

# Jesus and the Disciples

1.

Australian artist Margaret Ackland does not show us in her Last Supper a neatly ordered row of holy apostles, but a motley crowd, invited in from the highways and byways to share a sacred meal together. Such a varied gathering of old and young, women and children seems entirely consistent with Jesus' welcoming women among his disciples and frequently blessing children. Bread and wine set on the table invite us in for a Eucharistic celebration while the Menorah reminds us of its origins in Seder Suppers, reenacting the Exodus of God's people from slavery. Around the table, the rich diversity of people prays, each in her / his way -- as God gives them silent words or postures of just 'being there.' Although Jesus' face hidden from us in silhouette, we see him in the eyes of others leaning in eagerly to hear his words or just resting in Communion. Their expressions range from a sense of peacefulness to deep anxiety. A small child peers out at us with an innocent gaze while the woman to the left of Jesus catches us with a look clearly more confronting, questioning. Across the table, a breast-feeding mother may reflect nourishment, comfort and hope in the Last Supper. Near the right and left margins, the two figures crying may be anticipating the costly sacrifice in the words, "This is My Body given for you." Ackland's painting suggests that Eucharist is not a place of privilege and exclusion, but a celebration of God's generosity and love of inclusion.

2.

Some theologians dismiss Spanish artist, Salvador Dali's Sacrament of the Last Supper as a surrealistic bag of tricks, but I see in this transparent Christ surrounded [in the whole painting] by His reverently speechless apostles, a profoundly startling Resurrection image -- a giving of his body in Eucharist, on the cross and celebrated on Easter all in one image. In addition, through His seemingly transparent body, and in Him, we see the fishing boats on Lake Gennesaret, a reminder of calling and love for His fishermen-disciples. Surprisingly, a laser-like luminescence shines through Him, casting a reflection/ shadow on the glass of wine and the table, but He has no shadow!! - reinforcing the suggestion that the Risen Christ is celebrating. The Eucharistic bread and wine present on the table, and the wondrous landscape behind Christ may also refer to Dali's Catalan homeland and heritage

3.

The Last Supper by Congo artist, Joseph Mulamba-Mandangi has the capacity to draw the viewer into the action. The light in this intimate night scene does not come from the candles on the table but from the figure of Jesus in the center. The looks on the disciples' faces reveal that they can't quite understand what he has just told them, but everyone feels that this hour is key for what both he and they will soon face. Mulamba depicts the gospel scene from Luke where Jesus says, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Later when the risen Christ breaks bread with the two disciples at Emmaus, their eyes are opened to this desire of Jesus -- to share the meal with them in his kingdom. For an African, this desire includes a vast fellowship. The masks on the rear wall are not mere decoration. With them the people - especially the ancestors of Africa, are present with their history and culture. Masks are worn for important rites of passage for individuals and for the community. Jesus takes all these passages and transitions into his own Passover, this rite of passage to the resurrected life against which death is ultimately powerless. Mulambo uses a time-consuming scratch and scrape technique called *pinture grattee*. His first step is to determine the theme of his picture. While reflecting and meditating on a bible passage, the artist's picture slowly develops in his mind. After creating a draft or sketch on paper, spreads a thin white layer of latex paste on the paper giving it a structure. After it dries, background oil colors and china ink are added to the surface. Using a razor and pencil he scrapes and shapes the contours of an image creating a three dimensional picture.

4. Christianity arrived in the African colonies confusingly wrapped in capitalism, competition, and profit. For generations thereafter, parishioners in Mafa, Northern Cameroon have had to struggle to find for themselves -- their own faces, their culture and indigenous spirituality within the Gospel stories. Although there are no halos here, the flat-golden background similar to a medieval icon, speaks of hope and holiness, and promises of being absorbed into the Mysteries of God-among-us. Seated within the constrained space of adobe walls and the circular table, the disciples share the anxieties and real tensions of this significant night and a new urgency to love and bear with one another in the days to come. Later, in hindsight, they will recognize Jesus again in his breaking of the bread. For Christians, suffering may be valued as redemptive, transforming those who participate fully, willingly in the mystery of the Incarnation. These paintings now used for catechesis and evangelization, grew from the villagers' desire to live their Christian commitment more fully by reenacting several Gospel events and create a Christ who spoke their language, understood their gestures, their way of life and their Black-African culture. It is the intention of the Mafa villagers, not to be different from Europeans but in that this native imagery to enhance and complete the fullness of Christ's body on earth.

5.

Unlike most somber images of the Last Supper in Western art, this Plains Indian teepee welcomes a joyous gathering of like-minded disciples seated around a traditional ritual fire, laughing and enjoying each other's company. Notice the peace-pipes!! Giving us a unique glimpse into Native American ways, Cheyenne artist and college professor, Richard

West emphasizes here the essential gift of community -- called by some, The Way of the Circle. Non-native (sometimes New Age) Americans in search of a spiritual path often misunderstand the real meaning for Native people, and their indigenous forms of worship. The vision quest for example was never meant to reinforce separateness and individuality, but from beginning to end, is a communal ritual for the 'seeker', a rite of passage to reinforce and expand her/ his relationship within the clan. Interestingly too, is that in the West for example, religious practices are expressed in terms of time: church on Sunday, a liturgical calendar, for instance. For Indian peoples, the Great Mystery Above and Below is experienced spatially. That is, all the world and all moving things (the two-legged, four legged and the winged beings) as well as specific places (the Black Hills of Dakota, Blue Lake near Taos and Sacred Mountains) are seen and celebrated as alive, sentient and sacred. This suggests, that in West's Last Supper, "Chief" Jesus may be signing with his hand gestures, a blessing of the Four Directions.

