

Chapter 23

THE AGE OF REFORMATION

16th-Century Art in Northern Europe and Spain

Summary:

This is the period of the re-configuration of Europe. Burgundian Netherlands disappears and the Holy Roman Empire, mostly Germany, expands gaining new territories. Spain through a series of carefully conceived marriages and successful military campaigns became the dominant European power. The power of the papacy was rapidly diminishing and European monarchs were gradually increasing their hegemony, both as independent rulers and power brokers. This was the period of the Reformation, a reaction to the excesses of the Church. The period brought about the division within Europe: Protestant and Catholic. This division also led to war and civil war within these countries and without.

I. Lecture Model

The social and iconographic methodologies can be useful in gaining an understanding of the work commissioned. These approaches can help to establish the importance of the religious commissions and the alignment of the secular patron with the religious interpretation as a tool to fix political authority. Patronage would be a very useful approach, as well, to explain the diversity of the representational work.

1) Matthias Grünewald (Matthias Neithardt) created for the monastic hospital Order of St. Anthony the *Isenheim Altar* in 1510 (23-2 and 23-3).



This complicated altarpiece set the religious iconography for the hospital.

- The closed position of the altarpiece shows the “Crucifixion” in the center panel flanked by “Sts. Sebastian and Anthony” on the side panels.
- The predella depicts the “Lamentation”.
- This altarpiece was placed in the choir of the church that was next to the hospital. These scenes would have given the patients the gift of hope during their illnesses.
- The center panel of the Crucifixion bears witness to the hope of salvation for the faithful; the side panels of Sts. Sebastian and Anthony also invoke the protection of both saints.
- St. Sebastian not only was the patron of archers and soldiers, but also of plague victims. St. Anthony’s relics are credited with providing special help to plague victims as well.

In 1100 the order of Hospitallers of St. Anthony was founded as *special caretakers of the sick and plague victims*.

■ The predella (prudella, *the narrow ledge on which an altarpiece rests on an altar.*) would have given encouragement to the families of the deceased, for this shows the pain and suffering Christ underwent for the salvation of humanity.

■ The very graphic presentation of the Crucifixion would have given the viewer pause in his or her own suffering and also would have reaffirmed their faith in God and the Church.

■ The hospital itself was established to bring aid and succor to the sick and helpless plague victims. This section of the altarpiece would have been a recognizable representation.

■ The expressiveness of the Crucifixion would also encourage the belief in the Church and God.

■ The nature of the monastic order was in itself another factor for the commission. This was a hospital order, which supported the needs of the ill and dying.

■ The position of John the Baptist on to the right also reaffirms the covenant for the Church. The Baptist was the precursor to Christ and his death mirrored the coming sacrifice; however this sacrifice would lead to salvation.

■ The patients would have understood these Church teachings and would have encouraged a closer relationship with Catholicism. The profound impact of hope would have kept the protestors from straying.

■ When the altar is opened again, the clarity of this vision of hope and salvation becomes more apparent.

■ This section of the altar presents the foundational doctrines of the Church; it reads from left to right.

■ *The Annunciation* has the Angel concert serenading the infant Christ Child and Virgin, an abbreviated Nativity, and the Resurrection.

■ **Grünewald** has provided the viewer with the complete tableaux of the teachings of the Church and Catholicism.

■ The cycle is completed by *the Resurrection*, which provides for the redemption of humanity.

■ These doctrines would have been understood in 16th century Europe. The final section of the altarpiece shows the *Meeting of Sts. Anthony and Paul* and the *Temptation of St. Anthony*.

■ The *Temptation of St. Anthony* shows in explicit detail the devil tempting St. Anthony. Demon-creatures pull and poke at St. Anthony, but he stands firm in his commitment to his faith. It could be argued that these demon-creatures could also represent those dissenters within the Church who were challenging the authority of the Church.

■ Martin Luther posted his famous Theses at Wittenberg in 1517 just 7 years later. The problems and protests were a continuing criticism that Martin Luther crystallized in his tract.

■ Returning to the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, Grünewald has also depicted a figure in the left foreground, diseased and horribly bloated.

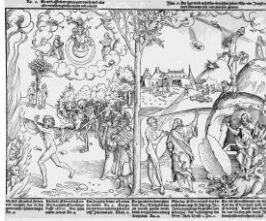
■ It has been suggested that this figure represents a sufferer of the disease of ergotism or *St. Anthony's Fire (a disease that causes convulsions and gangrene)*. The hospital served victims of this particular disease as well as other illnesses.

Grünewald has tied together in one work a religious presentation, which acknowledges the work of the monastic order but also confirms the teachings of the Church.

It could be argued that this altarpiece also supports *the political leanings of the monastic order*; they received their mandate from Rome and were recognized as a religious order. *The*

altarpiece could be said *to stand as a visual document in support of the teachings of the Church based on good works and clean living.*

In contrast to the *Isenheim Altar*, is the work of Lucas Cranach, a follower of Martin Luther. In his *Allegory of Law and Grace* (23-1), Cranach *presents the doctrine of Protestantism.*



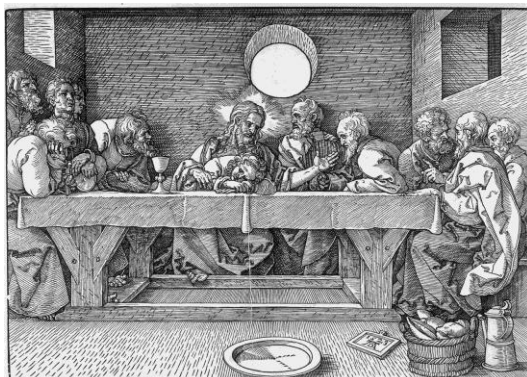
23-01 LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, *Allegory of Law and Grace*, ca. 1530. Woodcut, 10 5/8" x 1' 3/4". British Museum, London.

- The tree centers the work, possibly a representational icon for the Tree of Knowledge from which according to legend the Cross was constructed.
- The scene to the left presents Catholicism as the plan for damnation.
- In the background, hovering above the scene is Christ floating in a cloud, in the act of judgment.
- In the foreground is a skeleton, possibly a demon drives a sinner into Hell. The sinner is the Catholic who followed the teachings of the Church; this work in essence is nullifying the teachings of the Church.
- There is a certain ambiguity in this work, Moses appears, in the right foreground, holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments, *is he being judged as a sinner as well?*
- On the right side of the tree is a scene, which substantiates the Protestant doctrine of emphasizing God's saving grace. A sinner stands before the Crucifixion, *possibly exhorted by the Baptist to believe in the redeeming grace of God.*
- In this scene *the sinner is saved and goes on to his heavenly reward.*
- The twofold doctrine of salvation and redemption is presented; the Crucifixion is placed above the tomb of the Risen Christ.

This woodcut in a simplified and graphic manner has presented to the followers of not only Martin Luther but also other Protestants the doctrine of their reformation.

The belief in God's saving grace will gain the heavenly reward rather than the Catholic doctrine of good works and clean living.

Albrecht Dürer became the leading artist of the North. He created works that expressed his support of Luther.



23-04 ALBRECHT DÜRER, *Last Supper*, 1523. Woodcut, 8 3/8" x 11 13/16". British Museum, London.

In his *Last Supper* 1523 (23-4) a woodcut, that deviates from the standard, which had been developed.

His presentation depicts not the statement, “*one of you will betray me*” nor the “*this is my body...this is my blood*” but rather *the commandment “love one another as I have loved you”*.

This scene supports the doctrine of Luther, which states that it is God’s saving grace and not the ritual of the Eucharist, which will lead to salvation.

It is in *direct opposition* to the rule of the Church.

One could compare the woodcut to the fresco of Leonardo (22-3) and see the thematic difference.



22-03a, b LEONARDO DA VINCI, Last Supper (top, uncleaned; bottom, cleaned), ca. 1495-1498. Fresco (oil and tempera on plaster), 29' 10" x 13' 9". Refectory, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

Dürer’s *moment is after the supper and after the declaration of Christ regarding his betrayal*.

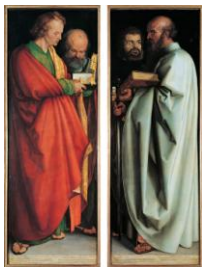
■ Judas is absent; in fact, he is on his way to betrayal. This moment is at the end of the supper, and the charge has been taken literally by the Apostles.

■ Dürer has depicted the two Apostles on the right as hearing and mindfully following the command.

■ Also *absent* from this woodcut are *the iconic references to the Church’s teachings*.

■ There is only *one window* and it is *not* directly behind Christ’s head, the table is bare, only the chalice remains perhaps empty.

■ On the floor in the foreground is a breadbasket and plate, not in use. The wine carafe next to the basket is closed. **No symbols or signs have been used as indications of the Eucharist or other Catholic teachings.** In the early 1500s Durer made a trip to Italy to see and observe and study.



23-05 ALBRECHT DÜRER, Four Apostles, 1526. Oil on panel, each panel 7' 1" x 2' 6". Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Self portrait 1498 Albrecht Durer 1471-1528- German High Renaissance

- Oil on panel 20” x 16 1/5 “

- German tradition lay in medieval expressionism and the use of line. They looked to Italy for inspiration.
 - He did not attain the height of Flemish artists
- He signed his paintings
- First Northern artists to do self-portraits
 - Elegantly dressed
 - Serious face (regards his mission as an artistic reformer) You can see the influence of Italian portraiture shown with his pose and landscape through the window
 - Use of Line is very German
 - Hair is treated as individual lines not masses (hundreds of them)
- Line in his clothes, crisp folds and edges
 - Faint outlines of hands and face.



23-06 ALBRECHT DÜRER, *The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve)*, 1504. Engraving, approx. 9 7/8" x 7 5/8". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (centennial gift of Landon T. Clay).

In 1504 he completed an engraving *The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve)* (23-6) that combines *classicism with Germanic realism and expressionism*.

- He presents both just seconds before their fall from grace, as if aware of the pending Fall, the tree branches, surreptitiously, cover their genitals.
- The leaves resemble fig leaves following the Old Testament; “they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.”
- This is not a Mediterranean garden; it is the forests of Germany. It still remains a peaceful and quiet domain, the animals co-existing in harmony, they rest quietly at the feet of Adam and Eve.
- Dürer was able to synthesize what he learned from his Italian studies and create a truly Northern style that combined observation with the classical passion for order and harmony.



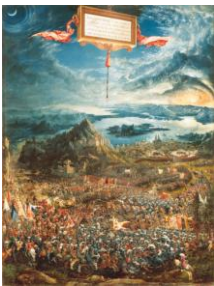
23-08 ALBRECHT DÜRER, Knight, Death, and the Devil, 1513. Engraving, 9 5/8" x 7 3/8". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Dürer's ability is amplified in the wood cut or engraving, this art form defined his intellect and expressed his aesthetic definitions, remains unparalleled and unequaled. He allowed his imagination free reign and created works which all could enjoy in the new medium of the printed work in addition to continuing with his career as a painter.

- *Durer* turned woodcut into a major medium as you see in the next slide.

10. *Knight, Death and the devil* 1513, (engraved copper) Albrecht Durer. Symbol of Christian warrior.

- Evidence of his comprehensive knowledge of animals and forms
- Death (holds hourglass)- the knight fears no evil
- Used line to outline as well as crosshatch
- Fantastic variety of darks, which appear to be grays rather than linear pattern
- Achieved chiaroscuro with line when Italians used paint



23-09 ALBRECHT ALTDORFER, The Battle of Issus, 1529. Oil on panel, 4' 4 1/4" x 3' 11 1/4". Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

England

Hans Holbein another **German** who excelled at the portrait traveled to England and became an important court painter. *Erasmus advised Holbein to travel to England and his recommendation to Thomas More gained him court entry.* He catalogued Henry VIII and some of his wives as well as his heir Edward VI. He too had the gift for observation and the ability to translate that observation to canvas.



23-10 HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, *The French Ambassadors*, 1533. Oil and tempera on panel, approx. 6' 8" x 6' 9 1/2". National Gallery, London.

In his *French Ambassadors* 1533 (23-10) he has captured the personalities and characters of both men.

- The figure on the left is Jean de Dinteville, lord of Polissy. He is represented as a richly clothed courtier; it can be argued that he represents the earthly world of the aristocracy and the monarchy.
- De Dinteville served as ambassador to England during a very trying period. The figure on the right is Georges de Selve, bishop of Lavaur.
- Objects, which have meaning in their respective worlds, surround them.
- The lute next to de Selve his love of music well as the discord in Europe, depicted as a broken lute string.
- The flooring in the room takes on the representation of the world, or earthly existence.
- Only de Dinteville stands squarely in the center thus indicating the right of the monarch to rule rather than the papacy for de Selve stands on the outside of the circle, characterizing the spiritual nature of his calling.
- The European monarchies were making a concerted effort to divorce themselves from the power of the Church.
- ***The sociological implications of this work can be argued to represent the dissolution of the power of the papacy as a temporal power in Europe.***
- It has been said that **de Selve** also was in sympathetic agreement with Martin Luther, perhaps not enough to break with Rome, but enough to show a text of Luther's Theses.
- It could also be argued that **de Selve** was showing a national partiality and a criticism of the papal policies.
- The anamorphic image, (*a distorted image that must be viewed by some special means (such as a mirror) to be recognized*) which ties both sides of this work together, could be said to represent the looming specter of death and that no one is free from their mortality.

Portraiture became a popular vehicle for the patron to immortalize himself or herself.



23-11 JEAN CLOUET, *Francis I*, ca. 1525-1530. Tempera and oil on panel, approx. 3' 2" x 2' 5". Louvre, Paris.

In the work of Caterina van Hemessen a Netherlands artist, she has caught herself at her work in *Self-Portrait* 1548 (23-19)



23-19 CATERINA VAN HEMESSEN, *Self-Portrait*, 1548. Panel, 1' 3/4" x 9 7/8". Kunstmuseum, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel.

She has presented herself as a serious and committed artist. The tools of her profession are in her hand, small palette, brushes and a mauhlstick; she looks at the viewer confident and aware of her ability as an artist.

■ She worked with her father the painter, Jan van Hemessen. Her ability as a painter was recognized by her patrons among who were Mary of Hungary, sister of Charles V (Hapsburg) and Charles V.

■ As her male counterparts working in the Netherlands at this time she was very capable at depicting texture, her velvet sleeves show the rippling effect of velvet as it is crunched in the natural course of bodily movement. She does not leave the viewer in any doubt as to her ability to delineate character for she has presented herself in unflinching honesty.



23-22 PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER, *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565. Oil on panel, approx. 3' 10" x 5' 4". Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



23-23 PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, 1559. Oil on panel, 3' 10" x 5' 4 1/8". Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

The work of Pieter Bruegel also shows the adherence to reality that van Hemessen depicted. In his *Netherlandish Proverbs* 1559 (23-23) the artist has *captured the follies of sixteenth century Netherlands*.

- This community is peopled with individuals who perform strange practices. Bruegel is recounting the proverbs or sayings that were popular.
- The inn focuses the attention and the activity. The front façade has a globe upside down and a peasant hangs out the window defecating on the globe or the world, the proverb takes on the meaning of “he literally s... on the world”.
- Around the corner the sign above the doorway has a crescent moon and another peasant urinates on the moon, the intent of the proverb is “he is p... on the world”.
- Centering the courtyard of the inn is an elegantly dressed young woman wearing a rich red robe putting a blue cloak on an old man; the proverb is the “foolish old man, a cuckold”.
- The colors both figures wear are both contradictions, *red in Church iconography represent the Passion and suffering*, here it takes on the quality of deceitful action as portrayed by the adulterous wife of the old man.
- The blue of his cloak, which *signifies faith and purity*, becomes the color of foolishness and folly.
- The bustling activity of the painting forms a pastiche of daily work at a busy inn. Many of the proverbs must be carefully scrutinized in order to define the action of the proverb.
- Seated next to the stable is *an enthroned Christ* and before him *kneeling is monk* who is putting on a false beard. This *is an indictment of the Church and its policies*; it could be argued that Bruegel was also making a sympathetic visual statement in support of the Reformation.
- In the right foreground stands a figure of a ruler holding the globe or orb on his thumb; **this is a reference to the precarious nature of the political situation in the Netherlands at this time**. It could be argued that the ruler represents the Spanish Hapsburg and the nature of their rule of the Netherlands, unstable and folly driven.

Spain at this time was the *dominant European power*. The Hapsburg rule of Spain and Europe as well as the New World enabled Spain to support the most powerful military force in Europe and to use it very effectively in supporting the policies of the Church.

Although not a Spaniard, **Domenikos Theotokopoulos or El Greco** depicted the Spanish heart and soul in his work. The expressiveness of his work did echo Spanish religious fervor.



23-26 EL GRECO, The Burial of Count Orgaz, Santo Tomé, Toledo, Spain, 1586. Oil on canvas, approx. 16' x 12'.

In his *Burial of Count Orgaz* 1586 (23-26) he has captured the religious response of Spain's support of the Counter-Reformation and he prefigures the Baroque.

This work is a visual testament of the legend surrounding the burial of Count Orgaz a patron of the church of Santo Tomé, but it also *represents the Spanish attitude to faith and the Catholic Church.*

■ Two saints, Stephen and Augustine are conducting the actual burying of the count. The celestial level of the painting shows the ethereal quality of heavenly grace.

■ The crown of this heavenly place is Christ himself, garbed in golden white; he forms the apex of the pyramidal shape of the heavenly level.

■ Beneath him on the left is the Virgin not looking at her son, but rather waiting for the entry of Count Orgaz himself, he is the small ascending ghostly figure assisted by an angel.

■ In the temporal realm arranged in the background of the burial are the nobles and church leaders of Toledo. They act as witnesses for this miraculous event; they also are reiterating their faith by their presence.

■ The individualized portraits demonstrate El Greco's ability as a portraitist.

■ The figure with his back to the viewer is the rector of Santo Tomé and the small child in the left foreground is the current heir of the Orgaz family.

■ The temporal realm is clearly marked by the nobles in the background forming a distinct line or boundary between heaven and earth. They enjoy us, the viewers, to witness this event as well.

■ Some of the nobles are looking at the viewer and inviting the viewer into the miraculous dialog.

El Greco has used color and shape as well as gesture to create a unified visual document that not only contextualizes a religious event but he also creates a reality by introducing contemporaneous people into his cast.



23-25 Juan de Herrera and Juan Bautista de Toledo, aerial view of Escorial, near Madrid, Spain, ca. 1563-1584 (after an anonymous 18th-century painting).

2) Architecture at this time shows a relationship with the political nature of the period. For example, the Escorial (23-25) does lend itself to the austere nature of Philip II the patron the palace. The architects, **de Toledo and Herrera**, created a square complex, which housed a mausoleum, church and palace.

The *classicism* of the palace does *show the influence of the Italian Renaissance*, the grand design, which Philip sought, was to *echo his faith, his dynasty (Hapsburg) and his will.* This palace was to represent Spain before Europe and the world. It became the fortress of Spanish monarchy and the *symbol of Philip II.*



23-12 ROSSO FIORENTINO and FRANCESCO PRIMATICCIO, ensemble of architecture, sculpture, and painting, Gallery of King Francis I, Fontainebleau, France, ca. 1530-1540.

In contrast to the classical severity of the Escorial is the **stylized** Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau (23-12), his was a collaborative project mounted by Francis and he commissioned **the Italians Fiorentino and Primaticcio** to design a gallery which represented his tastes.

- The work became a **sleekly elegant gallery** that had **rich lush surfaces and open spaces**.
- The *balance between the ornate and the open worked remarkably well in this gallery without descending into flamboyant decadence*.
- The long gallery corridor is balanced and enhanced with windows, which draw the light into the gallery.
- The paintings and stucco work blend without overwhelming the space. This work and the work of other artists at this time show despite the political and social upheavals in



Europe, there was a dialogue among the artists. Château de Chambord, Chambord, France, had begun 1519.

23-13

Resources:

Videotapes

- Matthias Grunewald: the Sanctity of Suffering* 34 min. BVL31228 \$129.95
- El Greco* 60 min. BVL735 \$89.95
- El Greco* 29 min. BVL6806 \$99.95
- El Greco: rediscovering a Master* 53 min. BVL11803 \$149.95
- Bruegel the Elder: His Life and Art* 28 min. BVL8844 \$89.95
- Albrecht Durer: Image of a Master* 21 min. BVL10365 \$75
- Reformation: Martin Luther and the Protestant Revolt* 52 min. BVL8312 \$129.95
- Anet and Dane de Poitiers* 26 min. BVL1506 \$89.95
- Chambord and the Renaissance* 26 min. BVL1503 \$89.95
- Chateaux of the Loire* 42 min. BVL2996 \$89.95
- Fran çis I* 22 min. BVL1050 \$89.95

Films for the Humanities

1-800-257-5126

<http://www.films.com>

Books

Batschmann, Oskar and Pascal Griener. Hans Holbein. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Howard, Maurice. The Tudor Image. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

Kavaler, Ethan Matt. Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

North, John David. The Ambassadors' Secret: Holbein and the Renaissance. London: Hambledon & London, 2002.

Luber, Katherine Crawford. Albrecht Durer and the Venetian Renaissance. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Orlin, Lena Cowan. Elizabethan Households Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

Rodini, Elizabeth and Elissa B. Weaver. A Well-Fashioned Image: Clothing and Costume in European Art 1500-1850. Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, 2002.

Roberts-Jones, Philippe. Pieter Bruegel. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.

Web Resources

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bnf/bnf0001.html>
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/holbein/>
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/durer/>
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/bruegel/>