

Cristos Il Mancino  
By Benedict Sweeney  
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Why would Leonardo da Vinci paint Christ with an anomalous Left Hand?

The Last Supper depicts Christ's final dinner with his apostles prior to his crucifixion. Christ lets the apostles know that one of them will betray him and that he would be sacrificed. Most feel that the emotions shown are those of denial (Apostles) and sorrow (Christ).

Ultimately Judas (third on his right) would betray him and Peter (second on his right) would deny knowing him three times, while the rest of the apostles were possibly worried more about their own futures. To understand the iconographic meaning of that moment one must study the stories that were reasonably available to Leonardo.

The bible Leonardo kept with him was the "Vulgate", or "Latin Bible". Saint Jerome translated it between 380 and 405 AD from Hebrew and Aramaic. This text became known as the "Versio Vulgata", which means 'common translation'. The Vulgate was the standard version of the Bible for Roman Catholics for over one and a half millennia.

Since Leonardo carried the Vulgate one might ask the simple question: " Are there descriptions of anomalous/congenital hands in the Vulgate that relate directly to Christ?"

The answer is yes, and can be found in New Testament Mark 3:1-6

This Chapter relates to miracles Christ performed on the Sabbath prior to the Last Supper, specifically one story of Christ healing the man with a "withered hand"

Below are both the Latin and English translations:

3:1 et introivit iterum synagogam et erat ibi homo habens manum aridam

3:1 And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

3:2 et observabant eum si sabbatis curaret ut accusarent illum

3:2 And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

3:3 et ait homini habenti manum aridam surge in medium

3:3 And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

3:4 et dicit eis licet sabbatis bene facere an male animam salvam facere an perdere at illi tacebant

3:4 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

3:5 et circumspiciens eos cum ira contristatus super caecitatem cordis eorum dicit homini extende manum tuam et extendit et restituta est manus illi

3:5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

3:6 exeuntes autem statim Pharisaei cum Herodianis consilium faciebant adversus eum quomodo eum perderent

3:6 And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

If Leonardo was asked why he depicted Christ's left hand as portrayed in the "Last Supper", he might have said: "The miracle of The Withered Hand" This Sabbath day miracle was prima fascia evidence used by his enemies to convict Christ. Leonardo might further have suggested that Christ was taking on all the sins and problems of the world and this "withered hand" symbolized such an act.

For over 500 years the hand has been in front of the world. Just as Christ was upset that the apostles had closed their minds and were not listening to him, so too Leonardo may have anticipated that the public would not have looked closely enough at his masterpiece.