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Fixing up the face of Christ

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A case of suspected vandalism in a church in a northeastern village in Spain has probably turned out to be the worst art restoration project the country has seen, reports *The New York Times*.

Octogenarian Cecilia Gimenez thought she was doing a good thing when she touched up the flaking fresco on the wall of her parish church, Santuario de la Misericordia in Borja. But her handiwork has created quite an uproar and provided fodder for the comedians. The soulful Christ in Elias Garcia Martinez's "Ecce Homo" now has a half beard and resembles "a very hairy monkey in an ill-fitting tunic," says BBC European correspondent Christian Frazier. Others liken the portrait to a werewolf or "she-man" with multiple chins.

After spending the past month trying to spruce up this old Catholic Worker house in Worcester, Mass., where I live, I can sympathize with Ms. Gimenez's desire to just "touch up" her favorite fresco. Who knows how many years the good woman spent praying before Martinez's image and thinking, "Hmmm. Now what can we do about those paint chips?" Hey, not every restoration project has the desired effect.

Ms. Gimenez's disfigurement of Martinez's Christ has shocked Spain, and many are bemoaning her well-intentioned alterations. Would that we were equally upset over the actual disfigurement of Christ that occurs whenever human beings harm or kill one another.

Art experts hope to restore the Borja fresco to its original beauty. Here's hoping they succeed. Perhaps the moral of this story is to take the revelations of Christ as they come to us in all their flaky, original beauty.

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