

THE SHAPE OF THE HOLY

Protestants and Catholics have long been obsessed with their origins. There is something powerful about claiming that one's faith descends directly from the life of Jesus. Holding to the truth thus means tracing one's practices and beliefs to the *true* beginning. Protestants have commonly imagined that their faith is grounded in an epochal return to Christianity's genesis after a long interlude of wandering and corruption. Roman Catholics have maintained that they never lost contact with the apostolic age, and have therefore preserved the church that Jesus founded, and then entrusted to Peter. The issue for both parties has been authority, or, in a more modern term, authenticity, though each has posed and answered the question of authority differently.

The Catholic tradition has been defined in many ways by asking *who* spoke for God, while Protestants from the outset focused instead on asking by what *means* God spoke. The Catholic answer is that the church fathers, the councils, and the continuous chain of popes speak as the united authority of the church. But that glosses over an ongoing conflict within the Catholic tradition that contributed importantly to the Reformation itself: a dominant strain of thought and practice asserts that authority resides in fathers and councils, yes, but that the preeminent servant of God, the vicar of Christ, remains the pope, who is invested with power by unbroken apostolic succession. The pope as the final authority on earth is infallible, as a nineteenth-century promulgation officially established. The Protestant tradition, by contrast, asserted that God spoke for himself, once and for all, in scripture, his Holy Word, which must be the unquestioned authority for all matters of faith. To be sure, this overlooks very rancorous, sometimes bloody

dissent among Protestants regarding the nature and authority of revelation: is it limited to the closed canon of the Bible or is it supplemented by prophetic inspiration, charismatic leadership, spiritual manifestation, or new revelatory writings?

Authority is force invested in a social mechanism for doing work. The sort of work that is performed depends on the mechanism and its purpose. Authority means that the individual or group or institution executing it compels obedience—because those subject to authority recognize the obligation to obedience or because they fear the consequences of disobedience, or both. They may also believe that the authority has it right. Authority organizes and maintains social configurations that obtain a kind of second-nature when their utility or the threat of punishment keeps them in place. Constancy breeds familiarity, which becomes an abiding sense of everyday life or normalcy. We learn something very important about Catholicism and Protestantism when we grasp how each of them understands religious authority to operate in human life. The major stream of Protestant thought and ecclesial practice insists that God calls the soul through the medium of scripture. A premium has therefore often been placed by Protestants on biblical literacy. Catholicism has long taught that God has established an apparatus for disseminating divine will and influence in the world. God operates through an elaborate bureaucracy of intermediaries that distribute divine agency. Emphasis has therefore commonly been placed on reverence for the institution and recognition of its authority and the propriety of obedience.

This difference plays out significantly in what sociologists call organizational dynamics. When Catholics say the word “church,” they usually mean something different than the Protestant utterance of the word. Catholics often have in mind a vast and holy apparatus descending from heaven to earth and from the ancient world to the present. There have been and will be bad priests, heretical teachers, and power-hungry prelates, but the church abides because it is the way that God works in the world. Protestants may think more of God’s people, who stretch from heroic beginnings through the dim present to the glorious future. If Catholics look upward and backward to see the church, Protestants often look ahead for the kingdom to come, pressed there by the intrepid example of the past and nagging uncertainty about the present. What this means for the material cultures of each tradition and the ways they practice their religion will occupy our attention here.

Of course, as soon as one accents the importance of obedience for Catholics, a host of qualifications come to mind. One thinks, for instance, of Brazilian and Haitian Catholicism, in which a substantial intermixture of spiritualist and African traditions challenges any notion of submission to official dogmatic purity. Or of American and European Catholics and their widespread disregard for church strictures on birth control, divorce, and church attendance. Obedience as ethos means neither purity of doctrine nor blank compliance with authority. As a marker of the faith, obedience has come to mean recognition of the institution at key ritual moments such as baptism, marriage, and death. And it means a history of reliance on its deeper sacred economies, which describe what Catholics do in everyday life to achieve comfort, health, and the favors of a merciful heaven.



FIGURE 1

Basil Zymomrja, *Savior Acheiropoeta* (Not Made by Human Hands), 2003, egg tempera on wood panel. Photo by author.

Nor should we imagine that Protestant and Catholic are internally consistent or neatly distinguished from one another. There are Protestants who are virtually Catholic in their sense of tradition, liturgy, and sacramentality; and there are Catholics who are deeply Protestant in their sense of liberty of conscience and suspicion of institutions and clerical authority. Moreover, there is more than one version of each. Roman Catholicism is certainly the dominant and largest tradition of Catholicism, but is joined today by other versions.¹ And the lines are even blurrier when we consider the Eastern Catholic Churches that profess unity with the doctrines of Rome, but do not practice the Latin rite. Instead, they use liturgies drawn from Orthodox traditions, allow their priests to marry, and give an important place to icons like the one reproduced in figure 1, whose style is clearly Russian Orthodox. But I purchased it from a Ukrainian Catholic iconographer in Lviv, where a group of Catholic and Orthodox Christians were actively seeking to reestablish icons in churches in the 1990s, after nearly a half-century of Soviet rule during which icons had been banned. Icons play no formal role in the Latin rite, but they are vital for Eastern Catholic devotion and worship. If we are to recognize the breadth of Catholicism, we need to realize that its visual pieties are even larger than the familiar medieval altarpieces and Renaissance church frescoes that have done so much to shape the Western Christian imaginary. Although the focus of this book will be

on the Western heritage, we will not be confined geographically to Europe or North America.

This degree of latitude in defining Catholicism is important to bear in mind since it will help us to avoid essentializing it, and, by extension, the even more fractious tradition of Protestantism. Neither Protestantism nor Catholicism consist of a single, timeless essence. There is no pure “Protestantism” or “Catholicism.” We can speak of Protestants and Catholics, but we are always speaking in generalizations, not single, irreducible principles. In each tradition, believers are shaped by history and by enduring loyalties expressed in artifacts and symbols that they may not clearly understand but that they find nevertheless important to enforce by forms of association, ritual utterances, and practices as varied as dressing, eating, praying, worshipping, marrying, and rearing children. As we shall see, Catholics and Protestants have relied on one another to define their own claims to authority. My aim in this chapter and the next is to examine their respective characteristics, follow them individually and interactively over the course of several centuries, and to consider the consequences of their various, differing sensibilities about word, image, revelation, body, and authority.

THE SHAPE OF THE HOLY

The shape of the holy has preoccupied the Catholic tradition, as the record of its earliest documents attests. Replicating pre-Christian Roman society, early Catholicism structured authority as a vertical hierarchy of offices and as an unbroken temporal chain. A late second-century pope, Saint Zephyrinus, rehearsed the hierarchy: “The Apostles were made preachers of the Gospel to us by the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent by God.” When the apostles made converts, “they appointed bishops and deacons.”² Appeals to the authority of Peter grow in the record over the next centuries as the pontiffs of the apostolic see asserted their primacy among bishops. They did so by citing Peter’s martyrdom in Rome and Christ’s words to Peter, interpreted as investing in him foundational authority over the church: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16: 18–19).³ In 431 the Council of Ephesus proclaimed: “It has been known to all generations that the holy and most blessed Peter, chief and head of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith, the foundation stone of the Catholic church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, and that the power of binding and loosing sins was given to him, who up to this moment and always lives in his successors, and judges.”⁴ From Peter to each successor is invested the power of the office to make decisions, to appoint bishops, to excommunicate, to rule the hierarchy from the pontiff’s office to the parish priest and the religious in monasteries. Obedience is a key virtue in this vertical organization of power. Material continuity functions as an analog both of apostolic succession and of the hierarchy and chain that organize the institution and its passage through time. According to tradition,

Rome is where Peter died and where the bishops of Rome took his place at the head of the universal or Catholic church. The many martyrs buried in Rome yielded relics and cults centered there; St. Peter's Basilica, to take the most prominent example, was erected over the tomb of Peter. The growth of other churches, shrines, and relics made the city an important pilgrimage destination.

Of course, Catholicism is more than its formal structure of authority. It is also popular devotional practice, some of which operates far beyond the arc of papal authority and official recognition. Yet folk saints like Santa Muerte and unauthorized apparitions such as Our Lady of Medjugorje remain similar to official piety inasmuch as they offer sensory access to the power of a saint, through such means as pilgrimage and vow. Their very popularity serves to underscore the urgency of asserting control over tradition by means of official review and recognition by the hierarchy as the unrivaled avenue of authority, even if, in fact, the conduits of authority are far greater and more varied than the magisterium would like to allow. It is critical to understand that the engines that drive a great deal of Catholic piety are not located in the official rules of the church, but in the practices of the laity, where rules meet the realities of everyday life. Our Lady and the other saints have repeatedly appeared to peasants and children, in the distant backlands of local parishes and mountainsides. The response of shepherds, artisans, and townsfolk to such manifestations has shaped the holy at the level of everyday life. The hierarchy takes note only when hundreds and thousands of lay devotees make pilgrimages and recognize in the apparitions and deeds of heavenly visitors the work of the divine. The pattern is familiar: power invested in the ironclad bureaucracy responds to the charismatic power of pilgrims in the grain field, orchard, or desert. The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe models this process (see figure 2): Our Lady reveals herself to a peasant, Juan Diego, clothed in the flesh and costume of indigenous peoples, and the peasant is charged to bear the revelation to the archbishop of nearby Mexico City, and thereby to the official church. Once the cult is established by popular response, the church embraces it, steers it, and recognizes in it the powerful relationship binding the divine to the church and to the faithful. In the bronze group in figure 2, erected at the site of the original revelation on the Hill of Tepeyac—said to be an ancient site sacred to the Aztec deity, Tonantzin, a mother goddess—the fault lines are smoothed over, and the potential menace of a grassroots movement is successfully grafted onto the tradition. A long line of indigenous peoples submissively offer gifts, themselves, and their devotion to Mary, the mother of the Christian God. And yet Our Lady, enfleshed in brown skin and speaking in Nahuatl, not Spanish, remains a potential icon of resistance and protest, no less than a symbol for appropriation by Mexican national military or the state. She is a site for the contestation of power, and that keeps her alive and relevant to the lives of many.⁵

The Catholic tradition maintains that it descends from a sacred origin and sustains the sacred in its performance of duties entrusted to its many offices and agents by virtue of their place in the hierarchy, as anchored in time to the chain of papal successors. In this regard, the shape of the holy for Catholicism is the configuration of authority in

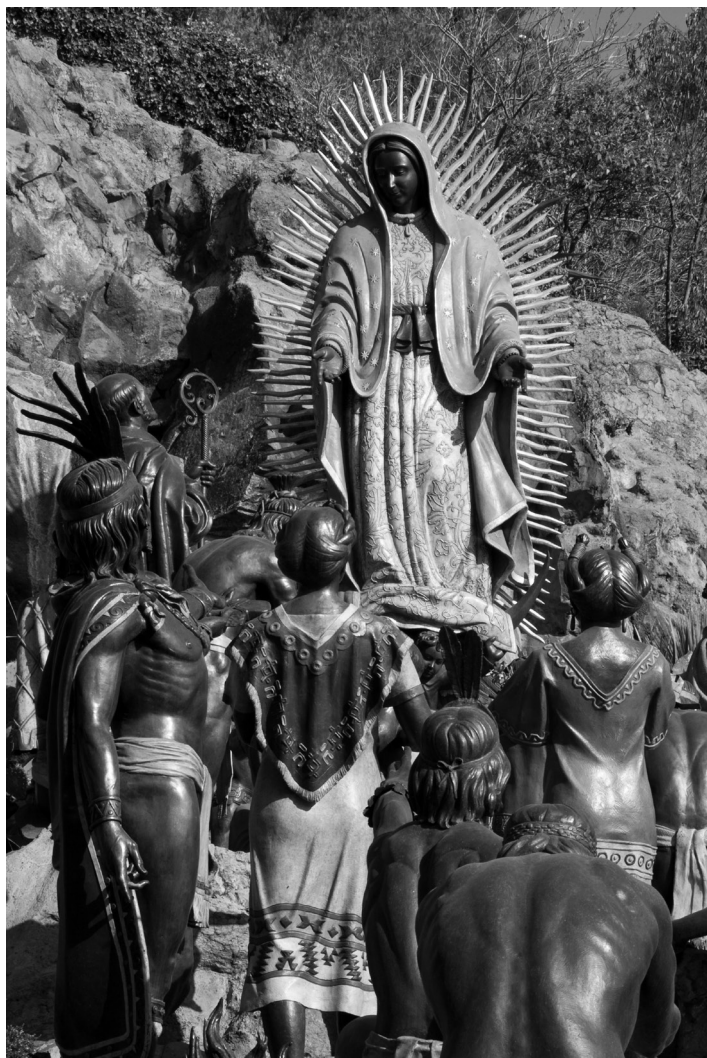


FIGURE 2

A.G.D. Mendoza, *La Ofrenda* (The Offering), 1986, bronze. Gardens of Tepeyac, Villa de Guadalupe, Mexico City. Courtesy of Album / Art Resource, NY.

these institutional and temporal forms. Continuity is a premium. To change is to risk loss of connection with the past, which remains the font of authority and the material source of holiness. Moreover, a secure origin acts as an anchor for subsequent history and allows succeeding authorities to posit and curate a stable essence called “Catholicism.” Of course this essence is in actuality a construction formed by time and the exertion of institutional power, and its maintenance is deeply dependent on the places and things that clothe the hierarchy of priests and prelates as the material culture of authority and put devotees in visceral connection to the majesty of the church. Catholic material culture is the means for accessing the power of the sacred in ecclesiastic ritual and in devotional life. Images, relics, altars, liturgical objects, vestments, rosaries, scapulars,

missals, architectural structures—all of these come from somewhere to deliver their power. They come, for one, from the past and are relied upon to maintain a connection to it. Further, these material forms come with the blessing and consecration of the hierarchy—the priest, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, or pope. Finally, the believer’s officially endorsed access to the holy comes through material interaction with these artifacts. Using them, honoring them, is an interface with the celestial hierarchy that ends in God himself. Levels of intercession are not experienced as distance from the divine, but as the way in which the divine draws near to the soul. A good deal of Protestant theology and church practice rejected this conception, coding all forms of the Catholic hierarchy as confusions with its apex, and therefore as idolatrous.

At the heart of Catholic and Protestant difference was an abiding disagreement over authority as the shape of the holy. Protestants have typically believed they have authority in the Word of God, the Bible, which they can access independently of clergy and hierarchy. Catholic laity and even many religious in monastic settings have generally not relied on reading the Bible, which Protestants have considered indispensable, but have looked instead to the power of spiritual exercises, liturgy, Eucharist, penance, and devotion to saints to bring them to the source of the sacred. The power of the church is delivered through the things believers do, such as pilgrimage and penance, vows, and practices of reparation; the practices of belief; the objects, such as the rosary, they use to pray; and the images they use to pledge, promise, praise, and thank the saints who intercede for them and bestow favors by virtue of their friendship with God. Devotion to the saints, to Mary, and to Jesus is performed before images or with images in mind as a way of focusing attention and embodying attachment and dedication. To bow or genuflect, to kneel or flagellate oneself before an image is to generate a range and intensity of emotions that knit the devotee to the object of devotion. The body serves as a powerful matrix for the experience of penance, and visualization has long been an important means among Catholics for staging encounter with the sacred. But by “performed” and “staging” I do not mean to imply a lack of sincerity or a merely *external* exhibition of devotion. I want to stress the central role of the active, performative body in Catholic practice as part of the materiality of the holy in this tradition.⁶

In Catholic and Orthodox traditions alike, action toward an image is action toward its prototype. The Second Ecumenical Council of Nicea affirmed that “the honor of the image passes to the original,” a view that was used in Orthodoxy to defend the veneration of icons.⁷ Although the Carolingian court harshly rejected the Council’s views on images, its judgments were not officially proclaimed or enacted, and the idea endorsed by Nicea is implicit if not explicit throughout Catholic history. The veneration of the images and relics of the saints was clearly endorsed by the church before the Reformation and was officially confirmed by the Council of Trent in response to the Reformation.⁸ Trent made a point of affirming the second Nicene Council and insisting that honor shown to images “is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images, which we kiss and before which we bare the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and

venerate the saints, whose likeness they bear.”⁹ To address the image of Jesus or Mary or another saint with one’s pleas or petition was not to hold conversation with a piece of wood or a painted surface. The image was understood as a communicative relay that directed human speech, thought, and the sentiments conveyed by gesture and deportment to the celestial reality of the person to whom one spoke.

A dazzling painting by Flemish artist Jan Gossaert, produced between 1520 and 1525, captures in European Catholic terms what the Eastern councils and the Orthodox tradition asserted regarding the authority and stature of images. *Saint Luke Drawing the Madonna and Child* (plate 1) is a subject that became important during and following the Iconoclastic controversy in eighth and ninth-century Byzantium, when icons were banned by several emperors as idolatrous.¹⁰ To show Luke, author of the longest and most detailed Gospel, creating an image of Jesus and his mother, and doing so with the supernatural aid of an angel, was intended to vindicate the practice of making icons and their authority. The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869–870), held thirty years after the end of the Iconoclastic period, boldly proclaimed the lofty stature of images of Jesus, and condemned as accursed any who failed to honor images of Mary, angels, prophets, martyrs, and saints. Most remarkable, however, was the elevation of the image to the stature of revealed biblical text as a source of teaching: “We decree that the sacred image of our lord Jesus Christ, the redeemer and savior of all people, should be venerated with honor equal to that given to the book of the holy gospels. For, just as through the written words which are contained in the book, we shall obtain salvation, so through the influence that colours in painting exercise on the imagination, all, both wise and simple, obtain benefit from what is before them; for as speech teaches and portrays through syllables, so too does painting by means of colours.”¹¹ Since colors are the analog of syllables, image and text mirror one another, and merit the same honor. We see the idea asserted in Gossaert’s image of Luke the author and painter. Stored inside the podium on which Luke draws an image of Our Lady and the Child is a clasped codex, no doubt the Bible. And just as the authors of Holy Writ were inspired as they wrote the scriptures, the angel intervenes to guide the draughtsman’s hand.

The authority of the image could not find a grander expression than in Gossaert’s painting. Luke has removed his shoes in honor of the holiness of the Virgin, who hovers in a radiant cloud that references the burning bush Moses encountered. We see Moses above, in a gray stone sculpture atop a well behind the angel. His presence is motivated by at least two allegorical references to the virginity of Mary. It was Origen who asserted that the burning bush was an apt metaphor for the virginity of Mary since the bush was aflame but was not consumed by the fire. And like Mary, Moses did the impossible in obedience to divine command, bringing water from rock by the touch of his staff (Exodus 17: 5–6). The scene in Gossaert’s painting is set within an ornately decorated interior that may represent a church nave lined by an arcade that forms a series of niches, one of which encloses the fountain on which the statue of Moses sits, holding the tablets of the law. The radiant cloud encircling the Mother and Child reveals the cherub-borne Mother

of God, who is being crowned by two putti. Devotion to the Coronation of the Virgin was widespread in late medieval Europe and its worship was often invested in side altars dedicated to Our Lady. In such spaces, set off for pilgrims and other devotees, paintings and sculptures depicted her heavenly crowning. Gossaert situates Luke's artistic inspiration before such a niche, as the Gospel writer looks into the side chapel where she appears. The result is an image that Protestant iconoclasts at this very moment were busy smashing in Swiss and German villages and pilgrimage churches.

Crowning the Virgin immediately brings to mind two medieval hymns that foreground Mary's status as queen. One, the "Salve Regina," is attributed to the eleventh-century Benedictine monk Hermann of Reichnau. This hymn achieved and has maintained a prominent liturgical and devotional place in Catholic worship, appearing in the liturgical calendar before Advent. A second is the "Ave Regina Caelorum," which dates at least to the twelfth century, is chanted from the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple to Wednesday of Holy Week. The text includes reference to angels (*"Ave, Domina Angelorum"*) and to the gate through which the light of the world shines. Both references might inform Gossaert's painting, in the host of cherubim that keep Our Lady afloat act as an angelic throne, and in the blaze of glory that radiates from her into the dark interior. The "Salve Regina" also refers to angels (*"Jubilare, Cherubim, / Exsultate, Seraphim!"*), but then addresses Our Lady in terms that seem quite relevant to Gossaert's image:

*Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.*

Turn then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us;
and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

In Gossaert's painting, Mary's eyes are turned downward as she attends to the Christ-child, and Luke's eyes are likewise trained on the image he is drawing with the angel's help. The painting thus enacts the moment of the hymn's plea for Mary to turn her gaze upon the viewer and to show the fruit of her womb. This showing (*ostende*) is a very significant matter for the understanding of Catholic imagery and its role in religious life because it sharply diverges from Protestant and iconoclastic views. As the Council of Constantinople decreed, the "imaginal energies of the colors" of icons are the equal of Holy Writ's syllables in their power to manifest truth, that is, to show what the Church teaches as revealed truth. Images bear truth as well as words and operate by showing or visually presenting it. Gossaert's image records a revelation, a showing, and affirms the power of images to capture that, though, like scripture, not without the intervening agency of heaven to secure its authenticity.

Closely related to the image's power to show the truth is the function of the emotions that images of Our Lady commanded, and produced, among Catholic faithful. As the "Salve Regina" instructs: "To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; / to thee do we send up our sighs, / mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." The mother receives these heartfelt expressions of misery and sorrow and responds because she is a mother. And her response goes to the heart of Marian piety as well as to the core of Protestantism's rejection of the veneration of Mary. As the mother of Jesus, indeed, as "Mother of God," one of her oldest titles, she enjoys intimate access to and honor from him, making her the ideal advocate to intercede for sinners: "*Ora pro nobis sancta Dei Genitrix.*" The "Ave Regina Caelorum" states the same request: "*Et pro nobis Christum exora*" (Plead with Christ [our souls to spare]). The coronation of the Virgin in heaven proclaimed her queenship and established her special rank there, to which belonged her role as mediatrix. She was understood to be empowered with dispensing graces or favors that were drawn from the treasury that accrued from Christ's righteousness and her own, as well as from the merits of saints. It is for this reason that the "Ave Regina Caelorum" was performed with indulgences and came to be an indulgenced prayer. As we will explore in greater detail in chapter 3, Mary is a central figure in Catholic sacred economy. Whereas Jesus generated the merits that sinners sought for forgiveness and aid, Mary was a principal mechanism for dispensing them through penance and indulgence. In light of this, the Protestant targeting of statues and images of Mary at pilgrimage churches—the places people went on missions to obtain her favor—is not hard to understand: by destroying these images, they hoped to disable the entire spiritual economy of intercession and the transfer of merit through Marian favor. What we learn from these images, and Gossaert's picture is a particularly beautiful example, is that interface with this economy was not grounded in texts, but in images linked to prayers. The cultural formation of the visual sense, that is, the forge of vision, imprinted the utterance and embodied performance of prayer on the act of seeing. Prayerful gazes engaged the image of Our Lady in a spiritual protocol of intercession that devotees hoped would end in the showing that the "Salve Regina" beseeches. Moses looks on, holding the diminutive tablets of the Law, the result of the "old" revelation on Sinai, which testifies and submits itself to the "new" dispensation taking shape visually before Luke.

Gossaert's picture reads like the guidelines on the veneration of images issued by the Council of Trent in 1563. The Council sought in its reforms both to affirm the veneration of images, relics, and the saints, and "to root out utterly any abuses that may have crept into these holy and saving practices . . . All superstition must be removed from invocation of the saints, veneration of relics and use of sacred images."¹² Moreover, the Council sought to eliminate "base profit," "all sensual appeal," "drunken feasting" and "disorderly . . . exaggerated or riotous manner" inside churches that might ensue from the veneration of these same saints, relics, and images.¹³ These three sacred elements were intricately interwoven in Catholic visual piety, and were often subject to what the Council considered an effervescent excess, particularly among the "unlettered." Regulating the

unruly physical body and the dangerous social body of the unlettered on occasions of ritual veneration was a key matter of Tridentine reform. The sensual appeal of images and rites posed challenges to control; these strictures of the Council were the first measure to mandate that sensuality be attenuated.

Far more powerful and invasive measures were already appearing within the church, but beyond the halls of the Council's deliberations. As we shall see, Catholic forms of spiritual renewal underway in the wake of the Reformation cultivated embodied, highly emotive practices of devotion and prayer.¹⁴ Religious orders played an important role. For instance, the intense introspection undertaken by Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which appeared with papal endorsement in 1548, developed a meditative technique for channeling imagination toward its pious object, directing the sensuous energies of visualization toward the spiritual end of envisioning one's intimate connection to the suffering and redemptive activity of Jesus. But the Jesuits were hardly alone. A wave of new religious orders and renewals of older orders swept across Europe as a vital response both to the Reformation as well as to the widespread calls for spiritual reform within the Catholic church. Imaging, both inward and outward, contributed importantly to these forms of renewal.

AUTHORITY, HIERARCHY, INTERCESSION: THE INTERFACE

But before we consider the impact of the new measures of visualization, it is necessary to examine the role of embodiment and its articulation in Catholic tradition. The human face is a form of communication unlike any other. We are wired to respond to faces interactively, using our own faces and our entire bodies to engage in a corporeal dialogue. The result is not a conversation of words, not a discourse, but an exchange of expressions and gestures that links bodies together in something more like a dance, a set of postures and movements that promise, anticipate, confirm, aver, deny, feign, and accept via the soundless engagement of looks, offers, aversions, and responses. And as a circumscribed field that we see and interact with, the face is likely the basis of the image as a system of human communication. A face, like the image of a face, looks back at us, allows us to watch it, leads us to expect something from it. Most importantly, a face is a surface that opens organically into a depth: to see a face is to enter the presence, the countenance of the person who lives within it. A face can be a frozen mask, a system of conventional signs, but the default is to experience a face as the living site where we hope to encounter one who shares our own life. Connecting with this other is what I mean by *interface*. Looking at a face is not in the first instance a semiological or symbolic process of abstract signification. It is not primarily a matter of reading a text as a set of signifiers. At first blush, to look upon another face, face to face, is to engage the presence of the other. It is to face something like oneself, even another version of oneself, and by consequence, to presume to know and anticipate what the face will do. Interacting in the medium of the face means, at least initially, to await affirmation or alienation. This is the raw affect of

interface. Meaning and the particular emotional interpretation of the face come later. Interface necessitates bodily connection, in which the face is not a sign of absent meaning, but the lived reality of it, the body or flesh whose significance is registered in our own flesh and face.¹⁵

Catholicism is a religion grounded in the belief that a community of friends has been put in place to help those who seek aid. God is a ruler who cannot be approached in himself because his holiness distances him from human presumption. But he reaches out to human beings by means of a system of intermediaries. Although human beings cannot look God in the face, they can seek out the faces of those whom he has appointed as his representatives—the saints, Mary, and, of course, Jesus. The intimacy of this yearning gaze is powerfully illustrated in Vincente Carducho's early seventeenth-century painting, *Stigmatization of St. Francis*, which shows the saint floating upward to see the crucified Jesus face to face (figure 3). In the distance we glimpse an attendant with the open book of the Gospels, which had served to launch Francis's vision of Christ, by being opened three times in the name of the Trinity. Rather than reading the text, Francis made use of it as a "divine oracle," a power object that unleashed visionary experience.¹⁶ In high Baroque manner, Carducho portrays a tender and sensuous meeting as the two men gaze into one another's eyes. Jesus is crucified on the flaming wings of seraphim rather than borne "betwixt" them "while [the] twain hid His whole body," as Bonaventure, Francis's thirteenth-century biographer, described the vision.¹⁷ Carducho seeks to stress the embodied character of the envisioned encounter, contrasting Francis's stiff gray robe with Christ's bare flesh. Francis is drawn upward by the force of mystical love, by what Bonaventure names the "seraphic glow of longing." Bonaventure relates that Francis afterward came to understand that the vision was a revelation, "that he was to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ Crucified, not by martyrdom, but by enkindling of heart. Accordingly, as the vision disappeared, it left in his heart a wondrous glow, but on his flesh also it imprinted a no less wondrous likeness of its tokens."¹⁸ The trace of a visionary experience in the flesh of the mystic marks the subtle join of spiritual and material worlds. And the bracing eros of the vision appealed no less to the Baroque imagination of Carducho and his viewers.

But the mysteries of visionary union with Christ were reserved largely for the monastic few who were dedicated to lives of mortification and prayer. Jesus's role in lay Catholicism was often limited to the singular work of redemption that he undertook in his passion, death, and resurrection. It is certainly true that he engaged many important figures in the mystical traditions of Catholicism, including Francis, Henry Suso, and Catherine of Siena, but it was not until the early modern era, as we shall see, that his suffering and visual intimacy would become more important for popular devotions such as Jesuit spirituality and the Sacred Heart, though each of these began among cloistered spiritual adepts as part of a special religious vocation. Mary and the saints, precisely because they had extraordinary experiences of intimate connection to Jesus, commanded spiritual authority and had broad appeal among the laity; they have been much more

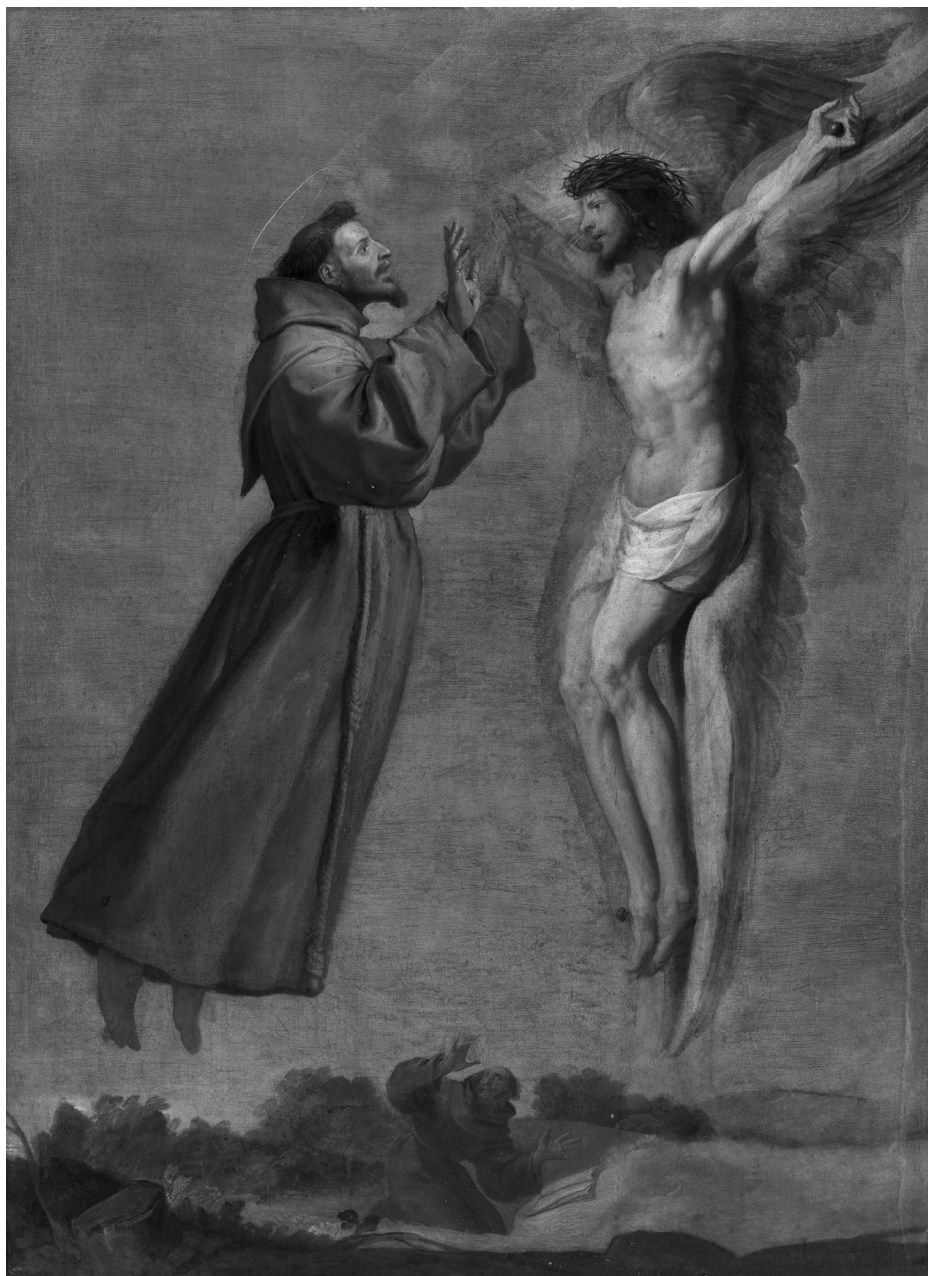


FIGURE 3

Vincente Carducho, *Stigmatization of Saint Francis*, early seventeenth century, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Hospital de la Venerable Orden Tercera de San Francisco.

important than Jesus himself for the devotions of daily life because they are intermediaries who enable access to the infinite merits that Jesus poured into the heavenly treasury through his sacrificial death.

Saints are the departed who now enjoy bliss in heaven with Christ. They are chosen by God as his friends to do the important work of serving him by interceding on behalf of the living and by providing models of moral virtue and self-mortification. The saints are like images: "We honor the servants that honor may redound to the Lord, who said: 'Who receives you, receives me'" (Matt. 10:40).¹⁹ The living can persuade saints to work on their behalf by offering masses in their honor, by prayer, by pilgrimage, by pledges, and by devotion directed to their images. Saints are inclined to help because they have proven their devotion to God and to humankind, both exhibiting virtues in this life and being divinely vindicated in the miracles worked by their relics or by their invocation. God honors them, so humanity should do likewise. The result is a sacred economy of exchange that distributes spiritual and material benefit among believers. The operation of this economy will be taken up in chapter 3, but it is important to say here that a saint's veneration and response are a constant means of sacred traffic that organizes everyday life. When a saint's patronage lags, it may be renewed, or it may be replaced by another saint or eventually by the translation of the saint's relics to another altar, where the saint has expressed some desire to go, or where need has bid an enterprising bishop or abbot to promote the saint's cause. The theft of relics by Crusaders and ecclesiastic entrepreneurs was a major part of the sacred economy of the cult of saints in the Middle Ages.²⁰ In this way, saints come into the presence of the community, materialized in their relics and visualized in the reliquaries, statues, and imagery that present them to their devotees.

A saint is the face or body of the one whom the believer wants ultimately to see, God. The saints look upon the face of God and, in the words of a bull issued by Pius IV following the Council of Trent, the saints are "reigning together with Christ [and] should be venerated and invoked." They "offer prayers to God for us."²¹ Their presence before God empowers the images of their faces by connecting the supplicant with the prototype in heaven. And the church has long privileged images of Jesus as ultimately linked to his face. The Fourth Council of Constantinople decreed that "If anyone does not venerate the icon of Christ, the savior, let him not see his face when he comes in his father's glory to be glorified and to glorify his saints, but let him be cut off from his communion and splendor" and then went on to insist on the necessity of honoring the images of Mary, martyrs, and saints.²² The priests, members of the church hierarchy, and monastics think of saints very much in terms of the liturgical calendar, the organized system of universal liturgy that joins the entire Catholic church in worship. Saints have their feast days and are remembered within the framework of the entire church year. The result is a communion of saints, an overarching community that structures sacred time so powerfully that it washes into the profane world and organizes it with bells, masses, and celebrations.

The church organizes worship according to the seasons of the liturgical calendar. But however much saints may participate in the liturgy of public worship, the laity is often inclined to think of saints more in terms of private devotion. The saints are engaged in daily veneration through prayer, rosary sessions, pledge, pilgrimage, meditation, and through occasional invocation for aid with a particular problem. There is certainly no inherent conflict between the two approaches, private devotion and liturgical worship. Over the centuries many Catholics regularly participated in formal worship, and before the modern era, liturgies were often in Latin, thus excluding active participation. Presence at mass did not require that laity understand the language of the liturgy. They knew the routine, the rhythm of the ritual. Presence meant being there and submitting oneself to the ritual's operation of grace. Participation did not mean cognitive understanding, but rather embodied response—chanted response in memorized Latin, standing, bowing, and kneeling on cue, praying, genuflecting, hearing the words of consecration, seeing the host elevated, receiving it, or not. Being there was not a mindless passivity, but neither was it the Puritan's careful notation of a preacher's sermon. It was an embodied form of presence, a participation in the event of the holy as performed by liturgical action.

The manner in which the church celebrates the saints and major feasts often involves processions, which take the cult statue or image on a tour of the surrounding neighborhood.²³ The processions, either before or after mass, organize the entire worshipping community into a long entourage that files into or out of the church with the image on a palanquin accompanied in succession by the priest, guest clergy or church officials, attendants, acolytes, sodality or confraternity members, and congregants. The entire company configures in its order a hierarchy that mirrors the structure of the parish, and the religious hierarchy of the church. The procession moves through the surrounding terrain, challenging the difference between sacred and profane space, finally blurring any distinction at all as the form of the procession dissolves into the streets. Processions enact the regal stature of the saint as spiritual nobility, simulating the august progression of the monarch or noble and the drama of their arrival and departure. Theatre or ceremony is an important part of Catholic ritual practice because, like standing before an image, it stages presence in a powerfully affective way. Obvious instances of this are the tradition of the Passion Play and the Via Dolorosa enacted during Holy Week.²⁴

The affective means in such rituals is to address not only the intellect but also the body of the viewer-participant. The experience of presence is the result, and this turns generally on the presentation of something grand, mysterious, exalted, powerful, majestic, or transcendent, which imposes a relation of submission on the viewer, who complies as part of an embodied colloquy that will produce an abiding relationship, membership in a community, and the possibility of an answer to prayer. Presence has also long been a powerful part of private devotional Catholic life, in which the devotee experiences the image as a compelling presence, one that sometimes works miracles or shows wondrous signs, moving, speaking, or otherwise responding to the devotee.²⁵ But an image acts

most commonly in less spectacular ways merely by receiving the address of petitioners, who present themselves before the image, touching it, kissing it, fondly caressing it, speaking or praying intimately to the saint with whom they are likely to have a long relationship. By receiving their attention and responding with the obdurate gaze and material presence of the saint, the image performs as an anchor in daily life.

The cult of saints and the veneration of the relics of martyrs and saints operate in a Catholic cosmology in which the relation between the present world and the next is continuous. This contrasts markedly with the views espoused by many Protestants, who insist on a sharp break between the materiality of this world and the spiritual reality of the next. Recognizing the depth of this difference is helpful in coming to appreciate the character of materiality and presence that matter to many Catholics. So it is worth pausing to take a look at the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, who articulated a very clear view on this distinction and one that was rooted in his definition of faith. Faith, he contended, is “a matter of fact, not of knowledge or opinion or imagination. A man, therefore, feels faith within, in his heart; for it is born only when a man begins to despair of himself, and to see that he must trust in God alone. And it is perfected when a man wholly casts himself off and prostrates himself before the mercy of God alone.”²⁶ This core state of faith, an inner state or disposition, is not the result of any external means, but of the individual’s submission to God. So when Zwingli engaged Catholics and Lutherans in debate over the meaning of the sacraments, he dismissed their understanding of sacrament as an objective power. A sacrament, he concluded, “is nothing else than an initiatory ceremony or a pledging.”²⁷ The Eucharist did not operate on the soul to regenerate the human being by forgiving transgressions or freeing the conscience from sin or producing knowledge of the sacrament’s inner working of regeneration.

The Lord’s supper and baptism, the two sacraments that Zwingli recognized, were public rites of initiation. Baptism is the social practice of naming the child with the charge “to fashion our lives according to the rule of Christ.”²⁸ And the Lord’s supper is a voluntary act by which “we give proof that we trust in the death of Christ, glad and thankful to be in that company which gives thanks to the Lord for the blessing of redemption.” Zwingli steadfastly refused any idea of acts or objects infused with intrinsic power. Faith began and ended in the heart: “I unwaveringly believe that there is one and only one way to heaven, firmly believe that the Son of God is the infallible pledge of our salvation, and trust in Him so completely that that for the gaining of salvation I attribute no power to any elements of this world, that is, to things of sense.”²⁹ Faith is “hope and trust in things quite remote from sense.” So Zwingli insisted that to speak of the spiritual consumption of Christ’s flesh in the sacrament of the altar was to speak nonsense, as “body and spirit are such essentially different things that whichever one you take, it cannot be the other.”³⁰ When Jesus said “This is my body,” Zwingli argued, he meant “This *signifies* my body.”³¹ The sacrament is therefore a sign or symbol of the testament.³² Zwingli reasoned, with the ironclad instrumentation of a modern analytic philosopher of language, toward a staunch dualism in which faith is a disposition toward the next world, quite independent of bodily or

intellectual inducement: “In short, faith does not compel sense to confess that it perceives what it does not perceive, but it draws us to the invisible and fixes all our hope on that. For it dwelleth not amidst the sensible and bodily, and hath nothing in common therewith.”³³ With this in mind, we grasp how Zwingli dismissed images as sensible things that could not know or teach of faith. Not only did he promote the removal and destruction of images that were worshipped, he also objected to the claim that images could teach anything about faith. Jesus, he argued, knew that “we turn to the things that are evident to sense, and He did not wish images to be made more impressive to us by the influence of teaching. For we do seem to owe something to those who teach us.” But the proper source of Christian teaching, Zwingli insisted, is “the word of God externally, and by the Spirit internally.”³⁴

COUNTERREFORMATION

A very different view was defended by the Catholic church, especially as articulated by the Council of Trent (1544–63), which condemned numerous claims advanced by the Protestants and spearheaded a Counterreformation that was taken up by artists employed by defenders of the faith in Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. Trent vindicated the place of images in churches, the cult of the saints, the veneration of relics, the Eucharist, and the use of indulgences—all issues Protestant reformers had targeted. It also boosted a theme that had been common in late medieval and Renaissance sacred art: the portrayal of saintly intercession, particularly in cases devoted to thanking saints for their aid in such disasters as plagues and the military siege of cities.³⁵ These images are typically spectacular, vertical compositions used on altars dedicated to the saint in question. Perhaps the most well-known image produced during the Counterreformation is El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz*, 1586 (plate 2). The subject is the sixteenth-century retelling of the fourteenth-century reburial of a nobleman, Don Gonzalo Ruis of Toledo (d. 1323), whose body was transported from the Augustinian monastery of St. Stephen to the Church of St. Thomas, also in Toledo. In the painting, the process is facilitated by the honored guests, Saints Augustine and Stephen, who appear richly dressed in gold embroidered robes at the lower center of the painting, grasping the deceased man. We have no trouble recognizing the domain of the living, formed by a line of black-clad and white-collared men standing behind the two saints, flanked by a priest in a transparent surplice on one side and by a Augustinian brother discussing the event with a Franciscan, on the other.

Yet the viewer's eye does not tarry long at this level, the sumptuous fabrics and gem-encrusted miter of the Bishop of Hippo notwithstanding. The entire picture conspires to draw the eye upward. We follow the ascending gazes of several figures to a glowing cloud that forms a natural barrier and conduit between heaven and earth. The cloud has opened up into a kind of celestial birth canal to receive the translucent shape of a child, the soul of the dead count, which is helped into the orifice by a winged angel. From there he will emerge into the august company of Our Lady and John the Baptist, Saint Peter, and the whole heavenly host of cloud-borne saints, martyrs, and glowing souls crowding

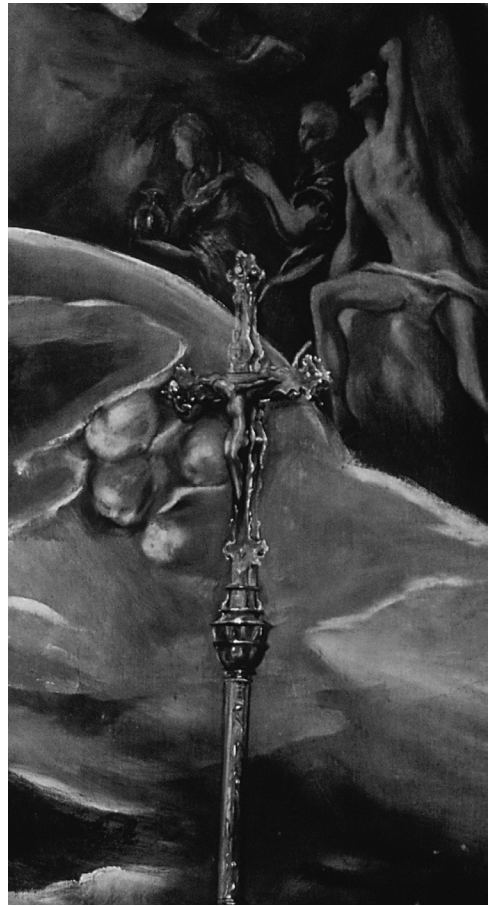


FIGURE 4
Detail from El Greco, *Burial of Count Orgaz*,
1586–88; crucifix piercing clouds. Courtesy of
Scala / Art Resource, NY.

about the uppermost figure, the enthroned Christ, Lord of Heaven. The ascending hierarchy of terrestrial rank and angelic and saintly hosts joins with the plastic architecture of the cosmos to portray a universe in which heaven and earth are part of a single, organically unified fabric. The world of spirit is not cut off or ontologically separate from the world of materiality, but joined with the same literalness as the mysterious unity of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of the Eucharistic meal. Note, for instance, the crucifix on a long staff held by an officiating priest standing on the right (figure 4). Where the cross rises above the cloud that divides terrestrial from celestial spaces it turns transparent, an ethereal tracery of its concrete actuality. The division might be said to mark the distinction between substance and accident, yet the continuity of the two realms remains evident. This is not a Platonic vision of reality versus appearances, of being opposed to shadow. Heaven and earth are joined on a single continuum of being, and the saints live at one end, in the presence of Christ, while angels shuttle between the two domains with bodies composed of luminous substance.

Looking at this painting, one cannot miss its hierarchical organization of the cosmos and the key role that the saints play in populating a spiritual bureaucracy that connects the layperson and viewer to the apex of the universe's government. The saints occupy levels of a hierarchy that brings the soul to the very throne of the Almighty, whose gesture toward his mother and look at John signal his command over the entire mechanism of intercession. El Greco's painting grandly endorses the Council of Trent's bolstering of the cult of the saints in response to the attack of the Reformation. Mindful of the Protestant claim regarding the abuse of images, Trent directed bishops "to instruct the faithful carefully about the intercession of the saints, invocation of them, reverence for their relics and the legitimate use of them; they should teach them that the saints, reigning with Christ, offer their prayers to God for people; that it is a good and beneficial thing to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers and helpful assistance to obtain blessings from God."³⁶ The Council of Trent addressed the misuse of images directly, telling bishops to teach laity that images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints should be displayed and venerated "not because some divinity or power is believed to lie in them as reason for the cult, or because anything is to be expected from them, or because confidence should be placed in images as was done by the pagans of old; but because the honor showed to them is referred to the original which they represent."³⁷ Their images act in devotion and intercession not by any intrinsic agency, but because they serve as a relay, transmitting veneration to the saints themselves. El Greco's painting shows that very procedure at work. The viewer's gaze enters the pictorial field of the figures only to be shunted upward. Although the allure of the painterly surface, particularly the fabrics and flesh tones, gives the eye pause, it lingers only briefly before moving restlessly onward, impelled by the very way surfaces dissolve into brushwork and by the composition's rising network of gazes, gestures, and movement. All things yearn upward in a universal circuit of energy, as Augustine put it in his *Confessions*: the heart is restless until it rests in God.³⁸ At the same time, the hierarchies of the celestial and terrestrial worlds conduct ontological traffic in both directions, upward and downward along the vibrating architecture of being. Like a cosmic diaphragm, the luminous nebula at the picture's midlevel aspirates a breath or spirit that sustains the cosmos.

El Greco's painting displays the ontology of Catholicism as a triumphal rejoinder to Protestant heresy. The difference is striking. Even though Catholicism and Protestantism are both versions of Christianity, and observe as such a dualist distinction between divine and mortal, spirit and matter, soul and body, their understandings of the relationship between this world and the next are different, and their conceptions of the connection between the materiality of the body and the soul are not the same. Although in Catholicism the body is understood to struggle against the destiny and longing of the soul, as a material reality the body is not ontologically separate from the spiritual realm, but rather serves as the existential seat of spirit. Spirit and matter intermingle and space itself is infused with presence. Because they have distinguished sharply between spirit and matter, Protestants have tended to differentiate between the here and the hereafter



FIGURE 5

Jakob Lucius, *The Figure of the Baptism of Our Savior Jesus Christ, in which Took Place the Glorious Revelation of the Eternally United Godhead in Three Persons, which all Christians Should Prayerfully Ponder*, circa 1556, woodcut. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

temporally: thus, the kingdom of God is not yet come, but it will do so soon. Setting the time of this arrival has been a preoccupation among many Protestants. Catholics, by contrast, have articulated the relation of here and hereafter in *spatial* terms: the sacred is here in this relic, manifest in this miracle-working image, present on this altar, in the body and blood of the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine. Thus, at the level of theological discourse if not always in popular practice, images and sacred objects are often signs for Protestants, but forms of presence for Catholics.

A fruitful comparison of contemporary sixteenth-century Catholic and Protestant images makes clear the differing cosmologies articulated by images in the two visual cultures. We can set El Greco's painting beside a large print by the Wittenberg artist Jakob Lucius, *The Figure of the Baptism of Our Savior Jesus Christ*, from about 1556 (figure 5). The comparison turns on the moment of revelation as portrayed by each artist. In the print by Lucius we behold, above the broad landscape, the heavens emanating a radiant dove, the Holy Spirit, as John the Baptist kneels on the bank and pours water with his hand, gathered from the Jordan in a pitcher (a reproof of the Anabaptists who baptized by immersion). The heavens are contained within a writhing cloud, animated by the heavenly host, none of whom penetrate the distinct contour separating the celestial and terrestrial

domains. Only the effulgent dove descends, accompanied by the voice of the Almighty, who gestures downward as he announces the identity of his son. The event is beheld by Luther and his patron Johann Friedrich, his wife, and their three sons. The elector and his family hold their hands in prayerful contemplation of the revelatory moment, imitating Christ himself who submits to the Baptist in this consecration of his public ministry and the revelation of his participation in the Trinity.

Lucius limns a curious image. At first glance, it seems to say that Luther and his patron were present at the baptism of Jesus. But we quickly notice that the scene is not set in Palestine, but in contemporary Saxony. That is not the Jordan River, but the Elbe. The city in the background is ground zero for the German Reformation, Wittenberg.³⁹ At the center of the image is the City Church, which, as Joseph Leo Koerner has pointed out, “functioned like an episcopal see, where Lutheran pastors from throughout Europe were ordained, with the city’s theology professors examining the applicants.”⁴⁰ Thus, the scene celebrates the beginning of Christ’s ministry as coinciding with the origin of the Protestant church in Germany. Luther and Johann Friedrich are not there in the simple spatial sense, but affirm the event prayerfully, faithfully across time. The past and present are type and antitype. Luther is the modern John the Baptist while Johann Friedrich and his family imitate Christ’s submission to divine will and establish thereby the connection between heaven and earth. The two worlds are parallel, but do not touch. They only join in the person of Jesus, who is revealed here to be man and god. The image affirms the fundamental Reformation principle of returning to the source. As a latter-day John the Baptist, Luther anoints the elector’s choice to support the Reformation as a purification of the church and a return to its origin. One might say that the image proclaims the inauguration of Jesus’s modern public ministry. Produced just after Johann Friedrich’s death in 1554, the print affirmed the Saxon nobleman’s support for the Reformation in spite of his fate in the Schmalkaldic War, when he was imprisoned for several years by Charles V and stripped of his electoral title.

To be sure, Lucius’s print and El Greco’s painting are different genres of imagery. The first is a mass-produced historical allegory applied to political propaganda and the popular commemoration of Lutheran culture heroes. The second is an altar painting—propaganda, certainly, but no less part of an altar devoted to liturgical and devotional intercession. But both were politically engaged artifacts that manipulated time in order to shape religious consciousness. Both bend the rules of time and space to suit their purpose. El Greco placed a first-century martyr and a fourth-century bishop at the reburial of a fourteenth-century count as mystically witnessed by a gathering in the sixteenth-century. Lucius took comparable liberties. And both situated the present and the past on the cusp of the eternal. Yet the relationship of heaven to earth is different in each image. The Lutheran image beholds the heavenly world only through the act of faith, as a prayerful contemplation of an ancient miracle. El Greco, by contrast, sees the present opening organically into the eternal. The Catholic faith, his painting announces, is unified by its mystical communion of saints across and beyond time. Lucius’s image operates in the

pictorial mechanics of political allegory, in which meaning is deciphered. The present mirrors the past, his print asserts: the Reformation is in harmony with the foundation of the true church of Jesus Christ.

Compare in this regard the roles of hands and of sound in each image. Lucius shows the hands of Johann Friedrich and family assembled in prayerful consideration of Christ's baptism. These latter day figures do not *see* Jesus wading in the Elbe; they contemplate his "figure." This more mediated relationship is announced in the image's title, "The Figure of the Baptism of Our Savior Jesus Christ."⁴¹ The figure of speech is an "as if" in which *see* means *believe*. Rather than witnessing the ancient baptism, they *believe* that Christ's baptism impinges on their world in the figuration or allegorical translation of "as if." Further, we are told in the full title of the print that "all Christians should ponder [*betrachten*] in calling [on Jesus]" that the deity consists of three persons eternally in one. Believers are to consider, observe, or behold (the German verb may be rendered by each English word), the mystery of the Trinity as they behold the baptism of Christ as the revelation of the triune godhead. And so we see the noble family with their hands joined in prayer.

The entire woodcut integrates sight and sound. Luther and Johann Friedrich watch the revelation that is described in the Gospel of Mark. They see what they hear from above, though they seem quite unaware of the turbulent heavens above them and the divine action of God and the Holy Spirit. Yet in some sense what they see is the sound of the word of God booming from heaven, the very sound once transliterated into the Gospel of Mark and now transformed into image. One of the verses below the image refers to the "voice" (*Stimme*) of the Father who attests to his son, as the Gospel of Mark indicates (Mark 1:11). The next stanza reads:

We all should hear him with zeal
and prize him above all things.
Therefore let every Christian see
when he is in fear and need
that he should seek comfort and salvation
not with creatures, that is fraud
the idols should not be called on
their strength and value is a lie
one should call on God alone.⁴²

The intermingling of sound and sight couples seeing, hearing, and reading in the same way we see the painter Lukas Cranach the Elder do in a well-known image of Luther preaching (see figure 10).

This enfolding and relaying of sound, text, and image, the mechanism of meaning that Lutheran imagery had come to espouse, is not at all how El Greco's image works. The hands in his painting enact a literal gesticulation of beholding. The priest in the foreground, the knight between Stephen and Augustine, the Augustinian monk to the

left, and Saint John the Baptist above them all refer with their hands to a miracle before them, giving the embodied response, “Behold what is happening.” For the Catholicism of the Counterreformation images do not *signify*, they *show*. And the eye does not interpret, but rather witnesses the material manifestation of divine action.

VISUALIZATION IN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

The Council of Trent, while undertaking some reforms aimed at curbing the abuse of church offices, focused much of its energy on responding to the schism in Northern Europe. The same decade that saw the first sessions of the Council also witnessed the formation of another arm of the Counterreformation, which would stretch from Rome, across Europe, and into the Americas and Asia. The Society of Jesus, or the Jesuit order, was organized by Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) and authorized by Pope Paul III in 1540. Even before the order was founded, however, Ignatius had composed his most enduring work, the *Spiritual Exercises*, a remarkable manual for cultivating the spiritual discipline of self-examination as an intensive practice of visual introspection. The manual, organized into four “weeks” or sections, guided practitioners through a series of highly structured forms of visualization of moments in the life and passion of Jesus over the course of many days, with intervening experience of fasting, prayer, flagellation, canonical hours, mass, confession, and penance.

Most striking is the work’s intensive, multi-sensory practice of visualization. The exercises are affective, deeply imaginative, rigorously introspective forms of guided meditation that take reader-participants from the fires of hell through the birth of Jesus to his Passion and Crucifixion and finally to the Resurrection. At each stage, practitioners are told to form a “composition,” which consists of becoming able to “see the place.”⁴³ The *modus operandi* is set out at the beginning of the first week: in “a visible contemplation or meditation, as, for instance, when one contemplates Christ our Lord, Who is visible, the composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is found which I want to contemplate.”⁴⁴ Ignatius was influenced by late medieval contemplative literature such as Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, in which affect played a primary role in identification with Jesus. Devotion and contemplation were not disembodied, but grounded in the faculties of feeling and imagination. Ignatius made abundant use of the imagination and the senses in the contemplation of hell, infamously celebrated in the graphic account of the Jesuit instruction of the youthful narrator of James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), in which the teacher dwells for pages on the agonies of those in hell. Likewise, the *Spiritual Exercises* direct the meditator “to see with the sight of the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of Hell,” and to contemplate in every sense “the pain which the damned suffer.” The diligent meditator is instructed: “to see with the sight of the imagination the great fires, and the souls as in bodies of fire . . . to hear with the ears wailings, howlings, cries, blasphemies against Christ our Lord and against all His Saints . . . to smell with the smell smoke,

sulphur, dregs, and putrid things . . . to taste with the taste bitter things, like tears, sadness, and the worm of conscience . . . to touch with the touch; that is to say, how the fires touch and burn the souls.”⁴⁵ Ignatius cultivated a practice of contemplation that was robustly somatic, applying all faculties and senses to the immediate interior sensation of the object of contemplation, with the intention of dismantling distance and indifference. The aim is to “conquer the self” by learning to regulate it.⁴⁶ Visualization was a dismantling and reconstruction of the self in a discipline that would regulate its every feeling and thought. Ignatius championed the idea of spiritual calisthenics in which the spiritual interior, or soul, was analogous to the body. The *Exercises* seek to discipline thought, body, and imagination on the analogy of bodily exercise: “For as strolling, walking, and running are bodily exercises, so every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul, is called a Spiritual Exercise.”⁴⁷

In the third week of the *Exercises*, the practitioner is instructed to experience “grief, feeling, and confusion because for my sins the Lord is going to the Passion.”⁴⁸ The path leads from the Last Supper to Gethsemane to the scourging of Christ and finally his crucifixion and burial. In effect, week three is a virtual experience of the Stations of the Cross, itself a recapitulation of the pilgrim’s walk on the Via Dolorosa. Visualization is the fundamental medium of this virtuality, an imaginative projection of oneself into the scene that strips the meditator of dispassionate distance and replays the ancient contemplation of Christ’s miseries and sorrows in the flesh of the shamed and guilt-stricken viewer. Not only did Ignatius condense centuries of spiritual practice into the *Spiritual Exercises*, he made the imagination a leading feature of contemplation for more than the cloistered elite, which had long engaged in dramatically visual forms of mystical experience. Ignatius applied a new psychological regimen to the practice of meditation among a far broader range of Catholics.

The *Spiritual Exercises* were fundamentally supportive of the Counterreformation, so much so that in 1548 Paul III issued a papal brief, *Pastoralis officii*, approving the *Exercises* and authorizing their use among the faithful.⁴⁹ Ignatius included at the end of *Spiritual Exercises* a list of rules to be observed in order “to have the true sentiment which we ought to have in the church militant.”⁵⁰ The first of these is “to have our mind ready and prompt to obey, in all, the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our holy Mother the Church Hierarchical.” Ignatian spirituality regarded the mind as an elastic faculty that could learn to stretch itself into the shape of the holy as the Church understood it. This is evident in the absolute degree of obedience that Ignatius demanded, as the thirteenth rule makes bracingly clear: “We ought always to hold that the white which I see, is black, if the Hierarchical Church so decides it.”⁵¹ And to this blind obedience he added the Tridentine necessity of venerating the saints, their relics and images, and honoring the practices of the Stations of the Cross, pilgrimage, indulgences, and more.⁵² Obedience was the core value because it was the pivot around which the mind could be shaped to serve the Church. And the visualization practiced and promoted by the *Exercises* demonstrated the

plasticity of subjectivity. The new medium for achieving the Church's aims was consciousness itself, shaped by the disciplinary rigors of Ignatian meditation: imagination was the new frontier. Where the Protestants discovered the value of mass-produced material imagery to shape public opinion as Evangelical propaganda, the Jesuits pioneered the power of internal imagery to form consciousness from within and instill a Catholic sensibility.

This trend was affirmed in 1593 by the appearance of a book densely illustrated with engravings by, among others, Anthony, Jerome, and Jan Wierix. The *Evangelicae historiae imagines*, or *Images from the Gospels*, had been written by Jerome Nadal (1507–80), aide to Ignatius, but not published during his lifetime. Nadal's work was intended as a pictorial guide to those using the *Spiritual Exercises*. Its task was to enable the intricate introspection that Ignatius taught as a powerful form of meditative prayer. Nadal undertook the tutoring of the imagination, recognizing how the brain works and can be best applied to devotional practice. Ignatius conceived of the imagination according to a long tradition of internal images that relied on place or spatial arrangement, especially by analogy to the manuscript page. This had been the way to train and exercise memory in the medieval world.⁵³ Ignatius moved from the memory of texts to engaging visual memory in an elaborate construction of place, regarding the production of mental imagery as a way to incite devotion and shape the mind into a vehicle of intense piety. Creating a sense of place in which memory unfolds was an ancient oratorical technique and one still practiced in Ignatius's day.⁵⁴ But he understood the imagination of place as a meditative technology that infused introspection with religious feeling. One did not merely remember the events of the Gospels, but constructed them in the mind as imaged sites whose process of visualization was interlarded with feeling and emotion. Imagination became a powerful creative act and introspection a searching inward practice that recoded neural networks to the shape and felt terrain of the individual's relation to what was imaged. The result was a reshaping of will and of the entire person.

The imagery of what came to be known as Nadal's *Illustrated Spiritual Exercises* is dedicated to the visual practice of Ignatian introspection, especially with respect to meditative prayer.⁵⁵ Consider figure 6, "On the Day of the Visitation," by Jerome Wierix, one of the opening plates of the book. Throughout the book, the engravings are composed around a central set of figures, very often positioned within an architectural milieu. Around this central placement appear vistas of events in the distance. Typically, these discrete scenes occur in windows, doorways, or apertures that open up onto the distance or position each scene as if it were a medallion floating above or behind the central configuration, as in figure 6. The page clusters a host of discrete moments from "the day of the Visitation," evoking thereby a temporal envelope in which the meditator's focus is fixed. Thus, just above Elizabeth and Mary in the foreground is a glimpse through the wall of Mary and Joseph traveling from Nazareth. Above this square image appears a circular frame encompassing the Annunciation. To either side of the central figures are vistas into the distance, where we see the birth of John the Baptist on the left, and on the



FIGURE 6

Jerome Wierix, *The Visitation*, in Jerome Nadal, *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1593). Courtesy of Woodstock Theological Center Library, Georgetown University.

right Mary and Joseph going to the city of Judah in order to visit her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39). We know the identity of each of these scenes because each portion of the collage is labeled with a small letter that is keyed to a list of Latin captions below. The careful articulation of scenes in Wierix's engravings corresponds directly to the Ignatian "composition of place," what Ignatius also called "seeing the place," in the *Spiritual Exercises*, was the genesis of the meditative process. He defined this as follows: "the composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is found which I want to contemplate."⁵⁶ The point of doing so was very clear: "to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul."⁵⁷ In describing the aim of the first exercise, Ignatius wrote that the "first point will be to bring [into inner sight] the memory of the first sin" against God, "and

then to bring the intellect on the same, discussing it; then the will, wanting to recall and understand all this in order to make me more ashamed and confound me more.”⁵⁸ The visual practice of introspective meditation was intended to integrate the human faculties, as Ignatius understood them, into a singular indictment of human guilt, to induce shame and to destabilize any sense of self-satisfaction. In other words, just as the mind constructed interior scenes, it did so to dismantle vanity and ego.

The engravings were intended to show meditators what their mental images should include and how the tableaux might be designed to incorporate it all. In figure 6 the process of visualization begins with place, the setting of the interior space defined by the architecture and labeled “C,” that is, “the house of Zechariah of the tribe of Judah in the hill country,” paraphrasing Luke 1:39. From there, the scenes register the biblical narrative. Against the background of these locative coordinates, the image features Mary meeting Elizabeth, the frontal figures, who perform the dramatic denouement of the narrative conveyed scenographically in a radial span behind them. The eye scans the array of visual episodes, darting from scene to scene to the central figures in order to assemble a coherent scheme or temporal sequence, combining image and text until the mind is satisfied that everything is identifiable and has found its place in a narrative that one already knows. By seeing the scenes of Christ’s life painted within the imagination, viewers may come to recognize intimate existential implications and therefore overcome self-will and submit themselves to divine will. We see the humility of the Virgin Mother, the pious submission of Joseph, Zechariah’s recognition and embrace of Joseph the paternal substitute who upheld Mary’s honor, their selfless conformity to the will of God working through each episode of the sacred narrative, moving it along to its culmination in the crucifixion of Jesus. Seeing in such a way is not a passive witnessing, but an inwardly directed working on the self, an image-making that exercises a shaping effect on the self. Seeing is feeling. As a result of such a conception, imagination took on a new moral efficacy and duty.

The *Spiritual Exercises* were undertaken by clergy, religious, and laity alike. The success that the meditative practice experienced inspired new generations of Jesuits to produce meditation literature, much of which was illustrated by remarkable engravings.⁵⁹ One of the most popular such books was Jesuit Antoine Sucquet’s *Via Vitae Aeternae*, or *The Way of Eternal Life*, which first appeared in 1620, but quickly went through several editions, and was translated into French in 1623; both the French and Latin versions contained illustrations by Boetius Bolswert (figure 7).⁶⁰ Sucquet’s book was deeply informed by the *Spiritual Exercises*, and systematically deployed its visualist sensibility, providing an image for each of its twenty-four meditations.⁶¹ The organizing metaphor for Sucquet, drawing from the *Spiritual Exercises* and Jesuit spirituality generally, was the discernment and choices that earthly pilgrims must make to fulfill the purpose of their lives, salvation. His book is a Jesuit *Pilgrim’s Progress* seventy-five years before that Puritan masterpiece appeared. Celestial Jerusalem looms throughout the text and its visual apparatus. The figure with his back to the viewer in these engravings is “us,” the



FIGURE 7

Boetius Bolswert, engraver, *Attending to the Example of the Saints*, in Antoine Sucquet, *Via Vitae Aeternae* (Antwerp: Martin Nuty, 1620), book 2, chapter 35, image 18, facing p. 418. Photo by author.

Christian reader/viewer who is engaged in the meditative work of discernment. The imagery offers a panorama that serves to map out the moral choices and spiritual discernments to be made by the meditator.⁶²

Fundamental to Jesuit theology and spirituality was the idea of free will, the capacity and call for each person to submit to God's will. We see it at work in the image reproduced here (figure 7), where the Christian practitioner is shown at an easel, gazing on a landscape that recedes into the distance. The subject of the meditation is imitating the examples of the saints, and a line of them has assembled conveniently before the painter-soul, consisting of Our Lady, Saint Paul, Saint Anthony, and even Saint Ignatius himself, who was beatified in 1609 and canonized in 1622, and appears directly in front of the painter, holding the glowing monogram of the Society of Jesus. A winged personification of Virtue casts pagan "philosophers of old" in shadow and points the painter's attention

to the Christian saints. Saint Jerome is visible in the distance, at work in a cave lined with codices, and further back is a host of martyrs outside what is presumably the walls of Rome. Because the soul is free, and charged with the paramount responsibility of making a choice about the direction its life will take, all these Jesuit examples of the rhetorical operation of imagery, both external and interiorly visualized, were applied to the soul's persuasion, not coercion. To this was added the help of the saints and martyrs, their images and relics, and the writings and labor of the heroes of the faith. The imagery and the visualizations of the Ignatian *Exercises* and guide books like Sucquet's seek to map out the total view of life, the long path to Jerusalem glimpsed in the remote distances of Bolswert's engravings. As the preeminent religious order in the Church militant of the Counterreformation, dedicated to education and missionizing, the Jesuits took their visual practice far and wide, and taught the modern world how to imagine.