

Nine windows by Chagall

Author

Chagall, Marc, 1887-1985

Date

1978

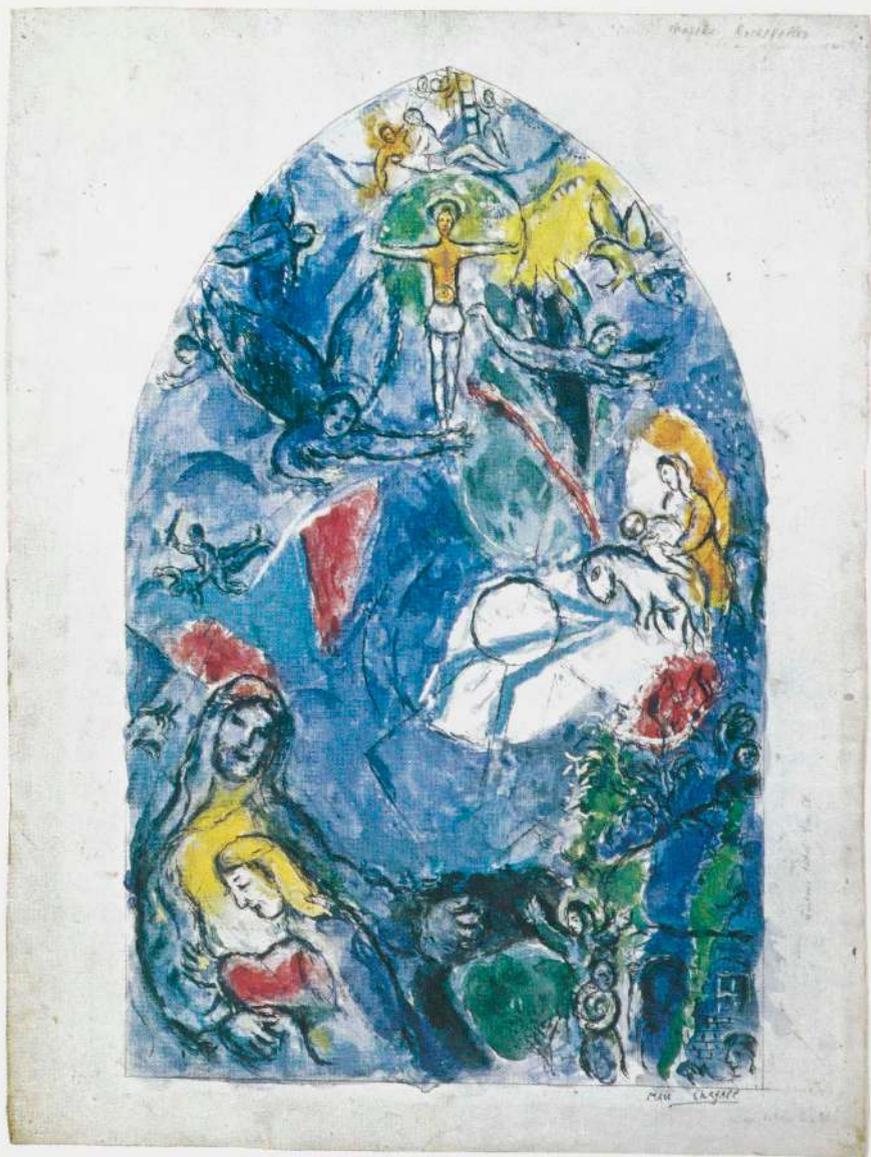
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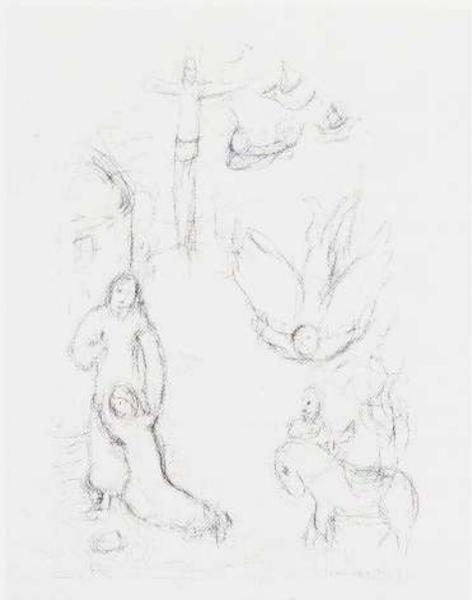
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Nine Windows by Chagall

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

April 13 - May 30, 1978



Above: Study for *The Good Samaritan*. (Cat. 10.)
Front cover: Study for *The Good Samaritan*. (Cat. 8.)
In memory of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

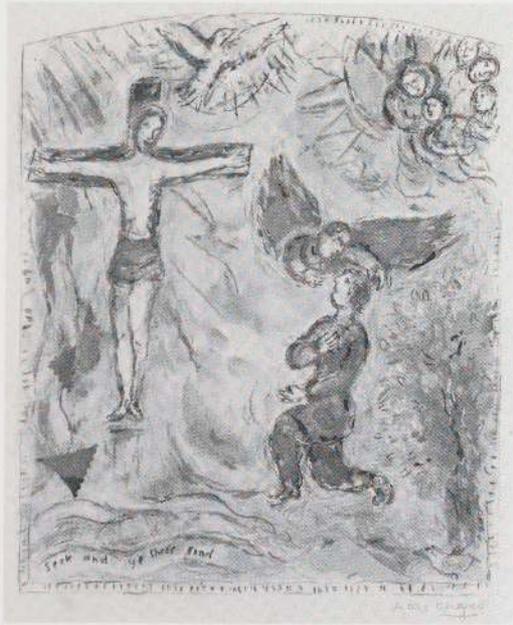
Luke 10:30-37

MARC CHAGALL has seldom lacked an appreciative audience, and in recent years his stained-glass windows have enjoyed more celebrity than his work in any other medium. Joining the art of the painter and etcher to the great craft tradition of stained glass, Marc Chagall has during the past twenty years created windows for the Church of Notre Dame de Toute Grâce in Assy, France—his first such commission (1957)—followed by windows for the Metz Cathedral in Germany, the Synagogue of the Hebrew University Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem, the United Nations Secretariat in New York, Tudeley Church in Kent, England, and the Fraumünster in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1966 he completed his first cycle in the United States, nine windows for the Union Church of Pocantico Hills, New York. In 1977 a second cycle, *The America Windows*, commemorating the Bicentennial of the United States, was dedicated at The Art Institute of Chicago, and in the same year Chagall began work on windows for the Rheims Cathedral.

The windows at Pocantico Hills, studies for which are for the first time illustrated here, were commissioned by the children and grandchildren of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., for the nondenominational church attended by the elder Rockefeller and many of his descendants. They consist of one large narthex window in memory of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., installed in 1964, and a cycle of eight smaller windows, four on each side, installed in 1966. The nine windows, illustrating figures and episodes from both Old and New Testaments, include memorials to other members of the congregation as well as to Rockefeller family members.

When Chagall works on a cycle of windows he is always concerned that they be assimilated to the architecture of the site and become part of the mystic and poetic experience of place for those who gather there. His windows represent a continuity of intention and subject that has prevailed in his work for some sixty years. As early as 1912 Chagall had painted a Calvary scene. It was only at the end of the twenties, however, that biblical or religious themes really captured his attention, evoking the first great cycle of Bible etchings in 1939. From 1931, the date of the commission from Ambroise Vollard, until 1939, Chagall was almost wholly preoccupied with these Bible illustrations. They have been a constant source of the imagery of Chagall's subsequent religious works.

The Bible had been anticipated by a series of preparatory gouaches drawn from celebratory religious and family scenes, synagogue scenes, and, finally, specific episodes from the Old Testament. At the behest of Vollard in 1931, in preparation for the Bible cycle, Chagall traveled to Palestine, feeling that in



1. Study for *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (Cat. 17.) In memory of Michael Clark Rockefeller

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

Matthew 7:7

order to “establish it [the Bible] (in his inmost soul) as a ‘world’ he needed a direct contact with the ‘real’ world of the Bible, namely Palestine.”¹ Work on the illustrations for the Bible continued for many years beyond the printing of the first plates in 1939. Chagall had finished 66 plates at the time of Vollard’s death shortly before World War II. In 1939 he had begun 39 additional plates but did not resume work on them until 1952. These were finished in 1956, and *The Bible* was published with 105 plates by Tériade in 1957.

Chagall’s plates were a departure from the traditional manner of Bible illustration. While occasional references to models by other artists are discernible, Chagall illustrated specific passages arbitrarily chosen by him and created an iconography independent of all previous iconography. Frequently choosing the single figure of a Prophet to illustrate an extended text, Chagall took man as his only theme—“man who remains the same throughout the centuries, man whom God looked upon, with whom God spoke, who thus received his rank and dignity.”²

There has been much speculation about Chagall’s religious attitude, but his

stance has remained consistent over the years. The themes of the windows of the Union Church remain essentially the same as those of *The Bible* and earlier religious paintings. Chagall’s trip to Palestine in preparation for the Bible etchings was a profoundly moving experience, but he has repeatedly denied that he is a religious man, and he rejects dogmatic interpretations of his work. He agrees with his fellow painter André Lhote, who said with special reference to Chagall: “It is the glory and the misery of the artist’s lot to transmit a message of which he does not possess the translation.”³ For Chagall, “In every



2. Study for *Joel*. (Cat. 19.)

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

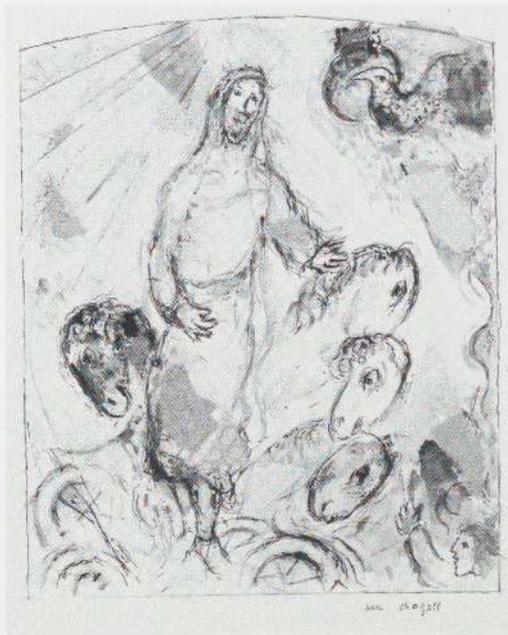
And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

Joel 2:28–31

work of art, especially if it is intended for a holy place, there must be present always a large part of the mystery. If this is not so, the work would not be a work of art and would not have the power to move."⁴ Thus Chagall sees the artist's role as that of mystic and poet, and he believes that the emotions transmitted by the work of art are often ultimately "of the same stuff as religious emotion."⁵

Chagall's earliest reading was the Bible, and his private visual vocabulary has consisted of the images brought with him from his Russian childhood in the



3. Study for *Elijah*. (Cat. 20.) In memory of Lilian T. Bowles and Eunice Turner

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

2 Kings 2:9-12



4. Study for *Daniel*. (Cat. 21.)

And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man.

And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.

So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.

Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright.

Daniel 8:15-18

shtetl—tradition adapted to fantasy—cows leaping over housetops, men with two faces or sometimes none, drunken fiddlers at weddings, levitating figures, animals, and candelabra, sun, moon, rabbis, lovers, and wandering peddlers from the mystic-joyous Hassidic tradition, endowed always with a kind of visionary lunacy and profound poetry.

Incorporating religious subjects in his work, Chagall has not enlarged the symbolic vocabulary of religion, but simply adapted and expanded his own private iconography,⁶ endowing it with perhaps a greater gravity than for worldly subjects. For instance, a variant of the wandering peddler appears at the lower left in Window 4, *Daniel*, and heavenbound horses appear in Window 3, *Elijah*, whose text may have been chosen specifically because the



5. Study for *Cherubim*. (Cat. 22.)

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24

iconography it suggested was so close to Chagall's artistic vision. Chagall's iconography for these subjects had already been established in the Bible.

For Chagall, Christ was a great poet, the meaning of whose teachings has been forgotten by the modern world. Since 1948, when at the church of Assy he was first asked by the great Dominican conciliator, Father Couturier, to treat a specifically Christian theme, it has been apparent that in working within the larger context of the Judeo-Christian heritage Chagall has quite deliberately carried over his Old Testament background, uniting it with the New in the spirit of Christ as poet-teacher and great humanist. As Franz Meyer explains, "Christ has more than *one* meaning for Chagall. He is the Jewish martyr and the Jewish prophet; he is the 'revolutionary' who shares man's fate to the bitter end. He is creative man who pays for every prize with pain. He is also and always simply man in his loneliness and isolation." Dr. Meyer further points out that Chagall identifies himself with Christ, writing in his poem *To Bella*, "Like Christ, I am crucified, fastened to my easel with nails."⁷

Two windows of the Union Church portray the crucifixion of Christ. The first, the large narthex window, installed in memory of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., is another specific adaptation of Chagall's familiar vocabulary—flowers, animals and birds, winged angels—to a New Testament theme: the parable of the Good Samaritan as related in the Gospel of Luke. Both it and Window 1, a memorial window to Michael C. Rockefeller, incorporate the crucified figure of Christ as the symbol of hope and redemption. It is significant that in the Good Samaritan window the crucifixion is in the top zone of the window, with the acts of the Good Samaritan following a path physically as well as spiritually up toward the Christ figure. The window for Michael Rockefeller, called *The*



6. Study for *Ezekiel*. (Cat. 23.)

But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house; open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.

And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;

And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.

So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.

And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

Ezekiel 2:8-3:3

Crucifixion, is inscribed "Seek and Ye Shall Find," from the Book of Matthew. The quotation was suggested by Steven C. Rockefeller as symbolic of the search of youth (in this case specifically his brother Michael, who had died in New Guinea) for the meaning of life through the example and teachings of Christ; he asked that a symbol of Christ be included in this window along with Old Testament symbols.

The subjects for the windows were in fact chosen in dialogue between Chagall and David Rockefeller and his nephew Steven, working with the Trustees and Deacons of Union Church. Steven Rockefeller wrote a searchingly thoughtful series of proposals to Chagall about the eight windows commissioned later, and several of these proposals were incorporated in the final choices. Chagall's final decision on subjects, however, was made on a formal basis—his feeling that single bold subjects, like the single figure of a Prophet, would be more effective in the small windows of the church than episodic multipart compositions. His choices of subject and the composition of the windows have direct affinities with his etched Bible illustrations. The verses treated in Windows 3, 6, and 7 are the same as for Plates 89, 105, and 103 in *The Bible* commissioned by Vollard.

The history of the Union Church commission begins in the early sixties. Shortly before his death in 1954 Matisse had completed a memorial window to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. When her husband, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., died in 1960, their children began to reflect on a comparable memorial to him. In 1962, after seeing Chagall's windows for the Hadassah Medical Center Synagogue on temporary display at the Louvre in Paris, David Rockefeller initiated the commission. Chagall first suggested a biblical subject from the Psalms or Prophets. However, he chose the final subject, the Good Samaritan, from a list of ten submitted by the Trustees and Deacons of Union Church, with David Rockefeller, as one of the donors, acting as intermediary. By April



7. Study for *Jeremiah*. (Cat. 24.)

I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chains heavy.

Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.

He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.

Lamentations 3:1-9

1963 a memorial window for Michael Rockefeller was being discussed.

In May 1964 Chagall visited Pocantico Hills, and raised the possibility of designs for the other windows in the church. Seven windows remained. Six were undecorated; one already contained a stained-glass memorial, which was later moved to the Church Library, with the permission of the donor's family, so that Chagall's windows would form a coherent visual cycle. The eighth window was added when the Cherubim window, originally intended as a memorial to Michael, was deemed inappropriate; it was inserted into a false window opening, and the Crucifixion was designed for Michael. In September 1964 the narthex window was installed. Until then no decision had been taken on any more ambitious project, but after the installation of this window it was decided to go forward with what finally became the cycle of eight windows. These were completed and installed in 1966.

The windows are a fascinating adaptation of painting and etching techniques to those of stained glass. Chagall's initial concern in his Bible etchings had been to make the black and white as coloristic as any painting, to irradiate the plates with light. Working with glass is the art of modulating light as the primary medium. Normally stained-glass windows are assembled from many panes of multicolor glass in order to imitate medieval mosaiclike stained glass. But working with Charles Marq at the Atelier Jacques Simon in Rheims, Chagall and the artisans of the Saint-Just glassworks perfected a new technique, "glass painting," that enables Chagall to create rich and varied tonalities, giving an impression of painterly texture, depth of tone, and sparkle like that in his gouache studies. A similar technique had been used at Assy in collaboration with the Atelier Bony in Paris, but it was elaborated and refined



8. Study for *Isaiah*. (Cat. 25.) A tribute to Ray B. and Nelie C. Walker

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

But now, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.

Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

Isaiah 64:6-11

and the collaborative procedure perfected with Marq for the windows of the Metz Cathedral.

Chagall used white or tinted glass covered with a thin film of color that can be partially removed with acid for toning and lightening. Preparatory sketches are made, like those illustrated here, initially simply in pencil or brush and ink to establish the iconography, then in more detail to establish contrasts and tonalities in black and white and gray. The gouache drawings are worked and reworked until a more or less final scheme is realized. Nonfigurative sketches with scraps of fabric and patches of color are an intermediate step that establishes broad color positions. Finally the gouaches form the basis for cartoons for Charles Marq; following the rhythm of lines and colors, Marq lays out the lines of the lead framework that holds the panes of glass together. Next the tinted glass is treated with acid to obtain the lighter areas and clear areas indicated by the gouaches. Chagall then begins work directly on the mounted glass, working with paint and acid, "exchanging colors and modifying highlights; but chiefly he uses grisaille, drawing lines, spreading the pigment, diluting, dabbing it with a rag, adding accents, hammering, scratching with the brush handle. He treats the glass as he does the paper in his India ink drawings . . ."⁸ Now he is no longer working to produce light and color, as he did in the Bible etchings, but rather to modify existing light and color.

As James Johnson Sweeney has observed, if Chagall is "an artist who has been content with a limited repertory of representational forms," he has shown a persistent effort to deepen and enrich his effects "by a steady development of more complex techniques."⁹ Glass painting has been Chagall's most recent and dramatic move in this sense. Concerned earlier with light as it emanated from reflected sources, Chagall has become involved with the modulation of light as a direct source. In medieval times light was understood as God's messenger; the windows of the medieval cathedral shed the light of God's word on the assembled people. Chagall's involvement with light generates its own subtle and complex poetry of tone, texture, color, and space, bringing a new dimension to both his art and the ancient craft of stained glass.

Since Chagall sees the artist's role as transmitting an untranslatable message, the mingling of that message with the light of God in his windows must be a source of satisfaction to him—an intimation that the message will indeed find its way.

B.R.

Notes

1. Franz Meyer, *Marc Chagall* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.), p. 384.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
3. Quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, *Marc Chagall* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), p. 7.
4. Quoted in *The Rockefeller Memorial Windows* (Pocantico Hills: The Union Church of Pocantico Hills, n.d.), p. 20.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
6. For a complete discussion see William S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assisi* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 134-49.
7. Meyer, p. 490.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 589.
9. Sweeney, p. 71.

MARC CHAGALL, French

Born Vitebsk, Russia, 1887
In France 1910-14, 1923-41; in U.S.A. 1941-48
Returned to France 1948

Catalog

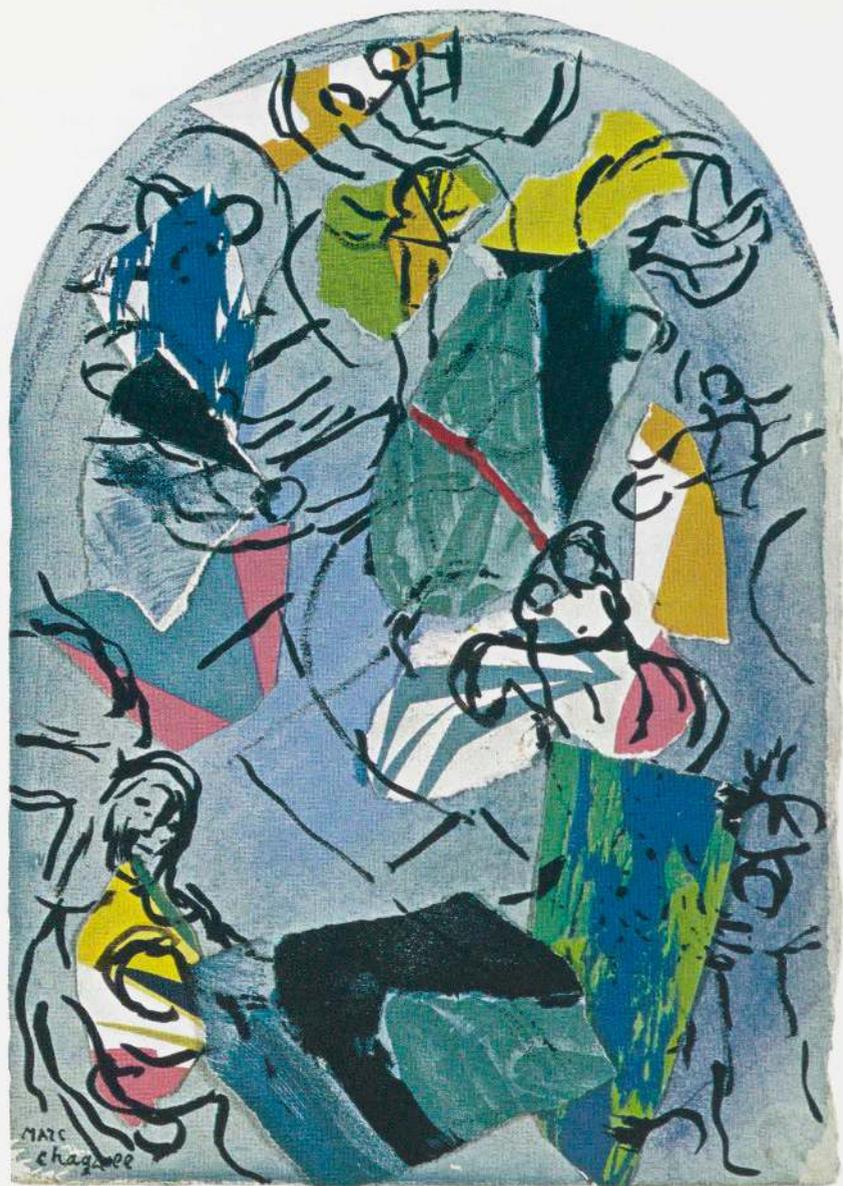
In this exhibition of studies for the Union Church windows, presented at The Museum of Modern Art from April 13 to May 30, 1978, all the works are purchases from the artist and are in The Rockefeller University Collection. In the listings below, the dates indicated for the works do not appear on the drawings themselves. Dimensions are for sheet size and are given in inches and centimeters, height preceding width.

1. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Pen, brush and ink, and pencil, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (18.9 x 11.8 cm) (irreg.).
2. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Pen, brush and ink, and pencil, touched with gouache, 9 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23 x 18.8 cm) (irreg.).
3. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Red crayon on reverse of book page, 12 x 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (30.5 x 22.1 cm).
4. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Red crayon on reverse of book page, 12 x 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (30.5 x 22.1 cm).
5. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Watercolor and pencil, 15 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 10 $\frac{9}{16}$ " (38.5 x 26.8 cm).
6. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Gouache, pastel, pen, brush and ink, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (51.1 x 33.5 cm).
7. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Collage of cut, torn, and pasted papers with gouache, watercolor, crayon, and brush and ink, 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (27.7 x 19.4 cm).
8. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Gouache, wash, pen, brush and ink, 29 $\frac{13}{16}$ x 22 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (75.8 x 56.4 cm).
9. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Gouache, wash, pen, brush and ink, 30 x 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (76 x 56.2 cm).
10. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Pencil, 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (57.3 x 38.5 cm).
11. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Pen and ink, and pencil, touched with gouache, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (50.3 x 32.5 cm).
12. *The Good Samaritan*. (1963-64.) Pastel, pen, brush and ink, pencil, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (51.1 x 33.3 cm).
13. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Pastel and pencil, 7 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (19.2 x 13.4 cm) (irreg.).
14. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Pencil, pen, brush and ink, 16 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{16}$ " (42.1 x 26.5 cm).
15. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Pen and ink, and pencil, 16 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (42.1 x 28 cm).
16. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Pen and ink, and pencil, 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (42.1 x 26.8 cm).
17. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Gouache, wash, pen, brush and ink, and collage of scraps of fabric and painted paper, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (42 x 27.7 cm).
18. *The Crucifixion (Seek and Ye Shall Find)*. (1965-66.) Pastel, pen, brush and ink, and pencil, 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{11}{16}$ " (42.1 x 27.2 cm).
19. *Joel*. (1965-66.) Watercolor, pen and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, touched with gouache, 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{15}{16}$ " (56.5 x 37.9 cm).
20. *Elijah*. (1965-66.) Gouache, watercolor, pen and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15" (56.6 x 37.9 cm).
21. *Daniel*. (1965-66.) Gouache, wash, watercolor, pen and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 15" (56.4 x 38 cm).
22. *Cherubim*. (1965-66.) Gouache, watercolor, pen and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15" (56.5 x 38 cm).
23. *Ezekiel*. (1965-66.) Gouache, wash, watercolor, pen, brush and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (56.5 x 37.5 cm).
24. *Jeremiah*. (1965-66.) Gouache, wash, watercolor, pen, brush and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (56.5 x 38.5 cm).
25. *Isaiah*. (1965-66.) Gouache, pen and ink, pencil, and collage of fabric, 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15" (56.1 x 38 cm).
26. Color studies for four windows: 1, 2, 3, 4. (1965-66.) Gouache, pencil, and collage of fabric, silver and gold paper, 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{7}{16}$ " (22.5 x 64.7 cm).
27. Color studies for three windows: 5, 6, 7. (1965-66.) Gouache, watercolor, pencil, and collage of fabric, 9 x 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (22.8 x 49.8 cm).

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Museum, we would like to thank Dr. Frederick Seitz, President of The Rockefeller University, for generously agreeing to lend to this exhibition, as well as Dr. Joseph Ernst of the Rockefeller Archive Center and the Reverend Dr. Marshall L. Smith, Minister of the Union Church of Pocantico Hills, for their gracious cooperation. We would also like to thank Olive Bragazzi for her invaluable help in every phase of this exhibition and publication.

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Study for *The Good Samaritan*. (Cat. 7.) In memory of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.