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The *White Crucifixion* and the Radical New of the Resurrection

This paper offers a hermeneutic-theological reading of Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion* (1938) as a visual meditation on the paradox of the Cross and the Resurrection – the inseparability of suffering and transfiguration. Painted in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, Chagall's luminous white Christ, draped in a tallit, stands amid burning synagogues, fleeing exiles, and the devastation of Jewish life. Through this audacious fusion of Jewish and Christian symbols, the painting becomes a *theologia crucis* of endurance (*ὑπομονή*), lament, and hope. The paper interprets the *Crucifixion* not as defeat but as divine *μαρτυρία* – witness to a love that abides (*μένειν*) within history's darkest hour. Drawing on the theological insights of Hans Urs von Balthasar, the phenomenology of revelation in Heidegger and Gadamer, and the symbolic grammar of color, the analysis shows how Chagall's white radiance anticipates the "radical new" of the Resurrection: not as reversal but as unveiling (*ἀλήθεια*) within brokenness. The study concludes that *White Crucifixion* is both an artistic midrash and a Paschal icon – a space where divine presence dwells in absence, where black and white become the grammar of faith, and where hope, transfigured by waiting, becomes the practice of resurrection.

Key words: Resurrection, Marc Chagall, *White Crucifixion*, *theologia crucis*, Hans Urs von Balthasar.

To speak of the Resurrection is not to recount a past event but to step into a mystery that continually disrupts our time-bound categories. Theological thinking resists the temptation to reduce the Resurrection to a symbol, a theoretical formula, or a mere act of remembering. Its task is more radical: to bring into the open (*ἀλήθεια*, truth-as-unveiling) that which discloses itself to those who allow themselves to be taken captive by the event (*sich selbst in Anspruch nehmen lassen*). This is

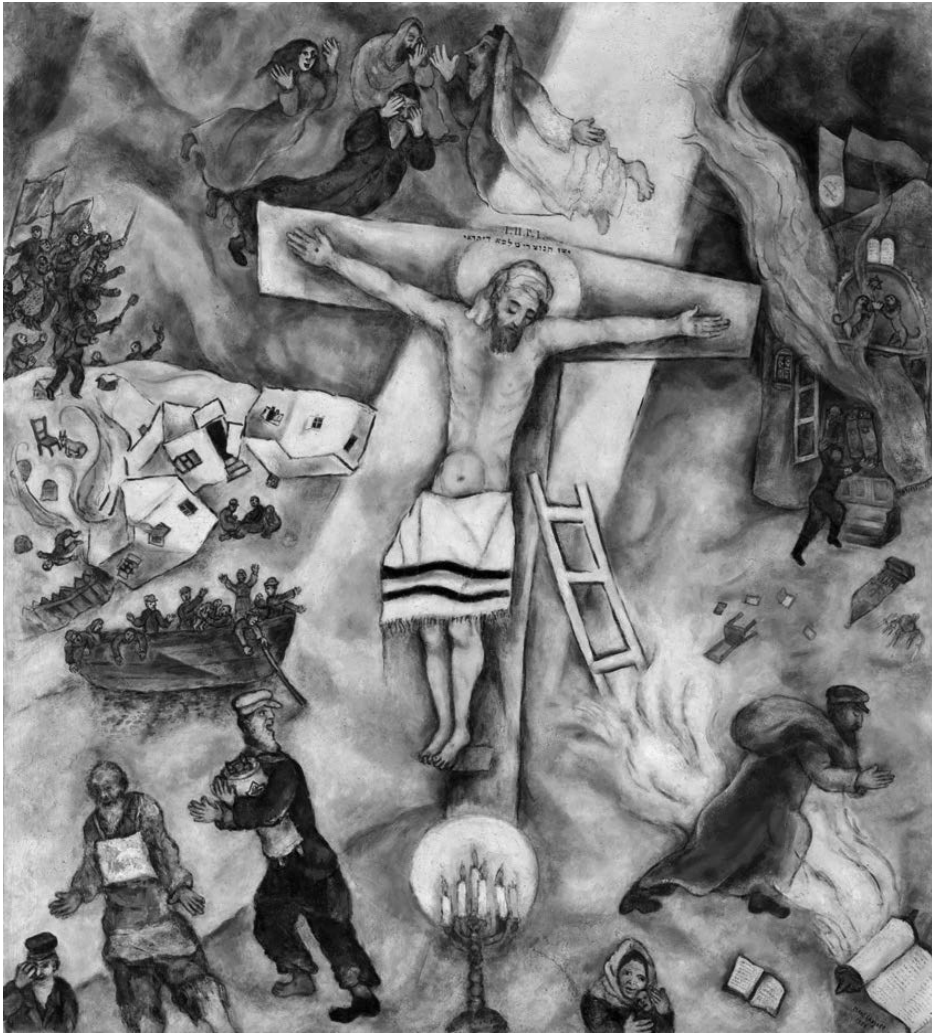
not about solving the Resurrection but dwelling in its radiance, with the attentiveness needed to be transformed by it. The Resurrection demands of us a new kind of perception, a readiness to see not only with the eyes but with our whole being. It invites us into a mode of seeing that is no longer a simple observation but *participatory attunement*, inseparable from response and transformation. Hence, it implies thorough receptivity, a kind of *comprehension* that is not mere sense data but a *gathering into oneself*, an *assimilation into meaning*. Perception becomes an act of surrender to the world’s self-disclosure, not by mastery and control (*Beherrschung*), but by receptive openness. Resurrection is not a phenomenon to be grasped, not an event to be noted, but a *λόγος* – *event*, a happening of meaning that gathers us into a new horizon of understanding – a new world. To perceive the Resurrection is to allow ourselves to be seized (*per-cipere*) by the *Λόγος*, to be gathered (*λέγειν*) into its meaning, and to dwell in the truth that is unconcealed (*ἀληθεύειν*) through it. In this sense, perception becomes a mode of existence: not neutral or detached, but *engaged, interpreted, and transformed*. It is a readiness of the whole being – open to the world, responsive to its address, and vulnerable to being changed in the very act of perceiving.

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Resurrection is the moment in which the *ἀρχή* (*An-fang*, beginning) and the *ἔσχατον* (end) are no longer separated by linear time but drawn together in the blessed intensity of *καιρός*. This is not chronological time, but the time of encounter, interruption, and fulfillment. In the risen Christ, the fullness of time erupts into the now: not as a conclusion but as *An-fang*, a new beginning that gathers all history into itself. To think Resurrection is to let ourselves be carried – *Leitenlassen* – into this space where wounds do not disappear but are transfigured. It is here, in the space of transfiguration, that we are called to remain – *ver-weilen* – with the Crucified to hear the silence between death and life. This is the silence of Holy Saturday, where the world holds its breath between loss and promise, and the heart learns to wait. Theology, if it is faithful, gives voice to this silence – not by explaining it, but letting it resonate in word, image, and liturgy.

This introduction does not introduce in a mechanical sense – it initiates and invites. The unfolding of the Resurrection is where theology begins. It is in this spirit that we now turn to a reading of the work of art – not to illustrate or embellish doctrine, but to enter, with reverence, the visual *καιρός* of Resurrection that Chagall dares to depict: a radiance rising from within the brokenness of the world.

The Crucified Jew(s): Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion*



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The Crucifixion as a Universal Symbol: A Landscape of Destruction and Endurance (ύπομονή)

Marc Chagall, though a practicing Hasidic Jew, repeatedly returned to the theme of the Crucifixion in his art. His *White Crucifixion*, painted in 1938, stands as a visual lament for the suffering of the Jewish people, persecuted, exiled, and exterminated. Created in the shadow of *Kristallnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass – when synagogues were torched, sacred scrolls desecrated, and Jewish homes destroyed, the

painting captures the theological and historical rupture of that darkening time. But more than lament, it articulates a paradox: between divine presence and historical absence, between luminous endurance and overwhelming despair. The horizon behind Christ is dark and smoke-filled – a visual embodiment of the existential and moral crisis engulfing Europe. The moral collapse of a continent is inscribed into the scenery, yet the painting does not allow darkness the final word. In the face of cultural erasure and divine silence, *White Crucifixion* becomes a theology of resistance: a proclamation of the enduring light, of a presence that remains when all else turns away.

At the center of the painting, the crucified Christ, wrapped in a *tallit*, radiates silent white light. Around him unfolds a world in chaos – villages aflame, refugees fleeing, elders praying in powerlessness, and a man marked *Ich bin Jude* (“I am a Jew”). These images mirror the horror of *Kristallnacht* and the broader violence against Jewish communities across Europe. Yet the contrast between the dark horizon and the radiant Christ reveals not mere aesthetic tension but theological provocation: How does faith endure when God appears absent?

The whiteness of Christ’s figure is not merely visual. In Christian iconography, white is the color of transfiguration and resurrection, the angel at the empty tomb, and garments made pure through suffering. Resurrection is not painted as victory, but as presence: *Ἐμμανουήλ* – God with us – even in destruction. This is no triumphalism but rather a *μαρτυρία*, a witness to divine *ἀλήθεια*, disclosed in the midst of catastrophe.

The crucified figure is not depicted as a distant Christian savior but as a suffering Jew, drawing Jesus back into the story of his people. The *tallit* affirms his Jewish identity, reframing the Crucifixion as a symbol of Jewish martyrdom and enduring faith. Chagall’s bold theological gesture invites both Jewish and Christian viewers to confront shared histories of pain and the possibility of reconciliation through compassion and memory. The destruction around Christ resonates beyond its immediate context, becoming a universal symbol of oppression, exile, and the fragility of human dignity.

Christ’s posture is not one of triumph but of witness. He does not command; He abides. His open arms do not impose redemption but invite recognition. In this way, Chagall transforms the Crucifixion into a symbol of *μαρτυρία* – bearing witness to suffering, to solidarity, and to the irrepressible possibility of renewal. The spiritual heart of *White Crucifixion* is endurance, not as passive survival but as active steadfastness. The New Testament notion of *ὑπομονή* (Rom 5: 3-5; James 1: 3-4)

evokes not a stoic acceptance of fate but the strength to remain beneath suffering while keeping one's gaze on the horizon. The painting does not negate despair. It acknowledges it, offering a luminous response: the faith that remains and the light that refuses to die out.

One of the most striking elements of the painting is its use of light. Christ glows with a transcendent stillness while a menorah at the bottom corner burns with warmth and tenderness. These lights stand against the backdrop of violence and collapse, signaling that even in devastation, divine presence endures. The menorah and the *tallit* anchor the Crucifixion in Jewish tradition, suggesting that faith survives through prayer, memory, and community even when hope seems eclipsed.

The *Tallit*: covering, identity, and sacred suffering

Among the most striking and theologically resonant features of *White Crucifixion* is Chagall's depiction of Jesus wearing a *tallit*, the traditional Jewish prayer shawl, wrapped modestly around his hips. This seemingly small detail becomes a profound act of reclamation. It restores Jesus to his Jewish identity, not as a universalized Christian icon severed from his roots, but as a Jewish prophet and martyr, a son of Israel, suffering in solidarity with his people. In doing so, Chagall directly challenges centuries of Christian iconography that have often stripped Jesus of his Jewishness. The *tallit* draws him back into the covenantal tradition, into the suffering endured by generations of Jews in exile, pogroms, and genocide. The crucifixion, here, does not belong exclusively to Christian redemptive theology. It becomes, too, an expression of Jewish martyrdom, a visual witness to shared persecution and historical endurance.

In Jewish tradition, the *tallit* is a garment of prayer, modesty, and sanctification. Draped across Jesus's loins, it affirms the dignity of the body even in the most vulnerable moment of death. It stands in stark contrast to traditional images of the crucified Christ exposed and humiliated. In Chagall's vision, suffering is not stripped bare, it is made sacred. The *tallit* becomes a liturgical sign, transforming the crucifixion into an act of intercession: a prayer offered not above suffering, but from its very depths. This gesture of covering recalls the story of Noah's sons, who veiled their father's nakedness with reverence (Gen 9: 23). It is an act of compassion that refuses to turn suffering into spectacle. By clothing Christ with the *tallit*, Chagall shields his humanity and

extends that reverence to all those whose pain has been ignored or who have been exposed to violence.

The *tallit* functions as a double symbol. It honors the personal suffering of Jesus while binding him to the communal trauma of his people. Set against the backdrop of burning synagogues and fleeing refugees, it draws a line of continuity between the crucified body and the wounded body of Jewish history. The substitution of the Roman loincloth with the *tallit* is a confident theological move, offering a vision not of split but of reconciliation. Jesus is no longer a figure pulled away from Judaism, but one returned into its heart. In this way, Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* becomes a visual theology of sacred suffering, where pain is neither denied nor sentimentalized but woven into the garments of memory, prayer, and presence. The *tallit* sanctifies Christ’s death, reframes it within the story of Jewish endurance, and opens a space where Christian and Jewish viewers alike are called to encounter the crucifixion not as a symbol of separation but as a possibility of shared compassion, memory, and hope.

The pilgrimage interrupted

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White Crucifixion offers a prophetic vision. The central figure of Christ radiates light, symbolizing the mystery of redemption that extends beyond individual suffering to encompass all of humanity. The painting, layered with symbols, challenges and expands our understanding of pilgrimage, chosenness, and covenant. In the biblical narrative, the people of the covenant are often depicted as pilgrims, journeying through history with God as their guide – from Abraham’s call to leave his homeland, to the Exodus from Egypt, to the return from exile in Babylon. This pilgrimage is both physical and spiritual, a movement toward the fulfillment of divine promises. Chagall interrupts this narrative. The fleeing figures evoke not the hopeful pilgrim but the displaced and terrified exile. Their movement is not toward a promised land but away from violence, persecution, and ruin. The flames consuming their villages and the destruction surrounding them reflect the historical trauma of pogroms and the Holocaust. These figures are not ascending towards a sacred destiny but escaping annihilation. And yet, this interruption discloses a paradox: their flight, though driven by despair, bears witness to the resilience of a people who continue to move, to hope, to survive. Above the fleeing figures and burning synagogues, a band of light shines, containing Hebrew texts and symbols of divine presence. This light testifies that even in

moments of the deepest darkness, the covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not extinguished. The journey continues. The *Shekhinah* – the indwelling presence of God – remains with the people, even in exile and suffering.

This interplay between despair and hope resonates with the prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Bible, where visions of judgment and ruin are often accompanied by promises of renewal. As the *Book of Lamentations* cries out in grief – “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!” (Lam 1: 1) – it also gestures toward divine compassion: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end” (Lam 3: 22). Likewise, Isaiah speaks into exile not with abandonment, but with promise: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem” (Is 40: 1-2).

White Crucifixion invites viewers to reflect on the interconnect-edness of their histories, faiths, and experiences of suffering. It is a profound visual *midrash* – an expression of solidarity, lament, and resistance. It underscores the universal significance of Christ’s suffering and the light of redemption that shines through it. By placing Christ at the center of the Jewish narrative of affliction, Chagall opens a space for theological encounter, dialogue, and mutual understanding. He dares to show the crucifixion not merely as a Christian symbol but as a universal call to hope, resilience, and transformation amid the darkness of human history.

The courage to hope and wait: presence in absence

In *White Crucifixion*, Marc Chagall weaves together two enduring threads of faith: the courage to hope and the patience to wait. Hope is not sentimental optimism but a resilient refusal to let despair speak the final word.

Waiting, too, is not passive. It is *ύπομονή*, a disciplined, active endurance shaped by centuries of the Jewish exile, persecution, and longing for the Messiah. The stillness of Christ on the cross, the elders lifting their lamenting prayers, the menorah burning through the surrounding darkness – these gestures embody a spiritual posture that holds space for redemption not yet seen. Hope gives waiting its vision; waiting gives hope its strength.

And yet, the painting is populated not only by figures of faith but by those who flee, turning away in fear, sorrow, or the paralysis of disorientation. They reflect the universal impulse to escape suffering and avoid the mystery it conceals. Their absence of presence sharply

contrasts with one who is not depicted but whose biblical presence looms large: Mary.

In the Gospel narrative, Mary remains at the foot of the cross. As *Ὁδηγήτρια*, she points to Christ. Her silence is not emptiness but a theology of presence. She does not explain suffering; she abides within it. Her steadfastness becomes a hermeneutics of dwelling, a staying that interprets without resolving, a faith not rooted in certainty, but in the willingness to remain when all else breaks apart. In her, we find an interpretive key: the courage to dwell in mystery without resolving it and perceive holiness in what appears forsaken.

Chagall's omission of Mary may be intentional, creating a space into which we are called. Her absence is not a void but an invitation: to become witnesses, remain where others flee, and bear hope not as consolation but as solidarity. Presence in absence is not a paradox to be solved. It is a truth to be lived. To remain, as Mary does, is a spiritual and ethical stance. It is the courage to listen to the silence of suffering and receive it as something that speaks. It is the humility to point, not toward resolution, but the Crucified One, where divine love abides (*μένω*) in its most vulnerable form. And it is the strength to dwell faithfully in the liminal space between death and resurrection, despair and hope.

White Crucifixion does not resolve this tension. It intensifies it. Yet in doing so, it invites us to embody a different kind of faith: not one that escapes the darkness, but one that shines quietly within it. Mary's absence becomes a summons. Her fidelity turns into a path (*ὁδός*). Through the light of the crucified Christ, we are asked to remain: Not to explain, but to witness; not to flee, but to wait. For it is often in the very space of absence that the mystery of divine presence is most fully revealed.

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Crucifixion as resurrection: the inseparability of suffering and redemption

The theme of crucifixion as resurrection reveals a profound theological paradox: suffering and glory are not opposites but inseparably joined in the heart of the Christian faith. Drawing on Orthodox theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion*, this vision insists that redemption is not achieved despite suffering, but through it. Suffering is not bypassed but transfigured – it becomes the very place where divine presence is revealed.

In Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Cross is not a defeat to be reversed by the Resurrection, but already the manifestation of divine

glory. The theology of *θέωσις* – divinization – sees in Christ’s suffering a transformative act that opens humanity to participation in divine life. Iconographic tradition affirms this: the crucified Christ appears serene, radiant, and crowned with light. Glory does not wait for the tomb to be emptied; it shines forth from the cross itself.

Hans Urs von Balthasar carries this vision further in his theology of Holy Saturday. Christ’s descent into the silence of the grave is the deepest movement of love – God’s self-emptying (*κένωσις*) reaching even into abandonment. In this radical descent, divine glory is made perfect not through power but through vulnerability. The “white glory of the Cross”, as Balthasar names it, is the paradoxical light that emerges from surrender, love that conquers not by overcoming but by remaining.

This theological vision takes visual form in *White Crucifixion*. Chagall’s Christ stands not above history, but within it. His body does not transcend suffering; it dwells in its midst. And yet, he radiates white light, not as spectacle, but as quiet fidelity. The whiteness does not erase the darkness – it inhabits it. The chaos surrounding Christ – burning scrolls, shattered synagogues, fleeing bodies – speaks to the historical darkness of Jewish suffering. The blackness of exile and violence is not a background but a force that presses in on every corner of the canvas. And yet, light persists. The burning menorah, like the glowing *tallit*, speaks to faith that refuses extinction. Chagall’s vision does not sentimentalize suffering; it bears witness to it and, in doing so, discloses the mystery of resurrection: that divine presence is most luminous where it seems most hidden.

This is the very drama of the Holy Saturday, the liminal space between death and life, where nothing is resolved, but everything is held in tension. Christ’s wounds are not erased by resurrection. They remain visible, glorified, not denied but transfigured. The Resurrection does not cancel the Crucifixion; it fulfills it. This is the core of a Christian theology of glory: not a victory over suffering, but a love that remains within it and renders it meaningful. Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* thus becomes more than a lament or protest. It is a visual *Paschal* icon. It dwells in the unresolved space between destruction and hope, abandonment and promise. It does not offer closure but invites decision: will we turn away like the fleeing figures or remain in fidelity like Mary at the cross, whose absence in the painting is a space we are called to inhabit?

To remain is not to understand but to accompany. It is to trust that resurrection is hidden in the wound and that presence is born in

apparent absence. Chagall’s Christ does not demand belief. He simply abides, luminous and still, asking whether we will turn toward the light or continue to flee. Resurrection here is not a triumph to be grasped but a mystery to be received. It is the quiet courage to believe that even in shattered history, the divine does not vanish but dwells in the silence, the darkness, and the luminous heart of suffering itself.

The logic of love: liturgy (λογικὴ λατρεία) as the enactment of resurrection

In *Sermo Guelferbytanus*, St. Augustine speaks with astonishment of the paradox at the heart of Christian faith: “*Magnum est quod futurum a Dómino promíttitur nobis; sed multo est maius quod recólimus iam factum esse pro nobis... Multo incredibílius iam factum est, quod mórtuus est propter hómines Deus*” – “Great is what the Lord promises us for the future, but far greater is what we recall has already been done for us... Far more incredible is what has already happened: that God died for humankind.” In Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*, this incredibility is visualized not as a triumph but as a luminous paradox: the dying God, draped in a Jewish *tallit*, becomes the very site where divine solidarity with human suffering is most visible. Christ’s glowing body amidst historical darkness reveals what Augustine names as the most astonishing act of divine love, not only promised glory but an already accomplished descent into human anguish. The painting, like the sermon, invites contemplation (*Besinnung*) of a mystery that resists simple comprehension: the death of God is not a theological scandal but the beginning of new life. In Chagall’s rendering, death bears not the weight of defeat, but of a radiant presence – God’s unfathomable decision to suffer *with* and *for* – a visual echo of Augustine’s awe-filled words. The *iam factum est* – “it has already been done” – shines not as a memory sealed in time, but as a luminous wound still open to the world, revealing that the most *incredible* act of God is not that He *will* raise the dead, but that He *has already* chosen to die for us all. What could be more incredible? And yet this incredibility, far from closing the book of faith, opens it anew with each generation, each wound, and each cry. In Chagall’s painting, the white radiance is not a halo of resolution, but the lingering light of that divine “already,” still bleeding into history.

God teaches us not only through the spoken word but by giving Himself. In the Eucharist, Λόγος becomes *teacher* (ὁ Διδάσκαλος) and *nourishment* (τροφή), *wisdom* (σοφία) and *life* (ζωή). He gives us not only

a lesson but Himself as the food that forms, enlightens, and raises us into communion. The λογική λατρεία, our “reasonable worship,” is not a cold intellectual assent but a worship conformed to the Λόγος: it is the worship of those who receive and are thereby transformed.

God, Who is truth and gift, forms us from within. The Eucharist is the place where God feeds us with Himself – *cibus viatorum*, the food of those on the way (*unterwegs*) – and in this nourishment, the Word enters our flesh. As the ancient *Lauda Sion* proclaims in the *Corpus Christi* liturgy: “*Ecce panis angelorum, factus cibus viatorum: vere panis filiorum.*” “Behold the bread of angels, made the food of pilgrims: truly the bread of the children.” In receiving Him, we are shaped into disciples who not only understand (*begreifen*) but are also seized (*ergriffen*) by the power of the Word made flesh. Our worship becomes the life that thinks, speaks, and loves in truth.

The unveiling of truth – the ἀλήθεια that nourishes and transforms – is never exhausted. It does not age, fade, or settle into certainty. It will always be new because it is not a *concept* (έννοια, *Begriff*) but a *living presence* (ζῶσα παρουσία). The contrast between thought held vs. presence encountered, mental containment vs. relational unveiling, highlights the movement from static understanding to dynamic encounter. It draws us ever further, ever deeper, into the radiance of divine life. For that which we come to know today will remain forever new. It distills the very rhythm of the Resurrection: not a conclusion, but a beginning that never ends.

When theology speaks of the last things, we often turn to the Greek term ἔσχατα, from which we derive *eschatology*, the study of the final realities: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Yet the Latin tradition offers this reflection a surprising twist. The title of the treatise is *De novissimis*, literally, *On the Newest Things*. What is “last” in sequence is also what is most new in essence. This is not a mere linguistic curiosity but a profound theological affirmation: Christ, in Whom all things find their end (τέλος), is also the one Who makes all things new – the *novissima*. He is not outdated, distant, or lost to the past. On the contrary, He is ever-present, ever-new – *semper novus*. The *novissima* are not behind us but ahead, drawing us forward with the freshness of the Spirit.

In this light, the end is not exhaustion or closure, but renewal. The final things are the most up-to-date things. The ἔσχατον is not an expiry but a bursting forth. Christ is the one who, even at the end of time, remains the most contemporary presence: *Ego sum Alpha et Omega... Ecce nova facio omnia: Ἴδού καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα* (Rev 21: 5). To contemplate

the *novissima* is to contemplate the radiance of what is to come, not as repetition or return, but as the unveiling of a fullness that has always been waiting to be born. The paradox of the end is that it is the beginning of what never ages.

Before the soaring notes of Händel awaken our ears to resurrectional triumph, we are invited to dwell in the mystery of longing – Christ’s longing. “*Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum antequam patiar*” (Lk 22: 15): “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” These words open the door to a depth of divine yearning that stretches far beyond the confines of the Upper Room. The phrase – both in its Latin and Greek forms (ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα) – is a Semitic idiom that intensifies emotion, but its etymological roots evoke even more. *Desiderium*, from *de-sidus*, “from the stars,” suggests a celestial ache, a longing born of absence, as though the heavens themselves were leaning in toward this moment. In Greek, ἐπιθυμία captures a reaching desire, a holy yearning, no longer a distortion of will but the will of God itself, bending low to embrace the world.

This is no ordinary hunger. It is a cosmic desire: Christ’s Paschal longing not merely to share a meal but to become the meal, the Lamb slain, the bread broken, the blood poured out. The Last Supper is not a mere farewell gesture. It is the beginning of a new creation. His longing is not for an event but for communion, not for memory but for presence. *A-dieu* is not a goodbye that signals departure, but a giving-over to God. It is the language of offering, trust, and love that allows us to remain more deeply. In the Eucharist, Christ’s *a-dieu* becomes an abiding presence: a farewell that does not remove but transfigures.

Here, the Liturgy is born – not as a mere recollection, not as ritualized nostalgia (as longing for the past), but as λόγος in act, the embodied Word offered and enacted: λογική λατρεία – the rational, responsive worship of the body, both Christ’s and ours. This is not worship from afar, but participation in the very movement of Christ, in the very logic of his Incarnation, death, and rising. And so the Church, from that moment on, does not remember a distant Christ. She encounters him. *Desiderio desideravi* becomes the rhythm of the Eucharistic heart. The liturgy is the continuation of Incarnation, a divine *Vollzug*, a performative enactment of love that will not rest until all have tasted the joy of the Paschal mystery.

Thus, when we hear St. Paul cry, “*Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus, ἐτύθη τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν, Χριστό*” – “Christ, our Pascha, has been sacrificed” – we are not merely asserting death. We are proclaiming

passage: a crossing over from suffering into glory, from longing into fulfillment. In this way, the liturgical celebration is not a retreat from history's wounds but their very redemption. It is the communion of heaven and earth, not merely a fellowship but a union through shared gift. To be in communion is to be drawn into one life, one reality, one mystery. Communion is both the path and the form of union, the act of becoming *unum*; *κοινωνία* is the shared life that leads into *ένωσις* (union), which is *θέωσις*, the mystical union with God. It is the mystery of heaven and earth brought together, not in theory, but in presence: in Christ, with Him, and through Him, in us (*per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso*). This communion begins not with brass instruments but with the whispered longing of a God who desires to dwell with His people. Only now, in this space of divine desire made flesh, can the trumpet sound. And Händel's exultant music, when it comes, does not begin a new song. It continues one already begun in the yearning heart of Christ.

Händel, *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*

In *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (1707), Händel stages a spiritual drama to a libretto by Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili. The allegorical figures – Beauty, Pleasure, Time, and Truth (*Disinganno*) – engage in a struggle in which fleeting splendor must ultimately bow before the enduring light of what is real. The music swells with the ache of relinquishment and the quiet majesty of unveiled truth. Händel gives voice to the soul's slow awakening. In one of the libretto's most poignant moments, *Disinganno* sings: "*Più non cura la bellezza / Chi ben vede ove sen va*"—"He no longer cares for beauty, who clearly sees where he is going." Here, truth is not a doctrine but a vision, something revealed only through the relinquishing of illusion. In our modern context, *disillusionment* often implies despair. Simone Weil challenges this: "Illusions are false gods; to consent to their disappearance is to consent to truth." For Weil, as for Pamphili, the stripping away of illusion is not loss but grace. It is a spiritual turning from illusion to the enduring light of *veritas*, echoing the New Testament's *ἀλήθεια*, the truth that sets us free (*ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς*, Jn 8: 32): the soul's slow turning toward what is. In the Greek tradition, truth is *ἀλήθεια* – not a static statement, but an unveiling, a disclosure of what longs to come into the light. *Ἀλήθεια* is the lifting of the veil (*λήθη*, forgetfulness or concealment), the revealing of what has always been present, waiting to be seen. Truth is what comes to light when we no longer resist

the light. Resurrection, then, is not the reversal of disillusionment, but its transfiguration: it is the moment when illusion falls away, and what remains is not absence, but presence.

White Crucifixion captures this theological tension, the moment (*καιρός*, *Augenblick*) of painful unveiling. The Jewish Christ, luminous in suffering, does not overcome darkness by force but transfigures it from within. Chagall’s Christ does not dazzle but bears – silent, radiant, unlooked-for. He is the truth that cannot be manufactured, only revealed. His triumph is not through domination, but through endurance; not beauty untouched, but beauty transfigured by suffering. Truth no longer veiled by time, but made radiant in love. He is the unveiled truth, not dazzling, but dwelling. And in the light of the Resurrection, *Disinganno* is no longer bitter exposure but sacred unveiling: a grace that reveals the *Λόγος* at the heart of what endures. Easter becomes the true *trionfo* of unveiled life. In the Easter dawn, the *ἀλήθεια* of God rises not to overwhelm us but to meet us exactly where the illusion breaks.

To read a work of art – be it a text, a painting, or a piece of music – is not to decode a hidden cipher or extract a pre-existing moral lesson but to enter into a dialogical event where meaning is unveiled through participation. In this hermeneutic encounter, understanding arises not by mastering the object but by dwelling with it, letting it speak. As Rilke inspires us, we are perhaps here not to define, but to *say* – to bring things into the open (*Ins-Offene-bringen*) more deeply than they could ever dream of being. The task of hermeneutics is thus not explanatory but disclosive. When we engage artistically and theologically with Händel’s aria, Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*, or the poetic intensity of the Bible, we do not simply learn *about* suffering or redemption, we are drawn into (*hineingezogen*) the space in which these become possible. Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and Heidegger’s *Ereignis* remind us that meaning emerges only in the openness of encounter, not in the security of possession. The work of art, in its autonomy and alterity, addresses us not with answers but with a call to dwell, respond, and be transformed. This is crucial for theology. To think the mystery of God – so utterly concrete that it enters flesh – is to read the world not as an object to be grasped, but as a work of art that invites participation. The Incarnation is not a static datum, but the unfolding of divine presence in the fragility of time. And the Resurrection is not the reversal of suffering, but its luminous transfiguration. In this light, the hermeneutic act becomes a theological gesture: to listen, be addressed, and open ourselves to the *Λόγος* not as explanation, but

as an event. Through art, we are not mere spectators (*Beobachter*) of the divine mystery – we dwell in its horizon. Interpreting such works means participating in their unfolding and stepping into a space where meaning becomes incarnate.

Resurrection as revelation: from *Weltgeschehen* (world-history) to *Heilsgeschichte* (the history of salvation)

The Resurrection does not take place within history. It transforms history itself. It is not an event added to the sequence of world affairs (*Weltgeschehen*), but the disclosure of God's own history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), into which we are invited not as disengaged spectators, but as participants. At the heart of Catholic teaching, hope – woven inseparably with faith and love – is not merely a virtue (*ἀρετή*), but a theological grace (*χάρις*): a gift, freely given, flowing from the mystery of divine generosity. "From His fullness we have all received – grace upon grace" (Jn 1: 16). Such superabounding grace does not impose; it invites. It longs to be welcomed. We are called to open ourselves to the revelation of God and to the quiet outpouring of His mercy. This grace does not leave us untouched. It empowers. It bestows upon us a strength not our own, a holy power that enables us to remain open in the face of mystery. And in this gesture of receptivity, salvation does not delay. It is already being born within us. "To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the power to become children of God" (Jn 1: 12). To be saved is to be born anew – cradled in the tender, trembling dawn of divine life.

Christ is risen – *Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*. The response comes not merely as confirmation, but as revelation: *Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη* – *truly* He is risen. In the word *ἀληθῶς*, we hear more than assent; we hear the pulse of *ἀληθεύειν* – to live and speak the truth, to let what is hidden be disclosed. The Resurrection is not a doctrine to be grasped. It is a reality that grasps us, a truth that unveils. It opens the tomb not only of Christ but of our own hearts. It is the *λόγος* breaking open our silence. The Resurrection is not an event locked in the past, but the eternal act of divine *ἀλήθεια*, the unveiling of life in the face of death, of God at the heart of our wounded world, beautifully holding together the divine *paradox of presence*. It is the moment when the tomb becomes a threshold, and truth is no longer an idea but a presence that moves within us.

Christ is risen not only *for* us but *within* us. In that rising, the silence of the grave is broken open by the Word who speaks. He is risen,

indeed, risen into us as the truth that frees, the light that reveals, the love that can be crucified but will never die. We are called to firmly believe that time and eternity belong to Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Risen Lord, to whom be glory and dominion forever. In His Resurrection, Christ opens for us the way into a new world – *κόσμος καινός* – and He Himself *introduces* us there (*εἰσ-άγω, intro-ducere*), for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή*, Jn 14: 6). The stone that seals the grave of our despair and unbelief is not removed by our efforts. It is God’s work (*τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ, opus Dei*). Our task is to allow ourselves to be led (*Leitenlassen*), to be brought in (*Einführenlassen*), to be drawn into this new life (*Bringenlassen*) that has already begun in Him.

The Resurrection is not the conclusion of the story but the radicalization of divine Revelation. “Read Moses and the prophets,” Jesus says. Believe. That is the request and the gift. When He entrusts the message of Resurrection to women, He does not simply challenge social expectations. He discloses what is essential: *faith*. It would have been easier to believe the apostles. Yet the point is not what we think of *who* speaks, but *what is spoken*, and whether we dare to believe it. God often chooses what is weakest and disregarded by the world (Paul’s scandal of the Cross, *σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ, scandalum crucis*). So too the prophets, who often spoke words they themselves struggled to believe. Their greatness lay in announcing what they could barely comprehend, trusting that it came from God. This is the tension we find in the divine teaching. Revelation is happening, the revelation of Revelation. The question is whether we will listen. And yet, even in this fragility of faith, divine glory does not withdraw. In the *Exsultet*, the Easter Proclamation, we are invited into the joy of the earth itself: “Be glad, let the earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King.” Even amidst war, catastrophe, and the deepest shadows, this glory still descends. It shone at Golgotha – precisely there – when Christ was crucified between criminals.

The glory of God does not wait for human worthiness. It diffuses itself (*bonum diffusivum sui*) through brokenness, illuminating the world’s brutal facticity (*Weltgeschehen*) and transforming it into salvation history. But this requires another kind of vision: the dialectic of seeing. We must learn to see that what seems most ordinary – earth, time, wounds – is already being flooded with divine radiance. As the Good Friday intercessions proclaim, it is this glory that has the power “to cleanse the world of all errors, banish disease, drive out hunger, unlock prisons, loosen fetters, grant to travelers safety, to pilgrims

return, health to the sick, and salvation to the dying.” To the Risen Christ belong time and eternity. He will not simply be with us at the end – He is the End that gives meaning to everything. And with Him, the end is not a ceasing, but a new beginning (*ein neuer Anfang*).

Coda: A hermeneutics of black and white – resurrection as a hermeneutic event

To live in the horizon of Resurrection is not to flee the blackness of suffering, nor to naïvely bask in the whiteness of hope. Rather, it is to remain in the space between, where lament and promise meet, where the Crucified and the Risen are one. *White Crucifixion* does not offer resolution, but revelation. The stark contrast of black and white is not an aesthetic device; it is a theological grammar of human existence. In the luminous whiteness of the suffering Christ, we are drawn into the paradox of divine presence: not a glory that eclipses pain, but one that transfigures it from within. The same Cross on which Jesus was hanged – the very sign erected to mock and humiliate Him – becomes, in the light of Resurrection, the most poignant sign of victory. It is the victory not of force but of love. The victory of mercy over mockery, of divine patience over the cruelty that sought to extinguish Him. In *White Crucifixion*, Chagall chooses to paint this Cross not as distant theology but as a way of dealing with his own suffering. Upon this Cross converges all the anger and meanness of humankind, all our failures to love, all our cruelty when love is refused. And yet, from within this violence, another reality shines forth: the immensity of God’s love for humankind. The Cross becomes, paradoxically, the gate of heaven, the very threshold through which all who believe may enter into life. The ladder leaning toward the Cross evokes Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28, a ladder set up between heaven and earth. It is as if Chagall were saying: this is the new Bethel, the house of God, and the gate of heaven (cf. Gen 28: 17). The ladder that once led to an unseen realm now leads to the Crucified One, who has made Himself the bridge between suffering and glory. The Cross, thus, is not only the site of death but the ascent toward life. It is not a spectacle to be gazed upon but a mystery to be entered – one that draws us in, calls us to dwell, and invites transformation. The ladder does not simply point upward; it invites us to climb, with trembling trust, into the heart of divine mercy.

In *White Crucifixion*, Chagall does not offer simple answers but instead presents his visionary theology. He merges Jewish and Christian

symbols to underscore the shared human condition and the hope for divine illumination that cuts through even the deepest shadows. This painting, in its complexity, serves as an artistic *midrash*, urging us to ponder the mystery of divine light in a world often overcome by darkness. It resonates as a powerful meditation on hope, resilience, and the enduring search for meaning in the face of profound suffering. The tension between black and white in *White Crucifixion* offers not only a way of seeing the painting but a horizon for interpreting our own experience of suffering and hope. Black becomes the space of lament – the burning villages, the fleeing figures, the disoriented silence. It asks us not to look away, not to resolve too quickly, but to dwell in the truth of affliction. White becomes the space of promise, a quiet, luminous presence that does not erase suffering but transfigures it. The whiteness of Christ, radiant yet wounded, opens a space where hope can speak gently without overpowering the real. This contrast does not invite easy interpretation but calls us to remain in the tension – to stay, like Mary, at the foot of the cross. Not to explain but to bear witness. Not to overcome the paradox but to live within it. We are summoned to hold black and white together – death and resurrection, lament and promise, despair and hope – without turning away from either. This is the space of faith. Such remaining is not passive. It is a call to *bear witness to hope*: to dwell with those who suffer and to carry the quiet light of the Resurrection as a sign of what may yet be. It is the invitation to *practice resurrection*: not only to proclaim a future promise but to live it now – to seek life amid death, to trust that God’s transformative power is at work, even when hidden. Unlike a human promise, which may or may not be fulfilled, God’s *ἐπαγγελία* is performative: it brings forth what it proclaims. It is the space where announcement is already participation in fulfillment, where *disclosure* is not after the fact but constitutive of the reality of divine presence. We are summoned to *see the hidden Christ*: not dazzling but present, not triumphant in the world’s terms, but unveiled in the fragility of love.

Resurrection is not merely a truth to be believed, but a horizon that calls us to live differently. It fulfills the Incarnation not by cancelling the Cross but by opening it. White, as the color of resurrection, becomes not an escape from blackness but its illumination from within. It transforms the painting from a depiction of suffering into a proclamation of hope. And we, like Mary, are called to remain within the paradox, within the tension, within the silence, trusting that Resurrection will have the final word.