

**LIVING GODS WILL**

**Biblical Artists**

**VAN DYCK**



**ANTHONY VAN DYCK**

**Born:** 1599 – Antwerp, Netherlands

**Died:** 1641 – London, England

## Anthony Van Dyck

Born in Antwerp on 22 March 1599, **Anthony van Dyck** was the seventh child of **Frans van Dyck**, a wealthy silk merchant, and **Maria Cuypers**, who was renowned for her embroidery skills.

In 1609, when he was ten years old, his parents apprenticed the precocious youth to **Hendrik van Balen** (1575-1632), a painter of small cabinet pictures and dean of the city's Saint Luke's Guild. Although the length of **Van Dyck's** stay with Van Balen is not known, it probably lasted three to four years.

**Van Dyck** registered as a master in the Antwerp Saint Luke's Guild on 11 February 1618, by which time he was already in demand as a portrait painter (see the NGA painting, *Portrait of a Flemish Lady*).

By 1615-1616, however, **Van Dyck** had presumably established his own workshop in a large house called **Den Dom van Ceulen**. The fact that the young artist was allowed to work independently before actually joining the guild may indicate that he enjoyed the protection of **Peter Paul Rubens**, whose contacts with the court in Brussels enabled him to obtain special favors for some of his protégés.

During the late 1610s **Van Dyck** not only created his own independent religious and mythological scenes but was also active as Rubens' most important assistant.

He helped the master with a number of his large commissions, including the designs for the *Decius Mus* tapestry series (see the NGA painting, *Decius Mus Addressing the Legions*) and the ceiling decorations for the Church of Saint Charles Borromeo, the new Jesuit church in Antwerp.

By 1620 **Van Dyck** had risen to the point where one admirer wrote that "his work is almost as highly appreciated as Rubens."

Sometime between July and November 1620, **Van Dyck** made his first trip to England. His activities there are not known in detail, although he apparently entered the service of King James I.

He also produced at least one picture for each of the two chief patrons of the arts in Jacobean England: **Portrait of Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel** (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum) and **Contenance of Scipio** (Oxford, Christ Church), executed for George Villiers, then Marquess (later 1st Duke) of Buckingham.

By the end of February 1621 **Van Dyck** was back in Antwerp, where he remained for eight months before leaving for Italy.

Just before his departure **Van Dyck** presented Rubens with three large paintings, including a portrait of his mentor's wife, Isabella Brant (see NGA 1937.1.47). **Van Dyck** arrived in Genoa, his first Italian port of call, on 20 November 1621. The following year he spent eight months in Rome and also made short visits to Florence, Bologna, Venice, Padua, Mantua, and Milan before returning to Genoa at the end of 1622.

There he encountered the majestic portraits Rubens had painted when he was in Genoa in 1606, among them Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria (NGA 1961.9.60); these paintings were to inspire **Van Dyck** in his own work (see Marchesa Elena Grimaldi Cattaneo [NGA 1942.9.92]).

**Van Dyck** spent most of 1623 in Genoa, although he was in Rome between March and October of that year. During the spring and summer of 1624 he worked in Palermo.

When an outbreak of the plague forced him to flee, he left behind an unfinished altarpiece, the **Madonna of the Rosary** (Palermo, Congregazione della Madonna del Rosario), which was sent after him to be completed in Genoa. Except for a purported trip to Marseilles and Aix-en-Provence in 1625, **Van Dyck** remained in Genoa until his return to Antwerp in 1627.

An informative document of **Van Dyck's** Italian sojourn is the so-called **Italian Sketchbook**, now at the British Museum, in which he recorded drawings from life and copies after many works of art, primarily by **Titian** (c. 1488-1576), that he saw and admired on his travels.

Indeed, not only was **Van Dyck** profoundly influenced by the style of this Venetian master, but inventories also reveal that he later owned no fewer than nineteen paintings by Titian, as well as his own copies of several others.

After his return to Antwerp, **Van Dyck** was extremely productive, both as a portraitist and a history painter. His portraits were sought after by Antwerp burghers and princely patrons, including Archduchess Isabella, governess of the Spanish Netherlands, and Queen Mother Maria de' Medici of France.

**Van Dyck** received many commissions for large altarpieces, including two that he painted for the Jesuit Confraternity of Bachelors (Sodaliteit van de bejaerde Jongmans) in Antwerp, a lay brotherhood that he had joined in 1628.

In the late 1620s **Van Dyck** began an extensive project known as the **Iconography**, a series of etchings and engravings of famous princes, aristocrats, and artists that would be published after his death.

Aside from his own achievements, **Van Dyck's** rising artistic and social status was helped by Rubens' absence from Antwerp during the late 1620s. In 1630 the archduchess named **Van Dyck** court painter.

**Van Dyck**, however, did not remain long in Antwerp. In the winter of 1631-1632 he traveled to The Hague, where he worked for both the prince of Orange, Frederik Hendrik, and for Frederick V of the Palatinate and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart, the so-called Winter King and Winter Queen.

More significantly, that spring **Van Dyck** moved to London, where, on 5 July 1632, he was knighted and named court painter to King Charles I and his wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, and provided with a generous yearly stipend.

His numerous portraits of the king and queen (see Queen Henrietta Maria with Sir Jeffrey Hudson [NGA 1952.5.39]), as well as of members of their court (see Philip, Lord Wharton [NGA 1937.1.50]), have profoundly influenced history's perception of the aristocratic character of Charles I's reign.

In 1634 **Van Dyck** took leave of his responsibilities at the English court and returned to Antwerp and Brussels. His motivation for this decision is not known, but he possibly left for family reasons. He may also have hoped that changing political circumstances after the death of Archduchess Isabella in 1633 would enhance his artistic prestige.

Nevertheless, **Van Dyck** returned to England after little more than a year, even though he had purchased a large country estate in 1634, was made honorary dean of the Antwerp Saint Luke's Guild, and produced an imposing group of portraits of aristocrats, scholars, and nobles (see Henry II de Lorraine [NGA 1947.14.1]).

Between 1635 and 1640 **Van Dyck** and his extensive workshop continued to execute portraits and mythological paintings for the English court. On 27 February 1639 he married Mary Ruthven, a noble lady-in-waiting to the queen. A few months after Rubens' death on 30 May 1640, **Van Dyck** returned once again to Antwerp, seemingly, at last, the undisputed head of the Flemish School.

However, upon arrival, he was asked by Cardinal Infante Ferdinand to complete a set of four pictures for the king of Spain that Rubens had left unfinished. **Van Dyck** refused to accept this project but indicated that he would be willing to undertake a new commission. Apparently rebuffed, he soon left for Paris in an unsuccessful attempt to secure the commission for the decoration of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre.

By May 1641 **Van Dyck** was back in London, but he was unwell and continued working only with difficulty. Moreover, the political turmoil that had erupted in England had already unsettled the lives of many of the aristocratic patrons on whom he relied. In November **Van Dyck** returned to Paris, where Queen Henrietta Maria had taken refuge with her brother, King Louis XIII.

Seriously ill, the artist returned shortly thereafter to England, where on 1 December his wife gave birth to their only child, a daughter named Justiniana. Three days later **Van Dyck** made his will, and **on 9 December 1641 he died**. He was buried on 11 December in the choir of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, where his tomb perished in the Great Fire of 1666.

**Jesus Captured**

**oil on canvas (344 × 249 cm) 1618 - 1620**

This painting by Van Dyck, then 20 years old, shows the moment Judas betrays his master by kissing him. That way he pointed out to the Roman soldiers which one in the group was Jesus.

In the midst of all the turbulence Jesus stays remarkably calm.

At the time of creation of this work Van Dyck was probably already an assistant of the great Rubens, whose influence can be seen in the muscular figures.

**Moses and the Brazen Serpent**

oil on canvas (205 × 235 cm)

1620

The Israelites complain about the long journey through the desert.

God immediately punishes them for this lack of faith: they are attacked by poisonous snakes, and many die.

The people admit to Moses that they have sinned and beg him to ask forgiveness from God.

God tells Moses to make a brazen serpent and put it on a stick. Everyone who was then bitten by a snake and looked at the brazen serpent, would not die.

**Samson and Delilah**

oil on canvas (148 × 257 cm)

1628 - 1630

Delilah has just cut off some of Samson's hair.  
The scissors and the hair are in the foreground to the left.  
Samson then lost his invincibility and immediately was captured by the Philistines.

This painting shows the influence of Van Dyck's two great examples.

Rubens lent him the strong figures, and Titian inspired the use of warm colors.

**The Descent of the Holy Spirit**



**oil on canvas (265 × 221 cm)**

**1618 - 1620**

This work is linked to **Acts 2:2**

The moment Jesus' followers had been waiting for has finally come:  
the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them.

This painting is also known by its short name *Pentecost*.



**The Penitent Mary Magdalene**



oil on canvas (169 × 148 cm)

1620 - 1635

This work is linked to **Luke 8:2**

Almost naked, Mary Magdalene raises her eyes to heaven while wringing her hands.

Next to her an angel holds her traditional attribute, an ointment jar.

On the ground is a bible.

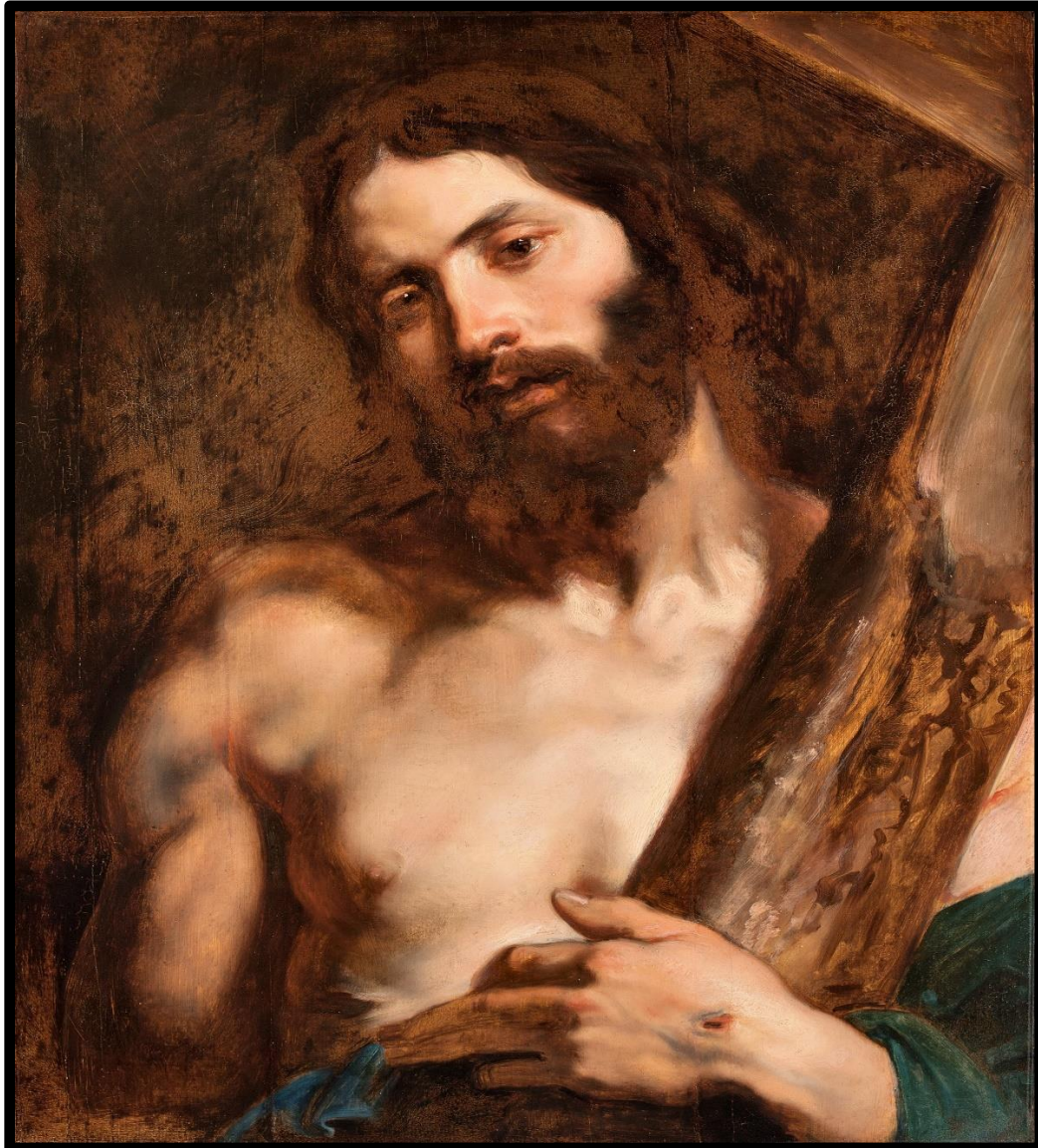
**Crowning with Thorns**

oil on canvas (223 × 196 cm)

1618 – 1620

He produced it aged 20 during his first Antwerp period, when he was the main studio assistant and pupil of Peter Paul Rubens. It shows Rubens' influence in its relatively somber palette, chiaroscuro and highly realistic portrayal of musculature. He seems to have completed it early during his stay in Italy, since it also shows the influence of Titian and other Venetian painters in Jesus' face.

Once it was complete, van Dyck offered the painting to Rubens, who declined it. It was then bought by Philip IV of Spain, who held it in the Escorial before it entered the Prado Museum in 1839.

**Christ Carrying the Cross**

**oil on canvas (63 × 48 cm)**

**1616 - 1620**

This painting on panel completed a series of the Twelve Apostles, once present in the Genoese Serra picture gallery, currently divided among various collections in the world.

A youthful work, dating back to Van Dyck's period of activity prior to his arrival in Genoa, it is to be placed in relation, with the other twelve subjects, to a similar series painted by Rubens.

Even in style, in fact, the influence of the oldest master is evident, so much so that in the past the panel of Palazzo Rosso was attributed precisely to the latter.

**The Penitent Apostle Peter**



**oil on canvas (63 × 52 cm)**

**1617 - 1618**

You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.

**Samson and Delilah**

oil on canvas (152 × 132 cm)

1620

He produced it just after his return from Italy and shortly before leaving for London. It was heavily inspired by his tutor Rubens's version of the same subject and for a long time was attributed to Rubens.

Van Dyck inverted the composition and showed Delilah in white chalk make-up and heavily rouged cheeks, the makeup traditionally worn by Parisian prostitutes. The painting is now held in the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. He returned to the subject in 1630.

## The Mocking of Christ



oil on canvas (112 × 93 cm)

1628 - 1630

Offering a complex narrative, this painting shows the torturers who mock the suffering Christ, crowning him with thorns and giving him a reed as a scepter. The depiction of one of Christ's tormentors as a black man draws on an iconographic lineage that, in the Middle Ages, depicted black executioners as evil incarnate.

This figure, however, reflects a more nuanced treatment that was seen in subsequent eras, as racial attitudes evolved. The figure is sensitively rendered from life, with a treatment of expression and gesture that is perhaps more suggestive of ambivalence than brutality.