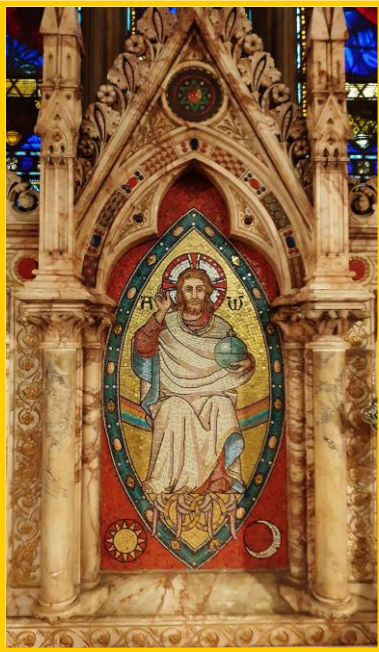


## SALVATOR MUNDI

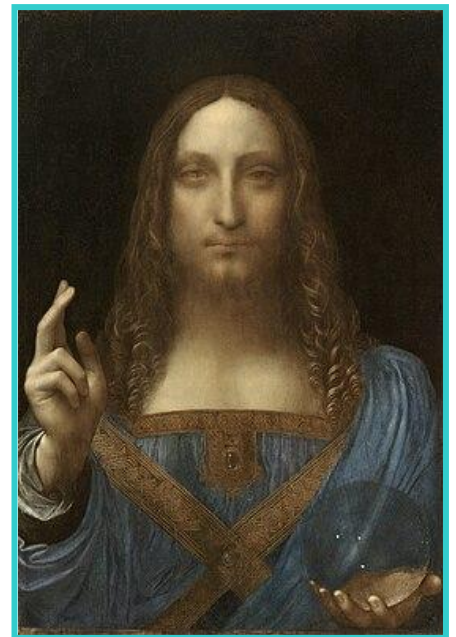


It is easy to take for granted many features of our church when one comes into the church on a regular basis. We become familiar with our surroundings and comfortable within its walls. However, one feature is worth a particular mention. It is the mosaic image of Christ as *Salvator Mundi* in the centre of the *Reredos*. There are several aspects of this which make it special and worthy of attention. Firstly, its origin. It is widely accepted that it was the design of George Gilbert Scott (architect of the church) and the work of Clayton and Bell, using coloured and gold mosaics made by Salviati & Co. of Italy. There have been many paintings of *Salvator Mundi* over the ages, from ancient Byzantine churches to the masters of the Renaissance. But rarely does one see a mosaic.

Furthermore, its design is rather noteworthy. It shows Christ blessing the world and holding a globe in his left hand. This aspect is strongly reminiscent of the *Salvator Mundi* (Latin for *Saviour of the World*), thought to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci, [below right] and now recognised as the most expensive painting in the world. Its

whereabouts are unknown, but it is believed to be in the possession of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, awaiting a special gallery to be built to show it.

The painting *Salvator Mundi*, (Latin for *Saviour of the World*) which has acquired a great deal of interest and attention in the art world within the past decade or so, is thought to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci. It has been rediscovered only this century, restored and was included in a major exhibition of Leonardo's work at the National Gallery, London, in 2011-2012.



This type of image predates Leonardo himself. This composition has its origins in Byzantine Art. This form of iconography probably dates from the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> centuries in northern Italy. It is believed that there are at least thirty copies and variations of the painting executed by Leonardo's pupils and followers. The right hand of Christ, with His fingers held in a special position, is identical, together with the position of the right thumb. The fingers show Christ giving a blessing. The fact that He is holding a globe in His left hand is rare. In the mosaic, it is held in the curve of the elbow, rather than the palm of the hand. In both forms, however, the globe is represented as a glass orb or sphere, compared with a globe showing plant and animal life in other depictions, or landscapes. In both forms, it depicts the orb as reflecting light. The earlier poses usually show Christ holding a book in his left hand. The globe seems to appear in the late 1400s. It is clear that the inspiration for this representation is Chapter 4, v14 of The Gospel of St John:

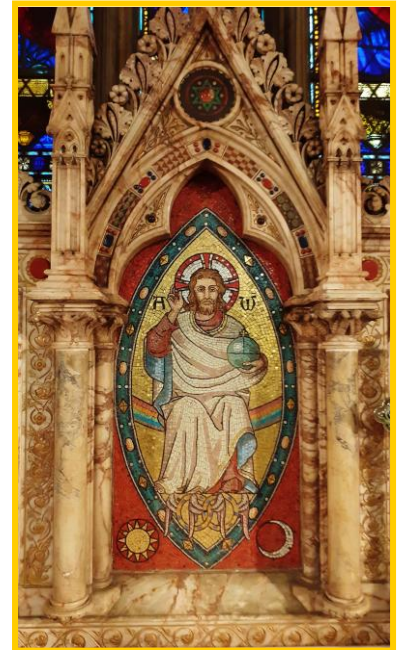
*“And we have seen and do testify that the Father hath sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.”*

The surround or mount is quite special too. G.G. Scott became Surveyor of the Fabric at Westminster Abbey in 1849 (until his death in 1878). He would have become familiar with the medieval **Retable** (measuring 11ft. by 3ft.) at the Abbey which was resurrected in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two images of that ancient screen seem to have featured here – the central figure of Christ (as Salvator Mundi) and the surround with pillars. The surround is all but identical to the surround of St. Peter holding the keys also featured in the **Retable**, which is in a much better condition. Dr. Tony Trowles (Head of the Abbey Collection) says “*it doesn’t seem an unreasonable hypothesis*” that Scott could have been influenced by what he saw. If you can, take a look online also at the canopies above the choir stalls at the Abbey. Erected in 1848, they too are very similar. These are all typical examples of the influence of the Gothic design in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.



At the time of the Byzantine Empire and in the early centuries of Christianity, gold was frequently used to symbolise transcendent, divine light embodying the invisible, spiritual world. Gold (or gold ground) could be found in the background of icons, mosaics, triptych panels and architectural settings. By the time of the Renaissance, a blue sky or a pastoral scene became more popular. Note on the **Reredos** the *tesserae*, small individual

ties, usually formed in the shape of a square, and used in creating a mosaic.



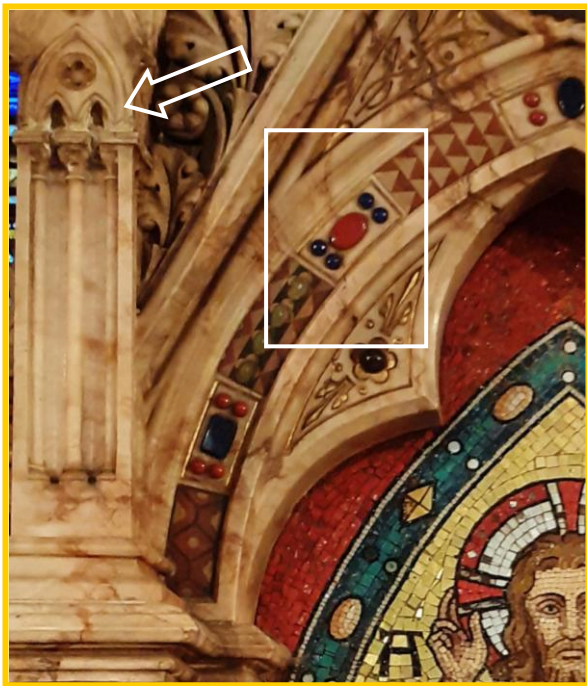
The **Reredos** in St. Mark's is 21 feet long and its maximum height is 10ft. 9ins. This is large! A screen with the same designers and manufacturers was erected in a church in Southgate, London, in 1869. Much smaller in scale, its cost at that time was equivalent to about £31,000 in today's value. Very similar design features can be seen on the Albert memorial (1873) in London – again with the same designer, manufacturer and mosaic makers.

*“I can certainly see some strong resemblances in the design of the arched surrounds of your reredos which it's hard to think are coincidental unless Scott chanced to have seen something very similar elsewhere. At the time that Scott was Surveyor of the Fabric here our retable was kept in the Jerusalem Chamber which is part of the Deanery. It was not, therefore, something that he could have seen just by walking into the Abbey but I think we can assume that the deans of Westminster under whom Scott served would have allowed him access to view or study the object if asked. It would be interesting to know if Scott ever drew the Retable. ...*

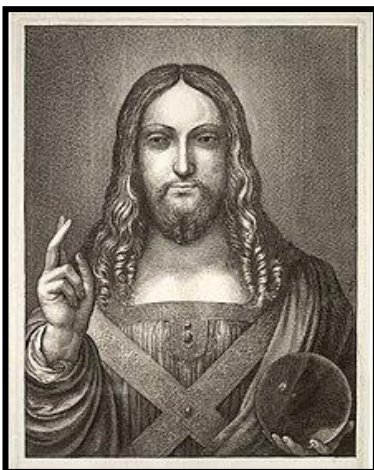
*I'm sorry I can't offer anything more substantial or convincing but it doesn't seem an unreasonable hypothesis.”*

[Dr. Tony Trowles – Westminster Abbey Librarian]

[See also **The Reredos** on our website [The REREDOS](#), within the Archive - Church].



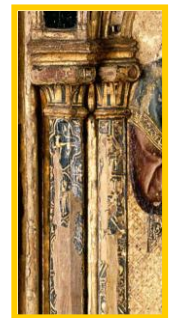
These 2 close-up images show the close similarities between the *Retable* and the *Reredos*. The pillars and surrounds of both are almost identical.



Leonardo da Vinci Pinxit. Wenceslaus Hollar fecit Aqua forti, Secundum Originale, A° 1650.



The columns in both the *Reredos* (L) and the *Retable* (R)



The right hand in *The Reredos*

The right hand in the *Da Vinci*

