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Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany

The role of the visual image in the popular piety of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has long been one of the vastly neglected themes of Reformation historiography. This neglect seems to have originated from two directions. The first was a Protestant tendency to represent the Reformation as a radical rejection of a degenerate form of popular religion which had expressed itself in crassly material and superficial images of the holy. This degeneration had progressed so far as to threaten the very fabric of Christian worship, and could only be reversed by a complete rooting out of the offending forms. Iconoclasm was therefore the correlative of the 'reformation of worship', and religion shifted its emphasis from the visible, the collective and the external to an invisible, interior realm of individual spirituality. The second was the conventional wisdom, produced out of an older historiographical tradition, that the Reformation had contributed to the decline of the visual arts. The latter view has been effectively laid to rest by the work of Carl Christensen, and there is now a developing interest in the theme of 'art and the Reformation'. So far, however, this has been more the preserve of the historian of art than of the Reformation. Invaluable as this recent work has been to our understanding of visual traditions, many important questions have yet to be raised or explored. One question in particular has attracted little or no attention, the role of visual perception in popular piety, and the relationship of piety to sense perceptions in general. In this article I want to begin to make good that deficit by sketching a very preliminary outline of how we might approach the question of popular piety and sense perception, and their changing relationship over the period that saw the onset and institutionalization of religious reform.

I

The visual image and visual traditions played a very complex role in late-medieval popular piety, and we can understand something of this complexity if we analyse two woodcuts from the first decade of the sixteenth century. The first (Figure 1) was produced around 1510 by the Nuremberg artist Wolf Traut, who was at that time intermittently active in Albrecht Dürer's workshop. It depicts in a single condensed representation some of the most popular devotions of the later middle ages. The centrepiece of the depiction is the Mass, but more precisely the Elevation, the moment in the Mass when the priest holds aloft the consecrated host for the adoration of the congregation. The centrality of the Mass as a reenactment of Christ's saving death on the cross is emphasized by the figure of the Saviour, the living-dead Christ apparently rising from the tomb behind the altar on which the priest celebrates the eucharistic sacrifice. It is also emphasized by streams of blood which flow from Christ's side to depictions of the other six sacraments, grouped three to each side of the altar. On the left-hand side, Baptism, Confirmation and Penance, on the right-hand side, Holy Orders, Marriage and Extreme Unction. A cardinal and a priest with processionial cross act as acolytes holding up the priest's vestment. To their left and right respectively are the symbols for St Mark (the lion holding the book) and St Paul (holding the book and sword), representing the New Testament.

This central scene also depicts the 'Mass of St Gregory', a stock late-medieval representation of a legend according to which Gregory the Great had doubted the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but at the moment of consecration was granted a vision of the crucified Christ. The vision is represented here as a fusion of the living Christ on the cross with the dead Christ being lowered into the tomb, the latter a common devotional image of the fifteenth century. Whereas many versions of the 'Mass of St Gregory' show the vision occurring as the pope bent over the bread to utter the words of consecration or as he genuflected before the newly consecrated

2. See the most recent view by Carlos M. N. Eiras, War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin, Cambridge 1986, esp. ch. 1.
3. Carl C. Christensen, Art and the Reformation in Germany, Athens, Ohio, 1979; Carl C. Christensen, 'Reformation and Art', in Reformation Europe, Ozment (ed.), pp. 249-70. However, see the excellent recent work by Lee Palmer Wandel, 'Images of the Poor in Reformation Zurich', PhD dissertation, University of Michigan 1985; Christopher S. Wood, 'In Defence of Images: Two Local Rejoinders to the Zwinglian Iconoclast', Sixteenth Century Journal, Vol. 19, 1988, pp. 25-44; and Kristin Zapata's forthcoming book, 'In His Image and Likeness: Political Iconography and Religious Change in Regensburg, 1500-1600, which all show the fruitfulness of historians tackling this theme, especially in terms of iconographic traditions.
4. I raised in a preliminary way some of the issues covered in this article in two earlier conference papers, forthcoming as: 'Das Visuelle in der Volksfrömigkeit', in Bild und Bilderverständnis im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit, Bob Scribner (ed.), Wolfenbüttel 1989; and 'Zur Wahrnehmung des Heiligen in Deutschland am Ende des Mittelalters', in Das Mittelalter: unsere fremde Vergangenheit, P. Dinzelbacher and H. Klemschmidt (eds), Stuttgart 1989. I am grateful for comments offered on these occasions.
host, there were just as many versions which chose to depict it occurring as in our woodcut, at the moment when the host was displayed to the laity at the elevation. The scene was thus clearly intended to emphasize the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist as the source and origin of all the sacraments.

Other scenes in the four roundels at the corners of the woodcut indicate Old Testament prefigurations of the Eucharist: in the top left, Melchizedek, the priest who blessed Abraham and gave him bread and wine (Genesis xiv. 18); in the top right, Abraham providing bread for the refreshment of three angels who appeared to him as travellers (Genesis xviii. 2-5); in the bottom left, Elijah being fed in the desert by an angel who brought him bread (1 Kings xix. 5-6); and in the bottom right, the manna from heaven from which the Israelites were fed in the desert (Exodus xvi. 4, 14). All these images stress the importance of the Eucharist as refreshing and strengthening food. Two figures between the roundels to left and right complete the prefigurations by pointing to the eucharistic sacrifice. Moses, to the left, holds a lamb with a halo seated on a book representing the Old Testament, and perhaps symbolizing the sacrifice of the Old Testament (the halo shows that the lamb represents Christ, but may also recall the lamb sacrificed by Abel or the ram sacrificed by Abraham in place of his son Isaac)—in any case, a clear prefiguration of Christ’s saving death. To the right, John the Baptist holds the lamb sacrificed in the New Testament, the Lamb of God bearing the victory flag, a symbol of Christ’s resurrection and triumph over death. The texts in the speech-bands attached to these two figures identify Christ as the Lamb whose taste is sweet and who takes away the sins of the world.

The central roundel at the top is constituted by a rosary, supported by St Dominic to the left and St Thomas Aquinas to the right. Dominic is here represented according to late-medieval legend as the saint to whom the Virgin had given the rosary in a vision, and who now enjoins his followers to teach this prayer to the people. The Dominican saint Thomas Aquinas is shown as directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, through the dove whispering into his ear, and as the theologian of the Eucharist by holding a chalice and host. He has been given a speech-band stating that he has written on the Sacrament in order that all may recognize Christ. Aquinas was not only particularly associated with the theology of the Eucharist, but was also credited with composing the liturgy for the feast of Corpus Christi. Within the circle, the Virgin holds up her son to receive a rosary from a kneeling devotee, which the infant then passes to his Father. Above

11. On Aquinas and his role in the Corpus Christi liturgy, see Lexikon der Heiligen und der biblischen Gestalten, H. L. Keller (ed.), 5th ed., Stuttgart 1984, p. 546. I am grateful to Miri Rubin for calling my attention to this point.
the Virgin an angel also brings two rosaries to the Father while the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove presides over the entire scene.

The rosary is shown here as a form of prayer providing specially privileged access to God. It was an increasingly popular form of devotion in Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century, following the foundation in 1475 by the Cologne Dominican Jacob Sprenger of the first lay confraternity devoted to its regular recital. However the rosary was more than a mere devotional practice. The string of prayer-beads on which the prayers were counted out was a blessed object which became an indispensable item in all forms of liturgical and non-liturgical worship: at Mass, in processions, at confession, at weddings, even being laid in the grave at burial. Because of the miraculous stories attached to it, it found use as an amulet and was prized for its apotropaic powers to drive off evil spirits, to protect women in childbirth, to heal sickness, and even to bind fast the bonds of love.12

This broadsheet shows how the rosary was used as a popular prayer for the laity to recite during the Mass, possibly because they were unable to follow the celebrant’s words spoken in Latin, and perhaps because its three sets of mysteries for meditation encompassed the whole range of Christian salvation history.13 The viewer of this woodcut, however, is intended to meditate on the Sorrowful Mysteries, and so on Christ’s sacrificial death. This is shown by the small shields bearing the five wounds of Christ, which separate the sets of ten roses making up the circlet of the rosary. The inscription to the left of the altar underlines this message with the words: ‘Whenever you are at Mass, regard the sufferings of Jesus Christ, behold the image of Gregory and pray five Pater Nosters’.14

The shape of the rosary could also recall Christ’s crown of thorns, and the similarity is evoked by the scene at the bottom centre, where two groups of kneeling figures—kings and clergy to the left, queens and nuns to the right—hold out their rosaries, while regarding the image of Christ on the Veronica-cloth held aloft by two angels. The Veronica-cloth provided another important visual focus for popular devotion. According to legend, the cloth with which Veronica wiped the face of Jesus retained an image of his features and was preserved in St Peter’s in Rome, where it was regularly displayed for veneration. It represented the vera imago or ‘true image’ of Christ, a notion also contained in the derivation of the name ‘Veronica’ from vera icon. This was no mere portrait, however, but the features of Christ in the midst of his Passion, suffering to redeem sinful mankind. It was, therefore, a true ‘image of piety’ (imago pietatis) which not only reminded the viewer of Christ’s saving death, but which appealed directly to his or her emotional involvement. It expressed vividly the rhetorical power of the visual image to move the viewer to piety, a rhetoric which is reinforced by the gesture of the central figure of Christ on the altar, a gesture both of complaint and appeal to the viewer to regard his suffering.15 This is further emphasized by the two angels to the left and right of the living-dead Christ holding symbols of the Passion, the pillar at which Christ was scourged, the spear used to pierce his side, and the sponge on which he was given vinegar to drink. The Instruments of the Passion themselves constituted an object of great popular devotion at this time, either as an independent image or in conjunction with a depiction of the Mass of St Gregory.

The images arranged along the vertical axis of the woodcut thus contained most of the major themes of pre-Reformation Christocentric piety, linking them both to the doctrine of the Real Presence and to the mediating role of the Virgin, albeit with characteristic Dominican emphases. The importance of Mary in this form of piety is underlined by the inscription to the right of the altar, enjoining the recitation of a rosary to the Virgin as the priest elevates the lord, and this is echoed by the text along the front of the altarcloth, the opening words of the Ave Maria. Overall, we can say that this woodcut skillfully combines piety with doctrine, symbolic with emotional-rhetorical visual messages. It was large enough (273 × 373 mm) to be pinned up either as a devotional image or as an instructional aid. Despite the complexity of its structure, its main visual images were sufficiently well-known in popular piety for their significance to be instantly recognizable.

The second example (Figure 2) is a woodcut broadsheet produced around the same time (c. 1505) by an artist from Dürer’s circle, and which contains themes characteristic of Franciscan piety. Its major subject is devotion to Christ’s monogram, IHS, understood in Germany to represent an abbreviation of ‘Iesus’. This is shown here with a crucifixion scene set against the initials I and H. The IHS monogram was a devotion popularized in Italy by San Bernardino of Siena, but in German popular belief it had apotropaic associations, being used on houses, barns and stalls for its protective power to prevent lightning strikes or repel sorcery. It was also used to invoke protection against the plague, for blessings over houses and in weather benedictions.16 Here it is combined with another set of initials, INRI, standing for Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judeorum, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’, the ironic inscription nailed to the top of the cross by Pilate. This inscription was believed to possess the same magical power as Christ’s monogram, but it is here given special potency by being written in the three biblical languages.17 The sheet contains several other visual images which were constituent elements of popular devotion:

13. On the Mysteries of the Rosary, which showed considerable variation at the end of the fifteenth century, as did the method of praying it, see S. Beissel, ‘Rosenkränzertbilder aus der Zeit um 1500’, Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst, Vol. 13, 1900, pp. 33-42.
14. On the five wounds, see LCI, Vol. 4, pp. 540-1; the Sorrowful Mysteries are the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus. The five Pater Noster-beads separating the Ave-beads could also be taken to recall the five occasions on which Christ shed blood. Beissel, ‘Rosenkränzertbilder’, p. 35.
15. On the Veronica cloth, see Belting, Das Bild und sein Publikum, pp. 17, 35f.; on the gesture of complaint and appeal, see Belting, pp. 103-26.
17. The trilingual cross inscription is mentioned in John xix: 19-21, but it was first depicted trilingually in the later middle ages: LCI, Vol. 2, pp. 648-9 (Kreuzaufstellung); see also Bächholdt-Stäubli, Vol. 4, p. 696 (INRI).
the Wolf Traut broadsheet on the human reality of Christ's suffering and saving death.

II

It was the emotional and apotropaic elements of such images that were subjected to such strong criticism by religious reformers of both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the Protestant reformers added the accusation that they only encouraged 'superstition' and idolatry. This latter judgment has overly influenced the opinion of some modern historians that such devotional images represented a form of superficial exterior piety, that they were overloaded with distracting petty detail, founded on excessive naturalism and aroused an overheated emotionality. Such views have contributed little to understanding late-medieval popular piety in its own terms, or to relating it to wider questions of perceptions of the sacred. To do so we must first begin to understand such piety as a 'way of seeing', locating it first in the whole context of worship in the middle ages, and then within the framework of medieval epistemology and hermeneutics.

For people of the later middle ages, worship was an intensely visual experience. There was no celebration of the Mass, indeed almost no prayer, which did not involve a relevant image, while the major feasts of the liturgical year were celebrated by a 'dramatized liturgy' in which images played a major role. On Palm Sunday, the image of Christ on the ass was pulled in procession through the streets and accorded special devotion; on Good Friday the Passion of Christ was often celebrated by the use of a special crucifix with movable arms, which was laid in a specially prepared 'Holy Sepulchre' from which it was resurrected on Easter Sunday, often to be carried through the streets in triumph. The realism of such dramatizations of the Passion was often heightened by having the figure fitted out with human hair and with a hollow in its side through which a bag of animal blood could be pierced with a spear to simulate the piercing of Christ's side as he hung on the cross. This crucifix was also often carried through the fields in Rogation Day processions to invoke divine protection over the growing crops. Similarly, the Ascension of the Lord was dramatized by a figure of Christ on a rainbow pulled up through a hole in the church roof; and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was reenacted through the lowering of the figure of a dove and the scattering of burning strips of paper or wafers over the congregation.

23. On these themes see Hennis Brinkmann, Mittelalterliche Herrnemutik, Darmstadt 1980; and the very useful study by Margaret Miles, Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture, Boston 1985.

The elevation was essentially a moment of 'putting the holy on show', but it was also, at least for the popular mind, a moment of participation in the liturgical action by the laity. Laypeople could perceive the Mass as a sacrifice by an act of seeing, for the elevation recalled the sacrificial death of the crucified Christ. Indeed, the crucifix, as the condensation of this sacred truth, was associated with the elevation in many ways, not only through the crucifix on the altar, which could be seen behind or above the elevated host, but also by the cross or crucifix embroidered on the priest's mass-garment, something that was emphasized by the ways in which the celebrant held his arms aloft at various points during the Mass.

The elevation gave expression to an intensified eucharistic piety which developed in the late middle ages in the wake of the doctrine of transsubstantiation, but it was also closely linked to visual representations of the suffering and saving death of Christ which led to the consecrated host and the crucifix being used interchangeably. The most popular example of this interchangeability is found in the iconographic representation of 'the Mass of St Gregory'. This depiction emphasized the notion that the participating layfolk could apprehend the bodily presence of Christ at this central point in the Mass by an act of seeing. It combined in a single action Luther's idea of 'looking through' the physical image and the mystics' notion of ascending from the sensual to the divine: it was perception of the sacred action through physical seeing. But in the context of the total sensual experience of the liturgy, this act of seeing became something qualitatively different.

As a ritual action which made efficacious that which was signified (the very essence of a sacrament), it was homologous to a sacramental action. Strictly speaking, it was the priest who made effective the Real Presence by speaking the words of consecration over the host; this was something the laity could not perceive at that point in the liturgical celebration, for the words were not spoken aloud. For laypeople, Christ was first made present by an act of 'sacramental seeing'. This explains the well-attested custom during the middle ages, by which many laypeople regarded the elevation as the essential part of the Mass and came to church only to see the host elevated, and left immediately thereafter. I want to label this form of seeing 'the sacramental gaze', and to propose it as a major form of perception that stands closer to popular epistemology than the Augustinian tradition of 'mystical seeing'.


34. In some depictions this was emphasized by placing the figure or head of the crucified Christ immediately behind the elevated host at the picture's vanishing point, so that the viewer literally looked through the host to see the Saviour. See for example the relatable from the workshop of van der Heide for the Corpus Christi confraternity in Lübeck, 1496, reproduced in *Die Mensa Gregors des Grossen*, p. 24.

35. The custom could be associated with the older usage of the thirteenth century, in which the words of consecration were spoken during the elevation: Browe, 'Die Elevation', p. 24; Jungmann, *Missa solemnis*, p. 257.


30. This has been emphasized as an essential feature of private devotion by Virginia Reinhart, 'Popular Prayers in Late Medieval and Reformation France', University of Princeton PhD dissertation, 1983, p. 64.

As a visual experience and as a pious action, the act of 'sacramental seeing' was essentially a form of the gaze, a prolonged, contemplative encounter with the holy figure represented. The encounter occurred either through a direct contact with the eyes of the depicted person, as in the most common form of the Veronica-cloth, or through a combination of eye contact and gestural appeal, through the gesture of complaint and appeal with which the suffering Christ addressed the pious viewer in the *imago pietae*. This was sometimes accompanied by a written injunction to the viewer to 'behold' the features of the holy personage, as in Hans Weiditz's 1522 depiction of the Man of Sorrows, with the simple text 'Ecce homo' (Figure 3). This form of contemplative gaze constituted a personal encounter between the viewer and the viewed that constituted a characteristic feature of the pious image. It is also represented demonstratively in those images which present examples of pious devotion for imitation by the viewer, usually in the form of the donors of an image displaying their own pious devotion, as in a woodcut by Bernhard Jobin (Figure 4).³⁶

The rise of naturalism and the refinement of artistic technique that worked its way through into German art at the end of the fifteenth century enabled the act of gazing to become more intense and emotional. It became almost a devouring 'passion to see', what we might call the 'greedy gaze', and in conjunction with the total sensual involvement so often implicit in the act of devotion it could become an act of ecstasy. Michael Ostendorfer depicted just this kind of 'ecstatic gaze' attached to the cult of the Beautiful Virgin of Regensburg in 1520, which devotees held to bring miraculous healing (Figure 5).³⁷ This could certainly spill over into an excessive sensuality with overtly sexual overtones. Both Bucer and Zwingli were to complain that it encouraged the viewer more to impure than to pious thoughts. Zwingli wrote in 1525.

Here stands a Magdalene so shockingly painted that even the priests have always said: who can maintain devotion here and observe moderation. Yea, even the eternally pure and immaculate maid and mother of Jesus Christ had to have her breasts bared. There stands a Sebastian, a Maurice and the pious John the Baptist, all so nobly, manfully and sensually [depicted] that the women had to confess because of them.³⁸

III

The radical critique of the devotional image presented by the Protestant reformers rested, as Carlos Eire has shown, on more than mere disapproval of the image in favour of the Word, or on a mere shift from seeing to hearing as a means of apprehending the sacred. It presupposed a hermeneutic principle which stressed that God was so totally other, so far

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³⁶ Also in the form 'Behold you who pass by...'. See Geisberg/Strauss, Vol. 3, p. 838 for Hans Krummbach's 'Madonna and Child'.
³⁷ Geisberg/Strauss, Vol. 3, p. 460. According to Albrecht Altdorfer's depiction of the Beautiful Virgin of Regensburg (Geisberg/Strauss, Vol. 1, p. 23), the image was of the same type as that depicted by Jobin.
beyond the reach of the natural world, that the supernatural could not be apprehended by any merely human effort. 39 One could attain no knowledge of the divine through the human senses, and the most radical critique of images was therefore also a critique of the role of human sensuality in worship. This critique was applied not only to images and music, but to the very essence of the liturgy. Garside has commented on Zwingli’s views of images that the logical consequence of his position was the abolition of common prayer itself, because any form of worship which impinged on the human senses served to distract the Christian believer from a proper disposition before God: true worship could only be performed alone and in the heart. 40 This indicates that the real point at issue during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was more than a mere dispute over images. Indeed, the dividing line between iconophobes and iconodules did not correspond neatly to that between Protestants and Catholics. There were Catholic critics of images both before and after the Reformation, just as there were Protestants who upheld the role of images in piety and worship, provided that they were used properly and with due decorum. Thus, Wycliff and Hus, along with Luther, advocated a reformed use of pious images, Calvin spoke positively about the didactic and admonitory value of religious images, and Theodore Beze even recommended using images of the Reformers as an aid to piety. 41

The real division was epistemological, between those who believed that humans could attain knowledge of divine reality through fleshy means such as images and those who believed that they could not. Indeed, radical iconophobes such as Carlstadt even saw recourse to such things as a diabolical distraction, leading to false and perverted knowledge under the guise of the sacred. Thus, Protestant iconodules such as Luther recognized the cognitive value of images for educating pious Christian believers, while iconophobes such as Zwingli denied this cognitive possibility: the pious Christians could recognize God in the heart alone. This was the same basic religious disagreement that divided them in their dispute over the Eucharist, where Zwingli’s opposition was founded on a firmly held antiscalarism. 42

Here Luther was almost certainly more realistic in his assessment of human cognitive capacity than radical antiscalarists such as Zwingli. Despite all attempts to reduce worship to purely oral/aural forms, and to limit the acquisition of sacred knowledge merely to the printed word, the question of ‘ways of seeing’ continually re-emerged as a contradiction within Protestantism. Visual modes of perception continually reasserted themselves, even if it were only through recourse to symbols or emblems.

41. See Eire, War Against the Idols, pp. 72-3.
as mere object, and opened the way to an awareness of the world as an observable nature which could be subjected to analytical scrutiny, rather than as a potentially personalized Nature with which affective relationship was possible. This produced an effect similar to the invention of the lens, which made its appearance during the fifteenth century. The lens could be used as a magnifying glass to reveal the 'hidden reality' of Nature, a nature which was not 'seen through' in the sacramental sense to reveal supernatural mysteries, but which revealed only a microscopic version of the natural world already visible to the naked eye. This made possible a 'scientific gaze' which could subvert the 'sacramental gaze', but its objectifying effects may also have been counterbalanced by the greater illusion of reality given by depth and naturalism in representation to heighten the 'mystery' of artistic representation. By the last quarter of the fifteenth century, warnings were already being issued about the beguiling effect of aesthetic representation, with the argument that beautiful and new images were not more worthy of devotion than the old or the ugly. Nicholas of Cusa, who called attention to the magnifying qualities of the lens, also pointed out the almost magical effects that could be created by the new visual techniques in the all-seeing portrait, the picture whose gaze seemed to follow the viewer irrespective of the point of observation. And as if to demonstrate that this grasp of new scientific theories of vision did not exclude older forms of visual understanding, Cusa used both phenomena as metaphors for mystical vision and the all-seeing eye of God.

It seems certain, however, that more naturalistic representation lessened the power of the gaze and enabled the objectifying glance, creating the emotionally distanced 'cold gaze'. The image could provide information dispassionately, without arousing any sense of personal involvement. It is this 'cold gaze' which provides the basis for an act of non-sacramental, didactic seeing that characterized many pious images in the Reformation tradition. The gaze became a 'theological gaze', in which contemplation of the image of Christ crucified was not so much to involve the viewer emotionally with the image, but to remind him or her of a doctrine.

46. The lens in the form of converging spectacles was in use from 1295, and was fairly common in the second half of the fourteenth century; see A. C. Crombie, Augustine to Galileo: The History of Science AD 400-1850, London 1952, p. 206; René Taton, Ancient and Medieval Science, London 1963, p. 513.
49. Cusa, pp. 7 (De berylo), 195-201 (De visione def). Cusa believed, of course, that supernatuarl light and supernatural darkness are not to be seen with the naked eye: De visione def, p. 99. On the more complex aspects of Cusa's position, see Marc Bensimor, 'Modes of Perception of Reality in the Renaissance', in The Darker Vision of the Renaissance, Robert S. Kinsman (ed.), Berkeley 1974, pp. 221-72, esp. pp. 227-34.

The same tendency is involved in the commemorative sheets that were another characteristic genre of Reformation visual representation—the portraits of the Reformers that were to be produced even by Calvinists and Genevese, or the representations of the Baptism of Christ, or of the heroes of the Reformation. Yet it did not prove entirely possible to remove the 'devout gaze' from the Christian repertoire. As we have seen with Cusa, older understandings of the act of vision and its pious applications could easily coexist with the new. The same proved to be true for the 'reformation of images'. The well-known depiction of Luther and Duke John of Saxony contemplating the crucified Christ (Figure 6) may have been intended merely as a means of catching the viewer's attention, as a Merkbild, but it could also be understood as an example of a 'sacramentifying gaze', a gaze which both represented and embodied the holiness of the persons depicted. This is more marked in a memorial sheet produced by Pankratz Kempf for the death of Duke Johann Friedrich of Saxony, which depicts what is almost a salvific vision of the Trinity (Figure 7). Such sheets form the beginnings of a reformed hagiography, which reached its apogee in the cult of miraculous Luther images, and reveal the essential continuity between the pre-Reformation and the Lutheran tradition of devotional images. In fact, the early Reformation and the emerging Lutheran tradition were unable to dispense with some of the most powerful images and symbols of Christian belief, and a conscious attempt was made to adapt traditional pious images to reformed usage. The most prominent example is found in the case of the crucifix. At the simplest level, the crucifixion was depicted merely as an historical event, accompanied by New Testament texts explaining its significance. Typical of its kind is a woodcut broadsheet created by the Master M.S. and printed in Nuremberg by Hans Wandereisen, in which brief texts from John i, 1 Corinthians i and Ephesians I spelled out the message of Christ's saving death. Similarly, a 1561 depiction of Christ as Saviour of the World (Salvator Mundi) was produced to mark the year in which the dates of the conception of Christ and his crucifixion coincided. This merely depicts the risen Christ giving a blessing with his right hand and carrying in his left the cross with its inscription. The text beneath the picture stresses Christ's call to follow him and promises that whoever loses his life for the sake of the Gospel will win eternal life. These are characteristically evangelical messages, devoid of the emotional involvement and complex layers of popular belief of the pre-Reformation broadsheets.

Other images seemed to stand closer to pre-Reformation types, and we can discern the way in which reformed depictions of the crucifixion moved

50. For these types see the works by Koepplin, Schuster cited above, n. 43, and by Beza, n. 41.
51. Koepplin, Reformation der Glaubensbilder', p. 369 on (a slightly different version of) this depiction as a Merkbild.
52. See the article 'Incombusible Luther': the Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany', in Scriber, Popular Culture and Popular Movements, pp. 323-53.
across the spectrum in this direction in four broadsheets from the second half of the sixteenth century. Hans Weigel the Elder, active in Nuremberg 1558-77, produced a devotional sheet showing a traditional crucifixion, with the flanking figures of the Virgin and St John (Figure 8). To the left of this illustration is a simple prayer expressing essentially evangelical sentiments:

My sins afflict me, I rejoice in God's grace; I know two things, that I am a poor sinner and that God is merciful; I confess the first and I believe the second. Ah God, be gracious to me a poor sinner. Turn your face to God alone, who will help you in all need; for whoever trusts in God has built well. God has given, Christ has merited, faith understands and works attest.

The prayer printed in large type shares the evangelical tone, calling on God for consolation in the hour of death:

O Lord, snatch me from the jaws of the Enemy, and set your consoling Word upon me, I beg to be reconciled to you... O true God, I beg you from my heart, give me patience in my pain, through Jesus Christ hear my plea.

The theme of recourse to the crucified Christ for consolation in the hour of death is the theme of a second broadsheet, printed in Nuremberg by Wolfgang Strauch, active c. 1554-72 (Figure 9). The sheet is headed with the cross inscription and shows a family, parents and two children kneeling before the crucifix. The prayer reads:

O almighty God, I give you praise and thanks for the bitter suffering that you had on the wood of the Holy Cross, as your soul departed your holy body. Think on mine when my soul departs my body. O Jesus, I live for your, I die for you; I am yours in life and in death.

This strikes an emotional note similar to pre-Reformation devotion to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross, and presents a form of the 'sanctifying gaze' for the imitation of the pious reader. Indeed, the image of the suffering Christ appealing directly to the devout believer reappears in a Lutheran context through the depiction created by Jacob Lucius for the Cranach workshop around the middle of the sixteenth century (Figure 10). The Latin text, although Protestant in its underlying theology, still calls upon the viewer in traditional manner to behold the sufferings of Christ the Redeemer.

A second broadsheet produced by Wolfgang Strauch could easily cater for pre-Reformation belief (Figure 11). It depicts Christ on the Tau-cross, and is headed with the cross inscription in three languages. The prayer immediately beneath these inscriptions calls upon Jesus to behold the servant for whom he has suffered on the cross. To each side of the cross are texts which explain the meaning of the Tau-cross by reference to biblical symbols, especially the brazen serpent. This text ends with words spoken by the person of Christ himself, which seek to arouse an affective identification with the suffering Christ, words which could easily have been invoked by Gellner von Kaisersberg or St Bernard:

O mortal man, behold my wounds; was there ever found such pain to equal mine. You are the cause of my suffering, I suffer this because of your sins; what
do you do through my wounds! I am dying here for your sake alone—you should mark that well and full; turn away from your wicked opinion, time and tide will soon expire.

The prayer at the bottom of the sheet offers opportunity for applying this image to the tribulations of daily life. It provides a threefold invocation in litany form

O holy god, O strong God, O merciful God, take pity on us; O holy God, O strong God, O immortal God, take pity on us; O merciful eternal God be gracious and merciful to us poor sinful men and forgive us our sins. Amen.

Finally it recommends devoutly uttering the 'inconquerable title of Christ' in the three languages at the tolling of the midday bells and in all times of need. Here, with the threefold invocation of the sacred words and the threefold calling upon the Saviour, the image has become virtually an apotropaic image. It recalls nothing so much as protestantized forms of conjurations which were to remain popular in Protestant areas until well into the nineteenth century.55

There is no doubt that these images represent a syncretism of traditional and evangelical modes of visual piety, found in several variations. A memento mori broadsheet published by Hans Glaser, a printer active in Nuremberg 1540-72, but probably printed before 1559, shows a clear syncretism of form. Glaser seems to have held evangelical sentiments—he produced two other broadsheets around the same time, one depicting the contrast between the doctrine of Christ and that of the pope, and a crucifixion with the Virgin and St John, to which were appended passages from the New Testament indicating Christ as sole Saviour.56 His memento mori sheet features a skull set in a circle, with the instruments of the Passion arranged around it in a second concentric circle, while at the corners of the woodcut are symbols of the transitory nature of human life—the sun, the moon, a sundial and hourglass and a cock. The printed text, however, sets out 'two kinds of human death', that of the 'heavenly man' and that of the 'earthly man'. Here too, the element of the devout gaze is not absent. How far the Lutheran form of the devout gaze encouraged a reformed version of the 'sacramental gaze' is unclear from our examples, and we would require more information about the popular use of such broadsheets; but neither their form nor their content ruled out this possibility. Works such as those by Weigel and Strauch were capable of being used as a prayerful means of encounter with the divine. Clearly, there were major transformations in the modes of visual piety, but there were also powerful continuities. When the history of popular Protestantism comes to be written, the theme of visual piety will claim a major share of attention.

56. On Hans Glaser, see Strauss, The German Single-Leaf Woodcut, Vol. 1, p. 333. The memento mori sheet is on p. 335; the dating is given by Glaser's address 'auf der Schmelzhütten', premises he occupied until 1553. The other two sheets referred to are on pp. 342, 360.