Venite et Videte: Art and Architecture in Brussels as Agents of Change during the Counter Reformation, c. 1609-1659

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Introduction

Whenever we enter one of Belgium's many old churches we are being overwhelmed by grandiose baroque altarpieces, sculptures, and lavish architectural decorations in gold and marble.[1] Most of these artworks originated in the first half of the seventeenth century, a period when the Southern Low Countries had hardly recovered from the religious crisis of the sixteenth century and were plagued by war, famine and disease. From a modern day perspective it seems hard to understand why people, under these circumstances, would spend so much effort and so many resources on something as "useless" and "superfluous" as art and architecture. However, the function of art and the place of religion in society in the Southern Netherlands during the Counter-Reformation were altogether different from those in our modern world.

The mindset of those who commissioned such splendid religious art in the midst of crisis may be illustrated by Rubens's painting *Saints Dominic, Francis, Catherine of Alexandria and other Saints invoking the intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary, to protect the world from Jesus' wrath* (1618-20) (*fig*. 1).[2] The painting, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, was originally the high altarpiece of the Antwerp Dominican church.[3] It depicts a vision of the order's founder Saint Dominic, seeing a furious Christ holding three bolts of lightning, threatening to strike all sinners. Mary falls at his feet begging Him to save the world by invoking the missionary zeal of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis. In the painting the two saints spread their protecting arms over the globe, around which a snake – symbol of evil – coils.

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[1] Surveys are Paul Philippot et al., *L'architecture religieuse et la sculpture baroque dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux et la principauté de Liège 1600-1770* (Brussels: Editions Mardaga, 2003); Hans Vlieghe, *Flemish Art and Architecture, 1585-1700* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Horst Gerson and Engelbert Ter Kuile, *Art and Architecture in Belgium, 1600 to 1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960).

[2] Wolfgang Heinrich Savelsberg, *Die Darstellung des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi in der flämischen Malerei und Graphik des späten 16. und des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1992), 308–313; Hans Vlieghe, *Saints (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, 8)* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 88.

[3] See Jeffrey M. Muller, "Ruben's Altarpiece in the Antwerp Dominican Church: How Visitors and Guidebooks Saw It," in *Le Rubénisme En Europe Aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles*, ed. Michèle-Caroline Heck (Turnhout, 2005), 69–82.

A painting like this may be seen as a typical example of the way art functioned as instrument of "propaganda" in the service of the Counter-Reformation, by visually emphasizing the need for saintly intercession, denied by the Protestants. At the same time, this work (and similar ones)[4] provides a compelling visual example of the intense fear of God that held early modern society in its grip, especially during times of distress. Any way you look at it, artworks like this had no neutral role, although its current display on a museum wall might suggest otherwise, because the museum presents it first and foremost as a specimen of Rubens' masterly brush. Neither should it be seen as a mere illustration of a long-gone mentality. I should rather like to ask: what can art do to people? How could it bring about change? And to which domains should we turn in order to understand this function of art in historical terms?

In 1923, Aby Warburg gave a lecture on the serpent ritual of the Hopi Indians, describing a dance in which the participants cast rattlesnakes in the sand.[5] As snakes resembled flashes of lightning, this gesture was part of a ceremony that was supposed to bring rain, and in which the snakes were treated as active agents (or intercessors in early modern Christian terminology). Interpreting the function of the Hopi ritual, Warburg coins the term "danced causality" (*getantzte Kausalität*).[6] Through sympathetic magic, the Hopi "turn objects of terror into means of control". I would argue that something similar happens in the painting of Rubens, and that Warburg asks for a wholly different way of looking at early modern religious art, which takes into account that artworks were "far from a static backdrop to private or public life but rather very much a part of the action".[7] This "action", whether it be Hopi rituals or early modern art patronage, often seems like

[4] E.g. Rubens' *The Intercession of the Virgin and St Francis deter the Wrath of Christ* (RMFAB inv. 160)

[5] Aby Warburg, "A Lecture on Serpent Ritual," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 (1939): 287.

[6] Ibid., 291. "Instinctively, for the unexplained effect, he [primitive man] substitutes the cause in its most real and most tangible shape. The masked dance is the danced law of causality". Warburg does not delimit his observations to non-western cultures: "The will to surrender in devotion is a nobler form of assuming a mask". See also the recent, much more complete edition in Aby Warburg, "Bilder Aus Dem Gebiet Der Pueblo-Indianer," in *Werke in Einem Band*, ed. Martin Treml, Sigrid Weigel, and Perdita Ladwig (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 524–66.

[7] Lydia Hamlett, "The Longinian Sublime, Effect and Affect in 'Baroque' British Visual Culture," in *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus' Peri Hupsous in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*, ed. Caroline van Eck (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 199.

irrational behaviour to our modern eyes, yet may be elucidated by an approach informed by Warburg's first steps towards an ethnography of art.

In this dissertation I start from the assumption that the pious anxiety over the wrath of God, which was of such central concern throughout the period, was one of the main motivations behind the religious donations and art commissions in the Southern Netherlands. As I will argue, works of art and architecture played a key role in processes of negotiation with the divine. In order to elucidate these processes, and to understand the role of art and architecture therein, I will examine in depth three different case studies of patrons intervening in the religious landscape of the Habsburg court city of Brussels with "acts of faith". In each case contemporaries expected art and architecture – and the objects and practices they involved – to bring about change. The transformative powers attributed to art and architecture are the central topic of my dissertation. These powers are what I term the agency of art and architecture.

My period of investigation starts roughly in 1609, when the Twelve Years Truce heralded a period of peace and relative prosperity during which travellers from the Protestant North were allowed (and encouraged) to visit the South.[8] It ends around 1659 after the conclusion of the Peace of the Pyrenees, which ended the Franco-Spanish war (1635-1659).[9]

The great historical and mental distance between our world and that of seventeenth-century Belgium calls for an extensive introduction, in which I will first of all present the contemporary notion of piety and provide a "thick description" of pious practises in the sense of Clifford Geertz: by putting this behaviour in context it will become meaningful to an outsider.[10] To understand the motivations and circumstances that informed actions, interventions and ultimately artworks and architecture during the period under consideration, one must have a clear sense of what was at stake and how contemporaries felt their problems were to be confronted.

[8] When in 1621 Archduke Albert died without progeny, the Netherlands fell back to the Spanish Crown under the act of Cession. At the same time the afflictions of war recommenced after failed negotiations for prolonging the Twelve Years Truce. The hostilities with the Dutch only ended at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

[9] Albeit to extremely unfavourable conditions for Spain and its Netherlands (or what remained of them).

[10] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 1–32.

A unique and exceptionally detailed insight into the mid-seventeenth century religious and political train of thought and its implications is provided by the diary of Simon le Boucq, city secretary of Valenciennes in Hainault, kept during the siege of the city by the French in 1656.[11] Our story thus begins at the close of the period under consideration, when this mentality was no less alive than half a century earlier.

The battle of Valenciennes, 1656

> *Haes-op van Valencijn, ghy lichte Fransche Naty*
> *Worpt u geweyr in 't slick en roept Don Ian om graty.*
> Be gone from Valenciennes, you wanton French nation
> Throw your rifle in the mud and beg Don Juan for mercy.
> (Popular song published in Antwerp in 1663).[12]

On June 15, 1656, the feast of Corpus Christi, an extraordinarily large French army of about 30,000 men surrounded and besieged the fortified city of Valenciennes, hoping to exhaust its defenders. Occupying a strategic position on the river Scheldt, Valenciennes constituted a key military bulwark and was considered to be the gateway to the North. Contemporary sources frequently stress that the fate of all of the Netherlands, North and South alike, depended on the outcome of the siege: if Valenciennes fell, the French would have free rein to push northward.[13] In what follows I will cite extensively from Le Boucq's day-to-day account of defensive measures and military events, as well as endless series of prayers, processions, and religious ceremonies that were staged in order to gain divine support for the city and its Spanish rulers. This reflected a mentality in which prayer was considered, according to one Spanish Jesuit and royal preacher, "a valiant arm to overcome our enemies, and no less powerful than the sword and the lance."[14] All the more so since the French had neglected the fact that the day at which they started their siege was the feast of Corpus Christi, at which

[11] Simon Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes en 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, ed. Maurice Hénault (Valenciennes, 1889).
[12] Jan Baptist Halbos, *Vermaeckelycke Duytsche Liedekens met III. IV. V. Stemmen...* (Antwerp, 1663), 13 (song no. 4, composed by Philips van Steelant).
[13] Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes sn 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, 153.
[14] J.H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1986), 586; quoting from Francisco Aguado, *Exhortaciones varias dotrinales* (Madrid: Francisco Martinez, 1641).

occasion the community of Christians (as "body of Christ") used to show its coherence by presenting itself united.[15]

On the second day of the siege it was still business as usual in the city: the procession of St. Géry during the octave of the Sacrament (the eight days including and after Corpus Christi) went on as usual despite the siege. Le Boucq recounts that one day later, the city Magistrate discussed specific devotional measures:

> "A special council [was held], where it was first proposed that it was necessary to implore the divine assistance and succour of the glorious Virgin for our deliverance. And in which it was ordained as of tomorrow to hold a general procession in the church of Notre-Dame la Grande, where we would bring the image of Notre-Dame de Grâce from the church of Saint-Jacques, to be placed on the high altar during the mass, and afterwards be carried in procession with the coffin of the Royez [confraternity], all making a vow on behalf of the city, that in case of deliverance the latter [city] will present to the said image of Notre-Dame de Grâce a silver lamp of the value of six hundred florins."[16]

In order to enforce this vow, a general procession was held on this Sunday with "unspeakable devotion", and in the Notre-Dame la Grande a giant wax candle was placed on behalf of the city. They took the image of Notre-Dame de Grâce there during the offertory, and then to a series of other churches, and finally to St Jacques, where a prayer octave was held to implore the succours of the Virgin.[17] Clearly, for the city Magistrate the Virgin Mary was the first saint to call on when the city was in danger, and her miraculous image was the primary means to reach her. By means of urban ritual – taking the ancient cult object in procession to the city's main church and honouring it with masses, votive offerings and vows on behalf of the citizens – Mary's intercession was to be guaranteed.

Meanwhile, the surrounding land was inundated: a proven method to keep the enemy at bay, and the fortifications were reinforced by the city's priests and monks. In addition to making themselves useful with manual

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[15] Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 83.

[16] Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes en 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, 83. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author.

[17] Ibid., 86–87. Le Boucq points out that though on this day the procession of the octave of the Sacrament was not done because of the general one (they did a small one in the cloister) on all the other days of the octave it was done as normally and with extraordinary devotion.

labour, the city's clergy also started a continuous prayer "estafette"; monks praying together for half a day in one church, and then handing the responsibility over to another, for as long as the siege would last.[18]

The French kept pestering the civic guards and tried to build a bridge over the swamps surrounding the city. Skirmishes between the besiegers and the besieged became ever more violent. On the twentieth, the Magistrate wrote a letter to the newly installed Governor and Captain General of the Spanish Netherlands, Don Juan José of Austria (1629-1679), natural son of the Spanish king Philip IV, urging him to come to the rescue. He replied within a few days that he would leave Brussels at once, "hoping on the mercy of God through the intercession of his Holy Mother".[19]

In addition, on June 25 the Lords Magistrates ordained to implore the help of the city's tutelary saints: Saint Saulve, "apostle of this town, which keeps his coffin," and Saint Gilles, its patron saint. Apparently these saints were considered particularly appropriate as intercessors (through their relics), because of their historical bond with the city, since they converted its population to Christianity in the eighth century. Therefore masses were sung, candles were burnt, and all of this "without saving on the music".

But this was still not deemed enough. On June 28, "The Magistrate ordained and had printed the following ordinance to implore divine assistance to our help":

> *"The Lords Magistrates of this city make known to all, that to move our God to mercy and to deliverance of the present siege by intercession of the holy Virgin, have decided to have celebrated on every day at nine the Holy Sacrifice of the solemn mass with music in the following churches: […]. Everyone is invited, by the Lords Magistrate, to present himself and contribute to this good work with vows and prayers."*[20]

One day later, on June 30, the French commenced the bombardment of the city. Le Boucq recounts how one bomb fell on the Jesuit church, which was full of faithful, but miraculously caused few casualties. On the first of July another procession was held, in which the priest celebrated and carried the Sacrament barefoot to implore heavenly assistance, followed by many people who went barefoot as well.[21]

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[18] Ibid., 89.
[19] Ibid., 103.
[20] Ibid., 110.
[21] Ibid., 115.

On July 4 the city received a letter from Don Juan, containing hardly more than a reassurance of his intention to rescue the city, and a request of the citizens to continue to pray for good success.[22] Then, on July 7 the city received another letter from Don Juan dated 5 July with a more specific demand:

> "[…] *with all the hope that this affair should veritably depend on the divine help, having in that place* [Valenciennes] *(as I am informed) the finger of the glorious St John, it would be very agreeable to me if the city made some offering in form of an anniversary of the day, on which by his intercession our Lord will be served to grant him the benefice of delivering this city from the great evils that would occur to him by its loss. And with that and the great value which the inhabitants make appear, I have no doubt that we will obtain the desired goal, God disposing this following his providence.*"[23]

It goes without saying that Saint John, as Don Juan's patron saint, was thought to have a unique intercessory power when it came to invoking celestial blessing over his military enterprises. To fulfil his request on July 8 the finger relic of Saint John was duly honoured with a procession headed by the city herald clothed in his coat of arms, and a promise was made, in case of deliverance, to continue this devotion every year. This was decided at a council of the Magistrates who also:

> "Authorised another time […] to have masses celebrated by all monasteries for our deliverance. This day the Magistrate had celebrated a solemn mass with music at the refuge of [the Abbey of] Fontenelle to the honour of the miraculous image of the Virgin reposing in that place. And subsequently by the abovementioned ordinance of the council, the Magistrate ordered to celebrate the masses hereafter declared and to start from tomorrow the 9th of the month and to continue every day throughout the siege, namely […]. Together 28 masses to celebrate every day, which was carried out with all possible devotion."[24]

[22] Ibid., 122–123: "[…] en quoy je me confie que notre Seigneur nous donnerat le bon succès necessaire, come je le supplie. Et il conviendra aussi qu'on fache chez vous les prières à ce mesme effect. [...]."
[23] Ibid., 130–131.
[24] Ibid., 132.

A miraculous image like that of Fontenelle, normally kept in a nearby abbey but taken to the city for safety, was not neglected, as it was deemed a welcome and potentially powerful complement to the city's sacred hoard.

In spite of this, and of even more public prayers on Sunday 9 July, the French kept trying to blow up the city gates with gunpowder, and dug tunnels under its walls.[25] They had now persistently besieged and bombarded the city for almost a month, and the situation became untenable. Yet the citizens remained loyal to Spain and the commander of the garrison protecting the town, Don Francisco de Meneses refused to surrender. Meanwhile the citizens called for help with signs, such as fire on the belfry, and letters urging Don Juan to come to the recue. Tensions between the men in charge of the city's defence erupted; the city's governor the Duke of Bournonville[26] called Meneses (who was loved by the people), a fool. Following letters of Don Juan promising a prompt rescue, on July 14 the Magistrate ordered all religious houses both male and female "to double their prayers in order to be assisted by our good Lord."[27] Le Boucq very explicitly states what was at stake:

> "To implore the divine assistance the churches were open all night long and full of people who incessantly implored the intercession of the glorious Virgin and of the saints for being delivered from this siege and avoid the ruin that they were to suffer in case of the change of monarchy, fearing nothing more than to fall in the hands of that insolent French nation, who do not keep law, faith, nor promise, only making use of a pure libertinism and living in unbelief [*en athée*] and treating the people of the cities of their conquests worse than the Turks do, which made them so odious to us that we felt brought to the way of a desperate [suicide] rather than to fall into their hands. At eleven at night we started in all the abovementioned churches to celebrate masses; the Rev. Prelate de Hasnon celebrated in pontifical [garb] in his church of Notre-Dame la Grande and so did other persons, not saving on this occasion that had become so pressing."[28]

[25] Ibid., 135.

[26] On Bournonville's patronage in Brussels, see Helena Bussers, "La famille de Bournonville et l'église des Carmes déchaussés à Bruxelles," *Bulletin des musées royaux d'art et d'histoire* no. 44 (1995): 113–124.

[27] Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes en 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, 144–145.

[28] Ibid., 147: "Pour implorer l'assistence divine toutte la nuict les Eglises furent ouvertes et remply de people qui sans cesse imploroit l'intercession de la glorieuse Vierge et des sainctz pour

On 15 July "the churches remained open all night where the people did not fail to perform altogether extraordinary devotions".[29] Having arrived at Valenciennes, Don Juan's army and that of the Prince of Condé (a renegade French relative of the royal family in the service of Spain) prepared their offensive. Le Boucq notes that "the watchword of this army [of Condé] was « JESUS-MARIA », which was an omen of good success."[30]

Meanwhile in Brussels, the yearly Octave of another, particularly important "national" relic, the "Holy Sacrament of Miracle" was being celebrated. On the express orders of Don Juan, the prayers, processions and religious ceremonies held in its honour were to be put in the service of warding off the siege of Valenciennes. We will soon find out why this performance of urban ritual in the country's capital was deemed so important.

Finally, "when it was about 1.30 in the morning of July 16, the day of the solemnity of the Holy Sacrament of Miracles in Brussels, and the principal feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel", four divisions of the Spanish army attacked the French camp by surprise.[31] By means of a series of well executed and brave cavalry charges, Don Juan managed to break through the enemy lines, forcing the French to withdraw hastily.[32] The Spanish army booked a resounding victory, avenging their defeat at Arras two years earlier. Valenciennes was relieved, and some 4,000 men were captured by the Spanish, among which were many officers of high rank, including the Marshall La Ferté.[33] Le Boucq describes the following events as follows:

> "His Highness [Don Juan] returned to the city at nine in the morning through the gate of Cambrai, and went into the church of Saint Jean to honour the relic of this saint, which he kissed three times, next he

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estre délivré de ce siège et éviter la ruine que leur eult causé le changement de monarchie, ne redoubtans rien plus que de tomber es mains de cette insolente nation françoise, qui ne gardent loy, foy, ny promesse, n'usant que d'un pur libertinage et vivans en athée et traîtant les peuples des villes de leur conquestes pire que ne font les Turcqs, ce qui nous les rendoit si odieux qu'on scent mis jusqu'en a la desespérade plutost que de tomber en leurs mains. Les douze heures de la nuict arrivé l'on comencea par toutes les susdites églises à célébrer messes ; le R. Prélat de Hasnon célébra en pontifical dans son église de N. Dame-la-Grande et ainsi des aultres personnes ne s'epargnoit en ceste occasion si pregnante."

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 148.

[31] Ibid., 149.

[32] Ignacio Ruiz Rodríguez, *Don Juan José de Austria en la monarquía Hispánica: entre la política, el poder y la intriga* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2007), 192.

[33] Jonathan I. Israel, *Conflicts of Empires : Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy, 1585-1713* (London: Hambledon Press, 1997), 140.

> heard the low mass during which we sung the Te Deum Laudamus, after which the said Highness left, the joint Magistrate saluted and congratulated him with his glorious victory, to which he told them: « Now well did I not fulfil my promise ».”[34]

It is obvious that Le Boucq does not attribute the victory to the military genius of Don Juan or his commanders; instead he is firmly convinced of the power of faith, and divine retribution:

> “Also our good God heard the prayers and delivered us from the great misfortune that was apparent to happen to this so catholic city and which ran the risk of being wasted by heresies, the chief and majority of the besieging army being infected by it, such a way that at all attacks and otherwise, they cried out after those of the city, that they would go implore the assistance of their “washerwoman” [*lavandière*] meaning the holy virgin, and other scandalous and damnable remarks, also God punishes them in such a way that one will have memory of it for several centuries.”[35]

The diary by Le Boucq reveals an almost chivalric concern for safekeeping the honour of the Virgin, and a genuine fear of the wrath of God in case his city would fall prey to the French blasphemers (as do many other contemporary accounts of the siege, all of which are conceived to an overwhelming extent in religious terms).[36] The relief of the siege was no less

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[34] Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes en 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, 152: “[...] elle [S.A. Don Juan] rentra dans la ville sur les 9 heures du matin par la porte Cambrisienne, et alla descendre en l'église de S. Jean pour y honorer la Relicque dudit Sainct, laquelle il baisa par trois fois, puis il intendit la basse messe durant laquelle on chanta le « Te Deum Laudamus », lequel achevé sa dicte A. [Don Juan] sortant, le Magistrat en corps le saluèrent et félicitèrent de sa glorieuse victoire, à quoy il leur dict : « Or bien ne me suis-je pas acquité de ma promesse ».”

[35] Ibid., 147–148: “Les Eglises demeurèrent ouvertes toutte la nuict où le peuple ne mancquoit à faire des dévotions en tout extraordinaire. Aussi notre bon Dieu exaucea les prières et nous délivra du grand malheur qui estoit apparent arriver sur ceste ville tant catholique et qui couroit risque d'estre gasté des hérésies, le chef et pluspart de l'armée assiégeant en estant infecté, en sorte telle qu'à touttes attacques et aultrement, ils crioient après ceulx de la ville, qu'ils allassent implorer l'assistance de leur « lavandière » entendans de la vierge sacré, et aultres propos scandaleux et damnables, aussi Dieu les punit de telle sorte qu'on en aura mémoire de plusieurs siècles.”

[36] Examples are Jacques De Rantre, *Description véritable des choses plus mémorables arrivees pendant le siège de la ville de Valentiennes Valentianae fait par l'armée de France* (Valenciennes: Jean Boucher, 1656); Jean Baptiste Maldonado, *Palmae seu Valentiana victricibus armis Philippi Quarti Regis Catholici, Joannis Austriaci felicibus auspiciis ab obsidione Gallorum liberate* (Valenciennes: Jean Boucher, 1660); G. Ricart, *Triumphus Valencenensium ob solutam urbis suae obsidionem per expugnationem potentissimi Gallorum exercitus auspiciis Serenissimi Principis Ioannis Austriaci peractam 16 Iulii 1656*, n.d.

than a relief of this gripping anxiety, and a reaffirmation of the conviction that Spain and its Southern Netherlands were under divine grace.

Consequently, everywhere in the war-torn and impoverished Southern Netherlands the news of the victory was greeted with extraordinary public rejoicing: all sorts of festivities and thanksgiving ceremonies were held throughout the country.[37] A veritable torrent of poems, songs, artworks, prints, coins, and publications celebrated the victory, praising the unyielding burghers of Valenciennes and the military heroes of the army, and, last but not least, explained the events in terms of divine interference. It could not, so it was thought, be a coincidence that the siege (which had started on Sacrament Day, the feast of Corpus Christi) was lifted on the very day at which in Brussels the yearly procession of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle was performed.

Making sense of Valenciennes

Events like those in Valenciennes are by some historians explained from the simplistic viewpoint that in times of war and distress the masses tend to turn to superstitious behaviour.[38] Yet how can we understand more profoundly the strange, in our modern eyes irrational behaviour of the people of Valenciennes? Why were the events so closely associated with the feast of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracles in Brussels? We can only understand why this procession was so important and closely connected to the military events by those who lived it, by recognizing that events like the Battle at Valenciennes were seen as part of the history of salvation. In this context, such events immediately acquired such a historical dimension because those involved incorporate a host of references, as is also shown by the invocation of protection of the city by the saints that Christianized it. Therefore I will now briefly summarize the history of the sacramental cult of Brussels and the meanings that were attached to (and the agency exerted by) the miraculous hosts and their procession.[39]

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[37] As may be expected, after the siege was lifted the citizens of Valenciennes fabricated a cavalcade of religious ceremonies of thanksgiving which I will not inflict on the reader. See Le Boucq.

[38] There is a growing awareness of the artificiality of distinctions between superstition and official belief. See John Edwards, "[Review Article:] The Priest, the Layman and the Historian: Religion in Early Modern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1987): 87–93.

[39] Margit Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2007), 255–275.

In 1369 a group of Jews were burnt at the stake in Brussels on the accusation of having stolen and defiled a number of consecrated hosts. According to tradition, the wafers had started to bleed miraculously after the Jews had stabbed them with knives.[40] Three of these hosts would then be brought to the collegiate church of St Michael and Gudule in a procession of *translatio*, where they would be venerated as relics, in the Blessed Sacrament of Miracles (*fig*. 2). An annual procession was instituted, reputedly by Duke Wenceslas and Duchess Joanna of Brabant, who had also given the Joyous Entry charter.[41] As it followed the same route as the Joyous Entry, it would remind the population of (arch)ducal legitimacy.[42] As successors of the dukes, the Habsburgs had always been closely associated with the cult, investing in the rebuilding of the chapel and donating stained-glass windows.[43] Because of these dynastic resonances the procession, which had only been of secondary importance (after the *Ommegang*), during the seventeenth century gradually became a great festival of state. The Archdukes Albert and Isabella played a key role in this.[44] As members of the House of Habsburg, they had a special devotion to the Eucharist, the *pietas eucharistica*, which went back as far as the 13th century Count Rudolph of Hapsburg, founder of the dynasty. According to legend, this ancestor had once lent his horse to a priest carrying the *viaticum* (a consecrated host reserved for the sacrament of the dying).[45] By this and other devotions, what came to be known as the *pietas Austriaca*, the House of Habsburg claimed to have obtained the divine mission to rule.[46]

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[40] Luc Dequeker, *Het Sacrament van Mirakel: Jodenhaat in de Middeleeuwen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2000).

[41] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 258.

[42] Raingard Esser stresses the importance of joyous entries as: "political events which constituted, rather than merely confirmed, the relationship between ruler and ruled." Raingard Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 304.

[43] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 259; Placide Lefèvre, "Offrandes princières faites en l'honneur d'une relique eucharistique à Bruxelles au XVII et au XVIII Siècle," *Bulletin des musées royaux d'art et d'histoire* (1937): 77–104.

[44] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 258. See also P. Quintens (ed.), *Brussel in feest: de ommegang en de meiboomplanting*, Brussels, 2000

[45] Archduke Albert would emulate his ancient forebear in this act of devotion whenever he had the chance.

[46] Luc Duerloo, "Pietas Albertina. Dynastieke Vroomheid En Herbouw van Het Vorstelijk Gezag," *BMGN* 112, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca: Österreichische Frömmigkeit im Barock*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1982), 13–23; see also M. Ohara, "Rudolf

According to Thofner the cult also "helped to foster a shared militancy of dukes and city against the shared enemy (of Christ): the sacrilegious Jews". In emulation of their ancient forebears who had banished the Jews from Brabant, the archdukes banished all heretics by their decree of expulsion in 1609.[47] After all, the Protestants were guilty of a similar crime as the Jews: destroying Christ.[48] The history of the cult was rewritten by the Jesuit Franciscus Costerus in 1611, defending it against protestant writers who denied that the relics were real hosts, and arguing that doubting their veracity is to be considered an offence to the "princely city of Brussels" and its court, the rulers as well as the ruled.[49] Thus the cult was increasingly understood as a focal cult of a militantly catholic state battling with heresy, Jews, and so on, turning the Blessed Sacrament of Miracles into "a national relic of the Southern Low Countries, and the procession a ceremony of state if not yet of nation".[50]

Precisely this function as national relic, protecting the state from impious invaders, was miraculously performed on the eve of July 16, 1656. Even the Dutch newspaper *Hollantse Mercurius* mentioned the miracle, and the honour that was being paid to the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle in Brussels by putting the chronographic inscription "MIraCVLoso Deo" (1656) over the altar in the chapel of the Sacrament in the collegiate church of St Michael and Gudule (*fig*. 3, 4).[51]

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of Habsburg and the Priest: A Study in Iconography of the Counter-Reformation under the House of Habsburg," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 49 (1996): 91–135.

[47] The Infante Isabella Clara Eugenia, in turn, may have emulated her name saint Clara, who repulsed the infidels with the Eucharist. See Barbara Welzel, "Princeps Vidua, Mater Castrorum: The Iconography of Archduchess Isabella as Governor of the Netherlands," *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten* (1999): 166–167.

[48] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 260.

[49] Ibid., 260–264; Franciscus Costerus, *Dialogue, Oft t'samen-sprekinge over de solemnele processie des H. Sacraments van Mirakel, jaerlijcks te Brussel ghehouden ende naemelijck in dit jaer 1610* (Brussels: Velpius, 1611).

[50] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 164.

[51] *Hollantse Mercurius*, 1656, p. 94: "Over dit slaen en ontsetten was de gantse Weerelt van Spagnien soo blije, datse God danckten en Don Jan, en al was men so geweldigh verarmt, de vreughdevuyren evenwel wierden aengesteken, de klocken geluyt, en de Taefelen gedeckt: te Madrid is den eersten Bode by Sijn Majesteyt Coninglijck vereert, selfs heeft den Spaensen Gesant D. Estafana de Gamara in 's Gravenhaeg oock gezegepraelt, (niet teghenstaende zijn Soon in den dienst des Coninghs was ghesneuvelt, beneffens Hendrick Verkest, een Boeren Soon uyt 't Lant van Waes, doch om zijn gau beleyt Mr. del Camp in dit ontset:) schenckende opentlijck den Wijn, en aen den Armen ettelijcke Contanten, etc. Men heeft te Brussel boven 't Sacrament dese Incarnatie gestelt: MIraCVLoso Deo. 1656."

The news of the victory at Valenciennes soon spread all over Europe, and the population of the Southern Netherlands celebrated (for more than a year) as they hoped the event would bring peace closer. Their joy was not only shared by the Dutch, but also by a large majority of the French population who hated Cardinal Mazarin for his belligerent politics.[52] The Battle of Valenciennes would prove to be the last great military victory of the Spanish empire, yet at the time it was seen as a historical turning point. The triumph was commemorated with brilliant historical medals, cast in gold, silver and bronze by the Brabant medallist Waterloos, which were to be worn around the neck with a ribbon (*fig*. 5).[53] On the front they showed an armoured portrait bust of Don Juan.[54] On the reverse, they depicted the reliquary of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracles containing the three hosts, accompanied by the following chronographic inscription: MIraCVLoso festo aDora. [worship it during this miraculous feast - 1656]. The medal leaves no doubt as to the cause of Don Juan's success: his miraculous victory was to be attributed to the virtue of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle. In fact, a contemporary Spanish account of the events states that Don Juan expressly chose the eve of the feast as a propitious moment for the attack:

> "[…] and His Highness having chosen Saturday night, the eve of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle, which fell on July 15 (which is one of the greatest and most worthy feasts of the Netherlands), for performing this resolution, […]"[55]

This was, however, a highly unusual decision: since the time of Albert and Isabella, who had greatly stimulated the cult, it was customary (or even mandatory) that the ruling governors of the Spanish Netherlands took part in the procession in Brussels: Archduke Albert would leave whatever military campaign he was in to attend it, and archduke Leopold-Wilhelm was known

[52] An intercepted letter to G. Ratchliffe, Paris, 17 July 1656. "State Papers, 1656: July (2 of 6)," in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe. Vol. 5: May 1656-January 1657* (London, 1742), 187–200; see also Israel, *Conflicts of Empires: Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy, 1585-1713*, 108.

[53] Gerard van Loon, *Histoire métallique des XVII Provinces dses Pays-Bas, depuis l'abdication de Charles-Quint, jusqu'à la Paix de Bade en MDCCXVI* (The Hague, 1732), Vol. 2, 402–404. (first published in Dutch as Gerard van Loon, *Beschrijving der Nederlandsche Historiepenningen*, 4 vols., The Hague, 1723-31)

[54] Identified by the inscription: "Joannes Austriacus, Philippi IV Hispaniarum Regis Filius; Belgii Gubernator."

[55] "'Relación de la campaña del año 1656,'" in *Varias relaciones de los estados de Flandes: 1631 Á 1656, Madrid* (Madrid, 1880), 160: "[...] y habiendo elegido S.A. la noche del sábado, víspera del Santísimo Sacramento del Milagro, que se contaron 15 de Julio (que es una de las mayores y más dignas celebridades de los Países-Bajos), para poner por obra esta resolucion, [...]."

to do the same.[56] What was the reason for Don Juan to break with this longstanding tradition of *Pietas Austriaca*?

An account of the events by the canon and historian Antonius Sanderus (1584-1664) in his description of the Abbey of Grimbergen of 1659 stated that it was significant that the siege of Valenciennes had begun on June 15, the day of the feast of Corpus Christi when the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist was celebrated by carrying it in procession.[57] That the "not sufficiently Christian" French had started their aggression on this sacred day was very impious, and was bound to be miraculously retaliated on that other Sacramental feast, one month later.[58] What Sanderus seems to imply, is that the French timing of their laying siege to Valenciennes was to be considered an offense to Christ, comparable to the torturing of the hosts by the Jews in 1370.[59]

In the perception of the citizens of Valenciennes, such as Le Boucq, the victory was to be attributed primarily to the intercession of the Virgin Mary (*fig*. 12).[60] From the perspective of Don Juan, however, the city's devotion to the finger relic of his name saint may have been crucial, and on the level of states, the Brussels' devotion to the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle was promoted by the court as the decisive devotion. This may be

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[56] Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, 258: The archdukes always travelled to Brussels to take part in the procession, whether they were in the midst of a military campaign or enjoying their annual stay at the summer residence of Mariemont. See also Michel de Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661* (Caën: M. Yvon, 1667), 206; Jean De Boeck, *Vier-Honderd-Jaerig Jubilé van het Hoog-Weerdig en Alderheyligste Sacrament van Mirakel, berustende in de Collegiale en Parochiale Kercke van de HH. Michael en Gudula, binnen de Princelycke Stad Brussel* ... (Brussels: J. Vanden Berghen, 1770), 90.

[57] Antonius Sanderus, "Chorographia Sacra Abbatiae Grimbergensis," in *Chorographia Sacra Brabantiæ sive celebrivm aliqvot in ea provincia ecclesiarum et coenobiorum descriptio* (Brussels: Philippe Vleugart, 1659), 10.

[58] The opposite also occurred, for instance when the French defeated the Spanish at the Battle of Leucate in 1637 on the feast day of St Michael, King Louis XIII donated an altarpiece dedicated to the militant Archangel (depicted in veneration of the Virgin and Child) to the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris. See Klaus Bussmann and Heinz Schilling, *1648 : War and Peace in Europe, Vol I* (Münster: Veranstaltungsgesellschaft 350 Jahre Westfälischer Friede, 1998), 306–307.

[59] This interpretation of the events would subsequently be integrated into the litany of miracles attributed to the Sacrament of Miracles, was recounted in histories of the cult, and depicted in a painting of Don Juan kneeling in prayer at Valenciennes, donated to the shrine as late as the mid eighteenth-century on the occasion of its jubilee.
De Boeck, *Vier-Honderd-Jaerig Jubilé van het Hoog-Weerdig en Alderheyligste Sacrament van Mirakel, berustende in de collegiale en Parochiale Kercke van de HH. Michael en Gudula, binnen de Princelycke Stad Brussel* ..., 91–93.

[60] As evinced by countless publications, prints, songs, medals, etc.

illustrated by a painting by the court painter (and courtier)[61] David II Teniers (1610-1690), presently in Antwerp, commemorating the battle of Valenciennes in a highly significant way (*fig*. 8).[62] It depicts the besieged city from various perspectives simultaneously, seen through a heavy arched window of stone.[63] A birds-eye perspective (resembling a military map) shows the city amidst inundated lands, surrounded by the opposing armies of Don Juan and Condé on the one hand and Turenne and La Ferté on the other. At the top emerges an additional silhouette of the city, over which the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle[64] hovers amidst heavenly rays of light, beneath the Virgin and child enthroned, and surrounded by angels holding banners seized from the French (*fig*. 9, 10). The framing window is adorned with many trophies of war, the coats-of-arms of King Philip IV and Don Juan, and portrait medallions of the King, Don Juan, Condé and other commanders. In the middle, a white cloth is upheld below the bust of the King (probably meant to be inscribed) by statuettes of Minerva trampling down Discord, and Hercules whose "Leo Belgicus" devours the Gallic rooster (*fig.* 11).[65]

In the city hall of Valenciennes, the Magistrate had the victory depicted in a painting of gigantic proportions (362 x 775 cm) by the battle painter Peeter Snayers (1592-ca. 1667).[66] This lost painting is extensively

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[61] Teniers the Younger was *ayuda de camera* (chamberlain) of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm and Don Juan José of Austria. Hans Vlieghe, *David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690): a Biography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 102; Hans Vlieghe, "David II Teniers (1610-1690) en het hof van Aartshertog Leopold-Wilhelm en Don Juan van Oostenrijk, 1647-1659," *Gentse bijdragen tot de kunstgeschiedenis en oudheidkunde* 19 (1966): 123–148; see also Ellen Roegis, "Het hof van Don Juan José de Austria, landvoogd in de Habsburgse Nederlanden (1656-1658)" (University of Ghent, 2006).

[62] KMSKA, inv. 344 (177 x 205 cm). The painting was possibly an elaborated design for a tapestry. See the exhibition catalogue Paul Huvenne and Hans Devisscher, *De uitvinding van het landschap: van Patinir tot Rubens 1520-1650* (Antwerp: KMSKA, 2004), 270; see also Richard D. Leppert, "David Teniers the Younger and the Image of Music," *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen* 10 (1978): 154.

[63] This is rather unusual and reminds of the plan of Brussels drawn up by Nicolaus van der Horst and published by Martin de Tailly as *Bruxella nobilissima Brabantiae civitas* in 1640.

[64] Misidentified in the exhibition catalogue *De uitvinding van het landschap* as "allegorical figure of Valenciennes".

[65] Le Boucq, *Récit du siège de Valenciennes en 1656 publié d'après le manuscrit original de S. Le Boucq, par M. Hénault.*, 173–174.

[66] This monumental work, unique in Snayers' oeuvre, was unfortunately destroyed in 1940, as confirmed to me by Leen Kelchtermans who prepares a monograph on the artist ("Between remembrance and glorification. A contextual study of Peter Snayers' (1592-1667) topographical battle paintings for the Habsburg elite") For the highly interesting history of this painting, of which no images survive, see Paul Foucart and Maurice Hénault, *Une toile de Pierre Snayers.* (Paris: E. Plon, 1895). From the hand of Snayers over 60 landscapes with battle scenes seen from

praised in a long laudatory poem on Snayers in *Het gulden Cabinet* of the Antwerp rhetorician Cornelis de Bie (1661),[67] who devotes more space to this painting than to any other picture in his book,[68] which was to herald a new period of bloom for the art of painting after the Peace of the Pyrenees.[69]

As I hope to have shown with this case in all its peculiar details, the complex of religious beliefs, cultic and devotional practices involving religious artifacts conducted by those involved and affected by the siege, informed their actions to a high degree. That this pious mentality was no eccentric conception adhered to only by radical Catholics, or pure propaganda, may be demonstrated by an intercepted letter from an English spy in Brussels, dated 12 August 1656:

> "It is no wonder the Spaniards should prosper at Valenciennes, there was such fasting, and praying, and processions generally held for so many days before the fight, and ladies of very good condition and tender sweet complexions going barefooted till the blood ran out."[70]

Thus many contemporaries were convinced of the power of religion to invoke celestial agency and effectuate change (especially if harsh devotions were performed by tender young ladies). The account by Le Boucq evinces the extent to which religious performances played a role throughout the events, and tellingly reveals the dynamics of piety that emerged between Don Juan and his loyal subjects. It is significant that, notwithstanding all the devotions practised at Valenciennes, in the eyes of those involved the "decisive" devotion took place in Brussels, and stemmed from the Austrian

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birds-eye view remain, depicting the Spanish military triumphs. He relied on topographical documentation like military maps, as he did not travel to the depicted locations. See Francine-Claire Legrand, *Les peintres Flamands de genre au XVIIe siècle* (Brussels: Meddens, 1963), 202, 266 (note 370); and Matthias Pfaffenbichler, "The Early Baroque Scene: From Depiction of Historical Events to Military Genre Painting," in *1648: War and Peace in Europe, Vol II*, ed. Klaus Bussmann and Heinz Schilling (Münster: Veranstaltungsgesellschaft 350 Jahre Westfälischer Friede, 1998), 495.

[67] Cornelis De Bie, *Het Gulden Cabinet van de Edel Vrij Schilder Const, inhoudende den Lof vande vermarste Schilders, Architecte, Beldthowers ende Plaetsnijders van deze eeuw* (Antwerp: Jan Meyssens, 1661), 223–224.

[68] As noted by Israel, *Conflicts of Empires: Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy, 1585-1713*, 140, note 125.

[69] See the forthcoming article by Sarah Moran "'The Right Hand of Pictura's Perfection': Cornelis de Bie's *Het Gulden Cabinet* and Antwerp Painting around 1660," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (2014).

[70] An intercepted letter "to Mr. Copinger, at the widow Andrews, in Bedford-bury in Covent-garden", Brussels, 12 August 1656. "State Papers, 1656: August (1 of 7)," in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Volume 5: May 1656 - January 1657* (London, 1742), 258–271.

pietas eucharistica, the very origin of Habsburg power (and of the specific "agency" of the host-relic). This context produced a convincing miracle with national and international resonance, which legitimized the rule of the house of Habsburg over the Netherlands, as both rulers and ruled were blessed with divine grace as a result of their piety.

In the eyes of the French this was of course propaganda, but that does not exclude the actual belief of Catholics in the effects of their piety. It is significant that the French answer to the Spanish spin, after the fates had turned in French favour at their siege of St Ghislain[71] and the capture of La Capelle from the Spanish, was a medal with the text "Fortuna Redux" (Fortune recovered) and the image not of a relic but of the classical goddess of Fortune.[72]

The case of Valenciennes illustrates the prevalent contemporary notion of "piety as a way to influence God" in the Southern Netherlands. Curiously, it has not been comprehensively studied before, as historians consider the victory unimportant in light of the subsequent erosion of Spanish military power.[73] Yet the many artworks (*fig.* 7, 13) and literary works that were created in its aftermath provide ample material for studying the cultural assumptions and achievements of the Spanish Netherlands in this period and seem to beg for an ethnographic analysis.

What role did artworks play in this culture? The events in Valenciennes involved hardly anything that we would consider art (at least not from the period). Yet it is in this setting that the new works of art and architecture of the baroque functioned. The events in Valenciennes exemplify the roles Baroque religious art and architecture played: they were made not primarily to be admired for their artistic qualities, but to act.

[71] For the Spanish spin on this event, see the pamphlet by the pastor of the Brussels Beguinage, Johannes Mytenus, *Ghislenopolis fortissime celerrimeqve expvgnata, Francisque violenter erepta per Serenissimum Principem Ioannem Avstriacvm, M. DC. LVII.XXIII. Martii. Levique carmine adumbrata* (Brussels: typis Guilielmi Scheybels, 1657).

[72] Loon, *Histoire métallique des XVII Provinces des Pays-Bas, depuis l'abdication de Charles-Quint, jusqu'à la Paix de Bade en MDCCXVI*, 404–405; on the use of event medaillons as a propaganda medium, see Bussmann and Schilling, *1648 : War and Peace in Europe, Vol I*, 64.

[73] See for instance Fernando González de León, *The Road to Rocroi: Class, Culture and Command in the Spanish Army of Flanders, 1567-1659* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 344–345 focusing on the little attention for the victory at the court in Madrid, and the lack of reward received by Don Francisco de Meneses.

Come and see

> Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth.
> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.
> He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
> I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:8-10)[74]

Venite & videte: come and see! With these psalmist's words, the Antwerp Jesuit polemist Jan David invites all inhabitants of the rebellious Northern provinces to visit the churches of the Southern Netherlands, when the Twelve Years Truce in 1609 had made travelling across the frontline possible again. In a pamphlet entitled *Pass to exonerate the conscience to go watch the catholic churches and religion*, he encouraged Protestants to visit the Catholic cities, even if just out of curiosity.[75]

The potential Northern tourists were in for a surprise in the Southern Netherlands, where a lot had changed since 1585, when Antwerp and other major cities in the Southern Netherlands were conquered from the Calvinists by Spanish forces under the command of Alexander Farnese.[76] Following the emigration of a large part of their (Protestant) population to the North for religious and/or economic reasons, the Southern Netherlands had subsequently witnessed an overwhelming catholic resurgence.[77] To name just a few of the most conspicuous developments of the catholic revival: an extensive educational system was set up by the clergy, the number of vocations rose sharply, and laypersons subscribed *en masse* to religious confraternities, eagerly reading devotional books. They took part in pilgrimages, processions, and Marian cults; in brief: all the traditional Catholic practices that a large part of the population had rejected in the

[74] Psalm 45:9-11 (Vulgate): "venite et videte opera Domini quae posuit prodigia super terram auferens bella usque ad finem terrae arcum conteret et confringet arma et scuta conburet in igne vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus exaltabor in gentibus exaltabor in terra."

[75] Divoda Jansen (pseudonym of Joannes David), *Vry-Gheleyde tot Ontlastinghe van Conscientie om de Catholiicke Kercken, ende Godsdienst te gaen bekiicken* (Antwerp: Joannes Trognetius, 1609).

[76] Frans Baudouin, "1585: de val van Antwerpen, ook een belangrijke datum voor de kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden," in *Herdenking Oranje*, 1985, 87–103.

[77] James D. Tracy, "With and without the Counter-Reformation," *The Catholic Historical Review* 71 (1985): 547–575; Alexandre Pasture, *La restauration religieuse aux Pays-Bas catholiques sous les archiducs Albert et Isabelle (1596-1633): principalement d'aprés les archives de la nonciature et de visite ad limina* (Leuven: Librairie Universitaire, 1925); H.J. Elias, *Kerk en staat in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden onder de regeering der Aartshertogen Albrecht en Isabella, (1598-1621)* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1931).

course of the sixteenth century.[78] And last but not least, the (re)building of churches, monasteries and the decoration of altars which had been ravished by warfare and iconoclasm was taken up energetically, especially during the reign of Archdukes Albert and Isabella (1598-1621).[79] All of this happened largely independently from internal attempts at ecclesiastical reform, and in spite of the fact that the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563)[80] was a very slow process.[81]

In a recent study Judith Pollmann elucidated how the catholic revival in the Southern Netherlands came about and what caused the consolidation of the newly confident mentality (and distinct identity) of Catholics.[82] Contrary to the traditional view of the Counter-Reformation as a top-down process, initiated and promoted by state and church, Pollmann showed how the catholic revival was to a great extent a "grassroots"-movement, driven by the local population – especially the urban elites and middle classes – in close collaboration with the (reformed) clergy and (new) religious orders.[83]

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[78] On pilgrimage guides, see Karen L. Bowen and Alfons K.L. Thijs, *Marian Pilgrimage Sites in Brabant: A Bibliography of Books Printed between 1600-1850* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

[79] Joris Snaet, *Reformatie versus Contrareformatie: de religieuze architectuur in de Noordelijke en Zuidelijke Nederlanden gedurende de 16de en 17de Eeuw*, Ph.Diss. (KU Leuven, 2009); Joris Snaet, "For the Greater Glory of God. Religious Architecture in the Low Countries 1560-1700," in *Unity and Discontinuity. Architectural Relationships between the Northern and Southern Low Countries (1530-1700)*, ed. Krista De Jonge and Koenraad Ottenheym (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 251–298; Krista De Jonge, *Bellissimi Ingegni, Grandissimo Splendore: studies over de religieuze architectuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden tijdens de 17de Eeuw*, ed. Krista De Jonge, Annemie De Vos, and Joris Snaet (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2000); Tine Meganck, "De kerkelijke architectuur van Wensel Cobergher (1557/61-1634) in het licht van zijn verblijf te Rome," *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Schone Kunsten* 60, no. 64 (1998); M.M. Thibaut de Maisières, *L'architecture religieuse à l'époque de Rubens* (Brussels, 1943); Jan H. Plantenga, *L'architecture religieuse dans l'ancien duché de Brabant depuis le règne des archiducs jusqu'au gouvernement Autrichien (1598-1713)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1926); Paul Saintenoy, "L'art architectural sous Albert et Isabelle et les règles du Concile de Trente," *Revue Latine* (1922).

[80] For the history of the Council, see John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013); Hubert Jedin and Ernest Graf (tr.), *A History of the Council of Trent* (London: T. Nelson, 1957).

[81] In the post-revolt Southern Netherlands, bishops had their hands full trying to suppress clerical abuses, scandals and improper management of churches and church property. See Craig Harline and Eddy Put, *A Bishop's Tale: Mathias Hovius among his Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Marie J. Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad," *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Letteren* 57, no. 155 (1995): chap. 2.

[82] Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[83] Ibid.; see also Michel Cloet, "De kerk en haar invloed," in *België in de 17de eeuw: de Spaanse Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik*, ed. Paul Janssens (Gent: Snoeck, 2006), 11–62; Stephanus

In fact, these two views are not mutually exclusive, as top-down and bottom-up processes may coincide, and – as Pollmann suggests – the revival often came "from the middle".[84]

Pollmann convincingly argues that the main impetus behind the revival should be sought in the strongly held belief by Catholics that their own sinfulness and decadence had provoked the wrath of God over the country, much in the vein of what we have seen in Valenciennes.[85] Indeed, this numinous[86] worldview persisted throughout the disastrous seventeenth century and was even shared, for instance, by King Philip IV of Spain (1605-1665) who feared that "the sins, mistakes, and abominations of his subjects" had not only been the cause of "a large part of the evils, miseries, and afflictions with which Divine Justice had chastised the countries under his obeisance during the last war [with France]", but also of various other disasters that had happened to him personally, notably the death of several of his children.[87] For his subjects, the divine punishment manifested itself primarily in the form of heresy and war; as Pollmann points out, heresy was considered not as the cause, but as a result of impiety.[88] The offenses to God during the Revolt, such as iconoclasm, had to be expiated.[89] Therefore, it was considered to be of critical importance to seek ways "to restore the

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Axters, *Geschiedenis van de Vroomheid in de Nederlanden. Vol. IV: na Trente* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1960).

[84] For arguments in favour of a more emphatical top-down view, see Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad," 39, 52, 158–159; and Jeffrey M. Muller, "Communication visuelle et confessionalisation à Anvers au temps de la contre-réforme," *XVIIe Siècle: bulletin de la 'société d'etude du XVIIe Siècle'* 60, no. 3 (2008): 441–482.

[85] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 57–67; See also Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes : Self and Other in Historical and Literary Texts of Golden Age Spain (c. 1548-1673)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

[86] This term denotes the fearsome and fascinating power or presence of a divinity. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

[87] Quoted in a letter of 1660 from the bishop of Ghent to the Governor General Caracena: Lucien Ceyssens, *La fin de la première période du Jansénisme: sources des années 1654-1660* (Brussels: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1963), 371; for a similar statement by Philip IV after the capture of Den Bosch in 1629, see J.H. Elliott, "Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth Century Spain," *Past and Present* no. 74 (1977): 47; or by by his favourite Olivares, see Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline*, 590; see also René Vermeir, *In staat van oorlog: Filips IV en de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1629-1648* (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2001), 269–275.

[88] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 158.

[89] Barbara Diefendorf makes a similar argument in her study on the patronage of Parisian *dévots* after the religious wars. See Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity : Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (New York NY: New York University Press, 2004).

broken tie between God and his people".[90] This concern generated a "sacralisation discourse", which was the basis of the Catholic Revival and its "baroque piety".

Art as propaganda?

In *The Power of Images*, David Freedberg considers religious art as "a technology of eliciting (orthodox) devotional responses, which was the single greatest and most problematic concern of churchmen and patrons, while at the same time the capacity of art to inspire and transform the viewer was one of the most important weapons in the hands of the clergy".[91] The idea of Baroque art as rhetorical and effect-oriented (and as a result of implicit prejudice often rejected as insincere) has strongly defined the historiography of seventeenth-century art and architecture.[92] The style and iconography[93] of Catholic religious art after Trent have often been explained as a means to promote the Catholic faith and to triumphantly proclaim the Catholic doctrines in the face of Protestantism.[94] Many scholars (tacitly)

[90] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 131.

[91] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989). This tension is also emphasized by Andrew Spicer and Will Coster, who consider sacred space "a meeting place between popular religion and the attempt to reorder that religion". Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, "Introduction: The Dimensions of Sacred Space," in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

[92] Werner Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (Berlin: P. Cassirer, 1921); Federico Zeri, *Pittura e controriforma: l'arte senza tempo di Scipione da Gaeta* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957); Rudolf Wittkower and Irma B. Jaffé, eds., "Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution," in *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972); Guilio Argan, *The Baroque Age, 1600-1700* (Geneva; New York: Skira; Rizzoli, 1989); Evonne Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2004); Gauvin A. Bailey, "´Le style jésuite n'existe pas´: Jesuit Corporate Culture and the Visual Arts," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley and Johann B. Staudt (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), 38–89; see also Joseph Braun, *Die Belgischen Jesuitenkirchen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kampfes zwischen Gotik und Renaissance* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1907).

[93] Thomas L. Glen, *Rubens and the Counter Reformation: Studies in His Religious Paintings between 1609 and 1620* (New York: Garland, 1977); standard works are John B. Knipping, *De Iconografie van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden* (Hilversum: Brand, 1939); Émile Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du XVIe Siècle, du XVIIe siècle et du XVIIIe siècle: etude sur l'iconographie après le Concile de Trente* (Paris: Colin, 1951).

[94] Criticism of these attempts include David Freedberg, "Painting and the Counter Reformation in the Age of Rubens," in *The Age of Rubens*, ed. Peter C. Sutton (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1993), 136; Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque : Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Sensuous Worship : Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jens Baumgarten, *Konfession, Bild Und Macht: Visualisierung als*

assume a top-down, institutional process of visual propaganda, largely initiated by the church and directed at an impressionable public.[95] As I will try to show in the following, there are several reasons for proposing a revision of these views.

Besides that what is presently considered as art (painting, sculpture, and architecture), a wide variety of means and (visual) media were employed in the post-Revolt efforts of recatholisation and confessionalisation.[96] According to Jeffrey Muller, this "massive campaign of visual persuasion" was the most important means of re-establishing the catholic faith in the Southern Netherlands.[97] The Jesuits in particular were very eager to use innovative means of indoctrination (visual as well as otherwise) in order to permeate every aspect of life with the true faith.[98] Muller speaks of "an unprecedented immediate communication of cause and effect to encourage a particular behaviour".[99]

Indeed, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a wide range of publications emerged, testimonies of a flourishing and a highly sophisticated elite devotional visual culture. Various recent studies have contributed to our understanding of their function as aids to meditation and

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katholisches Herrschafts- und Disziplinierungskonzept in Rom und im Habsburgischen Schlesien (1560-1740) (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2004); Willibald Sauerländer, *Der katholische Rubens: Heilige und Märtyrer* (Munich: Beck, 2011); Christian Hecht, "Schöner Terror? Rubens als Maler der Gegenreformation [review of: Willibald Sauerländer, Der Katholische Rubens: Heilige Und Märtyrer, München: Beck, 2011]," *Kunstchronik* 65, no. 12 (2012): 588–592.

[95] See Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*; Jeffrey Muller, "Review of: E. Levy, Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque," *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1238 (January 03, 2006): 344–45.

[96] Confessionalization in the sense of Reinhard, confession-building through social disciplining (by means of preaching, confession, promoting confraternities and catechizing). For the confessionalisation thesis, see Wolfgang Reinhard, "Gegenreformation Als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalter," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977): 226–252.

[97] I cite Muller from a draft of his article, Muller, "Communication visuelle et confessionalisation à Anvers au temps de la contre-réforme," 441.

[98] Jeffrey M. Muller, "Jesuits Uses of Art in the Province of Flanders," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), 113–156; see also Ralph Dekoninck, *Ad Imaginem: statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans le littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2005); Xander van Eck, "De Jezuïeten en het wervende wisselaltaarstuk," *De zeventiende eeuw* 14 (1998): 81–94; see also Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610*; Chipps Smith, *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany*.

[99] Draft of Muller, "Communication visuelle et confessionalisation à Anvers au temps de la contre-réforme," 447–448.

self-examination through combinations of image and text.[100] This evinces the traditional strategy against heresy as initially promoted by the church: individual penitence and humility.[101] A certain tension seems to exist between this urge for self-reflexion and the activistic spirit of militant Catholicism, between a top-down approach and a demonstrable hunger for the sacred from below.[102] May we infer a persuasive power from the sheer ubiquity of artworks during the Counter Reformation? Can we explain the surge in popularity of shrines by the patronage of the elite?

In response to the ongoing need for divine protection against the disasters that continued to strike the country (as a result of the wrath of God), the Virgin Mary emerged as the principal and "national" resort.[103] Her shrine at Scherpenheuvel on the immediate confessional frontline was erected by the archdukes in gratitude of a series of fortuitous military events against the rebellious North, and expressly conceived (by them) as a highly charged bulwark against heresy.[104] It would seem that such a project was

[100] See Reindert Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd Richardson, eds., *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Ralph Dekoninck and Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, eds., *Emblemata Sacra: Rhétorique et herméneutique du discours sacré dans la littérature en images* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Walter S. Melion, *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern devotional Print, 1550-1625* (Philadelphia PA: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2009); Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel, eds., *Early Modern Eyes. Intersections 13* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Karl Enenkel and Walter Melion, eds., *Meditatio: Refashioning the Self: Theory and Practice in Late Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual Culture, Intersections 17* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Walter Melion, Ralph Dekoninck, and Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, eds., *Ut Pictura Meditatio: The Meditative Image in Northern Art, 1500-1700. Proteus 4* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

[101] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 57–67.

[102] Howard Louthan argues that not just coercion but also various strategies of persuasion were used to convert heretical Bohemia after the catholic victory at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1621. Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[103] As illustrated by Annick Delfosse, "La vierge comme protectrice des Pays-Bas méridionaux dans les livrets de pèlerinage Marial au XVIIe Siècle," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 80, no. 4 (2002): 1225; Annick Delfosse, *La vierge « protectrice du Païs-Bas ». Instrumentalisations politiques et stratégies identitaires dans les Pays-Bas espagnols* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

[104] In gratitude of a series of fortunate military events, the archdukes honoured the miraculous statue of Our Lady venerated here, right on the confessional frontline, with a grand new church (1607), replacing the old tree to which it was attached. The heptagonal baroque cupola-church, designed by Cobergher, formed the centre of a brand new seven-cornered fortified town, and was imbued in every imaginable way with Marian symbolism. The altars and decorations of the church not only referred to the Virgin (such as to her Seven Sorrows and Joys) but were also dedicated to militant saints as defenders of the faith and fighters of heresy. See Luc Duerloo and Marc Wingens, *Scherpenheuvel: het Jeruzalem van de Lage Landen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002); Luc Duerloo, "Scherpenheuven - Montaigu. Un sanctuaire pour une politique emblématique," *XVIIe Siècle: Bulletin de la "Société d"Etude du XVIIe siècle'* 60, no. 3 (2008):

conceived as a tool for religious propaganda. In light, however, of the alternative grass-roots image of the Catholic revival in the Southern Netherlands as evoked in studies like those of Pollmann, and the implications of the concomitant sacralisation discourse, questions arise as to who was actually trying to persuade whom, and by what means?

The case of Scherpenheuvel, which has been extensively studied, shows to what extent art and architecture were conceived as facilities for ritual performance. Its complex Marian symbolism does not seem to be devised primarily to have a rhetorical effect on the viewer, but as a votive church, it rather seems the instrument of a negotiation process with the divine. This is not to say that artworks and architecture were not to a great extent conceived (and perceived) in rhetorical terms (like any cultural expression of the time, at least by the educated elite).[105] However, it raises questions as to exactly how religious art functioned in its social context, and who were the protagonists. Did patrons and clergy primarily try to persuade fellow citizens or was "appeasing God" and thus restoring peace and prosperity more important? How did these two efforts relate?

Precisely because conversion and persuasion are such important topics in the historiography, the revision of the historical context invites us to rethink the function of religious art and architecture during the Counter Reformation. What was the function of art and architecture in efforts to counter the still slumbering threat of Protestant critique, especially if we consider the contested status of religious imagery among the prime target group of (ex- or covert) Protestants?[106]

423–39. see also Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, chap. 11; and Pieter Martens and Joris Snaet, "De mariale bedevaartskerk van Scherpenheuvel. Een onderzoek naar dynastieke relaties en de verspreiding van ontwerpen en denkbeelden over architectuur," *Bulltin KNOB* 89, no. 5/6 (1999): 214–248.

[105] Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The mechanisms governing the function of images in the Early Modern period have been reconstructed on the basis of contemporary theories by C.P. Warnke. He distinguishes between images as sign and as symbol, divided in the rhetorical categories *figura*, *typus*, *simile*, *argumentum*, symbol, allegory, and emblem. See Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 159–163.

[106] Heinen points out that even the overtly propagandistic tapestry series *Triumph of the Eucharist*, commissioned from Rubens by the Infante Isabella for the monastery of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid, in gratitude of her victory on the Protestants at the Siege of Breda, 1625, has been shown by Wolfgang Brassat not to be anti-Protestant propaganda but must be seen in the context of inner-Catholic rivalry between the House of Habsburg and the Holy See (Pope Urban VIII). Ulrich Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen* (Weimar: VDG, 1996), 29 referring to; Wolfgang Brassat,

Catholic theologians writing on art, like Paleotti and Molanus,[107] defended the use of religious images as means "to move men to proper obedience and subjection to God" by *persuading* the viewer (in a rhetorical way: to move, instruct, and delight)[108] to virtuous behaviour (penitence, willingness to suffer, charity, contempt for the world, etc.); virtues that are "instruments to unite men with God".[109] Paleotti in particular saw painters of sacred images as "silent preachers to the people" and "mute theologians".[110] Molanus stressed that artworks should not just be seen as "books for the illiterate" and the ignorant laity, but also for learned people and "spirituals", to which they may be useful and provoke tears.[111]

In his abovementioned pamphlet, the Jesuit Jan David explains in great detail how religious art was supposed to have a transformative effect on the viewer, even if he were a Calvinist: not by persuading, but by *seducing* him to piety.[112] Though Calvinists condemned Catholic art and rituals as "covert magic or deceit of the eye", David explained that "many hearts were moved by looking at images of saints, decorated churches, beautiful altars, and the properly arranged catholic religion, which […]

Tapisserien und Politik: Funktionen, Kontexte und Rezeption eines repräsentativen Mediums (Berlin: Mann, 1992), 220–222.

[107] Christian Hecht, *Katholische Bildertheologie der frühen Neuzeit: Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti und anderen Autoren*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Mann, 2012). See also Wolfgang Brassat, ed., "Bild-Rhetorik," in *Bild-Rhetorik (Rhetorik, Vol. 24)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

[108] Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 23. The coordination of *Bild-genuss*, *Bild-verstehen*, and *Bild-erleben* was problematic. Yet through their combination of rhetoric and affect (ethos and pathos), images were thought to be highly capable to effectuate *enargeia* or vividness.

[109] Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images (1582)*, ed. William McCuaig (tr.) (Los Angeles CA: Getty Research Institute, 2012), I, 334.

[110] Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images (1582)*. According to Paleotti there are two ways to access images: via the intellect, or via affect/will. The first derives from a proper application of the rules of art, and a true depiction of events. The second is based on moving the senses and excite the spirit and devotion of the viewer. He distinguishes four types of viewers: painters, literates, illiterates and spirituals. The ideal way of receiving sacred images is through a unity of feeling and will. Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 32.

[111] Ibid., 36.

[112] On David, see L. Geerts van Roey and J. Andriessen, "Pater Joannes David s.j. (1546-1613)," *Ons geestelijk erf* 30 (1956): 113–155; and on his polemics with protestant ministers see W.J. 't Hof, "Willem Teellinck in het licht zijner geschriften, (6)," *Documentatieblad nadere Reformatie* 2, no. 2 (1978): 33–62; on his importance as emblematist, see Karel Porteman, *Emblematic Exhibitions (affixiones) at the Brussels Jesuit College (1630-1685): A Study of the Commemorative Manuscripts (Royal Library, Brussels)*, ed. Karel Porteman, Elly Cockx-Indestege, and Anna Simoni (Brussels; Turnhout: Royal Library; Brepols, 1996), 16–17.

sprang from God's inner movement".[113] Since, he argues, "the images of the saints are like clear mirrors of all purity, virtue, and holiness, and have a power to make their viewers their equal, which no corporeal mirror can".[114] What David proposes is virtually the opposite of idolatry: instead of equating images to the living (by attributing lifelike presence to them), the living are equated to the images (as they will imitate their virtuous example).

Clearly, there was a strong contemporary awareness of – and importance attached to – the transformative power or "agency" of artworks.[115] Yet, regardless of their seductive appeal, images were not necessarily the most effective means to reach those who were still suspicious toward religious images, or worse: covert Protestants. Catholics must have realized this, and alternative strategies were therefore devised in order to convert, convince, persuade, or seduce this public.

Sacred place and sacred history

According to the Jesuit Franciscus Costerus, the ancient roots of the church were by far the most convincing argument to win back heretics for Catholicism, since *by implication* Protestants condemned all their supposedly "idol-worshiping" ancestors to damnation.[116] Though Protestants countered the Catholic claim of historical continuity by claiming a continuity of Truth and Faith, and by promoting the recent Protestant achievements as fulfilments of Old Testament prophesies,[117] this was still a thought they may have found hard to digest. For the very same reason Catholics used every opportunity to stress the continuity of the Church and its traditions from the earliest days of Christendom onwards, and many contemporary publications

[113] Jansen (pseudonym of Joannes David), *Vry-Gheleyde tot Ontlastinghe van Conscientie om de Catholiicke Kercken, ende Godsdienst te gaen Bekiicken.*, 38

[114] Ibid., 82. See Barbara Haeger, "Rubens' 'Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death': Unveiling the Glory of God," in *Proceedings of the 2012 Lovis Corinth Colloquium,* ed. Walter Melion (Atlanta GA, 2013), 997. For the virtues expected from Counter Reformation saints, see the famous article by Peter Burke, "How to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint," in *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy. Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 48–62.

[115] Special emphasis is put on offering the viewer saintly role models. Paleotti refers to the Horatian maxim that seeing has a stronger impact on the soul than hearing. See Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 18–19.

[116] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 147; referring to Franciscus Costerus, *Schildt der Catholijcken, teghen de Ketterijen: inhoudende de principaelste Gheschillen, die in onsen Tijden opgheresen zijn in t'Gelooue, met een oprechte Verclaeringe der Seluer* (Antwerp, 1606).

[117] See Bussmann and Schilling, *1648: War and Peace in Europe, Vol I*, 310.

like Wichmans' *Brabantia Mariana* (1632) and Sanderus' *Chorographia Sacra Brabantiae* (1659-1663) also emphasize the historical connectedness of the Church with the land and its people. I would argue that if we are to study Catholic "propaganda", we should focus first and foremost on Sanderus, who thus forms one of the most important sources of this study.[118]

The content of the *Chorographia Sacra Brabantiae* consists mostly of a compilation of texts, often derived directly from monastery chronicles and archival material.[119] Sanderus also sent questionnaires to local churches or monasteries (*interrogatorium*) asking for information about a range of topics, such as the history of the institution, its government, benefactors, decorations, library, feasts and ceremonies, cults, relics, as well as the potential miracles that had occurred locally. In order to realise his ambitious publishing project, which was conceived as early as 1635, Sanderus constantly tried to solicit financial support and patronage, yet often to little effect, and the project seems to have ruined him. Sanderus' persistence despite the lack of sufficient support suggests that he was driven by a higher cause. As has recently been argued by Raingard Esser, a strong cultural-political agenda underlies the publication.[120] The *Chorographia Sacra Brabantiae* epitomizes the post-tridentine historiographical tradition of "hagiographical" chorography, chartering sacred space and emphasizing the role of religious institutions in the country.[121] In every possible way, tradition and continuity are emphasized: by listing epitaphs of ancestors, names of clerics, important donors, foundations by the dukes of Brabant, local cults and saints, as well as important feasts. All of this is to prove the historical connectedness of the Church with the land and its people by presenting Brabant as a sacred land. While responding to a Catholic need for self-affirmation, this also provided valuable ammunition for the catholic

[118] Following on his magnum opus on Flanders, the *Flandria Illustrata* (1641-1644), this chorography describes the history and topography of Brabants religious houses and churches. It was published in Brussels between 1659 and 1663 by different printing houses (primarily Philippe Vleugaert), in two volumes of each ca. seven hundred pages in the large *plano* format. Many of the sixty-seven separate chapters contain extraordinarily large and detailed engravings by Lucas II Vorsterman, depicting the most important religious institutions of the Duchy.

[119] The chapters in Sanderus' Chorography vary greatly in length and structure, as the author relied largely on information provided by his informants. Jules de Saint-Genois, *Antoine Sanderus et ses écrits: une page de notre histoire littéraire au XVIIe siècle* (Ghent: De Busscher Frères, 1861), 6.

[120] Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries*, 292.

[121] This tradition started in Brabant with Laurens van Haecht in 1612.

cause.[122] It did so by playing on what Adam Beaver calls a "deeply felt sense of determinism between landscape, history and nationhood".[123]

Recent art historical studies have shown how catholic art and architecture also explicitly harked back to the legacy of medieval and early Christian (local) traditions and cults, to enhance credibility and legitimacy of the catholic claims.[124] This was all part of a conscious strategy to connect the universality of the church with her local (ancient) roots, revaluing the sacredness of space and topography (denied by the Protestants).[125] The following two examples from Antwerp may serve to illustrate how this could be done.

In 1610 the rich merchant and art collector Cornelis van der Geest commissioned from Rubens, who had recently returned from Italy, a new triptych for the high altar of the Antwerp Burchtkerk. Studies by Cynthia Lawrence on the genesis of the triptych (*fig*. 14), which depicted the rare subject of *The raising of the Cross*, demonstrate to what extent it was adapted to its location – both by means of its physical staging in the church space, as well as by its conception as part of a coherent scheme evoking the

[122] Raingard Esser recently argued that this implied a need for self-affirmation after the final recognition of independence of the United Provinces (and of their conquests in Brabant) at the Peace of Westphalia. See Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries*, 291–317; Bowen and Thijs, *Marian Pilgrimage Sites in Brabant: A Bibliography of Books Printed between 1600-1850*.

[123] Adam G. Beaver, "From Jerusalem to Toledo: Replica, Landscape and the Nation in Renaissance Iberia," *Past & Present* 218, no. 1 (January 23, 2013): 88.

[124] E.g. Cynthia Lawrence, "Rubens's 'Raising of the Cross' in Context: The 'Early Christian' Past and the Evocation of the Sacred in Post-Tridentine Antwerp," in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 251–275; Barbara Haeger, "Rubens's Adoration of the Magi and the Program for the High Altar of St Michael's Abbey in Antwerp," *Simiolus: kunsthistorisch tijdschrift* 25, no. 1 (1997): 45–71; Anna C. Knaap, "Meditation, Ministry, and Visual Rhetoric in Peter Paul Ruben's Program for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. John William O'Malley and Johann Bernhardt Staudt (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), 157–181.

[125] Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Simon Ditchfield, "What Was Sacred History? (Mostly Roman) Catholic Uses of the Christian Past after Trent," in *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World*, ed. Katherine Elliott van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Anthony Grafton, "Church History in Early Modern Europe: Tradition and Innovation," in *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World*, ed. Katherine Elliott van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

ancient history of the place.[126] In a crypt under the high altar, which had been destroyed during the Calvinist occupation, Saints Walburga and Eligius used to be venerated as the founders of the Christian faith in Antwerp. In the year 650 Eligius had supposedly preached here on a hill where the first church of the city would be built. Subsequently the eighth-century Walburga would spend her life as a hermit in a crypt on the same spot. Van der Geest sponsored an excavation to find this crypt, where miraculous healings were thought to occur, and had it restored. The new painting was placed in the exceptionally high chancel of the church, rising dramatically above a long flee of stairs, creating an impression of mount Golgotha on which Christ was crucified. The spatial setting thus powerfully enhanced the visual impact of the depicted subject of the raising of the Cross, which in turn referred to the history of the place as cradle of Antwerp's conversion to Christianity. In light of the recent recatholization of the city, Van der Geest's patronage of the Burchtkerk was a manifesto of Catholic assertiveness, intended to appeal on various levels to potential converts by combining the restoration of age-old popular devotions – and claiming their legitimacy by means of "archaeological" evidence – with an ingenious "theatrical" display of this claim, justifying it in reference to the Passion, by means of Rubens' monumental and moving art.[127]

Like Rubens' *Raising of the Cross*, his *Adoration of the Magi* for Saint Michael's Abbey in Antwerp (1622-24) (*fig*. 15) referred to local church history, as Barbara Haeger has shown.[128] The theme of the painting

[126] Cynthia Lawrence, "Before The Raising of the Cross: The Origins of Rubens's Earliest Antwerp Altarpieces," *Art Bulletin* 81, no. 2 (1999): 267–296; Cynthia Lawrence, "Confronting Heresy in Post-Tridentine Antwerp. Coercion and Reconciliation as Opposing Strategies in Rubens' Real Presence in the Holy Sacrament," *Nederlandsch Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 55 (2004): 87 – 116; Lawrence, "Rubens's 'Raising of the Cross' in Context: The 'Early Christian' Past and the Evocation of the Sacred in Post-Tridentine Antwerp"; see also Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad," 247–248; Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*; John Rupert Martin, *Rubens: The Antwerp Altarpieces* (New York: Norton, 1969).

[127] Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 154. For the general public it offered a complex and affective visual sermon (exposition of coherence of Christ's forgiveness-plea, penance, and testimony as fruit of the sacrifice of the Cross), for the learned a supplementary learned excursus (punishment-*topoi* from classical mythology), for the spiritually inclined a traditional occasion for meditation (the seventh fall of Christ), for the inexperienced in art an easy to grasp and attractive image (variety, liveliness) and for art connoisseurs an artwork that conveyed very exigent and subtle art values (*contrapposto*, *scorcio*, proportion, style).

[128] Haeger, "Rubens's Adoration of the Magi and the Program for the High Altar of St Michael's Abbey in Antwerp"; Barbara Haeger, "Abbot Van Der Sterre and St. Michael's Abbey: The Restoration of Its Church, Its Image, and Its Place in Antwerp," in *Sponsors of the Past. Flemish*

represents the revelation of Christ's divinity to the gentiles, which explains its popularity during the Counter Reformation period.[129] The painting's mysterious morning gloom evokes the "dawn of a new age". Its original marble *aedicula* (architectural frame) was crowned by three sculptures of the Virgin Mary trampling a snake, symbol of original sin, the archangel Michael striking the fallen angel, representing evil, and Saint Norbertus trampling a heretic. Norbertus was not only the founder of the Norbertine or Premonstratensian order, but was also venerated as apostle of Antwerp because he had fought the local heresy of Tanchelm who, in the twelfth century, was accused of denying the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Norbertine monks of Saint Michael's abbey must have thought of themselves as true followers of their medieval predecessor in fighting Protestant critique of the doctrine of Transubstantiation. The altar, erected in 1623 – exactly 500 years after the victory of Norbertus over Tanchelm – thus commemorated this historical event as well as the recent (or current, ongoing) triumph of Catholicism over heresy.

The cases in Antwerp may be interpreted as manifestations in art and architecture of the legitimacy claims which were, I contend, the central means of strengthening the ties between the faithful and the Church, in response to a need for self-affirmation and historical justification in the context of the history of salvation.[130] Even if this may be seen as propaganda, it was primarily so in competition with other churches or religious orders. This strategy to strengthen the bond of the population with the church was complemented by appeals to virtue, aiming to transform and unite individual believers with God. By thus sacralising society, gaining souls and reforming society along catholic lines by means of faith, the ultimate goal was to appease God so as to restore peace and prosperity. But we need only look back at the events in Valenciennes to realize that this is

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Art and Patronage, 1550-1700, ed. Hans Vlieghe and Katlijne Van der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 157–79; see also Valérie Herremans, "'Opus vere basilicum et stupendum': devotionele profilering en persoonlijk zielenheil: de inrichting van het hoogkoor van de Antwerpse Sint-Michielsabdij en de abten Matheus Irsselius (1541-1629) en Johannes Chrysostomus van der Sterre (1591-1652)," *Rubensbulletin* 2 (2008): 5–35; Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*.

[129] Replacing the more traditional scenes of the Birth of Christ.

[130] Xander van Eck argues that in the clandestine catholic churches in the Northern Netherlands, local traditions were highlighted through artworks in a similar way. See Xander van Eck, *Clandestine Splendor: Paintings for the Catholic Church in the Dutch Republic* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2008).

not the whole story, as believers interacted through religious art with its divine or saintly prototypes in a mutual way.

Moreover, the cases above illustrate only the intended effects, not the (unintended) effects achieved, which depended on the attitude and knowledge of the viewer.[131] What such viewer responses could entail in the context of the Counter Reformation may be illustrated by the following anecdote, involving the abovementioned altarpiece by Rubens for the Antwerp Dominican church (*fig*. 1). A protestant visitor to Antwerp in 1665 described in his travel account what happened after he made a derogatory remark to one of the monks about the "idols" in the church.[132] The monk responded to this insult by falling to his knees in front of the altar, striking his breast (meaning: "Oh Lord, have mercy on me a sinner"), crossing himself and saying "haec est mea religio, quid tu credis?" (this is my religion, what do you believe?) and after learning his visitor was a Protestant he turned to his brothers saying "o frates videte, hic habeo haereticum!" (O brothers look, here I have a heretic!).[133] Besides the evidently unintended response of the Protestant, the anecdote also illustrates the ostentatious performance of piety by the monk.[134] It is clear from his behaviour and gestures that the monk places himself at the base of the intercessory prayer ladder going all the way up from the saints to the Virgin to Christ, who might at any time strike down from heaven, as depicted vividly in the painting. Seen through the eyes of a protestant visitor, the situation demonstrates how a Catholic monk related to a religious artwork as if it was an active social agent in a system of religious performance.

Agents of change

The Counter-Reformation was primarily a movement to change society: through the cultivation of piety, God was to be placated. I would argue that

[131] Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst: der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen*, 32, 222 (note 264); see also Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). See also Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[132] Muller, "Ruben's Altarpiece in the Antwerp Dominican Church: How Visitors and Guidebooks Saw It."

[133] Ibid., 72.

[134] Cf. Luke 18:13-14: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

in the society of the Southern Netherlands during this period, art and architecture played a key role in such processes of change. The subject of this thesis is not art and architecture per se, but the ways in which they were used to act: on fellow Catholics, heretics and the divine itself. The perspective of this thesis is therefore, one might say, ethnographic, but unlike major recent studies on the anthropology and ethnography of art, it aims to understand in historical terms how those involved in commissioning works of art and architecture conceived of their agency, and to reconstruct the historical circumstances of these attempts to placate God by changing society through the instruments of art and architecture.

Although recent historical studies engage with these issues, I would argue that the implications of the "sacralisation discourse" for the history of art have not been sufficiently acknowledged. The dominant focus on rhetorical persuasion tells only part of the story: it tends to neglect the roles of Counter Reformation art and architecture as practice, as experience, as a means of sociability. In the context of the sacralisation disourse, these aspects were much more entangled than has hitherto been acknowledged.[135] Traditional art historical methods focusing on stylistic developments and iconography are not adequate to come to grips with the role of art in these transformative processes, as they offer no comprehensive analysis of the social context. Studies that do engage with the effects of art on the viewer often aim to make claims purporting to patronage or intertextuality.[136]

As I intend to understand the workings of art in its full complexity, I will approach the religious art patronage in the Catholic South from an ethnographical/anthropological perspective. This implies a focus on practices and how they were performed, and more specifically what they were meant to do (i.e. how religious art worked as a cultural practice). To better understand the original functions and intended effects of art and architecture, I use the three concepts agency, performance, and change as methodological

[135] Exceptions include Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ulrike Strasser, *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004); Jeffrey M. Muller, "Confraternity and Art in the St Jacob's Church, Antwerp: A Case Study of the Altar of the Brotherhood of St Rochus," in *Concept, Design & Execution in Flemish Painting (1550-1700)*, ed. Hans Vlieghe and Arnout Balis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 97–110.

[136] For a recent example, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010).

tools. In what follows, I will discuss how each of these concepts is of use for my purpose, and how they interrelate.

Agency

It has long been acknowledged that religious art was not only meant to act on the viewer in a transformative way, patrons and viewers also expected to obtain effects *via* artworks (miracles, healings, indulgences, etc.).[137] Thus, more than just an instrument of visual communication, religious artworks facilitated a mutual relationship with a (divine) prototype. Frédéric Cousinié therefore considers high altar retables in seventeenth century Paris both in semiotic terms as "systems of images [indexes]" and as "relational objects" [interfaces] between man and God.[138] Precisely because of this relationality, an approach informed by anthropological methods is called for to fully understand the function of religious artworks and architecture in its historical context.[139]

In order to explore this (inter)active, dynamic function of art and architecture, I consider its "agency" in the sense of Alfred Gell's anthropological theory of art.[140] Gell conceives artworks as active agents in

[137] Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: Beck, 1990); translated as Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Belting discusses these aspects in a larger narrative on the changing function of artworks from medieval cult images to works of art in the modern sense, primarily valued for aesthetic reasons. On medieval conceptions and perceptions of materiality and agency, representation and divine presence in devotional objects, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011).

[138] In his study of the high altars of seventeenth century Paris, Cousinié considers the altar at the same time as « système d'objets » [exposing relics, images, holy sacrament], « système des signes » [the indexicality of these objects], and « système des relations » [mediation with the divine]. Frédéric Cousinié, *Le Saint des Saints: maîtres-autels et retables parisiens du XVIIe Siècle, Aix-en-Provence, 2006* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2006), 1–33.

[139] See also Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins, "The Anthropology of Art: A Reflection on Its History and Contemporary Practice," in *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 1–26.

[140] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); see also Robert Layton, "Art and Agency: A Reassessment," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 3 (2003): 447–463; and Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, "Introduction: 'Art and Agency' and Art History," in *Art's Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1–27; see also Michelle O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its 'Invisible Skein of Relations,'" *Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians* 28, no. 4 (2005): 416–441; Caroline van Eck, Joris J. van Gastel, and Elsje van Kessel, eds., *The Secret Lives of Artworks: Exploring the*

an "art nexus", the network of social relations in which they are embedded. For the analysis of such a network, Gell uses the concepts of agency, index, prototype, artist and recipients. Mapping this "network of intentionalities" (in the assumption that artworks are actively part of it) helps to identify the actors involved and to clarify the effects of their agency on the viewer or participant in the nexus.[141]

As theory, the art nexus helps to look at and rethink the function of artworks in a different, more comprehensive way, and describe it more consistently. As a heuristic technique or method, Gell's model helps to fully acknowledge the complexity of situations of patronage, and preserves from flattening or making them causal. For instance, it helps to avoid the common pitfalls of: 1) over-privileging the agency of the artist-genius, 2) oversimplifying models of patronage,[142] and 3) reducing Counter Reformation art to one-way propaganda.

Mapping the art nexus also heightens our awareness of how agents can change position and role, by illustrating the various possible directions of agency.[143] Thus Gell's model helps to ask more layered questions about interactions and functions of patronage. By looking into art's agency, my study shows how various seemingly antithetical intentions engage with one another in a perfectly contingent way.

Performance

Performance is an analytical tool to make sense of behaviour. It has often been noted that Early Modern people behaved in a "theatrical" way, displaying their social role to their "public".[144] Dissimilar to our modern concern for authentic conduct and honesty in social relations, Early Modern

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Boundaries between Art and Life (Leiden University Press, 2014), in particular the Introduction and essays by Ralph Dekoninck and Frédéric Cousinié.

[141] Caroline van Eck, "Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime," *Art History* 33 (2010): 208–23; For the use of the concept of art nexus, see also the brilliant reconstruction of the "social lives" of paintings by Elsje van Kessel, "The Social Lives of Paintings in Sixteenth Century Venice" (Leiden University, 2011).

[142] Whitney Davis, "Abducting the Agency of Art," in *Art's Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007), 199–219.

[143] Agency can be mutual, for instance when a patron influences the artwork's agency while the artwork also influences the patron, and artist simultaneously influences the patron or public via the artwork.

[144] Kessel, "The Social Lives of Paintings in Sixteenth Century Venice," 16; referring to Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). See also Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

societies expected a convincing performance of one's public persona, primarily valuing social factors such as appearance and honour.[145] In this context, religious art and architecture were to perform specific functions at the centre of rituals and ceremonies.

The rituals performed in Valenciennes, for instance, exemplify the importance of the concurrent practices of scripted theatrical behaviour (e.g. the "extraordinary devotion" of the citizens); magnificent display (music, liturgical vestments); treatment of sacred objects (miraculous images, relics); motion in time and space[146] as ritual "activation" of these objects (processions), and communal intercourse with the divine (prayer octaves, vows and donations *ex-voto*). It is important to realize that such performative events had much wider reverberations than we may tend to think.[147] Performances were not just events with a certain (symbolical) meaning, but may be seen as "constitutive actions", in the sense that they generated or constructed meaning and even reality.[148] This has for instance been illustrated in recent studies of religious architecture (focusing on rites of consecration[149] and pilgrimage[150]) and of the painted depictions of highly

[145] Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, "The Visual Arts and Theatre in Early Modern Europe," *Art History* 33 (2010): 208–23.

[146] Marc Boone and Martha C. Howell, "Introduction," in *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leuven: Brepols, 2013), 1–9.

[147] See Paul Arblaster, "Abraham Verhoeven and the Brussels Court: Isabel Clara Eugenia's Staple of News," in *Isabel Clara Eugenia: Female Sovereignty in the Courts of Madrid and Brussels*, ed. Cordula van Wyhe (London; Madrid: Paul Holberton Publishing; CEEH, 2011), 280–305; Paul Arblaster, *Antwerp & the World: Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004).

[148] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008); Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Einleitung: Theatralität als kulturelles Modell," in *Theatralität als Modell in den Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte (Tübingen; Basel: Francke, 2004), 7–26; see also Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*; Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries*, 304.

[149] Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven, "Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe. An Introduction," in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–13; Dagmar Germonprez, "Foundation Rites in the Southern Netherlands: Constructing a Counterreformational Architecture," in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 275–96; Anne-Françoise Morel and Dagmar Germonprez, "A Cornerstone in Architectural History: The Dedication of St. Peter's Abbey Church, Ghent, 1629," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 31, no. 2 (2012): 15–21; Anne-Françoise Morel, "Glorious Temples or Babylonic Whores: The Architecture of Church Buildings in England 1603-1736 according to Consecration Sermons" (University of Ghent, 2011).

[150] Maarten Delbeke, "Miracle Books and Religious Architecture in the Southern Netherlands. The Case of Our Lady of Hanswijk in Mechelen," in *The Authority of the Word : Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700. Intersections 20*, ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl

performative urban rituals (such as the Brussels *Ommegang* of 1615 and Isabella's shooting of the popinjay).[151]

Whereas contemporary perceptions of the potential agency of the cult of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle ultimately derived from the Austrian piety, this agency only gained pertinence by the blasphemous French timing of the siege on the feast of Corpus Christi, and was subsequently "activated" by means of civic ritual in a "national" context. This performative dynamic came about in an ongoing interaction between various agents (Don Juan, Magistrate, prelates, sacred objects, Virgin Mary), which may be described as a negotiation process in which the participants choose to adopt common rules, or their own, depending on their interests and the opportunities the situation offers.

Change

For Gell, art is "a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it".[152] Yet in early modern Europe, fostering change was easier said than done: every effort at reform met with resistance and amendments, and the lines between continuity and change are often blurred.[153] In this study, the thick historical layer is where (attempts to bring about) change may be located.

The example of Valenciennes shows that "pious performance" is not about consolidating a status quo, but is rather a matter of "trying out" various negotiating strategies in the transformative process of the sacralisation discourse. Apart from the obvious aim of the city's relief from the siege, these processes of negotiation aimed at lifting the wrath of God that caused it. The piety displayed at Valenciennes evinces a crisis of confidence: if Valenciennes fell, Spain and the Spanish Netherlands would fall out of

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Enenkel, and Walter S. Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 559–85; Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, chap. 11.

[151] This performance was to affirm Isabella's status as Governess in case Albert would die without progeny, which had become inevitable at the time. See Sabine van Sprang, *Denijs Van Alsloot (Vers 1568? - 1625/26): peintre paysagiste au service de la cour des archiducs Albert et Isabelle (Pictura Nova)* (Leuven: Brepols, 2013); Margit Thøfner, "The Court in the City, the City in the Court: Denis van Alsloot's Depictions of the 1615 Brussels 'Ommegang,'" *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 49 (1998): 185–208.

[152] Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 6.

[153] See Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven CN; London: Yale University Press, 2009).

Divine Grace.[154] It is in this context that we should see the Counter-Reformatory efforts to promote personal virtue, conversion, and social disciplining, and the transformative function (agency) of art and architecture to these ends. Yet it is important to realize that contemporaries had a different awareness of society's malleability; they conceived and perceived *change* not exclusively as a result of human actions, but also as sign of God's plan with the people of the Netherlands. Salvation, the ultimate aim of change, was not visible to mortals in this life. Hence we cannot simply assess whether intended change actually materialized; instead, this dissertation sets out to identify under what circumstances, and by what kind of behaviour, change was understood by those involved to be made possible.

A French perspective on Flemish piety

A wealth of relevant ethnographic information, detailing intentions and effects of artworks, can be found in the travelogue of the French nobleman, priest and theologian Michel de Saint-Martin (1614-1687), who travelled to the Southern Netherlands in 1661.[155] In the preface of his book he explains that, rather than writing on subjects such as the landscape, climate, or "beautiful houses and magnificent churches" of the country, he will describe "the way of behaving of the people […] which will be my main purpose […]".[156] Saint-Martin writes that even though the Low Countries may be close to France, and not nearly as exotic as the non-European countries described in other, very popular travel accounts of the time, they may provide his home country with some good examples. Therefore, he is: "[…] particularly committed to note the conduct of these people, because this is what seemed to me most fitting to satisfy our reason, and I have among other things studied their virtuous actions, and their pious practises, […]".[157] Thus Saint-Martin focuses on rituals and how they were performed, rather than on art, yet along the way he provides valuable information on the intentions behind – and the effects and agency of – artworks.[158]

[154] On this perception of events, see also Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline*, 590.
[155] Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661*.
[156] Ibid., Preface: "[...] mais peu observent la manière d'agir des peuples. C'est dont je fais mon principal objet, [...]."
[157] Ibid., Preface.
[158] Ibid.

As he does not fail to emphasize, Saint-Martin moved in the highest administrative and intellectual circles of the Netherlands. He was for instance invited by the erudite humanist Gaspar Gevartius (1593-1666), city secretary of Antwerp and friend of Rubens – and editor of his *Pompa Introiti Ferdinandi* – to attend a party with Antonius Sanderus, author of the *Flandria Illustrata* and *Chorographia Sacra Brabantiae*, exactly during the time the latter was published.[159] These "men of letters, and those in the principal offices of handling affairs" were exactly the type of patrons, agents, and authors who initiated, devised, staged, and disseminated religious artistic interventions and performances. Therefore, Saint-Martin assures the reader, he is able to provide a true and first-hand account of "the spirit that animates these provinces, and that sets them in motion."[160]

I will now turn to Saint-Martin's extensive description of the "Octave of the Dead", a period of eight days of prayer starting on All Souls' Day [November], in the Brussels Jesuit church in the years 1659 to 1661.[161] The account of the celebrations provides a case in point of the social, cultural, religious, economic, or celestial transformations that artworks and ritual performances were capable of setting in motion.

Since 1660 the Jesuits, who frequently worked as confessors in the army, reserved the last three days of the octave for the soldiers who had fallen in the service of the Spanish King (before the Peace of the Pyrenees of 1659). Three solemn masses were sung on these days to the benefit of their souls in Purgatory. Saint-Martin recounts:

> "To give extra lustre to the event, they not only adorned the high altar of their church with velvet, and illuminated it together with the two side altars with a great number of candles, but on various places,

[159] Ibid., 241: "Cet Autheur [Gevaerts] voulut bien m'inviter à un Festin, qu'il faisoit le jour de cette Feste [of H. Trinity, Antwerp, 1661] au Sieur Sanderus aussi Autheur, [...]."

[160] Ibid., Preface: "Je l'ay appris par ma propre experience dans la conversation des gens de lettres, et de ceux qui estoient dans les principaux emplois pour le maniment des affaires, avec lesquels je me suis entretenu sur toutes sortes de manières ; si bien que je puis assurer le Lecteur, que je luy fais voir en abregé comme l'âme qui anime ces Provinces, et qui leur donne le mouvement."

[161] Ibid., 108–113; on the Brussels Jesuits and their church (now lost), see Annemie de Vos, "Hofarchitect Jacques Francart En de Brusselse Jezuïtenkerk. Tussen Traditie En Vernieuwing.," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 14, no. 1 (1998): 65–80; Lodewijk Brouwers, *De Jezuïeten te Brussel, 1586-1733, 1833* (Mechelen: Huis van Leliëndaal, n.d.); the interior of the church is represented in a painting, published in Joris Snaet and Claire Baisier, "Contrareformatie en barok. Traditie en vernieuwing in 17de-eeuwse kerkarchitectuur in de Nederlanden," *Gentse bijdragen tot de interieurgeschiedenis* 33 (2004): 23.

representations of death made out of wax were displayed together with paintings that vividly expressed the pains suffered by the souls in Purgatory, which excited everyone to save them".[162]

The artworks were clearly devised in order to have an affective effect on the senses of the viewer, not in the last place through their life-like, or rather, death-like materiality.[163] Saint-Martin continues:

> "This feast happened with such magnificence that the whole city was delighted to see such an extraordinary decoration. The walls of the church were covered on every side with black drapery, one saw imperial eagles on top of the pillars, lions of Castile, crosses of Burgundy, the coats-of-arms of Kings, and Dukes, painted on gilded standards, which were kept in the archives of Brabant, and in the middle of the church was a superb mausoleum, very well lit, and made even more illustrious by the arms and escutcheons of Emperor Charles V, of John of Austria first Duke of Parma, and of the Marquis of Spinola."[164]

In 1660 these famous historical commanders were long dead, so why was their heraldry still displayed (and perceived) in such a prominent way? Was this a matter of dynastic logic or pedigree? Or did the heraldic devices exert a particular agency of national and military pride? It does seem to follow the conventions of Italian *theatrum sacrum* and princely funerary catafalques.[165] Saint-Martin continues to describe the ephemeral decorations of the high altar:

> "Art and painting contributed also to the embellishment of the altar in a very particular way: below was represented Purgatory, and on top the catafalque [*castrum doloris*], with the salutary warning of Tobias: *Super sepulturam justi panem tuum et vinum constitue* [Pour out thy bread and wine on the grave of the just (Tobias 4:18)]. On one side one saw a naval combat, on the other side one on land, and in the

[162] Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661*, 104.

[163] On the materiality of such wax images of suffering souls in purgatory, see Christine Göttler, *Last Things: Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), chap. 5; see also Christine Göttler, *Die Kunst des Fegefeuers nach der Reformation: kirchliche Schenkungen, Ablass und Almosen in Antwerpen und Bologna um 1600* (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1996).

[164] Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661*, 109–110.

[165] See Minou Schraven, "Festive Funerals: Funeral Apparati in Early Modern Italy, Particularly in Rome (Ph.Diss.)" (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2006).

> middle the Maccabee, who having collected twelve golden talents after the combat, sent one victim into Jerusalem, in order to sacrifice [it] in favour of those who were killed."[166]

The painting must have illustrated the episode from 2 Maccabees 12:39–48, in which Judas Maccabeus' troops found idolatrous charms on the bodies of slain Jewish warriors. To expiate their sin, he offered prayers and a monetary sacrifice. This passage was often used during the Counter-Reformation against the Protestants in order to justify the doctrine of purgatory and donations to it.[167] The way textual devices and images are here combined to bring across this message may be illustrative of the use of "emblematic" rhetorical discourse in which the Jesuits were particularly well trained.[168]

Saint-Martin also mentions how "the solemnity of this action" attracted the refugee (future) King Charles II of England and his brother the Duke of York (the future James II) who happened to stay in Brussels at the time.[169]

> "In the evening the Holy Sacrament was carried in procession, and the same confessors [of the army] were in surplice, and the Marques of Caracena, Governor of the Netherlands, followed by the principal officers of the army, and all the captains bearing torches. There was also a funerary apparatus erected full of statues in honour of the nobility. This devotion edified the attending prelates and officers of the army so much, that they gave to perpetuity the necessary rents to cover the expense, which provided the means to have good music performed, and beautiful decorations in the church every year, in which these peoples [of the Netherlands] succeeded very well."

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[166] Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661*, 111.

[167] Rubens painted the scene of Judah Maccabee praying for the dead for the Chapel of the Dead in the cathedral of Tournai. See Christine Göttler, "Saintly Patronage: Peter Paul Rubens and Bishop Maximilian Villain de Gand in the Cathedral of Tournai," in *Sponsors of the Past. Flemish Art and Patronage, 1550-1700*, ed. Katlijne van der Stighelen and Hans Vlieghe (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 135–157.

[168] See Porteman, *Emblematic Exhibitions (affixiones) at the Brussels Jesuit College (1630-1685): A Study of the Commemorative Manuscripts (Royal Library, Brussels).*

[169] On his stay in Brussels in November 1659, see Ernest Gossart, *L'auberge des Princes en exil: anecdotes de la cour de Bruxelles au XVIIe siècle* (Brussels, 1943), 137–144, 185–191; and in Antwerp, see Ursula Härting, "'A Small Entertainment' für König Karl II. im Rubenshaus," in *Munuscula Amicorum: Contributions on Rubens and His Context in Honour of Hans Vlieghe, 1*, ed. Katlijne van der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 331–39.

Devotional performance and art are here avowedly and unapologetically presented as tools for fundraising. With success, since:

> "The next year there was even more pomp than the first; since the church was not just wrapped in black with bands of velvet, but in addition the ornamentation of the high altar ravished everybody: from top to bottom rose a beautiful machine with five perspectives.[170] On one side the soldier combated generously under the conduct of St James, and on the other for having served faithfully in arms, he won this praise: *Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi, de reliquo, etc.* [I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8)]. Below, one saw the bloodshed of those who were massacred, and on top in a very well represented heaven, the Crown of Justice, with which the brave soldiers were rewarded. In the middle the just Judge had them expiate the rest of their crimes by means of various penalties, and sent them in the company of angels by the merit of the suffrages of the living."[171]

The case of the Brussels Octave of the Dead, with all its ramifications outlined here, therefore illustrates how art works function as part of ritual practices intended to influence the heavens. Despite their different nature, and the variety of aspects they offer for interpretation (such as their pedigree, patronage, sensory delight, affective horror or rhetorical discourse), they share what may best be termed "agency". Since agency exists by the virtue of the objects that exercise it, they will be the primary subjects of my investigations. In the following chapters we will see how religious artefacts function as material agents of change.

That the material artefacts have not been preserved in this case is no obstacle: Saint-Martin's "proto-ethnographic" account of the Octave of the Dead in Brussels sheds light on how artworks were intended to function, and describes their effects from a foreign, but informed perspective. It describes and interprets the mechanisms of pious behaviour and the art patronage that goes with it. The existing literature on the Jesuits usually emphasizes the rhetorical aspects of their use of art and architecture, yet this case exemplifies that the role of art was not purely instrumental, as studies of patronage, or of art as expression of religion would have us believe. Instead,

[170] Saint-Martin, *Relation d'un voyage fait en Flandres, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Cambresis, etc... en l'an 1661*, 111–112.
[171] Ibid., 113.

it highlights the tension, or boundary, between the believer and the divine. The artworks exerted various types of agency on the viewer: inciting to prayer, inciting to make donations, claiming legitimacy, appealing to virtue, warning for the brevity of life and the need for salvation, etc., but the viewers and patrons also actively participated (performed) as agents in the process of saving souls from Purgatory. In this context artworks functioned as machines to obtain grace: they were both the result of, and at the same time engendered, a heightened level of piety in the population. This piety, in turn, was considered both the result, and the primary cause, of a heightened level of Divine Grace over the country.

Brussels as a centre of Counter-Reformation patronage

> "[…] the prosecution […] will stop, Madam, a torrent of misfortune that menaces your blessed City, and will make her enter in grace with God to receive upon her, like upon all your Catholic Provinces, the heavenly blessings."[172]

Both historians and art historians of the seventeenth century Southern Netherlands have traditionally focused on Antwerp as the centre of art production, as many of the "great names" lived and worked here, and as the centre of the Counter-Reformation. Being the most northern catholic city in Europe after the Spanish *reconquista*, just a stone's throw away from the rebel territories, and triumphantly surmounting its openly Calvinist past, it was promoted as bulwark of Catholicism.[173] The altarpieces by Rubens described above might be typical of Antwerp, where, in light of the city's history and its proximity to the Protestant North, the catholic religion was most likely to be contested.

The role of the court city of Brussels as nerve centre of the arts and the Counter Reformation has received much less scholarly attention.[174] This may

[172] Charles Gambart, *Chariot mystique du nouveau Elie, touchant la vie exemplaire, & glorieuse mort du Reverend Pere Du Vivier, Provincial des Peres Minimes des Païs-Bas, & Basse Alemaigne, & Predicateur Ordinaire de Leurs Altesses Serenissimes. Sur le modele du Grand Prophet* (Brussels: Goddefroy Schoevarts, 1630), 159.

[173] Alphons Thijs, *Van geuzenstad tot katholiek bolwerk: maatschappelijke betekenis van de kerk in contrareformatorisch Antwerpen* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990); Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad"; Arblaster, *Antwerp & the World: Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation*.

[174] Notable exceptions include Claudia Banz, *Höfisches Mäzenatentum in Brüssel: Kardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517-1586) und die Erzherzöge Albrecht (1559-1621) und Isabella (1566-1633)* (Berlin: Mann, 2000); Paul Saintenoy, *Les arts et les artistes à la cour de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1931); Marcel De Maeyer, *Albrecht en Isabella en de*

be partially explained by the partisan political situation in Belgium and the focus of historians of Brussels on the French Revolution and the Enlightenment period, which have left a strong mark on the city and its historiography[175] up to today. The lack of art historical attention may be due to the fact that many historical buildings, churches, artworks and archives have been lost.[176] However, a major artistic innovation such as Rubens' design for the first portico-retable at the Kapellekerk in 1617 was disseminated from Brussels,[177] and the city's role as centre of tapestry production warranted a position as a hub of international artistic exchange.[178]

The contemporary importance of Brussels is manifest; besides being the second largest city after Antwerp and the administrative and political centre of the Southern Netherlands it was also a court residence: where patronage was distributed and (would-be) nobles strived to obtain courtly favours. It is hard to overestimate the splendour or the Brussels court during the reign of the archdukes, and to various degrees that of their successors.

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schilderkunst: bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de XVIIe eeuwse schilderkunst in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1955); Sabine van Sprang, "Les peintres à la cour d'Albert et Isabelle: une tentative de classification," in *Sponsors of the Past. Flemish Art and Patronage, 1550-1700*, ed. Hans Vlieghe and Katlijne Van der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 37–46; Sabine van Sprang, "Rubens en Brussel, een meer dan hoffelijke relatie," in *Rubens: een genie aan het werk*, ed. Joost Vander Auwera (Tielt: Lannoo, 2007), 12–17; Veerle de Laet, "Brussel binnenskamers: kunst- en luxebezit in het spanningsveld tussen hof en stad, 1600-1735" (KU Leuven, 2011); Katlijne van der Stighelen, Leen Kelchtermans, and Koenraad Brosens, eds., "Embracing Brussels: Art and Culture in the Court City, 1600-1800," in *Embracing Brussels: Art and Culture in the Court City, 1600-1800* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

[175] The standard work on the city remains Alexandre Henne and Alphonse Wauters, *Histoire de La Ville de Bruxelles*, ed. Mina Martens (Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1968); re-edition of the original three-volume Alexandre Henne and Alphonse Wauters, *Histoire de la ville de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Librairie Encyclopédique de Perichon, 1845).

[176] The city centre was heavily damaged in the French bombardment (1695), and the urban fabric underwent drastic changes as a result of the construction of the boulevard Anspach (1868-71) and the North-South railway connection (1935-52). The disbanding of religious orders during the Austrian and French periods (1777, 1794-1815) resulted in further demolition of churches and monasteries and the confiscation and sale of their artworks. For the bombardment, see Luc Janssens, "'Baeckens om naer te schieten': schade aan de religieuze instellingen ten gevolge van het bombardement van 13-15 Augustus 1695," in *Rond het bombardement van Brussel van 1695: verwoesting en wederopstanding*, ed. Arlette Smolart-Meynart (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet, 1997), 41–50; Maurice Culot, *Le bombardement de Bruxelles par Louis XIV et la reconstruction qui s'en suivit, 1695-1700* (Brussels: Aux archives d'architecture moderne, 1992); for the Austrian and French periods, see Christophe Loir, *La sécularisation des oeuvres d'art dans le Brabant (1773-1842): la création du musée de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1998).

[177] Valérie Herremans, "'Eenen loffelycken ende hoffelycken Aultaer': Retabelplastiek in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden ca. 1585-1685" (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2007), 153; For an extensive study of this altar, see Bettina Baumgärtel, *Himmlisch, Herrlich, Höfisch: Peter Paul Rubens, Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici* (Leipzig: Seemann, 2008).

[178] On the Brussels tapestry production, see the work of Koenraad Brosens.

Foreign visitors to Brussels never failed to note the sheer number of nobles who paraded around town in their coaches, surrounded by servants, and performing gallantries, not in the last place in the city's many churches.[179] In the midst of this worldly magnificence, religious orders in turn endeavoured to showcase their own exemplary and ascetic lives… and thereby solicit patronage and religious donations.[180]

Brussels was also the most important ecclesiastical centre of the country. Though the archbishop resided officially in Malines, he would spend at least half of the year in Brussels.[181] The papal nuncio (later internuncio) also resided at the Brussels court. Most religious orders had their main establishment in Brussels and various prominent and ancient abbeys were located around the city. Among the monks affiliated to these institutions were some of the closest advisors to the archdukes[182] as well as other Habsburg rulers, and some were members of state councils. Rivalry among orders was often "fought out" in Brussels and the processions and festivals they organized here drew visitors from far and wide.

Yet the most important reason we should reconsider the role of Brussels and its court during the Counter Reformation as a field of (art) historical inquiry is because the Counter Reformation implies such a strong interweaving of political, religious, and historical interests and arguments. This was especially so for the Habsburg frame of mind with its religious conception of state and "sacral rulership".[183] Whereas in the sixteenth century the Habsburg regime had tried to enforce the catholic faith and obedience to the prince with violence, Pollmann notes how in the

[179] See Claire Baisier, "De documentaire waarde van de kerkinterieurs van de Antwerpse School in de Spaanse Tijd" (KU Leuven, 2008).

[180] However, financial support for the orders was even more generous in the commercial centre of Antwerp. Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad," 160.

[181] Archbishops Jacob Boonen, in office throughout our period, and bishop Antoon Triest of Ghent often acted as influential intermediaries between the *ministère espagnol* and the local administrative bodies. See Vermeir, *In staat van oorlog: Filips IV en de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1629-1648*, 210–212.

[182] Such as the Franciscan confessor to Isabella, fray Andrès de Soto; the Dominican confessor to Albert, fray Iñigo de Brizuela; and the French court preacher dom Bernard de Montgaillard.

[183] Krista de Jonge, "'T Hof van Brabant' als symbool van de Spaanse hofhouding in de Lage Landen," *Bulletin KNOB* 98, no. 5/6 (1999): 183 – 198; On sacred monarchy, see Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); For the history of the notion of sacerdotal kingship, see Sergio Bertelli, "Rex et Sacerdos: The Holiness of the King in European Civilization," in *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation*, ed. Allan Ellenius (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 123–45.

seventeenth century the regime employed its catholicity instead as a "selling point" (implying a demand for this from the population).[184] The fervent Habsburg Catholicism was not only played out against the Dutch: the Southern Netherlands became a refuge (or even: sanctuary) of radical Catholics from England and France.[185]

Within the vast range of devotions the archducal pair cultivated, they had a special preference for the Eucharist (for reasons discussed above), the cult of their saintly forebears (and their relics – stressing dynastic and seigniorial continuity), and (miraculous statues of) the Virgin Mary (especially since her miraculous intervention in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571). Various recent studies point out how this "carefully considered system" of devotions was to legitimize the archducal government with religious arguments, help to conceal their limited sovereignty, and provide their dynasty with a sacral aura.[186] Yet these were more than just political instruments: in the Habsburg conception of state, religious and political motives were virtually identical.[187] They believed, like the population, that the dissemination of exemplary catholic virtues and ardent devotion was a powerful means to overcome the evils of heresy and rebellion, and to bring

[184] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 5–6, 161–170; Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, "The Habsburg Theatre State: Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries," in *Networks, Regions and Nations : Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, ed. Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 131–49; Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*; Duerloo, "Pietas Albertina. Dynastieke Vroomheid En Herbouw van Het Vorstelijk Gezag."

[185] To the dismay of for instance the English, numerous English monasteries were founded all over the country, strongly favoured by the Archdukes. See Imran Uddin, "William Trumbull: A Jacobean Diplomat at the Court of the Archdukes in Brussels, 1605/9-1625" (KULeuven, 2006), 140–154.

[186] Luc Duerloo, "Archiducal Piety and Habsburger Power," in *Albert & Isabella, 1598-1621: Essays*, ed. Werner Thomas and Luc Duerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 267–83; Werner Thomas, "Andromeda Unbound. The Reign of Albert and Isabella in the Southern. Netherlands, 1548-1621," in *Albert & Isabella, 1598-1621: Essays* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 1–13; Eddy Put, "Les Archiducs et La Réforme Catholique: Champs D'action et Limites Politiques," in *Albert & Isabella, 1598-1621: Essays* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 255–67; Duerloo, "Pietas Albertina. Dynastieke vroomheid en herbouw van het vorstelijk gezag"; Delfosse, *La Vierge « protectrice du Païs-Bas »*; Cordula van Wyhe, "Piety and Politics in the Royal Convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Brussels 1607-1646," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique de Belgique* 100, no. 1 (2005): 457–87.

[187] Luc Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety : Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

back the Northern provinces under their – legitimate and divinely sanctioned – rule.[188]

Indeed, one of the most important trumps in the strife with the Dutch was the archducal claim of legitimacy as "natural princes" of all seventeen provinces of the Netherlands, not just the ten remaining under Spanish rule.[189] Northerners and Southerners alike saw the "princely city" of Brussels as court residence, as it had been the seat of the Dukes of Burgundy.[190] Therefore the archdukes did not miss a chance to uphold the prestige of their court, receiving foreign nobles and (political/religious) refugees with all due honour and pomp, making Brussels a veritable "auberge des princes en exil"[191] in a "Habsburg theatre-state".[192]

But the archducal court in Brussels was not just any court; it was conceived as *aula sacra* (sacred court).[193] The archducal household was modelled on the Spanish example, resembling a monastery, in which male and female courtiers were strictly separated.[194] In emulation of the royal convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid, the Infanta had a distinguished group of Theresian nuns, disciples of St Theresa, brought over from Spain to found a convent in Brussels to which she had privileged access from her

[188] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 168–170; Duerloo and Wingens, *Scherpenheuvel: Het Jeruzalem van de Lage Landen*, 62–63.

[189] Jozef Andriessen, *De Jezuïeten en het samenhorigheidsbesef der Nederlanden 1585-1648* (Antwerpen: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1957).

[190] Raymond van Uytven and Andries van den Abeele, *Geschiedenis van Brabant: van het hertogdom tot heden* (Zwolle; Leuven: Waanders; Davidsfonds, 2011).

[191] Gossart, *L'auberge des princes en exil: anecdotes de la cour de Bruxelles au XVIIe siècle*; see also Paul Henrard, *Marie de Médicis dans les Pays-Bas 1631-38* (Paris: Baudry, 1876).

[192] Van Bruaene, "The Habsburg Theatre State: Court, City and the Performance of Identity in the Early Modern Southern Low Countries"; Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies: essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); J. Landwehr, *Splendid Ceremonies. State Entries and Royal Funerals in the Low Countries, 1515-1791. A Bibliography* (Nieuwkoop-Leiden, 1971).

[193] See especially Albert's *vita*, aiming at his canonization, by his almoner and librarian, the Antwerp canon and church historian Aubert Le Mire : Aubertus Miræus, *De vita Alberti Pii, sapientis, prudentis Belgarum principis commentarius* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1622).

[194] Courtiers who broke this rule faced penalty of death. See Dries Raeymaekers, "In dienst van de dynastie: adel uit Noord en Zuid aan het hof van de Aartshertogen," in *Het verdeelde huis: de nederlandse adel tussen Opstand en reconciliatie*, ed. Luc Duerloo and Liesbeth De Frenne (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2011), 96; on the political functions of the piety at the court of the Infante, see Birgit Houben, *Wisselende gedaanten: het hof en de hofhouding van de landvoogden Isabella Clara Eugenia (1621-1633) en de Kardinaal-Infant Don Fernando van Oostenrijk (1634-1641) te Brussel*, Ph.Diss (University of Ghent, 2009), 131–170.

adjoining quarters in the Coudenberg palace.[195] As Cordula van Wyhe argues, "In this respect, the Brussels court was a political arena where change was not only affected through prayer, but through Ana [de Jesus, a prominent Theresian nun]'s counselling of the Infanta."[196]

In the *pietatis orchestra* (dancing floor of piety)[197] or *pietatis asylum*[198] of the Brussels court, nobles were encouraged to imitate the pious model of the archdukes, not only by excelling in pious behaviour and religious patronage, but also to choose the religious life.[199] This monastic ideal was based on a strong belief in the God-given rule of the House of Habsburg, which built on medieval notions of sacral kingship (in fact, the archdukes aspired to have their dukedom elevated to a Kingdom of Burgundy).[200] Even after the archdukes died, this notion remained alive: the subsequent governors propagated a historical and quasi-religious "cult" around the persona and government of the archdukes.[201]

All this suggests that the prestige of the Brussels court (regardless of its real power) offered patrons – throughout the period under consideration – a unique "potential" of increasing the range of their efforts, as exemplified by the impact of the procession of the Blessed Sacrament of Miracle in 1656. Therefore I have selected a series of case studies of religious patronage in Brussels by the court or courtiers, which aimed at social, cultural, or

[195] Wyhe, "Piety and Politics in the Royal Convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Brussels 1607-1646"; Meganck, "De kerkelijke architectuur van Wensel Cobergher (1557/61-1634) in het licht van zijn verblijf te Rome," 32–51; Charles Terlinden, "Le Carmel Royal de Bruxelles, 1607-1957," *Cahiers bruxellois* 2, no. 2 (1957): 11–35; Pasture, *La restauration religieuse aux Pays-Bas catholiques sous les archiducs Albert et Isabelle (1596-1633)*, 8.

[196] Wyhe, "Piety and Politics in the Royal Convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Brussels 1607-1646," 471.

[197] Ibid., 472. citing Laurentius Beyerlinck's *laudatio* of Archduke Albert, 1621

[198] Houben, *Wisselende gedaanten: het hof en de hofhouding van de landvoogden Isabella Clara Eugenia (1621-1633) en de Kardinaal-Infant Don Fernando van Oostenrijk (1634-1641) te Brussel*, 137 citing F. Capronius' laudatio of the Infante Isabella, 1634.

[199] Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars*, 90–102; See also Dries Raeymaekers, *"Siempre un pie en palacio." Het hof en de hofhouding van de Aartshertogen Albrecht En Isabella, 1598-1621*, Ph.Diss (KU Leuven, 2009); Houben, *Wisselende gedaanten: het hof en de hofhouding van de landvoogden Isabella Clara Eugenia (1621-1633) en de Kardinaal-Infant Don Fernando van Oostenrijk (1634-1641) te Brussel*; see also Marie de Villermont, *L'Infante Isabelle: Gouvernante des Pays-Bas* (Tamines; Paris: Duculot-Roulin; François, 1912).

[200] Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars*, 249–251.

[201] Welzel, "Princeps Vidua, Mater Castrorum: The Iconography of Archduchess Isabella as Governor of the Netherlands"; Delfosse, "La Vierge comme protectrice des Pays-Bas méridionaux dans les livrets de pèlerinage Marial au XVIIe siècle," 1237–1238; W. Waterschoot, "Eenheid van kerk en staat bij de intrede van Kardinaal-Infant Ferdinand," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 5 (1989): 21–28.

religious transformation. The role of Brussels as stage of religious performance and agency is most clearly demonstrated by means of the artistic and architectural performances that were created on the commission of various actors of the court nobility and the administrative elite, and offers and alternative to the well-studied mercantile elites of Antwerp. The urban society surrounding the court offers a unique possibility to study the mechanisms of the political-religious agenda of the court, which was primarily communicated, or rather performed, by means of the visual arts.[202]

Objectives

As I have tried to show in the previous paragraphs, the revised view on the history of the Catholic Revival in the Southern Netherlands has important implications for the history of art. The god-fearing impetus for the catholic revival suggests we have to reconsider the traditional view of religious art and architecture during the Counter Reformation as persuasive, and hence mainly in rhetorical terms. Therefore, I propose to redefine the "baroque piety" of religious patronage that generated works of art and architecture not as a strategy to persuade (in a rhetorical way), but to negotiate. That is, to negotiate with the divine in a continuous process of reconciliation, aiming to regain the Divine Grace by which the Netherlands were thought to have once been blessed. This negotiation with God took place within networks of social relations (nexuses) in which art and architecture functioned as agents of change.

I will develop this thesis in a series of case studies of religious art patronage in the city of Brussels. This is, however, not a social history of Brussels or of the Counter-Reformation. It therefore necessarirly leaves out a multitude of potential case studies (e.g. parish churches, female convents, non-regular orders, hospitals, etc.), and focuses instead on three instances of religious patronages that immediately intervened in the religious landscape of Brussels as "acts of faith" in a specific transformative momentum. These studies were guided by the art nexus in which artworks were embedded, but their genre is that of the thick description. They establish the various types of agency implied in them, thus reconstructing the original function of artworks in their historical context. I make use of a wide range of sources, published

[202] Duerloo considers the visual arts the most important means of communicating the political-devotional messages of the archdukes. Duerloo, "Pietas Albertina. Dynastieke vroomheid en herbouw van het vorstelijk gezag," 13.

and unpublished, and not just those of traditional art history (paintings, prints, art criticism), to put artworks in their original context and reconstruct their viewing audiences.

The method of Gell implies that, instead of selecting (artworks as) case studies because of their aesthetic value, or the appreciation they received in the culture that produced them, I depart from historical situations of crisis in which the actors involved felt the need to use artefacts to achieve a change in the situation. Three significant case studies are assembled in which different types of nexuses emerge. In consideration of the decisive influence of individual patrons on religious foundations, the cases focus alternatively on the patronage of an émigrée widow of a radical French *Ligueur*, lady of honour to the Infanta; of a counsellor from the *noblesse de robe*, honoured with the *habito* of Santiago; and of a monk from the most prominent (yet disgraced) noble family at the Brussels court.[203] They each decided to patronize male religious orders, whose contribution to the Counter Reformation and Catholic Reform is thought to have been crucial.[204]

These three cases were most innovative, both for contemporaries, and with regard to the current state of research: the first has not been studied, the second only cursory, and the third only from the perspective of the history of the order and person of the patron. Each of these cases shows a great degree of complexity, which I intend to examine in detail. By zooming in on these cases and contextualizing them (nearly) exhaustively, I intend to throw new light on the complex ways artworks and buildings acted on their viewers, and on the divine.

[203] In Brussels patronage was done mostly by the administrative elite and robe nobility (as compared to Antwerp, where more prestigious private chapels were founded by patrons belonging to the city's commercial elite). Patronage by the high nobility usually concentrated on parish churches (or monasteries) in their (main) rural seats, as they did not need to affirm their social status and had an "international" rather than a national outlook. See Léon Lock, "Die Thurn und Taxis in Brüssel. Ihre Gedenkkappelle, Grabmonumente und der Internazionalismus ihrer Strategien sozialer Differenzierung," in *Grab - Kult - Memoria. Studien zur gesellschaftlichen Funktion von Erinnerung*, ed. Carolin Behrmann, Arne Karsten, and Philipp Zitzlsperger (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 209–210.

[204] Marinus, "De Contrareformatie te Antwerpen, (1585-1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad," 154.

Set up of the book

The thesis is divided thematically[205] in three chapters, based on the traditional catholic distinction between three types of devotion, as established in the decree of the 25th session of the Council of Trent (1563): *on the intercession and invocation of saints, the honour paid to relics, and the legitimate use of images*.[206] The Tridentine decree does not deal primarily with art, but with how believers can establish contact with the divine. In the same vein, my thesis takes these devotional categories of saints, relics and images – which frequently overlap – as point of departure for an investigation of case studies, which are selected on the basis of their function as marker of change or transformation, according to contemporaries. Each chapter interprets artworks and their transformative agency in light of the art nexus of which they formed the centre.

In the first chapter I focus on "the intercession and invocation of saints." I will examine the foundation of the Minim convent on the site of a former brothel (1621). The result of a complex exchange of interests between the monks, the city Magistrate, and the court, this event was propagated with a moralizing rhetoric of change, tapping into the widespread fears of the wrath of God over the sin of promiscuity. By invoking the Virgin Mary as patron, the various agents involved in the foundation hoped to muster support for a process of urban renewal. By lack of sufficient funding, however, the architectural project of a new church did not materialize as planned. Nonetheless, specific cults were promoted at the monastery, each directed at a particular audience: that of the Holy Guardian Angel and of the Virgin of Loreto and her Holy House, replicating the sacred original in great detail. How did the monks and their patrons propagate sexual morals through the cult of saints and for what purpose?

The second chapter deals with "the legitimate use of images". The chapter examines the altar of the confraternity of St. Dorothea in the Carmelite church (1640), which was decorated in the middle of winter by temporarily transforming it with a multitude of flowers, alluding to the Saint's miracle of having summoned flowers from heaven just before her

[205] Instead of chronologically, as I do not primarily intend to make arguments pertaining to historical developments of continuity and change.

[206] Translation published in Marcia B. Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art : Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 271–272; see also John W. O'Malley, "Introduction," in *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1–15.

martyrdom. I will investigate how ornamenting the altar by means of innovative horticultural techniques (through an international network of horticultural experts) was to astonish the viewer as a miracle, while calling forth (the divine mission of) the conquest of Nature by Man's ingenuity and so restoring the ideal of Eternal Spring. Moreover, by manipulating Art's greatest rival Nature, it engaged in Counter-Reformation discourses on the nature of religious art and illusion. Was the spectacle, and the specific agency of flowers, to highlight just the Saint's conversion-narrative, or did it also implicitly address the doubts and concerns about religious images that had arisen during the reformation?

In the third chapter I discuss the "honour paid to relics". Thanks to the close ties of the Capuchin monk Carolus van Arenberg to the Holy See, the order got hold of eight complete bodies of Early Christian martyrs from the Roman catacombs. While the relics were being translated to the Netherlands, a fitting new church was built, funded by the Arenberg family, to be promoted as "mausoleum" for these relics (1652). After a procession of *translatio*, they were displayed in an elaborate artistic setting, which nonetheless aimed to highlight the order's love of poverty. What role did this new cult and the art and architecture of the church play in the political contexts of the court, the rivalries between the orders, and the emergence of Jansenism?

Taken together, these chapters will not only provide an abundance of new material, findings, interpretations, and insights, but also show that seventeenth century Brussels was the locus for many performative interventions of religious patronage in which art and architecture functioned as agents of change, with a relevance that goes well beyond the concerns of art history.