Patrizio Foresta / Federica Meloni (eds.)

Arts, Portraits and Representation in the Reformation Era

Proceedings of the Fourth Reformation
Research Consortium Conference

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Patrizio Foresta / Federica Meloni (eds.): Arts, Portraits and Representation in the Reformation Era

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Patrizio Foresta / Federica Meloni (eds.): Arts, Portraits and Representation in the Reformation Era

Federica Meloni

Introduction

The course of visual culture in the 15th century

On the eve of the Reformation, there was talk of its being a time of 'visual hyper-figuration'[1] that permeated all aspects of daily life. This visual saturation was accentuated by certain devotional practices in which the image became the protagonist par excellence in the life of the community. Processions, theatrical representations at Easter, at Christmas, during Holy Week and in extraordinary situations, including sudden calamity, epidemics or upcoming battles, became privileged circumstances when visual instruments were used to nourish people's religious sentiments.[2]

By the early sixteenth century, the figurative arts had reached a level of development that attracted the attention of a vast literary criticism, which from then until today has continued to fascinate the public on all levels, whether in public or in private. For devotional, celebratory, commemorative and pedagogical purposes, these arts were adopted in the decoration of mansions and churches in the form of frescoes, paintings, altarpieces, stained-glass windows, engravings and sculptures. The artistic creations were also applied to furnishings, monumental works and funeral accoutrements and employed as printed illustrations, miniatures in manuscripts and codices and the decoration of sacred jewellery. The numerous objects of art and ornamental elements were carried out using a multitude of techniques and materials, endowing them with a highly variable economic worth according to their destination and scope.

The origins of this hyper-figuration are well known: at the end of the fifteenth century, art – in its broadest sense, i.e. functioning as a historical source – had undergone not only a quantitative transformation but also, first and foremost, a

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1 François Boespflug, *Le immagini di Dio. Una storia dell'Eterno nell'arte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012).
2 E.g. see Michele Bacci, 'L'effige sacra e il suo spettatore', in Castelnuovo, Enrico/Sergi, Giuseppe (ed.), *Arti e storia nel Medioevo* (4 vols.; Torino, Einaudi, 2002–4) vol. 3 (2004), 199–252.

qualitative one. The progressive proliferation of figurative languages had, in fact, gone hand in hand with the emergence of new artistic achievements. These achievements would prove significant for understanding the degree of maturity in the theological reflection of the Reformers of the following century. The transformation of pictorial space was probably the most revolutionary sixteenth-century innovation. The organisation of space in the previous century had followed a series of rules which imposed a symbolic subdivision that manifested itself in two ways: a horizontal axis, establishing an inferior and superior level to indicate the different degrees of the figure's dignity, and a vertical one where arrangement to the right or left of the work's main subject conferred roles and functions on the figures presented. At that time, with a rediscovered interest in physical reality, that pictorial space was designed based on its mathematical laws and materiality.

Even the physical space of the place of worship followed and inspired these fifteenth-century organisational rules. The placement of artistic works occurred through precise hierarchical designs. For example, the aisles intended for the faithful were distinct from the apsidal space where – as the site of the celebration of worship – works of large dimensions were displayed, including crucifixes or frescoes that ran along the walls. The area behind the altar was also dedicated to drawing the worshippers' attention inasmuch as this was the space where the eucharistic mystery took place. Here, the figurative works were integrated into the ritual, and each one became part of a specific moment during worship, thus acquiring a powerful visual impact, partly thanks to the use of wax candles that significantly enhanced the paintings or illuminated the objects.

With the advent of perspective, pictorial art incorporated the three-dimensional quality of reality and created the *trompe l'oeil* effect that endows entire works with a powerfully illusionistic significance. An initial example that bears witness to the manner with which Brunelleschi's rules of perspective were introduced can be found in *The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John and donors* by Masaccio (fig. 3). Masaccio reinterpreted traditional iconography within an altered logic that dictates the rules of perspective imposed on the artist in the service of a canonical Trinitarian scene. In the process, he experimented with innovative solutions. Note the position of God the Father, who, in order to be similarly represented in the central, glorious position as if on the throne of divine grace, is placed above a balustrade. His body, no longer floating unrealistically in the heavens, is proportionate to the Son, who is held by the cross. This complex representation was itself a significant novelty in art at the time,[3] one that demonstrates the manner in which the construction of three-dimensional space compelled the artist to bend traditional iconographies to fit new rules. These

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3 Boespflug, *Le immagini di Dio*, 219–21.

innovative standards included the sense of positioning on multiple generated spatial planes, new proportions to be respected and new techniques in the portrayal of objects, human beings and environments.

Furthermore, the formation of new rules of perspective altered the spatial and mental relationship of the spectator and the work in the course of the sixteenth century. The space between the one and the other was widened, 'the observer is pushed outside the representation' in an act that is no longer 'a mystical viewing, but rather an optical one'.[4] This was accompanied by a clear shift of attention from the object to the subject; the spectator is excluded from the work of art, but repositioned where s/he enjoys a unique and personalised vantage point. This aforementioned exclusion also represented an achievement on a level comparable to what the individual reached in Renaissance culture, becoming him/herself the measure of all things through his/her ingenuity, capable of reasoning and acting on nature and controlling it to his/her own advantage. Fifteenth-century art is strongly affected by Renaissance influences, including the manner with which it appropriated and made use of an improved knowledge of medicine and anatomy.

Devotio moderna and new artistic experimentation

These manifold artistic efforts contributed to propelling the fifteenth-century naturalistic style towards the hyper-realistic tastes that would assert themselves in the following century. In this direction, one of the techniques that especially lent itself to experimentation was the miniature, which as early as 1440 had enjoyed an extraordinary expansion. When the *Grandes Heures de Rohan* codex was compiled in the 1420s, an artist examining its pages would not have appeared particularly concerned with the new rules of perspective, although by contrast, he would have borne witness to the exceptional attention paid to the realistic reproduction of bodies and sentiments, applying them with the taste for the pathetic that was popular in those years. An observation of the Virgin Mary sprawling over the body of Christ (fig. 2) shows the sensitivity with which bodies and faces were depicted, together with the impressive minutia in detail found in expressions and gestures. The expressive charge that characterises individual subjects tends to individualise them with extreme precision, with the intention of rendering them unique and no longer the mere interpreters of a fixed scene.

If one wishes to understand fully the weight of this shift (these issues assume relevance in virtue of the reflections that will emerge in the context of the

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4 Jérôme Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole. Une théologie protestante de l'image* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1994), 242.

Reformation), it should be measured in contrast to the course taken by Byzantine and Russian iconography. As an example, we can examine the icon of Sveta Troijka, Andrei Rublev's masterpiece. This work has had a significant influence on western art until today (fig. 106). The three angels around the table are exact copies of each other. There are no differences; even their poses and gazes correspond in full. There are no indicators to attribute either age or gender. The very episode of Abraham's *philoxenia* found in Gen 18 has been removed and divested of the traditional narrative frame used to portray the story of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality. The effect of the great piety and emotional involvement in Rublev's work does not traverse the search for expression commonly found in French miniatures, but passes rather along traditional paths: the architecture of the figures, the use of colours and their symbolic values, the static nature and the general, silent contemplation of the cup in the centre of the table replicated in the drawn space of the figures of the three angels, and the play of glances expressing the Trinitarian perichoresis in the passage of the chalice of the first covenant and of the Eucharist in the New Testament.[5]

These two very different, if not opposed, modalities mentioned in the previous paragraphs equally demonstrate the effects of the *devotio moderna* which was consolidated at the end of the fourteenth century. They promoted an intimate and personal spirituality of the faithful in direct contact with the sacrifice of Christ and without intermediation. In this vein, an artwork became an object whose contemplation offered the faithful the occasion to contemplate themselves and their own faith.

One of the privileged subjects of this new relationship with images was Christ's Passion, where the representation of victory over death was replaced by the depiction of the suffering of that very death: the torments of the human being become those of the Son of God who, through his sacrifice on the cross, offers humankind a powerful moment of participation in the divine. In the *Grandes Heures de Rohan*, this is further extended; the observer not only witnesses the death of Christ, whose emaciated body lies on the ground and from whose wounds redeeming blood spills, but s/he also sees the totally human pain of Mary, who appears literally to fling herself over the body of her son. Through her veil, we see a face aged with pain. Her plain clothing reflects not the sumptuousness of fabric but rather convenience and simplicity. In the top right, the face of God the Father is not marked by a medieval impassivity or a hieratic character (signs of divine omnipotence), but He is Himself humanised and portrayed as an

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5 Boespflug, *Le immagini di Dio*, especially 116–17; Lev Gillet (Un Moine de l'Église d'Orient), 'La signification spirituelle de l'icône de la Sainte Trinité peinte par André Roublev', *Irenikon* 26 (1953) 133–9.

old man who takes part in equal measure in the human pain that is being consumed in the scene below. The effect reduces the scene to a family affair.

Devotio moderna thus deemed an artwork to be a tool to lead the faithful towards a direct communion with God through the contemplative meditation on the painting, plate or page. The image intended to foster an experience of authentic, interior faith and 'the desire for a direct and immediate relationship with the sacred'.[6] The artist was driven to reformulate his/her stylistic language towards greater restraint and a drastic limitation of the frivolous, mundane and sensual charge of the work. Alongside subjects that exalted the Christo-centrism and the compassion of the Father, other themes were developed that were more accessible in terms of private devotion, such as those found in the plate by Bernardo Daddi (fig. 1). During the 1330s, he painted a woman accompanied by two family members in the act of praying to the Virgin Mary. She is depicted within a frame that appears to outline a window onto the afterlife. In her left hand, she holds an open book and her right extends outside the frame. Her right arm and her gaze are projected towards the kneeling woman in a gesture of favour and direct participation in the woman's prayer. Michele Bacci defined this iconographic current as *pro anima*, highlighting the visual methods used to depict an active, reciprocal relation among the expectations of the faithful, their supplications and the gestures of actual intercession by the sacred subjects addressed, who, in turn, are able to guarantee the fulfilment of the requests for salvation.[7]

New iconographies in political culture and devotional culture

From the late Middle Ages, in the affirmation of an increasingly personal relationship with the sacred image, which is rendered a true and proper instrument of prayer and devotional practice, the figure of the Virgin experiences newfound attention. This development is seen in the spread of the iconographic motif that places her in an active role in the process of divine intercession together with Christ. The notion that not only the Son but also the Virgin mother can intervene directly with God is not biblical in nature. It appears in art from the eleventh century with the development of a more structured cult of the Virgin as *mater misericordiae* and *mater omnium*. Over the course of the fifteenth century, there are many instances of motifs of the dual intercession, where the Virgin stands alongside the Son in a two-voiced, single action with Jesus showing his wounds to

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6 Bacci, 'L'effige sacra', 228.
7 Michele Bacci, *'Pro remedio animae'. Immagini sacre e pratiche devozionali in Italia centrale (secoli XIII e XIV)* (Pisa: ETS, 2000).

the Father and the Madonna who uncovers her breast in memory of nursing Christ, both asking God to have mercy on sinners. While on the one hand, the Virgin – together with Christ – becomes directly responsible for the salvation of humankind, on the other, with the spread of the iconography of her Coronation by the Trinity, she returns to dominating the visual scene.

The theme of the Coronation is not solely limited to the figure of the Virgin but is also extended to God. In a retranslation of the religious value of the political signs of power, the crown becomes an attribute of the Virgin in much the same way as the peculiar triple crown may become an attribute of God the Father. This is evidenced mainly in the spread in French environments, from the beginning of the fifteenth century, of a unique iconographic subject that depicts God in the clothes of the pope. Crowned with the papal tiara, he is often dressed in the priestly vestments that the pope donned during liturgical ceremonies and seated on a throne that recalls the *cathedra Petri.* This 'pope-ifying' of God has been the subject of a multitude of different interpretations: the fact that it emerged in particular in French miniatures has led some scholars to see it as an exaltation of the papacy in the aftermath of the reorganisation brought about by the Western Schism. Other scholars, by contrast, do not believe it to be an emphasis of the temporal powers of the pope, but rather a warning to the contrary: the triple crown and the symbols of papal power have celestial, divine derivations, and the pope is but the earthly reflection of such and is not in total possession of divine powers. That being said, this is certainly not the historical path of its portrayal. This iconographic typology would remain limited in its diffusion. While it is found primarily in France, it is possible to see some examples in Spain, as shown e.g. in fig. 16, which depicts both the Father and the Holy Spirit with the triple crown as they turn the screws on a mystical winepress.

This representation was not found in Germany. During the years of the Protestant Reformation, when no one would have dreamt of raising the papal tiara and placing it on the head of God, it was used instead as a symbol unmistakably evoking the Antichrist. It was employed almost exclusively[8] in prints of a certain type of caricature to represent the pope and his iniquity (see fig. 5, 54, 87, 88). Moreover, in this figurative genre there was no hesitation in adding more than three crowns to the tiara as an act of sarcasm and derision. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, German sacred art saw artists crowning God with a crown that was not dissimilar to the imperial one.

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8 Jan Harasimowicz demonstrated how God with the crown made sporadic appearances in Reformed countries as well, see François Boespflug, 'Dieu en Pape. Une singularité de l'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age', *Revue Mabillon* n.s., 2 (1991) 167–205, on 183.

Luther and the renewed catechistic function of images

From the end of the fifteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century, many expressed a certain degree of discomfort at this flourishing visual culture with canons and aesthetic values that had long since become independent of the patron and location. Theologians, including Pierre d'Ailly, Vincenzo Ferrer and Girolamo Savonarola, perceived the risk of the observer's increasingly 'material' and 'sensual' consummation of the image.

This debate was anything but new: ever since the time of the iconoclast *querelle*, the West had rejected Isaurian rigour. That being said, it was nonetheless fascinated with its position – if we consider that the Carolingian propaganda against the Second Council of Nicaea arrived at theorising the principle of *nec adorare, nec frangi*,[9] which was not the conciliar solution. Be that as it may, images persisted in Gregorian logic with the function of being the Scriptures of the unsophisticated: they offered the possibility to worship what is represented through the veneration of representation. It was a way to legitimise even the boldest forms of art, which certain 'pre-Reformers' such as Jan Hus would contest.

Before his execution at the Council of Constance, Jan Hus had become a critic of the sumptuousness of images and the excessive sensuality of certain representations of the Virgin, and he had spoken out against the advantages the Church had drawn from the faithful's idolatrous use of such depictions. Despite this criticism, neither Hus nor Erasmus more than a century later would question the pedagogical function of the image in and of itself, or criticise its being an object of cult within the limits of general sobriety. However, both voiced a mistrust that was similar to Martin Luther's outlook.

Luther did not, in point of fact, elaborate a systematic stance on this issue. Instead, it could be said that he spoke 'strategically' of the appropriateness of the use of images, their function and their advantages and disadvantages depending on prevailing needs of different interlocutors, 'never iconoclastic, only temporarily iconophobic and selectively *iconomachus*', as Boespflug defined him. On this issue, too, Luther passed through various seasons (if not distinctly different phases) of thought. As Cottin observed, until 1522 he had voiced stark criticism against the visual culture of the time: in theology, he drastically rejected both images and any other object of cult as an object of devotion that distracts the faithful from the sole right thing: listening to the Word.[10] The *Verbum* is the exclusive vehicle of grace and salvation. In this order of ideas, images are either

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9 Jean Wirth, 'Il culto delle immagini', in Castelnuovo/Sergi (ed.), *Arti e storia nel Medioevo*, vol. 3, 3–47, on 7.

10 Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole*, 259–68.

completely irrelevant (*adiaphora*) or harmful as they feed the theology of merit and therefore the pride of those who are deluded into seeing the proclamation of Christ in worldly realties.[11] In a sermon on Ps 8, Luther explicitly states that 'the Kingdom of God is one of hearing, not of seeing'.[12]

In 1522, however, the context had changed. During the isolation of the Reformers at Wartburg, practical solutions were sought in Wittenberg to apply the new reforms. One of the main actors in this phase was Andreas Karlstadt. After having adhered to Luther's early ideas, Karlstadt and other Reformers intensified and expanded them more radically, especially those referring to the issue of images. They turned to the First Commandment and criticised the iconographic function supported by Pope Gregory I in the belief that, in addition to the clergy, laypeople also had the right to recognise what was truly divine in the Word. Images were not divine, and because they belonged to exteriority and corporeity, they were subordinate to the Word contained in the Book. Karlstadt's numerous sermons, however, coincided with the first instances of unrest carried out by groups of citizens who decided not to wait for authorisation from local authorities to divest the churches and monasteries of their artistic wealth. Concern on the part of city council magistrates and the Prince-Elector in relation to the commotion led to Karlstadt's progressive isolation, since he was considered the primary instigator of the unsophisticated people's unrest, and to Luther's being recalled to the city. Karlstadt left Wartburg on 1 March 1522, and the situation was swiftly brought under control.

The eight sermons that Luther delivered from 9 March dealt with the complex mainstays of the application of the Wittenberg reform. As far as images were concerned, he stated that in themselves they were 'neither good nor bad'. They became harmful when they were made objects of idolatrous practices both by those venerating them as icons, repositories themselves of the divine, and by those believing they acted in the service of God by destroying them.[13] At the time

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11 François Boespflug, 'Les étapes de la réflexion de Luther sur l'usage des images religieuses', in Boespflug, François/Fogliadini, Emanuela (ed.), *Lutero, la Riforma e le arti. L'articolato rapporto con la pittura, l'architettura e la musica* (Milano: Glossa, 2017) 33–52.

12 Cited in Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole*, 262.

13 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav/Lehmann, Helmut T. (55 vols.; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–86), vol. 40 (1958), 84; in this meaning, Luther openly states the Karlstadt's greatest error was to engage in destroying images, yet 'removing them from sight and leaving them in the heart' of the faithful. In this way, the opposite effect is achieved; instead of weakening the image and stripping it of its substance as an idol that is in the inner lives of the faithful, it eliminates it externally by force without caring for what rests in the souls of Christians. Later, when reflecting on the violent methods of those who incite the people to iconoclast uprisings, Luther reaches the following conclusions: 'This is to do away with images in a Karlstadtian manner, […] it is a work of the law which has taken place without the Spirit and faith. Yet it

when Karlstadt was being increasingly marginalised and essentially driven to leave Wittenberg, Luther struck a blow with the publication of *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*, which contains the harshest criticism of Karlstadt and the *Schwärmer*. In this treatise, we find Luther's most organic reflection on the issue of images, which from 1525 proves him to be opening up to iconographic culture. Having already reached the conclusion that the image in itself is a neutral object without intrinsic value until that value is endowed on it, according to its eventual use, Luther reiterated that art is without substance. This renders it subordinate to the Word inasmuch as it is only *ancilla theologiae*.[14]

Yet the iconoclasm of Karlstadt and the *Schwärmer* led Luther to recover a positive function of images as repositories of relevant didactic value. Be that as it may, Luther had ascertained with his typical vigour as the exegete he was that the Bible does not indeed condemn images, yet the Bible is full of examples where Jesus speaks in parables and images to assist in humankind's understanding of God's message. Because human beings are sinners by nature, they are unable to comprehend God's Word correctly through their capacities alone. God, who is merciful and good, uses the instruments of humankind, its mental categories and its sensorial characteristics as proof of his love. In this light, the image becomes a sign of the divine gift and of the presence of his word in the world.

In *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther confers on the image a threefold capacity: the first is mainly linked to memory because the image becomes a witness and visible sign of God and of faith; a second expresses an educational function because images can help understand the Word, especially for the less sophisticated; the last capacity is identified as the power of 'mediation' because it helps interiorise faith and the message of salvation, 'For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water look into it'. Hence, Luther wished to emphasise the fact that evoking mental images to grasp the heard message was a natural activity and 'If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes?'.[15] Jérôme Cottin, in fact, spoke of an image without aesthetics. In essence, Luther's image is one 'reduced to visual meaning', which acquires no artistic autonomy but remains necessarily linked to the text to which it refers. For Luther, the image is only writing depicted; or rather, it is Scripture depicted, and when it departs from the Book, it must be deplored and censured.

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makes for pride of heart, as though they by such works had gained a special status before God. Actually this means teaching works and the free will all over again'; ibid., 89.

14 Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole*, 264–6.

15 Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, 90–1.

Given these circumstances, patrons and artists adapted their iconographic subjects. Indeed, the Reformer does not shirk from privileging some subjects and condemning others, for example, Christ of the *Parousia*, the dual intercession, the Virgin of Mercy and the Lactation of Saint Bernard. The first causes excessive fear in believers, discouraging them from faith and saying nothing of forgiveness, the love of Christ or his sacrifice for humankind;[16] the other three divert attention from true faith in Christ through the presence of Mary with her excessively worldly or sensual representations.

Therefore, condemnation or favour do not depend solely on aesthetic taste but rather are the expression of a theological judgement referred to in a faith where the Word lies at the centre of the hearts of worshippers. The image and how it is used are not to be linked to the conception of theologies of the works,[17] but they are at the service of the Proclamation.[18]

Does this mean that the Reformation introduced a typically Protestant 'repertoire'? It does not because Reformers drew from a repertoire that was already in use, the Baptism of Christ, the Trinity, the Throne of Grace, the Good Shepherd and the Mystical Winepress to be described further below. Instead, what is clearly recognisable is the transformed style in portrayal and in preferred techniques.[19] In much the same way as for sacred music, Luther significantly scaled down the expressive role of the image, substantially stripping it of its aesthetic autonomy. The art he promoted was characterised by a more rigid canon, which finds greater structure in the work of Cranach.

Reformation art: new paths for the salvation of the soul

Of no less importance than Dürer, the studio of Lucas Cranach the Elder and his son Cranach the Younger had a profound influence on all subsequent art in the German and Flemish context. Similar to music, their artistic 'legibility' would go beyond the confines of the Reformed confession. Indeed, Cranach's art was the most rigorous expression of Luther's theological thought. Cranach the Elder was the official painter to the Court of Saxony from 1525, and later to the Prince-

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16 See for example Margarete Stirm, 'Les images et la Bible', in Bedouelle, Guy/Roussel, Bernard (ed.), *Le temps des Réformes et la Bible* (8 vols.; Paris: Beauchesne, 1989) vol. 5, 683–750, on 689.

17 Franco Buzzi, 'Martin Lutero: le arti a servizio della Parola', in Boespflug/Fogliadini (ed.), *Lutero, la Riforma e le arti*, 3–20.

18 Boespflug, 'Dieu en Pape', 268–70.

19 Bernard Aikemait, 'L'immagine della Riforma, la riforma dell'immagine: problemi di pittura religiosa nel Cinquecento fra l'Italia, la Francia e l'Europa', in Benedict, Philip/Seidel Menchi, Silvana/Tallon, Alain (ed.), *La Réforme en France et en Italie* (Roma: École française de Rome, 2007) 223–41.

Elector Frederick III. He was a close friend of Luther and a believer in his doctrines; in 1525, he and his wife were the witnesses at Luther and Katharina's wedding. In the following year, Cranach was a witness to the baptism of their firstborn child, and in 1541 Luther chose him to be his daughter's godfather. Cranach's art naturally assimilated Luther's notions and actively contributed to their propagation: the printing presses inaugurated in Wittenberg in 1523 published prints and cover pages of the main works of the Reformation and a considerable number of contentious pamphlets. Cranach and Luther worked very closely together; on many occasions, Luther himself suggested the iconographic motifs of the paintings or engravings and corrected their content if he thought them too distant from the biblical story.[20]

One of the characteristics of Reformed sacred art was a strict adherence to biblical stories. Beginning with Cranach the Elder, these tales were made topical and set within the daily life and politics of the community of the age. For example, the altarpiece in Wittenberg (fig. 47–8) shows Luther preaching to a small assembly, with his wife Katharina and some of their children present. In the centre panel that illustrates the Lord's Supper, Cranach again depicts an apostle with Luther's features dressed as Junker Jörg[21] offering a chalice to a servant that resembles Cranach the Younger. The left panel portrays Philip Melanchthon celebrating a baptism where one of the godfathers (to the left) is a self-portrait of the artist; the godfather on the right is Johannes Bugenhagen, the pastor of St Mary's Church in Wittenberg. Bugenhagen is holding two keys that have the power of binding and loosening. These had previously been the exclusive symbols of St Peter and thus of the Pope of Rome. With the white key, he readmits a believer to communion; with the grey key, he pushes another away.

It should come as no surprise that Cranach had few qualms about using an object so dear to the Catholic tradition in order to create his altarpiece (he created many of them, see *infra* also fig. 55). From a technical point of view, there were few significant innovations in the 1520s and afterwards, except for specific, precise choices in the use and placement of traditional instruments. The altarpiece, for example, which was usually meant to mark the most sacred space in the 'papist' liturgical area, became a Lutheran catechistic tool for teaching the true

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20 Jérôme Cottin, 'Cranach et le protestantisme', *Arts Sacrés* 7 (2010) 28–35.

21 After the Diet of Worms and the retreat to Wartburg, Luther assumed the false name of Junker Jörg, set aside his habits and grew his beard and hair. This change in appearance was not simply connected to the need for a false identity, but it also involved significant symbolic value: Luther meant it as a sign of protest against canon law and the Catholic uses of tradition. In certain portraits, he is portrayed in the appearance of Junker Jörg with a doublet and sword to evoke the *miles Christi* that, like Saint George, fought the dragon; that is, the Church of Rome, cf. Maria Lucia Weigel, 'Martin Luther in Portraits', in Melloni, Alberto (ed.), *Martin Luther. A Christian between Reforms and Modernity (1517–2017)* (2 vols.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) vol. 2, 1093–1118, on 1103.

faith. Furthermore, Luther had stripped not only cult objects of their old meaning, but also the spaces and accompanying furnishings. Religious architectural elements, as products of art, are subordinate to *sola Scriptura*, because they are 'places of sonority, not of vision'.[22] Within the sacred environment, the altarpiece thus becomes solely an instructive panel located at the centre of a space where the pulpit remains the essential element from which the Word resounds and which the altar reflects as a visual focus. This became the primary difference in Reformed architecture: on the basis of the fundamental dividing line in the conception of the Eucharist, the Reformed churches drastically reduced the role of the altar. In addition to removing all liturgical furnishings and images, both devotional and memorial, Reformers also eliminated all the accessory altars along the aisles, placed the benches around the pulpit and generally arranged the altar and the baptismal font at the foot of the pulpit. For the Eucharist and communion rite, long tables were often placed to accommodate worshippers, sometimes even outside the church itself (fig. 110–11).

The painters of the early Reformation cultivated novel interpretations of the theorisation of art that was endowed with a primarily catechistic function. It offered to those aspiring to salvation a path along which there was no longer need for the traditional signs of past iconography. By contrast, it posed a truth rediscovered in the facets and expressions of human physicality. It was a new conceptual elaboration that presented the papacy with the possibility to foster rich ambiguity, allowing patrons to commission the sacred and for artists to personalise and express their own meaning of art and of humankind.

Strategies of communication and propaganda in Reformation art: representations, identity and memory

The different ways in which the Reformation constructed a culture of the image according to whatever aims this identity was intended is a theme in its own right, as is demonstrated by the essays printed here. If compelled to choose a subject that exemplifies these tendencies, the image of Luther himself could be selected. Upon examination, the portrait par excellence of Martin Luther reveals a significant evolution. This transformation can be traced along two paths: the first follows the same steps as his reflections on the image, while the other follows the reception of his figure from the 1520s on. An excellent essay by Maria Lucia

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22 Federico Bellini, 'Riforma protestante e riforma dell'architettura religiosa', in Bancu, Stefano (ed.), *Riforma e modernità. Prospettive e bilanci a 500 anni dalle Tesi di Lutero* (Roma: Studium, 2018) 79–101, on 81.

Weigel explores the subject of Luther's portrait by Cranach the Elder.[23] Indeed, all the iconographic representations of Luther can be traced back to him. These depictions would later become prototypes; reproduced in series, replicated in other mediums and using other techniques, they rose to become foundational models of distinctive iconographic traditions.

Luther's first portrait (1520), in this case a copperplate engraving, remains an example of humanist iconography. It depicts a full bust inserted within a niche with one hand holding an open book and the other raised in an oratory gesture. It is accompanied by an epigraph that recalls the antiquity of certain Roman funeral practices.

Shortly thereafter, a re-elaboration of this portrait by Hans Baldung was circulated. This Strasbourg artist removed the niche, and above Luther's head he placed a halo and a dove, symbols of the Holy Spirit. This transition clearly demonstrates the shift in intentions, turning Luther – at the time involved in the Diet of Worms – into a Reformation saint.

The popularising and propagandistic scope of Luther's effigy returned to the fore in 1523. Daniel Hopfer took one of Cranach's icons of Luther dressed in the vestments of a doctor and exegete and not only added a halo but also translated the original Latin into the German language. Ottavia Niccoli offers interesting observations concerning these first early portrayals. She notes how the choice of clothing in which Luther was depicted went far beyond customs and fashion: 'Almost all the representations show him dressed as a monk and not in his doctoral gown', which signifies that 'his relationship with the Scripture is linked entirely to the biblical *ruminatio* which was typical of monks, and therefore has a religious, not a cultural, value'.[24]

In time, the models of the idealisation of Luther and his sanctity would be abandoned, partly due to the shift in Luther's thought in relation to his followers' perceptions. In January 1522, while the iconoclast riots were raging in Wittenberg, Luther launched an appeal from Wartburg that spoke of his awareness of the risks of his becoming too much the main protagonist: 'May my name be silenced, and do not call yourselves Lutherans but Christians instead. What is Luther? The doctrine is not mine, nor have I been sacrificed for anyone', followed by, 'I am certain the word is not mine, but rather the word of Christ'.

This standpoint also brought about a shift in the portraiture effected in Cranach's studio. Stripped of all the symbols of sacred iconography, Luther's portrait became that of a simple man, in accordance with his principles: 'The

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23 Weigel, 'Martin Luther in Portraits'.
24 Ottavia Niccoli, 'Aleandro a Worms (1520–1521). Fonti figurate della Riforma nelle parole di un avversario', in Felici, Lucia (ed.), *Ripensare la Riforma protestante. Nuove prospettive degli studi italiani* (Torino: Claudiana, 2015) 325–46, on 332.

beings thus represented are but men, creatures of God; they possess both dignity and insuperable weakness or, to take the words from the letter to the Hebrews, they are "foreigners and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13)'.[25]

Drawing on the humanist canons of realism, physiognomy and anatomy, the most famous portrait of Luther was created. It is a 'photograph' with a naturalistic realism in the folds of his skin and the aging of his bone-structure. Idealisation was lost but a decisive accentuation of the individual's identity was articulated. The portrait is divested of its mythical and heroic aura, but is no less functional in making him the central figure of Protestant memory. It acquired political value when he appeared, armed with the Bible, alongside Ulrich von Hutten, who in turn was armed with a sword. The association of the two figures endowed Luther with an undeniably political role; he is portrayed as the leader and defender of all things German and beyond. The representation also depicted him as the valiant soldier of Christ and the founder of the Church of renewed faith.

The new series of portraits depicts him half- or three-quarter-bust, wearing a cap and cloak. From 1539, he is generally painted bareheaded and with a book in his hand. These portraits were accompanied by numerous engravings by Dürer, whose art continued to be an inspiration for Cranach's studio. The culmination of these works is found in the portrait of Luther on his deathbed (see fig. 26), where he is painted half-bust wearing a white shirt. His eyes are closed, and his expression of serenity highlights his peaceful death and grace.

It can be clearly surmised from his own portraits that not only did Luther become more indulgent over time towards the visual arts, but also that he began to make conscious use of them to achieve communicative goals. The culture of the Reformation was mainly one of the Word; from a theological and doctrinal point of view, this is uncontested. Having said that, in terms of the circulation of ideas and the spread of a Reformed message, there were more incisive means of communication than the printed or spoken word. Images impressed in paintings, portraits and book illustrations of the Reformation were essential to spreading the Reformed message. In addition to these, and perhaps most importantly, there were also the so-called *Flugblätter*. These pamphlets were produced in high numbers in printing presses in many German cities. They were small, unbound papers (generally in eighths) printed in black and white on simple paper to guarantee economy and the ease of circulation. They were essentially propagandistic in scope and could contain apologetic or controversial images, satire being the primary choice for the latter (see for example, fig. 54, 57, 87, and 88).

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25 Bernard Reymond, *Le protestantisme et les images. Pour en finir avec quelques clichés* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1999), 49.

The effectiveness of the *Flugblatt* lay in the communicative impact of the subject depicted. Vulgarity was a potent tool for the satirical vignettes, but the graphic simplicity of the engraving also contributed to the interpretation and legibility of the message. The pamphlets were often circulated during preaching campaigns in which oral performances (sermons, songs or even theatrical plays) aided the comprehension and interiorisation of the theological and doctrinal content of the Reformation and often took on greater social meaning and value. The *Flugblatt* was clearly an operation of propaganda which Reformers used to spread new doctrines as widely as possible. Furthermore, the pamphlets would become an integral weapon in the heated battle against the Pope in Rome that started in the mid-1520s.

Illustrated books of the theological and doctrinal principles of the Reformation were also printed. In these texts, images were used for a strictly pedagogical and didactic purpose to help those, including the illiterate, understand those principles. They had less controversialist aims but were of no less significance in the analysis of the new visual codes of the Reformation. As several essays in this work demonstrate, after the Augsburg Confession, they were drafted to highlight a precise choice of faith, and from the 1540s and in the wake of what would be defined as the processes of confessionalisation, artistic trends were set in motion to emphasise religious identity. These new tendencies were rendered in the production of *Konfessionsbilder* and in the spread of celebratory monuments and paintings where the theme of commemorating the dead was blended with the memory of the Reformation. The first typology includes those paintings that depict the presentation of the *Confessio* to the Emperor during the Diet of 1530, which – as noted by Ashley Hall – Luther and his followers considered the true break with the Catholic Church of Rome (not the nailing of the ninety-five theses that we consider today).[26] The list of the articles of faith and of the abuses in need of rectification offered the first instance of an organic, normative status. This gave rise to the spread of paintings and plates where the presentation of the *Confessio Augustana* to the Emperor becomes the occasion to describe figuratively the content of the articles of faith. The *Konfessionsbild* by Andreas Herneisen, painted in 1602 for the church in Kasendorf (fig. 109), is an excellent example and a model for many others. Each scene is accompanied by a substantial text that served to describe the biblical foundations of the story illustrated. The Crucifixion of Christ dominates the centre of the painting to remind us that his sacrifice is the only thing that grants victory over death, the devil and sin. The Evangelists stand at the foot of the cross, and the sacraments are depicted

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26 H. Ashley Hall, 'Konfessionsbilder: The Process of Enforcing Confessional Identity in Early Modern Lutheran Territories', *Journal of Religion & Society. Supplement Series* 13 (2016) 124–41, on 127.

around the scene. However, they are also accompanied by good Christian practices such as private confession, marriage, song and music.

The plates of the *Konfessionsbilder* assumed the form of large manifestos where text and images were integrated to display the liturgy of the new faith to believers. These were set within scenes of daily life and had the aim of teaching the faith's orthopraxis. It was common for these depictions to include sections in which, in portrayals of the struggle against heretics, the new enemies of the Lutheran faith were included, e.g. Calvin and Zwingli. In the celebratory scenes, by contrast, Martin Luther and the group from Wittenberg were shown (e.g. fig. 47).

In the epitaph of Meyenburg (fig. 56), a group of men standing are seen on the left and the features of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon are clearly recognisable. This is an example in contrast to that offered by the Kasendorf table. In the Kasendorf one, the Wittenberg group is shown in its original role as directors of the Reformation; in the epitaph, greater value is given to testimony and to the homage owed to Meyenburg. This is effected by portraying his circle of friends and by the presence of Erasmus of Rotterdam, who, far from being one of the heralds of the Reformation, was instead a friend of the deceased and of his family.[27]

Images lose their aesthetics and sanctity, but other functions and aspirations are transferred onto them. This would not suffice to impede the substantial decline of visual art in the German context from the eighteenth century on. It would, however, permit them to play a central role in instruction and in the spread of religious, social, even political knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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27 Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'La storia e le immagini. La memoria della Riforma nelle opere di Lucas Cranach e Hans Holbein', *Reti medievali* 7 (2006) 137–63.

Images between traditional iconographics
and new theological meanings