



Albert Camus ~ 1913 -1960

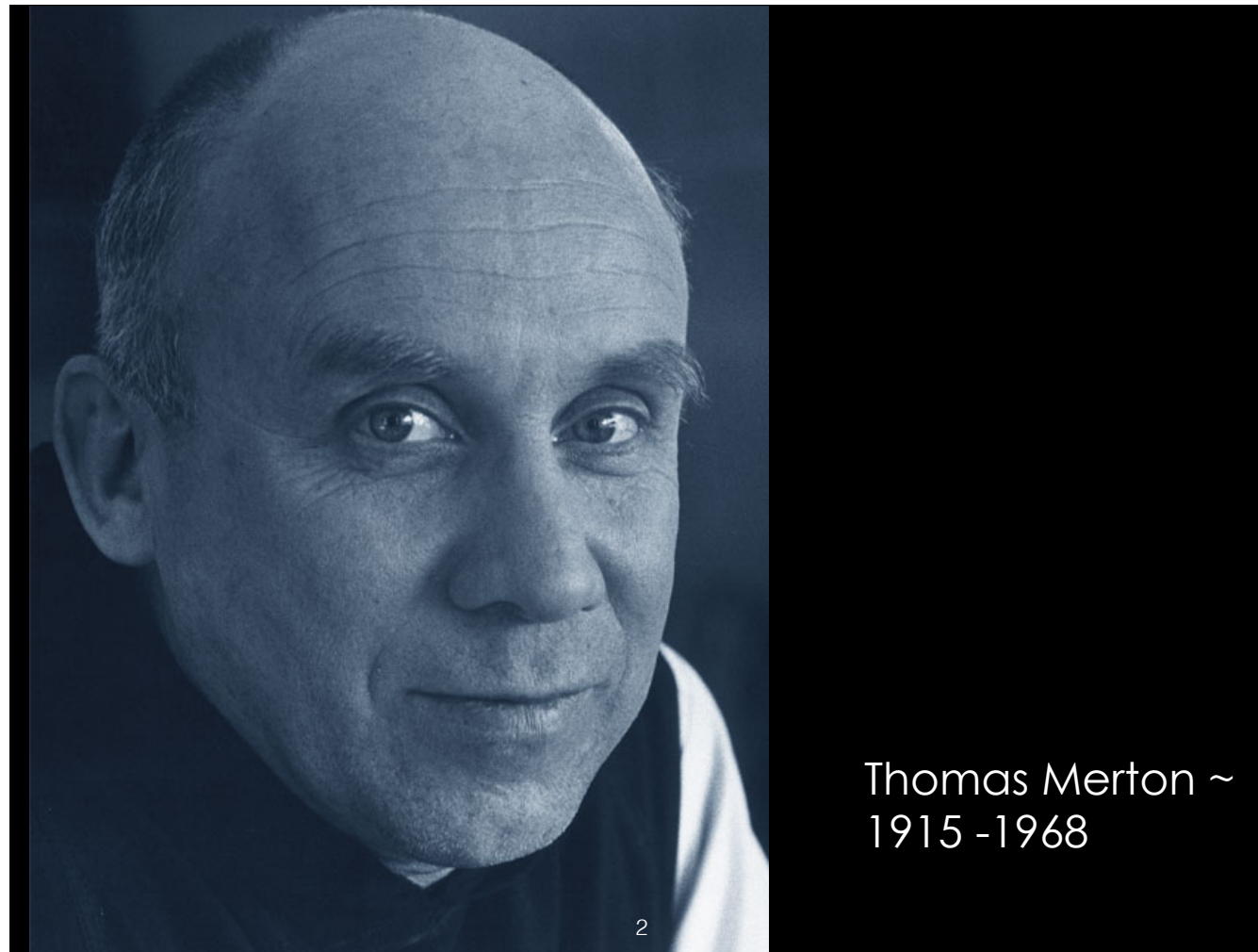
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In 1948, Albert Camus, author of *The Plague*, *The Stranger*, *The Fall*, and *The Rebel*, among many other plays, essays, books, and journalism, was invited to speak at the Dominican Monastery of Latour-Maubourg. Camus was not a Christian, but he was not unacquainted with Christianity, and maintained a vigorous dialogue and correspondence with Christian thinkers and writers until his tragic death in 1960. In fact, he wrote his dissertation on a fellow North African—the theologian, preacher, and early Christian Church father, Augustine—and was always respectful of a tradition he did not follow. But he refused to attempt a reconciliation between his beliefs and Christian ideals merely to "be agreeable to all."

In response to the invitation to speak freely to those gathered at the monastery that day, he offered these ringing words:

"What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out, loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today."

— Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*



Twenty years later, in 1968, Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who was deeply engaged in writing and speaking out for civil rights and against the war in Vietnam, said:



Resistance is futile.
Acquiescence is worse.

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“I am more and more impressed by the fact that it is largely futile to get up and make statements about current problems. At the same time, I know that silent acquiescence in evil is also out of the question.”

— Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence, in Seeds, 134

Today we’re going to take up the challenge from Camus and the dilemma posed by Merton. The world expects us to speak and act against injustice. How do we do that with courage and conscience and compassion? How do we resist that which is evil? And how do we not become that which we struggle against?

3 Christs: Art for Spiritual Resistance

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Slide 4 — 3 Christs: Art for Spiritual Resistance

We are changed by our beholding; there is no action without imagination. We are going to encounter three Christs in the works of three artists who give us art for spiritual resistance.



Slide 5 — Marc Chagall

The first one is Marc Chagall. Chagall was born in 1887 in the burgeoning Jewish community of Vitebsk in Russia. Chagall's life as an artist wove together three strands of identity: as a Jew, as a Russian, and as an expatriate in France. He is one of the greatest religious artists of the twentieth century for the ways in which his use of symbols from a particular religious community reflects a universal longing for transcendence.



Slide 6 — I and the Village (1911)



Slide 7 — Over the Town (1916)



Slide 8 — The Birthday (1915)

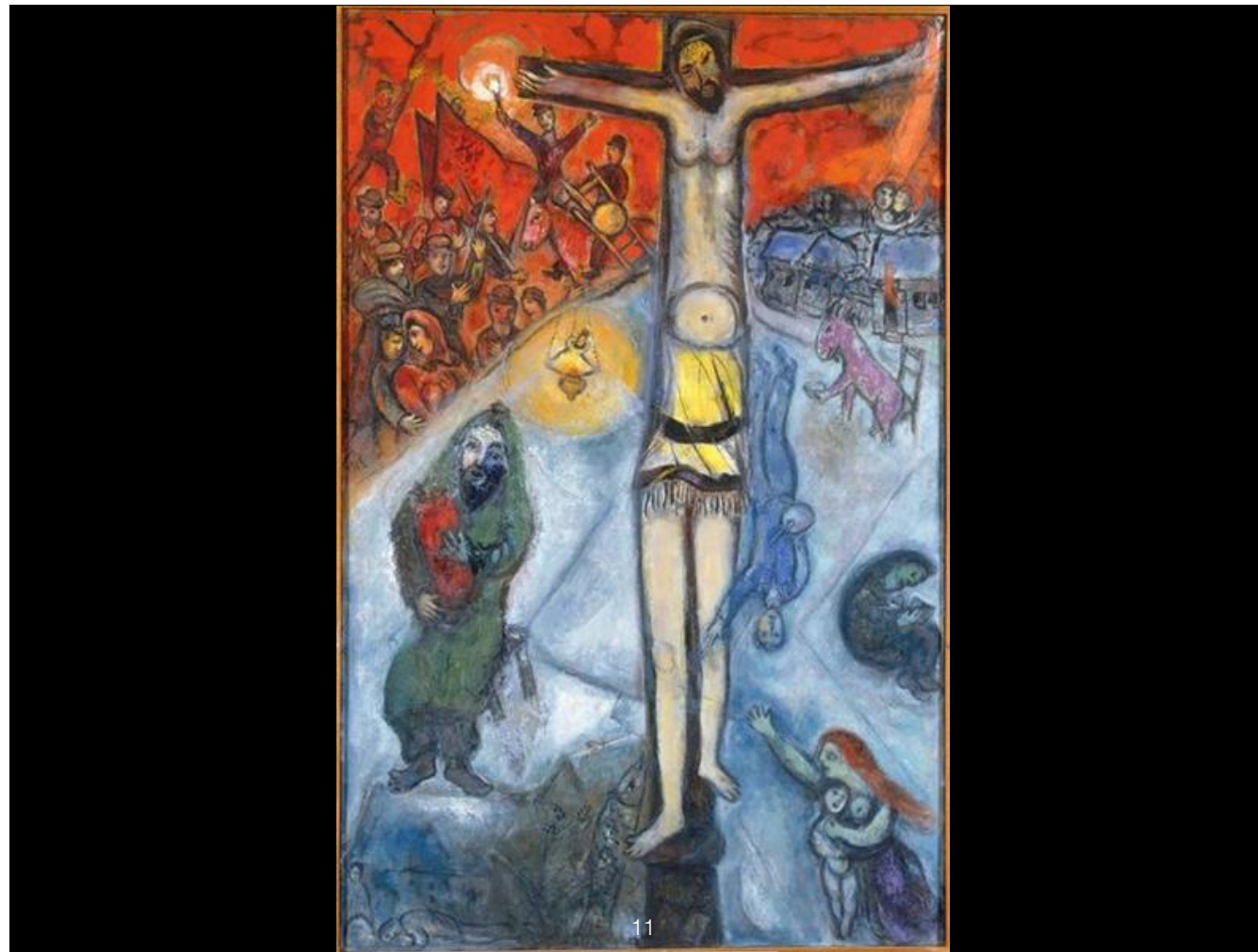
But I'm most interested today in some of his overtly religious paintings such as Golgotha



Slide 9 — Golgotha (1912)



Slide 10 — The Resistance (1937-1952)

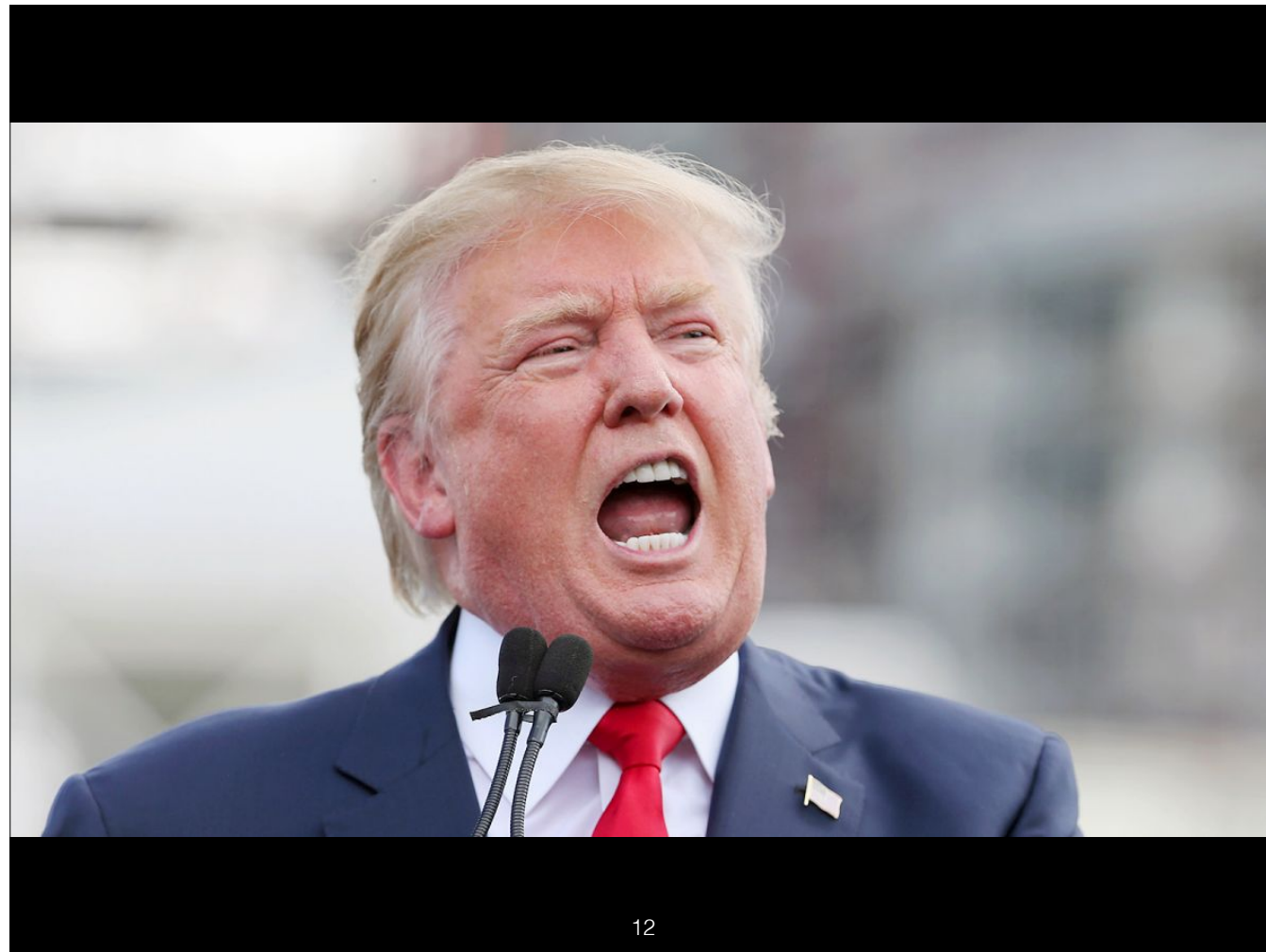


Slide 11 — The Resurrection (1937 - 1952)

These images came from Chagall's reflection on suffering, his own and that of his people. He saw the Christ as a potent symbol of Jewish suffering, to be sure, but more importantly, as a universal symbol of the suffering of all humanity.

Merton points us to this interior reflection as the starting point for resistance: "We have to learn to commune with ourselves before we can communicate with other men and with God."

Thomas Merton — Seeds, 130



Slide 12 — Trump

He goes on: “A man who is not at peace with himself necessarily projects his interior fighting into the society of those he lives with, and spreads a contagion of conflict all around him.”

Thomas Merton — Seeds, 130

“The basic and most fundamental problem of the spiritual life is this acceptance of our hidden and dark self, with which we tend to identify all the evil that is in us. We must learn by discernment to separate the evil growth of our actions from the good ground of the soul. And we must prepare that ground so that a new life can grow up from it within us, beyond our knowledge and beyond our conscious control.”

Thomas Merton — Seeds, 131

Back, even farther in, before we confront the principalities and powers, is an act of contrition. We know that we are capable of that which we abhor in others. Resistance begins in surrender.

Our repentance is hollow.

Why?

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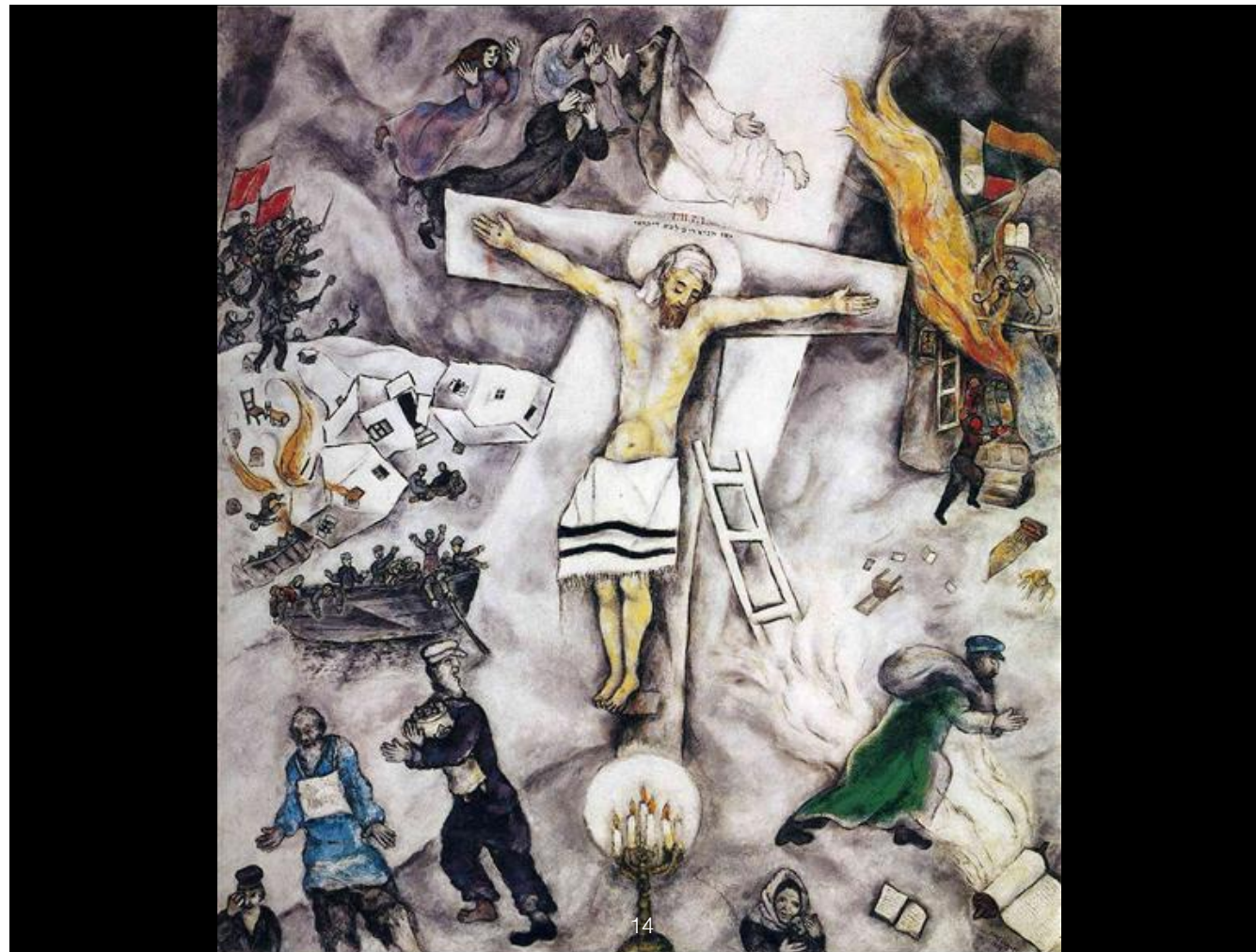
Slide 13 — Repentance is Hollow . . .

As he struggles with this dilemma, Merton says “One cannot be a Christian today without having a deeply afflicted conscience. I say it again: we are all under judgment. And it seems to me that our gestures of repentance, though they may be individually sincere, are collectively hollow and even meaningless. Why?

This is the question that plagues me,” he says.

“The reason seems to be, to some extent, a deep failure of communication.”

— Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence (in Seeds, 134)



Slide 14 — White Crucifixion (1938)

In the late 1920s, Chagall enjoyed an idyllic life in France. In 1931 he visited the Holy Land and, renewed in his faith, began work on his illustrations for the Bible. But terrible things were happening to Jews in Germany and Poland by 1935, and Chagall's changing themes reflect his anxiety. By 1937, as synagogues were burning in Germany, he began work on White Crucifixion, a large composition which he completed in 1938. This painting is a direct response to the political events of the time and reflects a narrative style which arranges scenes of cruelty and suffering around the still, almost serene figure of the Christ.

A technique that Chagall often uses, borrowed from Russian Orthodox icons, provides multiple scenes within the composition. Thus, the swirling scenes of chaos and violence around the still point of the Christ.

Although he offended both Jewish and Christian friends with this painting, Chagall maintained that his Christ becomes the symbol of universal suffering. In White Crucifixion we see the Christ for others, the Christ that exists for those who are persecuted, no matter their religious beliefs. We need that perspective, to regard Christ from within another perspective.



Protest is inescapable

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Slide 15 — Protest is inescapable

“I know too,” says Merton, “that there are times when protest is inescapable, even when it seems as useless as beating your head up against a brick wall. At the same time, when protest simply becomes an act of desperation, it loses its power to communicate anything to anyone who does not share the same feelings of despair.”

— Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence*, in *Seeds*, 130

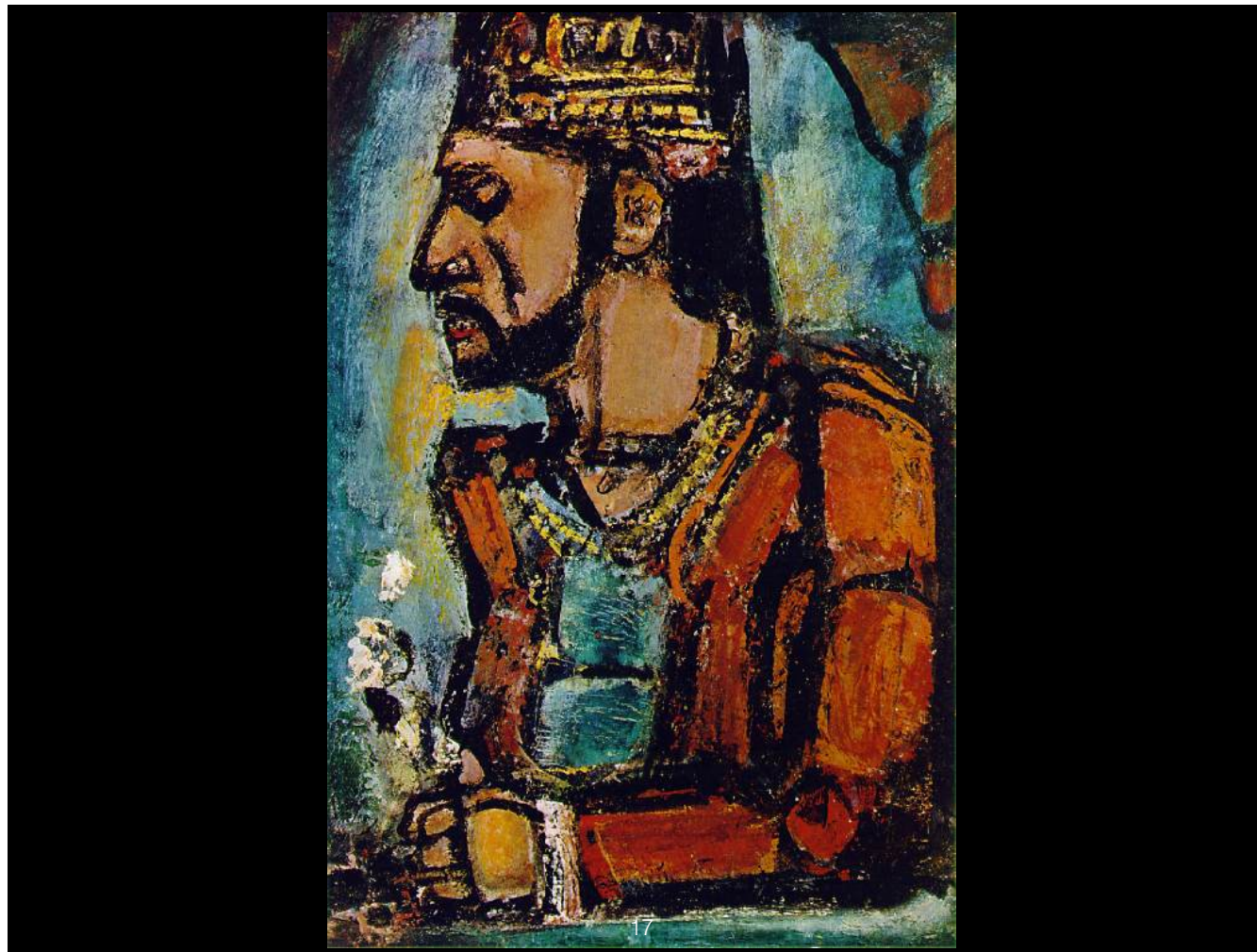


Georges Rouault ~
1871 -1958

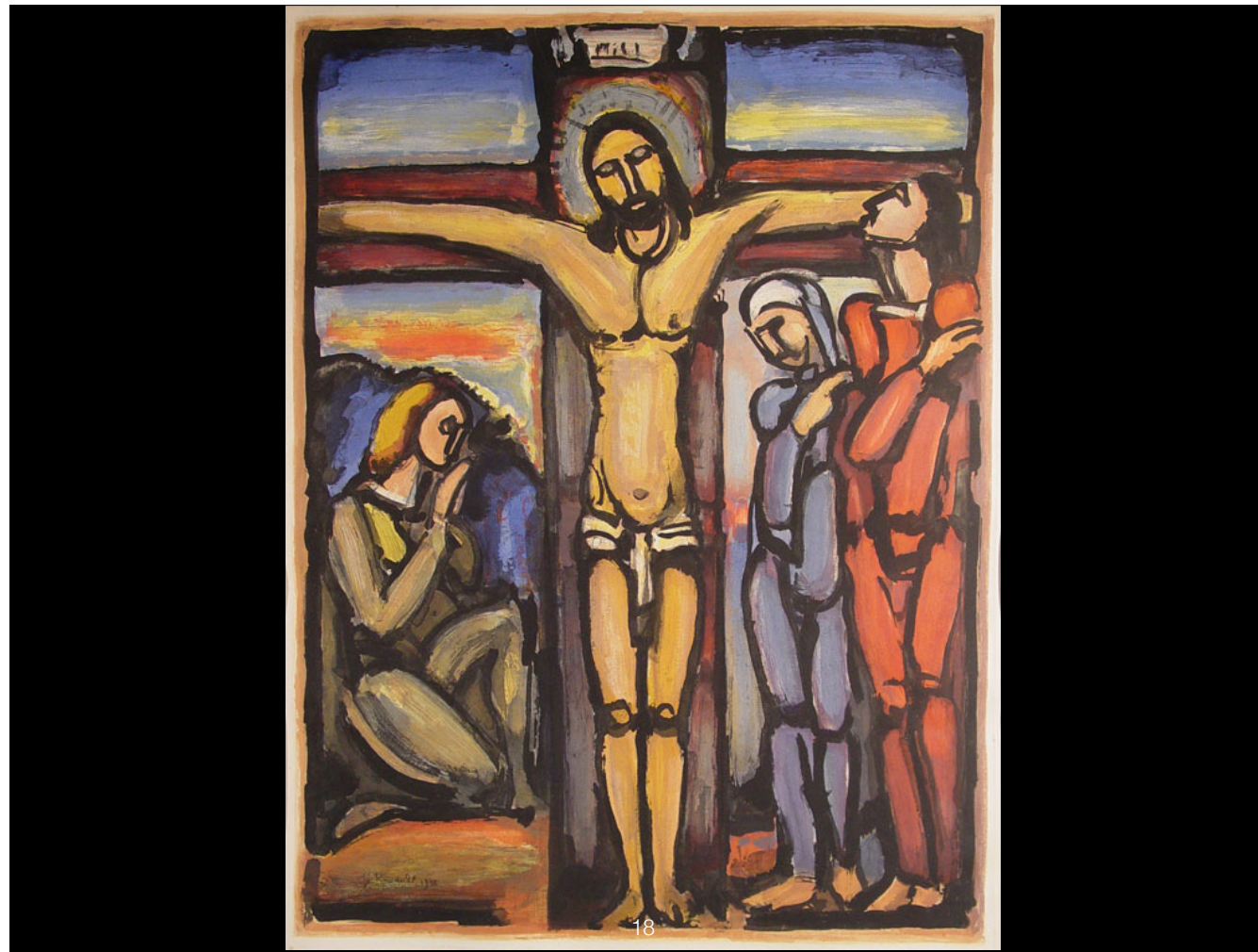
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Slide 16 — Georges Rouault

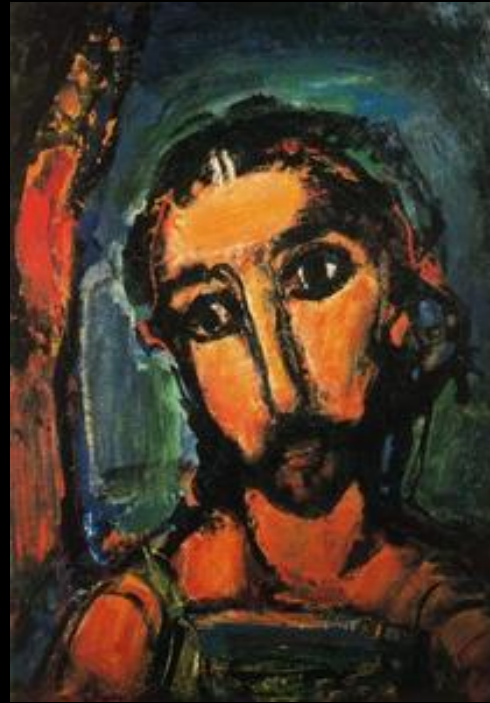
That brings us to a second artist, Georges Rouault, whose usual themes are clowns, prostitutes, the poor—and the sufferings of Christ. Born and raised in France, Rouault had to leave school as a teen to help with family expenses. He found work repairing stained glass windows, especially those from the 12th and 13th centuries, with their heavy lines of lead and their brilliant chunks of glass. Rouault's style has been called 20th-century Expressionism, "art which conveys emotions and thoughts directly, without a careful description of visual reality (Rouault, 5)," Brilliant color, heavy lines, simplified drawing, and rough, crude textures produce an effect of lyrical despair, and a conscious replication of those leaded stained glass windows.



Slide 17 — The Old King, 1936 — Probably his most famous painting. Realize our human limitations

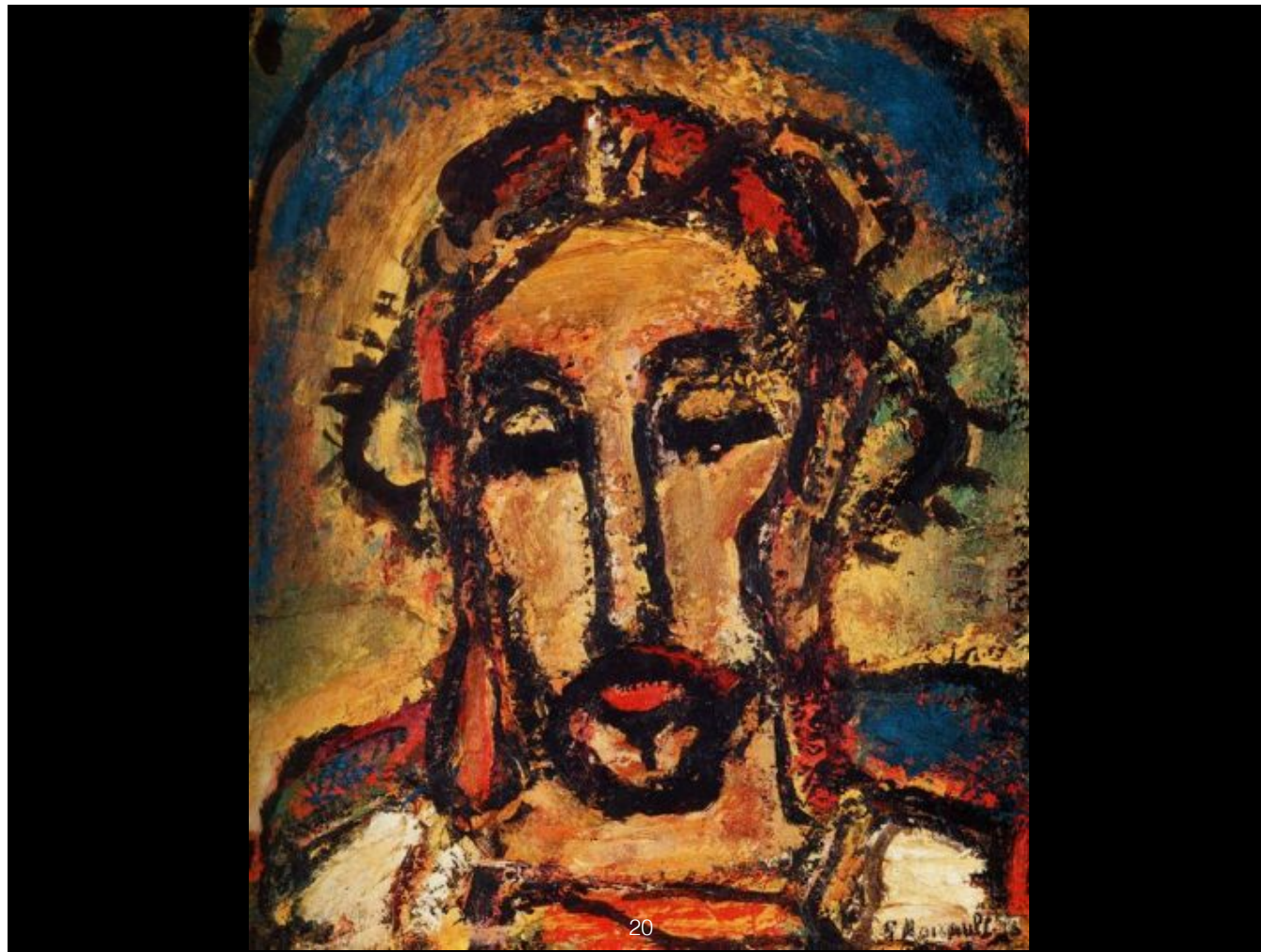


Slide 18 — Crucifixion; Christ unites heaven and earth, stretched between both, his arms reaching to infinity, protecting those gathered under them.

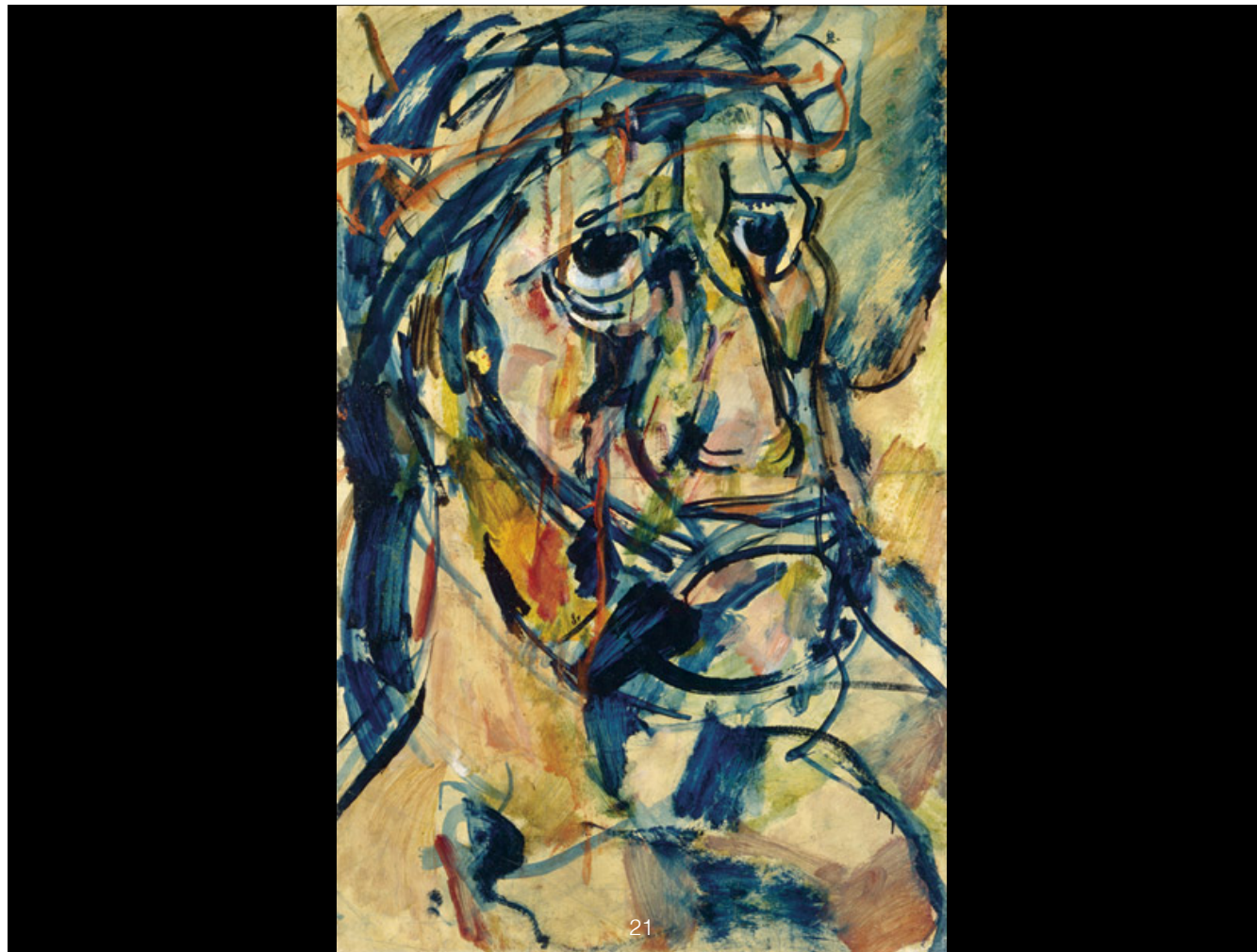


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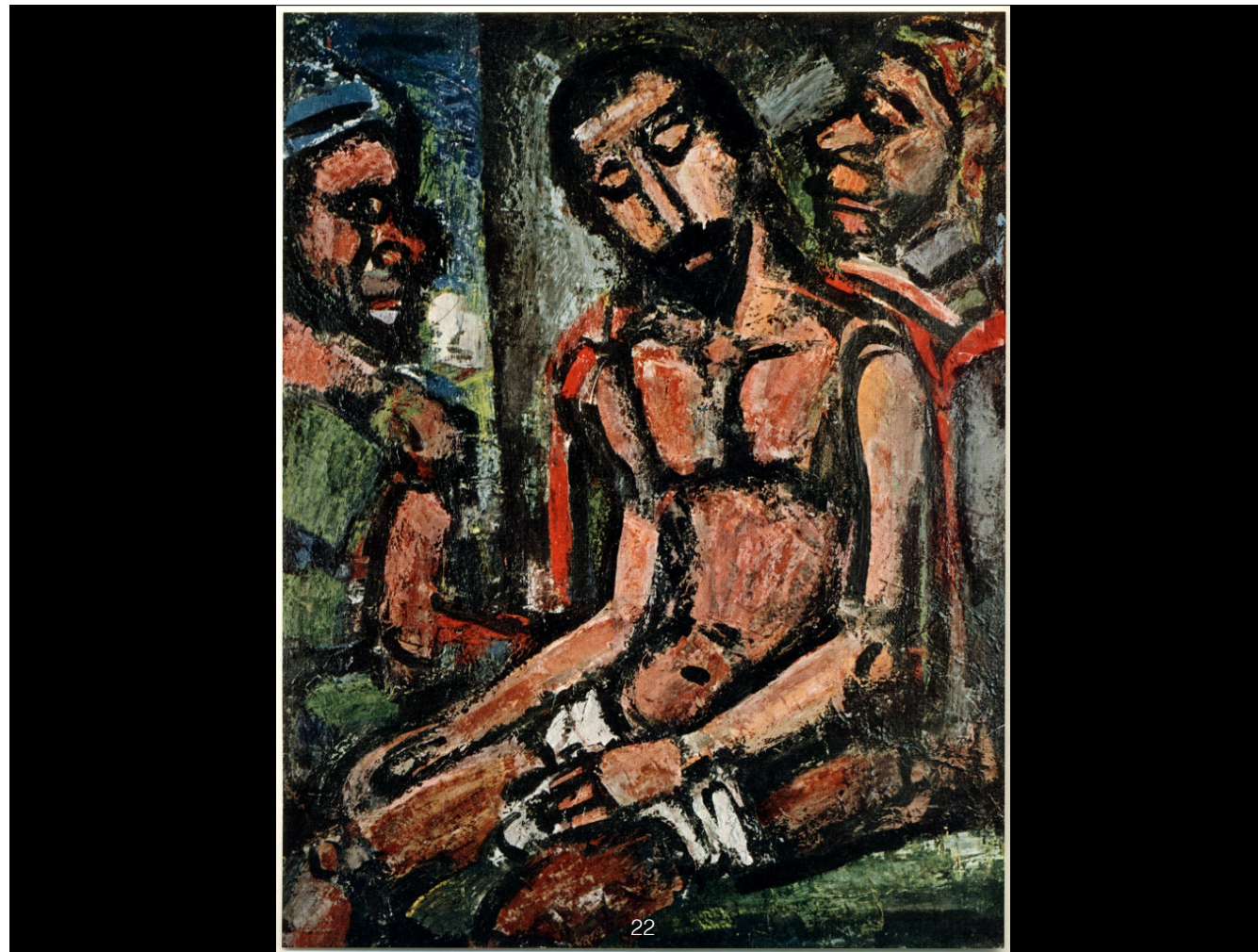
Slide 19 — Head of Christ, serenity and compassion



Slide 20 — Christ, crown of thorns



Slide 21 — Head of Christ, 1905 — Paint almost thrown at the canvas; lines heavy, the seeming artless tangle of lines resolving into an expression of longing and despair.



Slide 22 — Christ Mocked, 1932 — The downcast eyes of the Christ show a patience and forbearance in the midst of mockery and derision. Christ is the one we reject even though we know he does not deserve it. He is one with the despised, the alienated, the refugee, the falsely accused, he becomes the Other upon whom we may heap our fears and horror at his condition. Christ is The Other.

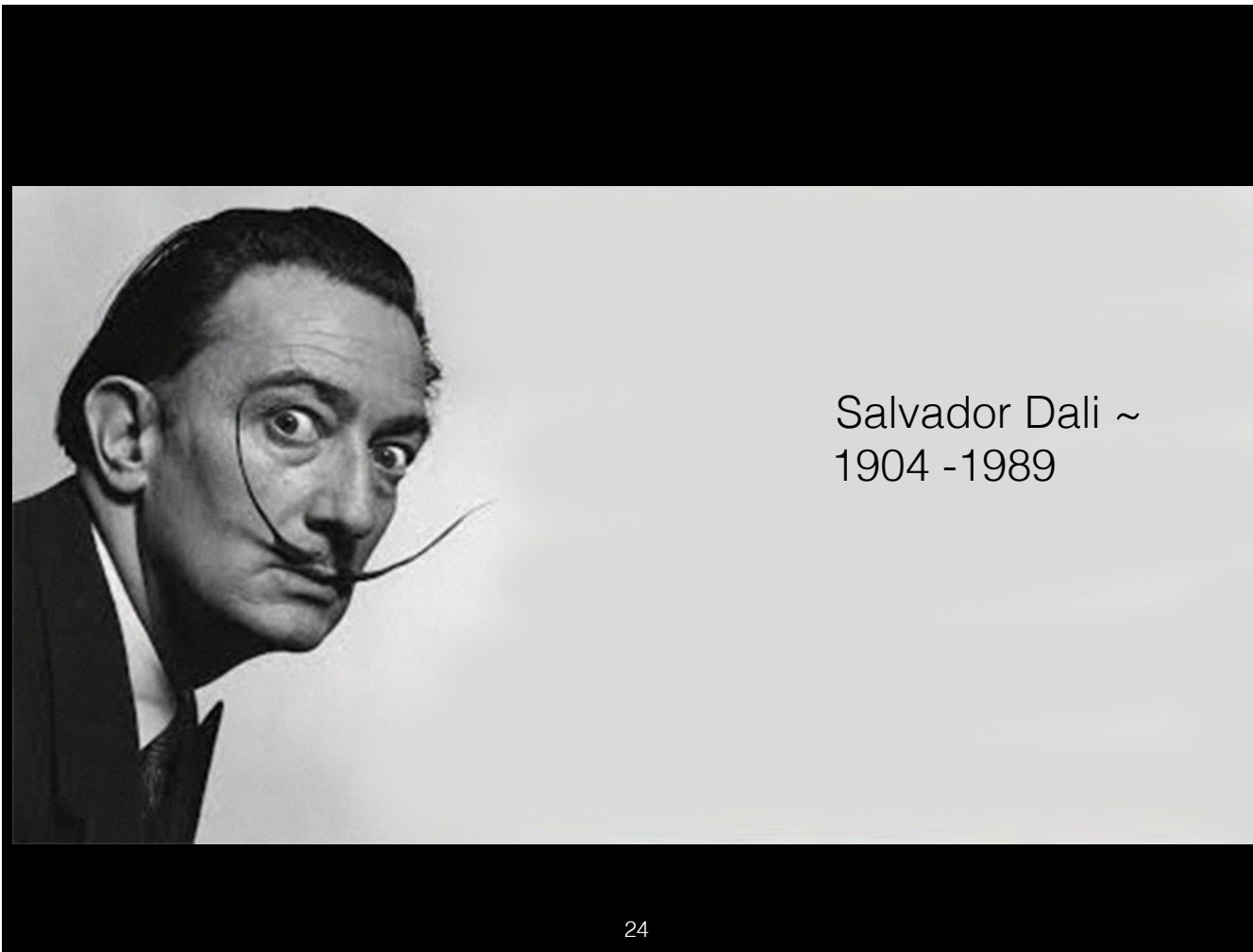
A theology of love.
A theology of *resistance*.

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Slide 23 — A theology of love; a theology of resistance

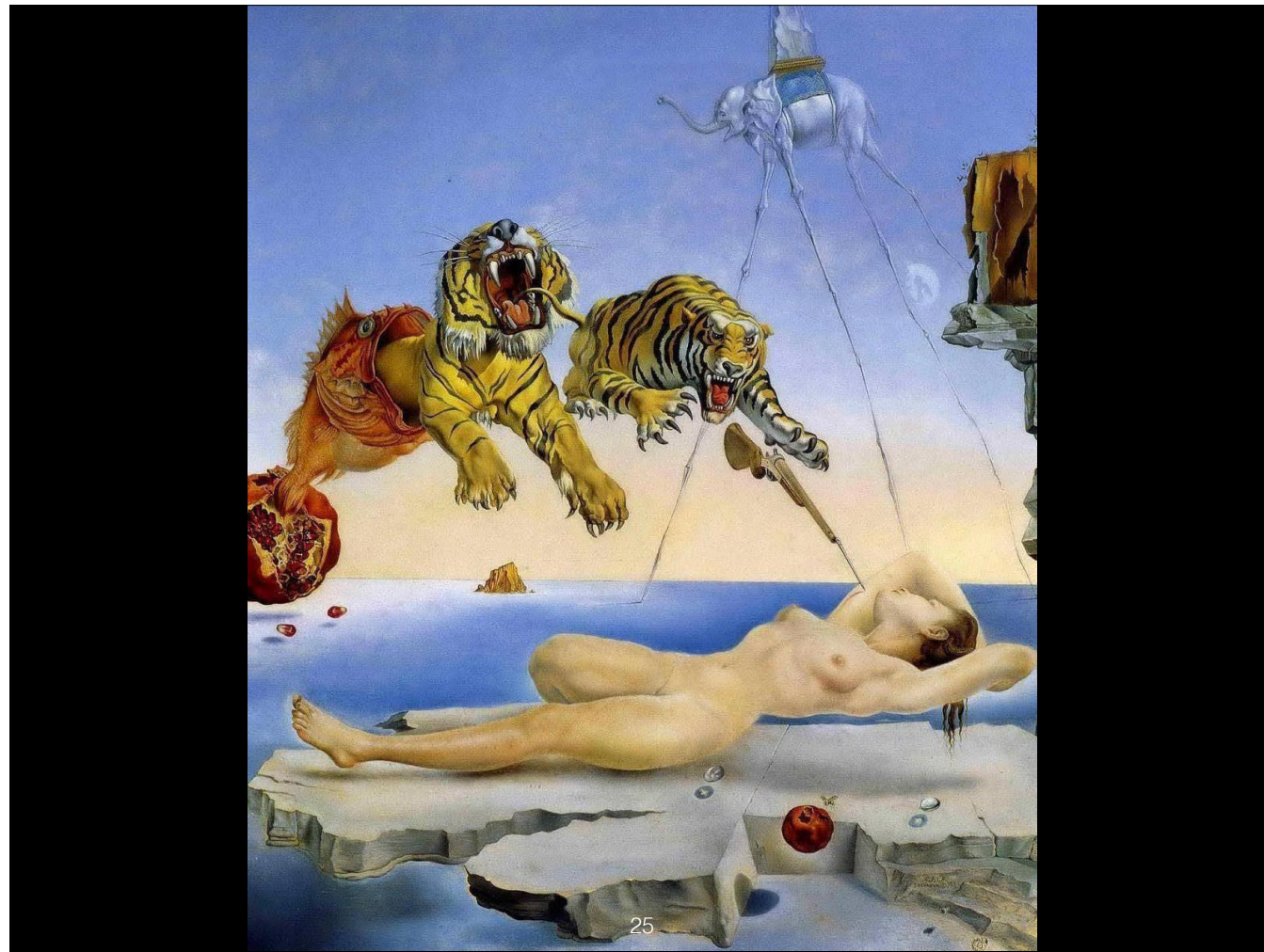
“Theology,” says Merton, “does not exist merely to appease the already too untroubled conscience of the powerful and the established. A theology of love may also conceivably turn out to be a theology of revolution. In any case, it is a theology of *resistance*, a refusal of the evil that reduces a brother to homicidal desperation.”

— Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence, in Seeds, 129-130



Slide 24 — Finally, we come to the Spanish surrealist, Salvador Dali.

Part court jester, part showman, part religious mystic who saw himself in a long tradition of spiritual artists, Dali gives us works which are technically exquisite, the products of his dreams and visions, and the working out of his scientific explorations.



Slide 25 — Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee



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Slide 26 — Figure on the Rocks

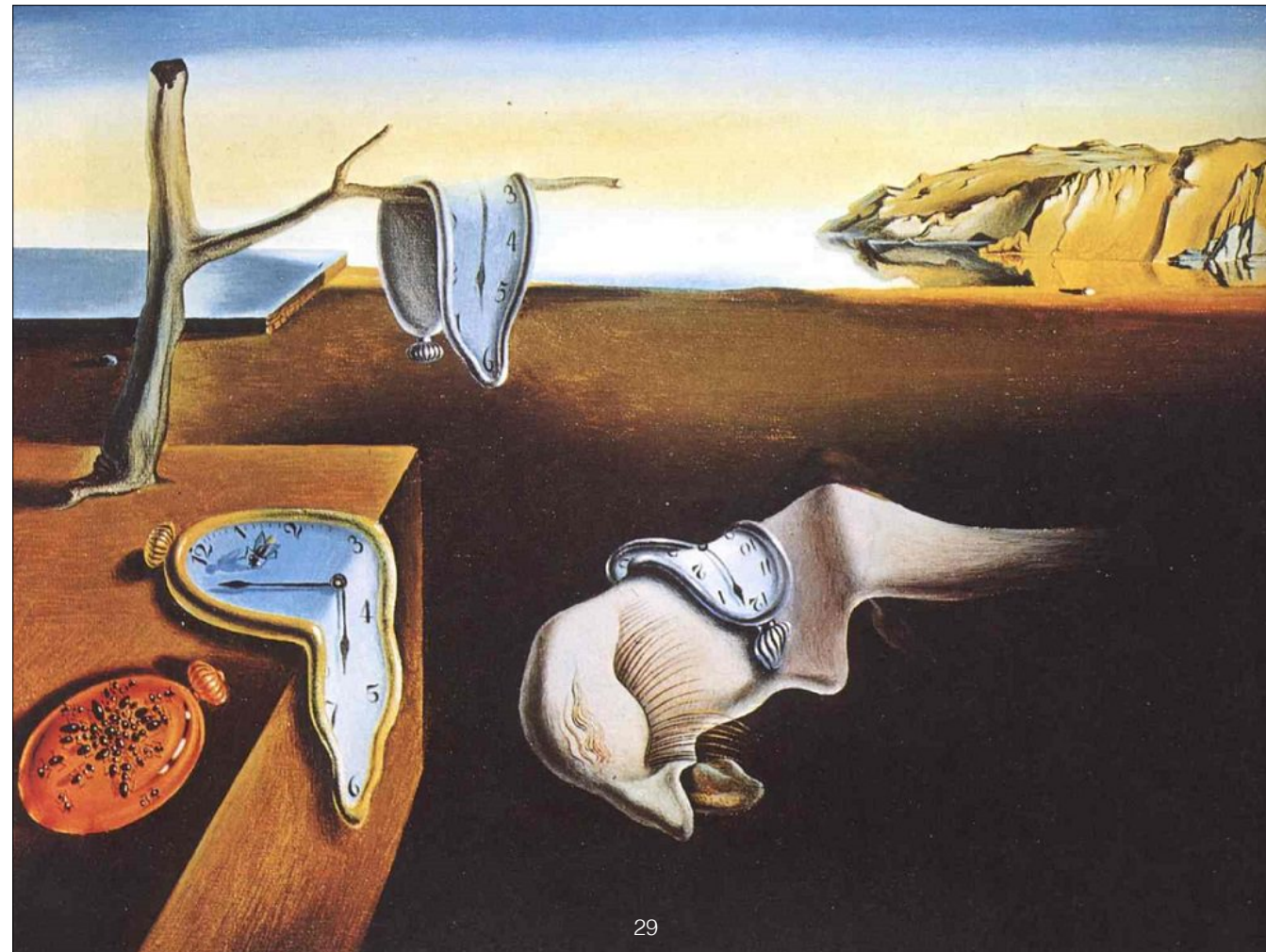


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Slide 27 — Paranoiac Face

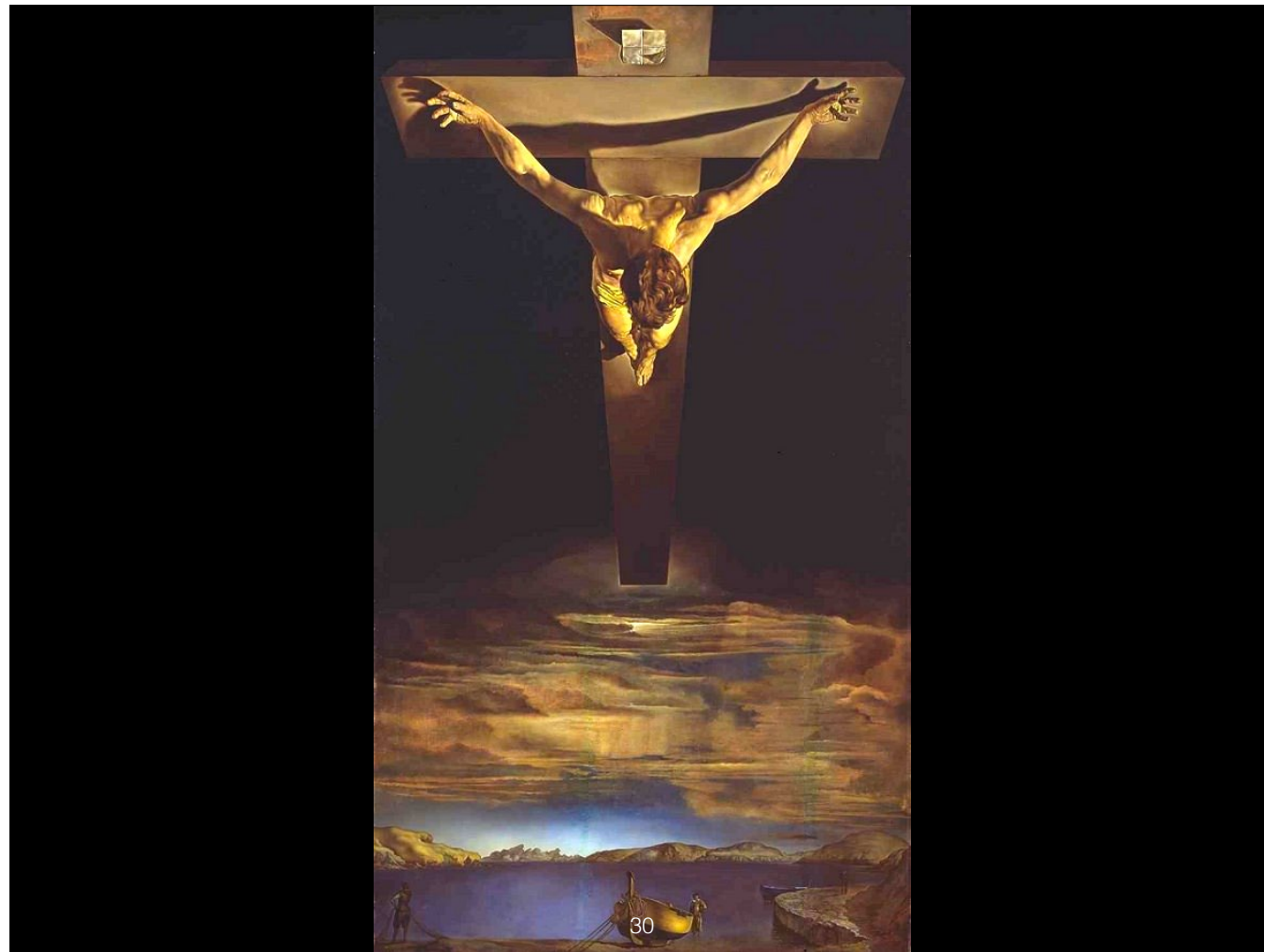


Slide 28 — Burning Giraffe



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Slide 29 — The Persistence of Memory



Slide 30 — Christ of St. John of the Cross, 1951

Dali's Christ of St. John of the Cross (1951) was based on a drawing by a 16th century monk named St. John of the Cross. Christ hangs suspended on the cross above the world, unbloodied, without nails or wounds. The observer looks down at the top of Christ's bowed head and simultaneously at a landscape of fisherman and boats. The effect is disconcerting at first as we plunge down vertically past the Christ and immediately level off to a horizontal plane. Dali traced inspiration for the extreme angle back to a dream he had, the vision of which appeared to him in color as the cosmic Christ.

We see Christ from God's point of view; His Son, His beloved Son, eternally hanging there above the world, floating in silent and profound dignity, magnificent in death. Down below, the fishermen, oblivious to the Light of the World above them, draw their boat up on the shore. One is standing at the stern in water up to his knees while his companion on the shore drags out the nets to dry. They seem indecisive or perhaps just tired. If they caught any fish we're not seeing the evidence. They may be heading home, weary from work, wondering how long they can survive without a catch. What we see from this angle is both the entire world in its suffering, and the labors and disappointments of two anonymous men.

The painting was purchased in the early 50s by the Glasgow Corporation for 8,200 pounds sterling, considered quite extravagant at the time. In 1961 a visitor heaved a brick through the canvas, apparently incensed by the angle that looked down upon Christ instead of up. The painting was restored and now hangs in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, the curators having stoutly resisted an offer of \$127 million by the Spanish government.

When the world is too much with us, when we find ourselves loathing humanity, when we feel, with shame, our complicity in the wickedness and suffering of this age, we can be lifted up, free and clear, to look down through Christ and see our tired world from a new perspective—one that through imagination wounds and heals.

“And I, when I am lifted
up from the earth, will
draw all people to me.”

— John 12:32

Christ for others . . .

Christ as the Other . . .

Christ for all . . .

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Slide 32

In Chagall's Jewish Christ we see Christ for others

In Rouault's Suffering Christ we see Christ as the Other

In Dali's Christ from God's point of view we see the Christ for all

Each of these Christ paintings give us a new perspective on the sufferings of Christ and of others.

They draw us first to humility and repentance, then to courage and compassion, and finally to a breadth of vision which includes both the world and individuals.

They are contemplative imagery which grounds us to answer Camus' challenge to Christians.

They are icons of the sacred in the secular.

They make Christ real for us in the world.

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