

- Brief discussion of winter quarter
- 2 x 3 week case study units, workshops throughout
- independent project component with clear parameters: related to the theme of the program, in fields related to the workshops

This week's lecture

I want to focus this week on the materiality of one of the images that was most offensive to the Protestant reformers, the crucifix. We're going to return to the discussion about the materiality of images that first surfaced in week 2 -- this is also a chance for me to talk a bit about the specific motives of the Protestant reformers. I'll mostly be focusing on England, but what you should focus on is not how many and who and why but **what** the reformers say they're doing when they attack crucifixes and what about their materiality is specifically offensive.

[reminder: England in relationship to the German reforms]

The materiality of the cross in worship

[review of the symbolic status of the crucifix, its relation to the mass SLIDE]

Cranmer: "The Image of our Saviour," he reasons, is "as an open book," and that image "hangeth on the cross in the rood, or is painted in cloths, walls or windows, to the intent that beside the examples of virtues which we may learn in Christ we may be also many ways provoked to remember his painful and cruel passion."¹

But

It was also a potential idol. Crucifixes were among the first targets of the reformers, and were often broken or defaced.

'We must,' Emile Male admonished, 'endeavour to conceive what took place in the minds and hearts of a Spanish nun or an Italian mendicant friar when they were told by travelers from the North that Protestants were demolishing statues of the Virgin, burning crucifixes, transpiercing with their swords the images of saints. . . Can we present to ourselves the views of craftsmen, who, if they were at work in the 1530s or 1630s, might have seen the creations of their own hands destroyed? What of those who saw the statue of their local patron saint, revered for centuries, held up to ridicule and broken?' (14)

¹ John Edmund Cox, ed., *The Works of Thomas Cranmer*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Printed at the University Press, 1844), 101.

[- why the 1530s and 1630s?]

- two points of view here: the craftsmen, the believers

Two main targets of early Protestant attacks in England:

- 1) statues of saints
- 2) crucifixes

I'm going to focus on the latter, because of the complexity of the debates about their materiality. Statues of saints were an easier target.

Remember the list of qualities of the icon that we talked about week 2 for evaluating the materiality and reception of images:

Size

Dimensionality

Use of color/other sensual materials

Medium/history of that medium

Availability/accessibility

Realism

Distance/perspective

Narrative quality (or lack thereof)

I want you to keep these in mind while I talk about three kinds of crucifixes and the reformer's responses to them.

Rood [SLIDE]

Altar cross [SLIDE]

Edward Sandys (bishop) to Peter Martyr in 1560: "the queen's majesty considered it not contrary to the word of God, nay, rather for the advantage of the church, that the image of Christ crucified, together with Mary and John, should be placed, as heretofore, in some conspicuous part of the church, where they might more readily be seen by all the people. Some of us thought far otherwise, and more especially as all images of every kind were at our last visitation not only taken down, but also burnt, and that too by public authority; and because the ignorant and superstitious multitude are in the habit of paying adoration to this idol before all others. (303)

"[t]he crucifix and candlesticks in the queen's chapel are broken in pieces, and, as some one has brought word, reduced to ashes. A good riddance to such a cross as that! It has continued there too long already, to the great grief of the godly, and the cherishing of I know not what expectations to the papists."²

² Aston, 311; 13. Eight months later the queen had conceded only that the candles not be lit before the crucifix.

Jeweled crucifix [SLIDE]

William Malden [mentioned in your duffy reading a couple of weeks ago] first converted to the reformed faith in 1538 when he began reading the Bible with a group of other men in his hometown of Chelmsford. He and his father's apprentice even bought an English version of the New Testament and kept it hidden in their bedstraw. From the Bible and the primer, Malden then progressed to reading a polemical work on the mass, which taught him that worshipping the crucifix was "plaine idolatry, and playnely againste the commandement of God." One night, he repeated this argument to his mother, chiding her for being one of those foolish persons who knocked their breasts and knelt before the crucifix in procession. His mother promptly shifted the discussion away from the crucifix as an object of civic pride, reminding him that the idol he was attacking had played a role in his childhood and was inextricably linked to his own body: "Wilte not thou worshippe the crosse? And it was about the when thou were cristened, and must be layed on the when thou art dead." For Malden's mother, the crucifix and the ceremonies associated with it dictated not only public worship but also the private life cycle of an individual believer. Malden was unconvinced, however, and repeated his charge to his father later that same night, urging him to abandon that "graven image." His enraged father gave him a thorough whipping for his disrespect, but the blows he received—a mirror of the martyrdom experienced by Foxe's more famous converts—only made him rejoice that he was "betten for Christ's sake."³ While Roger Martyn disobeyed the authority of Elizabeth's ministers to preserve a crucifix for his children, Malden's disparaging remarks about the crucifix caused a permanent rift in his family, even prompting him to reject his parents' authority.

The following poem gets at one of the points made by the defenders of images, which will be familiar to you from the Cummings article: namely, that there is no way of erasing the image of the cross from our minds: once we say, "cross" or "crucifixion" there it is.

John Donne, The Cross (excerpt)

Since Christ embraced the cross itself, dare I
His image, th' image of His cross, deny ?
.....
Who can deny me power, and liberty
To stretch mine arms, and mine own cross to be ?
Swim, and at every stroke thou art thy cross;
The mast and yard make one, where seas do toss;
Look down, thou spiest out crosses in small things;
Look up, thou seest birds raised on crossed wings;
All the globe's frame, and spheres, is nothing else
But the meridians crossing parallels.
Material crosses then, good physic be,
But yet spiritual have chief dignity.
.....

³ Ibid., 349-50.

For when that cross ungrudged unto you sticks,
Then are you to yourself a crucifix.
As perchance carvers do not faces make,
But that away, which hid them there, do take ;
Let crosses, so, take what hid Christ in thee,
And be His image, or not His, but He.

Donne's poem is written in response to images like this one [SLIDE] that associate all the evils of Catholic materiality with the image of the cross and the altar. Intriguingly, no corpus or body of Christ here. [reasons for this?]

Or, to put it another way, in the words of the famous humanist Erasmus, who was both against idolatry and horrified by iconoclasm:

“Since all names spoken or written be but images, if ye set aught by the name of Jesus spoken or written: why should ye set nought by his image painted or carven that representeth his holy person to your remembrance, as much and more too, as doth his name written? Nor these two words *Christus crucifixus* do not so lively represent us the remembrance of his bitter passion, as doth a blessed image of the crucifix, neither to lay man nor unto a learned.”

Paintings of the crucifix

But what about 2-d images of the crucifix? How do we assess their status as potential idols? In the images we're about to look at, I want you to consider how the viewer is being positioned, and how the other people in the painting are responding to the crucifixion.

Here's a kind of standard representation of the crucifix as an icon [similar to the images in Freedberg]

- Fra Angelico, Christ Adored on the Cross by St. Dominic (c. 1442)]

Freedberg: “The merest suggestion of living potentiality will trigger the process whereby the trope becomes cognitive reality”

Images discussed:

Grunewald, Isenheim Altarpiece (1515)

Cranach the Elder, Shneeberg altarpiece (1539)

Cranach the younger, Weimar Altarpiece (1555)

Cranach the younger, Wittenberg altarpiece (1547)

Van der Weyden, Crucifix and Crucifixion diptych (c. 1460)

Overall argument: inspired by Koerner's Reformation of the Image:

The English response to the problem of the crucifix is a continual, and uneven, cycle of iconoclasm.

The German response, embodied in Cranach the younger (both the Wittenberg and the Weimar altarpieces) is to reframe the crucifix as a didactic subject, emphasizing its historical status, the narrative quality of the crucifixion scene, and disrupting that scene with anachronistic references that point to contemporary theology (the Lutheran tradition). This makes the crucifix more of an aesthetic object rather than a devotional/iconic one.

Side bar:

The van der Weyden diptych (produced years before the Lutheran reformation!) makes a similar move, aestheticizing the crucifix by positioning it against a painted red cloth backdrop. Intriguingly, the installation of the piece in the Philadelphia Museum of Art seems to play upon the distinction between the devotional work and the work of art by giving it its own kind of altar, designed to look like the blank grey wall in the painting.