THE VISUAL NARRATIVES OF EL GRECO, ANNIBALE CARRACCI AND RUBENS: 
ALTARPIECES OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE

by

Livia Stoenescu

A thesis submitted to the Department of Art
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
(November, 2009)

Copyright © Livia Stoenescu, 2009
Abstract

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary has been regarded as a normative subject of post-Tridentine altarpiece production. Yet it is actually a complex pictorial allegory that comments upon an archaic tradition of Christian narratives and its intersection with Marian devotion. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary belongs to a tradition of devotional images in which the Eucharistic meaning is the preferred means for furthering narrative ideas. The deeper meaning of the Assumption altarpiece becomes apparent in the light of the following points, demonstrated repeatedly throughout the study: 1) altarpieces of the Assumption represent a Marian subject informed by narrative liberty, not views of iconography and Tridentine history 2) their imagery is largely based upon visual narratives associated with the historical imagination of the painter 3) they disallow the pre-eminence of the classical model and incorporate other models derived from a resemblance to Byzantine icons and Northern prints 4) they are analogous to icons, essays praising truthfulness and inwardness which operate to convey complex pictorial ideas in narrative adaptations.

The first chapter evaluates the narrative source of El Greco’s altarpieces from Toledo. The medieval past of Toledo fused with the Byzantine tradition in an altarpiece form for which parallels are rare in the modern age. The second chapter examines Annibale Carracci’s main Assumption altarpieces and a selection of related paintings. For Annibale Carracci, the original setting at the high altar safeguards the Eucharistic meaning of his Assumption narrative and in turn shapes the narrative link with the adjoining altarpieces. The third chapter involves the Northern devotional print as a narrative outset of Federico
Zuccari’s and Rubens’ altarpieces. Their narrative solutions negotiate complex pictorial allegories and further the claim for truthfulness of representation inherent in the print.
Acknowledgements

Research for this dissertation began during my graduate studies, and this means that it is indebted to my professors from the University of Toronto, York University, and Queen’s University in Kingston. With enduring gratitude I acknowledge above all the teachings and breadth of knowledge offered by Professors Philip Sohm and Alexander Nagel at the University of Toronto. I have benefited greatly from the friendship and encouragement of Professors Brian Grosskourth, Malcolm Thurlby, and Shirley Ann Brown who made my studies at York University a memorable experience in all regards. This doctoral dissertation was brought into its present form owing to the moral and scholarly standing of Queen’s Professor Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, who helped me overcome a very bleak hour.

In the course of this project I have benefited greatly from the hospitality and assistance I have received at various libraries and research institutions. I would like to express my special appreciation to the libraries of the University of Toronto, York University, Queen’s University, and also to the British School at Rome, the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, and the Bibliotheca Academiei in Bucharest. I acknowledge the support of the Bader Foundation which made the European research and writing of this dissertation possible.

There are many individuals who as scholars and friends have offered invaluable contributions to this doctoral dissertation, both intellectual and practical. For their vital assistance and encouragement, I warmly thank Elaine Genius, John Christian, Dimitra Chronopoulos, Jacopo Benci, Bogdan Stoenescu and Dumitru Paica. Leila Carnegie
carefully proofread my penultimate manuscript, greatly improving its style and readability.

My gratitude also belongs to my family. I wish to thank Ana Stoenescu for her emotional support and encouragement. Agripina and Julio Iriarte have offered unstinting assistance from beginning to end in every possible sense. The untimely death of my parents, Elena and George, occurred when research for this dissertation was in progress. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, with love and with immense gratitude for the books I have read under their guidance, their art collection and library, and their contacts with painters, musicians and writers from whom I have benefited greatly since early childhood.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... vi

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................ viii

Chapter 1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 1

1.1 The Assumption in Art History Studies: A Literature Review ............................... 8

Chapter 2 The Likeness of Icon and Altarpiece in El Greco’s Painting ......................... 13

2.1 El Greco’s Assumption at Santo Domingo el Antiguo: The Individualized Effect of the Altarpiece ........................................................................................................ 21

2.2 Reform Thought in El Greco’s Altarpiece: Pietà, the Moving Force behind El Greco’s Assumption ......................................................................................................... 51

Chapter 3 Annibale Carracci, Painter-Architect of his Altarpieces ................................. 91

3.1 From Icon to Visual Narrative: The Origins of the Carità Crucifixion .................... 100

3.1.1 Drawing on St. Augustine: Federico Zuccari’s art theory ................................... 118

3.2 Altarpiece and Historical Painting: The Paradox of St. Roch Distributing Alms........ 125

3.2.1 Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece and the ascendency of gallery painting ............. 135

3.3 Discursive Unity Across Altarpiece Structure in Roman Church Decoration ......... 143

3.3.1 The Saint Margaret Altar at Sta. Caterina dei Funari ......................................... 143

3.3.2 The Painter-Architect Consensus: Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio at the Cerasi Chapel .............................................................................................................. 161

Chapter 4 The Northern Print in the Narrative Context of Federico Zuccari’s and Rubens’ Altarpieces ......................................................................................................... 200

4.1 Reform Images on Counter-Reformation Ground: Federico Zuccari and the Northern Devotional Print ................................................................................................... 204

4.1.1 Archaic images re-seen for a modern age in Federico Zuccari’s Sta. Prassede altarpiece ................................................................................................................. 204

4.1.2 Federico Zuccari’s retreat from Spanish and Italian counter-reformatory directions .217
4.1.3 *Historia*, and the thesis of historical continuity of the Roman Church .........................................................223

4.1.4 The Imitation of Christ, an Augustinian model of the late-medieval religious devotion in the early modern age..........................................................230

4.1.5 Federico Zuccari’s prints, correctors to a restaging of classical antiquity ...............235

4.2 The Byzantine Icon as a Blueprint in Western Representations: *Koimesis* and Altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary ........................................................................241

4.3 Interlocking Engraving, Integrating Architecture: Rubens’ Assumption in Antwerp Cathedral ........................................................................................................262

Chapter 5 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................................317

Bibliography ..............................................................................................................................................................323

Illustrations.................................................................................................................................................................341
List of Illustrations


3. El Greco, Santo Domingo high altar, 1577–79. Toledo, Santo Domingo el Antiguo.


5. Albrecht Dürer, Sudarium of St. Veronica supported by two angels, 1513. Engraving, 100 × 139 mm. London, British Museum.


20. Michelangelo, Pietà for Vittoria Colonna, early 1540s. Drawing, 29.5 × 20 cm. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, US.


22. Rosso Fiorentino, Dead Christ with Angels. Panel, 133.5 × 104 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.


35. Donatello, Assumption of the Virgin. Relief. Naples, Church of Sant’Angelo a Nilo.
38. Rogier van der Weyden, Crucifixion, ca. 1445. Central panel, 96 × 69 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.
41. Domenico Ghirlandaio (workshop), The Dead Christ before the Tomb, late 15th century. Panel, 147 x 141 cm. Badia a Settimo, formerly Florence, Sant’Apollonia.


60. Raphael, **Madonna del Baldachino (Madonna with Child, Four Saints and Angels)**, 1508. Panel, 277 × 224 cm. Florence, Galleria Palatina.


64. Michelangelo, **Porta Pia**, 1561. Rome.


66. Albrecht Dürer, **Christ Carrying the Cross (The Great Passion)**, 1498–9.

67. Albrecht Dürer, **Christ Carrying the Cross (The Little Passion)**, 1509.


73. **Pantocrator with Angels and the Planets.** Mosaic and stucco. Rome, Chigi Chapel, Sta. Maria del Popolo.


75. Annibale Carracci, **Study for the Bonasoni Assumption.** Drawing. Paris, Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins.

76. Annibale Carracci, **Study for the Assumption of the Virgin.** Drawing, 285 × 176 mm. Windsor Castle, Royal Collection.


78. Matteo di Giovanni, **Assumption,** 1474. Panel, 331.5 × 174 cm. London, National Gallery.

79. Annibale Carracci, **Domine Quo Vadis?** Drawing. Vienna, Albertina

80. **The Cerasi Chapel,** Rome, Sta. Maria del Popolo, view from the transept.

81. Caravaggio, **Crucifixion of St. Peter,** 1601. Oil on canvas, 230 × 175 cm. Rome, Cerasi Chapel, Sta. Maria del Popolo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Work Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Caravaggio</td>
<td>Martyrdom of St. Matthew</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, 323 × 343 cm</td>
<td>Rome, Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Taddeo Zuccari</td>
<td>Calling of St. Paul</td>
<td>1563</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>Rome, Frangipane Chapel, San Marcello al Corso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Caravaggio</td>
<td>The Conversion of St. Paul</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>Rome, Odescalchi Pallavicini Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Michelangelo</td>
<td>Crucifixion of St. Peter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fresco</td>
<td>Rome, Paoline Chapel, Vatican Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Michelangelo</td>
<td>Conversion of St. Paul</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fresco</td>
<td>Rome, Paoline Chapel, Vatican Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>El Greco</td>
<td>The Adoration of the Holy Name of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>1577</td>
<td>Panel, 140 × 110 cm</td>
<td>El Escorial, Monasterio di San Lorenzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Federico Zuccari</td>
<td>Christ Comforted by Veronica</td>
<td>1594</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Rome, Olgiati Chapel, Sta. Prassede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Apse and Triumphal Arch</td>
<td>Sta. Prassede, Rome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Vault Mosaics</td>
<td>St. Zeno Chapel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Hendrick Goltzius</td>
<td>The Bearing of the Cross</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engraving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Leonardo da Vinci</td>
<td>Head of Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td>c. 1500</td>
<td>Venice, Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Virgil Solis</td>
<td>Bust of Christ in Profile</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intaglio Print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Enea Vico</td>
<td>Jesus Christ (Portraits and Medals)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engraving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


    Washington, National Gallery of Art.

110. Andrea Mantegna, *Death of the Virgin*, early 1460s. Panel, 54 × 42 cm.
    Madrid, Museo del Prado.

111. Niccolo di Ser Sozzo, Luca di Tomme and a Florentine painter,

    Marble tabernacle. Florence, Church of Orsanmichele.


115. Rubens, *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, 1611. Oil sketch,
    106 × 78 cm. St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.

    382 × 310 mm. London, British Museum.

    Passeri, from J. Nadal’s *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, 1593.

118. Rubens, *The Elevation of the Cross*. Central panel of triptych, 462 × 341 cm.
    Antwerp, Antwerp Cathedral of Our Lady.

    Royal Library Albert I.

121. High Altar of the Paoline Chapel, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore.


Chapter 1
Introduction

With El Greco, Annibale Carracci and Rubens, the Assumption altarpiece was affirming its own historicity, its own involvement in a disorderly historical process of the early modern age.\(^1\) What distinguishes the Assumption from the large post-Tridentine altarpiece production is the state of historical self-consciousness in disparagement of a Renaissance model which accepted the temporal, the contingent and the specific as given.\(^2\) The painters who furthered the Assumption in the early modern age were seeking a suprahistorical order, a relation with the past understood as a continuum which for them was unbroken. A sense of responsibility and freedom arises when the task of constructing retrospectively a past becomes an origin from which the work of art emerges without damaging continuity with Christian devotional origins.\(^3\) These are in the Assumption altarpiece a historical document of the most ancient Christian cult, the Byzantine icon of the Dormition or Koimesis of the funerals of the Mother of God.\(^4\) The past is reborn when a modern sensibility controls temporal distance and refers a source of revealed truth.\(^5\) This kind of assimilation underlies the Assumption altarpiece of El Greco, Annibale Carracci and Rubens where the modern work recalls unmistakably, but not imitatively, its paternal model, the Byzantine Dormition or Koimesis icon. This profound act of reanimating the initial source permits the subreading of a latent otherness in the modern work and invests it with a unique historical depth. Within this modern sensibility referencing the icon, the Assumption altarpiece enacts a sense of transformation arching over Eastern and Western cultures, from the Byzantine obsequies of the Virgin Mary to
the return of the soul in this life to God in medieval thought. The Western identity of the Assumption appears as a further assertion of the Byzantine icon in Mary’s body rising heavenwards, a cultural act of investing an image of the ancient Christian cult with fundamental thought on the journey of the human soul to God in primarily Dante’s Divine Comedy and Augustine’s Confessions.6

This dissertation studies the ways in which, in the early modern age, historical sensitivity was bound up with religious upheavals in altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. While theologians such as Molanus and Paleotti and the enlisted of the Counter-Reformation, like the Spanish painter Francisco Pacheco, saw in the Assumption a symbol of the triumphant post-Tridentine church, the masters of this dissertation excavated the image’s referential responsibilities towards origins, beyond contemporaneous frames.7 I believe that any altarpiece discussion should begin with an examination of the original location of the work of art, and therefore I have studied the original church setting or extant prints. I have based my visual judgments on a set of criteria derived from a historically informed interpretative framework which regards the Virgin Mary as a woman with a will not of her own, but as a vehicle by which Christ was resurrected years after he was born from a woman who understood submission as an order of self-surpassing.8 My method is structuralist and involves the content of form. It is of an overall indebtedness to Hubert Damisch who advocates the power of the visual material itself, a force synonymous with what he calls the “thought of the painting (which is) not to be confused with its subject.”9 My method is shaped by Damisch’s trust in the act of visual interpretation and, equally, by Georges Didi-Huberman’s work on the content of form by means of close, comparative visual readings. In Past Looking:
Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image (1996), Michael Ann Holly similarly believes in the interpretation of the historian of art who “views what is arrayed before him and confidently comes to his conclusions.”¹⁰ In Georges Didi-Huberman’s words such a process is called an exegesis, a word that signifies going beyond the textual source and openness to all the winds of meaning inherent in images.¹¹ It is a vigorous descent into the mysterious and paradoxical powers of images to haunt and to adhere, for which Aby Warburg set up the fundamental concept of Nachleben, “afterlife” or “survival.”

My basic concepts are *figura*, archaism, and reform which I use against a variety of backdrops in order to prove their semantic stability in contrast to volatile historical frames; the counter-reformation, a topic used throughout this dissertation, forms the main ground for both the affirmation and the counterpoise to these concepts in the late sixteenth-century. In Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953), *figura* is the figural sense of interpretation of textual sources which merges with the conception of an immutable, uninterrupted historical sequence of events.¹² For Auerbach, *figura* represents a connection between two events or persons in which each involves and fulfils the other; more relevantly God himself is called *figura*.¹³ My usage of it underscores the visual representation of the human figure as bearer of meaning in the Assumption altarpiece, where the rising Virgin Mary appears as being of all times and above all historical occurrences. It is a resurrected body patterned after the Resurrection of Christ. This notation of figural realism that animates my dissertation refers the individual soul of the dead only in the beyond, which is there in the true reality of the rising Mary towards Christ in the Assumption altarpiece. Therefore, the connection
between occurrences is not a chronological or casual development, but mirrors what Alexander Nagel describes in *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (2000) as an “archaizing gesture” in Michelangelo’s move toward sculpture as a return to a mode of cult statuary that preceded the rise of easel painting. My usage of “archaism” repeatedly throughout this dissertation is indebted to Nagel’s understanding of Michelangelo’s archaism as both a deliberate revival of a period of purer Christian art and a program through which it became possible to see sculpture as key to a reformed religious art.\(^{14}\)

Archaism is thus, for this study, the foundation for modern change and the preservation of the old which launches a tradition of the new. The Koimesis icon of the ancient Christian cult safeguards the historical authenticity of the Assumption altarpiece, which retains in this way both the devotional and liturgical significance of the Byzantine icon; it nourishes the religious imagination of the painter willing to reform the Assumption altarpiece within a continuum with Christian formational origins. Christopher Wood’s recent contribution to these ideas brought with *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (2008) fundamental enlightenment to the concept of archaism as figural realism in the realm of prints. Perfectly suited to the tasks of reference and notation, prints simultaneously represented an extension of the indefinite transformations that guaranteed the referential authority of relic and cult image.\(^{15}\) As Wood infers, prints betoken a reality of substitutional claims to the immutable presence of the *figura*.

The religious debates which underlay the concepts of *figura*, archaism and reform were officially curtailed after the closing session of the Council of Trent in 1563. After reform ideals proposed a unity of religious beliefs and artistic beauty, a subsequent
dispiriting of the reformatory circles of the first half of the sixteenth century could not withstand the counter-offensive of the post-Tridentine church. My dissertation inserts itself into the collapse of a culture of reform (albeit my efforts are to show their artistic survival beyond religious entrenchment) and the Counter-Reformation energetic annihilation of religious freedom. Whereas the “reform of art” epitomized a continuum with an archaizing direction in the use of religious change, the Counter-Reformation as a counter-offensive drove back the realism of the reform to political history and its contingent theological strictures. By the second half of the sixteenth century, the post-Tridentine church had successfully mobilized painters and printers for its counter-offensive. As H. Outram Evnett’s The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation (1968) has suggested, the post-Tridentine age in its propagandistic direction mimicked the proselytizing activity of the Protestant church. Evnett’s understanding of the Counter-Reformation aids my study for he is a keen observer of the ways in which the Roman papal court paralleled the ceremonial and governmental evolution of the royal and baronial courts; yet this observation does not depreciate the importance of what Evnett sees in the revival of sacramental life and eucharistic devotion as the essential elements of Counter-Reformation spirituality.

The first chapter of this dissertation examines El Greco’s Assumption from Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo and its conceptual unity resulting from a juxtaposition of the Assumption and the Trinity located directly above. I argue that El Greco’s deliberate melding of such fundamental icon-images subsumes the Assumption under the Eucharistic mystery in an effort to reconfigure anachronistically the Christian drama at the Marian thematic level in novel and expressive ways. The new spiritual ethos
embedded in Marian subjects in the late sixteenth century reanimates the directions of a culture of reform and its archaic underpinnings. Chapter two hence closes with a theoretical review of the survival of Renaissance ideas in the Northern sensibility apparent in El Greco, Annibale Carracci and Federico Zuccari’s critique of the Vasarian model of artistic change as an instrument of progress and rebirth of art. The antithetical direction upheld by El Greco, Carracci and Zuccari deepens its persuasive thrust through an irrepressible attachment to the dialogue between Renaissance painting, sculpture and architecture in times when the competing claims of painting and sculpture underlying the *paragone* debate were squaring novelty with the parting of the artistic genres.

The third chapter studies Annibale Carracci’s withdrawal from the institutionalized realm of Counter-Reformation art, specifically of church and high altar painting. His efforts to reinvent the theme of the Crucified Christ by departing from the iconographic model invest with devotional significance the narrative of *Carità Crucifixion with Saints*. The cresting of devotional sentiment furthers the narrative meaning as a mark of novel identity, albeit deeply ingrained in the prayerful mode of the icon. Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece epitomizes a purity of form and devotional feeling as an index of departure from the Counter-Reformation contingent and temporal model. In *St. Roch Distributing Alms* his efforts involve a coordination between church painting and the Assumption at the high altar, an intertextual bond meant to underscore the Eucharistic meaning of the high altar. Thus, the mixed sacred-and-profane mode of *St Roch Distributing Alms* and its inherent claims to gallery space subsumes charity, the painting’s subject, under the Christological significance of the Assumption high altar located within the same basilican space. In Rome, the incorporation of architecture into the altarpiece concept involves for
Annibale Carracci a direct invocation of the frontal model of the icon. The first step in this direction was taken in the Saint Margaret altar at the Sta. Caterina dei Funari, where the Eucharistic potentiality of the Coronation secures a unity of narrative meaning within an altarpiece enframement. At the Cerasi chapel in Sta. Maria del Popolo, the mingled narrative efforts of Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio furthered the Eucharistic significance of the central Assumption altarpiece in coordination with chapel and basilican architecture.

The Northern woodcuts studied in chapter 4 as altarpiece layouts shed light on the truthfulness of vestigial images in contrast to the mendacity of art inspired by contingent directions. Federico Zuccari’s Christ Comforted by Veronica in the Roman basilica of Sta. Prassede is a powerful invocation of the Milanese and Lombard woodcuts of Christ Carrying the Cross, brought to new narrative lengths in an altarpiece context. To reanimate the woodcut within altarpiece framework epitomizes a continuum with formational origins, in this case with an archaic image of Christ Carrying the Cross and its claims to truthfulness captured by the woodcut. My efforts are to show the woodcut, the print and the icon as a foundation for modern change in altarpiece designs. For this very reason, I set the Assumption altarpiece in comparison with the modern, shifting ideals and changing perceptions of the classical sculptural model. Intentionally, I end my dissertation with Rubens who embodied in his Hermitage oil-sketch for the Assumption in Antwerp Cathedral a series of reflections on the relation between prints and the antiquity and nature of Christian cult images.
1.1 The Assumption in Art History Studies: A Literature Review

This dissertation investigates the narrative meaning of the Assumption altarpiece brought about by a group of selected painters from the late Renaissance period in Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. Scholarly attention was focused upon the Assumption as late as 1986, when Elaine Tulanowski published her dissertation on the iconography of the Assumption in Italian painting from 1480–1580. Besides taking steps towards defining an iconographic model, Tulanowski showed that the Assumption attracted a large number of painters who fostered an approach to it in the Italian Renaissance. Tulanowski’s extensive documentation made the first serious attempt to awaken an awareness of the Assumption iconographic development, and gathered previously unknown documentary material. Yet owing to a subsequent broadening out of art history methodology, Tulanowski’s iconographic study remained virtually without followers. A significant attempt to emancipate the Assumption from iconographic confines was made by Brendan Cassidy’s article from 1988 on the Assumption in the marble tabernacle to the Mother of God in Florence, at the Church of Orsanmichele. Although an adept of iconography, Cassidy takes decisive steps towards a historically informed interpretative framework for Andrea Orcagna’s Assumption and the Prato relic in fourteenth-century Florence.

Since the late 1980s, Baroque and late Renaissance scholars have exhibited divergent positions on the Assumption. In recent Baroque writings such as Christian Hecht’s Die Glorie: Begriff, Thema, Bildelement in der Europäischen Sakralkunst vom Mittelalter bis zum Ausgang des Barock (2003), the Roman Church interests dovetailed with the interests of the new secular powers who were commissioning Assumption paintings to
project an image of self-glorification against the traditional authority of religious images and relics.\(^{21}\) In contrast, the virtues of the Assumption altarpiece that meld with the Eucharistic devotions of the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation are topics that stimulated Henk van Os’s *Sienese Altarpieces 1215–1480* (1984), Peter Humfrey’s *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (1993) and Patricia Meilman’s *Titian and the Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (2000), to name only a few. A fundamental contribution is Alexander Nagel’s *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (2000) who lays out critical observations on the Assumption altarpiece as a source of narrative meaning in chapel architecture.\(^{22}\)

This dissertation inscribes itself within efforts to refocus the methodological lenses in order to distill history, intertextuality and anachronism into an interpretative framework. For the historical consciousness of the late sixteenth century, my most frequently cited sources are William J. Bouwsma’s *The Waning of the Renaissance 1550–1640* (2000), Adriano Prosperi’s *Tra Evangelismo e Controriforma: G.M.Giberti* (1969) and Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica (2001), Camilla Russell’s *Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies of sixteenth-century Italy* (2006) and the pertinent Counter-Reformation position of Terence O’Reilly’s *From Ignatius of Loyola to John of the Cross* (1995). Besides history, I have based my interpretative conclusions on Philip Sohm’s *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (2001) and his subtle analysis of classical antiquity as an early modern ideal that should not be assimilated into a normative or typifying surrendering to decorum, the classical ideal of fitness to purpose.\(^{23}\) Anachronism as the condition of intertextuality that informs my dissertation derives its vital claims from Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western*
Literature (1953), Thomas Greene’s The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry (1982) and David Quint’s Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source (1983). Such a methodology is lent further support in Christopher S. Wood’s Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (2008) where woodcuts, prints and engravings form “substitutional myths” for the Renaissance inclinations to extend the referential authority of relics and cult images.24

1 Historicity in this dissertation breaks decisively with Jacob Burckhardt’s description of the use and development of Renaissance novelty in his 1860 Civilization of the Renaissance. Burckhardt’s ideas which saw the Renaissance pervaded by a new spirit of secularism have been modified, but not superseded, by interpretations that emphasize the persistence of medieval culture and piety in the Renaissance. After Alexander Nagel’s Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (2000), Christopher S. Wood’s Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (2008) inserts itself into the medieval past of Renaissance prints as antithetical to Burckhardt’s description of the Renaissance as novelty. Nagel and Wood’s ideas shed light on former positions about Burckhardt’s historicity as the historical evidence of the work of art independent from the aesthetic factor and associated with the original conditions of the creations of the work of art. On this understanding of Burckhardt’s historicity, see Michael Ann Holly, Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image (1996), 101. Holly reasons that Burckhardt shows in the Civilization of the Renaissance how he learned from painters how to look, although he paid little attention to the medieval consciousness.

2 The intertextuality of the Renaissance poem as a linguistic text woven with fragments taken from other texts was rarely mistaken for a document, as Thomas Greene shows in The Light of Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry (1982), 11, 118. In contrast, literary works such as Dante’s Commedia (1481) possess a genuine historical self-consciousness because they are capable of “measuring (their) own anachronistic distance” from the source. That was possible only outside what Greens calls the “dangerous element in the Renaissance resistance toward its medieval roots” and through Dante constructing retrospectively a past from which the Commedia emerges by a “homogenization of specific alterities” which do not “damage anachronism.”


4 For the icon of Koimesis as a historical document in Byzantium see Avril Cameron, Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1991), 103 and 203, note 53, where the author

5 These are the mechanisms to safeguard the historical authenticity of the Renaissance work of art examined by Thomas Greene, op. cit., 99, as the “authentic sense of transformation of the source without damaging anachronism.” David Quint analyzes in Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source (New Haven and London, 1983), ix, the depreciation of the Renaissance historical self-consciousness with the emergence of fictional works which were not dependent upon systems of revealed truth, but belonged instead to an autonomous secular domain.

6 Robert McMahon, Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius and Dante (Washington, 2006), 1–65. The theme of meditative ascent enacts an interior journey, the return of the soul to God, and was taken up in Augustine’s Confessions, Anselm’s Prosologon, Boethius’ De Consolation of Philosophy and primarily in Dante’s Commedia, all autobiographical works of the Christian ascent of the soul.

7 See Chapter 1, esp. 41–3.

8 Alexander Nagel, “Experiments in Art and Reform in Italy in the Early Sixteenth Century,” The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture, eds. Kenneth Gouwness and Sheryl E. Reiss (Burlington, 2005), 385–409, esp. 407 on the conception of the Virgin’s role within the Christocentric theology. For the reformed bishop Gian Matteo Giberti and his circle, the Mother of God was not a source of veneration in her own right, but was to be honored above all as the vehicle by which Christ was made flesh.


13 Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, (Minneapolis, 1984).


15 Christopher Wood, Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (Chicago and London, 2008), 12, 244.


17 H. Outram Evennett, The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation, ed. with a postscript by John Bossy (Cambridge, 1968), 25. In The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformation in Early-Modern Europe (Cambridge, 1979), vol. 1, 354–5, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein quotes Evennett’s suggestion that the Catholic Reformation used printing for proselytizing just as the Protestant churches did. Eisenstein subsequently remarks that the prohibitions on both sides of the confessional divide were the moving forces for the development of print technology.

18 Evennett, 1968, 90 (Papal court and secular courts), 40 (sacramental life).


22 Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 2000, 135.

23 Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 84, 89, 98.

Chapter 2
The Likeness of Icon and Altarpiece in El Greco’s Painting

El Greco as a preamble to this dissertation sets the stage for an engagement in the on-going history of concepts such as *icona* and *historia*, authenticity and referentiality, religious reform and the expressive content of pictorial form. The recent interventions of Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel are impressive efforts to utilize these abundant ideas in Renaissance art and cultural history, in divergence from lingering opinions about the massive restaging of antiquity at the turn of the sixteenth century.¹ This complex model in contemporaneous art history best exemplifies its claims in painting through El Greco, an expatriate who understood his later belonging to Toledo as a matter of his own art-market and artistic freedom. El Greco’s interests commended by the real, non-fictional elements of his painting epitomize a convincing depiction of the link between a Christian source of meaning and a spiritual world of action.

Prompted by El Greco’s autonomy as the individual painter who reanimated a Christian mode of expression within his own particular norms and merits, I single out “likeness,” “icon,” and “the individualized effect of the altarpiece” as the central topics of this chapter. An explanation of these concepts, freighted as they are with controversy, harks back to Hans Belting’s *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image in the Era before Art* (1994). In Belting’s view, likeness (truthfulness) and presence (representation) together constitute an origin of the icon’s expressive form and meaning, an epistemological bond which has challenged since the eleventh-century the prevailing narrative mode and the burgeoning aesthetic of icon-painting relevant to rhetorical means
borrowed from poetry. What Belting defined as “likeness and presence” and the surrender in the rhetorical direction, Henry Maguire drives back in equilibrium with the non-fictional, archaic leanings of his “likeness and definition” in The Likeness of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium (1996). Central to Maguire’s argument is the authenticity of the icon as it was secured in Byzantium by a creative imitative process of older prototypes and original settings. The icon faithfully reflected and recorded the way it was produced, and not “the fiction of the pose” which amounts for Harry Berger to an act of representation of the sitter, a pictorial image which does not record the model but only what the model pretends to be. Maguire’s ideas adduce further support to the concept of truthfulness as commonplace in the production of Byzantine icons, but similar to Belting he appears oblivious to how truthfulness remained grounded in the figura of God’s real presence. This foremost notion of authenticity, which Roland Barthes describes in Camera Lucida (1981) as “a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed,” underlies Robin Cormack’s efforts to ground the status of the icon in a source of beauty peculiar to Byzantine art in Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds (1997). Cormack locates the icon in a Byzantine aesthetics reliant on repetition and tradition which safeguarded authenticity (hence establishing a partial accord with Belting and Maguire), and on a dialogue between different styles ranging from the most abstract to the mere naturalistic. The unique semiotic matrix that lay within the Byzantine icon benefited greatly from the Byzantine church’s officially-sanctioned status of the icon as the identity of the Orthodox believer from 843 onwards. This historically-informed observation of the ancient Christian cult of icons forms the main thrust of Cormack’s thought. The official status amounted, as the author conjectures, to an effacement of the
dichotomy in Byzantium between iconography and style, a former iconoclastic inclination superseded by an artistic religious program meant to encourage the icon painter. The icon thus fostered an ideal and an ethos of timelessness that upheld authenticity in the art of the Byzantine icon painter and was simultaneously protected by the post-iconoclast, ecclesiastical dogma of the unity of iconography and style. That unity represented more than a conventional agreement; it bestowed institutional letter into a continuum with God’s real presence in the signifying universe of the icon, and has stayed so despite changes in the history and style of the icon examined by both Belting and Cormack.

While the Byzantine aesthetic of the icon stakes a secure claim for a painter trained in an inextricable link between the experience of the visual in religion and his own operation of the visual, any parallel with the West should be handled with great care. To assert that the West furthered the Byzantine model holds true only within the essential observation that the Byzantine icon never enjoyed an official status in the West. I believe, therefore, that the Western expression of the Byzantine icon belongs to an exclusive spiritual exercise of the painter capable of excavating the deepest origins of his own devotional universe, which long ago belonged to the Byzantine Empire’s expansions in the Western territory. Deborah Howard maintains the capacity of the painter’s imagination to reconfigure the Christian image in the wake of a slackening of Byzantine vigor, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Such tendencies were starting in earnest in Venice, a defender of the Christian faith, where Carpaccio and primarily Gentile Bellini culled from Byzantine fine carpets, exotic Eastern articles, and precious oriental textiles as robes for sacred figures to make decoration subservient to pictorial space and meaning.
Yet, the painter’s efforts should not be understood in terms of a regeneration of an aboriginal source, what Mircea Eliade describes in the “illo tempore” experience of a remote past which is endlessly enlivened in the signifying campus of religions and popular beliefs; rather, the Western painter excavates within his own operation of the visual an ancient Christian cult and the genuine matrix of the Byzantine icon. The historically informed observations of Kallistos Ware bring fundamental enlightenment in this line of argument. In “The Theology and Spirituality of the Icon,” Ware underscores that the Byzantine icon was denied liturgical function in the Western ritual from the eighth century onwards, although its presence was tolerated in churches for the purpose of decoration. An overturning of the mere decorative status of the icon arose only temporarily in the early Counter-Reformation when, under ecclesiastical measures, Byzantine icons replaced the high altars in numerous Roman churches including Raphael’s Madonna of Foligno from 1512 at Santa Maria in Aracoeli. However, these historical circumstances proved volatile in both directions: the Byzantine icon did not become a mainstay of the Western high altar; nor were altarpieces such as the Madonna of Foligno taken down perpetually by lingering Counter-Reformation ideals.

These observations shape the backbone of my study of El Greco, and of my dissertation in the whole, which propounds devotional significance as the Byzantine icon’s commonplace in the Western expression. On the basis of devotional meaning, an integration of Western ideas into the Byzantine tradition was possible; however, it was on the strength of the Western artist to establish a merger between the Byzantine icon and Western altarpiece as part of his own capacity to derive visual energy from outside of an officially-sanctioned practice. The icon as an instrument of devotion amounts to an
archaic subtext lying at the very root of all appropriations which made the task of the Western painter even more complex than that of his Byzantine comrade or predecessor. Alexander Nagel has meaningfully reasoned the existence of an unbroken bond with the Byzantine icon at the level of “an image’s referential capacity” embedded in Renaissance paintings of the period around 1500 which reanimate the figura, the eternal image of God.¹²

The concept of “likeness of icon and altarpiece” that I propose as the central topic of this chapter asserts truthfulness or referential responsibility towards figura as the colligating factor in the transfer of meaning between Byzantine icons and Western altarpieces. Such an understanding of likeness drives a wedge between imitation and creative indebtedness to origins, a distinction made explicit by Christopher Wood’s definition of likeness as “an effect generated not by literal analogic correspondence to a real model, but by an excess of information with respect to the apparent function of the image.”¹³ I conjecture that my notion of “the individualized effect of the altarpiece” is the mark of El Greco’s emancipation from the strictures of theologians which privileged rhetoric to the exclusion of archaism in the post-Tridentine altarpiece. My examination of El Greco’s Assumption at the high altar of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo wishes to take a further step in Robin Cormack’s and Jonathan Brown’s query whether El Greco’s distinctiveness lay in his past or in his Western altarpiece.¹⁴

El Greco’s interpretation of the Pietà constitutes a subsequent topic of this chapter. His adaptations of the Pietà to the visual narratives of Marian devotion conjure forth a suprahistorical order which shows El Greco antithetical to the Italian Renaissance model, grounded in the contingent and the specific of post-Tridentine history. However, the
backdrop against which El Greco formed his Western, non-mimetic altarpiece profile was not an isolated feature in the historical context of late sixteenth-century Spanish art, but anticipative of the debate between the ancients and moderns in Spanish art and culture. In Jose Antonio Maravall’s concept of the age of Spanish Baroque as the triumph of “modernity” over her ancient aggressors, the visual plays a seminal role in the age’s development in a direction unparalleled in neighboring countries such as Italy.\(^{15}\) Maravall’s thought is historically grounded in the culture of medieval and modern Spain, a value-free thesis for which – as the author underscores – the historical context is alien to all aesthetic theories belonging to a doctrinal content. In the antagonism between the classical theorist Vicente Carducho and the modern painter Vélazquez, Maravall acknowledges the triumph of modernity over classicism in the Spanish culture of the Golden Age. For Maravall, the ultimate victory of the modern spirit was not rebellious against the old continuities in what Weisbach recognized in the “anthropological pessimism” of Spanish literature, but rather triumphant over the classicism of the modern times as it was promoted by ecclesiastical writers and the classical treatises of Carducho, Pacheco and Palomino.\(^{16}\) The corpus of Counter-Reformation writing in Spain was attributed by Véronique Gerard Powell to the influence of Vasari’s \textit{Lives} in Spain, a direction first manifested in Toledo in the 1560s.\(^{17}\) An erudite ecclesiastical figure, Don Felipe de Guevara wrote in the 1560s his \textit{Commentarios de la Pintura}, a defense of the nobility of Spanish painting as a repository of the innovations in the Italian Renaissance visible among others in the Sienna Cathedral. A subsequent treatise from the 1580s by Alvar Gómez de Castro, a professor and friend of Guevara, takes further aim at the primacy of the Italian Renaissance as a fact to debase Spanish art. As Powell goes on to
explain, even more pervading than in the late sixteenth century, the influence of the Vasarian myth after the second edition of the Lives in 1568 grew possibly stronger in the Spanish-Vasarian treatise of Palomino, Museo Pictórico y Escala Óptica from 1715. Before Palomino, Vasari’s Lives were turned into a normative model and manual of iconographic formulas for painters and patrons in Pacheco’s L’Arte de la Pintura completed in 1638. Besides being patterned after Vasari’s concept of competing regional styles that pitted Florentines against Venetians in a way designed to provoke polemical discussions, as Philip Sohm shows in Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (2001), these treatises share a concerted attempt to define a fixed canon of imitation. Vicente Carducho has best approximated a norm for ideal imitation in his Dialogos de la Pintura from 1633, a work Maravall traces to the Three Dialogues on Painting by Francesco de Hollanda which he sees as an Italian historiographic model to mitigate a transfer from classical beauty to modern naturalness. Maravall sees in de Hollanda’s concept of naturalness the paternal model of Carducho’s canon of ideal imitation. I propose instead that Carducho wanted to restrict Spanish style to a preferred Counter-Reformation ideal of the imitation of classical beauty in Winckelmann’s later terms of the Greek style dependent upon proportion and contour, just as Vasari wished to claim for style design, ideal imitation and grace as the aspects of painting he most valued. For Carducho, modern naturalness is indebted to the classical ideal and to decorum or the fitness to purpose which was the watchword in the Counter-Reformation. Naturalness in Carducho’s canon of imitation equals mendacity for Maravall, a deliberate estrangement from the spirit of truthfulness to history as a landmark of the modern spirit of Spanish art and culture.
The critical steps in the formation of this direction of modernity in Spanish art originate in the Renaissance, primarily in the active opposition to ideal imitation, design and grace in Vasari’s model. El Greco’s annotations to volumes II and III of the 1568 edition of the Lives are famous in their refutation of the Vasarian model that submits painting to a mere imitative process. El Greco’s copy of Vasari’s Lives was acquired from one of the leading art theoreticians of the day, the painter Federico Zuccari.\textsuperscript{22} El Greco’s efforts to shutter Vasari drew, I believe, an extended response in his own norms and merits as painter of religious art in Toledo and also in the enduring legacy of his artistic model unhampered by Italian Renaissance and Spanish Counter-Reformation treatises.

El Greco’s adaptations of the Pietà constitute experiments to surpass the historiographical and iconographic model which fell under the spell of poetic-creative imagination. El Greco was constantly hunting for new evidence that would confirm the Pietà in its interrelation with Marian devotion, thus inscribing his efforts within the union between aesthetic and religious ideals hailed by Michelangelo. Alexander Nagel has reasoned that Michelangelo’s Pietà for Vittoria Colonna proposed a new kind of religious image to forge a novel link between artistic and divine grace, a reanimation of an old cult image as a work of art accommodated to the tastes and religious inclinations of Vittoria Colonna and her circle. Condensed in this way to its vestigial form, the Colonna Pietà sets out to define a new conception of the work of art as a viable purveyor of religious values.\textsuperscript{23} El Greco’s Pietàs at Santo Domingo in Toledo (Figure 10) and in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America (Figure 31) stand in relation to Michelangelo’s efforts to refine religious forms by tracing them to Christian narrative origins and their latent
associations with Marian devotion. El Greco responds to Michelangelo through a critical, on-going dialogue with the unity between reform ideals and archaic Christian sources of meaning embedded in the Colonna Pietà.

The strenuous range of values which operate within a syncretism of beauty, religion and art preclude any act of imitation. The reach exceeds the mimetic impulse which Leo Steinberg identifies with El Greco’s imitation of Michelangelo’s Florence Pietà in his four painted versions of the Entombment. Steinberg regards the Entombment as a belabored attempt to replicate Michelangelo’s marble group within a Venetian incorporation by El Greco of the expressive potential of Michelangelo’s Pietà.24 In Venice, preparatory drawings were important in the creative process in a way different from central Italy, where for Vasari good art was primarily concerned with the idealized human figure. More important for the Venetian artists was, as Charles Hope has suggested, a quality that involved besides colorito figures and compositions of a kind very different from those used by artists such as Vasari.25 El Greco’s adaptations of the Pietà betray a will to elaborate and perfect formal inventions decisively bound up with vestigial Christian images, an experiment superseding a literal act of imitation of cult images or contemporaneous models.

2.1 El Greco’s Assumption at Santo Domingo el Antiguo: The Individualized Effect of the Altarpiece

The principal concerns of much post-Tridentine painting in El Greco’s time gravitated around the demand for narrative clarity and the creation of a liturgical image with the principal holy figure placed in the center of a composition, and often oriented frontally. Texts of the post-Tridentine period document such issues in relatively roundabout ways
and do not elaborate how the image should be placed in the center of a composition. Even with stylistic adjustments, the creation of paintings that took to heart these regulations remained conceptual and iconic, rather than narrative and dramatic. Cardinal Carlo Borromeo’s observations indicate the idea of centrality in post-Tridentine religious painting: “From the bearing, the position, the adornment of the person, the whole expression of sacred images should fittingly and decorously correspond to the dignity and sanctity of their prototype.” Another important representative of religious institutions invested in the recovery of fundamental elements of venerable image traditions, the Dominican theologian Giovanni Andrea Gilio defended the old cult images and prized in particular their frontality, what he called their prosopoea. A most articulate defender of the late medieval tradition, Gilio said with great clarity in 1564 in his Degli errori dei pittori that the creation of paintings is solely the exercise of the artist. It is difficult, Gilio asserts, to give a reason why images should be painted so and not otherwise, because apart from Guillaume Durand’s Rationale “we do not have any rule or law, except the custom of painters (la consuetudine de’ pittori).” After Gilio alluded in theoretical terms, the idea of artistic integrity finds its fullest realization in the pictures that advance the hierarchies and symmetries of traditional religious images while generating a narrative drama. In contrast, compositions that follow strict decorum in religious painting only achieved decorous images of saints appropriately disposed and hierarchically arranged.

This dissertation is particularly concerned in investigating the painters’ idea of istoria expressed in narrative and dramatic ways. Such an engagement did not invariably maintain the frontality of the principal figure, but made most compelling changes to
adjust it to the narrative element. Efforts to surpass the commissioners’ desire for traditional iconographies and decorum are characteristic of Federico Barocci’s altarpieces that uphold and at once advance the idea of istoria in both its Albertian and post-Tridentine guises.\(^2^9\) A relevant example is Barocci’s Visitation for a side chapel in Santa Maria in Vallicella, the mother church of the Oratorians in Rome (Figure 1). A composition iconically stable and dramatically narrative, the Visitation proposed a compelling solution to the enduring presence of the Christian devotional sentiment—a fundamental dilemma of modern religious painting that is central to my dissertation. Barocci has abandoned depicting the Virgin Mary frontally in favor of showing her advancing obliquely from the left, yet this narrative solution does not transform the Christian devotional image into a secular work of art. Barocci’s Visitation was the favorite image of San Filippo Neri, and the focus of many of his meditations that he would have normally addressed to a more traditional icon. The idea of a parallel between icon and altarpiece embedded in the Visitation is sustained by the iconically stable composition within which Barocci advances a powerful narrative element.

While Federico Barocci’s Visitation upholds a carefully conceived compositional order as the painting’s closest analogy to an iconic composition, El Greco was committed to subvert most strict pictorial parameters. His Allegory of the Holy League (Figure 88) and The Martyrdom of St. Maurice (Figure 34) are powerful istorie that fuse icon and narrative in a manner that emphasizes the discontinuities of figura and narrative element. Such an anachronistic rendition departs from the certainties of iconic frontality in order to advance the dramatic core of the istoria and at once to stress the Christian devotional sentiment of traditional icons as authentic sources of prayer and meditation. El Greco’s
understanding of the Santo Domingo Assumption (Figure 3) as an image that directly refers the Eucharistic presence in the panel directly above accentuates the fundamental iconic claims of his altarpiece, in subversion of contemporary renditions of the subject.\(^{30}\)

The discontinuities of time and space as an icon mode transferred to the altarpiece practice belonged to reform ideas of central importance for El Greco. They took a compelling expression in Michelangelo’s \textit{Entombment} (Figure 2), in which Alexander Nagel has stressed an attempt to bring a new conception of narrative painting into alignment with the frontal traditions of the altarpiece. The frontal orientation and symmetrical structure interfere now with the impression of movement, yet the carrying of Christ towards the viewer is anachronistic in relation to the backwards movements of the figures. The varied dramatic movements of the carriers are hardly responses to the action at hand, thus stressing a continuity with more generic Christian devotional gestures rather than with the consistency of movement and theme in the Albertian \textit{historia}.\(^{31}\)

In the late 1570s when El Greco left Rome to move permanently to Toledo, the Counter-Reformation progress in the Western kingdom laid waste to reform ideals. The post-Tridentine age was the logical consequence of Pope Paul IV Carafa’s decision to break the alliance between papal and imperial forces, and thus to overturn the very mandate of the Council of Trent as a chance of confessional reconciliation.\(^{32}\) The age of religious entrenchment that emerged when the centralized power dashed reform ideals had profound implications in art.\(^{33}\) The implementation of the rigorous dogma of the Tridentine church became the authority of an ecclesiastical program of reform that heralded the beginning of a rhetorical use of images. Patronage as a form of propaganda
was rapidly expending discourse on the significance and value of art informed by the historical fortunes of contemporary events.  

The commissioning process ordering that works of art are meant to compete with contemporary history was detrimental to the inherent supra-historical character of Christian narratives. Accordingly, the ecclesiastical mechanism to supervise art, set in motion after Trent, brought about a shift in the fortune of reform-minded ideas and their interpretative fulcrum. The beliefs that animated a culture of reform privileged, over the first half of the sixteenth century, a process of religious renewal in accord with outward forms of display. These ideas were apparent at the hierarchical and elite level of the Italian society, and hopes that they would become official church teaching were dispelled only later, after the onset of the Tridentine council. The reform effort to unify the experience of inner faith and outward ritual, which materialized in the marriage of beauty and art, was soon discouraged by the post-Tridentine church as a gesture of disaffection with its historical purpose. The artists working on commission were the first pawns of these effects.

Yet the art faction headed by the ecclesiastical program of reform was constantly counter-argued by the individuality of talent. This dissertation argues that a more subtle claim was being made by outstanding artistic personalities and their efforts to safeguard reform ideals in the Counter-Reformation. The present research will bring to the fore the predisposition towards novelty and historical imagination bound up with a reflective articulation of archaic images that fuelled El Greco, Federico Zuccari, Annibale Carracci and Rubens, at the very same time when their shared enterprise and alliances were threatened by ecclesiastical dictates.
El Greco’s decision to move permanently to Toledo and work as an independent contract painter dissolved much of the negative impulses he accumulated during his seven-year Roman sojourn. Toledo, an outpost of reform ideals flourishing among El Greco’s friends, was also the spiritual centre of Spain and the former siege of the Visigothic monarchy. This archaic past furnished the ideal environment for the equally archaic nature of El Greco to negotiate the conditions of his own art market. The Erasmian culture tempered by medieval piety fostered by his Toledan friends did not collude with counter-reformatory implementations. Rather, the well-rounded scholars and clergymen of El Greco’s inner circle were prepared to debate with equanimity and to win the argument in their disputes with church authorities, appointed to reform the Toledo archdiocese in accordance with the Tridentine decrees.

El Greco was lending support to the Toledan resistance to Counter-Reformation directions primarily through his altarpieces. His engagement implicitly contended for the succession to public knowledge of his own artistic ideas. His annotations to the second edition of Vasari’s Lives from 1568, which he acquired from his friend and leading theoretician of the day, painter Federico Zuccari, clearly indicate that he arrived at these original ideas on his own. It appears certain, at the same time, that El Greco shared Federico Zuccari’s critique of Vasari’s normative and counter-reformatory model of the Giunti edition of the Lives. Equally, El Greco’s annotations reveal that he further agreed with his friend’s ideas in the 1580s when Federico moved to Spain to work, however briefly, at the Escorial. Besides being aligned with Federico Zuccari’s views, El Greco’s marginal commentaries have much in common with Annibale Carracci’s postille to Vasari. Although Annibale Carracci’s critical comments are less systematized, they
take a common interest in remonstrating against Vasari’s culture and his excessive praise of Roman papal commissions.\textsuperscript{43}

The most revealing exemplar of El Greco’s receptivity to a culture of reform was manifested in his Toledan altarpieces. The altarpiece was for El Greco the medium to confess with most certainty his engagement with Michelangelo’s legacy to the modern age. Michelangelo’s architectural drawings that advocate the role of ornament as an indispensable component of architecture and the link between figure and frame—namely an exchange between sculpture and architecture—were further developed in El Greco’s altarpiece concept. This understanding appears particularly cogent in El Greco’s use of the Mandylion in an altarpiece arrangement of novel significance at Santo Domingo el Antiguo (Figure 3). Michelangelo’s endorsement for invention in architecture stimulated El Greco to challenge the Counter-Reformation conception of architecture as a mathematical discipline associated with the science of mechanics that defined the official direction in Spain after the building of the Escorial.\textsuperscript{44} El Greco’s ideas were fully expressed in a set of famous annotations to another Counter-Reformation treatise, Daniele Barbaro’s edition of Vitruvius’ \textit{On Architecture} published in Venice, in 1556.\textsuperscript{45}

In adapting to painting Michelangelo’s position on architecture as a creative field, independent of orders and disciplines, El Greco simultaneously formed his own concept of the altarpiece. The individualized character of his Toledan altarpieces rests on the reform-minded ideas of the supremacy of architecture as a creative process. These ideas were fully embodied in El Greco’s first Toledan work of large scale, the \textit{Assumption} for the convent of Santo Domingo El Antiguo. Primarily, in this altarpiece construction El Greco took pains to assert the individualized altarpiece effect patterned after architectural
models, which turned elastic in his hands and he adjusted in relation to the figures. This approach to the figurative arts and architecture was further sustained by the individualized character of the icon, upon which El Greco was prepared to model his altarpiece. The complex entwinement of architecture and icon forms the individualized effect of the Santo Domingo altarpiece, where the altar frame and the sculptures were executed after El Greco’s drawings by Toledan sculptor Juan Bautista Monegro.46

The assertion that the existing frame accurately reflects without any limits or modifications an original design by the painter has been challenged by El Greco scholars. Opinions that El Greco only adapted the panels of Juan de Herrera’s and Hernando de Avila’s designs, and Monegro modified the size in relation to the Santo Domingo choir, register a classical concern of proportion and symmetry in the Renaissance architecture of Toledo.47 It is not our task here to examine these architectural precedents, but rather to stress that the final project was executed in conformity to El Greco’s concept for the Santo Domingo altar.48

The image of Veronica’s veil painted on a wooden panel is part of the high altar at Santo Domingo el Antiguo, occupying the center of the broken pediment over the first story (Figure 4). El Greco’s original treatment of the veil as an icon encased and held by sculpted angels at the center of the altarpiece underscores both the miraculous and the meditative nature of the relic of Christ. The use of the Mandylion in altarpiece context retains the early function of icons in Byzantine worship. From the earliest times, the role of icons has been apparent from the prayers performed for them by Christian believers. The concept of veracity played a fundamental role, as the prayer addressed to the icon was considered effective only when the image was an authentic representation of God or
the saints. It was on the strength of an icon’s referential capacity that the veneration directed to it was authentic worship.\textsuperscript{49}

The Byzantine icon-painters and their productions made deep inroads into Christian piety on the basis of a visually-preserved likeness to the original resemblance of God.\textsuperscript{50} Nurtured within this Byzantine tradition, El Greco grew up in Crete in the third quarter of the sixteenth century where his birthplace, Heraklion, was engaged in the production of icons for both the local market and export. El Greco was among the gifted artists working in the ateliers of Heraklion as an icon painter, and it is noteworthy that he was to make his entrance in the Western art world with the same status. Indeed, in 1572 El Greco was admitted to the Roman painters’ guild, the Academy of Saint Luke, and registered as a painter of miniatures.\textsuperscript{51}

In Italy, El Greco’s religious outlook and artistic expression underwent an adjustment to Renaissance art. In the remodelling to a new cultural context, his formation—nurtured as it was in the most purely religious painting tradition—played a seminal role. The Venetian sojourn, which predates El Greco’s arrival in Rome, further underscored his Byzantine expressivity.\textsuperscript{52} The information he gleaned primarily from paintings from the 1500s contended with the problem of authentic representation. El Greco did not simply see the source of authentic representation observed in the Venetian altarpiece and its development; he assimilated and incorporated the new stylistic synthesis of the Venetian school, which after the emerging of Giovanni Bellini as the leading personality, the contribution of the sculptor-architects Pietro and Tullio Lombardo, and of the architect Mauro Codussi, received the ultimate touch of excellence from Antonello da Messina.\textsuperscript{53}
El Greco’s contention that Byzantine icon painting is the art of painters, and not the reflection of a dogma, found a strong Western counterpart in the altarpiece accomplishments of the Venetian masters. The opportunity to expound his Byzantine expression as an icon painter on to the Renaissance altarpiece was clearly stimulated by El Greco’s understanding that the altarpiece may impart to his work the same religious feeling that inheres in the icon. The equation of sacrality and authenticity was of crucial concern to El Greco’s altarpiece; it also prepared the grounds for an absorption of Northern engraving. The incorporation of the Northern print into his Assumption at Santo Domingo el Antiguo is a direct implication of the equal claims to authenticity El Greco saw in icons and prints.54 The degree of likeness in the Sudarium located in the broken pediment is a replicated and thus original correspondence El Greco establishes with the Holy portrait once kept in Rome, as a true icon and authentic image of Christ. The analogy deepens its claim to authenticity by recourse to the horizontal format of Dürer’s Sudarium of St. Veronica supported by two angels (Figure 5).

Jacobus de Voragine stresses, in his account of the Sudarium in the Golden Legend, how being affected by the Holy Face is only contingent on faith: ‘Can this image be bought for gold and silver?’ enquires Volusian, a friend of Pontius Pilate, and to which Veronica responds ‘No, but sincere piety will obtain its blessings.’55 The Sudarium elicits an understanding of faith as the gift that was already bestowed on the believer in response to his unconditional love for God. The late medieval trope of the Imitation of Christ, circulated by Thomas à Kempis’ book as the model of a self-fashioning after Christ, has certainly made Dürer work intensively on his St. Veronica engraving.56 The most striking feature of the print, as many commentators have indicated, is the similarity of the frontal
gaze of Christ to Dürer’s self-portrait of 1500 in Munich. Dürer later gifted to Raphael his self-portrait painted on cambric, which again bears a clear resemblance to the idea of St. Veronica’s Sudarium. Upon careful examination, one can notice that the face of Christ on the sculpted Mandylion at Santo Domingo el Antiguo bears close resemblance to El Greco’s Apostles series and explicitly to his self-portrait as part of the celebrants in the Entombment of Count de Orgaz (Figure 8). El Greco’s own features grafted on to the horizontal format of Dürer’s St. Veronica Sudarium and then adapted to his sculptured replica secure a mark of increased authenticity at the altarpiece level. His motivation to cull from Dürer’s print in altarpiece context is, therefore, a calculated attempt to promote the Imitation of Christ as a guiding principle to painters of religious images in the late sixteenth century.

St. Veronica’s sweatcloth enjoys a special status in El Greco’s Assumption at Santo Domingo el Antiguo not only owing to its authentic character impressed upon altarpiece structure; it also contends with the late medieval altars’ ritual inventory, which negotiates between the visionary and the real. The liturgical alignment of the Eucharistic mystery enacted at the altar and the Mandylion reiterates the miraculous encounter between Christ and Veronica beyond the source of the sweatcloth. In embedding the Mandylion in the center of the altarpiece, El Greco transforms the whole altarpiece into a living presence of the Eucharistic body.

A dialogue between figure and frame arrays the religious context of the high altar at Santo Domingo el Antiguo. Michelangelo had already proposed the relation between figure and frame not as the simple use of the human figure as ornament, but as a complex architectural relation between subject and meaning. El Greco shows that he assimilated
this understanding when pondering Michelangelo’s ideas in his own drawings of the Medici Chapel, once part of Vasari’s Libro de’ disegni. The affinity between El Greco and Michelangelo stimulated El Greco to turn the classical orders elastic in his architectural altarpiece, as evidenced in the Santo Domingo complex altarpiece construction. Equally, the thematic significance that results from a dialogue between figure and frame is a clear evocation of Michelangelo’s ideas further developed in El Greco’s altarpiece painting. The transformation of St. Veronica’s Sudarium into a sculptural ornament was happening beyond the formal level. There are implications of iconographic meaning associated with a preferred device for sculptor-architects. Seen in this context, El Greco’s Mandyion enhances the tradition of figures located in Byzantine architecture on triumphal arches, or contained within the architectural decoration of the nave.

The assimilation of the Mandyion to the arch over the entrance wall at Panhagia Phorbiotissa in Asinou made the Byzantine painter, centuries before El Greco, expand the narrative meaning of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary depicted below (Figure 6). The presence of the archetypal icon that signifies Christ’s presence in the world presides over the Dormition, or Koimesis, in the central location. Rather than being an allusion to the difference between icona and historia, in the Panhagia setting the Mandyion impresses its sacral meaning upon the narrative episode of the Dormition located below. The obsequies of the Mother of God are invested with the Eucharistic significance embedded in the Mandyion and thus extended from chronological occurrence to supra-historical definition.
The iconographic meaning embedded in the juxtaposition of the archetypal icon and the Dormition is brought to further lengths in El Greco’s *Assumption* at Santo Domingo. Fluent as he was in Byzantine architecture, El Greco integrates the sculptured *Mandylion* patterned after the archetypal icon in a dialogue with architecture at the altarpiece level. In so doing, El Greco asserts the living presence of God inherent in the icon as an altarpiece hallmark. The interpolation of the St. Veronica’s *Sudarium* in an altarpiece context supplements the Assumption narrative of Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, a text El Greco challenged through his visual narrative of the Virgin Mary’s ascent which is not encompassed by Voragine. The *Mandylion*’s assimilation to the Assumption narrative furthers the spiritual ascent of Mary’s soul. In surpassing the written source, the visual narrative wrought by El Greco encapsulates now at the thematic level the eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary; in turn, the medieval ascent of Mary’s soul is an ongoing evocation of the icon that inheres in the altarpiece.

The dialogue of figure and frame dominated architectural practice in El Greco’s time. However, there was a shortage of artists and architects prepared to develop the relation between sculpture and architecture from preparatory sketches to narrative solutions apparent in the final version. For El Greco, the ability to interlock figure and frame in a narrative context was part of his fluency with the Byzantine dome tradition, where the Pantocrator is a synthesis of the whole fresco decoration of the main nave. Yet the Byzantine underpinnings that never ceased to play a fundamental role in El Greco’s altarpiece were not exclusively an Eastern preserve in his time. Toledo, the spiritual center of the archaic Spanish monarchy, was replete with Eastern and Western cross-references incorporated into the town’s architecture. At the church of San Juan de
Los Reyes, the abundant decoration is organized around distinctive and varied tracery motifs. The intricate tracery running across the transept arms and continuing into the choir is replicated on the tympanum directly above the entrance to the cloister. On the cloister side of the wall, a tracery form contains a relief sculpture of St. Veronica’s Sudarium held by two angels (Figure 7).

The occurrence of the Mandylion is far from being accidental at San Juan de Los Reyes. In the archaic Toledo, the association between Christ’s image and the redemptive power of the miraculous icon clearly points to the survival of ancient inflexions of meaning into a late Gothic vocabulary. In discovering the St. Veronica’s Sudarium employed as a sculptural ornament at San Juan de Los Reyes, El Greco received an important impetus for stretching the archaic vocabulary of Toledo architecture to include his own altarpiece. The transformation of the Mandylion into a sculptural ornament at Santo Domingo appears thus indicative of El Greco’s overriding concern to foster Toledan archaism at the thematic level of the Assumption.

In Toledo, funerary monuments offered another powerful point of intersection for sculpture and architecture. The construction and decoration of the convent church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, completed in 1579, is most relevant to this claim. Diego de Castilla, the commissioner of El Greco’s project for the decoration of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, intended that a funerary monument commemorate the donoress, Dona Maria de Silva, who was interred right in front of the high altar. Dona de Silva conceded in her will the place of honour to the patroness, the Virgin Mary, who appears in the center of the altarpiece in a scene of her Assumption.
The task to conceive his altarpiece as a funerary monument was new for El Greco, and of a complexity immediately apparent when one considers the figure of Diego de Castilla. The powerful dean of Toledo’s cathedral chapter was a person with reform-minded ideas, who impeded from the outset the Counter-Reformation character of the provincial court, challenged its authority and blocked all attempts to put Tridentine recommendations into effect in Toledo. Diego de Castilla was the voice of Spanish Erasmians in Toledo who, like himself, were simultaneously influenced by medieval traditions of piety. His resistance to Tridentine implementations continued to maintain the attitude of the former archbishop of Toledo, Bartolomé de Carranza y Miranda, whose Erasmian profile and medieval piety found a reputable counterpart in Diego de Castilla. As the leader of Toledo’s intellectual circle and dean of the cathedral chapter, Diego de Castilla aimed at fostering the archaic profile of the former capital of Spain at the very same time when Madrid had become a ceremonial capital of post-Tridentine Catholicism. The gulf between Madrid, a city dedicated to the externalization of religious form in keeping with the Council of Trent’s affirmation of the role of ritual in Catholic worship, and Toledo, the archaic center of Spain’s Christian heritage, was nowhere more apparent than in the debates of Diego de Castilla with the provincial court.

Against this religious backdrop of Toledo, it cannot be coincidental that El Greco conceived his Santo Domingo altarpiece with the principles of the reform of art firmly in view. An important source for these ideas was offered by the archaic past of Toledo and its funerary altarpiece monuments visible in the Cathedral of Toledo. Equally influential, the local medieval triptych and its narrative implications re-emerged in El Greco’s modernizing concept. The individualized effect of the altarpiece for Santo Domingo el
Antiguo bespeaks an impressive poise between the strands of modernity and archaism, with a conscientious intention to derive meaning from the medieval past of Toledo.

The sepulchral art of Toledo reflects the continuing taste in Spain for commemorating in marble tombs the late Roman Christian tradition. This trend which had begun in Seville was heralded in Toledo by members of the Mendoza family, who wanted their tombs to be “al romano.” Rather than an empty display of historical lineage, this decision was imbued with the memory of Toledo’s archaic past which, in later years, determined Count Salazar de Mendoza to defend El Greco’s funerary altarpiece of The Entombment of Count of Orgaz (Figure 8) from Counter-Reformation attack. The sepulchral art of Toledo offered an expressive model from which El Greco could glean in his altarpiece. His concept of the retable is derived from local prototypes, yet it has remained singular and virtually without consequence in Spanish art.

The funerary monument offered El Greco a vertical model of architectural structure to enframe a particular image. This model re-emerges in the high altar at Santo Domingo, where the entire ensemble is vertically arranged and dictated by the canvasses within. Yet rather than being a paraphrase of the traditional Spanish retable with a narrative sequence of painting and sculpture displayed in superimposed horizontal levels, El Greco’s design places a single, large canvas of the Assumption (Figure 9) at the center of the principal level. This is flanked by columns supporting a pediment and surmounted by an attic containing a Pietà (Figure 10) of large dimensions, instead of a second narrative sequence.

The referential character of icon-images is amplified when encased in sculptural altarpieces, and Roman and Venetian monumental altarpieces before 1530 testify to such
direction frequently. The durability of stone seemed more appropriate than any other material to secure a process of transmission of iconic messages. The form of the architectural altarpiece shows that issues of authenticity involved the shape of the plan as key to the function and meaning of Christian devotional images. The form of the first bay of the Santo Domingo high altar is the creative response that El Greco gave to the tomb monument of Doge Andrea Vendramin by Tullio Lombardo, from the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice (Figure 11). The architect adapted the tomb monument to the needs of an altarpiece, thereby creating the architectural altarpiece that suppresses the relief of outward sepulchral forms to create a flat surface, in close resemblance to the traditional altarpiece field.\textsuperscript{73} This type of Venetian sculptured altarpiece re-emerges in the high altar at Santo Domingo, in the flat quality of the columns supporting a main entablature and the attic placed over the center. El Greco’s adaptation to the church altarpiece of monumental tomb sculpture was essentially creative, not mimetic. He blended the Venetian tradition with antedating tendencies in Sienese monumental tombs which around 1300 showed a tripartite structure with the Mother of God and surrounding figures placed above the deceased. Such innovative and striking assembling principles testified to a reform of funerary monuments in which devotion to the Mother of God was imbuing with spiritual significance funerary monuments functioning like altars.\textsuperscript{74}

A reputable Renaissance artist invested in the creation of sepulchral monuments transformed into church altarpieces was Andrea Bregno. Christoph Luitpold Frommel has laid out the principles of Andrea Bregno’s architectural altarpieces that alert one to his reform of the late medieval sepulchral art of Florence.\textsuperscript{75} Bregno’s compelling inclinations concern his varied interpretations of the Renaissance plans for sepulchral monuments of
Arnolfo, Brunelleschi, Donatello and Michelozzo, an interest stimulated by their shape and not so much by features such as absolute size, materials and details. At the main altarpiece for the sacristy of Sta. Maria del Popolo (Figure 12), Bregno adapted to the needs of a church altarpiece the major altar at San Lorenzo in Damaso, a tripartite design surmounted by a triumphal arch (Figure 13). Remarkably, at Sta. Maria del Popolo, Bregno would accentuate a Marian devotional image in the attic of the sepulchral monument for Cardinal Cristoforo della Rovere, located in the third chapel on the right of the main nave (Figure 14). Although a simpler variation of the traditional Florentine tripartite plan, the della Rovere architectural altarpiece proposed an integration of the Marian cult into sepulchral monuments that would not remain without followers in Roman church architecture.\(^76\)

Beyond the formal Roman and Venetian similarities with which El Greco was playing in the design of his own architectural altarpiece, his overriding concern was to incorporate the sacramental function that resulted in the medieval transformation from sepulchral monument to church altarpiece. El Greco placed special emphasis on the sacramental function of his Santo Domingo high altar which derives meaning from the dialogue between figure and frame, precisely pointed to in the sculpted *Mandylion* impressed upon the altarpiece. He acts in the altarpiece manner of the sculptor-architect, who invested the Renaissance funerary monument with the sacramental function inherent in the very definition of church altarpieces, excavating the medieval origin of this transformation to further lengths by inserting the Assumption as part of the devotion to the Mother of God.
El Greco’s receptivity to a culture of reform, which fostered archaism in modern advocations, established his swift assimilation to Western art. His retooling in the Italian and Spanish Renaissance altarpiece did not overturn his Cretan practice or the icon tradition grounded in Byzantine art. The early formation in Heraklion secured an effective transition to the forms of Renaissance art, rather than conflicting with the state of sixteenth-century Western art. The claims for authenticity and referentiality that had informed El Greco’s icon painting were naturally developed at a level of higher complexity in his altarpieces in the West. Between the referential work of the Byzantine icon and the Western altarpiece El Greco found a unity of common representational aims.

This understanding was stimulated to an unprecedented extent by the similarities inherent in the Erasmian culture of Spain and El Greco’s own Byzantine traditions of piety. In both cases, a denial of external forms of religious commitment characterized Christian worship. In Byzantine religiosity, the liturgy was understood as a ritual of prayer directed to the icon, and the priest as an officiant to the image of God that was embedded in the icon.77 Accordingly, the archaic ritual was of a sober expression, and withdrew from this austerity only after the Byzantine emperor and his court gradually incorporated the imperial idea in the Christian ritual.78

In the Western kingdom, the most pertinent remonstrations with the externalization of faith was heralded by Erasmus’ Enchiridion Militis Christiani. In Spain, a development occurred in the mid 1520s when the writings of Erasmus became a matter of controversy. The center of the debate was the university of Alcalá de Henares, where in 1526 the Spanish translation of the Enchiridion enjoyed immediate popularity.79 Erasmus’ concern with interiority was common to all the reforming movements of the time, and primarily to
the Italian spirituali. The concern with interiority was thereby not exclusively Erasmian, but it found particularly forceful and popular expression in his Enchiridion. Erasmus’ spirituality and his stress on externals rather than internals, as the salient feature of a debased popular piety he yearned to renew, appealed to the Spaniards as the true spirit of reform. The medieval forms of prayer fostered before 1520 by Ignatius of Loyola originate in this devotional direction which addressed the individual involvement of the Christian believer. It may be said that Ignatius has prolonged medieval direction to the life and death of Christ and in so doing he reformed it of the defects Erasmus saw in the popular religiosity of the day. In view of this, it is safe to suppose that he agreed with Erasmus in condemning the distortion of medieval tradition by hypocrisy and superstition.

The themes of Erasmus’ thinking, which Toledan Erasmians like Bartolomé de Carranza y Miranda, Diego and Luis de Castilla, and Salazar de Mendoza drew on, were encouragement of lay spirituality and dissemination of the scripture, a preference for mental prayer, and above all criticism of ritual and ceremony. The movement of reform they fostered in this way transcended Erasmianism and deepened the medieval forms of prayer. The writings of Juan de Valdés, one of the most influential Erasmian voices of the Italian and Spanish reform, concordantly argued that the external manifestation of faith mattered little. What counted was the commitment of the individual believer, who was practicing a spirituality that was meditative and interiorized. This type of meditation became common in the late sixteenth century and was disseminated by Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises, which encouraged an intense activity both in the course of prayer and in all the powers of the mind.
Many prominent figures of Toledo were practitioners of this interpretation of the religious life. These ideas circulated in sixteenth-century Spain and Italy not only among humanists and noblemen, but among artists as well. Similarly, El Greco, a Byzantine living in the West, was naturally inclined to play down the importance of external signs of piety. His assimilation to a culture of reform was therefore a means of ascertaining his non-rhetorical contribution to the Byzantine idea transmitted to the Renaissance culture. Unlike the numerous Byzantine rhetoricians who had relocated in the West in order to support Byzantine culture as an exclusive prerogative of the imperial power of Byzantium, El Greco was never associated with the ambitions of historical survival. The credit he gave to the reform-minded ideas and their affective spirituality, integral to an aversion to the externalization of religious form, explains El Greco’s altarpiece as an unprecedented grafting of archaic ideas on to Western pictorial terms.

The archaism of a culture of reform in Toledo imparted to El Greco’s work even more religious feeling. His response to Diego de Castilla’s invitation to build a funerary sculptured-monument to Dona de Silva effects the transition from sepulchral art to altarpiece in keeping with medieval traditions of piety. The Venetian altarpiece pre-dating Counter-Reformation implementations played an influential role in this process, for it asserted the possibility of investing the funerary monument with sacramental significance. These adaptations ensured in the San Domingo altarpiece a survival of the deceased beyond the historical attitude inherent in the funerary ritual.

The furthering of the funerary altarpiece on sacramental grounds bespeaks an implicit tendency to neutralize the ritual function. With these premises, the altarpiece concept developed by El Greco in Toledo releases the Santo Domingo high altar from its funerary
function and historical past. The transcending of the funerary function in the sacramental significance, which El Greco embedded in his work, inscribes the Santo Domingo altarpiece in a higher order of religiosity. The sacramental value incorporates the funerary function into a frame of supra-historical meaning that inheres in the Eucharistic body. To this end, the assimilation of the Mandylion is the living presence of the Corpus Christi impressed upon the high altar, and transfers sacramental significance to the whole altarpiece.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the central panel effects the distribution of narrative meaning across the altarpiece field. Yet the visual narrative wrought by El Greco is a novel interpretation of the funerary gloss of the medieval legend. According to the written account, the Virgin Mary had fallen asleep for three days when she was resurrected by Christ’s visit. The encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary is portrayed by El Greco as the ascent of the resurrected Mother of God towards the Trinity, portrayed as an image of Christ in Pietà with God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit directly above. The Mandylion fuses the Assumption and the Trinity into an altarpiece unit of the authenticity and veracity sought after by El Greco. The combination of these images in a funerary altarpiece is without precedent, and suggests a specific significance for the Christian narratives. The association between the Mandylion, the redemptive power of the Trinity and the Assumption emphasizes the mystery of the Mother of God’s Resurrection and her eternal union with Christ. In incorporating the Mandylion into the altarpiece, El Greco supersedes the written account and transforms the historical character of the obsequies of the Mother of God into a sacramental act of communion, beyond temporal frames.
The medieval aspect of the Santo Domingo high altar was to serve as a precedent for subsequent transformations of funerary monuments into altarpieces. El Greco completed for his parish church, Santo Tomé, a funerary altarpiece in fresco to commemorate a benefactor of Toledo, Don Gonzalo Ruiz de Toledo, Count of Orgaz. The new altarpiece of the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz (Figure 8) replaced the medieval tomb setting of Don Gonzalo, who was interred in 1323 when Saints Augustine and Stephen stepped down from heaven to bury with their own hands this pious man. El Greco’s altarpiece does not repeat an old tomb type, in the sense of assimilating and generalizing from medieval funerary iconography of the gisant in Spain. Instead, the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz assembles a miraculous burial and a celestial scene of glory receiving the soul of Don Gonzalo. El Greco drew on the old legend only to reaffirm a very recent reassertion of old rights and Augustinian beliefs, as they were due to the Count of Orgaz. Yet, the old legend is visually recaptured beyond the historical sense of the text and the commissioner’s stipulation.

The pictorial equivalents found by El Greco to the constituent element of the legend represent a clear departure from the commissioner’s expectations. In shunning the specific iconographic demands elaborated in a petition from the parish priest of Santo Tomé, Andrés Núñez, to the Cardinal-Archbishop of Toledo, El Greco was resolute in portraying his own idea of the burial of the Count of Orgaz. He did not present the actual descent of the two saints explicitly mentioned in all accounts of the commission, perhaps because such representation appeared symbolically charged with historical allusions in which El Greco was certainly not interested. In contrast, El Greco opted for the Byzantine model of Koimesis (Figure 16) as a pictorial equivalent for the Toledan
entombment scene. In the *Analepsis* episode from the *Koimesis* narrative, the flying angels are those to whom Christ entrusts the soul-image of the Virgin he holds in his arms. In the *Entombment of the Count of Orgaz*, the analogy with the *Koimesis* is shown in the eidolon, a full-figured newborn who is carried aloft by an ascending angel. The newborn as an embodiment of Don Gonzales’ soul links the scene of the funeral with that of the heavenly glory directly above. El Greco’s supplementary details of the written account of the miraculous entombment further the narrative meaning beyond the historical information embedded in the funerary ritual. In substituting the saints with the angels as the carriers of the soul-image of Don Gonzales, El Greco was intent on drawing to a deeper extent on the assumption of the soul.

The *assumptio animae* was a preferred trope of late medieval literature, which received from St. Augustine’s teaching a strong impetus for the revival of the archaic notion of the ascent of the soul. As part of a culture of reform, Augustinianism played a fundamental role in fostering an individualized religious sentiment in contrast to the positivistic thrust of scholastic rationalism. In this context, El Greco’s deliberate archaism is not simply the recourse to his Byzantine experience, but rather the association with the prevailing Augustinianism of a culture of reform which was fostered in Toledo.

El Greco’s visual narrative of the miraculous burial of the Count of Orgaz reaffirmed a very recent assertion of the old rights of the deceased within a post-Tridentine propaganda for patrons and benefactors. Yet, in contrast to the commissioners who intended to allude to good works as means of personal salvation, El Greco opted instead to play down this Counter-Reformation direction in all its allusions to the Count of Orgaz. He was intent on portraying charity as identified with the renunciation of the self.
which supercedes material poverty, and as a powerful act leading to personal sanctification. This idea of charity was heralded by the spiritual leader of the Barnabites, Battista da Crema, whose doctrine made inroads into the Italian and Spanish reform-minded circles of the first half of the sixteenth century. It found distinctive adherents in Toledo, in the Erasmian circle of El Greco’s friends imbued as shown with a religious model that stressed the inner experience of the individual. It was through the direct influence of Battista da Crema that charity turned into an index of sixteenth-century echoes of the medieval roots of Northern Italian spirituality, which fuelled a culture of reform.

The assimilation of Battista da Crema’s ideas to the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz develops the ideals of charity viewed as spiritual detachment from earthly possessions. The Count of Orgaz, as endower of Santo Tomé, epitomized the reasons for carrying out charitable works as a form of personal renunciation of social status. This disposition was commonplace in a culture of reform, increasingly characterized by individuality, interiority and morality. These traits were already present in the late Middle Ages of the Count of Orgaz, and were steadily assimilated by the urban elite from about the fourteenth century onward. El Greco re-enacts this understanding in the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz within an archaic altarpiece scheme that embraces the late sixteenth-century likeness of the funeral celebrants and mourners.

The archaic altarpiece construction of the burial is consistent with medieval funerary friezes. Within this adherence to ancient forms, El Greco casts the entombment of the Count of Orgaz as a sacred event. The affinity rests on the common motif of the funerals of Meleager (Figure 17) adapted to the burial scene in Toledo. El Greco takes on the
challenge brought by Michelangelo’s London Entombment to Alberti’s historia modeled on the carrying of the dead Meleager. Michelangelo’s efforts to adapt this conception to a Christian context underlie El Greco’s emphasis on movement as being dictated by historicity and immutability, rather than the action being performed. El Greco transforms the scene of the carrying and transport of the dead Meleager into the representation of the central group of Saints Augustine and Stephen, who lower the deceased into his tomb, a drama of the departing soul and its final destination depicted in a language based on the Byzantine tradition. At the same time, his altarpiece mood retains Spanish order and medieval expression. This is primarily apparent in El Greco’s adherence to an old tradition of Spanish sepulchral art, which had become obsolete for more than a century. This type descended directly from the Romanesque figurative sarcophagi of north-eastern Spain, in which the deceased on his death bed or in his coffin forms part of the narrative frieze. Pedro Moragues’ monument for the Archbishop Don Lope Fernández de Luna in Saragossa, the old capital of Aragon, is related to a group of fourteenth-century Catalan and Castillian tombs (Figure 15). This tomb includes the representation of the entombment, in contrast to the enfeu Spanish tomb where the gisant occupies the center.

In adapting this tomb type to an altarpiece context, El Greco’s preference for the lowering of the body surrounded by a solemn frieze of celebrants and mourners is analogous to an old tradition of Spanish sepulchral art. The taste for narrative over static representation betrays an interest in the figura as a carrier of his own story. The archaic link of figura and narrative appeared especially resourceful to El Greco in relation to his own interest in an individualized effect of his altarpiece. The archaic tendency in
sepulchral art to involve sculpture into the narrative interpretation of the artisan who carves the funerary frieze took a special significance in El Greco’s re-interpretation of the miraculous burial of Don Gonzales.95

The Entombment of the Count of Orgaz becomes more intelligible in relation to the compositional schemata of Spanish medieval sepulchral art. This direction of engagement seems strangely isolated and unique when compared to the historical taste of the Counter-Reformation grounded in contemporary narratives. At the very same time when El Greco was responding to his commissioners with individuality and talent by reviving archaic forms, coeval artists were less prone to examine the art of the past than to conform to their patrons. This claim is supported by the features of ancient cults such as the devotion to the Virgin Mary, which undertook renewed forms of expression in the Counter-Reformation. But for artists reared in a culture of reform, the modernization of the Marian altarpiece was bound up with the archaic tradition. Annibale Carracci, Federico Zuccari and Rubens’ altarpiece solutions, as examined in chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, are outstanding examples of the archaic direction advocated in an early modern context. El Greco’s interpretation asserts a re-emergence of Byzantine sources, in both the Santo Domingo high altar and in the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz. The arrangement of figures in the heavenly zone of the miraculous burial of Don Gonzales is clearly derived from the model of the Byzantine Deisis and the Dormition of the Mother of God. Equally, the representation of the ascending Virgin in the Santo Domingo high altar features an analogy with the Trinity directly above. Other elements of El Greco’s visual narratives, such as the assimilation of the Mandylion to an altarpiece context, are precisely those for which sixteenth-century parallels cannot be found.
Integral to El Greco’s preoccupation with archaism in advocations of modernity are the changes he brought to the Marian altarpiece. He managed to strike a balance between his own interpretation and the counter-reformatory slant, while at the same time preserving authenticity. The most revealing situation concerns the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which in El Greco’s time became one of the very few themes considered appropriate for a high altarpiece in the Counter-Reformation and was among the subjects artists were most frequently called upon to paint. The Counter-Reformation predilection for the Assumption was a particularly testing topic for it incurred an underlined debt to Marian devotion. This was combined, after Trent, with the motivation to incorporate historical information in Marian subjects. The post-Tridentine art heavily imbued with history brought about a shift in the legacy of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The ecclesiastical program of reform managed to swerve away the Virgin Mary from her motherhood of Christ, opting instead for representations that featured a solitary Virgin rising heavenward. This new iconography was wresting Mariology from archaic bonds in order to integrate the Virgin Mary as a symbol of the triumphant Catholic Church. The advent of the solitary Virgin of the Assumption and her capacity to project an image of institutional authority became intrinsically linked to the iconography of the Immaculate Conception.

The new historical paradigm of the solitary Virgin Mary and its possibilities for Catholic propaganda was licensed in Spain by the Sevillian painter Francisco Pacheco in his El arte de la pintura. Pacheco advocated conformity to Marian representations where the Christ Child is no longer a commonplace in Mary’s motherhood. The Mother of God figured as a beautiful, solitary young girl and surrounded by the sun is the prototype that
Pacheco presents as his own invention, to which all other painters were encouraged to adhere.98

Yet Pacheco’s attempt to establish norms and pictorial canons for Marian art in the use of the Counter-Reformation was far from being a novelty on the post-Tridentine scene. The Treatise on Saint Images (1570) by Johannes Molanus de Louvain, which was swiftly translated into Spanish, heralded the beginning of ecclesiastical treatises attempting to turn the statements of priests into iconographic standards for artists. Molanus affirms that artistic representations of the Assumption must strictly conform to the vision of St. John given in the Book of Revelation,99 an appropriation that intended to take the Counter-Reformation church for the purity and dignity of Mary as Queen of Heaven. This iconographic type of the solitary Virgin stepping on the half-moon gained currency in the Counter-Reformation, as endorsed by Francisco Pacheco. The Apocalyptic woman fused with the Immaculate Conception after 1580, when in Spanish Counter-Reformation painting the two iconographies became indistinguishable in compositions where the solitary Virgin Mary ascends with the moon at her feet.100

The Counter-Reformation iconographic type of the solitary Virgin came into conflict with archaic attitudes in Marian devotion and their authentic contexts. At the very same time when the Counter-Reformation was in full spate of iconographic regulation on Marian imagery, the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe experienced a powerful revival. The Guadalupian cult culled from a medieval Spanish tradition that originates at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe at the Real Monasterio de los Jerónimos de Guadalupe, founded in 1340 in Cáceres. From there, the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe spread on to Seville, Montserrat and Loreto, and found special adherence in Toledo’s parish churches. It
became the popular Spanish typology representing Mary in a majestic garment, crowned and wearing a sceptre.\textsuperscript{101} It is noteworthy that the archaic underpinning of Mary’s motherhood remained an ongoing feature of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who holds the Christ Child in her arms. This representation of impressive diffusion across Spain, which did not fall in step with the iconography of the Mother of God in the ecclesiastical program of reform, underscores the divergent claims between medieval retentions and contemporaneous regulations in Marian imagery.

In the process of adaptation to altarpieces of the icon of Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary came to bear on the apocalyptic vision of St. John in which Mary is sitting on the moon. It is unmistaken that El Greco had in mind the Guadalupian icon when he began to work at the Santo Domingo high altar. Yet to support this claim is to acknowledge that El Greco distanced his altarpiece from any assimilation of the iconography of the solitary Assumption, upheld by the ecclesiastical program of reform. El Greco concedes the Virgin Mary sitting on the moon only when it sets the stage for Mary’s union with Christ, as shown in the Santo Domingo high altar. This involved a conscious step back in ancient representations in which Mary united with Christ prevailed over her solitary image. This disposition amounts in the Santo Domingo high altar to a desire to portray the Virgin Mary rising towards an image of Christ in the Trinity directly above. In so doing, El Greco supplements the verbal account of Jacobus de Voragine’s \textit{Golden Legend} and brings the late medieval legend to new lengths in his visual narrative. Accordingly, he confesses certainty about interpretative frames in Mariology in which archaic definitions prevail. The adaptation of late medieval Marian imagery to his altarpiece furthers El
Greco’s narrative on modern grounds by preserving the archaic flavour in ways unparalleled by his contemporaries.

2.2 Reform Thought in El Greco’s Altarpiece: Pietà, the Moving Force behind El Greco’s Assumption

To assert the narrative meaning of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary as the eternal dwelling in heaven did not amount to a simple effort to portray the Mother of God rising towards Christ. This claim certainly was of fundamental significance for the altarpieces examined in this dissertation that polemicize with the prevailing Counter-Reformation iconography of the solitary Mother of God as symbol of the post-Tridentine church. However, the quintessential truth of the encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary bears a profound meaning derived from the archaic context of a re-emergence of Mary’s motherhood of Christ within a culture of reform. The eternal dwelling in heaven draws its narrative meaning from the painter’s capacity to reconfigure the Christian drama at the Marian thematic level, in novel and expressive ways. The claim that the Assumption restages a drama of separation subsequent to the Passion of Christ appears as the overriding narrative in El Greco, Annibale Carracci and Rubens’ altarpieces on the subject.

Their interpretation hinges on details that supplement the historical account of the late medieval legend of Jacobus de Voragine. The painter recasts the obsequies of the Mother of God in visual narrative terms and thus arrives at the heavenly encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary, which is not encompassed in the text. The union wrought by the painter outstrips the historical frame of Voragine’s funerary account. Of a higher complexity, the overarching meaning of the painter lends itself to separation and grief at the thematic
level of the Assumption. This visual treatment was symptomatic of a reform-spiritual ethos for which the dramatic expression of Christian narratives was pivotal in association with Marian subjects.\(^{103}\) From this vantage point, the Assumption testifies to an altarpiece direction that considered helpful to recruit reform-images into its argument. An outstanding example was provided by the Zuccari brothers, Taddeo and Federico, at the Pucci chapel in Sta. Trinità dei Monti, in their association of the Pietà (Figure 18) and the Assumption (Figure 19). In juxtaposing the two subjects, the potential of the Assumption narrative becomes fully realized in the context of the Passion of Christ that overrides all historical and institutional interpretations.

The decoration of the chapel dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, located in the north transept of the Roman church of Trinità dei Monti, was interrupted by the Sack of Rome. By the end of 1564, when Taddeo Zuccari had endeavoured to complete the chapel, Perino del Vaga’s frescoes of the Virgin’s early life were already occupying the vaulted ceiling and the upper part of the altar wall. Taddeo Zuccari became particularly dedicated to this project where he was responsible for the Assumption and the Pietà he wished to add to the Marian narrative. While Taddeo was working on the preparatory sketch, he was overcome by a sudden illness from which he died in 1566. The Pucci chapel, along with his unfinished work at the Villa Farnese in Caprarola and the Palazzo Farnese, were undertaken by Federico Zuccari. Federico did eventually complete the Pucci chapel, but not until 1589 after a quarter of a century had elapsed.\(^{104}\)

It is certain that for the Zuccari brothers the Pucci project held a special significance from its very inception. We glean this first from Taddeo, who had long been pondering over it
when illness overcame him. After Taddeo’s death, Federico turned his brother’s uncompleted project into a painstaking preoccupation of his own.

The decoration of the Pucci chapel was Taddeo and Federico Zuccari’s response to the modern interpretation of the Assumption narrative in a context of higher complexity in correlation with Christian narratives. The novelty was Christ’s pre-eminent position in a Marian narrative context that featured the Assumption as its central image. By giving the topmost position to the Pietà with the Eternal Father and Angels, the Zuccari brothers bestowed sacramental significance on the Assumption and the frescoes of the Virgin’s life. The Eucharistic meaning transferred to the Assumption was symptomatic of a culture of reform when new spiritual ethos was embedded in Marian subjects.

The reform bias is borne out in the formal similarities pointed to in the Pucci Pietà. It was recognized that the image rests on the Renaissance tradition of the Pietà furthered by Giovanni Bellini, Antonello da Messina and Andrea Mantegna. Of special relevance for the Pucci Pietà remains an interpretative fulcrum of the subject within a culture of reform, Michelangelo’s Pietà for Vittoria Colonna (Figure 20). An expression of inwardness and love, the drawing amplifies the dramatic underpinnings of the Passions in association with the Virgin Mary’s feelings for Christ. The Zuccari brothers had Michelangelo’s model firmly in view in their narrative effort to expand Christian narratives into Marian subjects. At the Pucci chapel, they moderated a transfer of Christian narratives into Marian ethos by juxtaposing imago pietatis and the Assumption. To this end, they elaborated on former Renaissance innovations with great attention.

Federico Zuccari was not the only artist to adapt an image of the dead Christ in new narrative contexts, as seen in his Borghese Pietà with Angels (Figure 21). Federico’s
panel represents the highly novel subject of Christ inside an open tomb looking out over a nocturnal landscape and where the angels are holding candles over his body, a sort of vigil before his forthcoming Resurrection. Rosso Fiorentino had adapted the model in his panel of the Dead Christ with Angels (Figure 22) to similar ends. Like Rosso, Federico Zuccari was exploring the mysterious state of Christ within the interval after his death and before his Resurrection. Both Rosso Fiorentino and Federico Zuccari wished to abandon the narrative framework of the historical life of Christ and the pervasive effect it had on modern history painting in order to pursue new narrative energy. Alexander Nagel recognized how Rosso Fiorentino fostered narrative investigation beyond conventional boundaries by showing the extinguished torch-candles indicating the upcoming Resurrection of Christ. The Zuccari concept for the Pucci Pietà stands in relation to a similar attempt to dehistoricize the Passion narrative. The effort was to underscore the torment of Christ as a way and landmark of his Resurrection. The Pucci Pietà shows a dramatic vigil in which angels are the memories of the Crucifixion and holders of the Instruments of the Passion.

Taddeo and Federico Zuccari’s training in the Northern traditions of medieval art, a fact scholarship has attributed to their familiarity with Flemish prints, informs the narrative formula grafted on to the Pucci Pietà. Robert Campin’s Man of Sorrows-Trinity (Figure 23) adapts the traditional Trinitarian scheme of the throne of mercy with the seated God the Father holding the crucifix as an image of increased veracity in the treatment of Christ’s body hanging in the arms of the Father. This adaptation confirms the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice and sustains the sacramental significance of the image. In the Pucci Pietà, the frontal presentation of Christ supported by God the
Father was equally designed to preserve the image’s fundamentally Eucharistic meaning. Yet the Zuccari brothers were intent on stressing at great length the dramatic aspects of the Northern panel by recasting Christ’s torment through the angels carrying the Instruments of the Passion. The portrayal of the Instruments of the Passion retains the sacramental significance while combining it with an underscored spiritual ethos.

The departure from the historical framework of Christian narratives made it possible to build links with Marian subjects in the argument of the Pucci chapel decoration. The motivation to correlate between imitatio pietatis and Marian narratives was indicative of reform thinking, embedded in the art scene of the late sixteenth century. The fascination with representations of the Mother of God was part of imitatio Mariae, a medieval direction in the wake of the spiritual exercises that were dominating the sixteenth-century devotions as transfers from the Reform of the Marian devotion of the 1530s.\textsuperscript{110} It comes as no surprise that the Zuccari brothers, being late exponents of a culture of reform, were adapting imitatio Mariae to the early modern age. Their novelty consists in the juxtaposition of the medieval trope of the Imitation of the Mother of God and the Passion of Christ. In the correlation of imitatio Mariae and imitatio pietatis, they secure a comprehensive model to preserve the sacramental significance, a direction that also makes fluid the boundaries between Christian and Marian narratives.

For the Zuccari brothers, the Northern tradition as a stream of enduring relevance provided a unique example for the combination of Christian and Marian images. In Robert Campin’s folding diptych of the Trinity and the Virgin and Child (Figure 24), the association between Christ, as part of the redemptive Trinitarian power, and the Virgin and Child, as the mystery of the Incarnation, is without precedent in Netherlandish
painting.\textsuperscript{111} It primarily points to a calculated effort to expound sacramental significance onto Marian subjects by linking the Imitation of Christ with the Imitation of the Virgin Mary. In the Pucci Pietà, the Zuccari brothers recapture in a reworked narrative order Robert Campin’s combination of images. The juxtaposition is now between the Assumption on the altar wall and the Pietà, a link which preserves the sacramental significance in a narrative that outstrips the historical life of Christ and the Mother of God.

The narrative liberty taken by the Zuccari brothers to disengage the Assumption from a historical framework was an impetus for El Greco’s high altar at Santo Domingo. As asserted in the Pucci chapel, the correlation between \textit{imitatio Mariae} and \textit{imitatio pietatis} fostered narrative developments outside the canonical frame of post-Tridentine theology. After Trent, the historical content turned inimical to the Christian devotional meaning that was deeply ingrained in the Renaissance tradition. El Greco’s alignment with the Pucci model and its prayerful overtone stands in contrast with the Counter-Reformation direction.\textsuperscript{112} It confesses a preoccupation with narrative meaning and a simultaneous disregard of religious upheavals that dictated changes in the formal appearance of altarpieces. El Greco gave a full illustration of his reform thinking in his Assumption at Santo Domingo, an altarpiece that registers the tremors of a late culture of reform.

The association of the Virgin Mary’s Assumption with the Trinity characterized the narrative freedom of a reform direction that was losing considerable sympathy by the time Taddeo and Federico Zuccari set up work at the Pucci chapel. An evocative illustration of the shifting ideals of religious art that affected the Assumption narrative was provided just within the basilican space of Trinità dei Monti by Danielle da
Volterra’s Assumption (Figure 25) in the della Rovere chapel. The ascending Virgin no longer yearns for Christ and the fulfillment of her love for him in the eternal dwelling in heaven. Rather, Volterra’s Virgin Mary engages the scholastic rationalism of the enlightened disciples in the lower register of the fresco-altarpiece. They are preoccupied with the mystery of the Virgin’s ascent while glossing over books, as seen in the foreground characters. Their attitude is no longer a mark of faith that, only a few decades ago, determined Titian to show their awestruck gestures in the Assunta dei Frari (Figure 26). Volterra’s disciples are the theologians of scholastic rationalism, a direction questing after cogent proof for the Virgin’s ascent. Such a rendition of the Assumption points to the polarity between faith and history that broke the unity of religious art heralded by a culture of reform. The contradictory tendencies between Danielle da Volterra and the Zuccari brothers in their interpretation of the Assumption are indicative of the Tridentine entrenchment for which faith alone was no longer the colligating fact for painters. Volterra’s direction impugns the capacity of faith and revelation to be incumbent on the Assumption narrative. It cannot be coincidental that Volterra’s subsequent concern was to annul every vestige of the past that had arrayed the Assumption, and to determine instead historical things that can be said about it.

El Greco was temperamentally unsuited to conform to art content and the official regulations after Trent. Yet he made a successful adjustment to early modern art through his historical imagination steeped in the Byzantine tradition. As seen in his Assumption at Santo Domingo, the Mandylion confers on the altarpiece a Byzantine mode. Such use of the Mandylion was not serving an ornamental purpose, but fostered architectural combinations within an altarpiece setting. It enabled among others the juxtaposition
between the Assumption and the Trinity beyond a simple narrative correlation meant to enhance rhetoric at the altarpiece level; it was also a calculated effort to piece together imitatio pietatis and imitatio Mariae through the intercession of the sculptured Mandylion.

To place a panel containing the Dead Christ at the apex was common practice in Renaissance polyptychs. It was a characteristic feature of the Venetian polyptych to which El Greco had exposure during his sojourn in Venice. The place on the central vertical axis of the altar of the Man of Sorrows dramatically underscored the presence of the actual body and blood of Christ on the altar below. Polyptychs such as the Certosa of 1450 by Antonio and Bartolomeo Vivarini (Figure 27), and others like it, referred directly to the sacramental activity that constituted the essential function of the Christian altar.115 El Greco heeded this observation in great detail when he placed a panel of the Trinity at the apex of the Santo Domingo high altar. For him, this concern was entwined with an adaptation of the Assumption narrative to suit the sacramental significance embedded in the Trinity panel.

El Greco lends a high mark of unity with the upper register of the Trinity through the compositional element of the arched panel. Titian, in the Assunta dei Frari, similarly encased his panel in an arched central niche by borrowing from the medieval triptych. This type of frame, which was in turn encased in a rectangular outer frame, was individualizing the vertical aspect of the Assumption in altarpieces like Titian’s Assunta dei Frari. This heightened verticality was previously used by Andrea Mantegna to expand the narrative meaning of the Assumption at the Ovetari chapel (Figure 28). Mantegna adapted the arched inner-frame and the outer rectangular enclosure to establish an
impression of movement towards God the Father, outside the fresco-altarpiece located in the apex. The effect of this frame decoration was taken further by El Greco in the Santo Domingo high altar, where the rectangular enclosure of the Trinity surmounts the arched inner-frame of the Assumption. By means of this frame arrangement, El Greco points to the integration of the Assumption into the sacramental significance of the Trinity. The rectangular frame of the Trinity realizes the full potential of the Assumption narrative and thus subsumes the individualized effect of ascent under the Christian drama taking place above.\footnote{116}

It seems no coincidence that El Greco heeded the Renaissance tradition in Venice with an interest only equalled in his abiding Byzantinism. Venice as the place where religious freedom survived the Council of Trent was also a cultural environment to nurture reform-ideals. A search for a personal relationship with Christ, capable of offering assurance for one’s own salvation, characterized Venice well beyond the Tridentine period. The Venetian defence of Renaissance ideals was still vital, demonstrating the nature of the conflict between the Reform achievements and the vision of the Counter-Reformation. The Evangelical mood so strong among the Venetian elite grew possibly even more fervent during the years immediately following the Venetian interdict. It enlisted the efforts of Fra Paolo Sarpi the author of the \textit{Istoria del Concilio Tridentino}, a seminal work in European historiography to transmit the Renaissance ideals to later generations. Venice was also resolved to maintain the traditional autonomy of the church and the role of laymen in its administration. The interventions of Doge Leonardo Donà to the nuncio’s protests and the sermons of Fulgenzio Micanzio from 1609 illustrate an active concern to safeguard confessional freedom in the Venetian republic.\footnote{117}
The Venetian environment was particularly suitable for the survival of art informed by Renaissance ideals. In its religious tolerance El Greco must have found a great stake in maintaining his own reputation as a Byzantine painter. The tendency in Venetian piety for permissiveness in matters of belief and conduct was a matter of reassurance for El Greco’s Byzantinism, and a major impetus for his painting. He identified most of his own search for a direct contact with Christ in the experience of his Renaissance predecessors in Venice. To this end, Lorenzo Lotto’s work in the whole and his highly personal contribution to a pictorial type that enjoyed popularity in Northern Italy turned into a mainstay of El Greco’s altarpiece.

Santa Casa di Loreto was a site preferred by many who identified with the religious sentiments of the Tratatto del Beneficio di Cristo, one of the primary documents of the Italian reform movement written by Benedetto da Mantova and revised by the humanist poet Marcantonio Flaminio. An important adherent was the canon of Santa Casa, the Bolognese Nicola Bargellesi, who met in 1541 Fra Bernardino Ochino, a preacher whose beliefs that Luther shared a true faith in Christ were discussed in circles associated with Cardinal Reginald Pole and Gaspar Contarini and have been expressed in the Tratatto.\textsuperscript{118} Lotto would identify with the spirit of the Tratatto during his later retreat at the Basilica of the Santa Casa in Loreto. He entertained close contacts with the authorities of the Basilica, for which Lotto had painted an altarpiece during his previous stay in the mid 1530s, \textit{St. Christopher with Sts. Roch and Sebastian} in the Palazzo Apostolico of Loreto.\textsuperscript{119}

Lotto’s case is revealing for the outreach of justification by faith alone in the climate of the Catholic Reformation, when artists were often challenged by the uncertainty of
theological tides. Adriano Prosperi has stressed in Lotto’s work, and in particular in the fresco of Saint Vincent Ferrer at San Domenico in Recanati, his profound adherence to themes involving the Imitation of Christ and the justification through the Passion of Christ.\footnote{120} Lotto’s painting reflects his deeply felt religious beliefs and the narrative solutions he proposed for the Eucharistic theme. His polyptych for San Domenico in Recanati, \textit{Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints} (Figure 29) from 1506–8, illustrates the devotional function of the seated Madonna and its association with the Man of Sorrows image in the panel directly above. The notion of Mary as vehicle and vessel of the Eucharistic body was particularly cogent for Lotto, and a Venetian retention from Giovanni Bellini’s \textit{San Giobbe} (Figure 62) where the Madonna under the coffered barrel vault embodies the Christological presence. The Northern devotions embedded in this altarpiece direction took on expressive manifestations in Loreto, a Marian shrine much favored by the papal curia and where Luca Signorelli and Melozzo da Forli had executed important works in the 1470s and 1480s. Lotto’s \textit{Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints} is a response to a similarly perceived notion of the Virgin Mary as the Eucharistic shrine for the church of San Domenico in Recanati, a town in close proximity to Loreto.\footnote{121} An earlier rendition of the Virgin Mary as the vessel of the Eucharist was proposed by Lotto in his \textit{Santa Cristina} altarpiece from around 1502 in Treviso (Figure 30). The architecture of the two main panels reinforces the idea of a chapel like space, and the motifs of the central coffered barrel vault establish precedents for the main panels of the Recanati polyptych.

Lotto’s polyptychs in which the Virgin Mary as the Eucharistic shrine holds the central panel and is surmounted by an image of the Man of Sorrows appealed to El
Greco’s own preoccupation to develop sacramental significance in his altarpiece. The correlation between the Virgin and Child and the Man of Sorrows located directly above in Lotto’s San Domenico polyptych in Recanati was taken further by El Greco in his Santo Domingo high altar. The analogy exists first in the polyptych format that both Lotto and El Greco found suitable for narrative ends. The complex programme of Lotto’s Recanati polyptych shows in the principal panels the Virgin and Child with St. Dominic kneeling before them, and contains in each of the four other panels a Dominican saint. The same symmetrical disposition of the panels around a central Marian subject is to be found in the four panels of El Greco’s Santo Domingo high altar. The lower two are full-length representations of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist; those above, in half-length, are of Saints Bernard and Benedict. El Greco extended the programme within the chapel space by two independent panels in the side altars, devoted to the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Resurrection of Christ, with the inclusions of Saint Jerome and Saint Ildefonso.

The Virgin Mary with Child in Lotto’s Recanati polyptych deepens its Eucharistic significance in El Greco’s Santo Domingo high altar. If Mary and the Child were important to Lotto because Christ’s body was the occasion for human redemption, the Assumption as a direct source of the Eucharistic body was subsequently proposed by El Greco. His sensitivity to the Eucharistic implications of the Assumption prompted him to invest the subject with participation in a narrative context. This is asserted in the link with the topmost Trinity panel containing the Dead Christ which dramatically underscores the presence of the actual body and blood of Christ on the altar. The Assumption refers
thereby directly to the sacramental activity that constitutes the essential function of the Christian altar.

It is noteworthy that El Greco does not illustrate the Eucharistic meaning as the self-reference of the Assumption, but rather as the result of the link between the Trinitarian presence and the Assumption. The self-referential character of the Assumption as solitary bearer of Eucharistic significance did not preoccupy El Greco. Accordingly, Titian no longer represents a model for investing the Assumption with sacramental significance. Titian’s Assunta dei Frari was alluding to the altarpiece as the housing of the Sacrament tabernacle through the minute version of a reserved Eucharist encased into the base of the altarpiece frame. Such grafting of the Eucharist in the Assumption altarpiece anticipated the housing of the Reserved Eucharist on the high altar in Venice. The underlying thought of the Assunta dei Frari did not appeal to El Greco who, in contrast to Titian’s condensed and self-referential narrative, was willing to expound Christocentric religion through associations with Marian devotion.

The relation between the Virgin Mary and Christ was the powerful focus of Michelangelo’s Pietà drawing for Vittoria Colonna (Figure 20). The Colonna Pietà is at the summit of Michelangelo’s ideals of the reform of art, imbued with an enduring attachment to the tradition of the imitatio pietatis and amplified by the Virgin Mary’s passionate love for Christ. The continuing dialogue with the Man of Sorrows tradition now bases its claims on a new conception of art, outside of the traditional categories. The idea of art making as a liberal action resulting from a process of free invention which shuns the economy of art on commission profoundly marks the Colonna Pietà. The reinvention of the Man of Sorrows to accommodate the religious inclinations of Vittoria
Colonna and her reform-minded circle made explicit claims to the dehistoricizing tendencies of art in a culture of reform. Michelangelo captures this idea in the relation between the Virgin Mary and Christ as the cumulative phase of the various postures he explored in the tradition of the *imago pietatis*.

El Greco pursues Michelangelo’s effort in his own interpretation of the *Pietà*, in its two versions on wood and canvas dating to the 1570s. At that time El Greco was working closely with the miniaturist Giulio Clovio, himself an adept of reform ideals. Michelangelo exerted a powerful influence on Clovio’s work, palpably evident in the miniatures of his *Offices of the Madonna*. Years afterward in Spain, El Greco continued to pay tribute to Michelangelo through the friendship that tied him to the miniaturist Giulio Clovio. In the *Pietà* (Figure 31), El Greco elaborates on an important novelty of Michelangelo’s conception of the two carriers of the dead Christ. In *The Carrying of Christ to the Tomb* (Figure 32), Michelangelo diminished the expression of passionate love by withdrawing the Virgin supporting Christ. The drawing shows the figure of Christ sustained at shoulder height and carried forward by two figures who support him at the thighs.

The novel conception of Christ’s being carried by the two-figure group proposed by Michelangelo turns into a purposeful element in a narrative of separation and love in El Greco’s *Pietà*. It is here understood as a carrying of Christ off from the Virgin’s arms toward the Resurrection, a gesture of acquiring and giving further the body of Christ as a gift of love. El Greco’s figures are far from Calvary, seen in the left distance, and are shown carrying Christ’s body to a destination en route to the upcoming Resurrection. The transport of Christ is toward the light of the Resurrection that gradually removes the
darkness in the landscape behind. The play of dramatic light against the turbulent cloud formations heralds the beginning of the forthcoming day of great triumph.

El Greco’s interpretation of the Pietà as the way to the Resurrection is highly archaic in character, a deep memory of his Byzantinism that reckons the Resurrection as the central event in Eastern Christianity. Yet it is also highly informed by a deeply affective and meditative mood reminiscent of Michelangelo. The conception explored by Michelangelo in his drawing for Vittoria Colonna is continued by El Greco in the direction of more elaborate implications of the theme of transport and transitus. He fosters the connection between Michelangelo’s drawing and the idea of art as a gift in the union between Christ and the Virgin that is no longer the product of dramatic gesture. It is now a conception of emotional restraint, less informed by the passionate gesture of desire than evocative of the movement heralding the Resurrection. Within this interpretation El Greco strengthens the crucial claim to the notion of art as a gift of love, a notion inherent in the sacrifice of Christ and the circumstances of art making. We do not know if El Greco intended his Pietà as an explicit gift to a beloved one. But it is certain that he deliberately exempted it from the economy of art production in the period.129 El Greco transfers this understanding in the carrying of Christ, a movement which identifies with the direction of the gift that never interrupts the gesture of further giving. The conception of Christ’s body as a gift is visualized in his departure from the Virgin Mary and subsequent dispatch to the believers in the Resurrection.

The imitatio Mariae as a resourceful narrative to enhance imitatio pietatis becomes apparent in El Greco’s treatment of the human form. His deliberate distortions and elongations of the human anatomy outline an impression of narrative intensity that
derives from the peculiar energy of the human form. This device, which is not to be found in natural forms, was credited to Michelangelo and his effort to search for a certain meaning in putting the figures together in twisted and complex poses. El Greco’s similar interest in manipulating the human body for narrative ends became increasingly prominent in final works such as the Santa Cruz Assumption (Figure 33). Here, the impression of the Virgin’s ascent is exclusively an exercise in elongations of the human form against a counter-balancing effect of foreshortening in the landscape.

This instrumental approach to the human form in shaping a concept and treatment of the pictorial space was asserted by El Greco in most convincing terms as early as the Santo Domingo Assumption. The apostle in the left foreground is an example of El Greco’s narrative mood derived from manipulations of the natural form. The head of the apostle is part of the same plane as the face of the character immediately to his right.\textsuperscript{130} The deliberate distortion in the composition of the apostle behind suggests that the turned figure dominating the foreground was the narrative solution to strive after. The presence of the turned apostle underlines the sense of a narrative meaning within the image.

The function of the human body as viewer within the painted scene was akin to the Northern sensibility that furthered Alberti’s recommendation in his treatise On Painting to use the human figure as an indicator of the narrative action. A contradictory version prevailed in the Italian pictorial tradition which adapted the gazing figure to foster the outward gaze rather than the turned figure looking in.\textsuperscript{131} El Greco’s inclinations are towards the Northern sensibility of the relationship between the human figure and its place within the narrative field. By positioning the turned apostle in the foreground of the Assumption, the human figure appears as an interpreter of El Greco’s visual narrative of
the Assumption. The heavenly encounter between the Virgin Mary and Christ, which surpasses the verbal account, is pointed to in the turned figure as a narrative sense arising within the altarpiece. The relationship between the human figure and its place within the pictorial field mediates a distinct understanding of the Assumption.

El Greco locates his narrative efforts in the modern age, yet he departs from a general trend which fostered a rhetorical use of the turned figure as a visual mediator of the written message. The modern advocations of the viewer within were indicative of the rhetorical value of texts transferred into images. Whereas the Baroque direction favoured a rhetorical use of the turned figure as a mediator between text and image, El Greco was intent on departing from visual constructions informed by rhetorical content.\textsuperscript{132} He underscores this intention in the overlap of the viewer within and the gazing apostle facing forward. The prevailing form of the turned apostle suggests that the visual narrative is a matter of construing the image only within the pictorial field.

An important claim for the visual narrative as a departure from the historical account was established in the Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion (Figure 34). The extreme narrative liberty taken by El Greco in the martyrdom scene, a preferred subject in Counter-Reformation iconography, caused Philip II to reject the work and order it removed from the Escorial. The king’s decision recorded by Fray José de Sigüenza leaves no doubt that El Greco trespassed against Counter-Reformation articles of faith embedded in a normative use of religious art.\textsuperscript{133} El Greco’s contrasting direction fosters narrative developments that outstrip the historical narrative of the martyrdom and thereby invest the image with a religious content derived from the purest Christian tradition of piety. To this end, the viewer within played again an influential part, as
shown by the turned figure in the foreground. In the Martyrdom of Saint Maurice he embodies a visual narrative sense that, similar to the Santo Domingo Assumption, exceeds the historical account. El Greco’s turned figure underscores the moment when Saint Maurice and his companions decide to die for the Christian faith. A narrative sense arises within the pictorial field to subsume the martyrdom under the central element of a religious devotional sentiment. Rather than the glorious reputation of a Counter-Reformation martyr-saint, the expression of faith leading to martyrdom permeates the visual narrative.

El Greco’s freedom in relation to the historical narrative of the Passion seemingly endorses the Assumption as a powerful subject to increase a sense of drama. The novelty consists in the painter’s capacity to bring to further lengths the Christian narratives prior to the Resurrection by recourse to Marian subjects. The Assumption grafts the forthcoming Resurrection on to the altarpiece in an order of events that reorganizes the chronological flow. El Greco takes freedom from the historical account in order to portray anachronistically the Mother of God rising towards Christ. The Virgin Mary’s ascent is no longer an occurrence years after the Resurrection of Christ, but foreshadows the rising of Christ from the tomb. This inverted narrative order lends a mark of higher veracity to the visual narrative. El Greco’s anachronism prefigures the triumph, yet it is less an expression of literal interaction between Christ and the Virgin Mary than a form of gifting love and hope while awaiting the rising of the Lord. This dehistoricized narrative is evocatively pointed to by the turned figure of the apostle, a bearer of the meaning encapsulated in the pictorial field. Other similar effects are meant to draw
narrative meaning from the unusual forms of the apostles around the empty tomb of the Virgin Mary.

El Greco blocks any outward gaze coming from the group of the apostles. This is a calculated departure from the usual iconography of the Assumption in which outward gazes point eloquently to the empty tomb left behind by the Virgin Mary. El Greco underlines the departure from normative representation with even more astounding exercises in his combination and compression of the human body. An apostle bending over St. John the Evangelist, who is kneeling before the Assumption while supporting the Book of Revelation with his right hand, stretches upward his arm; the same arm is a member of the apostle’s body located behind him, an effect of anatomical compression meant to increase the general effect of a meaning within the pictorial field. The combination of the contours of distinct figures, located on separate spatial plans, produces an impression of condensed narrative space. El Greco underscores this effect through his treatment of color throughout the composition. He wishes to confound the illusion of space by erasing the transition of light between the second and third dimension. The alternation of dark and light zones that customarily produces the impression of depth does not preoccupy El Greco, who instead highlights the color where the apostles’ bodies intersect. He intensifies the light at the boundary between two figures, thus bringing forward a conflating form with increased narrative energy.

The attenuation between the second and third dimension possesses an effect of narrative power superseding the geometrically constructed space. El Greco gleaned this procedure from Donatello and his flattened relief technique of the Assumption in Naples, at the Brancacci funeral monument in Sant’ Angelo a Nilo (Figure 35). Donatello
suppresses the forms where the angels’ limbs intersect, a treatment that makes the outlines of the figures become not only longer, but also more undulating in their twisted poses. The technique of the *schiacciato* relief allowed Donatello a subtle transition between compositional planes and an enhanced dramatic effect of the narrative. The central figure of the ascending Virgin Mary is carved with any significant depth, while the angels’ bodies appearing and disappearing from the clouds are for the most part in squashed relief.\(^{135}\)

El Greco was not the only modern artist to adapt Donatello’s *schiacciato* relief to his pictorial narrative. Annibale Carracci heeded Donatello’s technique in the complex narrative of *Saint Rock Distributing Alms* which palpably transfers the flattened relief technique of Donatello into an important altarpiece advancement, as examined in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Before Annibale Carracci adapted Donatello, El Greco heralded the beginning of a pictorial narrative model patterned after Donatello’s *schiacciato* relief. His purpose appears twofold: to advance the altarpiece in a direction that incorporates narrative information in an order established by the painter’s historical imagination; and to propose a new avenue for the pictorial treatment of Christian and Marian subjects through a vital dialogue with Renaissance sculpture and architecture. The result is a highly sculptural treatment of figures in pictorial compositions, amounting to an irrepressible attachment to the dialogue between painting and sculpture.

El Greco’s attachment to Renaissance ideals was an intensive way to uphold his painting in alignment with past values. In his time, the conceptions that once informed the Renaissance were diminishing their lustre in the development of modern art. El Greco belongs to the very few to have grasped the consequences of abandoning the Renaissance
ideals, which was leading to a creative impasse precipitated by the progress of the Counter-Reformation. His senior contemporary, Federico Zuccari, was the first to point out the detrimental effect of departing from Renaissance ideals in his critical annotations to Vasari’s second edition of the Lives from 1568. An exemplar of Vasari’s Lives at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris that belonged to Federico Zuccari reveals his critical concern to re-establish the value order of the Renaissance which Vasari not only disregarded, but also distorted through his fabricated concepts. Years after in Spain, Federico Zuccari gifted one of his copies of Vasari’s Lives to El Greco, an expression of the reassurance and mutuality he strove to establish with his contemporaries.

El Greco’s annotations are a vivid polemic with the Florentine ideal of the superiority of art, which is maintained by Vasari as a normative value of the past impossible to transgress in contemporary art. El Greco’s vituperative comments are unrelated to the supremacy of Michelangelo implied in Vasari’s rationale, and yet an inconsistent look at El Greco’s criticism of the Florentine model misled many into believing that El Greco was disagreeing with Michelangelo’s ideas. In fact, El Greco was polemizing with the normative Florentine model that Vasari wished to uphold by praising minor artists and unworthy epigones of Michelangelo from Florence. The concern to overturn Vasari’s Florentine advocations of artistic excellence in order to re-establish the Renaissance value order is the main driving line of El Greco’s annotations. Equally important is his revolt against Vasari’s excessive praise of the classical antiquity, which is presented in the Lives as another criterion impossible to surpass and thus worthy of imitation.

Against Vasari’s normative understanding of the classical model as ideal imitation, El Greco rekindles the model of Giovanni Bellini tarnished in the Lives. The beauty of the
body of Christ represented by Giovanni Bellini is proposed by El Greco as superior to the classical canon that Vasari patterned after the sculptural model.\textsuperscript{138} The preference for Giovanni Bellini and Northern art lies its claim on the crucial notion that any representation of the human form is not the result of an imitation of the sculptural model, nor of nature. It is noteworthy that El Greco was willing to illustrate that art is not imitation through the further example of Correggio, whom he recommends as the greatest exponent of the Renaissance freedom from the classical model.\textsuperscript{139}

El Greco’s critical comments strike a blow at the spectacle of artistic change presented by Vasari as an instrument of progress and rebirth of art. The remonstrations to Vasari, coming from either El Greco or Federico Zuccari, never held sway in the way Vasari’s \textit{Lives} did. However, it is essential to look at Federico Zuccari, El Greco and later Annibale Carracci’s anti-Vasarian position as a palpable survival of reform-minded ideas in the late sixteenth century and beyond. The shared interest they took in a culture of reform bore fruit in the achievements of the Carracci. Annibale Carracci’s preference for Northern art and for Giovanni Bellini is largely derived from Federico Zuccari’s and El Greco’s ideals. The extent to which the Northern Renaissance influenced Annibale Carracci is primarily visible in his altarpieces; yet it is also a matter of the great attention he took in his predecessors’ remonstrations to Vasari’s \textit{Lives}. In the margin of his copy of the \textit{Lives}, Annibale Carracci responded to Vasari’s criticism that Giovanni Bellini and other Venetian painters of his time, having no opportunity to study ancient works of art, copied whatever they did from life in a hard, crude, and laboured manner. Annibale Carracci responds by recognizing in Vasari the great ignorant of art who did not realize that the good ancient masters based their works on life, not on imitation.\textsuperscript{140}

72
This dissertation is an effort to delineate in subsequent chapters the endurance of reform-minded ideas in the altarpieces of Annibale Carracci and Rubens. The exemplification of their ideals through the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is not a case study simply chosen from a large range of their altarpiece production. The motivation to examine the Assumption of the Virgin Mary arises from the singular narrative value of this Marian subject. This was a matter of supplementing the written account and, even beyond this infringement of historical information, an attempt to adapt to the early modern age the ideas of a culture of reform.


7 Ibid., 30, “the church engaged in a constructive refutation of the iconoclastic attack on artists, rather than orchestrating a programme of artistic censorship meant to curtail artistic freedom.”


Trask (Princeton, 1971), Ch. 2, “The Regeneration of Time,” 51–92, esp. 76–77. Eliade defines the mythical return in *illo tempore* as an act distinct from the imitation of cosmogony; it is, rather, a “reactualization of the mythical moment when the archetype was revealed for the first time,” an experience neither periodic nor collective that suspends the flow of time in order to project the celebrant into a mythical time, in *illo tempore*. It is noteworthy that Eliade’s theory shapes Greene’s theory of “reproductive or sacramental imitation” which celebrates an enshrined primary text by “rehearsing it liturgically” and seeing an absolute beginning in *illo tempore*. See Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London, 1982), 38–9.


11 Sylvia Pagden, “From Cult Images to the Cult of Images: The Case of Raphael’s Altarpieces,” *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1990) eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, 165–89, esp. 178. The Roman Basilia Aracoeli, where in the early 1560s the displacement of Raphael’s *Madonna of Foligno* took place, was the outset of a series of displacements of works of art from high altars for the setting of icons of the Virgin. My Roman research points out, amongst the new chapels built to enshrine images of the Virgin, the Altemps Chapel from 1589 in Sta. Maria in Trastevere, architect Martino Longhi, which houses the seventh-century icon of the Madonna della Clemenza. Also, the Gregorian Chapel from 1578 in St. Peter, architect Giacomo della Porta, enshrining the Madonna del Socorso. In 1612–13, at S. Giovanni dei Francesi, Carlo Maderno’s tabernacle of the Madonna della Misericordia and the high altarpiece in aedicular form at Sta. Maria della Pace show the persistence of Byzantine icons in papal Rome, however this direction gradually diminishes during the seventeenth century.


15 José Antonio Maravall, *Velázquez y el espíritu de la modernidad* (Madrid, 1987), 100–4.

16 Ibid., 132. Maravall brings not coincidentally Weisbach into discussion. The controversy Weisbach-Pevsner which took place in the 1920s was between Weisbach’s views about the Baroque as the ending of the Counter-Reformation, and Pevsner’s theory that saw Mannerism in continuity with the Counter-Reformation. On the style of the
Counter-Reformation see A. W. Boschloo, Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent (The Hague, 1974), Ch.8, “The Significance of Paleotti’s ideas for Art in Bologna.”


18 Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 141.

19 Maravall, op. cit., 126.


22 Jonathan Brown, El Greco of Toledo, ex. cat., Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art (Boston, 1982), 111.


24 Leo Steinberg, “An El Greco’s Entombment Eyed Awry,” The Burlington Magazine 857 (1974): 474–77. An imitative framework also characterizes Una Roman d’Elia discussion of Michelangelo’s Colonna Pietà as a vehicle for the debate between disegno and colore in “Drawing Christ’s Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform,” Renaissance Quarterly 59.1(2006): 90–129. The author’s conclusion stands for a critique of Michelangelo’s drawing as an unteleological thesis for the survival of a spiritual art in subsequent confrontation with the Counter-Reformation articles of faith; it also restricts the refined religious sentiment of the Colonna Pietà to a sophisticated work of intellectual complexity, one that draws on the cognitive persuasion of disegno as a rival claim to the ambiguous character of colore needed to express emotion. As Mark W. Roskill shows in Dolce’s Areino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2000), 267, in the commentary on the text of the Dialogue “Invention, Design and Coloring,” Lodovico Dolce’s theory of painting may have been shaped by his own antecedent theory of poetry. In his Osservazioni, first issued in 1550, the metaphor of painting he uses may be reminiscent of a parallelism between versi in poetry, the structural element, and disegno in painting and likewise between parole and colore. However, as Roskill infers, Dolce left open whether ordine and artificio were elements of invention or structure in the case of poetry, so he would be evasive in his theory of poetry to specify how exactly ordine and varietà, a close equivalent of artificio, fitted into his scheme for painting.


Gilio, 1961, 110: “Dite bene, rispose M. Francesco; or dunque dite voi, M. Ruggiero, come vogliano essere dipinte le sacre immagini.” Rispose M. Ruggiero: “Difficil cosa è a volerne rendere vera e indubitata ragione che cosi sia e che altramente esser non possa, perché di questo non abbiamo legge alcuna né regola, se non quanto che la consuetudine de’ pittori, innanzi che Michelangelo fusse, n’ha dimostrato (la quale però, come voi signori leggisti sapete, è legge), e quanto che Guglielmo Durante nel Razionale de’ divini officii ne scrive.”


See in the end of this subchapter Pacheco’s notion of the solitary Virgin of the Assumption in the Counter-Reformation, 48–50.


Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation* (Cambridge, 1972), 137. Pope Paul IV Carafà had an adamant policy to restore the political superiority of Rome. His first objective took expression in overt hostility to the Spanish monarchy, which led to war between the papacy and Spain. Yet before Carafà’s policy, the Council of Trent changed its course after the session of the debate on justification, in 1546. In the spring of the next year, the alliance between the Pope and the Emperor, which had been the condition of the Council’s operations, had been severed by the action of the papal legate.

Federico Zerri, *Pittura e Controriforma. L’arte senza tempo’ di Scipione da Gaeta* (Torino, 1979), 29–30. On post-Tridentine art developments Zerri observes an increased disciplinary direction that conflicted with individuality of talent: “...il fatto stesso che un controllo veniva comunque posto, constituiva la prima pietra de un edificio che, dapprima vagamente e sporadicamente, poi con un rigore sempre piú implacabile avrebbe circondato la libertà creatrice dell’artista con una gigantesca congerie di regole, tradizioni, dogmi, sino a portare le sacre immagini ad essere il risultato non piú di un processo de intuizione, espressione di creativitá spirituale, ma un’operazione puramente mecanica, posta su di un piano meramente materiale.”

76
... and theoretical position. Zuccaro owned two copies of the Vasarian Vite to which he added his own postille. In the 1580s, Zuccaro turned to the study of Christian spirituality, expressing the need to develop the teaching of the Church, especially in works such as La vita di Cristo (1597–1598) and the postille to the Vite. His religious concerns allowed him to adopt spirituals as a way of achieving the creative goal of the artist. Nevertheless, for Zuccaro the spirituals were not the end but the means to achieve the ideal of a master. His use of spirituals is a means of reconciling the two elements of spirit and sensuality, and his spirituals are often described as rationally motivated, characterized by a synthesis of the two elements. A similar idea can be found in the work of Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 7, “The Controversy over Images and the Paragone,” 188–200.

Adriano Prosperi, Tra evangelismo e controriforma: G.M.Giberti (1495–1543) (Rome, 1969). An arching characteristic of the spirituals was the constant aim that their teachings become official church doctrine. Yet after defeat, spirituals appealed exclusively to the upper echelons of the church and society. For an examination of reform-ideas in the activity of the spirituals after Trent, see Camilla Russell, Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century Italy (Turnhout, 2006), esp. 129–84.


Terence O’Reilly, From Ignatius of Loyola to John of the Cross (Variorum, 1995), esp. 316 on Spanish Erasmians influenced by medieval traditions of piety.


Cristina Acidini Luchinat, “Federico Zuccari e i pittori di Parma: appunti per una storiografia artistica antivasariana,” Parmigianino e il manierismo europeo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Parma 13–15 giugno 2002, a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi (Milano, 2002), 385–91, on Federico Zuccari and his critique of Vasari as an effective engagement apparent in Zuccari’s painting and theoretical position. Zuccaro owned two copies of the Vasarian Vite to which he added his own postille. In the 1580s,


45 Fernando Marías, “Il pensiero artistico del Greco: dagli occhi dell’anima agli occhi della ragione,” El Greco. Identità e trasformazione: Creta, Italia, Spagna, ed. José Alvarez Lopera (Ginevra-Milano, 1999). Also, Fernando Marías e Agustín Bustamante, “El Greco et sa théorie de l’architecture,” Revue de l’Art 46 (1979): 31–9. However, no El Greco scholar took pains to analytically read his comments on Daniele Barbaro’s La pratica. Such an attempt may investigate whether Daniele Barbaro’s treatise was influential in the Counter-Reformation period. An article by Margaret Daly Davis, "Perspective, Vitruvius, and the Reconstruction of Ancient Architecture: The Role of Piero della Francesca's De prospectiva pingendi," The Treatise on Perspective, Published and Unpublished, ed. Lyle Massey (New Haven and London, 2003), 259–79, examines a few Counter-Reformation treatises such as Daniele Barbaro's 1567 La pratica della perspectiva, in which Barbaro recounts that his studies of Vitruvius had prompted him to write a book on perspective. The article emphasizes how Barbaro went to relate the study of perspective to architectural planning and proportion, citing Vitruvius' book 3, chapter 2. In contrast, as underscored by El Greco’s annotations to Barbaro in Marías and Bustamante, and in Jonathan Brown as well, he did not miss any opportunity to challenge the classical preoccupation with the necessity of adapting the proportions in order that they fit the whole. El Greco’s most pertinent annotations to Daniele Barbaro’s remarks on the text of Vitruvius involve a criticism of beauty, based on proportions and measurements: “…those painters who have done something never dealt with measurements. Thus, Giulio Clovio used to tell this story. When he asked Michelangelo about the value of measurements in art, he told him that …anyone who dealt with measurements was very stupid and wretched” (see Marías and Bustamante, 1981, 143). The example of Michelangelo who supersedes the claim of the superiority of antique art lies at the heart of El Greco’s frequent attacks on Barbaro’s text of Vitruvius: “What would Barbaro say if he found among the ancient temples the Basilica of St. Peter, with
its variety of design and novelty, and yet so removed from that simplicity prized by the ancients. And with all this, Michelangelo never had studied architecture except to look at buildings and the ruins of Italy and used only his great ability to draw the human figure.” (Ibid., 151).

46 Francisco de Borja de San Roman, El Greco en Toledo: Vida y Obra de Domenico Theotocópuli (Toledo, 1983), first ed. 1910, 41–7, esp. 44–5, on the drawings for the altars submitted by the painter Hernando de Avila and architect Juan de Herrera, but not used in the final execution. New plans were commissioned from El Greco.


50 Cyril Mango, “The Cult of Icons,” From Byzantium to El Greco. Greek Frescoes and Icons, exh. cat., op. cit., 35–6. For more on the production of likeness as a matter of artistry which captures the lineaments and expression of the saint, not a generalized human face, see Cyril Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453 (Englewood Cliffs, 1972). Robin Cormack, Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds (London, 1997), 30, 46. Cormack’s position is that the Byzantine icon did not refrain the sense of beauty in religious art, but rather engages its efforts in maintaining and setting forth good models for icon painters, primarily after 843 when the icon was not just a tolerated object; it was the sign and the symbol of Orthodoxy, a distinguishing feature of the dogma of the Eastern church.


53 Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven, 1993), 144.

54 Christopher Wood, Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (Chicago and London, 2008), 244 on the referential function of prints. El Greco’s fluency with the Northern print came from his friend and Roman benefactor, Giulio Clovio. The friendship that tied El Greco and the miniaturist Giulio Clovio during their residence at the Farnese Palace in Rome had a profound impact on El Greco in that he became accustomed to the works of Michelangelo and Dürer in Clovio’s collection. Clovio’s own miniatures and his Offices of the Madonna were strongly influenced by Michelangelo, and his works reflected his predecessor’s masterpieces so much that Vasari, in his malice, called Clovio “a new, if smaller, Michelangelo.” On these thoughts, see Elizabeth Du Gue Trapier, “El Greco in the Farnese Palace, Rome,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts 51(1958): 73–90.


57 On Vasari’s description of the self-portrait painted on cambric, which Dürer sent to Raphael as a gift in about 1515 and which bears a resemblance to the St Veronica’s Sudarium, see Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist, ed. Giulia Bartum, 77.
It becomes apparent how these ideas derive from Leo Joseph Koerner, The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art (Chicago, 1993). Georges Didi-Huberman notes that Dürer’s self-portrait as a melancholy artist referenced…a figurative practice of the imitatio Christi which basically presupposes that Christ could also have provided the ultimate example of a melancholy in whose image men modeled themselves. See Georges Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art (Paris, 2005), 173.

Leo Joseph Koerner in The Reformation of the Image (Chicago, 2004), 357, analyses Dürer’s woodcut of the Mass of St Gregory (1511) which shows a deacon gazing over the Eucharistic wafer to a panel with the Sudarium. As Koerner underscores, St. Veronica’s sweatcloth enjoys a special status here not only because it is a miraculous icon like Gregory’s, but because being a part of most late medieval altars’ ritual inventory—often as a decoration of the pax—it negotiates between the visionary and the real. This liturgical alignment of Eucharist and icon re-enforces the idea that St. Gregory’s vision was making the retable altarpiece come alive.


John Shearman, Only Connect….Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance (New Jersey, 1992), chap. 4, Domes, 149–91, esp. 180–6, on the Byzantine Pantokrator disc and the assimilation to the Byzantine tradition of Renaissance illusionistic ideas.


67 Jonathan Brown, “El Greco and Toledo,” El Greco of Toledo, exh. cat., 55. David Davies, “El Greco and the Spiritual Reform Movements in Spain,” Studies in the History of Art 13 (1984): 57–77. Toledo preserved an Erasmian cell through Diego de Castilla, a defender of Bartolomé Carranza, who was imprisoned ostensibly for Erasmian tendencies. Luis de Castilla, son of Diego de Castilla, was the keeper of Erasmus’ correspondence. He was to remain a lifelong friend of El Greco and acted as the executor of his will. Pedro de Salazar y Mendoza, another friend of El Greco, had in his library an unexpurgated book by Erasmus and he was also the author of a biography of Bartolomé Carranza.


69 Andrew W. Keitt, Inventing the Sacred. Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural of Golden Age Spain (Leiden and Boston, 2005), 35–40.


71 Richard L. Kagan, “Pedro Salazar de Mendoza as Collector, Scholar, and Patron of El Greco,” Studies in the History of Art 13 (1984): 85–95. Salazar de Mendoza was an arbitrator of the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz in the dispute that developed between El Greco and the parish priest of Santo Tomé, Andrés Núñez de Madrid. A reformer himself, Mendoza completed his studies of St. Ildefonso and then wrote Bartolomé de Carranza y Miranda’s biography to honour the reputation of a prelate who had been arrested by the Spanish Inquisition in 1559 only to be exonerated by the papacy in 1576.


73 Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven, 1993), 291. Tullio Lombardo adapted the monumental tomb to the needs of an altarpiece, thereby creating
what may be termed the architectural altarpiece. This was to become the dominant type of sculptured altarpiece in Venice in the second and third decades of the sixteenth century, as epitomized by the S. Sepolcro altarpiece by Tullio Lombardo and Lorenzo Bregno in Venice, S. Martino.

74 Henk van Os, Sienese Altarpieces 1215–1460: Form, Content, Function, vol. II: 1344–1460 (Gröningen, 1990), 163.


76 Ibid., 194, the future variations are at Sta. Maria sopra Minerva at the tomb of Diotesalvi Neroni (1484), and at Sta. Maria del Popolo at the tomb of Marcantonio Albertoni (1485).


81 Carlos Eire, War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin (Cambridge, 1986), chaps. 1–2.

82 These observations belong to Terence O’ Reilly, From Ignatius to John of the Cross (Variorum, 1995), 310–11, who stresses Erasmus’ indebtedness to the devotio moderna movement, his education in its schools and their tradition of medieval devotion. R. P. Post, The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism (Leiden, 1969) draws on devotio moderna as a personal matter between a man’s conscience and God, and not a question of an institutionalized truth to be practiced only within the
cloister. In alignment with William Spoelhof’s ideas quoted in the preface, Post asserts that it may be seen as a return to the communal life of apostolic Christianity. Clearly, it displayed a diminishing respect for the externals of religion and a greater emphasis upon the internals.


84 O’Reilly, op. cit., 101. The Spiritual Exercises and the crisis of medieval piety in Ignatius’ thought cannot simply be classified as part of the other strand in the early Counter-Reformation distinguished by Hubert Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent (New York, 1957), the movement to reform the late medieval church.

85 Nicolae Iorga, Byzantium after Byzantium, trans. Laura Treptow (Iasi, Oxford and Portland, 2000), 189–90 on the preoccupation with the rhetorical direction of Cicero to the exclusion of the archaic element of Byzantine culture in the Greek educational system developed in Western culture.


89 The priest of the Toledan parish of Santo Tomé, Andrés Núñez de Madrid, stipulated the iconography for the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz and obtained the council’s permission before commissioning El Greco. This procedure was common in the Counter-Reformation, when a parish church wanted to commission a new altarpiece. It was required to obtain a license from the archbishop of the provincial council, which administrated the program. The text mentions that: “…On the canvas, he is to paint the scene in which the parish priest and other clerics were saying the prayers, about to bury Don Gonzalo de Ruiz, Lord of Orgaz, when Saint Augustine and Saint Stephen descended to bury the body of this gentleman……,” see El Greco of Toledo, exh. cat., 1982, 124–5.

90 Robert McMahon, Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, and Dante (Washington D.C., 2006), 1–65 on the return of the soul in this life to God as an interior journey, in the autobiographical works that enact the Christian ascent of the soul to God.

92 On Battista da Crema and his doctrine of charity as the renunciation of codes of honour and statutes, see Adriano Prosperi, Tribunali della coscienza: confessori, inquisitori, missionari (Turin, 1996), 20. A recent re-examination of da Crema’s doctrine within the spirituality of the new religious orders of the reform in Querico Mazzonis, Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474–1540) (Washington, 2007), 146–69, and note 37, 154. Battista da Crema (1460–1534) promoted in the early sixteenth century the medieval spirituality of the devotio moderna. A preacher of the Dominican congregation of the Observant movement in Lombardy, da Crema composed ascetic writings such as Via de aperta verità (1523), Della cognizione et vittoria di se stesso (1531), Philosophia divina (1531) and Lo spechio interiore (1540) which states: “he who has not purged well his eye and has not become cleansed and pure of heart cannot contemplate God.”

93 On the carrying of the dead Meleager as Alberti’s illustration of movement, its adaptation in Mantegna’s engraving and further surpassing the Albertian narrative model in Michelangelo, see Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 2000, 34–48.


95 It is most legitimate to see in El Greco’s re-use of the medieval funerary monument in altarpiece context a direct influence of his Byzantine formation. The interrelation of figure and narrative held special relevance in archaic Greek mythological scenes. These were not simple illustrations of the texts, but representatives of a genre in their own right and from the perspective of their own time. Narrative solutions were ascribed to the painter’s own rewriting of the story. On these ideas, see Reading Greek Art: Essays by Nikolaus Himmelmann selected by Hugo Meyer, ed. William Childs (Princeton and New Jersey, 1998), 67–103.


on the Capella Pucci-Cauco at the Trinità dei Monti as a testimony of Taddeo and Federico Zuccari’s mingled efforts.


For the claim that the fascination with a medieval representation of the Mother of God was part of the “imitatio Mariae,” a trope in the wake of the spiritual exercises that would soon dominate the religious arena of the Counter-Reformation as transfers from the Reform of the 1530, see Henk van Os, Sienese Altarpieces, 1215–1460, II (Groningen, 1984–1990), 84–5.

Alexander Nagel hints at the spiritual ethos derived from a correlation between the Passion and Marian devotion in his critical analysis of the Colonna Pietà drawing by Michelangelo, 2000, 170–4.


For precedents of the Pietà with Angels in Federico Zuccari’s fresco-altarpiece at the Villa Farnese in Caprarola, see David R. Coffin, The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome (Princeton, 1979), 286–9. Alexander Nagel, op. cit., 155, stresses that John Sherman has noted how Rosso Fiorentino adopted the model in his Boston Dead Christ with Angels.


Kristina Herrmann-Fiore, op.cit., 201. Zuccari’s familiarity with the Flemish traditions of the Pietà was made possible through their fluency with Flemish prints by Goltzius, Otto van Veen, Spranger, and Abraham Janssens which circulated in Rome. An essential observation belongs to J.R. Judson, “Van Veen, Michelangelo, and Zuccari,” Essays in Honor of Walter Friedländer (New York, 1965), 100. Zuccari’s Pietà shows indebtedness to the Flemish tradition and its medieval leanings which shaped with Michelangelo and Zuccari a response in the Italian Renaissance.


On the emergence of medieval forms of piety as the natural outgrowth of Ignatius of Loyola’s spiritual exercises initiated in the 1530s and the Marian subjects inserted within, see Terence O’Reilly, From Ignatius of Loyola to John of the Cross (Variorum, 1995), 306–8, 310–1.


I am referring here to the necessity to follow the written narrative of the Passion and to embed historical content within as the main direction of the Counter-Reformation. A few fresco-narratives, such as the Oratorio del Gonfalone, excluded the rule in the narrative liberty they took from the historical account, see Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600 (Chicago and London, 1990), 250–52. To observe that at the Oratorio del Gonfalone a major interruption of the narrative sequence occurs in the center of the entrance wall, where the Virgin Mary with the Trinity is inserted. The Oratorio del Gonfalone was decorated with a Passion cycle in 1556–57 and 1568–76 by a number of painters headed by Federico Zuccari.


On the inner-arched frame as a maker of meaning in the space outside the painting, see Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, “Framing Classical Space,” Art Journal 47/1 (1988): 37–41.


Loreto e la Santa Casa (Bologna, 2005), eds. F.Grimaldi, G. Guadalupi, S. Papetti.


Peter Humfrey, ibid., 28–30.


Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven, 1993), 52–3, 188, on Lorenzo Bregno, the author of the altarpiece frame of Titian’s Assunta dei Frari. Humfrey underscores that Bregno, skilled as he was in Sacrament tabernacles, incorporated a minute version of it into the base of the altarpiece frame of the Assunta dei Frari. In assimilating the Reserved Eucharist to the altarpiece frame, Bregno anticipated the housing of the Sacrament tabernacle on the high altar, a practice that turned into the
tradition of the ciborium-tabernacle replacing the Sacrament altarpiece introduced in Venice at the time of the Council of Trent.


129 David Davies, ed., *El Greco*, exh. cat., National Gallery Company (London, 2003), 108–10, cat. entries 14 and 15. The Pietà in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America, an oil on canvas, is purported to have been brought by El Greco to Spain in 1576.


131 Leo Joseph Koerner brings this observation under careful scrutiny in his essay on the turned figure as the bearer of an individual effect of the landscape. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friederich and the subject of landscape* (London, 1990), 162–66.

132 The Rückenfigur in the Baroque emblem tradition is a visual mediator of the written message. A shift occurred in parallel to this tradition in the altarpiece field where the Rückenfigur is the purveyor of meaning transmitted through the visual narrative. See Joseph Leo Koerner, op. cit., 164.

133 On the Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the circumstances of its rejection at the Escorial, see *El Greco of Toledo*, exh. cat., Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art (Boston, 1982), eds. Jonathan Brown et al., 16, 98.


135 On Donatello’s *rilievo schiacciato* and his proficiency in this kind of engraving in stone in order to emphasize the pictorial nature of the result, as shown by the Assumption of the Virgin from the tomb of Cardinal Rainaldo Brancaccio in Naples, see Bonnie A. Bennett and David G. Wilkins, *Donatello* (Oxford, 1984), 110–1, and 135.

Xavier de Salas and Fernando Marias, El Greco y el arte de su tiempo: las notas de El Greco a Vasari (Madrid, 1992), 89: “desgracia a de ser que el florentino no sea el vencedor,” II, 207; V-M, V, 162, in relation to the inartistic Florentine who took important commissions in Rome and the exclusion of Rosso Fiorentino; and II, 227, and V-M, V, 210, “a estos mayor los trata por no ser pintores, en fin, basta que sean amigos,” in relation to Florentines such as Andrea de Cosimo Feltrini who Vasari praises as seminal in Florentine art and decoration.

Ibid., on Bellini and the Venetians see 112. El Greco defends Bellini’s Northern borrowings from Dürer, whose presence he thinks was so influential in Venice. On the Venetians and Bellini imitating the Germans, El Greco criticizes Vasari’s perception of the Northern model as “estilo muy seco” and qualifies such a statement as unworthy of an historiographer: “tal juicio quiso la suerte que hubiera de escribir la vida de los pintores,” III, 808, V-M, VII, 433.

Ibid., on Correggio see 81. El Greco’s critique of Vasari’s brief assessment of Correggio at the Parma Cathedral is the opportunity for an important observation on how Correggio has surpassed any imitation of the classical antiquity: “téngase por cierto que en aquel tiempo en que esta obra se hizo, se le debió más que a todos los demás, porque ningún otro mostró en aquel tiempo tanta ferocidad sin depender de la Antigüedad como se ve en la mayoría de las cosas de Rafael de Urbino.” On II, 237. V-M, V, 234–5, El Greco adds: “Antonio da Correggio les ha superado a todos en lo que es gracia en general y en aquellos sus dibujos.”

“The ignorant Vasari does not realize that the good ancient master based their works on life, and he would have it rather that it is better to draw things at one remove, which antiquities are, than it is the first and most fundamental of things, which are living, and which one must always imitate. But this fellow did not understand this art.” See Aidan Weston-Lewis, “Annibale Carracci and the Antique,” Master Drawings 30, 3 (1992): 287–314, esp. 287. Annibale Carracci’s postille, including his thoughts on Bellini, are reprinted by Mario Fanti in “Le postille carraccesche alle Vite del Vasari: il testo originale,” Il Carrobbio 5 (1979): 148–64.
Chapter 3
Annibale Carracci, Painter-Architect of his Altarpieces

As might be expected from one of the major artistic figures of the period, Annibale Carracci has much to say about imitation, the bounds of decorum, and appropriate ornament in post-Tridentine religious painting. He constantly returned to the ultimate effort for a painter such as he, namely, the creation of sacred istorie that were at once dramatic and iconically stable. His work documents a successful struggle to resolve radical devices so unusual that they have not even been noticed as his retreat from the prevailing normative model of his age. To convey the power of painting as the act of painting itself betrays distinctive means of questioning an age abounding in rules and historical regulations.

John O’Malley’s assertion that the Counter-Reformation has set renewed claims to sacred art to “don or doff the robes of the hanging judge” encourages reflection on the greater task of Annibale Carracci to reform art. He was probably aware of the clash of institutional position and religious reform that prompted Hubert Jedin to draw a clear distinction between the Catholic Reform and the Counter-Reformation. In Annibale Carracci’s age, ideas on the insistence of faith in the benefits of Christ’s death and on interior reform of the individual were still at the center of laymen seeking a deeper and more personal Christian spirituality than institutional practices could offer. The reforming profile assumed by Annibale Carracci echoes the religious life of his time in a manner that maintains and advances Christian devotional ideals. When Bellori contrasted him with the generally low level of his age, he alluded to a marginalization of Annibale
Carracci by embattled historiographers such as Baglione. As Giovanni Previtali aptly underscored, Bellori’s earlier marginal note to his copy of Baglione would be amply manifested in Bellori’s Vite that appeared twenty-five years later: “just as Raphael restored painting to a most beautiful truth, so did Annibale Carracci, and thus Baglione did him wrong in writing so little about him, and numbering him among so many inartistic (imbrattatele) painters.”

In a period haunted by a sense of decadence and stricture, Annibale Carraci epitomizes a pure visual form of religious painting to reform altarpiece designs. This derives from a passionate engagement with the Christian cult which nourishes Annibale Carracci’s wellspring of imagination, primarily visible when he taps the resources of the Byzantine Marian icon within the Renaissance altarpiece. This chapter studies how Annibale Carracci adapted within his individual norms the pure tradition of Byzantine Marian icons and their frontal character intended to focus devotional attention. His assimilation of the prayerful mood of the icon and primarily of the Virgin Orante to altarpiece designs entails a profound transformation of the icon, a process which breaks decisively with all mimetic impulse. It was not an act of imitation but of reanimating historical documents of Byzantine art, meant now to reform the Western iconic tradition. As explained in the preamble to Chapter 2, the West did not adopt the Byzantine officially-sanctioned position towards icons and thereby their coming into the Renaissance focus rested solely on the Western artist’s capability to excavate the Christian cult, hunting for authenticity of representation and a more enlightened way to express the religious sentiment. The affirmation of the Byzantine icon within the Renaissance altarpiece constructs retrospectively a past from which the work of art emerges through a homogenization of
specific alterities conserving temporal distance. Christopher Wood has recently proposed “referential responsibility towards origins” as the direction of a visual transformation within which the past is reactivated in a continuum with the archetypal source. The sense of modernity which Wood singles out in the referential flow towards a unique beginning establishes a model of unity for modern time to stem a “linear flow with a fixed directional arrow” (Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt’s lingering Renaissance model) which fallaciously turned modernity into “a matter of getting everyone to agree where the boundaries between truth and falsehood are drawn.” While these frameworks inform my idea of Annibale Carracci as the reformer of a pure altarpiece form which went hand in hand with the idea of returning to an earlier Christian age, Renaissance theory upholds divergent positions. These prevail for example in Elizabeth Cropper’s The Domenchino Affair: Novelty, Imitation and Theft in Seventeenth-Century Rome (2005), where Renaissance imitation patterned after Marino’s poetry does not aim to reveal an original, but to celebrate its own stylistic originality. Erich Auerbach has reasoned that poetry holds an ethos and an ideal that conceals its real function, and thus precludes any involvement with the figura understood as the real, active presence of God.

This dissertation studies the Renaissance affirmation of the icon by Annibale Carracci as an act of transformation of the Byzantine icon, in divergence from the Western misconception over the icons as mere archaeological evidence of an ancient Christian cult. My study credits the historical imagination of the artist over archaeological evidence which has often served the leanings and idiosyncrasies of partisan trends not only in art history but largely in humanistic studies, as shown by Leonard Barkan’s Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture (1999). In this
dissertation, Annibale Carracci inserts his religious painting in a Christian tradition where the icon epitomized real and authentic presence, thus veering off from the scientific and archaeological directions of the post-Tridentine age. My study of Annibale Carracci’s disengagement from the Counter-Reformation ideological force does not concur with the Renaissance theory on which main directions Annibale Carracci was named a “reformer” and “forerunner” of the Baroque.

The demands of naturalness as a counter-reformatory direction drawn from the standard authorities of the Council of Trent form the majority view from Bellori and Malvasia to Boschloo and Dempsey. In A.W.A. Boschloo’s Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent (1974), naturalism as the landmark of Annibale Carracci’s Bolognese paintings is an imitation of Cardinal Paleotti’s theory of style which translates the scientific ideas of his lifelong friend Ulisse Aldrovandi into a canon for clear and didactic images. A naturalist philosopher and collector of the most exotic productions of nature, Aldrovandi constructed his theory of optical naturalism in which the artistic value of art took only second place. Clarity was essential for Aldrovandi as a scientific prerequisite, and his arguments met with Paleotti’s full approval of a new attitude of the church towards the artist and his work. Paleotti’s Discorso Intorno alle Imagini Sacre e Profane (1582; Latin edition 1592) vilifies the artist’s fantasy as being antithetical to il verosimile of an imitation of the natural model. The Cardinal appears to have taken to heart Aldrovandi’s advice concerning the proper principles of scientific research and his recommendations to copy the model he gave to the illustrators of his works. Aldrovandi’s demand of scientific accuracy translates into

94
stricture in Paleotti’s theory of imitation of his *Discorso*, where clarity and certainty take precedence above artistic imagination.

Boschloo’s ideas incurred a refutation in S.J. Freedberg’s *Circa 1600: A Revolution in Style in Italian Painting* (1983). Freedberg regards Paleotti’s theory of style loose and evasive when it came to specifying how exactly *il verosimile* of scientific root fitted into his scheme for post-Tridentine painting. Freedberg implicitly curbs enthusiasm for Paleotti’s *Discorso* as the conventional and counter-reformatory treatise which had circulated mainly within Bologna and a limited group of intellectuals and clergy, and which does not seem probable to have had any direct influence on the Carracci or other artists.\(^{16}\) However, Freedberg fully endorses that Annibale Carracci has achieved a naturalistic revolution, primarily visible in his *Carità Crucifixion with Saints* from 1583. Freedberg supports Paleotti’s authority over Bolognese art, namely, that his theory of style precipitated Annibale’s inclination to invent and emulate tradition by means of an “affective naturalism,” an appreciation of the imitation of nature in art and of the power of art to achieve direct and emotionally affecting communication.\(^ {17}\) It is precisely the emotional quality which can build a link between painting and spectator that Paleotti underscores as an essential relationship in a number of chapters which are among the most important in his treatise.\(^ {18}\) The concept of naturalism and its very origin of national versus regional style has extensively engaged scholarship on Emilian art in particular, and initiated a polemic vivid in the days of Malvasia’s *Felsina Pittrice*, first published in 1678. The “Life of the Carracci” is pivotal in the *Felsina Pittrice* for the lasting fame of the three Carracci, Ludovico, Agostino and Annibale who, for Malvasia, introduced a
new naturalism to celebrate Bolognese painting from a larger historical perspective, beyond the confines of Emilia. 19

Naturalism of Malvasia, Boschloo and S.J. Freedberg’s legacy as a method to reposition Renaissance theory in the forefront of research in art history is endorsed by Claire Farago’s recent intervention in Renaissance Theory (2008). Her argument leans on the capricious nature of artistic fantasy as being antithetical to the “reasoned imagination” of scientific naturalism which was validated by the authority of the post-Tridentine church. 20 Yet the most astute opponent of the new science was Cardinal Bellarmine who eventually saw the gravity of the new scientific ideas holding the grounds of theologians’ thought such as Paleotti’s. In The Waning of the Renaissance 1550–1640, William J. Bouwsma epitomizes with Robert Bellarmine the late Renaissance clergyman, who despite being a member of the Counter-Reformation, saw the gravity of the new ideas that no longer provide the model for human order. The secularizing concepts, Bellarmine charges, antagonize “all theologians and scholastic philosophers, injure the faith, and contradict the Scriptures.” 21 Bouwsma most pertinently observed that Bellarmine’s injunctions against a secularized cosmos after Galileo, who erased the old difference between heaven and earth, were akin to the refutation of Machiavelli’s secularization of politics and society which similarly rejects any ultimate model of organization patterned after unity and hierarchy. 22

The religious paintings of Annibale Carracci have been contextualized in more recent scholarship within the rise of the vernacular and its divisive claims in the early modern age. The basis for Italian language and literature as predominantly Tuscan has served as a foil against which the Carracci launched their celebrated reform. The analogy with
language in the debate over the vernacular – *the questione della lingua* – permeates to great lengths Charles Dempsey’s analysis of the Carracci reform of painting. After Annibale Carracci steeped his painting in the study of Correggio and Titian to the emulation of a rich repository of the past (color and chiaroscuro), he formed his own canon of “naturalism” as a conflation of the naturalistic and illusionistic canons of Emilia and Venice. The “naturalism” of Annibale Carracci appears grounded in an artistic tradition and at once endowed with a superior imitative power of the natural model to supersede the provincialism of the Bolognese school. This unity of styles was furthered in Rome through the assimilation of “the Roman canons of Raphael and the art of antiquity.” The rhetorical dimension of Annibale Carracci patterned after Raphael added to the grounds of his “regionalism” in which, for Dempsey, Ludovico still played an enduring influence as a mentor, not as a provincial master. Thus, Annibale Carracci’s “naturalism” stages a regional or vernacular debate of a complexity capable of rivaling the prevailing Tuscan style. The synthesis proposed by Annibale Carracci assimilates a “regional style” into the mainstream of Western art as a “truly national style,” one which is known today as the “baroque.” Paradoxically, though, it appears not to have superseded Vasari’s “modern manner” which was being given regional identification with the state style of Tuscany. To this idea Charles Dempsey gives a substantiating contour in “The Carracci and the Devout Style in Emilia,” where the “the idea of centrality” epitomized by Rome explains why the Tuscan style through the canon established by Vasari overlays Carracci’s “regionalism” with devout directions in the normative Raphael. For Dempsey, Carracci’s “regionalism” and “naturalism” were subdued to a vernacular proclivity for Raphael.
Philip Sohm has shown in *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (2001) that the Vasarian concept of competing regional styles designed to provoke polemical discussion was defined only later in a fixed canon with Agucchi, early in the seventeenth century. Agucchi identified four schools of styles (Roman, Venetian, Tuscan, Lombard) and his contemporary Giulio Cesare Gigli proposed a competing canon of thirteen artistic styles which did not survive in art literature. The Roman school as the “grand style” which follows the artifice of antiquity and the beauty of statues was widely influential for Agucchi’s exposition of his classicist aesthetic, the influence of which is most notable in Bellori’s *Idea*. In a debt to Agucchi that Bellori’s *Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1672) openly affirm, he presents Annibale Carracci as an imitator of Greek art:

“He allowed himself principally to the sweetness and purity of Correggio and Titian’s power and distribution of color, and from this latter’s master’s naturalistic imitation he proceeded to the more perfect ideas and the more emended art of the Greek.”

Bellori’s statements which further Agucchi’s surrender “naturalism” and “regionalism” into a style cleaving to an ideal form inherent in the Greek model, a standard by which to evaluate other styles. This dissertation proposes to look at Annibale Carracci’s religious painting from a vantage point that locates the indefinite “expression of an abstract truth beyond experience” not in style, but rather in a continuum with a devotional past. What was bracketed with “regionalism” I propose to assess against the roots of a *pietas interriorizata* which permeates Correggio’s paintings, as reasoned by Giancarla Periti. She locates *pietas interriorizata* in the Emilian circulation of the most significant developments of a Christian humanism emerging from the Erasmian doctrine.
of a unity of *eruditio* and *pietas* expounded through Erasmus’ *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* and its dissemination across the Italian peninsula.\(^2^9\) The melding of erudition and faith drew an extended response in Correggio’s work in his original interpretation of religious subjects and also in his antithetical model to Raphael’s interpretation of antiquity. My dissertation positions Annibale Carracci within this stream, demonstrating that his inclinations were less Emilian in character than part of a complex way to excavate a Christian past inextricably tied with the Northern origins of the religious reform.\(^3^0\) Annibale Carracci does not illustrate a style in terms of a stylistic engagement with a school or authorized theoretical position, but he epitomizes a purity of form and beauty beyond any stylistic canon and manner. My dissertation studies Annibale Carracci’s Bolognese and Roman religious painting within a continuum with Christian icons, an ancient signifying universe from which he excavated the purity of form and the historical authenticity of his altarpiece. This array of meanings was at work in the practice of the Carracci academy. Their prints and drawings played an essential role both in the transformation of traditional models and the invention of new subjects. Clare Robertson has argued that Annibale Carracci constantly pushed painting out of conventional molds and used Correggio and the Venetian masters to alter, even to subvert, existing contemporary approaches to painting in order to explore new modes of expression in whatever genre he essayed.\(^3^1\) To tap the unique matrix of the Byzantine icon was for Annibale Carracci, as this dissertation repeatedly demonstrates, a further assertion of the *figura* in altarpiece designs; it also launched modern yet Renaissance-indebted ways of coordinating between church painting and high altar.
3.1 From Icon to Visual Narrative: The Origins of the Carità Crucifixion

Before Annibale Carracci moved permanently to Rome in 1595, his St. Roch Distributing Alms (Figure 37) dating from the same year marked the last and quintessential accomplishment of his Bolognese activity. Spanning virtually two decades in the fields of altarpiece and fresco decoration, the Bolognese years of Annibale Carracci account for decisive solutions in the development of his forthcoming Roman altarpiece which first took shape in St. Roch Distributing Alms. At the root of a trajectory at the end of which Annibale Carracci issued a pictorial formula for his narrative altarpiece, as it is ascertained in St. Roch, lies one of his first Bolognese productions, an altar painting of a Crucifixion with Saints (Figure 36) from 1583 in the basilica of Sta. Maria della Carità.³²

The Carità Crucifixion with Saints confronts the icon type of the Crucifixion with its use in the Christian devotion of the early modern age. No longer exclusively permeated by a divine truth or theological consensus, the icon locates its significance in a narrative identity deeply attached to its archaic past and at the same time indicative of the shifting historical context.³³ In Annibale Carracci’s post-Tridentine times, the icon thus points to the effective relation between the biblical account of the Gospel and the visual narrative wrought by the painter or the Albertian historia. Under the sway of history, the Albertian classification of pictura into graphic, composition, and rhetoric began to signal in post-Tridentine times an unprecedented bias towards rhetoric, which pertains minimally to the painting’s natural resourcefulness in Alberti’s tripartite division.³⁴ An Albertian historia laden with contemporaneous history reflected matters of content, which appeared of overriding relevance to the early modern age. History, a manifestation of the modern Western state in which Fernand Braudel identified the claims to national identity
substituting cultural history or civilization, exerted a powerful attraction on the Roman Church.\textsuperscript{35} It inspired among others a normative use of contemporaneous history on religious grounds, with all the contingent fallacies. The ecclesiastical dictates of the Counter-Reformation to invest the visual character of the \textit{historia} with historical content were registered in the altarpiece arena as a clash of tradition and modernity. Accordingly, painters who still conceived and realized painting through means specific to tradition collided with those who overtly adopted the ensuing Tridentine theological and humanist principles of the content of art.\textsuperscript{36} The most integral message of a protracted Tridentine council heralded a new sense of \textit{historia} as the central attribute of religious imagery in the service of an embattled Catholic Church, which outlined discipline, power, and expansion into new territories as the main thrust of its agenda. It cannot be coincidental that the conclusion to strive after in the Counter-Reformation was a rhetorical content of religious images.

In pursuing the clearest alternative to the convention-bound Counter-Reformation direction, Annibale Carracci demonstrates in his Carità \textit{Crucifixion with Saints} of 1583 an evocation of the Italian Renaissance altarpiece tradition of Northern origin. This altarpiece direction evolved from the Byzantine icon, was perfected in Padua and Venice by Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini, and carried to uppermost results in Michelangelo’s London \textit{Entombment} (Figure 2). It hailed frontal visual presentation and restrained narrative as modes of canvassing new artistic models, with the hindsight of archaic conventions and traditions. Annibale Carracci traces his Carità \textit{Crucifixion with Saints} to this tradition and looks back around it, but—to the highest defining landmark of his art—scurries forward.\textsuperscript{37}
The Crucifixion, a derivative of the image of the Man of Sorrows transmitted to the West via Byzantine icons, had already been adapted to the Passion narrative in the Renaissance altarpiece. Yet truthfulness to the icon did not set the norm invariably, and Annibale Carracci’s restorative response aimed at effacing just this ambiguity. Annibale Carracci borrows from the tradition of the Man of Sorrows assimilated to images of the Crucified Christ and presents it frontally in order to unfold his altarpiece to a contemplation of the figure of Christ. In his effort to preserve the dimension of contemplation and mystery inherent in the icon, he impresses its frontal mode upon the narrative structure and brings it into alignment with archaic modes in the visual tradition.

In Annibale Carracci’s time, the frontal modes of archaic underpinnings transmuted their visual origin in the icon into a coordination with the structures of ecclesiastical ceremonial. A possibility emerged that the Counter-Reformation ritual of the Roman Catholic mass, which centered on the papal cult of the Eucharistic Host as a source of adoration, may translate the prayerful mode of the icon into the performative mood of the pontifical ritual. The incorporation of the frontal mode of the icon into the pontifical direction of the Eucharistic Host entailed uncharted and highly controversial means of thinking of the icon outside its prayerful mode and inside ceremonial functions. Notwithstanding, the outward use of the icon in the pontifical narratives appealed to the Counter-Reformation as playing a seminal formative role in the modern devotional consciousness of the believer. It ensued the possibility of upending the suprahistorical significance of the icon for contingent ceremonial ends, and interlocking rhetorical content derived from the Counter-Reformation function of religious images steeped in the classical rhetoric of *movere, docere, delectare*. “To move” and “to please”, the Counter-
Reformation verbs destined to enhance the rhetorical eloquence of religious imagery, derived their persuasive thrust from the ecclesiastical, verbal narrative and its prevailing epideictic direction. A rhetorical and outward identity of the religious image thus emerged at the expense of the inward character of the icon.

An opposite mechanism prevails in the narrative of the Carità Crucifixion with Saints. Annibale Carracci impresses the frontal mode of the icon upon his Crucifixion to flesh out a narrative structure rooted in the meditative and contemplative power of the icon of the Man of Sorrows. The icon of the Crucified Christ originates and likewise centers, organizes and grafts meaning on to the altarpiece historia. The inward and prayerful mode of the icon turns, for Annibale Carracci, into a principle of altarpiece composition. The frontal modes of the Counter-Reformation protocols must have come under his attentive scrutiny and their archaic connotations pleased him in all likelihood. But the annexation of their rhetorical content to visual ends was remotely distant from his understanding of the prayerful mode of the icon in an altarpiece context.

The Counter-Reformation protocols of liturgical setting aggrandised by the papal direction of the Eucharistic Host as a source of adoration squared with outward forms of ecclesiastical ceremony, of an escalating participation after Trent. Yet, they are distinguishable from the sacrament altarpiece which, perfected and reckoned in medieval exhortations, awaited the Tridentine theology when the doctrine of transubstantiation was finally established. During the sixteenth century the rise of the sacrament altarpiece precipitated in the private devotional domain a pending, top-down ecclesiastical interference with the freedom of the commissioning process. In stark contrast to the ceremonial predilection, but otherwise a part of the Counter-Reformation agenda, the
sacrament altarpiece represented a dignified formula for preserving the Host and securing the Eucharistic mystery. It was certainly the fitting conclusion to a series of past exhortations during which Girolamo Savonarola and the reforming bishop of Verona, Gian Matteo Giberti, emerged as the most compelling defenders of its regulatory function in both liturgical and devotional practice.\(^{43}\) More consequential than its newly-acquired official status, the rise of the sacrament altarpiece aligned itself with the doctrinal and Christocentric emphasis in altarpieces of around 1500, returning altar images to the central mystery of the Christian faith at the expense of altarpiece dedications to saints.\(^{44}\) In Annibale Carracci’s Carità Crucifixion with Saints one encounters all these matters assimilated to the private chapel of a Bolognese church where an episode of the Passion Narrative holds the frontal field of the main altarpiece. Yet Annibale Carracci did not endorse the Counter-Reformation beyond the restorative implications of the sacrament altarpiece. He extricated himself from the Counter-Reformation agenda of iconographic predilection just as he did from the Counter-Reformation annexation of the contemplative mode of the icon to ceremonial practice.

In the Counter-Reformation agenda for religious images, definitions of content were largely derived from iconography and its extreme attention to subject matter. The iconographic direction entertained a one-sided dialogue with history in the pressing matters of the ecclesiastical program of reform.\(^{45}\) For Tridentine theologians, iconography of historical content became antithetical to artistic freedom of expression. Artistic creativity came under scathing attack in the penetrating account of the Dominican theologian Giovanni Gilio da Fabriano, Degli Errori de’Pittori from 1564. His remonstration was launched chiefly against the currency of Michelangelo’s ideas in post-
Tridentine artistic circles, ostensibly visible in the production of two key personalities in the Rome of the Counter-Reformation, the brothers Taddeo and Federico Zuccari. Gilio’s Degli Errori expounded an alternative direction fostering a strained agreement between the “indecorous” beauty of modern painting and the piety of religious art. Yet Gilio’s efforts summarized in his regolata mescolanza did not present the thrust of refutable argument after which the Catholic Church strived. In 1570 a man of erudition from Louvain, Johannes Molanus, published his first edition of De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris in which Erasmus’ belief that there need not be a divorce between religion and classical culture became one-sidedly applied in the examination of religious images and interpreted as a pre-eminence of the moral character of the classical model. An implication of the tilting of the Erasmian poise between culture and religion towards morality, the rise of iconography asserted in De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris engaged religious imagery on a rhetorical path of moral and didactic conceits, integral to top-down ecclesiastical control. Molanus devised iconography as the main associate to the ratifications on images heralded at Trent, which he turned into the focal points of his own treatise: text and image invested with an authority rooted in a consensus of opinion among clerics of past and contemporary counciliar participation; and the ecclesiastical fear of materializing the figure of God subsequent to the clergy’s disbelief in the sacred representations of painters.

In 1582, in acknowledgment of Molanus’ ideas and after the printing in 1573 of Carlo Borromeo’s Instructiones, Cardinal Gabrielle Paleotti published his Discorso Intorno alle Imagine Sacre e Profane. The moralistic and didactic reflections on religious images constitute the driving lines of his treatise intended to oversee the production of art
through ecclesiastical control and guided patronage. Iconographic formulas reign supreme throughout Paleotti’s treatise and offer straightforward solutions on how to paint for artists and how to commission for donors, hence enforcing a manifold bind of control in the art politics of the Counter Reformation.

Annibale Carracci extricates himself from the Counter Reformation regulations on images by taking an individualized, yet steeped-in-tradition view, on the iconographic model. As shown in the preamble to this chapter, his recourse to icons as authentic representations of the saints was meant to secure referential work at the altarpiece level. In the Carità Crucifixion with Saints the frontal presentation of the Crucified Christ holds the vertical axis and focuses devotional attention in affinity with the icon mode of the Man of Sorrows impressed upon altarpiece structure. Annibale Carracci supplants with freedom in the visual narrative the simple restating of the icon in narrative context and thus confronts the canonical iconographies of the Crucifixion in a landscape background. To this end he enhances the dramatic quality of the eclipse of the sun at the Crucifixion hour and bathes the Cross in a counter-light. The body of Christ lit up in the shape of a torch, silhouetted against a tormented horizon, recedes and advances concomitantly and in consonance with the movement from absence to presence in the icon’s mesmerizing sway from visible to invisible matter. The visual narrative of the Crucifixion unravels mysteries and meanings that had remained unexploited in the verbal narrative, hence operating a transgression of the literal into the metaphorical sense of the Gospel narrative. The superseding of the verbal by the visual narrative that preoccupied Annibale Carracci in his first Bolognese altarpiece was to exert a constant gravitational pull throughout his
Roman activity and to provide an alternative formula to the rise of canonical iconography in the Counter-Reformation narrative altarpiece.

Other features of the Carità Crucifixion with Saints bear strong visual arguments for an early modern rendition of the Crucifixion that rekindles archaic modes. Annibale Carracci underlines the prayerful and contemplative mode of the participants by means of a symmetrical placement around the Cross and a collective gaze oriented towards the Crucified Christ.\textsuperscript{53} The coordinated gaze lends a mark of inward coherence to the symmetrical arrangement of the altarpiece field, a mechanism that enables Annibale Carracci to imitate the frontal mode of the icon as the focus of devotional attention. The prayer to the Crucified Christ arises within the narrative altarpiece organization and blocks outward thoughts by means of a compositional principle that features a coordinated gaze and symmetrical organization. Annibale Carracci stakes a secure claim for his narrative altarpiece as a reputable successor to the icon and its meaning that will always remain encapsulated within its framework.

A modern episode in the history of the adoration of the Cross, the Carità Crucifixion with Saints presents sacred history in an atemporal form and resorts to the icon as a paradigm of representation. In so doing, Annibale Carraci rekindles archaic modes in an early modern devotional key. Past experiments in this altarpiece type were Northern Italian in character and belonged to the late medieval period. They took seminal contours in an altarpiece direction of innovative solutions to reconcile dramatic pictorial devices with the conventions of altar painting, which originate in Rogier van der Weyden’s response to Fra Angelico after the former’s pilgrimage to Rome for the jubilee year of 1450. As several art historians have reasoned since the beginning of the twentieth
century, the adaptation of van der Weyden to Fra Angelico, whether or not based on Rogier’s independent knowledge of the Italian tradition, initiated an implicit critique of Robert Campin’s and Gentile da Fabriano’s excessive pictorial narratives. In the central panel of Rogier van der Weyden’s Vienna Crucifixion of 1445 (Figure 38), within a symmetrically gaze-coordinated altarpiece structure used to focus and reinforce devotional attention, a cresting in the dramatic register lends itself to a heightened prayerful mode. The Virgin Mary grasps the base of the Cross in a passionate embrace, an act of prostration before the Cross and an imitation of Christ’s humility and suffering. Her prostration is the result of her profound perception of the body of Christ to which van der Weyden responds by blowing Christ’s shroud in the wind to intensify the character of his presence. Amplified devotional gesture and dramatic narrative effects appear as interrelated means to enhance the visual argument of the Vienna Crucifixion and to cast out religious significance in the attitude of the participants. Rather than being hastily labelled as conventional, the emphatic gesture indicates a gamut of authentic emotions and a heightened veneration, all meant to bring the prayerful mode of the altarpiece to higher dramatic results to the exclusion of narrative details.

Annibale Carracci pursued in the Caritá Crucifixion with Saints the reform altarpiece directions laid out by his Renaissance forerunners. To this end, he expanded the dramatic register of the altarpiece by amplifying the devotional gesture of each character. This treatment is characterized by the kneeling St. Francis, the heart-oriented hand of St. Petronio and the ecstatic, open-armed Virgin Mary in the foreground, and continues in the pinpointing gesture to the Crucified Christ of St. John the Evangelist. The extension of the dramatic, devotional register asserts for Annibale Carracci the possibility to remain
inside the norms of his altarpiece predilection while at the same time transgressing the
code of narrative restraint. This step forward strengthens the archaic prayerful mode and
integrates it in order to cue a profound memory into a new road. Annibale Carracci’s
resoluteness to conform dramatic narrative to the paradigmatic discourse of the icon
ascertains a self-contained altarpiece character and an index of identity separable from
the iconographic and historical discourse of the Counter-Reformation altarpiece. 55

Annibale Carracci found an unparalleled model for the dramatic, narrative content of
his altarpiece in the non-Roman painting of his Emilian predecessor, Correggio. In the
*Holy Night* (Figure 39), an altarpiece first displayed in the basilica of San Prospero in
Reggio Emilia where Annibale Carracci’s *St. Roch Distributing Alms* was to be installed
decades after, Correggio testifies to an amplified use of the dramatic narrative in an
altarpiece arrangement. 56 In a low-view point composition of startling impression of
access, the participants form a framework of dramatic, devotional cohesion for the image
of the Virgin adoring the Child. 57 Correggio appears chiefly engaged in infusing narrative
meaning to his altarpiece at the expense of historical information. The participants are not
adherent to the Gospel narrative, yet Correggio subsumes their anachronistic character
under a devotional framework. He demonstrates that expanding *historia* into sacred
narrative painting entails the heightening of the dramatic, devotional register and hence
defines devotion as key in turning history into an index of the narrative altarpiece.

Annibale Carracci’s affiliation with Correggio may be best regarded as based on style
and its resourcefulness that played a seminal role in his artistic and teaching career. 58
Although on these grounds Correggio represents a mainstay of Annibale Carracci’s
development, Annibale Carracci formed an artistic identity that overlapped Correggio’s
even beyond the artfulness of style and its intentionally implied character. His leanings towards Correggio reveal cases where a direct contemplation of his forerunner’s work turns it into Annibale Carracci’s own case study. Even more consequential than an intensive graphic exercise, Correggio informs Annibale Carracci’s painting when a strategy of quotations understood as artful play with the metamorphosing qualities of style was intent on counteracting the single attribute of Vasari’s definition of style as ideal imitation. In the Dresden Madonna of St. Matthew (Figure 40), Annibale Carracci deployed Correggio’s anti-rhetorical model in order to remodel it for new narrative ends. The decision to adapt the narrative freedom of his predecessor to the narrative energy of a modern altarpiece invests the Madonna of St. Matthew with fresh historical identity. This asserts that, beyond erudite insights into the resourcefulness of style inherent in graphic as the most conducive teaching tool at the Carracci Academy in Bologna, Annibale Carracci learned from Correggio solid principles of narrative composition. His predecessor’s skillfulness of incorporating historical information to the exclusion of the anecdotal element and devising devotional narrative as the sine-qua-non of his sacred narrative painting were turned into Annibale Carracci’s own altarpiece principles.

Correggio’s lesson to crest devotional narrative in order to highlight religious meaning helped Annibale Carracci not only to pursue a path of his own, but also to review the past with more insightful eyes. A recurrent theme of his altarpiece is the anachronistic saint as a partaker in the sacred narrative. In the Renaissance altarpiece tradition, the anachronistic presence of saints was not regarded as an incongruity when it was incorporated in narratives of the sacred history or Christological mysteries.
However, as examined in subsequent Renaissance examples, the presence of anachronistic saints did not underline the narrative element around a frontal presentation of Christ inherited from the experiments of Fra Angelico and van der Weyden. The more static scheme that results when anachronistic saints are present entailed a reduction of the narrative element. In a panel by the school of Domenico Girlandaio in Badia a Settimo, the Lamentation scene (Figure 41) is set behind the kneeling saints, and the reduction of narrative emphasis is underlined by the presence of anachronistic characters. This places the saints in front of Christ, thus creating a spatial paradox that differs fundamentally from the appeal of icons as images outside of time and place.

In the Murano Assumption with Saints, Giovanni Bellini grappled with the problem of the Maria Assunta holding the frontal field of the panel above a group of saints who do not belong to the Assumption (Figure 42). Bellini’s efforts to preserve the frontal character of the icon in a narrative context with anachronistic presence is resolved with an explanation of how saints could be present at the Assumption when historically they were not. The detail of the mitre of a bishop saint overlapping the cloud carrying Mary to heaven places the bishop in front of Mary, even though he looked up at her as if he were behind her. Such a rationalist explanation for the appeal of icons as images outside of time and space is resolved by Bellini within a restrained narrative formula.61

In his Carità Crucifixion, Annibale Carracci was seeking to maintain the discontinuities of time and space as an icon mode by cresting the devotional gesture within a unified pictorial composition centered around Christ. The anachronistic presence of St. Petronio, the richly attired ecclesiast, yet humble-hearted perceiver of Christ epitomizes an eternal, dramatic response to the frontal image of Christ. Annibale Carracci took this experiment
to further lengths in the Madonna of San Ludovico from about 1590 (Figure 43), where he demonstrates increased confidence in resolving anachronistic participation in a difficult theme of the sacred narrative, the mystery of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. This skillfulness testifies to a steady interest in developing novel, dramatic narratives in his Bolognese years and after his definitive relocation to Rome in 1595.

Annibale Carracci has assimilated the dramatic, devotional narrative as an associate of his sacred narrative painting, hence asserting the possibility of turning historical information of an anachronistic character into an inner feature of his narrative altarpiece. In contrast to the prevailing contemporary direction of many ecclesiastical patrons and theorists demanding that religious painting adhere to the strict historical parameters of sacred history, his altarpiece was deeply committed to upholding and advancing the devotional sentiment. This perception characterizes the altarpiece of El Greco and Rubens as well, who in their historic contributions to dramatic narrative subjects gravitated around a concern shared by Annibale Carracci: A narrative formula that advances the devotional tonalities of sacred istorie at the very same time when stylistic adjustments to religious painting remained conceptual and iconic, and in conformity to the iconographic model.

Annibale Carracci’s narrative altarpiece set itself in open contrast to the affective naturalness of Molanus’ and Paleotti’s Counter-Reformation iconographic formulations. Of a rather contradictory and unpersuasive argument, Counter-Reformation iconography may be best qualified as the rise of an affective naturalness, which, as shown in the preamble to this chapter, intended to diminish the spiritual dimensions of sufferance of Christological mysteries. Molanus advocates the rhetorical model of classical culture as
the norm of expressive emotion and moral conduct, whereas Paleotti champions decency and decorum as the overriding principles of all sacred narrative. While their positions demonstrate a disregard for Gilio’s advice from 1564 to show blood in representation of the Passion narrative, the phases after Gilio materialized in nothing but the conventionalities of the iconographic model. The Counter-Reformation indebtedness to the classical model and the prevailing focus on decorum as fitness to purpose counterpoised the dramatic, devotional narrative wrought in the altarpiece tradition of Annibale Carracci’s predilection. In the post-Tridentine age, Annibale Carracci, El Greco and Rubens were deeply committed to advancing the idea of istoria as a quality of retrospection and reflective consideration of archaic images in the articulation of new ones. They upheld a newly persuasive model for the enduring presence of venerable image types, remodeled for a modern age. How a modern painter would represent the mysteries of the sacred through the mechanisms of dramatic narratives was the scope of painters. Such an engagement with the simplicity of early images was deliberate and reform-oriented, and did not evolve within the parameters of naturalness expounded by ecclesiastical reformers. In his Dialogo degli errori de’ pittori, which was published in 1564 just after the termination of the Council of Trent, the reformer Giovanni Andrea Gilio recommended the rules of naturalness related to the classical genres that served as models for public painting. Many ecclesiastical theorists and patrons therefore demanded that religious painting adhere to the strict parameters of literary genres.

Naturalness became compulsive as a top-down regulation of sacred art, and conforming artists were rarely missed in Counter-Reformation Bologna. Yet Annibale Carracci shows compliance neither with the demands of naturalness, nor with the
Counter-Reformation iconographic model hailed as a rhetorical tool in the ecclesiastical program of reform. In querying these Counter-Reformation tenets, Annibale Carracci formulated his own direction of response. To the affective naturalness in the Counter-Reformation model he opposed a devotional effectiveness of the image that underlies the religious sentiment. This rise in the devotional tone of the image entails a close-up view of the narrative potential in the visual model. The Carità Crucifixion with Saints bespeaks an engagement to scrutinize the devotional attitude of every participant in order to bring it to a higher dramatic level, which is then extended to the entire narrative altarpiece. An upsurge in the dramatic narrative arises as the natural outgrowth of a devotional response to the image of the Crucified Christ. Annibale Carracci offers strong evidence that his altarpiece stands for an emulation of the prayerful and contemplative mode of the icon located within. He erases the boundaries between icon and altarpiece by infusing a narrative setting with devotional content, hence asserting the possibility of incorporating the prayerful and frontal mode of the icon into his narrative altarpiece.

His Carità Crucifixion with Saints draws attention to the dramatic attitude of all the saints engaged in contemplation and grouped together with the Crucified Christ within the same pictorial plan. This mechanism of a close-up view, aimed at effacing distance in the geometrically-constructed altarpiece, translates into an infringement of the boundaries between narration and contemplation. Narrators and contemplators of the Crucified Christ, the saints in the altarpiece summarize the eye of Annibale Carracci who paints the image and at the same time visualizes in his mind an icon of the Crucified Christ.

Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece design upholds reform directions that advance the narrative solutions of his Renaissance predecessors. His innovations primarily concern an
altarpiece mode that develops the narrative element while emphasizing the devotional value of cult image, reinvested with the contemplative aspect appropriate to an altar image. In his Carità Crucifixion, the body of Christ is reinscribed as an image for veneration and contemplation in a manner that maintains the discontinuities of anachronistic presence and cult image. The fusion of narrative image and icon has been moderated in a manner that no longer incorporates aspects of the overt narrative drama that made the Crucifixion of his Renaissance forerunners a compelling image. The body of Christ occupies the center of the image and is the focus of a praying activity comparable to the prayer addressed to an icon. This imperative to fuse mystery with anachronism in an altarpainting may also explain the notable insistence on grouping the bystanders on both sides of the Crucified Christ. What Annibale Carracci produced was a modern solution of the traditional Crucifixion scene that maintains icon and narrative in a harmonious equilibrium, an image akin to the Byzantine Crucifixion as a mode of experiencing the Christian faith. Robin Cormack remarkably describes the spirit of icon as a meditation on Christ, a shared perception of painters and viewers alike:

“Both the producers and the viewers of icons were part of the same religious world, which saw references to the Gospels elsewhere. The icon is indeed art, but it is also representative of a way of life.”

The form of Christ in the Sta.Carità Crucifixion – frontal, closed eyes, leaning his head to the left – reminds one of Byzantine renditions and archaic traditions that hark back into the Duecento. A relevant example is provided by the Master of Saint Francis’ Crucifix (Figure 44) that hung in Perugia’s St. Francesco al Prato, a visualization of the archaic tonalities of medieval Italian art and of Annibale Carracci’s own devotional
universe. Although the figure of Christ in his engraving from 1581 (Figure 45) is much different from its painted counterpart in the finished Sta. Carità Crucifixion, it seems that Annibale Carracci has stressed the importance of the solitary Christ on the Cross as the first thought of his finished altarpiece. The archaic connotations of his Crucifixion may refer to a range of archaic prototypes detectable in the latest Crucifixion drawings of Michelangelo in which Paul Joannides had underlined the importance of archaic sources.68

The Sta. Carità Crucifixion indicates that Annibale Carracci was increasingly sensitive to archaic sources while resisting overt archaism. The stolid virtues of icons are reinscribed and advanced in dramatic and narrative compositions, rather than conceptual and iconic paintings rigorously adherent to the contemporary parameters of sacred istorie. The creation of paintings that registered a powerfully affecting istoria was demanded by many ecclesiastical patrons and theorists of the post-Tridentine age. As Federico Zeri has recognized long ago, Scipione Pulzone melds modern elements with “archaic stylization” in his Crucifixion from 1585–90 for the Oratorians at the Roman Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella (Figure 46). Zeri identified the incidence of archaic sources in the post-Tridentine altarpiece with a tendency to subvert the demand for compositions that favored decorous images of saints appropriately disposed and hierarchically arranged.69

The perception that the image of Christ should be placed in the center of a composition and oriented frontally is moderated in Scipione Pulzone’s Crucifixion in a manner that distills archaic sources into a post-Tridentine idea of centrality. It seems no coincidence that a group of post-Tridentine Roman altarpieces was exemplified by Pulzone’s Crucifixion.70 As Stuart Lingo has reasoned, the “archaic stylization” identified by Zeri is
most relevantly epitomized by a vocabulary of figural prototypes, common to a number of the Roman Crucifixions that were produced in the decades following the Council of Trent. The archaic quality most accentuated in Pulzone’s Crucifixion concerns the figure of the Virgin who recalls the archaic figures used in the female figures in the sculpture of Michelangelo, such as those of Rachel and Leah on the tomb of Julius II in San Pietro in Vincoli.⁷¹

Annibale Carracci was determined to evolve his Carità Crucifixion from an archaic model to a more dramatic and modern form, one that demonstrates an emancipation from the post-Tridentine vocabulary of archaic sources used by his contemporaries. His reforming altarpiece agenda advances the dramatic features of the Crucifixion while at the same time stressing the devotional religious sentiment of the icon. His archaic tonalities entail an anachronistic mode of evoking visual stretches of his Christian devotional universe, thus asserting a complete case study for the central argument of my dissertation that regards archaism as the foundation for modern change and the preservation of the old which launches a tradition of the new. Such a claim is underscored through a subsequent examination of Annibale Carracci’s response to Titian’s Crucifixion from 1558 for San Domenico in Ancona (Figure 47). The figure of the Virgin in his Carità Crucifixion is radically different from her rendition in Titian, and only the frontal form of Christ reminds one of the Renaissance tradition of representing the subject. Annibale Carracci the reformer advances the narrative element of the Crucifixion with a perception of the devotional sentiment of the icon. His archaism entails both a quality of retrospection and a reflective consideration of the icon in the articulation of reform images. In contrast, Scipione Pulzone’s response to Titian’s Crucifixion is
intensely emotive and dramatic in alignment with a post-Tridentine revival of archaic sources and Renaissance models. These features are most accentuated through direct borrowing from Titian as in St. John the Evangelist with outstretched arms and the pose of the Virgin’s hands which, albeit clasped together, reflect meditation on the figure of the Virgin in Titian’s Ancona panel; finally, Mary Magdalene embraces the Cross in a gesture of anguish and prayer comparable to the figure of St. Dominic.

3.1.1 Drawing on St. Augustine: Federico Zuccari’s art theory

Annibale Carracci challenges the limits of the altarpiece by ascertaining an inward participation of the artistic intellect to take precedence over the distractions of contingency in the historical and iconographic model. It is not an underestimation of Annibale Carracci to say that such ideas were of fundamental significance for his senior contemporary, Federico Zuccari, in both his painting and theoretical endeavours. William J. Bouwsma has observed how Federico Zuccari’s prowess as author of doctrinal and theoretical treatises offered a profound examination of the revival of Augustinian culture in early modern times. The primacy of sight as intellectual vision held an influential role in the modern Augustinian revival, yet a positivistic trust in the sensory power of sight evolved in parallel. The Augustinian interpretation of intellectual sight as a non-sensory perception of God did not belong to a widespread understanding in Federico Zuccari’s time and hence his assimilation of Augustine to the foundations of his Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects from 1607 is all the more startling.

The Counter-Reformation Augustinian revival represented a far cry from the early Gregorian interpretation or the high points of the late medieval revival of Augustine in
the fourteenth century, just as it was a rarefied memory of the Erasmian endeavour to bring Augustine to the forefront of sixteenth-century early debates on the accord of religion with classical culture in the Renaissance model. A new and more distant relationship to Augustine prevailed ostensibly after the opening session of the Council of Trent in 1545, when Augustine’s authority waned in the course of constructing a patristic basis framed by a direct return to the sole argument of the scripture.\textsuperscript{73} The privilege of the literal over the metaphorical sense of the scripture turned impervious the Counter-Reformation theology set up at Trent. The Tridentine comprehensive system collided with the Augustinian Christian theology which cross-references various discourses, from Neo-Platonism to Christianity, and advances from the Hellenistic to the Christian model to an inner-revelation of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{74} Yet despite a demotion of Augustine that was sought after by Tridentine rigorism, traces of Augustinian thinking began to make deep inroads into modern culture.\textsuperscript{75} His theory of sight appeared even more consequential than in the Middle Ages to the original rationales and meanings of the work of art.

In his treatise \textit{On the Literal Meaning}, Augustine defines a Christian theory of sight predicated upon a tripartite classification of seeing: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. After corporeal and spiritual vision as sites of sensory perception follows the highest form of sight, the non-sensory intellectual vision. This emanates from a non-sensory source in the highest levels of the human mind where Augustine admits the possible perception of divine truth. Augustine’s reliance on the contemplative gaze capable of perceiving the divine truth set a measure of unprecedented confidence in the power of sight, and in the human intellect in general. This capability of the human intellect to reach God came, since the Middle Ages, under the withering critique of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{76}
The Augustinian faith in non-sensory sight as a perceiver of God translates in Federico Zuccari’s *Idea* in reliance on *disegno interno* defined as “segno di Dio in noi,” a key concept of Zuccari’s art theory. Federico Zuccari understands *disegno interno* as the result of intellectual vision, an abstract form released within a non-sensory site by the intellectual vision in Augustine’s classification. The higher the capability of non-sensory sight or intellectual vision, the closer the abstractness of *disegno interno* approximates an image of God. This progressive relation reaches a climax, for Zuccari, when the human intellect can perceive the *disegno interno divino*, or the soul of God, that surpasses *disegno interno angelico* and *disegno interno humano*.77

Federico Zuccari’s *disegno interno* portends a remarkable confidence in the artist’s capability of sight to investigate God’s supreme intellect, and asserts the possibility of seeing and capturing the divine truth in art. His theory extols the artist who creates his work in the higher order of spirituality and sees there an image of the divine intellect, or the sensible soul.78 Under the appearance of an abstractly codified theory, Federico Zuccari conveys his deeply-seated understanding that art is feeling, but the feeling of the artist who creates in the higher order of spiritual senses and not in the alternate, sensory domain of physicality.

Annibale Carracci’s affinities with Federico Zuccarri worked in the direction of a shared appreciation of the introspective character of the narrative altarpiece. As it is ascertained by the *Carità Crucifixion with Saints*, introspectiveness and narrative are interlocked altarpiece principles that rekindle in the early modern age the archaic liaise of icon and narrative that animated the Renaissance tradition. The icon of the Crucified Christ in Annibale Carracci exudes prayer, mercy and devotion with no less intensity than
its older renditions. Yet this is a modern perception, of a novel character that attaches
now inwardness as part of the historical response to the reality of the Counter-
Reformation. Manifold artistic personalities such as Annibale Carracci, Federico Zuccari
and El Greco adapted the archaic bond of icon and narrative to the modern demands of
altarpieces. In so doing, they were responding to the historical context and at the same
time grounding the devotional message of their altarpieces in contextual frames
propounded by the Augustinian revival and its prevailing influence on Federico Zuccari’s
thinking.

Federico Zuccari’s *Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects* was printed as late as
1607, but his lectures as director of the Roman Academy of St. Luke revolved around the
concept of *disegno interno* a decade earlier. His academic teaching summarized
conclusions of an older preoccupation with *disegno* from the period of 1575–78 when, as
a member of the *Accademia del Disegno in Florence*, he had exposure to Vasari’s and
Cellini’s theories on the role of *disegno*. Zuccari’s theory of *disegno interno*, the first
part of his treatise, is the idea of the divine intellect or the soul becoming accessible in the
artist’s practice of *disegno*. As a mental representation, *disegno interno* can reach beyond
the sensory domain given its formation in the human intellect and without the aid of the
senses. Zuccari insists upon the primacy of the intellect in the graphic expression of
*disegno*, which he also sees as a fundamental activity of the soul. The unity between
intellect and soul in the practice of *disegno* defines the main line of argument in Zuccari’s
*Idea*.80

The split between the artistic intellect in Augustinian terms and its graphic expression
or *disegno* as a hallmark of Vasari’s theory pointed to an opposition of form and content.
The classical antiquity binarism of the conceptual form of *eidos* and the visible forms of *morphe* resurfaces in Vasari’s theory as the opposition of intrinsic and extrinsic principles of art. For Federico Zuccari a contrasting mechanism prevails in his definition of *disegno interno* as an intellectual activity acquiring knowledge from a perception of the divine intellect or the soul of God. *Disegno interno* thus equals the state of unity of form and content and advocates an artistic principle that infringes on the dualism of inward and outward appearance in Vasari’s interpretation of the seamlessness of *eidos* and *morphe* in antiquity.81

The credit William J. Bouwsma has accorded to Federico Zuccari as the believer in an introspective and religiously permeated character of art was to remain the preserve of a few contemporary artists, at the very same time when demands of the ecclesiastical program of reform officially nourished Vasari’s antithetical position to Zuccari. A passage of great significance from the life of Fra Angelico in the 1568 edition of Vasari’s *Lives* illustrates vividly a plea for the unity of beauty and religion in intimate relation with modern aesthetic ideals embodied in the beautiful human figure.82 The reforming tonalities of this passage and its several important alterations after the 1550 edition were singled out by Giovanni Previtali as Vasari’s withdrawal from his earlier claim for the marriage of beauty and art proposed by Michelangelo.83 Alexander Nagel has noted acutely that Vasari’s condemnation of the depiction of nude figures in a church setting in the 1568 edition was his implicit agreement with the atmosphere of censorship and suspicion exemplified by the critiques leveled at Michelangelo and the Last Judgment in particular after the Council of Trent.84
El Greco who befriended Federico Zuccari and his brother Taddeo in the 1560s during one of his first Italian commissions, the Villa Farnese at Caprarola, carried his affection for the Zuccari brothers beyond the confines of team work into theoretical sympathies. The latter were expressed years afterward in Toledo, in his marginalia on an annotated copy by Federico Zuccari on Vasari’s second edition of the *Lives* from 1568. In the 1570s Federico Zuccari’s thinking was reaching outside the Italian peninsula in ways that bore fruit in later years in Rubens’ painting. The mentor-and-disciple bond primarily entertained by the Zuccari brothers and their steeping in the Northern tradition of prints and drawings was responsible for disseminations outside the Italian peninsula. A seedling of Federico Zuccari’s ideas came from his brother Taddeo Zuccari whose grounding in the graphic and pictorial Renaissance tradition was transmitted to Rubens’ teacher, Otto van Vaen, who studied in Rome under Federico Zuccari. In the celebrated account of Rubens collaboration with the Oratorian fathers at the Roman church of Sta. Maria in Vallicella, in the aftermath of his altarpiece’s rejection, Rubens stood once again behind his beliefs just as Federico Zuccari did when he had carried out his formula for assembling an icon image of the Madonna with Child in a narrative scene with attending angels in the Angels’ chapel of the neighbouring Chiesa del Gesù. For Rubens and likewise for El Greco, affinities with Federico Zuccari were a matter of departure from the Counter-Reformation iconographic model and its historical content. Even more consequential than these affinities, their idiosyncrasies led both El Greco and Rubens to leave Rome in times when Federico Zuccari’s position was falling from artistic prestige and academic reputation.
As evidenced by the Carità Crucifixion with Saints, Annibale Carracci extricates himself from the overriding rhetorical direction of the Counter-Reformation and the demands of affective naturalness imposed on the altarpiece agenda. A modern artist in his own right, Annibale Carracci did not overlook these matters but did respond antithetically through the identity of his altarpiece direction. He found a formula to expand the narrative meaning of his altarpiece by cresting devotional significance in gesture and contemplative participation. Annibale Carracci demonstrates that historical information can effectively be incorporated in the altarpiece when devotional attitude permeates the visual narrative. He established to this end an accord of dramatic narrative and devotional gesture as the safeguard of a narrative altarpiece which casts out the prayerful mode of the icon. The devotional hallmark rooted in the very reason of archaic church altarpieces takes now precedence over historical content and iconography. This anachronistic mechanism that holds sway in Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece direction identifies his modern identity with the hindsight of the Renaissance tradition. On this foundation lies firmly his sympathy with Federico Zuccari’s assertion of the divine intellect’s participation in the artistic practice of the modern artist as a tribute to Augustinian culture. Annibale Carracci’s evocation of the icon mode in his Carità Crucifixion with Saints and the incorporation of the Man of Sorrows in the altarpiece composition make active claims to the unity of form and content, pictorial composition and devotional meaning, dramatic narrative and historical information as the undivided principles of the early modern altarpiece. In holding out for the tenets of tradition and modernity tempered with devotional meaning, the Carità Crucifixion with Saints stands out at the origin of an axis leading to St. Roch Distributing Alms.
3.2 Altarpiece and Historical Painting: The Paradox of St. Roch Distributing Alms

Annibale Carracci completed a few months before his relocation to Rome in 1595 St. Roch Distributing Alms (Figure 37), the outstanding exemplar of a new type of sacred narrative painting in a church setting. It is bound up with the narratives of Bolognese background, just as it is an episode of early modern hagiography. These two distinct strains derived from the polarities of the profane and the sacred intertwine in a church painting formula, for it should not be overlooked that St. Roch Distributing Alms was mounted in the basilica of St. Prospero in Reggio Emilia in 1595. The thrust of Annibale Carracci’s invention consists here in the devotional meaning of the painting submerging the binarism of sacred and profane. Indeed, the almsgiving as a practice of sharing first blessings before distributing benefactions inheres within devotional attitude as the outreach of God to the people. In his visual narrative Annibale Carracci supersedes almsgiving as contingent to charity, and develops the narrative meaning well beyond this point. The resurfacing of the devotional core of the almsgiving at the expense of sacred and profane narratives was intent on functioning as a church painting.

The St. Roch Distributing Alms was painted for the chapter of St. Prospero basilica in Reggio Emilia, where Annibale Carracci’s Assumption of the Virgin (Figure 49) was mounted at the high-altar in 1587, followed in 1588 by the Madonna of St. Matthew (Figure 40) taking its place in the chapel of the Merchants in the same church. The St. Roch Distributing Alms stood as the pendant of Camillo Procaccini’s St. Roch Visiting the Apostates on the corresponding left wall. In all evidence, the decoration of the chapter started in 1585 when, shortly after, Camillo Procaccini’s painting was installed. Yet Annibale Carracci gave himself pause before handing in his painting as late as 1595 to
the Confraternity of San Roch, the commissioning source. An integral examination of his working process leaves no doubt as to Annibale Carracci’s concern with the location of his painting in a liturgical setting being the main reason for his protracted time frame on the *St. Roch Distributing Alms*. He was to perpetuate the audacity of a perfect coordination of altarpiece, related painting, and liturgical setting in his forthcoming Roman activity, where owing to his efforts, the Cerasi chapel at Sta. Maria del Popolo and the later Madruzzì chapel in Sant’Onofrio stand out as a perfect accord between painting and church architecture. In the case of *St. Roch Distributing Alms* and its placement across Procaccini’s painting, the result was the coordination with the liturgical setting of the *Assumption of the Virgin* at the high altar of the basilica. This is strongly evidenced by the reworking of the *St. Roch Distributing Alms* from oil-sketch to the final Dresden version.

An oil-sketch in a private collection, in all likelihood predating the Dresden painting, features a background with architecture and landscape in an arrangement not akin to the final altarpiece. A later engraving by Guido Reni in Rome, at the Instituto Nazionale per la Grafica (Figure 48) indicates a reworking of the architectural background into a triple-arcaded loggia and also features a narrative order beginning with St. Roch, as shown by the oil-sketch. The saint as the narrative outset in Guido Reni’s intervening print resembles the narrator’s rhetorical means of foregrounding the hero in the verbal account, and was not transferred by Annibale Carracci to his final altarpiece. In the *St. Roch Distributing Alms* Annibale Carracci opted instead for St. Roch as both the outgrowth and the end of narrative action. This distinguishable arrangement of the narrative order was far from being coincidental in relation to the high altarpiece of the *Assumption of the*
Virgin (Figure 49). The reworking of the narrative order wrought by Annibale Carracci in the years that elapsed from the oil-sketch to the final painting bespeaks an integration of the horizontal narrative axis of the Virgin’s ascent from the high altar into the pictorial composition of St. Roch. In the Assumption of the Virgin, the entire image is powerfully focused by the dramatic event taking place in the upper register. Not only the attention of the figures is commanded by the ascent, but also individual movements and postures are unified into a single pictorial gesture. In coordinating across liturgical setting his high altarpiece of the Assumption of the Virgin with St. Roch Distributing Alms, Annibale Carracci operates on an horizontal, syntagmatic axis of narrative meaning that subsumes the devotional character of the almsgiving under the salvific role of the Assumption. Within this horizontal axis of meaning, the almsgiving prepares the believer for an encounter of God mediated by St. Roch and thus carries out devotional significance. Annibale Carracci’s narrative likewise invites an interpretation in the vertical, or associative axis of meaning provided by coordinated altarpieces. To subdue the devotional theme of the almsgiving to the redeeming message of the Assumption as the ultimate triumph over death facilitates a paradigmatic relation between religious practice and divine outreach as partakers in the suprahistorical character of the Christian message in its altarpiece expression. Annibale Carracci upholds the fulcrum of the Christian salvific theme through his preference for coiled relations of narrative meaning across liturgical setting.95

In the practice of Annibale Carracci, the altarpiece’s coordination with its architectural surroundings was Venetian in character and permeated by religious freedom tempered with the archaic liturgical leanings of the Venetian church. For Annibale Carracci Venice
never ceased to exert a dazzling influence, just as it did for Federico Zuccari who owed much of his steeping into the Renaissance tradition to his early academic training in Venice. The coordination of the altarpiece with its architectural surroundings held sway in the religious climate of Venice, where the Counter-Reformation failed to impose its centralized, top-down agenda on church decoration. Venice hived off arguably by upholding the Renaissance ideal of formal and thematic unity in order to safeguard the traditional character and function of the church altarpiece. A direct contradiction of the Renaissance model characterized Counter-Reformation projects that submit formal to thematic unity in Vasari’s aestheticization of altarpieces in co-ordinated architectural surroundings. The Vasarian altarpiece that disguises aesthetics with content and is part of a thematic architectural whole strayed far from the Renaissance ideal of the unity of form and content. The Renaissance ideal, despite Vasari’s alternate aesthetic mode, progressed in the early modern era and made deep inroads in Venice where the ideal of formal unity was not at odds with the Counter-Reformation ideal of thematic unity derived from the rise of the sacrament altarpiece that was gaining ground.

Clear evidence of the endurance of Renaissance ideas in Venice was proposed by Titian at the basilica of Sta. Maria dei Frari, where narrative meaning results from a coordination of altarpieces with their liturgical setting. In his Madonna di Ca Pesaro (Figure 50), Titian wrought up an oblique view of the traditional Enthroned Madonna figure group which helped establish a thematic coordination with the salvific character of his Maria Assunta mounted at the high altar of the Frari basilica in 1518 (Figure 26). The transfer of narrative meaning between two Marian altarpieces proposed by Titian at the Frari Basilica turned for Annibale Carracci at St. Prospero in Reggio Emilia into an
associative relation between almsgiving as a devotional gesture and the Christological theme of redemption inherent in the Assumption high altarpiece. The architectural setting was key in investing the St. Roch altarpiece with narrative meaning, and to this end Annibale Carracci fully exploited the lesson of Titian to coordinate altarpieces in the architectural surrounding of the Frari Basilica. At the Franciscan Basilica of the Frari, architecture was seeking to integrate the former altar of St. Bernardino into a larger Marian programme that also embraced both the altar to hold Titian’s *Madonna di Ca Pesaro* and the high altar dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin. This kind of comprehensive architectural programmes remained rare in the pre-Reformation period in Venice, yet was clearly anticipative of the sacrament altarpiece and its coordinating role in church decoration.

Titian’s model of coordinating altarpieces with the liturgical setting at the Frari basilica played an influential role in helping Annibale Carracci advance to the level of paradigmatic, suprahistorical meaning of his altarpiece. The aim was a setting of formally and thematically distinct altarpieces, coordinated with the Christological message of the high altarpiece. This overt tribute to the Renaissance ideal of formal and thematic unity is powerfully orchestrated by Annibale Carracci in the early modern age. It fulfills an ideal that had long been revered by Renaissance architects and designers, now stated in Annibale Carracci’s effective results in St. Prospero in Reggio Emilia where the ostensibly disconnected Assumption of the Virgin and St. Roch Distributing Alms cluster narrative meanings into the Christological mystery of the high altarpiece. Annibale Carracci scurried even beyond the Renaissance harbingers in asserting the possibility of upholding the Renaissance ideal even when the norm of formal unity is intentionally
broken. This subversive and at the same time archaic direction is evidenced by St. Roch Distributing Alms, a narrative of sacred and profane connotations. The profane mode dominates the foreground where an animated scene of bystanders flows into the crowd of alms receivers around St. Roch. Annibale Carracci wrestled to submit such a strikingly profane overtone to the prevailing devotional character of the almsgiving and to the salvific message of the Assumption high altar.

The modern artist of Annibale Carracci’s calibre did not create new traditions in disparagement of themes and innovations found in the narrative altarpiece even before the Renaissance “instauration” of the tavola quadrata and its implied optical experience. Notwithstanding, the early modern age bespeaks a new self-awareness on the part of the artist, who interprets the tradition and also propels it towards new horizons of complexity to resonate with a shifting historical context. A reference point in the remodelling of tradition was represented by the modernization of the altarpiece, a process entwined with architecture and traceable to the early Florentine Renaissance. The instauration of the tavola quadrata, the unified altarpiece field, emerged in the early Florentine Renaissance as the mingled effort of painters and architects based on a study of altarpiece and architecture as an inseparable whole.100 However, the unified altarpiece field was not invariably the result of a unified composition, but rather resulted from striking assembling principles derived from themes and thematic tendencies in the altarpiece tradition of the Trecento. A case in point is the altarpiece where the narrative reads from the sides to the center, just as artists developed in their altarpieces through direct borrowing from the relief compositions by Florentine artists Ghiberti and Donatello.101 Such a borrowing enabled artists to expand historia and to enhance the dramatic effect of
the narrative altarpiece in alignment with archaic modes. This altarpiece direction was to survive the post-Tridentine canonical orientation and to become an antithesis of the normative use of *istoria*, which turned progressively into the tenor of the Counter-Reformation agenda on religious imagery. The effective results of a post-Tridentine survival of the Renaissance narrative model produced an insurmountable gulf between tradition and modernity. The Counter-Reformation ecclesiastical dictates to embed historical content in the altarpiece materialized in a breach between painters who still conceived and realized painting through means specific to tradition and those who securely adopted the Tridentine theological and humanist principles of the content of art.  

In post-Tridentine Italy, the demands that religious paintings rigorously adhere to the strict historical content of sacred *istorie* involved the principal literary genres. The text of the Bible, epic and didactic poetry, all involved narratives and models for public painting. A significant number of post-Tridentine altarpieces take pains to ensure the primacy of written documents in compositions that would remain relatively conceptual and didactic, rather than narrative and dramatic. The fusion of pictorial composition and Gospel narrative is stressed by Annibale Carracci’s use of archaic sources. These were understood as an ideal that exceeds the simple repetition of the early model while maintaining the truthful transmission of iconic messages. Annibale Carracci was particularly drawn to the achievements of reliefs and to the quality of stone and bronze as more durable than parchment or paper. Giovanni Previtali has convincingly argued for the dominant model of early medieval portraits, effigies, tombs and epigraphic monuments in the evolution of the Christian devotional image into the Renaissance work
of art.¹⁰³ Such a process efficiently counterargued the dominant historiographical model of the period, namely, the transformation of the Christian devotional image into the secular work of art, as Christopher Wood has shown.¹⁰⁴ Benedetto Antelami’s marble relief of the *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 51) received polemical reviews in Renaissance literature, ranging from a criticism of the great school of medieval art to which Antelami belonged to a recognition of its devout and authentic values.¹⁰⁵ Antelami’s relief as part of a medieval corpus never ceased to transfer to the Renaissance masons and sculptors the purity of devotional sentiment that it embedded, together with an ideal of deliberate simplicity for modern religious images.

Such an advocacy of Christian sources distilled into a Renaissance relief is apparent in Donatello’s altarpieces for the high altar in the basilica of St. Anthony in Padua. Donatello enhanced the dramatic effect of the narrative by tapping the descriptive possibilities of the low relief.¹⁰⁶ He seems to have regarded its resourcefulness not disconnected from Leonardo’s belief that sculpture in very low relief can assist painting to create dramatic narrative effects.¹⁰⁷ In *The Miracle of the Host* (Figure 52) from Donatello’s high altar in the Paduan basilica, recession is controlled by Brunelleschian linear perspective with a vanishing point in the relief’s center where St. Anthony stands before the altar. Miracles, such as the mule that knelt in homage before the Host at a mass celebrated by St. Anthony, held importance as deeply felt religious experiences for Donatello. *The Miracle of the Host* extols the mighty power of the Eucharist to convert the inanimate heart into the sensitive perceiver of the body and blood of Christ in a narrative where the leader of a heretical cult vowed that he would return to the faith if he could see a dumb animal pay reverence to the Host.¹⁰⁸ The linear perspective proved of
overriding assistance for Donatello to intensify the dramatic effect of the miracle. To this end, Donatello self-quotes from his narrative relief as a canonical source based on the dramatizing of the frontal aspect by turning it into profile. The mark of self-quotation involves an early low relief, the Berlin Madonna dei Pazzi (Figure 53). A half-length relief resulting from turning the frontal Madonna with Child into profile, the Madonna dei Pazzi reveals Donatello’s interest in the rilievo schiacciato as the foremost technique for dramatic narrative results. Donatello self-quotes this canonical source in The Miracle of the Host by amplifying it to full-length figures and lending its dramatic profile character to all protagonists.

In Bologna, the medieval leanings of the town’s architecture and the icons preserved in its churches were most notably revived in the retrospective engagements of the Carracci and their followers. Annibale Carracci’s particular strategy for modernity signals his efforts to advance a number of altarpieces cultivated by Perugino, Pinturicchio and Francia who installed the so-called maniera devota on the eve of the ascendancy of Vasari’s terza maniera. To a tradition to such crossroads, the relief altarpiece of Donatello provided compelling answers to create a narrative out of principles that subvert the parameters of strict frontal representation demanded by post-Tridentine ecclesiastical patrons and theorists. Annibale Carracci assumed the challenge of Donatello’s flattened bronze relief by integrating its revelatory narrative prowess into his painting. In paralleling Donatello’s turning to bronze to enhance the dramatic effects of his flattened relief, Annibale Carracci assimilates to the Renaissance engraving technique his altarpiece for higher narrative ends. This is evidenced by his St. Roch Distributing Alms which betrays the intention of the painter to continue the engraver for narrative results.
The reciprocal challenge of engraver and painter that Annibale Carracci takes on ensured that the Brunelleschian linear perspective system coexists with the Albertian geometrically-construed pictorial perspective. In a linear narrative progression Annibale Carracci flattens the pictorial depth of the participants to restore their three dimension while they approach the group of alms receivers around St. Roch. This relevantly points to the modern painter taking up Donatello’s acquisitive steps in the dramatizing of the frontal Madonna with Child to a profile view in the Madonna dei Pazzi. The linear progression at the outset of St. Roch Distributing Alms becomes progressively swept in the devotional scene of almsgiving. This conflation does not stand for a merely breathtaking demonstration of the mingled narrative efforts of engravers and painters at work in the pictorial composition of an early modern master. It asserts the possibility of integrating a theme of profane character into an episode of the sacred narrative.

David Rosand has recognized in Tintoretto the artist who most remarkably explored the possibilities of the perspective in order to abandon the tableau tradition and any parallels between the formal structure and the picture plane. In his Miracle of St. Mark (Figure 54) these qualities of Tintoretto’s work advance an important model for the painter, Jacopo Sansovino’s relief series in San Marco executed between 1541 and 1544. In the Miracle of St. Mark (Figure 55) Sansovino condenses the attempted tortures and the response to the miracle into a single movement within the great density of the relief. Sansovino’s purely dramatic level contrasts Tintoretto’s fulsome narrative that wrestled to design a perspective construction where St. Mark’s healing hand corresponds exactly with the vanishing point. The more popular cultic tradition of Jacopo Sansovino’s relief and of his Madonna del Parto made much of an impression on popular audiences through
their still valid undercurrent latent in popular piety.\textsuperscript{114} What was projected as a revival of the antique in Tintoretto’s \textit{Miracle of St. Mark} is an elaboration within modern practices of underscoring the narrative element. Rather than an analogous mode of visual argument, Tintoretto’s more discursive and varied narrative references Sansovino’s antique models of popular piety to increase the spatial complexity of the miraculous scene.

\textbf{3.2.1 Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece and the ascendancy of gallery painting}

The \textit{St. Roch Distributing Alms} was not the single occasion when Annibale Carracci deployed sketches after Bolognese observations of men in their common avocations, misleading his audiences into believing that he claims realism for his painting. In fact Annibale Carracci was quoting from sketches inspired by the Bolognese background for a wider purpose, ranging from their use as models for engraving to teaching tools at the Carracci Academy, where the human expressive model held a prevailing importance in the practice inculcated there. As is borne out by \textit{St. Roch Distributing Alms}, the Bolognese sketch stands for a quality of self-quotation in which Annibale Carracci treats his own earlier drawings in new narrative contexts. The athletic figure wheeling the lame is a recasting in reverse of a \textit{rotatore} in one of his Bolognese engravings.\textsuperscript{115} The incorporation of Bolognese background scenes into a church painting testifies to the profane as counterpart to the overriding sacred meaning. The interlacing of profane and sacred themes breaks the formal Renaissance unity with an intensity that, nonetheless, submits innovative impulse to the Christian devotional meaning of the church altarpiece. Annibale Carracci breaks arguably the norm while restating it in the tremors of his
modern historical times, in bridging between the archaic linear perspective and the optical modern experience. He summarizes and likewise underlines his narrative efforts in the foreground of *St. Roch Distributing Alms*, in the flattened legs of the woman gazing at the athlete and the crippled man who is rushed into the three-dimensional scene of almmsgiving.

In integrating the profane into the sacred narrative of the distribution of alms, Annibale Carracci imbues his characters with religious meaning as evidenced in the prevailing profile mode derived from Donatello’s *Madonna dei Pazzi*. He derives concomitantly new narrative energy from Correggio’s narrative skillfulness playing down the anecdotal detail. Annibale Carracci’s efforts were geared toward fostering sacred meaning at the expense of historical context. To ensure an overall sacred mark to his narrative painting represented an exercise profoundly intertwined with liturgical setting and the coordination with the narrative meaning of the high altar. To this end, the narrative axis of the *Assumption* altarpiece subsumes the parallel axis of the *St. Roch Distributing Alms*. This coordination integrates *St. Roch* into the salvific role of the high altarpiece and the Eucharistic function that stands for its very reason.

*St. Roch Distributing Alms* stakes a secure claim, perhaps more convincingly than any other painting by Annibale Carracci, to the emerging gallery painting in times when Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio were shaping their way in Rome. In response to the ascendancy of gallery painting, the horizontal compositional axis of St. Roch and the raising ground line, slightly enhancing the dramatic overtone of the ensemble, make active claims to historical painting. Yet *St. Roch Distributing Alms* represents both an exercise in artistic virtuosity and a strenuous effort to expand the sacred narrative content
of altarpieces in times when a new conception of history painting was stating the norm after Trent. With a modern consciousness, Annibale Carracci points to sacred narrative painting and altarpiece as complementing sites of devotional meaning in a liturgical setting. To this end, he imbues his *St. Roch Distributing Alms* with a double-root in gallery and liturgical space. In so doing, he speaks in foresight of the prevailing influence of gallery painting that was to affect the interpretation of his own art by examining it in a framework disconnected from its original setting and oblivious to its higher complexity of meaning.

Annibale Carracci shaped his way through the undecided artistic ground of late sixteenth-century Rome by maintaining the contemplation of the human expressive model at the complexity and implicit mutability of meaning asserted by Michelangelo. A contradictory version of this model prevailed in Rome in Vasari’s aesthetic orientation centered on the classical ideal form and understood as ideal imitation.\(^{117}\) Annibale Carracci steers clear from Vasari in the *postille* to his second edition of his *Lives*, a text that Federico Zuccari shipped off years afterward to El Greco in Toledo.\(^{118}\) For Annibale Carracci and his like-minded companions the human expressive model holds an assailability never satiated in representation and which invites artistic imagination on all counts. The *St. Roch Distributing Alms* illustrates a use of Donatello’s sculptural relief model for narrative painting in a manner not akin to Annibale Carracci’s sixteenth-century predecessors. For those, Donatello was appealing for the valence of his sculptural model in the round and leading to a tradition of copies in the Florentine sculpture workshops.
As a part of this tradition, the statuettes of David after Donatello were produced in large numbers in Florence in the early sixteenth century and through wider dissemination served as models for painters. Correggio’s *Madonna of St. George* (Figure 56) borrows from the tradition of statuettes after Donatello’s David that were integrated in the workshop of Renaissance Italian painters from Florentine sculpture. Correggio’s simulation of Donatello and antique sculpture corresponded to a modern heroic style in which Roman antiquarianism was never the main controlling element. Yet Correggio never took his cue from the narrative quality of Donatello’s figural model in the way Annibale Carracci understood to use it for narrative ends. Annibale’s contribution appears singular indeed among not only his forerunners, but his contemporaries also. In Venice, Tintoretto and his workshop utilized *modelli* and plaster reductions of Michelangelo’s figures that involved painting compositions of a kind very different from those used by Vasari in central Italy. Such usage of the Renaissance *modelli* never preoccupied Annibale Carracci who always aimed beyond imitation. His efforts were paralleled in the practice of El Greco and Rubens, and upheld in Federico Zuccari’s theoretical position. For these masters, the contemplation of the classical sculptural model was not a matter of imitating art, and hence should be regarded beyond a simple antithesis of the Vasarian concept of ideal imitation.

As evidenced by the *St. Roch Distributing Alms*, Annibale Carracci’s tribute to Donatello testifies to an engagement with engraving and its relevance for narrative painting. Donatello’s engraving technique as a graphic medium of dramatic and powerful gestures appealed to Annibale Carracci for the adaptation from three to two dimensions. In setting his work in parallel to Donatello, Annibale Carracci positions himself in the
Renaissance engraving tradition that distills architectural space and narrative results into a graphic form. The legacy of the Renaissance engraving played a fundamental role in the early modern age when the conceptual phase of the work of art reached a higher level of complexity in the compass of Andrea Mantegna and his quintessential attempt to realize the potential of engraving as a means of spreading new style and new ideas.\textsuperscript{123}

At the Carracci Academy in Bologna, the propensity for prints to canvass a wider range of ideas or variants of the same work set its example after Mantegna, who realized the potential for propagating his own innovative artistic ideas through prints even when his name and his initials were absent on the plate. The engraving speaking against an overt intention of self-glorification was a landmark of the Carracci Academy, where teaching was geared towards graphic results as open-ended experiments.\textsuperscript{124} The comprehensive range of graphic means from drawings and prints to oil-sketches inculcated at the Carracci Academy found its most startling adept in Rubens. As a painter at the court of Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, Rubens contemplated Mantegna’s Triumphs of Caesar and also acquainted himself with prints of the Carracci Academy including Annibale Carracci’s Tazza Farnese, the famous Drunken Silenus with Satyrs design for the Farnese dish. Rubens’ enduring involvement in the practice of art study at the Carracci Academy turned into an active contribution to the language of his painting.\textsuperscript{125}

In Rome, Rubens’ attention fastened on Annibale Carracci’s narrative altarpiece and fresco decoration set his work once more in parallel to the Renaissance engraving of Carracci’s predilection, where Donatello and Mantegna adapted the human form from three to two dimensions with most spectacular narrative results. In integrating the
Renaissance adaptation from three to two dimensions, Rubens’ prevailing tendency to contemplate the sculptural model and to recast it for narrative ends found its fullest representation. In setting his work in parallel to Annibale Carracci and the Renaissance engraving technique, Rubens prepared the grounds for his borrowing from Michelangelo which he integrated in his pictorial compositions from Antwerp, such as the Elevation of the Cross. Distilled into this absolute fulcrum of the mature master, the graphic scope of Annibale Carracci and the practice inculcated by the Carracci Academy enabled Rubens to comprehend and to use the expressive suggestion of meaning in Michelangelo’s figures.

The complex graphic undertakings of Annibale Carracci, Rubens and of their senior contemporary El Greco mirror Michelangelo’s legacy to the early modern age. The painstakingly conceptual phase of Michelangelo’s drawings sweeps the streams of modern narrative meaning and in turn shapes the graphic identity of the modern master after the extensive vocabulary of forms arrayed in the Sistine Chapel. The challenge that Michelangelo and the Renaissance drawing tradition exerted on the early modern painter was best summarized in the notion that the outstanding painter squares with the architect. The painter who has had an essential bearing on the understanding of the painter-architect notion was Federico Zuccari, who in his Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects published in Turin in 1607 propounds the painter trained for his profession in the pristine forms of the Italian Renaissance and architecture. Zuccari lays particular stress on the painter-architect who possesses a good disegno in the double-meaning of drawing and concept, and represents forms and bodies in more expressive ways adapted from the classical orders and the rules of architecture.
The mingled profile of the modern artist adds more substance to Federico Zuccari’s notion of the artist’s sight as perceiver of the divine mystery. Zuccari’s reflection on the Augustinian perceptiveness of artistic sight as a tool of higher complexity for representation becomes effectively integrated into the widely encompassing frame of the painter-architect. Federico Zuccari asserts an Augustinian landmark of erudition transferred and absorbed into the practice of the early modern painter. Accordingly, he advocates historical imagination central to every part of the painted decoration, which must be seen as an element in a unity evolving with the architectural structure itself. In Zuccari’s time, an alternate thesis of an unprecedented thrust after Trent upheld that every element must be understood in the first place as a decision made in response to a liturgical setting that has included the expression of papal majesty. This special form of magnanimity which had motivated most spectacular Renaissance buildings and decorations was resisted by Federico Zuccari and Annibale Carracci as a top-down, ecclesiastically superimposed strain on the artist to submit formal to thematic unity.

Annibale Carracci’s steps on the undecided grounds of gallery painting are not antithetical to his belief in the devotional relevance of the church altarpiece; rather, they assert his modern understanding of gallery painting as the offspring of the church altarpiece. The dominant devotional core of the almsgiving scene is heightened through the incorporation of Bolognese history. In so doing, he endows his altarpiece with a double-meaning: as a church altarpiece that reinforces dialogue with the sacrament altarpiece as the bearer of Christological meaning in liturgical setting; and as a historical painting that bears out a new identity in response to the overriding modern historicity
that, nevertheless, mirrors for Annibale Carracci the complexity of meaning derived from the high altar.

The unsuccessful fate of the St. Roch Distributing Alms confirms that Annibale Carracci’s modern narrative endeavours did not win acclaim in Reggio Emilia, just as his Carità Crucifixion with Saints did not please in Bologna twelve years ago. Only one year after being mounted in the liturgical space for which it was commissioned and after Annibale Carracci had left for Rome not yet reimbursed by the confraternity of St. Roch in Reggio Emilia for his expenses accumulated in ten years of work, the St. Roch Distributing Alms was taken down and sold by the confraternity in 1596. Even though he was greeted with derision by his Bolognese contemporaries after the Carità Crucifixion, Annibale Carracci pursued his narrative modern efforts to a higher level of complexity in his Roman altarpieces. The legacy of his St. Roch Distributing Alms becomes visible in the coordination between altarpiece and architectural space that Annibale Carracci effected a few years after at the Cerasi Chapel in the Roman Basilica of Sta. Maria del Popolo. With Annibale Carracci’s progressive sapping of life, but in reliance on his undiminished generosity to teach and share the results of his work, his Roman assistants took up his painter-architect plans at the Madruzi Chapel in the Roman Basilica of St. Onofrio. All his Roman projects assert a synthesis of precedent Bolognese efforts to devise a narrative altarpiece identity that bears on the inner mode of the icon impressed on the altarpiece layout, as shown in his Carità Crucifixion with Saints. The devotional theme shaped after the prayerful mode of the icon defines the central element of Annibale Carracci’s narrative altarpiece that he enriched in Rome
through complex frameworks of meaning derived from liturgical setting and, in equal measure, from Christian narratives.

3.3 Discursive Unity Across Altarpiece Structure in Roman Church Decoration

3.3.1 The Saint Margaret Altar at Sta. Caterina dei Funari

The moment to fuse his Bolognese experience with novel productions came soon after Annibale Carracci settled in Rome, when in the years between 1597 and 1599 he set up work at the Bombasi chapel in the Roman basilica of Sta. Caterina dei Funari. The altarpiece there featuring St. Margaret and the Coronation directly above in the pediment (Figure 57) lends new impetus to Annibale Carracci painter-architect, now responsible for the design of the architectural enframement of his altarpiece. The single-saint altarpiece field surmounted by the Coronation was altogether innovative on the Roman scene, and of a composition that stands out from the local model. It is unlikely that Annibale Carracci would have envisaged such an altarpiece without the precedents established by his Bolognese productions, of which the Carità Crucifixion with Saints and the St. Roch Distributing Alms prepared the ground for the discursive unity across church space asserted in the Bombasi chapel.

Annibale Carracci invested his Roman altarpiece with narrative content while upholding and advancing iconic stability within altarpiece format. In post-Tridentine Italy, many ecclesiastical patrons and theorists demanded strict historical parameters of sacred istorie that submitted the devotional mode of the altarpiece to the historical information of overriding importance after Trent. A considerable number of post-Tridentine images take pains to ensure the centrality alluded by Gilio, namely, the
perception that the image of the principal figure should be placed in the center of the composition so that it may be properly reverenced. For Annibale Carracci the idea of centrality flourished at the intersection of concerns that preoccupied Michelangelo on the one hand, and painters invested in the recovery of image traditions on the other. In artistic terms, such a composition lent itself to the creation of figures in complex postures and with adjustments to enhance the narrative and dramatic element, rather than the iconic. Annibale Carracci found in the archaic narratives the most compelling fusion of narrative action and cultic value.

Whereas modern thematic flexibility characterized his sacred narrative in Bologna, as shown in the story of the plague-saint in the St. Roch Distributing Alms, archaism sets the norm of Annibale Carracci’s Roman altarpiece. This is evidenced by the narrative arrangement of the Saint Margaret altar in which St. Margaret’s twisted pose emphatically points to the eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary in the Coronation directly above. The image of a mutually active relationship between the martyr-saint resting in a paradisiacal landscape and the ultimate sense of union embedded in the Coronation of the Virgin Mary by Christ makes it clear that Annibale Carracci had in mind an image of profound devotional meaning steeped in the archaic substance of the Coronation. An image of the late Gothic vocabulary in circulation in Venice, the Coronation proclaims the heavenly reception and crowning of the Virgin Mary by Christ himself. The crowning ritual belongs to an ancient Christian cult in which the priest literally crowns the married couple during the wedding ceremony, a practice still valid in the Byzantine Orthodox rite. The pictorial composition of the Saint Margaret altar is predicated upon the Coronation triumph, and thus directly imbued with the devotional
character of a heavenly ceremony. Annibale Carracci deploys visual narrative permeated by archaic Christian underpinnings as landmark of his Roman altarpiece. To this end, he sets his *Saint Margaret altar* in parallel to his earlier *Madonna of Saint Luke* (Figure 58) in order to mitigate a transfer of narrative meaning from St. Margaret to St. Catherina of Alexandria, a central character of the *Madonna of Saint Luke*. Annibale Carracci did not intend a viewer in Rome to know his *Madonna of St. Luke* and to recognize a repetitive pattern; nor did his patron restrict his ambitions to having paraphrased a work by the same artist, although scholarship has advanced this hypothesis. \(^{134}\) Annibale Carracci was self-quoting his earlier work for a new narrative purpose, visible in an altarpiece solution that outstrips the written source of the *Golden Age* to which belong the Assumption and the lives of St. Margaret and St. Catherine.

An example of pictorial ability was to supplement a narrative by visual elements and to cast light on key attitudes and meanings of the characters. The image of Christ and the Virgin Mary portrayed as a wedding ritual, which is not mentioned by any text, may have been added to enhance the visual narrative beauty by outstripping the tight vestment of the verbal account. On a wider compass, it fulfilled the purpose of further narrative enhancement through visual marks that add new meaning and liveliness to the scene, and also operate at the level of historical verisimilitude hailed in the early modern age. At the Bombasi chapel Annibale Carracci enhances the historical narrative account he derived from the late thirteenth-century tradition of *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine. Yet he brings to further lengths of beauty and meaning the tradition found in *The Golden Legend* by means of his visual narrative associations, such as the eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary portrayed as a wedding ritual. Jacobus de Voragine
recorded the ascent of the Virgin Mary to Christ as a historical happening whose account is based on the most reliable and ancient tradition of St. John Damascene’s and St Augustine’s sermons cited at the end of The Golden Legend narrative of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary that includes her obsequies and ascent to heaven.135

The visual subtlety of the Coronation portrayed as a wedding ritual bespeaks novel altarpiece directions assimilated in Rome. A new narrative energy derives from the ferment of erudition that inspired Annibale Carracci through the Northern engraving affiliations of his friend, Federico Zuccari. Fundamental texts of the devotio moderna stream coupled with an extensive knowledge about Northern prints and engravings rest at the foundation of Federico Zuccari’s contacts with Rubens’ teacher Otto van Veen, who lived in Rome temporarily in the 1570s.136 Through the collaboration of Federico Zuccari and Otto van Veen seminal medieval sources were revived in the large framework of modern engraving culture fostered in Rome. The Golden Legend together with later devotio moderna texts such as Thomas à Kempis’ On the Imitation of Christ represented an essential narrative basis for painters and an inspirational source for prints and engravings. Although condemned altogether by the Counter-Reformation as propagators of false dogma on the grounds of their lacking in the authority of the Gospel word, these verbal accounts remained the main consulted sources for artists in both Italy and Northern Europe.137

The medieval connotations of sacred narrative meaning form a recurrent theme of Annibale Carracci’s Marian pala, or single field altarpiece. This engagement with the archaic notion of the Marian narrative is apparent in such Bolognese altarpieces as the Madonna of San Ludovico (Figure 43) and Madonna of Saint Luke that cast new light on
the *sacra conversazione*, a preferred theme of the Quattrocento altarpiece. During the sixteenth century, there was an obvious change in the appearance of altarpieces prompted by *sacre conversazioni* being superseded by compositions that looked like *storie*. A manifestation of a larger debate on the very meaning of the church altarpiece, *storia* replacing the static character of the diagrammatic symmetry of the Quattrocento *sacra conversazione* coincides with the rise of the narrative altarpiece. As the brightest forerunners of a new Marian *pala*, Raphael and Fra Bartolomeo understood modernity as the suppression of the iconographic model of the Enthroned Madonna with Child and Saints in the Quattrocento altarpiece norm. Their solution to shatter the iconography of the Quattrocento established a narrative unity intent on investing the Madonna and Child with Eucharistic significance. Raphael’s altogether transformed concept of a *sacra conversazione* is evidenced in the evolution from his *Pala Colonna* (Figure 59) to the *Madonna del Baldachino* (Figure 60) in which he brought new architectural and spiritual narrative unity to his earlier Enthroned Madonna of the rounded baldachin. St. Augustine, portrayed emphatically by Raphael in the *Madonna del Baldachino*, heralds a new horizon of spiritual awakening in the Augustinian modern diapason that was making deep inroads into the early sixteenth-century Renaissance culture. Raphael responded to the growing Augustinian impetus through placing St. Augustine in the foreground, pinpointing the central mystery of the Virgin Mary and Child. Through the flying angels lifting the baldachin, Raphael integrates a mystical Augustinian overtone, an impression of heavenly ascent patterned after the uplifting Eucharistic mystery embedded in the Madonna and Child.
Whereas Raphael intended still to have the baldachin, his contemporary Fra Bartolomeo placed with audacity the Enthroned Madonna and Child up in the open air and detached from the decorative requisite of the throne, as shown in his Carondelet Madonna (Figure 61).\textsuperscript{140} Fra Bartolomeo takes here the groundbreaking step of asserting the potentiality of the Eucharistic significance of the Madonna and Child, now carried aloft by angels within the raising walls of the apse. In so doing, Fra Bartolomeo wrought a visual narrative ascent for the Madonna and Child as the embodiment of the edifying message of the Eucharistic presence on the church altar, a devotional model destined to supplant the canonical iconography of the Enthroned Madonna. As evidenced by Fra Bartolomeo’s Carondelet Madonna, the advent of a new Marian \textit{pala} as a harbinger of the dynamic type of the \textit{Virgo in nubibus} resulted from a replacement of the institutional role of the Enthroned Madonna, signified as the church in Quattrocento iconography, by the Eucharistic and modern devotional character of the Madonna and Child carried aloft by angels.\textsuperscript{141}

In the transformation of the Madonna and Child from institutional to devotional character, the Eucharistic meaning inherent in the Venetian altarpiece of the Madonna with child exerted a powerful influence on Fra Bartolomeo, who studied in Venice in 1506.\textsuperscript{142} The archaic devotional mode in perpetuity in Venice ensured that the Virgin Mary was glorified not only literally as having carried Christ in her womb, but also metaphorically as embodying the Altar of Heaven, the Ara Coeli, and the tabernacle of the body and blood of Christ. Such visual metaphors that recast the words of Christ in the account of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary recorded in \textit{The Golden Legend} of Jacobus de Voragine, ‘Arise, my dear one, My dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life,
heavenly temple,’ hold the central field of Giovanni Bellini’s S. Giobbe altarpiece (Figure 62).\textsuperscript{143} There the figure of the Enthroned Madonna and Child lent itself to the metaphorical interpretation of the Marian body as the Host tabernacle and holder of the Christ child as the intentional reference to the Host.\textsuperscript{144} The S. Giobbe altarpiece invites this interpretative framework through the detail of the coffered barrel vault, a chapel like-structure that conjures up the church architectural setting where the Virgin Mary holding the Child is the high altar.

In the sixteenth century, the Eucharistic meaning of the Virgin Mary and Child merged with the rise of the narrative altarpiece, whose content pertained to shifting historical circumstances. The affirmation of the Eucharistic species that lent the altar a visual emphasis analogous to the sacred function of the liturgical practice of the elevation of the Host had implicitly been signalled in altarpiece subjects with abundant Eucharistic connotations since the early sixteenth century. As shown, a subject that in transgressing institutional status has won Eucharistic significance in the High Renaissance was the Madonna and Child furthered by Raphael and Fra Bartolomeo, and previously perfected on archaic grounds by Giovanni Bellini. The Eucharistic meaning embedded in the subject of the Madonna and Child reached thematic authority when mounted on the church high altar, as it was in the case of Raphael’s \textit{Madonna of Foligno} from 1512 (Figure 63) originally located in the main altarpiece of the Roman basilica of Sta. Maria in Ara Coeli. Although it soon fell prey to Counter-Reformation ideals that dictated the altarpieces in numerous Roman churches be replaced by icons, the \textit{Madonna of Foligno} indicates an earlier stage in the Catholic propaganda when the artistic possibilities of the Eucharistic meaning won an official acclaim. The historical shifting circumstances made
it a short-lived interval of excellence in church decoration, yet the historic moment of Raphael’s *Madonna of Foligno*’s placement on the high altar of a major Roman basilica such as the Sta. Maria in Ara Coeli was more than a triumph of beauty and art; it bespeaks that an artist of Raphael’s standing convinced the Roman church authorities that his altarpiece imbued with the Eucharistic meaning of the Madonna and Child carried aloft by angels fits the high altar location. In this triumph of beauty and art in church decoration, Raphael’s visual narrative of the Madonna and Child echoes the metaphorical subtleties of an Augustinian spiritual culture transferred to altarpieces. The belief in the marriage of beauty and art that animated the first decades of the sixteenth-century Renaissance culture informs Raphael’s *Madonna of Foligno* in which the beauty of the work of art becomes an integral part of the church high altar.145 Through its setting on the Ara Coeli high altar, the *Madonna of Foligno* staked a powerful claim to a changing relationship between liturgical function and religious art in which the leading role was awarded to the quality of beauty embedded in the altarpiece.

The Counter-Reformation concern that in the 1560s removed the *Madonna of Foligno* from Rome for reasons of an officially-oriented direction of engagement in the historical past of an early Christian culture led to a divide between artists attached to the Renaissance tradition and those who embraced the emerging historical prominence.146 In times of contradictory demands of tradition and history that reflected a changing official attitude towards religious imagery, to preserve artistic standing was increasingly the attribute of highly-skilled masters prepared to juggle their assimilation of the pictorial and intellectual grounds of the Renaissance tradition. With the advance of the Counter-Reformation, the clergy introduced greater aesthetic conformity with iconography and
history into the format of altarpieces at the very time when the masters were responding to the terms of their commissions with a freedom of inventiveness. Annibale Carracci was especially sensitive to the religious significance of his subjects and to this end invested his narrative themes with a sense of their deepest sacramental meaning. This is evidenced by the Eucharistic significance of the Madonna and Child, a subject Annibale Carracci takes over from the point where Raphael and Fra Bartolomeo had left off, to escalate it into a higher complexity of meaning. The Bolognese altarpieces of the Madonna of San Ludovico and the Madonna of St. Luke are visual narrative interpretations of Annibale Carracci’s pictorial metaphor of the Madonna and Child as the Host tabernacle and church high altar.

The medieval connotations of the sacred narrative as a recurrent theme of Annibale Carracci’s Marian pala engage Raphael and Fra Bartolomeo’s dynamic supplanting of the institutional character of the Madonna and Child iconography that symbolized the church. The forerunners’ endeavour to break free from the static character of the sacra conversazione by advancing the subject of the Madonna and Child with Saints on Eucharistic grounds was furthered to even more subtle devotional underpinnings by Annibale Carracci.

His progress is all the more startling when assessed against the Bolognese background. At the very time when Annibale Carracci painted his Madonna of San Ludovico and the Madonna of Saint Luke, Bolognese compositions that looked like storie superseded the sacra conversazione appearance of altarpieces that had been the subject of an intended change, produced by the rise of the sacrament altar since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Yet after the Council of Trent the appearance of Bolognese altarpieces settled for
a historical content of the sacred narrative, instead of a deepening in devotional meaning with which the Renaissance tradition was replete. Very few artists were prepared to set down the truth in post-conciliar times. The climate of intellectual and artistic ferment entertained by the Zuccari brothers, Taddeo and Federico, brought forth seminal results in the work of El Greco, Annibale Carracci and Rubens. Although El Greco and Rubens were not originally trained in the Italian Renaissance, they nonetheless assimilated its legacy and moreover circumvented its flaws through their steeping in the parallel cultures of the late Byzantium and the Netherlands. Whereas El Greco and Rubens, outside of a direct suspicion of their non-compliance, could juggle with the contradictory demands of tradition and history, Annibale Carracci first steered a middle course between those. His legacy as the Italian inheritor of the Renaissance tradition offered him an array of options to carry on into the Counter-Reformation. He stayed, nevertheless, resolute to imbue his modern adaptations of the sacra conversazione altarpiece of the Madonna and Child with Eucharistic significance.

The Madonna of San Ludovico (Figure 43), made for the high altar of the church of S. Ludovico in Bologna, serves as the outstanding exemplar of Annibale Carracci’s interlocking the devotional character of his sacra conversazione with the Eucharistic meaning embedded in the Madonna and Child carried aloft by angels. To this end Annibale Carracci cites his earlier Carità Crucifixion with Saints, a quality of self-quotation in which he treats his own altarpiece as a canonical source. Thus, the devotional and prayerful altarpiece mode shaped after the icon of the Man of Sorrows impressed upon the pictorial composition of the Carità Crucifixion with Saints resurfaces now in the Madonna of San Ludovico. The saints represented on the left, Louis de
Toulouse, Clare and Francis, and on the right, Alexis, John the Baptist and St. Catherina of Alexandria, parallel the devotional gesture of the Carità Crucifixion protagonists, yet they worship now the Madonna and Child carried aloft by angels as the visual metaphor of the Eucharistic mystery.

Whereas the Carità Crucifixion with Saints asserts the icon presence in an altarpiece format, the Madonna of San Ludovico proclaims the Eucharistic significance at work in the subject of the Madonna and Child transported heavenward by angels. The contemplative rapture in the Madonna of San Ludovico is expressed through the gesture of all the participants, with an emphasis being placed on the prayerful stasis of St. Louis, bishop of Toulouse, and St. Alexis, a Roman patrician vested as a pilgrim. Annibale Carracci enhances devotional participation and at the same time responds with the anachronistic presence of his predominant saints to the historical conceits that determined after Trent the revival of an early Christian culture. Yet he submits historical information to Eucharistic significance and makes this message apparent in the twisted, pinpointing pose of St. John the Baptist, signifying the altarpiece meaning located in the upper register in the Madonna and Child rising within the walls of the apse.

The Madonna of San Ludovico leaves no doubt that Annibale Carracci’s concept for the high altar of the Bolognese basilica of S. Ludovico was indeed a pictorial metaphor of the Eucharistic mystery, embedded in the Madonna and Child carried aloft by angels. Nonetheless, roughly eight decades elapsed since Raphael’s triumph at St. Maria in Ara Coeli when the Madonna of Foligno was mounted at the Roman church high altar. A careful perusal of all historiographical accounts pertaining to Annibale Carracci’s Madonna of San Ludovico cannot but reveal that the work never reached the church high
altar location for which it was commissioned. The unsuccessful appraisal of the \textit{Madonna of San Ludovico} is a symptom of the shifting historical grounds of the Counter-Reformation that affected the fate of modern masterpieces designed for church decoration. It indicates that the marriage of beauty and art that animated the sixteenth-century Augustinian culture had sounded its death-knell in the post-Tridentine Bologna of Annibale Carracci, where his masterpiece remained inaccessible until it entered the local art gallery in 1826.\textsuperscript{148}

The \textit{Madonna of San Ludovico} is still a \textit{sacra conversazione} interpreted in the archaic devotional key of the Madonna and Child imbued with Eucharistic significance, and wrought in the metaphor of the heavenly ascent of the Virgin Mary. It remains, however, in strictly compositional terms a modern tribute to the \textit{sacra conversazione} altarpiece. The \textit{Madonna of San Ludovico} was to prepare the highly innovative grounds of Annibale Carracci’s next outstanding Marian \textit{pala}, the \textit{Madonna of Saint Luke} (Figure 58). There Annibale Carracci suppresses the conventional placement of the \textit{sacra conversazione} in the altarpiece foreground to opt instead for setting it up in the air and mingling it with the escorting angels of the Madonna and Child of the Eucharist. The \textit{Madonna of Saint Luke} asserts for Annibale Carracci the demise of the \textit{sacra conversazione}, yet the ebbing away of the canonical model is replaced by a new identity resulting from a suppression of narrative action and an intermingling with the divine hierarchy in the upper altarpiece register. The devotional stasis as the solution of suppressed actions and gestures turns into an altarpiece hallmark. St. Luke’s contemplative rapture, which halts his fundamental activities as painter and evangelist, is conjured up in the palette and the scroll at the saint’s feet. Akin to St. Luke who interrupts work for prayer, St. Catherina of
Alexandria points to the ascending Madonna and Child while leaning against her body a massive book. Annibale Carracci conjures up in the pose of St. Catherina a visual metaphor of meditative prayer that echoes the Augustinian ferment of meaning in Michelangelo’s Sibyls in the Sistine Chapel. Purveyors of wisdom and messianic prophecy to the nascent age of Christ, the Sibyls hold or lean against their bodies heavy books of wisdom to awaken their literal senses in complex gestures and words.\textsuperscript{149}

In the \textit{Saint Margaret altar} for the Bombasi chapel in the Roman church of Sta. Caterina dei Funari, the streams of Eucharistic significance encapsulated in the Madonna and Child rising heavenwards and those of private devotion, signified by St. Margaret’s reciprocal relation with the Coronation directly above, distill into one frame of meaning: The demeanour of Christ and the Virgin Mary in the Coronation wedding ritual. Annibale Carracci grafts this message into the Bombasi altarpiece as his St. Margaret painting takes shape in coordination with the Coronation in the pediment. To this end, Annibale Carracci blends narrative and architectural meaning across altarpiece structure directly derived from Federico Zuccari’s \textit{Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects}. The Bombasi chapel offers proof of Annibale’s first outstanding Roman foray into conceiving the church altarpiece as an integrative unit of pictorial composition and architectural enframing. His next Roman commission, the decoration of the Cerasi Chapel at the Roman church of Sta. Maria del Popolo, takes him to the cumulative stage of his former essays in the unity of architecture and painting in altarpiece decoration: The unity of church architecture and altarpiece.

The St. Margaret \textit{pala} derives Eucharistic significance by means of an architectural enframing, as evidenced by the altarpiece tabernacle frame with broken pediment. An
adaptation of the archaic Venetian tabernacle frame of oval end, the Roman rectangular tabernacle frame with broken pediment lends altarpieces the form of the Host tabernacle, which was permanently placed on the church high altar after Trent. In a narrative compass, the broken pediment may serve as a signifier of the Eucharist when the painter deploys its architectural narrative resourcefulness within altarpiece economy. Annibale Carracci set the Coronation in the broken pediment to establish eternal dwelling in heaven, as the narrative thematic unity between the spiritual wealth of the saved martyr-saint Margaret and the eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The broken pediment as both recipient and coordinator of altarpiece meaning denotes an uppermost reliance on the mingled strengths of painting and architecture. Turned into a mainstay of the most reputable early modern productions that echo Michelangelo’s architectural vocabulary from the Roman Porta Pia (Figure 64), the broken pediment established the narrative complexity of altarpieces by Annibale Carracci, El Greco and Rubens, within and outside the Italian peninsula.

The Saint Margaret altar derives Eucharistic significance from a pictorial narrative akin to it, the earlier Madonna of Saint Luke where the Madonna and Child carried heavenward impresses narrative meaning upon pictorial composition. The St. Margaret pala is a subtraction from the narrative of the Madonna of Saint Luke and a transfer of Eucharistic significance called upon through an intended resemblance. It represents St. Margaret of Antioch, an early Christian Virgin martyr, who within a series of medieval saints contributed to the historical revival of early Christian sources as the prevailing narrative pull of the altarpiece agenda after Trent. The transformation of Annibale Carracci’s earlier figure of St. Catherina into St. Margaret may well have been an
implication of the narrative similarities of her legend and that of St. Catherina of Alexandria inherent in the medieval accounts. Yet Annibale Carracci aimed beyond such verbal narrative similitude when he employed interchangeable figures across different subjects. The interchangeable character of figures and compositions across different subjects was a Venetian mainstay, and attained in Titian’s work a level of pictorial skilfulness reliant on the fluid boundaries between sacred and profane thematic. Whereas Titian was content to set up a continuum between the sacred and the profane, Annibale Carracci resisted this orientation in order to further Eucharistic and devotional meaning on altarpiece grounds. The resulting solution of his audacity in safeguarding the Eucharistic and devotional tone marked a first groundbreaking statement in the Bombasi chapel, where the translation of St. Catherina into St. Margaret serves the devotional theme of eternal dwelling in heaven, and thus extends the literal sense of similarities between St. Margaret and St. Catherina.

Annibale Carracci was engaging his Roman altarpiece on a path of transformation from narrative action to religious significance. In so doing, he was releasing the subject from its historical frame in order to single out the Eucharistic significance of the Coronation which outstrips history. The St. Margaret pala is a subtraction from the narrative account of the Madonna of Saint Luke and its devotional significance earned at the expense of the sacra conversazione. All narrative accoutrements in the Madonna of Saint Luke have been stripped away in order to graft a syncretic meaning into the Saint Margaret altar through a dramatic close-up view on the figure of St. Margaret. The dramatic close-up view ensures that St. Margaret is pointing to the Coronation above and
thus the supra-historical significance of eternal dwelling in heaven supplants narrative action.

In this undertaking, Annibale Carracci reverts to the formative origins of devotional images that predate the Renaissance tradition of his predilection. The archaic account of the formation of devotional images through either the subtraction of a single figure form from a narrative representation, or the addition of narrative details and extra figures to a representational image characterized, towards the end of the fifteenth century, the devotional direction of Italian art through precedents and parallels north of the Alps. The first method consists of isolating the main figure or the most important protagonist from a *historia*, thus bringing the action to a standstill and retaining the devotional mark of the image.\(^{155}\) This method becomes apparent when Annibale Carracci has wrought in the *Saint Margaret altar* a close-up that results from a focus on a single character in the *Madonna of St. Luke*. In working up a subtraction from the narrative content of the *Madonna of Saint Luke*, Annibale Carracci focuses devotional attention on the figure of St. Margaret, the martyr-saint invested with the role of signifier to the Coronation theme of eternal dwelling in heaven; concomitantly, St. Margaret impresses upon the altarpiece composition the Eucharistic significance embedded in the *Madonna of Saint Luke* and transferred now to the *Saint Margaret altar* through the dramatic close-up procedure.

In the Italian Renaissance, Andrea Mantegna reformed the traditional devotional image by turning it into a narrative by means of a pictorial strategy that erases the boundaries between the aforementioned mechanisms at work in the formative origins of devotional images. To subtract the leading protagonist from a narrative account or to invest narrative action with historical information entails for Andrea Mantegna the same
final result of heightened devotional overtone. His entire altarpiece production and especially his Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Figure 28) in the Ovetari chapel in the Paduan church of the Eremitani bear out this feature.

One hundred years after Mantegna and on the controversial grounds of the Roman post-conciliar altarpiece, Annibale Carracci harks back at the Bombasi chapel to a synthesis of the archaic ways in the formation of devotional images and to the cumulative narrative results upheld by Andrea Mantegna. In the Saint Margaret Altar, Annibale Carracci melds Mantegna and the Renaissance tradition while echoing the seminal narrative advancements wrought in the altarpiece arena by Raphael. His Ascent to Calvary, also known as Spasimo di Sicilia from 1515–16 (Figure 65), was justly acknowledged as a turning point in Raphael’s development of narrative altarpiece unity. Leaving it to the next generation of painters, including Nicolas Poussin, to rhetoricize pictorial style after Raphael’s tapestry cartoons and the Vatican stanze, Annibale Carracci heeded Raphael’s new dramatic narrative unity. That unity derives from Raphael’s engagement with Northern prototypes in which the theme of Christ falling under the Cross is common. Dürer’s prints of the Large (Figure 66) and Small Passions (Figure 67) as well as the famous Christ Carrying the Cross (Figure 68), the anonymous Milanese woodcut from the end of the fifteenth century, may well have exerted a strong influence when Raphael invented the pose of his fallen Christ. The devotional intensity of these Northern masterpieces appears augmented by Raphael’s own religious sentiment that prompted tears to flow down the face of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and blood to gush out from beneath the crown of thorns in the Spasimo di Sicilia.
The devotional tonalities of Raphael’s *Spasimo di Sicilia* attest to the authenticity of the woodcut in reforming altarpiece design. Thus, Raphael’s *Spasimo* is not a strict recounting of the historical event, a didactic visual argument that would document the veracity of Christ’s Passion. The principal arguments of this painting are not those of historical documentation, but fundamental and pervasive meditations on the history of Christian images circulated in Dürer’s woodcuts. Raphael laid out an alternative type that would coexist with the post-Tridentine preoccupation with the recovery of fundamental elements of venerable image traditions. Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s revival of the frontality of cult images, what the Dominican theologian called their *prosopopea*, found a direct iconic response in Giuseppe Cesari, the Cavalier d’Arpino. Giuseppe Cesari’s preferred format was the Renaissance *pala* transformed into a single-figure representation of saints, and illustrated invariably with frontal full-length portraits responding to standard saintly attributes such as the palm and the crown of martyrdom, and the book to indicate learning and piety. This type of single-figure altarpieces with saints was on the rise after the 1590s and won official acclaim as an up-to-date conception and function of the ideals of devotion in Counter-Reformation, Rome when Giuseppe Cesari’s *St. Barbara* (Figure 69) was unveiled in 1597 in the church of Sta. Maria in Traspontina.  

The rivalling model to the *prosopopea* was for Gilio the self-involved contortion of the *figura serpentinata* in Michelangelo’s reformed artistic ideas. Castigated by Gilio as the emblem of modern decadence and the expression of individualism, virtuosity and elitist preoccupation, the *figura serpentinata* was advanced by Annibale Carracci’s *St. Margaret Altar* for narrative ends. Annibale combined the dramatic contrapposto of St. Margaret with a heightened awareness of its Eucharistic and devotional significance.
These were quintessential landmarks of the very existence of altarpieces and purveyors of their broadest meaning, in continuity with the archaic past and the Renaissance tradition.

3.3.2 The Painter-Architect Consensus: Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio at the Cerasi Chapel

More consequential than any Roman project of Annibale Carracci and his concern with coordinated spatial relations between altarpiece and architecture, the decoration of the Cerasi Chapel in the Basilica of Sta. Maria del Popolo provoked admiration and outrage in equal measure. An unforeseen development was that Caravaggio’s first two paintings were removed from the chapel even prior to Annibale Carracci’s commitment to paint the main Assumption altarpiece and the frescoes in the apse. In 1601, Annibale Carracci was in charge of executing the entire complex decoration personally, unaware of Caravaggio’s second altarpieces that were not yet completed. As scholarship admitted, Caravaggio’s altarpieces, those presently in the Cerasi Chapel, were certainly painted after he had seen Annibale Carracci’s altarpiece and in response to it, as well as to the arrangement of the frescoes.  

Annibale Carracci was especially sensitive to the religious implications of his subjects and to this end invested his narrative themes with a sense of their deepest devotional significance. In his Roman projects this direction engaged architecture, as it is borne out by the narrative conclusions he was prepared to draw now from a conceptual nexus between altarpiece and chapel architecture. At the Cerasi Chapel, Annibale Carracci turns the central narrative subject of the Assumption (Figure 70) into a continuous sequence of links between altarpiece, vault and lateral paintings. It is unlikely that Annibale Carracci would have envisaged the narrative continuum of the Cerasi Chapel without the
precedents established by his last Bolognese altarpiece of the St. Roch Distributing Alms, which staked a secure claim for a coordinated narrative between altarpiece and the church high altar. A few years later in Rome, the Saint Margaret altar in the Basilica of Sta. Caterina dei Funari summarized past Bolognese essays in an outstanding exemplar of narrative unity across complex altar structure. In the Cerasi Chapel, the central altarpiece of the Assumption asserts a possibility of higher complexity: The redeeming grace of the Assumption from its location at the chapel altar conscripts and at once complements the narratives of the transporting and carrying of Christ’s Cross in the barrel vault (Figure 71), in conjunction with the narratives of revelation and martyrdom in Caravaggio’s lateral altarpieces.

The leading narrative role of Annibale Carracci’s Assumption from its altar location was dependent on coordinating narrative meaning across chapel architecture and summarized an array of religious significance inherent in every decorative unit within the Cerasi Chapel, executed either in fresco, or on tavola or tela. The incidence of the Cerasi Assumption altarpiece was not ordinary fact in Counter-Reformation Rome and certainly not an update on clerical consensus of opinion. Akin to most altarpiece subjects in post-Tridentine times, the Assumption fell under ecclesiastical control. With the advance of the Counter-Reformation, the clergy introduced greater aesthetic conformity with iconographic norms into the format of altarpieces at the very same time when painters were responding to the terms of their commissions with an unprecedented freedom of inventiveness. An Assumption model as envisioned by ecclesiastical taste was soon to crop up in post-Tridentine treatises on sacred images. After Gabrielle Paleotti’s Discorso intorno alle imagine sacre e profane sentences the ambiguous nature of apocryphal stories
to which the Assumption arguably belongs, the Cardinal subsequently formulates an iconography of the Tridentine Assunta in a letter to Silvio Antoniano. He recommends that the Virgin Mary be highly raised above the tomb, assisted by angels, and with apostles around the tomb.\(^{161}\) Gabrielle Paleotti’s iconographic statement indicates an accordance with his Northern comrade Johannes Molanus, who being equipped with Erasmian knowledge was prepared to infer, after the closing of the Council of Trent, a theological justification for the post-Tridentine iconography of the Assunta.\(^ {162}\) Johannes Molanus rails against all painters who still portray the obsequies of the Virgin Mary after the Byzantine Koimesis, the icon of the Dormition of the Mother of God in which she is lying down on her death bed and receiving a visit from Christ. This statement rushed by Molanus into the post-Tridentine air and dated in advance of Paleotti’s iconography turned into a clerical consensus intended to segregate images from their archaic Christian origin in order to imbue them with historical information. In consonance with Johannes Molanus, Gabrielle Paleotti’s iconography for the Assunta drafted in 1583 was nothing but the concluding formula to retrace a key religious subject and to invest it with a post-Tridentine identity as remotely removed as Molanus desired from its Byzantine origins.

In times when Cardinal Paleotti drafted an iconography of historical consensus of opinion among post-Tridentine clergy, Annibale Carracci harked back to the archaic underpinnings of the Renaissance tradition to rekindle the religious significance of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary within the early modern age. In her forward-facing ascent that springs from the altarpiece center, the Virgin of the Cerasi Assumption turns her face and her opened arms towards the Coronation directly above in the vault of the chapel
altar. An effect of continuous vertical movement is thus created from earth to heaven, and from the altarpiece to the barrel vault.

A precedent for this spatial relation between altarpiece and architecture is to be found within the same basilical space of Sta. Maria del Popolo in the Chigi Chapel, where Raphael was planning in 1513 a dynamic Assumption as the main altarpiece. As a preparatory drawing for the project in Oxford at the Ashmolean Museum indicates (Figure 72), Raphael intended to show the Virgin turning her face and hands up towards God the Father above in the dome. The dramatic change that Raphael brings in this way to the Quattrocento iconography of the Assumption that shows the Virgin looking back to the apostles to reverse the upward direction of their gaze was an ostensive departure from canonical representation and at once a calculated effect of continuous vertical spiral movement that connects the ascending Virgin and God the Father in the dome. As John Shearman has shown, Raphael employs in the Chigi Chapel a synthesis of the Quattrocento illusionistic tradition of dome decoration and the pre-eminent continuity of Byzantine dome architecture. A Venetian mosaic in the Pantheon like oculus is used by Raphael as a Pantocrator disc in Byzantine architecture (Figure 73), thus investing the central image of God the Father in the Chigi Chapel dome with the Byzantine solution to the problem of the center. In practical terms, the problem of the center in the Byzantine Pantocrator disc ensured a fusion into one coordinated spatial relation of the entire complex decoration of the main nave.¹⁶³

At the Chigi Chapel, the assimilation to the Byzantine tradition of Renaissance ideas helped Raphael establish a continuum between dome and the intended altarpiece showing the Virgin Mary rising towards God the Father in the dome. The figure of the Pantocrator
and his gesture of receiving is directed down to the space of the chapel from where the body of the Virgin is rising from the tomb in the Assumption altarpiece originally planned for the space below. Raphael confers upon Renaissance chapel decoration the religious significance derived from the Byzantine problem of the center and its principle of decorative continuum in basilican space. A direct implication of the Byzantine model invested with Renaissance illusionism allowed altarpiece and dome to coalesce into a dramatic narrative of heightened effects, derived from a coordinated spatial relation.

The decorative continuum of architectural space that guided Raphael in the representation of the Virgin meeting God the Father was taken up by Annibale Carracci in his Cerasi project. Just as Raphael intended to interpret altarpiece and dome as one narrative continuum, so too Annibale Carracci fuses altarpiece and vault decoration in the overarching narrative of the Coronation and its message of dwelling eternally in heaven. The precedents for Annibale Carracci’s achievement are certainly to be found in the neighbouring Chigi Chapel and in Raphael’s engagement with Renaissance architecture. Yet these affinities, rather than being a simple borrowing, called upon original ideas to point to a new narrative road. The feature that distinguishes the Cerasi Assumption altarpiece from Raphael’s proposed model for the Chigi Chapel is the frontal figural focus of the Virgin Mary. Whereas Raphael settled for an off-center, dynamic impression of ascent in order to create the vertical continuum between the Virgin Mary and God the Father, Annibale Carracci opted instead for a frontal focus of the ascending Virgin Mary that led to an effect of vertical continuum from altarpiece to vault. His adaptation of Raphael’s idea of a narrative continuum across chapel architecture, rather than being a wholesale influence, left out the off-center model of dynamic ascent.
Annibale Carracci’s departure from the off-center narrative of Raphael’s Oxford sketch points to this model as being cavil in his Roman altarpiece. However, less than one decade ago, Anninale Carracci latched on to the idea of diagonal ascent in an altarpiece of ample narrative action, as is evidenced by his Assumption originally at the Bonasoni Chapel in S. Francesco in Bologna (Figure 74). A preparatory drawing at the Louvre offers a rather puzzling testimony as to what Annibale Carracci might have intended for this altarpiece (Figure 75). The Louvre sketch is cut off on a horizontal median line and only preserves the scene of the apostles around the tomb; the latter was taken up with higher graphic precision in the Windsor sketch, where the Virgin appears in the frontal figural focus of traditional icons (Figure 76). Whether the diagonal ascent was part of the halved sketch or not, it is beyond doubt that in the final Bonasoni altarpiece the intent was to have Mary’s ascent oriented outside the altarpiece field. The diagonal poise is void of any self-contained iconographic reference and thus lends new narrative meaning to the ascent. That the Virgin Mary glides towards a divine experience located somewhere in the outward altarpiece and shows herself oblivious to the earthly realm left behind is underlined by the visual narrative detail of the escorting angel pointing down at the apostles to make the Virgin Mary take heed of their gaze. Annibale Carracci adds visual narrative details such as the pinpointing angel to enhance the narrative beauty and the religious significance of the Golden Legend account, a text of embedded spirituality and yet confined to the historical genre to which it arguably belongs.

The diagonal ascent of Annibale Carracci’s Bonasoni Assumption is consistent with the way in which Raphael’s Chigi project was continued in the Renaissance tradition. The
effect of a continuous vertical spiral movement from earth to heaven encapsulated in Raphael’s Oxford drawing was taken up by Fra Bartolomeo in his Naples Assumption with SS. John the Evangelist and Catherina of Siena (Figure 77) and his preparatory studies. Raphael stimulated Fra Bartolomeo to further the Eucharistic significance of his Carondelet Madonna in the narrative context of the Assumption. In pursuing this idea, Fra Bartolomeo’s Naples Assumption derives narrative meaning from the Eucharistic significance of his Carondelet Madonna. Such reworking bespeaks compelling evidence of Fra Bartolomeo’s critique of the Quattrocento iconography of the Assumption that did not distinguish the glorious ascent of the Virgin Mary from the diagrammatic character of the sacre conversazioni.

Fra Bartolomeo’s new narrative complexity of the Madonna and Child and of the Assumption provided a continuous stream of inspiration for the Marian altarpiece of Annibale Carracci in Bologna. This is evidenced by the Madonna of San Ludovico and the Madonna of Saint Luke, altarpieces imbued as they are with Eucharistic significance, and by the Bonasoni Assumption that retains the impression of dynamic ascent in Fra Bartolomeo’s Naples Assumption. Nevertheless, after settling in Rome, Annibale Carracci turned impervious to those features of Fra Bartolomeo’s altarpiece that diminish the archaic underpinnings of the Assumption and which are apparent in the neglect of both the frontal figural focus of the ascending Virgin and the character of the narrative ensemble. Fra Bartolomeo’s narrative adaptations should have been regarded with discontent in the early sixteenth century when altarpieces recorded as Assumptions began to testify to a changing sensibility, but no model set the pictorial norm with the authority that was soon reserved for Titian’s Assunta dei Frari (Figure 26). Before the advent of the
Frari Assunta, altarpieces recorded as Assumptions that exhibit the Enthroned Madonna elevated above the empty tomb were still lingering in the sensibility of the mid- to the late fifteenth century. This tradition, despite many iconographic shortcomings, gave birth to an outstanding narrative union of Christ and the Virgin Mary in Matteo di Giovanni’s Assumption from 1474 (Figure 78). Matteo di Giovanni’s Assumption illustrates the story of Mary’s translation into heaven in the figurative of the Enthroned Madonna. His narrative encompasses elements derived from the Golden Legend, such as the large retinue of musical angels and the belt about to fall into the hands of St. Thomas.

The fundamentally archaic features of Matteo di Giovanni’s Assumption apparent in the frontal figural focus of the Madonna and the processional-like scene as altarpiece requisites were key narrative sources for Annibale Carracci in the Roman phase of his altarpiece. This testifies to an orientation of archaic underpinnings distinct from his Bolognese age when Fra Bartolomeo’s dynamic Marian narratives held importance for Annibale Carracci. In contrast to Fra Bartolomeo, in the Cerasi Assumption at the Sta. Maria del Popolo the apostles around the empty tomb and primarily the frontal figural focus of the Virgin Mary cropped up as indicative of a retrospective altarpiece direction manifested in Rome.

For Annibale Carracci the frontally-oriented image of the Virgin Mary in the Assumption was not in alignment with Fra Bartolomeo’s illustration of dynamic ascent or with Raphael’s off-center interpretation of vertical movement. Annibale Carracci settled for a frontally-oriented image of the Virgin Mary patterned after the Byzantine icon, yet he preserved the architectural implications of Raphael’s Chigi Assumption project designed to create an effect of vertical continuum between altarpiece and dome. Annibale
Carracci was determined to carry on Raphael’s architectural ramifications of the Assumption narrative with a deeply imbricated sense of the past. Such an altarpiece direction was even more consequential than Raphael’s Renaissance-Byzantine affinities, for at the Cerasi Chapel the conceptual nexus is a reciprocal relation between the frontal figural focus of traditional icons and the Byzantine architectural continuum. Annibale Carracci fuses elements of the archaic past, such as the frontally-oriented image of the icon and the Byzantine dome architecture, in order to establish a narrative continuum between his central Cerasi Assumption altarpiece and the complex sacred narrative of the vault directly above.

The model outlined by Raphael in the Chigi Chapel proved highly influential for Annibale Carracci’s modern assimilation to the Byzantine architecture of the Renaissance model. Whereas Raphael asserted the possibility of an off-center Assumption model to be grafted into the Byzantine architectural continuum, Annibale Carracci opted instead for the Byzantine frontal figural focus of traditional icons in a synthesis with the Byzantine architectural continuum. In other words, Annibale Carracci’s binding narrative across the Cerasi Chapel carries the disclaimer of Raphael’s archaism in the Chigi Chapel.

The frontally-oriented Virgin Mary in the Cerasi Assumption altarpiece safeguards the Byzantine traditional icon format and at once establishes a narrative continuum with the complex narrative of the Cerasi Chapel vault. The centered, dynamic character of the Virgin Mary in the Cerasi Assumption serves as both origin and developer of narrative action in the outward altarpiece, which unfolds in the vault decoration. The precedent for the Cerasi Assumption is certainly to be found in Andrea Mantegna’s Assumption at the Ovetari Chapel in the Paduan Basilica of the Eremitani (Figure 28). Andrea Mantegna’s
preference for the frontally-oriented image of the Virgin Mary was far from being a recasting for the Renaissance of the Assunta Orante, an iconographical model of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary encountered in the Western part of the Byzantine Empire and discontinued in the eleventh century.\footnote{168} For Andrea Mantegna to rekindle the frontal figural focus of the Assunta Orante underlay the narrative solution he strove for in the Ovetari Chapel, where he placed an image of God the Father receiving the Virgin Mary directly above. The objective was to acknowledge the narrative potentiality of the frontal figural model as a developer of religious significance, rather than to endorse a differing altarpiece possibility that emerges if painters revive canonical iconography.

The religious significance of Andrea Mantegna’s altarpiece, imbued with the eternal union between the Virgin Mary and Christ, cropped up in Annibale Carracci’s \textit{Cerasi Assumption}. In equal measure, Andrea Mantegna’s use of the frontal model, as both origin and developer of the overarching narrative of the eternal dwelling in heaven, was assimilated into the complex narrative of Annibale Carracci’s \textit{Cerasi Assumption}. In the vault of the Cerasi Chapel, Annibale Carracci demonstrates his narrative prowess to point to a new road from where his predecessors had left off. The Assumption and the Coronation are now the complementing themes to the Christological narratives of transport and carrying of the Cross in the small frescoes in the barrel vault executed by Innocenzo Tacconi, based on Annibale Carracci’s drawing and his personal share in their general design.\footnote{169} The left field shows the Apostle Peter kneeling before Christ carrying the Cross on the Via Appia, whereas the right evokes the Apostle Paul kneeling before the apparition of Christ (Figure 79). The frescoes relate to the \textit{Domine Quo Vadis} spiritual query addressed to Christ by his disciple and answered by the pursuit of life in
faith and sacrifice. The gesture of Christ’s right hand pointing to the road of life is apparent in Annibale Carracci’s Albertina study for the vault of the Cerasi Chapel and evocative of Christ’s words from Acts 9:6 and 22:10: ‘And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go unto Damascus…’.

Annibale’s conceptual nexus between the Assumption and the vault set up the narrative frame to acquaint the second paintings by Caravaggio on the walls of the Cerasi Chapel. The synthesis of Marian and Christological narratives wrought by Annibale Carracci expanded through the annexation of the Christian narratives of conversion and martyrdom designed by Caravaggio. The narrative unity across the Cerasi Chapel, accomplished in the accord of Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio, gave way to one of the most outstanding consensus in Counter-Reformation chapel decoration. The complex narrative is distributed on a system of gilt stuccowork that partitions the choir vault into an oval and two flanking rectangles, all aligned with the chapel’s main axis. Within the space of Sta. Maria del Popolo, the Cerasi Chapel interferes with the transept of the mother church and thus creates a narrative continuum between chapel and basilica (Figure 80). The narrative meaning devised by Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio for the chapel extends its redeeming message in the basilical space of Sta. Maria del Popolo. This is primarily conveyed through the central altarpiece of the Assumption which, from faraway in the transept, foretells the eternal dwelling in heaven.

The altarpieces of the Crucifixion of St. Peter (Figure 81) and the Conversion of St. Paul (Figure 82) were painted with their specific location in mind and certainly after Caravaggio had seen Annibale Carracci’s Assumption together with the fresco arrangement. These second paintings, those presently in the chapel, bespeak a
departure from Caravaggio’s Contarelli altarpieces, a commission that overlapped with the Cerasi project. At the Contarelli Chapel in the church of St. Luigi dei Francesi, Caravaggio’s indebtedness to Taddeo Zuccari holds sway in his Martyrdom of St. Matthew (Figure 83), as is primarily evidenced by the pictorial composition of ample dramatic gesture and expressive details akin to Taddeo Zuccari’s Calling of St. Paul at the Frangipani Chapel in San Marcello al Corso (Figure 84). Caravaggio’s departure from the ample narrative altarpiece found a counterbalance in a new, expressive direction he was prepared to mount on easel painting.\textsuperscript{173} His willingness to take bold risks with easel paintings functioning as altarpieces disallowed once again the terms of the Cerasi contract stipulating Caravaggio to paint on cypress wood the two lateral paintings of the chapel.\textsuperscript{174} Whether Caravaggio’s disregard of the Cerasi contract was the reason behind the rejection of his first paintings carries less weight than his engagement with a new narrative altarpiece direction that marked the formal changes apparent in his second Cerasi paintings. After the legacy of Taddeo Zuccari subtended his Contarelli Martyrdom of St. Matthew and his first Cerasi painting of the Conversion of St. Paul (Figure 85), Caravaggio’s altarpiece evolved against the grain that established his reputation until then as a painter of pictorial compositions dense with narrative data.

The new altarpiece direction he embarked on hailed subtractions from Michelangelo’s Crucifixion of St. Peter at the Paoline Chapel in the Vatican Palace (Figure 86) and from Taddeo Zuccari’s Calling of St. Paul at the Frangipani Chapel as landmark decisions to point to distinct dramatic possibilities.\textsuperscript{175} The dramatic close-up or the focus on a small group of figures was a direct result of Caravaggio’s involvement with Christological themes and his sensibility to develop their narrative core into a forceful means of
expression. The formation of devotional images which underlies Caravaggio’s dramatic close-up mechanism fuses with the archaic narrative continuum that inspired Annibale Carracci at the Cerasi Chapel. Caravaggio’s second paintings on the chapel walls, the Crucifixion of St. Peter and the Conversion of St. Paul, respond to Annibale Carracci’s narrative project. They are assimilations to Annibale Carracci’s arrangement and thus help establish a narrative continuum of altarpiece, vault, and lateral paintings. Together they set off redeeming grace as the overarching narrative in the Cerasi Chapel.

In his second paintings, Caravaggio was intent on carrying out narrative significance in accord with architectural space. At the same time, he was dedicated to furthering easel painting to new dramatic ends, a decision that prompted his new altarpiece direction of dramatic close-up view of Michelangelo’s and Taddeo Zuccari’s pictorial compositions. In his willingness to take bold risks with easel paintings functioning as altarpieces, Caravaggio secured from the outset a key measure of confidence in overt borrowing from the great masters. This mark of tradition is bound up with the cutting edge of his pursuit of easel painting in church decoration as the overtly rivalling claim to gallery painting. It is safe to assume that pressing the oil on canvas on altarpiece soil did not come into conflict with the Counter-Reformation and the prevailing leanings towards early Christian history; nor did it break the norm of the Renaissance tradition for church altarpieces that was firmly ingrained in the practice of numerous artists.

The Renaissance quotations, before being turned at the Cerasi Chapel into dramatic close-ups of Michelangelo’s and Taddeo Zuccari’s narratives, hold importance as direct borrowing from the Contarelli Chapel. There, in the Martyrdom of St. Matthew, the violent action performed by the executioner throwing the victim on the ground is an overt
evocation of Saul’s self-involved falling to the ground in Taddeo Zuccari’s *Calling of St. Paul* at the Frangipani Chapel in the San Marcellino al Corso. The arm of God stretched forth and pointed towards the conversion scene, a quote from Michelangelo’s *Conversion of St. Paul* in the Paoline Chapel at the Vatican Palace (Figure 87), crops up in the Contarelli Martyrdom of St. Matthew by Caravaggio, in the angel who emerges from a cloud to offer the saint the palm of martyrdom.  

Such dramatic quotes from Michelangelo and Taddeo Zuccari integrated by Caravaggio into his narrative altarpiece acquired a different character when Caravaggio set up work at the Cerasi Chapel, and primarily after his first paintings were rejected. A new perception emerges distinctly from the rejected *Conversion of St. Paul* in the Balbi-Odescalchi collection in Rome (Figure 85), a painting in which Christ gives his heart with both hands to the fallen wayfarer, while an influx of grace causes Saul to shield his eyes from the blinding light. Within roughly one year after the painting was removed from the Cerasi Chapel, a dramatic close-up view took precedence over pictorial composition dense with narrative data. In adopting a new direction for his church altarpieces, Caravaggio demonstrated that easel painting in altarpiece use could set up a parallel model to the traditional altarpiece. The claim to novelty hinges distinctly on tradition, as is evidenced by the narrative identity of his model and resulted from a dramatic close-up on the religious subject under scrutiny. Caravaggio’s recourse to the archaic mechanism of the pictorial close-up in order to develop the narrative core into a forceful means of expression merged with his novel use of easel painting in Roman churches. His abridged pictorial compositions point to tradition as the true cause underlying technical novelty. This is primarily borne out in his *Crucifixion of St. Peter*,

174
the painting on the left facing the Cerasi altar, where the elevation of the Cross of St. Peter is a dramatic close-up on Michelangelo’s Crucifixion of St. Peter (Figure 86) at the Paoline Chapel in the Vatican Palace. Caravaggio was prepared to invest his pictorial close-up with a self-contained narrative meaning and to derive new expression from his mastery of the chiaroscuro as a dramatic possibility for his visual narrative.

Caravaggio’s expressive ways in church altarpieces do not separate his claim to modernity from the Renaissance altarpiece tradition. Rather, it restages the Renaissance legacy through the dramatic close-up mechanism and the archaic underpinnings in the formation of devotional images. In parallel to his extraction from dense narrative accounts, Caravaggio fosters the dramatic resourcefulness of the chiaroscuro as a narrative means. The affirmation of the church altarpiece on easel painting stands alone, therefore, as the reputable counterpart and at once the competing force to the emerging gallery painting.

The binding stipulation at the Cerasi Chapel apparent in the accord of modernity and archaism carries the same significance in the continuum of painting and architecture. The painter-architect statement as the fundamental feature of the early modern artist in Federico Zuccari’s Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects appeared to have been highly influential in helping Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio establish a consensus view. The steps in the completion of the Cerasi project are relevant to this end. The conceptual phase during which Annibale Carracci worked up his Assumption altarpiece and the frescoes of the chapel vault was considerably enhanced one year later, when Caravaggio mounted his two lateral paintings. The consensus of Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio indicates that narrative meaning is conferred only upon the final arrangement.
The tribulations undergone in the Cerasi project bespeak the current arrangement as nowhere apparent in the conceptual stage of the project. The final Cerasi decoration as the purveyor of narrative significance rules out Vasari’s contention that drawing holds overriding importance from the initially conceptual stage and up to the final version of the work of art.\textsuperscript{181} Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio’s mingled efforts in reaching narrative significance of the ensemble through painstaking reworking establish a secure claim for creativity and consensus.

\textsuperscript{1} John O’Malley, “There’s Much in a Name,” Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era (Cambridge, 2000), 143: “Early Modern Catholicism breaks out of that traditional church-state framework in a way that permits consideration of claims to the sacred art and the transcendent on their own terms. It can, moreover, don or doff the robes of the hanging judge.”

\textsuperscript{2} Hubert Jedin, “Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation?,” The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings, ed. David M. Luebke (Oxford, 1999), 19–47, esp. 44–5: “It is impossible to speak of Catholic Reform or Counter-Reformation; rather, one must speak of Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation. … The Catholic Reformation was the church’s reorientation toward Catholic ideals of living through an internal process of renewal, while Counter-Reformation was the self-assertion of the Church in the struggle against Protestantism.”

\textsuperscript{3} Elisabeth G. Gleason, Reform Thought in Sixteenth-Century Italy (Chico, 1981), 103 on the \textit{Beneficio di Cristo} and its adherents.


\textsuperscript{5} On the Virgin Orante and its diffusion in the Renaissance see Ch. 3, 223–6 and note 99 on Andrea Mantegna’s adaptations to his Eremitani Assumption in Padua of the frontal character of the Marian Orante.

\textsuperscript{6} Robin Cormack, \textit{Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds} (London, 1997), 46, on the array of devotional meanings encapsulated in the Byzantine icon which became a historical document of Byzantine Orthodoxy after 843.


9 Ibid., 73 and 253.


11 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1946), trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 194. Auerbach’s model is Dante’s realism of the Commedia, what he calls a “realism projected into changeless eternity.”

12 Leonard Barkan, Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture (New Haven, 1999) which shows how Renaissance archeology in the first decades of the sixteenth century served the emergence of a culture of Renaissance art based on poetic-creative stories about objects and origins.


15 A. W. A. Boschloo, 1974, Ch.6, note 26.


17 Ibid., “affective naturalism,” 3.

18 One of those chapters is in Gabrielle Paleotti, op. cit., Ch. XXII, “Il piacere procurato dalle Immagini Cristiane,” where the emotional quality of the visual is pleasure, and Ch. XXIII, “Le Immagini Cristiane ad Istruzione del Popolo” where emotionality squares with the instructional and educational power of the visual.


22 Ibid., 86. In The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe (Cambridge, 1979), vol. 2, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein similarly observes how the spread of scientific ideas changed the very nature of authority and reoriented a sacred tradition, see Ch.8, “Resetting the Stage for Galileo’s Trial,” 670–82.


24 Ibid., 243–7 and 249.


26 Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 141. Giovanni Battista Agucchi’s Trattato della pittura, fragments of which were published in Rome, 1646, was influential on Bellori.


32 Daniele Benati e Eugenio Riccomini, eds., Annibale Carracci, exh. cat., Rome and Bologna (Milan, 2006), 136. Also known as The Crucifixion with Saints Bernardino of
Siena, Francis, and Petronio, the altarpiece presently in the Bolognese Church of Santa Maria della Carità comes from the Church of San Nicolò. Donald Posner, Annibale Carracci. A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590 (New York, 1971), II, 4–5, fig. 6. Anne Summerscale, Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci. Commentary and Translations (Pennsylvania, 2000), 91–3. Annibale Carracci’s first two public altarpieces, The Crucifixion in S.Nicolò and The Baptism of Christ in S. Gregorio were recognized not only by Ludovico Carracci, Annibale’s mentor, but by every interested person as a great beginning and a sure token of an exceptional talent. The Crucifixion received strong criticism from contemporary Bolognese artists, who objected to his crudeness and lack of grace, and felt that its style was suitable only to studies after the live model. Related to the Bolognese critique, see C.C. Malvasia, Felsina Pittrice (Bologna, 1841), I, 363.

33 Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 2000, 49–82, for the reform beginning of these developments in the early sixteenth-century Italian culture of pronounced Augustinian direction and the extent to which they influenced the altarpiece tradition.

34 Hubert Damisch, “Parlo come Pittore,” Leon Battista Alberti. Essais sur la direction de Francesco Furlan, Pierre Laurens et Sylvain Matton, ed. Francesco Furlan (Torino and Paris, 2000), 555–74. The narrative quality that dignifies the art of painting derives its strength less from rhetoric than from the graphic foundation of painting which is delineated by Alberti in Book I of his De Pictura. Through the graphical prowess of painting and the skillfulness of composition, the painter speaks his language as he departs from the rigorism of mathematicians and feels unbound to attach rhetorical discourse to his art. A similar position, however allowing Book I to take precedence over composition delineated by Alberti in Book II, is upheld by Charles Hope, “The Structure and Purpose of the De Pictura,” Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento. Studi in onore di Cecil Grayson e Ernst Gombrich, eds. L. Chiavoni, G. Ferlisi, M.V. Grassi (Mantova, 1998), 251–67.

35 Fernand Braudel, Grammaire des Civilizations (Paris, 1987) asserts history as being distinct from civilization or cultural history. History restricts a nation to isolation, whereas civilization integrates it into cultural circulation. William J. Bouwsma, The Waning of the Renaissance 1500–1640 (New Haven and London, 2000), 2, the various European nations were increasingly conscious of national identity and difference, a reality that stimulated the rise of the Western European state. For the Jesuit mission as the usher of history and its claims to pontifical rule, see John C. Olin, Erasmus, Utopia, and the Jesuits: Essays in the Outreach of Humanism (New York, 1994), 85–106. In Ignatius of Loyola’s time, historia was not an academic discipline or subject, but a narrative of events or a form of knowledge, a scientia, and a branch of literature. Ignatius was to include history, along with grammar, rhetoric, and poetry in the Constitutions of the Society to explain the litterae humaniores and to exude a sense of history as an historical attitude or consciousness coming to the fore.

36 Alexander Nagel, 2000, 19, 48, 112, 137.
Hopes discerns that during the sixteenth century there was an obvious change in the appearance of altarpieces as sacre

Alexander Nagel, 2000, 49.


Frederick J. McGiness, Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome (Princeton, 1995), 102. According to McGiness, after Trent “the epideictic sermons reflect what the Eucharistic celebration was in itself, namely an act of thanksgiving.” Also, John W. O’Malley, Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome, Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521 (Durham, 1979), 63–5. The epideictic direction was heralded by the Florentine humanist Aurelio Brandolini whose sermons show how a literary genre is transformed from an exercise in instruction rooted in the Erasmian legacy into an exercise of praise. In other words, through history and deeds the orator leads his audience to contemplation of divine mystery. The orators were using the rhetorical device technically known as ekphrasis.

Henry Joseph Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (Rockford, 1978), 72–5, “Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist,” “The Real Presence of Out Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist,” “The Reason for the Institution of the Most Holy Sacrament,” “The Excellence of the Most Holy Eucharist over the Other Sacraments,” and “Transubstantiation.” R. Po-Chia Hsia, The World of Catholic Renewal 1540–1770 (Cambridge, 2005), 16. The discussion of the Eucharistic theology was not the primary aim of the Council of Trent, and was addressed only in the second period from 1551–2 and after the decree of justification was ratified in 1547.

Charles Hope, “Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons,” Christianity and the Renaissance. Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, 1990), 536–71., esp. 543. Hopes discerns that during the sixteenth century there was an obvious change in the appearance of altarpieces as sacre
conversazioni were superseded by compositions that looked like storie, thus departing from the commissioning norm that required the image of a person rather than a storia, or a painting of an event.

43 Alexander Nagel, 2000, 85. Before becoming a hallmark of the Counter-Reformation and stretching its agenda in both theological and Eucharistic observance, the sacrament altarpiece was promoted in distinctly reform-minded quarters by Girolamo Savonarola and the reforming bishop of Verona Gian Matteo Giberti, who were among the strongest early proponents of the practice of placing sacrament tabernacles on altars.

44 Alexander Nagel, 2000, p.85. The rise of the sacrament altar bespeaks the emergence of a new doctrinal and Christocentric emphasis in altarpieces of around 1500, distinctly anticipating Counter-Reformation trends. In open contrast to the prevailing tendency to dedicate chapels to individual patron saints, the sacrament altar returned images to the central mystery of the Christian faith.

45 In Late Roman Art Industry (1927), Alois Riegl launches his critique of iconography rooted in the belief that matters of content can not be fundamental artistic components. See Margaret Iversen, Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory (Cambridge and London, 1983), 72.


47 Giovanni Andrea Gilio, “Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de’pittori circa l’istorie,” Trattati D’Arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma, ed. Paola Barocchi (Bari, 1961), II. For Gilio, the fitness to purpose in the classical definition of decorum became a primary concern in the application of a Catholic Reform agenda to painting. Consequently, the subject matter holds tantamount importance in Gilio’s advice to the painters to investigate, inquire and read the textual source so that they grasped in their mind “all of the subject and each of its particularities.” (see Gilio, op.cit, 49). Regola, modo, ordine, maniera as hallmarks of Gilio’s Dialogo are the tenets of post-conciliar art and represent the core of an intended critique of Quattrocento artists, see Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 115.

48 Federico Zeri, Pittura e Controriforma. L’arte senza tempo’ di Scipione da Gaeta (Torino, 1979), 29–31. Zeri identifies in the decree on sacred images ratified by Trent in 1563 the beginning of a “normative crystallization” and of an “implacable rigorism that curtailed the artist’s creative freedom in a gigantic agglomeration of rules and dogmas.” He interprets Gilio’s regolata mescolanza as an off-shoot of the Tridentine controlling policy on religious images.
49 John Olin, Erasmus, Utopia, and the Jesuits: Essays on the Outreach of Humanism (New York, 1994), 19. Erasmus sought to unite eloquence and piety, and in this endeavour Jerome was his model for he embodied the union of religion and culture in the revival of classical letters as the very essence of Renaissance humanism.

50 Molanus Johannes de Louvain, Traité des Saintes Images, trans. François Boespflug, Olivier Christian, and Benoît Tassel (Paris, 1996). Book II, more practical in its goals, deals with the 1563 decree on images issued by the Council of Trent. On the fear of materializing the divine as a consensus view among ecclesiastics, see Book II, 5:137; on the moral value of religious images that Molanus attaches now to their didactic role, see Book III, 60:209.

51 E.Cecilia Voelker, “Borromeo Influence on Sacred Art and Architecture,” San Carlo Borromeo: Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century, eds. John Headley and John B. Tomaro (London and Toronto, 1988), 172–87, esp. 177, showing that at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan there is a letter from Bishop Paleotti of Bologna to Carlo Borromeo that alerts us to the fact that both men were familiar with the book of Johannes Molanus whose treatise on religious art is the first which can be identified as a direct result of Trent. Paleotti’s letter is dated 22 April 1579. In it, he informs Borromeo that he has found a copy of Molanus’ volume and he requests to be kept informed of future religious art regulations issued by the Milan archdiocese. This information lends strong support to theological consensus among clerics in their official regulations on religious images in the post-Tridentine age.


54 Alexander Nagel, “Rogier van der Weyden and the Northern Man of Sorrows,” op. cit., 61–70, examines Karl Jähnig, Adolph Goldschmidt and Panofsky’s remarks on van der Weyden’s exposure to Fra Angelico and Robert Campin. Nagel sees in van der Weyden’s and Fra Angelico’s solutions a similarly perceived challenge to the conventions and functions of altar painting. Bret L.Rothstein, Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting (Cambridge, 2005), 63. The author stakes his claim for Rogier van der Weyden’s Crucifixion (central panel), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca. 1445 as part of a series of altarpieces that use the interdependence of showing and seeing to define the observer’s visual experience within a larger spiritual process.

182
Such Counter-Reformatory altarpiece example is illustrated by Bartolomeo Passarotti’s Crucifixion with Saints, formerly in Bologna, S. Giuseppe, destroyed in World War II. See S. J. Freedberg, Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting (Cambridge, 1983), 2.

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Dresden. Die Ausgestellten Werke, cat., eds. Harald Marx et al. (Köln, 2005), 88. Correggio’s The Holy Night was originally located in the Pratoneri family chapel in the church of San Prospero in Reggio Emilia.

John Shearman, Only Connect... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance (New Jersey, 1992), 220–21. An altarpiece by Correggio from about 1526 and counterpart of The Holy Night, the Madonna of Saint James testifies to a more demanding arrangement of the narrative information in which we perceive the artist more engaged in meaning. Correggio blocks now the look back of his characters and supplants the shared experience of the viewer with an infusion of narrative meaning.

Philip Sohn, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 29. Philip Sohn has noticed that Annibale Carracci’s taste for Correggio struck the first blow on Raphael’s normative value in the Seicento. Rather than a demotion of Raphael, Annibale Carracci’s use of his forerunner illustrates what Correggio had contributed to art and what he himself liked about Correggio.


Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven and London, 1993), 67–9. The author observes that The Assumption of the Virgin Mary by Giovanni Bellini of 1510 (Murano, S. Pietro Martire) is categorized as an Assumption, but like Titian’s Assunta dei Frari features saints who do not belong to the Assumption story, and perhaps the subject of this altarpiece might be more accurately defined as “The Virgin of the Assumption with Saints.” This was not an uncommon situation in Venice where owing to the fluid boundaries between icon and narrative it was entirely legitimate for altarpieces representing scenes from the sacred history to incorporate saints whose presence was anachronistic.

I am much grateful to Philip Sohn for his insights on Bellini’s Murano Assumption.

See my discussion of naturalness in the preamble to this subchapter. S. J. Freedberg, Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting (Cambridge, 1983), 6. The author coins “affective naturalness” to qualify Paleotti’s counter-reformatory position and to stress the ineffectiveness of its impact on the Bolognese artistic circle, primarily owing to
the conventional tenor of his Discorso intorno alle imagine sacre e profane. On the divide between Bolognese artists and Paleotti, see Claire Robertson and Catherine Whistler, Drawings by the Carracci from British Collections (Oxford, 1997), 28–30.

63 Giovanni Andrea Gilio, “Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de’pittori circa l’istorie,” and Gabriele Paleotti, “Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane,” Trattati D’Arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma, ed. Paola Barocchi (Bari, 1961), vol. 2. Gilio mocks the images of a beautiful Christ on the Cross and recommends instead a Christ on the Cross transformed by wounds, spit, disdain and blood, see “Dialogo nel quale...,” 42. Paleotti’s position, see Book II: 416–7, settled the debates about the violent imagery in Counter-Reformation painting by implicit allusion to the violence of the tragic antic genre. However, Paleotti contended that an exception can be made for scenes in which violence has a moral and transcendental purpose, such as scenes of martyrdom. As an overall impression intended to lower (however in vain) the consequences of his endorsement of violent martyrs, Paleotti asserted that if some pagan tragedians considered it indecorous to show violence on stage, all the more Christian painters should avoid such repugnant scenes.

64 Gilio, ibid., 1960–62, 80.

65 For a critique of the decadent art of Annibale Carracci’s Bolognese comrades labelled as “maniera” artists, see S. J. Freedberg, Circa 1600: A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting (Cambridge, 1983), 2.


69 Federico Zeri, 1979, 80.

70 Iris Krick, Römische Altarbildmalerei zwischen 1563 und 1605 (Taunusstein, 2002), 267–92.


73 Heiko Augustinus Oberman, Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe, trans. Dennis Martin (Cambridge, 1981), 71–4. Oberman’s thesis is that via moderna and devotio moderna sought to transcend the scholastic and the monastic controversies in pursuit of a synthesis of scientia and sapientia that would further a renewal of the Christian Golden Age. This direction was hampered by the Counter-Reformation.


75 A. D. Wright, The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World (Burlington, 2005), 196–210. The Counter-Reformation as a result of developments in medieval Western Christendom continued after the Council of Trent and, as endorsed by Wright, enforced the “puritanism of the right” as the dramatically opposite of the Augustinian moment in Christian Europe.


78 The infinite possibility of human creativity capable of undoing the fall and producing an infinite number of artificial things resembling natural ones, and by means of painting and sculpture, making new paradises visible on earth, was suggested by Federico Zuccari in his Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects (1607). William J. Bouwsma, The Waning of the Renaissance 1500–1640 (New Haven and London, 2000), 30–31, locates Federico Zuccari in the broadening out of the mimetic conception of art that occurred in the late sixteenth century.


81 Philip Sohn, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2001), 82. Philip Sohn shows that Federico Zuccari was trying to overturn earlier views about *disegno* together with the opposition of intrinsic principles and the exterior appearance. This took shape in his definition of *disegno interno* and *disegno esterno*, which came to the fore in the modern debate on the meaning of *disegno*. When Pietro da Cortona and Andrea Sacchi came to debate the meaning of *disegno*, they turned not coincidently to Federico Zuccari’s definition of the terms of engagement.

82 Vasari, *The Lives*, eds. P. Barocchi and R. Bettarini, 1966–77, *Testo*, vol. III, 274–5: “……..Ma io non vorrei già che alcuno s’ingannasse interpretando il goffo et inetto, devoto, et il bello e buono, lascivo, come fanno alcuni, I quali vendendo figure o di femina o di giovane un poco più vaghe e più belle et adorne che l’ordinario, la pigliano sùbito e giudicano per lascive, non si avendo che a gran torto dannano il buen giudizio del pittore, il quale tiene i Santi e Sante, che sono celesti, tanto più belli della natura mortale quanto avanza il cielo la terrena belleza e l’opere nostre………..Ma non perciò vorrei che alcuni credessero che da me fussero approvate quelle figure che nelle chiese sono dipinti poco meno che nude del tutto, perché in cotali si vede che il pittore non ha avuto quella considerazione che doveva al luogo: perché, quando pure si ha da mostrare quanto altri sappia, si deve fare con le debite circostanze, et aver rispetto alle persone, a’ tempi et ai luoghi.” (But I would not wish that anyone misunderstand, interpreting the awkward and inept as devout, and the beautiful and good as lascivious, as some do, who, seeing figures of a young woman or of a young man which are a little more alluring and more beautiful and adorned than ordinary, single them out immediately and judge them lascivious, not being aware that they very wrongly condemn the good judgment of the painter, who holds the Saints, who are celestial, as much more beautiful than mortal nature even as the beauty of heaven surpasses earthly beauty, and all our works………..But I would not, however, want anyone to believe that I would approve those figures that are painted little less than totally nude in churches, for in such one sees that the painter did not have that consideration that the place demanded: for though one wishes to display what one knows, one must do so with the necessary regard for circumstance, and have respect for the persons, the times, and the places.”

83 Giovanni Previtali, 1964, 18–9.


85 On El Greco’s brief contribution at the Villa Farnese in Caprarola and the difficulties that arose between Federico Zuccari and Cardinal Farnese in the summer of 1569, see David R. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* (Princeton and New Jersey,


90 The understanding of almsgiving as integral to devotion is provided by Peter Humfrey in his examination of Lorenzo Lotto’s St. Antonius altarpiece (1542), Venice, SS. Giovanni e Paolo where the inner meaning of charity was not the mechanical giving of


92 Donald Posner, 1971, 36–7. As reproduced by Posner, the exchange of letters between Annibale Carracci and Fossi, prior of the Confraternity of San Rocco, offers another disenchanting proof on the relation between artists and the commissioning source. The thin-skinned Annibale Carracci was left alone in the debates with an aggressive commissioner who disrespected the terms of the contract and never made payment.

93 *Annibale Carracci e i Suoi Incisori*, exh. cat., École française de Rome (Rome, 1986). On the extant engravings on the Elemosina di San Rocco including Guido Reni’s print, see p. 65. In the introduction, XV, Evelina Borea makes us sensitive to Annibale Carracci’s narrative painting as consonant with engraving. This notion, the author stresses, should work against the normative Raphaelian interpretation which is still most closely associated with Annibale Carracci.

94 Ibid., 65, on the reworked narrative order. Also, M.L. Paoletti, op.cit.


98 Alexander Nagel asserts that the rise of the sacrament altarpiece distinctly anticipated Counter-Reformation trends and returned altar images to the central mystery of the
Christian faith, see Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (Cambridge, 2000), 85. His explanation provides the *causa efficiens* for Peter Humfrey’s argument that in Venice the formal architectural unity developed in parallel with a unifying tendency in the making of altarpieces, see Peter Humfrey, op. cit., esp. 191.


101 Henk van Os, Sienese Altarpieces 1215–1400: Form, Content, Function, 2 vols. (Gröningen, 1990), vol. II: 1344–1460. *Tavola quadrata* became the norm in Florence, and was resisted in Siena. See p. 59, where the author explains that the *tavola quadrata* had become the exclusive, standard type of altarpiece in Florence completely displacing tradition. The inventions of Florentine architects and painters would be accepted in Siena only at a later date and only by very few patrons and painters. The Sienese allegiance to tradition was manifest in the persistence of the Gothic polyptych, or the presence of the Gothic polyptych explains the Sienese resistance to a new format. On the growth of the narrative in Siena spurred by Florentine sculpture and the narrative that reads from the sides to the center as directly borrowed from the sculptural compositions and previous paintings of high prestige, see p. 63.

102 Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 2000, 19, 48, 112, 137.

103 Giovanni Previtali, 1964, 38.

104 Christopher Wood, 2008, 23.

105 Giovanni Previtali, 1964, 144, 160.

106 Bonnie A. Bennett and David G. Wilkins, Donatello (Oxford, 1984), 110–12 on the technique of *rilievo schiacciato* and the pictorial nature of the result.


109 Sixten Ringbom, Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in fifteenth-century Devotional Painting (Abö, 1984). See 39 on the Eastern origin of the half-length portrait icon, 74 on the profile Madonna as a type which in the fifteenth century is closely
connected with the name of Donatello, and 74 on Donatello’s Pazzi Madonna marking the beginning of a whole series of Madonna reliefs.

110 Ibid., 51–2.


113 David Rosand, Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto (Cambridge, 1997), 110 and 136 on the following parallel between Tintoretto and Jacopo Sansovino.


115 Le Arti di Bologna, disegnate di Annibale Carracci, ed. Athos Vianelli (Bologna, 1968), 64, fig. 42, “Rotatore” and Annibale Carracci’s observations on the positions of the human figure under physical strain in a series of expressive studies. Dated to the 1580s, his drawings of the Bolognese merchants, their characters and their tasks were engraved by Simone Giuliani in 1776 in a book dedicated to prince Emilio Altieri. A study for the carrier man in Saint Roch Distributing Alms is also provided by Donald Posner, Annibale Carracci. A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590 (New York, 1971), II, fig. 86 d.

116 Daniele Benati has recognized in the Elemosina di San Rocco the intention to transform the sacred narrative into a historical scene, an orientation he attributes to Annibale Carracci’s realism and genre painting. See Daniele Benati, “Annibale Carracci e il vero,” Annibale Carracci, exh. cat., eds. Daniele Benati e Eugenio Riccomini (Milan, 2006), 19–37, esp. 27–8.

117 Philip Sohm, Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 84 and 89.


Wolfgang Stechow, Rubens and the Classical Tradition (Cambridge, 1968), 25, on Rubens and his copies after Hellenistic sculpture that betray his propensity to adapt the sculptural model for narrative ends. This direction positions Rubens in derivation from Donatello and Mantegna who interceded the adaptation from three to two dimensions.


129 Frans Baudouin, “Peter Paul Rubens and the Notion “Painter-Architect,” Rubens in Context Studies, Liber Memoriales, ed. Frans Baudouin (BAI, 2005), 153–74, esp. 169–70 on Federico Zuccari and his “painter-architect” as outlined in the Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects, as well as the Northern parallel to this notion in a treatise by Jacques de Ville, a painter active in Amsterdam who published there in 1628 a book that describes a fictional conversation between a painter, an architect and a painter-architect. Similar to Zuccari’s Idea, the Amsterdam book concerned the new type of architect, namely a painter trained in his own profession and who also designs architecture. This type of painter-architect or artist-architect disappeared after Dürer, when no other master continued his legacy.


131 Donald Posner, Annibale Carracci. A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590 (New York, 1971), II, 36 on Annibale Carracci’s letter to the prior of the Confraternity of San Rocco in Reggio Emilia, the commissioning source.

132 Ibid., 46–7, fig. 106 and 107.

133 Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven and London, 1993), 96. Humfrey attributes to the mendicant orders and their activity in Venice the popularity of the Coronation. In Venice, the Franciscans seem to have actively promoted the depiction of subjects such as the Coronation and the Assumption of the Virgin, which exalted the Virgin as unique among God’s creations and celebrated her triumph over sin and death. Annibale Carracci takes another opportunity to assert his freedom from canonical models or iconography in his Coronation of the Virgin Mary by Christ, a clear departure from the iconographical model of the Coronation as the Holy Trinity crowning the Mother of God. The Roman prototype of the Coronation in which Christ himself crowns the Virgin must have been the invention of painters. It evolved distinctly from the Late Gothic Coronation where God the Father hands over the crown and presides at the celestial marriage of the Virgin Mary and Christ, as seen in the apse mosaic by Torriti (1292) in S. Maria Maggiore, see Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art. Painting, Sculpture, Architecture (New Jersey and New York, 1979). The Late Gothic
Coronation served to demonstrate the legitimacy and authority of the glorious Ecclesia itself and thus associated with an institutional mystery, rather than devotional sentiment, see Bernard Decker, “Reform within the cult image: the German winged altarpiece before the Reformation,” The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge, 1990), 90–105, esp. 92.

134 Susan Russell, “Annibale Carracci’s St. Margaret and the Single-figure Altarpiece in Rome around 1600,” The Italians in Australia: Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Art, ed. David R. Marshall (Florence, 2004), 145–53, esp. 145, on Gabriele Bombasi, a favored member of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese’s entourage in Rome, who specified that the figure of St. Margaret should be a faithful copy of St. Catherine from Annibale’s Louvre Madonna of St. Luke from 1592. I am expressing my gratitude to Susan Russell, assistant director of the British School at Rome, for providing her article when the Hertziana Library could not meet my request.


139 Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, Raphael (New Haven and London, 1983), 47 on the Madonna del Baldachino, Raphael’s only Florentine altarpiece where he intended still the baldachin, but he may have planned to place it in the open air. Also, Konrad Oberhuber, Raphael: The Paintings (Milan, 1999). 73 on the Madonna del Baldachino which shows how Raphael had by now completely transformed his conception of a sacra conversazione, the representation of saints around the throne of the Virgin, a theme with which he had worked as early as the Pala Colonna.

140 Chris Fischer, Fra Bartolomeo: Master Draughtsman of the High Renaissance (Rotterdam, 1990), 235.

141 On the advent of a new Marian altarpiece that prompted the passage from the static type of the Madonna Enthroned to the dynamic type of the Virgo in nubibus as indicative of a debate on the very structure of the church altarpiece, see André Chastel, “Fra


144 Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven and London, 1993), 76, on the Eucharistic reference being extended on to very common subjects in Mariology such as the case of the very common subject of the Virgin and Child enthroned with Saints. Peter Humfrey acknowledges in Giovanni Bellini’s S. Giobbe altarpiece one of the first altarpieces depicting the Virgin and saints in which the Eucharistic symbolism attached to the Virgin is most obvious.

145 Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (Cambridge, 2000), 188–89.

146 About the changing relationship between liturgical function and aesthetic quality in the wake of which the Madonna of Foligno was removed from Rome for reasons of renewed interest in early Christian and medieval cult images, see Sylvia Ferino Pagden, “From Cult Images to the Cult of Images: The Case of Raphael’s Altarpieces,” The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge, 1990), 165–89, esp. 178.

147 Donald Posner, Annibale Carracci. A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590, (New York, 1971), II, 19. Masini, Bologna Perlustrata, 1666, 1, 383, and Bellori, Le Vite de’ Pittori, Scultori et Architetti Moderni, 1672, 30, mention the work without hinting at its original location. In 1686 in Le Piture di Bologna Malvasia reported that the painting was inaccessible and had been replaced on the high altar by Giovanni Andrea Sirani’s work.


Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, op.cit., 351–54 on Saint Margaret of Antioch, daughter of Theodosius the chief priest of the pagan cult in Antioch; and 708–16 on Saint Catherine, daughter of King Costus. Similarities between the lives of St. Margaret of Antioch and St. Caterina of Alexandria are indeed a matter of course in the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine. Both SS. Margaret and Caterina were of noble birth and thoroughly instructed in the liberal arts. Their utter embracing of the Christian faith rested on their own will and led both to martyrdom, in which they were followed by crowds of pagans who the young maidens won over to the Christian faith.

Leonard Barkan, Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture (New Haven and London, 2000), 16, on the mark of pathos as the recognizable trope of antiquity that Titian embeds in his Christ as Laocöön in the Averoldi altarpiece from 1520–22 at the Church of Santi Nazzaro and Celso, Brescia.


On Mantegna bringing a new sense of the past to historia used as a narrative mode by Alberti see Jack M. Greenstein, Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative (Chicago and London, 1992), chap. II, “Historia and Mantegna’s sense of the past.”


Chris Fischer, 1990, op. cit. note 88, 285 on Fra Bartolomeo dislocating the static impression of most Trecento and Quattrocento Assumption and taking up the dynamic study in his Assumption with SS. John the Evangelist and Caterina of Siena originally located in the church of Santa Maria in Castello in Prato, now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples. See p. 327, fig. 215, the preparatory drawings to the Naples
Assunta and especially the Munich sketch to reflect an early phase in the preparations for the Assumption in Naples.


167 On the switching sensibility for the Enthroned Madonna, see Kyra Belân, Madonnas from Medieval to Modern (New York, 2001), 111.


172 For the last update on Caravaggio’s taking up his second paintings on the lateral walls of the Cerasi Chapel, see Luigi Spezzaferro, “La Cappella Cerasi e il Caravaggio,” Caravaggio, Carracci, Maderno. La Cappella Cerasi in Santa Maria del Popolo a Roma, eds. Maria Grazia Bernadine et al. (Milano, 2001), 9–34, esp. 13–4.

Stephen Pepper, “Caravaggio, Carracci, and the Cerasi Chapel,” Studi di Storia dell’Arte in onore di Denis Mahon, eds. Maria Grazia Bernardini et al., (Milano, 2000), 109. On 24 September 1600 Caravaggio signed a contract with Cerasi to paint on cypress wood the two lateral paintings of the chapel. In the contract, the artist undertook to complete the work within eight months. However, when Cerasi died on May 1601, the decoration of the chapel was not yet completed and the commissioner had left a codicil to his will instructing the fathers of the hospital of S. M della Consolazione to oversee the completion of the chapel.

Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Michelangelo Pittore (Milano, 2007), Le pitture murali di Michelangelo, 344–61, esp. 361 on Caravaggio’s borrowings from Michelangelo’s Crucifixion of St.Peter from the Paoline Chapel.

Sixten Ringbom, Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in fifteenth-century Devotional Painting (Abö, 1984), 11–71 on the generic principle in the creation of devotional images through either the subtraction of a single figure from a narrative representation or the addition of extra-figures to a representational image.


(on good disegno as the foundation of architecture), 251 (on the mingled strengths of sculpture and architecture as the rule for a good disegno in the use of painters), 263 (on architecture as the guiding principle of painting).

Chapter 4
The Northern Print in the Narrative Context of Federico Zuccari’s and Rubens’ Altarpieces

Prints as authentic records of the figura and the seminal role they played in early modern religious painting form the focal points of Chapter 4, also the concluding part of this dissertation. My study proposes an insight into the ways in which prints reframe the icon and become a vehicle to assimilate it to the Renaissance altarpiece. The print secures the icon within altarpiece designs just as the icon has captured a true resemblance of God, a relay of transmissions in which the print equals the icon regardless of the latter’s cult function. A most evocative illustration of the fluid boundaries between equivalent sources of meaning is alluded to in Dante’s Comedy, in the turning of the river of Revelation into a river of light. In Paradiso 30, Dante’s river of Revelation flows in the typological circularity of the Jordan and surrounds the universe with an ocean of light; it disappears the moment it is crossed, for Beatrice tells the pilgrim:

“The river, and the topazes which enter and go forth, and the smiling of the grasses are shadowy prefaces of their reality.” (Paradiso 30.76–78)

David Quint has described Dante’s river as the figura, what Dante and quite possibly the author of the Revelation himself understood as a figure pointing to a divine mystery.¹ This chapter wishes to show how the print translates the icon into a double meaning, both as an individual document and as a vehicle of truth in altarpiece transfer.

The continuum with Christian devotional origins, which for Dante was unbroken, dovetailed with changes in cultural style from the ancient world to Dante’s own time, as Thomas Greene has reasoned.² Christopher Wood has aptly described how long before
the advent of print technology, in the realm of texts, the concept of fictionality having emerged from the self-emancipation of Renaissance poetry was clearly distinguished from the concept of referential text to which Dante’s *Commedia* belongs. In the realm of images, a similar distinction was drawn only in the aftermath of mechanical replication when the referential and the representational aspects of the image were pried apart, after they worked together in virtually every image. The print refers and thus establishes its own artistic function as a category distinct from the representational and potentially fictionalizing function of the image. The concept of printed images as perfectly suited to the tasks of reference and notation infers that the print technology shaped the modern mind in dialogue with cultural realities which antedated printing, apparent in Wood’s observation about fictional and referential texts. It sheds light among others on Elizabeth L. Eisenstein’s rhetorical query into whether the advent of printing precipitated a cultural mutation in the Renaissance as Gutenberg’s invention, or was a transition from medieval to modern times as an important precondition for the Protestant Reformation and the massive restaging of antiquity, especially associated with Italy. It seemed to have been permanence that introduced progressive change, a notion which underlies Eisenstein’s understanding of the print as an agent of change among other cultural developments that triggered the shift from script to print.

It is not coincidental that this chapter sets out to study prints and Northern Italian woodcuts from the Renaissance literature in their altarpiece adaptations. The Milanese woodcut of *Christ Carrying the Cross* from the late fifteenth century (Figure 68) occupies in Sixten Ringbom’s *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* an influential place in the development of the subject of
Christ Carrying the Cross as a bust image, detached from the narrative context of other icons of Christ. Ringbom underscores that reflections of the Milanese woodcut are especially to be seen in Venetian formulations both of the single Christ Carrying the Cross and of many figured narratives. In other words, the woodcut capturing the image itself of Christ Carrying the Cross opened an effective path for diffusion through religious images which extend the relays of replication in narrative contexts.\textsuperscript{5} Besides the Milanese tradition of Christ Carrying the Cross, the Savior figure attained popularity in the Lombard woodcut production to which belongs a sixteenth-century Christ Carrying the Cross (Figure 100). The catalogue of the National Gallery of Art in Washington to an impressive retrospective of Lorenzo Lotto has singled out the Lombard woodcut as an essential model for Lotto’s Louvre Christ Carrying the Cross (Figure 99).\textsuperscript{6} The Louvre Christ Carrying the Cross represents an extension in painting of the authority of the relic or cult image captured by the woodcut.

Explicit examples of how representations of the woodcut Christ Carrying the Cross appealed to Lotto’s followers are provided in this chapter by Federico Zuccari’s Santa Prassede Christ Comforted by Veronica (Figure 89). In the early modern age, Federico Zuccari has shaped the connecting link with the Milanese tradition within his Santa Prassede altarpiece, which extends with great efficiency the referential authority of the Milanese Christ Carrying the Cross. Precedents for the translation of prints into Renaissance painting hark back to Correggio and Andrea Mantegna, who reanimated the Koimesis icon within their interpretations of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

While the woodcut captures the image itself, prints extend the authority of relics or cult images. In the Italian space, from where the examples of Chapter 4 are taken, owing
to the massive impact of classical revival, the advent of printing would seem to digress from referential responsibilities towards \textit{figura}. The print technology sustained there a restaging of antiquity which, above all in Rome, became tightly bound to new formative canons in contemporaneous painting. Lisa Pon links the classical revival to a new sense of the artist as the author of his images, as fashioned by Vasari’s \textit{Lives} where printmaking is discussed at length in Marcantonio Raimondi’s life.\footnote{Pon credits Raimondi with the “birth of reproductive engraving” as an instrument of classical revival with which Franz Wickhoff has charged Raimondi’s work as “entirely reproductive” in his influential article on Roman engraving from 1899. Wickhoff’s position, like Alois Riegl’s legacy in Vienna, radically overturned normative judgments about late antique art when he observed no classicizing or idealizing hierarchy of styles in his insistence on the independence of academic art history from auxiliary frames in theology or political history.\footnote{The print as an extension of the referential authority of relics or cult images that concerns my study was a mainstay in the interchange of ideas between the northern centers of engraving and the Carracci Academy. Agostino Carracci assimilated the tradition of Northern engraving and its latest technical subtleties to his own print and to the South, just as Hendrick Goltzius did in the North by following Cornelis Cort’s double tenure as painter and engraver. Diane DeGrazia Bohlin underscored the role Cornelis Cort and the Northern engraving played in the Carracci Academy to focus the artist’s interpretation of the original, hence bringing to the work the meaning encapsulated into the print. Within the drawing class, prints were actively taught as transcriptions and translations of the original, another way of interpreting the artist’s ideas.}}

\textit{...}
that Agostino Carracci’s greatest convert was Peter Paul Rubens who, during his stay in Italy from 1600 to 1608, was influenced by the Carracci. Rubens’ fluency as interpreter and author of the thematic versions of his subjects,10 either Christian or from the Classical antiquity, rested securely on the notion of printing as an extension of the original source. My dissertation intentionally closes under the aegis of Rubens and his adaptation of the Hermitage oil-sketch of the Assumption to the tenets of his Antwerp altarpiece, where the coordination between high altar and church architecture extends into a continuum with the Christian devotional origins embedded in the print.

4.1 Reform Images on Counter-Reformation Ground: Federico Zuccari and the Northern Devotional Print

4.1.1 Archaic images re-seen for a modern age in Federico Zuccari’s Sta. Prassede altarpiece

Federico Zuccari was able to employ engraving as a return to a period of purer Christian art and a retrospective articulation of archaic images in the creation of early modern ones. This was precisely a self-conscious looking, a referential work through which it became possible to see the relays of replications circulated in prints as key to a reformed altarpiece. Federico Zuccari’s deliberate archaism is a revival of the Christian devotional image and a return to a mode of Christian imagery that preceded the transformation of the religious image into a secular work of art. Remarkably, Federico Zuccari established a merger between such exploration of archaic images embedded in prints and the reform altarpiece directions laid out by Michelangelo, Raphael and Lorenzo Lotto. A visualization of both these points is offered by his Christ Comforted by Veronica from 1594, still in situ in the Olgiati Chapel at the Roman Basilica of Sta.
Prassede (Figure 89). It seems no coincidence that Federico Zuccari reanimated Christian devotional images within the space of Sta. Prassede in Rome. A place famous for the preservation of Christian martyr’s relics transferred from the abandoned Roman catacombs, Sta. Prassede commemorates in its several large mosaics a Byzantine ethos tightly entwined with the referential value of relics and cult images (Figure 90). In the main nave, Federico Zuccari’s altarpiece is located in the Olgiati Chapel right across from the San Zeno Chapel, the main repository of early Byzantine mosaics and relics from the Holy Land (Figure 91). As John Sherman has noted, the San Zeno dome restates among other Roman examples the Byzantine dome tradition in which the center is occupied by the most significant part of the subject narrative, the presence of God the Father. Federico Zuccari’s solution to the problem of the center may be seen in a different way, as an altarpiece reinterpretation of the directed center of the Christian devotional image.

In the Sta. Prassede altarpiece, devotional stasis centers narrative action on a beautiful image of Christ depicted in profile, bearing the Cross. To transform Christ into the focus of devotional attention of the Carrying of the Cross was uncommon in late Renaissance altarpieces or engravings. Albrecht Dürer had pointed to such a dramatic device in The Little Passion (Figure 67) when he underscored Christ’s falling under the weight of the Cross in a manner that disentangles his presence from the narrative scene to a greater extent than previously explored in The Great Passion (Figure 66). The figure of Christ as the central element in the Carrying of the Cross is most evocatively rendered in Hendrick Goltzius’ engraving that singles out Christ as the concluding statement of the narrative, beyond which human activity no longer appears plausible (Figure 92). Goltzius’ creative
power became known to Federico Zuccari during an extended trip to Italy, an opportunity to exchange prints and to impress the Carracci Academy with his elaborate technique.\(^{13}\) In Northern Italian engraving, a half-length Milanese woodcut (Figure 68) from the late fifteenth century is a model with no precedents north of the Alps, as Sixten Ringbom recognized long ago.\(^{14}\) It seems to have originated in Milan where its inventor, undoubtedly prompted by new developments of the Christ icon, the *Ecce Homo* and the *Salvator Mundi*, created an entirely original figure. Christ is portrayed in the regal attire of *Salvator Mundi* and in a bust formula, which served as the center of many Passion narratives during the Renaissance. Meditations on the Milanese woodcut are especially to be seen in Venetian formulations of the single Christ in Giovanni Bellini’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Toledo (Ohio), as well as in many figured narratives in Italy.\(^{15}\) It was precisely the same subject of the single, tormented Christ that Leonardo da Vinci was drawn to during his stay in Milan (Figure 93). Despite the fact that it was conceived in Milan at approximately the same time, Leonardo did not show any points of contact with the Milanese woodcut in favoring Christ seen with his head bent backwards, in an attitude of exhaustion and fatigue.

In his *Christ Comforted by Veronica*, Federico Zuccari integrates reflections of the Northern and Milanese Carrying of the Cross into an altarpiece formula and thus re-inscribes Christ’s image as a modern source for contemplation. The suffering Christ captured in the late fifteenth-century Milanese woodcut is the source of authenticity around which Federico Zuccari constructed his narrative augmentations.\(^{16}\) While the woodcut shows Christ in near-frontal view, Federico Zuccari depicts him in profile and in a different narrative moment. The nature of his ability to create a beautiful Christ that
focuses devotional attention while maintaining a quality of holiness seems to be Zuccari’s greatest achievement. His strategy behind such a task reflects what would be termed the “beauty of holiness” in the reform circles of the post-Tridentine decades. Federico Zuccari was certainly cognizant of a contemporary document of retrospective leanings in late sixteenth-century religious art, Francesco Bocchi’s 1592 Opera di M. Francesco Bocchi sopra l’imagine della Santissima Annunziata di Firenze. A critical moment in the revaluation of the primitivi, Bocchi asserts that the head of Mary in the late medieval Annunciation venerated in Florence at the Santissima Annunziata surpasses the standard period notion of beauty in the Renaissance (Figure 94).\textsuperscript{17} The St. Mary of the Annunziata was the central image of the city and its most beautiful element, painted by angels as the artist slept. The “beauty of holiness” celebrated in the Annunziata remained a powerful element in the reformed circles after Trent, when the demand for decorous images obviated such concern among viewers sympathetic to ecclesiastical reform.\textsuperscript{18} The miraculous Virgin of the Annunciation and its inherent allusion to the Incarnate word was not simple occurrence at the Santissima Annunziata, a church famous for its medieval image rituals. Such a mysterious appearance of Mary as the central image of a narrative in which God agrees to send his Son to die in order to save people from death was directly connected to a ritual of figural transformation, practiced at the Santissima Annunziata. Aby Warburg was the first to draw attention to the tradition of ex-votos that attested to a fundamental episode in the history of resemblance by virtue of a medieval practice that maintained resemblance within the Christian drama, which places death at the center of all its operations.\textsuperscript{19} The church of the Santissima Annunziata held a unique place in the tradition of ex-votos, or bòti, the objects of a medieval religious piety of
impressive popularity in the late sixteenth-century. The ex-votos were imprints of a still-living face, based on the age-old technique of the *imago*, or mortuary effigy, which served a medieval practice meant to connect the donor with God. It was, as Georges Didi-Huberman notes, a resemblance conceived as a sacrificial gift offered to God and a certainty for another resemblance in the forthcoming life, or death, in the heavens; in other words, people attempted to identify with the death of Christ in an *Imitatio Christi* so as to believe that they have killed their own death, always in the image of the resurrected Christ.²⁰

Such endurance of the *Imitatio Christi* and its allusions to the “beauty of holiness” was of importance to modern engravers in their attempt to reclaim the achievements of the past for a new age. Portraits such as Virgil Solis’ intaglio print of a profile image of Christ might be said to possess the hallowed beauty of properties Federico Zuccari admired (Figure 95). Solis’ celebration of Christ is a defense of such notion in the engraving of one of the most prolific German printmakers of the sixteenth century.²¹ In mid-sixteenth century Rome, Enea Vico engraved designs after the Antique, Rosso Fiorentino, Primaticcio and his Parmesan compatriot, Parmigianino. His series of Portraits and Medals includes a Christ in profile of a beauty and serenity that reanimates for a modern age the purity of late-medieval Christian devotional images (Figure 96).²² These engraved portraits may be said to embed an authenticity comparable to effigies, tombs and epigraphic monuments. They were effective extensions of the referential authority of cult images, and entities to withstand the secularizing trend of modern historiography.²³
Enea Vico was more preoccupied than any of his coeval printmakers with authenticity in the representation of sacred imagery, namely, that the replicated image is a true resemblance of the living God.\textsuperscript{24} He awakened an awareness of the twin goals of numismatics and engraving in capturing holy portraits that faithfully render the appearance of an antic figure. Enea Vico’s concern with veracity as a foremost quality in the representation of a divinity sheds light on the holiness of beauty in a late culture of reform. For the ecclesiastical program of reform set in motion after the Council of Trent, the classical beauty of pagan Greco-Roman statues was an enduring leaning in the stylistic choices of religious reformers. Luba Freedman has noticed how many ecclesiastical patrons and theorists demanded that artists adhere to the classical beauty of pagan statues in the creation of religious paintings that registered the new epic and didactic directions in texts of the post-Tridentine period.\textsuperscript{25} In contrast, for printmakers like Enea Vico, the affecting power of classical beauty constituted a potent reminder of how ingrained such an ideal had been, in Antiquity, in relation to the resemblance of a divinity. The beauty of holiness attests, therefore, to a fundamental divergence between the stylistic choices of clerics interested in investing Counter-Reformation art with classical rhetoric, and the pursuits of engravers preoccupied with truthfulness of representation. Framed by this understanding, Christ’s replicated features affirm a new category of cult image, an authentic recapturing that secures engraving as an occurrence between an artistic past and an artistic future. The merit of engraving was to reframe the icon-image of Christ and to recreate it in a process of transmission that referenced Christ’s real presence. His beauty as an attribute of holiness becomes a chain in a series of replications connecting back to early renditions of Christ. Around such portraits of
Christ that retain a Christian devotional character while re-inscribing it in the present, Federico Zuccari constructs a modern narrative of Christ comforted by Veronica.

Federico Zuccari’s *Christ Comforted by Veronica* presents a dramatic narrative populated with a few figures and set in a specific location, outside the walls of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary. The artist focuses on the profoundly wrenching moment when Christ, weakened by the Passions he had already endured, falls under the weight of the Cross and Simon of Cyrene lifts the Cross from Christ’s shoulders. The painting’s dramatic core is the encounter between Christ and Veronica, who kneels in front of Christ and reaches towards him her famous cloth.

The precedents for this altarpiece are to be traced in Federico Zuccari’s *The Road to Calvary* for the main altarpiece at the Basilica of San Lorenzo in the El Escorial, and also to the painting of one of his preferred Renaissance masters, Raphael. It is noteworthy that Federico Zuccari, in contrast to Raphael’s fulsome and dramatic narrative of the *Ascent to Calvary* (*Spasimo di Sicilia*) (Figure 65), opted instead to strip away most narrative accoutrements in order to focus devotional attention on the suffering Christ. Federico Zuccari thus upholds narrative restraint in the Passion altarpiece in alignment with the purest directions of the reform of art. The opposite takes place in Raphael, who conjured forth a devotional scene that extends narrative action even outside the altarpiece field through the turned silhouette of the aggressor on the right border who indicates movement out of the altarpiece. The falling of Christ under the weight of the Cross and his anguished encounter with the Virgin Mary become part of a narrative continuum exceeding altarpiece framework, intently populated with many figures and details. Raphael fleshes out narrative moments for dramatic ends, such as the Roman soldiers
commanding Simon of Cyrene to carry the Cross in Christ’s stead, or the crowd of attendants supporting the Virgin Mary who reaches yearningly towards Christ in an exclamatory gesture of grief and appeal.

In challenging in his Ascent to Calvary the long-accepted convention according to which altarpieces were meant to provide a stable object of prayer and worship, the Northern Renaissance print was of fundamental assistance to Raphael. His propensity to integrate prints into a traditional altarpiece scheme was displayed in his Borghese Carrying of Christ to the Tomb (Figure 97), in which figures are moving out of the picture in a composition that incorporates aspects of Andrea Mantegna’s Entombment engraving (Figure 98). Although Raphael was clearly interested in Andrea Mantegna’s Entombment, he did not settle for an adaptation of the narrative of the carrying of Christ’s body, instead making adjustments to the engraving model within a more traditional lamentation composition better suited to the implicit functions of altar painting. Raphael’s painting thus responded directly to Michelangelo’s efforts in the London Entombment to maintain Christ in the altarpiece center while incorporating the new artistic tenets of the reform. In alignment with the reforming views that challenged the conventions and decorum of the altarpiece, Raphael’s Ascent to Calvary is an invocation of Albrecht Dürer’s prints of Christ Bearing the Cross from his Large (Figure 66) and Small Passions (Figure 67). Raphael ascertains another important Northern precedent in Dürer who, besides Mantegna, helped him to investigate a dramatic Passion narrative, thus establishing a secure claim for engraving as very much integrated with his artistic practice. Dürer’s model of the Passion, a paradigm of the Northern reform surpassing the medieval devotional image treated as a separate unit, was conceived as a
continuous story in which each scene contributes to the narration of the whole. The new and dramatic relationship between one scene and the next, coupled with the intensified dramatic overtone of each single unit in Dürer’s Passions, provided Raphael the impression of a narrative continuum and at once the heightened dramatic effects of his Ascent to Calvary.

For Federico Zuccari interest in the reform of art was particularly cogent and he was constantly inspired by the reforming views of his Renaissance predecessors. His attention fastened on Northern prints was a mainstay of his artistic and pedagogic activity, either as a direct influence of his friendship with Rubens’s teacher Otto van Veen and collaboration with Cornelis Cort, or as a personal bias for prints and their wide dissemination throughout the Catholic world after Trent. Federico Zuccari formed the connecting link with the Northern engraving tradition as a source of representation for his Sta. Prassede altarpiece when he adapted variations of Christ Carrying the Cross to the pictorial composition of Christ Comforted by Veronica. The devotional character of the Milanese woodcut belonged to the domain of private piety, where it was used as a recipient for prayer and benediction, and as an incentive and aid to meditation comparable to the role of the icon. The icon significance of the Milanese woodcut impresses upon the Sta. Prassede altarpiece a vertical format akin to the traditional Byzantine icon. This is evidenced by the composition of Christ Comforted by Veronica where figures and landscape are organized around a vertical axis showing Christ falling under the weight of the Cross. In choosing a path between the beautiful Christ from engraving and his initial dramatic composition, Federico Zuccari transforms his
altarpiece into a source of meditation patterned after the devotional significance of early Christian images.

Federico Zuccari’s ultimate solution to the Sta. Prassede altarpiece maintains the dramatic power of his forerunners’ altarpiece while reinscribing the figure of Christ as a modern source for contemplation and veneration. The fusion of narrative action and cultic site expressed in the study of Christ Comforted by Veronica has been moderated in a manner that refocuses attention on the devotional and contemplative aspect appropriate to an altar image. Zuccari clearly wished to incorporate aspects of the overt narrative drama that has made Raphael’s Spasimo a compelling image. However, his determination to present the narrative action in such a manner that Christ occupies the center of the image finds analogies in the procedure adopted by Michelangelo in the London Entombment (Figure 2). Federico Zuccari evolved an outstanding composition that employs a replicated image of Christ in order to accomplish the fusion of these two apparently opposed goals. The character of authenticity and referentiality encapsulated in the woodcut or engraved portrait is the modern answer to previous altarpiece experiments. The replicated, yet original image, as the fixed point of veracity around which narrative action rotates corresponds directly to the imperative to fuse history with devotion and mystery in the altar painting; it is also a moment when icon and narrative are held in equilibrium by Christ located in the central vertical axis of the image as an object of cultic veneration and in clear relation to the host raised before it at every Eucharist. Zuccari’s Christ Comforted by Veronica represents the modern altarpiece solution to the creation of a sacred historia that bases its claims on the authenticity of figural representation while maintaining the character of iconically stable and dramatic
altar painting. In pursuing such a reflective consideration of the referential authority of relics and cult images in the articulation of his altarpiece, Zuccari preserved the iconicity of archaic images and elements of their deliberate stylistic simplicity while decisively translating them into new forms accessible to modern eyes.

Comparable to the archaic Christ in his Sta. Prassede altarpiece, Zuccari engaged in several instances such as his reliquary altars and altarpieces for the Basilica of San Lorenzo at the Escorial what may be described as the modernization of archaic sources. His efforts alert one to the late Renaissance altarpiece as both the final homage to the great Renaissance predecessors and the ultimate critique of the post-Tridentine preoccupation with the holy figure oriented frontally. Christ Comforted by Veronica surpasses a resolution between narrative and icon by basing its claims on the radical devices of authenticity and inimitability encapsulated in the engraving. For Zuccari the perception that the image of the principal saintly figure should be placed in the center of a composition seems understood as a return to the ancient function of cultic images as authentic sources of prayer and veneration.

The tendency to regard images as sources of meditation belongs to early Christian devotion. St. Gregory the Great signalled the edifying power of images in his letter to Secundinus, a document underscoring the psychological properties of the private devotional image to provide the devotee with an inner source of edification and guidance, and to act as a recipient for prayer and supplication. The devotional underpinnings of images ceased to play an active role in the life of the devotee in the modern age, when an institutionalized character of religious art related piety to theological control. Such issues
are noted in a variety of texts, from the decrees of the Council of Trent that concern images to treatises on art by ecclesiastics ranging from Gilio to Federico Borromeo.

At the very same time when the contemporaneous direction of the Counter-Reformation prevailed, Federico Zuccari used the devotional print in order to safeguard authenticity at the altarpiece level. Zuccari’s preoccupation with prints in an altarpiece context was tightly interwoven with an effective application of his concept of disegno interno, a non-sensory perception of the artistic intellect.

Federico Zuccari’s propensity for prints was an active implication of the introspective potential of his disegno interno, as examined in Chapter 3 and further delineated in this chapter. The prints as non-mimetic counterparts of the artistic and teaching practice held a fundamental importance for the early modern artist, who created and lived in a visual culture rooted in prints. The print helped to broaden out the conceptual phase of the work of art in which drawing was actively engaged as an ongoing means to the final work and a stage to canvas ideas that would confer narrative meaning only upon the final stage of the work. In facilitating an ongoing process of grafting ideas upon the work of art through the assistance of prints, Federico Zuccari prepared the artistic mind to acquiesce new graphic forms in dialogue with the non-sensory perception of disegno interno. Federico Zuccari thereby investigated a range of new aspects in his effort to displace his work from the site of purely figural painting centered on naturalness and decorum as watchwords of the Counter-Reformation.

The representational forms issued forth by an artist trained in the theory and practice of Federico Zuccari are not ordinary or visionary apparitions, but rather mental images. The image of Christ that is grafted into one’s mind in the aftermath of prayer stands for
Zuccari’s *disegno interno*, a non-sensory perception transferred into an image when the artist’s mind willingly inscribes its contours on paper. A concordant process assured long ago that the Milanese woodcut of *Christ Carrying the Cross* would capture an authentic image of Christ. In its re-enactment within Federico Zuccari’s altarpiece, the woodcut asserts its authentic character while transferring it to the altarpiece field.

An important predecessor of Federico Zuccari and his contribution to the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross was Lorenzo Lotto, the Venetian artist with the most pronounced reform-leanings. Lorenzo Lotto’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* from 1526 (Figure 99) presents the biblical episode in a dramatic close-up of Christ’s face surrounded by his tormentors. Lotto’s purpose was certainly to approach the historia, or the sacred narrative of the Gospel, in order to highlight the most relevant aspect in his own visual narrative of the Carrying of the Cross. This is, in the Louvre altarpiece, the endurance of Christ as he confronts the cruelty of his tormentors. Lotto strongly believed in the painter’s ability to select in the scriptural text data conducive to visual narrative ends and revealed in his letters his concern with recognizing the visual beyond the written source.\(^{32}\) While a clear intention was for Lotto to develop the visual narrative, such concern clearly mirrors the essential union between his painting and the most active expressions of the religious sentiments of the reform movement. This union was particularly apparent in Northern Italy, where Lotto lived most of his life and where the artistic ramifications of the devotional theme registered incredible success. The Northern spirituality lent support to the belief that reformers and artists alike sought a personal relationship with Christ to assuage the anxiety resulted from the ecclesiastical and historical crisis of the day.\(^{33}\) An influential adherent, Lorenzo Lotto wrought up a tight
bond between his altarpieces, his steady reading of his own copy of à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* and his cognizance of Pietro da Lucca’s *Dello Imitar di Christo*.

While a large part of Lotto’s purpose was to give visual expression to the devotional sentiment of these texts, the extraordinary refinement of his Louvre *Christ Carrying the Cross* visible in the passages from light to shadow also reveals his intention to appeal to both the authenticity and the subtleties of the woodcut. An early sixteenth-century Lombard woodcut with hand colouring (Figure 100) consciously sets out to stir contemplation, and also to reveal a desire to draw attention to the engraver’s artistry. Lorenzo Lotto’s subtle interplay of *sfumato* in the dramatic expression of Christ, his crown of thorns, and in the metallic glints on the armours appeal to the most artfully revealed details of the Lombard woodcut. The communicative power of the image of Christ from the early sixteenth-century Lombard woodcut carries into the visual register of Lotto’s painting the Imitation of Christ as the most compelling visual means of following the Christologic example. The Milanese woodcut, made a few decades earlier, invites a concordant interpretation which reinforces through the visual narrative ends of engraving the call to embrace the royal road of the Cross disseminated through à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* on both sides of the confessional divide.

4.1.2 Federico Zuccari’s retreat from Spanish and Italian counter-reformatory directions

In Federico Zuccari’s career the Spanish interval was one of the most glorious time of achievement, even though local Counter-Reformation authorities laboured unscrupulously to present it as the uppermost failure. In accordance with Counter-Reformation thought, religious art should insist upon clear and unambiguous iconography
pre-authorized by clerical consensus. Philip II, adherent to these beliefs and sensitive to
the most rigorous Dominican clergy in Counter-Reformation Spain, did not tolerate any
unusual iconography of Federico Zuccari’s inventiveness. Yet the reliquary altars and
altarpieces for the Basilica San Lorenzo in El Escorial are certainly among Zuccari’s
finest works and opportunities to conjure forth his concept of relating scenes across
space, as outlined in his painter-architect theory expounded in his Idea of Painters,
Sculptors and Architects (1607) he published years afterward in Turin.

Philip II and his counter-reformatory circle that greeted with derision Italian
masterpieces was not restricted to Federico Zuccari only. The subject matter of El
Greco’s Adoration of the Holy Name of Jesus (Figure 88), which was chosen by the artist
rather than the patron and which depicted the political victory at Lepanto as a fusion of
the traditional themes of the Glorious Ascent and Last Judgment, was promptly
rejected. The art at the court of Philip II hinged on the historical incentive of the
moment that dictated images essentially contemporary and political in context. This
historical direction concordantly asserted a supremacy of the collective over the
individual spirit, manifested in the tendency to employ workers edifying the Escorial
under the coordination of architect Juan de Herrera rather than Federico Zuccari and El
Greco.

In 1588 when Zuccari left Spain, Fray José de Siguenza spread the rumour that his
departure was provoked by the failure of his overall work at the great cloister of San
Lorenzo in El Escorial and Philip II’s disapproving remarks. Federico Zuccari responded
to Siguenza in writing after his return to Italy. In a later letter to Duke Francesco Maria
II della Rovere of Ferrara, his words express a dissatisfaction of greater depth than his
personal disappointment with the Spanish court: “invidious feelings and ignorant complaints…a chapter of pure malice and blatant lies, harshly criticizing many honorable paintings by worthy and celebrated Italian painters, including myself.” One may expect that the fraught relation with the Spanish Counter-Reformation cleric sounded the death-knell of Federico Zuccari’s ecclesiastical contacts, but that was far from being the case in what concerned his public undertakings. Federico Zuccari’s affiliations with the Northern archdiocese of Milan bespeak that the post-Tridentine church mattered for him and certainly spoke to him as a historical reality he was intent on acknowledging. It cannot be coincidental that in 1593 when Federico Zuccari founded the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, Federico Borromeo from Milan began his tenure as the first Cardinal protector of the newly inaugurated art school.

The Northern affiliations of Federico Zuccari singled out an anachronistic mode within the late sixteenth-century Rome and its religious landscape heavily laden with papal interests. Reverting to the Northern Italian ideals held for Federico Zuccari a two-fold motivation entwined with the origin of the reform movement: confessional freedom and, primarily, inventiveness of religious art in accord with traditional Christian images. The Milanese archdiocese must have appealed to Federico Zuccari as the singular case of survival of the reform movement, which was exported to Northern Italy as early as 1524 when Gian Matteo Giberti was appointed Bishop of Verona. Carlo Borromeo, after taking charge of his Milanese archdiocese in 1565, modelled himself, his own pastoral visits and regulations after the reforming Bishop of Verona Gian Matteo Giberti and his Costituzioni published in 1542. Time had elapsed since then in an unfavourable direction for reform ideals and yet Carlo Borromeo, a cleric torn between his own beliefs
and the historical reality after Trent that estranged from the reform movement, remained unwavering in his anti-rhetorical position. His overall anti-theatricality, grafted on to his personal and ecclesiastical standing, distanced his diocese from the lofty style of the Roman curia. His efforts to revive the homiletic style and to rekindle the haleyan days of the early church took shape in the anti-Ciceronian language of his homilies, a counterpoint to the prevailing epideictic direction at the Roman curia.

What perhaps attracted Federico Zuccari the most was the liaison he hoped to find in Northern Italy with the humanist and reform-minded culture that dominated the intellectual life before the Council of Trent. Gian Matteo Giberti, Giles de Viterbo and many other illustrious reformers belonged to this culture of reform for which the inventiveness of religious art did not contradict religious purpose. Federico Zuccari’s aim was certainly to rekindle these reform beliefs within the Academy of Saint Luke when he welcomed Carlo Borromeo’s nephew and ward, Federico Borromeo, on the academic board. However, time was to reveal a clash between Federico Zuccari’s and Federico Borromeo’s views. Federico Borromeo’s fledging Neo-Platonic ideas acquired in the Oratorian milieu of Filippo Neri came to maturity and fostered a conception of the role of the Bishop as Christian philosopher which replaced Carlo Borromeo’s stern, but otherwise authentic strain of spirituality.

At the Academy of St. Luke, Federico Zuccari formulated in a lecture from 1594 a definition of disegno as a product of the human intellect, but it was not until 1607 that he published his well-known definition of disegno interno in his Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects. Federico Zuccari was conversant with the concept of disegno from the time when, as a member of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence, he had exposure to
the theories of Vasari and his academic mentor, Benedetto Varchi.\textsuperscript{47} It was, however, the Florentine propensity to swerve away \textit{disegno primo} taking place in the artist’s mind from \textit{disegno secondo} referring to its expression in line that Zuccari was particularly prepared to challenge.\textsuperscript{48} The Aristotelian premises that were informing the definition of \textit{disegno} at the Florentine Academy, as integral to Aristotle the great ancient hovering over the medieval intellectual life, incurred a dramatic refutation in Federico Zuccari’s growing reliance on the unity of inward and outward forms as perceptions of the artistic intellect. Augustinian in nature, Federico Zuccari’s ideas signalled the engaging of the modern Augustine within a new conception of art and the broadening out of the mimetic conception of art, as William J. Bouwsma has recognized. On a larger scale, Augustinianism, which had nourished Renaissance humanism since at least the time of Petrarch and shaped the driving lines of the Italian reform, restaged its crucial areas in post-Tridentine times. This became apparent in the reliance on the affections and the soul both seen as not dependent on reason, but on the quality of the heart as endowed with a higher subtlety of reason. These facets of Augustinian thought that Federico Zuccari actively engages in his definition of \textit{disegno interno} were especially prominent in Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}, a work not highly valued before the Renaissance and which attacked the nominalistic view about human beings who could only know what was accessible to the senses.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Disegno interno}, rooted for Federico Zuccari in the divine origin of the artistic and non-sensory intellect, undercuts Vasari’s generalizing and idealizing power of \textit{disegno} as \textit{giudizio universale}.\textsuperscript{50} The outset of the theories of drawing for both Zuccari and Vasari stemmed from Benedetto Varchi, who was the first to articulate a coherent framework for
a discussion of disegno as a process of cognition and for placing the practices of disegno within Aristotle’s universal reason. Varchi located the arts in the inferior part of universal reason, but such classification did not prevent him from drawing pointed distinctions between arts and sciences. Thus, Varchi was particularly cautious in emphasizing that the nobility of art was to be judged by its results in the effective process of art making by the artist, and as the opposite of the cognitive process of knowing for the scientist.\textsuperscript{51} It was just this point of Varchi’s classification that bore fruit in Federico Zuccari and relinquished in turn Vasari to a normative and typifying understanding of art. Whereas Vasari in his definition of disegno picked up precisely where Varchi left off and developed disegno within the Aristotelian framework based on knowledge as a scientific attribute, Federico Zuccari did exactly the opposite in wresting disegno from the positivistic thrust of Aristotelian thought involved by Varchi. In so doing, Federico Zuccari furthered for the first time the definition of disegno on the grounds of Augustinian thought.

More consequential even than rescuing art from the positivistic direction was Federico Zuccari’s broadening out of the mimetic conception of art. Whereas in Vasari’s definition disegno stands as a particularly Aristotelian formulation of imitation by which he meant the representation of that which the artist comes to know about nature, Federico Zuccari asserts with disegno the representation of that which the artist perceives in the world through his non-sensory intellectual vision which always ascertains the truth, as Augustine assures his readers.\textsuperscript{52} Federico Zuccari thus hints at artistic creativity capable of undoing the fall and of creating in God’s image and likeness. Together with elevating artistic status over historical values, the direct connection of non-sensory perception with
the universal reason or the Soul of God opened up an infinite array of creativity in the practice of *disegno*.

Federico Zuccari’s theory of *disegno*, which informs his leadership of the Academy of St. Luke, betokens a complex interlocking of religion and reform-minded notions. These ideas had long preoccupied him since his active membership at the Academy of Drawing in Florence, when Federico Zuccari took an official stand for pedagogical reform. In the late 1570s he composed a letter concerning the reform of instruction at the Florentine academy and drafted on this occasion a set of directions intended to revitalize the academy’s program of education. His text draws attention to formal instruction which had fallen off in all areas during the patronage of Francesco de Medici and turned the Florentine academy into a regulatory power of the emergent modern state. Federico Zuccari’s reforming views carried seminal implications about a shift in the critical development of academic instruction, which appear unimaginable without his Augustinian grounding into the creative power of the non-sensory and transcendental artistic intellect entwined with God’s supreme intellect.

4.1.3 *Historia*, and the thesis of historical continuity of the Roman Church

It seems no coincidence that Federico Zuccari deployed the devotional and prayerful mode of the Milanese woodcut within the basilican space of Santa Prassede in Rome, where his altarpiece is located in the Olgiati Chapel. Santa Prassede held a leading place among the ninth-century newly restored churches that preserved saints’ relics transferred from the abandoned Roman catacombs. A phenomenon registered in Rome towards the end of Byzantine iconoclasm, the remnants of the saints removed from the early Christian
cemeteries and abandoned Roman catacombs was accompanied by several large mosaics commissioned to celebrate the translation of the martyr’s relics. Prominent amongst these are the mosaics in the church of Santa Prassede in Rome, a place famous for a collective translation of the remains of more than two thousand bodies in the early decades of the ninth century. Like the mosaics in the Roman basilica of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo dated to the same time, the visual narratives of the Sta. Prassede mosaics submitted to influences from contemporary Byzantine pictorial programs transmitted in the ongoing exchange between Eastern and Western Christianity. Accordingly, the mosaics of Sta. Prassede and SS. Nereo ed Achilleo appeared as both original and innovative in devising an interrelationship of image and relic.\(^5^5\) The historical aspect in connection with contemporaneous events of ecclesiological and dogmatic nature played an active role in commissioning the mosaics. But to whatever these interests were geared, the overriding connection was between relics and the pictorial settings created for them.

Rome aimed at drawing worldwide pilgrimage attention with its churches as repositories of the bodily remnants of saints and the art produced in affiliation, and also through a large number of privileged icons or the *archeiropoieta*. These archaic vestiges and the reciprocal relation between image and relic they encompassed turned into a thesis of historical continuity.\(^5^6\) The sacred past of early Christianity deployed to serve the institutional continuity of the Roman church, a theory which drew historical basis from relics and images, was to resurface in new contours during the Counter-Reformation.

In 1597, after receiving a cardinal’s hat, Cesare Baronius proceeded to restore SS. Nereo ed Achilleo with his fervour to demonstrate the foundations of the early Roman church.\(^5^7\) Akin to his ecclesiastical predecessors, Cesare Baronius adduced the reality of
the early Christian martyrs to substantiate the church claim to historical continuity. Thus, two decades after he had published the *Matryrologicum Romanum* with the ideals of early Christianity firmly in view, the cardinal had the relics of three early Christian martyrs, Domitilla, Nereus and Achilleus translated to the church of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo from S. Adriano ai Fori.⁵⁸

The historical implications of Baronius’ transfer of the saints’ relics strayed far from the medieval translation of the martyrs’ relics during the end of iconoclasm. Whereas the ninth-century Christological program examined the religious and historical context of the holy remnants, Cesare Baronius focused his argument on the papal church as the inheritor of imperial Rome. His ideological shift submitted all early Christian evidence as well as his own archaeological results to the theory of the universal authority of the Roman church.⁵⁹ He developed his Counter-Reformation myth in his *Ecclesiastical Annals*, chiefly concerned to defend and promote papal authority as the continuator of the ancient conception of imperial Rome as divinely ordained to rule the world. The most effective contribution to the debate over papal claims was to come in 1619 with *The History of the Council of Trent* by the Venetian Servite friar Paolo Sarpi, a work of anti-papal bias resting on the history of the primitive church, that drew within the subsequent decades an extended development in Sforza Pallavicino’s writings.⁶⁰

In the Santa Prassede *Chist Comforted by Veronica*, the Veronica legend incorporated into the narrative of Christ carrying the Cross lends support to the idea that the growing cult of relics was making inroads into the practice of modern artists. Such use of the relics safeguarded the truthfulness of representation inherent in the icon and thus departed from the prevailing theology of religious images evolving in parallel. The *Sudarium*, or
the famous image made without hands when Christ’s face left his imprint on a cloth held out to Christ by Veronica while he was going toward Calvary, was promoted by Pope Innocent III since the thirteenth century and quickly found its place among the most sacred objects of the Roman church.\textsuperscript{61} Like the \textit{Mandylion}, the \textit{Sudarium} was recognized to be an imprint produced by direct contact with Christ’s body and a repository of the facial features of Christ. Yet the claim on which the church licensed this form of representation as authentic image was less concerned with its miraculous character than with the quality of non-manufactured object that was believed by the Roman church to convey holiness.\textsuperscript{62}

As the gulf between tradition and history became more apparent with the progress of the sixteenth century, artists who absorbed the direction of the reform of art collided with their coevals who submitted to the historical interests of the Roman church. The clash of reform-minded and counter-reformatory artists was a direct expression of the post-Tridentine age, when rhetoric became an indispensable tool in putting across the moral value of Christianity located after Trent in ethical teaching. The rhetorical direction patterned after the classical model worked against the fusion of classical and Christian humanism that originally rested at the very foundation of the reform movement.\textsuperscript{63}

One of the most influential exponents of the rhetorical direction of the Counter-Reformation who engaged his efforts at the annihilation of the reform-results was Vasari. A passage of great significance from the life of Fra Angelico may be read as a polemical response to the atmosphere of censorship and suspicion in the wake of the critiques leveled against Michelangelo and the Last Judgment in particular.\textsuperscript{64} Giovanni Previtali has noted that Vasari prudently moved the passage from the opening of the life of Fra
Angelico to its center and added the final passage containing the disclaimer of any personal approval of indecorous images in churches. Nevertheless, despite such reworking prompted by Vasari’s perception that his position appears to be increasingly embattled, the passage acutely illustrates the amorous tonalities in Vasari’s culture.

Vasari’s definition of art as ideal imitation which he perfected in 1568 in his Giunti edition of the Lives implies timelessness of art at the expense of an imitation of the ancients and their followers amongst the modern masters. The aestheticization of art licensed by Vasari on imitation was in fact nothing but the process through which artists judiciously select the beautiful parts of nature and discard its imperfections. Framed by this understanding, Vasari’s concept of ideal imitation amounts to much less than what the ancient classical artists achieved when painting and sculpture best exemplified individuality of talent.

Artists such as the Zuccari brothers who were reared in the classical culture and, according to reform-tenets, could accept the legacy of the classical heritage void of pagan connotations, did not allow themselves to be edged into an acceptance of Tridentine orthodoxy and its ramifications in art. Federico Zuccari blustered against Vasari’s second edition of the Lives, and Annibale Carracci and El Greco contributed with their own critical views to an anti-vasarian position.

Contemporaneous with Federico Zuccari’s endeavours, the historical direction of engagement with the ancient classical past of pagan Rome, purposely designed by Cesare Baronius’ Ecclesiastical Annals to support the claim of the universal authority of the pope, was gaining adherence in the art field. Cesare Baronius’ archaeological passion serving to demonstrate the historical foundations of the early church and his efforts to restore
medieval Roman churches exercised a strong influence on belief in the efficacy of the Christian past, just as Filippo Neri’s devotion for the many venerated miraculous icons of the Virgin awakened a passion for the efficacy of prayer. But under the historical goal dictating to conscript faith into palpable evidence that underlay their efforts, the ground for an authentic exploration of the religious, artistic and even historical context of the holy remnants of the Christian past shows how Renaissance archaeology became a framework for storytelling about objects and origins.

When Federico Zuccari wrought his *Christ Comforted by Veronica* in the Roman church of Santa Prassede, where a collective translation of the remnants of more than two thousand bodies of martyrs was performed in the ninth century, the connection between image and relic was fundamental to his altarpiece. In the central nave of Santa Prassede, the Olgiati chapel housing *Christ Comforted by Veronica* at the central altar is the pendant of the San Zeno chapel, where the Holy Land relics and the Byzantine mosaics were commissioned to celebrate the translation of the martyrs’ relics. The holy remnants, the relics and the visual program of the mosaics devise an interrelationship of image and relic in the ancient chapel of San Zeno, right across from Federico Zuccari’s altarpiece. In conceiving his altarpiece as the pendant of the Byzantine complex, Zuccari consciously submitted to influences from early Christian pictorial programs. His painter-architect creed, as he expounded it in his *Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, found now a comprehensive expression in the more daunting task to accommodate altarpieces in ancient Christian settings. This was an enterprise of higher complexity than his ongoing concern to adapt to liturgical space his paintings.
It was noticed that in due course his Santa Prassede Christ Comforted by Veronica was the beginning of a series of altarpieces Federico Zuccari produced until his death that continued and reutilized scenes already painted in the reliquary altarpieces at the basilica of San Lorenzo in El Escorial.\textsuperscript{72} Whereas at San Lorenzo Zuccari wrought his altarpieces as the containers of relics, at the Roman basilica of Santa Prassede he impressed relic and image upon the altarpiece field. The interrelation between authenticity, as epitomized by the holy relic of the \textit{Sudarium}, and portrayed, as manifested in the adaptation of engraving and woodcut, testifies to Federico Zuccari’s altarpiece paradigm as the enactment of Christian images on an early modern scene. Zuccari thus asserts the bond of image and relic taking precedence over the fulsome narrative of his Renaissance predecessors. In focusing pictorial composition on the emotionally wrenching moment of the encounter between Christ and Veronica, Federico Zuccari translates into an altarpiece hallmark the humanity of the woman comforting Christ on his road to Calvary. Simon of Cyrene prepared to lift the Cross from Christ’s shoulders, the woman bending in awestruck motion and the appalled traveller who drops his basket conjure forth an act of imitation of the compassionate love Christ has showed to all of humanity.

The invocation of the Northern Italian engraving in an altarpiece context subsumes into Federico Zuccari’s fundamental preoccupation to release his pictorial subjects from historical frames of contemporaneous political and theological direction. The sixteenth-century emergence of a culture of art dovetailed with the storytelling about religious origins in Renaissance archaeology. In exploring the referential value of prints as authentic repositories of a portrait of Christ and blending this character with the \textit{devotio moderna} substance of Thomas à Kempis’ \textit{Imitation of Christ}, Federico Zuccari strongly
engages his altarpiece in the Augustinian sense of history. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine explained that history was the work of God, not of men and their institutions. His call to faith as the gift by which one believes and the inwardness of humanist spirituality which, in time, help reveal with greater clarity the sense of history asserted by Augustine, formed the opposite to the universal and hierarchical order consolidated after Trent. At the very same time when hierarchy became central to the ideology of the Roman church, artists responded to their commissioners with increased freedom of expression grounded in their own reform-minded beliefs.

### 4.1.4 The Imitation of Christ, an Augustinian model of the late-medieval religious devotion in the early modern age

The appeal to the Northern print of Christ Carrying the Cross that served as a narrative focus for Federico Zuccari and Lorenzo Lotto exhibits a kinship with the late medieval devotional literature. Themes such as the Imitation of Christ prevailed in the printing culture, and disseminated devotional ideas amongst all factions of the confessional divide. As is often remarked, it seems no coincidence that the early modern artist derived his sources from printed information, primarily of religious content, in an age of post-confessional entrenchment. The printing culture on the rise since the late fifteenth century ensured a vast circulation of ideas amongst all factions of the confessional spectrum, until an unforeseen setback halted this freedom of information. Pope Paul IV Carafa, after ascending the papal throne in 1555, dashed all hopes of unity and reconciliation in Western Christendom, refused to reconvene the Council of Trent, and issued a Roman index of prohibited books. The *Imitation of Christ* by the Augustinian canon Thomas à Kempis fell prey to an earlier enactment of Pope Paul IV Carafa when,
as inquisitor general, he banned the circulation and printing of heretical books. Nonetheless, the *Imitation of Christ* remained one of the most popular and widely read devotional texts throughout the sixteenth century on both sides of the confessional divide. The most startling feature of the adaptability of à Kempis’ book to a wide variety of readers was inextricably bound up with the habits of individual, private devotion as the main characteristic of the reform movement. An essential stream of private devotion was embedded in the revival of late-medieval literature, including the *Imitation of Christ*, in a culture of religious reform. As early as 1520, the *Imitation of Christ*, together with the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph the Carthusian and the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, kindled in Ignatius of Loyola an intense devotion to the Passion of Christ.

The Northern medieval tradition to the life and the Passion of Christ, which was prolonged by these texts and primarily by Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, found sensitive adherence in the reform-minded Italian quarters sympathetic to the devotion to the person of Christ. The most impressive document of the Italian Reformation, the *Beneficio di Cristo* by the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova and the poet Marcantonio Flaminio, draws upon the knowledge of the leading sixteenth-century reformers in an overriding effort to emphasize the tremendous benefit which one derives from the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is not coincidental that the *spirituali*, the Italian reformers who nurtured the publication of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, found in à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* the stream of late medieval spirituality bound up with their own confidence in the power of the Crucified Christ. Marcantonio Flaminio, one of the leading lights of the reform-minded Italian circles and coauthor of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, brought this awareness to bear on the letter he wrote to a friend in 1543:
“I do not know of any more useful book than this little book of the Imitation of Christ for the edification of the soul and how to practice living as a Christian, in which everything is contained, how man has accepted the grace of the Gospel, that is, justification by faith.”

Marcantonio Flaminio’s letters were agents for the survival of the network of the spirituali after 1540 when, as a result of an intensified inquisitorial activity against them, the spirituali gradually began to disperse. Their ideas did not disappear but rather remained still represented, although in a more covert way and mainly through personal letters, as the essential modus operandi for their survival. The retreat to a subterranean activity behind the public scene that characterized the spirituali after 1540, and beyond the Council of Trent, mirrors a transfer of concepts from theology to the devotional profile of the modern Christian. The shift from a public to a personal sphere in an age of confessional entrenchment interceded the inward letter of the Imitation of Christ and thus bridged the early modern age and the late-medieval Augustinianism to which à Kempis’ text belongs. The growing reliance on the contemplation of higher things and the quest for what is highest in the self found expression in a resurgence of Christian faith and private devotion as opposed to the active life. This notion occurs in the Imitation of Christ where one reads that if a person loves God he must be ready to suffer and to accept suffering for the edification of his nature. This pain endured and embraced as a sign of true devotion, the pain of unfulfilled love, set a dominant tone in the passionate language of the mystical saints St. Theresa of Avilla and St. John of the Cross, who adduced to the furor of divine love the words of the Imitation of Christ:
“To suffer willingly, out of love for Christ—nothing is more acceptable to God, nothing more to your advantage in life. If you had the choice, you would do better to choose to suffer for Christ than to receive many blessings from him. Through suffering, you become more like him, and more like the saints. Pleasure and comfort win us no spiritual merit or growth; only sorrows and pain can do that, if we accept them willingly. If there were a better way—one more likely to lead us to salvation—than suffering, Christ would have shown it to us in his word and example. But what he clearly told his disciples, and all others who wish to be his followers, is this: If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. So after we have gathered all that has been written on the subject, this is the conclusion we are led to: It is through suffering much that we enter the kingdom of God.”  

The late-medieval emphasis on suffering as the most perfect means of imitating Christ, which was gaining currency in the second half of the sixteenth century, signalled the strong mark of Augustinian spirituality and its devotional background continuing to react against scholastic rationalism. On both sides of the confessional divide, faith seen by Augustine as the gift by which one believes, an inward disposition rather than external commitment to a creed, rejected the conception of faith as the doctrine to which one adheres. For those who understood faith in the Augustinian manner of the late sixteenth-century, true piety was expressed, according to the reform-minded ideal of the spirituali, in love as the basis of harmony and not in the letter of the doctrine. The inwardness of this humanist spirituality for which faith is a gift of God made deep inroads into late sixteenth-century art. Unlike beliefs acquired by reason, the notion of faith as a gift had a unique power to transform the individual.  

233
The invitation to embrace the Cross by following in Christ’s footsteps and imitating him in all things, above all in his patient endurance of suffering, is the key element in the appeal of the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross. It advises in visual terms the acceptance of suffering and the denial of self as a secure means in which to follow Christ. In the specific moment of the Carrying of the Cross, Christ is preparing himself for what he knows is to come when he acquiesced to the will of the Father. His gaze suggests the awareness of his spirit: ‘Not my will, but thine,’ as he had said in the garden of Gethsemane. The submission to the divine plan, after which the whole imitation of Christ is patterned, occupies a central position in the expression of Christ from the Northern engraving of *Christ Carrying the Cross*. Federico Zuccari, in adapting to his initial dramatic conception the figure of the beautiful Christ from the Northern engraving, set his altarpiece in the stream of Christian devotional images in the Passion narrative.

The self-fashioning after Christ as the central claim of the Imitation of Christ ceased to maintain its prominent position after Trent. After Girolamo Seripando, an Augustinian humanist and one of the pillars of the Council of Trent, did not find acceptance for his Augustinian decree on original sin at the 1545 session, a subsequent waning of Augustine doctrine became irreversible.\(^6\) The doctrine of *duplex iustitia* was passed under conciliar dictates that suppressed an Augustinian model centered on the righteousness of Christ as the grace that makes one capable of free and spontaneous action.\(^7\) Seripando became the advocate of the doctrine of twofold justification, after he had been an adherent to *sola fides* like other delegates of Augustinian thinking such as Archbishop Carranza of Toledo, Cardinal Reginald Pole and Giovanni Morone.\(^8\) The dramatic refocusing of interest in the literal sense of the Gospel was recognized by Hubert Jedin in his *A History*
of the Council of Trent as a necessity to defend the institution of the Catholic Church against the Lutheran attack. A subsequent absorption of Augustine’s ideas took place in the civil realm, where outside of an institutional control Augustinian thinking inscribed a new phase of its modern legacy. A most influential voice in this line of argument, William J. Bouwsma is still unsurpassed for stressing the impact of Augustine on the secularizing direction of modern Western society. While Bouwsma asserts that the general impulse of the Catholic Reformation is to discipline every dimension of life, Dermot Fenlon underscores the dissemination of spirituality and religious sensibility associated with sola fides. Yet sola fides was of remarkable endurance among an echelon of Italian Church representatives. Tomasso Sanfelice, the Bishop of Cava, and Galeazzo Florimonte, the Bishop of Aquino and member of the Italian spirituali, took significant pains to ensure a continuous stream of development for the Imitation of Christ. Florimonte, who belonged to the generation of Gasparo Contarini and Gian Matteo Giberti, was familiar with Erasmus’ legacy in Lefèvre d’Etaples and had moved among the circles of the Italian Catholic Reform.

4.1.5 Federico Zuccari’s prints, correctors to a restaging of classical antiquity

Federico Zuccari’s move towards prints provided compelling answers and correctives to the normative readings of classical antiquity since early sixteenth century. The antithetical claims of his prints to the conventional frameworks in the interpretation of classical antiquity were consistent with Federico Zuccari’s self-confidence to create his own compositions expressing complex ethical problems. Besides being theoretical statements about the art of painting, they were specifically a personal defense in response
to attacks on a few of his paintings. His inner conviction that painting fell prey to rhetorical conventions emerging from the Renaissance literary tendency to rhetoricize the art of painting prompted Federico Zuccari to produce his rare print of the Lament of Painting. Cornelis Cort’s engraving from 1579 after Federico Zuccari’s Lament of Painting (Figure 101) documents the painter’s narrative intention while highlighting details of dramatic interpretation through the Northern engraving technique perfected by Hendrik Goltzius and Cornelis Cort. This technique, which played a seminal role in the development of expressive prints in the Carracci Academy, enabled the engraver to act as the interpreter and problem solver who made explicit, creative choices when interpreting Renaissance designs.\textsuperscript{92}

In the Lament of Painting, Cornelis Cort’s subtle formal transitions from dark to light tones invest with a heightened narrative meaning the anti-rhetorical position asserted by Federico Zuccari’s drawing. The print underlines that Jupiter not only loves Painting best of all the arts, but also enlists her aid in his task of supreme judge in which Faith is his most important assistant. This meaning is conveyed through the smaller painting within the Lament of Painting and which is displayed before Jupiter, alias Federico Zuccari, given that comparison with his portraits shows that he is the artist depicted in the print.\textsuperscript{93} The painter looks at the nude apparition standing on a cloud, a woman symbolizing Painting, who appears to a learned artist to complain about the state of painting. The imagery of the Lament of Painting draws upon an allegorical imagery of painting and virtue which, dispirited by their treatment, speak of their fate to Jupiter himself.\textsuperscript{94}

Federico Zuccari appealed to the arsenal of allegories the artist might need to draw upon in the representation of the Lament of Painting, yet his intention outstrips the
renderings of the subject in the theoretical treatises of the first half of the sixteenth century. Francesco Lancilotti’s *Treatise on Painting* (Rome, 1509) and the twin work of Michelangelo Biondo’s *On the Nobility of Painting* (Venice, 1549) assert that Jupiter prefers Painting over all the arts and finds delight in her more than in any other of the muses. Yet further steps were hinted at when Federico Zuccari transferred his predecessors’ concerns into visual representation. The smaller painting in the upper zone is flanked by the figures of Minerva and a man holding the artist’s implements which portray theory and practice, the entwined strains of the Renaissance artist. Federico Zuccari places his *Lament of Painting* within the Renaissance pursuit of the intellectual life of painting and thus acts as an incentive to the seventeenth-century engravings of Pietro Testa and Salvator Rosa advocating the theoretical, cognitive side of painting being kept in balance by skillfulness. Beyond the intellectual claim which was instrumental indeed in Federico Zuccari’s work, the *Lament of Painting* marks a watershed in Renaissance engraving through the painting personification as Virtue and, in this quality, protector of her art. This message is transferred through the smaller painting which shows Fortune rushing along at the head of monsters accompanying her being halted by Faith, who braces herself on the cornerstone and holds up the Cross. The *Lament of Painting* shows, in its concluding statement, Painting pointing upwards with her right arm to faith and Jupiter enlisting her moral virtue as his most important assistant. Through his printing exhortations assisted by Cornelis Cort, Federico Zuccari underscores an Augustinian interpretation of history in which faith is closely associated with justice. In adhering to Augustine’s sense of history bound up with Christian belief, Federico Zuccari testifies to a turning point in the engraving of the *Lament of Painting*
for which the most important task for painting is to serve faith, not convention, and to
combat the vices illustrated on the frame of the small painting.

In view of Federico Zuccari’s theoretical expression, the nude figure seen from the
back identifies with *vera intelligenza* as a precondition for a good *disegno* and a non-
sensory visual judgment Zuccari advocates in his *Idea of Painters, Sculptors and
Architects* (1607). Concordant with Federico Zuccari’s double tenure of painter and
theoretician, painting as the personification of *vera intelligenza* departs from the
rhetorical interpretation of painting as inspiration, *ingenium* or the idea grounded in the
imitation of art and nature.98 Federico Zuccari’s *Lament of Painting* halts these stylish
interpretative frameworks transferred to painting from the literary genre, instead making
an active claim for the literal sense of the figure. The *sensus littoralis* of a figurative
representation, as distinct from the figure of speech or the poetic image that the words
signified, harks back to Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, which defends the literal
sense as a representation of meaning and as the most accurate carrier of the multiplicity
of senses in the Gospel.99 Federico Zuccari consciously adapts in his *Lament of Painting*
the medieval interpretative tradition of sacred texts and thus chooses virtue and faith over
poetical mode.

The *Lament of Painting* was far from being the singular print in which Federico
Zuccari takes a fairly moralistic view. The drawings on the life of his brother Taddeo, the
*Porta Virtutis* from 1581 and the *Allegory of the Liberal Arts* all establish an unequivocal
connection between art and the virtues.100 As a common denominator, this series of
drawings does not regard painting and *disegno* as apparitions or inspirational entities, but
as true personifications of virtue, intelligence and study. The highest evocative
connection Federico Zuccari established between his plea for painting guided by faith and his no less prominent belief in triumphant virtue lies in his *Calumny of Apelles* from 1572 (Figure 102).\textsuperscript{101} Whereas the *Lament of Painting* gave him the opportunity to launch an energetic critique of pictorial conventions, the *Calumny of Apelles* entwines this concern with Zuccari’s challenge of normative frameworks in the interpretation of classical antiquity.\textsuperscript{102}

An overturning of *ekphrasis* thereby assures the innovative character of Federico Zuccari’s preparatory drawing for the Hampton Court painting of the *Calumny of Apelles* (Figure 103) as the evident triumph of truth over her foul persecutors. In the famous pictorial *ekphrasis* of Botticelli’s *Calumny of Apelles* (Figure 104) a formal bridge exists between the figure of truth and her persecutors which is now utterly dissolved in Federico Zuccari’s drawing. For Zuccari the confrontation between evil and goodness leaves no doubt that truth is evidently triumphant. Federico Zuccari shows how Minerva restrains the unwitting king, surrounded by foul monsters, from unleashing violence, while Mercury ushers the artist and the personification of truth to safer realms. Federico Zuccari’s *Calumny of Apelles* represents indeed a watershed in the history of this tradition: It was Zuccari who challenged the universality of the Calumny of Apelles as a theme which artists could use to defend their honour by asserting the power of triumphant truth capable of silencing not only the ignorant and the envious, but also the vilifying critic of his time. In this latter task Minerva, Mercury and Truth were to become the protectors of the artist. The concluding statement of Zuccari’s *Calumny* confirms that the innocent man is never abandoned by God. To adduce more credibility to this final meaning and to substantiate once more the departure from the *ekphrastic* account,
inscriptions by Federico’s son, Ottaviano Zuccari, are placed within the area of these designs: “they will strike him but he will be unafraid” and “the fruits of the just man are not destroyed.”

Federico Zuccari was not the artist to execute a literal depiction of a subject invented by a predecessor; he himself was a reputable visual narrator of the Calumny of Apelles, just as Andrea Mantegna had been when no ekphrasis made sufficient sense for his invention of the calumny (Figure 105). Andrea Mantegna redressed the harmful attack of calumny in the triumphant power of virtue that transforms the victim of injustice into a personification of innocence. It took Mantegna and his expert interpretation of historia to release the Calumny of Apelles from a mere representation of the ill-effects of calumny, envy and ignorance into a lesson on how virtue triumphs over vice. Mantegna’s subject was not a response to a classical ekphrasis of Lucian’s text to which Botticelli adhered in his Calumny of Apelles; rather, in his slightly later drawing, Mantegna invented his own visual narrative after his revision of Alberti’s paraphrase in On Painting of Lucian’s description of Apelles’ calumny. A usual reaction to his pictorial inventions, Mantegna was cited by antiquarians as an expert of the classical antiquity and greeted with distinctions usually reserved for men of letters.

Federico Zuccari earned a no less prestigious renown and was treated more nobly than most of his contemporaries, even though his life was full of persecution and criticism. His exemplary attitude when confronting the wave of vicissitudes was the moral resistance with which he always defended his case. Federico Zuccari succeeded in reaching the pinnacle of moral and artistic perfection in exchange for his growing reliance on the
artist’s intellect bound up with God’s reasoning power. His willingness to ascertain a divine origin to the idea of the painter inscribes his efforts in Augustinian spirituality.

The Augustinian bias carried within its tenets a reaction against scholastic rationalism, which was visible in the positivistic forms and external commitments of the Counter-Reformation. There was no shortage of artists and thinkers to comply with the counter-reformatory rules. Gian Paolo Lomazzo’s Idea del tempio della pittura (Milan, 1590) denies the painter’s capability of shaping in his mind an idea of his representation, instead offering an arsenal of imitation patterned after the cosmic arrangement of the universe.107 Determined by his leanings towards Armenini’s De’Veri precetti della pittura (Ravenna, 1586), Lomazzo disallows belief in the Augustinian faith in the divine origin of the artistic intellect. His counter-reformatory writing deracinarites the metaphysical dimension of Giulio Camillo’s L’Idea del Theatro from 1530, the original outset for the idea of the ancient Roman theatre as a source for style and artistic excellence. Camillo’s treatise was predicated upon a secure claim for the artist’s idea in its most perfect state in the spirit of God, yet this concept disappeared in its counter-reformatory adaptation by Lomazzo. In times when modern neo-Platonists such as Lomazzo were prepared to invest classical thinking with counter-reformatory ideology, Federico Zuccari’s Augustinian profile remained singular indeed on the agitated scene of the late sixteenth century.

4.2 The Byzantine Icon as a Blueprint in Western Representations: Koimesis and Altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

A striking identification with Christ’s suffering as the source of parallels between Renaissance engraving and scenes typical of late medieval devotion amounts to a
primacy placed on the Imitation of Christ in a reform-oriented culture. The direction of reform, which was consolidated within the first half of the sixteenth century, had concerned artists with representations of a heightened devotion and a return to a purer form of Christian art. Within this strand, aspects of the violent, awestruck effects of the medieval Passion narrative were tamed in the wake of inward forms of living and representing the Christian faith. The shift from external forms of commitment to an inwardness of belief and its ramifications in a culture of reform brought about an unprecedented popularity of the late medieval literature, of which Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* held the record on both sides of the confessional divide. The Renaissance engraving responded through an activity meant to substantiate the claim for the Imitation of Christ as one of its central representational subjects. The Milanese and Lombard engravers of the early sixteenth century fleshed out images of Christ Carrying the Cross centered now on his inner profile and his resilient nature in committing himself to the divinely ordained plan. Years after Trent, the persistence of this new Christ, beautiful and woundless, asserted reform leanings in a time of post-confessional entrenchment and historical aims dashing with energetic ideological contours the delicate remnants of a culture of reform. The survival of a formerly reform-oriented culture remained the preserve of a few early modern masters reared in its spirit and prepared to develop its tenets while resisting ideological subordination. The Zuccari brothers, Taddeo and Federico, were equipped to foster reform ideals into the early modern age and at the same time to withstand official rhetoric. Federico Zuccari’s *Christ Comforted by Veronica*, an altarpiece in the Roman basilica of Santa Prassede, betrays a concern to
incorporate aspects of archaic Christian belief by adapting to an altarpiece format the narrative meaning of the North Italian engraving tradition of Christ Carrying the Cross.

As part of the Christocentric direction that permeated the post-Tridentine age, a subject that drew renewed attention was the Virgin Mary and her vast representational iconography. An embattled Roman Catholic church commissioned iconographies laden with rhetorical content in order to assert the magnanimity of the ecclesiastical institution and the universal authority of the pope. Within this top-down direction of post-Tridentine ideological engagement, representations of the Virgin Mary implicitly resorted to iconographic formulas that centuries ago had served concordant ecclesiastical goals. It cannot be coincidental that the Tridentine church preferred an iconographic direction of the Virgin Mary symbolizing power, rather than her implications inherent in the Incarnation and Motherhood of Christ.109

In the church of Sant’ Ignazio in Rome, the iconography selected by Andrea Pozzo for the Assumption located in the ceiling of the left transept is the allegorical figure of the triumphant church carried heavenward by a large retinue of angels (Figure 106). It sums up the iconographic meaning of the complex ceiling decoration of the main nave within which the Assumption appears as the concluding statement regarding the four allegorical figures of America, Asia, Europe and Africa, personifications of St. Ignatius’ mission to disseminate the Catholic faith worldwide. Yet Padre Pozzo, in mounting his Jesuit decoration program densely laden with official rhetoric of the day, offers compelling evidence of his understanding and adaptation to Counter-Reformation ends of the Byzantine dome tradition.110 The synthesis upon which his work as part of all significant dome decoration subsequently depends also betrays in Pozzo a well-rounded
iconographer, one steeped in the very core of the Roman church’s official cult practice. The Roman church had turned, since the fifth century, a solitary representation of the Virgin Mary as *Maria Regina* or *Mary Queen of Heaven* into a type particularly of its own and a political statement of the papal court and its campaign.\textsuperscript{111} This regularization of Marian devotion, which was placed at the very centre of the Roman church’s official practice since early Christian times, resurfaced with an up-to-date ideological identity in the Counter-Reformation. In accordance with the official cult practice of the early Roman church, the Counter-Reformation iconography of the Virgin Mary conscripts her glorious ascent into a personification of the post-Tridentine church and its rhetorical direction.

Whereas an iconography of the Virgin Mary consistent with Counter-Reformation ideals registered an increased popularity in the ecclesiastical commissioning process, a direction that safeguarded the mystery of Incarnation and Motherhood developed in parallel as the exclusive contribution of reform-minded artists. It was this stream of a late reform culture making inroads into counter-reformatory grounds that resisted assimilation into official rhetoric and at the same time preserved the narrative significance of the Virgin Mary in visual representations. The imagery of the Virgin Mary adherent to reform ideals, and yet evolving in parallel to counter-reformatory ideology, stakes a secure claim for the parting of religious art after Trent when the reform of sacred images clashed indefinitely with the ecclesiastical program of reform. The rhetorical content of art necessitated by the Counter-Reformation historical thesis of institutional and universal authority of the Pope broke the unity of the reform, which in its onset proposed the reformation of art entwined with the renewal of the Catholic church.\textsuperscript{112} Within the divided religious horizon of the early modern age, Marian images circumvented
ecclesiastical order and remained, through the icons reinvented by painters, central to the further dissemination of the visual narratives of Christianity. It was this direction grounded in Mary’s maternal love and purity that safeguarded the mystery of representation in Christian art.

The *Koimesis* or the Dormition of the Virgin Mary stands for an outstanding exemplar of Byzantine icons inspired by sacred narratives. The very belonging of *Koimesis* to narratives outside the Gospel did not prevent its incorporation into the Byzantine official imperial cult that was the norm beginning from the fifth century. Yet beyond the inescapable intermeshing in official rituals, the *Koimesis* icon was less prone to turn into a political and imperial statement than any other icons of the Virgin Mary. The seed of popular and genuine Christian belief on which the narrative of *Koimesis* rests must have acted as a protective shield against the rhetoricization of its content. Moreover, the narrative intricacies of the *Koimesis* visual narrative, such as the obvious allusion to the Resurrection of Christ now re-enacted by the Virgin Mary, the motif of *Analepsis* represented by the figure of Christ who holds his mother’s soul in the form of a swaddled child before transmitting it to the angels above, and the apostolic procession to the Virgin Mary’s deathbed, all account for characteristic aspects of the Eastern faith.

With the progress of the Western cult of Mary as *Queen of Heaven* which did not engage *Koimesis*, the early Eastern popularity of the *Koimesis* icon transferred into cogent argument in homiletic writing. Whereas the West remodelled icons of the Virgin Mary to forge an official papal cult, the East side of the Byzantine empire insisted upon the visual transfer of Mariology into a written source as part of an effort to sustain the official Christian culture wrought by former classical rhetoricians employed as
ecclesiastical writers.116 The historical developments that fostered Koimesis to become known in tenth-century Western Christendom through book illumination should not surprise, therefore, anyone willing to acknowledge that the Western emulation of Eastern patristic may have begun way before the rhetorical phase of fifteenth-century Renaissance culture in Florence.117 As the spectacular book cover of the Munich Gospel of Otto III, the Koimesis icon entered the stream of Western medieval thought as a visual source complementing the written account of the Gospel.118

The Koimesis icon did not win popularity in Western art except within the art of monastic orders who were more inclined to commission the funerals of the Virgin Mary than any lay patrons or congregations.119 Nonetheless, the encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary from the Koimesis visual narrative worked as an incentive for the mystical journey of the human soul after death in medieval thought. A transfer of meaning between the Eastern reception of the Virgin Mary’s soul by Christ and the Western mystical journey of the human soul to God appealed to medieval thinkers as part of their agenda to develop a Christian dogma free of scholastic rationalism. The meditative ascent that enacts an interior journey, the return of the soul in this life to God was taken up in Augustine’s Confessions, Anselm’s Prosologion, Boethius’ The Consolation of Philosophy, and primarily in Dante’s Commedia, all autobiographical works of the Christian ascent of the soul.120 The dramatic structure of the ascent lends the same narrative form to these works, the experience of the pilgrim who, after receiving the divine vision at the climax of his journey, returns to earth to write the poem in the double bind of narrator, or pilgrim, and author who knows the end. There is no final position or word in the meditative ascent, except God. The meditative ascent is, hence, a work of
transformation designed to work a transformation in the meditative Christian believer. The medieval pattern embodied in the movement from things outside oneself to things inside and above implied an understanding of the sacred narrative as a coherent whole. Accordingly, the figura does not distinguish between author and narrator and identifies with the literal sense of the narrative. Within this view of historia as a form of representation rather than the correspondence between written history and actual past, the Koimesis icon predicated upon the ascent of the Virgin Mary’s soul to God transfers into an energetic rise to God in body and mind in the Western Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

At the Ovetari chapel in the Augustinian church of the Eremitani in Padua, Andrea Mantegna’s concept of the Assumption in the main altarpiece has remained a reference source for any representation of the subject (Figure 28). Mantegna’s infringement of the static, diagrammatic symmetry of any Assumption iconography is a mere point of departure for an examination of his seminal contribution. His Assunta enacts the return of the Virgin Mary’s soul to God, the origin and end of all things which Mantegna locates in the figure of God the Father in the altarpiece apex. Before reaching God the Father, the Virgin Mary’s ascent invites contemplation from a viewpoint of great considerations, set higher than the common viewing point of altarpieces in liturgical setting. In working up this premeditated departure from the low viewpoint of altarpieces as indicative of their active participation in the liturgy performed in front of them, Andrea Mantegna draws on a moving viewpoint that follows the logic of the Virgin Mary’s ascent. In this way, the altarpiece lends itself to the dramatic structure of the ascent as the return of the soul to God.
The pattern of Mantegna’s ascent of the Virgin Mary embodies the movement from things outside oneself to things inside and above, hence imitating a chiasm, a ring structure and a cross. The circle and the cross structure that Mantegna gives to his decoration at the Ovetari chapel evokes fundamental beliefs in Christianity: creation and salvation, procession and return, all summarized by Christ’s Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. Thus, the double dedication of the chapel is not to the Virgin Mary, but to Saint James the Greater, whose life appears on the left wall, and to Saint Christopher, whose story is on the right (in the original setting predating the destruction during Second World War). The disposition of the narratives of Saint James and Saint Christopher is in six monoscenic episodes on three tiers moving from top to bottom. The connecting point of their lives is the martyrdom for Christ, to which Andrea Mantegna lends visual expression in a progress of the saints towards God. To this end Mantegna employs a subtle inversion of narrative progression: James the Great, the first apostle to be sacrificed, grows progressively meek as his narrative unfolds to emphasize his absorption, by feeling and thought, within Christ; in turn, Saint Christopher grows progressively heroic and higher-sized as he advances in his Christian enlightenment, which led him to death as a miracle-working giant for Christ. Mantegna portrays the journey to Christ of the two martyr saints as an ascent performed by each in his individualized way: Saint James shrinks in his quest for Christ, whereas Saint Christopher expands in his struggle to meet Christ.

Andrea Mantegna moves his narratives from top to bottom on both sides, and this impression of a descending line finds counterbalance in the ascending, vertical axis of the Assumption in the main altarpiece. The Assumption synthesizes in the Ovetari setting an
interior journey, the return of the Virgin Mary’s soul to God that carries within the ascent of Saints James and Christopher. The upwards movement of the Assumption as a journey to God bestows narrative significance upon the complex decoration of the Ovetari; accordingly, it leaves the task of discovery to the painter’s concept advancing from a moving viewpoint to more comprehensible and more fundamental considerations. Andrea Mantegna brought to bear on Alberti’s concept of *historia* as pictorial narrative a keen sense of history as representation of the past by making visual sense of higher things.\textsuperscript{124} It is argued here that Mantegna brought an archaic sense of the past to his understanding of painting as *historia*, used as a narrative mode by Alberti. For Mantegna, the representational thrust of *historia* hinges on investing the pictorial work with the same narrative significance that made the sacred narrative a true literary source of representation.

The Augustinian ferment of Renaissance culture that enabled Andrea Mantegna’s seminal work at the Ovetari chapel was closely entwined with the stimulating presence of Donatello in Padua. At the time when Mantegna set up work at the Eremitani basilica, Donatello had sojourned in Padua for a brief period during the 1440 and 1450s which had a crucial impact for the diffusion of Renaissance ideas in North-Eastern Italy.\textsuperscript{125} Donatello’s high altar of the Santo in the Sant’ Antonio basilica in Padua and the individualized character of his sculptural and relief forms were assimilated within Andrea Mantegna’s efforts to bring to perfection the experience of his predecessor. At the Eremitani, Mantegna created a unified narrative context of higher considerations by creatively adapting to his Assumption Donatello’s sculptural forms. Andrea Mantegna thus creates the illusion that the Virgin is ascending on her own, yet this is the result of
rather restrained animations in bodily movement. In settling for restraint in the representation of movement in an altarpiece context in accordance with the Renaissance altarpiece norm, Andrea Mantegna betrays himself as very cautious in expanding his pictorial narrative. This is evidenced by the ambivalent stance of the Virgin Mary’s ascending body, which indicates a contrapposto stance of antique mode that Mantegna is willing to animate only slightly through an upward glance and raised arms in order to create the impression of heavenward movement, as shown in his Ovetari Assumption.

But neither the Ovetari nor the later Frari Maria Assunta by Titian moves with the dramatic rush of Correggio’s Virgin Mary in the Parma Cathedral (Figure 107). Correggio’s exaggeration of movement for dramatic purposes nears the ideals of a culture of reform for which the assimilation to Christian ends of the animations of classical antique sculpture was a foremost concern. The Virgin Mary’s extremely active pose in the cupola of the Parma Cathedral is underscored by the flying drapery and her being swept into an animated heavenly throng. Correggio imagined a celestial vortex of concentric rings of clouds among which soaring figures, from the Old and the New Testament, perform a triumphant ritual in celebration of the encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Christ descends to welcome his Mother and she ascends to heaven and towards him, in the vast space of the cupola in Parma.

Andrea Mantegna’s Assumption from the Ovetari chapel certainly exerted a powerful influence on Correggio, visible among others in the interplay of ascending and descending narrative axes in Parma. Correggio culled further from Mantegna in his arrangement of the apostles and the angels on the edge of the tambour, which betrays an intended affinity with Mantegna’s apostles forming a lower altarpiece edge (Figure
In Parma, the Virgin Mary emerges straight from the register of the tambour conceived by Correggio as a processional space and designed to hail the spectacular encounter performed in the cupola directly above.

It was noted that, at Parma, Correggio wrought the most expressive illustration of the Assumption narrative as it was transmitted through Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*. Correggio’s concern with giving visual narrative life to archaic narratives was in alignment with his overriding aim to interlock pagan and Christian customs. These are in Parma the rituals of victory and mourning evoking the encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary in the dome and, simultaneously, one of the earliest-known Christian funerals, the obsequies of the Virgin Mary performed in the register of the tambour. The apostles and angels holding triumphant candelabra appear not as simple historical reconstructions, but as active participants in the ritual of the Assumption, clearly imagined by Correggio as existing in a time in which pagan and Christian culture intersected. The figures of apostles and angels concerned with the lampstands clarify the Christian-and-pagan reference, showing by their activities a twofold use of the lampstands as triumphant candelabra in funerary rituals.

Correggio references Mantegna who, in his *Triumphs of Caesar* (Figure 109), restaged a classical triumph in order to signify the annihilating progress of Roman imperialism. In presenting the contrast between the glory of the conquerors and the pity of the enslaved, Mantegna departed from the verbal account available in literary and historical material from conveniently available sources. Mantegna resisted in the same vein the surviving examples of triumphant art in the city of Rome itself, instead drawing on Greek texts and favouring accounts of early triumphs from the Roman Republic. This best defines
Mantegna’s antiquity as an independent approach to textual and visual sources which break decisively with the Renaissance model which accepted the temporal, the contingent and the specific as given.

Correggio created a powerful style founded on Mantegna among others, yet the ferment of a reform culture and its powerful ramifications in Parma stimulated Correggio to introduce pagan tradition into a Christian context. This becomes apparent in Correggio’s use of Roman oil-lamp stands from Mantegna’s Triumphs with Elephants into the ritual performed by apostles and angels to celebrate the triumphal entrance of the Virgin into heaven. The mourning connotations involved in Mantegna’s Death of the Virgin in the Prado (Figure 110), where one sees candlesticks next to the Virgin Mary’s deathbed, did not preoccupy Correggio. He replaces the candlesticks as funeral convention with triumphal candelabra in order to foster an impression of victory over death. Just as Mantegna derived material from early triumphs from the period of the Roman Republic, so too Correggio celebrated the triumphal entrance of the Virgin Mary into heaven by resisting funeral conventions. Correggio’s triumphal candelabra after Mantegna’s Roman oil-lamp stands are an appropriate accompaniment to the Christian apotheosis of Mary. In translating paganism into Christian ritual, Correggio established a secure claim for the absorption of classical antiquity within Christian culture. His efforts to derive visual material from classical sources and to restage it into a Christian context played a pivotal role in a culture of reform. It fostered the development of reform ideals and their concerted effort to reinterpret within Christian humanism the classical antiquity void of its pagan connotations.
The special receptivity to ancient art in a culture of reform was intent on recuperating the spiritual significance of Christian narratives. The reform-minded thinkers and primarily Michelangelo were resolute in taking exception to the former preoccupation with the literal representation of the Passion, which diminished the spiritual substance of Christian art. Within their efforts to wrest Christian narratives from pathetic formalism and excessive representational details, the return to the archaic forms of old cult images heralded the beginning of a powerful cultural trend. Michelangelo evinces his concern to reinvest the narrative expressiveness of contemporary Christian art by drawing on the ecstatic animations of antique sculpture. The ecstatic participations of bacchic enthusiasm that Michelangelo introduced in his early *Entombment* and which persisted all the way through the late *Pietà* amount to a means of reinvesting and reinterpreting the Passion of Christ within a culture of Augustinian underpinnings. This involved a highly motivated adaptation of what Aby Warburg called antique “pathos formulas.” Whereas several other antique-inspired Renaissance artists found in classical antique models incentives for narrative action, Michelangelo found powers to reanimate Christian art through a process of harnessing and at once neutralizing the demonic forces of pagan art.132

The construction of an artistic and cultural milieu within which the work of art takes its place and gains meaning was never a historical reconstruction, not in the least in a culture of reform concerned with the recuperation of Christian narratives. In like fashion the *Nachleben der Antike* did not amount to the aestheticization of antique imagery for the intellectual needs of the Renaissance culture.133 Rather, the after-life of classical antiquity was its rebirth within Augustinian humanism and its taking into account of the demonic and cosmic side of antiquity. Of particular importance in this context was the
role of what Aby Warburg termed, in retrospect, the *bewegtes Beiwerk* or the animated incidental detail in the Florentine restaging of antiquity.\textsuperscript{134} This notion refers to the emphasis in Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* on Venus’ flowing windswept locks and the representation of the mantle held out to her as fluttering in the wind, a sense of animation repeated in *Primavera* in the dress of the nymph Flora. The animation involved for Botticelli a profound understanding of antiquity, one that finds parallels in Alberti’s importance of movement in *De Pittura* but otherwise is beyond a simple historical interpretation. The highly motivated purpose of Botticelli’s windswept figures is the ecstatic animation inspired by the bacchic enthusiasm of Dionysius’ maenads. The necessity of a bacchic excess was fostered by the traditional wisdom of ancient Greek culture which regarded it as an ecstatic and revelatory experience.\textsuperscript{135}

The extremely elevated body of the Virgin Mary progressing heavenward in her Assumption references the ecstatic animations of classical antiquity figures. Nonetheless, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary no longer stages a performance of *fiorentinità* through her engagement with the Florentine all’antica figure that Warburg called the Nympha. Rather, the mixed model Christian-and-pagan that certainly lies at the origin of the dynamic ascent of the Mother of God lit the fuse in Christian imagery. A culture of reform and its vindication of pagan cult images in a Christian context fostered a departure from ritual and historical functions. The ecstatic animations of the bacchic maenads appear as logical statements of the classical antiquity models now invested with a Christian identity. These models, together with the entire corpus of classical antiquity, became assimilated into Christian humanism, an act of messianic fulfillment predicated upon prophetic visions predating the birth of Christ. Yet the vindication of the ecstatic
animations of the Nympha in the windswept drapery folds of the ascending Virgin Mary brings testimony to only a certain type of classical antiquity being restaged in Christian humanism. This was the dramatic and expressive model of classical antiquity. The taste for animated in lieu of tranquil forms such as the Apollo Belvedere points out the exact model that was considered resourceful for a pagan transfer into Christian images.

The preference for dynamic representational subjects over motionless expressions of classical beauty reveals shifting ideals and changing perceptions of antiquity between the death of Michelangelo and the rise of Bernini. Within a culture of renewed expressive direction, altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on the rise in post-Tridentine art betray the demise of classical antiquity grandeur, nobility, majesty and leggiadria as exclusively dependent upon proportion and contour. The early modern perception that sentient qualities were not inherent in tranquility, but rather in dramatic animations, opened up a new avenue of inquiry into classical antiquity. This direction was counter argued by the ecclesiastical program of reform and its predilection for the static type of classical beauty in Christian images. It explains among others the Counter-Reformation taste for Giuseppe Valeriano and Scipione Pulzone, whose popularity struck a blow against the non-rhetorical followers of Michelangelo and Raphael. Within the Counter-Reformation taste patterned after the ideal imitation of classical antiquity, the critique of the Carracci paintings as statuino that emerged in subsequent decades was nothing but the reaction to their calculated departure from standard misconceptions.

The fashioning of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary after the dramatic models of classical antiquity was not coincidental in a culture of reform dedicated to reinvigorate Christian narratives. The expressive model meant to recuperate the archaic underpinnings
of Christian narratives was, in the reformers’ view, the animated classical figure of a resourcefulness that outshone the tranquil model of classical antiquity. Yet the antique expressive adaptations to Christian narratives proposed by Michelangelo and carried further by Sebastiano del Piombo and Pontormo formed a highly divisive matter. It produced a swift hostile reaction of the ecclesiastical program of reform, for which the tranquil classical beauty was a better suited means for putting across rhetorical content and historical information. Despite the disagreement resulting from clashing attitudes and shifting perceptions of classical antiquity, the widespread popularity of the dynamic rise of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary testifies to a clear victory of the animated model. Accordingly, it lends substance to the belief that artists shaped their views in agreement with their own reform-minded convictions and occasionally in disregard of official Counter-Reformation leadership. The most telling example of an autonomous use of classical antiquity is Dürer. E. H. Gombrich has emphasized Dürer as an interpreter of the ambivalent character of classical pathos in his fundamental study on Aby Warburg, himself a free-minded interpreter of classical antiquity. Gombrich particularly commends Dürer’s free act of choice when he notes that Dürer did not yield to the emerging tendencies of Italianate Baroque by “surrendering his personality.”

Dürer consciously chose for his research into the canon of proportion not the model in fashion, the Laocoön whose discovery in 1506 awakened enthusiasm for the pathos of classical genre, but the serene beauty of the Apollo Belvedere.

An outstanding exemplar of El Greco’s, Annibale Carracci’s and Rubens’s disengagement from counter-reformatory directions is formed by their understanding of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Their altarpieces of the subject garner strands of
reform-minded adaptations to Christian narratives of the classical expressive model. In so doing, they invest the pictorial subject with a heightened religious significance inherent in the encounter of Christ and the Mother of God, the original mark of their interpretation.

The Western identity of the dramatic rise of the Mother of God was prepared in Padua, where Andrea Mantegna wrought in the church of the Augustinian Eremitani an Assumption that adapts to Christian ends the classical model. Mantegna’s effort of adaptation is entwined with an illustration of the medieval ascent. The reform culture of Padua fostered the development of medieval ideas of the ascent as a mystical journey of the human soul to God, as described in Saint Augustine’s Confessions. The University of Padua and its receptivity to influences from beyond the Alps was a Reformation stronghold where illustrious figures of the reform movement such as Cardinal Reginald Pole received academic training. The Paduan climate of reform-thought also gave the Latin poet Marcantonio Flaminio, co-author of the Beneficio di Christo and its synthesis of Northern religious thinking intended as an active mechanism of religious renewal.¹⁴²

It cannot be coincidental that, years before the coming to print of the Beneficio, the Paduan ferment of reform-thought inspired Andrea Mantegna to break free from rhetoric and the normative model of classical antiquity. The Augustinian bedrock of Padua amounts to the highly renewed concept of Mantegna’s Ovetari Assunta. It betrays the figure of Saint Augustine informing a Renaissance master through his synthesis of classical learning and Christian rhetoric. Andrea Mantegna’s well-appraised findings in the adaptation to Renaissance painting of pagan and Christian sources mirror Saint Augustine’s synthesis of classical learning and Christian rhetoric brought to new lengths.
Saint Augustine’s progress from pagan and Christian sources to an understanding of the Gospel narrative made it possible for Christian thinkers and artists to appreciate Christianity without associating it with paganism. Indeed, Augustine took a seminal step in Christian literature and criticism as an independent field of interpretation. It was in alignment with his self-asserted interpretation of Christianity that Augustine made deep inroads into Renaissance art. The melding of various discourses that once stimulated Augustine to anachronistically invent his own creative mosaic of ideas restaged its cumulative efforts in Renaissance art, one outstanding exemplar being Andrea Mantegna’s narrative altarpiece painting.

Saint Augustine’s legacy took a renewed expression within a culture of reform and its primacy on the Imitation of Christ. The early modern Christian emphasis on revelation and the following of Christ mirrored in fresh contours Saint Augustine and his acquiring of the Christian faith as the process of his inner dialogue with the truths of Christianity. His insights stimulated the discovery of narrative meanings and figurative senses that had hitherto rested dormant. This direction of inquiry became highly influential when Augustinianism intersected the reform of art.

In the cupola of Parma Cathedral, Correggio takes to new lengths Andrea Mantegna’s concept of dramatic ascent, entwined with an adaptation to altarpiece use of the classical model. Correggio creates his own invented narrative of the encounter of Christ and the Virgin Mary that expands the obsequies of the Mother of God, as recorded by Jacobus de Voragine’s The Golden Legend. Whereas the late medieval writer provided a historical account of the funerals, Correggio stages the event in heaven as the eternal union between Christ and the Virgin Mary. Correggio’s pictorial invention is not a literary
metaphor inherent in medieval texts, but a concerted visual narrative effort to explore the deepest resourcefulness of Christian narratives. The eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary is the equivalent of Correggio’s foray into the figurative meaning of the Assumption narrative.

The visual narrative wrought by Correggio outshines history and thus releases the Assumption from the narrow frame of factual information. In surpassing a boundary of cogent and written argument, Correggio inscribes his efforts within early Christian art and its narratives. The Renaissance painter parallels the icon maker who, in working up his visual narrative account of Koimesis, released the obsequies from factual information in order to point out the narrative significance of the encounter between Christ and his Mother’s soul. Correggio took up the intention of the icon maker and restaged it within a triumphant scene of heavenly joy. In so doing, Correggio effected a substitution of funeral ceremony with celestial triumph and of Byzantine Analepsis with Western medieval ascent.

It is necessary to stress at this point that the Koimesis icon had been an integral part of the Sienese altarpiece since the fourteenth century. Siena was the earliest medieval center to represent and explore in earnest the image of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.145 It was also the place of seminal developments and changing perceptions of the Assumption narrative that proved highly influential in the early modern identity of the subject. One of the most impressive examples is the Dormition/Assumption altarpiece from 1360 by Niccolo di Ser Sozzo, Luca di Tomme and a Florentine painter in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Figure 111). The Koimesis icon appears in the lower altarpiece field as a quotation from the Eastern faith of the Assumption and is surmounted by an image of the
seated Madonna of the Assumption. In altarpiece context, the presence of Koimesis testifies to a broadening out of the Western representation of the Assumption through adaptations from Byzantine art.146 Niccolo di Ser Sozzo and his comrades were intent on representing Mary’s ascent with the aid of the Byzantine Dormition, but they were not prepared to weave together the Western tradition of the Virgin Mary’s glorious ascent and the Eastern Dormition. The Koimesis icon thus outlines the Sienese Assumption altarpiece, without being integrated into the representation of Mary’s ascent.

In Florence, roughly at the same time, the doubting Thomas as witness to Mary’s ascent became an indispensable part of nearly all Assumption altarpieces. In Andrea Orcagna’s marble tabernacle Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin Mary from 1349–59 in the church of Orsanmichele (Figure 112), Mary lowering her belt to Thomas to cure his lack of faith forms a register of self-asserted narrative value.147 The lowering of the belt appears disconnected from the Dormition located in the lower register. Orcagna intended to exploit two traditions of the Assumption, the belt and the obsequies, yet akin to his Sienese comrades did not consider their entwinement a perfect visual narrative model in the Trecento altarpiece. The interest that Orcagna and the Sienese masters took in the Assumption was stimulated by the widespread circulation of Byzantine and Western representational traditions. Nevertheless, this basic correlation between traditions alerts us that the time of thematic interlocking with the archaic past was simply not yet around in fourteenth-century Siena and Florence.

The early Renaissance masters and their experiments paved the way for El Greco, Annibale Carracci, Rubens and their scrutiny into archaic narratives, which became an active part of the Assumption altarpiece in the modern age. Their narrative efforts rest
securely on the foundation laid by early Renaissance predecessors. To adduce proof to this statement is to ascertain the modern identity of a related subject, the Coronation of the Virgin Mary. In accordance with a mid-fifteenth century Sienese direction in altarpieces, the Coronation of the Virgin Mary displaces its Gothic origin. Indeed, in Siena there was a remarkable increase in popularity of the scene of Mary’s glorification in heaven in Coronation altarpieces featuring Christ and the seated Madonna of the Assumption with hands joined in prayer. This new type of Coronation lent itself to devotional meanings and narrative powers that surpassed its inherent Gothic association with ecclesiastical institutions.

The devotional character of the Sienese Coronation and its disregard for ecclesiastical connotations define the “modern” identity of the Coronation. Annibale Carracci appealed to this Coronation type in his Saint Margaret altarpiece in Santa Caterina dei Funari in Rome and in his later altarpiece of the Madonna of Loreto in the Madruzzì chapel in Sant’ Onofrio in Rome (Figure 113), where the Coronation was placed directly above the main altarpiece field. In the Cavalletti chapel in Sant’ Agostino in Rome, Caravaggio’s main altarpiece of the Madonna of Loreto from 1605–6 (Figure 114) betrays an understanding of the Coronation, similarly located directly above, as the complementing theme to the Madonna of Loreto. Although Caravaggio’s distinct interpretation of the Madonna of Loreto overlooks the narrative of the Holy House of Nazareth transplanted to Italy which is underscored by Annibale Carracci, his altarpiece setting resembles that of Annibale’s from Sant’ Onofrio. It is noteworthy that the interest that Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio took in the Coronation was shared and imbued with a sense of modernity bound up with the late medieval tradition.
4.3 Interlocking Engraving, Integrating Architecture: Rubens’ Assumption in Antwerp Cathedral

In Rubens’ age, the perception that the frontal, iconic figures of old images lack representational sophistication by modern standards was one of those “errors” that ecclesiastical theorists preferred to the decadent artfulness of Michelangelo’s *figura serpentinata*.\(^{151}\) Other sources confirm that the painter produced an imperfect work owing to a deliberate restraint, one that revealed how aesthetic ideals were not necessarily compatible with religious purpose.\(^{152}\) A related point had been made in 1522 in northern Europe, in Hieronymus Emser’s attack on the iconoclast Andreas Karlstadt. Emser adduced the simplicity of old images to support a stylistic choice on the part of the painter, who provides a strategy to focus the viewer on that which is most important in a religious image.\(^{153}\) Emser’s telling conclusion that deliberate stylistic choice rather than lack of skill is the characteristic of an artistic will in religious imagery finds its fullest manifestation in Dürer. In the wake of iconoclasm, Dürer’s feelings about religious art reflect his position of the artist being beyond the appreciation of religious images for their didactic function.\(^{154}\) In the introduction to his *Art of Measurement* of 1525, Dürer made it clear that only good standards reify the religious image: “A picture therefore brings more good than harm when it is honorably, artistically, and well made.”\(^{155}\) This chapter is an effort to place Rubens within such concerns with artistic excellence that surpasses ideological control. It seems no coincidence that Rubens found in Dürer’s prints and in the work of German engraver Albrecht Altdorfer the stream of authentic religious imagery he could advance in his altarpieces from Rome and Antwerp.
The memory of the work of art becomes the compelling source of Rubens’ pictorial allegory, highlighted in complex ways in his Assumption altarpieces. The Hermitage Assumption of 1611 (Figure 115), an oil-sketch, is one of the prime examples of Rubens’ ability to supplement an archaic narrative by allegorical elements derived from attitudes and connotations of the participants. The union of Christ and the Virgin Mary portrayed as part of a wedding ritual, which is not encompassed in Jacobus de Voragine’s Golden Legend, was added by Rubens to enhance the beauty of the action by allegorical allusions. It further sustained Rubens’ effort to disentangle pictorial action from factual information and thus to release his visual narrative from the narrow frame of the historical account.

In Northern altarpieces, the subject of the eternal dwelling in heaven of Christ and the Virgin Mary portrayed as a wedding ritual was utterly new. Rubens demonstrated on this occasion his ability to weave together the medieval traditions of the Assumption and the Coronation, which he combined with sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries representations of the subject in the North and in Italy. The genesis of Rubens’ Hermitage Assumption is a matter of reconstruction, traceable among others to his original interpretation of Christian narratives and their blending with reform-minded ideas. The wedding ritual of Christ and the Virgin Mary incorporates a statement of the carrying and transport of Christ’s Cross from the Sistine Chapel, a groundbreaking adaptation of Michelangelo’s narratives to Rubens’ altarpiece. This is borne out by the athletic figures on the left concerned with carrying the sepulchral stone to the Virgin Mary’s empty tomb. Rubens’ adaptation to Christian narratives of reform-minded images also signals an integrative use of architecture. The final altarpiece of the Assumption of
the Virgin Mary in Antwerp Cathedral, for which the *modello* of 1611 served as an early oil-sketch, testifies to an integrated use of architectural decorative elements turned into an active contributor to Rubens’ language of painting.¹⁵⁸

The Hermitage *modello* is one of the two projects which Rubens presented to the Cathedral Chapter for the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral.¹⁵⁹ It unites two subjects, the Assumption and the Coronation of the Virgin Mary, in a single composition, which Rubens combines with the group of apostles surrounding Mary’s tomb and a number of female figures. The lower half shows the miracle of the roses, in which the apostles and the three Marys—Mary, the mother of Joseph, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the wife of Cleophas—gather at the entrance to the Virgin Mary’s tomb and find only flowers in the empty grave, as her body had risen. While these women are not usually shown to be present at the actual scene of the Assumption, they are part of The Golden Legend, the late medieval text well-disseminated on both sides of the confessional divide.¹⁶⁰ Rubens includes the women who, according to the legend, have been present at the funeral of the Virgin after having prepared and anointed her body. These elements incidentally patterned after figures from Voragine’s late medieval text add liveliness to the scene and operate at the level of pictorial allegory, so much sought after by Rubens.

The means of his pictorial allegory were oriented to entwine narrative and dramatic elements with the Gospel truth, and to present it as a pictorial language of restrained drama. Accordingly, the miracle of the roses and the wedding ritual appear as allegorical prerequisites to the dramatic ascent of the Virgin Mary and its inherent allusions to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. Rubens’ restraint in rendering dramatic subjects defines the direction of his allegory in support of the Gospel truth.¹⁶¹ At the same time,
his resort to an open-ended language of visual and literary allusions in order to advance his Christian narrative interpretations serves his propensity to mitigate dramatic effects through expressive narrative details. The female figures appear to be typical of the characters Rubens frequently includes in order to add liveliness and richness to his most dramatic rendition of a Christian narrative. His use of pictorial allegory highlights the complex ways in which Rubens sought to surpass the verbal narrative of counter-reformatory texts which, around the same time, endeavoured to disentangle the Gospel truth from its drama and to present it for narrative use of an emerging language of peacefulness and serenity fabricated by churchmen.

In the Hermitage *modello* Mary kneels at the feet of Christ, amidst a heavenly reception accompanied by music-making angels. Rubens’ representation of Christian narratives was constantly visualized through the insertion of allegorically-interpreted motifs from the Renaissance masters. Among the great Northern artists who sacrificed a large part of their creative life to moral concerns, Dürer stands out as the first thinker among Northern artists who created a new language in images, primarily visible in his prints. Dürer sojourned in Antwerp in 1520, a trip conceived as an extended way to send ahead a large stock of his woodcuts. Rubens, having received a solid training in engraving in the studio of his teacher Otto van Veen, fostered his pictorial allegory to the incorporation of Dürer’s prints, a history of most spectacular forgeries of all time. The assimilation of Dürer’s late medieval heritage of devotional prints enhanced Rubens’ greatest achievement, the pictorial allegory. He never hesitated to blend legend with allegory, and this principle seems to have particularly guided him in his Assumption altarpieces in grafting allegorical allusions into medieval Christian accounts.
The upper half of the Hermitage modello contains Mary kneeling at the feet of Christ in an unusual wedding ritual image. In one of Dürer’s drawing compositions, the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin from 1503 (Figure 116), presumably one of the many preparatory sketches for an altarpiece dedicated to St. Thomas with a central panel of the Assumption and Coronation commissioned by Jacob Heller, the Virgin Mary kneels in prayer to God the Father while an angel rushes a crown to her. The design was of considerable importance to Dürer’s contemporaries and followers, although no painting by Dürer that corresponds to the drawing has survived.¹⁶⁴

At the time of Rubens’ return to Antwerp in 1608, the production of prints as companions to new forms of religiosity engendered by the Counter-Reformation was particularly stressed. Against this counter-reformatory backdrop, the voice of modern art history has associated Rubens’ Hermitage modello with the printing production in Antwerp. The source of Rubens’ Assumption was thus located in Jerome Nadal’s penultimate plate of his Adnotationes et Meditaciones in Evangelia and the illustrated section, Evangelicae Historiae Imagines by Hieronymus Wierix (Figure 117).¹⁶⁵ These types of Jesuit publications and devotional emblem books were aimed at counteracting the Picture Bible of the day which, in multi-confessional Antwerp, was part of the popular domain of Northern religious beliefs. With Hendrik Jansen von Barrefelt, a member of the spiritualist order of “The Family of Love” and the Spanish Jesuit Jerome Nadal, counter-reformatory texts promoted a mission of the emblem book genre in order to establish the justification of printed images through the transmission of the word of God.¹⁶⁶ The written commentaries had their content further strengthened in the adjoining
plates, a connection text-image designed to convert the gaze into a meditation in the religious spirit embedded in the text.\textsuperscript{167}

Jerome Nadal’s Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia had a special designation in multi-confessional Antwerp. The purpose was to put across a Jesuit creed dated to the early 1550s, when the Adnotationes project was first initiated under Ignatius of Loyola’s direct observance. Owing to the shifting ideals of the Jesuits and of Ignatius of Loyola himself in the wake of an increased regularization of Roman Catholicism as the universal authority of the Pope, the Adnotationes came to print as late as 1595.\textsuperscript{168} It cannot be coincidental that the Jesuits culled at that time from Italian engravings to illustrate their book, especially after all arrangements failed with Pieter van der Borch who had illustrated Barrefelt’s Imagines et Figurae Bibliorum.\textsuperscript{169} Hieronymus Wierix, who was hired to do the illustrations, could not avail himself of the Northern devotional engraving but was certainly guided by the Jesuits to use counter-reformatory prints from the Italian painter and engraver Bernardo Passeri.\textsuperscript{170}

The Evangelicae Historiae Imagines by Hieronymus Wierix testifies, therefore, to a source in the Jesuit scholastic and printing production which, by means of a widely encompassing apparatus, referenced an array of religious currents. These adaptations were heavily laden with counter-reformatory content. Thus, the Northern inflexions of devotional meaning were remodelled in the official Jesuit rhetoric of the day. The use of prints by Hieronymus Wierix did not rest on a dimension of Christ’s victory over death as a message to the believers. Rather, the purpose was of didactic requirements and assimilations of prayer consistent with the views of the Council of Trent, which fully recognized the value of images as important instruments for installing the doctrine of
Roman Catholicism. In emblem books commissioned for this purpose, the complementing relation of *meditatio* and *adnotationes* expanded meditation on the print, and vice versa. The religious imagery turned consistently into an instrument of renewed emphasis on specific texts in order to arise a guided meditative process. This entailed a clear statement of the validity and purpose of art in a didactic religious context, a characteristic of the post-Tridentine age when images became subordinated to the embattled Roman church and its Jesuit missioners.

The pre-eminence of the textual over the visual gave way to a consistent underplay of devotional content. This is apparent in Wierix’s print *Suscitar Virgo Mater a Filio*, the third of four scenes devoted to the Virgin Mary in the final section of Nadal’s text and subsumed under the general heading of the Assumption of the Virgin. The explanatory caption of Wierix’s print that includes the *adnotatiuncula* in the text was expanded by the addition of whole phrases designed to enlarge the description of the various elements in the scene. The added text calls into play a range of theological associations, yet Nadal’s language is permeated by an unrestrained sensual and emotional feeling which, the author believed, may stir the beholder and carry him to a better absorption of the written message. An emotional language conjures forth Christ’s welcoming of his Mother in a scene of psychological relations described by Nadal. This perception of emotional movements directly addresses Wierix’s engraving after Bernardo Passeri, the *Reception of the Virgin into Heaven*.

All claims to trace the Hermitage *modello* to Wierix’s engraving must bear in mind that Rubens’ foremost concern was to play down the emotional impressions of the text. In alignment with his overriding concern to tame passions and emotions, Rubens heightened
the dramatic content of Christian narratives to counteract all sensual connotations. This is borne out in the Hermitage *modello* by the rolling away of the tombstone, an expressive detail that signals Rubens’ departure from the sensorial aspects of the Assumption, as described in Nadal’s *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*. Whereas Nadal’s section of the Virgin Mary’s burial praises through sensual language the glorious light pervading the scene and the sweet smelling flowers as symbols of the Virgin Mary’s virtues, Rubens’ Hermitage *modello* plays down all emotional aspects through an overt evocation of the Passion of Christ. The Roman Catholic literature of the day appeared to Rubens excessively charming and sentimental to see a devotional character within. Of an opposite orientation, his indebtedness to Dürer’s prints amounts to a parallel he found between his fascination for the Northern devotional past and his creative use of Dürer’s figure canon. Rubens borrows directly from Dürer’s “raumfantasie” in compositional terms, perceivable in the figure of the kneeling disciple and his devotional attitude before the ascending Virgin Mary. The sentiment of awe in Dürer’s drawing is continued by Rubens’ narrative and entwined with the dramatic detail of the rolling and carrying away of the tombstone. Rubens develops to further lengths Dürer’s compositional drawing by stressing the dramatic underpinnings of the Virgin Mary’s glorious ascent patterned after the Passion of Christ. In so doing, he submits Christian drama to the celestial joy of the Assumption.

The two athletes rolling over the stone was used by Rubens to counterpoint the harmonious narrative in the Hermitage *modello*. The three Marys gathering the flowers the departing Virgin left behind, the emphatic gestures of the apostles and the frolicking *putti* betray, in their juxtaposition with the rolling away of the tombstone, that joy was
bought at the poignant price of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. The visual bond Rubens establishes between human joy and the strain to support the tombstone draws the Hermitage modello into the orbit of the dramatic altarpiece of the Elevation of the Cross (Figure 118). Although the Hermitage Assumption is of a softer outline, the men rolling back the stone as the most stressed figures in the foreground have all the straining muscularity and strong relief of the athletes in the Elevation of the Cross.

The altar for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Antwerp Cathedral, for which the Hermitage modello served as preparatory oil-sketch, is no longer in existence. Only from a print by A. Lommelin in the Royal Library Albert I in Brussels (Figure 119) do we know how the high altar looked on which the Assumption was placed. Equally, there is not much information available about the original setting of the Elevation of the Cross, today in Antwerp Cathedral. From a painting by Anton Ghering representing the interior of the church of Saint Walburgis preserved in the church of Saint Paul in Antwerp (Figure 98), we know that the Elevation of the Cross was mounted on the high altar. It is noteworthy that, in both situations, above the central panel there was a niche containing in Antwerp Cathedral a sculpture of Christ in the center of the pediment and, respectively, a painting of God the Father in the high altar of Saint Walburgis.176

The artists who conceived altarpieces as a unified concept of the central panel, pediment and architectural setting became rare in the Counter-Reformation. The ideology of the ecclesiastical program of reform and its radical orientation in the aftermath of Trent fostered contemporaneous historical content to take precedence over devotional significance. The art commissioned for a historical purpose found swift adherence amongst artists who embraced the new belief in rhetorical content over preoccupation
with past art.\textsuperscript{177} This point is underscored by the fact that none of these new productions could be considered artistic monuments in the way of their forerunners. The status of venerable cult images demanded in the Counter-Reformation contemporaneous leanings that implicitly counter-argued their inherent religious value.

The new model wrought in the conflation of religious rhetoric and historical engagement produced characteristic Counter-Reformation altarpieces such as the altar-tabernacle at the Paoline Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore (Figure 121). An exercise in Counter-Reformation team-work virtuosity, it enshrines the venerable icon \textit{Salus Populi Romani} of Mary’s divine maternity in an arrangement that features in the pediment a historical relief of the building of Santa Maria Maggiore at the initiative of Pope Liberius in the fourth century.\textsuperscript{178} The Paoline altar-tabernacle clearly reveals the historical mentality of the Counter-Reformation being at odds with the approach to late medieval representations of the \textit{Madonna of the Snow} in Siena, a center famous for its altarpieces of the Virgin of the Snow.\textsuperscript{179} The entire array of medieval devotions embedded in the Sienese tradition, which commemorates a miraculous apparition of the Virgin Mary who pinpointed the place to build a church in her honour through a snow fall in August on the Esquiline hill, was circumvented by historical and counter-reformatory conceits that valued an image of Pope Liberius’ better suited to express the foundation of Santa Maria Maggiore.

At the very same time when the altar-tabernacle was under construction at Santa Maria Maggiore, Rubens struggled to convince the Oratorian fathers at Santa Maria in Vallicella of the narrative power of the medieval altarpiece format and its sacramental significance. After several efforts, Rubens succeeded in enshrining the miraculous icon of
the Virgin Mary of the Oratorians in an altarpiece format that integrates architectural elements of the main nave and locates an image of the Crucified Christ in the broken pediment (Figure 122). Rubens’ consistent exploration of Christian cult imagery was far from being formal. As evidenced by the high altar at Santa Maria in Vallicella, this link was consistently narrative in its goal, for the frontality of the image articulated and effectuated the relation between sacred history and the architectural setting. When Rubens returned to his native Antwerp in 1608, he turned these ideas into a lifelong preoccupation with the Christological theme and specifically with the cult image tradition. The Hermitage modello for his Assumption in Antwerp Cathedral and his Elevation of the Cross subsume his efforts distinctly under the Eucharistic significance he sought after in his altarpieces.

The return of Rubens from Italy at the end of 1608 marked a new phase in his altarpiece painting. The reform-oriented ideas Rubens had assimilated in Rome found propitious grounds for further developments in his native Antwerp. Rubens’ decision was not coincidental and speculations that favourable historical circumstances prompted him to return home after his Italian apprenticeship appear legitimate indeed. Yet one should always turn to Egmont by Goethe to understand that the Netherlands, which had been laid waste by war, was a consequence of the broken alliance between imperial and papal forces after the beginning of the Council of Trent. The signing of the Twelve Years Truce invested the Flemings with feelings of hope for renewed stability and prosperity in a region which had suffered from the Eighty Years War. Rubens certainly found in Antwerp conditions to work without interference of the political and ecclesiastical power, and a flexibility he felt bereft of while painting for Roman Catholicism.
In Antwerp, Rubens undertook the effort of reform to preserve the sacramental significance of Christ’s Passion under new pictorial conditions. The Italian models of his senior contemporaries and Renaissance predecessors were replete with these connotations. The works of Annibale Carracci and Federico Zuccari, studied in chapter 3 and 4, involved an assimilation of the Imitation of Christ closely entwined with reform-ideas applied to Christian narrative contexts. This link to the Eucharistic meaning as the most conscientious reform-concern took constant care to preserve the devotional elements of the image by recourse to a dramatic pictorial language. At the Cerasi chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo, Annibale Carracci was preoccupied with portraying the eternal dwelling in heaven of the Assumption through an integration of the carrying and transport of Christ’s Cross from the barrel vault.

Rubens’ early Antwerp altarpieces underscore that he was fully cognizant of Annibale Carracci’s narrative scope in devising the complex decoration of the Cerasi chapel. The early Italian drawings Rubens made in connection to the subject of the carrying and transport of the Cross reveal that he was also well-versed with Annibale Carracci’s drawings for his Farnese ignudi. It was noted that the graphic model of his senior contemporary enabled Rubens to comprehend the enormous expressive potential of the Sistine chapel figures. Annibale Carracci’s dramatic scale of draughtsmanship and the swelling rhythms of his athletic figures turned into Rubens’s allegorical figures serving new narrative ends. The way in which Annibale Carracci interceded Rubens’ pictorial language is evidenced in Rubens’ copies after Michelangelo’s ignudi and their use in his altarpiece painting.
The model for the practice of art study inculcated by the Carracci Academy fostered representations permeated by Augustinianism and its cumulative ancient-and-Christian cross-references. The special receptivity to St. Augustine set the stage for a drama of separation and grief in juxtaposition with the celestial joy of the Assumption, as portrayed by Annibale Carracci in the Cerasi chapel. This evocative blend of Christian drama and joy stimulated Rubens to create enduring solutions marked by a critical, ongoing dialogue with Michelangelo. What we see in Rubens’ Assumption and Elevation of the Cross is a process of generic continuity directly correlated to Michelangelo’s representation of drama at the thematic level. The Hermitage modello calls into play the rolling away of the tombstone as a statement prefiguring the Eucharistic meaning of the wedding ritual performed in the upper register. Equally, the muscular strain involved in the Elevation of the Cross asserts the benefits the Christian believer may draw from Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. The integrated motif of the Passions in Rubens’ reinterpretation of the thematic model – of the Assumption and the Elevation of the Cross – result in a conduit of spiritual energy in these altarpieces.

The presence of athletes carrying the Instruments of the Passion or rolling away the tombstone recover the terror commonly associated with the theme of the Last Judgement. Rubens’ athletes reinvent in their actions the day of judgement which Michelangelo imagined under the gaze of Jonah, the prophet of the Resurrection, and the adjoining figures of Jeremiah and the Libyan Sibyl, who both foresaw the end of time. The Last Judgement prefigures its message in the two lunettes, left (Figure 123) and right (Figure 124), at the top of the altarpiece-fresco. The lunettes, one of the most turbulent
passages of the entire work, are given over to the representation of the Cross and the instruments of the Passion held by athletes in most complex poses.\textsuperscript{185}

Rubens followed the compositional source of the lunettes to make claim, in his Hermitage Assumption and in the Elevation of the Cross, to the Passion of Christ as the gate to Redemption. The narrative association of the effort involved in the rolling away of the tombstone with the theme of triumphant union is used by Rubens to break the harmonious narrative of the Assumption. In so doing, Rubens submits the celestial joy of the Assumption to its inherent meaning in the Passion narrative.

Michelangelo’s work in the Sistine chapel, as one of the most famous tributes to Augustine’s apologia for the pagan ancestry of Christianity, was among Rubens’ most important pictorial models. The ignudi portrayed by Michelangelo as carriers of the Instruments of the Passion turned into Rubens’ narrative models to express Eucharistic meaning in an altarpiece context. In his Antwerp altarpieces, the athletic muscular strain prefiguring the joyous day of the Resurrection is a recurrent subject directly correlated to the theme of the Eucharist. The furthering of the Eucharistic mystery on altarpiece grounds was part of Rubens’ return to late medieval devotional art and its representational forms. The explicit relation to the medieval tradition he rekindled in this way was not only a thematic option, but also a conscientious embrace of the medieval altarpiece format. The medieval triptych provided Rubens the extended narrative field required by his complex pictorial allegories. The archaic formula of the sacrament altarpiece was chosen by Rubens for the Elevation of the Cross, a subject that gave him the possibility of depicting a single scene running across the three panels of the triptych (Figure 125). The evocation of the medieval altarpiece format amounts to a distinct
feature of Rubens’ modernity. It concordantly testifies to his contrasting aims to Roman Catholicism, which long ago regarded the medieval altarpiece as obsolete. It was widely accepted that Rubens could not adhere to the taste of the Oratorian fathers at the St. Maria in Vallicella mainly owing to their unabated counter-reformatory position. In his native Antwerp devoid of Tridentine dictates, Rubens felt at large to express his pictorial allegories in medieval formats without provoking adverse reactions. With no interference of the court nor the guild, Rubens rekindled the medieval altarpiece format in entwinement with Christological themes.

In the *Elevation of the Cross* originally at the high altar of the St. Walburgis church, Rubens brings into play the Northern engraving of his predecessors. In Northern art the subject of the *Elevation of the Cross* appeared in late medieval engravings, yet it remained rather infrequent in altarpiece adaptations. In Germany the *Elevation of the Cross* by Albrecht Altdorfer (Figure 126), one of the forty small woodcuts of a series of small compositions made around 1513, became part of an *Andachtsbüchlein*. A small devotional book of the time, the *Andachtsbüchlein* did not include explanatory text as the image pendant. Its popularity was on the rise in times of post-confessional entrenchment when devout books akin to à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* became most influential. The *Andachtsbüchlein* was reprinted in 1604 in Hamburg, a notable assertion of the ongoing demand for this type of book-engravings at the very same time when Roman Catholicism was launching elaborate emblem-books.

The *Elevation of the Cross* became after Trent the subject of engraving adaptations meant to produce more poignant and dramatic effects. Yet frequently the narrative interpretations did not have an understanding akin to the devotional meaning
encapsulated in the Northern print. A treatment of the Elevation of the Cross in Hieronymus Wierix’s illustrations to Jerome Nadal’s Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia is a distancing from Albrecht Altdorfer’s woodcut. Hieronymus Wierix’s Elevation overtly borrows from an engraving executed after a design by the Counter-Reformation painter and engraver Bernardo Passeri, who opted for a simplified paraphrase of the elevation of the thief’s cross from Tintoretto’s Crucifixion in Scuola di San Rocco in Venice.

In accordance with the Counter-Reformation and Father Nadal’s didactic requirements, the explanatory caption of Wierix’s Elevation of the Cross subsumes the print under the general heading of the text by means of Nadal’s emotionally laden language, meant to stir the imagination and to carry the devout Catholic to a greater absorption of the written message. Wierix’s print establishes a secure claim for Counter-Reformation pictorial imagery consistently adapted to a renewed emphasis on words and specific texts.

In contrast, Albrecht Altdorfer’s print as part of a devotional Andachtsbüchlein was intent on safeguarding religious meditation as a value reserved to images and devoid of the additional, persuasive power of words. Altdorfer takes a dramatic close-up view on the elevation, a narrative procedure intended to underline the dramatic implications of the Passion narrative. The distinct devotional character of the reformed print as part of a faith in the self-asserted power of images determined Rubens to choose Altdorfer over Wierix as a point of departure for his Elevation of the Cross. After the Hermitage modello when Rubens settled for Dürer’s engraving for the Heller altarpiece instead of adapting
Wierix’s image from Nadal’s emblem book, he manifested a comparable aim in his *Elevation of the Cross* when selecting Altdorfer to the exclusion, once again, of Wierix.

Rubens never imitated literally but studied, reworked and combined his sources as he established his allegorical narrative language. The *Elevation of the Cross* as rendered by Rubens is an original and monumental treatment of engraving in an altarpiece context. But the Northern print did not constitute the only source for adaptations to new narrative lengths in his altarpieces. Rubens’ pictorial allegory called upon the past in a passionate engagement with an array of Christian-and-Classical Antiquity cross-references. Primarily in the *Elevation of the Cross* Rubens demonstrated his ability to revive and to incorporate models from the Antiquity, which he combined with early sixteenth-century reform-minded models from the North. In adapting to a Christian context themes of the Classical Antiquity, Rubens integrates his efforts within a modern Augustinian culture and its tribute to the pagan ancestry of Christianity. A hallmark of the reform of art, Michelangelo’s understanding of Christianity as an independent field of interpretation took an important step in the progress of Augustine’s ideas in the early modern age. In taking up Michelangelo’s reform-minded direction, Rubens’ synthesis of late medieval imagery and classical learning was consistent with his predecessor’s appreciation of Christianity as the repository of a neutralized pagan Antiquity.

The *Elevation of the Cross* is a noteworthy example of Rubens’ use of works of ancient art in a Christian context. In depicting this moment of the Passion cycle, Rubens used a scene from the lower tier of the *Gemma Augustea* (Figure 127), where a group of Roman soldiers elevate a trophy. The *Gemma Augustea*, a piece in the collection of Nicolas Peiresc, became Rubens’ model for several sketches including a painted copy in
What stimulated Rubens’ interest in the antique gem was not only the division of colour between various layers, but also the compression of the human form in the low-relief marble. Rubens’ propensity to observe the sculptural model and to adapt it to narrative ends found its fullest representation when ancient sculptured relief was adapted from three to two dimensions. We have observed in chapter 3 how Annibale Carracci positioned his Almsgiving of St. Roch in the same derivation when he culled from Donatello’s Miracle of the Host and his adaptation from three to two dimensions in the high altar at St. Anthony in Padua. Annibale Carracci and Rubens took a shared interest in adapting the sculptural relief for narrative ends in order to emphasize the pictorial nature of the result.

The record of Rubens’ drawings after ancient works betrays the correlation he acutely observed between his own standards of understanding ancient art and the classical sculptural model. This entailed for Rubens an active interest in the late Hellenistic period, to which all the works studied in Rome belonged, and which Rubens valued as an expressive potential outshining the classical Greek model. The Gemma Augustea, a work of the late Hellenistic period, offered Rubens an ancient example of physical strain designed to elevate a pagan trophy. The Hellenistic model of pulling and supporting the trophy was raised by Rubens to a higher level of significance in the Elevation of the Cross. The whole adaptation of the narrative in the Gemma Augustea was far from being a formal transformation, as Rubens raises now a trophy of a different kind. In adapting to a Christian context the action of the Gemma Augustea, Rubens advances the pagan raising of the trophy to a spiritual tribute to Christ elevated towards God the Father.
To supplement a narrative by adaptations of Hellenistic works to a Christian context is the landmark of Rubens’ religious allegory. The artistic transfer from ancient models, in all various aspects, into Christian narratives formed the predominant subject matter of Rubens’ religious allegories. In like fashion, the *Elevation of the Cross* transfers the pagan act of glorification into a Christian allegory of redemption. His fluency with the cultural legacy of Antiquity proved especially pertinent in Rubens’ representations of Christian narratives, where questions such as the source of a story and its various pictorial variants could present both challenges and rewards. As his interpretation of the *Elevation of the Cross* shows, the Northern print was a prevalent source of transfer into pictorial compositions which Rubens was prepared to intersperse with classical aspects, void of pagan connotations.

In this prolific chain of cross-references, the pulling of the ropes was prefigured in the athletic strain to roll away the tombstone in the Hermitage *modello*. Rubens was clearly intent on rendering the union of Christ and Mary in the Assumption as an event foreshadowed in the inherent origin of all divine occurrences in the Death and Resurrection of Christ. That Rubens’ conceptual unity of the Assumption rested on these ideas is intimated by the drawing of a man bending forward in the Albertina (Figure 128), which served as a preparatory drawing for the Hermitage *modello*. Rubens’ attention fastened on the athletic character further ascertains that he intended to use the rolling back of the stone to break the serene symmetry of the Assumption narrative. This presupposed a conscientious effort to submit the altarpiece’s joyous mood to the dramatic significance of Christ’s sacrifice.
A subsequent revision of the Hermitage *modello* still encompassed the rolling away of the tombstone, as borne out in the oil-sketch of the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Royal Collection where the tomb and the men lifting the stone are integrated with the group at the center of the composition (Figure 129). Yet this altarpiece layout reached a higher level of complexity in Rubens’ last version of the *Assumption* in Antwerp Cathedral. The final altarpiece indicates that Rubens settled for architecture in order to integrate Christian drama at the thematic level.

The present ensemble in Antwerp Cathedral is considerably different from the one which Rubens designed for his original altarpiece. The engraving by A. Lommelin in the Royal Library Albert I in Brussels illustrating the Antwerp *Assumption* in its original setting (Figure 119) shows Christ represented in sculpture in a niche, in the center of the broken pediment. The current arrangement in Antwerp Cathedral is also distinct from the main altar of St. Walburgis, on which the *Elevation of the Cross* was originally located. The top of the altar, as recorded by Anton Ghering’s painting *The interior of St. Walpurgis* (Figure 120), was originally crowned in the center by a niche containing a painted image of God the Father with a pelican, symbol of Christ’s sacrifice. This type of altar follows sixteenth-century Flemish prototypes such as Frans Floris’ *Triptych of the Seven Wounds of Christ* and his later *Baptism of Christ*, which both have in the niche above the central panel an image of God the Father.

The positing of God the Father in the broken pediment supersedes, with Rubens, a decorative function. Rubens takes in his Antwerp altarpieces the ornamental value of the niche, containing an image of God the Father, to further lengths. The interrelation between image, upper ornament and basilican space becomes a quintessential element in
Rubens’ conception of the role of the altar. Rubens’ originality in the treatment of architecture as an integrative force to his pictorial narrative was recognized as the conflation of two historical contexts.\textsuperscript{196} In his native Flanders, the architectural ornament was integral to altarpiece decoration, a relevant example in this line of argument being Otto van Veen’s and Frans Floris’ altarpieces. In Italy, where Rubens’ knowledge deepened, he turned the vocabulary of architectural decorative elements in Michelangelo’s architecture into an active contributor to his pictorial language. The resulting solution, after his return to Antwerp, was a highly complex and integrative use of architectural elements. After a time when Rubens used architectural elements in the background of his paintings as an antique quote—as evidenced by his London \textit{Triumphs of Caesar after Mantegna} and the \textit{Rape of the Sabine Women}—in Antwerp he actively engages architectural vocabulary to sustain his pictorial narrative. His Antwerp altarpieces and the drawings for the Jesuit Antwerp church betray a renewed altarpiece direction that integrates the basilican space. His quintessential input on the Antwerp altarpiece, therefore, rejuvenates the local tradition through borrowings from the Italian Renaissance.

This altarpiece progress on modern grounds concordantly asserts an archaic concern through the Eucharistic meaning taking now a more cohesive and significant treatment. The correspondence between the Host, which was raised above the altar during the liturgy, and the body of Christ in the broken pediment of the altar could not have been visualized in a more relevant way.\textsuperscript{197} It immediately becomes apparent that, although Rubens culled from both the conception of the medieval triptych and the visual allusions of the Northern print, he ultimately elaborated a cohesive final unity that surpasses all
previous adaptations. Rubens’ solution integrates his architectural altarpiece into the Eucharistic mystery performed at the high altar.

Rubens’ representation of the Corpus Christi in his architectural altarpieces recognized in the Assumption of the Virgin Mary a subject associated with the exaltation of the Host. In altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the body of the Mother of God seamlessly allies her Assumption and the Incarnation of Christ. As the vessel of the Incarnation, the body of the Virgin Mary was likened to a temple and to a tabernacle, the receptacle on the altar in which the consecrated elements of the sacrament were housed. The designation of the Mother of God as tabernacle became a common place in the late medieval West, figuring in Jacobus de Voragine’s The Golden Legend.

For Rubens the correlation between the Virgin Mary’s ascent and the Host tabernacle translates into an architectural altarpiece that unites the central panel, sculptural ornament and architecture in Antwerp Cathedral. The Assumption panel was set by Rubens in implicit dialogue with the Eucharistic body, as borne out by Lommelin’s print. The concept of the high altar at Antwerp Cathedral is not only Rubens’ most evocative interpretation of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary entwined with the Corpus Christi; it also represents the fulcrum of Rubens’ designs for architectural altarpieces in Antwerp, through the display of marble columns flanking the central panel and primarily through the interrelation between ornament and church architecture. Rubens’ first experiments in architectural altarpieces hark back to the project for the high altar of the Kapellekerk in Brussels, which Rubens continued to develop in his later designs for the high altar of the Jesuit church in Antwerp.
The process that integrates the architectural altarpiece into the Eucharistic mystery performed at the high altar originates in Rubens’ painting at the Chiesa Nuova, or Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome. The road to the final altarpiece documents Rubens’ steps in integrating architectural space into Eucharistic significance. In the first version today in Grenoble, Madonna and Child, Saints Gregory the Great, Maurus, Papianus, Flavia Domitilla and Achilleus (Figure 130), the interrelation between altarpiece context and basilican space becomes apparent. Rubens puts his altarpiece in direct connection with the architecture of the church by including an architectural detail, the capital to one of the pilasters of the Chiesa Nuova nave, which sustains the round arch in the background. Yet the final altarpiece was to be an utterly reviewed interpretation of Rubens’ Grenoble painting, betraying a further concern to integrate architecture. The Chiesa Nuova high altar is a painting of angels and saints conceived as a reliquary that enshrines the miracle-working icon of the Madonna and Child of the Oratorians (Figure 122).

The saints are located on two distinct panels symmetrically positioned behind the high altar (Figure 131 and 132), a remote but otherwise evocative memory of the medieval triptych which traditionally encompassed the central and the side panels within a unifying narrative. In the time period that elapsed from the Grenoble version to the final altarpiece, Rubens understood his painting as a narrative end suitable for medieval revivals. When his first version of the altarpiece was rejected, Rubens produced an even more ambitious replacement, adherent to the same beliefs.

A milestone in Rubens’ career, the new altarpiece for the Santa Maria in Vallicella also bears testimony to Rubens’ dissatisfaction with the Roman Counter-Reformation circle. Further evidence from the archives of the Oratorian order suggests that Rubens’
treatment of the upper half of the composition was chiefly responsible for the actual rejection of the Grenoble version. Rubens’ replacement betrays an effort to integrate the basilican space into his altarpiece and at the same time to correct the inherently normative view prevalent in the Counter-Reformation concept of the main nave. The newly rebuilt church of Santa Maria in Vallicella was the single-minded plan of St. Filippo Neri. In accordance with Counter-Reformation ideals, Neri planned a series of coordinated altar dedications reflecting his devotion to the Rosary that encircle the main nave and form one coherent program. St. Filippo Neri’s regular series of co-ordinated altarpieces was a centralized, top-down tendency that involved a direct contradiction of the traditional character and function of the church altarpiece as a personalized expression of devotion. The Counter-Reformation ideal of thematic unity that characterized Filippo Neri’s and Vasari’s projects imposed an official agenda on altarpieces and implicitly divorced altarpieces from their private function. Rubens’ misfate with the high altarpiece for the Santa Maria in Vallicella is a most telling illustration of the insurmountable gulf between top-down Counter-Reformation tendencies and Rubens’ assertion of a formula to accommodate the Renaissance altarpiece to the emerging ideal of Renaissance architecture, proclaimed simultaneously.

Of a seminal role in the development of Rubens’ architectural altarpiece was what he learned from Michelangelo, particularly from his late works. The revolutionary features of Michelangelo’s late works and their decorative vocabulary, such as the use of the giant pilasters and the idea of combining a straight and a curved pediment in various forms, fascinated Rubens. Michelangelo’s Porta Pia (Figure 64) and the drawings for it became a source for transfer and adaptation in Rubens’ altarpieces. No architect before Rubens had
applied the S-shaped curved form to a pediment, and his authority for this invention derives directly from the panels on the side bays of the Porta Pia, which are covered by broken pediments and flanked by S-shaped scrolls.205

In the final version of the high altar for Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rubens’ effort was to foster an integration of Michelangelo’s Renaissance architecture into his architectural altarpiece. Rubens culls directly from Michelangelo’s interplay of curved and straight forms applied now to the S-shaped form of the broken pediment, which at Chiesa Nuova encases a sculpture of the Crucified Christ. Michelangelo’s voice is even more deeply heard in Rubens’ unprecedented proficiency in joining architectural element to figure and frame.206 Michelangelo’s graphic habits as well as his approach to the figurative arts and architecture stimulated Rubens to link the high altarpiece to the church façade. An important feature of the façade of Santa Maria in Vallicella by Fausto Rugglesi is the curved pediment over the main door, an idea derived from Michelangelo that distinguishes Rugglesi from his contemporary Roman architects. Rugglesi and Rubens demonstrate a shared understanding of Michelangelo’s integrative use of architectural elements. In adapting Michelangelo’s ornamental suggestions encapsulated in Rugglesi’s façade, Rubens assimilates the high altarpiece of the Oratorians to the ideal of formal unity proclaimed by the Renaissance. His architectural altarpiece subsumes, therefore, a unifying concept of the central panel, architectural ornament and basilican space under the Eucharistic meaning inherent in the church altarpiece.

After his return to Antwerp, Rubens became the most outstanding painter-architect of his age to disseminate the forms of the Italian Renaissance to the Netherlands. Rubens’ fascination for Michelangelo’s use of the giant pilasters and interplay of straight and
curved surfaces primarily informs now his pictorial language. The Assumption at the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral is an outstanding example of Rubens’ integrative use of figure and form in an altarpiece context.

The correlation between painting and architecture as a hallmark of Rubens’ architectural altarpieces was also of paramount concern to his senior contemporary, Federico Zuccari. In Rubens’ Italian circle, Federico Zuccari had a seminal bearing on the notion of painter-architect upon which Rubens modelled himself in his age of artistic maturity. Federico Zuccari published in Turin, in 1607, his treatise Idea of Painters, Sculptors and Architects in which he suggests that the architect is firstly a painter, who possesses a good disegno, and also a sculptor, who designs figures and forms well-acquainted with the classical orders and rules of architecture.207

The modern type of artist shaped in the double-tenure of painter and architect epitomizes Rubens’ complex personality. Integral to this, his fluency with the cultural legacy of antiquity proved pertinent especially in its entwinement with the late medieval tradition. As his interpretation of the Assumption in Antwerp Cathedral shows, Rubens was an artist who, in acknowledgment of the medieval character of Christian narratives, distanced himself from renditions of the Assumption prevalent among painters of his time. In supplementing the narrative meaning of the medieval account, Rubens cast light on the allegorical potential of the eternal dwelling in heaven encompassed in the Coronation ritual of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

In the architectural altarpiece of the Assumption for the cathedral altar, Rubens’ richly layered altarpiece construction of Italian Renaissance overtones is a testimony to his narrative acuity as an interpreter of medieval legends. His concern to release the narrative
account from the historical frame in order to canvass a wider range of ideas and variants for the same work originates in his methodical pictorial preparation. Rubens’ use of oil-sketches was certainly not a shortcut from preparatory stages to the formal conceptual shape of the work of art.\textsuperscript{208} Rather, Rubens practiced the oil-sketch technique in the sense we have examined in his Hermitage \textit{modello}, as a graphic medium of higher complexity. This type of oil-sketch became the medium in which Rubens’ Italian architectural impressions were transmitted to his paintings and to the architecture of Antwerp, after his return to his native city.

Rubens’ efforts were intrinsically linked to the most advanced thinking of his age, which cumulated strands as various as paganism abated in a Christian context, the interpretation of late-medieval legends and Michelangelo’s architectural vocabulary applied to altarpieces. There is ample evidence to substantiate these claims if one examines the neo-Stoic ideas which were gaining currency in Rubens’ age. It is unimaginable to comprehend the complexity of Rubens in estrangement from the neo-Stoic outpost of reform-minded ideas entertained by his Northern friends. A coeval of Augustinian spirituality, neo-Stoicism set the stage for reactions against the scholastic rationalism of the post-Tridentine age. Disseminated on both sides of the confessional divide, neo-Stoicism and Augustinianism rejected a conception of faith as doctrinal truth, proposing instead faith as a gift by which one believes.\textsuperscript{209} Little wonder, then, that neo-Stoicism as an inward disposition rather than an external commitment to a creed found supporters in the circles of scholars and laymen. For those who assimilated the Christian faith in this way, true piety was expressed in love as the basis of harmony.
Rubens imagined friendship as a ramification of neo-Stoic love, which draws less on the pursuit of antique virtue than on notions of mutual affinities. In one of his paintings of the theme of friendship, his Self-Portrait with Mantuan Friends (Figure 133), Rubens includes his own likeness to associate himself with an ideal of friendship that was inextricably bound up with the possession of virtue as the foremost attribute of the relationship. Yet the concept of marital love as a motivation for painting outdoes for Rubens the virtue of friendship. His allusion to friendship in relation to the theme of marital love is compounded by his evocation of traditional representations of married couples in Flemish painting. The married couple as a basis for the enshrined image of himself and his friends was especially appealing to Rubens, through its precedents in Netherlandish artistic and humanist circles that fostered a connection between marriage and creativity.\textsuperscript{210} This concept of love signified the private peace and order lacking in public life, a certainty of emotional security and comfort to assuage disorders and sufferings. Rubens’ Prado The Garden of Love (Figure 134), a scene of gentle conversations set in a garden, is a pictorial allegory of private peace inspired by Rubens’ appreciation of marital love. His ideal was his garden or true Eden where he could concentrate his mind, just as it was advised by the most influential writer and defender of Stoicism, Justus Lipsius.\textsuperscript{211} The most circulated of Lipsius’ works was his De Constantia, a set of dialogues set in a garden as symbol of private peace and order lacking in public life.

The growing reliance on love as a motivation for his painting found expression in Rubens’ visual interpretation of late medieval legends. Against a backdrop of Stoic ideas understood as the contemplation of higher things, Rubens did not hesitate to blend
allegory with legend. This principle has guided him in his Assumption altarpiece in particular, where allegorical allusions are grafted into Marian narratives. Even when faced with an account of the Golden Legend, the freedom of his visual narrative interpretation remains Rubens’ overriding concern. He adapts the medieval account to his allegorical and pictorial language and thus furthers the narrative meaning beyond historical confines. The eternal union of Christ and the Virgin Mary portrayed as a wedding ritual is prefigured in the Christian drama of carrying and supporting the Instruments of the Passion. Through narrative permutations intended to make fluid the boundaries between Mariology and Christological themes, Rubens presents the Stoic strain of rolling away the tombstone as the equivalent to the elevation of Christ’s Cross.

The perception of sufferance that contended for the stability of love and of the divine was consonant with Stoic ideas about love as a spiritual ascent. The catalectic impressions or grasping images of what the Stoic saw in the figural relationship between figura and veritas as emotional truth were said to have the power to convince the lover that things are true. The catalectic impression of love felt in this way is not simply a route to knowing, it is knowing. It goes beyond simple perception to institute knowledge. The lover does not forgo the ennoblement of his own soul for the sake of a material phantasm corrupting his mind, but rather organizes the patterns of romance as the ascent of his soul to God.  


3 Christopher Wood, Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (Chicago and London, 2008), 244.


On the woodcut that captures the image itself, see Christopher S. Wood, Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art (Chicago and London, 2008), 12.

Francesco Bocchi’s Opera … sopra l’imagine miracolosa della Santissima Nunziata was published in 1592, one year after his Le Bellezze della Città di Fiorenza. In the Opera, Bocchi concluded that the late medieval Annunciation venerated in Florence’s Santissima Annunziata surpasses the works of both Michelangelo and Raphael in what could be termed “the beauty of holiness,” see Bocchi, Opera, 1592, 71.


Aby Warburg took the first decisive step in an anthropology of the medieval image when he ascertained the affinity of such a practice to primitive image magic. See E. H. Gombrich, Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography (London, 1970), 120 and 171.


For Solis, see The Illustrated Bartsch: German Masters of the Sixteenth Century, ed. Jane S. Peters 19 (1).

For Vico, see The Illustrated Bartsch: Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century, ed. John Spike, 30.

Christopher S. Wood, 2008, 23.

G. Bodon, Enea Vico fra memoria e miraggio della classicità (Rome, 1997), 97–102 and 119–29. Luba Freedman, The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 4, Ancient Testimonies: Coins and Gems, 75–6. The author draws attention to the interpretative power of sixteenth-century illustrated manuals on ancient numismatics such as those by Enea Vico, Sebastiano Erizzo and Guillaume Du Choul. Enea Vico believed that the figures of the Olympian gods and goddesses on coins resemble those seen in ancient statues. For Vico, Neptune’s reproduction on a coin resembled a real statue of this deity because the figure displayed both the art of sculptors and engravers of Antiquity. Vico’s observation about the twin goals of sculpture and engraving prompted him to initiate a usage of the verb sculptere (sculp) in relation to prints.

26 Alexander Nagel, op. cit., 113. Also 21, 124 and 136 on the challenge of the long-accepted convention according to which altarpieces were meant to provide a stable object of prayer and worship.


Printmaking was without question the sixteenth century’s most powerful technique for the traveling of images between artists, across different media and beyond geographic boundaries. For the printing’s capacity for various types of transfers, see Lisa Pon, Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print (New Haven and London, 2004), 15–22, 25. In the early sixteenth century, printing became less Gutenberg’s innovation than an “agent of change,” as alluded to by Elizabeth Eisenstein’s fundamental study, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 1979), which describes the radical break between scribal and print culture. Christopher S. Wood’s Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalités of German Renaissance Art (Chicago and London, 2008), 244, relevantly points to the use of prints in the artistic practice as verging on the referential aspect of the image. With the advent of print technology, the referential function was slowly severed from the representational and potentially ficitionalizing function of the image. Diane DeGrazia Bohn, Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci Academy. A Catalogue Raisonné (Washington, 1979), Introduction, 27–70, esp. 31 on Federico Zuccari’s collaboration with Cornelis Cort. Same author, “Drawings as Means to an End: Preparatory Methods in the Carracci School,” The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop, eds. Andrew Ladis and Carolyn Wood (Athens and London, 1995), 165–86.

Lorenzo Lotto. Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art (Washington, 1997), eds. David Alan Brown, Peter Humfrey, Mauro Locco, 24. Il Libro di spese diverse con aggiunta di letteri e d’altri documenti, ed. Pietro Zampetti (Venice, 1969), 286, Letter of 10 Feb. 1528, Venice, testifies to Lotto’s approach to historia, or the sacred narrative, as the concern of his own ability to determine what was important to portray in order to recognize the Gospel narrative, even without all the underlying meanings of the scriptural text. Giovanni Romano, “La Bibbia di Lotto,” Paragone 27(1976): 82–91, on Lotto’s illustrations to Antonio Brucioli’s vernacular edition of the Bible and his drawing of the figure of Moses that clearly demonstrates the essential union between his work as an artist and the most active expressions of the new religious sentiments.


39 The letter from Zucardi to Duke Francesco Maria II della Rovere of Ferrara, denouncing Fra Jose de Siguenza’s Cronica, is dated February 1609. It is published in Aurigemma’s article in Rivista dell’ Istituto Nazionale d’Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte, XVIII, 1995.


41 Alexander Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art (Cambridge, 2000), 189–90, on the humanist and reform-minded culture that dominated the intellectual life of early sixteenth century when the inventiveness of religious art was in harmony with religious purpose.


45 Alexander Nagel, 2000, 144. The experiments of Michelangelo, Jacopo da Pontormo, Rosso and Parmigianino, among others, when understood within the humanist and reform-minded culture that dominated the intellectual life of the period—the culture of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Jacopo Sadoleto, Giles of Viterbo, Johannes Goritz, Giovan Matteo Giberti, Paolo Giovio, Pietro Bembo, and Pierio Valeriano—explain their “innovative” qualities not in contradiction with their religious purpose. Concordantly, their archaism need not be understood in contradiction to their modernism.

46 Pamela M. Jones names Federico Borromeo the “Christian philosopher” in her Federico Borromeo and the Ambrosiana (Cambridge, 1993), 24, yet most of her ideas
pertaining to the efficacious role of a young bishop modelled after neo-platonic ideas do not subsume under the conclusions of this doctoral dissertation.


48 Thomas Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400–1800* (New Haven and London, 2000), 175 on Vasari’s *disegno* based on Aristotle’s definition of knowledge derived from experience in the opening sentences of the *Metaphysics*. *Disegno* is thus defined by Vasari as an activity of the intellect acquiring knowledge of a general and universal kind from past accumulated experience of individual, particular objects. *Disegno* therefore equals form as knowledge, or idea.


50 Vasari’s *disegno* was understood as *giudizio universale* and a definitory mark of the entire creative process, see Thomas Puttfarken, op. cit., 175–77. An understanding of Vasari’s *disegno* as the attribute of style and ideal imitation was proposed by Philip Sohm in *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2001), 115.


52 Intellectual vision, as Augustine asserts in his *On the Literal Meaning (De genesi ad litteram)* cannot be wrong. After corporeal and spiritual vision, intellectual vision is the third—and highest—level of the human mind, and the only site where Augustine admits the perception of divine truths. Visions at this level may lead to the highest form of sight, the non-sensory intellectual vision. See Cynthia Hahn, “Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance. Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge, 2000), 169–90. Also, A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Malden, 2006), 44–64.

Luogotenente and Consuls of the Universitá, Compagnia, ed Accademia del Disegno, late 1570s or early 1580s).

54 It is appropriate to observe that Federico Zuccari’s growing anxiety about the secular power of the emerging modern Florentine state was a shared concern among his contemporaries. It belonged to a strain of reform-minded ideas that advocated a clear separation of political and religious power. See Robert Bireley, The Counter-Reformation Prince: Anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe (Chapell Hill and London, 1990), 218–20.


56 Charles Barber, Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm (Princeton and Oxford, 2002), 138–9. To maintain the material memory of a historically situated Christian religion was a recurrent concern of the church. The iconoclasts fostered the status of icon to square that of theology, and the status of artist to imitate that of the theologian.


59 Frederick McGiness, Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome (Princeton, 1995), 137.


61 Robin Margaret Jensen, Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity (Minneapolis, 2005), 136.

62 The iconoclastic debate that denied the religious image of the artist as being manufactured in his studio resurfaces in the wake of the Counter-Reformation commissioning process which, in preferring team work over artistic individuality,
downgraded once again the creative and independent character of the artist. On the iconoclasts arguing that an icon made by painters could not be truthful, see Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton and Oxford, 2002), 138–9. On iconoclasts who do not deface the face but merely bare its prior defacement, see Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago, 2004), 111–3

63 Alexander Nagel, 2000, 90–93. The reform interpretation of the classical antiquity was indeed void of pagan connotations. As Alexander Nagel underscores, Michelangelo’s interest in bacchic themes and in the ecstatic animations of antique sculpture was an effort to reinvest the narrative expressiveness of contemporary Christian art with spiritual significance.

64 See the full passage in Chapter 3 as it stands in the 1568 edition of the Vite, four years after the publication of Gilio’s Dialogo. See in this dissertation p.122 and note 82, p. 186.


66 Philip Sohm, 2001, 84, on Vasari’s definition of style as ideal imitation of the classical model.

67 Leonard Barkan, “The Heritage of Zeuxis: Painting, Rhetoric and History,” *Antiquity and its Interpreters*, eds. Ann L. Kutner, Alina Payne and Rebekah Smick (Cambridge, 2000), 99–109. Barkan pertinently shows that the technique of modular painting that Cicero imputes to Zeuxis and which made Vasari see ideal beauty as a selection from several bodies is, in essence, discursive thinking, an imposition of poets on painters. Visuality is guided by a transcendental beauty located in the figura and is thus apart from all rhetoric. Visuality and rhetoric should not be one and the same.


71 In Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture (1999), Leonard Barkan shows how Renaissance archeology dovetailed with the emergence of a culture of art in the sixteenth century.


73 Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. with intro. by D.W. Robertson Jr. (New York, 1958), 64. History as asserted by Augustine belongs to the order of time, whose creator and administrator is God. It is one thing to describe what has been done, another to describe—as classical authors did—what should be done. History narrates what has been done faithfully and usefully. More on Augustine’s overarching influence on the early modern age and his figure taking precedence over the classical antiquity heritage once grounded in Aristotle and Plato, William Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought,” A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History (Berkeley, 1991), 19–73.


78 William J. Bouwsma, op. cit., 7, on Thomas à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ, a shared Augustinian assumption. The affinities of Protestantism and Catholicism help to explain the continuing popularity on both sides of the religious divide of such works as the Imitation of Christ.


80 Dermot Fenlon, op. cit., 73–9; Alexander Nagel, op. cit., 170.
81 Maria Cali, *Da Michelangelo all’Escorial: Momenti del dibatti religioso nell’ arte del Cinquecento* (Turin, 1980), 133.

82 Camilla Russell, *Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Turnhout, 2006), 126, the network of the spirituali survived through Flaminio, who in the wake of not being able to publish his defense of the Beneficio by the end of the 1540, turned his attention to writing private, unpublished letters. Adriano Prosperi, *Tra Evangelismo e Controrifroma: G. M. Giberti (1495–1543)* (Rome, 1969) asserts that, after defeat, spirituali appealed exclusively to the upper echelons of the church and society.

83 Terence O’Reilly, op. cit., 53–5.


87 Oberman, 2001, 85.

88 Dermot Fenlon, 1972, 138


91 Fenlon, 1972, 147.

92 On Cornelis Cort’s fundamental input on modern engraving and the legacy of Hieronymus Cock’s studio where Cort made an important technical innovation in engraving—the swelling burin line—which changed the course of engraving in Italy and expanded the possibilities of reproducing the colouristic effects of paintings in the graphic medium, see Diane DeGrazia Bohlin, *Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci Family. A Catalogue Raisonné* (Washington, 1979), 31–4.


97 The watershed significance of Federico Zuccari’s Lament of Painting is acknowledged by David Cast, and hence it establishes a consensus view between David Cast’s and Inemie Gerards-Nelissen’s claim of artistic virtue as the leading feature of this print. D. Cast, op. cit., 159–60; Inemie Gerards-Nelissen, “Federigo Zuccari and the Lament of Painting,” Simiulus 12 (1983): 51.


Carel van Mander writing about this allegory in 1604 mentioned for the first time that the Calumny of Apelles was designed by Federico Zuccari in a fury over his unsympathetic treatment by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese for whom he had worked at the Villa Farnese in Caprarola. H. Noë, Carel van Mander en Italië (The Hague, 1954), 249–51, also cited in D. Cast, The Calumny of Apelles, no. 10, 133 and Peter Hecht’s book review to David Cast, The Calumny of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition, Simiolus, Nehterlands Quarterly for the History of Art 13 (1983): 57–60.


The inscriptions by Ottaviano Zucari to his father’s print of the Calumny of Apelles are reproduced by David Cast, The Calumny of Apelles, 131.


Federico Zuccari’s disillusions were invariably about the commissioning process and its tight ideological engagement. David Cast, op. cit., 135–7, provides a full account of the events that led to Federico Zuccari being banished from Rome and prohibited from working within the territories of the Papal States from 1580 to 1583.


On the inter-confessional popularity of à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ, William J. Bouwsma, op. cit., 7. On external commitments and their adherence to an ecclesiastical


110 John Shearman, Only Connect...Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance (New Jersey, 1992), chap. IV: Domes, 149–91, esp. 180, the Byzantine dome tradition is restated in Mediaeval and seventeenth-century domes pre-eminent in that the center is occupied by the subject matter (in Byzantium by the most significant part of the subject narrative, the presence of God the Father).


112 For the parting of the genres in the Counter-Reformation, Alexander Nagel, 2000, 135. For a comprehensive analysis of the historical backdrop of the Counter-Reformation as a factor responsible for the collapse of reform ideals, Dermot Fenlon, 1972, esp. 137, the essential observation that the Council of Trent opened in the concept of an alliance between the Pope and the Emperor. After the session of the debate on justification in June 21, 1546, in the spring of the next year the political alliance between Pope and Emperor, which had been the condition of the Council’s operations, had been severed by the Papal legate Marcello Cervini. This brought an eventual halt to the Council’s proceedings.

113 Averil Cameron, “The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds its Symbol,” Journal of Theological Studies 29 (1978): 79–108, and Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1991), 103. The theme of the Dormition of the Virgin achieved its official status in art and literature only after the formal recognition of the feast on 15 August in the late sixth century. However, the story on which Koimesis was based had earlier origins traceable to the Syriac texts belonging to the fifth century and revisited in the wake of an increased attention given to the Virgin Mary at the time of the Council of Ephesus in 431. On this, M. Jugie, La mort et l’assomption de la Sainte Vierge, Studi e Testi 114 (Vatican City, 1944), and Christa Schaffer, Koimesis: Der Heimgang Mariens. Das Entschlafungsbild in seiner Abhängigkeit von Legende und Theologie (Regensburg, 1985), 47–51.

114 On the image of the Virgin Mary as an imperially sponsored cult, Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milano, 2000), esp.


Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, “The Significance of Leadership and Organisation in the Spread of Christianity,” The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries, ed. W.V. Harris (Leiden, 2005), 65. By the fourth century, the most important church leaders and Christian authors were members of the Roman elite, equipped with great learning and excellent family connections.

The contact of Western and Eastern Christian culture is still entertained in contemporary scholarship as the advent of rhetoric in Renaissance humanism after the fourteenth century. Michael Baxandall, Giotto and the Orators. Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450 (Oxford, 1971), 69–96, on Manuel Chrysoloras as the transmitter to the West of the rhetorical principles of Hermogenes of Tarsus, the most widely studied authority on rhetoric in Byzantium. George A. Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times (Chapel Hill and London, 1999), 292, on the Italian fourteenth-century which saw the beginning of a recovery of Greek culture through Byzantine rhetoricians. Most influential was Manuel Chrysoloras who came to Italy as an ambassador from Constantinople and taught Greek in Florence from 1396 to 1400. After Chrysoloras, the most important Greek emigrant to Italy for the history of rhetoric was George Trebizond, who introduced the writings of Hermogenes and the Byzantine rhetorical tradition to the West.

Barbara Zeitler, “The Migrating Images: Uses and Abuses of Byzantine Icons in Western Europe,” Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium, studies presented to Robin Cormack, eds. A. Eastmond and L. James (Burlington, 2003), 185–204. The Koimesis icon made its way into the Western liturgical world through a re-use of a Byzantine ivory in the tenth century. As the Munich Gospel Book of Otto III testifies to, a tenth-century Byzantine ivory of the Koimesis is incorporated as a spectacular book cover. It is tempting to attribute the prevalence of Byzantine icons of this type in Germany to the marriage of the Byzantine princess Theophano, the mother of Otto III, in the Ottonian reigning dynasty of the time.

305
Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter* (New Haven and London, 1999), 184–88, the popularity of obsequies scenes in the monastic commissions reflected the congregation’s outlook on death. In Carmelite painting, the obsequies scenes set in mountainous landscapes paralleled one of the most potent Carmelite mountain images, the “Holy Mountain of Everlasting Life,” to which the Virgin herself would personally convey each friar after his death. This guarantee of salvation embodied by the mountain appears in three scenes by Fra Filippo Lippi: *The Dormition of the Virgin*, Spoleto Cathedral, 1466–69; *Death of St. Jerome*, Prato, mid-1450s; *Funeral of St. Peter*, Prato, 1460s.


John Shearman has called the fresco “the most perfect illustration I know of the Assunta as it is described in the Golden Legend” and his suggestion that it was conceived as a visual equivalent of “sacre rappresentazioni” has been adopted in the literature. Shearman, “Correggio’s Illusionism,” *La prospettiva rinascimentale, codificazioni e transgressioni*, ed. M. Dalai Emiliani (Florence, 1980), 281–94; and *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1992), 190.

130 Carolyn Smith, 1993, 42.

131 These observations are consonant with Aby Warburg’s seminal ideas of the rebirth of paganism in Renaissance Humanism, see Aby Warburg, La Rinascita del Paganesimo Antico (Florence, 1966).


138 Pamela Jones, op. cit., 136–7, on Federico Borromeo’s art theory and respect for the classical principles of pagan art as edifying and probable within sacred narrative. He also considered the Apollo Belvedere a perfect model for figures of Christ.


E. H. Gombrich, 1970. Gombrich concludes his analysis of Dürer’s involvement with classical antiquity in a manner that stresses the free will of Dürer’s artistic nature: “His artistic personality remained in control to regulate and master the degrees of passion which he wished to infuse into his work,” 180–2.

Dermot Fenlon, 1972, 25.


Henk van Os, op. cit, 14: “This very unusual altarpiece is clearly meant to represent by means of the Byzantinesque “Dormitio” Western devotion for Mary’s corporeal Assumption” and 103, “Koimesis is never a maker of meaning in the Sienese altarpiece. Whether it is used to represent Mary’s glorification in the Assumption altarpiece, or is a narrative panel in a polyptych to the Virgin, its participation does not establish the meaning of the altarpiece.”


Henk van Os, op. cit., 158. In Siena, the Assumption and the Coronation have always disputed their claims but, unlike in other Italian cities, the Coronation never succeeded to cast out into shadow the Assumption. On this, a consensus emerges in Henk van Os, op.cit.,140 and Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven and London, 1993), 224. The most impressive Coronation altarpieces in the Gothic tradition are located outside Siena, in Venice, Bergamo, and Teramo: Paolo Veneziano’s polyptych of the Coronation of the Virgin Mary from 1350 (Venice, Accademia), Jacobello and Pier Paollo dalle Masegne’s Coronation polyptych from 1388 (Bologna,
San Francesco) and Jacobello del Fiore’s Coronation polyptych from 1415 (Teramo, Duomo).

In Gothic altarpieces, the Coronation served to demonstrate the legitimacy and authority of the glorious Ecclesia itself, especially by means of representation of the Mystical Marriage of the Virgin and the Son of God in the central axis. Bernard Decker, “Reform within the cult image: the German winged altarpiece before the Reformation,” The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge, 1990), 90–105.

On the Cavalletti chapel and Caravaggio’s Madonna of Loreto, 1605–6, see Pamela Jones, Altarpieces and their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni (Burlington, 2008), 79–83.


Alexander Nagel, 2000, 14., on Colonna’s defense of the spiritual effectiveness of archaic images.


Jeffrey Chipps Smith, Nuremberg: A Renaissance City, 1500–1618 (Austin, 1983), 33.

Ibid., 57.

In Antwerp and Brussels, three major altarpieces of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary by Rubens are as follows: the earliest, begun in 1611 but not completed until 1626, is the altarpiece for the high altar of Antwerp Cathedral of our Lady. Related to it, the sketch dated about 1611 in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, and the Assumption of 1612–14 in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, once hung above the high altar in the Mary Chapel of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp. The second, for the high altar of the Brussels Carmelite Church, a commission that came from the Archdukes Albert and Isabella about 1614, is today in the Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels. Rubens provided his third great Assumption of the Virgin for the high altar of the Kapellekerk, also in Brussels. This whole altar was removed in 1870 to the Church of Sint-Joost-ten-Node where it remains today, although the painting of the Assumption is a copy of the original now in Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf. For a synoptic view of these Assumption altarpieces, see Thomas L. Glen, Rubens and the Counter Reformation. Studies in His Religious Paintings between 1609 and 1620, Ph. Diss., Princeton University, 1975, chap. VII, The Assumption of the Virgin, 143–59.
Rubens and his Age: Treasures from the Hermitage Museum, Russia, ed. Christina Corsiglia, exh. cat., Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, 2001), 41. As Baudouin notes, the *modello* presented in March 1610 by Rubens’ teacher, Otto van Veen, was rejected by the Chapter of Antwerp Cathedral. Both Baudouin and Held suggest that the Hermitage sketch was one of the two *modelli* presented by Rubens in April 1611 to the Chapter for an intended altarpiece to stand upon the main altar, for which the subject was to be “Our Lord Inviting His Bride from Lebanon to Her Coronation,” a reference to the Song of Solomon 4:8. See F. Baudouin, “Een Jeugwerk van Rubens ‘Adam en Eva’ en de relatie van Veen en Rubens,” *Tijdschrift der Stad Antwerpen* 2 (1968): 11–3 and J. S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue*, 2 vols., (Princeton, 1980), I, no. 374.


Thomas L. Glen, 1975, 146. Related to the high altar of the Antwerp Cathedral of Our Lady are the sketch dated about 1611 in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, and probably also the *Assumption* of 1612–14 in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, which was hung eventually above the Houtappel altar in the Mary Chapel of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp.


Wolfgang Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 1968), 101, note 101, on Stechow’s pertinent observation that to see Rubens’ painting as an allegory only fails to evaluate properly his great achievement, the pictorial allegory. We should remember to evaluate carefully Burckhard’s decisive insight into Rubens’ restraint in rendering dramatic subjects and to do justice to his desire to unite such restrained drama with allegory. A recent effort to cast new light on Rubens’ pictorial allegory in a historical context belongs to Lisa Rosenthal, *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* (Cambridge, 2005).


164 Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist, 144, cat. 78 and 163–66 on Dürer’s Heller altarpiece, the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary.


166 Ralph Dekoninck, “Imagines Peregrinantes. The International Genesis and Fate of Two Biblical Books (Barrefelt and Nadal) conceived in Antwerp at the end of the sixteenth century,” The Low Countries as a Crossroad of Religious Beliefs, eds. Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong, and Marc van Vaeck (Leiden, 2004), 49–63.


168 Terence O’Reilly, From Ignatius of Loyola to John of the Cross (Variorum, 1995), 453, on Ignatius being certainly opposed to papalism of an exaggerated kind.

169 Ralph Dekoninck, op. cit., 59. After doomed attempts to entrust the engravings to Pieter van der Borch, the Jesuits convinced the Wierix brothers to create the plates, which were only brought together with Nadal’s text in 1595 under the press of Martinus Nutius.


172 This refers to David Freedberg, “A Source for Rubens’ Modello of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin: A Case Study in the Response to Images,” The Burlington
173 The Roman Catholic literature of Rubens’ time supplements evidence of Nadal’s text in many other works, of which Franciscus Costerus’ De Vita et Laudibus Deiparae Mariae Virginis Meditationes Quinquaginta brings to further lengths language as a component to the meditational process.


180 Filip Vermeylen, “Antwerp beckons: The reasons for Rubens’ return to the Netherlands in 1608,” Rubens and the Netherlands, eds. Jan de Jong et al. (Zwolle, 2004), 17–23, esp. 26. The author brings further evidence from the archives of the Oratorian order to suggest that primarily responsible for the rejection of the work was Rubens’ treatment of the upper-half of the composition. A quote from an order of the General Congregation of the Oratorians indicates that Rubens’ treatment of the upper half of the painting which contains a copy of the venerated miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary was considered an unsatisfactory invenzione.


186 Lisa Rosenthal, Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens (Cambridge, 2005), 159. In correlation with Rubens’ attempt to sell his rejected altarpiece for the Oratorians, the author stresses Rubens’ understanding of a painting produced as an altarpiece; it may augment a private collection and can assume identity in a new context, an appreciation for the inherent flexibilities of the medium and the contingent basis of its meaning.


189 George A. Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times (Chapel Hill and London, 1999), 182. Augustine’s progress from pagan and Christian sources to a biblical understanding of Christianity made it
possible for Christians to appreciate and teach eloquence without associating it with paganism.

190 On Michelangelo and the reform of art as source of these developments, see Alexander Nagel, 2000, 90–3.


192 To note that Rubens draws a distinction between the Roman and the Greek classical model that engendered seminal developments among his contemporaries. Stechou’s observation of Rubens’ awareness of the expressive Hellenistic model outshining the rhetorical model of the Greek ideal of classical beauty prompted only a limited reaction in current scholarship (see Wolfgang Stechow, op.cit., 47–72). Philip Sohm most relevantly points to Duquesnoy as a milestone in the distinction between “Greek style” and “Latin style” in his Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy (Cambridge, 2001), 29. In developing this distinction to further lengths in a counter-reformatory context, Estelle Lingo has pertinently pointed out Duquesnoy’s resistance to the emerging normative model of the classical model of Greek sculpture, in François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal (New Haven and London, 2007).


197 Thomas L. Glen, Rubens and the Counter Reformation: Studies in His Religious Paintings between 1609 and 1620. Ph. Diss., Princeton University, 1975, esp. 38–9, 75, 143.

The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, trans. and adapted from Latin by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York, 1991), 449–465, esp. 454: “Then the Saviour spoke, saying: Arise, my dear one, My dove, tabernacle of glory, vessel of life, heavenly temple, in order that thou hast not felt the plague of sin in carnal dealings, so thou mayst not suffer the corruption of the body in the grave! And straightway Mary’s soul went to her little body, and she came forth glorious from the tomb and was assumed into the heavenly bridal chamber, a multitude of angels mounting withal.”


Peter Humfrey, “Co-ordinated altarpieces in Renaissance Venice: the progress of an ideal,” *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge, 1990), 190–211, esp. 190 on Vasari’s Counter-Reformation projects at the rebuilt Cathedral in Mantua and at S. Croce, and the ecclesiastical concepts of Gesù and Chiesa Nuova in Rome as aesthetic and religious works that involved a direct contradiction of the traditional character and function of church altarpieces.


Mark Morford, Stoic and Neo-Stoics (New Jersey, 1999), 32. For Lipsius, the ancient notion of contubernalium was the most intense form of Stoic love. As renewed by Lipsius and celebrated by Rubens, it was a means of creating an inner-circle of intellectual affinities.

Martha C. Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature (Oxford, 1990), 265–7. The figural relationship between figura and veritas as emotional truth and a version of what the Stoic called phantasia kataleptike, or grasping image, is said to have the power to drag us to ascend and to convince us that things could not be otherwise. The cataleptic impression is a mark or impress in the soul, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, which by its own inward character and experienced quality certifies its own veracity. For a sensitive update on the perception of Stoic love in a Renaissance context, see Marion A. Wells, The Secret Wound: Love Melancholy and Early Modern Renaissance (Stanford, 2007), esp. 55–60.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

The reform of the altarpiece that had staged its crucial claims in the early sixteenth century was brought to new lengths by the turn of the seventeenth century. The modernization of altarpieces incurred a return to the icon and architecture as interrelated sites of figural language in a Christian context. This link was not merely formal but inherently functional, for the frontality of the icon articulated and effectuated the relation between image and its church setting. Throughout my dissertation, I have argued that the front-facing figure of the Virgin Mary of the Assumption and the motif of frontal orientation served as a link to a Christian tradition of cult imagery. This frontality was not a mere figural contact with the icon tradition, nor did it abandon contemporary evidence and thus fall into a wholesale archaism. We have seen instances of El Greco’s acute sense of iconicity in applying an icon-inspired figural language in a Toledan altarpiece context, a direction that responded to the most sensitive Venetian painters of the Renaissance. El Greco attempted to find in his Santo Domingo Assumption, in the animating contact between the Mandylion, the rising Virgin and the Trinity directly above, a new path into the Christian significance of altarpieces which actively refers the authenticity of the icon. The resulting union between Christ and the Virgin in the Assumption is imposed on them by the conditions of the altarpiece which transcend the laws of narrative accounts and even of human drama. The Virgin is rising towards Christ’s body located in the altarpiece attic. The result is something that engages the architectural space, the altarpiece frame or both. For Annibale Carracci, the Assumption was not a mere instance of archaizing quotation but resulted from the architectural power of figural meaning in the
service of an earlier conception of Christian art. It engaged a polemical view with the notion of architecture in the modern classification of the arts. Vasari gave his book the title *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1568) to underscore a noticeable change of value order from the 1550 Torrentino edition, where the title had been *The Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters and Sculptors*. This reordering reflects Vasari’s conviction of the superior merit of painting as an art form to supplant the prevailing status that architecture had in the Renaissance. Annibale Carracci strips away the contemporaneous classification without restoring the past preeminence of architecture in the Renaissance language. He negotiates a dialogue between painting and architecture as a vehicle to transfer a Christian vocabulary to altarpieces. To this end, he reformulates sacred narrative painting within a conception of figural movement and expression derived from the high altar location, a link he has created at the Cathedral of Reggio Emilia between the *Almsgiving of St. Roch* and the *Assumption*. This effort of reconciliation between the narrative power of painting and the meaning of architecture turned into an on-going focus of Annibale Carracci’s Roman years. It revealed his efforts to put a modern conception of art in the service of the traditional functions of the Assumption altarpiece. This becomes apparent in the architectural arrangement of the Cerasi Chapel in Rome at the Sta. Maria del Popolo, where the central altarpiece of the Assumption summarizes the narrative meaning of the side paintings and ceiling decoration.

Annibale Carracci’s preoccupation with the Assumption, and specifically with the cult image tradition of the Dormition icon remodeled in the Western sensibility of the Assumption altarpiece, constitutes a sustained meditation on the fate of the Christian cult
image in the modern era. It betokens an intimacy of conversation with the icon’s stylistic refinement which simultaneously corrects the Western view that the Byzantine icon was a mere direct survivor of the lost and most ancient Christian cult.¹ The perception of icons as the crude and rough images of the earliest Christian times was surpassed by the historical imagination of the modern artist who fostered their meaning in altarpiece context while refining, shading and coloring the ancient image.² Just as the artist brings a sketch to perfection in the finished work, so too he develops the icon or the woodcut that captures an authentic image of God beyond the basic outlines and the innocent contours that were to come later. El Greco, Annibale Carracci, Federico Zuccari and Rubens’ altarpieces adumbrate the idea that a solution exists in a conflation of modernity and archaism when authenticity provides a counterweight to innovation. This is nowhere more apparent than in Rubens’ fluency with an array of late medieval Northern prints which refer the authentic character of the figura. Rubens’ preference for Dürer over Wierix reinforces the attitude of his predecessor Federico Zuccari, who used the Northern Italian woodcut in an altarpiece context and within ancient basilican space.

Rubens is a relevant example of the way in which humanistic culture and Michelangelo’s reform concern informed the painter-architect status at the turn of the seventeenth century. It also casts a sharp light on some of the period’s central cultural awareness, namely the legacy of classical antiquity assimilated to a Christian oriented culture. With Rubens’ altarpieces in Antwerp, the Assumption for the Antwerp Cathedral and the Elevation of the Cross, antiquity was fully absorbed into the modern altarpiece that achieved in the early modern age the status of an independent field of interpretation
for Christian subjects. Rubens’ high altar for the Chiesa Nuova in Rome paved the way for his complex architectural altarpieces in Antwerp.

Rubens and El Greco’s impulses to flee Rome left the capital of Catholicism bereft of two essential contributors to art of unparalleled standards. Was their decision symptomatic of fundamental disagreements about their vocation as painters of religious subjects in the Counter-Reformation climate of Rome? Certainly, Rome as the place where the ecclesiastical program of reform won an official and political status refuted the Northern tradition of religious images. This argument acquires an even stronger, more poignant validity if we are willing to accept that both Rubens’ and El Greco’s grounding in an archaic devotional past did not collude with the Roman direction. For these masters, the purpose of a Christological sense of religious images was to stake a claim for truthfulness of representation patterned after an archaic past which did not conform to the new historical direction. The use of the icon in a counter-reformatory environment may best exemplify such a state of affairs. Rubens encased at Chiesa Nuova the icon of the Oratorians in a tabernacle altarpiece in order to further the Eucharistic meaning of Marian images mounted at the high altar; in contrast, a team of Roman painters and sculptors encased the Marian icon of Salus Populi Romani in a tabernacle altarpiece at the Paoline chapel in Sta. Maria Maggiore in order to underscore the papal contribution to the foundation of the Roman basilica. The post-Tridentine iconography densely laden with historical content became compulsive and there was no shortage of painters who conformed to it. Yet, contrasting artistic and moral principles guided the creation of the great masters. Federico Zuccari, a painter too easily assimilated to the Counter-Reformation, was in fact exiled from Rome for three years by Pope Gregory XIII and
prohibited from working within the territories of the Papal States under penalty of being sent to the galleys. This was imposed when Federico raised his voice to defend Renaissance values and the necessity to see this tradition furthered within the modern age.\(^3\)

How would Rome appear today if masters such as Rubens and El Greco had stayed and worked there? Rome has certainly remained the capital of Catholicism even without their contribution. Yet, does the Roman historical claim for universality truly rest its validation in religious images produced under ecclesiastical supervision? If so, is the sacred the most legitimate associate of a survival of the Christian idea in the Counter-Reformation? The flow of occurrences after Rubens’ and El Greco’s departure from Rome invites an unflattering response. Years afterwards, the peace of Westphalia in 1648 showed that the ecclesiastical program of reform could not withstand the rising, secular identity of the modern state. Would have been the modern identity so secular, had the ecclesiastical reform helped ingrain the sacred deeply into the modern consciousness? Was the Counter-Reformation instrumental indeed in fostering the sacred so as to make it an enduring value of the collective memory of the modern nation?

Annibale Carracci’s efforts to revive Renaissance ideals on Counter-Reformation grounds account for a decisive direction of the early modern age. Did Annibale’s disciples further his ideas, or opt instead to become painters of the Counter-Reformation? Did Augustinianism survive the positivistic leanings entertained at the hierarchical level of the Roman church?\(^4\) Giovanni Lanfranco’s work at the Buongiovanni chapel in Rome, at Sant’ Agostino, betrays a profound involvement in Augustinian thought. But could we say the same about Domenichino? Few of Annibale Carracci’s disciples understood the
necessity to preserve the sacred as the most determinant aspect of their new altarpiece production. The historical content of religious images fostered by the Counter-Reformation compelled a direction of engagement meant to annihilate the sacred character of the altarpiece.

1 Christopher Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago and London, 2008), 39, on Western Europe which fell upon the Byzantine icon tradition when the Fourth Crusade conquered Constantinople in 1204, mistaking icons for direct survivors of the Christian cult.


Bibliography

Primary Sources

Borromeo, F. De pictura sacra (1624), ed. B. Agosti (Pisa, 1994).
———. Musaeum (1625), Milan.
Carducho, V. Los Dialogos de la pintura (Madrid, 1633).


———. Le Piture di Bologna (Bologna, 1686), ed. G. P. Zanotti (Bologna, 1706 and 1732).


Secondary Sources


Acidini Luchinat, Cristina. Michelangelo pittore (Milano, 2007).


Bernardini, Maria Grazia et al., Caravaggio, Carracci, Maderno: La Capella Cerasi in Santa Maria del Popolo a Roma (Milano, 2001).


Borea, Evelina, and Ginevra Mariani, eds. Annibale Carracci e i suoi incisori (Rome, 1986).


de Jong, Jan et al., eds. Rubens and the Netherlands (Zwolle, 2004).


———. Annibale Carracci and the Beginnings of Baroque Style (Glückstadt, sec. ed. with new introduction, 2000).


Gelderblom, Arie-Jan, Jan L de Jong, and Marc van Vaeck, eds. The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs (Leiden, 2004).


Greenhalgh, Michael. Donatello and His Sources (London, 1982).


Hellwig, Karin. Die Spanische Kunstditeratur im 17. Jahrhundert (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).


———. Venise et Rome, 1500–1600: Deux Écoles de Peinture et leurs Echanges (Genève, 2004).


Jones, Pamela. Altarpieces and their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni (Burlington, 2008).


Keitt, Andrew W. Inventing the Sacred: Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural in Golden Age Spain (Leiden, 2005).


Krick Iris, Römische Altarbildmalerei zwischen 1563 und 1603 (Taunusstein, 2002).


——. El Greco (Barcelona, 2003).
Maravall, José Antonio. Velázquez y el espíritu de la modernidad (Madrid, 1987).


Pericolo, Lorenzo. Philippe de Champagne (Tournai and Bruxelles, 2002).


Smith Chipps, Jeffrey. *Nuremberg: A Renaissance City, 1500–1618* (Austin, 1983).


Summerscale, Anne. Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation (University Park, 2000).

Sutton, Peter C. The Age of Rubens, exh. cat., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Ghent, 1994).


20. Michelangelo, Pietà for Vittoria Colonna, early 1540s. Drawing, 29.5 × 20 cm. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, US.
41. Domenico Ghirlandaio (workshop), The Dead Christ before the Tomb, late 15th century. Panel, 147 × 141 cm. Badia a Settimo, formerly Florence, Sant’ Apollonia.
67. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ Carrying the Cross (The Little Passion)*, 1509.
68. Anon, Christ Carrying the Cross. Milanese woodcut, end of the fifteenth century.
80. The Cerasi Chapel, Rome, Sta. Maria del Popolo, view from the transept
95. Virgil Solis, *Bust of Christ in Profile*. Intaglio Print, 188 × 139.
96. Enea Vico, Jesus Christ (Portraits and Medals). Engraving.

456
121. High altar, Paoline Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore.