control over his artwork’s placement. The following year the artist began planning a convent chapel for a sect of Dominican nuns in Vence. He finally agreed to the Assy commission in 1948, due to the apparent ease of translating the Saint Dominic mural for Vence to the dimensions required at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce.

Conclusion

In a 1951 report describing the consecration of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Life Magazine declared: “Father Couturier has devoted much of his time to carrying on a quiet but effective crusade to revitalize the once-famous role of the Catholic Church as a patron of art.”304

His “crusade” had hardly been quiet. After Marcel Michaud took to the pages of Arts magazine in May 1946 to protest the dismissal of Groupe Témoignage, Couturier pled his case to the media, using arts publications, mainstream newspapers, and popular magazines across France and the United States to justify and defend Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. An article in Time reported that Couturier had made the following complaint to the Dominican hierarchy:

303 “…je vous demande de considérer si, en dehors des salles des Musées…ou des Galleries des Collectionneurs, de grandes œuvres des Maîtres de la peinture moderne ne vivront pas mieux dans une église vivant où des milliers de malades se succéderont, où la foule des amateurs qui sillonnent les routes des Alpes accourront ; et là le génie de nos Maîtres s’exprimera mieux qu’ailleurs.” Ibid.
Our church art is in complete decay…. It is dead, dusty, academic—imitations of imitations…with no power to speak to modern man. Outside the Church the great modern masters have walked—Manet, Cézanne, Renoir, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, Braque. The Church has not reached out, as once it would have, to bring them in. And here we have men who speak directly to the people with the same simple power of the great artists of the Middle Ages…. These moderns are greater than the sensual men of the Renaissance.305

As his mention of “modern masters” implies, Léger, Lipchitz, Lurçat, and Matisse no longer represented the cutting edge of modern art. But as Communist, atheist, and Jewish artists, their involvement in a Catholic art project was bound to draw the ire of the Vatican hierarchy. Couturier could therefore use the fact that these were canonical modernists to expose the prejudices within the Vatican and imbue Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce with an avant-garde caché. This was an undeniably canny move on Couturier’s part; one intended to restore the faith in the French clergy soon after the Occupation by dissociating them from the larger body of the Church. He did so by relying upon the myth of La France Résistante. At a time when memories of the Second World War were still fresh, he revealed that the prejudices that led the Vatican to condone fascist atrocities had survived. Not coincidentally, I think, his revolution followed fast on the heels of the Vatican’s prosecution of the Worker-Priests. William Rubin even suggests in his book on Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce that the Gallican Church never ceased to exist, despite its formal dissolution in 1905. Citing the example of the Worker-Priests, he concludes that Neo-Gallicanism prompted many in the clergy to join the French Resistance. Rubin’s thesis is complicated by the fact that this same Neo-Gallicanism prompted an even larger number of clergymen to welcome Pétain’s National Revolution.

305 Quoted in Pamela G. Smart, Sacred Modern: Faith, Activism, and Aesthetics in the Menil Collection (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 30.
Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce’s status as a *lieu de mémoire* of clerical resistance is therefore a testament to the power of the Resistance myth in reestablishing the credibility of French institutions after the Occupation. And in this regard, it is significant that the State was anxious to wield its symbolism as well. The church’s lack of aesthetic cohesion—which resulted from its haphazard, tourist-driven development—stood in stark contrast to the unified German *Gesamtkunstwerk* preferred by the Nazi Régime. Its eclecticism recalled a history of medieval churches that portrayed the French tradition to be innately diverse, cosmopolitan, and modern. In short, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce conveyed a history of collectivity through diversity at a moment when French morale was at its weakest.

The Sacred Art Movement resonated with modernists because of its art historical tenor. Couturier’s avant-garde rhetoric enabled them to reassume their role as heroes in a messianic narrative of history. It had become increasingly difficult to play that role. World War II reinforced the failure of the modernist project; it was an apocalypse that obscured rather than clarified the line between good and evil. The fact that a weapon so cruel, so inhumane, so faceless as an atomic bomb could be used after the Holocaust, and in the name of justice, only reinforced man’s mercilessness. But the war did accomplish one thing for French modernists: it provided institutional vindication. Modernism’s resilience under Fascist suppression reinforced its associations with liberal, democratic society. The Sacred Art Movement was therefore an opportunity to assert their spiritual gravitas at a moment when many were questioning their continuing relevance. Indeed, much like the clergy and the state, modernist involvement in the Sacred Art Movement can ultimately be described as self-serving: an attempt to reestablish the legitimacy of their institution—that of French modernism—and ensure its survival.
Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, however, was just one retrospective take on what French modernism was and what it looked like. Given that avant-gardism was such an essential part of this generation’s identity, it was only natural that modernists should react against a state-sanctioned version of the modernist project. In the next chapter, we will consider how Matisse negotiated the idea of a New Medieval Age while taking advantage of the Sacred Art Movement’s growing administrative connections.
Chapter 2 Figures

Figure 2.1. Germaine Richier, *Christ*, 1950. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Assy, France.

Figure 2.2. “Tract of Angers,” 1950.
Figure 2.3. Marguette Bouvier, "Une humble église de Savoie décorée par les plus grands peintres," *Le Matin: derniers télégrammes de la nuit*, 10 February 1944, 1.

Figure 2.4. Georg, cover of *Cahiers de l’Art Sacré* 1, no. 3, 1945.
Figure 2.5. Jean Lurçat, *Apocalypse*, 1947–49. Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce

Figure 2.5 Detail. Jean Lurçat, *Apocalypse*, 1946–1948.
Figure 2.6. Jean Bondol, *The Apocalypse d’Angers*, 1377–1382.

Figure 2.7. Jean Lurçat, cover of *Formes et Couleurs*, no. 5-6, 1942.
Figure 2.8. François Gruber, *Job*, 1944. Oil on Canvas, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 inches. Tate Modern, London.

Figure 2.9. Boris Taslitzky, *Crucifixion*. 1944 photograph. Fresco. Chapelle Saint Sulpice le Point, internment camp at Clermont-Ferrand. Photo Archives photographiques Germaine Chaumel, Archives municipales de Toulouse.
Figure 2.10. Boris Taslitzky, *The Death of Danielle Casanova*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 150 x 280 cm. Musée de l’Histoire Vivante, Montreuil sur Seine.

Figure 2.11. Jean Lurçat, *Apocalypse des mal assis*, 1945. Gouache on paper.


Figure 2.15. Fernand Léger, façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–48.
Figure 2.16. Léger, first study for façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–47.

Figure 2.17. Léger, second study for façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–47.

Figure 2.18. Léger, third study for façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–47.
Figure 2.19. Léger, fourth study for façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–47.

Figure 2.20. Léger, final study for façade mosaic, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1946–1947.

Figure 2.21. Henri Matisse, *Saint Dominic*, Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, 1948.
Chapter 3: Henri Matisse, The Accidental Medievalist

When Henri Matisse (1869–1954) visited Giotto’s Arena Chapel in 1907, he was struck by the early Renaissance artist’s ability to convey intense emotion through abstract design: “When I see Giotto’s frescoes at Padua, I do not trouble to find out which scene of the life of Christ is before me, for I understand at once the feeling which radiates from it.” Matisse explored the concept of architectural decoration throughout his career, in a variety of media and settings, but he had never achieved a work as satisfying as the Arena Chapel. “Giotto is the height of my desires,” he told Pierre Bonnard in May 1946, “but the route which leads towards an equivalent, in our epoch, is too long, too difficult [importante] for a single lifetime.” But despite these misgivings, Matisse began work on a Dominican convent chapel in the Riviera town of Vence late the following year.

The story of the Chapel of the Holy Rosary (1947–1951; figure 1) actually begins in 1941, when Matisse was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Two surgeries spared him from death but left him virtually incapacitated, unable to stand at an easel. Matisse returned home to his home in Vence in need of round-the-clock care from a team of local nurses. He was particularly fond of his pretty night nurse, Monique Bourgeois. The two grew close during his long bouts of insomnia; she read to him from the Bible and St. Thomas Aquinas, and he sketched her portrait. It was therefore a great disappointment when Monique left his employ to become a Dominican nun. A few years later, in 1946, the recently rechristened Sister Jacques-Marie was assigned to the Foyer Lacordaire in Vence. Her new sect was impoverished; it was so poor, in fact, that the nuns performed their daily services in a dilapidated garage. And one day, Sister Jacques-Marie

asked Matisse to design a window for a yet-to-be built convent chapel.\textsuperscript{308} As luck would have it, Brother Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier—a young Dominican priest, aspiring architect, and avid reader of \textit{L'Art Sacré}—was staying at the Foyer Lacordaire at that time. Once Rayssiguier heard that Matisse might be interested in contributing a window, he eagerly drew up plans and met with the artist, who promptly took over the entire project. The design, construction, and decoration of La Chapelle du Rosaire, to which he zealously referred as “mine,” consumed him for the next four years. And at its consecration in 1951, Matisse called the chapel his “masterpiece.”\textsuperscript{309}

The Chapelle du Rosaire is typically understood as a last-chance opportunity to fulfill a life-long aesthetic ambition. How else can one explain why this famously apolitical artist, who trod a thin line between atheism and agnosticism, became involved in the Sacred Art Movement? Matisse himself contributed to this widely-held assumption, saying that he had been “chosen by fate” to create the chapel:

A lot of stories were circulated, in Europe and America. The work of art was nothing more than a pretext for gossip. … My only religion is the love of the work to be created, the love of creation, and great sincerity. I did the chapel with the sole intention of expressing myself \textit{totally}. It gave me the opportunity to express myself in a totality of form and color…. I set a game of equivalences in play there. I created an equilibrium between rough and precious materials. These things were reconciled and harmonized by the law of contrasts. Multiplication of planes became unity of plane.\textsuperscript{310}


\textsuperscript{309} In a letter to the Archbishop of Nice excusing his absence at the chapel’s consecration in 1951, Matisse wrote: “It has taken me four years of exclusive and assiduous labor, and it is the outcome of my entire active life. Despite all its imperfections I consider it my masterpiece. I hope that the future will bear out this assessment as increasing numbers of people take an interest in it, independently of this monument’s higher meaning.” Matisse to Monsignor Rémond, 25 June 1951, in \textit{Henri Matisse et al. 1999}, 439, appendix 5.

\textsuperscript{310} Interview with André Verdet, 1952 as quoted in Flam 1995, 212.
Form thus becomes a defensive measure inasmuch as it enables Matisse to contribute to the Catholic tradition without engaging the faith itself. Indeed, the so-called “Matisse Chapel” stands apart from the medievalizing eclecticism of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy and L’Église du Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt with an aesthetic unity that speaks to the artist’s single-minded, almost egotistical, dedication to his own œuvre.

While Matisse’s route to the Sacred Art Movement was undoubtedly incidental, and his aims self-serving, the Vence Chapel was by no means a benign choice. Catholic churches are not only highly charged symbols of French nationhood, they also belong to the most prolific art historical tradition in the western canon. As I argued in the previous two chapters, the Sacred Art Movement appealed to the older avant-garde because it was undertaken in the name of patrimony. And in looking beyond Matisse’s “game of equivalences” to the Vence Chapel’s larger architectural design, one might well question whether aesthetics truly were his only consideration. Convent chapels are typically private and intended for the nuns’ daily hours and devotionals, but the large lay area of the Vence Chapel was clearly designed to accommodate tourists. Indeed, as viewers exit the chapel through the museum and gift shop, they may wonder whether Matisse himself had been the object of devotion. In other words, the Vence Chapel’s inherent museological dimension betrays a different set of concerns about the accessibility and security of his œuvre.

Seeing the Vence Chapel as a patrimonial endeavor raises a new set of questions about Matisse and his relationship to the Sacred Art Movement. What conditions made the artist’s need for a “masterpiece” so urgent that he looked to a Catholic artwork to satisfy it? What does the Vence Chapel say about Matisse’s relationship to the French tradition in the postwar period, now

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that tradition was defined by the Romanesque? How did he reconcile his Giotto-esque ambition for a “masterpiece” with the Sacred Art Movement’s medieval themes?

In what follows, I argue that Matisse saw the Vence Chapel as a means to solidify his connection to the patrimonial landscape of the Côte d'Azur. Faced with the instability of his oeuvre and the potential end of the French modernism, he was anxious for a permanent measure of visibility. Matisse therefore embraced the Sacred Art Movement as an opportunity to assert his art historical accomplishment in a way that was public, permanent, and legally protected. The Sacred Art Movement provided Matisse with a rhetorical framework that enabled him to execute and promote the chapel as an art historical object. Giotto suddenly became attainable, but within the nationalistic tradition of the Romanesque. And in its alternate function as a modernist “masterpiece,” the Vence Chapel offered an optimistic response to the apocalyptic atmosphere of the postwar period, an affirmation of the French tradition’s continuing viability using the eschatological rhetoric of the Sacred Art Movement.

The Vence Chapel as Église-Musée

The Vence Chapel overlooks the Mediterranean, a bleached stucco anomaly nestled between sand-colored buildings. It is simultaneously in conversation with the landscape while refusing to assimilate into its surroundings (figure 3.2). Its white tile roof with an undulating blue stripe is an abstraction of the deep sapphire sea and pristine white beaches found hundreds of feet below. Inside, Matisse created a remarkably cohesive space, controlling every aspect of the chapel’s design from the stained glass right down to the candlesticks that grace the altar. White walls and floors imbue the L-shaped sanctuary with a sense of uniformity, while floor-to-ceiling stained glass on the left and over-scaled tile murals on the right give it equilibrium (figure 3.3).
When the sun streams through the stained-glass windows, jewel-toned light washes over the otherwise cool, white-walled interior, warming the space and animating the black figures on the tile murals.

Today, the Vence Chapel is one of the most popular sites of art pilgrimage in France. The legend of how a Dominican nun inspired Matisse’s self-proclaimed masterpiece has inspired thousands of tourists to flock to Vence to see the so-called “Matisse Chapel” in person. The nuns of the Foyer Lacordaire open the sanctuary to visitors for few hours almost every day to patiently explain the Christian symbolism of the windows and murals and remind visitors that the space is a fully operational convent chapel before it is Matisse’s artwork.

It is easy to see why a tourist might forget about the Vence Chapel’s liturgical function. Convent chapels are typically private, intended for the nuns’ daily hours and devotionals, but the Vence Chapel was clearly designed to accommodate tourists. To enter, one must descend a staircase to a small waiting area with a podium for the taking of admission fees. In the sanctuary, the lay area is much larger than the choir stalls reserved for the nuns (figure 3.4). And the chapel’s exit leads into a museum containing studies, architectural models, photographs of the artist at work, and liturgical vestments and chausables (figure 3.5). Although Matisse may not have expected the nuns to turn the last quarter of the gallery into a gift shop, this museum was part of his original plan.

Matisse was not the only one thinking about tourists. The sanctuary features a few subtle, sophisticated challenges to liturgical heterodoxy that a lapsed Catholic could not have made, which reflect a consideration for the public that is unusual for a convent chapel. For instance, the altar has been brought out and turned away from the wall so that the priest looks out over the people. This arrangement emerged in the early 1920s to facilitate a new interactive liturgy called
the Dialogue Mass, which was developed to make the liturgy more inclusive of the laity. This arrangement was still considered innovative when the chapel was first consecrated in 1951, but since the Dialogue Mass was made canon law after the Second Vatican Council in 1969, it is an innovation often overlooked.

The Vence Chapel exemplifies a rather extreme variant of the église-musée concept espoused in *L’Art Sacré*. In my analysis of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in Assy, I discussed how the Dominican editors of this liturgical art magazine, Marie-Alain Couturier and Pie-Raymond Régamey, espoused modern art as a means of converting tourists into Catholics. Their notion of the église-musée was based upon a century-old French clerical strategy of using archaeological interest in medieval art as a conduit to deeper spiritual engagement with the faith. Now, Couturier and Régamey advocated the use of French modernism to similar ends. The fact that neither became involved in the Vence Chapel until fairly late in the planning stages reflects just how pervasive their ideas were.

The understated tension between modernist masterpiece and liturgical showcase reflects the early influence of Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier, the young Dominican monk who initiated the project. According to Marcel Billot, his aim was “to bring Matisse to religious art, as Couturier had done with Léger at Assy.” To that end, he designed the Vence Chapel with tourism in mind. After all, Matisse was one of the most famous artists in the world; why not take the opportunity to highlight the efforts being modernize the Catholic liturgy? Because he did not expect Matisse to take control as he did, Rayssiguier’s vision for the Vence Chapel is essential to understanding why the project sparked the artist’s interest and ultimately why their

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paths diverged. As I argue here, the Vence Chapel was based on Rayssiguier’s particular vision of a “nouveau moyen âge,” or New Medieval Age.

Rayssiguier and the Nouveau Moyen Âge

Brother Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier’s (1920–1956) role in the Vence Chapel was long overshadowed by Matisse’s contributions.\(^\text{312}\) Ironically, Rayssiguier approached the project believing Matisse was simply part of his larger challenge to liturgical heterodoxy. Although no one today doubts the importance of Rayssiguier’s contribution, his liturgical philosophy has been given only scant consideration. I suggest that his original plan is not only necessary to understanding the Vence Chapel’s otherwise vague connection to the Sacred Art Movement; it also helps us to elucidate the consciousness behind Matisse’s decision to create a Catholic chapel.

Rayssiguier’s involvement in the Vence Chapel project was somewhat incidental. He arrived at the Foyer Lacordaire in 1947 to convalesce after a bout of tuberculosis, not even knowing that Matisse lived nearby. Indeed, he had just returned from a sanatorium on the Plateau d’Assy, where he had seen Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce firsthand. He described Léger’s mosaic as “so simplified that you’d think she was [an allegory of] the Republic or something” and the interior as “gray, ponderous.” When he learned of Matisse’s presence in Vence, he saw an opportunity to create an aesthetic and even spiritual corrective to Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce.

Rayssiguier was by no means a leader of the Sacred Art Movement. He was young, having attended seminary during the Occupation. Nor did he have a chance to become one. He

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\(^{312}\) While the design changed significantly under the artist’s influence, Matisse’s overzealous claim to designing the chapel in its entirety can be understood as a way to reinforce the chapel’s reputation as his “masterpiece.” “The Chapel at Vence was done by Matisse in its entirety. Though a remarkable work, if he could have collaborated with an architect of the same stature as himself instead of doing both the art and the architecture….” Rose Slivka, “Matisse Chasubles Designed for the Vence Chapel,” *Craft Horizon* 16 (1956): 22.
died in 1956 from tuberculosis a disease that permitted him to create just two churches, the Vence Chapel and La Chapelle de l’Ermitage de Saint-Rouin (figure 3.6; realized after his death in 1961). Although little has been written about Rayssiguier’s liturgical philosophy, his letters and diaries suggest that his interest in the Sacred Art Movement derived from Personalist philosophy.313

Catholic Personalists believed that the individualistic values of the Renaissance had yielded a society beset by corruption and anomie.314 They sought a spiritual revolution that would bring about a new modernity, a New Medieval Age, where France would once again be united under the Catholic faith. As I demonstrated in the first two chapters of this study, modern art found favor in Personalist circles because of a shared desire to find authentic spiritual expression. But Personalism also had a profound influence upon modern church design. To bring about their spiritual revolution, Personalists sought to redirect the modern emphasis on individualism into personal communion with the divine. Thus, beginning in the 1930s, many members of the French clergy began to embrace attempts to modernize the liturgy. The French Dominican Order, to which Rayssiguier belonged, led the way using L’Art Sacré as their soapbox. Their efforts intensified after World War II because, with over 6,000 French churches either damaged or destroyed during the war, reconstruction as an opportunity to make the liturgy more lay inclusive by changing the way churches were arranged.315

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313 He was undoubtedly exposed to Personalism, having attended seminary during the Occupation, where it was actively taught. He was also a member of the Jeunesse etudiante chrétienne, a national Catholic organization that was founded upon the principles of Personalist philosophy. Rayssiguier, “The Sum Total of What I Knew about Henri Matisse” [Unpublished Text], in Henri Matisse et al. 1999, 435, appendix 2.
314 Nord 2010, 36.
315 “Près de 6000 églises sont endomagées en France entre 1939 et 1945: chiffre de la Fédération nationale des groupements d’églises dévastées.” Semaine religieuse de Lille, 7 September 1947 as cited in Frémaux 2011, 156.
I would suggest that Rayssiguier saw the Sacred Art Movement as an opportunity to reinforce the primacy of the liturgy above all other forms of collective piety. In his first meeting with Matisse, he reports to have said “…a few words about the way the spirit of the liturgy is evolving, about the communion of the faithful, about Mass being brought into the forefront again.”316 His decision to feature the Stations of the Cross on a single panel reflects that effort (figure 3.7). Although typically attributed to Matisse, the French Dominicans suggested this idea, citing medieval miniatures and paintings as precedent, in order to transform this collective ritual into a private devotion. Rayssiguier believed that collective worship of the Stations was a Renaissance-era corruption of a medieval practice. He therefore argued that the sequence should not only be featured in one composition, but set outside the sanctuary as well, where it would not distract from the ritual of Mass.317

Reputation alone could have recommended the painter once deemed “more dangerous than absinthe” an attractive prospect to Rayssiguier. Despite two offers to go abroad, Matisse had remained in France for the duration of the Occupation. As he told his son Pierre, “If everyone who has any value leaves France, what remains of France?”318 And through his sheer presence, Matisse became one of the most powerful symbols of the Resistance. Thus, as the large lay area in the original plan suggests, Rayssiguier probably saw Matisse’s involvement as a convenient, high-profile opportunity to highlight the efforts being made to modernize the liturgy. But in Catholic art circles, Matisse meant more than that. L’Art Sacré portrayed him as the light and

316 “Brother Rayssiguier’s first meeting with Henri Matisse,” 4 December 1947, in Matisse et al. 1999, 42.
317 Rayssiguier advised Matisse to consult an article in the March 1947 issue of La Vie Spirituelle entitled “Chemin de croix pour recitation publique et Privee” for background information. Letter from Brother Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier to Henri Matisse, 19 March 1948, in ibid., 46.
318 Flam 1995, 234.
continuity of the medieval tradition. This rhetoric, which so flattered Matisse, inspired the Vence Chapel.

Rayssiguier’s design was probably inspired by the “French Romanesque Painters” issue of the Cahiers de L’Art Sacré (1946). Matisse featured prominently in Maurice Morel’s article, “The Constancy of the French Genius,” which encourages French clerics to commission contemporary artists for sacred art projects. Drawing upon the rhetoric of Personalist philosophy, and Matisse’s decades-long rivalry with Picasso, Morel argues that a “new medieval age” might have been achieved after the last apocalypse if artists like Matisse had been equipped with the necessary spiritual knowledge:

In the absence of metaphysics that would allow him to use white magic, we see a Picasso stirring in the stifling darkness of black magic and emerging from it only by a brief movement of compassion for his neighbors. And yet, amidst the upheavals that have just bloodied our planet, we dream of an Apocalypse that could have brought forth a genius so eager for absolute. One also dreams of the paradisiacal world that a Matisse could have opposed to him with the ingenuously rediscovered writing of the Romanesque painters.  

As the two leaders of the modernist movement, Matisse and Picasso had long represented two seemingly divergent uses of modernism: art as a mirror to humanity, and art as the proverbial armchair. But as Morel’s article suggests, their decades-old rivalry came to be framed in apocalyptic terms in the postwar period, when the future of French modernism seemed to be at stake. Picasso came to be regarded as “modernism’s sorcerer” while Matisse (after the Vence Chapel was complete) was playfully named “modernism’s pope.” Morel thus uses the affinities

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between Matisse’s art and the Romanesque to suggest that he was inherently capable of defeating Picasso’s appeal, his “black magic.” To help support Morel’s argument, Régamey used Matisse’s Portrait de Famille and a nativity from the Chapelle Saint-Martin-de-Fenouillat as the article’s frontispiece (figure 3.8). However, Morel suggests that Matisse’s art lacked spiritual fiber because the clergy had monopolized the medieval tradition. He urges the clergy to lift the institutional barriers that previously stopped modernists like Matisse from creating religious art so that society would not fall prey to evil.

This article probably came to Rayssiguier’s mind when Sister Jacques-Marie suggested that Matisse might design a window for their convent chapel. In fact, he articulates some of Morel’s rhetoric during his first meeting with Matisse. After reading aloud a passage on love from Jazz, Rayssiguier said: “But, Maître, if you say love alone enables one to produce…my impression is that Picasso doesn’t always produce in this state: there’s something…almost hate…or what people have called Picasso’s black magic.” Matisse objected to this idea, saying: “The fact is that Picasso is Spanish; he has a violent temperament and sometimes needs to express feelings of that order.” And yet, the temptation to counter his rival’s “black magic” with his own aesthetic “light” ultimately proved irresistible to Matisse, particularly since it provided the basis of Rayssiguier’s design. The Dominican credited fauvism with having “indirectly revived stained-glass windows” and exalted the innate spirituality of Matisse’s art: “…true Christian spirituality is the energy, the joy one finds in colored light …. Grayness cannot create a genuinely Christian atmosphere…”

For Rayssiguier, Matisse’s “light” evoked a larger dialogue taking place in L’Art Sacré at this time about how to make the church relevant in this new, “post-Apocalyptic” environment.

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Régamey encouraged the clergy to reinterpret the scriptural basis of all church design, Saint John’s vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem: “…and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God, and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it.” In an issue of the Cahiers d’Art Sacré, Régamey included commentary by a specialist on the subject of the Apocalypse, a Dominican priest by the name Henri-Marie Féret, who wrote:

In the common opinion of our days…even the word Apocalypse is above all evocative of catastrophe. This is a deformation of Saint John’s message, which is above all a message of light, of the heavenly Jerusalem. From this point of view, medieval interpretations (manuscript of Saint-Sever, the painters of Saint-Savin and Berzé-la-Ville, the tapestry of Angers…) are much more faithful to Saint John.

Here, Féret highlights the rupture between contemporary use of the word and its Biblical sense to observe that Saint John intended his vision of the Apocalypse as a message of hope. He therefore suggests that medieval churches, far from an emphasis on darkness, actually emphasized light. This article helped Régamey to suggest that the role of the church should be to give light and to provide solace for an alienated laity. In fact, he took the idea of light so seriously that he dedicated an entire issue of L’Art Sacré to artificial lighting, an innovation that many in the Church had been hesitant to accept.

But like Morel, Rayssiguier believed that Matisse lacked the spirituality to handle Christian content. He wrote that Matisse was “no longer aware of God, as in the other paintings. This probably comes from the fact that he doesn’t have a Christian soul; if he were filled with the Christian life, it would pour out like the rest, which flows because he’s filled with a natural

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321 This passage also inspired Jean Lurçat’s tapestry at Assy. See Chapter 2; Revelations 21:19.
322 “Dans l’opinion commune de nos jours…le mot même d’Apocalypse est avant tout évocateur de catastrophe…. Il y a là une déformation du message de saint Jean, qui est avant tout un message de lumière, de la Jérusalem celeste. De ce point de vue c’est un fait que les interprètes médiévaux (manuscrit de Saint-Sever, peintres de Saint-Savin et de Berzé-la-Ville, tapisseries d’Angers…) sont beaucoup plus fidèles à saint Jean.” Féret 1945, 9.
aesthetic life.”\textsuperscript{323} And in a fundamental misunderstanding of the artist’s creative process, he believed Matisse’s engagement with the project would be strictly and superficially aesthetic. He commented in his diary: “The fact is I’m not giving him a subject, but an opportunity to work with color. Nevertheless, I read him the Heavenly Jerusalem for the two big windows.”

Rayssiguier was also eager to assert control over the project because Matisse, while the basis of the chapel’s design, was just one part of a larger challenge to liturgical heterodoxy. This young Dominican was anxious to put into practice some of the innovations recently featured in L’Art Sacré. Light would serve as a metaphor for the transparency that should exist between priest and his audience. Régamey published images of Swiss-German churches alongside instructional commentary about the Dialogue Mass—an interactive liturgy developed in the early 1920s to counter the increasing sense of alienation amongst the laity—touting its benefits while outlining its parameters. This was a radical departure from the centuries-old practice of celebrating Mass at altars hidden behind ornate baldachin or rood screens. Rayssiguier had these churches in mind when he designed the Vence Chapel. The altar has been moved to the central axis of the L-shaped structure, well away from its traditional place against the wall.

In short, Rayssiguier saw the Vence Chapel as an opportunity to project his own vision of a “new medieval age,” a vision that differed from Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce in both approach and character. Instead of trying to create a modern counterpart to the Romanesque chapel, he sought to perpetuate the medieval tradition through an emphasis on light and clarity. And to that end, he believed the artist’s vision should be secondary to his own. He was not under that

\textsuperscript{323} It may be surprising that Rayssiguier opted for Matisse over Bazaine. Although, as someone on the lowest rung of the Church hierarchy, and with no architectural experience behind him, it is unlikely that he had the choice. Indeed, Marcel Billot suggests, probably correctly, that Rayssiguier considered Matisse a convenient choice. Rayssiguier had only recently arrived in Vence to convalesce at the Foyer Lacordaire. He was unaware that Matisse also lived there until he was informed by Monique Bourgeois. Marcel Billot, “Matisse and the Sacred,” in Matisse et al. 1999, 12–13.
impression for long, however. When they met again in April 1948, Matisse had privately decided to take over the entire project.\textsuperscript{324} Over the coming months, as Matisse’s share in the project grew, the young Dominican found himself increasingly outmaneuvered and overruled.

It is strange that Matisse—a lapsed Catholic—should become so invested in a project intended to demonstrate the Church’s renewed commitment to the laity. More so, since he had refused Canon Jean Devémy’s commission to paint the Saint Dominic altarpiece at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce: a church that was already grabbing headlines across the world. Therefore, to understand why Matisse chose Rayssiguier’s project even after refusing Devémy’s, let us briefly consider what he knew about Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce.

At the end of the previous chapter, I noted that Matisse ignored Canon Jean Devémy’s offer to paint the Saint Dominic altarpiece at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Matisse was, of course, aware of the church, having become acquainted with it through his longtime friend, Pierre Bonnard, who lived in a neighboring village. Albert Marquet made teasing comments about Bonnard’s work to Matisse at the beginning of 1944, writing: “I suppose that he must stay perched in his little, charming chalet creating the sweet image of St. Francis of Assisi.”\textsuperscript{325} Matisse was not unsympathetic to the idea of a New Medieval Age but he was repelled by the church’s rather hodge-podge results. He told Rayssiguier that he had been offered the chance to paint its pendant, a Saint Dominic, but refused because of the church’s appearance. He had saved a magazine with an illustrated article about the church and noted his unfavorable impression of the interior, Léger’s mosaic, and the resemblance of Novarina’s façade to a “factory entrance.” However, he was most bothered by the way Bonnard’s commission had been handled: “Bonnard

\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 12-13.
\textsuperscript{325} “Je suppose qu’il doit rester perché sur son petit chalet charmant réalisant la douce image de S. Françoise d’Assise.” Letter from Albert Marquet to Matisse, 9 February 1944. Henri Matisse Archives.
didn’t even know where it was going to be installed, the colors, the feel of the space, etc. But the canvas has nice tones.” With such high, Giotto-esque ambitions, Matisse was understandably hesitant to accept a commission that would give him little control.

That Matisse should refuse the Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce commission for aesthetic reasons is well known, but I suggest that he was by no means indifferent to what the church represented. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, this Alpine church stood out as a model of cross-institutional collaboration that had generated state funding and opened the door to historic monument status. It enabled modernists to situate their art within the innately “modern” art historical tradition of the Romanesque. Following years of Occupation, when modern art was vulnerable to fascist iconoclasm, this older generation of modernists welcomed the opportunity to leave a lasting record of their art historical accomplishment within the legally-protected context of a French church. And, as I argue next, in the postwar period, Matisse was particularly anxious to find a publically accessible, legally fixed site of artistic display that would solidify his relationship to the Mediterranean.

Matisse and the Côte d'Azur

In the summer of 1904, the promise of rejuvenation brought Henri Matisse to the small fishing village of Saint-Tropez. This modern-day Arcadia was yet undiscovered by the bronze sun-worshipers who would visit the Vence Chapel. And there, amidst the sea air and “primitive” coastal terrain, Matisse found an escape from the anxieties that restricted his imagination. His contact with the seemingly untamable landscape was extremely generative. The ambient light of the Mediterranean prompted him to explore color as a means of expression. Working alongside André Derain, Matisse gradually moved from pointillism to Fauvism: the style that would

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establish his reputation as France’s leading modernist. For then on, the Mediterranean served as the inexhaustible source for an oeuvre dedicated to providing a “good armchair” for the weary businessman. Its landscape lends authenticity even to the imagined reality of the 1920s interiors, where the temptation of paradise looms behind curtained windows (figure 3.9).

The Vence Chapel would seem to be Matisse’s ode to the Mediterranean and the landscape that provided him with inspiration and security for nearly fifty years. Stained glass windows with regimented columns of abstracted leaves and algae filter the Riviera’s distinctive sunlight and inundate the cool, white space with tones of sapphire, emerald, and lemon. They order the landscape like one of his Fauve-era paintings. And yet, while these windows solidify Matisse’s connection to the landscape, they also keep it out. The Mediterranean remains the temptation of paradise that lays inaccessible, just beyond our field of vision. Deprived of an exterior referent, we are immersed in the artist’s unique vision of the Mediterranean. Only the change in day disturbs the order of this bright, ethereal environment. The artwork remains resistant, constant, even predictable, in a world beset by continual political, cultural, and physical flux.

Of course, the world outside had changed. The Côte d'Azur Matisse first encountered was a “primitive” region distinguished from the rest of the nation by strange dialects, exotic traditions, and seemingly untamable landscape. Over the years, his Mediterranean idyll would be radically altered by colonization, war, and Occupation. And now, after Liberation, a new threat began to emerge: Americanization. As an artist whose reputation was intricately tied to the Mediterranean, Matisse worried about the effects of these changes, particularly as the material security of his art was by no means assured. Therefore, in this section, I locate Matisse’s interest
in the Vence Chapel within the context of his peers’ involvement in the reconstruction of the Côte d'Azur.

*The Modernist Reimagining of the Côte d'Azur*

As World War II came to a close, the U.S. State Department began planning France’s reconstruction. With its industrial-production complex so out of date, the country was poised for a postwar economic depression (a prediction that ultimately proved true). It was decided that foreign tourism was the fastest and most efficient way for the country to recover. Over the next five years, under the auspices of the Marshall Plan, financial aid packages were sent to the Alps and the Côte d'Azur with specific provisions for improvements to the tourist infrastructure so that the country could accommodate a new audience of American middle-class tourist.327

This would be a particular challenge in the case of the Côte d'Azur, given that Europe’s glitterati and domestic tourists like Matisse provided its primary source of revenue. The “primitiveness” that attracted Matisse to Saint-Tropez years before did not resonate with Americans. Their vision of the Riviera was shaped by the recent war, the society pages, and F. Scott’s Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*. Local and regional governments therefore made a concerted effort to market the Côte d'Azur in a way that made it seem accessible to middle-class tourists. “How to see the Côte d'Azur,” a brochure published for American servicemen in 1945 by the Franco-Allied Good Will Committee, is a product of this effort. It begins:

> The Riviera satisfies every need, it succeeds in catering to all tastes, for it has such extraordinary variety. A tideless sea lies at the feet of snowy mountains; smart towns with fine houses rub shoulders with small sleepy villages. The ultra modern in architecture mingles with houses from five hundred to a thousand years old. The natives know that they live in a playground and don’t mind how much the visitors play, there is a

327 McKenzie 2007, 137.
spirit of great tolerance everywhere, and in a climate as perfect as that of the Riviera why should not everyone be happy?\textsuperscript{328}

In this passage, leisure is normalized an authentic part of Riviera culture. It helps to reconcile the region’s many natural, social, and temporal dichotomies. Everyone is a visitor to the Côte d'Azur; therefore, even Americans would find it easy to enjoy themselves.

The effects of these efforts could be seen outside Matisse’s very window. After World War II, Vence underwent an economic shift parallel to that of Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Vence had been a center for health tourism since the 1830s. The sea air was considered a palliative for all matter of ailments, most notably, tuberculosis. In fact, the Foyer Lacordaire was established around 1900 as a convalescent home for girls afflicted with the disease. World War II changed that. Vence tried to retain its reputation as a health destination, but like the rest of the Riviera, it found more stability in recreational tourism amidst the growing economic influence of the United States. These efforts began rapidly after the war’s end. Vence was one of the rare fortified villages where the original medieval walls remained intact. Although the village’s monuments had incurred only minor damage during the war, SMH—the government agency charged with protecting, preserving, and restoring French patrimony—conducted extensive repairs on the fortifications, cathedral, and monastery between 1945 and 1948.\textsuperscript{329} As was the case with the rest of the nation’s reconstruction, historic monuments were among the first buildings to be repaired not only because of their vulnerability, but because of their importance to foreign tourism.

\textsuperscript{328} “How to see the Côte d’Azur, for the soldiers of the allied armies,” (Paris Commissariat général au tourisme and Franco-allied good will committee, 1946), 2–3.

\textsuperscript{329} Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d'Azur; 06: Vence,” Archives des Monuments Historiques, Médiathèque de l’Architecture et Patrimoine (MAP), Paris.
Modern artists found ample opportunities to participate in the Côte d'Azur’s reconstruction, as regional tourism boards worked to promote the Riviera as an important satellite in modernist production, second only to Paris. After all, modern art was one of the few aspects of the region’s culture untainted by war. But this new image required glossing over the less savory implications of the Riviera’s modernist history. The Côte d'Azur was something of a modernist refuge after the Germans invaded Paris. And it continued to serve as their “capital of exile” even after the demarcation line between Free and Occupied France was lifted. But life there was far more dangerous for those who were Jewish, Communist, or otherwise politically undesirable. Having been the seat of collaborationist government for the last four years, the Côte d'Azur was anxious to associate itself with the École de Paris in order to rebrand itself within the free, democratic, and liberal French tradition.

Over the next twenty years, local governments make a concerted effort to integrate modernism into the historical landscape. Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s studio became a museum; Fernand Léger collaborated with politicians in Biot on an (unrealized) vacation colony called the Village Polychrome; Jean Cocteau painted murals for an amphitheater, a wedding chapel, and two Catholic Chapels. While some of these projects involved new construction, many more used historic buildings as their setting. For instance, in 1950, the village of Vence announced that Marc Chagall would create painted murals for a series of medieval chapels known as The Stations of the Cross. However, the project was never realized (the murals later provided the basis for Chagall’s Museum of the Biblical Message in Nice); instead, Chagall created a mosaic for the Vence Cathedral. The idea of modern artists modifying valuable sites of French patrimony

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330 Modernism’s wartime relationship to the Côte d’Azur has been discussed at some length. The Côte d’Azur could function as a refuge for French artists. A few studies on the subject are worth noting here: Silver 2001; O’Neill 2012; Cone 1992.
would have been unheard of before the war. Their ability to do so in the postwar era speaks to a concerted attempt to promote modern art as uniquely French.

Matisse was likewise interested in promoting the Côte d'Azur as a modernist haven, as we can see in the travel poster *Nice—travail et joie* (figure 3.10) he designed in 1946. Until the Vence Chapel, however, he was largely frustrated in his efforts to create something large-scale and permanent. For instance, his plans to erect a monument to Artistide Maillol were rejected by the regional arts council on the basis that the sculptor’s reputation had been sullied by his (unintentional) connections to fascism. He had better luck as president of the Union Méditerranéenne pour l’Art Moderne: a commission formed to establish a modern art museum in Nice. But while on the whole a positive experience, Matisse was annoyed by his lack of control, the bureaucracy, and the transience of the exhibits.

Lydia Delectorskaya, Matisse’s long-time assistant, therefore attributes Matisse’s interest in the Vence Chapel to an unfulfilled need to create a large-scale artwork. In a letter to Dominique de Menil, she explained:

> For this ‘crowning achievement,’ Matisse did not want a religious edifice or even a monument. He wanted a public place, destined and accessible to the generality of men. He would have liked to devote himself to a recreation room for children or preferably for adults or, better yet, a cultural meeting room.

> He was on the point of asking the Communists (Louis Aragon, to be precise), who were the most active in this regard, to give him ‘walls’ for this purpose, when circumstance ... put an entire chapel in his hands, where even the architecture could be conformed to the painter’s desires.

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332 Ibid., 38.
333 “Pour ce ‘couronnement,’ Matisse ne souhaitait ni un édifice religieux ni même un ‘monument’. Il voulait un lieu public, destiné et accessible à la généralité des hommes. Il aurait aimé se consacrer à une salle fixe de récréation pour enfants ou de préférence pour adultes ou, encore mieux, à une salle de réunions culturelles. Il était sur le point de demander aux communistes (à Louis Aragon, pour être précises), comme aux gens les plus agissants en l’occurrence, de lui donner ‘des murs’ de cet ordre, lorsque les circonstances ... lui mirent dans les mains toute une chapelle où
In other words, Matisse’s need to create a large-scale, public work of art was apparently so urgent that he, a famously apolitical artist, was nevertheless willing to create a political artwork. And the circumstantial nature of his chosen medium is reinforced by the idea that Matisse would have asked the French Communist Party (PCF) for a commission had fate (by way of a Dominican nun) not intervened.

Thus, by Delectorskaya’s reasoning, the Vence Chapel was nothing more than a medium for Matisse to fulfill his aesthetic ambitions. However, I argue that this interest in monumentality was more than just artistic: it spoke to very real desire to create a permanent, legally-protected form of artistic display. In their very first meeting, he asked Rayssiguier, “The project is interesting in itself. Is it going to be declared a public monument?”

In the next part of this section, I elucidate the legalistic dimension of Matisse’s interest in monumentality by placing it within the context of his art historical anxieties. In so doing, I suggest that Matisse’s interest in the Vence Chapel stemmed from a desire to solidify his art historical legacy in a way that transcended political instability and the vulnerability of the artwork on canvas.

**The Instability of Visibility**

Matisse emerged from World War II more celebrated than before. Despite two offers to go abroad, he remained in France for the duration of the war because it represented Free France. He worked tirelessly, apparently refusing to allow war, politics, or ill health to deter him from his pursuit of his œuvre. To the public, his refusal to abandon modernism, despite its official “degenerate” status, spoke to a heroic commitment to pushing the French tradition ever forward. Instead of watching the retreating German troops passing under his studio window, he continued

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mêmes le facture architecture pouvait être conformée à ses désirs du peintre.” Letter from Lydia Delectorskaya to Dominique de Menil, 20 January 1964. Marie-Alain Couturier Archives, Menil Foundation, Houston.

to sketch the model before him, reportedly saying, “Never let it be said that I stopped work to watch the Germans depart.”

Such a romantic image of Matisse—so intent on his work that he was blind to the chaos outside his studio—endeared him to the public. According to Louis Aragon, Matisse became a “national reality” to the French during the Occupation “because he was of France, because he was France.”

Matisse was equally respected in the United States. Indeed, John O’Brien suggests that he was held in even higher regard than Pablo Picasso or Jackson Pollock.

In the wake of the Atom Bomb, the European and American public looked to his art as an antidote to the alienation and uncertainty of the atomic age. Hugo Munsterberg, for instance, was not surprised that the artist who likened art to a “good armchair” “…should have continued painting his beautiful, decorative pictures of nudes and still lifes and landscapes throughout the wars and disturbances of our chaotic age.”

But Matisse was skeptical of fame. Although people applauded would when he walked down the streets, he knew that he could lapse into obscurity if the next generation of artists had no use of his work. This made his apparent lack of influence amongst the Abstract Expressionists particularly worrisome. He expressed some bafflement to Picasso about Jackson Pollock’s work:

You see, it’s very difficult to understand and appreciate the generation that follows. Little by little, as one goes through life, one creates not only a language for himself, but an aesthetic doctrine with it…. And so it becomes all the more difficult for one to

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338 “Later, the artist Romare Bearden…recalled being on boulevard Montparnasse, when the aged Matisse walked by, supported by two young people. ‘A waiter hollered something like, ‘He is passing by!’…and all the waiters went to the front of the café and started clapping.’” Harvey Levenstein, *We’ll Always Have Paris: American Tourists in France Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 99.
understand a kind of painting whose point of departure lies beyond one’s own point of arrival.339

With America’s star on the rise, and the face of the avant-garde changing beyond the point of reconcilability, Matisse became increasingly concerned about preserving a material record of his art historical accomplishment.340 As he told an interviewer in 1942, “Remember that the advantage that painting has over the theater is that future generations might repair the injustice of the generation in which the painting appeared.”341

Matisse’s concerns over visibility were by no means new. Over the last half-century, nationalization and redistribution through secondary markets put considerable distance between Matisse and the artworks that garnered him the title “King of the Fauves.”342 Most of his artworks were sequestered in private collections. When demand for his art dissipated with the 1929 economic downturn, he began to regard collectors as unstable intermediaries, even impediments, to his ultimate goal of reaching a public audience. He sought more enduring measures of success through large architectural commissions but was unsatisfied with the results.343 By 1935, he was concerned enough to tell his daughter Marguerite: “The worry that

339 Françoise Gilot, quoted in Flam 1995, 374.
340 According to Spurling, ‘‘What do you think they have incorporated from us?’ Matisse asked, producing American catalogues of Pollock and Robert Motherwell. ‘And in a generation or two, who among the painters will still carry a part of us in his art, as we do Manet and Cézanne?’” Spurling 2007, 442.
343 In 1930, he accepted a commission to create a large mural, Dance, for Albert Barnes in Philadelphia. Matisse welcomed the opportunity because he considered the Barnes Collection the “only sane place” to see modern art in America. Moreover, Barnes already owned fifty-nine artworks by the artist. Yet as a patron, Barnes proved extremely difficult. Matisse would later tell Couturier: “That old cow Barnes how he tormented me!” Neither party was pleased with the outcome of Dance. Matisse’s frustration intensified as Barnes became increasingly selective about who could see his museum. Access to the Barnes was famously difficult to obtain for those connected to the art world, and loans to other museums were strictly out of the question. For all intents and purposes, the Dance was inaccessible. Matisse et al. 1999, 88.
haunts me is that I'll end up being forgotten.” The prospect of another world war was particularly ominous because it placed national collections at risk. In 1936, Matisse’s name appeared on the Nazi list of “degenerate” artists and his artworks were removed from German museums. That same year, Soviet officials closed the Museum of Modern Western Art in St. Petersburg, which housed Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov’s illustrious collections of his work, citing modernism’s decadent influence upon the masses.

Matisse was therefore deeply conscious of the material threat that a German occupation of France would pose to his own collection, which was by far the largest and most complete representation of his oeuvre in the world. He refused when Robert Rey, the director of French National Museums, wrote just a week before the Phony War with an offer to evacuate his collection with that of the State. Instead, Matisse put his trust in Picasso. Matisse had already stored his collection in a vault at the Banque de France a year before, so when he fled Paris in advance of the German invasion, he gave his friend and rival the key. In 1940, the Germans gained access to the bank’s strongrooms. For a brief moment, Matisse feared that everything would be lost. He wrote a friend: “All my work, all my drawings and paintings, Cézannes,

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345 This included The Italian Girl from the Bremen Kunstahalle (see vol. 1, p. 57); a portrait of Cocteau from the Landes Museum in Hanover (see vol. 2, p. 59); Im Schaukelstuhl and Akt im Stuhl from the Städtische Kunstsammlungen near Chemnitz; Flusslandschaft, Stilleben balues Zimmer, Drei Fauen am Wasser, Weibl.Akt I, Stilleben, Weibl. Akt II, Vorzeichnung f.eine Fliese, and Liegende in Essen’s Folkwang Museum; and another Still Life in Frankfurt’s Städtische Galerie und Städelches Kunstinstitut (see vol. 1, p. 212). The Victoria & Albert Museum in London made the Nazis’ two-volume “Entartete Kunst” inventory available online in 2014. http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/entartete-kunst/.
346 His son Pierre made a covert bargain with the Nazi administration to purchase some of his father’s artworks. He tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange a similar deal in Moscow a year later with the help of Alfred Barr, who then asked for the Soviet collection to be loaned to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but again, failed. Spurling 2007, 374.
Renoirs, Courbets—for I know what refined and robust removal men the Germans can be.”

However, it was Picasso who ensured that no artworks were taken when the vault was opened for “inspection,” and as a result, Matisse’s private collection remained safe throughout the war. However, when he finally returned to the Banque de France in June 1945, he discovered that a heating system failure had caused the vault to flood. He had planned to spend two weeks in Paris. Instead, he spent four months “assessing damage, relining canvases, and drying out hundreds of waterlogged, often mildewed etchings.” The psychological effects of the flood cannot be underestimated, given that this, the most comprehensive representation of his work in France, had remained safe from German hands for five years.

However, none of Matisse’s precautions could have prepared him for the most significant threat to his œuvre: the black market. Nazi confiscation of state and private Jewish collections set into motion a highly complex and circuitous black market that, ironically, enabled the French art market to recover from its Depression-era slump. Because art was one of the few stable investments during the Occupation, even artists deemed “degenerate” were selling at pre-1929 rates. Matisse was no exception. Indeed, the motivation to sell rather than burn his artworks had little to do with ideology. His art was in particular demand because he was a native-born Frenchman and one of the few modern artists that Vichy deemed acceptable. In 1941, the Nazis pillaged the inventories of Matisse’s dealers, Paul Rosenberg and the Bernheim-Jeune gallery, were confiscated and stored at the Jeu de Paume. A few of the artist’s canvases made their way

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349 Spurling 2007, 396.
350 Information on the flood is scarce. Spurling cites a letter from Matisse to his wife dated 25 October 1945 as well as unspecified information from Matisse’s assistant, Lydia Delectorskaya. Ibid., 437.
351 Art even functioned as currency, an object that could be anonymously traded for goods or cash. A canvas could quietly change hands several times over before it finally re-emerged on the public art market, a journey that could span years and several countries. Elizabeth Karlsgodt, Defending National Treasures: French Art and Heritage Under Vichy (Stanford University Press, 2011), 228.
into the private collections of Hermann Goerring and Joachim von Ribbentrop, who used the Jeu de Paume as a source for their own growing stores of modern art. The remaining Matisses were sold to fund the Nazi war machine. In fact, Martin Fabiani, Matisse’s new dealer, facilitated most sales of Nazi-looted artwork. Upon learning this, the artist quickly severed their contract in 1944.

The black market would ultimately pose the greatest threat to Matisse’s oeuvre if only because it continued to flourish after the war. Because a painting could be anonymously traded for goods or cash, it could change hands several times over before it finally re-emerged on the public art market: a journey that could span years and several countries. Matisse, however, was little help in the recovery process. With almost seven decades’ worth of work behind him, an active secondary market, and a history of selling to foreign collectors, he was bound to lose track of his art.

Matisse was more worried by one of the black market’s secondary effects: fakes. Forgers seeking to profit from his mainstream fame exploited the apparent facility of Matisse’s art to create convincing imitations that fooled even his son and dealers. Matisse’s indignation was predictable, for as John O’Brian observes, this was an artist who refused to allow his own students to copy his work as part of standard art school practice. He therefore considered counterfeit artwork an immense threat to his overall artistic accomplishment because they negated the arduous process behind his reduced compositional style. As a result, Matisse would devote much of his remaining life to distinguishing genuine artworks from forged.

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352 See John O’Brian’s thoughtful discussion of counterfeit Matisses in O’Brian 1999, 152.
353 Therefore, when, at the end of 1952, Matisse’s ex-dealer, Bernheim-Jeune, asked for help in establishing authenticity in an effort to recover the artworks confiscated by the Nazis, they framed it in a way that would resonate with the artist: “You are no doubt aware of the scandals that erupt almost daily about fake pictures, and that newspapers, eager for copies, are hastening to raise a pen. We are afraid that in the long run such a practice will prompt amateurs, particularly abroad, to discredit French painting, and annihilate our efforts to make it known throughout the world.” Letter from Bernheim-Jeune to Matisse, 14 November 1952. Henri Matisse Archives, Paris.
354 His daughter, Marguerite, inherited the problem. She told Brassai, “I’ve taken on a difficult job: I’m establishing the catalog of Matisse’s paintings. So I need your photos. They can give me valuable indications about one canvas...
One can therefore see how the permanence and utilitarian function of a Catholic convent chapel, not to mention its potential status as a historic monument, might render it inaccessible to those who sought to capitalize upon his present fame for their own profit. A letter written to his friend Tériade suggests as much:

…very soon I will see you in my Vence studio, whose walls are covered with preparatory works for the decoration of this modest Dominican chapel, whose quality will be counted and inaccessible to the counterfeiters who work, with certain discretion, to capitalize upon the value of my art. This work will reveal to us the profound sensibility of the masses [original emphasis].

Fraud posed a significant threat to his relationship to the public because it compromised Matisse’s carefully constructed oeuvre. Consequently, the chapel’s Christian content worked to his advantage. With little to no religious subject matter in his oeuvre, he could ensure the easy detection of fraudulent copies, while maintaining the integrity of the chapel as a total work of art, thus barring black market access.

Matisse’s interest in monumentality can therefore be said to relate just as much to a desire for permanence as it does to aesthetics. Even though his art historical significance seemed assured at Liberation, he treated that status anxiously. After all, his oeuvre existed primarily on portable canvas: an object with immense ideological power and economic value, susceptible to theft, destruction, and occlusion. I therefore suggest that a Catholic convent chapel was by no

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or another. I have all my father’s documents, and yet, it’s a very rough business. All the fakes…. The diabolical skill of the forgers boggles the mind. They borrow almost literally different elements from several canvases to compose a new one. Very difficult to distinguish from the genuine ones.” Brassai in conversation with Marguerite Duthuit, 22 June 1960. Jane Marie Todd, ed. Brassai: Conversations with Picasso (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 331.

355 tu…très bientôt je vous verrai dans mon atelier de Vence dont les murs dont couverts de travaux préparatoires à la décoration de cette modeste chapelle de Dominicaine, dont la qualité ne sera compté et sera inaccessible aux fraudeurs qui travaillent, avec une certaine discrétion, à faire multiplier la valeur de mes œuvres. Ils nous révèlent dans le vouloir du profonde sensibilité-des masses.” Letter from Henri Matisse to Tériade, 18 November 1948. Henri Matisse Archives, Paris.
means a benign choice of medium: he undertook the project in full awareness of its potential to become a monument historique. In fact, as I note later in this chapter, churches comprise the majority of France’s SMH inventory.

But first let us consider how the artist’s interest in monumentality was influenced by the Musée Picasso in Antibes. Matisse was all too aware of art history’s fickle nature an artist who is appreciated in his lifetime could easily be forgotten after death. Therefore, the Picasso museum was more to Matisse than just the latest ante in their decades-long rivalry; it was an assurance of art historical security. I argue that the legal protections the Antibes museum afforded to Picasso, I argue, directly informed Matisse’s decision to create the Vence Chapel.

*Modernism’s Pope versus Modernism’s Sorcerer*

In September 1947, just three months before Matisse met with Rayssiguier about the Vence Chapel, it was announced that the Musée Antibes would be renamed the Musée Picasso, making it the first museum to a living modern artist.  

356 This branch of the Musée Antibes was located in the former Grimaldi Palace: a medieval fortress that had once home to ancestors of Prince Ranier of Monaco. After nearly a decade of restorations, the museum opened in 1945 to little fanfare. To generate more of the public’s interest, Romuald Dor de la Souchère, invited Picasso to use one of the floors as a studio in 1946.  

357 Picasso left for Vallauris after six months, but the twenty-three paintings and forty-four drawings he left behind prompted Souchère to preserve the artist’s former studio and begin proceedings to change the museum’s name. But to Matisse, the new Musée Picasso was more than just a museum: it was a *monument historique*.

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356 As Yve-Alain Bois has suggested, the establishment of a Musée Picasso was a significant ante in Picasso and Matisse’s decades-long rivalry. Bois makes a good case for seeing the Vence Chapel was a response to Musée Picasso. However, his argument does not extend to a discussion of monumentality and its administrative implications. Yve-Alain Bois, *Matisse and Picasso* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 215.

As discussed above, the Service des Monuments Historiques (SMH) is the government agency charged with protecting France’s historical patrimony. The SMH was founded in the 1830s with the sole purpose of preserving the nation’s medieval churches. Since its creation, the inventory for which the SMH is responsible had expanded to include architecture, objects, historical sites, and even natural wonders. The SMH has withstood numerous changes in government; in fact, it was one of the few branches of French government that the Nazis left alone. SMH mediates the French historical landscape in a very real, material sense; therefore, its policies are famously conservative. Once included in the SMH inventory, modifications can only be made with permission and supervision.\textsuperscript{358} SMH status is also famously difficult to achieve; a structure can be included in the inventory without ever being elevated to the status of official monument. SMH policy loosened under Vichy, which enabled individuals and local governments to integrate modernism into the historical landscape after World War II.\textsuperscript{359} While Matisse’s decision to create a convent chapel undoubtedly derived from circumstance, he was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that churches are intensely nationalistic symbols that make up the majority of the SMH inventory.

\textsuperscript{358} The legal definition of a Monument Historique has always been quite vague. The Historic Monuments Act of 31 December 1913 defined a \textit{monument classé} as: “Les immeubles dont la conservation présent au point de vue de l’histoire ou de l’art un intérêt public sont classés comme monuments historiques en totalité ou en partie.” The Historic Monuments Inventory is also loosely defined. According to Article 2 of the 23 December 1927 revision of the Historic Monuments Act, the Inventory comprises: “Les immeubles ou parties d’immeubles privés qui, sans justifier une demande immédiat; présentent un intérêt d’histoire ou d’art suffisant pour en rendre désirable la préservation, peuvent à toute époque être inscrits sur un inventaire supplémentaire.” An amendment to the 1913 law, enacted under Vichy on 25 February 1943, created a protection zone of 500 meters around a \textit{monument classé}, including adjoining vacant lots and buildings. These definitions were still in operation when Matisse created the Vence Chapel. Antonella Versaci, “The evolution of urban heritage concept in France, between conservation and rehabilitation programs,” \textit{Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences} 225 (2016): 6. Jean-Pierre Bady, \textit{Les monuments historiques en France} (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), 21–22.

The Musée Picasso resonated for that reason. And it was something of a first. Modernist buildings would not be included in the SMH inventory until 1950, when Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye became the first twentieth-century structure to be deemed a Monument Historique. The Palace was already in the SMH inventory when it became the Musée Picasso, but in April 1948, around the same time as Matisse decided to take over the Vence Chapel project, it was elevated to an official Monument Historique. Picasso was conscious of this fact, as was Matisse. In fact, he wrote Picasso in September 1947 advising him to return to the museum to paint a series of frescoes on the walls of his former studio: “I am convinced that you would do something stunning, and very simply at that. I would like you to do the job, because it is impossible for me, and I know you’d do it much better than I. Think about it. It’s important for all. Forgive my insistence. It’s my duty.” As a monument historique, the State was legally obligated to protect the structure, its immediate environs, and contents of the Château Grimaldi, including Picasso’s murals. It therefore offered the security and permanence that would enable Picasso’s art to resonate with future generations of artists.

The Sacred Art Movement therefore appealed to Matisse because of the official sanction it received from the French state after World War II. An impressive array of notable art historians and high functionaries from within the provisional government’s arts administration contributed to or were consulted for the Cahiers to equip parish priests with the knowledge to reconstruct their churches in a way that was both legally and ecclesiastically sound. Tourism was

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embedded within the Sacred Art Movement discourse because the anagogical experience necessitated an artistically-interested audience. The Department of Beaux-Arts and SMH supported the Dominican cause to bolster domestic unity, show the progressive nature of the postwar government, and rebuild the economy through tourist revenue. And as the project progressed, Rayssiguier and Matisse both took advantage of these relationships.

*The Vence Chapel as Artistic Sanctuary*

Rayssiguier understood that the French government was taking an active interest in church building projects because Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce had received state funding. Thus, with Matisse’s involvement apparently guaranteed, he suggested that a loan from the Department of Beaux-Arts might be obtained to pay for the stained glass, citing Jean Lurçat’s *Apocalypse* tapestry as precedent. But where Rayssiguier saw Beaux-Arts funding as an opportunity to make his vision to come to life, Matisse saw it as a sure route to achieving legal protection for his art. After an early planning meeting, Rayssiguier recorded in his diary:

> He [Matisse] wants his work protected—by the state, therefore—from destruction. He says changes of government are always possible and mentions persecutions and expulsions (he doesn’t want to spell this out, so I point out that it’s a real possibility), etc. ‘Apart from war,’ he had already said to me in another conversation, ‘I would like to have this ensemble protected from any threat of destruction or dispersal in museums.’... He asks me to send the 1/20 model to his Paris address, so he can splash paint on it and show it to [Robert] Rey, the director of Beaux-Arts. He’ll tell him he wants to work on it to see how Rey reacts and what he suggests. Rey wants to create important and original things. Perhaps it will be up his alley.

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364 This is confirmed by François Mathey’s dual role as inspector for SMH and chair of the Commission Diocesan de Besançon (CDAS): the committee behind Audincourt and Ronchamp. Although Mathey was partly motivated by his own religious beliefs, his involvement in the Sacred Art Movement was equally determined by a professionally derived sense of historical obligation.

365 Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 19 April 1948. Ibid., 60.

366 Ibid., 65.
Matisse was confident enough in his fame to believe that if Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce could receive funding, a church by Matisse almost certainly would. And with a financial investment in the project, the state would be more likely to classify the artwork as a monument, thereby protecting it from the political upheavals that endangered his other artworks.

*Monument historique* quickly becomes a constant refrain for the artist, who refers to the chapel as “the little monument.”367 As I noted above, permanence and function rendered the Vence Chapel inaccessible to those who sought to capitalize upon his present fame for their own profit. As a *monument historique*, the state would be obligated to protect the chapel against dispersal and fraud. And while the chapel could not be protected from total destruction, Matisse did believe that SMH could save it from political upheaval. This becomes evident when Matisse displayed a model of the chapel at the Maison de la Pensée Française. Louis Aragon said: “Very pretty—very gay—in fact, when we [the Communist Party] take over we’ll turn it into a dance hall.” Matisse responded: “Oh no, you won’t. I’ve already taken precautions. I have a formal agreement with the town of Vence that if the nuns are expropriated the Chapel will become a museum, a *monument historique*.”368 His statement therefore suggests that this was an artwork intended to endure beyond its ostensible function as a convent chapel.

The prospect of monumental status was understandably troubling for the nuns. The mother superior of the Foyer Lacordaire was also concerned that a chapel by a famous artist would be considered an artwork, not an active worship space, which would once again endanger the nuns’ legal right to possession. But Matisse rejected the suggestion: “On the contrary…that would mean it would get registered as a historical monument and it would be protected from

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367 Billot, “Matisse and the Sacred” in Matisse et al. 1999, 11. References to “the little monument” are scattered throughout the artist’s correspondence with Rayssiguier and Couturier.

368 Flam 1995, 298, n. 9.
being torn down.”

He also attempted to heighten the project’s appeal by citing its economic advantages, noting that revenue at the Musée Antibes had increased when Picasso painted a series of murals on one of its interior walls:

> Despite the fact that their art isn’t accessible to everyone, the museum took in 45,000 francs in one year, which had never happened before according to the custodian. ‘So if people knew I had done this they would come, and then all you’d need would be the sisters having enough sense to charge admission.’

The Mother Superior conceded, but objected to the possibility of Beaux-Arts funding, arguing that the state could take the chapel away if it was declared a monument. Sensing trouble, Rayssiguier asked Régamey to allay the nuns’ anxieties and smooth things over with the Dominican hierarchy.

> The potential for historic status would subsequently manifest itself in the small, practical details, as we can see in a letter from Matisse to Couturier:

> Concerning the heating, he [Auguste Perret] says floor heating wouldn’t last more than a hundred to a hundred-and-fifty years, which is not much when you think about it: the entire installation will have to be redone after that, which would be very expensive (and if the Chapel is placed under the tutelage of the Monuments Historiques, there is no guarantee they would be willing to foot the bill).

Moreover, Matisse also limited his attention to the public areas of the chapel, which he believed were more likely to receive SMH protection. For that reason, he focused on the sanctuary and the

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369 Ibid., 61.
370 In his letter to the Mother General of the Foyer Lacordaire, Régamey wrote: “who would ever have thought this artist, whose art seemed irremediably closed to the supernatural, would become passionately interested in such an undertaking?” Letter from Pie-Raymond Régamey to the Mother General of the Foyer Lacordaire, 5 July 1948, cited in Matisse et al. 1999, 81, n. 2.
public stairs, but played no part in the design or decoration of those areas reserved for the clergy and nuns.372

With Matisse’s “monumental” aspirations already influencing the smaller aspects of the design, it was inevitable that larger design should change too. Rayssiguier, clearly unprepared for this prospect, expected a kind of passivity from Matisse that reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the artist’s personality. Matisse did not take kindly to dictates, particularly when it came to matters of art. At first, their disagreements were small. In keeping with his desire to create a “timeless” artwork, Matisse bridled at Rayssiguier’s suggestion that the Virgin Mary should be dressed in contemporary fashion. Nor was he keen to see the Stations of the Cross outside the sanctuary, having deemed it essential to the decorative balance of the sanctuary.

Then, just two months after they began the project, the two fell out over the size of the murals. Rayssiguier argued for smaller murals to maintain the primacy of the Mass; meanwhile, Matisse believed that their size should be increased in proportion to the windows on the opposite side to create a harmonious balance between color and line. Rayssiguier asked Couturier to mediate, and much to his surprise, Couturier sided with Matisse. The project then fundamentally shifted when Matisse rejected Rayssiguier and Couturier’s suggestion of Le Corbusier as architectural advisor (Rayssiguier was not a certified architect). Instead, he asked Auguste Perret to sign off on the project, saying “He’ll do what I want him to.”373 The pair reconciled not long after and eventually settled into a productive working relationship, which reflects just how committed the

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372 “We examine the blueprints. He limits what he personally undertakes to construct to the Chapel itself with the public stairs; but not to any part of the gallery, the atrium, or chaplaincy. He suggests having the exterior of the gallery and outbuildings only loosely protected, so the present kitchen in the Foyer, as well as the garden, can be expanded. And having the interior on the Chapel itself totally protected.” Henri Matisse in conversation with Brother Rayssiguier, 10 April 1949, in Matisse et al. 1999, 174.

373 Matisse was already acquainted with Perret; moreover, his statement here reflects some concern that Le Corbusier would overwhelm his vision of the artwork. However, one could also see Perret’s work on the historical reconstruction of Le Havre as a factor, given that the project would have required SMH status. “Henri Matisse in conversation with Brother Rayssiguier and Father Couturier,” 3 July 1948, Matisse et al. 1999, 76.
Dominicans were to bringing Catholicism back into the social mainstream. Nevertheless, the project now unquestionably belonged to the artist.

This change of direction manifests itself in the final product. The Vence Chapel’s Christian subject matter competes (rather unsuccessfully at times) with Matisse’s voice and vision. The structure announces itself as Matisse’s artwork from the other side of the bay well before it becomes recognizable as a site of Catholic worship. The gold-tipped, wrought-iron cross that stands atop the roof seems almost as tall the building itself from up close, but it is so delicate and thin—Matisse compared it to a wisp of smoke—that it can hardly be seen from a distance (figure 3.11). Inside, the experience of the chapel is so choreographed that it rivals even that of the Mass. The immense scale of the murals and stained glass makes them impossible to see from a single vantage point. One must walk all the way up to the altar to view the Stations of the Cross at the back or move to the stained-glass windows on the left to see the Ave mural on the right.

In this section, I have described Matisse’s interest in the Vence Chapel as motivated by a desire to preserve his relationship to the Côte d'Azur through monumental, and therefore legal, means. Perhaps it was inevitable that Matisse should privilege the Vence Chapel’s aesthetic function over the liturgical. And the extent to which he did so speaks to why the Sacred Art Movement resonated with modernists in the postwar period. As a cross-institutional endeavor that received the cooperation of the Church and State, the Sacred Art Movement gave artists the opportunity to shape the patrimonial landscape in a way that was permanent, public, and legally-binding. For Matisse, Giotto suddenly became an attainable goal, but within the nationalistic tradition of the Romanesque.
Indeed, as I argue in the next section, the Romanesque was one of the reasons that Rayssiguier’s plan appealed to Matisse. The opportunity emerged at a time when he was actively working to stake his place in the newly revised notion of the French tradition, which now suggested an evolution from medieval to modern. In this sense, the Vence Chapel enabled Matisse to assert his spiritual gravitas at a moment of existential crisis while maintaining his connection to tradition.

*Matisse and the Nouveau Moyen Âge*

Despite Matisse’s claim that he had “always felt at home with medieval things,” his interest was actually quite recent.374 His first serious encounter with Romanesque art did not occur until 1940, when he visited the Romanesque frescoes at the Palais de Chaillot. A contemporary source records that he left unimpressed and uninspired. By 1945, he recanted that initial assessment, saying: “If I had been familiar with them, it would have saved me twenty years of work.”375 This is not to say that there is something disingenuous about Matisse’s interest in medieval art; rather, medievalism gave art historical roots to his established aesthetic.

Matisse’s art is characterized by an ambivalent encounter with the canon. By destabilizing pictorial convention, he sought to maintain the viability of tradition.376 Of course, the canon is not a stable entity; its shape and composition changed dramatically in Matisse’s lifetime. In the late 1930s, to accommodate French modernism’s growing institutional status, the tradition began to favor the medieval Romanesque over Latinate classicism. Two influential medieval art historians, Emile Mâle and Henri Focillon, set the groundwork for this shift in the

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374 “From Father Couturier’s Diary,” 14 October 1950, in ibid., 360.
376 “…While the ambivalence operating at the heart of his pictorial project made his works disturbing for the initial audience, it also opened up the possibility of a reclamation via the narratives of aesthetic pleasure and formal play.” Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.
late nineteenth century. Focillon, for instance, argued that the Romanesque was a reaction against the “false archaism” and classicizing tendencies of competing medieval styles. As I showed in Chapter 1, the nationalism of this idea appealed to the Catholic clergy at this moment in part because it enabled them to capitalize upon modernism’s popularity. The State also sought to exploit the nationalistic potential of medieval art. Work began on the Musée de la Fresque at the Palais de Chaillot in 1937, which recreated medieval frescoes in their original situation. Not coincidentally, the Palais de Chaillot would also house a new museum of modern art. Meanwhile, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France hosted several exhibits of medieval manuscripts, most notably the Beatus Manuscript and the Apocalypse of Saint-Sever. It was under Vichy that this medieval-modern teleology became recognized as tradition. However, Vichy only promoted specific, nativist strains of modern art as proof of the continuing genius of French tradition; “foreign” forms of modernism (e.g. Surrealism) were allowed to become targets of fascist iconoclasm. Consistent with that policy, the Beaux-Arts administration portrayed the Romanesque as a sort of domestic primitivism through exhibitions and the support of new museums.

Matisse benefited enormously from this shifting notion of tradition because it gave his career-long struggle against academicism a historical basis. He was no longer an agitator against tradition, but an artist dedicated to its recovery and vitality. Despite being something of a favorite under Vichy, Matisse’s medievalism was not an attempt to curry favor with the regime. Instead, it was a means of remaining relevant. Sarah Wilson argues that it furnished him an appropriate metaphor for deteriorating political conditions across Europe on the eve of World War II. The Apocalypse of Saint-Sever provided Matisse with the inspiration for the costumes he designed for

377 Sarah Wilson, Matisse (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1992), 75.
Étrange Farandole, an appropriate choice for a ballet “preoccupied with the theme of man’s destiny” (figures 3.12 and 3.13). Medieval society’s tendency towards chaos and violence could be seen in its tendency towards abstraction, which gave the artist greater license to explore liberated forms of artistic expression. Matisse’s engagement with the medieval tradition, which Louis Aragon described as the artist’s tribute to “la splendeur française,” intensified under the Occupation. In this phase, Matisse devoted his energies to releasing a book of his drawings (Thèmes et Variations, 1943, containing a preface by Louis Aragon) and illustrating books of medieval poetry (Les Lettres Portugaises and Les Poèmes de Charles d’Orléans (figures 3.14, 3.15, and 3.16).

I likewise suggest that, much like the Vence Chapel, Matisse’s interest in illustrating books was motivated by a need to maintain the visibility of his art. Two stomach surgeries in 1941 severely limited his artistic production, and he was hesitant to exhibit, citing fears for the security of his art. These books maintained his visibility in a way that the authorities would have found acceptable. For that reason, he sent copies to museums across France, effectively ensuring that he was represented in every regional collection at a time when straightened financial circumstances made new acquisitions difficult. Thus, even though his illustrated books of medieval poetry were produced as luxury editions and therefore beyond the means of a young artist, they were nevertheless accessible to the public during the war at a time when much of his art was not. And they were by no means devoid of contemporary resonance. For instance, Aragon cited Matisse’s persistent use of the fleur-de-lis motif as a Resistance symbol to assert that the nation remained spiritually autonomous even during the German Occupation. Likewise,

378 Ibid., 67.
Kathryn Brown argues that Matisse saw Charles d’Orléans, a medieval duke who spent a quarter of a century as a prisoner of war, as an avatar for his own experience of the Occupation.\textsuperscript{380} Seen against his postwar anxieties about his legacy, I would characterize Matisse’s medievalism as didactic. By working within the Romanesque tradition, he sought to provide the public with a historical basis to understand his aesthetic. Matisse’s interest in Romanesque art therefore assumes new significance as a way to assert his art historical relevance to a mass audience in a way that resonated with contemporary themes.

The art historical stakes that now characterized his rivalry with Picasso rendered it all the more important for Matisse to solidify his relationship to the French tradition. While mostly friendly, their competition intensified after World War II, when it became an issue of national importance even for the French government. In December 1945, Jean Cassou worked with the British Council to send an exhibition of artworks by Matisse and Picasso to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (V&A). According to Brandon Taylor:

> The British council felt that the choice of Picasso and Matisse was a ‘most natural one, as these two artists are regarded in France and in many other countries as the two most eminent of living painters.’ France was projected as the place where Picasso had found freedom and from which ‘Matisse, the true Frenchman,’ hailed.\textsuperscript{381}

This show of cultural diplomacy was intended to solidify cultural ties between the two nations at the dawn of a new, united Europe. A reporter for *Arts* wrote:

> In a time that has produced the atomic bomb, it is comforting to find that politicians have found a new toy to keep their attention. The term “cultural relations” has become one of

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., 89.
the slogans of the new era. Yet, cultural relations tend to serve a real purpose. They help to get us out of the isolation of the last four years.\textsuperscript{382}

Clearly, Cassou saw the contrast between Matisse and Picasso as a chance to ensure French artistic dominance in this “new era.” The exhibition followed on the heels of Picasso’s controversial retrospective at the Salon d’Automne in 1944, in which he displayed twenty-five pieces created between 1939 and 1945, each a response to the war. The public reacted violently: students protested and tried to tear down canvases from the wall.

Nevertheless, Matisse worried that Picasso’s art would resonate more with younger artists because it dealt with contemporary reality. On 5 August 1946, he wrote in his journal:

\begin{quote}
I’m doing this propaganda show in London with him. I can imagine the room with my pictures on one side, and his on the other. It’s as if I were going to cohabit with an epileptic. How quiet I will look (even a bit old hat for some), next to his pyrotechnics, as Rodin used to call my works! I still go for it head on, I never recoiled from a heavy or embarrassing neighbor. Justice will prevail, I always thought. But then, what if he was right?\textsuperscript{383}
\end{quote}

Matisse understood that he would be playing Picasso’s foil in the V&A exhibition. Knowing that Picasso would many of the works from his recent controversial Salon d’Automne to the V&A, Matisse sought to offer respite from the unrelenting, bellicose pace of the twentieth century. He sent thirty artworks representing a comprehensive representation of his stylistic evolution. He selected these artworks to show that their serenity was achieved through assiduous development and close study of tradition. The juxtaposition had its desired effect. \textit{Arts} clearly favored

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{382} “En des temps qui ont produit la bombe atomique, il est réconfortant d’avoir trouvé un nouveau jouet pour occuper l’attention des politiciens. Les termes de ‘relations culturelles’ sont devenus un des slogans de l’ère nouvelle…. Pourtant, les relations culturelles tendent réellement à servir un but. Elles aident à sortir de l’isolement des quatre dernières années.” Denys Sutton, “Picasso et Matisse au Victoria and Albert Museum,” \textit{Arts} 21 (December 1945): 1.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{383} Matisse diary entry, 5 August 1946, quoted in Bois 2001, 180.
\end{footnotesize}
Matisse’s measured brand of modernism over Picasso’s politics: “To see the art of these two masters side by side is to find oneself faced with a ferocious morality: it’s the contrast between love and hate.”

The fact that Rayssiguier framed the Vence Chapel project as a rejection of Picasso’s “hatred” and “black magic” probably resonated with Matisse more than he expected, and it imbues the artist’s decision to create a tourist-minded convent chapel with a greater sense of intentionality. While the Musée Picasso, with its location within the Grimaldi family’s former palace-fortress, represented an imposed authoritarian foreign presence, the Vence Chapel was an optimistic affirmation of the innate and enduring genius of the French tradition. It enabled Matisse to directly assert his legacy within the nationalistic tradition of the Romanesque, thereby rooting his aesthetic experiments in historical precedent while juxtaposing his “Frenchness” with Picasso’s “otherness.”

The apocalyptic framework of a “new medieval age” enabled Matisse to make a distinctly art historical statement about the fate of the French tradition. In an interview with Georges Charbonnier, he proclaimed: “[The Chapel’s] lightness arouses feelings of release, of obstacles cleared, so that my chapel is not ‘Brothers, we must die.’ It is rather ‘Brothers, we must live!’” Rayssiguier’s plan suited Matisse because it was not a modern counterpart to the medieval church; instead, it evoked the continuity of tradition. The artist embraced this idea because it enabled him to situate himself within an art historical lineage. By influencing the

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384 “Voir l’art de ces deux maîtres côte à côte, c’est se trouver en face d’une moralité féroce: c’est le contraste de l’amour et de la haine.” Sutton 1945, 2.
386 Rayssiguier began to play with this evolution during seminary. “At the time,” he later recalled, “I was spending all my free time in the study hall working out how the structures of European painting, architecture, music, drama, etc. had evolved from the early Middle Ages to the present.” Rayssiguier, “The Sum Total of What I knew about Henri Matisse...” in Matisse et al. 1999, 435.
future shape of art through the Vence Chapel, Matisse reinforced his commitment to the Western canon as well as its viability in the post-Apocalyptic era. In a book published to accompany the Chapel’s consecration, Matisse wrote: “I foresee that this work will not be in vain and that it may remain the expression of a period in art, perhaps now outdated, though I do not believe so. It is impossible to be sure about this today, before the new movements have been realized.”

Matisse was helped in this effort by Régine Pernoud, a medievalist from the nearby University of Aix. They met in 1945 when Pernoud was asked to convene a conference on modern art. Matisse gradually came to see her as his historical ally, and their exchanges say much about where he saw himself in art history and ultimately the thinking that informed his concept of the Vence Chapel. Matisse frequently told Pernoud that the aims of modern art were not too far removed from those of the Romanesque insofar as abstraction aimed to tease out the spiritual essence that lay beneath academic convention. And to that end, he encouraged her to write a book that traced an artistic evolution from the Middle Ages to the present. She wrote in response to the suggestion: “It would therefore speak, if I understood correctly, of true painting, and also to show those profound echoes that it has awakened in us, if only we better understood our most authentic tradition, that of the Romanesque.” In other words, Matisse seems thoroughly convinced that the medieval tradition was not only alive, but it had triumphed over the Renaissance. This idea eventually provided the basis of Pernoud’s book, The Great Epochs of Art in the West, which was published in 1954. Not surprisingly, after tracing an artistic evolution

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387 Verdet quotes Matisse’s response to critics: “I know some of them—good friends even!—reproach it for being too simple, too hasty. But didn’t they understand that I treated this in an allusive manner, that it is intentionally an emblematic representation? It’s like a road sign, a totality of signs.” André Verdet, “The Chapel at Vence,” from Entretiens Notes et Ecrits sur la Peinture (1978), excerpted in Flam 1995, 377.

388 “The Chapel of the Rosary” (1951), in ibid., 197.

389 “Il s’agirait donc, si j’ai bien compris, de parler de cette redécouverte moderne de la vraie peinture, et aussi de montrer quels échos profonds elle pourrait réveiller en nous, si seulement nous connaissions mieux notre tradition la plus authentique, celle du Moyen Age roman....” Régine Pernoud to Henri Matisse, 30 March 1946. Henri Matisse Archives.
from prehistory to the late Middle Ages over the course of several chapters, the teleology skips over the next few centuries and begins again in the late nineteenth century. Matisse endorsed this opinion by writing a few lines or the book’s preface: “If the object has become worthy of taking its place in the light of its time, it can represent that moment in the history of human sensibility.”

The art historical character of Matisse’s medievalism reinforces the Vence Chapel’s functional purpose. It would promote his spiritual gravitas at a moment of existential crisis and ensure that his artistic legacy would endure. In the next section, I will consider how the idea of an art historical monument influenced Matisse’s approach to the Vence Chapel—which, as a monument historique was a legally binding statement of his legacy—to come to a better understanding of his aspirations in the postwar era. As we have already seen, the artist’s need to solidify his art historical legacy had already undermined Rayssiguier’s conception of the Vence Chapel. I will therefore consider the strategies and partnerships that enabled Matisse to bring his vision to life.

Matisse’s “Masterpiece”

So far, I have used Matisse’s postwar anxieties, ambivalent medievalism, and monumental ambitions to describe the self-promoting motives behind the Vence Chapel. But the most telling indication of those ambitions exists in his use of the loaded term chef d’œuvre, or “masterpiece.” The term “masterpiece” appears early in the planning process, when he first described the project to his friend, André Rouveyre: “Certainly Florence will show you Vence once this little monument is built. I hope it will be like a flower. I would like to make it my

masterpiece.” He reaffirmed that status in a letter written to compensate for his absence for the Chapel’s consecration: “In spite of all its imperfections I consider it as my masterpiece. I hope that the future will bear out this assessment as increasing numbers of people take an interest in it, independently of this monument’s higher meaning.”

The term “masterpiece” is problematic from a theoretical point of view. According to Jonathan Harris, the term embodies “the reactionary values and assumptions of a traditional art history obsessed with (1) establishing the authorship of artworks and (2) pronouncing upon their relative degrees of aesthetic quality.” In economic terms, a masterpiece supports the “cult of the artist”: notably, a male artist. Griselda Pollock and Roziska Parker contend that a semantic equivalent for a female masterpiece does not exist, just as “old mistresses” does not equate with “old masters.” The term “masterpiece” thereby elucidates the Vence Chapel’s relevance for future audiences. It evokes continuity not only within Matisse’s oeuvre, but the whole of the Western tradition. However, the individualism implied by a “masterpiece” reflects the Renaissance-era values that eventually produced the modern art market in which Matisse was fully implicated.

393 Critics and scholars have long disputed the Chapel’s claim to “masterpiece.” Pierre Schneider, for one, argues that the appellation was more appropriate for the dining room Matisse decorated for Tériade. Nevertheless, the Chapel represents the “religion of happiness” that Schneider uses as the unifying theme of his 500+ page monograph of the artist. Matisse himself would later confer “masterpiece” status to Grande décoration aux masques just three years later. He told Pierre, “Je crois que c’est mon chef-d’oeuvre…Il est d’un esprit clair et fort. L’association des masques avec des fleurs est unique. Je veux dire qu’elle fait penser aux choses gothiques ou romanes, par l’unité de leur conception.” Jean-Claude Bonne, “Une certaine couleur des idées’’: Matisse et l’art médiéval,” Cahiers de la Villa Gillet: Les «Moyen Age» de l’art contemporain 17 (February 2003): 56.
Marie-Alain Couturier inadvertently facilitated this transition. As I noted above, Rayssiguier called him in in June 1948 to help settle a dispute with Matisse over the size of the murals. However, it should be said that Couturier was not quite as invested in the liturgical aspect of the Sacred Art Movement. He was fully committed to settling the divorce between mainstream and religious art, and to that end, he willingly gave modernists full reign, trusting that even a talented atheist could create more effective sacred art than a pious academician. To him, it was more essential to paint in a style that resonated with the times.

There is also a more skeptical interpretation of Couturier’s role in the project. By the time Matisse began the Vence Chapel, the brief era of political concord that made collaborations between the canonical avant-garde and the Dominicans acceptable was all but over. Charles de Gaulle assumed power earlier that year and expelled the French Communist Party (PCF) from Parliament. Institutional hopes for a a new, utopian medieval era began to fizzle as French Catholics halted the main tendue policy that promoted cooperation with the PCF, and partisanship became the order of the day once again. Despite the Communist leanings of many in the French Dominican Order, the Sacred Art Movement suddenly became a problematic prospect. As a result, Georges Braque and Joan Miró pulled out of the L’Église du Sacré-Cœur in Audincourt to be replaced at the last minute by two artists of the Young Painters of the French Tradition, Jean Bazaine and Etienne-Marcel. However, the controversies surrounding the Sacred Art Movement did not lessen the appeal of the medieval tradition. In fact, Braque and Miró gave up their roles in Audincourt for government commissions to design stained-glass windows for Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals under renovation. As Matisse himself soon

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396 It is difficult to judge if Couturier would have continued with further collective art projects, given that he died in 1954. However, Ronchamp and La Tourette seem to suggest that he was committed to the monographic route.
learned, there was a fundamental difference between creating art for a medieval setting and a
new church; while the former implied a historic endeavor, the latter connoted religious devotion.
Consequently, even though Couturier considered Matisse to be a “lightweight”—an opinion that
he would not hold to for long—the Vence Chapel was still a high profile means to sustain the
Sacred Art Movement’s momentum.397 It would show that the Catholic tradition still had value in
the atomic age because even modern artists still looked to it for art historical validation.

Regardless of his own motives, the Vence Chapel’s subsequent direction can be attributed
to Couturier’s good rapport with Matisse. They thought about art in similar terms, in part
because they were both products of a nineteenth-century secular society. For this generation of
modernist, the emotive quality of an artwork mattered more than its ostensible narrative. This
pervasive mindset even prompted the deeply religious Maurice Denis to claim: “Remember that
a picture—before being a war horse or a nude woman or an anecdote—is essentially a flat
surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.”398 The way Couturier blended
formalism with mysticism aligned with Matisse’s own sense of the creative process, which, to
him, necessitated a prayer-like mindset: “I have always worked with the same religious
sentiment, as it suited my subject. If I take for my theme the birth of Venus, I would have treated
it exactly like I treated the legend of the Christ.”399 Matisse’s statement reflects a formalist
tendency to privilege style over subject matter. According to this methodology, the modern
artist’s duty was to strip away layers of academic convention to discover and convey the inner

397 Couturier quoted in Marcel Billot, “Matisse and the Sacred,” in Matisse et al. 1999, 34.
398 Maurice Denis, “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism” 1890 in Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists
and Critics, ed. Herschel Browning Chipp, California Studies in the History of Art (Berkeley: University of
399 “J’ai toujours travaillé avec le même sentiment religieux, quelle que fût mon sujet. Si j’avais pour theme la
naissance de Vénus, je l’aurais abordé exactement de même que j’aborde la légende du Christ.”
truth-value of a subject. Matisse would begin with a particular subject, and then, through a gradual process of refinement, he would discover its inner essence.

They also shared similar opinions on religious art. Again, both were products of a time when medieval churches were effectively divorced from their religious function and vaunted for their nationalistic value. Couturier validated Matisse’s conception of the chapel as an art historical object, leaving him free to negotiate the Christian tradition in much the same way he had treated the classical. He encouraged the artist to treat the Vence Chapel as his “masterpiece.” And as Couturier’s role in the project increased, so did the chapel’s Matissean quality.

Like his medievalism, Matisse’s engagement with Catholic iconography was historically driven. By this time, avant-garde and mainstream artists alike had begun to adopt Catholic iconography to reflect upon their experience of the war. He did not share Léger or Lurçat’s political motives, Bonnard’s need for survival, or Bazaine or Chagall’s religious zeal. Matisse’s work is further distinguished from that of Boris Taslitzky, who, as noted in Chapter 2, articulated his experience of concentration camps using Catholic subjects as metaphors. Matisse too sought to empty Catholic iconography of its Renaissance-era associations to make it relevant to this new post-Apocalyptic moment. But he was set apart by his distinctly art historical approach. He steadfastly believed that “the objective of painting is not to describe history” and refused to use Catholic iconography as a metaphor for his own experience. However, he did see it as a way to evoke the feeling of a moment in history without referencing specific events.

The historical drive behind his engagement is apparent in Matisse’s treatment of iconography as “signs.” In elevating an object to a sign, the artist imbued it with a spiritual life.

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But he also created something enduring, because a sign would speak to future generations about his historical moment through style rather than narrative. This logic informed his 1907 essay, “Notes of a Painter,” in which he stated that the viewer need not be informed which scene in Christ’s life Giotto was depicting because the artist’s mode of expression made that evident.

Medieval art was essential to justifying modernism’s historical status. In addition to Pernoud and his own encyclopedic knowledge of art history, Matisse tended to consult the Éditions Braun art history series for pictorial sources, which covered artists and styles from prehistory to the present.\(^\text{401}\) Surveys such as Braun’s discussed medieval art and modern art using the same formalist approach, meaning that the object’s aesthetic and historical value were privileged over its devotional function. Matisse therefore carefully negotiated medieval tradition in its most generic sense, through medium and means, to give art historical credence to his formal experiments. For instance, Chartres could be a precedent for the decorative play between color and line. There, the stained glass of the Belle Verrière warms the cold grey stone, thereby rendering the towering interior more intimate. But one could also look to the Beatus Manuscript or the Apocalypse of St. Sever for color relationships.

And yet, despite his insistence that “Renaissance art is not a religious art,” Matisse rarely looked to medieval sources as the basis of signs.\(^\text{402}\) For instance, Mantegna’s *Christ Before Pilate* inspired his design for the first Station of the Cross.\(^\text{403}\) Matisse began with an elaborate sketch of Mantegna’s image then discovered its essential composition through gradual reduction.

\(^{401}\) A volume on his own work had been published nearly a decade before, in 1939. André Verdet notes that Matisse “has taken a large part of his inspiration—for Stations of the Cross—from a book published on the admirable frescoes of Mantegna, frescoes that retrace the Stations of the Cross at Calvary and decorate the walls of the Eremitani Church in Padua. These frescoes were destroyed in the last war. The book had been loaned to him by a young painter, Jean Darquet, who was a neighbor and friend from Vence.” Verdet, “The Chapel at Vence,” from *Entretiens Notes et Ecrits sur la Peinture* (1978), excerpted in Flam 1995, 378.

\(^{402}\) Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 6 February 1949. Matisse et al. 1999, 143.

\(^{403}\) Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 17 November 1948. Ibid., 106.
and refinement. He did the same thing with Rubens’ *Descent from the Cross*, Grünewald’s *Crucifixion*, and, for the Virgin and Child panel, Tintoretto’s *Paradise*.\(^{404}\) In fact, it is difficult to see the influence of medieval art anywhere in the Vence Chapel. The decorative and architectural elements he created were informed by his experience of, among other things, Islamic art, Byzantine mosaics, and Tahiti.\(^{405}\)

The sources of Matisse’s signs say much about his historical motives. The Vence Chapel was, after all, his “masterpiece.” As befitting the artwork that he referred to as “the culmination of a lifetime of researches,” Matisse mediates art history through an aesthetic language that he had spent a lifetime developing. By mediating the work of past artists through his own aesthetic language, Matisse imbues the Chapel with a sense of art historical continuity. Moreover, as his interest in creating a *monument historique* suggests, he also sought to affirm his connection to the French landscape and compensate for the absence of his works in France. The Vence Chapel is therefore deeply self-referential. For instance, in the “game of equivalences” he played between the stained glass and the murals, we can see his well-known statement to Louis Aragon, “I don’t paint things, I paint the differences between things.”\(^{406}\) Meanwhile, the emphatic references to Riviera flora found in the stained glass windows reinforce the idea that Matisse always worked from nature.

Because of Matisse’s emphatic references to his own oeuvre, the sanctuary’s Catholic content seems falls by the wayside. This particularly evident in his discussion of *The Stations of*

\(^{404}\) For his use of Rubens, see Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguié, 9 April 1949. Ibid., 173. With regard to Tintoretto, he wrote Couturier, “I’ve finally finished the definitive cartoon for the panel of the Virgin—at after much hard work. I finally have the result I’d been aiming for in the back of my mind. It’s a ‘Glorious Virgin’ and it reminds me of the spiritual space of Tintoretto’s *Paradise.*” Matisse to Couturier, 1 June 1949, ibid., 197.


\(^{406}\) Aragon 1971, 140.
the Cross. He writes: “…finding himself gripped by the pathos of so profound a tragedy, he upset the order of his composition. The artist quite naturally became its principal actor; instead of reflecting the tragedy, he has experienced it and this is how he has expressed it.” In describing himself as “the principal actor” in this depiction, Matisse invites the viewer to engage in that favorite art historical pastime of biographical interpretation. Which experience in Matisse’s past enabled him to sympathize so closely with Christ’s passion? Was it his recent illness? Perhaps it was the pain of his daughter and wife’s wartime imprisonment by the Nazis? In the next section, I will continue to explore how the pressing need to create a “masterpiece” produced a tension between the Vence Chapel’s function as Dominican convent chapel and tourist attraction.

The Arena Chapel as Model

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that Matisse looked to Giotto’s Arena Chapel as an ideal aesthetic. He articulated its influence early in his career in his essay, “Notes of a Painter”: “When I see Giotto’s frescoes at Padua, I do not trouble to find out which scene of the life of Christ is before me, for I understand at once the feeling which radiates from it.” The memory of the Arena Chapel became even more potent in 1941, during his recovery from cancer. He turned his attention to paper cut-outs, a medium that offered the most promising route to achieving the expressive synthesis he found in Giotto. He told Aragon that they expressed his “unconscious belief in a future life…some paradise where I shall paint frescoes.” As I demonstrate in this section, the Arena Chapel offered a functional model for Matisse as he attempted secure his art historical legacy by solidifying his connection to the Riviera landscape.

Giotto—who still falls uncomfortably between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—enabled Matisse to connect to a preferred artistic era, the medieval tradition, without sacrificing

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408 Louis Aragon “Conversations with Aragon: On Signs,” in Flam 1995, 150.
his capitalist values or his individuality. Using the same positivist logic that motivated Léger to
claim “Between Giotto and us, I see nothing!” without hesitation or irony, Matisse found the
rupture with the “true” artistic tradition in the next generation of Renaissance artists.⁴⁰⁹ And he
was not the only one. According to one mid-century American art historian, “In the art of Giotto
and his contemporaries we find a blending of these [abstract] qualities to which another is
added—Individualism. The result not only makes him representative of his age, but links him
strongly to the modern art movements.”⁴¹⁰ As a secular artist with ambivalent religious beliefs,
Matisse viewed the Arena Chapel as a conduit of art history. This mindset informed the way he
approached churches first as a viewer and, later, as a creator. In this sense, his touristic encounter
of Giotto’s frescoes in the totalizing, protected, and permanent environment of the Arena Chapel
is worth considering in greater detail because it offered him a model for the Vence Chapel.

Matisse made two “pilgrimages” to the Arena Chapel: first during a stay with Leo Stein
in 1907 and then by himself in 1931. Both visits were predicated on the Old Master’s reputation,
not religious fervor. His 1907 encounter was significant because of the flood of artworks he had
seen with Leo Stein in Florentine museums. He told Pierre Courthion in 1942:

[Stein] steered me to the most renowned masterpieces or left me in front of pictures he
found interesting, then discreetly took himself off; and when I felt it was time to move on
to another picture, Stein would be back beside me, asking, ‘What did you think of it?’ I
had nothing to say. It completely paralyzed me, visiting museums like that; I couldn’t see
anything…. He showed me very interesting things…but in general I prefer to travel on
my own and be attracted by things by the things themselves. Doing it that way, I may
overlook important works—and perhaps also be attracted by less significant things that
nourish me all the same, the way my temperament requires.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ Serge Guilbaut, ed. Chatting with Henri Matisse: The Lost 1941 Interview (Los Angeles: Getty Research
Institute, 2013), 122–123.
Matisse would thereafter equate the Arena Chapel with escape and contemplation. He traveled to Padua again in 1931 to recuperate at a medical spa and take a break from the Dance mural at the Barnes Foundation: “I was at Bagno Bagni, near Padua, at the Arena Chapel, where I saw the Giottos, which I could examine, study with considerable interest. There, I saw alone. There, I saw.\footnote{“J’ai été à Bagno Bagni, près de Padoue, à la Chapelle Dellarina, où j’ai vu les Giotto que j’ai pu regarder, étudier avec un intérêt considerable. Là, j’étais seul. Là, j’ai vu.” Ibid., 321.} The meditative atmosphere of the Arena Chapel made his experience of Giotto more meaningful. It stands in opposition to the overwhelming experience of the encyclopedic museums he visited with Leo Stein.

When Matisse saw the Arena Chapel, it was not operational as a Catholic sanctuary. It was purchased by the commune of Padua in the early 1870s and, after a lengthy restoration, reopened as a museum. It was promoted as an art historical object and analyzed as such in formal terms in art history surveys published across Europe and America. Again, Matisse’s pilgrimage was thoroughly artistic in character, motivated by the reputation of the Old Master, rather than religious fervor. Matisse’s interest in Giotto was conditioned by media—specifically, art historical texts and the modernist milieu—which analyzed the Arena Chapel frescoes in formalist terms. Moreover, as a cultural production, the Arena Chapel was a meaningful artistic encounter that enabled him to divorce the religious content from expressive form through the accomplice of media.

Matisse clearly intended visitors to experience the Vence Chapel in formal terms. But he was not blind to the implications of his decision, as a non-religious artist, to create a religious artwork in France at this time. In addition to the collapse in political relations between Catholics and Communists, the French were becoming increasingly apathetic about religion. Between 1950
and 1960, church attendance in France fell from 27% to 20% of the population.\(^{413}\) However, the Vence Chapel was probably not intended for a strictly French audience, particularly given the pervasive economic depression that stifled domestic tourism in the postwar period.

Instead, the Vence Chapel was more likely intended to appeal to the American tourists who now flooded the Côte d'Azur. Matisse believed that Americans possessed a more religious temperment than the French. During a visit to California in the 1930s, he playfully wrote to his wife about the discovery of a Gideon’s Bible:

…on a night table, a Bible, Holy Bible, verses said like holly—the holy book that the Gideon association leaves to give life, light, truth, path for the American business traveler—helped by the Christian forces of this city. I will probably always find them on my own path…\(^{414}\)

Matisse articulates his findings with the amused, anthropological tone of a cultural tourist. The Bible is, for him, a synecdoche for an American culture thoroughly guided by wealth and religion. Nevertheless, Matisse remained convinced that Americans would consider his “masterpiece” in strictly formal terms because such would be the nature of their encounter. In the rejected text from his 1941 interviews with Pierre Courthion, the artist describes the United States as a shallow culture where the arts provide the backdrop to dinner parties and where tourism is a venture undertaken by housewives “so that she has something to say at receptions.

The woman talks while the man is doing calculations in his head.”\(^{415}\)

\(^{413}\) French church attendance rates dated before 1950 are generally considered unreliable because Catholic priests collected the data.

\(^{414}\) “…sur une table de nuit une Bible, Holy Bible, holy vers dire houx – le holy livre qui donne la vie, la lumière, la vérité, le chemin, disposé par le Gideon ass\(\text{ss}^{299}\) [association] des voyageurs de commerce américains – aidée par the Christian forces of this city—les forces chrétiennes de la cité. Je vais probablement les trouver toujours sur mon chemin…” Matisse to Amélie Matisse, 13 March 1930. Henri Matisse Archives.

\(^{415}\) Guilbault 2013, 185.
The Vence Chapel was a form of defense against the curatorial pretensions of American museums, which he deemed vacuous.

American collections are made with pedagogy in mind. You can’t see the pictures. They get in each other’s way. Tintoretto, Cézanne, Courbet, one after another, all jammed up against each other. The purpose of the thing is to show that all genres and periods are present and correct. I’ve always felt it was a bit of burden to have to visit a collection in America. One day, after a long visit, I was told: ‘And we have more pictures that you haven’t seen yet. Follow me.’ And I was taken to the bathroom. I was shown one that was behind the bath.416

To Matisse, the only “sane” place to see art in the United States was the Barnes Foundation. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, by contrast, was a “tomb.”417 After the war, despite being thousands of miles away, he exercised a surprising amount of control over his retrospectives at MOMA and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.418 We can see why in a letter Matisse wrote to the curator the Philadelphia retrospective, Henry Clifford. Clifford had disregarded some of Matisse’s recommendations as to which artworks should be included in the exhibit. Angry, he wrote: “…I wonder whether its scope will not have a more or less unfortunate influence on young painters. How are they going to interpret the impression of apparent facility that they will get from a rapid, even superficial, overall view of my paintings and drawings?”419

As an artist who had always struggled with the curatorial pretension of others,420 Matisse used the Vence Chapel as an ideal display context: a totalizing experience of the artist’s vision that was celebrated, and therefore protected, on aesthetic grounds. His postwar retrospectives are

416 Ibid.
417 Ibid., 184.
420 Matisse seems to have railed against the museum establishment often: a point that Rayssiguier found amusing, if tiresome: “Another of his by now classical satirical tirades against museum curators…” Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 28 May 1949. Matisse et al., The Vence Chapel : The Archive of a Creation, 193.
significant in this regard because they evince his continuing need for curatorial control. It was not uncommon to find entire phases of his œuvre—even those spanning several years—organized in a consistent chronological evolution of form in order to justify his current production. He nominated Pernoud to be the curator at the new modern art museum in Nice, which was slated to open with a retrospective of his work. He was unsuccessful and struggled to maintain control. This made fixed site of display even more important:

I haven’t stopped seeing people since yesterday morning, when I had to go and confront the city council at the modern museum of Les Ponchettes to be able to exhibit my works there decently. I’m still obsessed with the whole thing. It was all a bit funereal. Fortunately, the wreathes haven’t arrived yet, and I expect to finish both Vence and Assy before they do.

The Vence Chapel thus enabled Matisse to provide an immersive experience of his art for an audience with considerable political, economic, and now cultural influence. David Carrier therefore contrasts the Vence Chapel to the Dance murals at the Barnes foundation, arguing that by acting as his own patron, Matisse was free to attain his lofty, Giotto-like aspirations.

Matisse established the Vence Chapel’s museological dimension at an early point in its development by staging an exhibit just down the street from the construction site. Rayssiguier recorded one early visit when the artist “decided to set up a permanent exhibition at the Foyer Lacordaire in a room in the Bastion: the sample windows, scale models, original drawings, photos. He’ll design a poster with a ‘reproduction of the Virgin as an illustration, the same size

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421 Matisse had always been highly attentive to the way his artworks were displayed. Early in his career, learning that a German gallery had not hung all the artworks he sent for their exhibition, he took an overnight train to Berlin and rehung the entire show. Matisse discusses display issues frequently in the interview series known as the Bavardages (only recently published in 2013). Although a lifelong concern, Matisse’s recent operation may help to explain why, in 1942, they were of such concern. Guilbaut 2013, 123–124.


as the one for the Paris show.” Matisse used this exhibit not only to promote interest in the project but to raise money for the construction as well.

Indeed, Matisse was able to monetize popular interest in the Vence Chapel because of a surge of unprecedented economic growth and religiosity in the United States. Church attendance, for instance, climbed from 50% of the population in 1940 to 63% in 1960; an increase that John O’Brian attributes to a Cold War search for spiritual meaning. He suggests that the Vence Chapel resonated with Americans in the postwar period because they already looked to Matisse’s art as a form of escape. Unsurprisingly, American magazines willingly paid for photographic rights of the work in progress, museums sold Matisse’s studies for the Virgin and Child as Christmas cards, and book publishers vied for the right to distribute the luxury book.

Matisse’s promotional ideas became more elaborate as he attempted to extend the Chapel’s influence beyond France. He sent scale models to exhibitions in Paris, New York, and Tokyo and even came up with the idea of making a film. He wrote Couturier:

Yesterday I dreamt the theme for a film on the Chapel. It began with the two warring trees in the Foyer garden: a palm tree pierced by a cypress. A symbolic struggle. I’m not saying this is Jacob Wrestling the Angel, because I don’t grasp its symbolism—but as an image of life—life=constant struggle and striving (I forget if I told you what the Americans do to make a film bring in money)….if you have a spare moment, please answer, chiefly concerning the poster for charging admission: 1) [the principle of] charging admission, 2) the poster’s warning (you see, we’re in Vence and foreign visitors coming to Vence might think we’re luring them into a trap without giving them due warning).

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425 Matisse seems to have railed against the museum establishment often: a point that Rayssiguier found amusing, if tiresome: “Another of his by now classical satirical tirades against museum curators…” Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 28 May 1949. Matisse et al. 1999, 193.
426 O’Brian 1999, 196.
427 Matisse suggested many ideas to generate funds for the chapel from American audience. For one such instance, see Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 24 June 1948. Matisse et al. 1999, 73.
428 Matisse to Rayssiguier, 27 August 1949 in ibid., 230.
The American-esque tone of his film idea is indicative of his attempt to solicit donations from an American audience. When the initial film project failed, he quickly agreed to collaborate with an American company on another. Rayssiguier wrote: “He seems averse to the straightforward, high-minded documentary and wants mainly something that will be an immediate success, thus publicizing the Chapel and bringing in the money needed to pay for the construction.”

Additionally, Matisse promoted the Vence Chapel through peripheral media like postcards, photographs, and magazine articles. And with each effort, he was careful to assert the Chapel’s place within a larger art historical lineage. His studies of Grünewald’s hands, for instance, were published widely in high-profile magazines and even sold as postcards in the Chapel gift shop. In the chapel, each decorative panel is self-contained and fairly planar, making it easy to photograph and easy to reproduce in print, perhaps even in the art history survey texts that he himself had referenced. I therefore argue that Giotto’s influence did not stop with his conception of “signs”; the Arena Chapel also offered a model as a touristic cultural production, an object or site that embodies a historic moment in culture through its physical, popular, and imaginative presence.

This decision to market the Vence Chapel to an American public further reinforces the idea that Matisse saw the changing world order as a threat to his legacy. Like many at this time and since, he likely attributed New York’s rise as a cultural capital to France’s recent political and economic instability. For that reason, I suggest that these efforts to market the Vence Chapel to an American audience should be seen in similar terms as his interest in the SMH. With a

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429 Matisse to Couturier, 24 October 1949, quoted in ibid., 254.
430 Matisse in conversation with Rayssiguier, 27 October 1949, in ibid., 255.
psychological and even financial investment in the Chapel, Americans would remain committed to its survival.

But the tension between “masterpiece” and Dominican convent chapel proved problematic from the start. When Matisse announced his plans, *Arts* wondered if “The peace of the convent will be troubled by the influx of visitors that the master’s work is bound to attract.” This concern quickly proved a reality. In an effort to maintain the primacy of the chapel’s liturgical function, the nuns of the Foyer Lacordaire restricted public access to two days a week. The limited and unpredictable schedule frustrated the public. In 1965, one exasperated visitor sent a letter of complaint to the Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, after traveling “several dozen kilometers” to find chapel inexplicably closed. He wrote: “I find this an absolute contradiction to promoting our culture riches... A chapel that Matisse has benevolently executed must be part of the national patrimony with the opening hours of a museum; it must not be the property of a parish whose priest uses it as he pleases.” An official from SMH provided an apparently definitive response: “that this chapel being private, it is impossible to modify the visit schedule.” Shortly thereafter, however, SMH began proceedings to include the Chapel in its inventory. According to the scant records of the meeting, the nuns objected to the measure, and after a debate, officials decided to bypass the sect entirely by seeking permission from the Bishop of Nice, who quickly agreed.

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433 “Une chapelle que Matisse a exécuté benevolement devrait faire partie du patrimoine nationale avec heures d’ouverture de tous les musées et ne devrait pas être la propriété d’une paroisse dont le prêtre ne devrait pas pouvoir disposer à sa guise.” Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; Vence: Chapelle des Dominicains.” Archives des Monuments Historiques, Médiathèque de l’Architecture et Patrimoine (MAP), Paris.
434 “…cette chapelle étant au bien privé, il n’est impossible de modifier le régime des visites.” Ibid.
435 Ibid.
Conclusion: The Vence Chapel as Artistic Eschatology

In this chapter, I have argued that Henri Matisse perceived the Sacred Art Movement as a way to establish his canonical status in a historically resonant medium. That Matisse, an artist of relatively safe artistic reputation, should engage in the uncharacteristic activity of church building speaks to the ongoing trauma of World War II and growing threat of Americanization. His fears regarding the future of his legacy therefore adds another biographical dimension to Rayssiguier’s eschatological design. He said: “[The Chapel’s] lightness arouses feelings of release, of obstacles cleared, so that my chapel is not ‘Brothers, we must die.’ It is rather ‘Brothers, we must live!’”436 Such statements, while meant to promote optimism in the new atomic age, are therefore just applicable to his concerns about the fate of the French tradition. In the luxury-edition book published to accompany the Chapel’s consecration, Matisse wrote:

I foresee that this work will not be in vain and that it may remain the expression of a period in art, perhaps now outdated, though I do not think so. It is impossible to be sure about this today, before the new movements have been realized. Whatever errors this expression of human feeling may contain will fall away of their own accord, but there will remain a living part which will unite the past with the future of the plastic tradition.437

By mediating the work of past artists through his own aesthetic language, Matisse imbues the Chapel with a sense of art historical continuity. But more importantly, it enabled him to leave a permanent, public, and legally protected record of his art historical achievement on the Riviera landscape. In this sense, the story of Matisse creating the chapel for his night nurse provides an effective cover for a work of art historical anxiety.

I would therefore modify Kenneth Silver’s claim that Matisse’s creation of the Vence

Chapel reflects the tenacious “Christian habits of his ancestors” to say that it demonstrates the far more forceful “habits” of the modern art market. His artistic identity had been shaped by an artistic idiom that celebrated and rewarded Renaissance-era individualism. Those habits stayed with him after World War II even though his place in art history seemed secure because he was astutely aware of the relationship between the art market and the canon. Matisse continued to fastidiously maintain, hone, and protect his artistic identity with regard to changes in avant-garde practice to maintain his market viability and secure his art historical legacy. The Vence Chapel therefore showed that the cult of the artist did not disappear with the end of the war, as many had hoped.

Not everyone was pleased with the result of Matisse’s years of hard work, as we have already seen. But it was Picasso who proved to be the most offended. Matisse was his long-time rival—his only true and worthy competitor—and to see him contributing to such a nationalistic conception of the modernist project was tantamount to a betrayal. Picasso could not see past its Vichy-era associations; at one point, he even declared that World War II had thoroughly spoiled his life-long interest in the Romanesque. As I show in the next chapter, this attitude thoroughly colored Picasso’s approach to the Temple of War and Peace.

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Figure 3.1. Henri Matisse, La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51. Vence, France.

Figure 3.2. Exterior. Matisse, La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51.
Figure 3.3. Interior lay area view, La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51.

Figure 3.4. View of choir from the lay area. La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51.
Figure 3.5. Museum. La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51.

Figure 3.6. Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier (architect), Chapelle de l’Ermitage de Saint-Rouin, 1961. Beaulieu-en-Argonne, France.
Figure 3.7. Matisse, *The Stations of the Cross*. La Chapelle du Rosaire, 1947–51.

Figure 3.9. Matisse, *Woman Seated, back turned towards an open window*, 1922. Oil on Canvas. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Figure 3.10. Matisse, *Nice Travail et Joie*, 1946.
Figure 3.11. Cross. The Vence Chapel, 1946.

Figure 3.12. Page from the Apocalypse of Saint-Sever, 11th century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 8878.
Figure 3.13. Matisse, *Two Dancers* (Costume Design Study for *L’Étrange Fandarole*), 1937.
Private Collection.

Figure 3.14. Matisse, *Thèmes et Variations*, 1943.
Figure 3.15. Matisse, *Les Lettres Portugaises*, 1946.

Chapter 4: Pablo Picasso, Modernism’s “Sorcerer”

On June 17, 1951, France-Soir announced the consecration of Henri Matisse’s Vence Chapel: “All the great contemporary artists were convened at the inauguration of this sumptuous gift from modern art’s pope, as if it were a council: Marc Chagall, Picasso, Léger, Lurçat, and Utrillo...” Comparing French painting’s mature avant-garde to an ecclesiastical council was all too appropriate in the postwar period. Modern art was now a religion unto itself, complete with pope and council. Through the Sacred Art Movement, the once unthinkable collaboration between French painting’s mature avant-garde and the Catholic Church had become commonplace. But not everyone was pleased with modernism’s “canonization.” Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), for one, considered it a political—, if not a moral betrayal for modernists to be involved in Catholic art projects. “You're crazy to make a chapel for those people,” Picasso told Matisse. “Do you believe in that stuff or not? If not, do you think you ought to do something for an idea that you don't believe in?” And in a cheeky, anti-clerical riposte to Matisse’s light-filled Vence Chapel, Picasso converted an abandoned Romanesque chapel in the Riviera village of Vallauris into the cave-like Temple of War and Peace (1950–1959) (figure 4.1).

What better way to counter the artwork that garnered Matisse the title “modernism’s pope” than with a temple that embodied Picasso’s own legacy as “modernism’s sorcerer”? In anthropological terms, religion is a collective ritual, practiced publically, in the light of day, whereas the sorcerer accesses the metaphysical apart from society, in secrecy and in darkness.

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440 Gilot and Lake 1964, 263.
For that reason, I suggest that Picasso’s ante in the *querelle de l’art sacré* may have been motivated by a related set of art historical aspirations.

Picasso’s sorcery in the *Temple of War and Peace* is reflected in both the material and historical record. In the mythic tale of its creation, the French Communist Party (PCF) asked Picasso to decorate Notre-Dame de Vallauris in 1950. The artist had moved to Vallauris three years before and the Communist-led government was anxious to use his fame to their advantage. They instructed him to paint something that would “please the workers,” meaning something in the Soviet-approved, socialist realist style, something that would tout the Communist cause. But Picasso, frustrated by his party’s failure to bring about peace, saw greater potential in this austere, Romanesque structure. He would transform Notre-Dame de Vallauris into a “temple of peace,” a spiritual space that would satiate man’s primitive lust for violence.

The *Temple of War and Peace* is a barrel-shaped room consisting of three murals: *Peace* on the right and *War* and the *Four Continents* on the terminal wall (figure 4.2). The Masonite murals leave little of the original surface visible, creating a cave-like atmosphere that is complemented by larger-than-life figures that urge the viewer deeper into the space, then around, in an insistent, forward-moving composition wrought with symbolic narrative. Viewers follow its progression by physically moving through the space, beginning with *Peace* on the right (figure 4.3). In this emphatically pre-lapsarian landscape, stalky, abstract figures picnic, dance,

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442 There is some dispute as to whether Picasso actually called the installation a “Temple.” In Georges Sadoul’s account of his interviews with the artist, Picasso reportedly refers to the project as a “Temple de la Paix.” By contrast, Picasso’s partner at the time, Françoise Gilot, argues that the artist never used that phrase. Dominique Forest, curator of the *War and Peace* installation and its adjoining museums (see below), likewise suggests that “temple” was a retrospective title given by the public in light of the dialectic with Matisse’s Vence Chapel. Forest cites Maria Casarés’ undated interview of Picasso, in which the artist says: “La chapelle ou Temple de la Paix, comme on l’a appelée (“The chapel or Temple of Peace, as you [the interviewer] called it”). See discussion in Dominique Forest, “Revoir *La Guerre et la Paix,*** in *Vallauris, La Guerre et la Paix* (27 juin–5 octobre 1998), ed. Jean Lacambre (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998), 42, 49.
play music, sketch, and perform acrobatics like animated Classical sculpture. The muddy reds, deep blues, and forest greens of the background seem to seep through their marble-white skin, suggesting harmony between culture and nature. Following the leftward progression of the composition, the viewer moves past the *Four Continents* mural on the terminal wall (figure 4.4) to the sterile, industrial-scaled violence of *War* (figure 4.5). Here, the pale, naked figure of Death rides an obsidian chariot while wielding a bloody knife in his right hand and carrying an insect-filled petri dish in his left. But the three black horses that pull Death’s chariot begin to stumble at the feet of a nude warrior. Armed with a spear and scales in one hand and a white shield sketched with a dove in the other, the warrior symbolizes Communism’s victory over a world corrupted by capitalism.

To Picasso, *War* and *Peace* possessed a palpable talismanic force that he believed could stop the world’s perpetual cycle of violence. So fierce was this faith that he described the murals as living entities. He said: “People will get too close to it, and when they scratch it a drop of blood will form, showing that the work is truly alive. But if Peace wins in the world, the War I have painted will be a thing of the past. The only blood that flows will be before a fine drawing, a beautiful picture. If you get too close and scratch it, a drop of blood will form; proof that the artwork is alive.”

However, one might well wonder if Picasso’s sorcery was intended to be an art historical statement, for despite the persistent political upheavals of the 1950s, the *Temple of War and Peace* remained inexplicably closed until 1959, nine years after Picasso began the project. The artist remained quiet for the duration, apparently cultivating the artwork’s immense spiritual

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power, biding his time until the moment was just right. As he told Pierre Daix, “…painting isn’t like women. Painting can grow younger while it waits.” However, when the Temple of War and Peace finally opened, it was as the Musée National Picasso: La Guerre et la Paix.

In this chapter, I delve beneath the myths that surround the Temple of War and Peace to describe it as Picasso’s attempt to leave a legally-binding, museological record of his accomplishment as “modernism’s sorcerer.” Contrary to popular belief, the Temple of War and Peace was a civic commission intended to promote the local ceramics industry. I argue that by giving Picasso this commission, the village of Vallauris sought to capitalize upon his fame and “otherness” to secure a lasting, economic lifeline. In return, Picasso satiated his anxieties stemming from an intensifying sense of irrelevance. This chapter therefore considers his “sorcery” less a genuine belief than an art historical performance. It was a mask Picasso wore to occlude the museological character of the commission as well as a role he played to prove his spiritual and, ultimately, “avant-garde” accomplishment. To support my claim, I examine Picasso’s performance as sorcerer against the realities of modifying a valuable piece of medieval patrimony using administrative documents from the Monuments Historiques archives. In so doing, I suggest that, though an informed and undeniably antagonistic riposte to the Sacred Art Movement, the Temple of War and Peace was nevertheless inspired by the same art historical anxieties and aspirations.

The Temple of War and Peace: An Act of Complicity?
The Temple of War and Peace is found on the grounds of the Château de Vallauris, a former Catholic priory located in the center of the Riviera village of Vallauris. The Château de Vallauris provides a curious setting for Picasso’s famed anti-institutional statement, not in the

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least because it also features a pottery museum, a museum dedicated to the art of Alberto Magnelli, and of course, a gift shop (figure 4.6). Because these museums were not added until after 1975, visitors might well come away with the impression that the village has exploited its connection to a famous artist. After all, why would Picasso intentionally create a tourist attraction? This was an artist who once praised a tin bathroom sign as the best thing he had ever seen in a museum, saying that he had seen art that was far worse. He maintained this opinion even while at work on the Temple of War and Peace, insisting that “if art is ever given the keys to the city, it will be because it’s been so watered down, rendered so impotent, that it’s not worth fighting for.” But in this section, I demonstrate that plans to transform the Château de Vallauris into a pottery museum were over a decade in the works by the time Picasso became involved. By examining the museological background of the Temple of War and Peace, we can better understand why the querelle de l’art sacré was relevant to Picasso.

The Musée de Vallauris

Vallauris is a small village in eastern Provence. A thriving center of pottery production since Roman times, even its name, loosely translated from Latin as “valley of gold,” referenced the distinctive clay soil that made Vallaurien pottery so unique. The village hit hard times in the 1910s when the discovery of a new chemical process facilitated the industrial production of ceramics. Demand for artisanal pottery fell and most of the studios in Vallauris closed. By the late 1920s, the local economy had all but collapsed.

The economic downturn provided an opportunity for Georges and Suzanne Ramié, an accountant and fashion designer respectively, to purchase the Atelier Madoura, an established pottery studio with a storied history. Together, they sought to elevate the reputation of Vallaurien ceramics, once referred to as the “Sèvres of schlock,” through style, craftsmanship, and savvy marketing. A museum was essential to their plan. Despite its long history, Vallauris did not possess a museum or even an exhibition space. Given the popularity of the Ramié’s annual pottery exhibitions amongst Europe’s glitterati, this posed a problem. And so, in 1934, under the couple’s advice, the mayor of Vallauris began to lay the groundwork for a museum. Through exhibits that united local ceramics with Gallo-Roman artifacts and artworks by a local Prix de Rome winner, the Musée de Vallauris would show that a productive conversation existed between ceramics and the fine arts.

In keeping with the historical tone of the endeavor, the mayor suggested the museum should be housed in one of the village’s oldest sites, the Château de Vallauris. This former Catholic priory was built in the late twelfth century by the Abbot of Lérins, perhaps for the Aiceline nuns who first occupied it in 1227. The sect never grew past its dozen initial members, and after only fifty years, the complex was donated to the Bishop of Grasse. The priory remained in the bishop’s gift until the French Revolution, when it was abandoned, sold to a

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449 Scholarship typically assumes that the PCF granted Picasso the *Temple of War and Peace* commission. Gertje Utley for instance, disputes a claim made by Picasso’s contemporary and friend, Claude Roy, that the village of Vallauris gave the artist the commission. She suggests (without citing a source) that Laurent Casanova made the offer. Casanova, however, had no connection to Vallauris beyond speaking at the party celebrating the commission in 1950. Moreover, a 1941 text by local historian Léon Chabaud attributes the idea for a ceramics museum to the Ramiés and the village’s mayor, Dr. Victor Sènes. Sènes was indeed a Communist, but like the Ramiés, his interest in the museum seems motivated more by the economy than politics. Léon Chabaud, *Histoire de Vallauris*, rev. ed. (Vallauris: Arnera, 1952), 36. Utley 2000, 238 f. 32.  
trader from Vence, and transformed into an olive oil mill. Indeed, the massive stone olive press remained in operation until the 1920s (figure 4.7).\footnote{René Batigne, \textit{Une visite à Vallauris: guide illustré} (Vallauris: Editions du Musée de Vallauris, 1950), n.p.}

The sprawling château was an ideal setting for a pottery museum; however, ownership quickly proved to be a challenge. The property had been owned by the Daumas family since the mid-nineteenth century, and it was still in their hands when the decision was made to transform it into a museum. But despite several requests and lucrative offers from the village, Madame Daumas refused to sell. In fact, the pottery museum did not come into being until 1975 for that reason. In 1934, Madame Daumas offered to rent the deconsecrated chapel to the village for use as a gallery space.\footnote{According to Chabaud, the municipality of Vallauris voted to rent the chapel from Madame Antoinette Daumas on 16 July 1934. Chabaud’s 1952 text is a revision of an earlier 1941 edition; therefore, his chronology is the most reliable. Chabaud 1952, 36.} Still, the museum project remained stalled until 1947, when René Batigne, a former French diplomat and one of Picasso’s earliest collectors, moved to Vallauris.\footnote{The reasons for the delay remain vague, but I would suggest that the high costs of restorations were probably a factor. Records from the Commission des Monuments Historiques archives suggest that by 1950 the Château de Vallauris had been handed down to Madame Daumas’ three heirs, each of whom lived elsewhere in France. These records also suggest that current owners were unwilling to pay for restorations. Financial expense still seems to have been an issue in 1970, because the owners wrote to the Monuments Historiques commission with a funding request, citing that an inability to shoulder restoration costs for the château, which was in an advanced state of disrepair. Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Château de Vallauris” MAP, Paris.} As I show next, Batigne played an essential role in facilitating the \textit{Temple of War and Peace} project.

\textit{The Sorcerer’s Apprentice}

In July 1950, three months before Picasso supposedly accepted the \textit{Temple of War and Peace} commission from the PCF, the yet unopened “Musée de Vallauris” released its first publication, \textit{Une Visite à Vallauris}. This luxury edition guidebook featured numerous photographs of “the future Vallauris museum,” Notre-Dame de Vallauris, including an image of Picasso’s sculpture, \textit{Man with Sheep}, displayed in the nave. By this time, the abandoned Romanesque chapel had been in use for over a year as a gallery space: first for an exhibit of
modern ceramics entitled *Palissy à Picasso* (1949), and subsequently for the display of Picasso’s *Man with Sheep* (figures 4.8 and 4.9) A caption accompanying an image of the latter explains: “This year, *Man with Sheep*, gift from Picasso to the village of Vallauris, was displayed [in Notre-Dame de Vallauris] and the confrontation of this work of today with its almost thousand-year-old setting was a profoundly moving sight.”

The text’s author, René Batigne, played a vital role in the *Temple of War and Peace* project, from financial, administrative, and even aesthetic standpoints. However, his part in the project has yet to receive the attention it merits. I now examine Batigne’s diplomatic background to reframe our understanding of the project’s political dimension. In offering Picasso a Romanesque chapel to decorate as he saw fit, Batigne essentially perpetuated the same version of tradition that we saw at work at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce and the Vence Chapel. Batigne’s vision of the project is therefore essential to understanding the *Temple of War and Peace*’s relationship to the Sacred Art Movement.

Batigne made his name as an oil field explorer and film executive before becoming a French diplomat after World War I. He and his American wife were prominent figures on the French social scene. In fact, he had known Picasso since the artist’s days on the Bateau-Lavoir. Batigne was also something of an amateur art historian, which came in handy in his new diplomatic career. For instance, in 1934 he was elected to the Comité Nationale Français de Coopération Intellectuelle, an organization that aimed to achieve peace through active

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454 Cette année ‘l’Homme au Mouton’, don de Picasso à la ville de Vallauris, y fut exposé et la confrontation de cette œuvre d’aujourd’hui avec ce cadre presque millénaire aura été un spectacle profondément émouvant.” Batigne 1950.

455 Although the French government consulted him mainly for his expertise on Middle East oil fields, he must have had some knowledge of military weaponry. He is listed alongside Henri Bonnat, French ambassador to the United States, as a member of the French delegation to a 1922 U.S. arms conference. *The News-Herald of Franklin, Pennsylvania*, 6 January 1922.
intellectual exchange. And in that capacity, he helped to curate an exhibition that told the story of French-Iranian relations through manuscripts and miniatures.\footnote{Henri Corbin, \textit{Firdousi: manuscrits à miniatures, autographes, estampes, imprimés, cartes, monnaies concernant l'histoire des relations franco-persanes et des études iraniennes en France: exposition organisée à l'occasion du millénaire de Firdousi}, Bibliothèque Nationale de la France (1934). http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k58383090} It would be the first of many instances where Batigne used art as a diplomatic tool.

Batigne gained notoriety through his wartime position as “curator of French artworks in America” at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, in which capacity he was made custodian of “all French works of art in the United States in which the former French government had an interest.”\footnote{Many of the artworks in his care derived from a 1939 exhibition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings that the Louvre staged in Buenos Aires. When the Phony War began, Hughye decided to keep the exhibit in circulation. Most of the artworks had been borrowed from private collectors, who deemed it a way to keep the artworks safe from the Nazis. In fact, the exhibit continued to tour and grow over the next two years for that reason. The paintings were brought to the National Gallery of Art just after Pearl Harbor. Nancy H. Yeide, “The Spirit of France: the 1940–46 exhibition of French art in the United States,” \textit{Burlington Magazine} 154, 1313 (2012): 569.} This included an exhibition of privately held nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings that had been on tour in the Americas since 1939. With Batigne’s help, the exhibition enabled French art collectors of Jewish descent to protect their artworks from the Nazis.\footnote{Some artworks were retained by the United States government as payment for unpaid import duties. Fourteen artworks were finally released to Batigne himself, presumably because their owners could not be found. Ibid., 569.} When the war ended, Batigne faced the complicated process of returning the artworks back to their original owners.\footnote{In 1950, they purchased the \textit{Atelier de Tapis Vert}, which produced ceramics by artists and celebrities. Like the \textit{Temple of War and Peace}, the \textit{Atelier de Tapis Vert} put fame in the service of promoting French patrimony.} I argue that this experience conditioned his interest in the Musée de Vallauris.

Batigne and his wife moved to Vallauris in 1947. They may have even lived in the Château de Vallauris for a time.\footnote{Ibid., 564.} They had long been collectors of Madoura pottery and close friends of the Ramiés. René’s wife—an artist herself—had helped Suzanne Ramié with the annual pottery exhibit since the 1930s. When they moved to Vallauris, Batigne and his wife
began the *Association des Amis de Vallauris* [Friends of Vallauris] with the intent of finally getting the museum off the ground.461

However, Batigne’s aims were quite different from the Ramiés’. A 1948 Cold War commentary he wrote for the journal *Politique Étrangère* suggests that politics motivated his involvement in the Musée de Vallauris. In this commentary, “L’Amérique nous parle,” he voices the need to assert the autonomy and relevance of French culture against American imperialism. Batigne claims that the U.S. government exerts its political hegemony through mass-produced goods and the promise of “the American Dream.” He argues that this strategy will destroy the cultural identities of many nations, but not France. Culturally, France was “too independent” and “not weak enough” to be manipulated by American imperialism. Indeed, to Batigne, the United States perceives France as a threat because, despite its political defeat, the country had retained its cultural prestige. However, he fears that France would be ostracized “if she doesn’t bend to the world order that America wants to establish.”462 For Batigne, patrimonial tourism such as the Musée de Vallauris was a way of reasserting French cultural dominance, showing that France valued craft over industry, culture over military might, diversity over uniformity. It was a small step in upsetting the Cold War dynamic that left France politically toothless.

This diplomatic context imbues Batigne’s work with the “Friends of Vallauris,” and particularly the *Temple of War and Peace*, with a sense of political purpose.463 I argue that

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461 Evidence for this idea can be found in a letter written on Batigne’s behalf to the Chief Inspector of Monuments Historiques in October 1950. “He [Batigne] has formed a company, the Friends of Vallauris, and it is in the name of this company that he wants to buy the château in its entirety.” I will discuss this letter in greater detail shortly. Letter from l’Architecte Départemental des Bâtiments de France to Paul Colas, Architecte en Chef des Monuments Historiques, 20 October 1950. Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Château de Vallauris,” MAP archives, Paris.


463 Batigne and his wife moved to the village at the invitation of their friend, Suzanne Ramié, in 1947. The following year, Batigne founded and was elected president of the *Amis de Vallauris.*
Picasso was key to his diplomatic strategy. We can begin to get a sense as to why in the publication *Une Visite à Vallauris*. In it, Batigne uses the diverse character of Vallauris as evidence of an open, accessible culture. He writes: “Vallauris is…entirely linked to the foreigner, and this foreigner, whether he comes from neighboring communes, America, or elsewhere, is always received as a friend, equal to equal.”

Batigne insists that all visitors, even Americans, are treated equally in Vallauris. They all walk the same roads, smell the same perfumed air, and frequent the same cafés. He argues this is why the village appeals to the rich and famous. As proof, the guide includes pages of celebrity signatures, photographs of Picasso having lunch on a busy outdoor patio, and an illustrated chronicle of Rita Hayworth’s recent marriage to the Prince Ali Khan at the Vallauris town hall. Although Riviera tourist guides often referenced the region’s appeal to Europe’s rich and famous, here, Batigne uses those connections to promote the enduring prestige of French culture. Picasso’s reputation as a foreign “other,” which I discuss in detail below, certainly helped in this regard.

In fact, Batigne facilitated the donation of Picasso’s sculpture, *Man with Sheep*, to the village knowing that Picasso was growing increasingly frustrated with the Musée Antibes. As noted in Chapter 3, Picasso had been donating large numbers of artworks to the museum since his residency there in 1946. The curator, Romuald Dor de la Souchère, was struggling to house all the works securely. For instance, a series of vitrines were built in 1947 specifically for Picasso’s initial donation of forty-six ceramic objects. Two years later, with over 6,000 objects in his personal collection, Picasso was ready to free up space and return to painting. He sent Batigne to the Musée Antibes with a car load of pottery, only to have it turned away by

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464 “Vallauris est donc étroitement lié à l’étranger et cet étranger, qu’il vienne des communes environnantes, des Amériques ou d’ailleurs est toujours reçu en ami, d’égal à égal.” Batigne 1950.
Souchère. The breaking point came not long after, when Picasso offered *Man with Sheep* to the museum. Souchère hesitated. Incensed by the delay, the artist asked Batigne to donate the sculpture to Vallauris instead. From there, a plan emerged to create an entire installation around *Man with Sheep*, using the chapel as the setting.

Of course, the juxtaposition between Romanesque setting and modern artwork was by no means unusual at this time. It speaks to the medieval-modern teleology that now defined the French tradition and provided the basis for the Sacred Art Movement. Rather than an evolution toward idealism, tradition was now defined by a series of aesthetic rebellions that began with the Romanesque and culminated with modern art. Underlying this teleology was a desire to distance French art from classicism, recently been tainted by its associations with fascism and conformity. The formal affinities between the Romanesque and the modern seemed to prove that the French tradition was inherently modern, cosmopolitan, and spiritual. Thus, by inviting Picasso to decorate Notre-Dame de Vallauris, Batigne perpetuated the same art historical rhetoric that we find in the Sacred Art Movement.

However, problems plagued the project from the beginning. By the time Picasso became involved in 1949, Batigne had already spent two years trying to buy the château. Frustrated, he used his considerable political connections to register the site as an historic monument in an attempt to invalidate the Daumas’ claim to the property. On 20 October 1950, his letter was sent on Batigne’s behalf to Paul Colas, Architect-in-Chief of the Service des Monuments Historiques (SMH):

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Mr. René Batigne, who is very involved with museums and exhibitions in the region and who held an important post during the war, in America, of safeguarding French painting, is particularly interested in this building ensemble to make it a museum of pottery. He has formed a company, the Friends of Vallauris, and it is in the name of this company that he wants to buy the château in its entirety. He hopes that, if a classification of some kind is given, he can obtain a decree of public utility and arrive at its expropriation, because none of its owners want to sell it. 467

By submitting this request to the SMH, Batigne sought to use the château’s historical value as grounds for its legal expropriation. His gambit was more or less successful. A conservation report, dated 31 January 1951, recommended classifying the chapel as a historic monument, citing it as “one of the rare examples of a well-preserved 12th century chapel in the Nice-Cannes region.”468 By contrast, the château and its additions seemed to hold little historical value to the official inspector. The same conservation report, however, suggests adding the other parts of the complex to the SMH inventory—a lower classification rank—because “a decoration project by Picasso is planned for the walls and vaults of the chapel’s entryway.”469 As I argue later in the chapter, the artist’s subsequent donation of the murals to the State on 26 September 1956 would prompt the state to take possession of the chapel in the name of Musées Nationaux (French National Museums). However, the rest of the château complex remained the property of the Daumas family until 1971.470

467 “Monsieur René Batigne qui s’occupe beaucoup de questions de Musées et d’expositions dans la région et qui a eu un poste important pendant la guerre, en Amerique, en vue de la sauvegarde de la peinture française, s’intéresse particulièrement à cet ensemble pour en faire un musée de poteries.” Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Château de Vallauris,” MAP, Paris.
468 “Un des rares examples de chapelle XIIe bien conservée, dans la région de Nice-Cannes.” Ibid.
The museological background I have offered in this section thus complicates our understanding of the *Temple of War and Peace* as an act of political subversion. Because the PCF had no stake in the project, Picasso was by no means obligated to create a work of propaganda. Instead, the commission was part of a diplomatic strategy to create a museum that would promote the enduring prestige of French culture through the diversity of its artists and strength of its artistic traditions. Picasso’s status as a foreign “other” was therefore a distinct advantage in Batigne’s diplomatic gambit. Perhaps it is significant, then, that the myth that surrounds the *Temple of War and Peace* hinges upon the artist’s reputation as a “sorcerer,” a foreigner who exacerbates his “otherness” by exploring the metaphysical realm through unconventional means. Thus, to understand the statement behind the *Temple of War and Peace*, and ultimately, Picasso’s motivation to create the artwork, I suggest that we must first consider it within the context of the *querelle de l’art sacré*. For, as I demonstrate in the next section, Picasso’s decision to accept the Musée de Vallauris commission takes on particular meaning in consideration of Picasso’s brief flirtation with the Sacred Art Movement.

**Picasso and the Sacred Art Movement**

Apocalypse has been a dominant theme of this study. As a concept, it generally signifies a profound spiritual break with the past and the beginning of a new utopian era. During World War II, apocalypse encapsulated hopes, on both sides of the political spectrum, for a France reborn from its cataclysmic defeat. It could therefore describe both the Fall of Paris or its Liberation, the rise of fascism or its demise, the emergence of a “new medieval age” that was Catholic or secular. Shared post-apocalyptic aspirations for a utopian “new medieval age” often provided

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471 The basis for understanding the *Temple of War and Peace* as an act of political subversion derives from the fact that the PCF played an active role in the 1950 ceremony celebrating the project’s commencement. Gertje Utley describes how this event, originally intended to honor Picasso, quickly snowballed into a Communist rally, where Party bigwigs instructed the artist what to paint and how. Utley 2000, 153.
enough common ground for non-religious artists to contribute to the Sacred Art Movement. Modernists had long defined their battle against academic art in eschatological terms: a regenerated, unified society that welcomed free expression would dissolve the need for an avant-garde. Many non-religious modernists were therefore willing to accept a Sacred Art Movement commission because it resonated. However, the same could not be said of Picasso.

In 1942, Canon Jean Devémy visited the artist in his Paris studio and offered him the chance to paint the Saint Dominic mural at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce. Picasso pointed to a heavily abstracted, cubist portrait: “If I showed you this head of a woman with a child…could I call it Virgin with the Christ Child?” Devémy said that it would be “difficult.” Picasso replied, “Aha! I would say yes!” He then pointed to a small painted female bust: “Could I call this one Catherine of Sienna?” Devémy deferred as he walked over to admire a still life in the corner. Picasso remarked: “That’s by Matisse…one of the most beautiful Matisse’s that I know. Go see him. He should make this painting for your church.”

Picasso’s refusal was predictable. The artist had been vehemently anticlerical from an early age. At first, his disdain for the Church was a form of rebellion against his conservative Spanish Catholic upbringing. In fact, one of his uncles was a hermit who came extremely close to sainthood and another was a respected bishop. His contempt for the Catholic Church was such that, apart from a handful of crucifixions painted during a brief period in the early 1930s, he remained strongly opposed to painting Catholic subjects. And it is something of a testament to Devémy’s ignorance of modern art that he should ask Picasso to create a Catholic artwork so soon after the Vatican put its support behind General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Devémy later confessed that his familiarity with the artist’s work extended only to the Rose

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472 Lafet-Cartier and Kijno 1985, 10.
Period and that his decision to ask the artist to paint the altarpiece derived from the fact that he, like Saint Dominic, was a Spaniard.473

Father Marie-Alain Couturier, by contrast, had a clear understanding of Picasso’s objections to the Church, but he was not so easily deterred. He regarded Picasso as the symbolic figurehead of modern art, so much so that when he wrote about modern art in general, he evoked Picasso’s name, not Matisse. Until his death in 1953, Couturier courted Picasso with relentless determination. He was confident that Picasso’s anti-Catholic feeling was temporary, and it was only a matter of time before he returned to his childhood faith. Ever the social gadfly, he had once heard Olga Picasso claim that her ex-husband was a “most spiritually minded man.”474 Likewise, Matisse told Couturier that Picasso did not deny it when he told him, “yes, I pray, and so do you, and you know it…” Picasso himself even seems to have encouraged the Dominican, if only in jest. He once grabbed Couturier by the arm and said, “I ought to go to confession every day; I need this more than anything else in the world.”475

Despite his teasing, Picasso continued to hear Couturier out. There was no doubt that he was intrigued by the Dominican, who reportedly wore custom-made robes by Balenciaga. Moreover, Matisse’s church project spurred an interest amongst the public that Picasso could not ignore. He followed the Vence Chapel’s progress closely, paying frequent calls to the artist, never failing to deliver a wry comment: “‘Why not a brothel, Matisse?’ ‘Because nobody asked me, Picasso.’”476 Picasso’s interest encouraged Couturier. Not long after the Vence Chapel was consecrated in July 1951, Couturier confidently reported to Dominique de Menil: “Lunched with Picasso on Tuesday. Long and affectionate conversation. I no longer despair of getting him to do

473 Ibid.
475 Ibid.
some great work for us.”\(^{477}\) Two months later, he mentioned the encounter to Menil again, optimism still unhampered: “…I had the impression that he is less far from us than I had feared for a year. And what a marvelous intelligence of every human problem. Let us not despair of entrusting him with a church one day!”\(^{478}\)

Had he agreed, Picasso would have been the Sacred Art Movement’s biggest trophy, a symbol of true reconciliation between the Church and the arts, and a definitive sign that the “new medieval age” had arrived. But despite Couturier’s confidence, it is highly unlikely that Picasso considered such a prospect; he simply could not dissociate the Dominicans from the larger institution of the Church, which he saw as a corrupt institution that only perpetuated war and violence. But more than that, as I argue next, a Sacred Art Movement commission would have been contrary to his reputation as “modernism’s sorcerer.”

*Modernism’s Sorcerer*

The idea of Picasso as a “sorcerer” has been evoked through various epithets: the magician; the shaman; “le sorcier de Montmartre”; *artiste-sorcier*. The most interesting is perhaps *génie*: a French word that can refer to a magic genie or genius. In either sense, the *génie* is distinguished from the rest of society by his intellectual, metaphysical, and in this case, artistic insight. Picasso initially garnered the reputation of sorcerer because of his preternatural talent and use of primitive motifs. As an American critic admiringly wrote in 1920: “Picasso is a


\(^{478}\) “…j’ai eu l’impression qu’il est moins loin de nous que je n’avais cru depuis un an. Et quelle merveilleuse intelligence de tout problème humain. Ne désespérons pas de lui confier un jour une église!” Couturier to Dominique de Menil, 23 October 1951. Menil Archives, Houston.
sorcerer in paint. He can do anything and everything.\textsuperscript{479} But in addition to being a hyperbole for the artist’s talent, sorcery was, for Picasso, a genuine belief.

Even though the artist was vehemently anti-clerical, he retained some of the more esoteric aspects of his childhood faith. Lydia Gasman has examined his mystical belief system in intricate detail. She argues that he believed in a hidden, metaphysical essence that animates the visible world from within and determines its destiny. This essence contains both good and evil, and it expresses itself in that dialectic as well: light and dark; past and present; motion and stasis; inside and out; appearance and reality; sacred space and profane.\textsuperscript{480} In short, his beliefs express themselves in the same apocalyptic binary we have seen at work throughout this study.

Gasman suggests that Picasso became convinced that he could control that metaphysical essence through his contact with the editors of the Surrealist journal, Documents. In “The Rotten Sun,” Bataille compared Picasso’s manipulation of form to an alchemical experiment with base matter. Through his experiments with ancient motifs, Picasso had uncovered the inner essence of tradition and proved that “the modern, atomized imagination is ultimately driven by the forces of the unconscious.”\textsuperscript{481} Like a sorcerer, he operates outside the “religion” of academic tradition in his search for art that could truly serve as a conduit for spiritual elevation.

Although some art historians suggest that Picasso stopped believing in his shamanistic powers after 1940, his statements to his partner, Françoise Gilot, suggest otherwise. “Art,” he told her, “is a form of magic designed as a mediation between this strange and hostile world and

\textsuperscript{479} Picasso recognized that African masks possessed a totemic function when he first incorporated them into his paintings. However, according to Lydia Gasman, his own shamanistic beliefs did not develop until the late 1930s, under the influence of the surrealists. Lydia Gasman, “Mystery, Magic and Love in Picasso: Picasso and the Surrealist Poets 1925–1938” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1981), 3–4.

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid., 106.

\textsuperscript{481} Christopher Green neatly describes the theoretical basis for their argument. See discussion below. Christopher Green, \textit{Picasso: Architecture and Vertigo} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 208.
us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires.” The phrase “seizing the power” is significant because Picasso genuinely believed that he could control the world’s destiny through his art. He even went so far as to tell Gilot that he was destiny. The *Temple of War and Peace* seems to reflect that belief. As an “artist-magician,” Picasso sought to effect real change in the world through his ability to “transform evil into goodness.” And it was apparently in that desire to offer spiritual transcendence unfettered by the restraints of Catholic ritual that Picasso created the *Temple of War and Peace*.

**An Act of Sorcery?**

Picasso first learned about the concept of a “temple of peace” in 1949 when he chaired a Communist youth conference in Nice. There was clearly a need for such spaces. Each military engagement seemed to push the world closer to the brink of disaster. Every new weapon seemed more inhumane than the last. These aggressions went beyond the Cold War between Russia and the United States. France, having already taken military measures to protect its interests in Indochina, would soon become embroiled in the Algerian War. Frustrated that this perpetual bellicose cycle continued even after the “apocalypse” of World War II, Picasso believed that a Temple of Peace could satiate man’s primal desire for violence. He said that the artwork he created in Vallauris would be a prototype for Temples of Peace everywhere: “If I am the first, one could well construct temples seventy stories tall…” And yet, he insisted, even if his temple were ultimately reduced to a sort of “daughter church,” it would stand out by the unique magic of his touch and the ancient spiritual power of its Romanesque setting.483

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482 Gasman 1981, 144.
Notre-Dame de Vallauris was an ideal setting for a Temple of Peace. As a 1940 tourist guide suggests, the chapel’s transformation to olive oil mill saved it “from the indiscreet restorations of the 19th century.” Architecturally, the chapel is distinctive for being a barlong plan rather than cruciform; put another way, the structure consists only of the horizontal portion of the cross. The interior measures sixteen feet in length and forty-two feet in width, with vaults reaching almost twenty-nine feet. An original oculus and two sixteenth-century windows illuminated the stern lines of the triumphal arch that join the semi-domed chevet to the nave. The interior, now stripped of all Catholic adornment, was distinguished by austere stone walls that appealed to modern tastes (figure 4.10).

Picasso considered the chapel’s ascetic quality a reflection of its violent history. This Romanesque chapel had remained in pristine condition, surviving the destruction of the adjoining priory and the decimation of the population…twice. In the fifteenth century, the chapel housed victims of the plague. Then, in 1707, a group of Hessian mercenaries slaughtered all the women and children of the village within the chapel’s walls. But Picasso was particularly moved by its transformation from Catholic chapel to olive oil mill. To him, the progression from religious ritual to the ancient and distinctly Mediterranean ritual of making olive oil imbued the space with an unwieldy spiritual power that he believed he unleashed through the display of his sculpture, *Man with Sheep*. Georges Sadoul quotes him as saying: “All good people will come and I would like there to be many, such as this old woman who came to see my *Man with the Sheep* in this chapel, and asked me for holy water on leaving, because she was in the habit of

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484 The author of the guidebook describes Notre-Dame de Vallauris as being distinguished “par son élégance…et par la rare perfection de son appareil, dont la patine a échappé aux restaurations indiscrètes du XIXe siècle.” Thirion 1957.
Picasso’s description of his encounter with the old woman suggests that he believed there was an innate sacredness to the abandoned chapel that naturally compelled spiritual awakenings to occur within its walls. He sought to harness that power through a far more ancient ritual: art.

Considerable confusion surrounds the Temple of War and Peace because it is an incomplete installation. The space that contains Picasso’s murals was originally the chapel’s eighteenth-century entryway, which was added after the priory house was razed by Hessian mercenaries in 1707 (figure 4.11 and 4.12). At that point, the Bishop of Grasse was using the adjoining priory house as a summer home. Having long been frustrated by the fact that the laity could only enter the chapel by means of the château’s courtyard, he took the destruction of the priory house as an opportunity to add this separate entryway, which now enabled worshipers to enter the chapel directly from the street. Despite being several centuries newer, its barrel-vaulted appearance was hardly modern. Medievalizing grottos were fashionable in the eighteenth century and this one appears to have been designed to appear original to the Romanesque structure. At thirty-two feet in length and twenty-two feet in height, the grotto-esque space would have heightened the drama of entering the bright, lofty nave. Nevertheless, throughout the project, Picasso would insist that the entryway was an original feature of the Romanesque chapel, often refusing to distinguish between the two.

However, Picasso actually intended the Temple of War and Peace to comprise both the chapel and its entryway (figure 4.13). A month after he accepted the commission, he said:

486 Thirion 1957.
The municipality of Vallauris had placed my Man with Sheep in a beautiful fourteenth-century [sic] chapel. They have since placed the statue in the public square. The chapel empty, I would like to make a Temple of Peace. In the chapel proper, which is made from beautiful ancient stones, no paintings, but on the large, old-fashioned olive oil mill, that is in place of the altar, a dove. The entryway is clear and vast. On its walls I will paint in honor of peace.”

In other words, Picasso never intended the space we now refer to as the Temple of War and Peace as anything more than an entryway. This point is lost on most modern-day visitors because his Four Continents mural covers the original entryway door. Originally, however, audiences would have taken the passage with the sterile, industrialized violence of War on their right. They would then enter the chapel to find Picasso’s sculpture, Man with Sheep, displayed in the nave. Behind the sculpture, on the apsidal wall, he planned a mosaic of a peace dove. For the oculus, he would design a stained-glass window. Viewers would then exit the space through the entryway with the prelapsarian landscape of Peace on their right. I will explain why Picasso never completed the installation later in the chapter. Lest to say, as Claude Roy put it, the artist’s “purpose was to create a magic illusion. The visitor who comes in from the light of day will, in front of War and Peace, be suddenly plunged into the populated penumbra; he will find himself trapped by Picasso; he will move to recoil: he will be pushed back by Peace, he will receive a shock.”

To the end of his life, he would always regret that Man with Sheep was never returned to its place in the nave.

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488 Roy 1954, 147.

489 “…but est de créer l’illusion magique. Devant La Guerre et la Paix, le visiteur qui arrivera de la lumière du jour, plongé soudain dans la pénombre peuplée, se trouvera pris au piège oudi par Picasso, aura un mouvement de recul: il sera repoussé par le ‘côté-Paix,’ il recevra un choc.” Ibid.
The original sequence of the *Temple of War and Peace* thus suggests an incantatory function that is consistent with Picasso’s intent to alleviate man’s primal need for violence. Despite the change in orientation, this dimension of the project is still palpable because he drew inspiration from the caves at Lascaux, which he visited with André Malraux not long after they were discovered in 1940. He reportedly emerged from the caves proclaiming, “We love all prehistoric painting! No one can match it!” That memory was still fresh in his mind when he conceived the *Temple of War and Peace*. He told Claude Roy:

> On the wall, I will complete two panels [flanked] by another composition. *War and Peace* will be illuminated by a luminous frieze that runs down to the ground. The chapel isn’t very bright, and I don’t want it brighter, so that visitors with candles in their hands will walk the length of the walls like in a prehistoric grotto, discovering the figures by the tiny candlelight that moves against [the walls] that I have painted…

Picasso’s description suggests that the *Temple of War and Peace* was intended to be a phenomenological experience, where the act of looking involves physical movement and disorientation.

Even in its incomplete state, the *Temple of War and Peace* was a far more a pointed critique of the Sacred Art Movement than previously assumed. Through references to prehistoric art, Picasso upends the medieval-modern teleology that now reductively and nationally defined the modernist project. In so doing, he mocks not only the ephemerality of a religion that

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490 He told Brassai in 1943, “A few years ago, I was in the valley of Les Eyzies in the Dordogne. I wanted to see cave art at the source.” Todd 2002, 95.


sees the world in terms of the Alpha and Omega, but the apocalyptic New Medieval Age rhetoric that defined his peers’ churches. He suggests that art, much like spirituality, is a primal instinct that can be accessed outside the confines of set ritual.

However, the reflexivity of his response suggests that his ante in the querelle de l’art sacré may not have been too far removed from those of his peers. Like Léger and Lurçat at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce or Matisse at the Vence Chapel, Picasso looked to Catholic space to articulate his art historical legacy. Picasso’s sorcery at the Temple of War and Peace therefore becomes something more of an art historical statement than an expression of actual spiritual belief; it is a pretense of avant-gardism that sets him apart from his peers.

The fact that Picasso as sorcerer was a well-established critical trope is our first suggestion of the art historical intent behind the Temple of War and Peace. That trope found its basis in Documents, which understood Picasso’s art historical achievement in terms of sorcery. As Green observes, Bataille and Leiris did so by drawing upon the anthropological dialectic between magic and religion:

If, for Mauss and Hubert, religion is practiced in the light of day, magic, they tell us, is practiced ‘in the woods, far from human habitation, in the night, in the shadows, or in the furthest corners of the house, it is apart. In society, it follows, the magician as sorcerer keeps him or her herself apart. ‘Even with regard to his colleagues,’ they write, ‘he almost always keeps himself to himself. Isolation, like secrecy, is an almost perfect sign of the intimate nature of the magic rite.’

Although Bataille and Leiris typically abstain from thinking in reductive dialectical terms, they nevertheless draw upon the theoretical distinction between magic and religion to set the psychological impulse behind modern art apart from its academic counterpart. Academic art, like

493 Green 2005, 208.
religion, is driven by the needs and tastes of the collective. By contrast, modern art is a private, therapeutic ritual that the artist uses for the “magical evocation of inner demons.” To Bataille and Leiris, the emotional drive behind Picasso’s constant experiments with ancient motifs had led him to accidentally discover deeper spiritual meaning. Much like a sorcerer, then, Picasso’s constant, often dangerous aesthetic experiments yielded unexpected results, which in this case represented an ability to heal the breach between the conscious and unconscious self.

More significantly for our purposes, Documents supported Bataille’s and Leiris’ claims by looking beyond Picasso’s art to the man himself. They credited his abilities to his appearance, secretive manner, and foreign “otherness” in French society. A photograph taken by Georges Brassaï for a 1932 issue of Documents reflects this idea (figure 4.14). The artist stands frozen in his cluttered studio, cigarette in hand, as if we have caught him unaware in his private lair. He confronts our gaze with a piercing intensity that evokes the occult belief in the “evil eye”: a magical curse that could transmit physical harm, even death, to the unsuspecting subject through a malevolent glare.

Brassaï’s image leaves no doubt that Picasso was complicit in creating this interpretation of himself as sorcerer. Indeed, the performative character of his sorcery, which I discuss in greater detail below, has caused some debate as to the authenticity of his belief. Gasman suggests that he vacillated. Picasso was friends with the editors of Documents, and in this photograph it seems as though he willingly performs the role of sorcerer for Brassaï. However, Green insists that the artist did not seek to “conform” to the role of sorcerer (though it should be noted that his analysis is limited to the 1930s). Most art historians agree that Picasso was incredibly
responsive to the way art was received. Ruth Kauffman, for instance, suggests that the artist began to deliberately incorporate ancient Mithraic cult motifs into his artworks after Bataille’s article was published.\footnote{495}{I would argue that Picasso’s sorcery at the Temple of War and Peace was a performance inspired by Matisse’s work at the Vence Chapel. Again, what better way to counter the work that garnered Matisse the soubriquet of “pope” and “saint” in the mainstream press than with a “temple” that embodied Picasso’s reputation as “modernism’s sorcerer.”}

The art historical intent behind Picasso’s sorcery at the Temple of War and Peace becomes apparent in light of the secrecy that surrounded his creative process. In September 1952, two full years after he first accepted the commission, he went into his studio and locked the door behind him. When his son came to pick him up that night, he locked the door again. He repeated the process almost every day for ten months. “No one,” Claude Roy recalled, “was allowed into the sorcerer’s antreum.”\footnote{496}{The writer Hélène Parmelin and her husband, the painter Édouard Pignon, were staying with Picasso at the time. She recalled:}

\begin{quote}
[Picasso] showed us the keys of his studios hanging on their respective nails. He told us that we could go anywhere we liked and look at anything we wished. These keys are all yours, he said, except one and that one, you must take care not to use; it is Bluebeard’s own particular little key.\footnote{497}{According to Gasman, keys were deeply powerful symbols to Picasso. They represented “potential access to the mysteries of superior forces as well as his own claim to be able to influence fate.” She even suggests that he kept the War and Peace murals completely locked not ultimately his own creation, but is created by opinion. … in Picasso was found the artist-magician which, in a sense, avant-garde ‘opinion’ required.” \textit{Ibid.}, 211.}
\end{quote}

\footnote{495}{The performative character of Picasso’s sorcery can be substantiated through the way he incorporates Mithraic motifs into his iconographic vocabulary after Bataille described his discovery of them as accidental. In doing so, Picasso suggests that his sorcery was in fact controlled, informed, and consciously directed. See Gasman.}
\footnote{496}{“Personne, n’est admis dans l’antre du sorcier…” Roy 1954, 36.}
\footnote{497}{Hélène Parmelin, \textit{Picasso plain} (London: Secker And Warburg, 1963), 200.}
away to contain their mystical power. In so doing, as I argue below, he rendered the studio, which he referred to as “Bluebeard’s Closet,” a sacred space.

Some historians suggest that Picasso kept the murals hidden because they were a deliberate rejection of the socialist realist style to which the PCF expected him to conform. He suspected that Parmelein and Pignon—both high-ranking Communists—had been sent by the party to spy on him.\(^{498}\) Parmelein would later recalled hearing Picasso whistle “La Marseillaise” and the Communist anthem, “The International,” while he painted. When Parmelin remarked upon his patriotism, Picasso retorted that “he could hardly whistle something trite while painting a subject as important as war and peace.”\(^{499}\) Kirsten Hoving Keen therefore suggests that these slippages were deliberate attempts to show his party loyalty.

However, I argue that the performance of sorcery was intended to foment a legend around the artwork.\(^{500}\) While Matisse published and exhibited sketches, maquettes, and even scale models of the Vence Chapel as soon as they were ready, Picasso used the absence of his murals to similar effect. Indeed, for Picasso, the myth behind the artwork was just as important as the artwork itself. In the words of Gertrude Stein:

> Later he [Picasso] used to say quite often, paper lasts quite as well as paint and after all if it ages together, why not, and he said further, after all, later, no one will see the picture, they will see the legend of the picture, the legend that the picture has created, then it makes no difference if the picture lasts or does not last. Later, they will restore it, a picture lives by its legend, not by anything else.\(^{501}\)


\(^{499}\) Parmelin 1963, 200.

\(^{500}\) See Gertje Utley’s excellent use of Gasman’s analysis to suggest that Picasso, frustrated by his Party’s failures, looked to magical means to bring about peace. Utley 2000, 172–175.

To Picasso, an artwork’s legend is its security. It enables the artwork to remain in the popular imagination even when physically absent. Picasso’s performance of politically tinged sorcery therefore helped to build a mystique around the *Temple of War and Peace*. And it ultimately redeemed the murals’ value in the eyes of critics, who initially criticized Picasso for failing to create an artwork on par with *Guernica*.502

Picasso’s performance is reflected in the artwork itself. He said that it only took three weeks to paint the 100 square meters’ worth of murals, bragging that it would have taken a house painter much longer to paint a surface of equivalent size.503 The considerable presence of overpainting serves as evidence of his rapid process. For instance, sprawling figures can be seen just beneath the surface of the blue field in *Peace*, strange to find in a painting meant to last for hundreds of years. Likewise, a woman’s face can be seen beneath the dove on the Peace Warrior’s shield in *War*. The white paint used to occlude her presence is so haphazardly applied that her features are visible even in reproductions, suggesting that the politically charged symbol of the dove was an urgent, last-minute addition.

The historical impulse behind Picasso’s performance can be further substantiated through accounts of the murals’ unveiling. When Picasso finally revealed the murals on 24 February 1953, he did so in a way that evoked Michelangelo’s unveiling of the Sistine Chapel. He unlocked the secret studio and revealed his accomplishments to Jean Cocteau, Parmelein, Roy, and Gilot. Cocteau recorded the event in his journal:

Lunch at Vallauris. Picasso…opens a locked door and we go into the room where *War and Peace* is kept. The first sensation is of a nave in a church, and apparently everyone

503 Picasso statement to Jean Leymarie, quoted in Cabanne 1977, 427. According to Batigne’s diary, Picasso likely started the murals on 26 August 1952. Jean Cocteau notes that the murals were unveiled on 19 September, although, as Forest argues, the secrecy of Picasso’s process makes it impossible to know when they were actually finished. René Batigne, unpublished diary entry, cited in Forest 1998, 46, n. 15.
who comes in here takes off his hat. I take off mine. The thing is of an incredible youthfulness and violence. A balance between Ingres and Delacroix. No form is realistic, but everything is true, with that eternal truth, which is the only kind that matters. And when we come out of there, reality seems pale, colorless, stupid, inert, dead.  

The flourish with which Picasso opens the door adds a touch of theatrical drama to the murals’ political gravitas. It also imbues the murals with a sense of sacredness that existed independently of the chapel context. Interestingly, Roy described the event in similar terms the next day:

Yesterday, the big key, finally disentangled, unprohibited, squeaked in the lock and the heavy door opened. I received a double shock in the face. War and Peace hit me in the eyes, in the heart, in the belly, with the unimaginable violence of a tidal wave, a cry of a woman in labor, a grenade exploding at your feet.  

The similarities between the Cocteau and Roy’s accounts should not be overlooked; both emphasize “the shock of the sacred,” and both accounts would eventually be published. Cocteau reprinted his recollection in his memoirs while Roy’s were featured in a 1954 collectors’ edition book on the Temple of War and Peace. Picasso therefore passively promoted the artwork’s spiritual gravitas by performing this act of “sorcery” for his friends.  

The art historical dimension of Picasso’s sorcery therefore elevates the Temple of War and Peace from cheeky critique to an act of art historical anxiety. This idea is reinforced by his commitment to playing the part of sorcerer for the period in which the Temple of War and Peace remained closed. The artist remained uncharacteristically silent throughout, refusing to quell intensifying rumors that the government had censored the murals. As I have shown in this

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505 “Hier, la grosse clef, en fin désensorcelée, désinterdite, a grincé dans la serrure et la lourde porte s’est ouverte. J’ai reçu un double choc en pleine figure. _La Guerre et la Paix_ me cognait aux yeux, au coeur, au ventre, avec l’inimaginable violence d’un paquet de mer, d’un cri de femme en gêsine, d’une grenade qui explose à vos pieds.” Roy 1954, 37–38.
section, although the artwork’s subsequent history has in many ways diminished the statement behind the artwork, it is a testament to the obvious importance that Picasso placed upon the *Temple of War and Peace* that his sustained performance enabled the artwork to transcend the *querelle de l’art sacré* and take on a life of its own. Therefore, in the next section, I will query the circumstances that made the *Temple of War and Peace* necessary.

**Picasso as a “Historic Monument”**

Today, Picasso is an undisputed fixture of the art historical canon. But after World War II, Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky were deemed more influential than him. To his critics, Picasso’s relevance was forever compromised by his outspoken politics, playboy behavior, and the profound spiritual turn in modern painting. In this section, I describe how these threats to his artistic legacy prompted Picasso’s interest in securing a lasting form of artistic display at the *Temple of War and Peace*.

On the eve of World War II, Picasso’s canonical status seemed assured. Indeed, in 1935, he was all but ready to pronounce the victory of the modernist project:

> In terms of laboratory research, the search has been thorough and intensive. Our epoch could not go any further. Certainly we have achieved a profound break with the past. The proof that the revolution has been radical is demonstrated by the fact that the words expressing fundamental concepts—drawing, composition, color, quality—have completely changed meaning.**506**

Victory, however, made Picasso uncomfortable. He briefly abandoned painting for more literary forms of artistic expression: poetry, short stories, even playwriting. But the Spanish Civil War redeemed modernism’s value to Picasso. It proved that the avant-garde struggle had yet to be won, and it also garnered him fame. After *Guernica*, the Nazis put him atop their list of

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“degenerate” artists. The title made his decision to remain in Paris throughout the German Occupation particularly dangerous. Friends went missing, his artworks were burned at the Jeu de Paume, and he was subjected to Gestapo scrutiny. He later recalled, “Sometimes there were Boches who came to see me on the pretext of admiring my pictures. I distributed among them postcards reproducing my canvas Guernica and I told them, ‘Take them away. Souvenir! Souvenir!’”

Picasso was even witness to the Liberation of Paris in August 1944. Françoise Gilot later said:

I talked with Picasso by telephone, but it was next to impossible to get to see him. People were already beginning to bring out the cobblestones to build the barricades. Even children were working at the job, especially in the sixth arrondissement, where Pablo lived…so to get to those quarters and out again was difficult. German snipers were everywhere. The last time I talked to Pablo before the Liberation he told me he had been looking out the window that morning and a bullet had passed just a few inches from his head and embedded itself in the wall.508

Picasso thus became a symbol of the Resistance without actually being active in it because he had shared in the nation’s collective suffering. In so doing, he garnered something of a begrudging respect amongst the French. As Critic Georges Huisman wrote: “…when a Spaniard like Picasso becomes French by adoption, shares the trials of our years of Occupation, and exhales his sensibility on our disasters as [he does] on the roots of Guernica, France must unanimously thank him for having enriched her artistic patrimony.”509

Picasso embraced his newfound “Frenchness” by joining the French Communist Party (PCF). He had long been a fellow traveler, but he did not make his allegiance official until that

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508 Gilot and Lake 1964, 60.
moment. Like so many who witnessed the Liberation of Paris, he joined the Party because he viewed the Communist-led Resistance as the city’s liberators. He justified his decision in a statement sent to newspapers around the world:

…I have become a Communist because the Communists are the bravest in France, in the Soviet Union, as they are in my own country, Spain. I have never felt more free, more complete than when I joined. While I wait for the time when Spain can take me back again, the French Communist Party is a fatherland for me. In it I again find all my friends—the great scientists Paul Langevin and Frédéric Joliot-Curie, the great writers Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard, and so many of the beautiful faces of the insurgents of Paris. I am again among brothers.510

The PCF gave Picasso the community that he long lacked. They anxiously embraced, perhaps even exploited, his “foreigness” to demonstrate the party’s diversity, openness, and power. Through the PCF, Picasso was made the subject of the first Salon d’Automne since 1939, also known as the Salon de Libération. They also arranged for him to take over the chair of the Front National des Arts—the leading French fine arts union—from Maurice Denis.

However, he could no longer ignore the fact that he was in favor of, and strongly identified with, an artistic idiom that was gradually becoming irrelevant. Cubism now featured prominently in academic art curricula across Europe and America. And to an up-an-coming generation of modernists, soured on politics and beset by existential crisis, he was a celebrity who had sacrificed his artistic commitment for celebrity. As one critic noted:

“And Picasso? Picasso that we talked about so much! Picasso, a celebrated star, who attracts as many tourists to the coast of Antibes as the Eiffel Tower in 1900 [sic] attracted suckers to Paris, where is his influence? Picasso walks away. Young people detach

themselves from this 'cumbersome genius.' Miró, Kandinsky, and Klee are now more influential than Picasso.”

The reference to Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky suggests that this new avant-garde looked for spiritual solace in non-figuration and expected their predecessors to do the same. Consequently, only passive traces of Picasso’s influence could be found in mid-century movements like Abstract Expressionism, Informel, and CoBrA. The artist was deeply frustrated to find his relevance so severely compromised. According to Pierre Daix, he “felt that he had opened doors” but felt younger painters had “failed to ask enough of his painting.” But he remained stubbornly hostile towards pure abstraction. He described it as “never subversive” and claimed that it exacerbated the already immense gulf between the avant-garde and the public. He told Gilot: “It’s always a kind of bag into which the viewer can throw anything he wants to get rid of. You can’t impose your thought on people if there’s no relation between your painting and visual habits.”


512 In Chapter 1, I noted that Jean Bazaine frequently claimed that Picasso had denied its spiritual dimension. However, rejection by the so-called “nouvelle École de Paris” mattered little to Picasso: “Instead of taking up our researches to react clearly against us, [young painters] are absorbed with bringing the past back to life—when truly the whole world is open before us, everything waiting to be done, not just redone...To repeat is to run counter to spiritual laws; essentially escapism.” Quoted in Christian Zervos, “Conversation avec Picasso,” Cahiers d’art 10 (1935), included in Ashton 1972, 12.


514 Gilot and Lake 1964, 104.
A growing sense of art historical irrelevance—of working in an artistic direction that no longer interested younger artists—exacerbated anxieties regarding the material security of his art, particularly in light of intensifying Cold War rhetoric. The Russian government owned a large number of his artworks but refused to display or loan them. The reason became clear at a 1947 Peace conference in Wroclaw, when Picasso was attacked as a formalist by a high-ranking Communist official: “It is inconceivable that Soviet socialist art should be in any sympathy with decadent bourgeois art represented by those two exponents of formalist thinking, the French painters Matisse and Picasso.” The PCF urged him to give up abstraction, presumably in a bid to please Moscow, but he resisted, claiming “I don’t advise the Russians on economics. Why should they tell me how to paint?” However, Picasso’s fidelity to free expression did not win him any favor with the United States. The FBI deemed his politics so radical that he was refused a visa to visit the country in 1948. Françoise Gilot recalls that Picasso feared another round of fascist-style iconoclasm after “hearing wildly fantastic stories about American congressmen fulminating against modern art as politically subversive—the kind of rabble-rousing speech that Hitler used to make in the thirties…. the congressmen saw it all as a Communist plot…”

Picasso fully understood the importance of museums, despite his vocal protests against them. In September 1936, the Spanish Republic named him director of the Prado National Museum in Madrid. Even though the post was strictly symbolic, he took his responsibilities seriously. He considered it a personal insult when the Prado was bombed by General Francisco Franco’s forces in February 1939, as we can see in a letter he sent to newspapers.

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516 Gilot and Lake 1964, 196.
across the world: “In Valencia I investigated the state of the pictures saved from the Prado, and the world should know that the Spanish people have saved Spanish art. Many of the best works will shortly come to Paris, and the whole world will see who saves cultures and who destroys it.” 518 In 1944, Picasso still insisted that he was never ousted from his post: “After all, I was only the director of a phantom museum, of a Prado emptied of its masterpieces…” 519

I argue that Picasso’s art historical anxieties prompted him to accept an artist-in-residence position at the Musée Antibes (formerly the Grimaldi Palace) in 1946. He never admitted to that, of course. At Antibes, he would rescue classicism from its fascist associations and imbue it with new meaning under Communism, which he saw as defender of Western culture. The Antipolis series ostensibly exemplified that aim. In his 1946 revisiting of the theme La Joie de Vivre, centaurs, fauns, and nudes dance on warm beaches to the music of panpipes (figure 4.15). And yet, a desire to create an enduring site of artistic display—an historic monument, in fact—was an equally important factor. That year, and for three years thereafter, he made a substantial donation of artworks to the museum, treating it as a repository. He even returned in fall 1947 to paint a series of murals on the walls of his former studio, telling Souchère: “I have always wanted to paint large surfaces, but no one ever gave me one.” 520

What we have, then, is an artist who was just as affected by the dramatic shifts in the political and cultural landscape as his peers, and perhaps even more so, because as a Communist and a Spaniard, Picasso was not easily assimilated into the newly redefined notion of “tradition” as easily as the apolitical Matisse. Because the United States, Russia, and Spain could not guarantee the safety of his art, Picasso looked to solidify his historical legacy in France. Thus,

519 “...those masterpieces! That caused me many worries, many headaches!” Todd 2002, 198.
520 “J'ai toujours souhaité peindre de grandes surfaces, jamais on ne m'en a donnée.” Romuald Dor de La Souchère, Picasso, Antibes (Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1962), 1.
even though he continued to publically oppose them, fears for the material integrity of his work prompted him to look favorably upon museums.\textsuperscript{521}

But while the artist obviously desired opportunities for permanent forms of display and received them because of his celebrity status, he was loathe to despoil his avant-garde reputation, which provided the basis of his art historical accomplishment. He therefore refused to admit any museological intentions. Dor de la Souchère believed the artworks were a donation, but with no formal contract, they were in legal limbo. When he pressed the artist to sign the necessary paperwork, Picasso refused. He told Souchère, “If you had said: we’re going to make a museum, I wouldn’t have come. But you said: here’s a studio…. In any case, do what you’d like, it doesn’t matter to me.”\textsuperscript{522} Georges Salles, Director of French Museums, was then called in to persuade the artist. Picasso rejected the suggestion: “Of course I left those paintings at the museum; but what gives anybody the right to start talking about gifts and donations? Since everybody is so fond of quoting that remark of mine, ‘I don’t seek; I find,’ I’ll give you a new one to put in circulation: ‘I don’t give; I take.’”\textsuperscript{523} In the end, he agreed to give a legally-binding verbal consent in the presence of a lawyer. And in 1948, the Musée Antibes became the Musée Picasso.

Picasso’s ambivalent attitude towards museums is consistent with John Berger’s analysis of the artist’s later years. According to Berger, Picasso’s sudden shift to arrière-garde had an immense affect upon the artist’s psyche because his success was contingent upon the romantic

\textsuperscript{521} Guernica (1937) was on tour in New York to raise money for Spanish refugees at the end of the Phony War. Because he deemed France too unstable, Picasso arranged for the painting to remain on loan at the Museum of Modern Art until the end of Franco’s reign. When World War II ended, Jean Cassou tried to convince the artist to bring the work to France, but Picasso said he never got around to it. Guernica was finally hung in the Prado on 21 September 1981. Gilot and Lake 1964, 198.

\textsuperscript{522} “Si vous m’avez dit: on fait un musée, je ne serais pas venu. Mais vous m’avez dit: voilà un atelier…. En tout cas, faites ce que vous voulez, ça ne me regarde pas.” Picasso quoted in Giraudy 1987, 4.

\textsuperscript{523} Gilot and Lake 1964, 199.
nineteenth-century trope of avant-garde genius, driven to alienation by creative, political, and amorous struggle. Berger suggests that Picasso played this role so well that he was unable to distinguish between the act and his true self. Such was the case after World War II. Unable to return to Spain and removed from the younger avant-garde by style, wealth, and age, Picasso played the part of tortured artistic genius to stave off feelings of irrelevance. But while Berger describes the artist’s false avant-gardism as a coping mechanism, I contend that it was an art historical performance, a means to solidify his artistic legacy for perpetuity. These “avant-garde” performances express themselves in tandem with attempts to find lasting forms of artistic display. The *Temple of War and Peace* exemplifies this idea.

*Picasso Discovers Vallauris*

Picasso visited Vallauris once before in the 1920s, only to leave unimpressed. But now, pottery resonated with this new, classicizing phase in his oeuvre; it offered the most authentic connection to antiquity of any other medium. According to Dor de la Souchère, the artist soon began to retreat to Vallauris on a regular basis, “just like the bishops who lived at the Palace in Antibes had done before him.” He became a permanent fixture in the village in 1947, when he purchased La Galloise, a villa near the Madoura studios. That same year, he purchased and renovated a dilapidated perfume factory, La Fournas, to use as studios. Picasso devoted three years of his life in Vallauris exclusively to ceramics, creating nearly four thousand objects in that short period.

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524 “His [Picasso’s] success has little to do with his work. It is the result of the idea of genius which he projects.” John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 130.
525 Dor de la Souchère cited in Giraudy 1987, 30.
526 Gilot writes that Picasso devoted himself almost entirely to pottery between 1946 and 1949. He spent every day at Madoura for a few months, then as he became more proficient in the medium, he reduced his visits to two to three afternoons a week. Gilot and Lake 1964, 253.
Like much of the art Picasso produced during his seven-year residency in Vallauris, the Temple of War and Peace is typically interpreted in terms of his “Red Period,” a reference to the sense that the village was, first and foremost, his communist idyll.\textsuperscript{527} As a reporter wryly commented in 1954, “the inscriptions found on all the walls [of the village] must warm the heart of the Old Master: ‘U.S.A. go home’ and ‘Vallauris says no to the C.E.D. [European Defense Community].’”\textsuperscript{528} This interpretive framework persists because of the magnitude of his Vallauris-era production; in other words, his Communist values prompted him to create art that was utilitarian and accessible to a greater segment of the population.\textsuperscript{529} However, I suggest that we should look upon this period in Picasso’s career in terms of self-preservation. In exchange for an economic lifeline, Vallauris gave Picasso a specialty industry dedicated to promotion, protection, and even production of his art. Therefore, to understand what Picasso sought to achieve with the Temple of War and Peace, I will next address how the commission works within this new framework. I argue that the same avant-garde performance that characterizes his residency at the Musée Antibes, and later, the Temple of War and Peace, also characterizes his time in Vallauris.

Today, Picasso is remembered in Vallauris as something of a village curiosity. He could often be seen picking through the village dump, looking for broken pottery sherds. Black smoke billowed from the chimneys of his studio at strange hours because he tended to work late into the night. Curious tourists often embarked upon the rocky path to find the artist, only to turn back

\textsuperscript{529} Picasso’s ceramics were, at the low end, marketed at 750–850ff, or approximately $215–242 (in 1953, 1 USD was the equivalent of 3.49 ff).
because of the waist-high weeds. Potential encounters along the way with a pair of mean-spirited goats and the old woman who lived next door added to the mystique. Picasso called the woman “the concierge” because she told anyone who came looking for him not to waste their time; he was a terrible artist and didn’t live there anyway.530

Despite his misanthropic reputation, Picasso’s behavior was hardly that of a recluse. In his many interviews from this period, he talked about his need for solitude, frequently intoning that he had moved to the Côte d’Azur to find the privacy that he lacked in Paris. And yet, his door was always open to visitors; even random curious tourists could find a ready welcome at La Fournas, once they found their way past “the concierge,” the weeds, and the goats. As a Communist, he would say he was obligated to educate the public about his art. And yet, he clearly enjoyed being the center of village life. He dined in public often and never refused an autograph. In 1954, he organized a three-day Spanish corrida for the village to enjoy. Everyone was invited to enjoy bull-fights, outdoor dinners, and even a concert by the orchestra he imported from Maxim’s in Paris. France-Soir commented: “All of Vallauris, which Pablo Picasso effectively saved and gave him the luster of her pottery and ceramics, was behind the master.”531

Indeed, Picasso’s “outsider” performance occluded the fact that he was gradually creating an industry around himself in Vallauris. His ability to do so can be attributed to his chosen medium. Xavier Greffe suggests that pottery was one means by which the artist sought to ensure his lasting art historical relevance. He argues that the artist consciously adopted a few key marketing strategies to transition from celebrity to canonical status; these strategies included maintaining his market viability by varying his style, working in discrete phases (e.g. the “Blue

530 Gilot and Lake 1964, 253.
Period” and “Rose Period”), creating art in a variety of media: all the while maintaining his hallmark gesture.\footnote{Greffe suggests that Picasso achieved canonical status through a few basic economic strategies, including: “the division of his work into periods, use of different mediums such as ceramics and sculpture and a reduction of output once he had established himself as an artist.” Xavier Greffe, Arts and Artists from an Economic Perspective (London: Unesco, 2002), 148.} In other words, while undoubtedly an effective means to refresh his painting practice and reinforce his connection to the Mediterranean, Picasso’s exploration of ceramics also enabled him to diversify his production and maintain a market presence. Thus, much like the Temple of War and Peace, pottery was yet another means to ensure his future relevance. He told Gilot that he wanted to create pottery that would last so that some future generation would puzzle over it, dispute its meaning and function: “In three or four thousand years they’ll say, perhaps, that at our period, people worshipped Venus in that form…just the way we so confidently catalogue old Egyptian things and say, ‘Oh, it was a cult object, a ritual object used for the libations of the gods.’”\footnote{John Richardson, ed. Picasso and Françoise Gilot: Paris-Vallauris, 1943–1953 (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2012), 248.}

The village proved a willing partner in his industry, for as France-Soir suggested, Picasso’s move to Vallauris spurred an almost instant economic recovery:

The kilns of Vallauris had been extinguished one by one. They only fired ‘pignata’—earthenware casserole dishes. The rest: frogs for suburban villas and [replicas of Jean-Léon Gérôme’s sculpture] Truth Emerging From Her Well… Vallauris was very surprised to learn that Picasso had bought an old ceramics studio and a villa, La ‘Galloise.’ A few months passed. Next the chimney for the kiln began to smoke. The entire world bought plates and platters signed by Picasso. Other artists were soon installed in Vallauris. Shops opened. Tourists streamed in. The sky of Vallauris blackened by thick clouds of smoke.\footnote{“Les fours de Vallauris s’éteignaient un à un. On n’y cuisait plus que des ‘pignata’—des casseroles de terre. Le reste: grenouilles pour villas de banlieu. Vérités-sortant-du-puits pour dessus de cheminées, ne trouvait plus d’amateurs. Vallauris fut très étonné d’apprendre que Picasso avait acheté un ancien atelier de céramiste et un villa, la ‘Galloise.’ Quelques mois passèrent. Puis la cheminée d’un four se mit à fumer. Le monde entier achetait des assiettes et des plats signés Picasso. D’autres artistes vinrent s’installer à Vallauris. Des boutiques s’ouvrirent. Les touristes affluèrent. Le ciel de Vallauris se noircit d’épais nuages de fumée.” Georges Pernoud, “Picasso à vol d’oiseaux,” Paris-Match 324 (11 June 1955): 55.}
Most tourists came to Vallauris just to purchase Picasso’s pottery, which he sold at relatively affordable rates in the village shops. And gradually, his style became synonymous with the Vallaurien style. This was hardly a coincidence in a village that depended upon imitations for its economic livelihood. What is surprising is Picasso’s role in developing that market. As one reporter observed: “The most secret painter of our times is, for the potters of Vallauris, nothing more than a colleague of whom one can always ask advice.”535 In addition to “advice,” Picasso passively encouraged local artisans to adopt his style by his willingness to overlook forgeries. In 1953, a local potter was arrested for selling fake Picasso ceramics, complete with forged signature, to the Musée Antibes. But Picasso refused to press charges, claiming that the young man was a friend. His attitude is quite different from Matisse, who looked upon forgers as criminals. Picasso, by contrast, called them “disciples.”536

The symbiotic relationship between Picasso and the local potters of Vallauris eventually undermined the Ramiés’ and Batignes’ bid to transform the village into an artists’ colony. During Picasso’s residency there, the village enjoyed a brief “avant-garde” moment when it was regarded as a center for experimental craft production. That reputation gradually dissipated after Picasso moved to Cannes in 1954, which yielded a veritable industry in “Picasso kitsch,” to borrow a term from Gilot and John Richardson. Although that industry would later be stifled by the Picasso estate’s rigid anti-forgery policies, the economic effects of Picasso’s decade-long residency in Vallauris can still be felt today. Spray-painted portraits of the artist line the street, the village shops sell postcards and posters of his work, and, of course, there is the Temple of War and Peace. It is therefore fitting, and by no means coincidental, to find that the most ancient

535 “Le peintre le plus secret de notre temps n’est pour les potiers de Vallauris qu’un grand confrère habite à qui on peut toujours demander un conseil…” Joly, “Les Vieux Potiers de Vallauris.”
536 Ashton 1972, 52.
chapel in Vallauris has been transformed into a “temple” by Picasso. This transformation is so complete that a picture of the artist sometimes hangs in the place where the altar once stood (figure 4.16).

The *Temple of War and Peace* can therefore be interpreted as a complement to the industry Picasso created around himself at Vallauris that depended upon a tourist audience. It is therefore significant that the *Temple of War and Peace* is most commonly understood as an act of political and spiritual resistance. Picasso was loathe to despoil his avant-garde reputation; his art historical accomplishment was directly wedded, if not indistinguishable, from his reputation as social outsider. I argue that it was for that reason he drew upon his reputation as “modernism’s sorcerer.” As I show in the next section, sorcery was a well-established critical trope that reconciled Picasso—the very embodiment of “otherness”—to the French tradition by keeping him outside of it. By adopting that stance at the *Temple of War and Peace*, the artist sets himself outside the dominant notion of tradition in an attempt to articulate, protect, and promote his art historical legacy.

*Sorcery as a Mask*

In 1954, celebrated Italian director Luciano Emmer released a documentary on Picasso’s life in Vallauris entitled *Picasso à Vallauris* (figure 4.17). Here, Picasso’s sorcery is communicated subtly, not with words, but through aesthetics. Dramatic orchestral music and sustained shots of Picasso’s studio, La Fournas, cloaked in black smoke exacerbate the artist’s own eccentric performance as artist-outsider, creating art through various media and methods. Odds and ends collected from the town dump are effortlessly combined into an assembled

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537 Upon his arrival in Paris, he found that dealers exploited an artist’s nationality as an attribute of his style, and by most accounts, he resisted the notion of style being geographically determined. Instead of being labeled specifically “Spanish,” he assumed the generic identity of European “other.”
sculpture of a woman. An unfired clay pot transforms into a dove with a few deft motions. And near the end of the film, Picasso executes a series of murals on the walls of Notre-Dame de Vallauris. At this point, the actual War and Peace murals were on tour in Italy. He therefore executes his new design freehand on the chapel’s primed, white walls with deft, expansive gestures. In Emmer’s film, sorcery is a virtuosic art historical performance, a way to describe Picasso’s preternatural talent, his eclectic, “outsider” approach to art making, and above all, his artistic aims. “Modern painting,” the narrator explains, “can change the course of ancient myths.” Picasso attempts to accomplish just that by depicting Pluto (depicted as an eagle-headed man) being chased away from Proserpina by a peace dove, thus subverting the myth’s rape narrative. Through Picasso’s art, it seems peace can overcome pre-determined violence.

Of course, the artist’s sorcery was itself a myth that critics had drawn upon for decades as a way to describe his art historical accomplishment. It was a myth that Picasso gradually came to believe, or at least, bought into. The “sorcerer” we find in Emmer’s film was a persona that Picasso had embodied from time to time, often for his own amusement, since the 1930s. But after World War II, we find him playing that role with increasing frequency. Now I analyze the trope of Picasso as sorcerer in its postwar iteration to further elucidate its relevance at the Temple of War and Peace. As the narrator in Emmer’s film suggests, if new myths emerge in times of crisis, Picasso as sorcerer was one such example. And I suggest that he played that role at the Temple of War and Peace for a mass audience in an effort to secure his relevance in a radically changed world.

The Performance of Sorcery
Above, I noted that the performative quality of his sorcery has prompted some debate as to whether he held on to those beliefs. If Picasso ever did willingly conform to his image as
“modernism’s sorcerer,” it was after World War II, when the mainstream press adopted the trope of Picasso’s sorcery to describe his art historical achievement for a general audience with little arts education. The way he abstracted the human figure almost to the point of deformity now seemed remarkably clairvoyant in light of concentration camps victims and survivors of the atomic bomb: “The magic eyes of Picasso,” extolled the newspaper Arts, “search with the terrifying force of a blind man.” Similarly, in 1946, Anatole Jakovski wrote:

…the master of this place, affable and smiling, has nothing about the sorcerer about him except for this strange look that pierces you and exposes not just your face or body but everything contained within, all that makes a man and sets him apart from other men. That’s why nothing that is human is a strange to Picasso. He sees things as they are, with ugliness and flaws, and he sees them in a way that makes him a worthy contemporary of Buchenwald and of Ravensbruck.

Jakovski uses Picasso’s sorcerer-like gaze as a metaphor for his artistic insight. The artist renders “ugliness and flaws” because humanity is ugly and flawed. Jakovski goes on to say that in a happier time, Picasso would create art that was more serene. For that reason, he argues, Picasso is well suited to expressing the anxieties of the Atomic age.

Picasso picked up the mantle of “modernism’s sorcerer” once again after World War II to conform to this positive appraisal of his art historical accomplishment. He performed this act frequently in the mainstream press, often to the point of exaggeration. For instance, in 1949, Life magazine featured photographs of the artist stripped to the waist, creating “light drawings”

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539 “…le maître de ce lieu, affable et souriant, n’a rien d’un sorcier, sinon cet étrange regard qui vous perfore et met à nu non seulement le visage et le corps mais tout ce qui l’habite, tout ce que les fait homme et les différencie par conséquent des autres hommes. C’est pourquoi rien de ce qui est humain n’est étranger à Picasso. Il le voit tel quell, avec sa laideur ou ses tares, il le voit très souvent en digne contemporain de Buchenwald et de Ravensbruck.” Anatole Jakovski, “Midis avec Picasso,” Arts de France no. 6 (1946): 4.
540 Pernoud 1955, 48.
in the cavernous space of his pottery studio, like a magician casting a spell (figure 4.18). And in a 1950 film, *Visite à Picasso*, the artist paints figures on the invisible surface of an upright glass, as if conjuring them out of thin air (figure 4.19). Sorcery allowed Picasso to solidify his art historical legacy as an avant-garde artist. Alienated from contemporary avant-garde practice, Picasso cultivated his image as sorcerer with the public, who still regarded him as subversive and watched his every move with interest. ⁵⁴¹

The exaggerated performance we find Picasso playing in *Life* Magazine seems specifically targeted to the increasingly reductive version of the *Documents* framework, which emphasized the personal and physical aspects of his sorcery over the theoretical. The postwar public was just as eager to hear about the artist’s latest escapades as it was desperate to understand his work. In *Le Figaro*, *France-Soir*, and *Le Matin*, and even in the *New York Times*, sensationalized reports of his playboy lifestyle embellished the same personal qualities that *Documents* had in the early 1930s: his eyes; his late hours; his need for privacy; and his messy studio. Unmoored from its critical foundations, Picasso as “sorcerer” became the hook that promised insight into his enigmatic personality and working method.

Although the pantomime we find in these images is an essential part of Picasso’s performance, sorcery was, first and foremost, a didactic tool. His studio is a good example. In a newspaper profile from 1955 called “Disorder and genius: inside the sorcerer,” we find the artist posed, arms crossed, in the center of his messy Riviera studio, La Californie (figure 4.20). ⁵⁴² Here, Picasso seems to offer the public a rare glimpse into his creative process. Indeed, through the layers of centuries-old paintings, African masks, classical sculptures, and empty frames that

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lean haphazardly against the ornate nineteenth-century walls of the luxurious villa, the viewer gets a sense that he cherry-picks from Western and non-Western art to arrive at a genuinely original product. The reporter articulates this visual metaphor with the caption: “Picasso himself ‘ordered’ with meticulous care the disorder without which he wouldn’t feel at home. ‘I don’t move in,’ he said, ‘I un-move in.’”

The art historical dimension of this performance becomes apparent in the context of the documentary Picasso created starring himself as “sorcerer.” Georges Sadoul recalls:

Picasso had already taken part in two or three films, but, if I may put it, as an actor, for instance in Nicole Védrès’ documentary Life begins tomorrow [1949]. For that production he had used one of his ceramic plaques as a mask. He did so again at Vallauris, brandishing a dead branch and draping himself in crumpled wrapping paper. He soon abandoned this, however, and fetched some pieces of pottery and sculpture which he placed on a rotating table. He married these to the sky, to some foliage or a ripe cluster of berries, made them spin round and modulated them with shifting tawny colours, using a sheet of copper as a reflector.…

As he did in Védrès’ celebrated documentary, Picasso playfully acts the part of artist-shaman by using society’s cast-off objects as magical tools in ritualistic acts of artistic creation. In his magpie-like search for spiritual meaning in the world, he creates magic. Perhaps it is significant that only Sadoul’s account of the film exists. He notes: “Owing to various circumstances the film found its way into the Aladdin’s cave where Picasso keeps the treasures wrought by his own hand, and it is still there. Let us hope that, some day soon, it can at last be shown to the public, for in my opinion it marks an important stage in his career as a creative artist.” By keeping the film hidden, allowing only secondary accounts of its existence to be known, he

543 “Picasso a lui-même ‘ordonné’ avec un soin méticuleux la désordre sans lequel il ne sent pas chez lui. ‘Je n’emménage pas, dit-il, je désaménage.’” Ibid.

Sorcery would also define the *Temple of War and Peace*, were it not an incomplete installation. As noted above, the space currently called the *Temple of War and Peace* originally functioned as the entryway to Notre-Dame de Vallauris. And, as Dominique Forest suggests, it appears that Picasso never intended it to be more than that. Viewers would enter the space with *War* on their right, step into the nave to find *Man with Sheep* displayed where the altar once stood, then exit with *Peace* on their right. But when the *Temple of War and Peace* finally opened in 1959, the effect was quite different from that which Picasso originally intended. The door between the entryway and the street had been sealed and covered with his *Four Continents* mural, and the chapel was effectually rendered an anteroom to the space that once served as its entryway. The shift in orientation exacerbated the grotto-esque feel of the space, which subsequently compelled André Malraux to compare the space to the caves at Lascaux. Lascaux, and even Picasso’s own experience of living in a cave in 1898, undoubtedly informed his conception of the entryway murals. However, because Picasso was unable to realize any of the modifications he planned for the chapel (notably, the stained-glass window and mosaic), and because his sculpture, *Man with Sheep*, was never relocated to the nave, the *Temple of War and Peace* lost its crucial Romanesque elements.

I argue that the Romanesque is essential to understanding the statement behind the artwork. In my analysis of Batigne, I suggested that the commission was a symbolic endorsement of Picasso’s “Frenchness,” because the national tradition was increasingly defined by a medieval-modern teleology that was thought to reflect its innately spiritual, rebellious, and modern character. He was by no means alone in this regard. As French politics lapsed into its familiar divisions and prejudices, sorcery provided the terms by which critics debated Picasso’s entry into the French canon.
Picasso’s “otherness,” which had long been a sticking point for critics, emerged once again after World War II. His high-profile role in the PCF only seemed to prove that he was a menace to the nation’s democratic institutions. As a result of conservative protests, some viewers of the Salon de Libération—whom Gilot described as Vichy loyalists—tried to take paintings off the walls in protest. This small but vocal minority likewise took issue with Picasso’s role as chair of the Front National des Arts. He was listed as the titular judge in the *épuration* trials of several French artists, notably André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, and Aristide Maillol. However, little in the historical record suggests that he actually presided over said trials. Indeed, even though the French government refused to follow any of the committee’s recommended punishments, conservatives still considered it unconscionable that a foreigner should pass judgment over native-born Frenchmen.

Sorcery subsequently came to define the terms of this debate. In “L’Art de Picasso n’est pas Français” (“Picasso’s art isn’t French”), the conservative critic Waldemar George writes that Picasso’s “sorcery” is incompatible with a tradition defined by Catholic humanism. He argues:

Picasso flatters himself by breaking this ideal which is our common heritage. A genial draftsman (who would contest it?), this malignant sorcerer is the architect of a union of forms ... The figures of Picasso's women ... are grotesques of brutal realism. We may be told without a doubt that they evoke the animals and the amphibious animals of the time of the barbarian invasions! What do the Catholic friends of this former tenant of the Bateau-Lavoir think about an art which ravages the human individual, who was made in God’s image, to the level of a reptile, perhaps assimilated to a sacrilegious act.

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545 The extent of Picasso’s involvement in the postwar political purges has long been a matter of debate. For some time, consensus held that his post was strictly symbolic. Utley provides evidence to suggest that Picasso presided over some of these *épuration* trials. Utley 2000, 63.

546 “Picasso se flatte de battre en brèche cet idéal qui est notre patrimoine commun. Dessinateur genial (qui donc le contestera?), ce sorcier malagaine est l’architecte d’une union de formes...Les figures de femmes de Picasso...sont des grotesques d’un réalisme brutal. On nous dira sans doute qu’elles évoquent les animaux et les être amphibies de l’époque des invasions barbares!...Quoi qu’en pensent les amis catholiques de l’ancien locataire du bateau-lavoir, un art qui ravage l’individu humain, fait à l’image de Dieu, au niveau d’un reptile, peut-être assimilé à un acte sacrilège.” Waldemar George, “L’Art de Picasso n’est pas Français,” *Opera* (13 March 1946): 1, 6.
Here, George uses the dialectic between religion and magic as well as classical and medieval aesthetics to evoke Picasso’s hostility for the Christian tradition. The artist’s abstractions are in communion with the Romanesque, which George considers a sacrilege against God. Georges Huisman, by contrast, interpreted Picasso and the Romanesque positively, and responded to Waldemar George with an article entitled, “Mais si, Picasso est un peintre français!":

What separates me radically from Waldemar George is that he seems to regard the history of French painting as a logical, happy and well-ordered sequence of artists who all obey the same Ideal. This scholarly panorama contradicts reality. The history of French art is only a continuation of perpetual upheavals in conceptions, tendencies, and means of expression, and one cannot be surprised at this, for true creators are always revolutionaries in their domaines. Revolution in the Romanesque period, a revolution in the Gothic period, an impassable break between 15th century art and the conceptions of the Renaissance... Revolutionary Watteau, Revolutionaries Ingres and Delacroix, Revolutionists Impressionists, Fauves and Cubists.547

To Huisman, revolution is tradition.548 A need to liberate oneself from the status quo, even when that status quo is self-imposed, gives French art its consistency: “If Picasso had really wanted to show his disrespect for the human form in his last few canvases, he would have thus proven his fidelity to one of the eternal traditions of France.”549 In this sense, Romanesque art provides the

547 “Ce qui me sépare radicalement de Waldemar George, c'est qu'il parait considérer l'histoire de la peinture française comme un enchainement logique, heureux et bien ordonné, d'artistes qui, obéissant tous au même Idéal….Ce panorama scolaire est contraire à la réalité. L'histoire de l'art français n'est qu'une suite de bouleversements perpétuels des conceptions, des tendances, des moyens d'expression et on ne saurait s'en étonner, car les vrais créateurs sont toujours, dans leur domaine, des révolutionnaires. Révolution à l’époque romane, révolution à l’époque gothique, abîme infranchissable entre l’art du XVe siècle et les conceptions de la Renaissance….Révolutionnaire Watteau, révolutionnaires Ingres et Delacroix, révolutionnaires les impressionistes, les fauves et les cubistes.” Huisman 1946.

548 The same resistance-era logic also informed broad definitions of the French “spirit” at this time. Huisman cites Roger Vailland to defend Picasso from George’s claims that Picasso’s “grotesques…s’écarterais de la tradition française”: “La faculté d’irrespect est typiquement française…l’irrespect exige beaucoup de grandeur d’âme: alors, il donne naissance à l’esprit libre, la plus haute expression de l’homme.” Ibid.

549 “Si Picasso a vraiment voulu dans ses dernières toiles marquer son irrespect à l’égard des formes humaines, il prouverait ainsi sa fidélité à l’une des traditions éternelles de la France.” Ibid.
point of departure for an historical narrative that validates Picasso’s assimilation into the French canon.

At the *Temple of War and Peace*, Picasso played the role of sorcerer to exploit the opinion of this small but vocal conservative minority and assert his avant-garde relevance. Earlier, I noted that he wanted visitors to discover the entryway murals by candlelight. Through references to prehistoric and Romanesque art, Picasso suggested that his art transcended the restrictive teleology that now defined the modernist project. It was once again an attempt to reflect the way Picasso mined every cultural tradition at his disposal to arrive at new, spiritual insights.

Scholarship’s inability to elucidate a single message from the *Temple of War and Peace* is consequence of this strategy. Considerable disagreement about the iconography exists, although typically it is interpreted within a Communist context. *War* has been seen as a condemnation of bacterial warfare; a protest against the execution of the Greek Communist leader, Nicolas Beloyannis; and a case for continued artistic freedom in an era beset by propaganda. The many allusions to the arts—the trampled book in *War*; reading, writing, and sketching motifs in the classicizing atmosphere of *Peace*—and the presence of the warrior are considered references to the Communist defense of culture. However, Picasso himself said: “To call up the face of war I have never thought of any particular trait, only that of monstrosity. Still less of the helmet or uniform of the American or any other army. I have nothing against the Americans. I am on the side of men, of all men.”

His eclectic use of symbols reflected his ability to create spiritual meaning out of an assemblage of diverse iconography. He said, “I would like my work to help men to choose, after

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having obliged themselves according to their authentic calling, among my images. So much the worse for them who are constrained to recognize themselves in pictures of war.”  

The murals thus enabled viewers to explore their own spiritual make-up, for in his hodge-podge use of symbols, they would see their personal capacity for evil or good. The *Temple of War and Peace* would be, in a sense, a voyage of spiritual discovery. I suggest that the murals’ incantatory function becomes clear in consideration of the fact that Picasso may have used tarot as an iconographic source. For the 1929 issue of *Documents*, Michel Leiris wrote an article about Grillot de Givry’s recent book, *Le Musée des Sorciers*, which contains a substantial section on tarot. According to Givry, its symbolism was most closely aligned with alchemy, “another intangible doctrine which has beaten a subterranean path through the centuries, avoiding both religion and science and yet establishing itself in their domains…”  

There are numerous variations of tarot decks, each with its own unique iconography; however, my research suggests that Picasso drew specifically from the Charles VI tarot deck. The symbolism of the Charles VI is not only the most similar to the images found in the *Temple of War and Peace*, it was also the deck that illustrated Leiris’ review. What makes Picasso’s use of tarot symbolism so interesting is the way he combined multiple cards to create a single figure. Just like a tarot reader, Picasso uses multiple cards to determine the individual’s fate. Indeed, in claiming that he could use his artistic powers to control “destiny,” it would seem that he sought to control the audience’s fate.

Let us therefore consider the murals in their original orientation. *War* begins with Death, who is shown in left profile, riding a horse and wielding a scythe above his head. The symbol seems to be an amalgamation of the Death card and the Charioteer (figures 4.21 and 4.22).

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551 *Quoted in ibid.*, 165.
Typically, the Charioteer is typically shown frontally with a city in the background, suggesting that he has turned his back on material matters. But in tarot, Death is associated with spiritual change, good or bad. Here, shown in left profile with the city in front of him, Picasso’s figure of Death attempts to usher in the city and its materialism (figure 4.23). However, he is stopped by the Peace Warrior (figure 4.24), who could be understood as a conflation of the Justice and Emperor cards. The Emperor, who bears a shield (figure 4.25), is associated with the dominance of mind over heart, while Justice, as his name suggests, typically carries sword/scales (figure 4.25). In its totality, then, War implies that culture is the remedy for material corruption. After passing through an Arcadia filled with artmaking, viewers would encounter one of Picasso’s most enigmatic figures: the boy with the fish and birds is the most significant (figure 4.26). His iconography likely derives from a combination of the Fool and Hermit cards. Contrary to what the name suggests, the fool represents newness (figure 4.27). The hourglass that the boy drags along by his toe relates to the Hermit card in Charles VI tarot deck, which symbolizes spiritual transcendence (figure 4.28). In short, the boy represents spiritual rejuvenation, a feeling that Picasso sought to impart to viewers upon their departure from the space.

But again, at the root of his altruistic overtures is a self-aggrandizing need to preserve his art historical accomplishment. Perhaps this is best embodied by the fractured orb in Peace. This symbol could be interpreted in terms of Georges Bataille’s aforementioned article, “The Rotting Sun.” In it, Bataille wrote that to look at an artwork by Picasso is akin to staring at the sun; it shakes the viewer at an instinctual, almost primitive level. His artwork therefore reflects a humanistic search for spiritual values that are universal and eternal.

In sum, Picasso’s sorcery at the Temple of War and Peace was less a matter of genuine belief than it was a sophisticated art historical statement. Sorcery, with its “outsider”
implications, enabled him to solidify his avant-garde legacy in light of the spiritual turn in avant-garde practice. His identity as artist-outsider becomes particularly palpable when the *Temple of War and Peace* is considered in the context of the *querelle de l’art sacré*. The artwork brings to the fore a different vision of the modernist project, one not guided by the nationalistic recovery of tradition, but the rediscovery of art as a spiritual practice.

Consequently, one might well wonder why Picasso would allow the incantatory effect of the murals to be spoiled by reversing their orientation, or why, despite the persistent political upheavals of the 1950s, the *Temple of War and Peace* remained closed until 1959. Scholarship has yet to fully account for its protracted closure; therefore, to complete our understanding of the artwork, I offer another explanation for the delay.

*The Sorcerer Bides his Time*

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned that the *Temple of War and Peace* remained closed until 1959, a full nine years after he accepted the commission. Scholarship has yet to fully account for the project’s long gestation, but through my research at the Service des Monuments Historiques archives, I have found that the space remained closed for much of that time because of rather mundane administrative entanglements, namely, those stemming from the fact that the village of Vallauris did not own Notre-Dame de Vallauris. These entanglements further speak to the *Temple of War and Peace* as an act of art historical anxiety. Thus, in this final section, I will examine how the pantomime of sorcery occluded the institutional character of the artwork.

Sorcery characterizes the artwork from an early date. Most assumed that Picasso would begin painting the *War and Peace* murals not long after he accepted the commission in August 1950. Picasso said he was anxious to begin the project and declared his intention to begin
sketching an initial design in October 1950. But instead, he set the project aside for another year, until 5 October 1951, apparently waiting for the anniversary of his joining the Communist Party to begin. The reason for the delay was administrative. And as I noted above, the current owners, the Daumas, were reluctant to sell. The fact that Picasso began his initial sketches not long before suggests that he had waited until the security of his artwork could be legally guaranteed. What we have then is a surprisingly cautious artist; someone unwilling to invest the time in a large-scale project if the security of the final result could not be secured.

Despite a good start of the October 1951 sketches, and a promise to the potters of Vallauris that he would begin painting soon, Picasso dropped the project until September 1952. The wait caused considerable concern. Batigne wrote: “Time passed, curiosity began to wane and rumors began to spread that Picasso had changed his mind and forgotten the project.” In reality, however, Picasso was biding his time while the space was being restored. A report from February 1951 notes that while the chapel was in excellent condition, the porch and château were in an advanced state of disrepair. In order to accommodate Picasso’s murals, the walls would need to be completely redone. Restorations began in early 1952. Initially, the restoration seemed the perfect opportunity to execute the murals in fresco. He told Georges Tabaraud, in a distinctly off-hand manner, “They asked me to decorate [the space], you know? I thought a little this summer about what I would paint. On one side, there will be The War, for the other The Peace,

553 “Le temps passa, la curiosité se lassa et le bruit couru que Picasso avait changé d’idée et oublié ses projets.” René Batigne, journal excerpt included in Forest 1998, 121.
554 The three owners of the chateau complex had nothing to do with its restoration. The adjoining structures were in such an urgent state of disrepair that the initial November 1950 estimate of 700,000 francs in restoration costs had increased to five million francs by February 1951. Because the state was only responsible for the chapel, not the chateau, Monuments Historiques only increased the project’s credit line from 8,000 francs to 20,000. I have yet to discover the project’s funding source, but I speculate that it was Batigne, because he facilitated the restorations. Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Château de Vallauris,” MAP, Paris.
but the walls need to be redone because they’re too wet; after, I will maybe get to work.”  

However, Picasso would soon be told that a permanent solution to the damp could not be achieved unless significant modifications were made to the structure of the space. To keep costs down, the artist began experimenting with different media. His subsequent idea to use ceramic tile murals, à la Matisse, and the stained-glass window he designed for the chapel’s oculus fell by the wayside when restorers sealed it to reduce the interior humidity.

Picasso finally picked up the design when the interior work was complete. Between 28 April and 14 September 1952, Picasso created almost 300 preparatory sketches in a school notebook belonging to his young son, Claude. In July, the fibrocement panels with which he had been experimenting broke unexpectedly. At that point, Gilot came up with the solution: painting the murals on Masonite, then attaching the panels to wooden braces affixed to walls. There was probably a little more logic to this idea than we suspect. The porch was inscribed into the SMH inventory, meaning that the state was legally obligated to protect the structure and its fixtures. Again, there is a difference between the SMH inventory and an actual Monument Historique. Standards for the inventory are lower, so the application to make modifications is (somewhat) easier. However, this meant that the owners of the chapel complex could have successfully applied to remove Picasso’s work. By executing the mural on panels, he could facilitate removal without harming the material integrity of the painting.

After being displayed in Vallauris in March 1953 and again in October at Picasso’s Rome and Milan retrospectives, the murals were installed in their intended space in February 1954. And yet, the _Temple of War and Peace_ remained shut until 1959. Myriad reasons—most of them

555 “Ils m’ont demandé de la décorer, tu sais? J’ai un peu pensé cet été à ce que je peindrais. D’un côté il y aurait La Guerre, de l’autre La Paix, mais il faut refaire les murs qui sont très humides, après je me mettrais peut-être au travail.” Ibid., 142.
political—were cited for the extended closure of the *Temple of War and Peace*. Many thought that the uproar surrounding Picasso’s portrait of Stalin in 1953 may have quelled his interest in the project.\(^{556}\) Given that the murals were displayed that year and the year after, this seems an unlikely prospect. Likewise, the Gaullist government was also seen as a barrier. When de Gaulle was elected in June 1958, the artist apparently removed the *Four Continents* mural in protest. Curiously, however, the mural had yet to be installed. Newspapers reported that de Gaulle was unhappy with the Communist content of Picasso’s murals because an inauguration ceremony that had been announced for July 1958 was abruptly cancelled. A new inauguration date was then selected, but that too was cancelled, supposedly after Picasso learned that the Minister of Fine Arts, André Malraux, would preside over the ceremony. The two had just fallen out over the latter’s support of de Gaulle’s administration, and rumor had it that Picasso refused to reschedule until the government found someone else. And on 19 July 1959, the director of Musées Nationaux, Georges Salles, opened the *Temple of War and Peace* to the public.

Administrative delays, however, were actually to blame for the five-year delay. After the murals were installed in late 1954, the *Temple of War and Peace* remained closed while Picasso and Batigne worked out a solution regarding the ownership of the château. Finally, on 26 September 1956, they came up with a solution. That day, Picasso wrote a letter to Salles offering the murals as a gift to the State. As a result of this action, in March 1957, Salles took over the lease for the chapel on behalf of French National Museums, and on 6 November 1957, the site was made a national museum with a retroactive start date of 1 January 1957. This enabled Musées Nationaux to claim eminent domain over the *Temple of War and Peace* and the chapel, while negotiations over the purchase of the château continued.

\(^{556}\) Ibid.
Giving the murals to the State caused its own set of problems. Just before the scheduled 1958 inauguration, Musées Nationaux decided to seal the eighteenth-century entrance because the busy public street on the other side increased the potential for vandalism and theft. Yet, as noted above, Picasso designed the *Temple of War and Peace* with its function as an entryway into the Romanesque chapel in mind. He intended viewers to enter the chapel through the eighteenth-century entrance, passing by *War* as they enter the chapel, where they would find a dove in place of the altar, turn around, and exit with *Peace* on their right. With that door now closed, visitors would instead pass through the château courtyard and enter the *Temple of War and Peace* through the Romanesque chapel. For that reason, Picasso covered the sealed eighteenth-century entrance with a mural, *The Four Continents*. It contained Picasso’s new avatar: the peace dove. On 20 August 1958, Salles informed the mayor of Vallauris that the ceremony would occur as soon as the modifications were complete: “The Minister of National Education will proceed with the opening of the National Museum of Vallauris as soon as small development works in progress have been completed, and that the third panel of *War and Peace*, which Picasso has generously reserved for us, is complete.”

These various administrative entanglements speak to Picasso’s desire to leave a lasting and legally binding record of his art historical accomplishment. Distrust in the future of modern art compelled him to seek permanence through painting and museum relationships. Picasso orchestrated such falsehoods through secrecy and silence, with the intention of occluding the historical anxieties that motivated him.

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557 “Le Ministre de l’Éducation nationale procédera à l’ouverture du Musée national de Vallauris aussitôt qu’auront été achevés les petits travaux d’aménagement en cours et qu’aura été terminé le troisième panneau de *La Guerre et la Paix* que la générosité de Pablo Picasso nous réserve.” Ibid., 52–53.
Picasso and the Work of Eternity

In this chapter, I have described the Temple of War and Peace as a secular extension of the Sacred Art Movement, a space that validates Picasso’s spiritual accomplishment through art history. Like Léger, Chagall, and even Matisse, he sought to provide a lasting, legally-protected record of his historical contribution in a space that would validate the spiritual dimension of his art for a tourist audience.

In decorating the medievalizing entryway to Notre-Dame de Vallauris, Picasso could have easily perpetuated the official medieval-modern teleology that now defined the French tradition. He was not unfamiliar with this idea, having looked to the Romanesque for inspiration often in his career. It would have also been an a distinctly potent symbol of his “Frenchness” for an artist whose reputation was based in “otherness.” But instead, he transformed the barrel-vaulted space into a prehistoric grotto. As a foreigner and a Communist who made no secret of his desire to destroy tradition, it was fitting that “modernism’s sorcerer” should refuse to operate outside the medieval-modern teleology that now defined the French art. Such would seem to be his process at the Temple of War and Peace. He transformed Notre-Dame de Vallauris’ medievalizing entryway into a primeval grotto because it was necessary to work outside of the national tradition that Notre-Dame de Vallauris represented. That tradition was fated to end in apocalypse. And so, to break this seemingly endless cycle of global conflict, he must create a space that addressed man’s primal desire for violence.

Picasso therefore sets himself apart from French tradition with this space. He touts modernism’s achievement as the rediscovery of creativity as a base human instinct, an impulse as primal as violence. In his ambivalence towards tradition, he had rediscovered the essence of art. The commission enabled him to solidify his status as “modernism’s sorcerer,” so that he could articulate his legacy in the post-Apocalyptic age.
Despite all the precautions to ensure its security, the *Temple of War and Peace* was vandalized on 1 November 1970. A security guard discovered that the *Four Continents* mural had been painted over sometime in the early morning by Salvador Izquierdo-Torres (figure 4.29). This was not mere graffiti. Izquierdo-Torres, an aspiring Spanish painter, had planned the elaborate composition in advance. He even posed with the sketch in a photograph. Picasso left for the site immediately upon hearing the news (figure 4.30). He had come armed with a signed release, authorizing the two brothers who initially installed the murals to remove the offending composition. Izquierdo-Torres was apprehended shortly thereafter. He defended his actions by saying that he came from the same Spanish village as Picasso and had only wanted to see his work alongside that of a renowned fellow countryman. And with typical ambivalence, Picasso masked his concern by saying: “I’m not complaining, but I pity him.”

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558 Ibid. 55.
Chapter 4 Figures

Figure 4.1. Interior. Pablo Picasso. War [left] and Peace [right], Four Continents [center], 1952. Musée National Picasso: War and Peace, Vallauris, France.

Figure 4.2. Ground Plan, Temple of War and Peace.


Figure 4.6. The Château de Vallauris. Musée National Picasso: *War and Peace* [right], Musée de la Céramique [right].
Figure 4.7. Interior, Notre-Dame de Vallauris, ca. 1950.

Figure 4.8. Pablo Picasso, *Man with Sheep*, 1943 as pictured in *Une Visite à Vallauris* (1950).
Figure 4.9. Pablo Picasso, *Man with Sheep*, 1943 as pictured in *Une Visite à Vallauris* (1950).

Figure 4.10. Interior, Notre-Dame de Vallauris.
Figure 4.11. Ground Plan, Notre-Dame de Vallauris.

Figure 4.12. Château de Vallauris, view of eighteenth-century porch prior to the murals’ installation in 1954.
Figure 4.13. Ground Plan, Intended Installation for the *Temple of War and Peace*.

Figure 4.14. Brassai, photo of Picasso in his studio at 23 rue La Boétie, 1932. Musée Picasso.
Figure 4.15. Pablo Picasso, *Joie de Vivre*, 1946.

Figure 4.16. View from the *Temple of War and Peace* into Notre-Dame de Vallauris, with Picasso photograph hanging where the altar once stood.
Figure 4.17. Luciano Emmer, shot from the documentary film “Picasso à Vallauris,” 1954.

Figure 4.18. Gjon Mili, *Pablo Picasso "draws" a centaur in the air with light*, 1949. The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.
Figure 4.19. Paul Haesserts, *Visite à Picasso*, 1950.

Figure 4.20. Willy Rizzo, *Pablo Picasso*, 1955.
Figure 4.21. *The Chariot* from the Charles VI Tarot Deck.

Figure 4.22. *Death* from the Charles VI Tarot Deck.

Figure 4.23. Pablo Picasso, Detail of the Charioteer, *War*, 1952.
Figure 4.24. Pablo Picasso, Detail of the Peace Warrior, War, 1952.

Figure 4.25. Justice from the Charles VI Tarot Deck.

Figure 4.26. The Emperor from the Charles VI Tarot Deck.
Figure 4.27. Pablo Picasso, Detail of the Boy, *Peace*, 1952.

Figure 4.28. *The Fool*

Figure 4.29. Photograph of vandalized *Temple of War and Peace*, 1 November 1970.
Figure 4.30. Picasso entering the *Temple of War and Peace*, 1 November 1970.
Coda: Monographic Museums as Sacred Spaces

In this dissertation, I have examined the three sites at the Sacred Art Movement debates as lieux de mémoire, or sites of shared memory, of avant-gardism brought to churches. Belying the avant-garde narrative that surrounds Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Matisse’s Vence Chapel, and Picasso’s Temple of War and Peace is a nationalistic effort to use modern art to assert the strength of postwar France after its recent history of occupation and collaboration. Government and clergy alike sought to reestablish their legitimacy by integrating modern art into the historical landscape by means of the nation’s churches, thus affirming the strength of a national tradition that dated back to the Romanesque. Thus, at Notre-Dame de Toute-Grâce, Matisse’s Vence Chapel, and Picasso’s Temple of War and Peace, we see modernists contributing to a nationalistic effort to demonstrate the enduring avant-garde character of the French tradition by exploiting the contrast with the conservative aesthetics of the Soviet government and the Catholic Church.

By describing the Sacred Art Movement as part of French modernism’s state-driven “canonization,” an effort that emerged alongside new modern art museums and government commissions for modernists, I have highlighted the art historical motives behind modernist involvement. They contributed to this nearly two-thousand-year-old tradition in which they were underrepresented in an effort to assert their art historical significance. These canonical modernists viewed Catholic churches as conduits of the western artistic tradition and believed that the churches they created would be viewed in that way as well. The art historical drive behind modernist involvement in the Sacred Art Movement is therefore deeply revealing of this generation’s formalist mindset. They created Christian artworks even though they did not
practice the faith itself because they believed that an artwork’s content existed within form, rather than subject matter.

The art historical/monumental drive behind each of the three sites, however, reveals that modernists were willing to risk their political reputations in an effort to create something enduring. Indeed, while the postwar period was undoubtedly this generation’s moment of triumph, I have shown that it was also an era of great anxiety: one that emerged from living long enough to see oneself admitted to the art historical canon and realizing the possibility of seeing one’s achievements possibly eclipsed. In this case, the canonical avant-garde perceived a threat in the market success of neo-avant-gardes in the United States and Europe, whose fascination for non-figurative abstraction seemed to negate the older generation’s influence. As such, modernists looked to churches to transcend the instability of the art world and prove their spiritual and historical worth.

The historical impulse behind modernist interest in religious space manifests itself again in Jean Cocteau’s Chapelle Saint-Pierre in Villefranche-sur-Me (1957; figure 5.1). “It seems to me,” he wrote Arturo Lopez-Willshaw, “that, since the Renaissance, there hasn’t been an effort comparable to that which we’re seeing on the Alps-Maritimes with Picasso, Matisse, Chagall and myself.” The Chapelle Saint-Pierre was a long-desired opportunity to create an artwork on par with the Vence Chapel and the Temple of War and Peace. In fact, Cocteau had contacted town officials with his proposal in 1950, believing that they would welcome the chance to see the chapel transformed into a tourist attraction. But the local fishermen were using the chapel as a storage facility, and it was only after he promised them rights to all admission fees that he was

559 “Il me semble que, depuis la Renaissance, on n’a pas eu…un effort comparable à celui des alpes-maritimes avec Picasso, Matisse, Chagall et moi-même.” Letter from Jean Cocteau to Arturo Lopez-Willshaw, 10 January 1957, Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Chapelle des Pêcheurs,” MAP, Paris.
allowed to proceed. Even then, the fishermen continued to steal his ladders and paints. And so, in 1957, a full year before he completed the work, Cocteau and his friends began writing letters to the SMH with requests for the Chapelle Saint-Pierre to be classified as a historic monument, arguing that the “uncultivated and lazy” fishermen were incapable of preserving it.\footnote{Letter from Jean Cocteau to M. Bosquet, SMH, 27 April 1957. Jacques Jaujard, former director of the Louvre, also chimed in, claiming that Cocteau was worried about what would become of the work after his death. Letter from Jacques Jaujard to René Perchet, Inspector General for Architecture, SMH, 9 April 1957. Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Chapelle des Pecheurs,” MAP, Paris.} Cocteau would decorate two additional religious spaces, Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem in Fréjus (1961–1965; figure 5.2) and Saint-Blaise-des-Simples in Milly-la-Forêt (1959; figure 5.3). While ostensibly religious in function, all three chapels are driven by the artist’s need to represent his historical moment. For instance, Cocteau depicts his friend, Coco Chanel, as one of the attendees at Christ’s Last Supper in his mural for Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem (figure 5.4). His applications for monumental status, however, were denied.\footnote{The application was denied because the chapel was found to be sixteenth century, not fourteenth as Cocteau believed. 7 August 1957. Archival File, “France; Provence-Côte d’Azur; 06: Chapelle des Pecheurs,” MAP, Paris.}

The prevalence of religious artworks by modern artists in French churches and cathedrals might well suggest that the sample size for this dissertation could be expanded. Georges Braque designed the Tree of Jesse window for the Church of St. Valery in Varengeville-sur-Mer (figure 5.5; 1953) and contributed two stained-glass windows for the twelfth-century St. Bernard Chapel at the Fondation Maeght in Saint-Paul-de-Vence (figures 5.6; 1960–63). And in the small, inland village of Les-Arcs-sur-Argens is the eighteenth-century chapel of St. Roseline, which features artworks by Chagall, Jean Bazaine, Diego Giacommeti, and Raoul Ubac (figure 5.7; 1968).

Churches by modern artists contributed to the nation’s patrimonial landscape, thereby evincing a living artistic tradition that originated in the Romanesque. Pierre Soulages’ windows at Conques...
(figure 5.8) reflect the fact that non-religious and non-Catholic modernists continued to explore the aesthetic potential of religious space well after the Sacred Art Movement ended.

Were it not for the excellent work being done by French and German art historians, a future iteration of this study might examine the Sacred Art Movement’s influence in the restoration of medieval-era monuments by celebrated modern and contemporary artists. But I believe a more productive direction for this study would relate modernist interest in religious space to the concept of the single-artist museum because they relate to a similar self-aggrandizing impulse. Single-artist museums are, in a broad sense, permanent retrospectives that emphasize development, influences, and hagiography. In their monographic opposition to the encyclopedic museum, they resist the curator’s impulse to historicize an artwork within a larger cultural or artistic context. Instead, they prompt deeper engagement with the artist’s oeuvre. Single-artist museums also face a unique set of institutional challenges; namely, attracting repeat viewers. The former director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for instance, suggests that many single-artist museums fight the perception of being tourist attractions because of the limited scope of the permanent collection.562 For artists like Matisse, Picasso, and Léger, the touristic dimension of the museum may have been part of its appeal, even though their museums have featured many interesting temporary exhibitions in recent years. A study such as this would obviously highlight established theoretical issues regarding the idea of the museum as a new type of sacred space.

By describing religious space and single-artist museums as two expressions of a similar phenomenon, this project would naturally lend itself to a comparison study with the American

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context, which likewise sees modernists, particularly Abstract Expressionists, involved in the creation of chapels and single-artist museums. Mark Rothko took his inspiration for the ecumenical “Rothko Chapel” on the grounds of the Menil Foundation from Pompeian Third Style painting (figures 5.10 and 5.11). In that same vein, Jackson Pollock, who kept a picture of the Vence Chapel pinned to his studio wall, planned to create a church with Tony Smith. Meanwhile, Clyfford Still took considerable issue with the idea of modernists creating religious spaces; however, he made specific provisions in his will for the creation of a museum specifically for his own art. Considering the immense market value assigned to these artists’ works in their lifetime, their interest in religious space can be seen in terms of a need to insist upon the transcendent value of their art.

The comparison between the French and American context would invite a discussion about nationalization versus privatization because American museums, like American churches, tend to be privately owned. In France, religious space was the most overtly symbolic medium by which these artists’ accomplishments were sanctified in the postwar period. Single-artist chapels are contemporaneous with the restoration and preservation of artist’s studios (Monet’s Giverny, Renoir’s workshop in the south of France) as historic sites and the creation of modern art museums across France. According to Dominique Poulot, museums of modern art tended to be encyclopedic in nature in order to avoid a nationalistic/isolationist reading of the modernist project. How, then, should we interpret single-artist museums? I argue that they serve the same nationalistic purpose as modernist chapels: they enable the state to assert the artist’s

relationship to the national landscape, marrying the artist’s accomplishment to the nation. When concentrated in a single region, they suggest that it was not only that the artist’s success is owed to the region’s political and natural conditions. Barbara Freed, for instance, suggests that the “great concentration of…artistic treasures” in the Côte d'Azur “is a tribute to the unique French system of government support for the arts.”

What, then, can we say about American museums and churches, which, again, remain in private hands? John and Dominique de Menil, for instance, were artistic protégés of Marie-Alain Couturier, who instructed them in modern art during his American exile and whose principles forever guided their taste. Their constant belief that modernism had a place in the church is evident in the fact that the chapel they commissioned from Mark Rothko was originally intended for the University of St. Thomas in Houston. And yet, because the chapel is not in the public domain, is it not prone to market fluctuation?

In the end, few of the artists in this study could be described as religious. Indeed, if any faith moved the non-religious modernists in this study to create sacred spaces, it was a faith in their power to inspire, endure, and to move the spirit of future generations. Living under the specter of the art market and an ever-changing canon, they were willing to risk their political reputations to create something enduring. The canonical avant-garde’s involvement in the Sacred Art Movement can be characterized as a moment of retrenchment: an attempt to solidify their own institutional status and legacy within the institutional and symbolic space of a church.

**Coda Figures**

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Figure 5.1. Jean Cocteau, Chapelle St. Pierre, 1956. Villefranche-sur-Mer, France.

Figure 5.2. Jean Cocteau, Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem in Fréjus, 1961-65. Fréjus, France.
Figure 5.3. Jean Cocteau, Chapelle Saint-Blaise-des-Simples, Milly-la-Forêt. (Chapel: 12th century; Cocteau’s Murals: 1959).

Figure 5.4. Jean Cocteau, Notre-Dame-de-Jérusalem in Fréjus, 1961-65. Fréjus, France.

(Coco Chanel in Green Dress)
Figure 5.5. Georges Braque, *Tree of Jesse* window, 1951. The Church of St. Valery, Varengville-sur-Mer, France.

Figure 5.6. Braque, St. Bernard Chapel, 1960-63. Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence.
Figure 5.7. Marc Chagall, *The Offering*, 1975. Saint-Roseline Chapel, Les Arcs, France.

Figure 5.8. Pierre Soulages, windows for Cathedral of Saint-Foy de Conques, 1994.
Figure 5.9. Mark Rothko and Philip Johnson, Rothko Chapel, 1964–1971. Menil Foundation, Houston.

Figure 10. Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, mid-first century B.C.
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