

icono

clash

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»There is no stronger evidence that we have been successful in our effort ... than when the patient reacts to it with the words 'I didn't think that,' or 'I didn't (ever) think that.'« — SIGMUND FREUD, NEGATION (1925)

Two Aspects. Two Objects

Especially when they seek to publish their endeavors, image breakers become image makers. Marcus Gheerhaerts the Elder, a Calvinist iconophobe with an immense imagination, gave defacement an unforgettable face.

Produced in the immediate wake of Protestant iconoclasm in the Low Countries in 1566, when a good proportion of Netherlandish church art was smashed and burned within weeks, his large anamorphic etching is the sixteenth century's most dialectical icon of iconoclasm. Surviving today in only one impression, and brought to the present exhibition quasi as its monstrous mascot, it presents to the eye two distinct images, the one forming and the other deforming.

Viewed from up close, at reading distance, it displays iconoclasm. On a strange, bulbous hill, along its terraces and in its hollows, swarming figures engage in religious practices of the type that Protestant reformers branded as idolatry. The seven sacraments of the Roman Church, along with such Catholic usages as pilgrimage, bell-ringing, the sale of indulgences, and image veneration itself, are each described with an ethnographer's precision. It is only the stray detail (e.g., a bird sitting on a monk from atop an icon-bearing pole), plus the overall chaos of the whole, that condemns and enters them into a gallery of folly and deception. Iconophilia is at once censored and preserved, like the Soviet Union's museums of atheism. In the early sixteenth century, in the Church of St. Mary in Zwickau, offensive images were taken to a storeroom named the *Götzenkammer* (the idol-chamber). There they languished as baleful documents of superstition until around 1850, when they were earmarked for the city's new historical museum.¹ In order to vilify, it is also necessary to exhibit. At the base of his print, in the undulating flatlands from which

the hill of idolatry rises, Gheerhaerts repudiates what he displays. Image breakers – tall, bearded men in long furlined coats – break, bury, and burn church ornament as if it were garbage.

Viewed from afar, from the distance not from where one reads a page but from where one beholds a picture, the print displays an altogether different aspect: the grotesque icon of a tonsured monk. The bonfire of vanities in the landscape's lower right, suggestive of a topology of hell, also rises from the monster's heart. In their archimbaldesque interplay, the etching's dual aspects of place (landscape of iconoclasm) and of person (icon of monk) at once perform and undo defacement. Instances of idolatry are fitted into appropriate zones of the face that they (the little structured scenes themselves) reciprocally shape and reinforce. The Eucharist is elevated in the monster's mouth, where the wheaten disk will be received, and confession is heard in his ear. And right between his cavernous eyes – which are filled, and thus blinded, by the (to Protestant eyes) unbiblical sacraments of marriage and orders – stands a venerated crucifix: Christ on the cross as the veritable icon of icons.

The grotesque face, in turn, gets modified by these scenes. The figures crawl on and into it, like insects picking a cadaver clean. Note how the birds that dot the sky read like flies buzzing above carrion. The iconophiles infiltrate the face's orifices so that it (he, the monk) becomes like the idols it adores, those monsters of whom the Psalmist warns, "They have mouths but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not."² Gheerhaerts' image argues that, even before the hammer strikes, idolatry, having mistaken objects for humans, made humans into objects. Iconophilia is its own defacement, creating through its own energy the etching's festive furor-fare. Iconoclasts, for their part, do not deface the face but merely bare its prior deface-

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¹ Sergiusz Michalski, *Das Phänomen Bildersturm*, in *Bilder und Bildersturm im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, Robert Scribner (ed.), Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1990, p. 110, citing Ernst Fabian, *Der erste Versuch, in Zwickau ein Museum zu errichten*, in *Mitteilungen des Altertumsvereins für Zwickau und Umgebung*, 11, 1914, pp. 1-13.

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² Psalm 115: 4-8; Psalm 135: 15-18; Margaret Aston, *The King's Bedpost: Reformation and Iconography in a Tutor Group Portrait*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 170.

Marcus Gheerhaerts the Elder / Allegory of Iconoclasm / c. 1566-1568 /
etching / 15 x 10.4" / British Museum, London



»We want no more cross ...« / c. 1526 / woodcut /
in A Truly Horrific History of the Peasant Rebellion



ment. Clearing things away to reveal the underlying monster, they disenchant a world that, even after their toil, will be haunted still. What if this etching were not an object in the exhibition but the exhibition itself? Iconoclasm: a rhizomorphic passage among an architecture of cells, in which having images and having done with images collide to form a new image where iconoclasm, personified, is glimpsed again. We would wish, of course, that the idol chambers on the hill were less prejudicially appointed, that is, that the use of images were not *always* staged as an emblem of abuse. Then what believers do with pictures might seem, for once, less naive and penetrable: an activity fully as complex (and as “knowing”) as what the critical eye performs in its search for an imageless beyond. Then, too, we would be able at least to hesitate before censoring and mourning what the scenography of museological display will have modified: authentic religion, beautiful art, scientific science. More crucially, we would wish the face that iconoclasm globally shaped to be a visage not of the iconoclast’s imaginary *fanaticus* (from Latin *fanum* =

»The crucified idol we raze out of childish scorn« / c. 1526 / woodcut /
in A Truly Horrific History of the Peasant Rebellion



temple), villain of so many anti-superstition campaigns, but of the hatred and fanaticism of the clash itself. But we certainly would relish the supreme and paradoxical *visuality* of Gheerhaerts’s image. For both aspects – furor-fare and anamorphic face, iconoclasm and icon – are deeply engaging images of the two mutually incompatible absolutes that this exhibition seeks to put on view: if only we could do without representation / we cannot do without representation.³

We could not turn the galleries of the ZKM into a life-size equivalent of this amusement park monster.⁴ The print must therefore hang as but one offering within a cell exploring the clash of face with defacement, of image with non-image, of God’s necessary representation and non-representation, within the domain of religion. There, the artist-iconophobe Gheerhaerts performs an iconoclasm through the icon itself. Beyond the story of Protestant image breaking unfolding in the landscape, beyond even the blow symbolically struck at an idolatrous clergy by way of the face, the etching systematically disfigures whichever figure it yields. Whatever we see

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_ See Bruno Latour’s essay in this catalog.

_ Bruno Latour suggested such an architecture during an early meeting of the curatorial group.



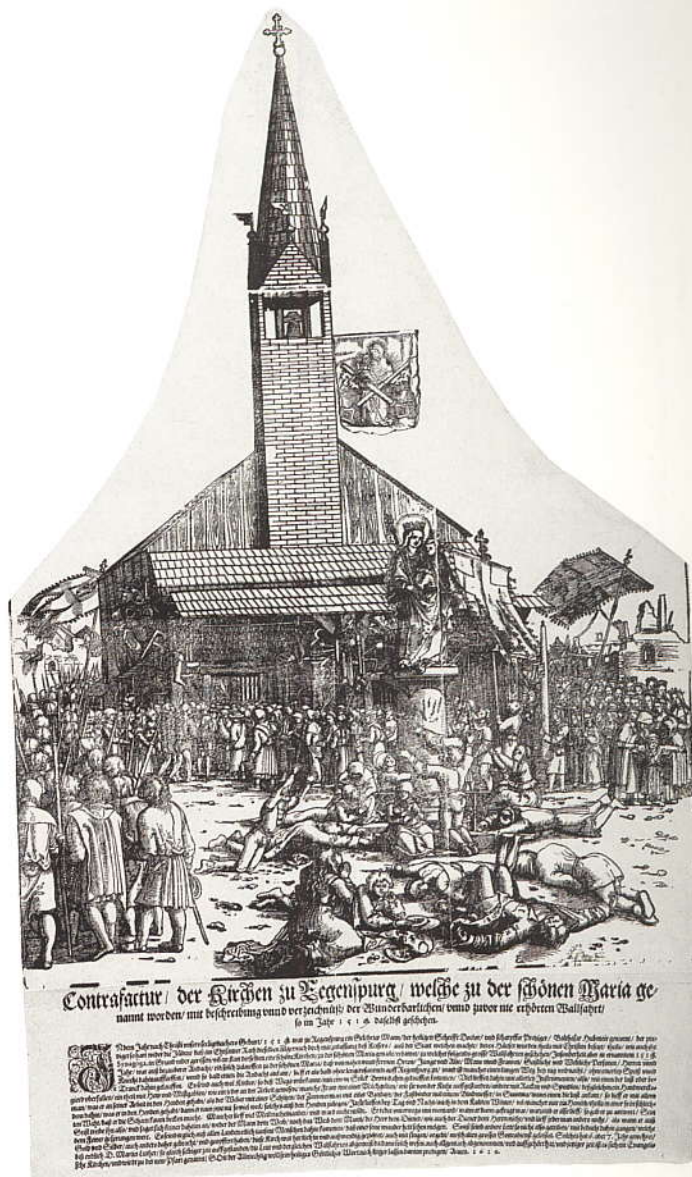
ends up belonging to some other thing, some other viewpoint, thus undoing both object and beholder. In shifting between the perspectives of landscape and face, the etching also repeats – as in an apotropaic ritual – the error it imputes to its target, the idols, which confuse *things* and *persons*. Yet what were those quasi-objects, the *Götzen*, that Gheerhaerts breaks and collects? Or to put this more generally, which is to say, to situate this one offering within a history of Western monotheism, as an interminable, agonistic succession of non-image by non-image all within the ineluctable medium of images: what and how does the divine image show?

Long before the hammer strikes them, religious images are already self-defacing. Claiming their truth by dialectically repeating and repudiating the deception from which they alone escape, they are, each of them, engines of the iconoclasm that periodically destroys and renews them. In Christian culture of the late Middle Ages – the assault on which continues to model the modern critique – the image that people principally venerated was such a picture. It was an icon of God's hiddenness from icons like itself.

The Image Breakers Are Image Makers⁵

Protestant iconoclasts took a special relish in breaking crucifixes.

Certainly, they smashed other church pictures with zeal. They vented great fury on effigies of the Virgin and the saints. Held to be invested with miraculous powers, and venerated in special cults, these exemplified for iconophobes both the idolatrous belief in pictures and an erroneous faith in intercessors: both as images and as personage, that is, the Virgin and saints were an affront to the one unrepresentable God. The cult of the so-called Beautiful Maria of Regensburg stands advertised (documented?) by a large woodcut by Michael Ostendorfer. Ecstatic pilgrims crowd into a temporary wooden church containing an icon that, in 1519, was believed



Michael Ostendorfer / Die Wallfahrt zur Schönen Maria von Regensburg [The Pilgrimage to the Beautiful Virgin of Regensburg] / c. 1519 / woodcut / two sheets stuck together, image and text, inscription by Albrecht Dürer / 15 x 26" / Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg. Kupferstichkabinett

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⁵ This formula modifies the famous dictum of the historian Hermann Heimpel, (*Die Bilderstifter waren die Bilderstürmer*, in *Der Mensch in seiner Gegenwart*, second edition, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1957, pp. 377-404.) That is, the same class of people who fervently venerated pictures became, in the course of the Reformation, the very ones who fervently smashed them.

Hans Baldung Grien /
Christi Himmelfahrt
(Christuskörper, der
zum Himmel getragen
wird) [The Ascension of
Christ (Christ's Body
Being Carried to
Heaven)] / 1517 /
woodcut, hand colored /
Albertina, Vienna /
© photo: Albertina,
Vienna



to have healed a man injured while demolishing the synagogue of the city's violently evicted Jews. Note the ruined building in the right background, remnants of a Jewish house of worship. The impression displayed in the present exhibition bears an indignant inscription by its original collector, the artist Albrecht Dürer, who laments the disgrace to God that such idolatry represents.⁶

In the public performances of church cleansing, however, it was the removal, degradation, and destruction of crucifixes that held pride of place. Perhaps this was because the crucifix seemed to instance idolatry in its most primary form, as the worship of the image instead of God. Yet never is the ambivalence of iconoclasm more evident than when it strikes the image of Christ on the cross.

A few examples from a host of documented instances: in Stadelhofen near Zurich in 1523, a certain Klaus Hottinger, having obtained a wooden wayside crucifix from its owner, broke it into pieces, which he gave to the poor as firewood, in a typical gesture of critical economy.⁷

First exiled, then tried for blasphemy in the Catholic city of Lucerne, Hottinger refused to honor a crucifix brought before him. He confessed that "the passion of Christ must be received in true faith in the heart," and declared the picture itself to be a mockery: as with the prophet Jeremiah, inward religion repudiates external pictures. In 1523, iconoclasts had numerous rationales: images contradicted the Old Testament law, were a wasteful expenditure, exiled Christians from God's word, distracted the eye, symbolized the power of a corrupt Church, contradicted apostolic poverty, perpetrated fraud, etc. But in the sixteenth century, the most global objection was Hottinger's: as spirit to flesh, as inner to outer, religion had to be purified from things of this world, and to achieve this, certain things that were not thus purified had to be eradicated according to the formula made famous by Zwingli: out of sight is out of mind; to rid the heart of idols one must first banish them from the heart; *ab Aug, ab Herz*. Burned at the stake,

Albrecht Dürer /
Schweißtuch Christi von
einem Engel ausgebreitet
[The Veil of Christ
Being Spread by Angels]
/ 1516 / etching /
7.4 x 5.3" / Albertina,
Vienna / © photo:
Albertina, Vienna



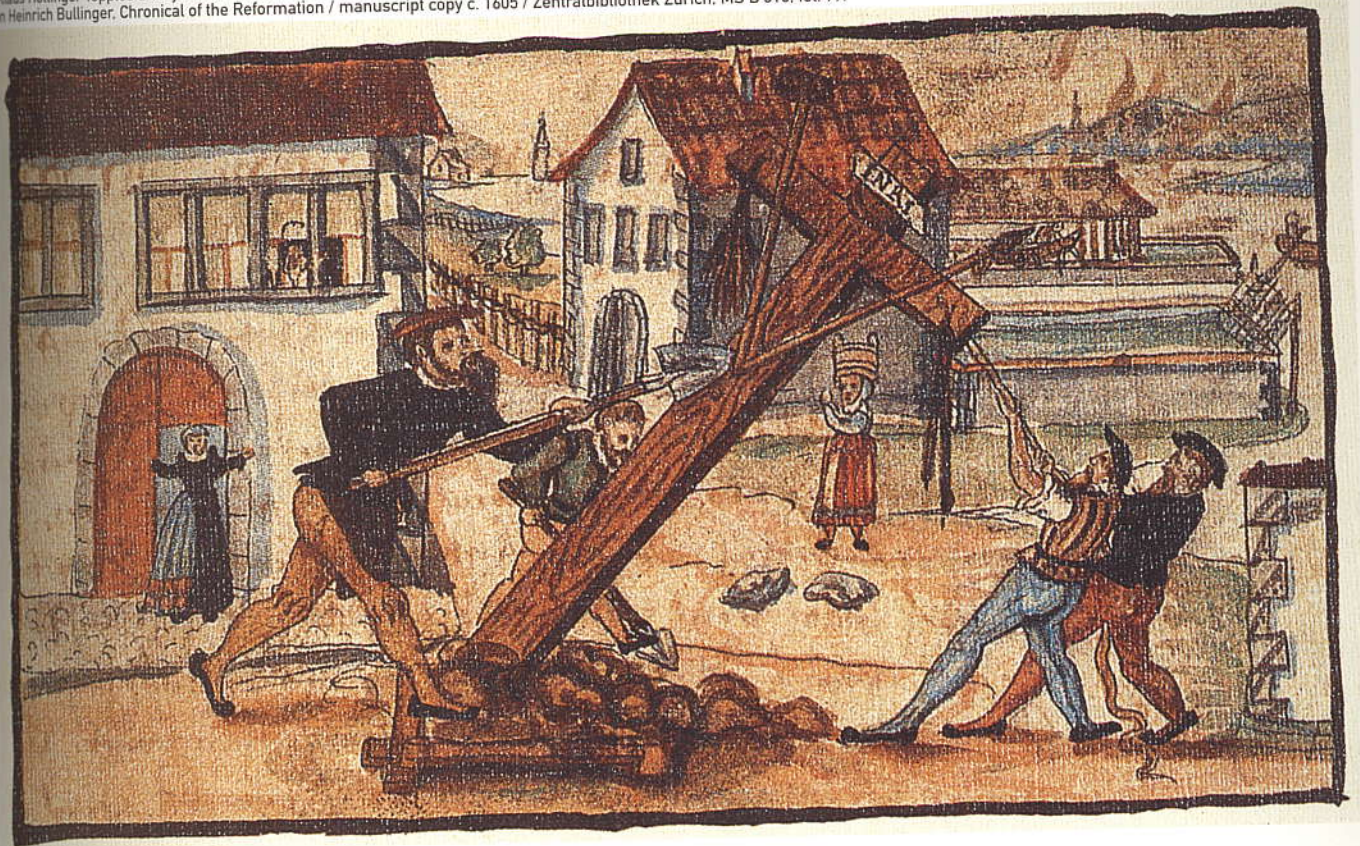
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⁶ Albrecht Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlaß*, Hans Rupprieh (ed.), Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 1956-1969.

⁷ Heinrich Bullinger, *Reformationschronik*, manuscript c. 1605, Copy of Heinrich Thomann, Zentralbibliothek Zürich, MS B 316; see Peter Jezler, *Tempelreinigung oder Barbarei? Eine Geschichte vom Bild des Bilderstürmers*, in *Bilderstreit. Kulturwandel in Zwinglis Reformation*, Hans-Dietrich Altendorf and Peter Jezler (eds), Theologischer Verlag, Zürich, 1984, pp. 78-79.

Klaus Hottinger Topples a Wayside Crucifix in Stadelhofen / illustration / pen and ink and watercolor / in Heinrich Bullinger, Chronical of the Reformation / manuscript copy c. 1605 / Zentralbibliothek Zürich, MS B 316, fol. 99r



Urs Graf / Fraudulent Image-Miracle in Bern / 1507 / woodcut / in Thomas Murner, On the Four Heretical Preachers of the Observant Order at Bern, Strasbourg, 1509



»Here speaks a pious Christian and admonishes the scandalous people that they abstain from their evil mischief« / c. 1526 / woodcut / in A Truly Horrific History of the Peasant Rebellion

and immortalized in Heinrich Bullinger's *Chronicle of the Reformation*, Hottinger became the first Protestant martyr. On one manuscript copy of the *Chronicle*, an early seventeenth century illustrator depicts Hottinger toppling an empty cross rather than a crucifix, perhaps because he (the watercolorist) was unwilling to paint a Christ statue. Hottinger, meanwhile, wields a shovel that extends, formally, into the lance which, according to legend, was wielded by the Roman centurion and delivered Christ's mortal wound.⁸ This is a typically ambivalent motif, on the one hand depicting the idea that Hottinger, in being martyred, suffered a Passion, while on the other hand linking him with the Passion's original perpetrators. Another example: in Basel in 1529, a crucifix was pulled from the Münster's rood screen and dragged to the market, where a crowd mocked it with the words, "If you are God, then save yourself, but if you're a man, then bleed."⁹ Addressed to the effigy by people who deny that pictures can hear or speak, this taunt recalls the standard plea, repeated in prayers and votiv inscriptions attached to images, "Help me!" At the same time, it also echoes the words Christ's tormentors spoke at the crucifixion: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40); "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us" (Luke 23:37), etc. Complexly allusive, the iconoclast's taunt seems oddly well rehearsed, more like a chronicler's embellishment than an image breaker's spontaneous cry. Yet it plays throughout Protestant iconoclasm like a steady refrain.¹⁰ It adds insult to another ubiquitous injury: the public demonstration that the image is a fabricated thing, an object made of wood or stone. "Look," the image breakers like to cry, showing a broken effigy to a gathered crowd, "Can't you see? It's nothing but wood!" The eye, believed to have been formerly dazzled into seeing the thing as a person, is forced to look again and see a thing. Exposed *as* a thing, the idol is revealed to be ... nothing: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). "Look," cried a weaver in Tournai, grabbing the Host

from a priest, "Deceived people, do you believe this is the King, Jesus Christ, the true God and Savior? Look!" Then he crumbled the Host and ran. "Look," exclaimed an iconoclast in Albiac holding up relics, "Look, they are only animal bones!"¹¹ Already in 1507, rumors circulated of a fraudulent image miracle in Bern, in which a pietà that appeared to weep was exposed as a deceptive artifice involving piped in varnish. The Swiss artist Urs Graf's woodcut illustration diagrams the trick, yet one wonders how sharp the distinction was between such automata and veristic pictures and theater of the time, and whether in all cases viewers easily maintained a suspension of disbelief in order to feel piously sacred presence.

Unlike these disenchanting cries and demonstrations, however, the phrase "save yourself" enrolls the crucifix in new fiction, one in which it, as object, is ritually crucified. A Catholic broadsheet from 1621 vilifying Calvinist iconoclasm in Veltin (in present-day Lombardy) records the gesture.¹² At the right, a sculpted crucifix has been hung upside down, presumably after being whipped by the scourge balanced on the hook. Woodcuts from a Catholic pamphlet from one century earlier depict similar degradations and blames them on "Martin Luther's teaching."¹³

In the rites of violence they improvised¹⁴, iconoclasts seemed to relish their role as scoundrels. During carnival celebrations in Hildesheim in 1543, members of the tailors' guild hauled a much-venerated Christ statue from the church of St. Andreas into their drinking hall, where they ordered it to drink. Playing off its non-response, they began to taunt the effigy with words like those spoken by Christ's tormentors in Passion plays of the time: "Now how's he supposed to drink? Can't you see? He's been whipped, his blood is squirting out of him and he's holy and impotent, so he just can't do it."¹⁵ Then, after a pause that made muteness audible, the statue was "forced" to drink, and a cup was rudely tossed in its face. More rude still was the gesture of a burgher in Ulm in 1534, who shat into the mouth of a Christ-effigy pulled from Our Lady's Gate.

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— Cécile Dupeux, Peter Jezler and J. Wirth (eds), *Bildersturm. Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille*, exhib. cat. Historisches Museum, Bern, 2000, cat. 151.

— *Basler Chroniken*, 1, 1874, p. 447, cited Dieter Koeplin, *Komet her zu mir alle. Das tröstliche Bild des Gekreuzigten nach dem Verständnis Luthers*, in *Martin Luther und die Reformation in Deutschland*, Kurt Löcher (ed.), Gütersloh, 1983, p. 155.

— Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1975, p. 157.

— See Norbert Schnitzler, *Ikonomismus-Bildersturm*, Fink, Munich, 1996, p. 17, p. 214; Michalski, op. cit., pp. 97ff.

— *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, Werner Hoffmann (ed.), exhib. cat. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Prestel, Munich, 1983, cat. 26.

— The term is Natalie Zemon Davies' (*The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France*, in *Past and Present*, 59, 1973, pp. 51-91).

— Eyn Warhaftig erschrocklich Histori von der Bewrischen vffru ..., in Dupeux, et al., *Bildersturm*, op. cit., cat. 147.

— Schnitzler, op. cit., pp. 214-15.

Anonymous / »Kurtzer vnd warhaffter Bericht des KelchenKriegs« [Short and True Report on the Thirty Years' War] /
Iconoclasm in Calvinist Veltlin / 1621 / engraving / 13.7 x 11.5" / Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Kupferstichkabinett

Kurtzer vnd warhaffter Bericht des KelchenKriegs/ so von de Erstern Caluin: Püntner: Zwinglischen/ Zürichern vnd Grauern / in Veldelin von dem 15. Augusti Anno 1620. bis dato her volbracht worden.

Als der Caluin vnd Zwinglian
Nach dem die Iheren auffstah/
Der zeit herfür Ditz gebracht/
Har jeder Christ so diß betrachte/
Auf solchem zuschließen wol/
Was man auff dieselb halten soll/
Wol sie der zeit heru pausier/
Habens des Volcks so vil verfürer/
Also wann diß betrachte ein Christ/
Daf diß wol zuerbarmen ist/
Wiem Königreich vnd allen Landen
So vil Secretmeißer seyn verbanden.
Die Welt man voll History finde/
Was sie für Feuer haben anzündt.
Mit Muthwill/ frechheit/ vnd beruig/
Vnd mit Teuffischer falscher lug/
Habens der massen praetier/
Dami ihr Giff so vil purgier/
Vnd möcht kommen in Italia
Vnd biß hin in Hispania
Auch die herrlich Stadt Rom vor allen/
Waren vorhabens in überfallen.
Den Pabst verraisen/ die Kirchen berauben/
Vnd anstigen den wahren Glauben/
Sodoch die Catholisch Religion
Von anfang Gott war zugerhan.
Also das vil Gortshäuser gar/
Durch sie schändlich verwüster war/
Wie es dann laider ist geschehen/
Da man: schir der tag funfzehn.
Im Anauß vnd zwangigsten Jar
Ein Bernäheren angeßelt war/
Wen dem Caluin vnd Zwinglian/
Vnd wolten erwürgen jederman.
Vnd herangen die Veldliner hart/
An vnser lieben Frauent Dimselart.
Da die Catholischen allwegen/
Den Gortsdienst zuhalten pflegen/
Da haben die schönen saubren Gellen
Die Catholischen überfallen wollen.
Alles erwürgen/ die Widler stürmen.
Nach ihren gefallen daselbst schwören/
Welchs die Catholischen baldt erfahren.
Vms der Religion willen sich nit sparen
Wir hüßf Italiauer guet/
Wagen sie dar ihr eigen Blut/
Haben wider sie ein Einfall schon.
Die Kezers Wubn griffens an.
Dem Tyrannisch Potesar dort/
Ein Wortsdienner/ vnd andere ermordt/
Die vbrigen Caluinisten aber/
So im Flecken waren Innhaber.
Nehen auf dem vnd Zürich hin/
In epl sich versambelen darinn.
Zohen wider mit ein Gschwader groß/
Sambt der Pindmer Mügnos/
Auf die Gegent/ Sanders zu/
Mit Rumit vnd großer Breuße/
Ihr Wüßel fürer Güller war/
Welcher fürer die Judaschaar/
Da namen sie baldt Sanders ein/
Vnd andre Flecken groß vnd klein/
Die Kirchen vnd ein Kloster dort.
Habens zerstör vnd als ermordt/
Nanbrenn da alles vberal.
Vnd begiengen großen Diebstal.
Vnder allen Kezern so hat sich/
Der Güller gehalten treffenlich
Wurdt ein vnerhörter Kirchen Dieb/
Die Engediner ihm durch lieb/
Haffen darzu so grim vnd Wild.
Das nit verble ein einigs Wild.



Haben also groß Gut bekommen.
Solchs mit sich heimgenommen.
Damit ein schändlich leben geführet
Mit Weib vnd Kindt verpantentert.
Waren lustig vnd guter ding/
Dachren sie hetrens gwinnen gering.
Must auch gering werden verhan:
Der Caluin vnd der Zwinglian
Ehren mit Breuden zammen rucken/
Brolocten ab ihren Diebstucken.
Die sonst in ihr Religions geschmeiß
Stribren vberlein/ wie schwarz vnd weiß.
Wie ein wilde Kag vnd Englischer Hund/
Jest waren sie gang Circelrund/
Zammen in ein Rodel gossen/
Welchs ihn aber wenig ersprossen.
Als es schier als verschleimb war/
So samblen sich die Kezerschaar
Widerumb auffß neue zammen
Vnd mit einem grossen gschwader kommen
Den fünff tausent auff Wormbs hin/
Erdapren sie was vom Veldlin.
So ermordren sie groß vnd klein/
Namen da erlich Flecken ein.
Mit Kumor der ganze hauffen
Eher nur den Gortshäusern zulassen/
Vnd wo ein Tabernackel stund/
Nissens dieselben gar zu grund.

Für auß der Erstern zuhandt/
Der von Wülünen ist genant/
Nams H. Hochwürdig Sacrament/
Wheils nit lang in seiner Handt/
Sonder mit gar schändlicher Geberdt/
Warff er daselb auff die Erdt/
Vnd so gar mit Füßen getretten/
Dartu ander Hauptleut helffen Iheren/
Drachen auch auff den Tauffstein/
Schängens heilig Tauffwasser klein/
Den Klossen das zurincken gaben/
Die sich darob entsetz haben/
Die vnnernünftig Eher wol spürten/
Daf mans halten soll in Würden.
Darnach brauchens ein gewalt/
Wuschgen ihn drauß die Füß alsbadt/
Mit dem heiligen Del allenthalben/
Ehren sie ihre Schuetz salben/
Erlich in die Sacristey brachen/
Namen her auß all gweichte sachen/
Mit Priestertlichem Messgewandt/
Vnd leuten Röck trübens schande.
Für lagten Kassacklin angelegt/
Keiner sich an dem bewegt.
Leben vnnatürlich wie die Wölff/
Von Golt der Kelch vber zwölff
Sambt andern Widern habens entfremb.
Keiner sich vor Gott nit schembt.

Die Bildniß Christi vnd Maria
Sambt andern Widern habens alda/
Köpff/ Arm/ Füß abgehauen/
Ihre Augen außgucken ohn grauen/
Sambt andern spot vnd lastern groß/
Habens vil geriben so Gottlos/
Ertlich so haben sie hinfort/
Die Crucifix geaßelter dort/
Vnd außgehent/ schändlicher weiß/
Kezerliche Stuck gebrauchet mit fleiß/
Erlich Eherren vnd Priester war/
Haben sie ermordet gar/
Erbarmliche Penn von ihn gelstren.
Ihr heimliche Stüder außgeschnitren.
Einen Priester sie ins Wasser gehent/
Haben / ihn doch nit gar errecket/
Den andern Tag habens ihn wider
Zohen her auß/ vnd gehawet nider/
Haben also in Wormbs dort/
Begangen manchen schändlichen Mordt/
Zwölff Kirchen beraubt gang vnd gar/
Vnd was von Goltstöcken brinnen war/
Die Weinfässer am selben ort/
Haben sie alle durchspott/
Vnd den Wein darauß rinnen lassen/
Das Graid auch aller massen.
Habens verhergt vnd gar verbrennt/
Zuerbarmen war ein elende/
Auff den Kezern geloffen haben/
In gesundheit aller Kezers Knaben.
Nach dem Iohens hin auff Ehiran.
Ningen dort auch zu plindern an/
Namen inuor vil Dörffer ein/
Deren Namen wohl bewußt seyn/
Sandalo vnd Monoyia.
Grosio/ Grosuo alda/
Auch andere/ wie zu Wormbs gehant/
Erbarmlich war es zu schauen an/
Da sie für Ehiran hinrecketen/
Vnd wider sie die Degen zuckten/
Da haben sie sich hart gestoffen/
Vnd schussen daselbst einten blossen/
Die Catholischen Veldliner dort/
Vorchten nit ihrer Ehorwort/
Gegent mit Ernst in einiger lieb/
Auff die versuchgen Kelchdieb/
Der Christ Claus von Mülin
Der Zocher/ sechs Hauptleut mit im/
Vnd vber Tauffent darneben/
Haben sie wider bracht vms leben/
Ihr Christ hette ein Teufels Kunst
Wen sich / war aber vms linst/
Dann er mit Pichsen würdt reacket/
Daf er kein Teuffisch gschmeiß mehr fähret.
Die Vermer so schneidlich worn/
Da sie so vil Volck verlornt/
Ein heils sprungen in Wasserflus/
Vnd sich ersäufften mit verdruß/
Har also foster ihren Hals/
Vnd was sie vor gestolen als/
Das müssen sie mit Spott vnd Schandt
Dahinden lassen alles sandt.
Also hat Gott mit seiner Krafft
Die Kelchdieb allhie gestrafft.
Vnd dort wird er in gleicher maß/
Ihn eben messen ohn vnderlaß/
Wie dann Gott böß vnd gutt belohnet/
Nach seinem thun keines verschont/
Gott wöll sein hüfflein wohnen bey
Wetters/ vor solcher Ertannen.
Auff daß wir preisen allesamen
Dich / Jesum Christum/ Amen.

Getruet im Jahr / 1621.

From a protest lodged against the tailors by the Bishop of Hildesheim we know that the “misused” Christ was a statue “which, for the remembrance of the bitter suffering he endured, showed [Christ] scourged, bloodily crowned, and with the cross on his shoulder.”¹⁶ In other words, it was the sort of statue – grimly detailed, sometimes life-sized, sometimes with movable limbs – that might be used in staging Passion plays, and that became a special target of iconoclastic fury.

Perhaps the tailors were good at playing the bully because bullying is what men in drinking halls generally do best. Perhaps, though, they knew their roles because they had

Crucifixion with Movable Arms / c. 1515 / wood / Diözesanmuseum, Klagenfurt



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— Schnitzler, op. cit., p. 214.

— Raphael Straus, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der Juden in Regensburg 1453-1738*, Münster, 1960, pp. 29ff; see Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, pp. 66-68.

acted them already in church, in paraliturgical dramas, where the evil characters often got the best lines. In Dresden, for example, in a scene worthy of Monty Python, a layman playing the Bad Thief got laughs for improvising on Christ’s “I thirst!” (John 19:28) by calling for beer from the cross.¹⁷ Now everyone in the culture in question was taught that Christ’s biblical henchmen, his villainous judges, torturers, and executioners, were Jewish. And rumors routinely circulated of contemporary Jews who, itching to crucify Christ again, spied on, or infiltrated, performances of Passion plays. It was for this reason that many German towns locked Jews in their houses, barricading town gates during times of sacred theater.

In Regensburg, a converted Jew named Kalman was drowned in 1470 for (among other things) watching, disguised as a Christian, the municipal Good Friday procession.¹⁸ On the eve of the Reformation, Jews were usually blamed for image desecration, as in a case much publicized by Emperor Maximilian, of a Marian statue mutilated in Camberon in 1322.¹⁹

How, then, did Hildesheim’s tailors understand the likeness between their iconoclastic acts and the crimes pinned upon the Jews. If such rites aimed to punish Christ’s false image, if they fit a pattern of associating papal religion with renewing Christ’s torment, why did they model retribution so overtly on the scandal of all scandals, Christ’s murder by his own people? And might the effigy’s inertness, configured as inaction by means of the mocking command “save yourself,” have resembled Christ’s stoic endurance? What a risky demonstration, behaving like villains and allowing the effigy to act like Christ! “By mocking and jeering his effigy,” observed a Lutheran preacher in 1596 denouncing contemporary iconoclasm in Anhalt, “you tear open the holy wounds of Christ the Lord again and crucify him anew.”²⁰

But then again, in Christian thinking, every semblance hides a dissemblance and every dissemblance, a

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— Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, Johannes Bolte (ed.), H. Stubenrauch, Berlin, 1924, cited Scribner, *Bilder...*, op. cit., p. 215.

— Pamphilus Gengenbach, *Daz ist ein erschrockenliche history von fünf schnöden juden, wie sie das bild Marie verspottet durchstochen haben*, Basel, 1517; see Schnitzler, op. cit., p. 123. On rare cases of the sanctioned destruction of Christian images by Jews, see Michele Luzzati, *Jews, the Local Church, the ‘Prince’ and the People*, in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds), trans. Eren Branch, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991, pp. 101-118.

— Abraham Taurer, *Hochnotwendigster Bericht. Wider den neuen Bilderstürmerischen Carlstädtischen Geist im Fürstenthumb Anhalt*, Jaubisch, Magdeburg, 1597, p. Niili.

Albrecht Dürer / Engelsmesse [Angel's Mass] / c. 1500 / pen, ink, and watercolor over metalpoint / 24 x 19" / Musée des beaux arts, Rennes



semblance. Sacred theater delighted its audience with a routine in which the actor playing Christ, as if suddenly fed up with being beaten and mocked, pretends to step out of character and strike back at the other actors with the words such as “If that’s the way you’re going to play the Passion, then next time let the devil be your God.”²¹ Comic interludes like these encouraged more serious suspicions. Might the actor playing Christ in fact be the devil? Might the play-acting tormentors be Jews disguised as Christians representing Jews? Representations of Christ, whether pictorial, dramatic, or ritual, were self-consciously deceptive, partly to reflect the deceitfulness of the world, partly to accord with the vagaries of subjective response. A drawing by Albrecht Dürer included in the exhibition introduces the crucifix into a plot about sinful sight.²²

Clergy and lay folk gather round an angelic celebration of the Mass. And in accord with that ritual arrangement, Dürer aligns his own depiction with the central altar, as well. In the intermediary space, however, within a band of clouds separating the altar – with its backing ensemble of reliquary and carved crucifixion, from its depicted supplicants – the artist has sketched little figures representing what the individual people think²³ and see – or better, what temptation induces them to desire and imagine. These thought-bubbles show people visualizing wine, women, food, dice, cards, and game boards, which are served up by little demons, while others appear contemplating visions of the Virgin, or of their own salvation, or indeed of the crucifix itself (upper right of the group, between a game board and a roast chicken), in a curious doubling of the altar cross. Around the sheet’s center, and therefore aligned with the altar, an angel (above) and a devil (below) draft testimonies that, filed away in the gabled box, will damn or save.²⁴

Dürer’s drawing is itself not easy to decipher. Unconventional in subject matter, and lacking any clarifying labels, it invites us to engage visually in the good and evil visions it

Anonymous / St. Bridget Triptych /
c. 1490 / woodcut, handcolored /
10.5 x 15” / British Museum, London



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²² The attribution of this drawing to Dürer has been disputed. For a summary of opinions, see Walter Strauss, *The Complete Drawings of Albrecht Dürer*, Abaris Books, New York, 1974, 4, p. 524. The inscription is certainly Dürer’s, as is the overall plan.

²³ Moriz Thausig, *Dürer. Geschichte seines Lebens und seiner Kunst*, second edition, Seemann, Leipzig, 1884, 2, p. 235.

²⁴ Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, Hermann Osterley (ed.), Litterarischer Verein, Stuttgart, 1866, p. 416; cited and discussed in Valentine Groebner’s extraordinary essay, “Abbild” und “Marter.” Das Bild des Gekreuzigten und die städtische Strafgewalt, in *Kulturelle Reformation. Sinnformationen im Umbruch 1400-1600*, Bernhard Jussen and Craig Koslosky (eds), Göttingen, 1999, p. 227.

²¹ On this motif, see Jean Michel Massing, *Sicut erat in diebus Antonii: The Devils Under the Bridge in the Tribulations of St. Antony* by Hieronymus Bosch in Lisbon, in *Sight and Insight: Essays on Art and Culture in Honor of E. H. Gombrich* at 85, J. Onians (ed.), Phaidon Press, London, 1994, pp. 108-127.





St. Francis / dorsal of a choir stall / 1445-1447 /
iconoclastic intervention 1537 / Church of Saint-Gervais, Geneva

imagines. At the sheet's base, as if to provide space for an explanatory gloss, Dürer has drawn a blank tablet and headed it: "Here write whatever you want." Someone, probably the

artist himself, has beat us to the task, filling the space not quite with writing but with skillful calligraphic lines. It is tempting to take these inimitable arabesques as enacting at the level of *fabrication* the free play of response staged above. Laying bare the image's liminal condition between fact and fiction, however, the lovely, errant lines – this German painter's signature artistic medium – aestheticize, and thereby to a degree also neutralize, representation's dangerous errancy. While there are good and bad responses to the sculpted crucifixion represented in the picture, the picture itself can be labeled as you want.

The premier image-maker of northern European culture at 1500, Dürer recognized that pictures are, at best, mediators, affecting without determining what their viewers see in them. Or as Bruno Latour puts it, "Images do count, they are not mere tokens, but not because they are the prototype of something away, above, beneath: they count because they allow one to move to *another* image, exactly as frail and modest as the former one – but *different*."²⁵ In the sketch, the worshiper who thinks of Christ while beholding the mass does so, it seems, with another image in mind: not the carved crucifixion see raised above the mensa itself but something more like a memory tag: a crucifix held by a mediating angel. During the 1510s, just prior to the outbreak of Protestant iconoclasm, Dürer argued explicitly that, contrary to what "many crude people who hate art say,"²⁶ images do not corrupt their viewers. Only their improper use does this, just as weapons don't kill but murderers using weapons do. "Non est disputatio de substantia, sed usu et abusu rerum," wrote Luther in a similar vein.²⁷ This has always been the standard argument for moderation on the question of images: the supreme irrationality is not to venerate images but to imagine that it is the images themselves that cause their own abuse. Already in 1522, opponents of iconoclasm sharpened this critique by blaming idolatry on the image breakers, whose fury seemed to prove their own belief (one not shared by the pious users of images) in an intrinsic power of images.

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— See Bruno Latour's essay in this catalog.

— Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Böhlau, Weimar, 1883-1980, 28, p. 554; Luther's position here agrees with that of Hugo of St. Victor: *Idolum nihil est* (*Patrologia Latina*, 175, col. 527).

— Dürer, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 107.

And it was also true that iconoclasts utilized images in their war against the idol, making and remaking visuality in their own terms. As in Gheerhaerts' print, defacement itself leaves a face behind. When iconoclasts cleansed their churches (e.g., in Münster, Bern, Zurich, and Geneva), they left the ruined idols standing as emblems of defeat. A dorsal from the dismantled choir stalls of a Franciscan church in Geneva displays iconoclastic anti-carving as a theological skill. The elements gouged away in 1535-36 (the patron-saint's face, halo, and insignia, as well as the face and hands of the Christ seraph) play off the carving from circa 1445 that leaves, in this case, uncannily, the scar of the stigmata.²⁸

Scores of extant sacred sculptures evidence a similar destructive routine.²⁹ The deleted features – the eyes, mouth, and hands, as organs of sight, speech, and action – had been places of the image's purported power. Erased, they display the object's impotence, as blind, mute, and anonymous stone. Yet in the targets of their aim, iconoclasts also treated that stone as if it were a criminal to be punished. As Martin Warnke wrote in his seminal study of this material, such blows reference the deformations with which offenders at the time were disciplined.³⁰ Convicted criminals were variously scarred, burned, blinded, castrated, and dismembered, then left alive to advertise that, on them, justice had been served. But in similarly punishing and preserving idols, did the iconoclasts not invest them with a personhood they abhorred? How material was materiality shown to be when, as sometimes occurred, a saint's effigy was decapitated by the town executioner?³¹ And what about the many legends of miraculous iconoclasm? The iconophobic Martin Bucer wrote of statues in Basel breaking at the touch of a wand; the Calvinist martyrologist Jean Crespin reported of great stone idols being more easily removed by women and children than by workmen; and the traveller Richard Clough describes Antwerp's iconoclasm as if it were a supernatural event: "It was the marveylest piece of work that ever was sene done in so short a tyme; and so

Master of Frankfurt / Flight into Egypt / c. 1505 / oil on panel / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



terybell in the doing, that yt wolde make a man afrajd to thinke upon it – being more like a dreame than such a piece of work."³² There were old precedents for the image's instantaneous collapse. Legend had it that when Christ was carried by Joseph and Mary into Egypt, the idols toppled as he passed; pictures of this episode are some of medieval art's liveliest fantasies of what pagan idols looked like: misshapen to begin with and therefore destined for the fall they now endure.

Already at the moment of their earliest circulation, Erasmus labeled Protestant tales of wondrous church cleansing as "superstitions," and accused them of the naive conviction they pretended to vanquish. Thus arose the "critique of the critique" that is still omnipresent today.

What is gained by calling the image breaker an idolator? If idolatry is indeed but an accusation made by

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— Dupeux, op. cit., p. 343.

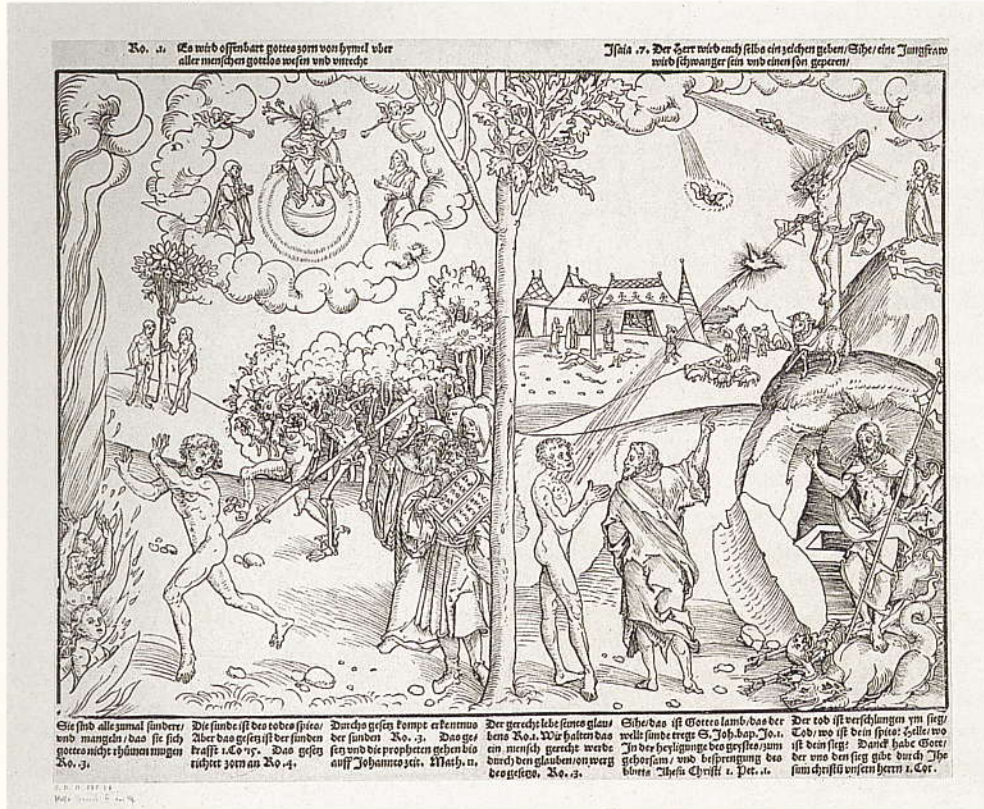
— Martin Warnke, *Durchbrochene Geschichte? Die Bilderstürme der Wiedertäufer in Münster 1534-1535*, in *Bildersturm. Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, Martin Warnke (ed.), Syndikat, Frankfurt/M., 1977, pp. 159-167.

— Dupeux, op. cit., cat. 168.

— Michalski, op. cit., pp. 120ff.

— John William Burgon, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham*, Wilson, London, 1839, p. 145; discussed in Christine Göttler, *Iconoklasmas als Kirchenreinigung*, in *Georges-Bloch-Jahrbuch des Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars der Universität Zürich*, 4, 1997.

Lucas Cranach the Younger / The Old and New Testament / book / 10.5 x 13" / British Museum, London



Anonymous (Netherlandish) / Calvinist Iconoclasm / 1566 / Engraving / Rijksmuseum Amsterdam / © photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Raphael Sadeler / Die vier letzten Dinge [The Four Last Things] / series of four engravings / 66.5 x 43.3", 66 x 45", 66 x 45", 65 x 43.3" / Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München, Munich / © photo: Engelbert Seehuber, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München



iconoclasts to caricature certain uses of pictures, if (as this exhibition contends) it is less a belief than a fiction of naive belief, what function is served by accusing the accusers of their accusation? For some observers, turning the tables is a way of insisting that, although they deny it, everyone – the iconoclast, the iconophile, even the historian of art – is a naive believer, hard-wired to exhibit certain “natural” symptoms of re-

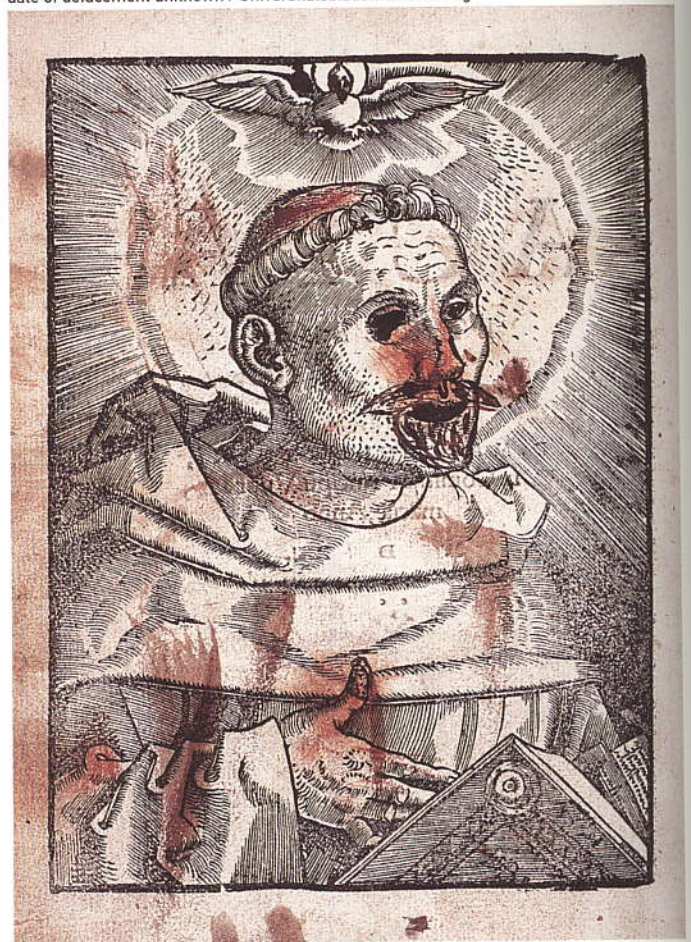
sponse.³³ And as in Freud’s treatment of an interlocutor’s “no,” the more the patient protests that he or she “didn’t think that,” or “didn’t (ever) think that,” the more certain the paracritical verdict: “What, we ask, would you consider the most unlikely imaginable thing in that situation? What do you think was furthest from your mind at the time? If the patient falls into the trap and says what he thinks is most incredible, he almost always makes the right admission.”³⁴ For those who

Hans Baldung Grien / Martin Luther / 1521 / woodcut

**Martinus Luther ein dyener Ihesu Christi/vnd ein
wideroffrichter Chrißlicher leer.**



Hans Baldung Grien / Martin Luther / 1521 / woodcut defaced with pen and ink / date of defacement unknown / Universitätsbibliothek Marburg



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— The strongest proponent of this view is David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989.

— Sigmund Freud, *Negation*, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Alan Strachey (ed.), London, 1953-1974, 19, p. 233.

are closer to iconoclasm's frontlines, table-turning is a sly, polemical trick, as when Luther blames Wittenberg's chief iconoclast, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, of idolatry. It is not that the iconoclast really is an idolator. However, calling him one while smiling knowingly at his denial inflames his self-incriminating zeal.

Yet when a reformer holds up the broken idol and cries, "Behold, it's only wood," wood is what he thinks he holds. If, in seeking to make that knowledge vivid, he further breaks, burns, or degrades the wood, it is still wood in his mind. Granted, from outside, his antics seem possessed by a fury that exceeds the fact. But this is because he believes the wood had been everything to someone else. He assaults the deception he believes attached to the wood, the fiction of a spirit inhabiting the fact. That the iconoclast believes in idolatry does not make him an idolator, though. He is simply another believer, another person with "a strong commitment to representation," in this case, that of naive belief itself. To phrase this in terms borrowed from Dan Sperber, believers in belief do not confuse representations with persons (the idolator's imputed error). Rather, they confuse representations with facts.³⁵ Imagining that iconophiles know the wood falsely (as God, not wood), they hit the wood but instead strike *representation* – of a deity, of an institution, of a social body. No wonder the critical gesture rebounds.

Representation from the start, the wood becomes, in its "specious" (as the iconophile Hieronymus Emser put it) exposure, representation once again.³⁶

We can observe this succession of image by image in the polemical art of the period, as Protestants and Catholics did battle by disfiguring each other's representations. By 1519, before the war against idols had even begun, images of Luther began circulating in printed form.³⁷ Hans Baldung Grien depicted the reformer nimbused like a saint, and with the Holy Spirit overhead, affirming his divine election as interpreter of the Bible he holds.

Scandalized by this woodcut, Catholics accused its purchasers of idolatrously "kissing it and carrying it." At the Diet of Worms, the Papal authorities banned it, burning and mutilating extant impressions. One surviving example displays such a defacement, including, in addition to the mocking mustache, marks on the eyes that cancel Luther's heavenward gaze.³⁸

Hans Brosamer / Martinus Luther Siebenkopf (Seven-Headed Martin Luther) / woodcut / title illustration / in Johannes Cochlaeus, *Sieben Köpffe Martini Luthers*, Valentin Schumann, Leipzig, 1529 / Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg

Sieben Köpffe Martini Luthers
Vom Hochwürdigem Sacrament des Altars / Durch
Doctor Jo. Cochleus.



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³⁶ Dan Sperber, *On Anthropological Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 54-60.

³⁷ Hieronymus Emser, *Das man der heyligen bilder in der kirchen nit abthon, noch unehren soll*, in *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser, and Eck on Sacred Images*, Bryan D. Mangrum and Giuseppe Scavizzi, (trans. and ed.), Dovehouse Ed., Ottawa, 1991, p. 62.

³⁸ Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, second ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 14-36; Martin Warnke, *Cranachs Luther: Entwürfe für ein Image*, Fischer, Frankfurt/M., 1984.

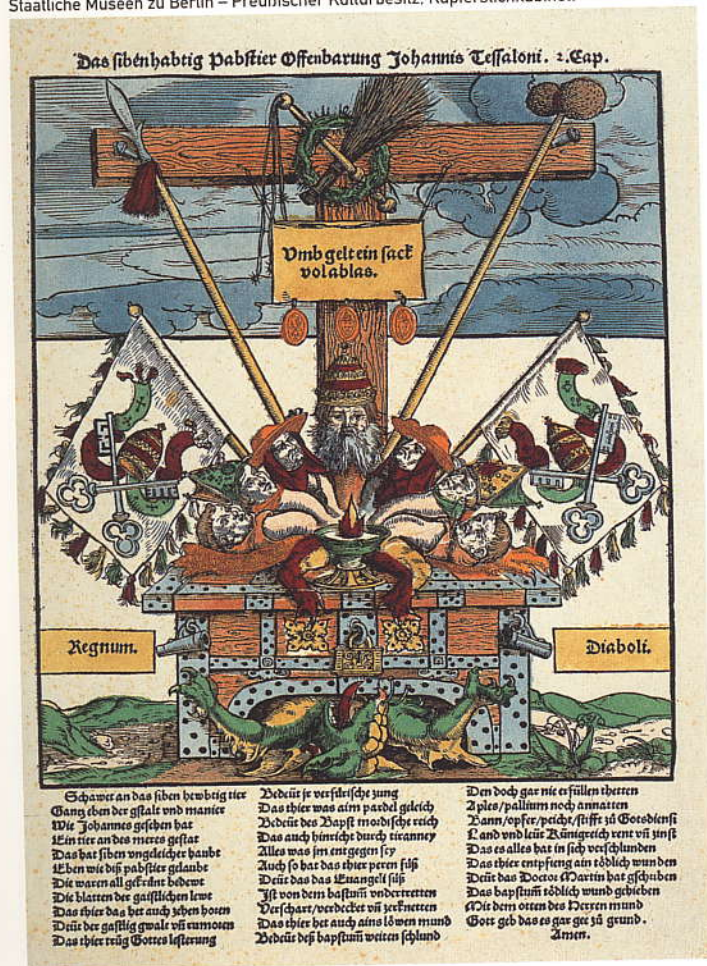
³⁸ The impression is in University Library in Marburg; see Warnke, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68.

Within a few years, Catholics consolidated their critical gestures in a printed image of infamy. *The Seven-Headed Martin Luther* accompanied Johannes Cochlaeus' refutation of the Protestant altar sacrament. Probably designed by Hans Brosamer, the 1529 woodcut shows the Reformer as the apocalyptic dragon or Antichrist described in *Revelations 13*. The seven heads – here as doctor, saint, infidel, priest, fanatic,

church supervisor, and Barabbas – visualize Luther's deception and the falsehood of his creed, the sola scriptura. Though Luther reads from one book (as in Baldung's woodcut), his opinions will be as various as his heads. Within a year, Protestants responded with the woodcut *The Seven-Headed Papal Beast*.

This effigy of an effigy assaults church pictures on several levels. Giving the Antichrist the heads of the

Seven-Headed Papal Beast / 1530 / woodcut / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett



Anonymous / Gregormesse [Mass of St. Gregory] / woodcut / in Johann Bäuml, Chronik von 1476 (Augsburg), 1476 / Justus-Liebig-Universität, Gießen



Pope and his officers, it mocks Catholic mockery of Luther portraits. The monster placed on an altar of mammon also specifies what the likes of Cochlaeus do to the sacrament they feign to defend. As an accompanying text explains, the papacy “places itself in the temple of God and thereby declares itself to be God.” Behaving like an idol, demanding material tribute in return for salvific reward (“for money a sack of indulgences”), the Church stands condemned by its own representations. Altar and altarpiece, turned into cash box and apocalyptic beast, become the “kingdom of the devil.” And these are framed by the deformation of another instrument of Catholic piety, the devotional woodcut.

The late Robert Scribner observed that the *Seven-Headed Papal Beast* parodies popular images of the Mass of Saint Gregory. One such print published in 1476 promises in its inscription some 430 years of indulgence to “he who honors this figure with a Pater Noster.”³⁹

The Protestant satire so resembles this, its target, that a casual viewer would be led to think that it is itself an indulgenced print. Only close inspection reveals the defacements. Instead of the resurrected Christ, there is the Antichrist; instead of the INRI inscription, an indulgence letter; instead of the wine chalice, a demonic flame, etc. These deformations might signal the work of some iconoclast were it not for signs of an inside job. Papal flags fly at both sides; and on a seal of the indulgence letter stands the Medici coat-of-arms of Pope Clement VII. Contrasted with the humble *arma Christi* (the cross, lance, sponge, crown of thorns, etc.), the papacy’s symbols profane their setting with worldly pomp. Not some iconoclast but the Church itself has desecrated this altar.

The woodcut strikes a blow both against the things it depicts and against the framing depiction it parodically appropriates. Images of the Mass of St. Gregory celebrated clerical agency. They portrayed the miracle, attributed by legend to Pope Gregory the Great, in which Christ appeared visibly at the altar sacrament. The priest’s power to transubstantiate

the wheaten disk of the Host into Christ’s flesh was thus, for this once, made sensibly evident (since ordinarily, the flesh was hidden under the “species” of the bread). Various versions of the legend link this capacity to represent Christ sacramentally to the cult of images. To commemorate the miracle, Gregory was said to have made a portrait icon of Christ as he appeared

Anonymous (Master Seewald?) / Mass of St. Gregory / 1491 / tempera on wood / 40 x 30" / date of defacements unknown / Stadtmuseum Münster



Der dñe figur eren mit einem pater noster der det
 xij dñent iaz ablas vnd von iij vnd xl bepfende
 gab wgher vi iaz vnd von xl bilchoffen von igh
 che x tag vnd de ablash at testens bapst clemens

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— Johann Bämeler, *Chronik*, Augsburg, 1476, fol. 140v;
 Scribner, *For the Sake of...*, op. cit., pp. 102-104.

Peter Flötner / Die Neue Passion Christus [The New Passion of Christ] /
c. 1535 / woodcut / 5 x 18.7" / Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg



in the vision: a ruined cadaver risen from the grave and backed by the tools of the Passion. This portrait, identified with an actual icon displayed in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, and enormously indulgenced (up to 32,755 years of pardon), modeled all late medieval images of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. And because of their narrative link to the altar rite, and due also to Gregory's role as main apologist for Church art, such pictures became meta-emblems of Christian images generally. More than any other iconography, they diagram divine presence at the altar, making explicit what both liturgy and sacred images themselves do implicitly.

It is difficult to fathom the grounds of the assault of the Gregory panel, dated 1491 and signed by the artist ("Seewald"). The attacker scratched out every eye of the surrounding clerics and donor, but left untouched the sacred icons they are shown to behold. Whatever the reason for this restraint, the panel occasioned at some point in its reception a limited symbolic violence against priests and their supporters; note that two layfolk in the background are spared. To venerate the 1491 panel, like a prayer to the Augsburg woodcut, meant committing to the Church's institutional, sacramental, and pictorial representation of Christ, hence the generous indulgence.

Imitating such pictures in medium, layout, composition, and motif, *The Seven-Headed Papal Beast* disfigures its

model from within. Christ, whom the target picture makes multiply present, has vanished. The altar's specific debasements explain his absence. The money chest accuses the Church of transforming sacrament into a business by its sale of private masses and its receipt of pious donations. The Papal Beast, in turn, pictures what the sacrament, thus corrupted, represents: not Christ but the Church itself. The woodcut makes these charges by using elements from its Catholic prototype. For example, it shifts the triple-crowned pope from the margin to the center, indicating that priestly mediation, idealized in Gregory's Mass, stops with the mediator, who celebrates himself. By placing the Papal Beast on the altar in the manner of an idol, the woodcut extends its critique to the cult of images. At one level, the heads of the pope and his officers evoke late-medieval polyptych altarpieces, which featured mediators (the Virgin and saints) more prominently than Christ.

Also, the Beast's pomp, contrasting with the aesthetics of the Man of Sorrows, repeats the old complaint about church art as contrary to Christ's humility. At another level, the putative indulgence letter hanging from the cross recalls that the Protestant print's pictorial model – the Catholic indulgenced woodcut – belongs to the same corrupt regime. What one worships in it is Antichrist.

Lucas Cranach the Elder / Christ Entering Jerusalem / The Pope Waging War / woodcuts / 3.7 x 4.7" /
 in *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, texts by Melancthon and Johan Scherdtfeger, Wittenberg, 1521 / British Museum, London

Passional Christi und
 Sauffmützig der Herr kam geritten —



Sich an, dein König kompt dir demützig, uf einem jungen Esel, Matthai 21. (V. 5). Also ist Christus kommen reitend uf in fremdden Esel, arm und sanftmützig, und reit, nicht zu regieren, sondern uns allen zu einem seligen Tode. Johannis 12. (V. 41).

Antichristi.
 Der Papst in Hoffart und stolzen Sytten.



Die Geislichen seind alle Könige, und das bezeugt! die Platten ufim Kopfe, das. 12. q. 1. Der Papst mag gleich, wie der Kaiser reiten, und der Kaiser ist sein Erabant, uf das bischofflicher Würden Gehalt nicht gemindert werde. c. Constantinus 10. c. 6. Dis. Der Papst ist allen Völkern und Reichen vorgesetzt. Exvag. sup. gentes, Johannis 22.

1 bezogen.

Passional Christi und



Christus.
 Als Jhesus ist eyn weyten wegt gangen / ist er misd worden. Johan. 4. Der mir will nach folgen / der nem seyn Creutz vff sich und folge mir. Matthai 16. Er hat ym seyn Creuze selbst getragen vnd ist zu der stell die Caluarie genant wirt / gangen. 19.

Antichristi.



Antichristus.
 Das capittel Si quis suadente vñ der gleychen sezt gegung an wie gerne der Papst das Creuz der wyderwertigkheit duldet / so er alle die ihonen / die hande an die pfaffen an legt / vormaladeyert vñ dem treuffel gibt / vnd also auch trägt der Papst das Creuz das ynnen getauffte Christen vff yren achffelen tragen müssen. 25 ij

Iconoclasm in Zurich / 1587 / pen, ink, and watercolor / in Chronical of Johann Jakob Wick / Zentralbibliothek Zürich



It is tempting to seek a message behind each deformation, as if the idol's fragments catalogued every reason for its ruin. Yet like the broken statues and scraped paintings that iconoclasts preserved, pictures such as the *Seven-Headed Papal Beast* speak chiefly in negations. To every statement appropriated from the model they append a mocking "not!" Antithesis is the controlling device of polemic prints in this period.

Sharpening doctrinal controversy into an Armageddon of absolutes, it stamps antithesis opponent's "yes" with indelible "no's." To say "no" is at once to communicate rejection and to reject communication. "No" exits social inter-

action in the double negative "I will not do what you want if you do not do what I want."⁴⁰ Reformation historians often ask whether visual propaganda persuaded, or whether it only preached to the converted.⁴¹ We might rephrase this by asking if the polemicist's "no" is a communicative event at all. On the one hand, it states its refusal to belong together with the Other: "alter" is false, is the Devil, is Antichrist. On the other hand, negation cannot stand on its own, but depends on the societal communication to which it negatively refers. Instead of sending messages, "no" is communication's background noise, the broken idol's dumb stock and stone. Yet noise is also negation's resource, and fills each "no" with alien communiqués.

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⁴⁰ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995, pp. 371-391.

⁴¹ Scribner, *For the Sake of...*, op. cit., p. 248.

The Image Makers Are Image Breakers

From where did the destroyers of crucifixes derive their representations? Historians have long observed the resemblance between iconoclastic riot and carnival. Often breaking out during the revelry prior to Lent, iconoclasm modeled its actions both on church rites (as when Wittenburgers, in 1522, stripped the altars on Green Thursday, the customary day of ritual church cleansing) and on parodies of church rites that already formed part of the liturgical year. Such travesties flourished on *Fastnacht*, on the food-and-drink-filled eve of

»Alexamene Worships His God!« / anti-Christian graffiti / early third century / poster / Palatine, Rome / Archive Alinari



the fast, after which the eating of meat, along with a host of carnal pleasures, would be forbidden (“carnival” means *carne vale*, “farewell to flesh”). Under the motto world-upside-down, carnival engendered a jumble of transgressive antitypes: parodic Masses sung by children, Passion plays with Christ impersonated by a fool or devil, crude mimicry of local notables, etc. Sometimes sanctioned, sometimes curtailed, and often slipping uncomfortably into general unrule, these serio-comical interludes violated the order to which they, as part of the calendar, also belonged. For Mikhail Bakhtin, who largely shaped current attention to this material, one essential feature of carnival was that, like the literary forms derived from it, it spoke in multiple voices. Expressing itself “dialogically,” it mimicked official speech only to reveal that that speech was mimicry, too. “Discourse lives,” wrote Bakhtin, “on the border between its own context and another, alien context.”⁴² In staging their acts of destruction, and in retrospectively describing them, iconoclasts utilized the places, gestures, and timing of carnival transgression. An illustration of an iconoclastic episode in Zurich in 1587 shows young men tossing sacred effigies into a fountain.

Such public shaming is scripted by carnival pranks, which mix cruelty and comedy. Note how the illustrator carries forward this mockery by showing at the fountain’s center a statue of St. Veit boiling in his caldron; the nude martyr seems comically content in his new bath. The Basel chronicler and iconophobe Fridolin Riff termed the bonfires of images set in his town “carnival fires” not just because, occurring on 10 February 1529, they blazed on the Wednesday before Lent. Riff termed them thus also because, like the bonfires that concluded Carnival, their flames were meant symbolically to purify the flesh of its attachments – to meat, to drink, to beautiful things.⁴³ But these transgressions, in turn, were appropriated from rituals that were themselves carnivalesque to begin with, rites of a religion whose God was a man arrested, mocked, tortured, and crucified.

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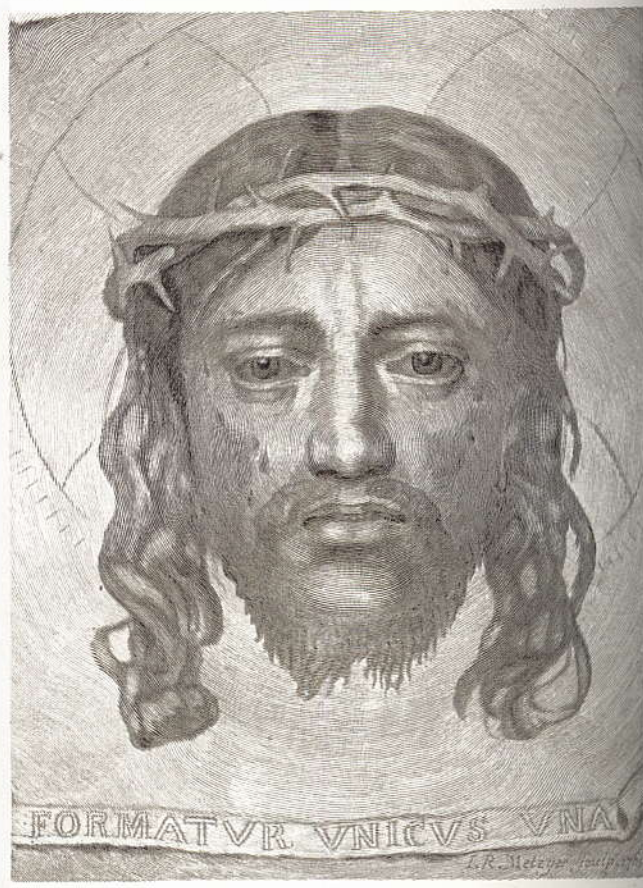
— Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist (ed.), University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, p. 284.

— Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 174-182.

Sheet of Four Veronicas / before 1462 / Cistercian psalter, illuminated / 4.3 x 3.2" /
 Het Kongelige Bibliothek, Copenhagen, MS Thott 117. 8, fol. iv



Claude Mellan / Das Schweißstuch der Heiligen Veronika [The Veil of St. Veronica] /
 etching / Hamburger Kunsthalle / © photo: Elke Walford, Hamburg



At the center of the great machinery of Christian images stood the paradox of the cross: what to the rest of the world was the ultimate punishment – crucifixion as the most painful, public, and humiliating of deaths reserved for criminals, traitors, and slaves, as the “most crude and horrendous torture” (Cicero), the unspeakable “sign of shame” (Hebrews 12:2)⁴⁴ – was for Christians the emblem of their God. There survives some evidence of how this paradox was received by non-Christians. On the walls of the Palatine in Rome, in the former barracks, someone scratched a crude caricature of a

donkey-headed man crucified on the cross; below, a mocking inscription probably targets some Christians in the graffitist’s midst: “Alexamene worships his god.”⁴⁵

Augustine, seeking to reconcile the low literary style of the gospel texts (especially the Vulgate) to their divine content, argued that humble expression not only spoke to all men, but fitted Christ’s incarnation as man.⁴⁶ The humility of Christ’s birth and life among the poor, and more so, his cruel death, formed a *sermo humilis* that ought to be preached in a humble way. The Bible’s aesthetics are of the ugly not the beautiful.

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⁴⁴ Erich Auerbach, *Sermo humilis*, in *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Auerbach, Erich (ed.), Princeton University Press, New York, 1965, pp. 25-81;
⁴⁵ Hans Robert Jauss, *Die klassische und die christliche Rechtfertigung des hässlichen in mittelalterlicher Literatur*, in *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste. Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, Hans Robert Jauss (ed.), Fink, Munich, 1968, pp. 143-168.

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⁴⁶ Hengel, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, SCM Press, London, 1977, pp. 7-10;
 Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Reaktion Books, London, 1999, pp. 201-204.

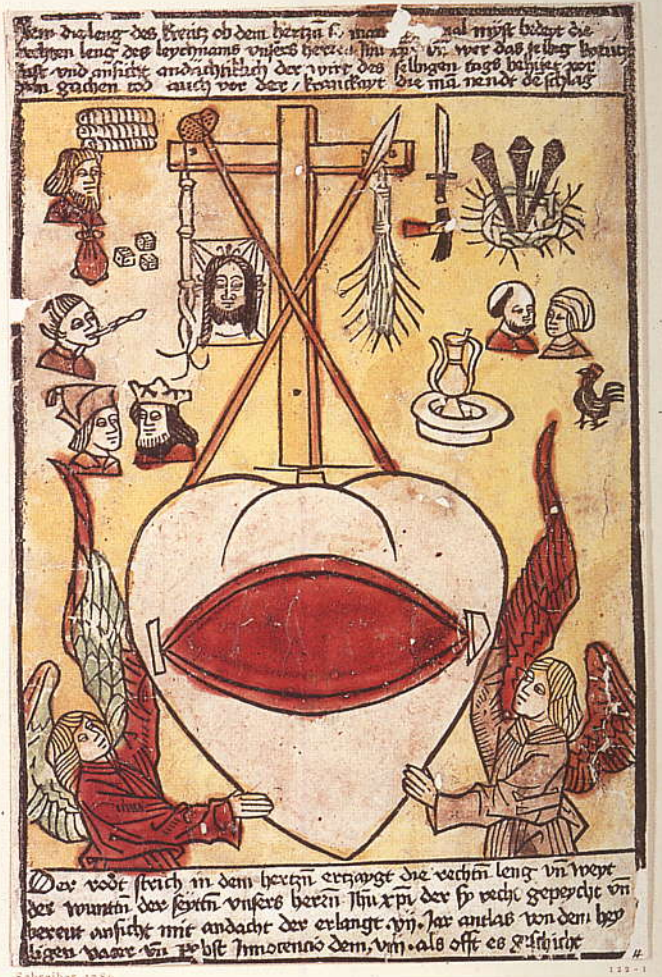
Anonymous / Herz Jesu [The Holy Heart] / c. 1460 / woodcut, handcolored, with tear / 3 x 2.4" / Albertina, Vienna / © photo: Albertina, Vienna



And its ontology of the image is based as much in dissimilarity as in resemblance: likeness *and* difference of man, of Satan, of Christ, to God. Created in God's image ("resemblance in humility"), but tempted by Satan to be God's equal ("resemblance in equivalence"), man fell into sin ("resemblance in conflict"), was expelled into a world of dissimilarity (the world as "regio dissimilitudinis"), there to remain until one man, Christ (true "resemblance in equivalence"), through his crucifixion (which makes him dissimilar again), regains our blissful seat.⁴⁷ The aesthetics of the ugly, whether Christian or modern, are a provisional, deceptive stage in a larger movement at the end of which truth, beauty, and power stand revealed.

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Anonymous (German) / Christi Wunden [Wounds of Christ] / c. 1450 / woodcut, hand colored / 22.6 x 17" / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett



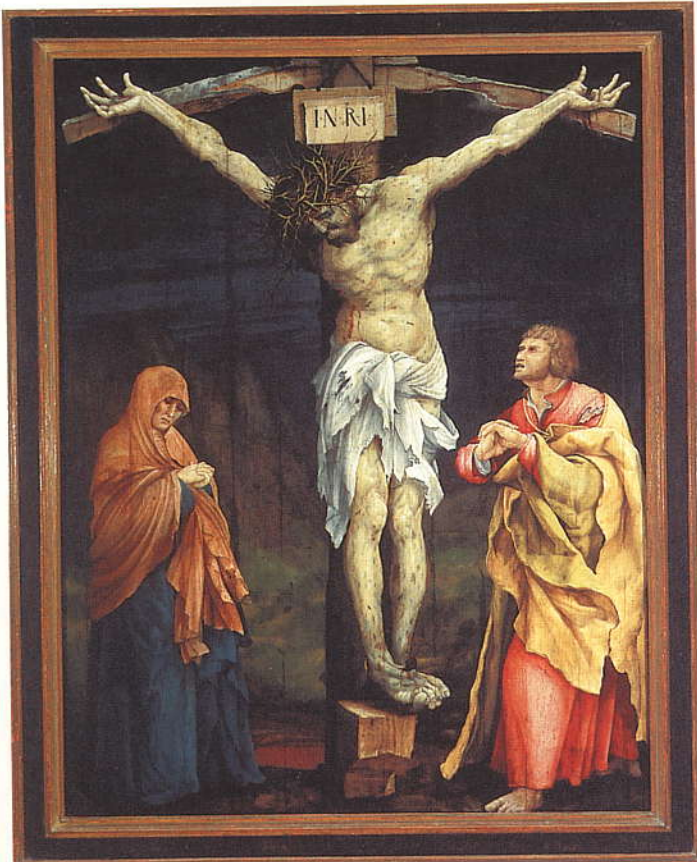
In striking the crucifix, iconoclasts at once negate and repeat the likenesses cultivated in their target. Their blows are negations of a negation, "no's" cancelled by an ultimate "no." Religious imagery has iconoclasm built into it. Charged with illustrating how God's only son suffered the most miserable of human deaths, church pictures were made both to save and to reject phenomenal appearances. God became visible and circumscribable in his incarnation as Christ: true picture of his

⁴⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Vor einem Bild*, Hanser, Munich, 2000, pp. 218ff; see also Robert Javelet, *Image et ressemblance au XIIe siècle de saint Anselme à Alain de Lille*, Université de Strasbourg, Paris, 1967; A. E. Taylor, *Regio dissimilitudinis*, in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Ages*, 9, 1934, pp. 305ff. See, too, Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance et figuration*, Flammarion, Paris, 1990.

father, Christ could therefore be pictured, indeed produced pictures of himself miraculously, like his Virgin birth, without human manufacture (*acheiropoetos*), as in the likeness deposited on St. Veronica's cloth. Betrayed, humiliated, tortured, and crucified, however, Christ was also concealed in his visibility, God's perfect likeness transformed into the ugliest of things: "with no beauty in him nor comeliness ... the man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53).

In the late Middle Ages, painted, sculpted, and printed images of Christ on the sudarium reflected this duality. Depicting – often in the very same format⁴⁸ – Christ's face untouched

Mathias Grünewald / Crucifixion / c. 1520-25 / black chalk, and black, gray and white pencil / Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe



Mathias Grünewald / Crucifixion / c. 1520-25 / oil on panel / Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

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James Marrow made this important observation some twenty years ago.

Anonymous / Christ in the Wine Press / woodcut, handcolored / 4.8 x 3" / The British Museum, London / © photo: The British Museum, London



by the Passion (because outside of death and time) or else abjectly distorted by it, these hybrid index-icons merge beauty with ugliness, concealment with ostentation. On the one hand, everything about these holy faces shouts visibility: the shining halo, the *en face* view without viewpoint, the visage on cloth that in no way adheres to that cloth's heavy folds, etc. On the other hand, typically, those faces are difficult to see, and not only because they have often been effaced by use (e.g., in oscularies, where kissing rather than beholding is the key receptive practice). The gilded frames, mirroring silver surrounds, and chrysal capsules that encase the face, which is itself often dark and featureless, eclipse the image in a blaze of reflective light.⁴⁹

In his brief account of the sudarium in the *Golden Legend*, Jacobus de Voragine stresses how being affected by the Holy Face is contingent on the viewer: "Can this image be bought for gold or silver," inquires a friend of Pontius Pilate,

to which Veronica responds, "No, only true piety can make it effective." Along these lines, the thirteenth century mystic, Gertrude of Helfta, in her meditations, glimpsed in the sudarium both darkness and light, concealment and clarity; for her, as Jeffrey Hamburger put it, "the Veronica cannot simply be characterized as either blank or stained, billian or sullied; it is, paradoxically, both at once, just as Christ is both human and divine."⁵⁰

At the eve of Protestant iconoclasm, people reveled in grisly depictions of Christ's abject body, in which every bit of necrotic flesh stood artfully portrayed. Ubiquitous paintings and woodcuts of Christ's wounds and of the "arms" of his Passion, wounded images, even, of those wounds, in which the image of the cut is printed, painted over in red, and then physically slashed, give collections of fifteenth century prints the character of a chamber of horrors.

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Hamburger, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

⁴⁹ Didi-Huberman, *Vor einem Bild*, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-206; Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, New York, 1958, pp. 317-382.

Michael Wolgemut / Sketchbook / pen, ink, and watercolor / 7.8 x 5.5" /
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett / © photos: Jörg P. Anders

Christus am Ölberg [Christ at the Mount of Olives]



Gefangennahme Christi [Capture of Christ]



Christus vor Pilatus [Christ ahead of Pilatus]



Geißelung Christi [Flagellation of Christ]

Geißelung Christi [Flagellation of Christ]



Christus im Gefängnis [Christ in Prison]



Der gefangene Christus [Captured Christ]



Verspottung Christi [Mocking of Christ]

Albrecht Dürer / Self-Portrait / 1500 / oil on panel / Alte Pinakothek, Munich



Karlsruhe's most famous artistic possession is such a thing: the large Crucifixion from Tauberbischofsheim by the painter who now goes by the disputed name Mathias Grünewald.⁵¹

Everything that Christ became – hands and feet wrenched and dislocated by the nails; loin-cloth hyperbolically shredded; skin darkened by filth, gangrene, and congealed blood and bristling with thorns, each causing a specific infection; rib-cage collapsed in the suffocation that, were it not for

the centurion's lance, would have killed Christ that much more painfully – becomes hyperbolically visible within the deprived visibility of a nighttime setting. For Christians of Grünewald's time, this spectacle would have aided their piety. The practice of religion consisted primarily in meditating on Christ's death by imaginative recollecting (on the basis of stories, pictures, or improvised fancy) its minute particulars. Yet the end of this exercise of achieving a mental picture of the ruination of a body was finally the recognition that what we end up seeing – in our minds, in our hearts, in the painting before us – is also everything Christ is *not*. The incarnation of Christ as man conceals his divinity. Though created in God's image and likeness, Christ, though humble birth and humiliating death on the cross, makes God's invisibility *also* visible. And images of that image, second-order icons of the true icon of God, repeat the paradox not only by dwelling on the frailty of Christ's body but turning that flesh into a repertoire of signs, those paratactic "arms" which allow their viewers to remember the item (the nails, sponge, wound, etc.) yet know that it, the sign, is not that item. As Peter Galison reminds us, the mathematician David Hilbert, imagining a purely abstract geometry, quipped that if the indicators "point," "line," and "plane" were replaced by, say, "chair," "table," and "mug," the propositions of geometry would be just as true.⁵² The medieval maker of devotional images excelled in fashioning signs announcing their status as mere signs.⁵³

Long before Luther's doctrine of the hidden God, the Gothic Christ was already an erasure: what Heidegger, in another connection (but linked, in my view, to the religious tradition) termed the "sign of crossing through" (*Zeichen der Durchkreuzung*).⁵⁴ This crossing had been applied by his human tormentors, racialized as the Jews, who, unable to see it, concealed Christ's majesty wholly under the form of supreme abjection. Visited on a crucifix, iconoclasm merely repeated the antagonism between appearance and truth that the image itself already displayed.

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⁵¹ On Crucifixion in the Karlsruhe Kunsthalle, in Jan Lauts, *Grünewald. Kreuztragung und Kreuzigung*, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, 1968. My initial idea for iconoclasm had been to organize it around this masterpiece.

⁵² Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. William Kluback and Jean Wilde, bilingual edition, Vision Press, New York, 1959, pp. 80-83.

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⁵⁴ Robert Suckale, *Arma Christi. Überlegungen zur Zeichenhaftigkeit mittelalterlicher Andachtsbilder*, in *Städte/Jahrbuch*, 6, 1977, pp. 177-208.

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⁵³ See Peter Galison's essay in this catalog.

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Self-negating from the start, and “realistic” only as massive deceptions (for their real Real was Christ’s invisible beauty), such spirit-bound descents into flesh played tricks on those who negated them, short-circuiting their critical gestures or writing them into contrary plots. How exactly to separate the iconoclast’s hammer blow from the defacement evident in a sketchbook from the shop of the late fifteenth century Nuremberg master Michael Wolgemut (Albrecht Dürer’s teacher) and included in the present exhibition.⁵⁵

The sketchbook is a puzzling object both in form and in function. Formally, it gathers drawing by at least four different hands: Wolgemut’s, two of his assistants’, and that of another later artist who, inspired by drawing sheets, adds new ones and corrects some of the old. Functionally, it probably began as a draft for the pictorial program of Fridolin’s *Schatzbehälter* but ended up as a devotional book in its own right. Of its 105 sheets, thirty-five are full-page drawings of Christ’s Passion; in these, violence begets violence. First there are the blows of the tormentors who, in page after blood-filled page of the sketchbook, are shown variously to whip, club, kick, and cut Christ; to undress, blindfold, and mock him; to suffocate him with their spittle and then to drag him away and start all over again; and finally, again in several repeating scenes, to nail him to the cross and crucify him.

Then there are the painters’ gestures, those hectic brush-strokes of color that, painting over outline drawings of cruelty, themselves turn cruel, rendering gore in wild, red scribbles, while managing their sadism in crucial spots – evocative of bedrock reality – as where Christ’s blood, after flowing from his multitude of wounds, meets the ground and pools neatly about his feet. Almost none of this blood finds a place in the woodcuts of the *Schatzbehälter*, not even in its hand-painted copies; it seems to belong to a logic of production and reception particular to these sketched and painted sheets. On one unforgettable page, Christ’s face is wholly concealed by dirt, blood, and spit, the last layer (spit)

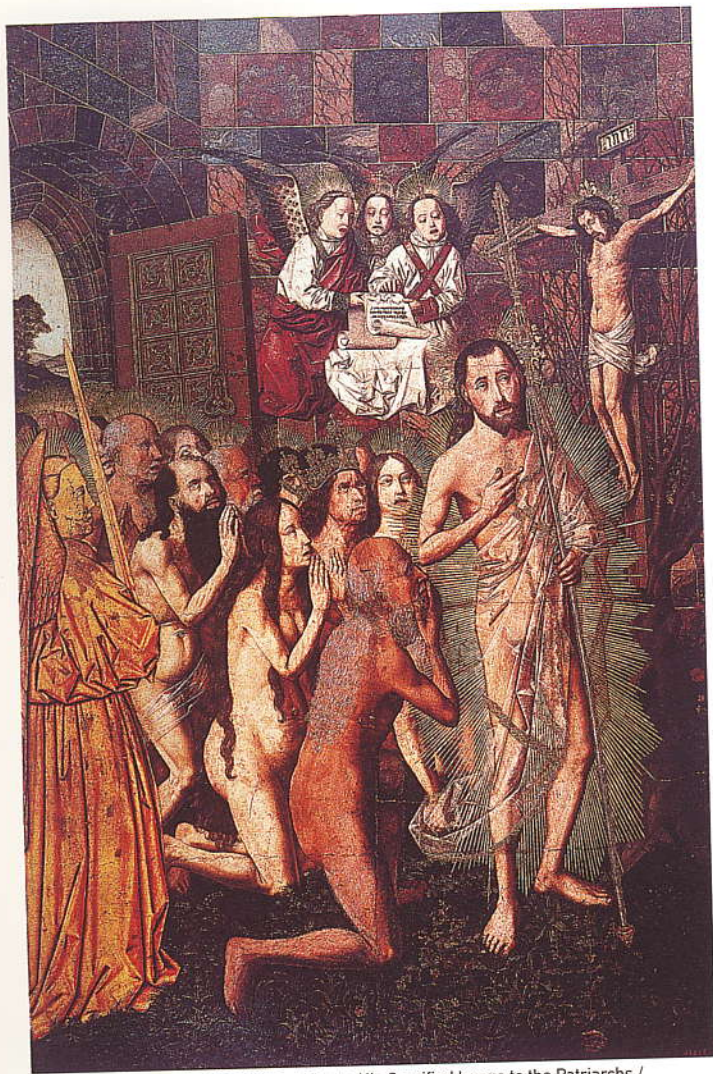
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— Richard Bellm, *Wolgemuts Skizzenbuch im Berliner Kupferstichkabinett. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des graphischen Werkes von Michael Wolgemut und Wilhelm Pleydenwurff. Studien zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, 322, Heitz, Baden-Baden and Strasbourg, 1959.

Rembrandt / A Scholar in his Studio (Faust) / 1652 / etching / 8.4 x 6.6" / The British Museum, London / © photo: The British Museum, London



Rembrandt / Three Crosses / 1653 / etching / 12 x 20" / The British Museum, London / © photo: The British Museum, London



Bartolomé Bermejo / c. 1480 / Christ Shows His Crucified Image to the Patriarchs / Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Barcelona

being painted in opaque, white "body color" over black and red watercolor.

Here, it might seem, is the antithesis of the miraculously non-manufactured "true image" of God: the Holy Face thoroughly defaced by the sinful hands of men. Yet in the legend, it is also of sweat and blood that the image was made, hence its index status as stain. Of the face upon the sudarium one fifteenth century female mystic wrote: "His face was stained a brownish yellow color from the great duress in which he found himself there." In the Sketchbook, this face concealed in abject, corporeal excretions, both of Christ and of his tormentors, is recollected by the skillful hand of Dürer's teacher, or of a fellow member of Wolgemut's shop. Remember here that it would be Dürer who, in his self-portrait of 1500, would equate himself and his mimetic powers with Christ and the *acheiropoetos*, respectively. At the eve of the Reformation, display of the image's madeness was not a sign of infamy – the iconoclast's perspective – but the very index of its value.⁵⁶

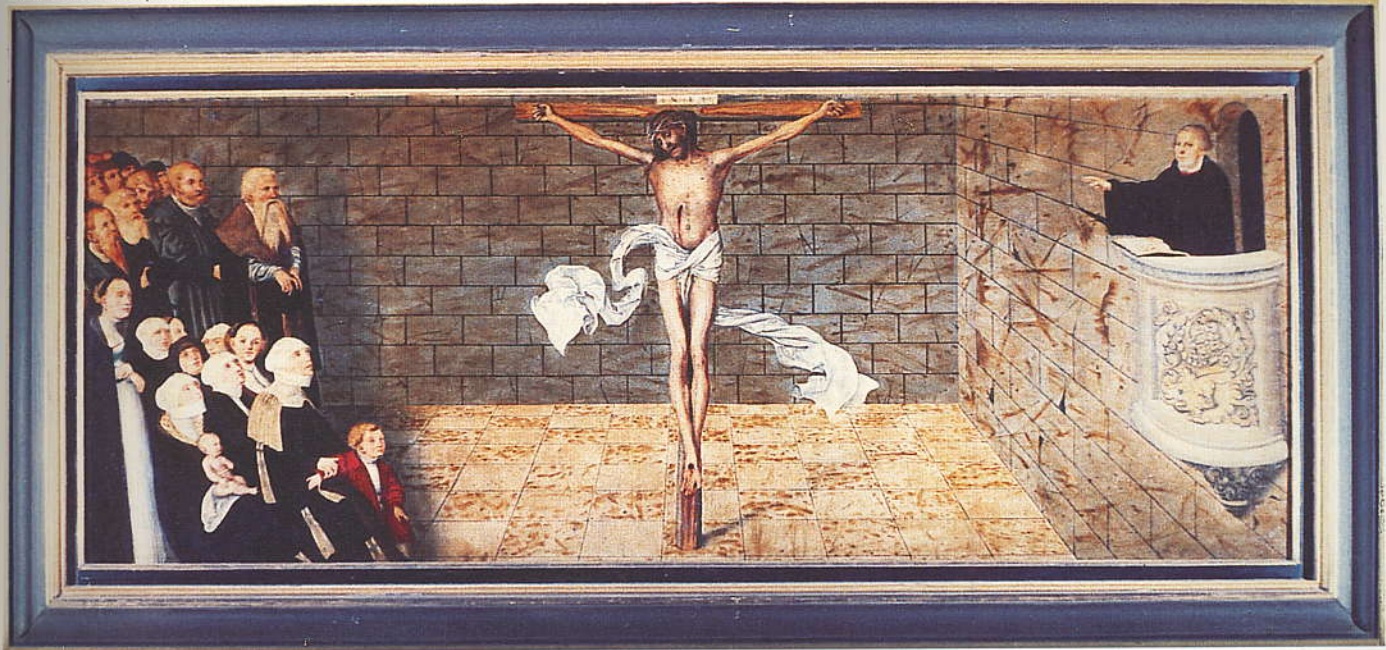
The culminating violence of the Sketchbook is of a different kind. At some point after the intervention of the fourth painter, who was himself inspired by the extant sheets to paint more violent scenes, an owner – or user – of the book attacked eighteen Passion images with a sharp object. These thrusts are inflicted on the painted image itself, in which some viewer, offended by what the tormentors do, has jabbed or scraped away their faces. These are responses to the image rather than against it, violence turned against the violent. Yet they nonetheless produce wounds not unlike those on Geneva's choir stalls attacked in 1537.

The *Schatzbehälter* itself provides the program for such a response. Fridolin's text insists that loving Christ means also hating passionately his enemies, the Jews: even if they did not directly scourge his body, the Jews "pled, screamed, begged, and threatened and forced the heathen judge against his will to give him the death sentence ... and so it is appropriate that the flagellation of Christ, as well as the crucifixion, is attri-

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— Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993. Here I argue that this self-portrait, in addition to recuperating prelapsarian man through the perfection of art, also signals the abjection inherent in the image: the artist becomes the example of fallenness.

Lucas Cranach the Elder and shop / Luther Preaching the Crucified Christ / Last Supper Altarpiece / detail: Predella / completed 1547 / Stadtkirche, Lutherstadt Wittenberg



buted to the wrathful and merciless Jews, by which one should understand that the same people whom the Lord freed from their scourgers by scourging them, they scourged the Lord.”⁵⁷ “Our Lord,” wrote the pious laywoman around 1420 of her visions of Christ, “showed her on his face how he was treated and how he appeared when he was in the cruel hands of the Jews who had imprisoned him. And his face was stained a brownish color from the great duress in which he found himself.” Religion becomes a negation in infinite regress: the chosen people scourged, their redeemer scourged by them, they scourged by his people, the Christians, who, from time to time, in order to renew their faith, will scourge his effigy.

A panel painted around 1470 by the Spanish master, Bartolomé Bermejo, discerns the ruined Christ even at the very limits of visualization.⁵⁸

The resurrected Christ, having passed through limbo, enters heaven itself and points to his own image on the cross.



Lucas Cranach the Elder and shop / Last Supper Altarpiece / completed 1547 / Stadtkirche, Lutherstadt Wittenberg

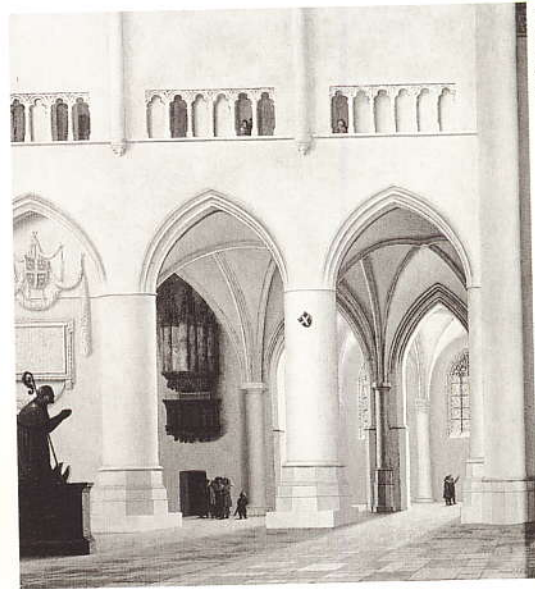
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⁵⁷ *El Renacimiento Mediterraneo*, Mauro Natale (ed.), exhib. cat. Museo Thyssen Bornemiza, Madrid, 2000, cat. 82 with bibliography.

⁵⁸ *Schatzbehälter*, z3, Nuremberg, 1493; I am indebted here to the forthcoming Harvard Ph.D. dissertation on the *Schatzbehälter* by Cindy Hall.

Pieter Saenredam / Interior of St. Bravo in Haarlem, Southern Transept / black crayon, brown ink, gouache / Albertina, Vienna



Pieter Saenredam / Interior of St. Bavo in Haarlem / 1637 / oil on panel / Louvre, Paris

Standing in an interior of multicolored marble blocks, Christ triumphant wears a transparent robe that shows him naked underneath. This frontal nudity, realizing the eschatological dream of seeing God in himself – *deus nudus* – “face to face,” plays off against the naked, aged bodies of Adam and Eve, recalling that it was Christ’s flesh that arose from the dead, and that he will raise us as flesh, too. These are the furthest shoals of the Christian image, a scene set beyond the “covering cherubs” of Old Testament aniconicity, here represented in reflective gold. Visualizing Christ’s absolute form, the painter allows the “naked person to see the naked God” (Luther).⁵⁹

Yet even here Christ himself insists, with his pointing finger, that we still behold what the Old Testament patriarchs do for the first time: the crucifix. It is only by way of Christ’s blood (here streaming into the Tree of Knowledge, which trespass the blood redeems) that heaven is reached. The icon of Christ, even one representing the unrepresentable, displays invisibility still. For despite what iconoclasts imagine, believers are not fools. No one in the picture or before it beholds the naked Christ’s outstretched finger and prays to it.

Infinite Regression

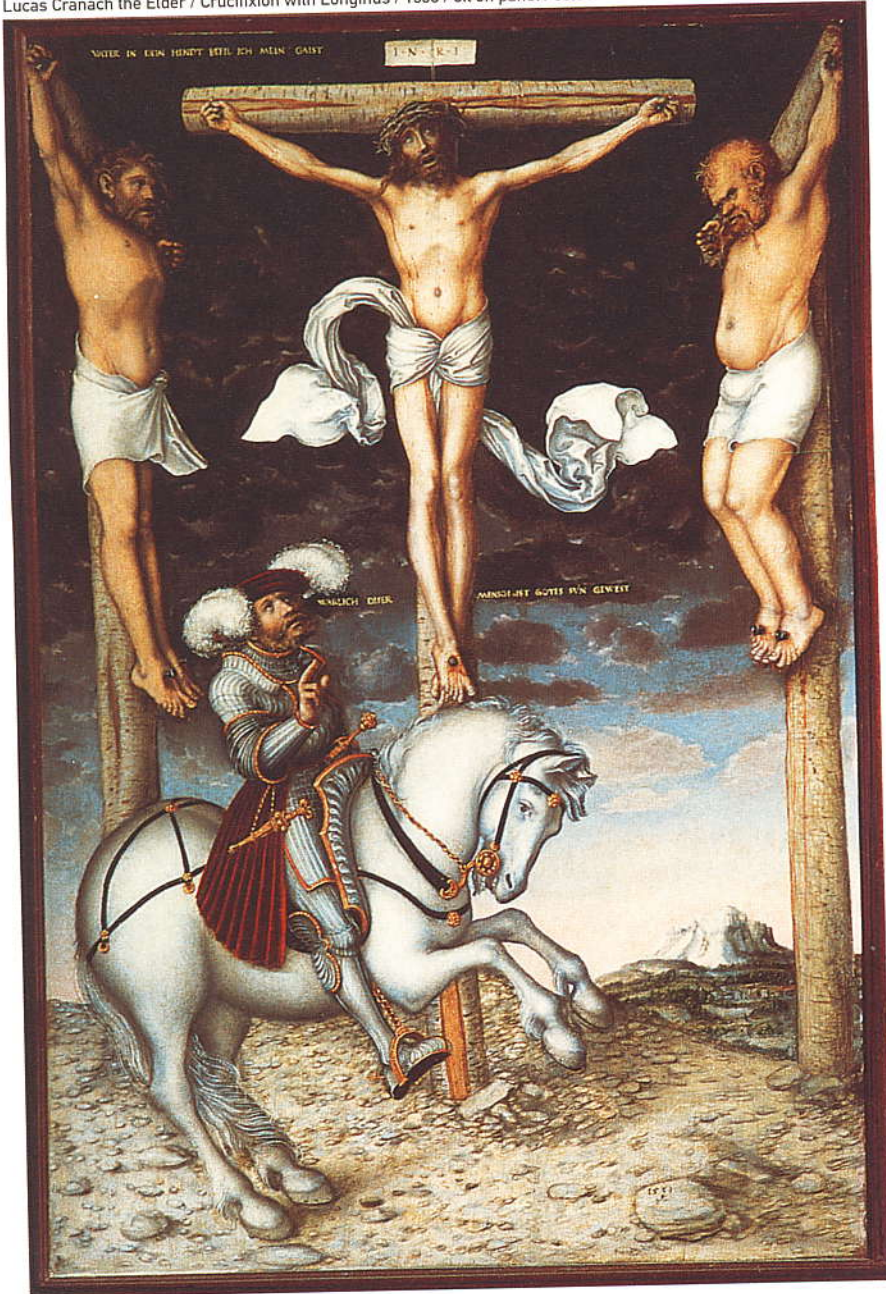
“The holes in the hands and feet of the dead Christ,” wrote Michel Serres of Michelangelo’s *Dead Christ*, “the gaping wound in his flank, the traces of spears or hammered nails: are they any different from the hammer wounds inflicted onto the surface of the marble Mother by a dangerous lunatic that Whitsunday in 1972, or from the sculptor’s blow to Moses as he threw the hammer and chisel at him, begging him to speak?”

THE ICON AS ICONOCLASH

Anonymous (Niederrhein) / Die Vision des Heiligen Bernhard [St. Bernard Embracing the Crucifix] /
c. 1340 / pen, ink, and watercolor / Schnütgen Museum, Cologne / © photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne



Lucas Cranach the Elder / Crucifixion with Longinus / 1538 / oil on panel / 33.5 x 22" / Museo de Bellas Artes, Sevilla



Or from the blows that carved it?”⁶⁰ There are differences, of course. Doing requires time and skill that undoing does not. Image breakers, wrote Dürer on the eve of Protestant iconoclasm, destroy “what required great effort and time to be invented, and what is given by God alone.”⁶¹ In the German Pietàs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that inspired Michelangelo, sculptors lavished extra care precisely on carving Christ’s wounds. In their hands, the layered flesh and bone glimpsed beneath cut-open skin, and blood flowing and congealing round the wound and over the body’s surface, becomes an ambivalent spectacle at once ugly and beautiful, and engineered to augment the projective imagination of viewers themselves steeped in metaphorical ways of seeing the wound as relic, as jewel, as blossom, etc.

Yet there will be times when wounding such wounds will be harder to do than carving them. For modernists in 1900, for example, *un*-making ornament was harder to do, and caused more social pain, than making ornament. Adolf Loos’ 1910 construction of a plain facade or “house without eyebrows” at the entrance to the sprawling imperial palace of Habsburg Austria, which forced the outraged Prince Franz Ferdinand to thereafter use another entrance, was certainly a more difficult and perilous undertaking than applying, in pressed cement, the usual Viennese pseudo-Renaissance decor.

In the 1520s, striking church pictures was a tough undertaking for people who, perhaps just weeks before, had been praying to them. Wittenberg’s iconoclast preacher Karlstadt acknowledged this when, in his tract against images, he asks Christians to overcome their terror at striking “some devil’s block of wood,” and recollects the enchanted worldview that goes with this fear of magical retribution: “Although, on the one hand, I have Scripture and know that images have no power and also no life, no blood, no spirit, yet, on the other hand, fear holds me and makes me stand in awe of the image of a devil, a shadow, the noise of a small

Lucas Cranach the Elder / Christus am Kreuz [Crucifixion] / 1503 / oil on panel / 54,5 x 39” / Alte Pinakothek, Munich / © photo: Archiv J. Hinrichs, Peissenberg – Artothek Weilheim



falling leaf.”⁶² Unattended by such fears, image breaking is no longer quite iconoclastic, turning into a routine that is as difficult to undo as were once the images themselves. Most of the time, people live in iconoclasm’s aftermath, totemically preserving and neutralizing its gestures and settlements. We can observe iconoclasm’s normative obsolescence in Lutheran icons of the crucified Christ.

On 6 March 1522, Martin Luther returned to Wittenberg from his ten-month captivity in the Wartburg Castle and

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— Rupprieh, op. cit., p. 113.

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— Mangrum / Scavizzi, op. cit., p. 36.

— Michel Serres, *Statues: Le second livre des fondations*, Editions F. Bourin, Paris, 1987, p. 195; I am grateful to Bruno Latour for this reference.



Altarpiece with Texts of Ten Commandments and Institution of the Lord's Supper / 1537 / wood / Heilig Geist Kirche, Dinkelsbühl



Last Supper / c. 1537 / oil on panel / 49,2 x 46,5" / Heilig Geist Kirche, Dinkelsbühl



immediately set about tempering a city that had grown radical in his absence. In his famous *Invocavit* sermon of 9 March, he sought largely to undo the new church constitution that the Wittenberg Council had recently approved. There, among other things, it had been decreed that “images and altarpieces shall be removed from the churches.”⁶³ In his sermon, Luther countered that the destruction of religious pictures, whilst theologically admissible, unnecessarily aroused “indignation” in the weaker brethren. (Equivalent to the Greek *skandalon*, indignation – German *Ärgernis* – named both for what images were to iconoclasts and what image breaking was to iconophiles: both were mutually scandalized.)⁶⁴ More crucially, iconoclasm was done in “tumult and violence” and had to be avoided, for it threatened the communal order.⁶⁵ By March 1522, however, iconoclasm had already destroyed much of Wittenberg’s church art,⁶⁶ and what Luther now said about images was meant to justify the proper future making and use of pictures. This justification grew stronger in Luther’s writings, and by 1525, in a tract titled *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, he attacked iconoclasm by confessing the ineluctable iconoclicity of his word-based faith:

“I know for certain that God desires that one should hear and read his work, and especially the passion of Christ. But if I am to hear and think, then it is impossible for me not to make images of this within my heart, for whether I want to or not, when I hear the word Christ, there delineates itself in my heart the picture of a man who hangs on the cross, just as my face naturally delineates itself on the water, when I look into it. If it is not a sin, but a good thing, that I have Christ’s image in my heart, why then should it be sinful to have it before my eyes?”⁶⁷

This minimal image dominates the predella of the altarpiece of the Wittenberg City Church, where it appears to support the whole ensemble of images above.

Executed by the shop of Lucas Cranach, the Wittenberg Altarpiece was commissioned by the City Council, perhaps as an epitaph to Luther who, deceased in 1546, appears twice: once as the preacher in the predella, and again as the recipient of the chalice in the Last Supper scene.⁶⁸ Tradition has it that the retable was dedicated on 24 April 1547, the day of the Battle of Mühlberg, when the army of Emperor Charles V defeated the Lutheran forces under John Frederick of Saxony. Within this context, the panels appear like an open confession, made against the invading Catholic enemy, in which the evangelical faith is proclaimed to be a proper *church*, hence the unusual depiction of the three sacraments as accepted by Luther: on the left, baptism, with Melancthon officiating; on the right, confession; and at the center, an apostolic communion in both kinds. These representations of church service, raised behind the altar in defiance of annihilation, also occupy a space within the city church that, in January 1522, partly through the instigation of Karlstadt, had been cleared by iconoclastic riots. Yet the predella, which literally forms the base of this new and radically contingent Lutheran altarpiece, recalls the scenario imagined in the Reformer’s anti-iconoclastic tract. God’s passion read and heard becomes unified in the scene of preaching, where Luther *reads* aloud from the Bible and his flock *listens* to his words. These words are not pictured, and Luther’s mouth is shut, but the *content* of the words delineates itself at the center, in the picture of a man who hangs on the cross. Thus the preacher and his congregation are physically shown to *see*.

Yet Cranach also indicates that this crucifix, beheld by us frontally, and in a vacuous interior, is actually meant to stand in our hearts, as an *inner* picture. He constructs the void itself through the geometry of a corner of architectural space, of church (in Luther’s sense) as functional *Predigtraum*. In this, it prefigures Pieter Saenredam’s whitewashed church interiors, which metabolize the aesthetic dimension of Catholic space and practice into the art of painting itself.

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— A summary, with bibliography, of the events and controversies is offered by Sergiusz Michalski, in *The Reformation in the Visual Arts*, Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 9–28.

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— Luther, op. cit., 10, 3, p. 29.

— Ulrich Bubenheimer, *Scandalum et ius divinum. Theologische und rechtstheologische Probleme der ersten reformatorischen Innovationen in Wittenberg 1521/1522*, in *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Bohlaus Verlag, Vienna, 1973, pp. 262–342.

— Sehling, *Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1902, p. 697.

— Luther, op. cit., 18, p. 83.

Oskar Thulin, *Cranach-Altäre der Reformation*, Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt, Berlin, 1955, pp. 5–32; Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Image in Quotations: Cranach’s Portraits of Luther Preaching*, in *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*, Cynthia P. Schneider, et al. (eds.), Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 143–146; and idem, *The Reformation of the Image*, London, forthcoming.

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Heinrich Göding the Elder / Last Supper Altarpiece / 1568 / oil on panel / Marienkirche, Mühlberg



Preacher and congregation, reading and listening, are pushed to the sides, as if to constitute a framework. Luther preaches from a stone pulpit introjected into the void, its portal giving way to a blackness that only heightens the scene's hermetic closure; and to the left, the congregation is arranged to close off this void like a second side wall. The void itself pictures the heart's interior as an empty space, as a church after the idols have been stripped, bare except for the regular grid of tiles and stones relieved only by random cracks and by those smudgy brush-strokes that render variegation in the pictured stone, but that, disobeying the grid, adhere to the panel's surface, like marbling paint on wood.

Interiority's ineluctable content – the referent of the Bible's word – appears closed off from its enclosure. Unlike the gore of the late Gothic crucifix. Christ's streaming blood

stops just short of the clean-swept floor; his cross stands at the exact center of the picture panel but slightly off-center on the perspectively rendered tile floor; and his huge loin-cloth billows wildly, but in the dead air of a windowless interior. Cranach intensifies this irreality by opposing our frontal perspective on Christ with the profile view, within the picture's internal logic that the preacher and congregation have of what they see. Because of this disparity between inner and outer viewpoints, we find it difficult to place ourselves *in* the scene, which further banishes us to the surface. And Cranach emphasizes precisely the opacity *of* surfaces by his eerie treatment of the architectural setting, which recedes perspectively, but into a windowless, imageless wall. I would also note that Luther, in describing how Christ's image projects itself ineluctably in our heart, used the word "entwerfen," which refers to the

Heinrich Göding the Elder / Communion / Last Supper
Altarpiece / detail: Predella / 1568 / oil on panel /
Marienkirche, Mühlberg



Hans Weigel / Last Supper and Communion in Both Kinds / c. 1560 / woodcut / in Johannes Brenz. Eine tröstliche Vermahung zu dem Empfang des Heiligen Sakraments nach Nürnbergischer Ordnung. Nuremberg

Ein tröstliche Vermahung zu der empfangung des Heiligen Sacraments / nach Nürnbergischer Ordnung / auch darbey Gebet / vor und nach der empfangung des Heiligen Sacraments / Durch Johann Brenzium beschrieben.



Aller liebsten in Gott / Die weil wir jeho das Heilig Abendessen unsers lieben Herrn Jesu Christi wollen bedencken und halten / darinnen er uns sein fleisch zu einer speiß / vn̄ sein Blut zu einem tranck / den glauben damit zuffercken gegeben hat / Sollen wir billig mit allem fleiß / ein jeder sich selbs bedencken / wie der heilig Paulus vns vermanet. Dann diß heilig Sacrament ist zu einem sonderem trost vn̄ sterck gegeben / den armen beiruben gewissen / die ihre Sünd bekennen / Gottes zorn und den tod fürchten / vn̄ nach der gerechtigkeit hungerlich und durstig sind / So wir vns selber brüsten / und ein jeder inn sein eigen gewissen geht / wie vns der heilig Paulus lehret / worden wir gewißlich nichts anders sünden / dan allerley gresliche sünde / vnd den tod / den wir mit vnser sünd verschuld haben / vn̄ können doch vns selbs in keinem weg darauß helfen. Daruñ hat vnser lieber Herr Jesus Christus sich vor vns erdarmet / vn̄ ist vnd vnser sünde willen mensch worden / auf das er das Gessen und allen willen Gottes vns zu gut erfüllet / vnd den tod vn̄ alles was wir mit vnsern sünden verschuld hetten / für vns / vnd zu vnser erlöschung auff sich neime / vnd erlöste / vn̄ das wir das jeßiglich glauben / vn̄ durch den glauben frölich in seinem willen möchten leben / nam er nach dem Abendmal das brodt / sagt danck / brach / vn̄ sprach: Nemet hin und esset / das ist mein Leib / der für euch gegeben wird / das ist / das ich mensch bin worden / vnd alles das ich ihu vnd leide / ist alles ewer eigen / für euch / vn̄ euch zu gut geschick / des zu einem gewissen anzeigen vnd zeugniss / gib ich euch mein Leib zur speiß. Des gleichen nam er auch den Kelch und sprach: Nemet hin und trincket auß diesem alle / Das ist der Kelch des neuen Testaments in meinem Blut / das für euch vn̄ für viel vergossen wird / zur vergabung der sünden / so offte jr das ihu / selst / mein darbey bedencken / das ist / die weil ich mich ewer angenommen / vnd ewer sünde auff mich geladen hab / wil ich mich selbs für die sünde in todt opfern / mein Blut vergessen / gnad vn̄ vergabung der sünde erwerben / vn̄ also ein new Testament aufsetzen / darinnen die sünde vergeben / vnd ewig nicht mehr sol gedacht werden / Des zu einem gewissen anzeigen vn̄ zeugniss / gib ich euch mein Blut zu trincken. Wer nun also von diesem Brod isst / vn̄ von diesem Kelch trincket / auch disen wort / die er von Christo empffehet / jeßiglich glaubt / v̄ bleibt in dem Herrn Christo / vnd Christus in ihm / vnd wird ewiglich leben. Dabey sollen wir nun sein gedanken / vnd seinen todt verkündigen / Nentlich das er vnd vnser sünde sich gestorben / vn̄ zu vnser rechtfertigung wider anser händen / vnd im daruñ danck sagen / ein jeder sein Creu auff sich nehmen / vnd ihm nachfolgen / vnd nicht sein / nemt gebot einander liebe / wie er vns gelobet hat. Dann wir alle sind ein Brod und ein Leib / die weil wir alle eins brodt theilhaftig sind / vn̄ auß einem Kelch trincken.

Die offene Beicht.

Aller liebsten in Christo / trost ewer gewissen vor Gott / erinnere euch selbs / nach dem die eh / mit demütiger bekantnis ewerer sünd / vnd sprecht mir nach die offene Beicht. Ich armer Sünder bekenn dem Allmechtigen Götterbarmherzigen Gott / und euch lieben Brüdern in Christo alle meine sünd / wie sie der ewig Götter an mir errent / Nentlich meinen unglauben / das ich den bund meiner Tauff nicht und freulich gehalten hab / sonder der angeborenen erkünd / mit mancherley bösen gedanken worden und werck / darwider zu handeln trann und stat geben hab / die betörung Götlicher schrifft und verheißung meines Herrn Jesu Christi verachtet / vnd mit mir forcht und begir daran fest gehalten / wie mich nun Gott frelich weiß / so bekenn ichs auff sein barmherzigkeit / und bin gnad / o Gott bist gnedig mir armen Sünder / Die euch auch lieben Bräder vnd verziehung / und vnd ein Christlich freit und erlöschung.

Absolution. Zelter ewer herben auff Gottes gnedige verheißung / darauß ich euch zusag Gottes gnad und vergabung der sünd / durch das verdienst unsers Herrn Jesu Christi / vnd entbind euch von ewren sünden / in dem Namen des Vaters des Söns / vnd des heiligen Geists / Amen.

Ein Gebet so der mensch zum hochwirdigen Sacrament gehn wil. **A**lmächtiger Ewiger barmherziger Gott / Ich armer elender Sünder bin besüßet und geladen worden / zu deinem hohen und köstlichen Abendmal / in welchem du deinen eigen Leib / dein heilig Blut / mir vnd allen glaubigen zu einer speiß / vnd zu einem tranck hast gnediglich bereitet. Nun bekenn ich mich warlich für einen armen Sünder / der ich auch der wenigsten gnad unwirdig bin / ich glaub aber an allen zweifel / das du allein deinen Leib und Blut für vns gegeben / mir mittheilest / als ein stark zeichen / deiner wahrhaftigen zusage / als du dem Sünder gelobet hast / der sich erkennet / vnd seinen verrawen allein zu dir stellst / seine sünde gnediglich zuergeben. Vnd glaub frölich an allen irthumb / das der Leib / den ich nun empffehet / der Leib für mich hingegen wird / in den todt / vn̄ das Blut ist für meine sünde vergossen worden / Ich weiß auch wol / das ich darzu vberit / vnd nit würdig bin / das du gehst vnder mein dach. Deneit ich aber nit vrmag noch verhoffe von meinen sünden / durch meine eigene reue / beicht und buß / auch durch keiner creatur / hilff oder macht geringet werden und bereit. So glaube ich / und begere von gantem herzen / von dir erlöset und gerimmet werden / in der zuerichte will ich auff die Götlichen beuelch vnd zusage / zu dir kommen / vnd dich empffehen / das ich bey dir alleine meiner armen elenden betrübten Conscience rechtfertigen / trost vnd ruhe möge finden / das du in mir bleiben mögest / vnd ich in dir / Ich habe auch keinen zweifel vnd forge / das deine freßige Wort / warhaftig an mir armen Sünder erfüllet werden / Amen.

Ein ander. Du gebet / das man mit warhaftigen glauben / im Herzen bedencken und sprechen soll / wann man zu Gottes Tisch geht.

Herr war ist das / Das ich nit würdig bin / das du gehst vnder mein dach / so bin ich doch nottustig deiner hilff / vnd begirig deiner gnaden / das ich mich selig und fromb werden / Nun fomb ich in keiner andern zuerichte / dann das ich deine hilff wort gebort hab / damit du mich zu diesem Tisch ladest / vnd saest mir zuwirdigen zu / Ich soll vergabung der sünde haben / durch deinen Leib vn̄ Blut / so ich esse und trincke / in diesem Sacrament. **L**ieber Herr / Ich weiß das dein Götliche zusage und wort / warhaftig sind / da zweifel ich nicht an / vnd darauß esse und trincke ich mit dir / Mir geschhe nach deinen wort.

Wann du das Sacrament empfangen hast / so sal nider auff deine knie / vnd bedenk diese wort in deinem Herzen.

Herr vereinige mich mit dir / durch deine zusage / vnd werck in mir alle gute Werck / vnd bleib in solcher weise mit mir / auff das ich ewiglich bleib mit dir / Amen.

Ein gemeine danckfagung nach dem Sacrament.

Wir danken dir Allmechtiger Herr Gott / das du vns durch diese heilsame gabe hast erquicket / vnd bitten deine barmherzigkeit / das du uns solches gebeyen laßest / zu starkem Glauben gegen dir / und zu prächtiger liebe vnter vns allen / durch Christum vnsern Herren willen / Amen.

gedruckt zu Nürnberg / bey Hans Wengel Formschneider.

painter's practice of outlining figures in ink or chalk before beginning to paint. Cranach's Christ, with its lack of surface detail and emphasis on contour, matches nicely the schematic character of the Reformer's imagined internal image.

In the Wittenberg altarpiece, the crucifix's citational character is given in the structure of the whole scene. Christ on the cross, meant to exist at once before our eyes (note its reifying shadow) and in our hearts, stands here as if the materialized content of a speech act, or more precisely, of a recitation of scripture. What Luther reads, and what his audience hears, appears delineated as this curiously cipher-like picture, this at once concrete and abstract crucifix. The whole scene pictures the force and directness of reference specific to preaching. With his left hand Luther indicates a text of the Bible, while with his right, he points to Christ. The word, materialized as inscription on the open book, passes from index finger to index finger by way of Luther's heart, then meets its mark in the Crucifixion, upon which converge, from the left, all the eyes that see what has been spoken and heard. Thus pointing and seeing, saying and hearing, resolve in one and the same thing. This thing, this minimal image, models the ineluctable presence of *mediators* even within a religion of inner faith. Words refer to images, which refer to words. An altarpiece erected in Dinkelsbühl in 1537, and included in the exhibition, consists (now) only of texts – the Ten Commandments flanking the institution of the Last Supper. These are placed on a panel shaped like a predella.

It would seem that the word strips the altar bare. Yet even here, words contain images: a little blossom punctuates the text, separating the blessing of the bread from the words about the wine. And the ensemble is more visible than legible (especially given literacy rates in 1537): the word has itself become the icon of a word-based faith. Furthermore, as this exhibition will propose, it is possible that the retable is more iconoclastic now than in its original state, when it may have supported a painting of the Last Supper, in accordance with

later Lutheran altarpieces and with the Reformer's own preference, stated in 1530, for altars with just that biblical scene pictured behind them and accompanied by words illuminating it.⁶⁹

Cranach was the perfect artist of this compromise. Briefly, in his youth, he was Germany's greatest painter of the crucified Christ, producing images unmatched for their ability to make viewers feel themselves present at the scene of Christ's death.

In the years after 1520, when through his large Wittenberg shop, he shaped a distinctly Lutheran art, his painting lost this power. But it also gained a consciousness of mediation that could only come from one who was once a master of immediacy. Cranach, that is, learned to deaden his pictures by inscribing their surfaces with biblical quotations that collapse pictorial space, or by announcing in the gesture of his figures, or through his own painterly style, that what we see is only a visual quotation, an image of an image rather than the thing itself. We can observe this in a Cranach included in the exhibition. The *Crucifixion with the Converted Centurion* on loan from Seville exemplifies this mortification of painting through text, gesture, and style.⁷⁰

Longinus appears at the moment of his conversion, when he points to the crucified body and says, against the evidence of what he sees, and in the words now inscribed before him in German: "Warlich diser Mensch ist Gotes Son gewest" (Truly this man was God's son). At the top of the panel, meanwhile, over the INRI where Cranach's Crucifixions usually end, Christ's last words, directed upwards with his gaze, synchronize Longinus's confession with another moment: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The one text states (to whosoever reads it) who it is who dies, and, in stating this, it announces what Christians believe. The other (whispered by the son to his father, and only overheard by us) draws us into that death and shows what, because of it, dying will become: with and through Christ, *our*

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⁶⁹ In 1995, the present deacon of the Hospital Church, Herbert Reber, discovered an uninventoried Last Supper panel in the upper gallery and, on the basis of its probable date (before 1550) and size, has speculated that it is the text-retable's missing pictorial *corpus*. I am grateful to Reber for generously sharing his discovery and research.

⁷⁰ On Cranach's several Longinus panels, see John Oliver Hand, *German Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Seventeenth Centuries*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1993, cat. no. 1961.9.69, pp. 44-48.

spirit too shall be commended to heaven. In Luke, Christ speaks these words after his dialogue with the Good Thief, who requests and receives redemption. Faith (the thief's, Longinus', the viewers') and salvation thus converge on Christ at the threshold of death.

Our visual experience of this convergence is, however, anything but immediate. Whereas in earlier depictions, Longinus makes his gesture in the bustle of the real world – Christ's cross death (to borrow Leopold Ranke's phrase) "as it actually was" – here he gestures alone on Calvary, which itself stands isolated from the world as a weird swelling of rocky ground set off from the blankness of the sky. And elements that elsewhere place the action in place and time here increase the scene's abstraction. Longinus' horse rears up, wild and mobile, against the flat and static background as if it had galloped into the wrong movie set. Its left eye placed along the picture's median, in unnaturally exact alignment with the cross, Christ's body, and the words *diser mensch* (this man) and *ich mein* (I my), it gazes straight out of the picture at us, as to interpellate our response to Christ in *all* his visual and verbal appellations. No one thus hailed feels this is how it actually was on Calvary, though. At best, one feels monitored for one's attention to a difficult lesson. Here, as in the Wittenberg predella, Christ dies in the dead air of a school room, despite the flapping loin cloth.

Although the freeze-framed horse and loin cloth convey its temporal status as historical event, Cranach's crucifixion takes place more in words than in a world, as one element in the syntax of a sentence. The cross interrupts the inscription, pushing "this" and "man" apart. This unusual interaction between writing and its support, seemingly courteous to painting, benefits writing more. It allows us to "read" the cross as if it were a word in a grammatical sequence. Here is Wittgenstein's dictum reversed, "A sentence is a picture." This painting is a sentence, one that claims to state, from the universe of the sayable, what most crucially is the case.

In its home-baked way, Cranach's *Longinus* grapples with the paradox of an absolute message transmitted by hyper-incommensurate means. Everything struggles to attach the deictic "my" and "this" (those pointers whose failure introduced Hegel's phenomenology) to their object. Christ's body literally spans the space between them, between the gospel's first-person "I my" and third-person "this man," epigrammatically inscribed on or about the painted cross. And to this painted conjunction of word and object, Cranach adds Longinus's finger pointed upward at Christ. Here gesture returns words to that primordial movement of hand to thing which St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, describes as the very origins of language: "this" *names* what the pointing finger *shows*. In Cranach, moreover, Christ hardly needs denotation, since he veritably *is* the painting. His frontality, spot-lighting, and isolation make him a pure silhouette, as if the minutest obscuring of the hidden god through foreshortening, shadow, or overlap were taboo. Cranach's Christ is a visual deixis at once transmitted and received. Indeed the audience (an implied second-person "you") will have seen "this man" before noticing Longinus's gesture. Longinus himself sees first and speaks second. Christ confronts the Roman outsider as an abject visual spectacle – the public eradication of state criminal – that he penetrates: "And when the centurion, who was standing right in front of him [in Luther's German, *gegenüber*], saw the way He breathed His last, he said "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). Cranach shifts Longinus to the side of the cross only to place the viewer in a position "right in front." Unlike the "cryptic" (*kryptos*) of the Greek gospels that names the cross's secret in terms illegibility, the Latin *absconditus* (as in "videre in abscondito") means "that which retreats from the visible," thus entrusting secrecy to sight.⁷¹ Both the existence of Lutheran church pictures, as visible things for a hearing-religion, and their inertness, their signature reluctance to visualize any invisible beyond, thus follow from the nature of their task.

Anonymous / Flagellation / woodcut / 6 x 5.1" / British Museum, London



Anonymous / Christ Ecce Homo / 7.6 x 5.3" / British Museum, London



Anonymous / Vision of St. Bernard of Clairvaux / woodcut, handcolored / 11.2 x 8" / Albertina, Vienna / © photo: Albertina, Vienna



Anonymous / Vision of a Sick Woman / woodcut / 7 x 5" / British Museum, London

In the Longinus legend, beholding Christ *as* Christ was radicalized as a conversion from blindness into sight: the centurion saw nothing until he saw Christ. Cranach preserved this prior deprivation in the setting of his panel: besides the crucifix and those who behold or ignore it, there is nothing but night and death. But then, blindness was implied by all his crucifixions, since it was the historical circumstance of Christ's death, in which no one but Longinus identified who "this man" was – except in the double irony of mocking labels like the crown of thorns and the INRI superscription. And how could they have, beholding Rome's ultimate penalty for slaves. In arguing, contra the spiritualizing iconoclasts, that hearing God's word is obligatory, Luther points out that those who actually witnessed Christ stood infinitely less a chance of grasping him than we who, though remote in time and place, have the gospel to rely on. The empirical facts of condemning Christ to death and blankly watching him die revealed his identity (the Son of God) to be imperceptible *in* those facts and thus available only through testimony that must be heard and counterfactually heeded. The reference of Cranach's crucifixes – condensed in Longinus's equation "this *is* God's son" – must remain invisible. They are icons, quite specifically, of the *deus absconditus* that stood at the heart of Luther's theology. Even if we gaze at the gaze of one who believes, what Cranach paints is another blankness neither more nor less penetrable than were the original facts themselves. Christian art, as an art which has Christ as its only center, must be crude.

In Cranach, Longinus's sentence ends in darkness. Whereas English bibles render the centurion's words with the preterit "was," Luther used the compound "ist ... gewest" to indicate that Christ died just now. Inscribing it on his panels, Cranach makes the sentence keep pace with death. He encloses the crucifix and its label ("diser mensch") between "Warlich" and "ist," so that, at that point in the sentence, those words seem to properly describe his painting of a still-living Christ. But he lets the death-knell "gewest" ring out as if afterwards,

and in the empty space before the damned Thief. Viewing and reading thus begin in the present and end in the past. Long before the curtain closes, however, Cranach already absented his image of Christ. He extracted it from the world where the enunciation occurred, placing it inside a sentence, a word about the sentence, and a scene of Longinus' statement of both of these. And he so standardized his painting of the cross that no viewer would judge Longinus' statement on what they see. Materially and syntactically embedded in the gospel quote, and itself resembling other painted crucifixes more than a "visibly living Christ," Cranach's crucifix itself stands inside implicit quotation marks. It is a "sign of a sign" (Frege) that can be understood and believed without being directly experienced. The drastically formulaic character of the painting *as painting* thus suits a religion where the real truth, by definition, lies not in faithfulness to a world but in faith in words.

At its furthest limits, at the point where it most explicitly denies its own access to a beyond, the iconoclastic icon postulates the world. In Mühlberg in 1568, the city erected a *Last Supper* altarpiece by the painter Heinrich Göding.

Dresden's major painter during the last decades of the sixteenth century, Göding had trained under the elder Cranach, and collaborated with Lucas the Younger. As in the Wittenberg Altarpiece, Göding centers the Mühlberg retable on the biblical event of the Last Supper, staging it in a lavish Renaissance interior. Contemporary persons, though, appear only in the predella, where the local pastors, Johann Liebe and Paul Taucher, administer the sacraments in both kinds to their Mühlberg flock. The formula is a familiar one in Lutheran art: a liturgical Last Supper attached to its biblical precedent above.

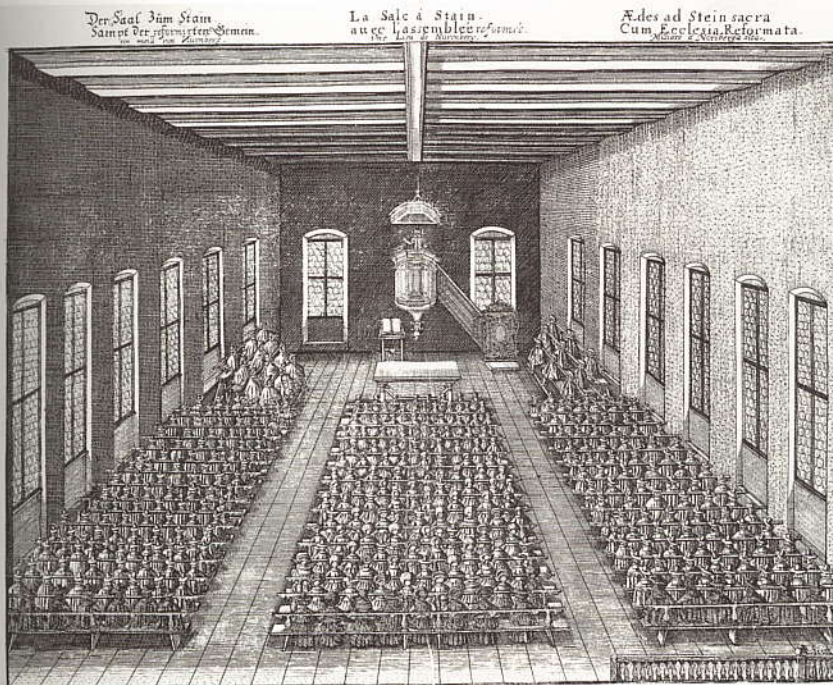
In Mühlberg, what is paired in the altarpiece's panels is meant also to duplicate what would occur in the church before it, as the everyday routines of a reformed German mass. To make this redundancy complete, Göding portrays behind the pictured altar in the predella a *painted* predella, in which

his own predella repeats itself; and in this predella one glimpses the same predella again, and so forth, in infinite regression.

This *mis-en-abyme* of the altar sacrament takes place at the painted scene's perspectival vanishing point, which occurs unusually at the center of the predella's upper edge, indeed at the very spot where liturgy meets its historical antecedent.

I am tempted to take this eccentric detail as an emblem of the disenchantment of the world. Christ may be shown thus to be, according to Luther's view, "ubiquitous" in the eucharist, as simultaneously everywhere and in the bread and wine.⁷² Göding gives this ubiquity a temporal dimension. The communion scene occurs out-of-doors (note the birch trees and the weeds between the paving stones), in the everywhere of Lutheran service: where word and sacrament, there church,

as the reformer often put it. More specifically, this setting is a churchyard, a Lutheran *Friedhof*. Carved epitaphs are visible in the background; formally, they are like those in Mühlberg, in the church where Göding's altarpiece once stood. The dead are shown to live in Christ just as the congregation of 1568 lives on in its portrayal. Yet the predella also displaces Christ from the world to the point, literally, where the picture "vanishes" infinite. At the point where the image *represents itself* it also disappears. The impulse to pass beyond representation – or to do without representation – entraps us in a world that is *only* representation: religion as nothing but what people customarily do. "Do you not feel the breath of empty space?" asks Nietzsche's madman as he raises his lantern to the sun.⁷³ |



Lorenz Strauch / Saal der reformierten Gemeinde Stein bei Nürnberg [Hall of the Reformation Church in Stein near Nuremberg] / etching / 10.2 x 13.5" / Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg

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Hans Grass, *Die Abendmahlslehre bei Luther und Calvin*, Bertelsmann, Gütersloh, 1954, pp. 57-86.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1974, p. 184; cited Michael Taussig, *Defacement*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 1.