The Iconic (Re)Turn:

Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* between Image, Relic and Martyrdom in Early Modern Italy

Simen K. Nielsen

Master's Thesis in the History of Art

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art, and Ideas

Supervisor: Associate Professor Per Sigurd Tveitevåg Styve

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

June 2017

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Abstract

In September 1601 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) signed the contract to produce two paintings for the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. Modern art historiography contains millions of such details; Yet, a painting is not simply a painting, in the way history is never just history. Things, like language and words themselves, have histories. These intertwine and mesh with social, religious and cultural practices. Consequently, in order to speak about meaning in historical visual cultures, we must reconstruct and engage with these histories. Such is the aim of this thesis.

In 1545, Pope Paul III Farnese called the Council of Trent, a great ecumenical endeavour which would last eighteen years, closing in December 1563. What followed was a so-called Post-Tridentine period. At a distance, these compromise what we know as the Counter-Reformation. Caravaggio grew up in the wake of these developments, when the Catholic Church, more or less finding itself in a constant state of spiritual blitzkrieg, devised a new artistic programme for its visual theology.

This thesis seeks to connect Caravaggio's particular engagement with the subject of martyrdom, and frame the outpourings of a sacrificial iconography which ties into a contemporary cult of early Christianity. My argument is that the veneration of a paleochristian past extends into and shapes the cult of the sacred image, the icon, associated, first and foremost, with an early medieval kind of Christendom. The icon, or rather, the iconic, becomes, I argue, an instance of appeal, or source of pictorial strategies in Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* of 1601, that serve as rudiments in the controversy of the image, which surface during the sixteenth century between Catholic and Protestant confessions.

Within this matrix of collisions, conflations, and connections, I regard Caravaggio's religious imagery as torn between an archaic address to Christian iconic cult practices on the one hand, image and relic, invocation and iconoclasm, the visual and the verbal. On the other, an Albertian conception of artistic, aesthetic and stylistic practices. My desire is not to convey the logic of the latter, which has dominated what I call "the modernist narrative" of Caravaggio criticism, but rather to explore the hermeneutics of the former; how Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, by facilitating a response to the "iconic (re)turn" in post-Tridentine pictorial ideology, produces, structures and reflect meaning(s) embedded in the life-world and visual culture of early modern Italy.

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1   Introduction

"Die Kunst ist die Vermittlerin des Unaussprechlichen."
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Kunst und Altertum* (1827)

1.1 Thesis

Why write another thesis on Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610)? At first glance, the question may seem felicitous, and indeed warrant a thorough reply. Nevertheless, by having to ask such a question to begin with, we have, I believe, already provided an answer; it is not so much *despite* of, as it is *because* of the plethora of Caravaggio research I have decided to embark upon another study.

Caravaggio paints in a period caught between fierce appeals to traditional authority, and the progressive power of secular-scientific paradigms.[1] As an entity giving material solidity to these tensions, the image, or the disputes over the image, make up one the fundamental anxieties of Early Modern experience. Precisely as the site of these discursive, hermeneutic, and even physical struggles, the image – torn between its status as cult object and aesthetic art work, so decisively described by Hans Belting – finds itself in a state of crisis.[2]

The starting point of this thesis is Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* [*Fig.* 1]. This iconic image engages with the intellectual, religious and visual life-world of post-Tridentine Rome, that is, the capital of the Catholic Church emerging from the closing of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which devised, prescribed, and consolidated a new basis for the dogmas and practices of Christianity in face of Protestant reform.[3] Herein lies the root of the sixteenth-century controversy of the image, a subject recounted thoroughly by Giuseppe Scavizzi[4], which produced a climate of spiritual, liturgical and intellectual tensions, as a fragmented and destroyed Church desperately sought to maintain the fundamental structures of Christian experience.

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[1] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century. Religion, The Reformation and Social Change*, (Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1967), as well as John Elliot, "Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe," in Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith (eds.), *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997): 109–127.

[2] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. 16, 458, 472.

[3] A general narrative of the Counter-Reformation in general, and the Council of Trent in particular, may be found in A. G. Dickens, *The Counter-Reformation*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), and John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[4] Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

Central to my argument is the Counter-Reformatory and post-Tridentine appeal to paleochristian[5], that is early Christian, ideals of worship and theology. Visuality and visual manifestation made up a vital part of the nexus of the apostolic centuries; for a religion built around metaphysical and spiritual beliefs, Christianity has from its very infancy been consumed, even haunted by notions of the body and the material.[6]

Caravaggio engages with and lives through violent confrontations between these diametrically opposed conceptions of the image, putting the immense reception of his naturalist revolution in perspective. While conjuring forth images of fundamentally human qualities, he sacrifices nothing in terms of miraculous impact and supernatural value. Or, by shedding any overt reference to the supernatural, Caravaggio presents a fundamentally new and profound interpretation of the miraculous within the parameters of human experience. Making him the subject for yet another study, then, warrants no further explanation; I firmly believe in the necessity of addressing, and re-addressing, the canons of art history.

I build the argument of the thesis around the conviction that meaning in Caravaggio's religious altarpieces in general, and *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* in particular, draws upon a network of enmeshed and interrelated contexts. Precisely because, I argue, meaning is generated not in singular, separated spheres, but in frictions and tensions taking place on the level of both material experience and the level of language, a hermeneutic of early modern painting needs to address these oscillations.

Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* is done oil on canvas, measuring 230 x 175 cm. Observing the image in the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, we observe four figures, occupying a crowded yet depopulated canvas; there are few individuals and at the same time little space. Caravaggio's reductionism engages with a tangible effect of presence and action. The sense of concentration and distilled subject matter is achieved by stripping his motives down to the bare minimum, almost pure essence. Practically devoid of historical context, Caravaggio's image confronts us with a timeless space. We are watching a man being crucified upside-down. An initial iconographical response informs us as to the identity of the convicted. St. Peter crucified upside down as a gesture of humility, or rather, a testament to his own sense of unworthiness compared to that of Christ.[7]

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[5] Gauvin Bailey refers to this tendency as "The Paleochristian Revival Movement", see Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 122f.
[6] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality – An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 154f.
[7] The crucifixion of St. Peter is an event taking place outside of canonical Scripture, and belongs to early Christian Apocryphal writings. Consequently, it belonged to the peripheral parts of Biblical iconography. See

Tangible and tactile, his body burst outwards in powerful protrusion. Rendered with realist rigor, the setup is one composed of aggressive diagonals and foreground relations. Caravaggio's executioners go about their duty with solemnity and seriousness, struggling to realize the goal of the raising the Cross bearing the saint. In this forceful will to presence and immediacy lies the crucial discrepancy between what I will call the Counter-Reformation clarity of Caravaggio's "iconic mode" and de-sanitized language of the Albertian art-work.[8]

As mentioned, my conviction that Caravaggio's religious imagery may be effectively, meaningfully, even necessarily, explored in the wider contiguous contexts of late sixteenth-century Rome, is intended to reflect the narrative structure of this thesis: Chapter Two seeks to provide an outline of the discursive beginnings to a Christian concept of the image, the icon, and how this comes to furnish a Counter-Reformation and post-Tridentine notion of the sacred image. Framing the physical, social and visual space of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* is the objective of Chapter Three, as well as conveying the prevalence of a particular Petrine iconography in the Rome of Clement VIII, which I believe contributed to the historical pressures put upon Caravaggio's commission. In Chapter Four, I address the enormous intellectual influence of the Council of Trent, especially its role in conducing a displacement of High Renaissance humanist ideology in favour of what I call a "medievalization" of spiritual, theological and visual culture. Herein I explore the centrality of Cesare Baronio as Counter-Reformation disseminator, the pervading influence of Spanish spirituality during the later *Cinquecento*, as well as the correlation of violence and devotion in Early Modern Europe, a coupling which gained climactic expression in the form martyrdom and the martyr. I also explore radical transitions in Catholic culture: The new religious orders, had, and will have in my argument, a bearing upon the hermeneutics of religious art, something which makes up a sub-field of Caravaggio criticism. Chapter Five sketches the theoretical framework of religious painting in Italy between 1560 and 1600, emphasizing the treatises of Giovan Andre Gilio and Gabriele Paleotti, where, I argue, a naturalist rhetoric and language provides Caravaggio's visual vocabulary with decisive influence. Nature and naturalism deal not just with proto-scientific and empirical observation but ties into a religious hermeneutic that I will attempt to argue is realized in Caravaggio's *Crucifixion*. In Chapter Six and Seven I

Felicity Harley-McGowan, "Death is Swallowed Up in Victory: Scenes of Death in Early Christian Art and the Emergence of Crucifixion Iconography," *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2011): 101–124.

[8] An indispensable work on Mannerism and the ways in which it ties into the cultural history of the Renaissance is Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art. vol. 1*. 2. vols, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

seek to complete my argument with a discussion of the materiality of Early Modern worship and piety. By elucidating the of conflations in the concepts of image, relic, and martyrdom in post-Tridentine discourse, I hope to substantiate my claim that meaning-making in Caravaggio's image takes place *within* these categories, categories shaped by Protestant reforms, Petrine "pressures", a cult of the early Christian image, a new naturalist language, and the pervasive presence of the martyr body. Around criteria, Caravaggio constructs an visual language whose radical revisions, I will argue, may be defined as an "iconic (re)turn".

1.2 Existing scholarship

Providing a comprehensive catalogue of Caravaggio research over the last century and beyond is in itself too great an undertaking to be attempted here, perhaps anywhere. For an artist whose enticement to scholarship remains spellbinding, however, there are certain unavoidable bodies of work that unarguably needs to be discussed and confronted.

As this thesis explores hermeneutical and contextual implications of Caravaggio's work, mainly directed toward the domains of religious and intellectual history, a rudimentary study, and the first of major significance in this regard, is Walter Friedlaender's seminal *Caravaggio Studies* of 1955.[9] Friedlaender becomes the leading and primary exponent of a strand of research, which seeks to tie Caravaggio's corpus into the fabric of late sixteenth-century religious life. While contested, as I will discuss in more detail, his opening of the possibilities of conceptual and material correlations in Caravaggio's imagery – without having to recourse to biographical causations – helped expanding the topography of meaning surrounding image thought and theory in Caravaggio's lifetime.

On the note of biography, there are several narratives of Caravaggio's life. Howard Hibbard's monography covering life and work is still immensely useful, with its translated appendices of the fundamental primary sources. In the more recent spectrum, Helen Langdon's thorough life is dependable; accompanied by Sybille Ebert-Schifferer's monography and the fairly recent biography of Andrew Graham-Dixon, which digs deep into the contextual conditions for image production and meaning-making in the post-Tridentine period. these make up the major material for the fairly brief amount of space I devote to biography. In addition, the work of John Gash and Alfred Moir warrants mention.[10]

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[9] Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, (Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955).
[10] Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983); Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio – A Life*, (London: Pimlico, 1998); Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Caravaggio*: *The Artist and His Work*, (Los Angeles: CA:

Caravaggio criticism in scholarship, as well as work on post-Tridentine artistic thought, in addition to larger works on the history and theory of the image, constitute the main portion of sources. Discussions of Caravaggio's relationship to history painting, narrative, and the legacy of Renaissance painting have gotten its indispensable work in Lorenzo Pericolo's magisterial *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative: Dislocating the 'Istoria' in Early Modern Painting*. Pericolo's opus may be compared to Todd Olson's *Caravaggio's Pitiful Relics*, an example of new approaches to visual hermeneutics, a domain of configuring and interpreting visual culture that has proved productive and informative in my own procedure. Anne H. Muraoka's fairly unnoticed but highly interesting work on pauperistic aspects of Caravaggio's imagery, especially pertaining to the spirituality of Carlo Borromeo has provided insights into the nature of icon and image.[11] Ferdinando Bologna, Maurizo Calvesi, Maurizio Marini and John Varriano have all brought important discussions on the topic of nature, naturalism and image in Caravaggio.[12] Giulio Carlo Argan's book on the visual rhetoric of imagination and persuasion in the sixteenth century has brought keen observations.[13] Pamela Jones' wonderful work can neither go unmentioned, containing important scholarship on the subject and modes of religious representation in early modern Rome. [14] Alongside these, several edited essay publications have proved useful. Maj-Britt Anderson's *New Caravaggio*, as well as Franco Mormando's *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image* have profitable approaches to visual, contextual and historical analysis. [15]

The issue of martyrdom is one which figures prominently in this thesis, as an entry way into questions of representation, image, and visual meaning. Brad S. Gregory's[16] influential

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Getty Publications, 2012); Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Caravaggio: A Life Sacred and Profane*, (London: Penguin Books, 2011); John Gash, *Caravaggio*,(London: Jupiter, 1980); Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio*, (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1982).

[11] Lorenzo Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative: Dislocating the 'Istoria' in Early Modern Painting*, (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2011); Todd P. Olson, *Caravaggio's Pitiful Relics*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Anne H. Muraoka, *The Path of Humility: Caravaggio and Carlo Borromeo*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015).

[12] Ferdinando Bologna, *L'Incredulità del Caravaggio e l'esperienza delle "cose naturali"*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992); Maurizio, Calvesi, *La realtà del Caravaggio*. (Torino: Einaudi 1990); Maurizio Marini, "Gli esordi del Caravaggio e il concetto di 'natura' nei primi decenni del Seicento a Roma," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1981): 39–83; John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2006).

[13] Giulio Carlo Argan, *Immagine e persuasione. Saggi sul barocco*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1986).

[14] Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2008).

[15] Maj-Britt Anderson (ed.), *New Caravaggio – Papers presented at the International Conferences in Uppsala and Rome 2013*, (Uppsala: Newman Institute/Edizioni Polistampa, 2015); Franco Mormando (ed.), *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, (Boston, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 1999).

[16] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

work on early modern martyrdom is fundamental in this regard. Other important sources in this aspect of early modern visuality are the research of Leif Holm Monssen, Alexandra Herz, Kirsten Noreen, Gauvin Bailey, Simon Ditchfield and Candida Moss.[17]

On the topic of Counter-Reformation, image theory and history, essential readings are Belting's masterful *Likeness and Presence*, also Wood and Nagel's "alternative" account representational problematics in Renaissance imagery, as well as Margaret Miles' account of the interrelations between religious thought and Christian art and architecture. [18] In terms of primary literature, the post-Tridentine treatises of Gabriele Paleotti, Giovan Andrea Gilio, especially, but also Johannes Molanus will be discussed in detail.[19] I also employ research focusing on the more specifically theoretical considerations regarding the issue of theology and imagery, in particular the confessional contexts; how Catholic image theory and practice depart from and collide with Protestant reforms. Sergiusz Michalski, Giuseppe Scavizzi, Carlos Eire, and Joseph Leo Koerner have all done essential work on this topic.[20]

1.3 Theoretical Considerations

1.3.1 The Image and Visual Hermeneutics: Language and Historicity

Theory and method in the study of early modern art history and visual culture concern themselves with fundamental issues of understanding and reception. The distancing of historical inquiry requires tools and mechanisms with which to engage a *Lebenswelt*, a life-

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[17] Examples are Leif Holm Monssen, "The Martyrdom Cycle in Santo Stefano Rotondo, Part II', *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, vol. 3, (Bretschneider, 1983): 11–106; Alexandra Herz, "Imitators of Christ: The Martyr-Cycles of Late Sixteenth-Century Rome Seen in Context", *Storia dell'Arte* 62 (1988a): 53–70; Kirsten Noreen, "Ecclesiae militantis triumphi: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter-Reformation," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1998): 689–715; Todd P. Olson, "Pitiful Relics: Caravaggio's 'Martyrdom of St. Matthew," *Representations*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2002): 107–142; and Candia R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom. Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

[18] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*; Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

[19] Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), in Paola Barocchi, (ed.), *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, 2nd ed. 3 vols., (Bari, 1961–1963): 117–509; Giovan Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo degli errori dei pittori*, (Camerino, 1564);

[20] Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts. The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1993); Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius*; Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols – The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); ibidem, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

world, in its Husserlian sense.[21] That is, a conceptual and interpretive structure where, at a given time, contemporary subjectivities experience a shared, self-evident world of meaning. The absence of this self-evidence, of shared subjective experiences, is one of the primary obstacles for the historian, whether in cultural, intellectual, anthropological or religious fields. I seek to try, which is all the student of cultural analysis can do, to establish a parameter for engaging with the function and understanding of sacred imagery in the late sixteenth-century.

The questions one faces through studies of early modern visual culture are legion, yet some more pronounced than others: What sense of significance – social, doctrinal, spiritual, and moral – did these images possess for contemporary audiences? What type of content, literal or symbolic, what associations or connotations were implied within the life-world of Counter-Reformation Italy? In the process of "reproducing" religious contexts where intangible entities like reception, spectatorship, and devotion abound, cut short, the domain of meaning, the art historian deals discourses that extends beyond the usual limits of his trade - texts and contexts which early modern Catholics had to come to terms with. The rationale of approaching material that strictly speaking belongs to the field of religious history rather than art history, proceeds from the conviction that the intellectual and cultural barriers between the spheres of art and religion, now rooted in a medieval, pre-Renaissance ideal of the image, dissolve, I argue, in the post-Tridentine period. We do not yet find ourselves at the stage of modernity in which the realms of politics, religion, art, and ethics have branched out into separate territories – what Max Weber called the "rationalization of modernity"; an ordering of societal experience which remained a hallmark of the modern as such.[22]

Theoretically and methodologically, the framework for my essay will be derived from the fields of hermeneutical aesthetics and intellectual history. The work of scholars like Hans-Georg Gadamer is applied in tandem with perspectives from the work of Gottfried Boehm, Belting, Miles and Foucault. Caroline Walker-Bynum's work on Christian material thought has also been influential. I do not, however attempt to enmesh their theoretical and methodological differences; I subscribe to an approach with a coherent conceptual core. That is, where a sense of narrative and theoretical foundation can be traced throughout the argument.

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[21] See, Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
[22] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: Routledge, 2001); for an in-depth discussion of Weber and the concept of rationalization, see Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (eds.), *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 6ff and 137ff.

1.3.2 Iconicity, Hermeneutics, and Visuality.

Important for the theoretical foundation of my own views, and the methodological approach, which governs my interaction with the material, is what could be called a visual hermeneutic, or hermeneutical aesthetics. I will make use of thought pertaining to characteristics of the visual, as opposed to, or perhaps in complex dialogue with, the linguistic or textual. How the hermeneutical acts of engaging with imagery in a meaningful way, or rather, a way which produces both meaning, ideas and discourse, I deem especially significant. Gottfried Boehm have addressed the notion of "iconic turn" with reference to Gadamer and the hermeneutical tradition, whose discussion on imagery and the possibility of a "science of the image", have proved fruitful.[23] Central to my discussion of Caravaggio's religious art and post-Tridentine ideas of imagery, will be the concept of the "iconic". An anthropological interest in the iconic, its history, logic, function and anatomy, have developed noticeably during recent years and decades; an interest that, in general, desires to reclaim and contextualize the historical authority and identity of the image, an identity felt to be subjugated the written word.[24]

Historical inquiry abound in pitfalls of interpretation, analysis and prejudice. In our attempts to understand and disseminate an alien symbolic system, we are required to exercise "great care and good deal of generosity", as Margaret Miles points out.[25] Western historical imagery tend to prove even more remote in sense and significance than western historical texts. Hermeneutics provides a flexible, yet self-critical discussion on our own ability to comprehend and contextualize historical data. Because words themselves have a history, the strategies of hermeneutics remain crucial to the historian of images, ideas and mentalities.

Hermeneutical aesthetic theory, then, seeks to present a way in which visual content can be transmitted into discursive language: "Die Hermeneutik des Bildes hat ihren Uhrsprung", writes Gottfried Boehm, "wo die Bilderfahrung des Auges in das Medium der Sprache übergeht."[26] Anyone in the business of looking at images, seeking to interpret them in art

[23] See Gottfried Boehm and W. J. T. Mitchell, "Pictorial versus Iconic Turn: Two Letters," *Culture, Theory & Critique*, vol. 50, no.2-3 (2009): 103–121; Gottfried Boehm, "The Iconic Turn – Una Lettera," *Lebenswelt*, no. 2 (2012): 118–129.
[24] Jeffrey Hamburger, "The Iconicity of Script," vol. 27, no. 3 (July-September 2011): 250. Important works in this respect, both for the general "iconic turn" and this essay in particular, are Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, 1994; David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images, Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.
[25] Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight. Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006 [1985]), 89.
[26] Gottfried Boehm, "Zu einer Hermeneutik des Bildes," in Gottfried Boehm and Hans-Georg Gadamer (eds.), *Seminar: Die Hermeneutik und die Wissenschaften*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 444. "The

historical context, necessarily becomes part of this hermeneutical relationship. He or she employs an implicit, or "secret equation", as he calls it (*geheimen Vergleichbarkeit*), between word and image. The "hermeneutics of the image" (*die Hermeneutik des Bildes*), then, deals essentially with the transliteration of the two. It seeks an elucidation between visual and verbal "language", a biased metaphor that privileges the latter and not the former.[27]

The iconic, as we will see, deals with an instance of experience which prefigures language; a domain built around transcendent parameters where discourse falls short. Even though Hermeneutics has by no means, claims Boehm, unequivocally claimed that understanding is exclusively a linguistic event, but on the contrary acknowledged the "mute spaces" (*sprachlose Räume*) of communication, language has been its mode of conveyance. Hermeneutics establishes a platform upon which material culture is not just taken seriously as a cognitive moulding-process, but acknowledges the "extraordinary power" of image to "electrify inanimate matter with concepts and ideas", but equally to alert us to their sense of *presence*, historically as well as living contemporary agencies.[28]

Hermeneutical aesthetics can also be fruitful in its engagement with spectator response. It is not so much a "philosophy of art" as a "philosophical meditation upon what happens to us in our experience of art," writes Nicholas Davey.[29] Iconic perception, or rather, the position which make iconic perception possible, gains conceptual expression in the German word for perceive, *wahrnehmen*, meaning not just something we "take in" or "receive", but receive as *true*. In Davey's words then, "Hermeneutic aesthetics focuses on how our experiences of art occasion the appearance of certain truths." The iconic could therefore be said to entail a process from sight to *in*-sight; seeing as the eye was the chief organ for cultural, religious and social orientation in pre-and Early Modern Europe, I suggest important connections between perception, that is, sensing and looking, and visuality and religion.[30] Not least how these are conceptualized in contemporary Catholic discourse.

The religious optic of Caravaggio studies remains a productive, I argue even paramount, gateway to the material, as well as a framework to grasp the political, social and visual configurations of the early modern period. "Religion", claims Miles, "both articulates and

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hermeneutics of the image has its origin where the image experience of the eye crosses over into the medium of language."

[27] Gottfried Boehm, "Zu einer Hermeneutik des Bildes," 444.

[28] Nicholas Davey, "The Hermeneutics of Seeing," in Ian Heywood and Barry Sandwell (eds.), *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of Vision*, (London: Routledge: 1999): 13.

[29] Nicholas Davey, "The Hermeneutics of Seeing", 3.

[30] See for instance Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

responds to the life experience, the ideas, and the ultimate concerns of human beings and communities."[31] A religious lens relegate what I call the "modernist narrative" of Caravaggio research into a secondary concern, and opens up a space in which to address his radicalism in terms of the reactionary: an appeal whose forceful novelty precisely looks to the past for spiritual authority, not as conscious premonition of a possible future.

1.3.3 "The Inseparable and the Silent": Word and Image

The center of my discussion of the iconic will circle around the word – image-duality, which is constitutive to a number of historical and discursive developments in Europe. Several art historical methodologies, claims Boehm, projects from a notion, the language, as it were, *replaces* the visual, that speech can *depict* an image by means of language.[32] That the imagistic can be disseminated verbally remains intrinsic to modern art methodologies. That we, when looking at a painting, essentially deal with something lingual and verbal. It is the task of the interpreter to "release" verbally structured content from the confines of the exterior mode of visuality. This "act of liberation" on behalf of the interpreter (*aus deme es der Interpret befreie*), as Boehm calls it, surface in a multitude of theoretical traditions, most prominently in semiotics, but also majorly in Panofsky "iconological" project.[33]

One of the most influential minds of modern theoretical scholarship, Panofsky and the reception of his approach was based on stages of meaning, accessed through the analytical penetration of interpretive language.[34] The image in this narrative yields to the primacy of the verbal. It retains no meaning of its own. Strictly speaking, argues Boehm, the image 'is' "soweit es auf die Sphäre des Logos verweist."[35]

Nevertheless, it amounts to a "methodological necessity" that visual sources and visual data may be considered informative with regards to understanding the intellectual, social and political topography of a period and its people. This "obvious" hermeneutical assumption has been anything but among many intellectual historians. Images as cultural containers of

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[31] Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight*, 1f.

[32] Ibid. Boehm, "Zu einer Hermeneutik des Bildes.", 447.

[33] Ibid. 452.

[34] Ibid. Boehm describes this as an instance in which "Die Äußerlichkeit bildlicher Phänomene wird in eine Immanenz sprachlicher Bedetung zurückgeholt." The exteriority of image phenomena are brought back into the immanence of linguistic signification."

[35] Ibid. 453. "To the extent it refers to the domain of logos."

meaning, a description seemingly innocent and self-evident enough, has important ramifications for the discipline of visual hermeneutics.[36]

The creative act of language, in the sense that language produces reality, and not merely represents it, underlies these questions. A constitutive function of discourse – that the way we invoke the world through language retain just as much reality to it as reality "itself" – so thoroughly explored by a historian like Foucault; semblance, language and reality becomes for him, one. Naturalism, in its "grammatical" likeness to direct speech, punctures the distance of sign and signified, word and image. This stand out as a central aspect of the early modern *episteme* as such, according to Foucault. A moment when "the sixteenth century superimposed hermeneutics and semiology in the form of similitude."[37] Caravaggio's naturalism, I claim, his manipulations of semblance and similarity, explores this merger.

Post-Tridentine viewers would have approached the altarpiece as presenting what they perceived as truth. They interacted with a world in which "the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike," Foucault writes, and adds "The nature of things…the way in which they are linked together and communicate is nothing other than their resemblance."[38]

As will be evident from my argument, I do *not* claim Caravaggio's religious images to *being* icons in early Christian sense. Using the adjective iconic, or noun icon or, I want to demonstrate how an *appropriation* of the iconic resurfaces during, and *within* post-Tridentine discourse. There is an inherent danger to these undertakings; repeatedly victim to what Miles calls the "limiting principle": Explained in a brimming sentence as "the self-contained cohesiveness of particular discursive unities, of statements that have verbal similarities with one another." More readily explained, she argues that "we posit a single tradition…that guarantees the homogeneity, across time, of statements related to this tradition."[39] What these "limiting principles" fail to outline, I argue, is the particularity of discursive statements, their sense of belonging to a structure. "In a different discourse, they occupy a different position, respond to a different situation, are governed by a different structure and different laws of discourse. No statement can be abstracted from its position within a particular discourse and retain its meaning." This "different position" is fundamental for my deployment of visual hermeneutics in context of Caravaggio's religious imagery. He responds precisely to a "different situation", governed by a "law of discourse" which the generic concepts of "art"

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[36] Ibid. Miles, 15.
[37] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 33.
[38] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 33.
[39] Ibid. Miles, 24f.

and "realism" fail to frame and contain in a historically meaningful way. It is against this backdrop I argue for the relevance of the "iconic". Foucault also stresses that:

> Even if a statement is composed of the same words, bears exactly the same meaning, and preserves the same syntactical and semantic identity, it does not constitute the same statement if it is spoken by someone in the course of a conversation, or printed in a novel; if it was written one day centuries ago, and if it now appears in an oral formulation. A statement must have a substance, a support, a place and a date. And when these requisites change, it too changes identity.[40]

This insight demands conceptual clarity, insofar as this is possible, and strict attention to the historicity of expressions, coined in what Michael Baxandall called "The Period Eye".[41]

When systematizing and interpreting visual evidence it is equally important to preserve glitches, ruptures, discontinuities and contradictions, as it is to search for the "intactness" of historical development.[42] Conversely, to identify the strained and the conflictual delivers a vital moderation of historical circumstance. Our job, then, must not automatically be to reconcile these contradictions; our hermeneutical efforts should rather be interested in mapping them, of charting their specific roles and limits in discourse.[43] The intermingling of visual paradigms, such as between image and relic, or an iconic and an "Albertian" image conception[44], are direct examples capable of conveying these important contradictions.

The lens of intellectual history, greatly influencing my own approach, have erroneously been taken to reflect a "history of philosophy" argues Miles. She adds that "all people live with and by ideas, whether or not their ideas are ever articulated."[45] This strand of inquiry likens more to a history of discursive thought, of mentalities and attitudes expressed in visual, textual, and material culture.

Finally, anthropologist Clifford Gertz cautions humility in our acknowledgement of the necessary limitations of historical presentation, in the end always a topography of suggestions: "Cultural analysis is, or should be, guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses,

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[40] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, (San Francisco: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 176.
[41] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. 103– 108.
[42] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present. A Short History*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama), 98.
[43] Ibid. Miles, 26f.
[44] By "Albertian", I refer to the theoretical paradigm of Alberti, the *istoria*, and the reception of his image conception. A formally oriented, "secular" conception of representation, which I contrast with a Byzantine-iconic notion. On this inherent difference, see Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 36ff. On the concept of *istoria* specifically, see Kristine Patz, "Zum Begriff der 'Historia' in L. B. Albertis 'De Pictura,'" *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1986): 269–287.
[45] Ibid. Miles, 27.

and drawing explanatory conclusion from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping its bloodless landscape."[46]

1.4 *Kunst-als-Spiel* – Methodological Approach

In visual hermeneutics, our attention must turn toward the *Kunsterfahrung*, the art experience, or rather the way in which the artwork *is*, as opposed to what Gadamer calls the "levelling" of aesthetic consciousness.[47] This inquiry into the manner of being of the artwork helps to emphasize the meaning-making process of Caravaggio's religious imagery. Because the image, claims Gadamer, is not constituted simply as object perceived by a by-standing subject, but the art work's being consists in transforming itself into an experience that renews the one making this experience.[48] Approaching an altarpiece within the optics of the iconic, not only projects this iconic comprehension unto the image, but conversely, the image reply and materialize through its own nature as *Kunsterfahrung*, an iconic expectation.

Gadamer's concept of art as play, *Kunst-als-Spiel*, runs through his entire visual hermeneutic, and by no means possible or necessary to summarize here, but his discussion encompass important insights regarding the representational of logic of the art work as play.[49] "Play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness," writes Gadamer, and suggests relationships between something we may regard as holy, and the experience of art. I believe that the Counter-Reformation visual culture, climaxing in the Clementine[50] Rome of Caravaggio, reflects an instance of "the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player". An intellectual dimension in which the *Kunsterfahrung* dictates the dialectic between image and observer, as opposed to the Albertian paradigm where the "subjecthood", or subjectivity of the spectator was complete.[51] In this sense, the dislocation of Renaissance Humanist

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[46] Clifford Gertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 20 and 29.
[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 103.
[48] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103.
[49] This must not be confused with "play" in a trivial sense. See Nicholas Davey, "Gadamer's Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.): [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/gadamer-aesthetics/].
[50] Caravaggio's Roman sojourn (1592–1606) corresponds almost exactly to the papacy of Clement VII (1592–1605); Clare Robertson frames the shared context between the two in *Rome 1600. The City and the Visual Arts under Clement VIII*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).
[51] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 63–72.
(Originally published as *Die Perspective als 'Symbolische Form'*, Leipzig & Berlin: *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-1925*, 1937: 258-330).

ideals[52] and a reformulation of new aesthetic and artistic parameters in Post-Tridentine Rome can be observed in the visual arts.

Gadamer, though not explicitly comparing the logic of *Kunst-als-Spiel* with my use of the iconic, still, and not by chance, compares the action of the play of art, with the cultic rite.[53] The iconic as, first and foremost, that-which-is-itself, something beyond semiosis and signs, shares, as I will return to later, this ontological quality with the cultic rite, as well as the worship of relics. Gadamer renders this correlation even more pronounced: "It [the action of the drama] no longer permits of any comparison with reality as the secret measure of all verisimilitude." Gadamer's theory of play provides a fruitful point of entry to the iconic. The possibility of moving between iconic and pictorial modes is challenged in this framework.

I argue that naturalism in context of Caravaggio and Post-Tridentine discourse plays upon deep pre-nominalist mimetic convictions, the logic of which is also discussed by Gadamer. As the iconic transformation depict a reality in which art "is raised up [*Aufhebung*] of this reality into its truth," the material verisimilitude of the image also carries important significance for our discussion. *Mimesis* is nothing less than the most deep-rooted and long lasting idioms of representational structure in the history of visual culture. A concept from which there have been little departure.[54]

The icon concerns itself with a socially and culturally constituted concept of image-magic; by nature of imitation, sanctified by Christian visual tradition, the religious persona is "summoned". Conjoined with its signifier. What I call "iconicity" grows out of this idea basic to iconic imitation that what is depicted is not only there – "*das Dargstellte da is*t", as Gadamer coins it – but that is has, through its "thereness", through its presence, come into being more "authentically" (*eigentlicher ins Da gekommen ist*.)[55]

Understood as *event*, then, the iconic opens up the syntactical and semiotic limitations of linguistic logic and reaffirm our understanding of the power of visuality. "It is in the performance and only in it…that we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in the religious rite."[56] The concept of play demonstrates now its benefits as a methodological

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[52] The classicizing attitudes of the Renaissance Church tended to look toward imperial Rome as provider of cultural and visual ideology, whereas the post-Tridentine church rather "exalts in its continuities" with the martyr church of early Christianity. See Frederick J. McGinness, *Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 175.

[53] Ibid. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 111f.

[54] Hans Blumenberg, "The Concept of Reality", in R. E. Amacher and V. Lange (eds.), *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1977), 30.

[55] Ibid. Gadamer, 114.

[56] Ibid. 115.

apparatus. Rather than uprooting the work of art from the "'contingency' of the chance conditions of which it appear," achieving nothing but an empty abstraction that, in our respective context, would end up uninteresting and uninformative, the work, I argue, abounds in substantial relationships. "It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself."

1.4.1 *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* – The Icon and the Picture

What we call a "picture" in its most general sense is framed image with no fixed location or origin to compel its significance. As opposed to the icon, or in our discussion, the fixed post-Tridentine altarpiece, pictures "have nothing about them of the objective dependence on mediation." Gadamer, through Theodor Hetzer's description of "the full sovereignty of a picture," situates this representational, semantic significance of the image precisely to the Renaissance and Alberti. More specifically, in the term "*concinnitas*" employed by Alberti, Gadamer observe "a good theoretical expression" of a visual paradigm.[57]

An icon eclipses the general concept of presentation (*Darstellung*) which generally encompassed artistic representation, as it could be said to possess an "essential relation to its original", argues Gadamer. Here, however, a necessary distinction arises between icon and picture, as the latter must be regarded as ontologically inferior to the former. In context of a mimetic conception, the only dominant matrix of imitation in early modern Europe, a representation, fundamentally, has no other purpose than to mimic an original.[58]. Success is synonymous with the degree of recognition. An icon, however becomes more, in other words, than a copy; its existence depends entirely on the prototype.

A productive binary in this regard is Gadamer's differentiation between *Bild* and *Abbild*, image and copy, or in this context, icon and picture: It is the "religious picture which displays the full ontological power of the picture," claims Gadamer.[59] This is caused principally by the fact that revelation, as mentioned, and the divine, only becomes materially comprehensible through the image. I will make use of these binaries established by Gadamer in order to frame a productive tension in the work of Caravaggio's religious painting: the image torn between icon and picture, *imago* and *pictura*, presentation (*Darstellung*) and representation (*Vorstellung*). I will initially outline the historical space of the Christian icon.

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[57] Ibid. 131.
[58] Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis – Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 2002), 18.
[59] Ibid. Gadamer, 137.

2   The Icon and the Iconic: An Outline

2.1 Genesis and Genealogy

"When does an Image become a god?" ask Jonathan Sheehan in an article on the role of idolatrous thought in early modern Europe.[60] In the last instance a topic on which the final word is entirely a matter of personal conviction and belief, historically, something of profound seriousness and importance. An issue constitutive to not just as centuries of discourse and bloodshed in Eastern and Western European Christendom, but a question of political and religious confrontations so powerful, that we are taxed with its repercussions even today. The fatal consequences of contemporary caricature remains one such; additional examples are superfluous; that images possess a hold over our imagination is a fact beyond argument. However, this study is by no means political in scope or outlook; my argument is strictly hermeneutical and historical. The urgency and relevance of its contemporary contextualization contributes simply with a sense of framing: why we study images, and the histories of imagery in the first place: Our deepest notions of identity, our apprehensions of self and other, memory and moment, what we are and who we, as individuals and collectives, desire to be. This part seeks to give a conceptual outline of the icon and the iconic, and roughly sketch its historical and intellectual context.

The *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* refers to "Icon" as a "Religious painting or holy image to which special veneration is given. In Christianity, icons can represent Christ, the Virgin, saints, angels either individually or in groups, as well as scenes from the lives of these personages, or even theological concepts."[61] Whereas early Christian and Byzantine culture in general employed the word *eikón*, which in their context denoted every type of image from easel to murals, mosaics and reliefs, our surviving usage designates the painted image, on either wood or canvas – the center of religious-liturgical practice in the Byzantine church.[62]

Eikôn became the favoured terms in Christian discourse, denoting both images, reliefs and statues. Yet Bremmer argues for an implied "distance" in the word between original and

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[60] Jonathan Sheehan, "Introduction: Thinking about Idols in Early Modern Europe", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2006): 561.
[61] Eugene Kleinbauer, "Icon", in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1997), 556.
[62] Bente Kiilerich, Hjalmar Torp, *Bilder og Billedbruk i Bysants. Trekk av tusen års kunsthistorie*, (Oslo: Grøndahl og Dreyers Forlag, 1998), 134.

representation, thus making it less controversial and facilitating broader usage.[63] I consider this partly unconvincing as the concept obviously contained deep ontological links with its signified, propelling as it did the great *Eikônomachia*, iconoclasm, in the coming centuries.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth", sounds the Second Commandment of Exodus 20:4–5. The biblical prohibition if images is the discursive starting point for the intellectual history of iconic and iconoclastic thought, and the one that underlie the period from Bishop Eusebius and Tertullian in the early Christian period, to Luther, Ignatius, Paleotti and the other *trattatisti* in the sixteenth century.[64] There reigned, however, an ambivalence regarding its interpretation, an ambivalence most keenly observed in the Tridentine–Protestant disputes. Stressing the uncertainties of these issues do not serve to create another problematic, but as a means of providing a less "dominating context", as Dillenberger writes.[65]

In any case, the narrative of the icon begins roughly in the fifth century: initially the embellishments of small, private houses, it eventually burst out into the main component of stately visual culture in late early Christianity.[66]

It was in the Byzantine culture of eastern Christendom the icon eventually became an institutionalized emblem of worship. From the early post-Justinianic period (Justinian I c. 482–565 A.D), sources speak ever more increasingly about the use, presence and power of images in Byzantine culture.[67] It was the "all-present icon", writes Haldon, which lends Byzantine Christianity from the seventh century on one of its most prominent and enduring characteristics. The icon was, perhaps, the most democratic feature of early Christian discourse – sources of infinite availability. They were the "literature of the illiterate".[68]

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[63] Jan N. Bremmer, "Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy," *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 88, no. 1 (2008): 3.

[64] Moshe Barasch, *Icon – Studies in the History of an Idea*, (New York/London: New York University Press, 1992), 13.

[65] John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987), 5.

[66] See Jaś Elsner, "The Origins of the Icon: Pilgrimage, Religion and Visual Culture in the Roman East as 'Resistance' to the Centre," in Susan E. Alcock (ed.), *The Early Roman Empire in the East*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997): 178–199.

[67] J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), 405.

[68] J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture*, 406.

2.2 Death and Destruction: Contextualizing Iconoclasm

The main context of iconoclasm in this thesis will obviously be the iconoclasm of the sixteenth century, which grew out of, and in turn help consolidating, a Lutheran-Protestant theological programme. Attempting to build Caravaggio into the pictorial discourse of the Counter-Reformation, however, need the narrative of Protestant development in order to make historical sense.[69]

As mentioned, the power of images is evident and beyond discussion. Facing them triggers all types of historical, emotional, and psychological triggers. Human beings are

> sexually aroused by pictures and sculptures; they break pictures and sculptures, they mutilate them, kiss them, cry before them, and go on journeys to them; they are calmed by them, stirred by them, and incited to revolt. They give thanks by them, expect to be elevate by them, and are moved to the highest levels of empathy and fear.[70]

The first major iconoclastic controversies and debates represent the beginning of a Christian doctrine and discourse of images. As such, a crisis was necessary in order to integrate the image-question into the finer gradations of theology.[71] Frequently, the discussion is characterised by "subtle and even hair-splitting definitions", the majority of which "was more an occasion of polemics than sincere attempt at solving the problem."[72] Importantly, in the end, the victorious pro-iconic parties are largely responsible for curating the quotations of the iconoclast subscribers, the *eikonomachoi* as they called them, "enemies of images", and must be prone to exaggerations of argument and in their accounts of the violence enacted.

"*Η τῆς εἰκόνος τιμή ἐπί τό πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει*", sounded the main argument of the iconodules, the faction championing the truth of the icon: "The honour rendered to the image passes to the prototype."[73] This *locus classicus* of the Byzantine Image Controversy is taken from the late fourth-century treatise *On the Holy Spirit* by St. Basil (c. 330–379), a text which seeks to unify the figures of God and the Son in relationship to the Trinity, and functioned explicitly as an anti-Arian polemic.[74] Basil the Great appealed to the theological speculations

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[69] Caravaggio and the Counter-Reformation is field of enormous scholarship and divergences, which we will be thoroughly treated subsequently.

[70] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, 1.

[71] Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 94, no. 3 (2012): 368

[72] Ibid. Belting 146.

[73] Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, vol. 7 (1953): 3.

[74] Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy", 3. The conflict between the Nicene and Arian view on the nature of the Trinity is central to the issue of images. Christ as the Image of the Father, Man as the Image of God etc. play upon the

of Nicene and Trinitarian thought, arguing that likeness in the image given by form stood in relation to the divine relation between Son and Father. He even modelled this argument upon the worship of the imperial image: there is no *image* of the emperor and the emperor himself. "If the image and the emperor can be one," he wrote, "the same holds true of the divine *Logos* and God."[75] Basil gained support from the most important voice at the Council of Nicaea in 325, Athanasius (295–373) who, extending the argument, claimed that "In the image, the features of the emperor is preserved unchanged…Thus the image could say: 'I and the emperor are one'…". He then delivers a bottom-line dictum for the logic of iconicity: "He who honours the imperial icon, therefore, honours in it the emperor himself."[76]

This was the basis of the *eikônomachia*, the image storm, or Iconoclasm, which surfaced under Leo III in 726 and finally ended in 843. Was the holy figure depicted *present* in his or her image? In the more archaic pictorial thought of Byzantine-Medieval discourse, "validity" was a matter of similitude and presence.[77] With a strong sense of participatory perspectives, validity in the image rested on the relation between image and model, and whether or not the image "participates" in the signified. Although associated with early Christian and Byzantine pictorial thought, the notion of "partaking" when discussing the connection between image and original, come to the fore in the Platonic concept of *methexis*, meaning "partaking" or "participation", referring the regulation of the relationship between *eide* and its material manifestations.[78] In a Christian context, the question of iconic *methexis* became different, in the sense that it displaced the older issues of ontological semiosis with an intellectual and moral fervour of a different kind altogether. From the beginning, Barasch states, "the intrinsic leanings of this concept [*methexis*] became inseparably linked to an attitude of total rejection of images.".[79]

The dichotomy of icon and picture, or image and sign, as Belting employs, dealt with deep-seated complexities of visibility and truth. "In an image", Belting writes, "a person is

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nature of copy and original, true and false, theologically and conceptually contained in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Writing on the subject is immense and in general far too extensive to address in this thesis. But some important texts remain John Alfred Faulkner, "The First Great Christian Creed", *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 14, No. 1 (1910): 48-59 esp.; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom - Triumph and Diversity: A.D 200 – 1000*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine*, (Ada; MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013); John. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* 5th ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 223–309.

[75] Basil, *De spiritu sancto* 17.44 (*PG* 32, 149); Ladner, *op. cit.* 3. Quoted in Belting, Ibid. 153. *PG* refers to *Patrologiae cursus completes*, *series graeca*. 1857–1866. 161 vols. Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris. Reprinted Paris, 1977.

[76] Athanasius, *Oratio III contra arianos* 3.5 and 5 (*PG* 26, 322 and 332.)

[77] Moshe Barasch, *Icon – Studies in the History of an Idea*, 7.

[78] Ibid. *Barasch*, 7. See also Plato, *Phaedro* 100d, and *Parmenides* 130c–131a.

[79] Ibid. *Barasch*, 8.

made visible. It is a different matter with a sign". The sign aid the appearance, but nothing more. The image implies "both appearance and presence."[80]

Iconoclasm is connected to the "uniconic" phase of early Christianity, but a perpetual iconoclastic attitude prevails from the infancy of Christian worship, making it necessary to think of it less in terms of an alternation between iconic and uniconic paradigms, but rather as a constant shuffling of arguments and ideas, imploding finally in an all-out "civil war".[81]

From its earliest infancy, the syncretism of the icon betrayed a legacy of late-classical panel painting infused with divine aura, sanctioned by its appropriation of the imperial image and Greco-Roman portrait traditions.[82] Consequently, the icon was a network of formal devices which absorbed and intermingled ideas and practices. While no set iconographic scheme was in place at this time, however, there certainly ruled a tension between the demands for imperial precepts in the sacred image, and an independent Christian visual identity. The so-called "imperial style theory" is put forward by Jensen, but mostly noticeably promulgated in the work of André Grabar, which represents the so-called "competition narrative".[83] Others have made correctional attempts, such as Jaś Elsner who argues for a displacement of an "initiate sectarian identity," toward "the promulgation of a cohesive narrative of inclusive identity, designed to incorporate everyone."[84] We can albeit deduce two main agencies in the icon: an embrace of the "conflict between the desire for commemorating an individual's likeness and the wish for obtaining an imperishable ideal."

By way of, as it were, an iconic genealogy which traced each image, through the magic of similitude, back to a sacred prototype, captured by an *acheiropoietos eikon*, (image not made by human hands), the icon gained its rationale.[85] This model sheds light on how the iconic image could negotiate between atemporal and temporal being. Especially as the image's claim to divine relationships with its referent suffered, it could still appeal to what Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel call a "chain of effective substitutions."[86] In keeping alive a model of "mutual substitutability", meaning that an iconic image could replace another

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[80] Ibid. Belting, 8f.
[81] Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm.", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 8 (1954), 85.
[82] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 98–100.
[83] André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 27–30.
[84] Jaś Elsner, "Inventing Christian Rome: The Role of Early Christian Art", in Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Rome the Cosmopolis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 73f.
[85] Bente Kiilerich, Hjalmar Torp, *Bilder og Billedbruk i Bysants. Trekk av tusen års kunsthistorie*, 135.
[86] Christopher S. Wood and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 10.

as they both denoted the exact same truth, the early Christian visual culture possessed an artificial memory that "archives the past and generates a future."

Another vital component of hermeneutical reconstruction is the reproduction of not just the historical past in question, but how this very moment produced their own past and pasts. Caravaggio's world was one in which the icon made up a living, thriving part of the visual economy; just as important, these images were surrounded by spectators accustomed to venerative practices. Presentations of Early Modern religious painting frequently fail, I believe, to embed the dynamic presence of historical pasts in visual cultures. Conveying the use and presence of the icon in post-Tridentine Rome, therefore, is a necessary inclusion in our framing of the appropriation of the iconic in Caravaggio's environment.

2.3 "Remembering the Middle Ages in Early Modern Italy": The *Salus Populani Romani* and the Iconic Legacy in Caravaggio's Rome

Counter-Reformation Italy did, as I have already outlined, through a process which had been more implied than expressed, begun to entertain a cult of the apostolic church, most noticeably through its martyrs. In other words, the mid- and late sixteenth-century religious culture in Italy in general and Rome in particular, refashioned a sense of spiritual and ideological self in the pious image of the paleochristian tradition.[87]

The task of the Counter-Reformation Church, was basically to "uphold the claims of the cult image in an era of art".[88] Beginning with the need for a radical change in the attitude toward the image itself. Christian icons in practice functioned equally as relics, deployed as ammunition against the Protestant refuting of Christian image practice. It was the authority invested in the words of medieval and early Christian texts, like those of the Church Fathers, which provided Catholicism with a pretext for image veneration, buttressing the Counter-Reformatory program concerning images, as well as validating the Tridentine pictorial policies.[89] Contemporary art, then, in other words the post-Tridentine painters, "was given the task of providing the effective presentation of the old image."[90] It became the mission of

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[87] Ibid. Langdon, 3
[88] Ibid. Belting, 16.
[89] Christian Hecht, *Katolische Bildertheologie im Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock. Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti and anderen Autoren*, 133–137.
[90] Ibid. 16f.

Caravaggio's generation of religious painters, in ecclesiastical eyes, to oversee a return of the Catholic iconic image in an early modern world.

Icons made up a present and influential part of the visual topography of Caravaggio's Rome.[91] Since 1613, the Cappella Paolina in Santa Maria Maggiore has housed one of the Roman icons said to be an authentic portrait by the hand of St. Luke. Alongside the Veronica *Sudarium*, a relic of such enormous importance it became recurring image in the writings of Dante[92], this icon, and the *Sancta Sanctorum* icon of S. Giovanni in Laterano, make up the arguably most venerated images in the history of Roman devotional life.[93] Kirstin Noreen refers to this image as "the icon of Santa Maria Maggiore"; the definite article attests to a privileged image, an icon of *The Virgin and Child*, approximately of the sixth century, which inhabits an important position in the history of image veneration in Rome.[94] It is known today as "The Salvation of the Roman People", *Salus Populi Romani* [*Fig.* 2], a title bestowed upon it during the nineteenth century.[95] Through the late medieval period, a series of venerable histories in the form of oral and written testimonies were produced authenticating the icon. A true representation, then, of the Mary and Christ themselves, the icon took part in a complex system of processional and intercessory functions, e.g. protecting Rome from famine, war and disease. Importantly, Noreen describes how the icon's "salvific power as an intercessor and defender of the city continued into the modern era".[96]

In the Medieval period, during the feast-day of the Assumption of the Virgin on August 14-15, the Maggiore Icon was the focal point of the annual procession, in which every part of the social order from pope to civic representatives played out, using icons, the symbolic encounter between the Virgin and Christ. The presence of Christ was guaranteed through his miraculous image in the Lateran palace, from where it was taken to the Forum, and finally to the Esquiline Hill and Santa Maria Maggiore. "Through this ritual", explains Noreen, the

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[91] Ann van Dijk, "The Afterlife of an early Medieval chapel: Giovanni Battista Ricci and Perceptions of the Christian past in Post-Tridentine Rome," *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2005): 689ff.

[92] Alessandro Vettori, "Veronica: Dante's Pilgrimage from Image to Vision," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, No. 121 (2003): 43ff. The veil of Veronica came to be the dominant relic of the Roman cult, leading Nicholas IV to declare it, during Dante's adolescence, as more significant than the tomb of St. Peter himself. See Gervase Rosser, "Turning Tale into Vision: Time and the Image in the 'Divina Commedia,'" *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 48, Permanent/Impermanent (2005): 120.

[93] Ibid. Belting, 68.

[94] Kirstin Noreen, "The icon of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome: An image and its afterlife", *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 19, no. 5, (2005), 660.

[95] Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1990), 19.

[96] Kirstin Noreen, "The icon of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome: An image and its afterlife", 660.

images and their prototypes were conflated."[97] The powers of Catholic rite collapsed any material distinction between image and original: "the iconic representations became surrogates for the Virgin and Child." This event, which perfectly illustrates the liturgical and theological interrelations between icon and relic, was the so-called *Santo viaggio*, the sacred journey; the ritualistic translation of the Marian icon from the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, to the Pauline Chapel, initiated on Sunday, 27 January 1613.[98]

Catholic rekindling of the cult of saints became a vital part of the Counter-Reformation counter-attack directed at Lutheran and Calvinist critique of the Roman hagiography during the mid-sixteenth century. Left virtually fallow by Protestant expansion, the Church retaliated decisively from 1588, when papal canonization resumed after a sixty-five year interim.[99] With the cult of images now also targeted by the Reformers, the Catholics found a suitably sacred line of defence in the icon of Santa Maria Maggiore. The church, with its ancient origins partly intact, was also an appropriate symbol of Roman Catholicism as such. With the Church emphasizing exactly those aspects of its ritual practice which the Protestants refuted, there was an explosion of texts and treatises attesting to the miracle-working powers of holy images in general and the Marian icon in particular.

In Counter-Reformatory discourse, much was dependent upon the centrality of Mary. "Images, such as the Santa Maria Maggiore icon and its later recensions", writes Noreen, "helped to emphasize the centrality of the Virgin in the process of human redemption."[100] Mary being one of the prime targets of Lutheran and Calvinist critique, Catholicism found it urgent to affirm, textually and visually, her role as *mediatrix*.[101] Both Luther and Calvin had objected to the Catholic practice of turning Mary into an idol, and claimed that she in no way presided over the pathway to Christ. "God does all", attested Luther.[102] By extension, any liturgical emphasis on Marian devotion was rendered shady by Protestant commentators, including prayers like the "Salve Regina" and "Ave Maria", in addition to Feast days, such as the Assumption on 15 August. The latter deemed by Luther to be "totally Papist."[103]

[97] Ibid. Noreen, 660f.
[98] Steven F. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome. The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118.
[99] Simon Ditchfield, "Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints," in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 6: Reform and Expansion 1500–1660*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 205.
[100] Ibid. Noreen, 668.
[101] Steven F. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome. The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore*, 167–174.
[102] Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 116-7.
[103] Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 118.

Marian devotion, then, reached fever pitch in the wake of Trent, due to the Protestant threat toward the cult of the Virgin. Her centrality to Catholic worship in general made her "intactness", in every sense of the word, paramount.[104] Mary enjoyed the status of sin-free saint, but whether or not she surpassed the all-encompassing shadow of original sin continued to divide theologians. This amounted to a discussion on the Immaculate Conception: The Franciscans championed her constant purity and thus upheld her immaculate status. The Dominicans, however, due to Thomist theology, opposed it.[105]

In conformity with the general bend of post-Tridentine dispositions, the figure of Mary also went through a militarization; The Virgin of the Rosary and *Santa Maria della Vittoria* became one of her designated personages; in the role of *generalissima sacrale*, she had led the Christian fleet to complete triumph against the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the year of Caravaggio's birth.[106] Her capacity to interfere in a masculine sphere pushed Marian worship in an increasingly political direction; she became popular as a saint of nations, municipalities and duchies.[107]

The political function of the icon, i. e. how the icon could actively be employed as a weapon of faith, and not simply a passive devotional item, was a matter of special urgency in Caravaggio's early years.[108] Albeit, Caravaggio is not, I iterate, nor do seek to be, an icon painter in a Byzantine sense. Rather, his deployment of a new religious realism - which has deeper hermeneutical implications than simply showcasing natural verisimilitude, as I will return to – and interactions with a changed intellectual climate, becomes a vital part in producing a visual culture characterised by a theological language of conflations – blending image, relic and body.[109] The addition of a promulgation of martyrdom, fashioned upon the Counter-Reformation cult of early Christianity, ends up *appealing* to the iconic, I argue. Caravaggio employs what I describe as "iconic strategies" as a vehicle for an intensified dissemination of Catholic visuality.

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[104] Thomas Worcester, "Trent and Beyond: Arts of Transformation," 100.

[105] On Marian devotion in post-Tridentine Italy, see Wolfgang Brückner, "La riorganizzazione della devozione dei fedeli nello Stato confessionale post-tridentino," in Paolo Prodi and Wolfgang Reinhard (eds.), *Il concilio di Trento e il moderno*, (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1996), 204-9.

[106] See Langdon 11ff. and Graham-Dixon 12–15 on the historical significance of Caravaggio's name. For specific discussion on the Virgin as *Madonna del Rosario*, see Nathan D. Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[107] Peter Burschel, "Imitatio sanctorum". Ovvero: quanto era moderno il cielo dei santi post-Tridentino.", in Paolo Prodi and Wolfgang Reinhard (eds.), *Il concilio di Trento e il moderno*, (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1996), 326-327.

[108] Anne H. Muraoka, *The Path of Humility: Caravaggio and Carlo Borromeo*, 11.

[109] See Julia L. Hairston and Walter Stephens (eds.), *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) for different approaches to the problematic of the body in Early Modern Italy.

3   Caravaggio in Context: The Sacred Image in the Era of Art

3.1 *Phoenix Romanus*: Santa Maria del Popolo and *The Crucifixion of St. Peter*

Santa Maria del Popolo [*Fig*. 3] is nothing less than the first Renaissance church in Rome. Work began in 1472 or possibly early 1473, and completed in 1478, making it one of the earliest feats of Sixtus IV's pontificate.[110] Seeing several of the pope's relatives are buried in the church, S. Maria del Popolo, could with certain license be described as veritable Pantheon of the della Rovere-clan. Despite the valiant efforts and architectural ambitions of previous Renaissance-popes, none came close to Sixtus IV Della Rovere (p. 1471-84), who was the most powerful and influential builder in Quattrocento Rome. Known among contemporary commentators as *renovator Urbis*, both the Ponte Sisto and the Sistine Chapel bears his name.[111] Sixtus' work as church builder was arguably his most important; in his long pontificate, second longest in the fifteenth century, four great churches were built, in addition to maintenance on a multitude of other, older churches. His own contributions to the sacred fabric of Rome included Santa Maria del Popolo, S. Agostino, Santa Maria della Pace and S. Pietro in Montorio. Sites, which, in addition to hold a fair share of Caravaggios, still defines the topography of the modern city.

Santa Maria del Popolo was from its infancy meant to, as it were, *speak* Roman – expressing a notion of *romanità* in concordance with the papal view of Rome's place in the history of Christianity. The architecture, therefore, was to promote and consolidate a specifically "Roman" identity. In contrast to the slightly more slender, linearity of the Tuscan early-Renaissance style of Brunelleschi, Roman renaissance architecture is heavy, sculptural, masculine and muscular.

Geographically, S. Maria del Popolo has the honour of being the first acquaintance of any visitor from the north. Just inside the Aurelian wall, marked by the Porta del Popolo, it was the first Roman church encountered by anyone. It formed the prelude of final pilgrimage

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[110] Mogens Nykjær, *I Pavernes Rom – Bybilleder, Kunst og Historie 1420-1870*, (København: Gyldendal, 2005), 63.
[111] Jill E. Blondin, «Power made Visible: Pope Sixtus IV as 'Urbis Restaurator' in Quattrocento Rome", *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (2005), 2.

to the Holy City, signifying its coming to life, to the "rebirth of a Christianity rooted in the blood of Peter and Paul".[112] The original church plan had eight side chapels, out of which six remain. Several with the original decoration intact. Two new chapels were added in the High Renaissance and late-baroque period. The dome crowning the square floorplan is the oldest Renaissance-dome in Rome.[113] The site was previously home to another church and a monastery, housing Augustinians, who remain connected to the church and its activities. Although Franciscan of old, Sixtus showed great interest in the work of St. Augustine and Augustinian theology – three of the Sistine churches are built for the Augustinians. The last one was bequeathed the Franciscans, an order with close theological ties to the Augustinians.

The church is constructed around a single nave, with two transepts. S. Maria is very "structural" in comparison with other, especially later churches; clean, heavy forms interacting, emphasising solidity, weight and mass. Far more decorous than the church it inhabits, architecturally the Cerasi Chapel [*Fig*. 4] warrants, however, limited attention; Rich in "guilt stucco and half-faded frescoes",[114] as Leo Steinberg describes. It is also, coincidentally, the darkest chapel in the church.

The fame of the chapel rest naturally, since 1601, on its pictorial contents: *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* and *The Conversion of St. Paul* [*Fig*. 5] by Caravaggio adorn the sides and the *Assumption of the Virgin* [*Fig*. 6] by Annibale Carracci grace the main altar. The frescoes of the chapel, according to Giovanni Baglione, were done by a Giovanni Battista Ricci da Novara: "Alla Madonna del Popolo dentro la capella de'Cerasi…il Novara ha la volta di quella a fresco con varii Santi colorita."[115] He has represented the four Evangelists in the spandrels and crowned the oval with The Holy Ghost in the guise of a dove. Prominent in the interior are the busts of the Cerasi: Tiberio to the left, the committent of the chapel, flanked on the right by his father Stefano.

Monsignor Tiberio Cerasi was a man with a lot of money and little time. Having only acquired the chapel in July 1600, work to embellish the chapel began only two months later.[116] Clearly wishing to avoid the spouts of delay that haunted the Contarelli commission, he was already an old man, having signed his last will two years prior, making the *Ospedale di Santa Maria della Consolazione* his *erede universal* as well as residuary legatee of his

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[112] Ibid. Langdon, 182.
[113] Mogens Nykjær, *I Pavernes Rom – Bybilleder, Kunst og Historie 1420-1870*, 67.
[114] Leo Steinberg, "Observations in the Cerasi Chapel", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 41, No. 2 (Jun., 1959), 183.
[115] Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de'pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori*, (Rome, 1642), 142.
[116] Luigi Spezzaferro, "La Capella Cerasi e il Caravaggio," in Maria Grazia Bernardini (ed.), *Caravaggio, Carracci, Maderno. La Cappella Cerasi in Santa Maria del Popolo*, (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2001): 10.

testament.[117] The famous hospital, in which Caravaggio reportedly, and more than once, is to have been a patient, usually as a result of a petty street fight, have interesting links to Cerasi, who functioned as Tesoriere General of the Papal States under Clement VIII. Tiberio's father, Stefano Cerasi, originally a Neapolitan, but accepted for Roman citizenship in 1530, worked as a physician at the Consolazione.[118]

Born in 1544, Tiberio made it big practising jurisprudence at the Papal court. Treasurer-General to the Apostolic Chamber since 1596, in which his firm hand overlooked papal expenditure, he had the means and the position to employ whomever his heart desired. And so he did: Before embarking on embellishment, he had Carlo Maderno renovate and restructure the chapel architecture.[119] His working life corresponded with that of Cardinal Vincenzo Giustiniani's position as Depository-General. Brought together frequently in professional circumstance, it may very likely have been Giustiniani, a close acquaintance of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte[120], Caravaggio's first and most important supporter, who put Cerasi on the scent of Caravaggio, as the man to decorate his burial chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo.[121]

A contributing factor in landing Caravaggio the prestigious commission may have been his Lombard lineage, thereby being a fellow-countryman of the *Fratres Augustini Congregationis Lombardae*, proprietors of the church and convent of Santa Maria del Popolo.[122] Caravaggio, however, were not to reap the honour alone. Tiberio, in a bold and inspired move, hired the other, slightly older, but equally if not more famous painter with whom Caravaggio then, as now, would involuntarily be compared, Annibale Carracci. Thus, Tiberio set up a joust between the two opposing pictorial idioms of the period: the Raphaelesque High Renaissance revival of Annibale, vs the aggressive and immediate naturalism of Caravaggio.[123]

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[117] Ibid. Graham-Dixon, 211.
[118] Notary's copy of Deed of Lease dated August 27, 1583, in the Archivo di Stato, Rome (Fondo Ospedali, Santa Maria della Consolazione, Istrumenti, Vol. 38, fol. 27 verso f.)
[119] Heather Nolin, "'Non piacquero al Padrone': A Reexamination of Caravaggio's Cerasi *Crucifixion of St. Peter*", *Rutgers Art Review*, vol. 24 (2008): 45.
[120] For the definitive account of Del Monte's life and patronage, see Zygmunt Waźbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, 2 vols., (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1994). For a general account of Caravaggio's relation to Giustiniani and Del Monte, see Creighton Gilbert, *Caravaggio and his Two Cardinals*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
[121] Ibid. Graham-Dixon, 210.
[122] Ibid. Friedlaender, 7.
[123] Ibid. Langdon, 180.

Pitting the two leading painters of 1600 up against each other conformed not only to a penchant for rivalry, which permeated Early Modern Rome, if not the entire history of art, but was also deeply imbedded in the *Paragone*, the competitive comparison between the arts and artists. Annibale and Caravaggio were undoubtedly aware of the element of contest in the Cerasi commission, something that ended in a dialectic of statement and reaction, a "curious instance of cross-influence between the two."[124]

Annibale had made his name in fresco, a manner in which Caravaggio never obtained sufficient knowledge, and was commissioned to paint the high altar, depicting the *Assumption of the Virgin*. Carracci had reached the point of artistic success in which he did not bother to personally follow through the less prestigious parts of commissions. Subsequently, Innocenzio Tacconi, "the first and one of the ablest of Annibale Carracci's assistants", executed the frescoes over the "choir" part of the chapel [*Fig.* 7].[125] Efficient, reliable, and professional, Annibale had likely finished work by May 1601, when Tiberio Cerasi died. No documents of any kind remains to verify the details of the arrangement, but we know Caravaggio signed his contract on 24 September 1600.[126]

In the contract for the paintings (*Obligatio pingendi duo quadra*), Caravaggio is described, to his, we must believe, immeasurable proudness, as "egregius in Urbe Pictor", the foremost or most distinguished painter in the city. He agrees to paint to "two pictures on cypress wood, each 10 palms long and 8 palms wide: one representing the *Mystery of the Conversion of St. Paul* and the other the *Martyrdom of St. Peter*." ("…pingere duo quadra cupressus longitudinis palmorum decem et latitudinis octo pro quolibet, in altero, uero misterium Conversionis Sanctorum Pauli et in altero martyrium Petri Apostolurum.")[127] The paintings were to be completed within eight months, upon which Caravaggio would receive 400 scudi, 50 of which would be paid in advance. ("Hanc auteum promissionem dictus Dominus Pictor fecit pro mercede, et precio scutorum quadringentorum [400] monetae…". Cerasi specified his desire for Caravaggio to present him with so-called *bozetti*, that is sketches of his intended designs, the shape and beautification of which would be rendered "ex sui Inuentione (invenzione) et ingenio" – from his powers of invention and genius.[128] Notary

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[124] Beverley Louise Brown, "The Black Wings of Envy: Competition, Rivalry and Paragone," in ibidem (ed.), *The Genius of Rome: 1592–1623*, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2001): 252.

[125] Leo Steinberg, "Observations in the Cerasi Chapel", 184.

[126] Ibid., Steinberg, 180.

[127] Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 302. Original contract printed in Denis Mahon, *Burlington Magazine*, (July, 1951), Pl. 17.

[128] The meaning of "genius" in the Renaissance fails to conform to our post-romantic projections of the word, and needs to be distinguished from "genius" in the *romantic*. The Italian word *ingenio* is related to *ingegnere*,

and witness to the signing was none other than Vincenzo Giustiniani (Vincentio Justiniano), and the document of contract is the first recorded mention of the Cardinal and Caravaggio's professional relationship.

We know from Giovanni Baglione that both paintings in the Cappella Cerasi replaced earlier versions of the same subjects, which were done "in a different manner", (*questi quadri prima furono lavorati da lui in un altra maniera*).[129] Failing to please their patron (*non piacquero al padrone*), they were subsequently acquired by Cardinal Giacomo Sannesio (c. 1557/60–1621). Long been thought lost, two paintings eventually surfaced: a *Crucifixion of St. Peter* in the Hermitage [*Fig.* 8], whose authenticity is debated,[130] and a *Conversion of St. Paul* [*Fig.* 9] in the Odeschalchi-Balbi Collection. We cannot believe that these were rejected on the basis of indecency of decorum or vulgarity in some way or other, such as was the case with the first *St. Matthew and the Angel* of Caravaggio and the painting of the dead Virgin [*Fig.* 10].[131] Were the latter to have crossed any boundary deemed disgraceful by the Church, we cannot explain their acquisition by Sannesio, a man of pious and decent description, not to mention a main candidate for the chair of St. Peter's.[132] A long shot from the somewhat more frivolous *esprit* of the young and aggressive Marchese Giustiniani, who likely bought the mentioned *St. Matthew*, not so much in spite, but likely *because* of its transgressive content. The still nebulous reasons for the dismissal of the first versions may, as Denis Mahon suggested, have been due to Caravaggio's breach of contractual terms, for instance failing to provide his patron with *bozzetti*, preparatory drawings etc., or that the end result turned out somewhat different than those anticipated.[133]

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engineer, which demonstrates how close the idea of craft in traditional sense was to the idea of genius. Moreover, in the Renaissance mind-set, an individual *had* or *possessed* genius, whereas the romantic notion, informing our modern one, is an individual *being* a genius. He or She *is* a genius, rather than he or she *has* genius. The Renaissance concept, then, understands genius as something outside the individual, something the individual can take possession of, for example through the cultivation of craft. See Noel L. Brann, *The Debate Over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance: The Theories of Supernatural Frenzy and Natural Melancholy in Accord and in Conflict on the Threshold of the Scientific Revolution*, (Boston; MA: Brill, 2002). Also Martin Kemp, "From *Mimesis* to *Fantasia*: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator*, vol. 8 (1977): 347.

[129] Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de'pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori*, 137.

[130] Heather Nolin, "'Non piacquero al Padrone': A Reexamination of Caravaggio's Cerasi *Crucifixion of St. Peter*", 43. Nolin disapproves of the authentic claim, and suggests the possibility of a Luigi Saltarello as the artist behind the painting.

[131] A thorough analysis of the conditions behind the apparent rejections and Caravaggio's need, or possibly desire to, produce second versions is undertaken by Nolin: 41–71.

[132] Ibid. Friedlaender, 28.

[133] Denis Mahon, "Egregius in Urbe Pictor: Caravaggio Revised", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 93, nr. 580 (1951), 227.

3.2 "An Almost Magical Power": An Iconography of Essentials

Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* possesses, as Langdon says, "an almost magical power".[134] Yet, in framing Caravaggio's iconic context, "almost" ends up a redundant description: Within the venerative, paleochristian ideology of contemporary religious painting and spectatorship, Caravaggio, shedding every unnecessary reference, fixates and clusters his image in echo of the icon. His capacity to pierce the pictorial plane renders us participants.

We are forced to follow the martyrization, to witness the process.[135] The farthest of the executioners, back to us, leans toward and pulls on the rope, affixed to the lower member of the cross. The second figure is all furrow and face, approaching the end of the weighty cross, pushing it up and holding it firm to the best of his ability. The third and closest figure, forced on his knees, braces the heart of the cross, lifting it up on his left shoulder. An emblem of bodily tension and commitment, his firm trousers thrusts his backside and feet against us. Peter's saintly gravitas profess the psychological defiance of an Old Testament patriarch, a constancy which, despite his threefold denial of Christ, earned him the title of the "Rock of the Church": "*Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam.*"[136]

We observe an event which has just began its main operation; the cross is roughly reaching eye-level, striking us from the lower right angle. From the outset, Caravaggio's conception differs other representations of the subject, formally as well as a psychologically: The lack of interactive engagement in Filippino Lippi's rendering in Santa Maria del Carmine and Masaccio's [*Fig.* 11-12] Berlin-version, for instance, cut us off from the socialising experience of the spectacle, missing the sense of outwardness which Caravaggio deploys.

St. Peter, usually depicted old and world-weary, was the most "attractive" and "intensely human" of the Apostles.[137] Here, in the moment of martyrdom, he is the simple angler of Bethsaida, facing the savagery of sacrifice. Nevertheless, Caravaggio's St. Peter is still capable of addressing the observer: With a final act of will, he twist his chest and upper torso as far as possible in our direction. One last bodily affirmation.

This is an image of labour, of a struggle on entirely material and physical conditions. The men push, pull and pant toward the inevitable. You wonder if three is enough; the

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[134] Ibid. Langdon, 1
[135] Ibid. Friedlaender, 31f.
[136] Matthew 16:18. On St. Peter's denial, see Matt. 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31; Luke 22:33-34; and John 13:36-38.
[137] Ibid. Langdon, 187.

constant friction of dry rope and oily hands. Veins bursting to the dirty surface of muscled skin; Caravaggio's colours are those of earth: ochre, umber, carbon black, lead white, Verdigris, dried brown, blue grey.[138] Pungent *chiaroscuro* light pours in from the upper left, dramatizing the prospect of divine intervention.[139] His black background shuts out the perspective of Albertian painting and pushes the composition toward the foreground plane. I argue that this becomes one of his iconic strategies: Caravaggio's "reversed perspective". It also implies a suspension of Renaissance notions of narrative and pictorial temporality.[140]

The icon strived to suspend the temporal; timelessness became a necessary condition for claiming an absolute, ahistorical and transcendent truth.[141] Caravaggio's choice, I argue, to clothe St. Peter's executioners in contemporary outfits, becomes a vehicle for suspending temporal and historical situation. Their garments end up signifying the iconic presentness of the martyrization of St. Peter; the sacred image shatter the spaces of past and present, and subordinates the logic of the material world to that of Christian revelation.

3.3 Michelangelo vs Michelangelo

St. Peter and St. Paul were synonymous with the spiritual life of Rome itself.[142] Deeply revered as the religious fathers of Apostolic See, their heads were said to rest in St. Giovanni in Laterano, their bodies beneath the high altar of San Pietro. Reportedly martyred on the same day, the saints had, so to speak, baptized the Roman Church with their blood.

Though frequently invoked in tandem as the *principes apostolorum*, apostle princes, it is not that we rarely see representations of the saints together, but rather these two particular episodes in juxtaposition.[143] The choice of theme, therefore, is unusual, connecting the conversion of St. Paul, i.e. the beginning of his Christian life, with the martyrdom of Peter, signifying the end of his mortal existence. An equivalent "counterpiece" would have been

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[138] Pietro Moioli, Sergio Omarini, Claudio Seccaroni, "Analisi dei pigmenti presenti nei dipinti", in Maria Grazia Bernardini (ed.), *Caravaggio, Carracci, Maderno. La Cappella Cerasi in Santa Maria del Popolo*, 141.

[139] Some, like Suzanne May, fails to encompass the spiritual hermeneutic of light in the Christian visual tradition. Secularizing the phenomenon within completely formal concepts. See May, "The Artifice of Depicting Reality: Caravaggio and the Theatrical Spotlight," *Rutgers Art Review*, no. 18, (2000): 27–50.

[140] On the topic of time in Renaissance painting, on its relation to light, see Per Sigurd Tveitevåg Styve, "Sub Luce Videantur: The Time of Light in Early Renaissance Painting," in Anna Rebecca Solevåg et al. (eds.), *Bodies, Borders, Believers. Ancient Texts and Present Conversations. Essays in Honour of Turid Karlsen Seim on Her 70th Birthday*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015): 68–93.

[141] Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 30ff.

[142] I will subsequently elaborate on the relations between the Petrine cult and Caravaggio's painting. Tracing the history of Petrine worship, I wish to direct attention to the presence of Peter in discourse and popular imagination as one which influence the realm of cultural production.

[143] Ibid. Nolin, 46.

Christ handing over the keys to Saint Peter.[144] So likely a suite was this that Vasari in the first edition of his *Vite* made the error of stating that this in fact *was* the combination, correcting his mistake in the second edition.[145]

Before Caravaggio's work in Santa Maria del Popolo, the only notable precedent pitting together the Crucifixion of St. Peter and the Conversion of St. Paul, was that of his still rather more famous namesake, Michelangelo Buonarotti; two large canvases produced for the Cappella Paolina, private chapel of Paul III Farnese [*Fig*. 13-14].

Examples of the latest period in Michelangelo's *oeuvre*, here reigns a gloomy mood altogether different from the triumphant optimism of the Sistine Ceiling. A possible explanation for the iconography may have been Paul III's or even Michelangelo's wish to symbolize the theme of mystical death involved in both events.[146] Anyhow, by commissioning the exact same juxtaposition for his own funerary chapel, Cerasi with little subtlety of implication pits, Caravaggio against the "ghost of the most celebrated Renaissance artist of all."[147] In other words, we are now faced with two examples of rivalry: the one between Caravaggio and Annibale, and the other between Caravaggio and Michelangelo.

Michelangelo's choice of location in his *Crucifixion of St. Peter* also remains, though considerably more attached to a material place than Caravaggio, strange and nebulous; we observe a geography of uncertain traits; landscape, mountain ridges – all bleak and barren. Such features abound in what some call Michelangelo's "late style": a move toward more increasingly conscious mannerist tropes, while simultaneously in a far more pious and Catholic mode.[148] Viewed in comparison with Michelangelo's paradigmatic work in the Sistine chapel, the Pauline frescoes falls astonishingly short. Often regarded as a symbol of the decline of genius, they are not just deemed unsuccessful, but outright "reviled".[149]

The spot of the crucifixion was a topic of hot debate. No one theory has ever enjoyed general consensus; in early fifteenth-century Rome two different theories were "jostling for official approval.", as Huskinson writes.[150] The only piece of documentation from sparse sources reads that St. Peter was crucified *inter duas metas*, which can mean different things, a

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[144] Ibid. Friedlaender, 7.
[145] Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite di Michelangelo Buonarotti*, (ed.) Carl Frey, (1887), 172.
[146] Ibid. Friedlaender, 7.
[147] Ibid. Graham-Dixon, 212.
[148] Philipp Fehl, "Michelangelo's *Crucifixion of St. Peter:* Notes on the Identification of the Locale of the Action", in Willam E. Wallace (ed.), *Michelangelo: Selected Readings*. New York/London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999), 411.
[149] William E. Wallace, "Narrative and Religious Expression in Michelangelo's Pauline Chapel," 429.
[150] J. M. Huskinson, "The Crucifixion of St. Peter: A Fifteenth-Century Topographical problem", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 32 (1969), 135.

popular translation being "between the two turning posts of the racecourse". This amounts to what was the Circus of Nero on the *mons Vaticanus*.[151] *Meta* also designates, however, in a general sense, a conical or pyramidal form. In practice, at least what concerned the Medieval and Renaissance visitor to the city, this would refer to the *meta Romuli* and *meta Remi*, meaning the Cestius pyramid and Vatican pyramid. Therefore, we frequently see the crucifixion rendered between two pyramidal shapes, such as in Filarete's bronze doors at St. Peter's [Fig. 15] and Giotto's *Stefaneschi Triptych* of c. 1330 [*Fig*. 16]. Here we immediately recognise the pyramid of Cestius on the left hand.[152] A rare instance of Petrine martyr iconography, the Stefaneschi triptych by Giotto in the *Pinacoteca Vaticana*, commissioned for the *confessoni* of Old St. Peter's by the Cardinal Giacomo Gaetani Stefaneschi, does not, like the later *Quattrocento* works, thematise the raising of the cross.[153]

Was the phrase *inter duas metas*, then, to be associated with the two pyramids, it follows that – accepting the description of the Vatican Hill as the surroundings – the likely spot would be precisely where San Pietro in Montorio stands today. The hilly landscape of Michelangelo's depiction in fact goes a long way suggesting the Montorio.[154] Renaissance commentator usually in consensus regarding the Montorio as the spot of martyrdom, such as Cesare Baronius himself in the *Annales ecclesiastici*.[155]

Where Michelangelo's St. Peter do foreshadows Caravaggio's is in the resentful raising of the head as a final, gestural statement [*Fig*. 17-18]. The former's stares us right in the eye, whereas the latter's looks above the spectator's left shoulder, toward the high alter, if observed from the side as was the intention. The man kneeling below the cross, preparing for the cross to be lowered into the ditch is almost the mirror reversal of Caravaggio's later interpretation. What unites the two works, notwithstanding their common iconography, is the procedural feature; how we witness the martyrdom midway, in the process of completion.

Michelangelo decided, in a mannerist move, to let the different parts of the canvas "compete for attention".[156] The result is a simultaneously focused and disjointed composition,

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[151] Philipp Fehl, "Michelangelo's *Crucifixion of St. Peter:* Notes on the Identification of the Locale of the Action", 411.
[152] For a much more detailed narrative of these connections, see B. M. Peebles, "La 'Meta Romuli' e una lettera di Michele Ferno", *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, ser. III, *Rendiconti*, xii, (1936): 21-63.
[153] For further discussion on the Stefaneschi-triptych, see Julian Gardner, "The Stefaneschi Altarpiece: A Reconsideration", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 37, (1974): 57–103.
[154] On the history of the church, see Emilio Lavagnino and Benedetto Pesci, *San Pietro in Montorio*, 2nd. rev. ed. (*Chiesa di Roma Illustrate*, xlii, Rome, 1958).
[155] Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, I (Rome: ex Typographia Congregationis Oratorij, 1593), 669-71.
[156] Ibid. Wallace, 433.

one torn in collision of centripetal and centrifugal movement. Mimicking the move of Michelangelo, Caravaggio emulates the Cerasi-paintings on an exactly similar logic of viewing perspective as his older namesake. While the frontal view provides us with greater levels of detail, it also distorts the figural relations, which in both cases were made to be seen from the side. A further key difference between the two chapels is Michelangelo's emphasis on narrative: the Florentine has taken into account the spectator's movement through space, from entrance to altar, creating a matrix of time and space, entities absent in Caravaggio, where we are left with the stable and momentary omnipresence of the icon. The Cerasi chapel, then, have no such temporal axis; it incites worship, not movement.

Close to the bottom right of the *Crucifixion* is a group of women depicted. These are, along with Peter himself, the only ones to make contact with us, contributing to the "sense of continuity" between our space and the pictorial space. The women function almost, as Kenneth Clark memorably described, "like a Greek chorus, intermediaries between us and the tragedy."[157] This takes us immediately back to Caravaggio, where we have the rudiments of new differences and displacements: By negating the gap between foreground and background, suffusing the planes of the pictorial space into one synthesized sacred space, Caravaggio have efficiently negated time. Or rather, denied the workings of time any place in the sacred piece.

The subject of sacrifice reminds the faithful how fundamental the category of martyrdom is to Catholicism. What Michelangelo manages to transmit to Caravaggio is the transformation of the spectator, from precisely his status as observer into "responsible participant".[158] Just as Christ, and then St. Peter, took upon themselves the status of martyrs, as witnesses, so are we made to witness. There exist then, not just a theological but also a semantic relation between iconography and audience, icon and spectator. It is a construction of enormous intellectual intimacy: After Michelangelo, not a single artist of renown attempted to explore the problem for more than fifty years.[159] Not until the moment of Caravaggio to impose his own monumental vision of Petrine miracle in the Cerasi chapel: "The primacy of Peter", writes Francesco Mormando, "occupied a great deal of space in Catholic literature of the age of Caravaggio".[160] His towering presence, his image as the papacy personified, protruded throughout the city he was chosen to inherit.

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[157] Kenneth Clark, "Michelangelo pittore", *Apollo*, vol. LXXX, no. 34 (1964), 445.
[158] Ibid. Wallace, 442.
[159] Ibid. 30.
[160] Franco Mormando, "Teaching the Faithful to Fly: Mary Magdalene and Peter in Baroque Italy", in ibidem (ed.), *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, 120.

3.4 *Princeps apostolorum* – St. Peter and the Petrine presence in Rome

The Petrine cult was at the heart of Roman spiritual life from the early byzantine and medieval period. For the European pilgrim, and not just the Romans, the city was, first and foremost, apostolic. This was the seat of Peter, the prince of the apostles – *princeps apostolorum*. Not surprising, then, that the presence of Peter, permeating the world city, retained an almost iconic quality.[161] Cornelius Lapide gives us one perspective on the Petrine supremacy:

> Peter is called the first of the Apostles: not in age, for Andrew was older than he, as Epiphanius testifies (*Haeres. 51*); not in vocation, for Andrew was called before him (*S. John 1:41*); not in love, for Christ loved S. John above all the rest, and therefore, he leaned upon His breast at His Last Supper. It remains, therefore, that Peter was the first of the Apostles in excellence and authority, being, indeed, their head and ruler.[162]

Counter-Reformation commentators vehemently backed Lapide's assessment – chief among them Cesare Baronio – that defending St. Peter amounted to the same as defend the legitimacy and primacy of the Church itself. Still, St. Peter eclipsed a mere representative function. He was not simply the papacy incarnate; As much as, even more so, than a symbol, he served as a genuinely human mirror in Man's daily struggle against flesh, sin, and evil.

Among the several objects and facts recorded and distributed by Baronio regarding the piety and culture of early Christianity, was what he called the "true likeness" of St. Peter.[163] This *vera effigia*, true effigy, was not just spoils of Baronio's obsessive antiquarianism – his manic hunt for relics and martyrs – but "represented an important part of the cardinal's defence of the cult of images in the Catholic Church". These "prototypes" provided visual proof of the use of sacred images in the ancient church. A tradition that now, Baronio argued, had divine precepts.[164] Baronio claims that these early representations were rendered from life (*viventibus illis, effigiatas coloribus*), and not just of Peter, by Paul and Christ himself.

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[161] Alan Thacker, "Rome of the Martyrs: Saints, Cults and Relics, Fourth to Seventh Centuries," in De Vegvar, C. (ed.) and Carragáin E., *Roma Felix – Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2007), 15.

[162] Cornelius a Lapide, *The Great Commentary*. 8 vols. trans. Thomas W. Mossman, (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1908), 2:5

[163] Franco Mormando, "Teaching the Faithful to Fly: Mary Magdalene and Peter in Baroque Italy", 120.

[164] Daniela Campanelli, "Le arti negli *Annales*.", in R. De Maio et al. (eds.), *Baronio e l'arte*, atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Sora , 10-13 ottobre 1984, (Sora: Centro Studi Sorani Patriarca, 1985), 399.

Petrine iconography do vary across temporal and geographical divides, but there exist common features among several, including those of Caravaggio, where Peter generally is invoked as an elderly figure; world-worn, but always of great physical presence; muscular and masculine, the image of authority. The ageing, elderly Peter, however, was a deep-seated trope in Christian iconography; Luigi Tansillo, in his book *Le lagrime di San Pietro*, names him *il miserabile vecchio* – the miserable old man.[165]

To base the miraculous and revelatory upon the divine itself, such as the old iconic tradition does, would be akin to impossible in 1600 due to the almost two hundred years of Renaissance humanism standing between the late-medieval and Counter-Reformation periods. Post-Tridentine painting, then, carries within itself the humanist legacy. As such, as I will come back to, Caravaggio's painting synthesizes the iconic with an Albertian anthropocentrism.[166] Pamela Jones have stressed in this respect how the tactile and immediacy of saintly representation, such as the forcefully human renderings in Caravaggio and other post-Tridentine painting, were meant to assert the "direct, intimate connection between saints and sinners", to tear down the "psychological barrier" between them.[167]

Cesare Baronio, Lapide and the Catholic establishment assigned great significance to the chain-relic of St. Peter, claimed to be endowed with thaumaturgic force. Clearly, the excessive energy spent on glorifying the power of relics by Lapide, Baronio and others, contained a strong element of anti-protestant polemic.[168] Still, and more importantly in this regard, their discursive labours help to emphasize how intimate the relationship between relic and image was. What is important about pointing out this shared devotional language, is how it reconfigures and expands the material and intellectual contexts of art history and visual culture; We may convincingly make the argument, then, that there is indeed a hermeneutic correlation of image and relic which carries consequences for our understanding of post-Tridentine imagery in general, and Caravaggio's religious altarpieces in particular.

To restate, then, I argue that Caravaggio's religious imagery hark back to an iconic visual language, by means of, and as a response to, a new naturalist vocabulary of Catholicism. These contexts structure our reading of his work in important directions divorced from the anachronistic arguments of the "modernist narrative".

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[165] Luigi Tansillo, *Le lagrime di San Pietro*, (Venice: Barezzo Barezzi ,1606), canto 1, octave 51.
[166] Anne H. Muraoka, *The Path of Humility: Caravaggio and Carlo Borromeo*, 4.
[167] Pamela M. Jones, *Federico Borromeo and the Ambrosiana: Art Patronage and Reform in Seventeenth-Century Milan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128-129.
[168] Ibid. Mormando, 124.

4   Martyrdom in Context: Caravaggio and Contemporary Catholicism

In the entire span of early modern history, roughly the period from 1400-1700, the most turbulent and sea-change of a century, was – arguably – that between 1500 and 1600. A narrative of unprecedented change; radical revisions; fragmentation of religious unity and cultural consensus; the end of the Renaissance as we first came to know it; the social tragedies of the wars of religion; and, not least, the reaffirmation of Roman-Catholic retaliation; the Cinquecento was a century battling its sense of self, negotiating constantly for boundaries of cultural hegemony.[169] Crucial in this essay will the ecclesiastical dislocation of cultural direction from the mid-fifteenth century, the advent of the Counter-Reformation.

Son of a steward to the Sforza da Caravaggio-family, Caravaggio was born in 1571, in the minor town of Caravaggio. Entrenched in the shadow of Spanish-controlled Milan[170], subject to the whims of Philip II, Caravaggio grew up into a Christendom at war with itself. Torn apart by the last, great schism of ecclesiastical history, the protestant Reformation initiated in 1517, the Church was at a crossroads.[171]

Thirty-five years prior, under the aegis of Paul III Farnese, the Council of Trent set out to reaffirm Catholic dogma, to shield, reinforce and consolidate all those aspects of the Roman religion under threat from Protestant heresy.[172] Seeking to restore the reign of Roman Catholic rule, the lost sheep was to return to its native herd – the issue of conversion becomes immensely urgent[173] – the heretics called to justice, by sword or repentance. Generally referred to as the Counter-Reformation, the subject of which will feature extensively in the argument of this essay, the world of Caravaggio was one who witnessed a Rome restored, or at least in the process of completing a monumental transformation.[174] The earlier part of the sixteenth century had seen Italy turned into a battleground between the French and the Spanish quests for Italian dominance. The 1527 Sacco di Roma became the emblematic event

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[169] Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517–1648*, (London: Penguin Books, 2015), xxviiiff.
[170] See Stefano D'Amico, "Spanish Milan, 1535–1706", in Andrea Gamberini (ed.), *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan: The Distinctive Features of an Italian State*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014: 46–68.
[171] Christopher Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 1ff.
[172] R. K. Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological foundations of Christian architecture and art*, (New York: Continuum, 2005), 37.
[173] See Peter A. Mazer, *Conversion to Catholicism in Early Modern Italy,* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2016).
[174] A. G. Dickens, *The Counter-Reformation*, 53.

of Italian subversion.[175] I want to connect Caravaggio to the intellectual pressures of particular kind of sixteenth-century religion. The forces of this brand of spirituality were legion in the land of Caravaggio's youth.

Counter-Reformation Milan created a topography of pious and superstitious asceticism which may have embedded Caravaggio's religious and artistic[176] formation with a sense of spiritual purpose. The city's devotional heart was not Spanish, however, but Italian, Archbishop and Cardinal Carlo Borromeo [*Fig*. 19], who was Cardinal Papal Legate of Italy. Running the Lombard diocese from 1564 to 1584, Borromeo's personal, sombre, and sacrificial presence reverberated throughout Milanese culture. He hailed from a noble family in Milan, and only at 22, in 1560, he was called to Cardinal duties in Rome by his uncle Pope Pius IV, elected in 1559.[177]

Borromeo surrounded himself with a rhetoric of urgency, regarding the future of Catholicism itself in lethal danger. Playing an instrumental role in the final sessions at Trent, his untiring commitment prevented the Council from ending in complete breakdown.[178] The location of Milan, not to mention that of Trent, on Catholic frontier against Zwinglian[179] Switzerland, gave Borromeo's work a particular kind of urgency; Northern Italy became a *de facto* first line of defence against the spread of Reform ideology.[180]

Borromeo's name will resurface in this thesis, as he both he and his intellectual contribution would permeate Italian social and cultural history. Such a profound religious presence in Caravaggio's adolescence and adulthood may be convincingly ascribed critical importance in bestowing the painter's intellectual and spiritual formation with an artistic imagination "deeply attuned to the ideals of the Counter-Reformation."[181]

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[175] Ibid. Langdon, 1.
[176] As outlined, the stylistic language precepts of Caravaggio is outside this thesis' scope of interest. Still, for interesting contexts regarding Caravaggio's formal training and aesthetic influences, see Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, esp. 10–19 and 34–55. An in-depth examination of Caravaggio's reception of Savoldo , which I consider significant, is found in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, "Il Savoldo e il Nord. Un processo di appropriazione," in *Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo – tra Foppa, Giorgione e Caravaggio*. Exhibition Catalogue, (Milano: Electa, 1990): 71–77. Also Mina Gregori, "I temi della luce artificiale nel Savoldo e le radici lombarde di Caravaggio," in *Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo – tra Foppa, Giorgione e Caravaggio*: 87–92.
[177] Pamela M. Jones, "The Court of Humility: Carlo Borromeo and the Ritual of Reform," in Mary Hollingsworth and Carol M. Richardson (eds.), *The Possessions of a Cardinal: Politics, Piety and Art 1450–1700*, (University Park, PEN: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 166.
[178] Ibid. Graham-Dixon, 23.
[179] See Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), for Huldrych Zwingli's conception of image, music and literature in relation to reform theology.
[180] Ibid. Graham-Dixon, 26.
[181] Ibid. 31.

Catholic re-ascendancy also led to the establishment of a multitude of new, religious orders, often on the-more-blood-the-merrier side of spectrum; The Theatines, the Capuchines, the Oratorians, and finally the Counter-Reformation personified, the "Special Forces" of Tridentine militarism, the *Societas Iesu*, or Jesuits.[182] I will return to discuss spiritual production and its possible effect on the artistic expression of Caravaggio in chapter 4.

The popes' new sense of self resulted in a refashioning of the office. Part spiritual leader, part general, part judge, the Tridentine-popes tightened their grip on European affairs. «The old elasticity had gone," writes Hugh Trevor-Roper, "intellectually and spiritually as well as politically.»[183] Offense was regarded as the only manner of defence in Pontifical eyes.

The propagandistic programmes of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century pontificates rested on strong populist sentiment, appealing to what they regarded as the unblemished and popular piety of Medieval Christianity.[184] Crucial for the intellectual foundation of my argument is what I will describe as the promulgation of religious "medievalism" in Tridentine and Counter-Reformatory discourse. Creating an ideal matrix of piety and praxis in the image of the Early Church, late sixteenth-century Catholicism was obsessed by the apostolic origins of Christianity in general, and the image of the martyrs in particular.

4.1 Worship and Violence: Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe

Early modern Christendom was a world "forged in a crucible of conflicting convictions and dramatic deaths,"[185] writes Brad Gregory in his seminal work on Christian martyrdom in Early modern Europe. I want to frame the concept of martyrdom as a lingering physical and visual presence in Caravaggio's environment. A violent environment[186] in which it is suggested that as many as one in four churches had representations of martyrdoms either on the high altar or in side chapels, some even dedicating the entire iconographic scheme to the subject, as we will see, rendering them virtually as monuments to martyrdom.[187]

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[182] James Hall, *A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art*, (London: John Murray, 1983), 303.
[183] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). 25.3.2016. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/719#Trevor-Roper_6114_100
[184] Ibid. Langdon, 3.
[185] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.
[186] Religious, political, and social violence in Early Modern Europe is explored by Julius Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[187] John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 75.

Coinciding with the greatest threat to orthodox Roman Catholicism since Great Schism, martyrdom was simply in vogue: To give one's life for the preservation of the Mother Church became nothing less than a dominant *topos* of late sixteenth-century spiritual life. And not coincidentally, as a cultural and theological trope, it cemented the sought-after symmetry between the old and contemporary Church.[188]

That Christian identity was forged in flames is not merely the rhetoric of later apologists; in the imagination of subsequent generations of Christian authors, Rome became the home of the martyrs.[189]

This romanticizing, even fetishizing of sacrifice in the religious discourse of the time, stemmed from the fatal year of 1523, when two Augustinian monks were burned to death in Bruxelles.[190] The event unleashed a shockwave throughout Europe, inflating the demand for visual representation. Consequently, Early Modern Christianity didn't produce one, but three separate martyrological traditions; the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Anabaptist, all of which intermingled, influenced, and chastised each other, in addition to entertain conflicting views upon the symbolic meaning of death. Congenital to the dissemination of these traditions, however, was the printing press; cultural technology facilitated and reproduced the martyrological discourse of early modernity. German printers flooded Europe with pamphlets on the merits of the evangelical martyrs.[191] Soon they numbered in hundreds upon hundreds of editions; Catholic Europe veritably drowned in martyrological literature.

The years between 1566 and 1640 alone witnessed over fifty pamphlets dedicated solely to the killing and persecution of English Catholics.[192] 163 editions only between 1580 and 1619. The most pivotal, however, was arguably the *Martyrologium Romanum*, the Roman Martyrology – a revised liturgical collection of the lives of the saints – which saw nineteen editions from 1584 to 1613. The brain behind this undertaking was a figure who arguably shaped the intellectual profile of post-Tridentine Catholicism, the veritable manifestation of Counter-Reformation spirituality, Cardinal Cesare Baronio (1538-1608) [*Fig.* 20].

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[188] Ann van Dijk, «The Afterlife of an early Medieval chapel: Giovanni Battista Ricci and Perceptions of the Christian past in Post-Tridentine Rome", *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 19, nr. 5 (2005): 689.

[189] Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom. Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, 78.

[190] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, 3.

[191] Ibid. 4.

[192] Ibid. 4.

4.2 Cesare Baronio: Art and Apostolicism

One of the supreme opinion-makers of the post-Tridentine period, Baronio was an man with a theological temper on constant boiling point; an historian and theologian obsessed with the notion of recreating a *Roma apostolica*, an apostolic Rome imbued with the *gravitas* of its early Christian temperament. Coming of age in the Oratorian circle around Filippo Neri[193] - the so-called "Apostolo di Roma", popularly believed to be a living saint – Baronio was the most influential ideologue of Counter-Reformation Catholicism.[194] Since childhood, he had been ingrained with a raging enmity for anything Lutheran. Presumptuous to the point of paranoia, Baronio led an intellectual crusade against the Protestants, on the lookout for heretics in every corner.[195] This natural bend for vengeful hostility – utterly foreign to the Oratorian mind-set – demanded the intervention of Neri himself, who was forced to reprimand the Cardinal for his lack of *temperantia* and self-control.[196] These figures helped producing the intellectual landscape out of which Caravaggio produced his *Crucifixion of St. Peter*; painting himself right into a visual and discursive space which coupled a fierce devotion for the figure of St. Peter with a deep-seated deference for martyrdom.

The study of Baronio's work for art historical purposes is legitimized by the mentioned obsession with the question of imagery during the Counter-Reformation. It is precisely "in the context of the importance the Council [of Trent] explicitly gave to visual imagery – that the figure of Cardinal Caesar Baronius and his historical work should be approached," claims Josephine von Henneberg, pointing out the only recent interest paid to Baronio's work by art historians.[197] Baronio had no interest whatsoever in the intellectual subtleties of art theoretical discourse, which he considered an unsanctioned direction of visual culture. In complete conformity with Tridentine thought, Baronio had deep reverence for the force of sacred representation, not just as emblems of decorum and devotion, but also as "tangible *witnesses* to the history of Christianity".[198] The martyr was precisely the paramount witness of Christian

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[193] On the theological and cultural significance of Filippo Neri and spiritual practices of the Congregation of the Oratory, see Antonio Cistellini, *San Filippo Neri. L'Oratorio e la Congregazione oratoriana: Storia e spiritualità*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1989) and Alessandro Zuccari, "La politica culturale dell'Oratorio romano nella seconda metà del Cinquecento," *Storia dell'Arte*, vol. XLI, (1981): 77-112.

[194] Simon Ditchfield, "Baronio storico nel suo tempo," in Giuseppe Antonio Guazzelli et al. (ed.), *Cesare Baronio tra santità e scrittura storica*, (Rome: Viella, 2012): 5f.

[195] On the topic of conversion and heresy in Baronio's thought, see Peter A. Mazer, "Searcher of Hearts: Cesare Baronio's History of Conversion," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 75, no. 2 (2014): 213–235.

[196] Ibid. Langdon, 48.

[197] Josephine von Henneberg, "Cardinal Caesar Baronius, the Arts, and the Early Christian Martyrs", in Franco Mormando (ed.), *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, 136.

[198] Josephine von Henneberg, "Cardinal Caesar Baronius, the Arts, and the Early Christian Martyrs", 137.

narrative. The Greek *martyrein*, to witness in blood, or by means of your own blood, to be a *martyros*, a blood witness, takes on increased potency in pictorial representation as a form of doubled testament[199]; The martyr witnesses and the image witnesses; not as a passive signifier then, but viewed as an active agent itself capable of interfering in the world, the martyr-image itself implies hereness, agency and iconicity.

What united Baronio's two major accomplishments, the *Annales ecclesiastici*, his Church History, and the *Martyrologium Romanum*, were the promulgation of early Christian martyrdom. In both works, the normative presence of the Palaeochristian sacrifice permeates the writing.

On 31 May 1578, to ecstatic reception, the catacombs of the old Christian martyr Priscilla were discovered. Today thought to contain the remnants of the much more recent Giordano family, contemporary clerics harboured no doubts as to the authenticity of their finding. The discovery did not just open up the possibility of there being a *Roma sotteranea*, a subterranean Rome, which prompted the writings of several books of the same title, principally the *Roma sotterranea* of Antonio Bosio (1632),[200] but pre-eminently, the finding of imagery in the early Christian catacombs had massive consequences for the image question. "The wall paintings of the catacombs provide compelling evidence that the early Christians had used images in their rituals, while the human remains of those who had died at the hands of their Roman persecutors gave new, tangible meaning to the cult of the martyrs and their relics."[201] Bosio's posthumous volume, based on decades of exploring the *disabitato*, was produced for archaeological as well as devotional purposes. The underground studies, accompanied by antiquarian drawings from scholars like Philips van Winghe (1560–1592), sought to reanimate the slumbering world of the catacombs, to enlist the dust and bones of the martyrs to bolster the ranks of the Counter-Reformation forces.[202]

The combat for continuity which characterized Catholic-Protestant exchange, explained the importance of this event. In their iconoclastic venture, the Protestants had repudiated sacred imagery as a "*falsum quod posterius imissum*" – false because introduced later. Now the Catholics and the Council of Trent sat on compelling counter-measures: In their 24th and

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[199] Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom. Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, 2f.
[200] See Antonio Bosio, Giovanni Severino (ed.), *Roma Sotterranea, opera postuma di Antonio Bosio Romano, antiquario ecclesiastico singolare de' suoi tempi. Compita, disposta, et accresciuta dal M. R. P. Giovanni Severani da S. Severino* (Rome, 1632).
[201] Ibid. von Henneberg, 137.
[202] Ibid. Olson, 92.

second-last session of the Council in December 1563, they concluded that relics and images are the "*viva membra Christi*" – the live members of Christ.[203]

Baronio's contribution, then, may at first glance appear to be primarily theoretical, intellectual, and theological, rather than directly material and practical. However, one Baronio's major legacies concerns his standardization of post-Tridentine church renovation, and re-decoration, such as his restoration of his titular church SS. Nereo ed Achilleo, which became a recipe for post-Tridentine archaeology.[204]

As discussed, there was not an abundance of talent in Rome during the later 1500s. The visual language of censorship rarely promote spontaneity and experimentation. The artists associated with Baronio have therefore mostly been neglected, especially outside specialist discussions. Cristofano Roncalli, a Volterrese painter apprenticed by Niccolò Circignani, was Baronio's favourite painter, yet considered a minor figure today.[205] His contemporary success, however, was considerable enough – Baglione tells us – to make Caravaggio mad with envy, after Roncalli got the prestigious commission of painting the Casa Santa in Loreto.[206] Caravaggio's grudge, according to Baglione, allegedly led him to hire a Sicilian "traitor" to rough him up.[207] This came somewhat as a surprise as Roncalli had been one of a selected few hailed by Caravaggio as "*valenthuomo*" – a "Gentleman", in lack of a better English word. By "*valenthuomo*", Caravaggio meant a painter who "knows how to practice his art well" – "*sappi far bene dell'arte sua*". Those worthy of such distinction, in his book, counted only Giuseppe Cesari[208], Federico Zuccari, Pomerancio (Roncalli), and Annibale Carracci. Not only, claimed Caravaggio, was Roncalli keenly versed in the pictorial craft, "*pittore valenthuomo che sappi dipingere bene et imitar bene le cose naturali*," but he was equally a fine critic of other artists – "*valenthuomini come quelli che si intendono della pittura e giudicaranno buoni pittori*".[209]

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[203] Ibid. von Henneberg, 144, fn. 6.

[204] See Alexandra Herz, "Cardinal Cesare Baronio's Restoration of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo and S. Cesareo de'Appia," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 70, no. 4 (1988): 590–620.

[205] Ibid. von Henneberg, 138.

[206] Ibid. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 71.

[207] Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de'pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori*, 291: "tra gli altri, che a quest'opera concorrono, v'era Michelagnolo da Caravaggio in paragone del Roncalli, essendone quegli stato escluso, sì fattamente sdegnossene, che per via d'un traditore Siciliano il fece ferire, sebbene con taglio leggiero, là dove il contrario ad esso Michelagnolo occorse in Napoli, ov'egli restò sì fortemente segnato, che più non si riconosceva."

[208] On Caravaggio's relation to Giuseppe Cesari and their work in the Contarelli Chapel, see Herwarth Röttgen, "Giuseppe Cesari, die Contarelli-Kapelle und Caravaggio," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 27, no. 3/4 (1964): 201–227.

[209] See "Esame di Michelangelo Merisio da Carauaggio, 13 settembre 1603", printed in Friedlaender, document 11, 276.

Baronio is above all remembered as the great Church historian.[210] History, as the source of all authority, validity and authenticity in pre- and early modern cultures, became a *sine qua non* in the mentioned combat of continuity between Catholic and Reform churches.[211] Under the invocation of *semper eadem*, "always the same", the emphasis on continuity with the early Church, of its unbroken bloodlines of rite and practice became paramount.[212] The classicism of pagan culture, which in so many ways provided the matrix of intellectual self-fashioning in the late *Quattrocento* and early *Cinquecento*, was now only invoked in order to rejoice in its perishing. Gregory Martin, a Jesuit priest wrote in his *Roma Sancta* of 1581 how "…in Rome Christianitie hath succeeded Paganisme, the kingedom of Christ, overthrowen the Empire of Satan.."[213] Nothing less. Eternal life was at stake.

Different Catholic orders, driven by consensual and conflicting politics and policies, predominantly in their capacity as patrons, but also as promulgators of spiritual programmes, would exercise considerable influence upon the direction of the visual arts. More than any of the others, the Jesuits have been associated with the concept of "Baroque". Modern scholars, however, are quick to refute the notion that Jesuit spirituality were somehow the dominant constituent in the development of a Baroque style[214]; Still, through their aggressive intellectual, theological and pedagogical enterprises, disseminated by means of enormously effective "PR-department", the Jesuits succeeded in shaping the taste, iconography and the artistic agency of generations of popes, cardinals and contiguous religious orders. [215]

Nevertheless, the Jesuit – as Gregory Martin's testimony betrays – temperament had arguably unhinged a level in the Catholic religious imagination which were firmly at odds with the pseudo-pagan priorities of the High Renaissance; early on, the Jesuits were identified as the sole perpetrator in dislocating the paradigm of Renaissance Humanism, and replacing it with a fundamentalist, ecclesiastical, borderline-theocratic aristocracy. As such, this Counter-

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[210] Eric Cochrane, "Caesar Baronius and the Counter-Reformation," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 66, no. 1 (1980): 53

[211] On the issue of continuity and reform between Catholic and Protestant programmes, see Scott Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization", *Church History*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2000): 558–577.

[212] Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6 and 314ff.

[213] Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, (1581) (ed. G. B. Parks) (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 54. For further reading on Rome, *Civitas Sancta*, see Frederick J. McGinness, *Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome*, 167–192.

[214] See for instance Rudolf Wittkower, "Introduction," in ibidem. and Irma B. Jaffe (eds.), *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1980), 8. Also Sydney Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 599–600.

[215] Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610*, 3.

Reformation, claims, Friedlaender, was also a Counter-Renaissance, in the sense that the happy, humanist musings of Julius II and Leo X – with a pull toward archaeological interest and classical reception – were a thing of the past. Contemporary considerations now gravitated toward how to unify the Church, re-consolidate the power of sacrament and dogma, provide a bulwark against future heresies and schisms, and reaffirm the outer and inner image of "*una et sancta ecclesia catholica*".[216]

This popularized narrative rested on misrepresentations by later seventeenth-century commentators, especially Bellori and Mancini. On the contrary, the revolutionary, and today still much-admired educational enterprise of the Jesuit schools[217], would contribute to the intellectual reproduction of centuries of Christian as well as secular thought; René Descartes; Denis Diderot; David Hume; Michel Foucault; Martin Heidegger, to mention some, were all trained by those who became known as "the school masters of Europe".[218]

By the closing years of the *Cinquecento*, the Jesuit were in charge of numerous colleges and universities in Italy, hosting diocesan seminaries, founding countless congregations and lay organizations. Working closely with the charitable institutions on the peninsula, the order helped running hospitals and prisons, as well as their famous resuscitation home, the Casa Santa Marta, which aided penitent prostitutes and assailable women.[219] Within 1615, the Jesuits were registered with as many as fifty-nine Colleges in Italy alone, in addition to fifteen in Sicily, one in Corsica, and four in Sardinia.

Revisionism aside, there can be no doubt that Jesuit thought laid the rudiments for an exuviating Catholic Church: This new "militant turn" I have described was in great measure the offspring of the Council of Trent. The tenets of Tridentine command were characterized by a language thoroughly militant and conservative. The Counter-Reformation was nothing less than the dominant phenomenon of Italian intellectual history between 1550 and 1600: resacralization, a discourse of militant metaphors, theological mysticism and persecution, the Church viciously aimed their arrows at Lutheranism or Lutheran-derived movements.[220] Instigators and princes of "this new militancy," were the Counter-Reformation-popes; from Paul III Farnese, through Paul IV, Pius IV, Pius V, Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, and Clement VIII.

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[216] Ibid. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 58.
[217] On Jesuit education in Early Modern Europe, see Christopher Carlsmith, "Struggling for Success: Jesuit Education in Italy, 1540-1600," *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2002): 215–246.
[218] Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610*, 5.
[219] Christopher F. Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy*, 58-59.
[220] Ibid. Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 6.

Germane to the developments described, with consequences for the visual as well as intellectual culture of the Counter-Reformation, was the two-horse race for political dominance in Italy between France and Spain; Spanish spirituality, made manifest in the figure of St. Ignatius of Loyola, shaped the major part of the Italian sixteenth-century – most particularly in the Spanish Milan of Caravaggio's youth. A brief outline of Iberian influence in Early Modern Italy is therefore necessary in order to fully understand the intermingling of confessional and artistic currents both in Caravaggio's environment as well as in that of Counter-Reformation Rome.

4.3. Spain and Tridentine Spirituality

The Jesuits structured the hierarchy of their order on a militarist logic; they were every bit the frontline fighters of "God's Army", the shock troops of the Papal spiritual armada. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits in 1534, had in his youth served in the army. Along with his spiritual calling, he brought the rigorous discipline of military life. He pursued his studies for a decade, attending the universities of Alcalá and Salamanca.[221] Arrested two times by the Inquisition, he was regarded with suspicion as an *Alumbrado*, a type of unaffiliated and unlicensed preacher who set off all the alarm bells of the Spanish heretic-chasers. He moved to the somewhat more liberal University of Paris, where he found space to develop his ideas, despite skeptical local theologians. Ignatius and his companions made their mutual vows of poverty and chastity on 15 August 1534, with the initial ambition of their pilgrimage being Jerusalem. Stopping in Rome on the way in 1537, they sought the blessing of Paul III, whom eventually convinced them "to make Rome their Jerusalem"[222], due to the ongoing war against the Turks. Joined by nine friends – Savoyards Pierre Favre and Claude le Jay; the Portuguese Simon Rodriguez; Pasachius Brouet and Jean Codure from France; and the four Spaniards Francis Xavier, Diego Laynez, Alfonso Salmeron and Nicholas Alfonso of Bobadilla[223] - the Society of Jesus was ratified by Paul III in 1540. From this point on, they would be the dominant religious order of the Church.

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[221] Ibid. A. G. Dickens, 75.
[222] Christopher F. Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy*, 57.
[223] Ibid. A. G. Dickens, 76.

"The overruling secular force behind this Church," explains Horace Kallen, "was that of Spain; its ruthless spiritual aim the secret power of the Jesuits."[224] Spain was the supreme Catholic state in Europe, a colossal entity that had fought against France and the Holy Roman Empire for control over the Italian peninsula. Under the aegis of Charles V, the Spanish Trastámara dynasty and the Habsburg dynasty merged into one, legitimized through his father's, Philip I (1478-1506), marriage to Joanna of Castile (1479-1555) in 1496, inaugurating the beginning of Habsburg rule on the Iberian Peninsula.[225] After 1530, French interests were gradually sidetracked in favour of an increasingly Hispanicized climate in Italy: Broadly observed we may describe a decline in French influence in Italy; their aggressive and expansionist agenda eclipsed by a more pious and conservative Spanish presence.[226]

Spanish immigration to Rome was unorganized and ad-hoc during the early 1500s. Catholic monarchs had promoted the growth and establishment of Iberian communities for many decades already, but it was only "during the reign of Philip II, however, that the Spanish community and its adherents grew until they constituted a large percentage of the Roman population and were the dominant foreign faction."[227]

Ironically, the *Sacco di Roma* of 1527 ended up not so much weakening the Papacy as reaffirm, consolidate, and radicalize its sense of political, cultural and social self. From the horrors of Constantinople's fall in 1453, the post-Lutheran schism, and the decentralization of trade following the discovery of the Americas in 1498, Italian greatness could no longer be sustained on its own. Spain became the natural ally with which to halt the alarming prospect of French ambition.[228]

The intellectual history of Spain remains a murky, disjointed and ambiguous affair. In comparison with the economically affluent and proto-bourgeois states of Italy and Northern Europe, Spain remained an almost schizophrenic entity; on the one hand, they possessed unrivalled military prowess, a royal lineage connected to all the major bloodlines in Europe, cemented further with the triumph of Habsburg supremacy, and relentless self-promotion in matters of European issues. On the other, a state and an Empire in social and political backwaters; The Iberian Peninsula was virtually feudal, to the point of being purely medieval

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[224] Horace Kallen, *Art and Freedom. A Historical and Biographical Interpretation of the Relations Between the Ideas of Beauty, Use and Freedom in Western Civilization from the Greeks to the Present Day,* volume 1. (New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1942), 145.

[225] Aurelio M. Espinosa, *The Empire of the Cities: Emperor Charles V, the Comunero Revolt, and the Transformation of the Spanish System*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 43.

[226] Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1962]), 103.

[227] Thomas James Dandelet, *Spanish Rome: 1500-1700.* (New Haven, CON: Yale University Press, 2001), 109.

[228] Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*, 103.

in great areas, an analphabetic population save the absolute upper strata, a dark, cultural hotbed of superstition, zeal and serfdom.[229]

The Spanish Counter-Reformatory apparatus proved particularly influential in Southern Italy, a place known for "fervent piety and devotion, susceptible to superstition," in large part due to the constant threat of natural disasters, and therefore consistently in "desperate need for 'miracles'."[230] The Papal change in allegiance, then, meant a turning away from the relative progressive company of Italian City States, from merchants and bankers, and toward "a foreign power with almost feudal ideas and methods."[231] Consequently, the aim of the sixteenth-century Pontificate from the mid-1500s onwards was not a continuation of High Renaissance stately ambitions, but rather the foundations for an "ecclesiastical absolutism as far as possible in Italy." This meant, as a particular example, the introduction of the rigidly unfair Spanish system of taxation, hitting the traditionally Iberian dominion of Naples particularly hard[232], while also draining the last drops out of an already spent Italian economy. In a more general sweep, to return to my question regarding the "medievalization" of Italian intellectual, political and, primary in this account, artistic life, the essential direction of the Italian Counter-Reformation is an attempt to return to the ecclesiastical sovereignty of the Medieval Church.[233]

4.4 Caravaggio's Work as Pictorial Theology: The Jesuits and Oratorians

By means of scrutiny of the religious institutions of Caravaggio's day, I aim to convey just how close the ties between theological and artistic discourse were. Approaching the spiritual developments, then, can help to illuminate this dynamic. Caravaggio scholars have tirelessly debated as to what extent institutional traces, and thoughts of the different religious orders, may betray themselves in his sacred paintings. Still, this remains the least explored terrain in

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[229] For a wider discussion of the social and political developments in early modern Spain, see James Casey, *Early Modern Spain: A Social History*, London: Routledge, 1999), esp. 222–249. For primary sources, see Jon Cowans, *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), esp. 49–57, 79–82, and 91–99.

[230] Sebastian Schütze, «The Politics of Counter-Reformation Iconography and a Quest for the Spanishness of Neapolitan Art", in Thomas James Dandelet, John A. Marino (eds.), *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society and Religion 1500-1700*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 557.

[231] Ibid. 104.

[232] H. Michael Tarver, and Emily Slape (ed.), *The Spanish Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia vol. 1*, (Santa Barbara: CA: ABC-Clio, 2016), 26.

[233] Ibid. Blunt, 104.

the topography of Caravaggio studies, which mainly gravitate toward the historical

consequences and radicalism of a naturalist style.[234]

The first scholar to thoroughly integrate the religious discourse of Early Modern Italy

into the wider study of Caravaggio's art was Walter Friedlaender. His apprehension of the

lack of religious perspective when dealing with Caravaggio's paintings comes firmly to the

fore in his double-review of Lionello Venturi and Roberto Longhi's – the latter at the time the

un-rivalled doyen of Caravaggio studies – monographs on the artist. In Friedlaender's mind

"neither author concerns himself with what seems to me to be of prime importance for

understanding Caravaggio's art: the significance of his religious content – a content through

which Caravaggio attempted to evoke the most profound spiritual response."[235]

In a more or less continuous creative outpouring, Caravaggio produced the main body

of his most significant religious work: The Matthew-cycle [*Fig*. 21] for the Capella Contarelli

in San Luigi dei Francesi; *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* and *Conversion of St. Paul* for the

Cerasi chapel; *The Entombment* [*Fig*. 22] for the Chiesa Nuova; *Madonna di Loreto* [*Fig*. 23]

for the Cavalletti chapel in Sant'Agostino; *Madonna with St. Anne* today in the Galleria

Borghese; the notorious and rejected *Death of Virgin* made for the church of Santa Maria

della Scala; and the *Madonna del Rosario*, executed for the Duke of Modena. To this, we can

add the fiercely devotional image of *St. Jerome writing*, a painting bursting with apostolic

austerity.[236] *The Seven Acts of Mercy* [*Fig*. 24], dating 1607, after his escape to Naples, would

have completed the continuous and grandiose Catholic gesture of his Roman work.

In Friedlaender's narrative, Caravaggio's naturalistic invocation of Christian mystery

becomes "the strongest and most persuasive interpretation of the popular religious movements

of the period in which he lived."[237] Chorpenning describes Friedlander's positioning of

Caravaggio within the religious pattern of late sixteenth-century Rome as one that "has an

affinity, on the one hand, with the mysticism and humility of St. Philip Neri and the

Oratorians and, on the other, with the ideas and meditative practices of St. Ignatius Loyola's

Spiritual Exercises."[238] I am inclined to incorporate elements of their arguments, yet I

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[234] See for instance Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). Also John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* and Troy Thomas, *Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2016).
[235] Walter Friedlaender, "Review of *Caravaggio* by Lionello Venturi and *Il Caravaggio* by Roberto Longhi", *The Art Bulletin*, 35, 315-318, (1953): 318
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 121.
[238] Joseph F. Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion", *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 8, no. 16 (1987): 149.

attribute greater significance to the naturalizing rhetoric of post-Tridentine discourse on the sacred image, especially the work of Giovan Andrea Gilio and Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, to whom I will return. Their demand for a new miraculous naturalism in Catholic visual language, a mode painting of transcendent immediacy capable of collapsing the barrier of heaven and earth, in short, of making Christian truth present, is one I personally consider consequential.

Friedlaender anchors this brand of spirituality historically in the devotional treatises of 13- and 1400s; Ludolf of Saxony's *Vita Christi* of 1374, and the *Imitatio Christi* (1418-27) by Thomas à Kempis in particular. These books of "the deepest pietistic mysticism" sought to unite the human spirit with the transcendence of a Christian universe.[239] The path toward such a lofty goal, was pursued by means of the senses. Sensual or sensory interaction with Christianity become of one the traits of Early Modern mysticism and piety, having a significant bearing upon visual culture. The major implications of Ludolf and à Kempis' work is how they refrain from establishing hierarchical or meaningful distinctions between heaven and earth, sacred and profane; it's when the transcendental must be acknowledged in and through the material, that the miraculous retains a significant element of difference. It is here, then, among the dirty feet, black-rimmed fingernails, and blood-gushing wounds of the pious crowd and too human saints of Caravaggio, that revelation recuperates its sense of meaning.

The (in)famous *Exercitia Spiritualia* of Ignatius Loyola owes its language and content in many respects from these mystical and doctrinal writings. The reductionist structure of this spiritual guide emphasizes the link between the individual and God; there is nothing to confuse, corrupt, or derail the devotional attention.

Ignatius' chief contribution to cultural, intellectual, and theological history, the *Exercitia Spiritulia*, the *Spiritual Exercises,* is a manual of meditation composed between 1522 and 24, but published only in 1548. It was to be Ignatius most important and enduring inheritance to Catholicism, including the visual arts, a guide that "draws heavily upon imagery…the use of the senses to conjure up scenes from Sacred Scripture".[240] John O'Malley could not have made it any clearer when he states that "There is no understanding of the Jesuits without reference to that book."[241]

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[239] Ibid. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 121.
[240] Ibid. Bailey, 7.
[241] John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

The Ignatian sensorial practice consisted in using one's own "*ojos interiores*", as Ignatius said, one's "interior eyes".[242] A crucial part of the *Exercitia*, making use of one's five senses, principally sight, would, according to Loyola, aid contemplation. Imagination would help the faithful *envision* the evangelical stories before them, what he called *compositio loci*, a sense of place composed through piety.[243] It was, then, the power field of piety between Jesuit militarism and Oratorian enthusiasm that Friedlaender argued proved most decisive for Caravaggio's art. The former has gained little backing in later research, combined with the fact that Caravaggio never produced any work for the Jesuits, as Friedlaender himself points out.[244] In addition, Caravaggio being on friendly terms with the French-Florentine faction in Rome, the Spanish Jesuits were usually regarded with suspicion. Hvalvik, however, makes the logical observation that one need not be a Jesuit to be influenced by Jesuit teaching and piety; The *Exercitia Spiritualia*, he claims, did definitely have "a general impact on contemporary Catholicism".[245] I will briefly outline this hermeneutic before articulating my own position.

What could be said to connect Caravaggio to the Ignatian camp is the latter's strong emphasis on the visual experience of Christianity; the senses remain the chief instrument through which one receive and approach Christian truth, a truth whose primary features are precisely to be found in the figurations of flesh – flesh disfigured, flesh dead, and flesh risen again. These palpable, I would even say phenomenal, descriptions of Scripture and Faith prepares the way for a visual rendering of sacred content which *needs* naturalism in order to appear efficient, clear, and unambiguous. In this regard, Caravaggio's religious images attuned to dominant currents of spirituality in the latter half of the sixteenth century.[246]

The immediacy of religious impression advocated by Ignatius – the "composition of place" and "application of the senses" – were meant to realize the gospel truths in the here and

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[242] Pierre-Antoine Fabre, "Les visions d'Ignace de Loyola dans la diffusion de l'art jésuite", *MLN* 114, no. 4 (1999): 822: "Alzandose el Corpus Domini, vió con los ojos interiores unos como rayos blancos que venian de arriba." Quoted in Fabre 822 from: *Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola et de Societatis Iesu initiis* (FN), I (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1943), 402.

[243] Daniel Estivill, "Iconography and Iconology in Caravaggio. A Catholic Key to Understanding the Works", Maj-Britt Anderson (ed.), *New Caravaggio – Papers presented at the International Conferences in Uppsala and Rome 2013*, (Uppsala: Newman Institute/Edizioni Polistampa, 2015), 103.

[244] Ibid. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 122. Caravaggio's religious work were produced for five different religious orders in Rome: The Augustinians, Capuchins, Dominicans, Discalced Carmelites, and Oratorians. See John Varriano, "Caravaggio and Religion," in Franco Mormando, *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, 196.

[245] Reidar Hvalvik, "Light from the Outside: The Paintings of Caravaggio in their Theological and Ecclesiastical Context," in Maj-Britt Anderson (ed.), *New Caravaggio – Papers presented at the International Conferences in Uppsala and Rome 2013*, (Uppsala: Newman Institute/Edizioni Polistampa, 2015), 20f.

[246] Reidar Hvalvik, "Light from the Outside: The Paintings of Caravaggio in their Theological and Ecclesiastical Context," in Maj-Britt Anderson (ed.), *New Caravaggio – Papers presented at the International Conferences in Uppsala and Rome 2013*, 21.

now. This "theology of immediacy", as I call it, however, had older precedents than Ignatius. In the work of medieval thinkers and philosophers like St. Bonaventure, St. Anselm and St. Bernard, which Ignatius based much of his teaching on, we find a dissemination of Scripture and Christianity where the tactile, humanizing, albeit ecstatic, and sensual qualities of the sacred are emphasized.[247] These conceptions provided the matrix of countless religious text in the later sixteenth and seventeenth century.

A best-seller in Caravaggio's day was the Italian translation of the Dominican Luis de Granada's *Book of Prayer and Meditation* of 1554. A blockbuster success of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, Granada's book went through more than hundred editions between 1554 and 1679. Similarly, the Italian version, ready by 1556, saw more than twenty-four editions between its release and 1610, the year of Caravaggio's death.[248] In a period dominated by Spanish spirituality,[249] Granada's text was *the* most read and published Hispanic work in the Italian *Cinquecento* and *Seicento*. Perhaps the saint most art historians associate with the birth of a specifically baroque brand of spirituality, St. Teresa of Avila's energetic and suggestive biography came at a fairly remote second place.[250] Chorpenning summarizes the tendency when he writes that "In short, the composition of place and application of the senses were part and parcel of a widely disseminated, and specifically Catholic, method of meditation during the Counter-Reformation".[251]

This was by no means solely the merit of Spanish piety; A pattern of devotion fixed upon the sensual attachments of Catholicism, a religious, immaterial truth that was most fully expressed precisely through its material manifestations, had also its native Italian proponents, like the *Spiritual Combat* of the Theatine Lorenzo Scupoli[252], which competed directly with the *Exercises*. This also enjoyed enormous success and dissemination; between 1589 and 1750, more than 250 editions were published in every considerable European language.

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[247] Joseph F. Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion", 149f.

[248] Ibid. 150.

[249] For a thorough discussion of the Spanish influence on Italian and Roman culture of the early modern period, see Thomas James Dandelet, *Spanish Rome: 1500-1700*. Also Dandelet and John A. Marino (eds.), *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society and Religion 1500-1700*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007) as well as Piers Baker-Bates and Miles Pattenden (eds.), *Spanish Presence in Sixteenth-Century Italy. Images of Iberia*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[250] Giovanni Maria Bertini, Maria Assunta Pelazza, *Ensayos de literature spiritual comparada hispano-italiana*, (Turin: University of Turin, 1980), 204-8.

[251] Ibid. Chorpenning.

[252] See L. Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat and A Treatise on the Peace of the Soul*, trans. W. Lester and R. Mohan, New York, 1978, esp. pp. 46–7, 69–70, 72–3, 138, and 147–8.

4.5. Augustinian Illumination vs Franciscan Pauperism: Caravaggio and the Piety of Poverty

Caravaggio's religious persuasions, or rather, the degree to which we can identify clear precepts of certain religious confessions in his work, is strongly debated. We may refer to a semi-diagrammatic, academic division where – to mention scholars subscribing to this strand of Caravaggio research – Wittkower, Fagiolo dell'Arco and Spear conform more or less to Friedlander's narrative, that is, the noticeable influence of both Oratorian and Jesuit spirituality.[253] In the middle, as it were, Julian, Zuccari and Moir are only willing to admit a trace of Oratorian influence, refuting directly or indirectly Ignatian values.[254] In the last camp, Cozzi, Röttgen and Hibbard rejects the notion that any of the two spiritual traditions were conducive for Caravaggio's pictorial and intellectual development.[255] Hibbard has famously suggested a third option, the correspondence between Caravaggio's Cerasi paintings and Augustinian theology, both as Santa Maria del Popolo was an Augustinian church, as well as the affinities of Pauline subject-matter and Augustinian spirituality.[256]

The theology of light, so prominent in the Augustinian tradition and, not least, the *chiaroscuro* of Caravaggio, ties into the same hermeneutic. Yet, this argument has little backing in St. Augustine himself, where the concept of grace as a simplistic metaphor holds little basis.[257] Meredith Gill has suggested that it is the *shadow*, not the light, in Caravaggio's imagery that retains analogies to Augustinianism. Not refuting the existence of Augustinian content, then, Gill identifies the presence of Pauline-Augustinian elements in Caravaggio's decision to *hide* the source of his light: Implying that the unexpected and ineffable suddenness of "unmerited grace" in the image acknowledges the ubiquity and symmetry of light and shade, forces facing each other in "mortal contest."[258] We can assume that Augustinian theology surrounded the commission of *The Crucifixion of St. Peter*, as the mentioned order

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[253] Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1700*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 56; M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, "Le Opere di Misericordia": contributo alla poetica del Caravaggio", *L'Arte*, N. S., I, no. 1, 1968, pp. 41-3 and 47; R. Spear, *Caravaggio and His Followers*, (New York, 1975), pp. 6, 10-11, and 13.

[254] See R. Julian, *Caravage*, (Lyon-Paris, 1961), pp. 111 and 136, nn. 35 and 36; Alessandro Zuccari, "La politica culturale dell'Oratorio romano nella seconda metà del Cinquecento", *Storia dell'Arte*, XLI, 1981, pp. 77-112; Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio*, (New York, 1982), pp. 13, 22, 56 and 128.

[255] G. Cozzi, "Intorno a cardinal Ottavio Paravicino, a monsignor Paolo Gualdo e a Michelangelo Caravaggio," *Rivista storica Italiana*, LXXIII, no. 1, 1961, pp. 36-68, esp. pp. 62-65; H. Röttgen, *Il Caravaggio: richerche e interpretazioni*, Rome, 1974, pp. 236-40; and Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 313.

[256] Ibid. *Hibbard*, 131.

[257] Meredith J. Gill, "'Until Shadows Disperse': Augustine's Twilight", in Marcia B. Hall and Tracy Cooper, eds., *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 264.

[258] Meredith J. Gill, "'Until Shadows Disperse': Augustine's Twilight", 264.

supervised the content of the interior decorations. Yet, Augustinianism faced controversy throughout the sixteenth century as Martin Luther's – originally an Augustinian monk - reform theology borrowed greatly from Augustinian precepts.[259]

Much have been made of the network of ideas surrounding Caravaggio's paintings that Jones refers to as "pauperistic". The "pauperistic ideas" of Caravaggio's time Jones links to Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226).[260] Well-established in the intellectual landscape of Catholicism, Franciscan spirituality was especially identified with humility in the form of personal poverty. Bert Treffers has suggested elements of Franciscan ideology in Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew*, arguing how the Gospel of Matthew enjoyed special reverence among Francis himself as well as the later Franciscans. Treffers emphasizes the discalced feet of Christ as a reference to or play upon Franciscan ideals of poverty.[261]

Humility is a dominant aspect in several of Caravaggio's religious images, making the Franciscan connections understandable. What unities a general iconography of poverty in Caravaggio, is the prominent feature of dirty and soiled feet. Most notably is this present in Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* and in his *Madonna di Loreto* in the Cavalletti chapel in Sant'Agostino [*Fig*. 25-26]. Importantly, changing attitudes to poverty and humility in the later sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries would have decisive impact upon the reception and critique of Caravaggio's work, the *Madonna di Loreto* in particular.

A topic of valuable and significant interest is the history and anthropology of poverty in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Rome, as it deals directly and indirectly with questions of liturgy, religious practice, politics, economy, and power in the early modern period. Generally a moment of precarious poverty among the masses, the 1500s and 1600s discourse of humility, lack, and squalor, plays at part in any narrative of the age.[262] In his study on Roman attitudes toward privation and poverty, Luigi Fiorani demonstrated yet another ambivalence in the early modern imagination, when describing how the status of being poor were simultaneously regarded as a productive spiritual state which encouraged mysticism, emblematic of a fundamental Christian virtue, and an obvious social disaster. In the same vein

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[259] Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 28 and 35f.

[260] Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni*, 101.

[261] Bert Treffers, "Dogma, esegesi e pittura. Caravaggio nella cappella Contarelli in San Luigi dei Francesi.", *Storia dell'Arte*, vol. 67 (1989), 241-55. Further on Caravaggio and Franciscan iconography, see Treffers, "Il Francesco Hartford del Caravaggio e la Spiritualità francescana alla fine del XVI sec.", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 32/(½), (1988): 145-172. Also Langdon, 232.

[262] Pamela M. Jones, "The Power of Images: Paintings and Viewers in Caravaggio's Italy", in *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, 47.

that discussion flourished on the topic of "true" and "false" images, so there arose a debate concerned with "true" and "false" poor, discriminating between those who were deserving and those who were not.[263]

Dirty feet as sign contains interesting complexities in Caravaggio's *oeuvre*. In the *Madonna di Loreto*, the dirty feet of the two worshippers designate them as pilgrims, subjected to the tear of the elements – material witnesses so to speak. The dirt and earth on their feet betray their connection to this world, a place of flesh, blood and material pollution.[264] An acute insight of visual hermeneutics in discussing the *Madonna di Loreto* is the semantic play on dirt as signifier; the pilgrim's display of dirty feet becomes an affirmation of his or hers humility itself: the Italian *umiltà*, as well as English word humility, derives from the Latin root *humus*, denoting "earth" or "ground".[265] However, the equation of dirt and the profane on the one side, and the unblemished and the sacred on the other, is more nuanced than that. In *The Crucifixion of St. Peter*, we see Caravaggio presenting two pairs of feet: those of Peter, penetrated by nails, blood-gushing [*Fig*. 27], yet unsullied, and the dark brown, almost black dirt of the feet of the kneeling executioner. Soil, earth and dirt become signifiers of the material body. At the same time, dirt as *mementos* to materiality was exactly a distinction Caravaggio subverted through naturalism as strategy, to which I will return.

Friedlaender's approach of establishing conceptual analogies between spiritual and intellectual discourse and religious image-making have provided the rudiments for a strong contextualizing tradition in Caravaggio-studies. Yet this correlative hermeneutic have several retractors.[266] Some question whether Caravaggio himself would actively adapt his artistic approach against the backdrop of Counter-Reformatory programmes; having established that these currents were indeed circulating around Caravaggio's social environment, it is more than likely – I believe – that he would engage with Tridentine discourse, especially the part pertaining to artistic process. It is true that this strand of Early Modern hermeneutical readings faces deep challenges and unanswered questions. Consequently, tendencies of polarization arise; expressed for instance in the dichotomy between Friedlaender and a Maurizio Calvesi one the one side, who argues that Caravaggio's later work is "animated by a profound

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[263] Luigi Fiorani, "Religione e povertà. Il dibattito sul pauperismo a Roma tra cinque e seicento," *Richerche per la storia religiosa di Roma*, vol. 3 (1979): 97-104.

[264] Ibid. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni*, 96.

[265] Ibid. Hibbard, 188.

[266] See for instance Troy Thomas, "Caravaggio and the Roman Oratory of Saint Philip Neri", *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 12 (1988): 61–89 and John Spike, *Caravaggio*, (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2001), 15.

religiosity."[267] On the other, the positivist account of Stephen Pepper, claiming Caravaggio's work only designates "visible things, not invisible ideas,"[268] and the nihilistic topography of Herwarth Röttgen, in which the darkness of Caravaggio's images betray profound depths of despair, his black backdrops denoting a shattered, disenchanted world.[269]

As will be obvious, early modernity found itself frequently squeezed between forces of progress and the demands of traditionalism. The very notion of "Early Modern" carries with it this exact ambivalence; a back and forth thrusting between a world in the midst of political, intellectual and technological modernization and the aggressive attempts to hold sway against "the tide of modernity" by means of traditional religion. The English poet John Donne (1572-1631), one of many who is virtually split between the two "powers" of scientific progress and spiritual authority, respond to this exact sentiment: In facing the instrumentalization of nature by Copernican and Baconian science, the so-called "New Philosophy", he writes in his 1611 poem "An Anatomy of the World" that "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone".[270]

Counter-Reformation artistic ideology harked back to a Byzantine conception of the image, engendered largely by the threats from Calvinist iconoclasts, whilst retaining a Renaissance matrix of pictorial narratives.[271] In his appeal to iconic pictorial strategies, merged with a figural repertoire wholly in compliance with Renaissance developments, Caravaggio dramatizes these tensions of old and new.

Friedlaender, to repeat then, identified a Jesuit-Oratorian grid through which Caravaggio found an intellectual framework for his religious projects. In the same manner, Bailey finds a similarity between the Jesuit and Oratorian approach to artistic commissions.[272] Academics have tried in plenty, therefore, to establish binary oppositions in their respective religious and intellectual orientation: the "pro-Florentine, cultured, and aristocratic" Oratorians, versus the "pro-Spanish, didactic, and low-brow" Jesuits.[273] As the last element in this chapter, I will address the iconography of martyrdom in post-Tridentine painting, as it played a vital part in the religious psychology of Roman visual culture.

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[267] Maurizio Calvesi, *La realtà del Caravaggio*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), quoted from dustjacket summary.

[268] D. Stephen Pepper, *Guido Reni*, (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 36.

[269] Herwarth Röttgen, "Riflessioni sul rapporto tra la personalità del Caravaggio e la sua opera.", in *Il Caravaggio. Richerche e interpretazioni*, (Rome: Bulzoni edizione, 1978): 227.

[270] Robert Romanschyn, "Copernicus and the Beginnings of Modern Science", *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1973): 190f. For Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 269.

[271] Lorenzo Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 200.

[272] Ibid. Bailey, 16.

[273] See Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of Baroque*, (New Haven, CON: Yale University Press, 1980), 68.

4.6 "A Panorama of Horror and Butchery": Santo Stefano Rotondo and Martyr Iconography

While the Jesuits and Oratorians were inclined to clash in matters of artistic taste, they frequently employed the same artists, such as Girolamo Muziano, Durante Alberti, Scipione Pulzone, Cavalier d'Arpino and Rubens. Certain differences of opinion naturally prevailed. The Jesuits, who were never particularly wealthy, tended to look for inexpensive artists.[274] They became fond of Niccolò Circignani, who always worked cheaply, something reflected in the quality of his work; Gaspare Celio – a painter so pious he refused any payment from the order – and Giuseppe Valeriano, who was himself a Jesuit. The Oratorians entertained a particular penchant for Federico Barocci (1535-1612). Painting two altarpieces for Chiesa Nuova, Barocci provided the order with what Ian Verstegen describes as "sweetness with realism," denoting a preference for an affective art which targets the heart, not the mind.[275]

Essential for the discussion of Caravaggio in terms of the influence of the religious orders, and especially his image of martyrdom, is the shared predilection of the Jesuits and Oratorians for an iconography of sacrifice. "The two orders were the most active promoters of the iconography of early Christian martyrs as a symbol of the legitimacy of the Church and of the cult of the saints."[276] The pairing of saint and martyr, then, climactically fused in the figure of Caravaggio's St. Peter, touches the core concerns of contemporary Catholicism.

The genre of the martyr cycle, that for many have become synonymous with Jesuit art in general, began with the decoration of the German-Hungarian College in 1582. The success of the Collegium Germanicum had encouraged Pope Gregory XIII to establish another college in Rome with the intention of educating missionaries and priest headed to Hungary. Through the bull of 22nd of February 1579, the Hungarian College was officially founded.[277] As a birthday present, the College was granted the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo [*Fig*. 28]; then and since a "paragon of 'Counter-Reformation' iconography."[278] Nowhere in Catholic Europe is the symmetry between Martyrdom and Christian virtue more explicitly stated.

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[274] Morton Colp Abromson, *Painting in Rome during the Papacy of Clement VIII (1592-1605)*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1981), 239.

[275] Ian Verstegen, "Federico Barocci, Federico Borromeo, and the Oratorian Orbit," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 66 no. 1, (2003): 56-7. For a more detailed account of Oratorian spiritual practices, see Antonio Cistellini, *San Filippo Neri. L'Oratorio e la Congregazione oratoriana: Storia e spiritualità*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1989).

[276] Ibid. Bailey, 18.

[277] See Francesco Cesareo, "The Collegium Germanicum and Ignatian Vision of Education", *Sixteenth Century Journal* vol. 24, no. 4 (1993): 829-841.

[278] Ibid. Bailey 122f.

Exceeding the fact that the level of artistic quality borders on highly questionable, this notorious Jesuit "slaughterhouse" drove Charles Dickens to remark in 1846 that "such a panorama of horror and butchery no man could imagine in his sleep, though he were to eat a whole pig raw, for supper."[279] Bailey contends that the images of Santo Stefano Rotondo "are among the most visceral and gruesome in the history of painting." The round-shaped church provides a panorama of execution and torture the spectator can digest from the centre. There cannot be a more enduring testimony to the unfathomable horror of the iconography than having the father of sadism himself, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), recoiling in revulsion, describe the scenes as "one of the most frightening collections of horror that it is possible to gather together."[280]

In the summer of 1581, at the behest of Michele Lauretano, rector at the German-Hungarian College, Niccolò Circignani was commissioned to produce 31 images in fresco around the entire ambulatory wall in Santo Stefano Rotondo. Depicting the killing, torture and mutilation of a series of early Christian martyrs [*Fig*. 29-30], starting with the Crucifixion of Christ, the cycle was a chapter in the post-Tridentine campaign to embellish and visually fortify the Jesuit college churches in Rome.[281]

Leif Holm Monssen is responsible for the most thorough analysis of the decorative program in Santo Stefano Rotondo, which he has explored in a catalogue and several articles. In his view, the awkwardness of Circignani's pictorial treatment may stem from the painter having to adapt his foreground figures to the background landscapes of Matteo da Siena.[282] Another reading is that of Thomas Buser, who opens up the possibility of Circignani painting in a deliberately "crude" manner in order to invoke the stylistic traits of early Christian art, matching the pictorial language of the frescoes in the then recently excavated tomb of St. Priscilla.[283] Circignani's subsequent fall from grace in art historiography is astounding – if looking past his limited formal inventions – when considering his contemporary repute, but follows the obvious chauvinisms of a secularized pro-modern narrative. He was a favoured painter in the 1580s, the superintendent of the Gregorian *loggie* at the Vatican, and booked to lecture on the merits of painting *istoria* at the newly founded Accademia di San Luca.[284]

[279] Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy*, (London: Everyman's Library, 1997), 415.

[280] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, *Oeuvres completes du Marquis de Sade*, vol. 6, (Rome) (Paris: J. J. Pauvert, 1967, 288-9. Quoted and trans. in Bailey, 123.

[281] Leslie Korrick, "On the Meaning of Style: Niccolò Circignani in Counter-Reformation Rome". *Word & Image*, vol. 15, no.2 (1999): 170.

[282] Leif Holm Monssen, "The Martyrdom Cycle in Santo Stefano Rotondo, Part II': 47, 49.

[283] Thomas Buser, "Jerome Nadal and early Jesuit art in Rome," *The Art Bulletin,* vol. 58, no.3 (1976), 432.

[284] Ibid. Korrick 170.

Each of the martyr scenes in Santo Stefano are accompanied by a text panel providing the onlooker with the essence of the representation. This intimate juxtaposition of word and image may account for the exceedingly detailed renditions of the subjects, something Monsson identifies with Jesuit pedagogy in general, and the didacticism of Loyola's *Exercises* specifically.[285] The frescoes articulates and concentrates the sense of place and event, pertaining to the mentioned notion of *compositio loci*. Buser, on the other hand, regards Circignani's frescoes as responding to the formats of the *Evangelicae historiae imagines, adnotationes et meditationes*, an illustrated Gospel book by the Spanish Jesuit, and Rector of the Collegio Romano from 1564 to 66, Jerome Nadal. This may have informed not just the thematic and chronological pattern of the Santo Stefano frescoes, but provided the foundations of early Jesuit visual thought. This was a book written as a canon volley in the battle against the Protestants over the centrality of the martyrs, and as such, part of the larger fabric of Counter-Reformation art.[286]

Circignani's frescoes engaged in a process of cultural and intellectual assimilation that took place in the post-Tridentine wake, cementing Early Christian and Counter-Reformatory relations. The serialized sacrifices and its images of triumphant martyrs, juxtaposed with references to a Tridentine pictorial pedagogy, became the emblems for a Christian ideal: "The repetition, renewal and completion of Christ's victory by his followers."[287] Together, these carriers of ecclesiastical continuity bridged and affirmed a narrative of past and present.[288]

Martyrdom as act made no sense in isolation, the *raison d'être* of sacrifice rested in its valid conformity with the first martyrs, Stefano, Peter, and Paul; an "ancient course of action" that gained full expression in the act of crucifixion. There could not, then, be a more concise expression of the *emulation* of sacrifice, than martyrdom by crucifixion. And there exists arguably no more concise representation of this than Caravaggio's *Crucifixion*. His naturalism protests its pictorial limitations, in the way the image's claim to "truth" negates its status as artwork. Semantic clarity in Caravaggio's painting threatens to collapse the boundaries between a true eternal event, and its image. Donald Kelley therefore regards martyrdom itself as "a form of mimesis – *imitatio Christi* with a vengeance".[289]

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[285] Leif Holm Monssen, "Rex Gloriose Martyrum: A Contribution to Jesuit Iconography," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 1 (1981): 133.
[286] Thomas Buser, "Jerome Nadal and early Jesuit art in Rome", 424.
[287] Herz, "Imitators of Christ: The Martyr-Cycles of Late Sixteenth-Century Rome Seen in Context", 63.
[288] Ibid. 715.
[289] Donald R. Kelley, «Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew", *American Historical Review*, vol. 77 (1972), 1328. Quoted in Gregory, 119.

5   Image and Spectator: Caravaggio and Post-Tridentine Theory of Painting

5.1 The Image Question

In the wake of 1517 and the Reformation, the power of images emerged forcefully in discourse through the remaining century. The apologetic became the preferred genre of much Tridentine *trattati*; the 25th and final session of the Council of Trent cemented and reaffirmed the well-established position of the Church on the topic of sacred imagery. The decree at Trent being fairly brief and general in description, subsequent commentators and writers – cardinals, ecclesiastics, and bishops to a large extent and the occasional lay author – on religious art, had the opportunity to articulate a rather personal set of norms with regards to form, subject-matter and decorum. This account partly for the absence of a homogenous Tridentine pictorial doctrine.[290] As such, the issue of periodization and use of "Counter-Reformation art" in singular form becomes evident.

Unarguably among the most important of the Catholic writers on the subject were Giovan Andrea Gilio (*Dialogo degli errori dei pittori*, 1564); Johannes Molanus (*De picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, 1570); Gabriele Paleotti (*Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, 1582) in the later 1500s, and Federico Borromeo (*De Pictura Sacra*, 1624) and Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli (*Trattato della pittura e scultura. Uso ed abuso loro*, 1652) in the following century. In these, we find a consistent support of the Tridentine articulations regarding the power and usefulness of images.[291]

The Twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, of December 3 and 4, 1563, under the rubric *De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum, et de sacris imaginibus*, "On the invocation, veneration and relics of saints, and on sacred images", states how

> The holy council commands all bishops and others who hold the office of teaching and have charge of the *cura animarum*, that in accordance with the usage of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, received from the primitive times of the Christian religion, and with the unanimous teaching of the holy Fathers and the decrees of sacred councils, they above all instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to the intercession and invocation of the saints, veneration of relics, and the legitimate use of images...Moreover, that the image of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be

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[290] Pamela M. Jones, "The Power of Images: Paintings and Viewers in Caravaggio's Italy", 29.
[291] Ibid. 29.

placed and retained especially in the churches, and the due honor and veneration is to be given them; not, however, that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them by reason of which they are to be venerated, or that something is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be placed in images, as was done by the old Gentiles who placed their hopes in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear.[292]

This speaks of several guidelines for maintaining a proper, Catholic visual tradition. Catholic idolatry, its misuse and veneration of images, was one of the main targets of Protestant criticism; consequently, reinforcing the authority of the Christian visual and representational regime became one of the dominant priorities of the Roman Church.[293]

Exploring the asymmetries and interplay between confessional approaches to the image leading up to and during Caravaggio's life, can outline an intellectual and theoretical topography of visual thought: "The study of the image question," Michalski explains, "can provide us with many convenient starting-points for the study of art-historical, historical, anthropological and theological problems."[294] What unities these domains of study and specialization, is a preoccupation with change and displacements in the intellectual and mental terrain; how we think about images, how we think about history, how we think about religion, and consequently, ourselves.

5.3 Luther: Nominalism and the Protestant Image

In his narrative of the development of German religious and visual culture, the avant-garde poet Gottfried Benn (1886–1956) singled out Martin Luther as the progenitor of the great artistic decline which had rendered German culture moribund. Culpable for the severing of the mutually beneficial links between art and religion, that "dirty Saxon", as Benn wrote, lacked every comprehension for "the problems of Form."[295] The sacred was depleted and

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[292] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, *Twenty-Fifth Session, December 3 and 4, 1563, On the invocation, veneration and relics of saints, and on sacred images*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art 1500–1600: Sources and Documents*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 120.

[293] Kevin V. Mulcahy, "The cultural policy of the Counter-Reformation: the case of St. Peter's", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011): 131.

[294] Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), xii.

[295] Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*, 1.

destroyed to satisfy his [Luther's] own "conscience", Benn claimed. Even in the early Protestant camp, Luther had outspoken critics who deemed his iconoclastic urges to akin to vandalism. Catholicism had for over thousands years been very much an "aesthetic" religion, a visual regime which attributed liberal space to its sensual manifestations. Thus, what had saved religion had crippled culture.[296] A figure like Erasmus who – albeit in the end a faithful Catholic and papist – had met Lutheranism with a certain degree of sympathy and understanding, termed the outcome *Lutherana tragoedia artis*.[297] Luther would hardly have understood his being described as an iconoclast, but that was very much the reception of Lutheran aesthetic critique, which peaked during the early German romanticism.

Yet, Luther – though often associated with the neo-iconoclasm of Protestantism – was a man and theologian "of strong visual and sensual impulses."[298] In his own mind "only a humble exegete of the Scriptures." Despite myths of iconoclast views, it remains anyway plausible that Luther's genuine desire was to rectify what he regarded as scriptural and devotional corruption in the Church, not simply displacing its visual orthodoxy.[299]

Art and representational culture had little bearing upon Protestant agenda during the infancy of the Reformation. The nature of Mass, the conditions of Salvation[300], and especially the sale of indulgences, were all considered issues far more urgent.[301] Theologians of Northern Europe had already developed negative attitudes to veneration of sacred imagery before Luther, but from the point of view of religious debate, it was an "entirely marginal problem in the general consciousness of the age." Even Luther himself embraced "wholly uncritically the forms of religious art which he encountered in his own environment." In the same manner, he "zealously accepted all manifestations of late medieval devotion."[302]

Befitting my design of establishing a rudimentary contrast between Catholic and Protestant positions, it is important to point out that Luther's early philosophical standpoint was informed by nominalism, a strand of thought that facilitated a perceived difference

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[296] Ibid.
[297] Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 28.
[298] Sergiusz Michalski, 1.
[299] For a more detailed discussion of Luther's concept of the image, see Rosemarie Bergmann, "A 'tröstlich pictura': Luther's Attitude in the Question of Images," *Renaissance and Reformation, New Series*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1981): 15–25.
[300] The urgencies related to the prospect of either damnation or salvation is explored by Piero Camporesi, *Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lucinda Byatt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[301] Martin Brecht, "Luther's Reformation", in Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Oberman and James D. Tracy (eds.), *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600. Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, *Vol. 2: Visions, Programs and Outcomes*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 133f.
[302] Ibid. Michalski, 3.

between icon and picture, word and world. Luther's privileging of word over image pushed his nominalist convictions to breaking point.[303] Nominalism helped fortify his apprehension of images as arbitrary and conventional signs. This informed his later conception of religious images.[304]

What in the end characterized the image policies of Lutheran reform programmes was the insistence on *tollatur abusus et maneat usus* - remove the abuse, but continue the use.[305] The late-Lutheran defence of images made manifest the importance of a "visible Church", *ecclesia Visibilis*. Herein lay the nexus of Protestant church decoration; the material image was to serve and influence the inner one – *obiecta movent sensus.* In summary, Luther's assimilation of artistic problems was the offspring of spontaneous iconoclastic developments and his own theological formation. Evident is a lack of dogmatism from his part; nowhere does he pretend to present a systematized aesthetic doctrine. His attentions rested fundamentally on the recipient of the work, and not the work itself.[306] Luther's mode of inquiry was only directed outward. The nature and essence of representation did not interest him whatsoever. "Art is a medium which lacks its own inherent sacrality," was the general notion. For Luther, then, in the end, "art is a language".[307] His position ends up inverting our use of Gadamer's concepts, regarding the *image* only as *Vorstellung*, whereas the Word, God's own speech, is thought to inhabit its own presentation, *Darstellung*.

5.3 Giovan Andrea Gilio: A Decorum of Dissonance

Of singular significance in the articulation of a specifically Catholic image program was Giovan Andrea Gilio, a Presbyterian, and Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, both of whom advocated radical revisions of the ecclesiastical visual vocabulary. I believe the new naturalist ideology and rhetoric of the post-Tridentine *trattatisti* helped to push and compile pressure on the religious representational regime of which Caravaggio was a part.

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[303] Thomas Osborne, "Faith, Philosophy, and the Nominalist Background to Luther's Defense of the Real Presence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2002), 67–68.

[304] For further reading on the nominalist attitude to images, see Erwin Iserloh, "Bildfeindlichkeit des Nominalismus und Bildersturm im 16. Jh.", in W. Heinen (ed.), *Bild-Wor-Symbol in der Theologie*, (Würzburg: 1969): 119-39

[305] Bengt Arvidsson, *Bildstrid, Bildbruk, Bildlära. En idéhistorisk undersökning av bildfrågan inom den begynnande lutherska traditionen under 1500-talet*, (Lund: Lund University Press/Kulturteologiskt Förlag, 1987), 10.

[306] Ibid. Michalski, 37.

[307] Hans von Campenhausen, "Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation", in H. von Campenhausen (ed.), *Tradition und Leben. Kräfte der Kirchengeschichte*, (Berlin: 1960), 405.

The two treatises of Gilio and Paleotti comprise, as mentioned, a much greater production of artistic *trattati*, but remains those that, perhaps, most acutely address the tensions between orthodoxy and artistic expression. A tension, as Caputo describes it, between "*fede*" and "*fantasia*", faith and fantasy.[308] Equally so is this tension played out as a struggle of word and image, Scripture and icon. Issues deeply embedded in Caravaggio's imagery. My aim, then, is to shape an argument around key Tridentine concepts of painting articulated in Gilio's *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* of 1564, and Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* of 1582.

Giovan Andrea Gilio wrote his dialogue on the errors and abuses of art immediately after the Council of Trent. Consequently, his work is affected by a fervency of devotion and propriety which tied into a new demand for decorum. Nudity in post-Tridentine Italy was a so-called *quaestio vexata* – a troublesome question. Decorum and propriety, or rather breaches thereof, were sources of major headaches and moral dissonance for Tridentine authorities. Nudity as an ingredient of sacred art, therefore, was a reoccurring controversy.

Due to the fact the pictorial prescriptions of the Council of Trent were ambiguous at best, implementing a consistent Counter-Reformation style appeared to be futile. Banishing all lasciviousness and sensual ornament, images were subjected to strict rules of decorum.[309] At the same time, Tridentine *trattati* constantly calls for veracity and truthfulness in depicting the Scriptures; Gilio made his name as the great critic of Michelangelo's portrayal of flesh in the *Last Judgment* [*Fig.* 31], which end up becoming, for Gilio and the post-Tridentine sensibility, Mannerism made manifest.[310] At the same time, and not without grains of paradox, he vehemently argued for total transparency of representation; No ugly detail, no deformity, no disfigured part of human flesh should be covered up. Michelangelo Buonarotti became an example for Gilio of what happens when *inventio* eclipses *decoro* in painting: we cannot end up with a visual culture, argues Gilio, in which "[ch']ogni cosa è lecita al pittore." Where everything can be excused through artistic licence.[311] These juridical regulations of pictorial conduct gives context to Gilio's meaning of "abuse" in the arts. It denotes a disproportion and asymmetry between technical rendition and the painter's commitment to

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[308] Vincenzo Caputo, "Gli 'abusi' dei pittori e la 'norma' dei Trattatisti: Giovanni Andrea Gilio e Gabriele Paleotti," *Studi Rinascimentali*, vol. 6 (2008): 99.

[309] Beverley Louise Brown, "Between the Sacred and Profane," in ibidem (ed.), *The Genius of Rome: 1592–1623*, 277.

[310] See, John W. O'Malley, "The Council of Trent (1545–63) and Michelangelo's Last Judgment' (1541)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 156, No. 4 (2012): 388–397.

[311] Giovanni Andre Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie*, (Camerino: Antonio Gioioso, 1564), 38.

historical coherence and dissemination of content. As Caputo comments, "ci sono, insomma, da un lato le ragioni dell'arte e, dall'altro, quelle della fede tridentina."[312] Caravaggio capsuled this uneasy balance between fierce devotion in rendering, and a pseudo-defiance of decorum. In famous letter to Monsignor Paolo Gualdo of 2 August 1603, Cardinal Ottavio Paravincino described Caravaggio's imagery as "mezzo tra il devoto, et profano", halfway between the sacred and profane.[313]

An Observant Oratorian of a much sterner kind, Paravincino had close affiliation with Cesare Baronio, and through him, Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini, who ascended the papal throne in 30 January 1592 as Clement VIII. Himself influenced by the appeals for asceticism pouring through the Vatican in the wake of Trent, Clement supervised an administrative and moral regime which sought to regulate and discipline Roman decorum.[314] Clement, we have established, was every bit the Tridentine character, not someone who wished to pull the papacy in looser, more liberal directions, such as we later come to identify with the Barberini-pope Urban VIII, but hell-bent on "backward" politics.[315] Launching prohibitions on everything from sex trade to nude swimming, Clement particularly confronted sketchy theology and dangerous literature, articulating new guidelines for the *Index librorum prohibitorum* – the Index of Forbidden Books.[316] He was keen on public executions, especially those hesitant to confess their heresies in front of the Inquisition. The papacy of Clement VIII is the one which perhaps more than any other Post-Tridentine pontificates expresses the social, religious and cultural tensions of Church wrestling with the divergent and colliding aspirations of an era torn between secular affirmation of the Self and the search for salvation. These "un-aligned cultural ferments", as Bologna calls them, "*i fermenti culturali non allineati*", of 1590's Rome, produced such a climate of inconsistencies.[317]

As mentioned, Michelangelo in general, and *The Last Judgment* in particular, became the bulls-eye of a steadily, dialogical deconstruction of the latter's lack of religious and scriptural allegiance. Gilio's characters emblematize this late work as the epitome of artistic transgression. An image that fails its doctrinal mandate. It is not coincidental that Gilio puts

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[312] Vincenzo Caputo, "Gli 'abusi' dei pittori e la 'norma' dei Trattatisti: Giovanni Andrea Gilio e Gabriele Paleotti". Studi Rinascimentali, vol. 6 (2008), 102. "There are, then, one the one hand, the reasons of art, and, on the other, those of the Tridentine faith". My trans.

[313] Beverley Louise Brown, "Between the Sacred and Profane," 276.

[314] Ferdinando Bologna, *L'Incredulità del Caravaggio e l'esperienza delle "cose naturali"*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992), 15.

[315] On Clement's censorial practices, see Diego Beggiao, *La visita pastorale di Clemente VIII (1592-1600). Aspetti di riforma post-tridentina a Roma*, (Rome: Libreria Ed. della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1978).

[316] John Varriano, "Caravaggio and Religion," 192.

[317] Ferdinando Bologna, *L'Incredulità del Caravaggio e l'esperienza delle "cose naturali"*, 15.

most of the demolitionary rhetoric of his dialogue in the mouth of Ruggiero, a doctor of canon law. Capable of approaching the fresco with a purely scriptural and ecclesiastical eye, Ruggiero's is an eye which only sees in terms of more or less biblical adhesion. Michelangelo's late religious masterpiece ends up as nothing more than "un'ostentazione ipertrofica di bravura artistica," a hypertrophic affectation of artistic skill, for Gilio's characters.[318] A work which sees the triumph of the aesthetic at the expense of biblical truth.

Nudity did not only concern Paleotti and Gilio, but another of the great Tridentine *trattatisti*, this time the Netherlandish theologian Johannes Molanus, connected to the University of Leuven. His *De picturis et Imaginibus Sacris* of 1570 dedicates a whole chapter to the issue.[319] Molanus' appeals for decency appear less as a series of personal invectives than a set of consistent conservative references. A man of utmost loyalty to the temple of tradition, he shields his arguments behind the authority of Aristotle, the Church Fathers and even such a unlikely candidate as Erasmus.[320]

While he wasn't the first of the post-Tridentine writers to discuss nudity in a Catholic visual context – Gilio's *Diaologo* appears six years before Molanus' but address the issue only in terms of Michelangelo, not once commenting upon Tridentine decrees – Molanus was the first to systematize a general investigation of the problem.[321] Molanus belongs to the more rigorous faction of image theorists, advocating strict parameters for profane as well as sacred imagery. In addition, he felt, images needed sharper supervision and censure than for instance literature, due their far more spellbinding and powerful presence. An argument he borrows, rather surprisingly perhaps due to the anti-classical atmosphere in the Vatican, from Horace.[322] Still, what infuse the book throughout is a staunch belief in the edifying force of visual representations. Precisely because images served *ad instructionem eruditum*, as instructional tools, their capability to arouse demanded regulation, making sure that the soul, not the body, was the object of excitement.

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[318] Vincenzo Caputo, "Gli 'abusi' dei pittori e la 'norma' dei Trattatisti: Giovanni Andrea Gilio e Gabriele Paleotti", 103.

[319] Ibid. *Beverley Louise Brown*, 277.

[320] Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images From Calvin to Baronius*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 116.

[321] David Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum, Book II, Chapter 42", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 34 (1971): 229.

[322] David Freedberg, "Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum, Book II, Chapter 42", 233.

Artistic judgment was paramount, then, and equalled the symmetry between image and doctrine. Images were not meant to satiate the aesthetic appetites of the *cognoscenti*, but rather to kindle and reinforce the faith of every observer, be it cardinal or beggar.[323] Counter-Reformation rules regulated and democratized the space of religious pictorial production. Firm restrictions were put in place in order to root out undesirable iconography. Exemption of nudity was one of these dictums, and creates a fundamental disparity between High Renaissance celebration of bodily beauty and proportion, and Counter-Reformation austerity, which paradoxically, as mentioned, moved from calls for complete decorum to total transparency in representation. Nevertheless, The Council of Trent never formalized any moral prudery as part of their cultural policy. The main issue was simply how the arts should be manipulated to fortify popular belief.[324]

Gilio's treatise becomes an example of the regulatory and normative discourse which manages to create a grid in which "la libertà artistica può essere imbrigliata in un reticolo di specificazioni e precisazioni teologiche".[325] This framework, or mould, initially monitors and administers, then subordinates, the rules of imagination – "le ragioni della fantasia" – to those of the post-Tridentine faith – "quelle della 'fede' post-tridentina".

5.4 Gabriele Paleotti: Nature and Reform

Where Gilio's dialogical form provides the treatise with a literary structure and form, Paleotti's *Discorso* is far more authoritarian in style and address. Direct and pontificating, the speech of the Bolognese bishop models itself on the sermon, and its monological form. Script and scripture as normative is an idea the runs throughout the two books Paleotti was able to finish, and his account of Tridentine decrees on imagery functions mainly as a formulaic narrative of painting – the go-to book for serious artists.[326] What makes the *Discorso* indispensable in any study of early modern public visuality is the way it connects the

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[323] Charles Dempsey et al., *Captured emotions: Baroque painting in Bologna, 1575-1725*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 3.

[324] Kevin V. Mulcahy, "The cultural policy of the Counter-Reformation: the case of St. Peter's", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 133.

[325] Ibid. Caputo, 107. "artistic freedom can be harnessed in a pattern of theological specifications and clarifications." My trans.

[326] Ibid. Caputo, 107f.

relationship between art history and religious, cultural and political history, between the images themselves and the use of them.[327]

Just like in Gilio, Paleotti's language is built around a moralizing and shepherding vocabulary, more often than not targeting a negative pedagogy: The *Discorso* frequently describes what you *should not* do, rather than the opposite. Thus, the books are saturated by words like "temerarie" (daring); "scandalose" (scandalous); "erronee" (erroneous); "sospette" (suspect); "eretiche" (heretical); "superstiziose" (superstitious) e "apocrife" (apocryphal).[328]

The two main issues or "abuses" – he uses the same word as Gilio – Paleotti identifies, are, on the one hand, a lack of discipline and experience in religious painters, cut short, ignorance. On the other, an absence of ecclesiastical insight and training among contemporary painters. Instilling the spectator with devotion, belief and truth, as the main ends of painting, doctrinal expertise becomes the *sine qua non* for Paleotti's ideal painter. Theology, and not technique, manifests the core competence of the Tridentine artist.[329]

What ended up a fundamental objection to the early sixteenth-century visual culture, partly enacted by the pro-Catholic agencies of Gilio and Paleotti, was the realization that the "theological-humanist synthesis," as Prodi calls it, could no longer be sustained. Prodi's narrative of dislocation is pointed and illuminating, yet ends up unloosening the mesh of art historical and religio-social fabric which he assumed to begin with, describing a world of confusion and collisions in which "artists will pursue different paths…in search of spiritual experience amid the tumultuous clash of opposing fronts."[330] A chief insight was, quite on the contrary, that this branching out of pictorial possibilities more or less only takes place within a clerical context, that is, the institutional boundaries provided by the Counter-Reformation Church. This does not mean that individual agenda didn't exist; There is perhaps no more poignant example than the Inquisition's trial of Paolo Veronese, whom they accused of taking artistic liberties with matters whose decorum of depiction were entirely outside pictorial jurisdiction.[331]

It is a mistake, however, to associate Paleotti solely as a Counter-Reformation character through and through; I have attempted to depict an image of a period with persistent and

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[327] Paolo Prodi, "Introduction", in Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, [1582] trans. William McCuaig, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 1.
[328] These descriptions occur frequently in chapters III to IX of the *Discorso*.
[329] Ibid. Caputo, 108.
[330] Paolo Prodi, "Introduction", 3.
[331] See Edward Grasman, "On Closer Inspection – the Interrogation of Paolo Veronese", *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 70 (2009): 125–134. A full transcript of the trail is available in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner (eds.), *Italian Art 1500–1600: Sources and Documents*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 129–131.

enduring ambiguities, and Paleotti himself reflects the same Janus-like qualities of late sixteenth-century discourse. His upbringing and intellectual formation took place very much within the sphere of the humanist environment of Bologna. His social habitat was more literary than ecclesiastical, close acquaintances being Baldassare Castiglione and other Roman *litterati*. In the same vein, his early occupation was among other things teaching civil law at the Università di Bologna.[332] Through his mastering of juridical language and procedure, Paleotti swiftly advanced in the Vatican hierarchy, becoming counsellor to the papal legates in 1562, the Council of Trent then at the point of concluding its work. The cardinalate was bestowed upon him in March 1565, and only a year later, the archbishopric of Bologna.[333]

Paleotti's treatise is different from the other Counter-Reformation treatises in that its author took a far more hands-on approach to the artistic scene of his day. The extensive time it took him to write it warrants no more explanation than a simple browsing through the pages of the *Discorso*; from beginning to end, Paleotti's work is a tight packed masterclass of erudition, quoting everything from theoreticians, to Church Fathers, and lawyers, not to mention Paleotti's own method of personally consulting painters, architects, intellectuals, and antiquarians, in order to best get an idea of the field he was delineating.

Paleotti's naturalism partly grew out of the Tridentine theological language of scriptural realism, but also got strong impetus from the bishop's adolescent friendship with the botanist and naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), who shared with Paleotti a fascination for plants, flora and fauna.[334] Aldrovandi, who talked Paleotti into creating the first botanical garden in Bologna, provided him with compelling and practical arguments in favour of images, as vehicles for learning, understanding, and emotional effect. Paleotti's extensive social connections gave Aldrovandi access to Medici circle in Florence, where he gathered material for his major undertaking, the *Theatrum biblicum natural* – Biblical theatre of nature. Again we witness how the biblical and the natural are conjoined in contemporary thought and discourse, creating a platform upon which the two provide each other with definition and structure; I repeat, without this framework we cannot fully come to terms with the dialectic between religion and nature, idealism and naturalism, presence and absence in early modern visual culture.

The nexus of the *Discorso* is simple, as Prodi outlines: "Its aesthetic is that of the imitation of nature, and the overriding concerns are devotional and educational: art must

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[332] Ibid. Prodi, 13.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid. 15.

'delight, teach and move'." *Dilettare, insegnare et muovere*. At its core, and the most original aspect of Paleotti's treatise, is the notion that art becomes the "true translation" of the two manifestations of God in the world: nature and scripture.[335] The image is what mediates the two, completes and synthesizes their difference of language. *Muovere* is a word which specifically connects Paleotti with Ignatian spirituality and the *Exercitia*, practices which the former subscribed to from his early clerical days and that runs through the visual ideology of the *Discorso*; an approach to sacred representation where the senses structure and receive the sacred and supernatural. As a general rule, Paleotti always privileges the senses over the intellect, as the former's immediate engagement with sights and imagery prevents them from sieving impressions, and rather consume them directly.[336] Paleotti – as was the traditional topos of Catholic image theory – expounded the virtues of the eye at the expense of the ear, the visual at the expense of the verbal. Corresponding to the rhetorical and emotional universality of images, reflected in *dilettare*, *insegnare*, and *muovere*, was the three levels of hierarchical cognition through which, Paleotti argued, we experience Christian truth: *sensuale*, *razionale* and *sopranaturale*. Guided by our faith in sensory, naturalist stimuli, reflections of God's grace in the world, we achieve what Paleotti calls spiritual cognition, *cognizione spirituale*.[337]

There remains staunch debate on the existence of a "Tridentine style," and whether or not this is to be associated with the Bologna school of painters, or the naturalism of Caravaggio. Paleotti's Bolognese background puts him immediately into the orbit of the Carracci and other artists working in the city. Among the early proponents of this reading of the Italian sixteenth-century were Eugenio Battisti, Cesare Gnudi and Francesco Arcangeli. The latter wrote an enormously influential introduction to the catalogue of the first major exhibition dedicated to the Carracci painters, Agostino, Annibale and Ludovico.[338]

Several elements in this was repeated by Arcangeli in one of his last texts, where he describes what I call an "iconic strategy" in the work of Caravaggio; In the religious imagery of late sixteenth-century, stressed Arcangeli, "Lo spazio non doveva esser più lontano, sublimato dall'arte in una univoca distanza, come era nei capolavori de Rinascimento; anzi

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[335] Ibid. 23.
[336] Ibid. Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 201.
[337] Pamela M. Jones, "Art Theory as Ideology: Gabriele Paleotti's Hierarchical Notion of Painting's Universality and Reception," in Clare Farago (ed.), *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 128ff.
[338] See Francesco Arcangeli, "Sugli inizi dei Carracci," *Paragone*, vol. 7, no. 79 (1956): 17– 48.

vicino, aperto allo spettatore, quasi a fargli sentire la verità di quegli eventi, che non erano stati solo miracolosi, ma reali."[339] Physical and pictorial should merge into one.

As already noted, naturalism becomes essential for Paleotti, as art's semblance to the real, sensuous world becomes evidence for the reality of Christendom as such. The Bolognese writes how "the purpose of painting…is to make the subject depicted resemble reality, which according to some is the very soul of painting."[340] This naturalism constitutes in itself no risk to Christian truth as long as it is practiced within the parameters of Catholic dogma. From that point, the image "can effectively avail itself of the likeness of the figure represented with the world of inferior realities both as a condition and a means of accessing higher realities."[341] Likeness therefore becomes, for Paleotti, "an instrumental mediation," as Estivill explains. Paleotti further stresses how "our weak human condition does not allow us to access the contemplation of sublime realities without relying on inferior realities." Caravaggio provides Catholicism with this "inferior reality", I argue, precisely as a vehicle for conveying the divine in a baser world. Of facilitating a hermeneutic of sacred imagery where the miraculous appropriates the visual logic of the physical, natural world. Nature and Faith equalized.

The religious crisis of the late sixteenth-century came to directly affect visual and artistic culture, as the image takes on a role as a sensible and enfleshed form of dogma. Because of this intensification of function bestowed on sacred imagery, it becomes "[una]...manifestazione sensibile della verità di fede," a tangible manifestation of the truth of faith.[342] A sensory mediation between Man and God, Church and Image. Beyond the question of truth or false, comes the question of useful versus harmful, the issue of which Paleotti is quick to establish, and in this simultaneously directs attention away from the more flammable controversy of icon versus picture, *Darstellung* versus *Vorstellung*. Furthermore, the intellectual challenges of producing a theory of the image led the Counter-Reformation *trattatisti*, Gilio, Comanini, Paleotti, L'Ammanati and Borromeo, to rather aim for a sacred *politics* of the image, by and large what characterized post-Tridentine thought.

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[339] Arcangeli, "Introduzione", in idem (ed.), *Natura ed espressione nell'arte bolognese-emililiana*, exhibition catalogue. (Bologna: Minerva, 2003 [1970]). "Space must no longer be distant, sublimated by art into a univocal distance, as it was in the masterpieces of the Renaissance; it must be near, open to the spectator, almost making him feel the truth of those events, which had not just been miraculous but also real." My trans.

[340] From Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre et profane* (1582), Libro I, cap. XIX, ed. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vaticano 2002, 66. Quoted in Daniel Estivill, "Iconography and Iconology in Caravaggio. A Catholic Key to Understanding the Works," in Maj-Britt Anderson (ed.), *New Caravaggio – Papers presented at the International Conferences in Uppsala and Rome 2013*, (Uppsala: Newman Institute/Edizioni Polistampa, 2015): 100.

[341] Paleotti, Libro I, cap. VII, 35. Quoted Estivill, 101.

[342] Giulio Carlo Argan, *Immagine e persuasion*e. *Saggi sul barocco*, 39.

5.5 Spectatorship, Naturalism and the Iconic Return: Bridging the Distance

What in the end concerned Gilio and Paleotti was the potency and efficacy of the sacred image. The former's *Dialogo* and the latter's *Discorso* are in this regard essentially apologetics. Imperatively, notions of potency and efficacy doe not so much reflect an interest in the image itself, as it mirrors a serious concern for the spectator and spectatorship.[343]

Gilio's *Diaolog degli errori* is fundamentally structured around two main agencies: displacing the fashionable mannerisms of Michelangelo's late style with a new, devotional naturalism suited to move the majority of illiterate and uneducated Catholics, and for painting to hark back to medieval pictorial precedents – the visual world of the icons.[344] Caravaggio, I will argue, entwine Gilio's plea for a new naturalism in Christian art, with a formal approach to the image-site structured around iconic principles: flat background; reversed perspective; reductionist centralized iconography; and basis in foreground planes.

"Nature", "natural" and "naturalism" became ambiguous concepts in Early Modern language. Counter-Reformation rhetoric rehabilitated, so to speak, the notions of nature and naturalism in a Christian artistic context: Having served as an instrumental term in Vasari's vocabulary, the "nature" of which Gilio and Paleotti spoke was something else entirely.[345] Denoting the artist's capacity to transcend the limits of nature by means of *invenzione* and *ingegno*, Vasari's understands nature as something to be conquered, i.e. improved on by idealization. Gilio conversely berate Mannerism for going beyond the empirical. Caravaggio refrained from this precise transgression: To improve upon nature implies a challenge to God, equating artistic creation with that of God's. This concept of nature clashed with that of the Post-Tridentine *trattatisti*.[346] Caravaggio's naturalism conforms, I claim, entirely to the latter.

Paleotti expounded the need for a vivid, graphic naturalism in order to coerce and sway the recipients of the sacred image. Naturalism, then, is what disrupts the distance between truth and artifact, even to the point of deconstructing the notion of "art" itself: the potency and efficacy of sacred painting is commensurable with its degree of naturalism.[347]

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[343] I will address the poignant issue of vision and visuality in the following chapter.
[344] Ibid. Muraoka, 97.
[345] Ibid. 98.
[346] Ibid. 99.
[347] Ibid. Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 201.

Gilio on his part ends up appealing to an archaic mode of painting, "a pre-*maniera* style that exhibited the simplicity, truthfulness, and piety of the past."[348] Advocating an "iconic turn" in the development of sacred painting, Gilio, understanding the need to accommodate a distant visual syntax with Renaissance-Albertian forms, advanced the concept of *regolata mescolanza*, measured mixture, which referred to the equilibrium of modern representational (Albertian) structure, and early Christian devotion.[349] Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* compounds these two traditions into one – the formal language of Renaissance figural art, with the frontality, essentialism, and immediacy of the icon. The quality of frontality, which Gilio termed *prosopopea* [Gr. *Prosopopeia*], was what gave the iconic its presence and immediate address.[350] In iconic art, *prosopopea* was the mediational instrument between image and spectator – revealing Christian truth to the Christian viewer.

Christian spectatorship was the normative concern of the Post-Tridentine writers, and Paleotti in particular. Significantly, one must avoid the misapprehension that a so-called "elite" spectator – well-educated, economically endowed etc. – automatically reads the image as "art", or discriminates a painting on its aesthetic merits alone, while the "common" viewer automatically focus on the devout, religious content. Treatise writers like Gabriele Paleotti, had no time or interest in aesthetics or style as such. Rich, educated clerics of his social position took images, their religious, cognitive and moral content, extremely seriously. [351]

True, sacred spectatorship rested for Paleotti on the concept of universal comprehensibility. Pictorial efficacy, facilitating an emotional connection between the image and the viewer, depended upon visual legibility. "If painting was a universal language, then truth to nature – the reflection of the everyday world and everyday experience – was its syntax."[352] Caravaggio's religious agency, in this regard, coupled with a searing sense of Christian truth, is made manifest as artistic, almost to say positivist, fact. The factual basis of this kind of faith is *il quotidiano* – the everyday life – the "mirror of the materiality of being": "La religiosità del Caravaggio si manifesta come puro fatto artistico, scisso, per lo più dal quotidiano, specchio della materialità dell'essere."[353]

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[348] Ibid. 103.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.
[351] Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni*, 116.
[352] Ibid., Muraoka, 117.
[353] Maurizio Marini, "Gli esordi del Caravaggio e il concetto di "natura" nei primi decenni del Seicento a Roma," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1981): 44. "Caravaggio's religiosity manifests itself as pure artistic fact, divided by everyday experience, a mirror of the materiality of being." My trans.

Caravaggio engages with Paleotti's criteria on several levels: Firstly, the naturalist conception, which also reflects the naturalizing rhetoric dominating Catholic discourse in Caravaggio's milieu.[354] Secondly, his application of iconic visual strategies – closed backdrop, reversed perspective and space structured around the frontal plane – relieving the constant concern for visual symmetry between the early and contemporary Church. Finally, the pedagogical centering of iconography, addressing the matter of comprehensibility, whose goal was to bridge the distance between icon and onlooker, what Paleotti named *lontananza*: a collapsing of the physical and psychological border between past and present.[355]

I claim that these concepts may help us construct a new vocabulary with which to engage, and make meaning of, Caravaggio's imagery. His *Crucifixion*, as a case in study, reconstructs the intimacy of the icon's relationship with its viewer through a visual pairing of religious "truth" and a naturalist framework.[356] Thus, he also bridges the conceptual corollaries of Gilio and Paleotti, positioning his painting within the logic of the former's *regolata mescolanza* and the latter's *lontananza*. I believe the iconic formula of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* resides within this theoretical scheme.

Caravaggio's figures possessed a physicality conforming to Gilio's concept of *prosopopea*, a direct ontological challenge to the spectator, which both overwhelmed and threatened. For Giovan Bellori, one of Caravaggio's chief biographers, his imagery exposes an unsettling presence, a "*furia cieca*", and a "*l'impeto oscuro e repentino*", a blind fury, a dark and sudden impetus. What these qualities amount to was a relief-like cohesiveness, a "*concisione terribile*" – a terrible conciseness. Bellori's critique of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* rested on the latter being conceived as "*historia affatto senza atione*", that is, all historical rendering and no agency. Argan claims, in fact, that this criticism suggests the opposite.[357] That is, action without history. The iconic, then, negates the historical: It deals with the image as *event*, as *spiel* in Gadamer's sense, as *Darstellung*. "*Come potremo sostenerne la violenza, il peso, l'offesa*?" ask Argan with reference to this aspect of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion*, "how can we sustain the violence, the weight, the offense?"[358] As an iconic image, the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* discriminate and negotiate the terms of our own spectatorship.

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[354] Ibid. Muraoka, 120
[355] Ibid. 117.
[356] Ibid. 118.
[357] Ibid. Argan, 152. "Il loro essere, come dirà della 'Crocefissione di San Pietro', "historia affatto senza atione" (ciò che, in termini moderni, significa esattamente il contrario: azione senza storia, mero accadere) "Their way of being [the figures] as he [Bellori] remarked on the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, "historia affatto senza atione", (what in modern terms signifies the exact opposite: action without history, simply happen.)." [My trans.]
[358] Ibid.

6   Painting and Particulars: Caravaggio and the Materiality of Devotion

6.1 Change and Materiality in the Late-Sixteenth Century

I have described Caravaggio's world and Early Modern Culture as caught between colliding notions of history, past and present, the meaning of matter itself. Paralleling the dogmatic devotion to religious representation to which Caravaggio's most explicitly post-Tridentine painting adheres, are other art historical traditions, underpinned by a, if not diametrically, at least widely divergent, intellectual and spiritual apparatus. One such may be Nicolas Poussin, to whose classicizing rationalism the emotional immediacy of Caravaggio is constantly compared [*Fig*. 32].[359] Todd Olson associates Poussin with sixteenth-century French humanism, and the process of secularization fomenting in the early modern state. His thematic and intellectual reservoir was one in which Moses "was an orator" and the "Eucharist was an orderly ritual rooted in antique precedents, not the consumption of blood and flesh under siege by the Reformation's metaphoric turn."[360] Poussin was all archaeology, Caravaggio all revelation. While one can be tempted to address Poussin as the suppressor of particulars, and Caravaggio the poet of pictorial particularism, I hold that it is precisely through the particular that the general, and by extension, the eternal, can be given fathomable form. This is also necessary for what I will call an "iconic logic".

Such a reverence for the holiness of material manifestation was exemplified through the testimony of the English Jesuit Gregory Martin. In 1579, Martin turned to "the filthy and deformed begging chattel, his 'pitiful relikes'…as an object of devotion." Precisely their immediacy, their "hereness" witnessed holy presence. For Martin, "redemption was found in particulars such as the rags and sores of beggars."[361]

The visual world of Early Modern Italy was one in which "the precision of the descriptive sign leaned towards the connotative and symbolic, while still, as Olson remarks, not quite yet able to shed off the "immediate signifier". As such, I believe, the specifically post-Tridentine contribution is one particularly emphasizing holy presence, privileging

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[359] See for instance Donald Posner, "A Poussin-Caravaggio Connection," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschicte*, vol. 28, no. ½ (1965): 130–133.
[360] Todd P. Olson, *Caravaggio's Pitiful Relics*, 3.
[361] Ibid. 6.

presence, i.e. the iconic, at the expense of the Albertian *istoria*'s fixed distance between representation and represented, form and content, sign and signified. "The True Cross was a symbol but it was also a contact relic, harbouring the physical presence of the holy."[362] In context of its Counter-Reformation understanding, I perceive the truism of the "True Cross"[363], to be one where the symbolic is insufficient; what characterize the "true" for the post-Tridentine Church, discussed in the previous chapter, was something deeply physical, material and present. For the "True" to be "True" in its Christian, ontological sense, the *symbol*, understood semantically and substitutionally, is what needs to be possessed, what demands transcendence. When symbol dislocates its sense of substitution and sign, and reclaims its rigour of ritual, of event, as *Darstellung* – an "iconic logic" – it can both inhabit and protrude its material limits. It regains its pre-nominalist significance, that is, its convergence with the signified. Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* contests its own materiality precisely by asserting its rootedness in the material. Salvation or Revelation gain visual and thereby actual credibility in Caravaggio's image logic through a naturalistic approach.[364]

"Caravaggio lived on the cusp of an era where material signifier and signified collapsed," claims Olson. Caravaggio's art, in the sense of forming part of his material culture, becomes one torn between its status as "pitiful relic" and "*praesentia*".[365] His tableaux of sacrifice and martyrdom enacts the encounter between the sacred and "base materiality."[366] That is also precisely why I consider Caravaggio's contribution to be one conforming tangibly to the tenets of post-Tridentine appeal. Where else but in the realm of the tangible and material can the power of spiritual presence be grasped? Necessarily as the binary opposition to the secular and profane can the sacred be defined *as* sacred. Only through such an absolute distinction can a meaningful discrepancy be maintained. Notwithstanding Olson's remark that "Caravaggio transposed the pictorial strategies of his lower genre pictures to the arena of monumental Roman ecclesiastical painting," every bit as much, I believe, and with greater historical consequence than that of Olson's description, Caravaggio transposed the pictorial strategies of Greco-Byzantine iconic imagery onto, and merging it with, the

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[362] Todd P. Olson, *Caravaggio's Pitiful Relics*, 9.

[363] For a thorough account of the relation between the cult of saints and their relics in Christianity, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University f Chicago Press, 1980).

[364] Richard C. Trexler, "Being and Non-being. Parameters of the Miraculous in the Traditional Religious Image," in Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf (eds.), *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Accademia di Danimarca/Bibliotheca Hertziana (*Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte*), 2004): 15ff.

[365] For the concept of *praesentia* pertaining to relics, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 88.

[366] Ibid. Olson, 11.

material-corporeal innovations of Renaissance painting.[367] In other words, as a *regolata mescolanza.*

Caravaggio's invocation of martyrdom "was a response to the contemporaneous cult of the martyrs, the threat of iconoclasm, the collapse of borders between martyr pictures and contemporary persecution, the invigoration of relics, and the investigation of the material traces of early Christendom in the catacombs."[368] Though great disagreement prevails as to whether Caravaggio's religious work could be regarded as responding to the intellectual tensions of Post-Tridentine tenets, I am inclined to agree.[369] Deducing from the countlessly corresponding and contiguous events of the period 1545-1610, that the visual – not least understood as vehicle for the dissemination and manifestation of Christian truth – was confronted by similar concerns, seems to me the obvious conclusion. Albeit, these connections are by no means causally straightforward or otherwise given.

The revising of the Roman breviary in 1568 was one of these key implementations of the Tridentine reform. Chief among the revisions was the freeing up of calendar space in order to find time for reciting the offices of the multitude of existing and ever-increasing number of saints. The study of beatification and canonization of contemporary saints were paralleled by the already mentioned intense veneration of early Christian personages. Reforming the breviary, which had a huge bearing upon the cult of saints in the liturgy, was a strategy that sought "to strip the [papal] office back to its antique [simplicity]", *ridur l'officio all'antico*.[370] Pius V, the first post-Tridentine pope, echoed a similar sentiment, seeking to reclaim *pristina patrum norma*, "the original standard of the [Church] Fathers."

A new minute kind of historical scholarship came of age around the study of the life, devotion and relics of individual saints. In this novel interest in the biography and physical and material remains of a specific saint, "Rome went a long way towards reconciling the particular with the universal."[371]

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[367] Ibid. Muraoka, 4 –18.

[368] Todd P. Olson, *Caravaggio's Pitiful Relics*, 12.

[369] Pericolo, while admitting definite affinities with post-Tridentine Catholicism in Caravaggio's religious painting, is one of the main detractors of a Counter-Reformation reading. See Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, esp. 199–209.

[370] Simon Ditchfield, "Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints," in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 6: *Reform and Expansion 1500–1660*, 201.

[371] Simon Ditchfield, "Reading Rome as a Sacred Landscape, c. 1586–1635," in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds.), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 173.

6.2 Image and Relic: The Dialectics of Sacred Remains

Even though Iconoclast controversies had specifically targeted the icon, the discussions of Western Christianity fomented radically with the voluminous growth of relics, and the power of religious materialism these signified. The scarcity of biblical sites in Western Europe, as opposed to those of the East, found a counteragent in the relic, whose dispersive nature helped creating what Belting calls a "cult geography" of shrines and centers.[372]

Image and relic can be hermeneutically linked in Caroline Walker Bynum's concept of "holy matter"; the level of devotional ferocity exhibited toward this category of visual culture displays an "intense awareness of the power of the material" which Counter-Reformation and Tridentine Catholicism extracted from late-medieval piety.[373] In this final part of my argument, I will seek to construct a hermeneutic which seeks to convey how our modern language of differentiations and distinctions fails to encompass the intermeshed and conflated discourse of early modern material culture. Caravaggio's image plays upon, and reflect, I believe, a collapse in the categories of image and relic. Two, in principle, different concepts which end up structuring and informing each other's significance.

The development from a more physical and punitive piety of the earlier Middle Ages, toward a Late-medieval devotion centered around visuality and internalized faith, took hold in the later thirteenth century[374]. Whereas the pilgrim tended to visit holy graves in order to make petition, it now became increasingly customary to seek out cult sites to offer thanks for visions received and miracles performed. Liturgically, the *viewing* of the Eucharist – simply being present to witness it – came to replace the physical consumption of bread and wine.[375]

From the early medieval period, images had gradually begun to replace relics as sites of healing power. Already, as we can see, the interchangeable functionalities of image and relic, not least, how their respective natures were understood to overlap, were, rudimentary at least, in place centuries before the Council of Trent. Given the prevailing tensions between spirit

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[372] Belting, 298.

[373] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality – An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 18.

[374] Henry Lucas, "Survival of the Catholic Faith in the Sixteenth Century," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 29, no. 9 (1943): 29. Lorenzo Pericolo outlines the main arguments of scholarship regarding the issue of continuity vs discontinuity in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in Pericolo, "Epilogue: The Shifting Boundaries of the Middle Ages: From *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) to *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010)," in idem and Jessica Richardson (eds.), *Remembering the Middle Ages in Early Modern Italy*, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015): 271–321.

[375] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality – An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, 19.

and matter, body and soul, from the earliest period of the Christian religion, image and relic, as "materializations of piety", were necessarily charged objects.[376]

While "the rule of relics" designates a pre-literacy phase in Christian intellectual history, Bynum claims that it was actually during the advent of Renaissance developments that the greatest enthusiasm for animated holy matter – living images, bleeding statues, etc. – was mobilized.[377] What is of particular interest is that the occurrences and reports of animated images and living objects date from the period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, not as religious myths of medieval folklore. Images possessed power by the token of their physicality as such. In their materiality, they corresponded more directly to the relics they replaced than to the visions they intermittently depicted.

Relics and images, regardless of the conditions for their conflation, have retained an intimate ritualistic relationship throughout the history of Christian liturgy. In veneration and ritual, they frequently depended on each other.[378] Images took on relic-like form while also infused with the same measure of sacred materiality and tactility characteristic of relics. In medieval imagination, which set the tone for Counter-Reformatory thought and ideology, images and relics were never two distinct realities. The way in which the image "represented the reality of the presence of the holy in the work" echoed that of the relic. Aspects of similar nature, they explained and defined each other.[379]

To repeat: essential to my emphasis and argument is the conviction that "holy matter" did not automatically conform or adhere to given categories. Relic, contact relic, image, and so forth, possessed no designated shelf in the mental inventory of pre- and early modern culture, instead they were inclined to conflation.[380] A literal example of how image and relic integrated may be observed in the practice of inserting relics into the painted surface, or its frame. Consequently, to construct passive sentences regarding pictorial description becomes futile: talk of "iconography", or the formulation "image of" become instead "the thing itself". Images embedded with the relics of the saint represented *become* relics themselves. They assert their transcendence – their "more than ordinariness" – by virtue of asserting their materiality.

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[376] Bynum, 19.
[377] Bynum, 20.
[378] Belting, 301.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Bynum, 29.

Principally, the material remains of the saint is the saint "by origin and descent," whereas a picture of him or her is not. Nevertheless, the moment when the boundaries between the two begin to blur and dissolve, in ritual function and linguistic practice, this distinction evaporate.[381] While subjected to differentiation and categorization in modern scholarship, relics, images and ritual were approached in similar ways; prayed to, bowed to, surrounded by incense and flowers, even kissed, late medieval as well as early modern visual and material culture tended toward coalescence, not incongruity. My argument, however, is sooner historical than analytical in scope; I attempt to construe hermeneutical networks in which particulars objects and their interrelations produce meaning(s).

Bynum address how the iconic conclusion inevitably lies at the end of the practice of veneration. The business of blessing the sacraments, images and relics, betrays a belief in the power of objects themselves. Something *within* them: "People behaved as if the relics were the saints."[382] If we take Bynum's remark to be a truism, and as I have demonstrated, the Early Modern occidental practices drifted towards this iconic conception, our attention must be directed equally toward patterns of behaviour as that of the object itself. If people *behave* as if the image denotes its representation, if people believe that signifier and signified conjoins inside the pictorial space of religious art, then that is what remains the chief concern of historical hermeneutics.

The painted surface as a space of signification does more than simply refer to entities beyond itself. Because it discloses the sacred and divine in and through the material, it refers coequally to its own materiality. Caravaggio uses the material qualities of a naturalist vocabulary to conjoin matter and referentiality in one operation; the space "through which [painted surface] achieves [its] effect rather than merely using it [the surface] create the illusion of something else."[383] This "something else" is specifically what is rejected in the iconic; the iconic apprehension of the image deals not in difference but in identity. Psychologically and eschatologically charged objects, in other words, it becomes paramount how the sacred image presents and reveals a power and truth which take part in and yet goes beyond their own materiality, not simply signifying it. In disclosing its own sacrality, the image in the post-Tridentine conception conform to Gadamer's notion of *Darstellung*, pure and unmediated conveyance, that is, iconic, as opposed the concept of *Vorstellung*, where the logic of replacement and copy denies transcendental identification.

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[381] Bynum, 29.
[382] Bynum, 34.
[383] Bynum, 35.

Making manifest the paradox that it simultaneously refers to its own materiality and yet beyond it, the discourse and theology of the image encapsulate this difficult duality of the image's religious function. It's the image as paradox; Wood and Nagel attempts to overcome this duality, which got an almost absolute conceptual formula in the work of Hans Belting, by addressing how the two polar oppositions of "art" and "icon" are overcome in the artwork itself. Through dialectical exchanges of "performative" and "substitutional" functions, the binary of Belting is challenged by an alternative mode of art-making in the Renaissance.[384]

Materiality and sacred remains was not only an urgent and acute issue in Caravaggio's day, but a problematic with a long legacy in iconodule discourse. John of Damascus acknowledged the issue of materiality in the iconophile defence of image veneration, pointing out that "is not the wood of the cross most blessed and happy? Is the sacred and venerable mount, the place of Calvary, not material...? Are not the ink and paper of the Gospel material? Our not the body and blood of our Lord material?"[385]

Images and relics did not just conjoin in language use, but in practical application as well. In its materiality, the image absorbs the healing function of contact relics, transferring not just sacred powers, but also its likeness to the original. The image object is not limited to an imprint of bodily presence, but even animates and enfleshes it.[386] This synthesis and merger of object and image, body and matter intensifies dramatically in late-medieval devotion. The Counter-Reformation church, and through it Caravaggio's reformation of religious representation, becomes the first major cultural response to its developments.

6.3 Matter Matters: Vision and Veneration

The facts of early modern experience, to use a dangerously presumptuous word, I believe to be entrenched in the assumptions, conflicts, actions and convictions governing cultural and social patterns. Religion, then, as Margaret Miles stresses, can be described fundamentally as a "way of seeing", but extending beyond the domain of worn-out metaphors; "Seeing", understood in the potency of its literal meaning, is so deeply a regulative force of Christian experience, something that frames its core beliefs and practices. Emphasizing the idea of "Seeing" itself helps to connect the Christian to the tactile, material and sensible world, a

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[384] Christopher S. Wood and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 112f.
[385] John of Damascus, *Orationes pro sacris imaginibus*, Oratio 2, PG 94, cols. 1300B–D. Cited in Bynum, 46
[386] Bynum, 111.

place where nature and revelation becomes two sides of the same coin.[387] More easily put: the visual. Vision and image are in Christian tradition contingent; they confirm and legitimate each other's truths. Christianity, then, exceeds the limit of pure idea and entails "concrete participation in a body."[388] The structure of Catholic reality during the last part of sixteenth century exploits and invokes the visual as proofs of not just doctrinal, liturgical and theological supremacies, but as proofs of God. "Eyesight as insight".[389]

"Eyesight as Insight" aims primarily at a specifically Christian sense of truth, "the first step toward realization of the ultimate fulfilment of human being as symbolized by the idea of the vision of God." Seeing *is* believing. At the same time, synchronous with the ambiguous and parallel developments of early modern Europe, is the notion that nature reveals a truth to be inherently its own, that knowledge may be derived from the assembled data of minute empirical observation. The beginnings of so-called Baconian Science, and by extension the Scientific Revolution.[390] As becomes evident throughout the topics I address, Christianity is fraught with such contradictions, binaries, oppositions, and ambiguities. For a religion generally considered to be hostile to the body and material existence, Christianity is veritably obsessed with the affairs of the flesh, most pronouncedly in the body of Christ, and the eschatological narrative regarding the resurrection of the body. Matter matters.

As the visual took on increasing significance during the Renaissance, not least in liturgical context, the visibility of the relic now became crucial.[391] Previously, relics were usually contained in rectangular boxes, unavailable or invisible to anyone venerating or praying to the object. From the late-medieval period, and ever more forcefully observed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, iconic reliquaries displaced the older contraption. These transparent containers made visible the saintly relics, to the point in which the faithful could identify what body part they prayed to.[392] We can in the same way observe another correlation between the changing attitudes to Sacramentals, relics and images: as mentioned, it became permissible in liturgy to partake in Mass without physically consuming the host and the wine – simply to see them, being in the same spiritual and temporal space as them, sufficed.[393]

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[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid. 36.
[389] Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 31.
[390] See Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and John Henry, *The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).
[391] Ibid. Belting, 303. Also Bynum, 131.
[392] Ibid. Belting, 303.
[393] Lee Palmer Wandel, "Envisioning God: Image and Liturgy in Reformation Zurich," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1993): 32.

Likewise, having the ability to perceive the remains of the saints amounted to taking part in the ritual. Seeing is believing.

The intensified interest in optics, vision and visuality in the transition from pre- to early modern period corresponds to a transition in the understanding of the image from "cult" to "art". A key aspect, however, is the equally intensified relationship to materiality, especially how materiality pertains to visuality. What facilitated the shift was partly the way in which early modern imagery retained some of its medieval garb, particularly its sense of the material.[394]

The widespread tendency of indiscriminately designating visual production from the Ancient Egypt to the postmodern and contemporary as "art", is a hermeneutical problem which only fairly recently have been properly addressed.[395] This issue pertains particularly with respect to the term "religious art": a category that in its very definition is faced with, if not directly binary, at least an ontological and epistemological tension. "There [religious art] devotional objects were not just decorative embellishments of church and chapel or devices to direct attention to the invisible." What mattered was that "People behaved as if the images *were* what they represented."[396] [orig. emph]. To materialize, then, is to animate.

6.4 To Materialize is to Animate: Naturalism as Hermeneutical Strategy

The logic that underlies my juxtaposition of naturalism and the iconic is the apprehension that "the more physical such devotional objects became, the more they were thought to come alive."[397] In these objects, "likeness and presence merged." These parameters partly explain why for instance alleged pieces of the True Cross, highly revered relics, converged with the visual representations of them in early modern minds. You did not kiss the image of Christ, Mary, and St. Peter because an image "looked like" them – you kissed it because they resided in their own image, possessed it.

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[394] Belting, 121.
[395] See for instance David Clowney, "Definitions of Art and Fine Art's Historical Origins," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2011): 309–320. Also Belting; Larry Shiner, *The Invention of art. A Cultural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[396] Bynum, 125.
[397] Bynum, 125.

The dichotomy of icon and picture, or image and sign, dealt with deep-seated complexities of visibility and truth. "In an image," Belting writes, "a person is made visible. It is a different matter with a sign."[398] The sign aid the appearance, but nothing more. The image implies "both appearance and presence". The process of differentiation, however, had little moment in late-medieval and even early modern intellectual history. Still, even though, by our modern differentiated standards, the situation of word and world, language and object, were conflated and intertwined, questions of right and wrong, true or false concerned early modern minds immensely.[399]

Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* negotiated, as I have explained, the relationship between the icon and the narrative image. There was therefore a need to negotiate the boundaries of Sacrality and empiricism; "The more persuasively religious images mimicked empirical experience," points Jeffrey Hamburger out, "the more insistently they had to assert their authenticity, that what they showed could simultaneously lay claim to a higher reality."[400] In other words, naturalism and sacred imagery involved a dilemma and a dialectic, the solution to which in Caravaggio, I argue, ends up as the totality of foreground plane and background dissolution.

The binary forces of light and shade, which confront each other as absolutes in Caravaggio rather than in gradations and subtleties, ends up evaporating many of the transitional coloristic variations. Colour in Caravaggio, then, frequently engage hermeneutically with its own religious morphology, that is, it takes on not just symbolic significance, but act out its own part in the meaning-making process. Caravaggio's *tenebrismo*, his dark cellular light modulated by *chiaroscuro* effects, serve two main functions in the religious work: to enhance and highlight the heart of the drama, in addition to accentuate the pictorial characteristics, and signify transcendent presence.[401] Divine light in Caravaggio plays the pictorial game according to naturalist rules, which only serves to fortify its contrast to supernatural truths. The more naturalistic the image, the more potent the miracle.

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[398] Belting, 8f.

[399] Jeffrey Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion," in Klaus Krüger and Alessandro Nova, eds., *Imagination und Wirklichkeit. Zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit*, (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 2007), 48.

[400] Jeffrey Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion," 48.

[401] John Varriano, "Caravaggio and Religion", 200.

We could say furthermore that formal properties as such never manages to compete with the scriptural significations of the pictorial space. They will, and must, yield, to "la verità incontrovertibile dell'immagine," as Argan writes, the incontrovertible truth of the image.[402] In fact, he claims the iconic power, if we follow my conceptual framework, of the religious work to be so confluent with the physical material world of the onlooker, that it doesn't need to be credible: "Così certa da non aver bisogno di esser 'credibile.'" Naturalism conveys in detail and rhetoric the material, physical truth of the Gospels, it negates symbolism and metaphor in favour of "fact": The visual discourse of Caravaggio is "un discorso estremamente fluido, coerente, persuasivo; un'argomentazione tanto perfetta ed esauriente da non aver bisogno della prova dei fatti. Dall'altro vi sono soltanto dei fatti, così evidenti da non aver bisogno di alcuna argomentazione."[403]

The visual, then had a particular poignancy for post-Tridentine thought and culture, and not least with its main disseminator, Cesare Baronio. The merging of materiality and visuality found its climactic form in the conflation of relic and image; when discovering the body of the early Christian martyr St. Cecilia in 1599, Clement VIII immediately sent Baronio to the site in order to preside.[404] St. Cecilia was known through the late fifth-century narrative *Passio Sanctae Caeciliae* (c. 495-500), and had a particular admirer in Baronio. Upon viewing the casket of her remains, Baronio reports his own emotional response: "*vidimus, cognovimus et adoravimus*" – "we saw, we recognized and we worshipped."[405]

This juxtaposition of vision and veneration, I argue, underscore the sense in which sacred visuality in post-Tridentine Italy constantly forces its ontological claims upon its spectators and users, constantly working to dissipate the divide between nature and naturalism. That is, life and image. Caravaggio's naturalism, then, ties into the logic of miracle in a material world, not simply as secular reflections of minute empirical data. This helps frame my understanding and use of the concept of "iconic"; the bridging, or rather, dissolving, of material and religious, visual and venerative discrepancies. It is by and through this iconic process, I believe, Caravaggio delivers his most important contribution to religious painting.

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[402] Ibid., Argan 153.

[403] Ibid., Argan, 153. "An extremely fluent, coherent and persuasive language; an argument so perfect and complete that it doesn't need the proof provided by facts. At the same time there are only facts, evident to the point where no argument is needed". [My trans.]

[404] Josephine von Henneberg, "Cardinal Caesar Baronius, the Arts, and the Early Christian Martyrs", in Franco Mormando (ed.), *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, 141.

[405] Josephine von Henneberg, "Cardinal Caesar Baronius, the Arts, and the Early Christian Martyrs", 141.

7 Epilogue: Martyrdom in Caravaggio

7.1 Martyrdom as Iconoclasm

Caravaggio's martyr images, beginning with the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in San Luigi dei Francesci, (c. 1599-1600), tie into the tradition of the desecration of the saintly body, which Todd Olson describes as "one of the contradictions of Western art."[406] In general, earlier saint iconography were made up by "untouchables"; conventionally displaying the instruments of their own physical destruction and demise, the figure of the saint still remained off limits to the active debasement of his body by executioners. [*Fig.* 33] Northern Renaissance depictions do also linger on equally macabre details in its rendering of martyr imagery, but express rather a programmatic approach to natural description than reflect a new focus on, and a new discourse of, bodily and sacrificial violence, such as that of the Catholic Church.[407]

The devastation of the human body – the body being the "structuring and organizing principle of the Albertian *istoria*" – can be regarded as an attack upon the mode of *istoria* itself.[408] The proportioned, intact, and classical body had been the crux of early Renaissance innovation; the Counter-Reformation fascination with its destruction may also, therefore, imply the possible destruction of Albertian painting as such. It may be relevant to repeat the famous dictum of Alberti's *Della Pittura*: "*Grandissima opera del pittore sarà l'istoria: parte della istoria sono i corpi; parte de' corpi sono i membri; parte de' membri sono le superficie.*"[409] Notwithstanding that Alberti's rhetoric employs the image of the body as metaphor, it nonetheless holds that the image of the body itself retained strong and powerful associations. Bodies were not only decimated in real life, also in painting and imagery did the body become a target for visceral deconstruction. It is equally therefore, I argue, Albertian metaphors that are appropriated and inverted in post-Tridentine painting and discourse.

I have already established the strained diplomacy between the early Renaissance liberalism and the pious demands of Counter-Reformation conservatism, the result being a

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[406] Ibid. Olson, 56f.
[407] Ibid. Langdon, 50.
[408] Ibid. Olson, 56f.
[409] Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari. Volume Terzo: Trattati d'arte…,* ed. Cecil Grayson, (Bari: Laterza, 1973), 58–59. "a painter's greatest endeavour is the *istoria*; parts of the *istoria* are the bodies; parts of the bodies are the members; parts of the members are the surfaces." Quoted in Pericolo, 38.

situation in which the humanist tradition of exalting exemplarity coincided precariously with the demands of Christian martyrology."[410]

Being the recipient of violence – "The Martyrdom of…." is a passively constructed sentence – the sacrificial body is passive, as if already united with God. Beyond the changes to pictorial convention enacted by the heroic Albertian bodies, this attitude to sanctity and salvation pre-figures the Renaissance.[411] It ties into medieval notions of bodily decomposition and materiality[412], and in compliance with the mentioned post-Tridentine "medievalism", this passivity in question became central in the promulgation of the cult of saints; the martyr is the one acted upon by another. Placing the passive martyr-body in the centre of the pictorial field, then, it competes with its active surroundings, creating a tension between sacred and profane, passive and active, dominance and subordination. In this displacement of the active agent by the passive recipient lay an inversion of Albertian pictorial ideals, forcing the active expressive body into lethargy and languor.[413]

Caravaggio's venture into high ecclesiastical mode contrasted sharply with his formative output in the 1590s: A lyrical entourage made up of Del Montean pretty-boys [*Fig*. 34-35], dressed up as Bacchus, tuning their lyre, hoaxed by gypsies, bitten by lizards and so on. The pedagogical and Tridentine challenges, in the presence of which he now worked, were a wholesale departure from this, by contrast, pastoral iconography, and strained his abilities in difficult briefs such as violent martyrdoms. As was the case with both of his martyrdoms, in San Luigi and Santa Maria, his initial attempts failed. In the latter, however, he may have produced a finished work [see *Fig*. 9]. Beside the obvious and mentioned issues of decorum, the consideration of which remained the easiest, it has been suggested that he perhaps "failed to offer semantic clarity and triumphal resolution."[414] Without discussing the Tridentine implications of this reflection, it remains arguably and at least partly the case of absent religious clarity.

The Counter-Reformation wanted above all to discipline painting, to regulate, re-energize, and restructure its social, ecclesiastical and political potential.[415] The Albertian system, as I have tried to convey, with is basis in geometrical modules and rational

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[410] Olson, 57.

[411] Ibid. Olson, 57.

[412] See Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies*, (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), for wider contexts into concepts and discourses of the body in the Medieval period.

[413] Jane Andrews Aiken, "Leon Battista Alberti's System of Human Proportions," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 43 (1980): 68–92.

[414] Ibid. Olson, 64.

[415] Kevin V. Mulcahy, "The cultural policy of the Counter-Reformation: the case of St. Peter's," 131ff.

organization, conform to Bohem's critique of a type of image ideology which models itself on linguistic precepts. Most explicitly stated in its debt and aspiration toward classical rhetoric.[416]

In line with Boehm's argument, Olson reiterates the indebtedness of Alberti's theory as built upon "the grammar of a periodic sentence."[417] Stated most generally, with the *De Pictura* of Alberti, we get the paradigmatic beginning of a theoretical discourse where form structures and dominates content, not the other way around. The image surface is now a system of formal relationships, not the *locus sanctorum* of the icon-relic in which presence is invoked, not the charged site of violence and sacrifice. Instead, a "hierarchy of forms within a framework of which one assess the role of each element in the total effect of the picture," as Alberti states.[418] His exclusive attention to narrative images it quite startling, given the very much active use of contemplative and sacred art.

Compare Alberti's discussion of hierarchy, a purely mathematical and formal concept, with the notion of hierarchy invoked by the Tridentine theorists; a strictly ecclesiastical and religious concept functioning as the vehicle of Catholic authority as such. Understanding and analyzing the displacements and changes of meaning in key concepts can be instrumental in our task to produce productive perspectives on historical dynamics.[419]

The crux of Olson's thesis regarding Caravaggio's annihilation of Alberti's *istoria*, is his argument for an existing homology between pictorial structure and the integrity and intactness of the human body. As far as we accept the premise that the classical, Vitruvian body makes up a conceptual and structural nucleus in Alberti, I believe this is *a* meaningful way of approaching a key aspect of the Albertian tradition. I argue with support in both Olson and Belting, who have been instrumental in exploring the field of visual hermeneutics and

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[416] See John Spencer, "Ut Rhetorica Pictura: A Study in Quattrocento Theory of Painting", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 20, No. ½ (1957): 26–44. Also Eric Cameron, "The Depictional Semiotic of Alberti's On Painting", *Art Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1975): 25–28 and Anthony Grafton, "Historia and Istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context", *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 8 (1999): 37–68.
[417] Ibid. Olson, 67.
[418] Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura* (1435), cited by Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350–1450*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 130
[419] This approach as arguably its greatest exponent in Reinhart Koselleck, and his work on the sub-category of intellectual history known as *Begriffsgeschichte*. See Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002). Also Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten : Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011). For a discussion on *Begriffsgeschichte* and its relation to intellectual history, see Melvin Richter, "Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (1987): 247–263, and Keith Tribe, "Intellectual History as *Begriffsgeschichte*," in Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *A Companion to Intellectual History*, 1st. ed. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2016): 61–71.

meaning making, that the violation and "iconization" of the martyr body staged on the pictorial surface corresponds to the material mutilation of the physically present relics of the martyrs.[420] There is an aspect of Catholic Counter-Reformation sensibility which affiliates, even fetishizes, the intimacy between violence and devotion [see Ch. 4.1].[421] Not just martyr by the brand of his or hers devotion, the victimized Christian body is defined as martyr by the measure of violence enacted upon it. In my view, the relic and martyr are united by their physical possibilities: only as an image, *in* an image, only as invoked presence in visual form can the martyrized body be reclaimed.

The relic was the *pars pro toto* of the saint's body: In image and sculpture, the saint received a new body, a reconstituted body to replace the ruined one.[422] Relic and martyr images become two manifestations of the same signifier, the signified being the martyr him- or herself. Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* embodies, then, liturgically and hermeneutically in its post-Tridentine context, the same function as the bones and dust of the material St. Peter. In the image, his body is remade.[423] There is an obvious and unavoidable relationship here to both the Incarnation, and the re-embodiment of the faithful on the Last Judgment; from its living testimony *as* relic, the martyr body is reclaimed, I argue, *as* image.

The relic staged two aspects of its sacred content, both *as* the material presence of the holy figure, as well as the *container* of the holy, what was known as *praesentia*. Peter Brown testifies to the same argument when he describes how the relic was regarded as an "invisible person."[424] More than that, the individual, by means of his or hers relics, possessed indexical traces of violence. They *testified* – in the deepest sense of the word, as martyrs = witnesses – to violence. The bones themselves living witnesses. Constituted as bodies, then, as charged anatomies, Caravaggio's figural constructions draw upon the material and mimetic echoes of the image-relic association; sacred body *as* relic. The tension between the two is negotiated in Caravaggio's religious images. In a more general observation, we can describe this contradictory pressure as made up of the Albertian *istoria* on the one hand and Christian Martyrology on the other.[425]

If we accept the notion that the relic has a direct, present, i.e. iconic relationship to its origin – it *is* in fact its origin – and we follow my argument that there takes place a devotional

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[420] Olson, 69.
[421] See chapter 4.1.
[422] Ibid. Belting, 298.
[423] Ibid. Belting, 298.
[424] Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 88.
[425] Ibid. Olson, 69.

as well as linguistic collapse between relic and sacred image, the two end up sharing the iconic connection. The destruction of the saintly body, ends up not simply connoting a deconstruction of the fundamental principle of the *istoria*, but also suggests iconoclasm.[426] Violation of the body doubles into a violation of the material image. Martyrdom as subject thematises the anxieties of iconoclasm, an immediate and enduring issue during Caravaggio's lifetime. Caravaggio's martyrization of St. Peter and St. Matthew sustains and extends the homology of body and composition, pushing it further into the associative patterns of a post-Tridentine life-world.

We must not, however, exaggerate the discrepancy of what I have described as the Albertian tradition, and Caravaggio's merging of this narrative mode with iconic strategies. Alberti's correlation of body and image is what enables our equation of canvas, relic and martyrdom to begin with. Building on the apparent interrelations between the icon and the logic of the Albertian image tradition, I argue that Caravaggio indeed ends up synthesizing the *istoria* and the icon, mirroring what I have described as his conjoining of the concepts of image and relic. Devotional demands placed on the image from popular as well as ecclesiastical pressures, paralleled the unavoidable developments of the Albertian figural ideals. The black background of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion* conforms to the sealed-off golden backdrops of the Byzantine mode, facilitating a new tension of proximity between image and spectator. Caravaggio's image then, I believe, to repeat my argument, complies with Gilio's concept of *regolata mescolanza*, a "measured mixture" between the narrative and iconic mode.[427] The *Crucifixion* responds, visually, to Gilio's outcry for a new frontality and immediacy in Catholic imagery, what he called *prosopopea*; a way of recalling the affective presence and charged sanctity of the early Christian icon.[428]

I argue that the notion of the "iconic" can provide conceptual structure to the similarities and homogeneities of the image and the relic: As martyr, St. Peter is a witness to his own bodily demise performed in response to his unwavering faith. The relic is material witness to, and signifier of the destruction of the saintly body. In the image, his martyrdom is invoked and reconstructed, and his body, once again, present. In their capacity as icons, then, images and relics confirmed the experience and presence of the living saint.[429] As such, the two conform to Gadamer's concept of *Darstellung* – material presentations signifying

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[426] Ibid. Olson, 69.
[427] Ibid. Muraoka, 103ff.
[428] Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.
[429] Ibid. Belting, 303.

themselves by means of themselves. We could say the relic becomes the endpoint of a narrative of the body destroyed, displacing the Albertian concepts of the intact, heroic and complete body, the mentioned focal point of the *istoria*. Herein lies a crucial reversal of pictorial understanding: One fetishizing magical medieval precedents at the expense of Renaissance interest in authorial and representational self-reflexivity.[430]

Icon and relic did not only share coinciding aspects in an intellectual and conceptual sense. Christian liturgical practice tended to incorporate them into the church interior in physically similar ways. That the icon, such as the *Salus Populi Romanus*, was framed more or less like an ancient, early Christian relic, corresponds, again, to the conflation of relic and image. The Council of Trent reflected this conjoining specifically in their decision to prescribe the rules of veneration of images and relics into the same decree.[431]

This "externalization of piety", that is, spiritual content given substantial form, tied precisely the physical properties and constituents of Christianity together: the materiality of the Mass and Eucharist; the solidity of ecclesiastical architecture; the tactility of the body – the consolidation of the feast of *Corpus Christi* takes place at this time – and, not least, the image and the relic.[432]

Moreover, and of considerable importance, the guidebooks to Rome, like that of Onofrio Panvinio of 1570, demonstrate the two-fold significance of the religious icon, as it is designated simultaneously as both "*reliquia*" and "*imago*".[433] Their conflation, in other words, also took place on the level of language. It doesn't even warrant further explanation, that having the relatively stable category of relic inform the relatively unstable category of the religious image, provided an intellectual infrastructure to the late sixteenth-century notion of the icon.

I will return now to summarize in short detail how the naturalism of Caravaggio dislocate the Albertian image tropes. Naturalism understood as a formal device which, as demonstrated, goes beyond purely mimetic and representational concerns, but reflects a changed conception of "nature" in Counter-Reformation thought and language.[434]

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[430] Ibid. Wood and Nagel, 16. Also Todd P. Olson, "Pitiful Relics: Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*", *Representations*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2002): 133.
[431] Anne H. Muraoka, *The Path of Humility: Caravaggio and Carlo Borromeo*, 114.
[432] Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16f.
[433] Onofrio Panvinio, *De praecipuis urbis Romae sanctiorbusque basilicis, quas septem ecclesias vulgo vocant*, (Rome, 1570). Quoted in Noreen, "the icon of Santa Maria Maggiore", 672.
[434] See fn. 361, 361, 361, p. 74.

7.2 Displacing the *Istoria*: Subverting the Albertian Tradition

Naturalism of the *chiaroscuro* mode so defining of Caravaggio, produces a canvas in which light and shadow struggle for hegemony, a site where "corporeal integrity is compromised," and the planes do not adhere. Luminosity and obscurity heightens the relief-effect yet create a discontinuous surface. In the end, the "failure" or refusal, of coalescing the image into a stable pictorial structure, breaks the affinities to Albertian composition definitely.[435] The compositional logic of *chiaroscuro* – structuring the pictorial field around productive contrast between light and shade – implies a hierarchical relationship, a normative pattern.

Where I depart from Olson's persuasive and interesting argument, is where Caravaggio's sacred image end up; Where Olson frames Caravaggio's contribution as essentially a negation of the precepts the *istoria* – "He [Caravaggio] left painting in ruins" – I deem that he re-stages the iconic through formal properties and the metaphoric and semantic affinities between image, word and relic. In other words, I am interested in the *consequences* of Caravaggio's "poetics of dislocation",[436] whereas Olson's perspectives discuss the specifics of the *act* dislocation itself.

I have stressed how Caravaggio and his environment responded to the cultural pressures exercised by the martyrs in the "sacred space" of Counter-Reformation Rome. Olson' underlines the same element, when he, with reference to the "brief" concept of Baxandall, writes that "the late sixteenth-century Roman Catholic church's demands for the visualization of martyr narratives from its own early history were consistent with one aspect of Caravaggio's brief."[437] We cannot hermeneutically establish an absolute causation between Caravaggio's pictorial strategies and the Tridentine decree on sacred images. The interpretive engagement being one of the primary vehicles of the humanities, one works in the business of likelihood, possibilities, affinities and metaphor. Seldom the direct speech of positivist science. And while I have attempted to establish these likely possibilities, metaphorical affinities etc., there remains, "no clear and easy fit" between the two.[438] What is unarguable, however, is that the Contarelli and Cerasi painting reflects emergent devotional stipulations.

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[435] Ibid. Olson, 75.
[436] Ibid. Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 11.
[437] Ibid. Olson, 76.
[438] Ibid. 77.

7.3 Spaces of Violence: The Authority of the Image-Site

From the moment Caravaggio had finished his martyrdom images in San Luigi dei Francesi and Santa Maria del Popolo, there had been dramatic ruptures in the confessional and political geography of Europe.[439] 1600 marked the Jubilee Year; Henri IV's absolution derailed the hegemony of Spanish influence in Italy, and the French Monarch struck an alliance with Elizabeth as mutual protection from the Iberian Habsburgs. The Spanish threat, not the English, was also regarded by the pro-French Clement VIII as the most pressing; even though he attempted to mend Spanish-French relations, the lack of Iberian enthusiasm in Rome led Clement to encourage as much French presence as possible on the Italian peninsula. Both in spiritual and political matters equated with the interests of Spain, the Jesuit expansion consequently became even more conspicuous and suspicious.[440]

What separates Caravaggio's two most iconic biblical invocations of martyrdom is most immediately the increased concentration of the *Crucifixion*; while both of them sustains the presence of imminent violence, the surficial dispersal of the canvas on the *St. Matthew* "undermines the visualization of concentrated authority." Herein lies the "iconizing" feature which sets the *Crucifixion* into relief; the inward centripetal vortex that unities the dispersed and distributed elements, merging the composition into the body of the crucified saint. In the sense that the pictorial body carries, perhaps even *is*, the composition, the homology between body and canvas gains complete expression in the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*.[441] Furthermore, whereas Caravaggio suggests historical time and distancing in his drapery of the characters in the *St. Matthew*, he has collapsed the temporal divide between early and contemporary martyrdom in the *St. Peter*; the two intermingle on the pictorial surface as explicit associations. *Semper eadem*. The iconic also reveals itself then, I argue, in the synthesis of sacred form and material expression. Skin and canvas become metonymies, constantly exchanging roles in the tension between image and surface.

In this analogy, Olson presents the pictorial space as surrogate for the martyred body; the result of this coalescing is a new ambivalence in Caravaggio's martyr images – one between his attack on the pictorial structure of the *historia*, "the displacement of violence onto the picture's formal organization" – and an "iconoclastic gesture".[442] Caravaggio, as I

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[439] Ibid. Olson, 84.
[440] Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe. Religious Conflicts, Dynastic Empires and International Change*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 258–260.
[441] Ibid. Olson, 84.
[442] Ibid. Olson, 85.

insist, structures his formal organization of the space of religious imagery precisely because he wish to *save* sacred art, not destroy it. Olson's acknowledges this same paradox, yet claims there exist a correspondence between martyrdom and the violation of pictorial unity.

Caravaggio's *St. Peter* is nothing if not the visualization of concentrated authority. *St. Matthew* on the other hand, succumbs to pictorial disintegration. Whereas the "peripheral connective tissue of surfaces, members and bodies does not bind the pictorial structure" of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, St. Peter defiantly attempts to maintain his presence as body and figure, as the *Darstellung* of his own image, not a *Vorstellung* of his absence.[443]

In a sense, Caravaggio only adapted his work to the present process of sacred substitutions in post-Tridentine discourse, where the "disturbance" of the ontological distinctions of flesh and pigment, blood and paint, functioned as a central Counter-Reformation strategy. We cannot ignore the interesting historical "coincidence" that martyr iconography, the destruction of sacred, Christian bodies, surfaces at the exact same time when the destruction of images took place. To dismiss such a correspondence as arbitrary and random appears ignorant.

In Catholic sensibility, the attack and denunciation, verbal as well as physical, of the holy objects by the Reformers, that is the relics and images, were regarded as a restaging and echoing of the abuse, torture, and killing of the sacred personages – the saints and the martyrs. As an anti-Calvinist response – Calvinism that principally advocated iconoclasm due to the misapprehension of picture and prototype[444] – popular Catholic propaganda exploited this "mimetic confusion" with a view to convey the symbolic correlation of martyrdom and iconoclasm.[445] Caravaggio stages the act itself, the conflation, in his "attack [on] the body as constituted in pictorial form." Herein lies the most significant dislocation of the Albertian paradigm: The ancient, classically constituted body, the organizing center and metaphor of Alberti's pictorial system, is subverted through its disintegration.[446] The violence of the image, then, concerns not just iconography, but the canvas itself.

The topography of Rome eventually came to be seen as a relic in itself; Antonio Bosio's work on underground Rome discussed earlier, was not unaware of these implications, regarding the Roman *sotterranea* as simultaneously a site of worship and violence – just as

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[443] Ibid. Davey, "The Hermeneutics of Seeing," 4–5, 19–20.
[444] The indeterminacy of origin related to the image and relic was among Jean Calvin's chief concerns, spelt out in his *Treatise on Relics* of 1543. See also G. R. Evans, "Calvin on Signs: An Augustinian Dilemma", *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1989): 38–42.
[445] Ibid. Olson, 87.
[446] Ibid. Pericolo, *Caravaggio and Pictorial Narrative*, 29.

Caravaggio's image denote both. Bosio's volume, then, ends up as sequence of repeated atrocities exercised into erudite patterns. Each part an "index to infamy". Language itself therefore, signified the site of martyrdom, and consequently, Bosio's archaeological text made "the violation of syntax a devotional instrument."[447]

These formal, intellectual and associative networks serve to produce a hermeneutic platform for the looking, reading, and historicizing of Caravaggio's *Crucifixion*. Readings of his work aiming to establish a visual morphology between Caravaggio's formal approach and classical precedents[448] – or, on the other hand, frames Caravaggio as an anti-clerical gunslinger and his naturalism as proto-realism in the nineteenth-century meaning of the word[449] – fail to encompass the conflictual complexities of the appeal to a paleo-Christian past.[450] Bosio's text, for instance, conveyed the conviction that the material remains of the early Christians signified violent narratives; the relics, as discussed earlier, denoted their own destruction. His descriptions of the relics, then, "recapitulated Protestant assaults on devotional objects and the remains of saints." [451]

A key witness for the Tridentine cause was the fourth-century Latin poet Prudentius, who gave verbal testimony to the existence of visual representations in the early Christian martyr sites, effectively countering the Protestant argument that the early Christians exercised a consistently aniconic policy.[452] Prudentius, in a sense, became himself a martyr, in the capacity of being "witness". Providing a devotional language to mirror the visual syntax of the images, Prudentius' ekphrases served as artillery against the Lutheran accusations, making him indispensable for both Baronio and Bosio alike. Not only to did he supply rationales for the cult of saints, but equally so for the veneration of images and relics. The significance of this cultural and ideological attachment for Caravaggio and post-Tridentine painting was the way in which Prudentius also furnished Counter-Reformation arguments with a "linguistic protocol" for the veneration of images.[453] By fashioning Catholic visual culture upon fourth century texts and early Christian imagery, discursive agents like Baronio and Bosio could "bypass" the Albertian art criticism and its technical-humanist vocabulary.

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[447] Ibid. Olson, 92.

[448] See Avigdor W. Posèq, "Caravaggio and the Antique,"*Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 11, no. 21 (1990): 147–167.

[449] John T. Spike, *Caravaggio*, 14–15.

[450] Ibid. Olson, 93.

[451] On the subject of the materiality of paleo-Christian inscription in early modern Italy, see Ann Marie Yasin, "Displaying the Sacred Past: Ancient Christian Inscriptions in Early Modern Rome," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2000): 39–57.

[452] Franca Trinchieri Camiz, "Death and Rebirth in Caravaggio's 'Martyrdom of St. Matthew," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 11, No. 22 (1990), 101–102.

[453] Ibid. Olson 95.

Historical pressures pushes Caravaggio's religious imagery into close contact with the sacred materiality of the relic. In the interaction of image and relic, issues of martyrdom, icon, iconoclasm and visuality merged during the late sixteenth century. Why the relic? As object, site, symbol, icon, and witness, the relic dramatized the incongruous concerns of the Tridentine church, in the way that it not only mirrored a salvific Martyrology, but also denoted a concrete residue of possible dissolution, a prospect signified by the saintly body's exposure to a violent and corruptive world.[454] The anxieties relating to the mixing up of, and the collapse of the border between, image and prototype, extended to that between sacred remains and base material – pushing the two even further into each other's orbits.

Caravaggio's naturalism, or rather, the pictorial surface of his naturalism, becomes the site of a constant religious coalescing. In the same way the identity of icon and prototype collapse, relic and image, canvas and body, so the distance between ground and figure in his *Crucifixion* dissolves. We are left with an image caught completely in-between its rootedness in reversed perspective and archaic veneration, hermeneutically sealed off in its post-Tridentine context, and at the same time, forcefully contemporary, even modern, in its staging of the anxieties and ambivalences inherent in the concept of artistic representation. Our most vital hermeneutic assessment must reside *not* in our arguing for the pre-eminence of the one over the other, but rather in the acknowledgment of their overlapping, their constant shuffle and skirmish.[455] Caravaggio's "empty" pictorial spaces, just as much as those of figural subject matter, tightens and heightens the discursive uncertainties of a Catholic identity in the process of re-definition. His space is a space of the instantaneous, a site of representational and religious negotiation which dramatize the conditions of visual meaning in post-Tridentine and Catholic imagery.

I have attempted here to demonstrate how the production of religious and visual meaning in Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* engages with the wider life-world of material and intellectual culture, specifically the function of the relic and the challenge Caravaggio poses to the Albertian tradition. Together, these perspectives both frame a context for understanding Caravaggio's sacred images in general and his martyrdoms in particular, while at the same time providing us with a conceptual vocabulary with which to engage them.

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[454] Ibid. 96.
[455] Ibid. Olson, 103.

8 Concluding remarks: The Reactionary Radical

As this thesis have attempted to convey, in the religious image-world of Caravaggio, the verbal fails to contain and define the visual. The icon was precisely that which moved beyond the realm of language and word. By articulating a distinction between icon and picture, which gains meaningful content in Gadamer's notion of *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* – a presentational, iconic regime, vs a representational and signifying regime – I aimed to locate Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* in the complex negotiation between the two. Unarguably one of most urgent issues in Early Modern visual culture, the controversy of the sacred image did not only concern frictions between the icon and the narrative (Albertian) picture, but comprised, as I demonstrated, a whole series of additional tensions – that of image and relic, martyrdom and iconoclasm, the visual and the verbal, copy and prototype.

Perhaps, on the prospect of facing this category of image "ogni discorso è inutile," as Argan says, all talk is futile.[456] Argan's choice of "discorso" is more significant than it appear to be at first glance, as it ties into our discussion of visual and verbal modes, or rather, the word-image question so fundamental to issues of meaning, representation, sign and semantics. As Boehm on his part argues explicitly, Argan implies an interaction where language yields to visuality, or rather, the power of the visual to make present.

Caravaggio's imagery, in the same way as the work of contemporary religious painters, was susceptible to interlacing of theology, language and visuality in Early Modern Italy. Functioning as spiritual and intellectual influences as well as patrons, the old and new Catholic orders – Augustinians, Franciscans, Jesuits and Oratorians – have a part to play in the narrative of post-Tridentine visual culture. Not in the sense of serving a need for conclusive causalities between their respective traditions and visual expression; equally, if not more important, I believe, is the task of making their physical presence and discursive contributions current. To surround an historical analysis with the *possibilities* of interaction, not categorical correlations. To do so was, at least, my intention.

What in the end emblematize Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Peter* is precisely his powerful capacity to make present; to invoke, to inculcate and imbue matter with spiritual meaning. This was the context within which the pious Christians in 1601 approached the

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[456] Ibid. Argan 152.

Cerasi chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo. Not as sign or symbol, but as physical trace of the martyred St. Peter – the image of the crucified saint played upon the destruction and resurrection of his body, his relics and remains reversed into imagery.

Caravaggio's reception therefore need to account for almost schizophrenic developments: the "modernist narrative" in which the painter is responsible for articulating a visual naturalism that conditioned, diachronically, the growth of realist painting in the nineteenth century; that is, Roger Fry's "first modern painter."[457] On the other side, the painter the Catholic Church had been waiting for: An image-maker capable of fusing the intense demands for Early Christian subject matter with the pictorial structure of the icon. Deploying a formal approach which conformed to the Counter-Reformation demand of clarity, conciseness and coherence.

I have attempted to endow his revisions of Early Modern notions of nature and naturalism with a wider framework: Caravaggio was certainly radical. But radicalism involves dialectics of back-and-forth, push and pull. History never moves in straight lines. As such, my argument stresses that the *reactionary* ideologies pervading Caravaggio's life-world, the explicit desire to return to ancient ideals of religious imagery, dogma and practice, is what gave his religious art the decisive radical component. He pushed the precedents of sacred imagery in *new* directions precisely by virtue of extolling a bygone visual vocabulary.

As part of a material and visual economy, then, where the image defined, and was defined by, the profusion of relics, and an ever-increasing number of martyrs, I argue that the contexts of Caravaggio I have explored in thesis also consist of new contexts to art historiography as well. Evidently, a hermeneutics of visual arts, while certainly rich and complex enough to incorporate specialized and detailed readings of artistic material, cannot bypass contiguous fields of scholarship, such as religious and intellectual history, visual and material culture, even ethnography and anthropology, when attempting to construe narratives of meaning. Such was my intention in establishing a set of contexts which together produces an interpretive topography.

The final chapter attempted to organize the many implications I presented throughout by argument. Not as intrinsic connections, but at least productive analogies. Clearly, the plethora of possibilities in Caravaggio studies denies any one monolithic conclusion. Yet, I hope to have conclusively proved that Caravaggio's visual legacy is one unarguably in need of expanded attention, as his imagery and radicalism contains inexhaustible complexities.

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[457] Roger Fry, "The First Modern Painter," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 93, no. 580 (1951): 211.

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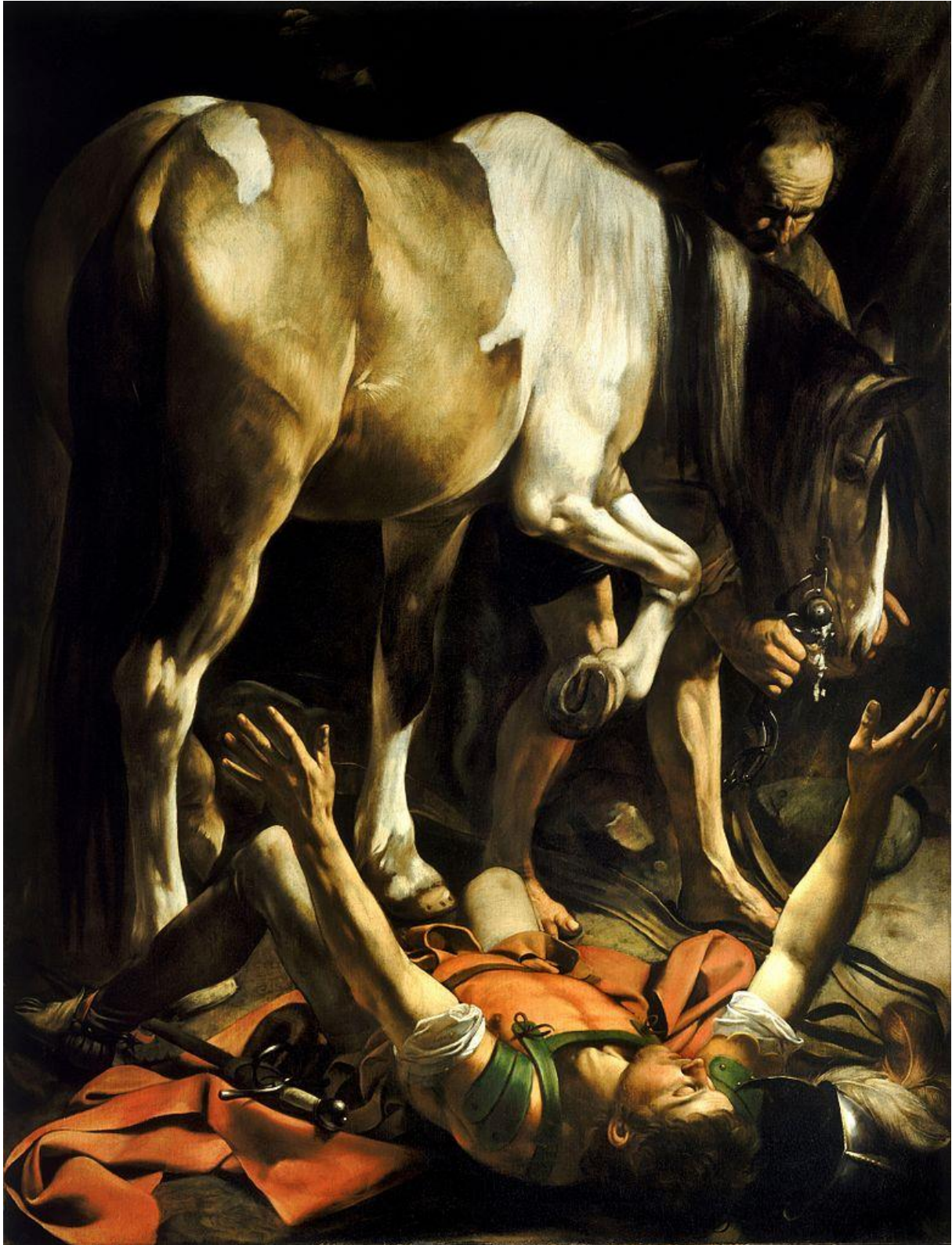
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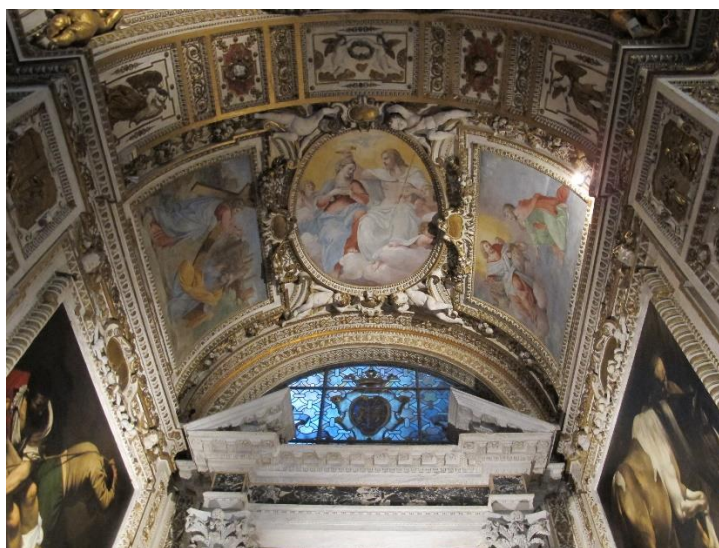
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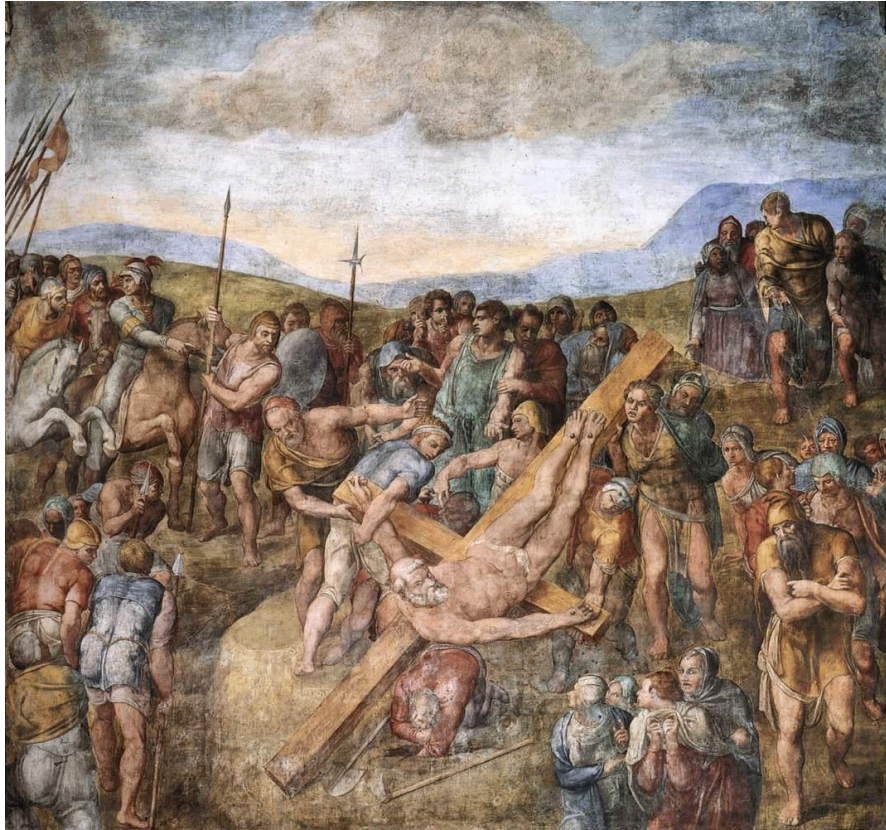
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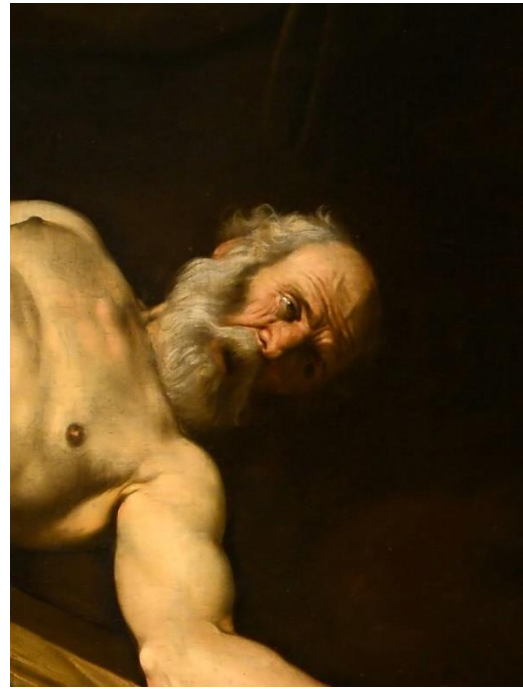
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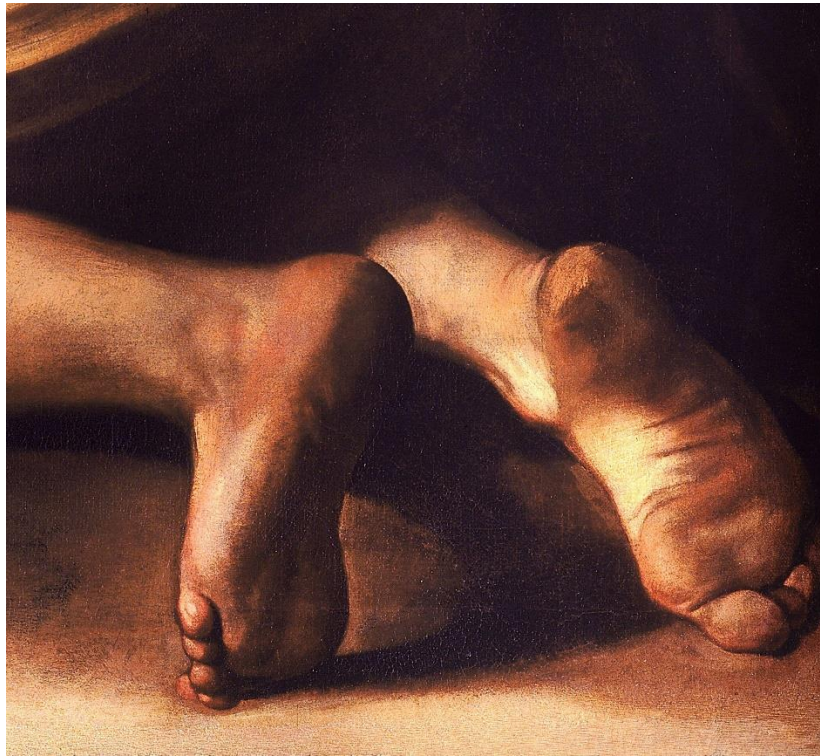
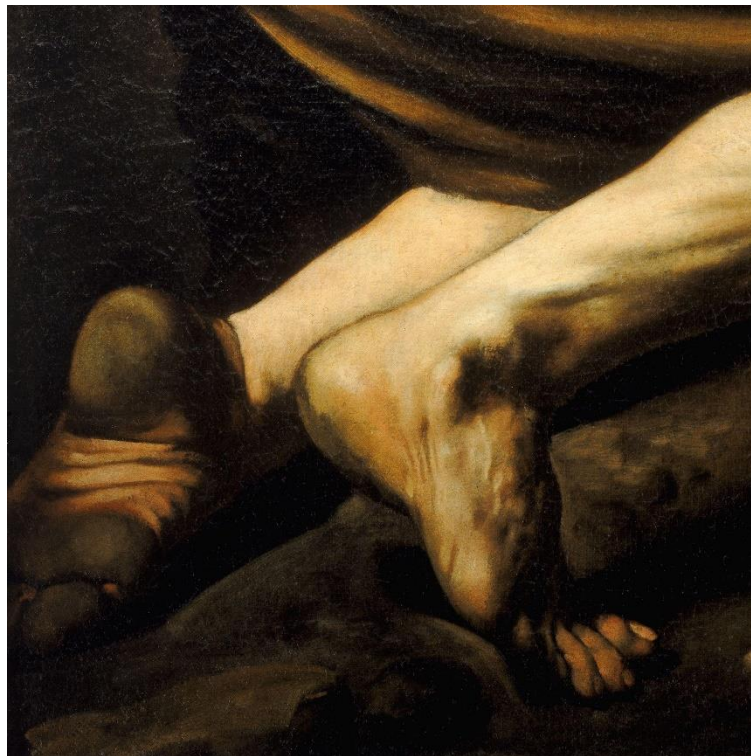Fig. 25: Caravaggio, *Madonna di Loreto* (detail of feet).

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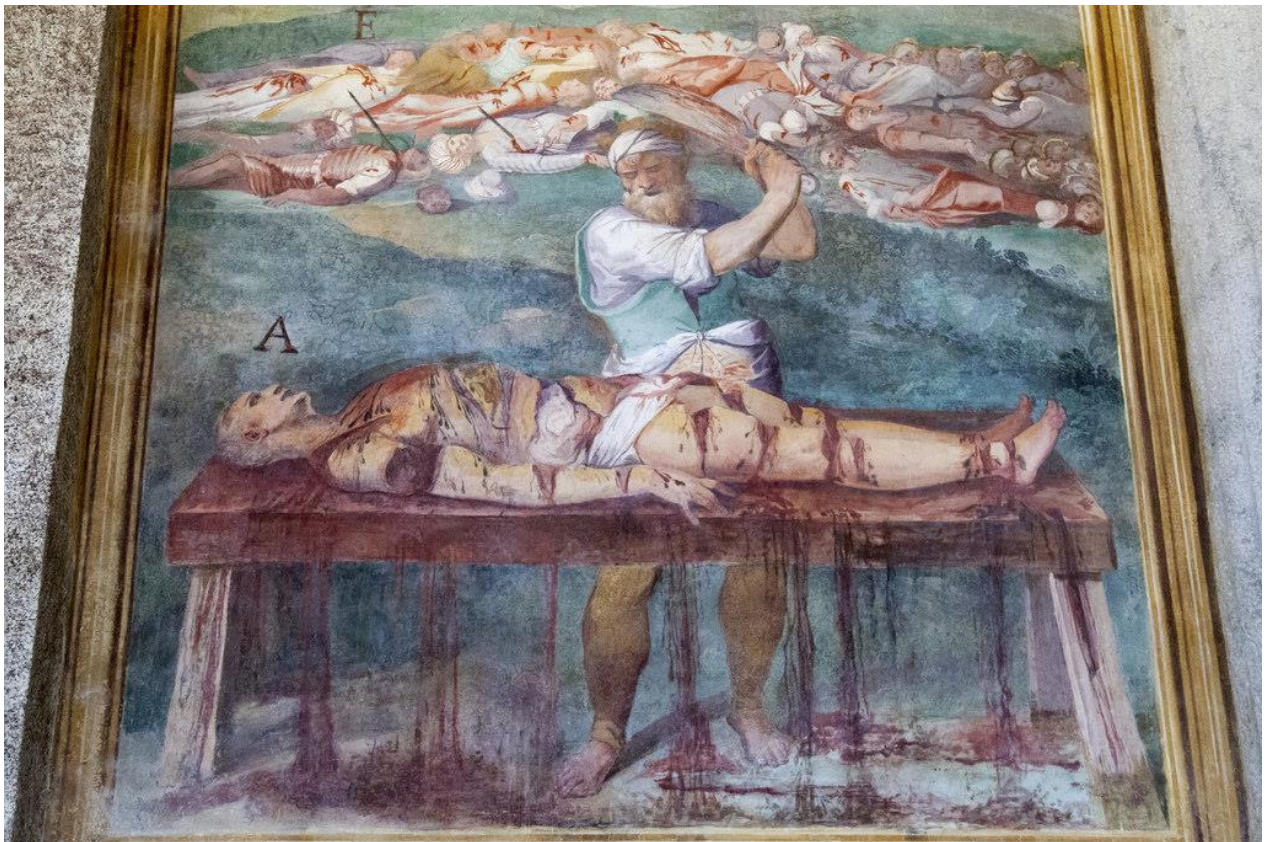

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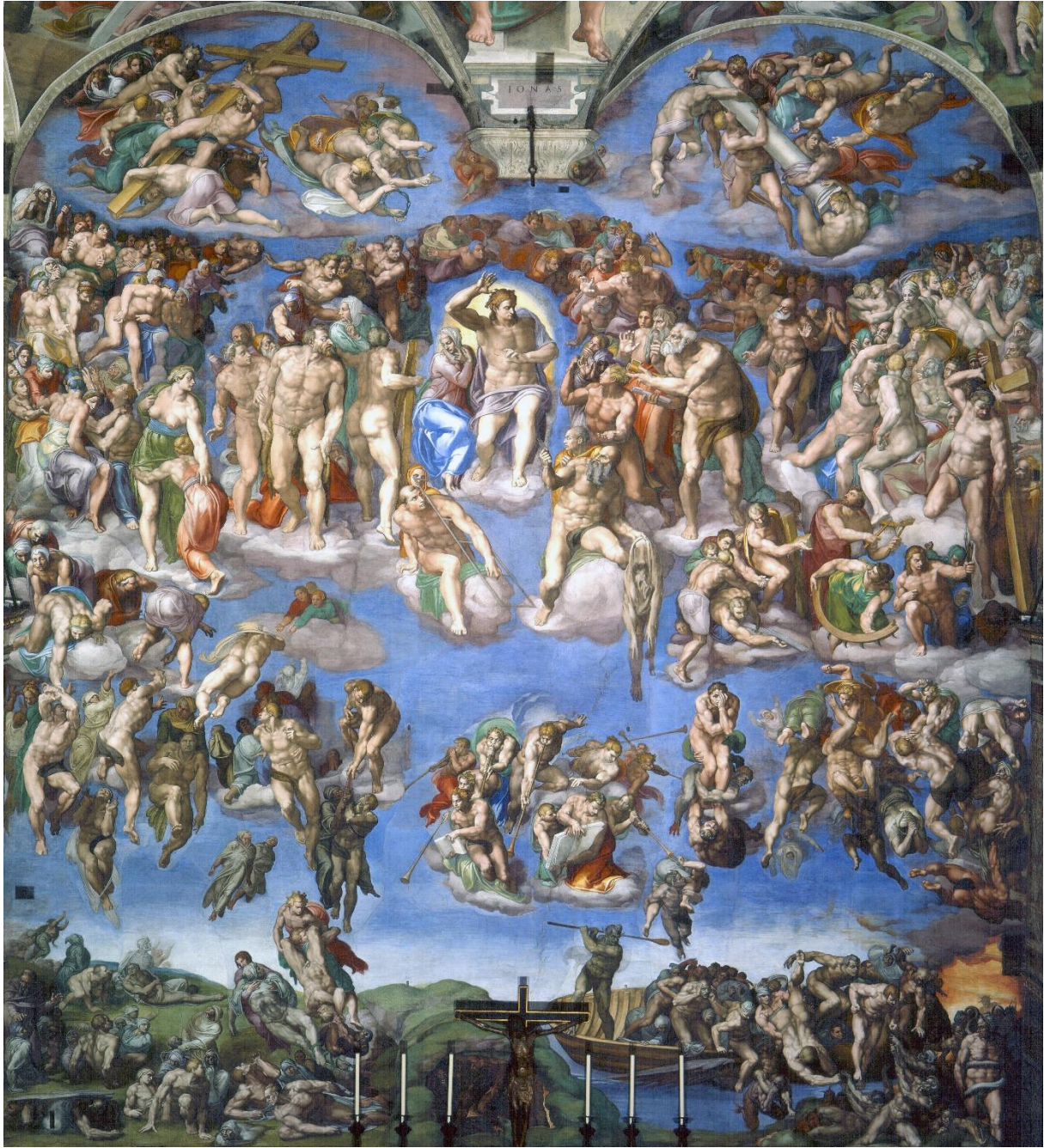
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