

# RELIGION AND ART

## *God's Images*



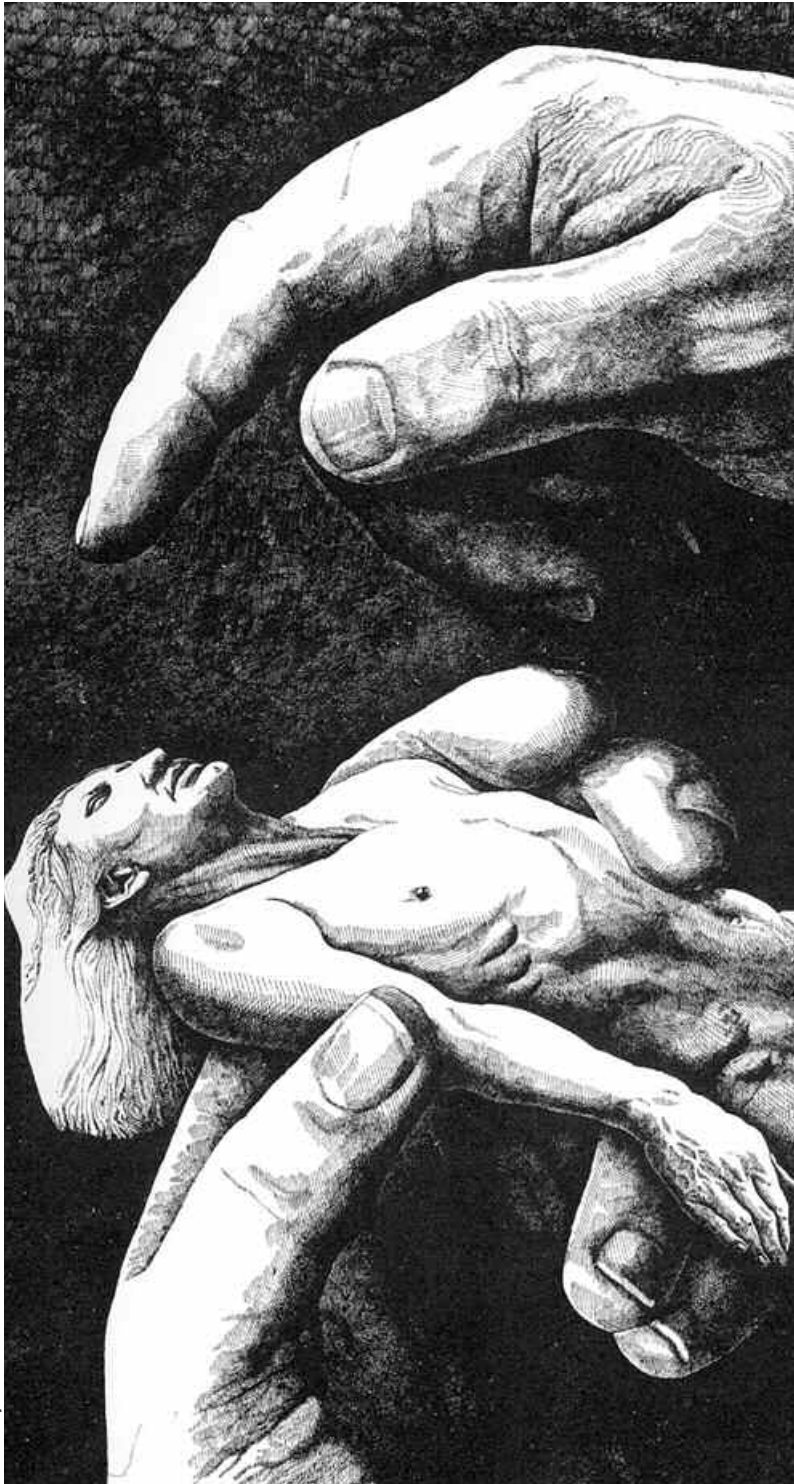
### Creation

Sky. Translucent infinite acre. Anxiety of water, when the hand of God passes over it. Here in the sleep-turning void, the pain waves have not yet begun. These are the star laws, moon-turning. The infinite hands are trembling. What is coming? Sleep circles. River eyes dust terror. From now will come the enormous storms over the sad volcanoes, where lava flows to no purpose. From now will come the cooling of the crust. From this the great beasts will arise; this new place will be consecrated and fertilized by gigantic blood. The ground will shake with huge lizards. In the sea, monsters slide beneath the surface, up-coming to tear other monsters apart: those swimming serenely under the hot new sun.

Why do it this way? Why the tremendous dust storms? Why the strange animals? What is to come of this? What possible end? The deep waves I have made give off nothing but meaningless, endless blood. What terror do I wish to release to the clouds I have created? I am trying something out. I don't have to do it, but the soft pain of the blue planet urges me on. This doing is precious to me. Am I ready for it? Is my only Son ready? About it and its quiet fragile air there is water, fire. There is earth. There are flowers and tenderness coming, also. It is all here, now, in my two hands. I can make the forest eagle circle over the green of leaves. I must do this thing. What I have done, I am doing. My hand passes over the deep waters, and the fish become. The forest eagle circles. Come everything. I am afraid.

### Release

*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.*—Genesis 1:1



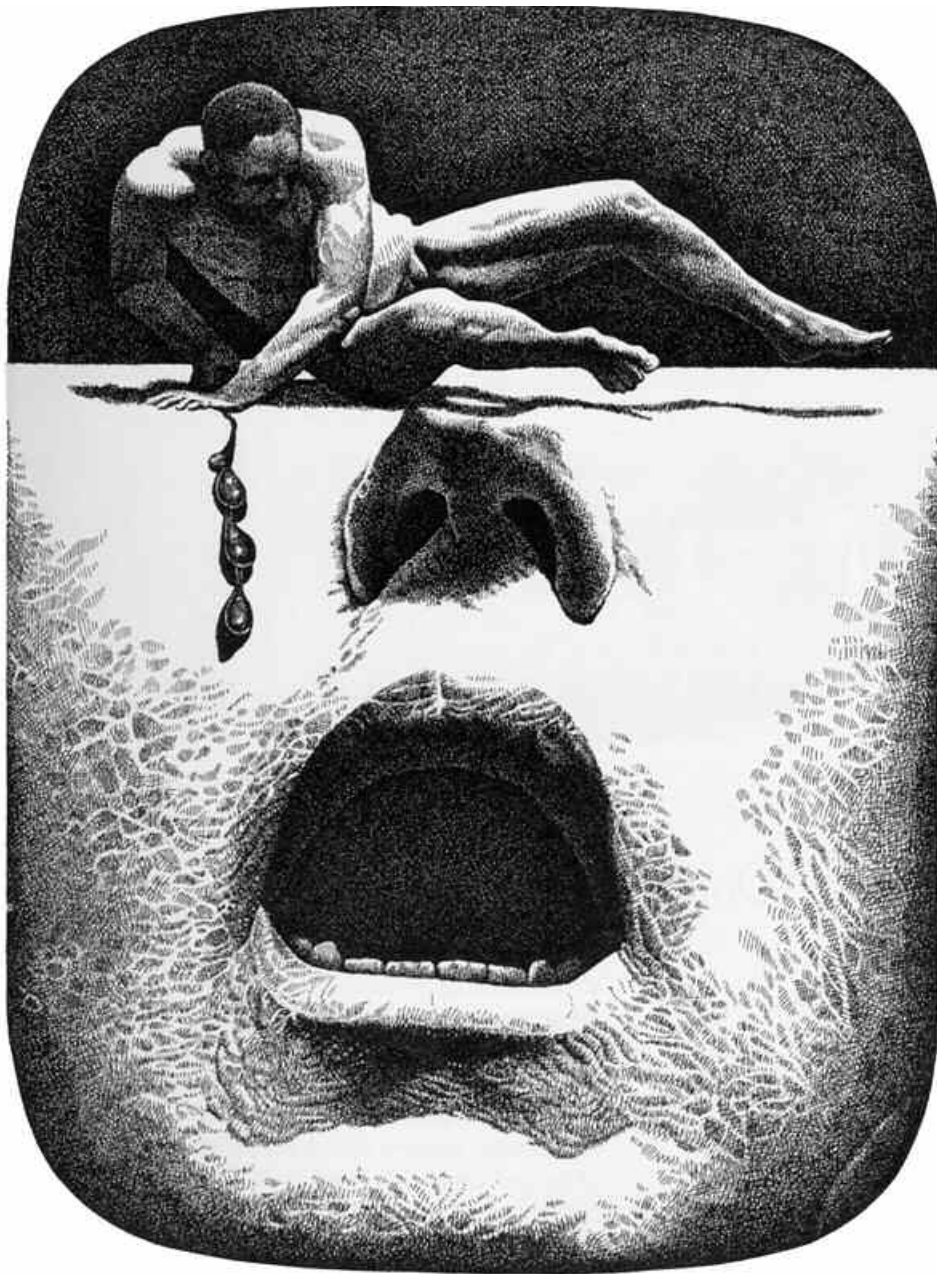
Marvin Hayes

## ADAM

Dust fields breathe, slowly.  
Taking shape,  
the soul begins to feel its form.  
Around God's image  
tenderness begins to ache.  
The muscled valves of the heart  
begin to pulse.  
Adam is healed of nothingness.  
God murmurs over him  
as a mother would speak to her child,  
who cannot understand why  
he has been brought into the world,  
but he is there.  
The lids of his eyes unfold.  
Now there is wind upon him.  
The warmth of his mouth  
loses the last of its dust.  
His teeth are young.  
His breath is a mystical opening.  
His cheek and forehead  
find their true relationship.  
The great hands put him  
down into the world,  
shadows pass over him  
and he feels the quiet grasp of rain.  
Adam hears an enormous,  
soft and caring voice say,  
"Welcome, son, creation and brother."

## Brother

*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.—Genesis 2:7*



Marvin Hayes

## Death of Abel

Young fear. Fear bearing deathless terror from the youth of the world. I, Cain, slew my brother Abel. Nothing is fixed; things are wandering. There is an aimless storm around me, and sheet lightning is infinite. I do not know why I did what I did, except that the force of my brother was preferred before me. Around my eternal journey among men there can be no peace; the mystery has been severed, and the curse on me has begun. Nothing like I have done has ever been done before. Abel is dead, but I must wander. I have created death and must carry it everywhere among men. My brother's death is underfoot and catches me with every footstep I take among the great cities. This all happened on a whim, and all the wars of men will come exactly thus. I bear death to men, women and children: a destruction that I do not want, for I am a gentle man.

### Gentle

*And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.—Genesis 4:11*



### Virgin and Child

He is mine, or at least half of Him is mine. Let me kiss the sweet, wet eyes that have come out of my belly. I cannot understand any of this, but I do know I hold in my lap a child who comes from me. He is the Son of God, but God needs a human mate to bring forth a human child. Gently let me rock Him and smooth down his sweaty hair. The Son of God rests easy, and the human mother rejoices deeply, as any human mother does. I love this creature come from me. I am ready for whatever may happen. The main thing is the love that I feel at this moment, and the new, dependent flesh against mine. This is the way things are and thanks be to God.

#### Thanks

*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus.—Matthew 1:21*



## Christ and the Fig Tree

There must be prepared soil.

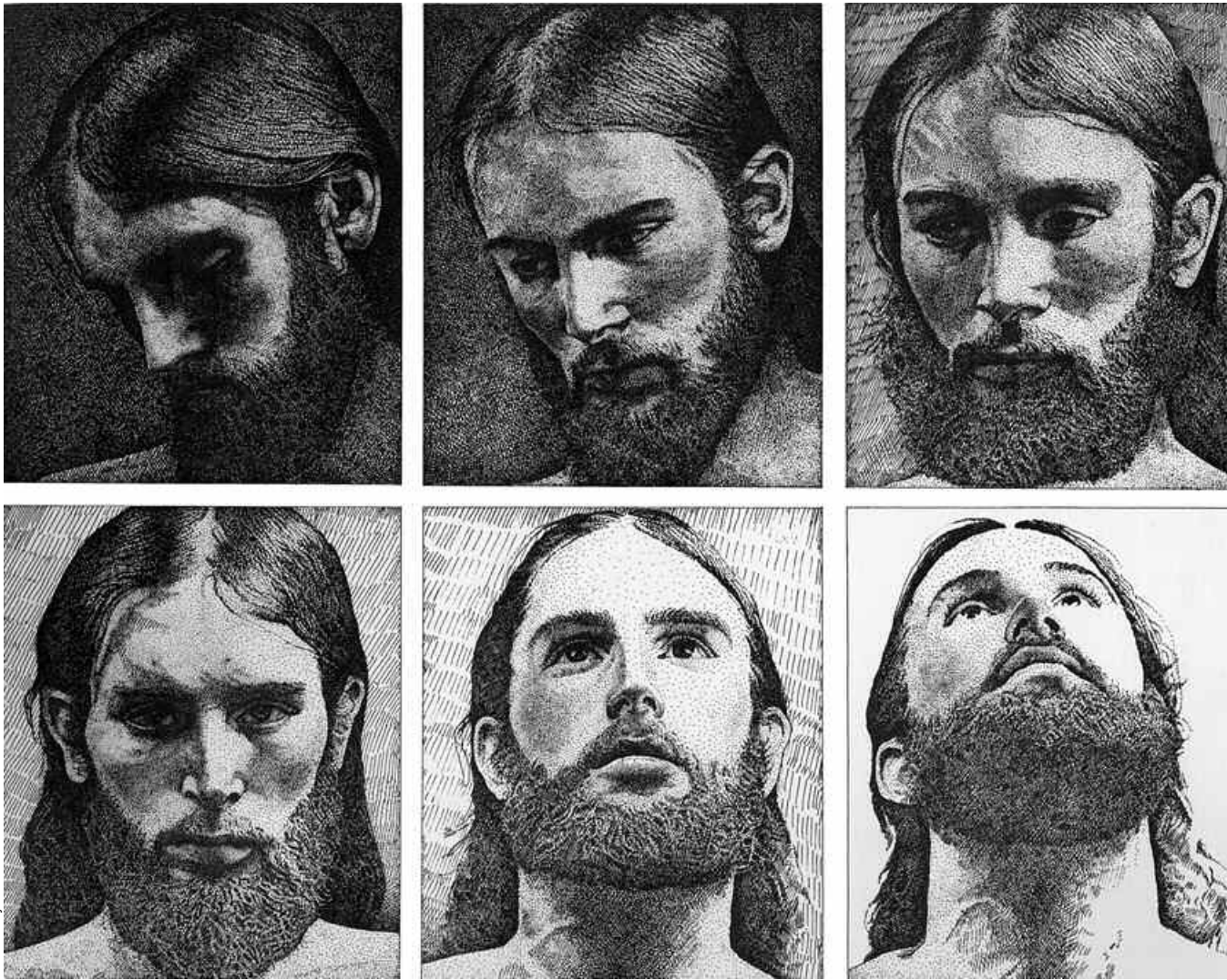
All growth and life and vitality come from it. As it is with the soil, so it is with the soul.

All things must die properly.

The fruit of the fig tree rises freely. The growth is just. But, the Son of Man said that the sinner must repent and bear fruit, or die. And die merely, and feed the soil. Or the man must die, flower, and live again, as the tree blooms.

### Grow

*He spake also this parable; A certain man had a tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.—Luke 13:6-9*



Marvin Hayes

## Transfiguration

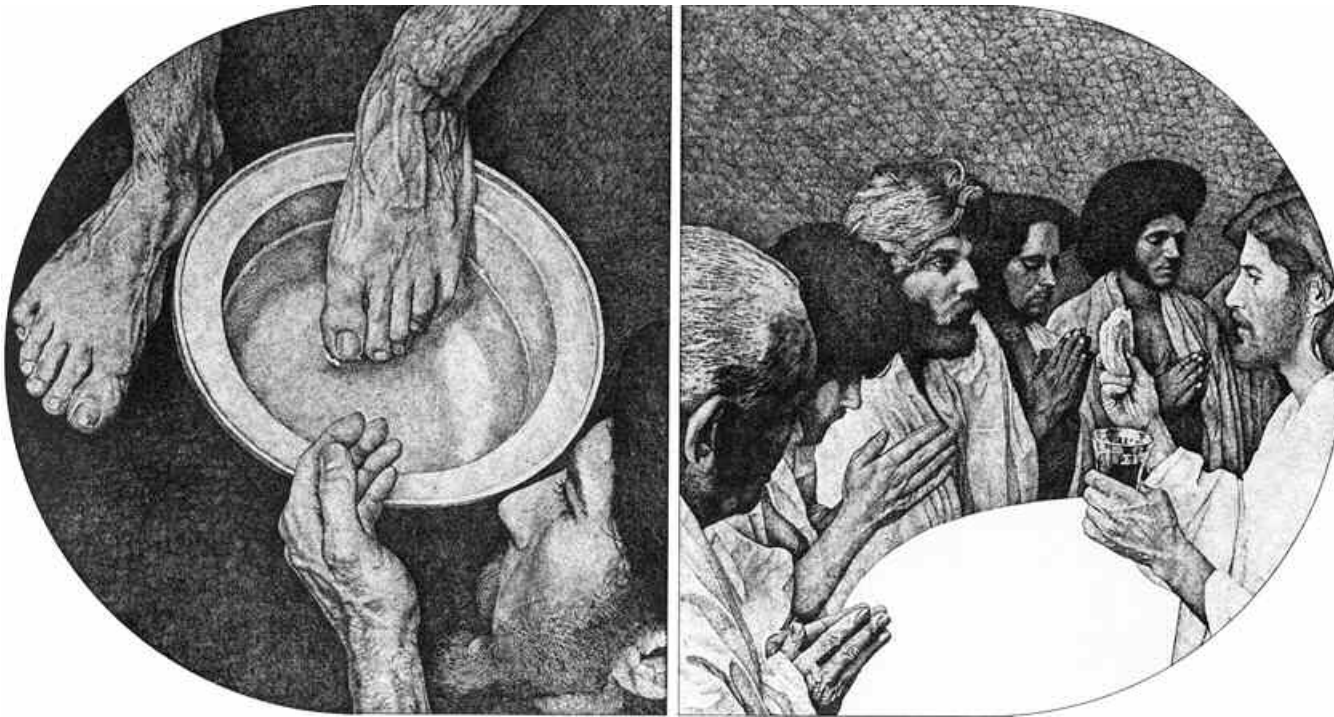
For no reason our Brother bids us go with Him to the high, the solitary mountain. We follow wordlessly. We know that He would not ask us to go with Him if it were not important. It is not a difficult journey, though each leg grows tired at the continual ascent. Then the trees break, and He beckons us to be separate from Him. We wait in bushes, and He waits alone. His face is as of the ground where there are shadows. Then, slowly, His countenance rises through the shadow, through the shade cast by leaves into the utter blackness of midnight.

We, His brothers, can see enough to know that there is a cloud passing over the central darkness of the moon. We see Him with His hands in a gesture of utter acceptance. He is our Brother. We do not know Him, but we will follow Him to the death. We will follow Him to the moonlight on the mountain.

A great light, as that of noon, breaks slowly upon His form. We feel on our faces a radiance that is not ours. From somewhere deep within the sky, from somewhere above, from the heart of a small cloud, a voice is over us, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

### Voice

*And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.—Matthew 17:2*



## The Last Supper

Darkness, with spread-upward light. Men are embarked on something mysterious. Jesus is like them, and they can understand Him deeply on the basis of His manhood. But He is also profoundly different, giving them an inkling of what men through God may *become*. Something terrible is working in a simple meal: something terrible and wonderful.

Bread and wine. Eating and drinking are simple things. Immortality is simple. Under these strange circumstances the eating of the common bread and the drinking of the common wine will stand for immortality through a great terrifying and liberating pain.

The key is humbleness. The Son of God does not abase Himself, but He *ministers*. That is the true meaning of all His teachings. You *minister* to the *other*. Any wellspring of human kindness—always available—can flow over into another human being. You are humble before all humanity, and will wash feet.

### Humble

*And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.—Luke 22:14*

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*The foregoing images have been drawn from God's Images, The Bible: a New Vision, a collaborative venture between poet James Dickey and illustrator Marvin Hayes. The book, copyright in 1977 and published by Oxmoor House, Inc. Birmingham, Alabama, is, regrettably, now out of print. The book's fifty-seven scenes and personages from the Old and New Testaments were etched, in almost microscopic, cross-stitched gradations, on copper plates with acids and cutting, inked troughs—much in the manner of Hayes' admired predecessor and fellow visionary, William Blake. In the book's foreword, Dickey, one of the twentieth century's most accomplished poets, writes: "The Bible is the greatest treasure-house of powerful, disturbing, life-enhancing images in the whole of humanity's long history. They are images of what generations of men have taken to be those projected on the human race by God Himself, or God as He resides in the souls of men.... We all have our images of God, given to us by the Bible, which is the Word of God. These images are ours, and in calling them up in our minds we are living witnesses of the fact that 'the kingdom of God is within you.'... The Bible is buried and alive in us—not one of us can encounter it, and our tradition of the individual human being and the universe, who cannot but have been affected by it."*

Marvin Hayes