SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO AND HIS COLLABORATION WITH MICHELANGELO: DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY TO THE DIVINE IN CATHOLIC REFORMATION ROME

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is structured around seven paintings that mark decisive moments in Sebastiano del Piombo’s Roman career (1511-47) and his collaboration with Michelangelo. Scholarship on Sebastiano’s collaborative works with Michelangelo typically concentrates on the artists’ division of labor and explains the works as a reconciliation of Venetian colorito (coloring) and Tuscan disegno (design). Consequently, discourses of interregional rivalry, center and periphery, and the normativity of the Roman High Renaissance become the overriding terms in which Sebastiano’s work is discussed. What has been overlooked is Sebastiano’s own visual intelligence, his active rather than passive use of Michelangelo’s skills, and the novelty of his works, made in response to reform currents of the early sixteenth century. This study investigates the significance behind Sebastiano’s repeating, slowing down, and narrowing in on the figure of Christ in his Roman works. The dissertation begins by addressing Sebastiano’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings as catalysts for his own inventions, demonstrating his investment in collaboration and strategies of citation as tools for artistic image-making. Focusing on Sebastiano’s reinvention of his partner’s drawings, it then looks at the ways in which the artist engaged with the central debates of the Catholic Reformation – debates on the Church’s mediation of the divine, the role of the individual in the path to personal salvation, and the increasingly problematic distance between the layperson and God. I show that his works reveal a rethinking of how to depict Christ’s body and its accessibility to the viewer; an exploration of effects of distance and proximity to the divine lies at the heart of Sebastiano’s project. One key outcome of this research is a reevaluation and deconstruction of the current terms in which Renaissance
artistic collaboration is typically understood, that is, through such binary oppositions as drawing/color, Rome/Venice, center/periphery, and giver/receiver. Additionally, by examining the problematics of image-based devotion, as they play out in Sebastiano’s work, this study contributes to a more precise, historically-grounded understanding of the artist’s response to pressing questions of his day regarding reform of the Church and personal devotion.

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Introduction

I first became interested in Sebastiano del Piombo when I encountered his Christ Carrying the Cross (Figure 1) at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. I was struck by the painting’s dark solid ground, the broad surfaces of Christ’s sleeve and cross that nearly break through the surface of the picture plane, and the prominently flexed, outstretched fingers of Christ’s hand. The hand delicately touches the cross with the tips of its fingers, which in turn cast soft shadows over the grain of the wood. As far as I could tell, the painting had no precedent among other fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian works that treated the subject of the portacroce. This became all the more apparent when I looked at Sebastiano’s other portacroce paintings (Figure 2 and Figure 3), where Christ appears walking directly towards the viewer head on. I then discovered his Viterbo Pietà (Figure 7), where Christ, traditionally shown in his mother’s lap, is isolated from her and lying on the ground at her feet. Sebastiano’s works, it turned out, did not follow the canonical forms of established pictorial subjects.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed to recurring patterns in Sebastiano’s Roman works of 1513-40, distinctive and extraordinary for their powerful visual effects, but have yet to offer a compelling explanation of these. Sebastiano’s compositions have been characterized as increasingly tending towards greater simplification – of space, figures, and material surfaces – frontality and flatness – almost always avoiding deep perspectival recession of space – and repetition.¹ In other words, his compositional choices have a tendency to recur throughout his oeuvre. Sebastiano’s interest in monumental, solid forms and in placing figures in noticeable isolation from one another are equally puzzling

aspects of his work. His paintings are perhaps most commonly singled out for their effect of “slowness” or “timelessness.” Michael Hirst and Claudio Strinati both explain this effect as one of so-called “non-narrative”; Hirst elaborates on the term as referring to scenes that have been stilled and figures that have been emptied of the vitality of Michelangelo’s bodies.

Michelangelo constitutes a key figure in scholarship on Sebastiano; in fact, few studies have been published on the latter that do not make reference to the former. Reading both the sixteenth-century art critical reception of Sebastiano’s work and recent scholarship on the artist, it quickly becomes apparent the extent to which Sebastiano’s pictorial intelligence has been subsumed under Michelangelo’s – the artist with whom Sebastiano partnered as a collaborator for over twenty years while in Rome. Soon after moving from Venice to Rome in 1511 on the invitation of Agostino Chigi, Sebastiano befriended Michelangelo and began obtaining drawings from him – largely over long distance – for certain commissions.

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5 Michel Hochmann, Venise et Rome 1500-1600: deux écoles de peinture et leurs échanges (Genève: Droz, 2004), 190 says the same of Sebastiano’s Raising of Lazarus – that Michelangelo’s figures “lose a part of their force” in Sebastiano’s hands (“perdent une partie de leur force”).
6 I am speaking of Sebastiano’s Roman career in particular. An important exception to this rule is the collection of essays published under the title La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo: Storia e tecniche a confronto, eds. Costanza Barbieri, Enrico Parlato and Simona Rinaldi (Rome: Nuova Argos, 2009). Several authors, such as Enrico Parlato, Roberto Bellucci, and Cecilia Frosinini, move the discussion away from the binary opposition and rivalry between Sebastiano’s colore and Michelangelo’s disegno, while others, like Costanza Barbieri, argue for the importance of looking at Sebastiano’s motives in new ways, separate from Michelangelo’s interests.
7 Michelangelo was mostly in Florence working for the Medici between 1515 and 1534, while Sebastiano resided in Rome. Drawings were sent along with letters through their mutual friend and assistant, Leonardo Sellaio.
The story of Sebastiano’s early Roman career, as told by Giorgio Vasari in his *Vita* of the artist, is symptomatic of his broader narrative of artists coming to Rome from the periphery: upon his arrival in Rome, Sebastiano finds himself in an unfamiliar milieu dominated by the rivalry between Michelangelo and Raphael, and colored by the theoretical debate on *colorito* (coloring) and *disegno* (drawing or design). A neophyte to the technique of fresco painting expected of him at the Farnesina, Sebastiano is seen as struggling to cast off his Venetian past to embrace the Roman *maniera*, but ultimately set up to fail under the shadow of its overpowering effect on outsiders. Ludovico Dolce was equally critical in his dialogue *L’Aretino*: “Everyone knows, moreover, that Michelangelo did designs for Sebastiano; and the man who garbs himself with the feathers of another is

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7 The *colore-disegno* debate was based on the mid sixteenth-century theorization of the intellectual superiority of Tuscan design over Venetian color or coloring. See Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce’s Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968); Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura* (Vinegia: Paoulo Gherardo, 1548); Federico Zuccaro, *Scritti d’arte di Federico Zuccaro*, ed. Romano Alberti (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1961). For an overview, see Maurice Poirier, “The Disegno–Colore Controversy Revisited,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 13 (1987): 80–86. For Sebastiano’s *Vita*, see Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti*, V, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 567-8 and 584. Vasari writes that Sebastiano painted the frescoes at the Farnesina “in a manner that he had brought from Venice, which was very different from that which was followed in Rome by the able painters of that day […] spurred by rivalry with Baldassare of Siena and then with Raphael, he strove to his utmost to surpass himself, whatever may have been the result.” (“di quella maniera ch’aveva recato da Vinegia, molto disforme da quell ache usavano in Roma I valenti pittoridi que’tempi […] comunque gli riuscisse, cercò d’avanzarsi più che poteva, sporando d alla concorrenza di Baldassare Sanese, e poi di Raffaello.”) He then frames the ensuing collaboration as Michelangelo’s initiative to compete with Raphael’s mastery of both coloring and design: “The mind of Michelangelo, therefore, drew towards Sebastiano, whose coloring and grace pleased him much, and he took him under his protection, thinking that, if he were to assist Sebastiano in design, he would be able by this means, without working himself, to confound those who held such an opinion [favoring Raphael over Michelangelo].” (“Destatosi dunque l’animo di Michelagnolo verso Sebastiano, perché molto gli piaceva il colorito e la grazia di lui, lo prese in protezione; pensando che se egli usasse l’aiuto del disegno in Sebastiano, si potrebbe con questo mezzo, senza che egli operasse, battere coloro che avevano si fatta opineone.”) Finally, Vasari characterizes Sebastiano as “leisurely and lazy,” (agiate ed infingrade”) ceasing to do work at the moment that Michelangelo breaks off their friendship.

left, when they are subsequently taken off him, looking like that absurd crow which was
described by Horace.”

Similarly, Michael Hirst’s book – the most authoritative monograph on
Sebastiano published to date – characterizes the years of 1517-20 as Sebastiano’s “most
stretched,” threatened by overt competition with Raphael and by contributions from
Michelangelo, which “at the same time helped and overwhelmed him.” According to
Hirst, Sebastiano’s work at this time reveals a struggle in front of “insistent, inescapable
prototypes,” that is, Michelangelo’s Sistine ceiling that had been unveiled just a month
before Sebastiano’s arrival and Raphael’s Vatican Stanze, in the process of being
painted. By entering into collaboration with Michelangelo, a collaboration and
friendship that would last roughly twenty years and that yielded numerous important
works that were recognized as such during the artists’ lifetime, Sebastiano ironically lost
his place in the canon of great artists. At worst he has become an unthinking, willing
pawn in Michelangelo’s competition with Raphael – his Venetian coloristic skills
compensating for what Michelangelo lacks – at best he becomes a submissive, dependent
artist who is constrained and enfeebled by the very thing that he needs in order to create
his work.

9 Roskill, *Dolce’s Aretino*, 94-5. “Poi è noto a ciascuno, che Michel’Angolo gli faceva i disegni: e chi si
veste delle altrui piume, essendone dipoi spogliato, riman simile a quella ridicola cornacchia, ch’è discritta
da Horatio.”
11 Ibid., 39.
12 Sebastiano’s *Raising of Lazarus* was displayed in the Vatican Palace on December 11, 1519 and chosen
by Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici to be sent to his titular church, the Narbonne Cathedral in France, over
Raphael’s *Transfiguration*. In his letter of 1519, Sellaio reports to Michelangelo that “everyone remained
filled with wonder” (“ogni uomo resta balordo”) upon seeing it nearly complete. See Paola Barocchi and
Renzo Ristori, *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, II (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), 187. When both works were
shown side by side after Raphael’s death, Vasari himself wrote that both “the one and the other were vastly
extolled” (“l’una e l’altra lodata infinitamente.”) Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 570. Likewise, Vasari writes of the
Borgherini chapel, that Sebastiano “executed it with such zeal and diligence, that it was held to be, as it is,
very beautiful piece of painting.” (“la condusse con tanta diligenza e studio Sebastiano, ch’ella fu tenuta
et è bellissima pittura.”) Ibid., 569.
To be clear, I am not attempting to recover Sebastiano’s lost greatness or argue for his superiority over Michelangelo. Yet the kinds of explanations that have been put forward for the visual strategies employed by Sebastiano have tended to eclipse what I see to be the greater issues at stake in his works. Scholarship has tended to analogize compositional repetition to a lack of inventiveness, the effect of pictorial “slowness” to a corruption of Michelangelo’s invention, to psychologize the figures’ pictorial solitude as bearers of Michelangelo’s infamous melancholia, and ultimately to divest Sebastiano of his own artistic interests and intentions. In sum, Vasari’s discourse, with its bias toward single-authorship style and Tuscan disegno, has had serious consequences for our current understanding of the artist and his larger project.

Scholarship dealing with Sebastiano’s collaborative works focuses mainly on the division of labor, seeking to tease apart his and Michelangelo’s share of the work, those elements that belong to the Venetian – the sensuous color, the windswept moody landscapes – from those of the Tuscan – the invention itself, the monumental figure, the contour gleaned in the underdrawing from radiograph analysis. In discussing the products of collaboration, it is ironic that scholars ultimately seek to separate out the works’ components, and in some cases only to then argue that Michelangelo catered to

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13 See, for example, Radolfò Pallucchini, Sebastiano Viniziano: Fra Sebastiano del Piombo (Milan: Casa Editrice Mondadori, 1944), 99; Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 48; and Rona Goffen, Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 254. Gould goes as far as to suggest that Sebastiano didn’t mind being “being used as a pawn in other people’s quarrels” and that he welcomed the stimulus from another artist. See Gould, Raising of Lazarus, 12. See also no. 4.

his collaborator’s style in his drawings in order to bridge the gap.\textsuperscript{15} What such scholarship does is underline and reinforce the basic premise of two irreconcilable styles, made separate by a geographic and theoretical gap. Moreover, by inserting Sebastiano into the colorito/disegno debate, the notion of artistic dissonance, rivalry, and single-authorship style become the overriding terms in which Sebastiano’s work is discussed. In doing so, I believe scholars are trapping themselves and Sebastiano in a set of issues imposed on the artist from the outside, from Vasari and Dolce’s theoretical discourses, which postdate Sebastiano’s work.

In this dissertation, I argue for the importance of looking at the works themselves to guide us in our inquiry and the questions we pose about them – rather than using art theoretical language, which is driven by its own particular interests, as the terms through which to view Sebastiano’s production. I propose that the colorito/disegno debate was not the debate that Sebastiano saw himself participating in when he moved to Rome and when he chose to enter into collaboration with Michelangelo. A close reading of Sebastiano’s work reveals a very different set of preoccupations – ones that are grounded in the problematics of image-based, material devotion, the mediation of divine truths through texts, images and Holy matter, and the means by which artistic images brought viewers closer to the divine.

The aim of this dissertation is to recover those preoccupations and what was at stake for Sebastiano at this moment of his career. It contextualizes him in both artistic and theological debates in early- to mid-sixteenth century Catholic Reformation Rome. In undertaking this task, I do not wish to heroicize Sebastiano by arguing for his neglected

\textsuperscript{15} Hirst, \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 60-1. Hirst attributes the increasing abstraction and simplification in the Flagellation and even more so in the Botoni version to Michelangelo’s understanding and appreciation of his friend’s aesthetic preferences, catering to his “strengths and limitations”. 
greatness and complete autonomy as an artist. This would be to ignore the facts – the letters that he and Michelangelo exchanged documenting Sebastiano’s persistent desire for Michelangelo’s drawings, as well as the severely negative critical reception that characterizes sixteenth-century writing such as that of Vasari, Francisco de Hollanda, and Giovanni Andrea Gilio, but also of Sebastiano’s fellow Venetians such as Ludovico Dolce. This incomprehension, and at times hostility, on the part of theoreticians is also of interest to me and will serve to illuminate the novelty of this joint enterprise and how it might have differed from other collaborative alliances like those of Michelangelo, Pontormo, and Daniele da Volterra.

Methodologically, this dissertation pushes against terms frequently used to characterize the act of taking pictorial ideas from another source – terms like duplicating, copying or transcribing – which I find unhelpful and limiting. To call Sebastiano a transcriber of another artist’s designs, or conversely to say that he was “influenced” by Michelangelo as his follower, is to deprive the act of borrowing of both intentionality and agency. Instead, my understanding of citation and borrowing as a generative artistic

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**Notes:**


17 Hochmann, *Venise et Rome*, 190 writes that Sebastiano imitated and “transcribed” Michelangelo’s designs (“En cherchant à imiter ou à transcrire directement les dessins de Michel-Ange […]”); Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals*, 255 writes: “For what kind of wholeness does such imitation or duplication allow? For Sebastiano and perhaps to a lesser extent for Michelangelo, the answer seems to be a diminished wholeness.” The conflation of imitation with duplication and transcription, which are not at all the same, is equally problematic.

choice is informed by scholarship on reception theory and the study of intertextuality.\(^{19}\) I am interested in intertextuality as a framework for understanding Sebastiano’s redeployment of existing iconographies in new contexts and his citations of Michelangelo and Raphael’s work as acts of re-interpretation. In drawing on these ways of approaching the problem of imitation, this dissertation explores questions of authorship and the performance of style raised by Sebastiano’s incorporation of a second authorial identity into his work.

I interrogate the meaning behind the act of taking for Sebastiano by reevaluating and deconstructing the common binary oppositions used to describe Renaissance artistic collaboration: drawing/color, Rome/Venice, center/periphery, and giver/receiver.\(^{20}\) Such polarizing dichotomies traditionally privilege the first of the two terms, without consideration for how both artists and artworks often undo these constructs in highly self-...


\(^{20}\) I owe my re-thinking of these oppositions to Derrida’s articulation of the notion of \textit{diff\'erence} and the play of hierarchical binaries in his essay “Diff\'erance.” Derrida writes that “every apparently rigorous and irreducible opposition (for example the opposition of the secondary to the primary) comes to be qualified, at one moment or another, as a ‘theoretical fiction.’” and that “the dream of two equal forces, even if they are granted an opposition of meaning, is an approximate and crude dream.” For Derrida, terms are defined by the construction of their opposite, in which one term is privileged over the other. Moreover, it is not enough to neutralize the hierarchy of of the terms in order to challenge the dichotomy, one must overturn them and see what happens. Jacques Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17-18. This made me ask: what would happen if we reversed the hierarchy implicit in the giver/receiver opposition of Michelangelo and Sebastiano’s collaboration.
conscious ways. For example, a close reading of Sebastiano’s letters to Michelangelo and the metaphors he employs reveals that Sebastiano welcomed being on the receiving end of Michelangelo’s drawings because it allowed him to position himself as the receiver of divine illumination. His was not a passive act of copying; rather, the echo of Michelangelo’s designs in his paintings create productive dialogue grounded in difference.

The notion of difference is likewise important for my thinking about pictorial irresolution in Sebastiano’s works. The play on visual heterogeneity – an integral part of the viewing experience of Sebastiano’s works and often the result of his incorporation of Michelangelo’s designs – turns out to be part of Sebastiano’s thinking about the function of artistic images in personal devotion. Effects of contradiction, incongruity and compositional dissonance emerge as recurring and meaningful strategies in Sebastiano’s work, as a way of reflecting on its own material and medial status in mediating the divine. I borrow the term “mediality” (medialität) from Klaus Krüger, whose work has been fundamental for my own thinking about art as media; it is the notion that visual representations are bound to a concrete medium and offer the viewer a mediated experience of the invisible realm of the divine – in effect, fashioning a God made known only through images, texts, and rituals. Sebastiano’s representations of the divine turn

22 The term mediality here refers to the notion that images are bound to a medium – such as language, a wall or canvas, and other technology – by which they are transmitted to an embodied recipient. A picture thus occupies an ambivalent position as an intermediary between the invisible, immaterial referent to which it points and its material representation. The mediality of images thus engenders a certain distanced or detached attitude from the viewer, who must differentiate between reality and pictorial representation. Klaus Krüger, Das Bild als Schleier des Unsachtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien (München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001), 91, 250-53 and Klaus Krüger, “Andrea Mantegna: Painting’s Mediality” Art History 37, Issue 2 (2014): 222-52. For a discussion of the term, see
out to be self-conscious reflections on the function and hermeneutics of artistic images – on the way images can be read and used by viewers – in light of theological concerns raised by reform-minded thinkers within the Catholic fold. Among the key questions was the relationship between the external and internal image, and the means by which the viewer attains proximity to the divine. Sebastiano’s interest in a phenomenological experience of the work of art, but also in exploring the limitations of the material artistic image, underscores his thinking about the viewer’s role in actively completing the meaning of the work.

By turning to these topics, this dissertation responds to several exciting avenues that scholarship on Sebastiano has taken in recent years. One of these trends has been an interest in exploring the connection between Sebastiano’s art and the reform currents of the sixteenth century. In 1957, Federico Zeri was the first to sense a relationship between Sebastiano’s art and the reform currents of that scholarship on Sebastiano has taken in recent years. One of these trends has been an interest in exploring the connection between Sebastiano’s art and the reform currents of


23 Some of the key thinkers with respect to these issues that will be discussed in the chapters that follow are Giles of Viterbo, Thomas Cajetan, Juan and Alfonso de Valdés, and Baldassare Castiglione.

Sebastiano’s work and reform; in Sebastiano, he saw the first sign of reform maturing in Rome, calling his work iconic and its concentration on a sacred subject meditative. More recently, scholarship has followed up on this possiblity. Mauro Lucco ascribed to the Viterbo Pietà landscape a moral unease and religious apprehension that was animating the circle of reformed in Viterbo. Moreover, he saw the Hermitage portacroce as a response to the requirements of the Counter-Reformation ideals and Spanish mysticism. Lucco found something deeply disturbing about the work – “animated by torment and almost a subtle and winding horror” ("animata da un tormento, e quasi un orrore sottile e serpeggiante"), as Sebastiano grew “ever more burdened by his melancholy” ("viepiù incupito nella sua malinconia"). Both Marcia Hall and Claudio Strinati echo Zeri and Lucco’s proposal that Sebastiano’s art anticipates Counter-Reformation ideals; in addition, Strinati argues that the Viterbo Pietà borders on Lutheranism and that Sebastiano was “the only true reform artist” (“l’unico vero artista ‘riformato’”) in the 1510s in Italy.

In sum, scholars have characterized Sebastiano’s work as “Lutheran” or “Counter-Reformation art avant la lettre” because of its apparent manifestation of asceticism, simplicity, or religious unease. The direction is promising, and yet, given these tenuous connections and vague terminology – as well as the unhelpful notion of foreshadowing or anticipating future preoccupations yet unknown to the artist – there

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27 Ibid., 122.
29 Hall, The Sacred Image, 152.
remains a clear need to investigate Sebastiano’s work in less speculative and more historically-grounded terms.  

This need becomes all the more apparent in light of tentative statements on Sebastiano’s relation to reform such as this one by Hirst:

Many years earlier it appears that [Sebastiano] had already achieved a reputation as an almost exclusively religious painter. What was his attitude to the commissions of the post-1530 period? And what weight, if any, did the views of the reformists with whom he demonstrably came into contact have on him? Is the reference to “cose pietose” just a reflection of a prevalent, current anti-Spanish feeling? To these and similar questions sure answers seem to me impossible to find.

The present study addresses this impasse in scholarship by querying Sebastiano’s engagement with such thinkers as Giles of Viterbo, Paolo Giustiniani, and Juan de Valdés, as well as with the statements made by the Fifth Lateran Council on proper preaching and interpretation of Scripture.

A second galvanizing trend in recent scholarship has been the study of Sebastiano’s experimentation with the new medium of oil painting on stone, as well as effects of sculptural monumentality in painting. Contemporaries like Vasari, Pietro Bembo, Vittore Soranzo, and Benedetto Varchi credited Sebastiano with the invention of a new kind of painting that “petrified” color and made painting more “durable.”

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30 The most convincing and historically-grounded account of Sebastiano’s relationship to early sixteenth-century reform currents is by Josephine Jungić, “Joachimist Prophecies in Sebastiano del Piombo’s Borgherini Chapel and Raphael’s Transfiguration” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 66-83. Jungić proposes that we examine Sebastiano’s decoration of the Borgherini chapel within the context of early sixteenth-century Franciscan reformist circles, in particular those of the Friars Minor of San Pietro in Montorio.


33 In a letter of 1530 to Pietro Bembo, the Venetian cardinal Vittore Soranzo attributes the invention of painting on slate to Sebastiano, calling it “eternal painting” that “nearly petrifies” color. Sebastienello
poets Francesco Maria Molza and Gandolfo Porrino praised his work for its “eternal” quality, like that of stone, while retaining the coloristic effect of *vaghezza*. These contemporaneous writers point to Sebastiano’s ongoing pursuit of painting’s durability in its *paragone* with sculpture, but I believe that this preoccupation goes beyond a utilitarian need for longevity. The fragility of works painted on stone, as well as the cumbersome consequences for transporting paintings in this medium, suggest that other, artistic and theological, concerns should be considered. In this study, I recover the strangeness of this aim – of petrifying color into something more eternal – and how it relates to Sebastiano’s broader project of thinking about the relationship between the material image and its divine referent.

Related to Sebastiano’s use of stone supports, is the larger question of style and the artist’s engagement with a sculptural aesthetic and effects of monumentality. This dissertation questions the extent to which Michelangelo’s sculpture is necessary for explaining Sebastiano’s own project. Sebastiano’s Venetian works, prior to his arrival in Rome, such as the *Judgment of Solomon* (Figure 4), the S. Giovanni Crisostomo altarpiece (Figure 5), and the San Bartolomeo di Rialto organ shutters (Figure 6), reveal a

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34 Francesco Maria Molza, “stanza XLII” in *Delle poesie volgari e latine di Francesco Maria Molza*, I, ed., P.A. Serassi (Bergamo: Pietro Lancellotti, 1747), 148. Porrino’s poem is cited in Barbieri “Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi,” 61. The poems are presented and discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

35 Alessi, for example, believes that the Viterbo Pietà was conceived as “a pictorial companion to its sculptural equivalent,” that is, Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà. Alessi, “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 46.
confident wielding of sculptural and architectural effects that do not depend on anything Sebastiano would have learned from Michelangelo. This should caution us against giving primacy to Michelangelo’s impact on Sebastiano.

Finally, rather than seeing the Venetian and Roman manners as antagonistic, it pays to look at Sebastiano’s work as an ongoing engagement with the art of Bellini, Giorgione, Raphael and Michelangelo – not as conflicting artistic modes, but rather as possibilities available to Sebastiano. Thus, I reframe what has frequently been called stylistic rivalry in terms of productive dialogue.36

The dissertation is structured around seven paintings that mark decisive moments in Sebastiano del Piombo’s Roman career (1511-47) and his collaboration with Michelangelo. The scope of this study encompasses Sebastiano’s Roman period nearly in its entirety and focuses specifically on works for which he either received drawings from Michelangelo or used an older drawing by the master as a starting point. Sebastiano’s Venetian period is excluded from this dissertation because it entails its own unique problems and would demand a separate study, which is beyond the scope of this investigation.37 Here I am particularly concerned with Sebastiano’s Christocentric works and his engagement with reform ideas in Rome. This is not to say that Venice did not have its own debates on Church reform; I occasionally bring these into the discussion, especially for Sebastiano’s early years in Rome.

The reader will also discover a notable absence among the works under consideration: the Raising of Lazarus (1517) (Figure 8), for which Sebastiano received a

36 Goffen, Renaissance Rivals.
37 In Venice, Sebastiano worked alongside and engaged with the art of Giorgione and Bellini, and developed his interest in the sacra conversazione, mythologies, portraiture, and paintings of idealized female beauty. It is only in Rome that he begins his Christocentric works. See the exhibition catalogue Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, 92-125 for his Venetian works.
number of drawings from Michelangelo. The painting was commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de’Medici in tandem with Raphael’s *Transfiguration* (Figure 9). One reason for this absence was my original interest in looking at works by Sebastiano that had received relatively little attention in scholarship. The *Raising of Lazarus* was, until recently, one of Sebastiano’s most discussed and celebrated works.\(^{38}\) This is because in it scholars like Cecil Gould and Rona Goffen saw play out the familiar account of artistic rivalry between *colorito* and *disegno*. In a way, the competition set up by Giulio de’Medici between Sebastiano and Raphael literalized the confrontation that Vasari would go on to stage between the Venetian and Roman manners. Consequently, the Venetian Sebastiano transplanted to Rome and armed with Michelangelo’s *disegno* against Raphael’s “perfect manner” (both a colorist and a draughtsman) has become the ideal case study for scholars wishing to focus on artistic rivalry, competition, and ultimately, the reconciliation of regional stylistic differences.\(^{39}\) This is a narrative I decided I wanted to avoid in my approach to Sebastiano, for one, because it has outlived its usefulness, but more


\(^{39}\) For Vasari’s account of Raphael’s perceived superiority over Michelangelo for having a manner that combined *colorito* and *disegno*, see Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 567-8. “While Sebastiano was executing these works in Rome, Raphael of Urbino had risen into such credit as a painter, that his friends and adherents said that his pictures were more in accord with the rules of painting than those of Michelagnolo, being pleasing in colour, beautiful in invention, and charming in the expressions, with design in keeping with the rest; and that those of Buonarroti had none of those qualities, with the exception of the design. And for such reasons these admirers judged that in the whole field of painting Raffaello was, if not more excellent than Michelagnolo, at least his equal; but in coloring they would have it that he surpassed Buonarroti without a doubt.” “Mentre che lavorava costui queste cose in Roma, era venuto in tanto credito Raffaello da Urbino nella pittura che gl’amici et aderenti suoi dicevano che le pitture di lui erano, secondo l’ordine della pittura, più che quelle di Michelagnolo, vaghe di colorito, belle d’invenzioni e d’arie più vezzose e di corrispondente disegno, e che quelle del Buonarroti non avevano dal disegno in fuori niuna di queste parti. E per queste cagioni giudicavano questi cotali Raffaello essere nella pittura, se non più eccellente di lui, almeno pari, ma nel colorito volevano che ad ogni modo lo passasse.”
importantly, because I do not think that this is how artists saw themselves in relation to their fellow colleagues, even if competition was a real part of their daily lives. By exploring other important and often overlooked works in Sebastiano’s Roman oeuvre, we stand to gain a fuller picture of the artist’s larger project and to approach it with a fresh perspective.

The dissertation is structured both chronologically – starting with Sebastiano’s first collaborative work, the Viterbo Pietà (Figure 7), and ending with his last, the Úbeda Pietà (Figure 10) – and thematically. It traces the expression of a key preoccupation in Sebastiano’s work: the articulation of effects of distance and proximity to the divine, or the figure of Christ, and the broader significance of these in context of the central debates of the Catholic Reformation. These debates focused on the Church’s mediation of the divine, the role of the individual in the path to personal salvation, and the increasingly problematic distance between the layperson and God. The title of this dissertation contains the phrase “distance and proximity to the divine,” and it holds a double significance, which emerged as my research progressed. It refers to Sebastiano’s thinking of how to depict Christ’s body and its accessibility to the viewer, as well as to his close relationship with “the divine” Michelangelo (“il divino”), which nevertheless occurred largely over long-distance.40

I begin, in Chapter One, by first considering how Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s joint operation fits within the broader Renaissance practice of sharing drawings between independent artists. I contextualize these artists’ partnership within the widely-practiced exchange of ideas via drawings and the exchange between the pictorial cultures of Venice

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and Rome by means of travelling and collaborating artists.\textsuperscript{41} At the same time, however, I show that their works posit a new model of collaboration that was beginning to emerge in the early 1500s, based on a non-commercial economy of gift-exchange among friends. I contend that Sebastiano’s reliance on but also deviation from his models marks the borrowings as meaningful acts – as opportunities to reflect on the problems raised by the very subject matter he was working with. By using accepted iconographical types to work out his ideas visually, Sebastiano arrived at strikingly idiosyncratic compositions and figural configurations.

Central to Sebastiano’s \textit{oeuvre} is its deep investment in the metaphoric potential of painting and its rethinking of what it meant to portray the presence of God in the modern altarpiece. In Chapter Two, I investigate Sebastiano’s Viterbo \textit{Pietà} (1513-16) (Figure 7) – the first collaborative effort undertaken by Sebastiano and Michelangelo – as a complex reflection on the call to religious reform by Giles of Viterbo, Gasparo Contarini, and Paolo Giustiniani. I focus on Giles of Viterbo, whose passionate sermons Sebastiano heard during his residence in Rome and whose friendship with Sebastiano’s patron, Giovanni Botoni, attests to the artist’s intimate contact with reformist circles. The \textit{Pietà} is set in a tempestuous, solitary landscape, rather than the historical setting of the Passion, marking it as a discerning response to the figurative language of Giles’ sermons.

Moreover, Sebastiano’s persistent interest in the simultaneous assertion of Christ’s proximity and distance to the viewer finds its first expression in the Viterbo \textit{Pietà}. The position of Christ at the bottom of the canvas, seemingly set outside the

painting, suggests that the work responds to Giles’ revival of St. Augustine, specifically, the latter’s question on man’s ability to conceptualize God – a motionless eternity that is outside time and yet seen through temporal phenomena – in the concrete terms of oratory or writing. The *Pietà* asks: how can a picture convey the fixed, unchanging presence of God to the viewer, who sees everything within time? The work lays claim to a new kind of modern devotional painting, one that mirrors the sense of eternal looking and meditation before the altarpiece and that interrogates the means by which the pious viewer traverses the distance between himself and the divine.

The body of Christ constitutes a nucleus of absolute stasis for Sebastiano’s works, the figure around which he stages his scenes. Yet while this is true for Sebastiano’s Borgherini chapel (1516-24) (Figure 11) in S. Pietro in Montorio, Rome, the surrounding figures – Sts. Francis and Peter, and Isaiah and Matthew – do not look at Christ, but rather appear immersed in the books and scrolls they hold. In Chapter Three, I suggest that the Borgherini chapel insists on a focused meditation on Christ, but one that is defined by the architecture of the chapel, which acts to distance the body of Christ from the viewer. In doing so, Sebastiano’s work creates a sacred space that draws attention to the mediated nature of divine truths; it foregrounds intercessory figures as necessary interpreters of Scripture. Put another way, the chapel invites distanced contemplation of images as interceding and metaphorical representations of the divine, as well as the reading of authoritative texts, whose authors occupy the liminal space that must be traversed to arrive at the central image of Christ. I contend that the work should be seen as a response to the turbulent years leading up to the Reformation and the problem of
human mediation of divine truths – in rituals, texts, and images – raised by reformers and addressed by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1516.

The tension between proximity and distance re-emerges in Sebastiano’s series of works done between the 1510s and 30s of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, now located at the Prado (Figure 2 and Figure 12), the Hermitage (Figure 1), and in Budapest (Figure 3). These works form the focus of Chapter Four, in which I examine the notion of giving and withholding Christ’s body. In having his hands break through the fictive picture-plane, the paintings insist on the proximity and “hereness” of Christ’s body, removing mediating figures and barriers, and push for a direct and intimate encounter with God. Moreover, they reflect on what it means to imitate and conform to Christ – whether this entails human works, as modeled by Simon of Cyrene, or meditation on Christ’s psychological and hidden suffering. Sebastiano’s reflection on personal cross-bearing as a path to salvation reveals his interest in contemporaneous re-interpretations of Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*, particularly the *Alfabeto Christiano* by Juan de Valdés. His contact with Giulia Gonzaga and Vittoria Colonna, both of whom had their portraits painted by the artist, attests to Sebastiano’s communication with the leading reform thinkers of his day. At the same time, when seen in context of Juan de Valdés’ reprimand against using man-made images to try to truly understand God, Sebastiano’s Budapest *Christ Carrying the Cross* shows itself to be a mere shadow of Christ’s presence. It suggests, like Valdés’ text does, that any man-made picture of God can never bring one as close to Christ as drawing the picture directly from him. In desiring a more direct, unmediated encounter with God, Sebastiano came to the conclusion that his images
would ultimately fail and sought to build in a material distinction between the man-made and divine image.

In Chapter Five, I continue examining how Sebastiano’s work reflects on the changing status and function of the image. I ask how in the midst of the Reformation and its reflection on the power of mimesis and the beauty of modern images, Sebastiano conceptualizes the relationship between man-made images and icons. His Úbeda Pietà (1533-9) (Figure 10) is remarkable both for its unusual iconography, which conflates the iconography of the Pietà and the Man of Sorrows, and for how it treats the subject. The striking juxtaposition of the Veronica cloth, turned so that the viewer can scarcely see the Holy Face, and the sensuous face and body of the dead Christ, taken from a drawing by Michelangelo and conspicuously turned towards the beholder, raises further questions as to the meaning of the Pietà. This is further complicated by the fact that a letter from Ferrante Gonzaga’s agent conveys Sebastiano’s proposal to use Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà as his model; yet despite this, the final painting is a radical re-interpretation of the original sculpture. I suggest that Sebastiano’s citation of Michelangelo’s drawing and his St. Peter’s Pietà, and his unusual inclusion of the Veronica, is a response to the physical context of the sculpture; the painting reflects on the relationship between different categories of Holy objects, those that are meant to stand as substitutes for Christ’s body and those that are believed to be it. I conclude the chapter by showing that the Virgin and dead Christ, the subject of both his first and last joint endeavor with Michelangelo, is where the artist seems most compelled to overtly reflect on his art making and its ability to convey divine presence.
A key premise of this study is that the *colorito-disegno* debate was not the debate that Sebastiano saw himself participating in when he moved to Rome and when he chose to enter into collaboration with Michelangelo. A close reading of Sebastiano’s work reveals a very different set of preoccupations – ones that are grounded in the possibilities of dual-authorship style, and a rethinking of the function of images and what it meant to portray the body of Christ in the concrete terms of painting in Sebastiano’s time. This dissertation challenges the current pervading view on the artist, which finds itself unable to articulate the impact of reformers’ ideas on Sebastiano’s work. I show that the exploration of effects of distance and proximity to the divine lies at the heart of Sebastiano’s project. The artist’s changing position across his works on the mediated nature of divine knowledge and a layperson’s access to God points to his continued reflection on complex questions of his day about human salvation and the respective roles of the individual and the Church in attaining it. Moreover, that Sebastiano continually made Michelangelo and Raphael’s works the departure points of his paintings, demonstrates his investment in refashioning accepted iconographical types as a way of thinking about pressing theological questions as they were framed in Rome.

As an artist who spent most of his working career in Rome and who was sensitive to ideas issuing from Catholic reformers, Sebastiano is an important figure to study in order to better understand the Roman response to the challenge on the city’s spiritual authority and centrality by reformers both within and outside the city. This dissertation also adds to our current understanding of collaborative dynamics and, more specifically, of Sebastiano’s investment in collaboration as a tool for artistic image-making.
Chapter One. A New Model of Collaboration by Sebastiano and Michelangelo

This chapter looks at mature, collaborating artists, rather than the collaborative practices found within artists’ workshops between masters and pupils, which have already received attention in a number of excellent scholarly works. Specifically, it will examine the giving and receiving of drawings by independent artists – the nature of the exchange, what is sought or gained by the use of the drawing, and the final products that emerge. In this way, the scope of this chapter covers cases of active – and at times ongoing – collaboration between artists where there is a known intention to share the work with a specific artist from the onset so as to bring it to completion and thus excludes the ubiquitous Renaissance tradition of borrowing from drawings, prints, or finished works of another artist without the latter’s knowledge or intention to share it. The goal is to contextualize Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s partnership within this tradition of


2 For a collection of essays on this tradition of borrowing, specifically from Michelangelo, see Ames-Lewis and Joannides, *Reactions to the Master*; Paul Joannides, "On Some Borrowings and Non-Borrowings from Central Italian and Antique Art in the Work of Titian c. 1510-c. 1550" *Paragone* 41 (1990): 21-45; Creighton Gilbert, "Some Findings on Early Works of Titian" *Art Bulletin* 62 (1980): 36-75; William E. Wallace, “Titian Looks at Michelangelo Looking at Titian” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 22, No. 2 (2003): 13-18. See also Megan Holmes, “Copying Practices and Marketing Strategies” in *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation*; Hannelore Glasser, *Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance* (New York: Garland Pub, 1977), 66-8; and Bambach, *Drawing and Painting*, 91 for a discussion of contracts that contained the “modo et forma” clause, which asked the painter to make a work in the manner of an existing model. Holmes discusses the copies of the “Lippi and Pesellino Imitator” – a group of artists in a workshop who used cartoons derived from figures in Lippi’s original paintings. Copies after Lippi guaranteed patrons the highly valued authentic *invenzioni* of Lippi, though not his hand, demonstrating an increasing appreciation for invention within an expanding market. Bambach lists a number of such examples: the 1503-5 contract for Raphael and Roberto di Giovanni’s altarpiece of the Coronation of the Virgin for the Poor Clares of Monteluce, the 1507 contract for Lo Spagna’s extant altarpiece of the Coronation of the Virgin (Pinacoteca, Todi), and the 1518 contract for Ridolfo Ghirlandaio’s altarpiece for Beltramini Chapel in S. Agostino (Colle Val d’Elsa), which was to imitate an earlier work by his father Domenico. Glasser cites and goes over some of contracts for the above commissions, as well as others.
collaboration, querying the extent to which theirs fits in or departs from it (I will argue that they do in fact set up a new model of collaboration and patronal demand for dual-authored works), as well as to better understand the collaboration from Sebastiano’s perspective – a viewpoint that is rarely considered in scholarship to date. By recovering the dynamics and aims of the partnership we gain a better understanding of how artists drew upon and transformed their chosen models.

The argument put forth in this chapter challenges the narrative of a passive, one-directional “influence” of Michelangelo upon Sebastiano, and, more broadly, calls to rethink such collaborative partnerships in terms that give equal consideration to the artists involved rather than assuming an influential “power” or dominance of one over the other. It also refocuses the discussion away from the presumption that Sebastiano and Michelangelo sought to reconcile the differences and combine the best of their regional schools – Venetian *colorito* and Tuscan *disegno* – by working together, as a means to better rival local competitors like Raphael. By doing so, this chapter reframes the aims of the collaboration not as primarily a tool for artistic rivalry (though I am not discounting the element of competition in the daily lives of artists in Rome) or a way to

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amalgamate stylistic differences, but rather as a means to explore differences and consequently generate meaning.5

1.1 The Existing Tradition of Shared Drawings

Sebastiano and Michelangelo were certainly not the first two independent artists to collaborate on a given work through the use of drawings or to give drawings that would later become departure points in a future work. In sixteenth-century Italy, drawings could be given as gifts and kept as ends in themselves to be copied later, like those given by Michelangelo to Tommaso Cavalieri. They could also take on the form of full compositions as when Raphael gave his Holy Family composition to his friend Domenico Alfani or when Raphael gave his completed drawings to Marcantonio Raimondi or Valerio Belli to translate into engravings. As I will go on to show, Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration should be understood within this emerging pattern of non-commercial gift exchange between friends and colleagues in the form of drawings; yet they also differed in significant ways in that Michelangelo’s drawings were much less complete, more fragmentary, and far from defining the final character and composition of Sebastiano’s works.

David Landau and Peter Parshall have investigated sixteenth-century prints that appropriate other artistic prototypes and come to the conclusion that most prints made in Raphael’s lifetime were not reproductive – that is complete and faithful reproductions of a finished work in tonal value and all other aspects – but rather were the expression of a

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5 See Campbell and Milner, Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation, 15 for an approach that treats the subject of types, derivations, models and copies as a type of transmission that entails strangeness, negotiation and contestation, rather than in terms of “a quasi-biological or genealogical morphology,” where types gradually and smoothly evolve into new types.
close and active collaboration between painter and engraver. The authors define a “genuine collaboration” as a two-way exchange and conversation between two artists, where both work in proximity and where the provider of the drawing oversees and advises the engraver’s work, at times correcting errors or providing elaboration in detail. The collaborations of Mantegna and Giovanni Antonio da Brescia – which is contrasted against Girolamo Mocetto’s appropriation of Mantegna’s design without the latter’s presence and possibly knowledge – Raphael and Marcantonio, and Parmigianino and four printmakers – Iacopo Caraglio, Antonio da Trento, Niccolo Vicentino, and Girolamo Fagiulo – are some of the cases explored in their study of Renaissance prints. In the cases of Marcantonio’s Massacre of the Innocents, Judgment of Paris, il Morbetto, and the Aeneid, it is certain that Raphael made drawings specifically for Marcantonio to translate into engravings.

What emerges from Landau and Parshall’s study is a pattern in Italian printmaking where “some of the greatest artists of the time were using some of the best contemporary printmakers to make independent images that could spread their inventions and designs quickly and effectively.” Thus, Marcantonio and Raphael’s goal was not to reproduce but to broadcast the latter’s classical designs, his invenzione and disegno, by carefully chosen samples and specimens of the painter’s new art that would please and inspire fellow artists. Notably, the collaboration between Marcantonio and Raphael began around 1510/11, preceding that of Sebastiano and Michelangelo by just a few years. In certain cases, such as Marcantonio’s The Bather (c. 1509) or Agostino Veneziano’s The

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7 Ibid., 113-15.
8 See Talvacchia, Raphael, 204.
10 Talvacchia, Raphael, 202.
Climbers (1524) (Figure 13 and Figure 14), the print bore both the monogram of the engraver and the name of the design’s inventor showing acknowledgment of the dual authorship – though these are less examples of a planned collaboration than instances of an engraver selectively appropriating select figures from a cartoon meant for an entirely different commission and inserting them into Venetian landscapes.

The literature concerning fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century partnerships (before that of Sebastiano and Michelangelo, that is pre-1513) between mature, independent painters involving the translation of drawing to painting is much more limited when compared to studies of collaborative prints and engravings; more often than not, such collaborations are mentioned in passing, rather than given full treatment, or the focus falls on identifying the respective contributions of each artist.\textsuperscript{11} It is my goal here to bring some of these cases together to examine them as a group in order to reach a better understanding of this largely unexplored pattern of artistic practice. It will then be possible to contextualize Sebastiano and Michelangelo within an existing precedent for the movement of drawings as gifts from one artist to another.

First, I would like to begin by examining instances of officially-recognized, business collaborations that were common workshop practice in order to demonstrate an important distinction between these and the exchanges of drawings between friends that emerged in the early 1500s. The case of Mariotto Albertinelli and Fra Bartolommeo is representative of a practice that had become common in Italy since the Fourteenth Century. They collaborated together in Florence, forming a workshop together in 1509.

\textsuperscript{11} See for example ibid., 170.
under the sponsorship of the Monastery of San Marco. Profits from their commissions were divided equally between Mariotto and the Monastery of San Marco, attesting to the artists’ equal partnership. Their partnership dissolved in 1513 and a document records their agreement to divide a number of works held in common between themselves.

What is also notable is that the collaboration began shortly after Fra Bartolommeo’s trip to Venice in 1508, where the works of Giovanni Bellini – such as his San Giobbe and San Zaccarias altarpieces – made a strong impression on the artist and his subsequent works reflect this. The impact of Venice and the role it may have played as a model of collaborative practice between independent artists will be discussed in more detail below.

For now, I want to suggest that it is likely not coincidence that Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli began their partnership after the former had returned from Venice, where Giorgione, Sebastiano, and Titian were all working very closely together. The fact that Albertinelli’s use of color changes upon Fra Bartolommeo’s return from Venice – in works like the Basevi-Gambarana Madonna (1509) (Figure 15) – is further testimony to the stylistic technique (and likely the working practices) that the Frate brought back from Venice.

A number of works survive that attest to the two artists’ collaborative endeavor. The Carondelet Altarpiece (1511-12) (Figure 16) for Jean Ferry Carondelet, which used to carry the signatures of both artists, demonstrates a highly integrated working practice where both Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli generated a number of preparatory

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12 I’m grateful to Colin A. Murray who brought this collaboration, as well as Vasari’s critical response to it, to my attention. See also no. 123.
14 The document (Doc. 24, 5 January, 1513) recording the dissolution of the partnership is published in ibid., 548-51.
15 Ibid., 127.
16 Ibid., 141-2.
drawings, jointly participated in the execution of the final work, and returned to earlier works by Albertinelli as points of inspiration.\textsuperscript{17} Drawings by Albertinelli include an angel and the kneeling Virgin (Figure 17 and Figure 18), both of whom appeared in the top lunette portion of the altarpiece in a scene of the Coronation (Figure 19); it is fragmented today but had once been part of the composition. A sixteenth-century copy in Besançon (Figure 20) helps us picture the way the intact original would have looked. Fra Bartolommeo created an incomplete \textit{modello} (Figure 21) for the lower part of the composition, where the architecture is faintly indicated and different from what we see in the final work. There are also two more \textit{modelli} (Figure 22 and Figure 23) that show Fra Bartolommeo’s earlier conception of the altarpiece as a \textit{Sacra Conversazione}, with a Madonna enthroned at center. Moreover, as Ludovico Borgo notes, it is Albertinelli’s \textit{Annunciation} for the Compagnia di San Zenobi (Figure 24) – to which the artists must have looked – that informs the dramatic animation and open architectural space of the Carondelet altarpiece.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, it appears that Albertinelli and Fra Bartolommeo worked together in the development of the subject and composition for the Carondelet altarpiece, and that their ideas evolved through drawings.

Another important work – the \textit{Annunciation} (1511) for the monks of the Certosa of Pavia (Figure 25) – bears the signatures of Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli, as well as their signature mark of a cross between two circles.\textsuperscript{19} The painting is thought to be a section of a larger complex destined for the major altar of the church, and Fra Bartolommeo’s Pitti \textit{Deposition} (Figure 26) has also been linked to this commission. It is believed that the \textit{Annunciation} and \textit{Deposition} were framed together as part of a storied

\textsuperscript{17} See ibid., 136-8 for a discussion of this commission and the preparatory studies for it.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{19} See ibid., 139-41 for a discussion of this altarpiece complex.
altarpiece. The *Deposition*, however, never reached its destination, and the *Annunciation* was ultimately framed with paintings by Perugino by the monks. According to Borgo, the *Annunciation* was done entirely by Albertinelli, who received the commission from the monks, and the presence of Fra Bartolommeo’s signature likely refers to the dual authorship of the entire altarpiece to which the *Annunciation* was to be attached.\(^{20}\) Thus, it appears that the artists took on the commission together, choosing to divide the execution of its parts between themselves, and to sign the altarpiece together as a jointly-authored unit. Notably, as the partnership grew older, assistants were called in to create workshop productions, such as the *Holy Family with St. John* at the Borghese Gallery (Figure 27), which is partly by Albertinelli.\(^{21}\)

In Venice, family partnerships among artisans, especially between brothers, were a predominant form of business association – and it is within this type of workshop partnership that Albertinelli and Bartolommeo’s collaboration can be classified.\(^{22}\) The Vivarini workshop – first set up by the brothers-in-law Giovanni d’Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, and continued after the former’s death by Antonio and his younger brother Bartolomeo Vivarini – was the most notable and prolific partnership in the Veneto during the 1440s, furnishing polyptychs to numerous Venetian churches. In 1448, Francesco Capodilista contracted two teams of artists to decorate the Ovetari chapel: d’Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, along with Andrea Mantegna and Nicolò Pizzolo, who formed a one-time collaboration specifically for the project. The Ovetari chapel (Figure 28) represents an important instance of collaboration (though in the long run, a

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 140.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 143-4.
failed one given the death of d’Alemagna, the subsequent withdrawal of Vivarini, and the quarrelling between Mantegna and Pizzolo), both short- and long-term, in the history of artistic partnerships. It is also reflective of the broader trend in Venice and the Veneto, where independent masters were often contracted to paint separate sections of a single project in order to speed up production for large-scale commissions.23 D’Alemagna and Vivarini were assigned the task of decorating the chapel’s vault, the inner face of the entrance wall, and the lateral wall visible from the nave; Mantegna and Pizzolo were tasked with creating a terra cotta altarpiece and decorating the apse of the chapel, its back wall and the wall opposite it.24

Of course, this type of collaboration was not limited to Northern Italy. The decoration of the Brancacci Chapel in Florence was carried out in collaboration by Masolino and Masaccio, two artists who began their partnership around 1423 in the triptych for the Carnesecchi family chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore, Florence (Figure 29 and Figure 30).25 In both commissions, the artists worked separately on different sections of the wall and altarpiece respectively, which was common practice in the quattrocento and cinquecento.26 And specifically, in the Brancacci Chapel, Kieth Christiansen has noted the ways in which in the two artists were highly aware of their stylistic differences.27 At times they played on them in their choice of subject matter – Masolino portrayed a graceful Adam and Eve in the Garden (Figure 31), while Masaccio depicted

24 Ibid., 15-16.
them starkly after their Fall (Figure 32) – at other times they created continuity between their respective scenes by means of unifying elements – as in the mountainous landscape that unites Massaccio’s *Tribute Money* (Figure 33) and *St. Peter Baptizing the Neophytes* (Figure 34), and Masolino’s *St. Peter Preaching* (Figure 35). It is thought that Masaccio executed the landscape in Masolino’s *St. Peter Preaching*, while Masolino did the same for Masaccio’s *St. Peter Baptizing the Neophytes*; other than these areas, the proposal that they intervened in the execution of each other’s frescoes has been largely rejected.28

The collaborations discussed thus far indicate that workshop partners usually divided the work into sections that they would work on in unison, but individually. There are, of course, certain exceptions to this rule as seen in the Carondelet altarpiece by Albertinelli and Fra Bartolommeo mentioned earlier, or Masaccio and Masolino’s *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (c.1524-5) (Figure 36) for the Church of Sant’Ambrogio, a single panel that they worked on together. On the whole, however, such partnerships rested on the model of an officially established and publically recognized professional alliance, familial or not, (often having outside sponsorship and bound by a contract), where all participants benefited financially and were physically present to carry out the work.29 In other words, none of these collaborations involve long distance or an exchange of

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29 A number of documents survive that show the payments made to Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli for works jointly commissioned from them during their partnership. *The Virgin Adoring the Child with St. Joseph* (c.1511), The National Gallery, London was commissioned by Alemanno Salviati in 1509-10 from both artists; Mariotti is referred to as “Mariotto dipintore compagno di Fra Bartolomeo,” and the term reappears in Michele Mastiani’s payments where Mariotto is again named “suo compagno.” Ferry Carondelet similarly calls the painters “dipintori compagni” in a payment made in January 29, 1512. The patrons’ use of the label “companion” or “partner” painters indicates a widely known partnership that was recognized as such in official documents. The documents are quoted in full in Borgo, *The Works of Mariotto Albertinelli*, 528 (see also 142-3 for further discussion of the identity of Salviati’s work) and 538-40.
drawings where the maker of the design does not benefit financially from the final product.

It is to these cases that I want to turn to next, as precedents for the sort of division of labor and model of gift-exchange that were adopted by Michelangelo and Sebastiano between the 1510s and 1530s. Michelangelo ostensibly never lent his hand to Sebastiano’s paintings and murals, contrary to what Vasari believed (this will be addressed in the chapters that follow with respect to specific works). Their partnership, in fact, played out largely over long distance. And this underscores their mutual commitment to a very different kind of collaborative dynamic – one founded on distance, both geographic and stylistic – from the abovementioned workshop partnerships. Sebastiano’s interest in Michelangelo’s *disegno* as a separate and distinct catalyst for invention will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, which examine the ways in which their collaboration played out in different commissions over roughly twenty years.30

Another notable difference is that the partnership of Sebastiano and Michelangelo did not rise to the official level of that of the Vivarini workshop, nor did it receive institutional sponsorship. Its dissolution possibly came with a break or strain in the friendship – if we follow Vasari’s account of their disagreement over using oil painting or fresco for the Sistine *Last Judgment* – and was certainly not accompanied by official documents detailing the terms and division of shared works as it did with Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli. It follows that their alliance needs to be considered in context of a different tradition: the non-commercial giving of drawings by one

30 I’m grateful to Fredrika Jacobs for reading a draft of Chapter Three and suggesting the notion of drawing as “catalyst” – that is, its catalytic effect on invention – as a helpful way of articulating the relationship between Sebastiano’s paintings and Michelangelo’s drawings.
independent artist to another for the making of paintings. This is a practice that has received little attention in scholarship; moreover, such instances are rarely discussed together as a group, particularly outside the framework of individual artists and their pupils or “followers.” I will begin by presenting the known cases in order to consider their shared characteristics, the circumstances of exchange, and the underlying artistic values that such exchanges point to with respect to transient alliances among artists.

Giampietrino completed and signed his altarpiece *Madonna and Child with St. Jerome and John the Baptist* (Figure 37) for the Church of San Marino a Pavia in 1521. The work bears a number of similarities to Cesare’s *Madonna and Child with John the Baptist and St. George* (1513) (Figure 38), painted for a group of Genoese merchants for their Oratory at the Church of St. Dominic in Messina, Sicily. The orientation of the Madonna and Child, seated on an architectural, stepped throne decorated with antique reliefs, the pointing figure of John the Baptist, and the putto (or putti) who stretch the canopy above the Madonna demonstrate knowledge – most likely second-hand – of Cesare’s work. In fact, Cesare arrived in Milan between 1520 and 1521 and it is likely that he brought his preparatory studies and cartoons with him, which Giampietrino appears to have received and used. The cartoon has been lost, so it is impossible to compare what Giampietrino was working from and his final painting; the only

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A preparatory study that exists is of St. John’s head at the Biblioteca Reale di Torino and there is no resemblance between it and the head of Giampietrino’s St. John.

Two other cases where the gifted drawing has been lost are Giovanni Lappoli’s *Visitation* (Figure 39) and *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 40). The former was the artist’s first independent public commission mentioned by Vasari – an altarpiece for a wealthy Aretine citizen, Cipriano Baldassare d'Anghiari, for a chapel in the Benedictine abbey of Sante Flora e Lucilla (1524-6). Vasari reports that Rosso, passing through Arezzo on his way to Rome, stayed with Lappoli who was his good friend and provided him with a small sketch of some nudes for the altarpiece upon the latter’s request. A few years later, between 1527 and 1528, Lappoli visited Rosso, who was in Borgo, and, according to Vasari,

> After showing him many courtesies and causing some things to be brought for him from Arezzo, which he knew Rosso needed, having lost everything in the Sack of Rome, he obtained for himself from Rosso a very beautiful design of the abovementioned altarpiece that he had to paint for Fra Guasparri.

> Dopo avergli fatto molte cortesie, e fattogli portare alcune cose d'Arezzo, delle quali sapeva che aveva necessità, avendo perduto ogni cosa nel sacco di Roma, si fece far un bellissimo disegno della tavola detta che aveva da far per Fra Guasparri.

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34 Vasari, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti*, VI, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 9. “Rosso passed through Arezzo on his way to Rome, and lodged with Giovanni Antonio, who was very much his friend; and, hearing of the work that he had undertaken to do, he made at the request of Lappoli a very beautiful little sketch full of nudes. Whereupon Giovanni Antonio, setting his hand to the work and imitating the design of Rosso, painted in that altarpiece the Visitation of S. Elizabeth, and in the lunette above it a God the Father and some children, copying the draperies and all the rest from life.” “Passando intanto per Arezzo il Rosso che se n’andava a Roma, ed alloggiando con Giovann’Antonio suo amicissimo, intesa l’opera che aveva tolta a fare, gli fece, come volle il Lappoli, uno schizzetto tutto d’ignudi molto bello; perché messo Giovann’Antonio mano all’opera, imitando il disegno del Rosso, fece nella detta tavola la Visitazione di Santa Elisabetta, e nel mezzo tondo di sopra un Dio Padre con certi putti, ritraendo I panni e tutto il resto di naturale.”

The altarpiece in question was Lappoli’s commission of an *Adoration of the Magi* for the high altar of the church of San Francesco in Arezzo. The giving of drawings as repayment for a friend’s kindness points to the intrinsic value of a fellow artist’s work. Moreover, the consequent use of such drawings, rather than keeping them as ends in themselves, demonstrates a noteworthy aspect of the decorum of imitation: a drawing could be taken in this way from a friend without overstepping authorial boundaries and perhaps it was even expected that it be used.

Vasari likewise reports on Raphael and Dürer’s exchange of drawings as gifts:

This and [Raphael’s] other work spread his fame as far as France and Flanders, and influenced the work of Albrecht Dürer, the marvelous German painter and master of fine copper engravings, who sent his own self-portrait. This was a head executed in gouache on transparent cambric, so that the design appeared the same on both sides; he used watercolors for the ground and colors, and the white of the cloth to provide the lights. Raphael considered this a wonderful work, and in return he sent several of his own drawings which Dürer kept and treasured.

One of the drawings that Raphael gave to Dürer survives (Figure 41). It is signed by Dürer in the past tense, suggesting that he did this after Raphael’s death. The inscription reads: “1515. Raphael from Urbino, who had been so highly respected by the pope, made these nude figures and sent them to Albercht Dürer in Nuremberg to show his hand (“1515 Raphahill de Urbin, der so hoch peim Pobst geacht ist gewest hat der hat dyse

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nackette Bild gemacht und hat sy dem Albrecht Dürer gen Nornberg geschickt, Im sein hand zu weisen.”) The drawing was originally a preparatory study for the *Battle of Ostia* in the Stanza dell’Incendio, but in context of the exchange, it acquired a new status: it became a gift that stood for Raphael’s hand and skill. Unlike the aforementioned cases, these drawings were exchanged as demonstration pieces – a function underscored by Dürer’s added inscription – rather than for practical use. What remains unknown, however, is whether alongside the delivery of his self-portrait, Dürer had also included a written request for drawings from Raphael or whether Raphael decided to send these himself as thanks for Dürer’s gift.

The question of how such drawings were given – explicitly solicited or received as unexpected gifts – cannot easily be answered based on the evidence available to us, and likely varied case by case. In the case of Raphael’s drawing for his friend Domenico Alfani, not much information is available about the nature of the exchange – whether it was an agreed upon division of labor or a gift from Raphael, for example. It has been noted that Raphael’s drawing of the *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elizabeth in a Landscape* (1507-8) (Figure 42), by virtue of the absence of significant *pentimenti*, must have been intended as a *modello* for use by another artist. And Raphael’s autograph letter addressed to Alfani on the *recto* of the drawing, points to Alfani as its intended owner. This is confirmed by Alfani’s painting, *The Holy Family with Saints and Angels* (c.1520/22) (Figure 43) for the high altar of San Simone dei Carmini in Perugia, which shows its indebtedness to Raphael’s drawing.

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38 Ibid.
Conversely, Vasari reports that when Pintoricchio was working in Siena on the Piccolomini Library frescoes for Pope Pius III, he himself brought in his friend Raphael to help him with the designs:

[Raphael] having acquired very great fame in following that manner [Perugino’s], Pope Pius II [actually Pope Pius III] had given the commission for painting the library of the Duomo at Siena to Pintoricchio; and he, being a friend of Raphael, and knowing him to be an excellent draughtsman, brought him to Siena, where Raphael made for him some of the drawings and cartoons for that work.

Avendo egli acquistato fama grandissima nel seguito di quella maniera, era stato allogato da Pio II pontefice la libreria del duomo di Siena al Pinturicchio, il quale essendo amico di Raffaeollo, e conoscendolo ottimo disegnatore, lo condusse a Siena; dove Raffaello gli fece alcuni dei disegni a carotni di quell’opera.40

The statement was considered controversial in the past because of Raphael’s young age compared to Pintoricchio, but the five drawn preparatory works associated with the library are now unanimously attributed to Raphael.41 They are the Group of Four Standing Youths (Figure 44), the sketch of horses and riders (Figure 45), Cardinal Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini Presents Eleonora of Portugal to Emperor Frederick III (Figure 46) – a modello, but not squared up for use, The Journey of Aeneas Silvius to the Council of Basle (Figure 47) – a modello squared up for transfer and with detailed annotations in Raphael’s hand, and Aeneas Silvius making Obeisance to Pope Eugenius IV (Figure 48) – a copy after the lost modello by Raphael. According to Luke Syson, this range of works shows that Raphael gave Pintoricchio drawings that were improvisational figural motifs with pentimenti, which could be adopted and reused in different ways (as small groups of stock figures for example), as well as complete modelli or cartonetti – that is, finished

40 Vasari, Le Vite, IV, 319.
compositional drawings of entire scenes which could be enlarged to make cartoons for painting on the wall.42

In addition to these one-way transfers, there are double-sided or sets of sheets that demonstrate a back and forth exchange of ideas, where one artist responds to the other in the form of a drawing. Raphael was known for his training of pupils to become active contributors to the final workshop product in precisely this manner. For example, the verso of Raphael’s drawing of the head of St. Thomas (Figure 49) for the Oddi Altarpiece contains a study by an unidentified assistant for the upper register of the same work showing Christ crowning the Virgin (Figure 50). The study is done in pen over stylus and faint traces of black chalk, suggesting that the assistant may have been drawing over a rough guide set down by Raphael or possibly sketching from a lost drawing by the master.43 That this was common practice in Raphael’s workshop is corroborated by other examples of similar exchanges, such as Giulio Romano’s Study for the Holy Family of Francis I (Figure 51), which shows the pupil focusing on the arm and leg of the figure of Mary. He must have given the drawing to Raphael, who then repeated the figure in a new drawing (Figure 52), emphasizing volume and movement of draperies, and gave this back to Giulio.44 In this way, Raphael relied on his pupils to create preparatory drawings that could be improved on through back-and-forth dialogue in the form of drawings.

Alexander Perrig contends that Michelangelo’s drawings for Tommaso de’Cavalieri were also a form of this type of collaboration – a process of ideation, elaboration, and improvement upon the same idea by means of an exchange of

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42 Ibid., 255-6.
43 Talvacchia, Raphael, 170.
44 Ibid., 189.
drawings. Cavalieri received at least seven highly finished drawings from Michelangelo in the 1530s and some preliminary sketches for these same compositions – among the former are the *Rape of Ganymede* (Figure 53), the *Punishment of Tityos* (Figure 54), the *Fall of Phaeton* (Figure 55) and *Bacchanal of Children* (Figure 56) – in addition to sketches for the Last Judgment (Figure 57, Figure 58, and Figure 59). The argument is controversial because it relies on extensive revisions in traditional attributions of drawings usually assigned to Michelangelo and reattributed to Cavalieri (and to Michelangelo’s other collaborators discussed throughout the book). Perrig maintains that the corpus of drawings attributed to Michelangelo is overgrown, especially given that the artist burned much of his work before his death and gave few drawings to friends. In addition, he is skeptical of the converse trend that sees a reduction in the number of drawings attributed to Michelangelo’s collaborators.

Nevertheless, I introduce Perrig’s argument here because despite numerous changes in attribution that I disagree with, his account of the Michelangelo-Cavalieri exchange – based on an analysis of the inscriptions that appear on the drawings – seems plausible. Michelangelo’s *Fall of Phaeton* (Figure 55), given to Cavalieri around the summer of 1533, has written on it:

Sir Tommaso, if you don’t like this sketch, tell Urbino [Francesco Amadori], so that I have time to do another one before tomorrow evening, as I promised you. And if you do like it, and you want me to finish it, then send it back to me.

[Mess]er tomao se questo scizzo non iu piace ditelo a urbino [acci]o che io abbi tempo duaerne facto unaltro doman dassera [co]me ui promess e se ui piace euogliate che io lo finisca [rim]andatemelo.47

45 Perrig, *Michelangelo’s Drawings*, 75-95.
46 Ibid., 1-11.
47 Quoted in ibid., 39.
Cavalieri had been preparing his own sketch of Phaeton at the same time, which Perrig identifies as the drawing at the Gallerie dell’Accademia in Venice (traditionally attributed to Michelangelo) (Figure 60). Upon receipt of Michelangelo’s drawing, it appears Cavalieri became dissatisfied with his own, sending it and Michelangelo’s drawing back with a message on his drawing that reads, roughly: “I have drawn it as well as I could. But I’m sending yours back to you. Because of it I feel myself obliged to you to draw it again.” (“lo [l’o] ritracto el meglio che o Saputo io pero ui rima[n]do il uostro p[er]ch[e] ne son [?] seruo uostro che lo ritraga un altra uolta.”)\textsuperscript{48} At this point, Perrig suggests that Michelangelo drew a new drawing (Figure 61) that shows a clear debt to Cavalieri’s sketch – in its enhanced dynamism and rigor – and sent it to Cavalieri.

Perrig likewise sees Michelangelo’s \textit{Rape of Ganymede} (Figure 53) as part of a course of instruction in drawing, with the red chalk drawing of Ganymede at the Uffizi (Figure 62) – sometimes attributed to Michelangelo, but here re-assigned to Cavalieri based on the character of the composition and shadowing – as its inspiration.\textsuperscript{49} According to Perrig, Michelangelo made adjustments to improve on the design and position of the limbs “making his drawing a ‘mirror’ in which the pupil could see his own thoughts reflected in clarified form.”\textsuperscript{50} The same is true, he says, of Michelangelo’s \textit{Punishment of Tityos} (Figure 54), which is traced on the back, with the addition of lower arms and legs and a sarcophagus, turning the figure into a Resurrected Christ (Figure 63). Perrig once again attributes this back tracing, as well as the risen Christ (Figure 64) on the back of Michelangelo’s sketch of the Last Judgment at Casa Buonarroti, to Cavalieri, who worked from the figures of Tityos and Christ as Judge respectively on the other side of

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in idbi., 39.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 44.
the sheets. The highly finished drawing of the risen Christ at Windsor Castle (Figure 65) is Michelangelo’s response to his pupil’s attempts (“homework tasks” as Perrig calls them), bringing out their latent potential, so that Cavalieri could evaluate his own performance objectively. I find myself less convinced by this sequence of exchanges; no inscriptions corroborate it and the reassignment of the verso drawings to Cavalieri seems conjectural. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that Michelangelo critically engaged with Cavalieri’s drawings for the Fall of Phaeton and the Rape of Ganymede, and that the two artists took part in a collaborative back-and-forth appropriation of pictorial solutions for the same subject.

At times the appropriation of a drawing by another artist happened without its author’s consent; instead it was brought about by arrangement of the patron. In Ferrara, Duke Alfonso d’Este wanted to have a work by Raphael, among other artists, for his Camerino and commissioned him to paint the Indian Triumph of Bacchus in 1514. In September of 1517, Raphael sent Alfonso a modello – only a print after it by Conrad Metz survives today (Figure 66) – at which point it was given to Pellegrino da san Daniele so he would make a painting on the basis of the drawing. Irritated, Raphael refused to proceed and demanded a new subject from the Duke.

A similar transfer of a preparatory drawing from Raphael to another artist may have happened in the case of the Marriage of Alexander and Roxane (Figure 67), commissioned by Agostino Chigi for the Farnesina. Raphael had made a watercolor drawing heightened in white of the Marriage of Alexander and Roxane; Dolce was in possession of this drawing, which is now lost and known only through a print by Gian

51 Ibid., 44 and 77.
52 Andrea Bayer, Dosso Dossi: Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 34.
Giacomo Caraglio (Figure 68). It is debated whether the drawing was for a lost painting or for the Farnesina. If it was the latter, it may indicate that Chigi had commissioned Raphael, but that with too many commitments, Raphael had to give up on the commission and pass it on to Il Sodoma, who ultimately executed the fresco and appears to have availed himself of several of Raphael’s drawings.53 Either way, Il Sodoma must have been in possession of multiple drawings by Raphael because the final fresco reveals knowledge of both the watercolor drawing and the intermediary studies to that led up to it (Figure 69 and Figure 70), yet does not match any one exactly. Roberto Bartalini suggests that these drawings may have remained with Chigi, who then passed them on to Il Sodoma.54 Such reassignments and transfers of drawings from one artist to another point to an accepted mode for the translation of invention. It also indicates that reassigned drawings were not copied pedantically, as one might expect if the patron had wished to see the original designer’s invention faithfully realized. Instead, it may have been a way to show the new painter roughly what the patron wanted or to advance the design phase by providing the painter with solutions that had already been worked out for that space.

In addition to involuntary transfers of drawings, there are also cases of intentional gifting of drawings for the purpose of being used by yet another artist. Vasari reports that Michelangelo gave drawings to his pupil Antonio Mini to be sold in order to help the latter raise money:

Now in those days Antonio Mini, his disciple, who had two sisters waiting to be married, asked him for the Leda, and he gave it to him willingly, with the greater part of the designs and cartoons that he had made, which were divine things, and also two chests full of models, with a great number of finished cartoons for making pictures, and some of works that

54 Ibid., 87.
had been painted. When Antonio took it into his head to go to France, he carried all these with him; the Leda he sold to King Francis by means of some merchants, and it is now at Fontainebleau, but the cartoons and designs were lost, for he died there in a short time, and some were stolen; and so our country was deprived of all these valuable labors, which was an incalculable loss.

E così in que’ giorni Anton Mini suo creato, che aveva due sorelle da maritarsi, gliene chiese; et egli gliene donò volentieri con la maggior parte de’ disegni e cartoni fatti da lui, ch'erano cosa divina: così due casse di modelli con gran numero di cartoni finiti per far pitture, e parte d'opere fatte, che venutogli fantasía d'andarsene in Francia, gli portò seco, e la Leda la vendé al re Francesco per via di mercanti, oggi a Fontanableò; et i cartoni e’ disegni andaron male, perché egli si morì là in poco tempo, e gliene fu rubati: dove sì privò questo paese di tante e si utili fatiche, che fu danno inestimabile.55

Indeed Mini received four cartoons of the Sistine ignudi and prophets and a cartoon for Leda, which is lost and known only through a copy attributed to Rosso (Figure 71).56 The latter resided at Fontainebleau in the 1530s in the service of the King, where he could have seen the cartoon and possibly was asked to make a painting after it – the Leda and the Swan in the National Gallery of London is thought to be by Rosso (Figure 72).57

Michelangelo similarly sent Bartolommeo Bettini a cartoon for Venus and Cupid at the latter’s request with the intent, it seems, to have it executed by his friend Pontormo. Pontormo was likewise recruited by Alfonso d’Avalos to make a painting after Michelangelo’s cartoon of the Noli me Tangere for Vittoria Colonna. The cartoon was ultimately meant to end up in Mini’s hands – a gift from Michelangelo.58 These cases of Michelangelo giving cartoons to his friends and colleagues will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter. For now it should be noted that the abovementioned

56 Perrig, Michelangelo’s Drawings, 2.
arrangements postdate several collaborative initiatives by Michelangelo and Sebastiano, which appear to have set the stage for such practice.

The examples discussed thus far show Raphael to have been an active supplier of drawings to pupils, friends, and colleagues. He had set up a model of temporary, non-commercial artistic alliances – based on a division of labor where the drawing functioned as either a gift or instructional tool depending on the recipient – that Sebastiano and Michelangelo must have found successful and appealing. The discussion thus far also demonstrates the ways in which Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration to a certain extent fits into a preexisting pattern of exchanges between mature, independent artists. Their practice is in many ways comparable to one-time or recurrent instances of gift-exchange where an artist shared a cartoon or drawing with another artist, as in the case of Raphael and Alfani, or Rosso and Lappoli. The alliance between Sebastiano and Michelangelo can certainly been seen as emerging from the precedent that Raphael had set in the early 1500s and as part of an emerging trend in the 1510s and 1520s where drawings came to be valued and exchanged as gifts and tokens of friendship. However, at the same time, Michelangelo was not supplying finished cartoons or complete inventions to Sebastiano as was the case with the modelli and compositional drawings received by Giampietrino, Alfani, Pintoricchio, Pellegrino da san Daniele, and Il Sodoma.

The Flagellation (Figure 73) is, in fact, the most complete compositional drawing Sebastiano would ever receive from Michelangelo during the twenty or so years that they worked together. And it should be noted that the Flagellation is but one scene of several that Sebastiano drew and composed himself in the Borgherini chapel, thus precluding the
notion that Michelangelo designed any of Sebastiano’s works in its entirety.\(^{59}\) It was much more typical for Sebastiano to receive incomplete, single-figure drawings or tight figural groups that often focused in on the torso, as he did for example for the Viterbo and Úbeda Pietà (Figure 74, Figure 75, and Figure 76) or the Raising of Lazarus (Figure 77 and Figure 78). Even when apparently working without a Michelangelo drawing for a specific commission, such as the Prado Christ Carrying the Cross (Figure 2), Sebastiano appears to have thought back to a fragmentary and highly-unfinished drawing he had received for the figure of the flagellated Christ (Figure 79) in the Borgherini Flagellation, in order to distill out and refine the Michelangelesque body in his own work. This interest in the fragmentary drawing sets Sebastiano apart from the tradition of using a conceptually whole drawing from another artist as a point of departure. It comes closer to the small figural drawings that Lappoli probably received from Rosso, or Raphael from his assistants. In a way, Sebastiano and Michelangelo started to systematize what had been more casual occurrences in the early 1500s – possibly inspired by Raphael’s more formalized and publicized workshop practices, as well as the artist’s proclivity to give drawings to colleagues.

The duration of their alliance, on one hand, and the irregularity with which they produced collaborative works, on the other, sets Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s partnership apart from the one-time or short-lived exchanges described above. While a comparison can be made to the ongoing friendship between Rosso and Lappoli, for example, which facilitated occasional exchanges of drawings (much like we see with Sebastiano and Michelangelo), there is also a marked difference between these working

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\(^{59}\) Sebastiano also uses Michelangelo’s drawing of Lazarus – again a single-figure drawing – for his figure of St. Matthew in the spandrel above.
relations: Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s was founded not only on friendship – as an analysis of their letters will show – but also on a public image of professional alliance that advertised to patrons the possibility of obtaining a doubly-authored work (more on this in the section dealing with patronage). As Deborah Parker has noted, in his letters Michelangelo addressed Sebastiano in intimate terms such as “Sebastiano, dearest friend, like a brother” (“Sebastiano chompare e amico karissimo”), “my dearest friend” (“Carissimo compar mio”), and “Sebastiano mio karissimo” (my dearest friend Sebastian”) – and that Sebastiano did the same – reflecting their standing as close friends and longtime associates.\(^{60}\)

That the two artists founded a professional alliance on their friendship fits within a broader attitude that saw business and friendship as linked, rather than antithetical types of relationships, as we might see them today. In her discussion of Renaissance notions of friendship, Dale Kent observes that Florentines did business with relatives, neighbors and friends (parenti, vicini e amici) rather than with strangers because they already had a secured bond; friendship included, rather than excluded, utilitarian, spiritual, and economic interests.\(^{61}\) Moreover, gift-giving, in addition to other social favors and obligations, was an integral part of artists’ professional networks, which were frequently couched in terms of affection and friendship.\(^{62}\) Consequently, one need not ask which came first for Sebastiano and Michelangelo – friendship or business alliance – for the two were socially intertwined.

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\(^{60}\) Deborah Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14-15. Sebastiano addresses Michelangelo using the same intimate terms, such as “my dearest friend” (“carissimo compar mio”) and “my sweetest friend” (“dolcissimo compare mio.”) See Barocchi and Ristori, *Carteggio III*, 299, 303, 308, 316, and 332.


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 137-49.
Their long-distance partnership should also be understood in context of the working practice adopted by Michelangelo’s later collaborators, such as Daniele da Volterra. As Morten Steen Hansen contends in his book *In Michelangelo’s Mirror: del Vaga, da Volterra, Tibaldi*, Daniele’s work in the Ricci Chapel in San Pietro in Montorio “exemplifies a radical separation between *disegno* and execution, which reveal[s] a particular understanding and imitation of Michelangelo’s practice that can be traced back to his collaborations with painters like Sebastiano del Piombo, Pontormo, and Marcello Venusti.”\(^63\) According to Hansen, Daniele “limited his part to that of originator of *disegno*” and this is yet another way that he imitates Michelangelo.\(^64\) The commonalities between Daniele’s project in the Ricci Chapel and Sebastiano’s work will be discussed below so as to build on Hansen’s provocative suggestion that, in separating the generation of *disegno* and execution, Daniele was employing a working practice that was first conceived and made available to him by Sebastiano and Michelangelo in the early 1500s.

What can be concluded is that the Sebastiano-Michelangelo collaboration differs significantly from workshop partnerships where painters, usually friends or relatives, formed lasting professional alliances that were officially acknowledged in contracts and payments. Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli worked under the sponsorship of San Marco; both generated preparatory drawings and relied heavily on each other to mold the final work. This type of collaboration can be compared to the deep-rooted working practices of Venice, where families like the Vivarini often formed professional relationships that were widely recognized and whose collaborative products were held in

\(^{63}\) Hansen, *In Michelangelo’s Mirror*, 91.  
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 75.
high demand by patrons. As with Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli, d’Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, as well as Masaccio and Masolino, worked together under contract for commercial gain in an ongoing fashion.

The fact that Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s partnership approaches but does not quite fit any preceding model of collaboration – the latter shared his inventions through drawings, but always fragmentary ones that do not determine the final composition or idea, and never seems to have put his hand to the canvas or benefited financially – suggests that the artists established a new model of collaboration that differed substantially from the way artists had been working together up until this experimental partnership. Whether it was done knowingly is difficult to gauge; what is certain is that subsequent artists referred to and emulated this new model of collaboration – as will be shown shortly. But first, it is important to consider Sebastiano’s Venetian background as a possible basis for his interest in collaborative work in Rome, before going on to examine the impact that Sebastiano’s work with Michelangelo had on later artists, as well what patronal expectations can tell us about the desired results of such collaborative practices.

In taking this short detour to discuss the tradition of Venetian collaboration, I do not wish to elide important differences between Sebastiano’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings in Rome as a working practice and the types of collaborations I am about to discuss in Venice. The latter did not necessarily involve cases of one artist receiving a drawing from another; often these collaborations instead entailed the grafting of ideas from disparate sources, that is, from already completed works, the finishing of a painting started by another artist, and the performance of shared style. The discussion that follows
functions as a backdrop that will help to contextualize and pose key questions about authorial merger and individuality in Sebastiano’s work.

1.2 Collaboration in Venice

In order to gain a better understanding of Sebastiano’s thinking about dual-authorship and shared style, it is helpful to consider his prior experiences in Venice as a collaborator with painters like Giorgione and Bellini. As will be discussed below, Stephen Campbell has called attention to the unusual recombinatory experiments undertaken by Venetian artists; I propose that this tradition of borrowing, in addition to the cooperative working relationships and methods employed by Venetian painters, would have provided a formative working practice for Sebastiano’s approach to questions of authorship.

Marcantonio Michiel’s *L’Anonimo* cites several instances of what appear to be collaborative works between painters working in Venice. Unlike Vasari, he reports on these without any indication of a problematic split in authorship, stating, for example, that in the house of Taddeo Contarini, “the canvas picture in oil, representing three Philosophers in a landscape […] was commenced by Giorgio di Castelfranco and finished by Sebastiano Veneziano.”

Likewise, in the house of Jeronimo Marcello, Michiel reports on seeing “the canvas, representing Venus, nude, sleeping in a landscape with Cupid,” and that it “is by Giorgio di Castelfranco; but the landscape and the Cupid were finished by Titian.” In disclosing these jointly-authored works, Michiel appears

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66 Ibid., 66. “La tela della Venere nuda, che dorme in une paese con Cupidine, fu de mano de Zorzo da Castelfranco; ma lo paese e Cupidine furono finiti da Tiziano.”
unconcerned with the notion of single-authorship and individual maniera as an ideal of picture making.

The issue of borrowing, hybridity, and multiple authorship in Venetian works has received little attention in scholarship beyond the acknowledgment that painters worked together or took motifs from one another.67 One notable exception is Michel Hochmann’s book Venise et Rome 1500-1600: Deux Écoles De Peinture Et Leurs Échanges, where the author discusses what he sees as Venetian-Tuscan hybrid works that were created through an encounter between artists of Venice and Rome.68 Agostino Veneziano’s Two Men Near a Cemetery (Figure 80), for example, takes two figures from the left of Raphael’s School of Athens (Figure 81) inserts them into a landscape inspired by Giulio Compagnola’s Diogenes (1515) (Figure 82), which itself took Michelangelo’s Sistine Noah (Figure 83) as its model.69 According to Hochmann, Agostino abolishes the original meaning of the figures and creates a Giorgionesque poesie – elegiac and enigmatic. Hochmann calls such collaborative products an “eclecticism in the form of collage” (“un éclectisme sous forme de collage”), where famous Roman figures are placed in Northern-type landscapes; yet, it is a characterization which I see as reductive both for such prints and when applied, as Hochmann does, to Sebastiano’s case.70 The implication is that Venetian artists were inept draughtsmen when it came to drawing the

68 Michel Hochmann, Venise et Rome, 169-72.
69 Ibid., 169.
70 Ibid., 169 and 185-92.
human body and submitted themselves to a “superior” Roman tradition, thereby creating a melange of both schools.  

Stephen Campbell has approached the problem of hybridity in Venetian drawing and painting quite differently, proposing that such recombinatory experiments need to be seen in context of poetry, metaphor and the pictorial graft.  

Campbell defines Venetian poetic painting as a process of recombination, that is, of insetting or “grafting” of heterogeneous elements. The process is closely related to the literary tradition of “borrowing” or “imitation” but distinguishes itself by the operation of the graft, formally and semantically. The final product contains effects of discontinuity or irresolution, thereby complicating the meaning of the work. According to Campbell, this is a more specific kind of borrowing that is characterized by an aesthetic of hybridity and composite character, where the parts translate each other into their own terms. Thus, Virgilian arcadia and vernacular modernity, verse and prose, mythology and descriptive naturalism can co-mingle in a painting and redefine one another, as for example we see in Giorgione’s Sleeping Venus (Figure 84), Titian’s Pastoral Concert (Figure 85) or the Penance of St. John Chrysostom – a print by a follower of Giulio Campagnola (Figure 86).

This understanding of borrowing in Venetian painting, print, and drawing offers a more fruitful approach, illuminating the ways in which artists appropriated ideas in order to generate difference and from that new meaning. Moreover, it helps us pose valuable questions about the Sebastiano-Michelangelo partnership; for instance, to what extent

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71 Ibid., 190-2.
73 Ibid., 115.
could it be said that Sebastiano’s paintings were meant to elicit similar effects of grafting one author’s work into his own? And did viewers register Michelangelo’s authorial presence as separate in Sebastiano’s works? On one hand, the final works do frequently appear heterogeneous, even composite: take, for instance, the Viterbo Pietà (Figure 7) where the figures of the Virgin and dead Christ do not resolve easily with the landscape or with each other (something similar can be said of the isolated figure of Christ, based on Michelangelo’s drawing, in the Úbeda Pietà (Figure 10)), or the Borgherini chapel decoration, where the scene of the Flagellation – taken from Michelangelo’s design – is framed by figures, none of whom look in towards this section of the wall (Figure 11), making it appear separate and less immediately accessible. On the other hand, we might question whether Sebastiano (and viewers) thought of his collaborator’s graphic contributions as formally and conceptually separate. It should be pointed out that whereas the recombinatory experiments of the abovementioned Venetian artists borrowed from existing, public works – both ancient and modern – that could be more easily viewed as autonomous and separate, Sebastiano took from Michelangelo his personal and private drawings that had not been made public through gift-exchange or circulation among friends. The borrowed ideas and designs originated from within the collaborative sphere rather than outside it.

To respond to the question of distinct versus merged authorship in Sebastiano’s work, I would like to first discuss the notion of communal style in Venetian art, as a backdrop for Sebastiano’s experiences with multiple authorship. That scholars notoriously have had difficulty in attributing a significant number of Venetian works to Giorgione, Titian or Sebastiano with certainty may point to a larger pattern of stylistic
decisions and methods on the part of these artists. The style in which the three artists worked in the early 1500s was often so closely related that scholars have had difficulty distinguishing between the authors of the *Pastoral Concert* (Figure 85), the *Three Philosophers* (Figure 87), the *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (Figure 88), the *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman* (Figure 89), and the numerous Venetian portraits of idealized, beautiful women. In response to this observation of a shared or “communal” style, W.R.Valentiner has suggested that Titian and Sebastiano were collaborators in Giorgione’s studio roughly in the years 1508-10.⁷⁴ Valentiner cites the *Triple Portrait* in Detroit (Figure 90), though its attribution is highly disputed, as evidence of such a collaboration.⁷⁵ The work is inscribed on the back with the names of Titian, Giorgione and Sebastiano in what appears to be sixteenth- or seventeenth-century script (an apocryphal inscription added later since Sebastiano was not given the title of Papal sealer until 1531) and Valentiner believes that the painting is indeed of triple-authorship, with each author contributing a figure in their signature style.

Yet the notion of all three artists – whose styles can at times easily be mistaken for one another’s and whose works can seamlessly integrate the hand of a second author – creating a painting in which each figure appears distinctly and stylistically different does not quite square with such a hypothesis. How can three nearly interchangeable styles, in the period of the early 1500s, suddenly appear so markedly distinct in this painting? Unless of course the differences are an intended effect. An alternative explanation is possible – that Titian feigned or “performed” the styles of Giorgione and

Sebastiano in this painting as he did in the Pastoral Concert, which, until recently, was credited to Giorgione or to both Giorgione and Titian. Another possibility is offered by Frank Jewett Mather Jr. – that the painting is indeed a pastiche, though made by none of the artists imitated here, but rather around 1600 by an amateur in Rome enamored with the Venetian school.

Whichever of the two, the notion of a stylistic performance enacted either by one of the artists or by a sixteenth/seventeenth-century pasticheur points to an interest in a multi-authored work where Venetian styles come together in a way that emphasizes rather than elides differences. The pictorial experiment seems to at once acknowledge the existing Venetian practice where painters combined their individual hands and to exaggerate their differences – by means of fashioning a representative figura for each style – so as to draw attention to this fact. The reality, however, was that Giorgione and Titian more often than not subsumed another painter’s style under their own and this may help us understand why Sebastiano did not appear to see a problem in subsuming Michelangelo into his style and co-authoring a work.

To clarify, I am not suggesting that co-authorship played out in the same terms every time it was undertaken. As my earlier discussion shows, I concur with Campbell in that Venetian painters often experimented with composite effects in their works, borrowing from disparate sources and generating discontinuity – in fact, as subsequent chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate, Sebastiano made use of these kinds of disjunctive effects to specific ends, such as in his decoration program for the Borgherini.

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Chapel, and in the Viterbo and Úbeda Pietàs. At the same time, though, Sebastiano’s works also display an interest in merging his borrowings more seamlessly into his own work, without reservations about authorial distinctness or ownership. Thus, as will be seen, Sebastiano shows us that Michelangelo’s presence in his work is both distinct and unproblematically part of his invention.

Ultimately, such working dynamics highlight our own bias towards single-authorship as an ideal of art-making and question the usefulness of studies that seek to parse out the division of labor between painters in an attempt to rank the respective talents and skills of the artists involved. This is perhaps most evident in scholarship on Michelangelo’s collaborations, to which I now turn in the following section.

1.3 Michelangelo’s Collaborators after Sebastiano

Sebastiano was the first of a number of painters who would go on to collaborate with Michelangelo. Pontormo, Daniele da Volterra, Marcello Venusti, and Ascanio Condivi are some of the prominent figures often associated with Michelangelo’s name. Their joint works and friendships with the artist roughly span the years of 1531 to the late 1550s. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve in-depth into each unique partnership. Rather, my goal here is to provide a brief overview of the ways in which these collaborations have been approached and understood in scholarship to date, and, more importantly, to examine Sebastiano’s position at the beginning of this emerging pattern of collaboration. Sebastiano stands as an important figure in the emergence of a new model of collaboration, particularly among painters working with Michelangelo; a look at the partnerships Michelangelo would go on to have can tell us a great deal about it.
Scholarship on the Michelangelo-Venusti collaboration – which began around 1550 and, like with Sebastiano, lasted at least a decade, though probably to the end of Michelangelo’s life – has tended to characterize this partnership in very similar terms to the one Michelangelo had with Sebastiano. It is also representative of a broader scholarly disregard for Michelangelo’s collaborators as “minor” or less talented artists (terms that are obviously disparaging and not helpful in understanding the collaborations) and a failure to see artists’ relationships beyond terms of rivalry or stylistic reconciliation. William Wallace, for example, sees the Cesi Chapel altarpiece in S. Maria della Pace as Michelangelo’s way of gaining the upper hand in his competition with Raphael by partnering up with a talented colorist and thereby “combining the best of disegno and colore.”78 The end point of the collaboration is thus seen as competitive one-upmanship and rivalry. And as Michael Hirst has said of Sebastiano’s case, Wallace states that Michelangelo adapted his drawings to the enamel-like, polished style of Venusti.79 This sort of narrative – entailing the reconciliation of stylistic differences and the notion of a generous and accommodating Michelangelo catering to a “relatively minor artist” – has been deeply pervasive in scholarship.80

Rather than continuing in this vein, I wish to reevaluate early to mid sixteenth-century collaborative practices in terms that come closer to the realities of artistic practice, rather than the art theory imposed on them by Vasari and other writers on art.

78 William E. Wallace, “Michelangelo and Marcella Venusti,” 147. See also Barbara Agosti, Marcella Marongiu, and Roberta Scarpetti, Michelangelo, amici e maestranze: Sebastiano del Piombo, Pontormo, Daniele da Volterra, Marcella Venusti, Acanio Condivi (Milano: Il Sole 24 ore, 2007), 186, where Agosti states that that it is probable that in the case of the Raising of Lazarus, as in the Borgherini chapel, that the patron first thought to give the commission to Michelangelo, but that the latter declined the invitation in favor of giving it to his friend Sebastiano, participating instead through drawings. Here, once again, emphasis is laid on Michelangelo’s rivalry with Raphael by proxy and not on Sebastiano’s interests in the collaboration.
80 Ibid., 137-8.
Moreover, I wish to query the predominant view that Michelangelo’s collaborators mainly helped satisfy a clientele “hungry for examples of Michelangelo’s art,” and that their goal was to propagate Michelangelo’s concetti in response to this unquenchable demand. An analysis of a number of works by Michelangelo’s collaborators reveals a rather different picture, one where the hand of Michelangelo – though certainly treasured by patrons – was not the sole purpose behind the appropriation of his drawings. I would like to begin by looking at what exactly Michelangelo’s collaborators received from him and the ways in which they translated his designs into their final works. In the section that follows, I will examine the circumstances that prompted the creation of some of these paintings.

In the case of Pontormo, we have two paintings that were based on complete cartoons provided by Michelangelo – the Noli me Tangere (1532) and Venus and Cupid (1532-4) (Figure 91). Today, three extant versions of the Noli me Tangere exist – two are considered to be from Pontormo’s bottega (held in a private collection and at Casa Buonarroti) (Figure 92 and Figure 93) and another is by Battista Franco at Casa Buonarroti (Figure 94). The one held in the private collection is most accepted as Pontormo’s version for Vittoria Colonna because it is confirmed as autograph, its smaller size matches the dimensions of Michelangelo’s commission, and the presence of the tomb indicates that it likely came first (the tomb was painted over in the Casa Buonarroti version and substituted with stairs). The Casa Buonarroti version was likely for Alessandro Vitelli, executed by either Pontormo or Bronzino, his collaborator.

81 Ibid., 147. Agosti et al., Michelangelo, amici e maestranze, 241.
82 Agosti et al., Michelangelo, amici e maestranze, 243-44.
Michelangelo’s cartoon, on the other hand, is lost – so it is difficult to judge how the painting compares to it. It likely contained only the figures since Battista Franco’s version completely alters the background by substituting a landscape from a print by Dürer.\textsuperscript{83} We do, however, have two drawings by Michelangelo of Christ at the Casa Buonarroti and Archivio Buonarroti (Figure 95 and Figure 96); they had first been one sheet, but then were divided into two.\textsuperscript{84} They are not preparatory drawings for the cartoon on account of important differences, but rather studies leading up to the final design of Christ’s posture. The situation is similar for Pontormo’s \textit{Venus and Cupid}, for which the cartoon is likewise lost. However, there is an anonymous copy in Naples at the Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte (Figure 97), and a preparatory study by Michelangelo at the British Museum (Figure 98).

Thus, in both cases, Michelangelo seems to have followed through with a number of drawings – some of which are likely lost – that led up to a finished cartoon, which he then gave to his collaborator; he did not stop at small, individual drawings like he did for Sebastiano’s Viterbo and Úbeda \textit{Pietàs} and the \textit{Raising of Lazarus}. The working method comes much closer to what Michelangelo did for Sebastiano’s Borgherini chapel – generating both preparatory drawings (Figure 79 and Figure 99) and a final, polished drawing (today known only through a copy by Giulio Clovio) (Figure 73) – though Sebastiano seems to have received and kept at least one of the preparatory drawings judging from his reuse of Michelangelo’s \textit{Christ at the Column} for the Botoni \textit{Flagellation} (Figure 100), and possibly other commissions that will be discussed later in Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 244.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 244.
Looking to Michelangelo’s collaboration with Marcello Venusti and Ascanio Condivi, we find a similar pattern where Michelangelo provided finished cartoons – though often with the setting only roughly sketched in or not at all – for the artists to execute in paint. For Venusti, Michelangelo provided two cartonetti (Figure 101 and Figure 102) for the Cesi Annunciation, as two alternative solutions, meant for S. Maria della Pace and there are four to five drawings that preceded these.⁸⁵ The altarpiece was a gift from Tommaso de’ Cavalieri for Cardinal Federigo Cesi as a token of friendship, and the former acted as an intermediary in the commission.⁸⁶ The altarpiece is lost and survives only in copies (Figure 103). Afterwards, Tommaso de’ Cavalieri commissioned Venusti to paint a panel of the other (discarded) Annunciation cartoon for himself to install in the Chapel of the Sacrament in S. Giovanni in Laterano (Figure 104).⁸⁷ Likewise, Condivi’s Epiphany (Figure 105) is based on Michelangelo’s cartoon of the same title and scale in the British Museum (Figure 106). Michelangelo apparently had Condivi stay at his Roman house in Macel de’ Corvi, while Condivi executed his painting from the cartoon.⁸⁸

Venusti also made smaller paintings for private devotion after drawings (rather than cartoons) given to him by Michelangelo, such as his Expulsion of the Money-Changers (Figure 107 and Figure 108), the Madonna del Silenzio (Figure 109 and Figure 110), and the Agony in the Garden (Figure 111 and Figure 112). Additionally, he used drawings that were never intended for him, such as in his Crucifixion and Piaità (Figure 113 and Figure 114), which were based on Michelangelo’s presentation drawings for

⁸⁶ Ibid., 378.
⁸⁷ Agosti et al., Michelangelo, amici e maestranze, 362.
⁸⁸ Ibid., 357.
Vittoria Colonna (Figure 115 and Figure 116) that then circulated within a limited circle. Wallace wishes to see all of these works as products of “multiple authorship” where both artists contributed, rather than making Venusti out into a copyist of Michelangelo’s designs. Yet his analysis of what Venusti contributes is ultimately not a particularly exciting one or clear about what that contribution is. Looking at the Madonna del Silenzio, he makes note of the Madonna’s pointing gesture and the fact that Venusti does not add the intended veil to her hand, thereby transforming her hand into a gesture that exhorts the viewer to meditate on Christ’s death. Similarly, in the Agony of the Garden, Venusti’s coloring creates tension between the left and right side, thus emphasizing a tension between watchfulness and sleep. However, Wallace does not explain the larger implications of these changes in context of Venusti’s personal artistic concerns nor admits that such changes to Michelangelo’s drawings can be observed in the works of most of the artists collaborating with Michelangelo. Thus, the notion of “multiple authorship” remains to be not only defined, but also proven – this is an important point that I will come back to at the end of this chapter.

Wilde has likewise called for a reevaluation of Venusti’s role in the collaboration, singling him out from Michelangelo’s other collaborators:

It is important to observe that Venusti’s own products remained remarkably untouched by any influence of the works which he so often copied. Of Michelangelo’s other partners in painting, Sebastiano Veneziano nearly succumbed in his efforts to absorb the standards which collaboration imposed on him; Pontormo underwent a severe crisis and changed his style radically; Daniele da Volterra gave up painting altogether and became a sculptor. Venusti, a much lesser artist than any of these three, kept to the modest path along which he could walk safely and from which he felt no temptation to wander.

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Yet this attempt to elevate one collaborator above the rest feels quite forced, if not arbitrary, and is lacking in evidence.\textsuperscript{91} Neither Wallace nor Wilde ultimately demonstrate how Venusti’s role differed from that of the others or what made him a more autonomous collaborator than, say, Sebastiano or Pontormo – painters whose \textit{oeuvre} as a whole has a decidedly different look and feel from Michelangelo’s. Moreover, there is a strong undertone of an “anxiety of influence” in Wilde’s statement; his discomfort with the notion that an artist could borrow from the master and not suffer from a personal crisis of style significantly detracts from his evaluation of these collaborations.\textsuperscript{92}

Finally, there is Daniele da Voleterra, who likely met Michelangelo in the mid 1540s and who has been singled out by Barbara Agosti and Letizia Treves as a more equal collaborator than the rest judging by the drawings Michelangelo gave to him, “which are more like thoughts than models,” according to Agosti.\textsuperscript{93} The collaboration, argues Agosti, was more a dialogue between two artists searching for a solution, than a master who created a model to give to another artist for execution.\textsuperscript{94} She examines two of their joint works: the double-sided \textit{David and Goliath} (1550-1) (Figure 117) and \textit{Mercury}...

\textsuperscript{91} This seemingly arbitrary selection is underscored by the fact that different authors choose different collaborators as “favorites,” elevating them above the others based on variable and unclear criteria. Barbara Agosti sees Venusti in almost opposite terms, writing that he was “molto più ‘copista’ che ‘interprete’” that is, “much more a ‘copyist’ than an ‘interpreter.’” Agosti et al., \textit{Michelangelo, amici e maestranze}, 361.

\textsuperscript{92} The term comes from Harold Bloom, \textit{The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry} (Oxford University Press US, 1997).

\textsuperscript{93} Agosti et al., \textit{Michelangelo, amici e maestranze}, 333. See also Letizia Treves, “Daniele da Volterra and Michelangelo: A collaborative relationship” \textit{Apollo} 154, no. 474 (2001): 36-7, who likewise – and I think wrongly – downplays Venusti and Sebastiano to “pedantic transcribers” whose patrons were interested in their works only for the Michelangelo design upon which they were based and who gained recognition entirely because of their collaboration with the artist. Yet Treves misrepresents the differences between the collaborations she discusses; for instance, Sebastiano – like Daniele – also received “\textit{invenzioni} on a very small scale, almost exclusively dealing with one- or two-figure motifs,” exchanged ideas privately with the artist, and was recognized for his work – particularly his portraits - independently of Michelangelo. Conversely, Daniele similarly received commissions for which patrons asked Michelangelo to provide the design. The subject of patronage is treated more in-depth in section 1.5.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 334.
Orders Aeneas to Leave Dido (original lost) (Figure 118). Both paintings were for Giovanni della Casa. He asked Daniele to make a modello of David for the painting of David and Goliath “di terra finito,” that is, in terracotta.95 The model was likely the product of a long collaboration and preceded by a large group of drawings, which in turn stemmed from ideas penned-down by Michelangelo. Out of these small drawings by Michelangelo, today at the Morgan Library and Museum and the Ashmolean Museum (Figure 119 and Figure 120), Daniele developed a series of refined and polished drawings (Figure 121, Figure 122, and Figure 123). The terracotta model was likely an in-between step between Michelangelo’s small ideas and Daniele’s refined drawings.96

For the painting of Mercury Orders Aeneas to Leave Dido, there remains an even larger group of preparatory studies and three-dimensional figurines. A sheet at the Courtauld Institute has a Michelangelo drawing (Figure 124) which shows a powerful figure flanked by a putto who helps him disrobe while the former looks up toward the left from where Mercury would come. On the same sheet, Daniele repeats the profiles of the figures (Figure 125), making them mirror images of each other.97 Daniele then made a three-dimensional model of the figural group, which he used to create drawings from multiple angles (see, for example, Figure 126). Another Michelangelo intervention exists in the form of a drawing in Haarlem at the Teylers Museum (Figure 127) that shows the two figures closer together and rendered more compact. Daniele produced a highly finished drawing, today in the Albertina (Figure 128), from the Haarlem study.98

Michelangelo had also elaborated the figure of Dido faintly on the Haarlem sheet, in a

95 Ibid., 336. Vasari, *Vite*, vol.7, 61. “fece fare a Daniello, con tutta quella diligenza che fu possibile, il modello d’un Davit di terra finite.”
96 Agosti et al., *Michelangelo, amici e maestranze*, 337-8.
97 Ibid., 348.
98 Ibid., 348-51.
pose recalling his *Aurora* in the New Sacristy, with her head turned toward Aeneas. From this drawing of Dido, Daniele made a three-dimensional model, from which he also made a bronze figurine and a drawing (now lost).

Daniele has been singled out from Michelangelo’s other collaborators for his in-depth study and translation of the latter’s drawings into figurines and drawings of his own; and yet, Sebastiano did something very similar for several of his joint works with Michelangelo. For the Borgherini commission, a letter to Michelangelo from Sellaio informs us that in the Fall of 1516 Sebastiano was preparing the cartoon for the central scene of the Flagellation and that his preparation for this included modeling a small-scale clay model of Christ. The letter shows that Sebastiano, like Daniele, used Michelangelo’s drawings to make his own cartoon and three-dimensional model.

Moreover, there are small drawings by both Sebastiano and Michelangelo on the back of the panel for the Viterbo *Pietà* (Figure 129) that appear to relate to the figure of the Virgin and other projects, which suggests that Sebastiano rethought, modified, or added to the drawing Michelangelo had given him, and that the two exchanged ideas on the work, rather than Sebastiano merely accepting instructions.

This is further corroborated by the existence of numerous drawings by Sebastiano (Figure 130 and Figure 131) that build on and transform Michelangelo’s invention for the Borgherini Christ; Sebastiano focuses in on the psychological interiority of Christ’s face (the very element absent in Michelangelo’s drawing), and continues to explore this in his Christ *portacroce* series. Other drawings by Sebastiano show him to be an expert

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99 In a letter dated to October 11, 1516, Sellaio reports to Michelangelo that “Sebastiano has started the cartoon and is in the spirit of doing great things, and I believe it. He made a figure of clay for Christ and has great spirit. Soon we will see.” “Bastiano à chominciato el chartone ed è d’animo di fare chose grande, e io lo chredo. À fatto una fighurinadi terra per Christo e à grandissimo animo. Presto si vedrà.” Paola Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, I (Firenze: Sansoni, 1965), 203.
draughtsman, capable of transforming Michelangelo’s inventions, such as the latter’s
drawing of Lazarus (Figure 77) – turned into St. Matthew in the Borgherini spandrel
(Figure 132) – as well as producing his own independent drawings in order to complete
the Borgherini chapel decoration (see Figure 133, Figure 134, Figure 135, Figure 136 and
Figure 137). It should be noted that Michelangelo only once made a complete and
finalized compositional drawing for Sebastiano (the Flagellation scene) and even this one
comprised only part of the entire commission. In all other cases, Sebastiano
recontextualized individual and fragmented figures in new and novel ways.

Like Sebastiano, Michelangelo’s other collaborators similarly expanded on what
Michelangelo gave them. Venusti, in his painting (Figure 113) after Michelangelo’s
Crucifixion drawing (Figure 115), brings in two more figures – that of the Virgin and St.
John – which also derive from two separate drawings (Figure 138 and Figure 139) that
Michelangelo would later add to the design of the Crucifixion, and places them under the
cross on either side of Christ. Michelangelo’s Crucifixion drawing has been dated to
between 1538 and 1542, while his studies of the Virgin and St. John date to 1542 and,
according to Hugo Chapman, may be fragments from two separate studies rather than
from a single drawing of the Crucifixion due to a slight difference in condition, scale and
drawing style.100 The chronology raises an important possibility: Venusti may have been
the one who first combined all the drawings in one painting with Michelangelo following
suit in his exploratory sketches of the Crucifixion made between 1555 and 1564 (Figure
140 and Figure 141), rather than the other way around. Likewise, in his painting of the
Purification of the Temple (Figure 107), Venusti worked from a small drawing by

100 Phyllis Borland, “A Copy by Venusti after Michelangelo” The Burlington Magazine 103, No. 703
Michelangelo (Figure 108) in which the figures were only roughly sketched in. The placement of this figural group in a Roman-inspired architectural setting – the pillars, for example, are modeled on antique examples in St. Peter’s, Rome – demonstrates the artist’s interest in making the biblical story speak to the current situation in Rome, where reformers were fighting to purge the Church of corruption. 101 Venusti built on Michelangelo’s invention, rather than merely copying it.

This overview should caution us against polarizing the collaborations between “equals” of Michelangelo and “mere executioners.” It also tells us that Michelangelo’s collaborators were not simply adding landscapes as backdrops for his figures; their input went beyond pedantic copying. Perhaps what can be said with respect to differences between the collaborations, is that Sebastiano, having been the first in a line of partnerships, seems to have received from Michelangelo drawings that typically focused in on single figures and often times incomplete bodies. This can be seen in the incomplete male torso and studies of clasped hands for the Viterbo Pietà – though there may have been a more complete drawing that is now lost – the figure of Christ for the Úbeda Pietà, and the drawing of Christ at the Column, which Sebastiano seems to have used as a starting point for refining his understanding of the Michelangelesque body, as we see in his Martyrdom of St. Agatha, the portacroce series, and the wing of a triptych depicting Christ Descending into Limbo. The extant drawings for Venusti, Condivi and Daniele, on the other hand, are more typically composed of figural groups of two or more figures. The general concept or subject behind these figural groups is often already determined

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and no new figures are added by the painter (this is not to say, however, that the painter
does not build on and change what is in the drawing).

The two exceptions to this distinction in Sebastiano’s case is Michelangelo’s
Flagellation scene for the Borgherini Chapel and his studies of Lazarus surrounded by
attendants. For the former, Michelangelo supplies Sebastiano with a complete
composition of the Flagellation, while for the latter, he provides a figural group that
Sebastiano incorporates on the right side of The Raising of Lazarus. Yet it should be
noted that the Flagellation is but one scene of several that Sebastiano drew and composed
himself in the Borgherini Chapel. Similarly, in the case of The Raising of Lazarus,
Michelangelo’s figural group design remains a component of a much larger, complex
composition. In both commissions, the drawings do not supply a complete compositional
idea, but rather a section of the larger whole.

The various degrees of completeness of the drawings that Michelangelo provided
for his partners raises a question about the ways in which these artists conceived of
artistic invention and authorship. In thinking about the problem of collaboration, Hansen
has suggested that Daniele’s late sculptural and architectural work, such as the Ricci
Chapel (Figure 142), “exemplifies a radical separation between disegno and execution,”
where Daniele limits himself to the role of “originator of disegno,” as a form of imitation
of Michelangelo’s practice with his former collaborators.102 Daniele hired craftsmen to
carry out the parapet, the paintings and stuccoes for the chapel based on his designs,
thereby separating invention from execution. He himself only worked on the marble
statues of St. Peter and St. Paul, which flank the altarpiece, and even then he had

102 Hansen, In Michelangelo’s Mirror, 91 and 75.
Leonardo Sormani complete them. Presumably, in asserting that Daniele modeled his working practice on Michelangelo’s, Hansen has in mind the kind of acts of borrowing that have been discussed thus far with respect to Pontormo, Condivi, and Venusti, where Michelangelo was the generator of a design that was then taken up by the other artist, with Michelangelo relinquishing control over its execution and transformation.

In many ways, Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s partnership can be said to fit this mode of collaboration. As an analysis of the letters exchanged by the artists will go on to show, Sebastiano solicited drawings from Michelangelo in a way that emphasized the difference between Michelangelo’s invention and his own. However, I would like to push Hansen’s provocative thesis further and suggest – in the following section – that Sebastiano’s investment in establishing an external source of _disegno_ had to do with his artistic self-fashioning as a recipient of divine illumination.

1.4 The Letters Exchanged by Sebastiano and Michelangelo

In a letter to Michelangelo dating to November 22, 1516, Sellaio remarks on the stylistic likeness between Michelangelo and Sebastiano, writing that “according to those who see the work [the prophets for the Borgherini Chapel], there is no one of your manner [aria] if not he.” The statement appears to point to the public’s early awareness, and perhaps by then expectation, of Sebastiano’s Michelangelism – of his affinity to Michelangelo’s manner from the day he arrived in Rome. This passage and others have also fueled the kind of scholarship that wants to see Sebastiano as a less

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103 Ibid., 88.
104 I would like to thank Danilo Piana for his generous help with the translations in this section and section 1.5. Danilo checked my translations and advised me on a number of difficult passages.
105 Barocchi and Ristori, _Il carteggio_, I, 222. “Bastiano à fatti que’ dua Profeti, a fino a oggi, sechondo si vede, non c’è nessuno dell’aria vostra, se non lui.”
talented follower, an instrument of Michelangelo’s rivalry with Raphael, and a dependent executor of Michelangelo’s designs.106

Yet, looking closely at the letters, there is nothing to definitively suggest that either Sebastiano or Michelangelo themselves sought stylistic merger through their collaboration or that they conceived of their joint works as a way of bringing Michelangelo’s manner to patrons via Sebastiano’s hand. Each referred to the other in equal terms as a colleague or compare – as we see patrons referring to Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli in contracts and payments – and Sebastiano was certainly not a passive recipient.107 On at least one occasion, in July of 1532, he expressed concern that the figure in the drawing Michelangelo had sent him was not as novel as he had hoped it would be, but that he would make do nevertheless. He wrote back:

I have received in more batches three of your letters with the design, for which I thank you as much as one can thank someone, and which satisfies me enough. However, the Christ from the arms and the head outward, is almost the same as that in San Pietro in Montorio; but even so I will make do as well as I can.

Io ho ricevuto in più partite 3 vostre lettere con el disegnio, dil che vi renglato quanto si po renglariare; et satisfami assai. Però el Cristo, da le brasse et la testa in fora, è quasi simile a quello de Sancto Pietro in Montorio; ma pur io me accodarò meglio che potrò.108

It was a figure Sebastiano would have known quite well from his multiple iterations of it for the Borgherini and Botoni Flagellation scenes, and variations on it for other works. Perhaps he had grown tired of the repetition. Furthermore, writing to Sebastiano from Florence in May 1525, Michelangelo insisted:

106 Goffen, Renaissance Rivals, 245 and 255. Goffen labels Michelangelo Sebastiano’s “guide,” who nevertheless abandons his partner upon Raphael’s death when the rivalry comes to an end.
107 See, for example, Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, III, 143, 147, 149, 299, 303, 316, 322, and 324. See Borgo, The Works of Mariotto Albertinelli, 528 and Chapter 1, no. 29 for the payments made to Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli.
108 Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, III, 419.
Seeing, then, that my opinion is justified, don’t say, henceforth, that you are not unique, when I write and tell you that you are, because there are too many witnesses and there is a picture here, thank God, which proves, to anyone who has eyes to see, that I’m right.

Dipoi visto che il mio giudizio non è falso; dunce non mi negate più d’essere unico, quando io ve lo scrivo, perché n’ò troppi testimoni, e ecci un quadro qua, Idio grazia, che me ne fa fede a chiunque che vede lume.109

Michelangelo clearly did not see his partner as a facile imitator of his manner.

With Michelangelo away in Florence for most of the time that Sebastiano was working in Rome, requests for drawings from the former are documented in letters on numerous occasions for different commissions. I will mention a few here. On August 9, 1516, Leonardo Sellaio – their mutual friend and correspondent – writes to Michelangelo, “You have to send the drawing to Sebastiano,” referring to a small design for the Borgherini Chapel.110 In a letter from September 25, 1518 Sebastiano presses Michelangelo for a drawing – most likely for the Raising of Lazarus – by recourse to the impatience of Cardinal Giulio de’Medici to see something produced:

And the Cardinal asked me if you have made any thing; I answered him that you sketched a great part of the figures. Of this, I will not write you more, and forgive me if you had not intended to so soon. The error was the Cardinal’s and the request of the Pope.

Et el Cardinal mi ha dimandato se vui haveste facto cossa alcuna; io li ho risposto che havete bozato gran parte de le figure. Di questo non vi scrivo altro, et perdonateme si non havete havuto l’intento Vostro cosi presto. L’eror è stato del Cardinal et la partita del Papa.111

Another frequently cited passage is Sebastiano’s request for “a little light” [un poch’o de lume] for the commission of the Nativity of the Virgin for the Chigi Chapel in Santa

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109 Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio*, III, 156.
111 Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio*, II, 86. Sellaio continues to press Michelangelo to send a figure by his hand to the Cardinal in October and November. See ibid., 103, 111, and 115.
Maria del Popolo. Michelangelo’s unresponsiveness to the letter has often been taken as Sebastiano’s own failing – as a desperate plea for inspiration. Goffen contends that “Sebastiano’s language reflects his dependence on Michelangelo,” adding that “the letters were a call to arms.” Yet, she continues, “[Michelangelo’s] interest in the project or in helping Sebastiano was clearly waning” and thus “his reply was silence, or darkness.”

Rather than focusing on Michelangelo’s so-called silence or on the narrow phrase typically quoted, I would like to look at the passage in context of Sebastiano’s request, which I quote in full below:

Regarding my thing, take it at your convenience and when it suits you, because all that pleases you, pleases me. Remember that it goes from left to right for the sake of the door of the church. Thus, you would do me a very great favor again with a little bit of light on the story of the Nativity of Our Lady, with Our Father above with little angels around, in the same light as well, done in roughly this way. It is enough only that you illuminate for me how you interpret the invention because “without your light there is nothing in man”; and if I am too bothersome, forgive me. And above all, be sure to send me these things in such a way that they do not get lost and that they do not fall into hands other than my own. And if you do not have a messenger that you trust, do not send them; I will await your arrival, and you will bring them. Therefore, I will not say more of it. May Christ keep you in good health.

Circha a la cossa mia, pigliatela a vostra comodità et quando vi vien bene, ché tutto quello piace a vui piacerà a me. Arecordatevi che va a lume reverso per amor de la porta de la thiesa. Cussi ancora grandissimo apiacere me faresti de un pocco de lume de la istoria de la Natività de Nostra Donna, con un Dio Padre de sopra con agnoletti intorno, pur al medesmo lume, facto grosso modo. A me mi basta solamente thiarirmi come la intenderesti vui circha l’inventione, perché “sine tuo lumine nichil est in homine”; et se io vi do troppa noia, perdonateme. Et soprà tutto advertite de mandarmi tal cosse de modo che non se smarischano et che non capiti in mano d’altri che in le man mie. Et se non havete messo piú che fidato, non le mandate; piú presto aspettarò insino a la venuta vostra, et vui le portarete. Si che io non ve dirò altro. Cristo sano ve conservi.

112 Barocchi and Ristori, Carteggio, III, 405-6.
113 Goffen, Renaissance Rivals, 258-9.
114 Ibid., 264.
115 Barocchi and Ristori, Carteggio, III, 405-6.
Sebastiano’s request for “un pozzo de lume” should be seen alongside the other term he uses “[c]hiarirmi,” as well as the phrase “sine tuo lumine nichil est in homine” – an altered quotation from Veni Sancte Spiritus, a hymn for the Masses of Pentacost, where Sebastiano substitutes lumine (light) for numine (grace or divine will).\textsuperscript{116} In using metaphors of light, illumination, and the idea of divine presence within man, Sebastiano characterizes Michelangelo as divine illumination for his own artistic invention. This kind of language is repeated in an earlier letter from two months prior sent on April 5, 1532, where Sebastiano again praises Michelangelo’s powers of invention: “your imagination [fantasia] lights up a flame [fuoco] of the kind that places things in the mind that it does not have, and will be nearly impossible to remove.”\textsuperscript{117}

Sebastiano’s language evokes the notion of inspiration as light and fire that come to inhabit the mind. This light is equated to the drawings that Sebastiano solicits from Michelangelo. Moreover, the ideas that Michelangelo implants by means of drawing are potent, even transformative, because they are “impossible to remove.” Such metaphors for artistic creation are powerful expressions of Sebastiano’s conception of invention, authorship, and of his relationship to Michelangelo. The notion that inspiration for art originates elsewhere parallels conceptions of divine grace as something given and instilled in man by God, thus bringing about inner transformation.\textsuperscript{118}

Sebastiano’s very substitution of (God’s) grace for (Michelangelo’s) light in his quotation from Veni Sancte

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 388, no. 3.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 388. “la fantasia vostra se acenderia un fuoco de sorta che se li meteria cosse [nel] ciervelo che non le anno, et saria quasi impossibile a levargele.”
\textsuperscript{118} This reading of Sebastiano’s letters is further supported by Christian Kleinbub’s discussion of Michelangelo’s collaboration with Pontormo in his analysis of touch in the Noli me tangere and Venus and Cupid. For a discussion of the propagation of images – of Michelangelo’s planting of disegno or composition in the heart of Pontormo – as analogous to the implanting of faith in the soul, see Christian K. Kleinbub, “To Sow the Heart: Touch, Spiritual Anatomy, and Image Theory in Michelangelo’s Noli me tangere” Renaissance Quarterly 66, No. 1 (2013): 117-25.
Spiritus drives this point home. It follows that Sebastiano did not view his solicitations for drawings from Michelangelo as a dependence, but rather a powerful way to acquire divinely-inspired illumination for his work. Having an external source from which to receive ideas seems to have been of importance for Sebastiano. A closer analysis of the letters suggests that he viewed the drawings as agents of personal and artistic transformation – and as catalysts for invention.

The public did not necessarily see it the same way; it had a different sort of investment in Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s project. The next section addresses questions of patronage in order to better understand the demands and expectations that shaped the emergence and continued popularity of dual-authored painting.

1.5 Patronal Demand and Expectations

Sebastiano is notably the first of many collaborators that Michelangelo would take on and set the stage for the demand among patrons for such novel collaborative endeavors. Fra Gianpietro Caravaggio, prior of San Martino in Bologna, for example, wrote a letter on June 19, 1529 to Michelangelo, in which he requests an altarpiece (today lost) for his church and states “but if you are unable to color it, as you said you would in person, at least I would like that your Sebastiano color it, since you promised to notify me of it [...]”119 The letter shows that the collaboration between the two artists was familiar to a cleric far removed from the Roman scene. How did patrons typically ask for and perceive such dual-authored works? What were their expectations, why did they want them, and how was the final product viewed in terms of its authorship? These are questions that arise when thinking about paintings produced by Michelangelo, in

119 Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, III, 272. “Ma se quella non puotesse collorire, comne essa mi disse a bocha, almeno vorere che Sebastiano vostro lo colorisse, dil che Vostra Signoria mi promisi advisarci [...]”
collaboration with Sebastiano, Pontormo, Daniele da Volterra, and Marcello Venusti – artists who ultimately executed the paintings and often elaborated and changed the drawings they received from Michelangelo. In this section, I examine Vasari’s accounts of some of these commissions, as well as extant contracts and letters that begin to tell us how such collaborative works came to fruition under patronal demand.

Beginning with Sebastiano, there is evidence to suggest that at least two patrons specifically asked that he and Michelangelo produce the work together. According to Vasari, Pierfrancesco Borgherini commissioned Sebastiano to decorate his chapel in S. Pietro in Montorio, Rome with the expectation that Michelangelo would provide a design for the entire work:

Pierfrancesco Borgherini, the Florentine merchant, having taken a chapel in San Pietro in Montorio, which is on the right hand side upon entering the church, gave it to Sebastiano with Michelangelo’s approval, because Borgherini thought, as was true, that Michelangelo would make the design for the entire work.

Vasari’s testimony is inaccurate in several respects: for one, Michelangelo did not provide a drawing for the entire work, but for only one section (additionally, Sebastiano models the figure of St. Matthew on a drawing for The Raising of Lazarus); second, Vasari also claims that Michelangelo outlined the figure of Christ in the Flagellation, which is highly unlikely given that the artist was residing in Florence during Sebastiano’s work on the chapel. Yet letters from Michelangelo to his brother reveal that he and Pierfrancesco were friends and seem to support Vasari’s assertion that the patron

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120 Vasari, Le Vite, V, 568.
expected Michelangelo to provide the design for the work.\textsuperscript{121} One of the letters, dating to
October 20, 1515, has Michelangelo say:

\begin{quote}
Know that I do not want to give any burden or annoyance to Pier Francesco
Borgherini, because I want to be as little indebted to him as possible, since I
have to make him a certain painting, and it might seem that I am seeking
payment in advance.
\end{quote}

Sappi che io non voglio dar charicho né noia a nessuna a Pier Francesco
Borg[her]erini, perché io gli voglio essere mancho obrigato che io posso,
perché io gli ò a fare una certa cosa di pictura, e parebbe che io ricerchassi
el pagamento inanzi.\textsuperscript{122}

Additionally, there is the request for an altarpiece by Fra Gianpietro Caravaggio in 1529,
cited above, where the patron expresses his wish that Sebastiano “color it” if
Michelangelo is unable to do so. Apparently, by this date, is was common knowledge
among patrons that not only was there a high chance that Michelangelo would not finish
the work, but that he had partnered up with Sebastiano who took on the role of colorist.

In the \textit{Vita} of Pontormo, Vasari praises Pontormo’s \textit{Noli me Tangere} and \textit{Venus
and Cupid}, made in collaboration with Michelangelo, and describes three patrons’ intent
– Signor Alfonso d’Avalos Marchese del Vasto, Alessandro Vitelli, and Bartolommeo
Bettini – to possess these joint works after seeing the results:

\begin{quote}
In the meantime Signor Alfonso Davalos, Marchese del Vasto, having
obtained from Michelangelo Buonarroti by means of Fra Niccolo della
Magna a cartoon of Christ appearing to the Magdalene in the garden,
moved heaven and earth to have it executed for him in painting by
Pontormo, Buonarroti having told him that no one could serve him better
than that master. Jacopo then executed that work to perfection, and it was
accounted a rare painting by reason both of the grandeur of
Michelangelo’s design and of Jacopo's coloring. Wherefore Signor
Alessandro Vitelli, who was at that time Captain of the garrison of soldiers
in Florence, having seen it, had a picture painted for himself from the
same cartoon by Jacopo, which he sent to Citta di Castello and caused to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{121} See his letters of October 6 and 20 and November 3, 1515 in Barocchi and Ristori, \textit{Il Carteggio}, I, 181-3.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 182.
be placed in his house. It thus became evident in what estimation Michelangelo held Pontormo, and with what diligence Pontormo carried to completion and executed excellently well the designs and cartoons of Michelangelo, and Bartolommeo Bettini so went to work that Buonarroti, who was much his friend, made for him a cartoon of a nude Venus with a Cupid who is kissing her, in order that he might have it executed in painting by Pontormo and place it in the center of a chamber of his own, in the lunettes of which he had begun to have painted by Bronzino figures of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio, with the intention of having there all the other poets who have sung of love in Tuscan prose and verse. Jacopo, then, having received this cartoon, executed it to perfection at his leisure, as will be related, in the manner that all the world knows without my saying another word in praise of it. These designs of Michelangelo’s were the reason that Pontormo, considering the manner of that most noble craftsman, took heart of grace, and resolved that by hook or by crook he would imitate and follow it to the best of his ability.123

Antonio Mini’s letter of December 26, 1531 testifies to the direct collaboration between Pontormo and Michelangelo and to the fact that it was on the patron’s initiative that Michelangelo’s cartoon of Noli me Tangere was to be painted by Pontormo. The final painting was meant for one of Charles V’s generals, given through an intermediary, the Archbishop of Capua.124 Mini’s letter reads:

123 Vasari, Le Vite, VI, 276-7. “In questo mezzo avendo il signor Alfonso Davalo marchese del Guasto ottenuto per mezzo di fra Niccolò della Magna da Michelangelo Buonarroti un cartone d’un Cristo che appare alla Maddalena nell’orto, fece ogni opera d’averle il Pontormo, che glielo conduceesse di pittura, avendogli detto il Buonarroti, che diuino poteva meglio servirlo di costui. Avendo dunque condotta lacopo questa opera a perfezione, ella fu stimata pittura rara per la grandezza del disegno di Michelagnolo e per lo colorito di lacopo, onde avendola veduta il signor Alessandro Vitelli, il quale era allora in Fiorenza capitano della guardia de’ soldati, si fece fare da lacopo un quadro del medesimo cartone, il quale mandò e fe porre nelle sue case a Città di Castello. Veggendosi adunque quanta stima facessi Michelagnolo del Puntormo e con quanta diligenza esso Puntormo conduceisse a perfezione e ponesse ottimamente in pittura i disegni e cartoni di Michelagnolo, fece tanto Bartolomeo Bettini, che il Buonarroti suo amicissimo gli fece un cartone d’una Venere ignuda con un Cupido che la bacia, per farla fare di pittura al Pontormo, e metterla in mezzo a una sua camera, nelle lunette della quale aveva cominciato a fare dipingere dal Bronzino, Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio, con animo di farvi gli altri poeti che hanno con versi e prose toscane cantato d’Amore. Avendo, dunque, lacopo avuto questo cartone, lo condusse, come si dirà, a suo agio a perfezione in quella maniera che sa tutto il mondo, senza che io lo lodi altrimenti. I quali disegni di Michelagnolo furono cagione che, considerando il Puntormo la maniera di quello artefice nobilissimo, se gli destasse l’animo, e si risolvesse per ogni modo a volere, secondo il suo sapere, imitarla e sequitarla.”

124 A letter of May 1531, sent to Federico Gonzaga from his representative in Florence, Giovanni Borromeo, shows that Vittoria Colonna was the destined owner of the Noli me Tangere by Pontormo and Michelangelo. Pilliod, “The Influence of Michelangelo,” 243.
Michelangelo made a cartoon for the Archbishop of Capua, who wanted Jacopo da Pontormo to paint it. And before the said Jacopo was given the cartoon, it was with the condition that, once Jacopo translated it into a painting, the cartoon was to be mine because it was a gift to me from Michelangelo, and that is what Michelangelo told the said Jacopo [...]

Michelangiolo fecie uno chartone a l’a[r]civenschovo di Chapua, e l’a[r]civenschovo volle che Iachopo da Puntorno lo cholorinsi. Ina[n]zi che deto Iachopo avesi talle chartone, l’ebe chon questa chondizione, che quando l’aveva cholorinto, che egli aveva a esere mio: ché Michelangniolo ne fecie uno presente a me per sua grazia, e chosì lo dise Michelangniolo a detto Iachopo [...].

Furthermore, an earlier letter dating to April 11, 1531 from Giovan Battista Figiovanni to Michelangelo refers to the commission, asking Michelangelo to send a sketch, and shows that Michelangelo was given full liberty over the dimensions of the figures, as well as the support:

But again I ask you to satisfy him [the Archbishop of Capua], at your convenience however, and on cloth or on panel, in your fashion, at your preference, because in all he will be satisfied, be the figures large or small [...] And this I say myself: if it seems fitting to you to make a sketch in black or white chalk on a cartoon of tin-plated panel [foglio reale] and send it in the meantime, I believe this would be good.

A number of months later, in a letter dating to October or November 1531, Figiovanni again writes to Michelangelo, conveying the archbishop’s satisfaction that the painter (unnamed) who was to color Michelangelo’s drawing would do so at the latter’s house:

“It gave the most reverend Archbishop of Capua great pleasure when you said to him that

126 Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, III, 301. See also ibid., 328 for another letter exchange regarding the same work.
you would like the painter to color the drawing that you made at your house.”127 The circumstances recall Condivi’s work on the *Epiphany*, also executed in Michelangelo’s house and based on his cartoon—though Vasari judges Pontormo’s work much more favorably (more on this in the following section).

Following this first joint project with Pontormo, Michelangelo was asked by Bartolomeo Bettini to make a cartoon of Venus and Cupid, which Pontormo would carry out for Bettini’s palace, for which Bronzino was already making portraits of poets who wrote on love. According to Vasari, cited above, the painting never arrived to Bettini, because Duke Alessandro Vitelli demanded to have it and got his way.

Later in the 1550s and 60s, patrons similarly made requests of Michelangelo to have his collaborators Marcello Venusti and Daniele da Volterra execute works based on his drawings. On December 13, 1557, Cornelia Colonelli wrote to Michelangelo: “I would like that through you [*per mezzo Vostro*], Marcello made two of them [paintings], from these same drawings, and they will cost whatever he wants.”128 Colonelli is speaking here of Michelangelo’s drawings, from which she wishes Venusti to work. The context of the request is her wish to replace the two paintings she had owned, which were based on Michelangelo’s drawings (neither the paintings nor the drawings survive today, and it is unclear who executed the paintings), and which had been taken from her by Duke Guidobaldo II della Rovere, who demanded to have them upon seeing them.129 Colonelli is distraught at her loss and, in her letter, entreats Michelangelo to have Venusti make two more.

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127 Ibid., 340. “Al reverendissimo arcivescovo Capuo fu piacere assai quando li dissi che voi volevi il maestro pittore colorisse il desegno da voi fatto in casa vostra.”


129 Ibid., 120 and no.2.
Likewise, when Roberto Strozzi writes to Michelangelo on October 24, 1560 regarding the equestrian monument for King Henry II of France that was commissioned from Daniele da Volterra, though never finished by him, he too refers to the work as being done “through” or “by means of” Michelangelo: “[…] waiting to send the resolution along with the shipment of money for the work that, by means of you [per mezzo vostro] and by the service of the Queen mother [et per servitio della Regina madre], Daniele da Voleterra starts to work on.”  

The language implies that Michelangelo intervenes in the work, or rather instigates the request; it also conveys a sense of collaboration rather than mere copying: Michelangelo acts as a catalyst for Daniele’s work, much like the Queen is as patron of the work. This situation came about because Michelangelo had declined the commission upon being asked by the Queen and passed it on to Daniele, likely promising to advise his collaborator on the designs. 

Notably, Catherine de Médicis was well aware of the practice, and anticipated Michelangelo’s proposal by writing in her initial request:

And although I know that they could excuse you for the years that you were with someone else, I believe that you would not wish to use this excuse with me in order to not take responsibility for the design of the work, and so have it cast and polished by the best master that you can find.

And although I know that they could excuse you for the years that you were with someone else, I believe that you would not wish to use this excuse with me in order to not take responsibility for the design of the work, and so have it cast and polished by the best master that you can find.

Et benché io sappia che gl’anni forse con altra persona vi potrioni scusare, credo che meco non vi vorrete di tal scusa servire, sì che almeno non pigliate il carico del disegno di seta opera, et di farla gettare e pulire ai migliori maestri che di così potrete trovare. 

130 Ibid., 234 and no.1. “[…] aspettando di mandare la resolutione et insieme la expedizione de’ denari per l’opera che, per mezzo Vostro et per servitio della Regina madre, Daniella da Volterra prese a fare.”

131 Antonia Boström, “Daniele da Volterra and the Equestrian Monument to Henry II of France” The Burlington Magazine 137, No. 1113 (1995): 809. Vasari’s Vita of Daniele da Volterra relates that Michelangelo would not forget to provide help and advice to Daniele in everything that he could (“egli non mancarebbe nè d’aiuto nè di consiglio in tutto quello potesse”). See Vasari, Vita, vol.7, 66. Confirming this is an extant sketch by Michelangelo of the monument in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; see Figure 143.

132 Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, V, 185.
Both the requests to have Michelangelo’s collaborators “color” his drawings, to have them carry out or replace a work through his instigation, and the artist’s own propositions to have the works done this way may point to the patrons’ growing familiarity and experience with dual-authored works. It may also provide one possible explanation for the shift from Michelangelo’s earlier fragmentary or section drawings for Sebastiano to his more complete compositional drawings made for his subsequent collaborators. Perhaps Michelangelo and his later collaborators had developed a more systematic and comprehensive way of delivering what patrons wanted and replicating the effect for those like Bartolomeo Bettini, Alessandro Vitelli, and Cornelia Colonelli who wanted copies.

It appears that patrons welcomed circumstances that brought in two great artists to work on a single painting and understood the collaboration to involve a close exchange between them, with the colorist at times working in Michelangelo’s house to bring the work to completion. In requesting and anticipating such dual-authored works, patrons acknowledged the authorship of both parties involved, but also seem to have perceived a divided allocation of labor – between the design and execution (or coloring) phase – when in reality, no such clear division existed. From extant drawings by painters like Sebastiano, Venusti, and Daniele, we know that the inventive process was much more two-directional and involved something much more complex than the “coloring in” of a ready-made design.
Was the goal of the collaborators mainly to help satisfy clientele desirous of Michelangelo’s art and to supply it in response to increased demand? Judging from Sebastiano’s letters and from the way in which he, Venusti, and Daniele worked with Michelangelo’s drawings, I do not believe this was how the artists themselves viewed their collaborations with Michelangelo. There is no indication that they – for the most part – sought to reproduce Michelangelo’s inventions without alteration or that patrons valued their works solely for the presence of Michelangelo’s designs; instead their partnerships stemmed from an interest in a productive exchange of ideas and, in Sebastiano’s case, in locating artistic invention outside himself, but still within the limited and private sphere of friendship. It may be, however, that patrons did on some level perceive the products of such collaborations in terms that separated invention from execution in color – and consequently, prized the works for channeling Michelangelo’s authorial presence. There are also clear instances, as shown above, where the collaborator was being asked to provide a replacement for a lost work; such instances speak more to a practice of copying rather than imitation or borrowing, and should not color our understanding of these artists’ collaborative endeavors as a whole.  

1.6 Vasari, Dolce, and the Critical Reception of Collaboration

Everyone knows, moreover, that Michelangelo did designs for Sebastiano; and the man who garbs himself with the feathers of another is left, when they are subsequently taken off him, looking like that absurd crow which was described by Horace.  

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Costanza Barbieri, Michael Hirst, and other scholars have long noted the negative judgment that has been cast over Sebastiano, beginning with Vasari’s *Vita* of the artist, as well as the responses of Paolo Giovio and Francisco de Hollonda, and even of Sebastiano’s own Venetian contemporaries like Ludovico Dolce and Paolo Pino. The negative critical reception has continued to be propagated in recent scholarship, such as that of Cecil Gould, Rona Goffen and to a certain extent Michael Hirst, who characterize Sebastiano as a dependent or weaker artist with respect to Michelangelo and the Roman manner and is thus not given credit for his collaborative works. More recent scholarship has questioned the accuracy of this characterization and has begun to consider other types of concerns in Sebastiano’s art, such as his interest in the *paragone* between painting and sculpture and the notion of eternal color, the artists’ exchange of ideas on sacred painting and the altarpiece, and the reformist, “Lutheran” or “Counter-Reformation” aesthetic of Sebastiano’s art – to name a few. Others, like Claudio Strinati, have stressed important differences in the two artists’ styles and pictorial

delle altrui piume, essendone dipoi spogliato, riman simile a quella ridicola cornacchia, ch’è discritta da Horatio.”


interests, thereby refocusing the discussion on the uniqueness and specificity of Sebastiano’s project that was “absolutely and completely his own”.  

The work of these scholars constitutes an important step in reevaluating Sebastiano’s contribution to and participation in sixteenth-century conversations about art and its religious function. Yet what remains to be explained are the reasons behind Vasari, Giovio, Pino, and Dolce’s harsh criticisms of Sebastiano’s relationship to Michelangelo at the onset of the partnership. What was so problematic or perhaps different about their collaboration that prompted these art theorists to pen down such disparaging remarks? This section seeks to answer this question and offer insight into the roots of the negative critical reception of the collaboration. It also looks at some of the positive evaluations that Vasari made of Michelangelo’s other collaborations and attempts to provide an explanation for the art critic’s difference of opinion with regard to these. Vasari and Dolce’s criticisms stand in marked contrast to the evident demand among patrons for joint works by Sebastiano and Michelangelo.

The imitation of another artist was at once a long-standing Renaissance practice of art making and a potentially damaging move for an artist’s reputation. In his writings on art, Leonardo criticized imitative practice: “I say to painters that no one should ever imitate the style of another, because he will be a nephew and not a child of Nature with regard to art.” Indeed, upon examining the ways that sixteenth-century art theorists responded to instances of collaboration, one encounters a diverse range of judgments, even within the writing of a single author. Vasari is known for his disparaging remarks

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about Sebastiano, writing that he was “a fairly good painter” but unable to accomplish anything of quality without Michelangelo’s drawings; once the friendship ends, in Vasari’s eyes, Sebastiano’s productivity and interest in painting decline dramatically as well. Francisco da Hollanda is similarly reproachful in his *Four Dialogues on Painting* about Sebastiano’s ability to maintain an active output, writing that he was a lazy painter who did not make more than two works while in Rome. Francisco da Hollanda, *De la Pintura Antigua y El diálogo de la Pintura*, eds. Elías Tormo, and F. J Sánchez Cantón (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2003), 186. “sin haber pintado el perezoso pintor más que dos cosas solas en Roma […]”

Dolce, through the mouthpiece of Aretino, continues along the same lines as Vasari and pronounces:

> Everyone knows, moreover, that Michelangelo did designs for Sebastiano; and the man who garbs himself with the feathers of another is left, when they are subsequently taken off him, looking like that absurd crow which was described by Horace.

In that same passage, he goes on to characterize Sebastiano as “someone who cannot make a design.” In response, Fabriano exclaims, “it is true that Sebastiano was no match for Raphael, even with the lance of Michelangelo in his hand – the point being that he did not know how to handle his weapon – and far less of a match for Titian.”

The metaphors used to describe Sebastiano’s relationship to Michelangelo are striking; Michelangelo is Sebastiano’s weapon in the fight against his opponents and he is his disguise in a deceptive masquerade. The former relies on notions of rivalry to paint a picture of competitive combat among painters. Moreover, it makes Sebastiano an inept user of his tools, more specifically, his lance. The implications are that Michelangelo’s

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139 Francisco de Holanda, *De la Pintura Antigua y El diálogo de la Pintura*, eds. Elías Tormo, and F. J Sánchez Cantón (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2003), 186. “sin haber pintado el perezoso pintor más que dos cosas solas en Roma […]”

140 Roskill, *Aretino*, 94-5. “Poi è noto a ciascuno, che Michel’Angolo gli faceva i disegni: e chi si veste delle altrui piume, essendone dipoi spogliato, riman simile a quella ridicola cornacchia, ch’è discritta da Horatio.”

141 Ibid., 94-5. “(perche poca loda sarebbe a me [Raphael] di vincere uno, che ma non sa disegnare) […]”

142 Ibid., 94-5. “Invero, che Bastiano non giosstava di pari con Rafaello, se bene haveva in mano la lancia di Michel’Angolo: e questo, porque egli non la sapeva adoperare: e molto meno con Titiano […]”
designs are deployed by Sebastiano – as something both external to and separate from himself, a false augmentation of his true abilities.

The garb of feathers implies a different sort of criticism, but one that is similarly reproachful of artificial or outer enhancement (beyond what Nature had given) and consequently of deception. The reference to the “absurd crow” that is described by Horace comes from the author’s passage about imitation and the poet Celsus. The poet is advised not to borrow from others by recourse to the Greek fable, where a crow or jackdaw dresses itself in peacock feathers and tries to join the flock; but the peacocks recognize their plumage and reclaim it, stripping the crow of its borrowed finery. The other crows chastise it for not being content with what Nature had bestowed on it. Horace’s passage is as follows:

What, pray, is Celsus doing? He was warned, and must often be warned to search for home treasures, and to shrink from touching the writings which Apollo on the Palatine has admitted: lest, if some day perchance the flock of birds come to reclaim their plumage, the poor crow, stripped of his stolen colors, awake laughter.

Quid mihi Celsus agit? Monitus multumque monendus, privatas ut quaerat opes et tangere vitet scripta, Palatinus quaecumque receipt Apollo, ne, si forte suas repetitum venerit olim grex avium plumas, moveat cornicula risum furtivis nudata coloribus.

144 Ibid., 196-7. “Contentus nostris si fuisses sedibus et quo Natura dederat voluisses pati, nec illiam expertus esses contumeliam nec hanc repulsam tua sentiret calamitas.” “If you had been content with our station in life and had you been willing to take what nature gave you, you would neither have experienced that first humiliation nor would your misfortune have felt the sting of our rebuff.”
Michelangelo’s designs are thus here equated with the falsity or dishonesty of putting on attire belonging to someone else, suggesting that Sebastiano inflates his abilities by adorning his painting with someone else’s design. The stricture against borrowed attire also resonates with Castiglione’s advice to the courtier in Book II of The Courtier to avoid affectation in dress, which will appear labored and borrowed:

I wish our Courtier to be neat and dainty in his attire, and observe a certain modest elegance, yet not in a feminine or vain fashion. Nor would I have him more careful of one thing than of another, like many we see, who take such pains with their hair that they forget the rest; others attend to their teeth, others to their beard, others to their boots, others to their bonnets, others to their coifs; and it comes about that these slight touches of elegance seem borrowed by them, while all the rest, being entirely devoid of taste, is recognized as their very own. And such a manner I would advise our Courtier to avoid [...] [my italics].

Yet it is not that Castiglione admonishes artifice and the imitation of models – for in the same book he writes “masquerading carries with it a certain freedom and license, which among other things enable a man to choose the role in which he feels most able” – but rather the visibility and effort of such borrowings. This stricture against affectation in

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149 Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 75; Castiglione, Il Cortegiano, 178. “travestito porta seco una certa libertà e licenza, la quale tra l’altere cose fa che l’omo po pigliare forma di quello in che si sente valere [...]” Similarly, In Book I, Castiglione advises the courtier to selectively combine and steal from the best models: “even as in green meadows the bee flits about among grasses robbing the flowers, so our Courtier must steal this grace from those who seem to him to have it, taking from each the part that seems most worthy of praise.” Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, 32. “E come la pecchia ne’ verdi prati
dress is directly in line with his notion of *sprezzatura*, that is, concealed art and seemingly effortless grace.\textsuperscript{150} In this way, by recourse to Horace and, indirectly, to Castiglione’s warnings against discernible imitation, Dolce stresses the foreignness and externality of Michelangelo’s drawings to Sebastiano’s actual abilities. Oddly, drawing – the hidden underlayer of a painting – is turned into an outer, external disguise to be worn on the outside as a means of deception.

Vasari is similarly critical of Condivi’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings, writing in his *Vita* of Michelangelo:

Ascanio dalla Ripa Transone took great pains, but of this no fruits were ever seen either in designs or in finished works, and he toiled several years over a picture for which Michelangelo had given him a cartoon. In the end, all the good expectation in which he was held vanished in smoke; and I remember that Michelangelo would be seized with compassion for his toil, and would assist him with his own hand, but this profited him little.

Elsewhere Vasari is more explicit about his disapproval of borrowing “too much.” He states that Battista Franco, for instance borrows too much and too plainly, and voices his agreement with Michelangelo's comment on the artist (un-named in Michelangelo’s *Vita*) who, according to Michelangelo, “borrowed many things from various parts of drawings... sempre tra l’erbe va carpendo I fiori, cosí il nostro cortegiano averà da rubare questa grazia da que’ che a lui parerà che la tenghino e da ciascun quella parte che piú sarà laudevole.” Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*, 74.

\textsuperscript{150} For a discussion of imitation and *sprezzatura*, see Harry Berger Jr., “*Sprezzatura* and the Absence of Grace” in *The Book of the Courtier*, 300-1.

\textsuperscript{151} Vasari, *Vite*, vol. 7, 273-4.
and paintings” and thus produced a work in which there was “nothing that was not borrowed.”\textsuperscript{152} Vasari continues to quote Michelangelo regarding Battista Franco:

He has done well, but I don't know what will become of this painting on Judgment Day, when all bodies will reassemble their members, for nothing will be left of it: a warning to all those who make art, that they accustom themselves to working by themselves.

Bene ha fatto; ma io non so al di del Giudizio, che tutti i corpi piglieranno le lor membra, come farà quella storia, che non ci rimarrà niente: avvertimento a coloro che fanno l’arte, che s’avezzino a fare da sé.\textsuperscript{153}

Vasari wittily chastises the artist who borrows everything from someone else – as if those borrowings were literal bodily extensions of the artists they’re taken from – and his language closely resembles the rhetoric of Dolce’s criticism of Sebastiano’s “borrowed plumage,” which the birds, following Horace’s warning, would come to reclaim as their own. Vasari’s metaphor vividly underscores the notion that borrowed elements produce a kind of temporary composite body, stitched together but never a single, unified whole and always at risk of being revealed as a falsity when Judgment Day comes (this is a play on the notion of \textit{Giudizio} as the critical judgment of a discerning eye and the Judgment of Christ).

In other instances, however, Vasari is much more positive about the possibilities of collaboration, seeing it as a kind of authorial merger in a single \textit{maniera}.\textsuperscript{154} In his \textit{Vita} of Mariotto Albertinelli, he describes the artist as Fra Bartolommeo’s closest friend, “his

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., vol.7, 281. “aveva cavato di diversi luoghi di carte e di pitture molte cose, né era in su quella opera niente che non fussi cavato.” The unnamed artist in Michelangelo’s \textit{Vita} is identified as Battista Franco by Webster Smith. See Webster Smith, “Giulio Clovio and the "Maniera di Figure Piccole" The Art Bulletin 46, No. 3 (1964): 397.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 281.

\textsuperscript{154} I am grateful to Colin A. Murray for bringing to my attention Vasari and Pino’s comments on collaboration as a bodily merger, and in the case of the former, spoken of in terms of \textit{amicizia}. Colin A. Murray, “Collaboration and Marriage in Late Renaissance Venice: Palma Giovane and Aliense” Paper presented at the Renaissance Society of America. New York, March 29, 2014 addresses the critical reception of Italian artists, such as Albertinelli and Fra Bartolommeo or Palma Giovane and Aliense, collaborating in the late Sixteenth century.
other self, one might call him,” on account of their constant connection and “similarity of manner.”

“He formed such an intimacy with Baccio della Porta,” continues Vasari, “that they were one soul and one body [...] And then, seeing his work succeeding so well, he so grew in courage, that, imitating the manner and method of his companion, the hand of Mariotto was taken by many for that of the Friar.”

And again, speaking of a commission by Gerozzo Dini, Vasari writes:

He was besought by Gerozzo Dini, who had given the commission for the Judgment that Baccio had left unfinished in the Ossa, that he, having a manner similar to Baccio’s, should undertake to finish it; whereupon, being also moved by the circumstance that the cartoon completed by the hand of Baccio and other drawings were there, and by the entreaties of Fra Bartolommeo himself, who had received money on account of the painting, and was troubled in conscience at not having kept his promise, he finished the work, and executed all that was wanting with diligence and love, in such a way that many, not knowing this, think that it was painted by one single hand; and this brought him vast credit among craftsmen.

Ma da Gerozzo Dini, che faceva fare nell’Ossa il Giudicio che Baccio aveva lasciato imperfetto, fu pregato che, avendo quella medesima maniera, gli volesse dar fine; ed inoltre, perchè v’era il cartone finite di mano di Baccio ed altri disegni, e pregato ancora da Fra Bartolomeo che aveva avuto a quell conto danari, e si faceva coscienza di non avere osservato la promessa, Mariotto all’opera diede fine; dove con diligenza e con amore condusse il resto dell’opera talmente, che molti non lo sapendo, pensano che d’una sola mano ella sia lavorata: per il che tal cosa gli diede grandissimo credito nell’arte.

This near-perfect imitation of and integration with another artist’s hand is, for Vasari, the mark of successful collaboration. It echoes Paolo Pino’s ideal of painting where

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155 Vasari, *Vite*, vol. 4, 217. “Mariotto Albertinelli, familiarissimo e cordialissimo amico, e si dire un altro Fra Bartolomeo, non solo per la continua conversazione a pratica, ma ancora per la simiglianza della maniera [...]”

156 Ibid., 217 and 220. “Prese tal domestichessa con Baccio della Porta. Che erono un’anima ed un corpo [...] Perchè prese tanto animo, vedendo riuscir si bene le cose sue, che imitando la maniera e l’andar del compagno, era da molti presa la mano di Mariotto per quella del Frate.”

157 Ibid., 221.
Michelangelo and Titian are combined in one body and seems to be the very opposite of Dolce’s notion of borrowed drawings as a deceptive garb of feathers.\textsuperscript{158}

Vasari is similarly approving of Pontormo’s \textit{Noli me Tangere}, writing that “it was accounted a rare painting by reason both of the grandeur of Michelangelo’s design and of Jacopo’s coloring.”\textsuperscript{159} And as with Albertinelli, it is important for Vasari that Pontormo was imitating the \textit{maniera} of a great artist to generate the work: “[he] resolved that by hook or by crook he would imitate and follow [Michelangelo’s manner] to the best of his ability.”\textsuperscript{160}

In all of the above cases, collaboration entails the imitation of drawing, the translation of a cartoon into painting, or both. This raises the question: what was so problematic and different about Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration that drove Vasari and Dolce to such disparaging remarks? And why were they not seen as two artists combined in “one body” and “one soul,” as several before them had been? One possible answer to this may be that Vasari was unable to reconcile the art of Sebastiano and Michelangelo – as he was with Fra Bartolommeo and Albertinelli or with Pontormo and Michelangelo – because the works did not invite such resolution. Despite his interest in assimilating and transforming Michelangelo’s inventions from the onset of his arrival in Rome, Sebastiano ultimately was not interested in absorbing the artist’s style. In many ways, his borrowings often remain isolated and external to the composition, as if to underscore the sentiment he expresses in his letters – of Michelangelo’s \textit{fantasia}

\textsuperscript{158} Paolo Pino, \textit{Dialogo di Pittura di Messer Paolo Pino} (Vinegia: Pauolo Gherardo, 1548), 24-5. “If Titian and Michelangelo were one body, to Michelangelo’s design one would have to add Titian’s colors […]” “Se Titiano e Michiel Angelo fussero un corpo solo, over al disegno di Michiel Angelo aggiuntovi il colore di Titano […].”

\textsuperscript{159} Vasari, \textit{Vite}, vol. 6, 277. “ella fu stimata pittura rara per la grandezza del disegno di Michelagnolo e per lo colorito di Iacopo.”

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 277. “si risolvesse per ogni modo a volere, secondo il suo sapere, imitarla e sequitarla.”
implanting things in the mind “that it did not have” before. The disjunctive effects that result from this importation of pictorial ideas is a recurrent theme in Sebastiano’s work, one that will be pursued and unpacked more fully in the chapters that follow.

I would like to conclude this section with a short digression that shifts the discussion of Sebastiano’s critical reception away from writers on art to practitioners of it. Daniele da Voleterra, who would go on to collaborate closely with Michelangelo, produced a bizarre visual reference to Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration in his stucco reliefs (c.1548) for the chapel of Elena Orsini in Trinità dei Monti, Rome – supposedly as a form of defense against possible censure.  

Vasari’s take on the reliefs is odd; he purports that the satyrs are weighing different body parts to assess their proper proportion, sending the rejected ones to Michelangelo and Sebastiano to talk over. In the following passage, Vasari is explicit about Daniele’s debt to the two artists and seems to allude to a parallel between their partnership and the collaboration between Daniele and Michelangelo:

[Daniele] made below the feet of those two saints [S. Francesco di Paola and S. Jerome in the entrance arch], to please himself, and as it were in his own defense, two little scenes of stucco in low-relief, in which he sought to show that although he had worked slowly and with effort, nevertheless, since Michelangelo Buonarroti and Fra Sebastiano del Piombo were his friends, and he was always imitating their works and observing their precepts, his imitation of those two men should be enough to defend him from the biting words of envious and malignant persons, whose evil nature must perforce be revealed, although they may not think of it. In one of these scenes, then, he made many satyrs that are weighing legs, arms, and other members of figures with a steelyard, in order to put on one side those that are correct in weight and satisfactory, and to give those that are bad to Michelangelo and Fra Sebastiano, who are holding a conference.

over them; and in the other is Michelangelo looking at himself in a mirror, the significance of which is clear enough [my italics].

Fece per suo capriccio, e quasi per sua defensione, sotto i piedi di detti due Santi, due storiette di stucco di basso rilievo; nelle quali volle mostrare che essendo suoi amici Michelagnolo Buonarroti e fra' Bastiano del Piombo (l'opere de' quali andava imitando et osservando i precetti), se bene faceva adagio e con istento, nondimeno il suo imitare quei due uomini poteva bastare a difenderlo dai morsi degl'invidiosi e maligni, la mala natura de' quali e forza ancorche loro non paia, che si scuopra. In una, dico, di queste storiette fece molte figure di Satiri che a una stadera pesano gambe, braccia et altre membra di figure, per ridurre al netto quelle che sono a giusto peso e stanno bene, e per dare le cattive a Michelagnolo e fra' Bastiano, che le vanno conferendo. Nell'altra e Michelagnolo che si guarda in uno specchio: di che il significato e chiarissimo [my italics].

To declare the imitation of Michelangelo and Sebastiano and their “precepts”, two artists with very different styles and interests, would have most likely meant the imitation of their joint working methods rather than their maniera.

These reliefs have not survived, but two anonymous drawings (Figure 144 and Figure 145) after them suggest a somewhat different scene than described by Vasari. Instead, an allegorical female figure – most likely Judgment – holds up a mirror in front of Michelangelo, above whom appears the Greek inscription “Know thyself” (ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ) Next to him stands Sebastiano, who holds a compass close to eye-level with the inscription “My advice to all is that nothing is beyond measure” (ΠΑΣΙ ΠΑΣΙ ΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΛΩ ΜΗΔΕΝ ΥΠΕΡ ΤΟΝ ΜΕΤΡΟΝ) which begins at the top and continues below. Hansen has convincingly shown these inscriptions together to mean that knowledge of ideal measurements, the mark of artistic perfection, lies within the artist.

and can only be known through understanding one self.\textsuperscript{164} That Sebastiano holds a compass at eve-level refers to the good judgment of the artist, which lies “in the eyes and not the hand” – a trope expressed by Vasari with respect to Michelangelo – that is, it is an inborn quality that cannot be reduced to proper measurement.\textsuperscript{165}

The reference, both Vasari and Daniele’s, to the close connection between Sebastiano and Michelangelo, as artists to be emulated and who together show good judgment in art, demonstrates the extent to which followers of Michelangelo looked to the artists’ partnership as a model of art making. The isolation of the bottom inscription, which reads “beyond measure” below the figures of Michelangelo and Sebastiano, may at first raise questions regarding Daniele’s attitude towards Sebastiano – whether he is seen as capable of living up to Michelangelo who is “beyond measure” or committing the error of not knowing his own style as Dolce and Vasari believed; this is Jaffé’s reading of the reliefs.\textsuperscript{166} Yet is it much more likely that Daniele praises Sebastiano’s partnership with Michelangelo.

This is made clear by Daniele’s recourse to the very works that Sebastiano authored together with Michelangelo – the Borgherini Flagellation and the Viterbo Pietà – in his Assumption of the Virgin (c.1555) (Figure 146) for Lucrezia della Rovere’s chapel, exactly opposite the Orsini chapel in Trinità dei Monti. As Vittoria Romani and Hansen have pointed out, the columnated architectural setting of the Assumption recalls that of the Flagellation, while the figure of the Virgin evokes the Virgin of Sebastiano’s

\textsuperscript{164} Hansen, In Michelangelo’s Mirror, 63.
\textsuperscript{165} Cited in ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{166} Jaffé, “Daniele da Volterra’s Satirical Defense,” 250. Yet Jaffé all misreads the inscription, seeing it as two separate statements rather than one continuous statement. See no.163.
Pietà.\textsuperscript{167} Hansen further notes the portrait of Michelangelo in the guise of an apostle (Figure 147) standing on the right and pointing towards the Virgin in Daniele’s Assumption, a figure that is simultaneously an imitation of Michelangelo’s own invention (for Sebastiano).\textsuperscript{168} In this way, the gesture becomes an indication of “dual or shared authorship, blurring the limits between Daniele and Michelangelo.”\textsuperscript{169}

Thus, it is evident that Daniele did imitate their works and observe their precepts, as told by Vasari. Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s partnership was instrumental in establishing a model of collaboration that was not only imitated, but also explicitly referred to as an established exemplar of dual authorship by subsequent admirers of Michelangelo.

1.7 Defining Dual Authorship

So what conclusions can be drawn about what constituted dual authorship for Sebastiano? On one hand, his works announce difference between himself and Michelangelo – the borrowings are explicit and his compositions are staged around them to underscore this. His letters, too, show his commitment to having an outside source of inspiration. The repetition and recycling of figures and compositions is a recurrent theme in his work, suggesting that Sebastiano was interested not only in obtaining figural designs from someone else, but also in pursuing permutations of the same limited subjects. Moreover, the geographical distance between him and Michelangelo contributed to the separation between the inception of a figure and its integration – once it had arrived into Sebastiano’s hands by mail – into the latter’s work. On the other hand, as will

\textsuperscript{167} Romani, Daniele da Volterra Amico di Michelangelo, 41-2 and Hansen, In Michelangelo’s Mirror, 66.

\textsuperscript{168} Hansen, In Michelangelo’s Mirror, 66.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 66.
become evident, the separation between Michelangelo’s inventive process and Sebastiano’s is not as pronounced and distinct as is often thought.

The varied ways in which artists chose to work together and the changing dynamics of such partnerships points to the difficulty of finding a single definition for authorship, and specifically for dual authorship. What can be said with certainty is that it was common and advantageous for painters to share commissions, whether at the request of the patron or of their own volition. Collaboration rather than rivalry was the predominant mode in which artists related to one another; the latter has been overstated by both Vasari and modern scholarship at the expense of studying the former. Dual authorship – the collaboration of two artists, either on a single project or in an ongoing manner – should be understood as an outgrowth of an existing collaborative tradition, which in turn can be related back to Renaissance workshop practices.

In the four chapters that follow, I investigate four instances of collaboration between Sebastiano and Michelangelo, paying attention to what Michelangelo contributed in each case, and how Sebastiano made use of and transformed these drawings. In this way, I intend to clarify what dual authorship meant for these two artists. What matters most to me is to see the collaboration from the latter’s perspective – a view rarely taken in scholarship. Furthermore, one of the key goals of this study is to understand Sebastiano’s larger project and the themes and spiritual and pictorial concerns that permeate some of his joint works with Michelangelo. This dissertation asks how Sebastiano’s work responds to the difficult and unstable years that we call the Catholic Reformation – that is, the internal efforts at reform undertaken by those inside and close to the Catholic Church in Rome.
Chapter Two. The Viterbo Pietà: Meditation on Motion and Stillness

Sebastiano’s Viterbo Pietà (1513-16) (Figure 7) is a monumental and haunting work. It is the product of the first collaborative effort undertaken by Sebastiano and Michelangelo and it is the first public commission Sebastiano took on after his arrival from Venice to Rome in 1511. The work was made for Giovanni Botoni’s family chapel in S. Francesco alla Rocca in Viterbo, a small city near Rome that was occasionally the seat of the papacy. It is difficult to not be struck by the painting’s imposing grandeur, conveyed both by its sizable dimensions and the monumentality of the foregrounded bodies, and by the immense expanse of darkness that surrounds the brightly lit Virgin and dead Christ. The Virgin sits on a rock with her dead son placed horizontally at her feet. Her hands are clasped in prayer and her eyes raised up towards the white moon, which is partially obscured by ultramarine-blue clouds the color of her own dress. One imagines the clouds passing over the moon momentarily, drawn in the same direction as the drapery billowing rightward around her ample waist. The bent trees in the background, seen behind her twisting shoulders and torso, seem to respond to the same gust of strong wind. The white burial cloth underneath and around Christ, however, remains immobile and his face, unlike hers, is cast in dark shadow.

1 Vasari describes the commission, though he does not know the name of the patron. See Giorgio Vasari, Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti, V, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 568. “un messer non so chi da Viterbo, molto riputato appresso al papa, fece fare a Sebastiano, per una capella che aveva fatta fare in San Francesco di Viterbo, un Cristo morto con una Nostra Donna che lo piange.” No contract for the work exists, but a notarial document shows that Botoni’s procuratore in Viterbo was making provisions for altar cloths, candlesticks and the like in May 1516. For the document, see Archivio di Stato, Viterbo, Notaio N. Du Ser Angelo, vol VI, cc. 134 verso – 135 verso. Hirst discusses Sebastiano’s Pietà with respect to this document; see Michael Hirst, Sebastiano Del Piombo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 43-44 and esp. no.10.
The strange iconography of the Viterbo Pietà – its nocturnal setting, the absence of the Cross, Rock of Golgotha, mourners, and other references to the Crucifixion or the sepulcher, the glowing red light on the horizon and the barely-visible red sphere in the sky, and the fact that Christ lies on the ground instead of in his mother’s lap akin to a Lamentation but without its usual group of mourners – has repeatedly frustrated scholars’ attempts at interpreting the work.² Perhaps the comment most demonstrative of the current scholarly impasse, but also of the unusual nature of the work, is Michael Hirst’s:

The picture was the result of exceptional circumstances, biographical accident, and Michelangelo’s consciousness of isolation and befriending a man unconnected with the Raphael bottega, rather than from any conscious artistic program.³

Hirst implies that the strangeness of the painting stems from a supposedly unplanned and mismatched union of two very different artists with no interest in responding to their artistic circumstances – that is, to the novel picture making that was being explored at this time by Raphael, particularly his approach to the narrative altarpiece, and by Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione in the preceding decade. Hirst goes as far as to call the Pietà an

² Various interpretations for the nocturnal landscape setting have been put forth, none of which are entirely convincing. Alessi reads the background as Viterbo’s Bulicame and an evocation of the descent into the inferno in Dante’s Divine Comedy, Canto III. See Andrea Alessi “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo: further reflections on the Viterbo Pietà” in Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, exh. cat., eds. Claudio M. Strinati, Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, and Roberto Contini (Milan: F. Motta, 2008), 50. Barbieri argues that the tempestuous landscape, the wind, fire and darkness of the night allude to the demonic night attack documented in Viterbo on May 28, 1320, which had become a popular account of Mary’s intervention and the rise of her cult in Viterbo. Her argument rests on the identity of the landscape as the outskirts of Viterbo, but nearly the same landscape is depicted in Sebastiano’s Raising of Lazarus. See Costanza Barbieri “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto e altri significati emblematici della Pietà” in Costanza Barbieri, Notturno Sublime: Sebastiano e Michelangelo nella Pietà di Viterbo (Roma: Viviani, 2004), 80-83.

Alessi’s reading of the figure of Christ also illustrates the kind of bewilderment that the novel composition has evoked from scholars. Alessi is troubled by what she describes to be a Christ “almost like a paradox, more feminine than the Virgin,” “pictorially treated like a Venus,” “seductive” and “a body ready to exude only beauty and hedonism, rather than agony and torment. See Alessi, “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 47.

³ Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 48.
altarpiece “lost to Rome” and “exiled to a dark transept in a provincial town.”\textsuperscript{4} We are made to imagine Sebastiano as an outsider to the Roman scene and his painting the product of Michelangelo’s controlling hand, not to mention the bearer of the latter’s melancholic mood. Following Hirst’s reading, the work’s visual message of prayer in solitude comes to stand in for the infamous *melancholia* of the brooding artist.

This is one way of explaining the uniqueness of the *Pietà*. It is one which I want to resist. First, instead of making it an odd outlier, the *Pietà* first needs to be considered in context of the pictorial and sculptural Northern Pietà tradition, out of which Sebastiano emerged as an artist. On one hand, Sebastiano’s nocturnal, moonlit, and wind-swept *Pietà* is the only one of its kind in 16\textsuperscript{th}-century Venice and Rome and works that likely acted as precedents – Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s *Pietà* (1499-1500) (Figure 148) and Bellini’s *Pietà*, (c.1505) (Figure 149) – are serene, immobile, and portrayed in daylight.\textsuperscript{5} Thus, the choice of a turbulent nocturne for the setting, I argue, is central to Sebastiano’s conception of the *Pietà*. On the other hand, the Pietà tradition in Northern Italy also needs to be considered in order to understand Sebastiano’s work: Cosmè Tura’s two *Pietà*s dating to 1460 and 1474, the former at Museo Correr (Figure 151), the latter at the Louvre (Figure 150), Ercole de’ Roberti’s *Pietà* (c.1495) (Figure 152) and his S. Domenico Altarpiece *Pietà* (c.1490-5) (now lost and known only through a surviving copy) and Amico Aspertini’s nearly contemporaneous *Pietà with Saints* (1519) (Figure 153) demonstrate that Sebastiano’s work is not as idiosyncratic as is commonly argued.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 48

\textsuperscript{5} The connection between Bellini and Michelangelo’s works and Sebastiano’s *Pietà* has been made by Barbieri “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 64 and Alessi “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 46.

\textsuperscript{6} For more background and a discussion of the provenance of Ercole de’ Roberti’s S. Domenico Altarpiece in Ferrara, as well as its popularity in being copied by local Ferrarese artists, see Joseph Manca, “An Altarpiece by Ercole de’ Roberti Reconstructed” *The Burlington Magazine* 127, No. 989 (1985): 521-524. Ercole’s Liverpool *Pietà* was a predella for an altarpiece in S. Giovanni in Monte, Bologna; see Joseph
Sebastiano could have seen most of the abovementioned works on his way from Venice to Rome, likely having passed through Ferrara and Bologna. He shares with these artists an interest in a heavily-draped Virgin seated either in a dark setting or herself wearing dark robes, and a Christ whose long horizontal body predominates the scene and recalls the Eucharist.

Sebastiano’s Pietà should be treated as a work emerging from this well-established Northern tradition. At the same time, however, Sebastiano’s distinctive pictorial choices show his insistence on a very different kind of Pietà, one that emphasizes distance between the Virgin and Christ rather than intimate contact. He also rejects the pathos-ridden angst that characterizes these works. His indebtedness to the sculptural Pietà type from north of the Alps, via the paintings, is also evident. Yet here again Sebastiano departs from the representation of a tight figural unit and the sorrows of the Virgin. In this chapter, I will examine how Sebastiano complicates a common and canonical form of the subject of the Pietà and experiments with the Eucharistic implications of the body of Christ.

Second, I find it difficult to accept that the Pietà had no connection to the broader artistic and religious problems surrounding Sebastiano at this time of change and religious reform. To date, no scholars have fully and thoroughly explored Sebastiano’s relationship to the reform movement at the beginning of the 16th century and the implications this had for his art, though some have connected his work to the Augustinian Giles of Viterbo and to Martin Luther, who was in Viterbo in 1511. These connections

however, though an important step, remain superficial or made simply in passing. Current interpretations usually take one of two extremes: they either describe a highly generalized relationship based on mood or the reformer’s values (such as asceticism, simplicity, or religious unease) or they offer an overly elaborate and rather esoteric interpretation of each “puzzling” element in the Viterbo Pietà. 7 Marcia Hall goes so far as to call it and other of Sebastianio’s works Counter-Reformation art avant la lettre. 8 Certainly, his art held strong appeal for a later generation of artists, but to align Sebastiano with the concerns of artists of the latter half of the 16th-century would be to ignore the particular demands and debates of Sebastianio’s own historical moment. 9 While it may be argued that religious painting is by its nature “reformist,” in that it continually seeks to renew itself and the viewer’s relationship to God, and that the call to simplification and to a

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7 Lucco ascribes to the nocturnal landscape a moral unease and religious apprehension that was animating the circle of reformed in Viterbo. See Mauro Lucco, L’opera completa di Sebastiano del Piombo (Milan: Rizzoli, 1980) 9. Strinati argues that the work borders on Lutheranism and calls Sebastiano the only “true reform” artist in the 1510s in Italy, but does not elaborate on why that may be the case. See Strinati, “Notturno,” 16. Carratù asks whether the Viterbo Flagellation might not be related to the milieu of reform in which Sebastiano found himself and to which also belonged Botoni, Agostino Chigi, Giles of Viterbo, Vittoria Colonna, Michelangelo and Raffaele Riario (also a patron of Sebastiano). She sees the works speaking the language and pathos of the Counter-Reformation before it happened. See Tullia Carratù “La Flagellazione di Cristo di Viterbo: una replica ad hoc,” in Notturno Sublime, 50-51. Alessi mentions in passing that the work is a response to the social and moral ambiguity of the reformation and to Martin Luther’s visit to Viterbo in 1511. See Alessi “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 50. Barbieri has put forth one of the more convincing and well-articulated accounts of the nature of Sebastianio’s relationship to reform. Although her account is similar to Alessi’s in its reliance on the 14th-century demonic attack, Barbieri allows the work to also encompass a more metaphorical and less literal meaning: it is about the faithful’s vigil for the divine light of Christ Resurrected and for salvation from sin by the Madonna Liberatrice. Yet there are problems with this account as well, such as her overstatement of the tempestuous violence of the scene and her iconographic reading of the moon, night, and red fire as symbols. See Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 72-83.

8 See Marcia B. Hall, The Sacred Image In the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 152.

9 Late 16th-century artists like Girolamo Muziano and Manuel Dionis found a somber, dark seriousness in Sebastianio’s work that appealed to their interests in countering maniera art. Their copies after Sebastianio’s Flagellation and Christ Carrying the Christ demonstrate their interest in the works’ pared-down, abstract quality. However, Dionis also felt the need to make up for the idealized absence of wounds with overstated bloodiness, contortion, and ugliness. For a discussion of their works, see Miguel Falomir “Sebastiano and ‘Spanish taste’” in Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, 67-71. Gilio da Fabriano provides the context for Counter-Reformation artists’ interest in bloodiness and gore. He is explicit in his criticism of Sebastianio’s Christ in the Flagellation in St. Pietro of Montorio on this matter: he does not conform to the way Christ really looked after the Crucifixion because he lacks blood and wounds. See Giovanni Andrea Gilio, Dialogo degli errori della pittura, ed. Paola Barocchi (Firenze, 1986), 39-40.
return to the roots of the Church is a recurrent theme in religious art, I contend that how painting does this is unique and dependent on the problems and crises of the moment in which the images were made. Moreover, Sebastiano’s Pietà is by no means archaizing or simplified, despite contemporary reformers’ call to religious asceticism; the painting answers the call to reform without relinquishing its investment in the modern maniera.

There is a clear need to investigate the Pietà as a complex reflection on the call to religious reform at the turn of the century by Giles of Viterbo, Luther, Erasmus, Gasparo Contarini, Paolo Giustiniani and others. This chapter will specifically focus on Giles of Viterbo, whose passionate sermons on reform Sebastiano would have heard upon his arrival to Rome and with whom Sebastiano would have likely come into direct contact two years later through his Viterbese patron, Botoni. In calling attention to this relationship, it is necessary to establish more than superficial correlations between Sebastiano’s art and the call for a simplified, more authentic devotion. It is not about Sebastiano “visualizing” Giles or anticipating Luther’s reform program concretely in art, as much as it is asking how Sebastiano’s work answered the call for reform during his lifetime, which ideas the artist gravitated to, and how he marshaled his cosmopolitan background to address these issues.

In addition to linking this work to broader reformist concerns, I see the Pietà as continuous and consistent with Sebastiano’s pictorial concerns and intellectual goals, which need not be called an explicit “artistic program”. Sebastiano’s reclining Christ is bloodless, elegant, still, and asserts his corporeal presence for the viewer, stretching horizontally edge to edge on the near-bottom portion of the canvas. In connection to Sebastiano’s other Roman works, the Viterbo Pietà explores the pictorial visualization of
God Incarnate, specifically his earthly form as it underwent the Passion, and simultaneously his sacramental body in the present. The painting speculates on the possibility of visual proximity to his body, of its accessibility for the viewer in the present; at the same time, it insists on an encounter of that body in its historical narrative. Put another way, I see Sebastiano exploring effects of proximity and distance as they pertained to the functions and demands of the altarpiece.\textsuperscript{10} My claim is that the tension created by the simultaneous assertion of Christ’s proximity and distance accounts for the strangeness and uneasy visual experience of Sebastiano’s \textit{Pietà}.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, the painting reveals Sebastiano’s interest in the interaction between pictorial motion and stillness as a means of mirroring the devotional experience of the faithful before the altarpiece.\textsuperscript{12} I tie the abovementioned concerns to the early 16\textsuperscript{th}-century debate on God’s accessibility to man and the debate over his real presence in the Eucharist, as well as to St. Augustine and Giles’ of Viterbo reflections on the concepts of time and eternity. Moreover, I bring

\textsuperscript{10} The altarpiece was meant to offer the viewer access to God’s divinity through contemplation of his physical image and through intermediary figures, such as patron saints and the Virgin Mary. An awareness of both proximity to and distance from God were built into the experience: the image at once invited the viewer into an intimate rapport with the representation of Christ and produced a reminder that true knowledge of God was always out of reach. I propose that Sebastiano’s \textit{Pietà} is a reflection on this dynamic. For a discussion of the altarpiece and its functions in the early 1500s, see Peter Humfrey, \textit{The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and Patricia Meilman, \textit{Titian and the Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For the Medieval idea that images can enact a hierarchical spiritual ascent, that they can promote spiritual seeing while at same time assert the limitations of carnal seeing, thus showing the invisible by means of the visible, see Herbert L. Kessler, \textit{Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{11} I owe my thinking on the recurring effects of proximity and distance in Sebastiano’s work to Shira Brisman. Her thoughtful feedback during the initial stages of this dissertation was invaluable to the development of my ideas on this subject.

\textsuperscript{12} The notion of Sebastiano’s “slowing down,” freezing or eliminating narrative has been pointed out by several scholars with respect to most of his works, without, however, offering any kind of account of this unusual pictorial strategy. See Strinati “Notturno,” 15-19; Hirst, \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 60 and 135; Stefania Pasti, “Sebastiano’s Influence on Post-Council Figurative Production,” in \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 1485-1547, 61-2. Rather than speak of “narrative,” which the abovementioned scholars tend to conflate with the idea of implied motion, I prefer to use the term “movement” since it more accurately reflects the visual properties of the painting. I propose that instead of freezing or eliminating movement, Sebastiano allows both movement and stillness to operate in the work.

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in the broader monastic reform movement at the turn of the century to frame the Pietà’s basis in solitude and meditation.

Sebastiano’s Pietà should be seen as an altarpiece not limited to its role in official liturgical ritual, but as an image also capable of inciting devotion and personal meditation. Altarpieces not only offered a visual frame for the official and external rituals of Mass, but were also able to effect a highly personal and interior experience within the viewer. Klaus Krüger has shown that images both circumscribed what was possible in the beholder’s mind and liberated the play of the imagination by facilitating the creation of individualized interior images. He points to altarpieces like those of Santi di Tito, Moroni, Michele Tosini and Giovanni Battista Crespi as both objects of contemplation and instruments that helped the mind enter a contemplative state, guiding and controlling the religious gaze to aid the viewer in his or her desired union with God. Walter Melion similarly argues for the capacity of images to “cultivate the soul” of the pious viewer by stimulating the soul’s powers of sensation, cognition, and

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13 Van Os sees the altarpiece as a functional category – a type of liturgical image that met the need for a framing backdrop to the Eucharistic ritual during Mass. See H. W. van Os, Sienese Altarpieces, 1215-1460: Form, Content, Function (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1988), 17. Hope rejects liturgical readings of altarpieces where the theology of the Eucharist is emphasized, opting for a more “what you see is what you get” approach. See Charles Hope, “Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons” in Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 536-71. In her review of recent developments in scholarship on the altarpiece, Williamson shows that scholars have begun to question the usefulness of boundaries that are placed between the categories of liturgical and devotional images. She argues that in many cases that side altars and the images associated with them were explicitly secondary altars whose devotional functions for laypeople were as important, if not more important, than liturgical or Eucharistic functions. See Beth Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion” Speculum 79, No. 2 (2004), 343, 361-2, 372. See also Leo Steinberg, Leonardo’s Incessant Last Supper (New York: Zone Books, 2001) who offers a reading of Leonardo’s Last Supper that simultaneously allows for both a Eucharistic and a biblical narrative dimension to the fresco.

transformation. The idea of the soul as a mediator between God and man, heaven and earth, spiritual and temporal experience strongly resonates with Sebastiano’s Pietà, which visually and externally constructs the interior experience of the pious beholder.

This chapter investigates the Pietà in context of Augustinian monastic reform currents that emerged broadly in Italy, and specifically in Viterbo in the circle of Botoni and Giles of Viterbo, at the beginning of the 16th-century. Giles can be seen as a direct precursor to the Evangelical movement that spread over Italy in the 1530s and 40s in an effort of internal self-reform separate from the Protestant Reformation. His Christocentric piety, his focus on interior renewal, and his search for a simplified and more individual spirituality became a model for later reformers. Giles’ program of reform was based on the interiorization of religious life, as well as a greater emphasis on prayer and meditation in solitude. Looking beyond this first important parallel between Sebastiano’s painting and Giles’ reform, one can see a profound commitment in Giles’ sermons, theological writing, and letters to the use of a highly figurative language to convey divine truths. Like his former mentor Marsilio Ficino, Giles makes use of metaphor to infuse scholastic arguments with the elegance of ancient and modern poetry. He was invested in the idea of a “poetic theology.” This can be best observed

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17 For a discussion of Evangelical values, see ibid., 520.
18 Contemporaries noted his elegant speech to convey ideas to his audience. Paolo Cortesi said of Giles’ style of oratory: “Who else among the multitudes seems so uniquely born to persuade, to win over the minds of the Italians, whose speech is so seasoned with the salt of literary elegance, so that all the sap of content is present in the supreme harmony of his words, and it flows so gently and rhythmically with the pitch and variety of his voice that one seems to hear sounds like that of a plucked lute?” Cited in Ingrid Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: The Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 145.
in his unpublished Eclogues, which combine the imagery of pastoral lyric with Christian narratives like the Birth and the Resurrection of Christ, and in his public sermons, delivered in Rome in the years 1511-13 that Sebastiano was residing there. Moreover Giles’ sermons and Commentary vividly call to mind Augustine’s reflection on man’s fallen existence within time, which is contrasted to God’s eternity and atemporality. By doing so, Giles reflects on the process by which the soul comes to know and understand God.

In asking whether a connection between the rhetorical language of theologian and artist existed, I wish to focus on the sermons Giles delivered in Rome, in the years that span from Sebastiano’s arrival in Rome to the commission of the Pietà. The connection between Giles and Sebastiano is both contextual and geographic. Giles had been in Rome when Sebastiano arrived in 1511, giving public sermons that passionately called for urgent reform – particularly within the individual Christian. He is best known for the statement, “Man is to be changed by the sacred, not the sacred by man.” Sebastiano very likely heard these sermons and, more importantly, became an active witness to the general atmosphere of change and reform in Rome. Giles also intimately knew Sebastiano’s patron for the Viterbo Pietà, Giovanni Botoni; the latter shared Giles’ desire

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19 This is a term I borrow from O’Malley. He discusses Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as wanting to develop a “poetic theology” by finding a single religious truth under pagan myths. According to O’Malley, Giles continued Pico’s endeavor. See ibid., 57.

20 Chapter XVII of Giles’ Commentary on the Sentences of Petrus Lombardus, where Giles imagines a banquet hall that serves nectar and ambrosia, builds on Augustine’s idea in the Confessions of divine, eternal rest and temporal movement towards that goal. For a discussion of this, see Daniel Nodels, Giles of Viterbo: The Commentary on the Sentences of Petrus Lombardus (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 11. For Giles’ sermons that evoke Augustine’s conception of man, God and movement towards eternal rest, see his “Letter to Antonio Zoccoli and the Roman people” (1503-8) (written as a public discourse rather than a familiar letter) and “Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II” (1507) in Francis X. Martin, Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo, 1469-1532 (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1992), 203-21 and 222-84, esp. p. 232-36.

21 Giles makes the statement in his “Inaugural Oration of the Fifth Lateran Council” (1512). See Martin, Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar, 286.
for religious renewal. Giles and Botoni corresponded through letters in an effort to bring Augustinian reform to Viterbo by affiliating the Viterbo monastery with the Augustinian Order in Lecceto. A letter from Giles that dates to May 7, 1502 responds to Botoni’s request to revive the monastery and incites Botoni to help him implement this.22 About two months later, on June 20, 1502, Botoni appealed to the city council for their approval to incorporate the Augustinians in Viterbo with the Order in Lecceto.23 Thus, Sebastiano was well aware of and, as I will argue, interested in the call for individual and Church reform, for monastic solitude as a way to renew one’s personal relationship with God, and for metaphor as the medium for conveying this renewed relationship to the divine.

The sermon that Giles delivered at St. Peter’s Basilica in 1507 and the two sermons he gave at the Lateran Basilica and at S. Maria del Popolo in 1512 during Sebastiano’s stay in Rome employ imagery of tempests and violent weather, and repeatedly use darkness as a metaphor for catastrophe, turmoil, and ignorance, and light as a metaphor for God, restoration and hope. His investment in changeable natural phenomena as a metaphor for the soul’s own instability and ultimate ascent to unite with God reveals a great deal about how Giles thought of individual reformation as a process of interior transformation.

In this chapter, I ask how Sebastiano’s Viterbo Pietà might be taken as a response to Giles’ use of metaphorical language to convey his call for individual reform. I argue that Sebastiano was greatly invested in the metaphorical potential of painting. His representation of Christ is metaphorical rather than literal because it does not claim to be an exact, mimetic portrayal of Christ within the narrative of the Passion. Instead, his figure

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22 Cited in ibid., 348.
23 See ibid., 25 and 35, no. 106.
of Christ is like idealized classical sculpture – bloodless, elegant, still, and abstracted – which Sebastiano uses to convey the idea of rest and eternity. In fact, the citation of sculpture becomes important for Sebastiano in creating a new kind of modern devotional painting, one that has a “longer memory” because its models come from older artistic traditions and that mirrors the sense of eternal looking and meditation before the altarpiece.

Moreover, Sebastiano’s Pietà situates the Virgin and Christ in a landscape that has little to do with the setting of the Passion. In this chapter, I will argue that the nocturnal landscape is nuanced by turbulent weather effects and changeable light and darkness as a figure for the devotee’s movement of contemplative thought seeking to find rest in divine eternity. The Pietà employs a type of imagery and figurative thinking comparable to that found in Giles’ sermons, and thus visualizes and mirrors the “movement of the soul” by which the faithful strives to ascend to God’s state of rest. I argue that Sebastiano’s use of metaphor parallels Giles’ investment in a figurative Christian language. Thus, Sebastiano turns away from the historical Passion, and instead concentrates on the Virgin’s solitude and interior mental state, which in turn mirrors the subjective, meditative experience of the viewer. The painting as a whole becomes a meditation on interior transformation effected by contemplation of the divine.

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25 For a discussion on the role images played in conditioning the way viewers visualized the divine and in actively constructing their relationship to God, see Krüger, “Authenticity and Fiction,” 43, 60, 66-8. See also Melion, “Introduction: Meditative Images,” 1-36 for a discussion of images’ capacity to “cultivate the soul” of the pious viewer.
The chapter opens, however, by first considering what is known about the commission of the Pietà and the circumstances under which it was viewed. It also begins by examining the role that Michelangelo’s Albertina drawing played in Sebastiano’s conception of the work and argues for a new way of conceiving Sebastiano’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings.

2.1 The Commission and Viewing Circumstances

The Pietà was commissioned for the altar of Giovanni Botoni’s funerary family chapel in the left transept of San Francesco alla Rocca, Viterbo (Figure 154). Botoni’s will of September 6, 1528 documents his desire to be buried in the chapel in the event of his dying outside Rome. The finely carved tufa frame for the panel still survives, though it has been damaged in an aerial bombardment in 1944, and bears Botoni’s inscription: “Ioannes Botonus Cameræ Apostolicae Clericvs Singulari Erga Domum Suam Charitate.” No contract for the commission survives, but a notarial document shows that in May of 1516 Botoni’s procurator was making provisions for altar cloths, candlesticks, and other sacred furnishings for the celebration of mass in the recently-erected family chapel – built by Giovanni Botoni himself. Hirst suggests that

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26 Archivio di Stato, Rome, Collegio Notai Capitolini, Notaio Stefano de Ammannis, vol. 79, 6.9.1528, Testamentum d. Johannis Botonti de Viterbio Camere Apostoliche Chiericus, cc. 235 verso – 240 recto: 236 recto. Giovanni Botoni desired to be buried in “ecclesiam Sancti Francisci Viterbium in sepulcro paterno in capella pietatis pro ipsum testatore constituta,” that is, the chapel that he himself had built. A family tomb, either in the floor or the wall, existed already long prior to the construction of the chapel as evidenced by an unpublished document dating to September 30, 1511, in which Francesco Botoni expresses his desire to be buried in the tomb of his ancestors in the Church of San Francesco and nominates his brother Giovanni Botoni (patron of Sebastiano’s panel) executor of his will. See Archivio di Stato di Viterbo, Fondo Notarile, Notaio Napoleone di Ser Angelo, prot. 1603, 30.9.1511, Testamentum Federicus quondam Francisci de Botontus de Viterbo, c. 149: “Item reliquiam corporis sui sepolturam in ecclesia S. Francisci de Viterbo reliquit sepulcro suorum antiquorum parentum.” Both of the abovementioned documents are cited in Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 80, 86 no. 94 and 86 no. 97.

27 For the notarial document, see Archivio di Stato, Viterbo, Notaio N. di Ser Angelo, vol. vi, cc. 134 verso -135 verso. Cited in Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 44 no.10.
Sebastiano’s work was installed in its stone frame by this date.\textsuperscript{28} Another document records the construction of a singing gallery or “coro pensile” on the opposite transept wall, which Botoni had built in 1519.\textsuperscript{29} The brackets which supported the gallery can still be seen today.

It should be noted that what we see today is an altar projecting from the wall, rather than a deep chapel space.\textsuperscript{30} As noted by Valtieri, there is a clearly walled up door opening within the tufa frame, which would have given access to the sacristy, today accessed from the choir (this is the original entrance before access points from the transept were created).\textsuperscript{31} Judging by a document from 1605, which reports the Friars asking the Commune to repair the crumbling sacristy to save “the very beautiful image of the Pietà,” it appears that at a certain point Botoni had to use the sacristy as his own chapel and had furnished the doorway with a portal frame.\textsuperscript{32} The door was then later walled up, creating the altar we see today. Thus, as explicitly mentioned in the document, the painting was located inside the sacristy for some time and it is possible that it was painted with that location in mind.

The Pietà would have likely been installed looking into the left arm of the transept out of the sacristy doorway, facing the singing gallery on the opposite wall. By means of three strong cast shadows Sebastiano registers a light source in his painting.

\textsuperscript{28} Hirst, \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 44.
\textsuperscript{29} Archivio di Stato, Viterbo, Notaio N. di Ser Angelo, 1607, cc.14 recto and verso. Cited in ibid., 44 no.10.
\textsuperscript{30} The archival documents however specifically refer to a “capella” rather than an “altare” when speaking of Botoni’s monetary donations and provisions.
from the upper left and it is possible that he was responding to the window on the left wall of the sacristy facing out into the courtyard. This would be consistent with his subsequent commission in the Borgherini chapel in S. Peter in Montorio, Rome, where he again casts long shadows in his *Flagellation of Christ* that correspond to the light that enters from the front doors of the church.

The provisions for altar cloths, candlesticks, and other sacred furnishings for the celebration of mass further tell us that Sebastiano’s panel was installed above an altar table and formed the focal point of the chapel space. This raises important questions (addressed later on in this chapter) as to the relationship between the painted body of Christ and the Eucharist placed on the altar table before it. The experience of Sebastiano’s painting and its meaning would have been conditioned by its interaction with its physical environment and by the position of the viewer before the work.

Sebastiano’s *Pietà* would have certainly carried complex meaning for its patron and his family. As Humfrey argues, altarpieces were not solely meant to instruct the faithful in the tenets of their faith, nor to act as visual reminders of biblical stories. Rather, they served highly personal and flexible functions, and their meaning was often expressed in implicit ways. Speaking specifically of its sacramental function, Humfrey suggests that an altarpiece that portrayed the body of Christ did not necessarily privilege

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34 This is also consistent with general practices among Renaissance painters, particularly in Venice, who responded to natural light sources in their treatment of pictorial light, treating it as if coming from a real, natural source. See Humfrey, *The Altarpiece In Renaissance Venice*, 53.


the Eucharistic meaning of the subject, but rather, incorporated other, more personalized, ways of relating to the subject – either through intercessory saints or through the assertion of differences between this altarpiece and another. This is to say that Sebastiano’s panel should be considered in context of Giovanni Botoni’s personal interests as patron and Sebastiano’s reflection on the urgent theological concerns that his patron and Giles of Viterbo expressed at this very time, rather than solely for its sacramental function as an altarpiece.

Moreover, in addition to Botoni’s immediate family, the panel’s accessibility to the Friars of the church and possibly the laity is important to consider. The church of San Francesco alla Rocco was the home to the Friars Minor, whose convent was located to the left side of the church. The Ceccolini chapel, constructed in 1429 and located in the same arm of the transept as the Botoni chapel led to the outside (today it is walled off by a glass door), giving access to the parish house, the library, and an art gallery. Another doorway existed, also currently walled up, which led out to an external cloister – located almost directly across the entrance to the sacristy. The portal, in fact, is still conserved and bears the coat of arms of the Botoni, which was added at the beginning of the 1500s, thereby physically and visually connecting entry into the church from the cloister with the visibility of the Pietà through Botoni’s other portal.

The Friars would thus come and go through the transept to access their convent by means of these two doors, thereby passing the sacristy doorway, which allowed a view of the Pietà. Additionally, Alfonso and Jacobelli record that the church’s convent hosted a

37 Ibid., 70-4.
great number of Popes, Emperors, and Governatori del Patrimonio. The Governatoro del Patrimonio would have likely come down through from the entrance of the Ceccolini chapel, accompanied by rectors of the Commune and faction heads, and walk through the transept where the Pietà could be seen. It is significant that Sebastiano’s Pietà was not only viewed by Botoni’s family, but also by the Friars who lived with the painting and by important ecclesiastical visitors to the church. It shows that the spiritual concerns visualized by the painting may have had a more widespread impact than previously thought and, conversely, that the work was likely created with the broader preoccupations of viewers at the opening of the century in mind. This was not a work tucked away in the periphery, as Hirst would have it, but rather an image that was seen by visitors from city centers and intimately known by the Friars who lived with it.

Finally, there is some indication that the laity likewise had limited visual access to the Pietà. The Apostolic Visit of 1583 records the following of S. Francesco alla Rocca:

The old choir in the walls of the church stands open on all sides and in it many lay people sit. However, another choir in which the Friars recite divine offices is located on the right side of the main altar. It has seats made of old wood. […] It is closed on all sides and in it no laity sit. It has an organ, and it is resonated on festival days.


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42 Archivio Vaticano, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Ap., 108, f. 86 r and v. I would like to thank Shana O’Connell for her patient help with translating the Latin.
Angelone, Nicolai and Parasassi corroborate that a pulpit stood on the right angle of the church, erected in 1429, from which the Friars would preach.\textsuperscript{43} It thus appears that the left side of the church had a space designated for the laity, where they could possibly get a glimpse of Sebastiano’s painting in their comings and goings – further attesting to the visibility of the work.

### 2.2 The Albertina Drawing and Michelangelo’s Role in the Viterbo Pietà

Before moving on, it is first necessary to address the role of Michelangelo in the invention of the painting’s design, a controversial point given that only a drawing at the Albertina (Figure 74) of the Virgin’s clasped hands and torso remains of the full cartoon that Vasari claims to have existed.\textsuperscript{44} By examining Vasari’s claim, Michelangelo’s typical pattern in the kinds of drawings he gave to his collaborators (Pontormo, Marcello Venusti, and other drawings for Sebastiano), and the evidence of Sebastiano’s painting it is reasonable to conclude that Michelangelo was not the designer of the entire painting. Rather, he likely gave to Sebastiano only a drawing of the figure of the Virgin. The rest was Sebastiano’s invention. I will also argue that neither Michelangelo’s sculptural Pietà (Figure 148) in St. Peter’s nor Niccolò dell’Arca’s Lamentation over Christ (Figure 155) were the models for this painting as is often suggested by scholars. The mood of the painting is much closer to that of the painted Northern Pietà tradition, with which Sebastiano would have been familiar; although here too, he departs in significant ways from the canonical format.

The only evidence in favor of the existence a cartoon by Michelangelo is Vasari’s assertion in the Vita of Sebastiano that Michelangelo provided Sebastiano with a full

\textsuperscript{43} Elisa Angelone, Gilda Nicolai, and Daniela Parasassi, *Le antiche chiese della Tuscia Romana: Quindici secoli di storia e di fede nelle diocesi dell’alto lazio* (Viterbo: Sette Citta, 2009), 223.

\textsuperscript{44} Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 568 and Chapter 2, no.45.
cartoon for the painting: “[the work] was finished with great diligence by Sebastiano, who executed the dark and very praiseworthy landscape; the invention however and the cartoon were Michelangelo’s” (“l’opera] fu con molta diligenza finito da Sebastiano, che vi fece un paese tenebroso molto lodato, l’invenzione però ed il cartone fu di Michelangelo [...]”\(^45\) No physical evidence remains to corroborate Vasari’s claim. A number of sketches by Michelangelo have been put forth as candidates for what parts of the cartoon may have looked like, or alternatively, as modelli for Sebastiano’s direct use in creating his own composition.\(^46\) The figure of the Virgin has been more fully accepted as Michelangelo’s invention, in great part due to the existence of Michelangelo’s Albertina drawing of a nude male torso surrounded by a series of clasped hand studies, which bears a clear resemblance to the torso of Sebastiano’s Virgin.\(^47\) On the recto of the Albertina sheet is a complete drawing of an ignudo, dating to Michelangelo’s work on the Sistine ceiling, which also recalls the S-shaped pose of the Virgin. Conversely, scholars are divided as to whether the figure of Christ is Michelangelo’s or Sebastiano’s. Alessi suggests that Michelangelo was inspired by Niccolò’s Lamentation over the Dead Christ in S. Maria della Vita, Bologna which he would have seen in 1494 during his visit to Bologna (Figure 155).\(^48\) He describes the feminine sensuality of Christ as like that of a Venetian Venus and attributes the design to Sebastiano, though ultimately he believes the Christ to be Michelangelo’s idea.\(^49\) Other scholars, however, argue that the Christ is

\(^{45}\) Vasari, Le Vite, V, 568.
\(^{47}\) See, for example, ibid., 33-5 and Barbieri “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 60.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 47.
explicitly and intentionally un-Michelangelesque, especially when compared to the Virgin, and thus Sebastiano’s invention.\(^\text{50}\)

I agree with scholarly consensus in crediting the Virgin to Michelangelo. In fact, her form strongly recalls Michelangelo’s later sculpture of Rachel (Figure 156) for the Julius II tomb – a figure that was conceived through drawings during the years of Sebastiano’s commission.\(^\text{51}\) It also resonates with Michelangelo’s other earlier serpentine figures such as the Madonna of the Doni Tondo (Figure 157). Most importantly, the Albertina drawing (Figure 74) constitutes hard evidence of Michelangelo’s involvement in the figure’s creation.

Vasari’s claim, however, is cast in doubt by his overall characterization of Sebastiano in his Vita of the artist. It was Michelangelo, according to Vasari, who “took [Sebastiano] under his protection” and assisted him in design in order to rival the coloring and grace of Raphael.\(^\text{52}\) And, according to this account, it was largely because of Michelangelo’s designs that Sebastiano succeeded in Rome. Vasari takes every opportunity to highlight the superiority of Michelangelo’s drawing over Sebastiano’s and the visibility of his contribution to Sebastiano’s work: “Nor must I omit to tell that many believe not only that Michelangelo made the small design for this work [the Borgherini Flagellation], but also that the above-mentioned Christ who is being scourged at the Column was outlined by him, for there is a vast difference between the excellence of this

\(^{50}\) Claudio Strinati, “Notturno,” in Notturno Sublime, 19.

\(^{51}\) Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 60; Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 45 and see Plate 61 for a detail of Michelangelo’s drawing (now at the Uffizi) that Hirst identifies as a figure that Michelangelo was planning in the summer of 1513 for the tomb of Julius II.

\(^{52}\) Vasari, Le Vite, V, 568. “Destatosi dunque l’animo di Michelangelo verso Sebastiano, perchè molto gli piaceva il colorito e la grazia di lui, lo prese in protezione; pensando che se egli usasse l’aiuto del disegno in Sebastiano, si potrebbe con questo mezzo, senza che egli operasse, battere coloro che avevano si fatta opinione, et egli sotto ombra di terzo giudicare quale di loro fusse meglio.”
figure and that of the others.”53 This is another passage where we should pause to suspect Vasari’s claim to be an over-exaggeration of Michelangelo’s personal involvement in the final work. Correspondence between Michelangelo and Sellaio informs us that in the Fall of 1516 Sebastiano was preparing a cartoon for the central mural and that his preparation for this included modeling a small-scale clay model of Christ.54 Given this knowledge, the extra preparations that Sebastiano undertook to execute the figure of Christ, and – most importantly – the fact that Michelangelo was in Florence during the years of 1516-24, it is highly unlikely that he had any direct involvement in the outlining of the figures on the wall of the Borgherini chapel. Thus, Vasari’s bias against Sebastiano as an artist who needed Michelangelo for his success in Rome suggests that Vasari’s claim regarding the existence of a cartoon by Michelangelo for the Viterbo Pietà should be cast in doubt.

Instead, the evidence points to his contribution in the form of a drawing, now seemingly lost, of a full and likely male figure that Sebastiano then adopted for the figure of the Virgin.

Finally, rather than attributing the figure of Christ to Michelangelo, as some scholars have done, and explaining away its non-Michelangelesque style by recourse to Niccolò dell’Arca’s sculptural composition, I propose a less circuitous explanation.55 The reason the figure of Christ looks different from the Virgin, which scholars agree was

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53 Ibid., 569. “Nè tacerò che molti credono, Michelangelo acere non solo fatto il piccol disegno di quest’opera, ma che il Cristo detto che è battuto alla colonna fusse contornato da lui, per essere grandissima differenza fra la bontà di questa e quella dell’altre figure [...]”

54 In a letter dated to October 11, 1516, Sellaio reports to Michelangelo that “Sebastiano has started the cartoon and is in the spirit of doing great things, and I believe it. He made a figure of clay for Christ and has great spirit. Soon we will see.” “Bastiano à chominciato el chartone ed è d’animo di fare chose grande, e io lo chredo. À fatto una fighurinadi terra per Christo e à grandissimo animo. Presto si vedrà.” Barocchi and Ristori, Il Carteggio, I, 203.

55 The argument that Michelangelo invented the figure of Christ by recalling his trip to Bologna in 1494, where he saw dell’Arca’s work, has been made by Alessi. See Alessi, “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 48.
Michelangelo’s invention, is because it was not designed by Michelangelo, but by Sebastiano. In support of this claim is Sebastiano’s pencil study of the Dead Christ (Figure 158), dated to before 1516, during the concluding years of his Viterbo commission and the beginning of his St. Petersburg Lamentation; the latter painting, in fact, relies on this drawing for the figure of Christ. Sebastiano explores the idea of a sleeping figure even earlier in his painting Death of Adonis (1512-13) (Figure 159). The reclining Adonis is based on another Sebastiano drawing, titled Study of a Putto and Venus (c.1511) (Figure 160), while the tilted-back head and orientation of both arms anticipate the Christ in the Viterbo Pietà. Thus, there is good evidence to believe that the sleeping/dead figure of Christ is Sebastiano’s own and has precedents in his earlier work, not to mention that it continues to appear in his later work as well.

It follows that I disagree with Alessi in that the picture was conceived as “a pictorial companion to its sculptural equivalent,” that is Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà, “but with significant changes.”56 Aside from the subject itself, nothing in the painting recalls the sculpture: the aged and masculine Virgin with arms raised in prayer, the rigid Christ on the ground, the absence of physical contact between them, and of course, the atmospheric landscape are all unique to Sebastiano’s work.

This brings me to two important questions: how does Sebastiano use Michelangelo’s figural drawings, and is there meaning behind his bold assertion of a nocturnal, Venetian landscape as the setting for these two figures? First, I propose that Sebastiano works by piecing together figures and that this is in accord with his combinatory pictorial aesthetic and dates back to his collaborative experiences in

56 Ibid., 46.
Venice. The suggestion of a pictorial graft, where figures overlap and seemingly share bodies, appears in the three young women of the S. Giovanni Crisostomo Altarpiece (Figure 5). This way of working – of building on an existing invention and adding to it – dates back to his work with Giorgione and Titian. The sitting young man in Giorgione’s *Three Philosophers* (1505-9) (Figure 87), for example, is thought to be by Sebastiano.

Second, it is notable that Sebastiano turns to landscape backgrounds only in Rome and even evokes the Venetian city facade in the background of the *Death of Adonis* (Figure 159), while in Venice he consistently focuses on architectural settings. Without a doubt, he is summoning and declaring his Venetian allegiance. This interest in Roman figures set in Venetian landscapes is played out over and over in Venetian prints that transplant Michelangelo’s and Raphael’s heroic nudes into landscapes and other seemingly unrelated settings. Michel Hochmann cites many instances of this: Agostino Veneziano’s print *Two Men Near a Cemetery*, Paris, BNF (Figure 80) takes two figures from Raphael’s *School of Athens* (Figure 81) and inserts them into a landscape inspired by his other print *Diogenes*, 1515 (Figure 82), which itself transplants Michelangelo’s Sistine Noah (Figure 83) into a landscape. Likewise, Ugo da Carpi engraved the *Penitent St. Jerome* (Figure 161) after Titian’s design and brought the engraving to Rome around 1517 where artists like Raphael could see the open possibilities of the Venetian

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57 Marcantonio Michiel mentions *The Three Philosophers* as a work that was started by Giorgione and completed by Sebastiano. This was, in fact, a common way of working in Venice judging by Michiel’s other citations of collaborative work, such as Titian finishing Giorgione’s *Dresden Venus*. See *The Anonimo; notes on pictures and works of art in Italy made by an anonymous writer in the sixteenth century*, trans. Paolo Mussi, ed. George C. Williamson (New York, B. Blom 1969), 102 and 106. On composite painting practice among these artists, see also Stephen J. Campbell, “Naturalism and the Venetian "Poesia": Grafting, Metaphor, and Embodiment in Giorgione, Titian, and the Campagnolas” in *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, 115-20.

58 Hochmann, *Venise et Rome*, 169-171
style: a Roman-esque figure in *contrapposto* set in a Venetian landscape and rendered in painterly, non-linear hatching.  

Where I strongly disagree with Hochmann is in his final assessment of the nature of Sebastiano’s collaboration with Michelangelo: “the Farnesina lunettes prove that [Sebastiano] was ill at ease in the representation of the human figure at the moment of his arrival to Rome. In looking to adopt or to transcribe Michelangelo’s designs, Sebastiano probably thus felt convinced in the need to submit himself to a tradition which he considered superior to his native one.” Sebastiano clearly did not renounce his Venetian roots; instead he asserted them with even more virtuosity and confidence upon his arrival to Rome. Moreover, Hochmann describes Sebastiano’s project as a type of “eclecticism in the form of collage,” (“un éclectisme sous forme de collage”) like the experiments of Agostino Veneziano. My contention with this claim is that it completely misses what is at the heart of Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaborative project – that an “eclectic mélange” of the Roman and Venetian schools is precisely what their work is not.

It must be stressed that Sebastiano’s Viterbo Pietà and his later collaborative works differ markedly from the examples cited by Hochmann. The difference lies in how Sebastiano uses his sculptural, Roman prototypes and what he does to them. The engravings, by means of what Hochmann terms collage, transplant renowned and recognizable figures into unexpected environments. The displacement creates dissonance

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59 Ibid., 169-171.
61 Hochmann, *Venise et Rome*, 185.
and exciting, new combinations that play with multiple identities (Noah-Diogenes-School of Athens philosophers). Instead, Sebastiano takes his figure of the Virgin not from large, public works like the School of Athens or the Sistine ceiling, but from small, intimate, and fragmented sketches that he received from Michelangelo by post. Thus, Sebastiano’s project is of a much more private nature than the kinds of borrowings Hochmann describes and does not rely on viewers’ prior knowledge of recognizable Roman works to create meaning.

What is most notable about Sebastiano’s initial years in Rome is the change in execution and use of sources from his earliest Roman works to the Viterbo Pietà, executed in the years 1513-16. Sebastiano begins by emulating massive Roman sculpture and Michelangelo’s bodies in the Sistine ceiling without ever reproducing any one exactly. His Polyphemus (Figure 162), for example, evokes the ignudi as a group (Figure 163), as if assembling their postures and limbs together into a single figure. Sebastiano’s Lille drawing of Polyphemus (Figure 164), the only one that survives for this commission, demonstrates how the artist assimilates the broad torsos, profiled heads, wild curling hair, and expressive hands of the ignudi through a highly loose hatching technique. Similarly, his Madonna and Child at the Fitzwilliam Museum (Figure 165) models the Christ child on the Vatican statue of Hercules reclining (Figure 166), while filtering it through his own drawing. Sebastiano’s Milan drawing of Hercules (Figure 167) captures the statue in crepuscular lighting when it stood on the Quirinal Hill, as pointed out by Hirst, and is more interested in the way the form curves and disappears into darkness than in reproducing it exactly. The Christ child retains the heroic, adult body – signaling his ties to Roman antiquity and perhaps a recollection of Michelangelo’s

62 Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 38.
Sistine Adam – and transfers the interest in night-time illumination to the atmospheric landscape around him. These experiments with antique sculpture and Michelangelo’s heroic bodies (associated by contemporaries with classical sculpture), which Sebastiano transforms into explicitly Venetian works by means of drawing, demonstrate Sebastiano’s desire to digest Rome’s statuary into painting.63

Sebastiano’s interest in Michelangelo’s sculptural bodies and the antiquities of Rome should be seen as a continuation of his interests while working in Venice. The initial results, however, feel pedantic and perhaps a little too obvious. The Polyphemus appears stiff and the Christ child oddly muscular and different from the Titianesque-Giorgionesque style of the Virgin. In the Pietà, however, Sebastiano has changed course and done something new: he has assimilated the aesthetic of Roman statuary through the direct use of Michelangelo’s private drawings, rather than his own, which were made after public works. Yet, by establishing greater proximity to the hand of Michelangelo, Sebastiano paradoxically attains more distance from his prototype: male becomes female, young becomes old, profane becomes sacred, and a nude becomes a clothed figure. As Nagel suggests, Michelangelo’s ignudi came to be seen as detachable figures and signifiers of artistry.64 Their adaptability heightened their double-life as site specific parts of Michelangelo’s program and as mobile, virtual figures. Sebastiano’s Virgin is created out of a young, male ignudo type, yet the latter is made nearly unrecognizable. Thus,

63 Hirst calls this Sebastiano’s “Romanization” period. My intention is to nuance Hirst’s concept of Sebastiano’s Romanization, in which he ultimately sees Sebastiano’s “struggle in front of insistent, inescapable prototype.” While I firmly agree with the broader problem that Hirst proposes was in Sebastiano’s mind – how to conquer and assimilate Rome and Michelangelo – I disagree with the usefulness of the term. Romanization, as Hirst conceives it, implies a kind of fluid, tension-free transference of style from Rome’s powerful models to Sebastiano’s receptive and passive temperament. See Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 39.
while patrons commissioned Sebastiano with the expectation that his work would somehow bear Michelangelo’s mark, the recognition of Michelangelo’s hand would not have depended on citation of his iconic works. Sebastiano’s project lies in giving Michelangelo’s privately-produced, single figures without context a place in painting with a pictorial logic very different from Michelangelo’s.

It follows that in this chapter I will lay emphasis on this pictorial logic and on the independence of Sebastiano’s visual thinking. I will speak of the Viterbo Pietà as Sebastiano’s work, rather than Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s, because it was ultimately his invention that enacted the transformation of drawing to painting and because the final product builds significantly (both in terms of color and composition) on what Michelangelo provided him. Thus, I want to shift the focus to Sebastiano’s own visual intelligence, his active rather than passive use of Michelangelo’s skills, instead of the other way around. It was Sebastiano, I argue, who took advantage of what Michelangelo’s drawings could offer him. He is notably the first of many collaborators that Michelangelo would take on and set the stage for the demand among patrons for such novel collaborative endeavors.65

To date, scholars have placed Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration in terms of the Vasarian competition between colorito and disegno. They see the artists answering the call to reconcile the opposing stylistic schools of Venice and

65 His other work partners included Pontormo, Marcello Venusti, and Daniele da Volterra. On these collaborations, see Agosti et al., Michelangelo, amici e maestranze. On the new demand for such joint works, see Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 42 who discusses Sebastiano’s Hermitage Lamentation as a response to the demand created by the Viterbo Pietà and cites Fra Gianpietro Caravaggio’s request for a Bologna altarpiece that points to a new pattern of commission and patronal expectation. Hirst also discusses Sebastiano’s Flagellation and Raising of Lazarus as works that were ordered with the expectation of Michelangelo’s involvement in the design. In addition to this, Vasari, in the Life of Pontormo, praises Pontormo’s Noli me Tangere and Venus and Cupid, made in collaboration with Michelangelo, and describes three patrons’ intent to possess these joint works after seeing the results. See Vasari, Le Vite, VI, 276-7 and no.88 of this dissertation.
Florence/Rome. At its worst, this interpretation places Sebastiano in the role of mere colorist and a pawn to Michelangelo’s intent to outcompete Raphael in both color and design. At its best, it does not push the discussion beyond the parsing out of the division of labor between the two artists and the idea of stylistic reconciliation. In both cases, I believe that this approach is mistaken because it is anachronistic. It imposes a set of issues on the artists from the outside, from Vasari and Dolce’s theoretical discourses, which date later to mid-century rather than to Sebastiano’s own time. I argue that the colorito/disegno debate was not the debate that Sebastiano saw himself participating in when he moved to Rome and when he chose to enter into collaboration with Michelangelo. A close reading of Sebastiano’s work reveals a very different set of preoccupations, ones that take the fragment as a source of inspiration and the private sketch as the origin of invention for a public work.

Moreover, by inserting Sebastiano into the colorito/disegno debate, the notion of artistic dissonance, rivalry, and single-authorship style become the overriding terms in which Sebastiano’s work is discussed. Rather than seeing Sebastiano, Michelangelo and Raphael as three rivals competing for primacy in Rome or seeing Sebastiano and Michelangelo as possessing styles that needed to be reconciled into one single, unified manner, this dissertation proposes a new way of conceptualizing these artistic interactions. The abovementioned artists had recourse to a broad range of pictorial invention in order to generate new ideas and forms. In this chapter, I stress the importance of considering small, incomplete drawings as powerful sources of creativity for artists. Rather than seeing them as crutches for an artist unable to invent himself, or alternatively, as already fully-complete works that Michelangelo wanted to have
executed, these intimate exchanges of private works of draughtsmanship should be regarded as two-way exchanges of ideas that generated the kinds of paintings that neither Sebastiano nor Michelangelo would have produced on their own.

2.3 Proximity, Distance, and God’s Accessibility

Scholarship on the Venetian and Roman altarpiece tradition commonly traces a neat trajectory of development in which the altar image is seen as casting aside its archaic, iconic format in favor of the modern narrative altarpiece. Sebastiano’s Viterbo altarpiece, the Pietà, challenges this kind of teleological account. By examining the ways in which painters visualized God incarnate at the turn of the century, this section reveals the novelty of Sebastiano’s pictorial project – specifically, how Sebastiano differs from his contemporaries in his pictorial and theological concerns when representing Christ. I argue that his Viterbo Pietà departs from traditional representations in order to explore the theological implications of portraying Christ’s body for the beholder in the present. The painting’s ambiguous and disjunctive space indicates that Sebastiano was innovatively thinking through issues of proximity and distance between the viewer and God.

Peter Humfrey, in The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, points to the altarpiece as the devotional image par excellence: the altarpiece raises questions about the legitimacy of images in Christian worship and probing the theological justification of images.66 Humfrey outlines a trajectory of development that sees the emergence of narrative in the Cinquecento altarpiece as a new, modern element that stands at fundamental tension with the traditional demands of the iconic, contemplative dimension of the altarpiece. This

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trajectory, thus, traces the “conflicting demands of drama and symbol.” According to Rosand, iconicity is seen as traditional, whereas narrative is a liberating force.

But was this really the trajectory in the development of the altarpiece? Does Sebastiano’s work fit into this kind of account or challenge it? Notably, both accounts neglect to take into consideration the numerous narrative altarpieces that existed in both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – for instance, Bartolo di Fredi’s *Adoration of the Magi* (c.1375-85) for the Cathedral of Siena and Ghirlandaio’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1483-5) for the Sasseti Chapel – or the so-called iconic altarpieces that continued to be produced in the 16th century, such as the Castelfranco Altarpiece (c.1503) by Giorgione or Bellini’s monumental *sacra conversazione*. The simultaneous availability of both modes to painters emerges as a more accurate picture of the Renaissance altarpiece than the notion of an evolution from one mode to the other.

It follows that I see the pictorial concerns of the Viterbo *Pietà* as being much more complex than the oft-repeated struggle between iconic and narrative impulses would have it. The formal tensions that arise in the *Pietà* are not the result of a historical dialectic between the old iconic and the new narrative altarpiece, but rather, a consequence of Sebastiano’s sensitive attention to the ways that movement and stillness, present and past, sculpture and painting could simultaneously co-exist in conversation within a painted altarpiece. In this chapter, I argue that Sebastiano explores the spatial,
temporal, and theological continuities between different states of meditation and on the transformations that effect the change from one state to the other. His decision to enter into collaboration with Michelangelo also reveals a concern for the possibilities that dual authorship could offer painting. Sebastiano and Michelangelo employed their diverse artistic backgrounds to bring about this kind of transformative painting that announces its parts and disparities, and holds them in tension with one another.69

Venetian painters were already experimenting with a new kind of altarpiece, one that does not fit neat categories like the contemplative or narrative image and that breaks up traditionally expected compositions. This is evident from the works of Marco Basaiti (Agony in the Garden, 1511 (Figure 168) for the Church of San Giobbe), Titian (Baptism of Christ, c.1514; The Malchiostro Annunciation, c.1519, for the Chapel of Broccardo Malchiostro in the Cathedral of Treviso), and Bellini (Sacred Allegory, c.1500). These altarpieces set the stage for Sebastiano’s pictorial experimentation in Rome; they distribute the figures in unexpected ways, include or implicate figures outside of the painting, and create new points of view and asymmetrical compositions.70 Basaiti’s Agony in the Garden, in particular, had a tremendous impact on Sebastiano before he left for Rome. It was a work that he would have seen installed in the Church of San Giobbe

69 My account of their collaborative works goes against the predominant narrative that describes their desire, even need, to reconcile Venetian colore with Tuscan disegno. For this account see, for example, Goffen, Renaissance Rivals, 230 and 235; Hall, The Sacred Image, 152; Costanza Barbieri, “The competition between Raphael and Michelangelo and Sebastiano’s role in it,” in The Cambridge Companion to Raphael. Yet, reconciliation of these polarities became an interest for artists and art critics only later in mid-century. At the turn of the century, other concerns must have been guiding the artists’ decision to collaborate.

70 Titian’s Malchiostro Annunciation re-orientates the traditional planar composition of the Annunciation, creating a rapidly-receding spatial gap between the Madonna in the foreground and the angel approaching her from behind. Although not an altarpiece, Bellini’s Sacred Allegory (c.1500), Galleria degli Uffizi likewise experiments with composition, dispersing what appears to be a sacra conversazione group and reorienting it to face the viewer laterally. The child seated on the cushion, thought by some scholars to be the Christ Child, has seemingly walked off his mother’s lap. See Anchise Tempesta, Giovanni Bellini (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999), 152.
along with Bellini’s monumental San Giobbe Altarpiece (c.1487) and that would have been of interest to Sebastiano for its treatment of the subject of solitary prayer and its portrayal of the act of reading as private meditation. Specifically, Basaiti’s painting foregrounds the intimate relationship between meditation and the production of mental images, and conversely, the role of the artistic image in facilitating private meditation. Below, I will discuss how Sebastiano’s rethinking of pictorial space and the viewer’s relationship to the body of Christ came out his engagement with this work.

In some ways, the kind of experimentation that we see in northern Italian altarpieces does not appear in works that take up the subject of the Pietà at this time – perhaps because of its origins in a traditional sculptural group, the German *Vesperbild* – marking Sebastiano’s composition as a highly innovative reformulation of the canonical form of the Pietà and, in turn, of the relationship between the viewer and Christ’s dead body. Looking at Sebastiano’s *Pietà* it is notable that very few painted altarpieces depicting the Madonna and the adult Christ in isolation come close to what Sebastiano has done in his work. In Bologna and Ferrara, the *Pietàs* of Ercole de’ Roberti (Liverpool and formerly in S. Domenico), Cosmè Tura (Louvre and Museo Correr), and Amico Aspertini (S. Petronio) focus on the sorrow of the Virgin, heightened by the dark, somber backgrounds, the agitated lines of drapery, and her body, which leans in or echoes that of Christ in *compassio* with his suffering. In Aspertini and Tura’s works (Figure 153 and Figure 150), saints surround the Pietà group and amplify the Virgin’s grief through dramatic gesture and facial expression. Each *Pietà* also underscores the earlier moment of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross by the positioning of his body, the crossing of his legs, his wounds, or, in Ercole’s case, his Crucifixion in the background. Sebastiano’s *Pietà*
departs from this tradition by separating Christ from his mother, who does not grieve over his body but lifts her head and hands in prayer. No crucifixion wounds are visible and Christ’s idealized beauty is emphasized over his human suffering. Moreover, Sebastiano’s Christ lies still and rigid, unlike the animated body of Christ in Tura’s Pietà, Museo Correr, and in his Louvre Pietà and Saints. As Stephen Campbell points out, in Tura’s works, Christ is rendered in a highly agitated, calligraphic line and has an animated facial expression, with head inclined, eyes slightly open, and lips parted, which speaks to his paradoxical body, both dead and still suffering.\textsuperscript{71} Sebastiano replaces this image of Christ’s liminal state between life and death with a body that appears completely motionless and unblemished by pain or suffering. The Bolognese and Ferrarese tradition of the Pietà, based on sculptural prototypes from North of the alps, illuminates what is most novel in Sebastiano’s rendition: the separation of mother and son and the unblemished, static body of Christ.

In Venice, Sebastiano’s closest precedents would have been Giovanni Bellini’s Pietà (Figure 149) and the Dead Christ Supported by Angels (c.1474) (Figure 169), for the sacristy of San Francesco in Rimini. Yet even Bellini’s works do not adequately account for the novel rendering of the Pietà, and specifically of God incarnate, in Sebastiano’s work. Most notably, when Bellini depicts Christ, either in the arms of his mother or those of surrounding angels who hold him up on or behind a parapet, it is never with the same sense of remoteness from his surroundings that one senses in Sebastiano’s work.\textsuperscript{72} Bellini’s Dead Christ Supported by Angels, despite its belonging to a different

\textsuperscript{71} Stephen J. Campbell, Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 76.
\textsuperscript{72} Pächt describes this as Bellini’s investment in the harmonious Mother-Child relationship, which the artist wanted to maintain while satisfying the need for a frontal-facing dialogue with the faithful beholder. See
iconographical type, is a helpful case in point because it calls upon the viewer to meditate on Christ in death – much like the Pietà. Though the original context of this work is unknown, its resemblance to other Venetian images of the dead Christ with angels (both by Bellini and others) that formed the cyma of the altarpiece, suggests that it too might have constituted the top part of the altarpiece made for Carlo Malatesta.73 Jacopo Bellini and assistants’ *Madonna* triptych from the *Carità* (1460-4) and Lorenzo Lotto’s *St. Christina* altarpiece (c.1505-6) in Treviso are crowned with a lunette of the *Dead Christ and Angels*. These altarpieces establish a vertical link between Christ’s death and life, that is, his Eucharistic body offered in the present and his historic body. Bellini’s panel, resting atop an altarpiece, would have likely conveyed the same kind of message – of Christ’s corporeal and Eucharistic presence distilled out of its historical moment – as an altarpiece (like Sebastiano’s) portraying the Pietà would have.

Bellini’s *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* has the young angels gently touch and hold up Christ’s body. The numerous hands on Christ’s body, along with Christ’s own hand resting conspicuously at the bottom edge of the painting where his legs slide off as if into our own space (placing his tomb illusionistically in our world), emphasize the possibility of touch. Our proximity to his body is underscored by the nearness of his blood-stained loincloth and by the angel on the right who stands holding Christ’s arm with both hands and contemplates his wound from above. The association between touch

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73 See Tempestini, *Giovanni Bellini*, 106 for a discussion of the work’s patron. Though the original context of the *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* is unknown, its resemblance to other Venetian images of the dead Christ with angels (both by Bellini and others) that formed the cyma, or top panel, of the altarpiece, suggests that it too might have constituted the top part of the altarpiece made for Carlo Malatesta. Bellini’s Pesaro *Coronation* (c.1475) was crowned with an *Embalming of Christ* (today at the Pinacoteca Vaticana), and Jacopo Bellini and assistants’ *Madonna* triptych from the *Carità* (1460-4) and Lorenzo Lotto’s *St. Christina* altarpiece (c.1505-6) in Treviso are topped by a lunette of the *Dead Christ and Angels*. 

and sight is made emphatically clear. The painting invites us to see and approach Christ so closely that we can almost touch him. However, while Bellini’s Christ is much closer to the picture plane than Sebastiano’s, allowing for the physical and emotional proximity that a “close-up” permits, he remains incorporated into the pictorial illusion. The angels interact with, touch and look at his body. The same is true for Bellini’s Pietà (Figure 149): Mary embraces Christ around his neck and legs, while his own right arm and legs form a tight frame around her draped legs.

In contrast to Bellini’s interest in physical proximity and touch, however, Sebastiano isolates his Christ from the Virgin’s gaze and hold, and places him on a white burial cloth that makes a pristine island of his body. Nothing suggests that his body can be reached and touched by the viewer, though its proximity to the viewer’s space in the lower portion of the painting is highly suggestive of the desire to bridge that distance. The highly paradoxical effects of divine proximity and distance are highly significant in Sebastiano’s work. Sebastiano’s Viterbo Pietà makes explicit Christ’s physicality, yet at the same time, suggests a different kind of relationship to his body, one that is not dependent on physical touch – neither ours nor the Virgin’s – in order to attain

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74 I borrow the term and concept of a “close-up” from Lorenzo Pericolo, “The invisible presence: cut-in, close-up, and off-scene in Antonello da Messina’s Palermo Annunciate.,” *Representations* 107, No.1 (2009): 1-29 and Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: the Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1983), 48, 57-8, 71. Ringbom defines it as a half-length image invented in the 15th century for private devotion, which allows for nearness, immediacy, and stresses subtle emotional relationships over action by showing figures in isolation. He relates the “close-up” to the *Andachtsbilder*, produced either by distilling the main protagonists from a narrative and bringing the action to a standstill to make it suitable for contemplative absorption (i.e. Carrying of the Cross made into Christ Carrying the Cross) or by augmenting a static image, usually an icon, and adding figures and elements to it to make it more emotional (producing the Pieta, Christ Crowned with Thorns, and the Holy Family). For Pericolo, the term has cinematic connotations; it suggests a narrative that contextualizes the portrayed scene as a frozen still and unseen characters that interact with the portrayed figure. In both cases, the viewer is brought near the protagonist, but is still situated on the other side of the painting.
knowledge of God’s divinity. For all the differences between Bellini and Sebastiano, they nonetheless share a mutual and historically-bound concern for how a viewer might approach the image of Christ in an altarpiece. That other contemporaneous images, some of which were familiar to Sebastiano, shared this preoccupation with exploring proximity and distance, corporeal and non-corporeal ways of relating to Christ’s body is evidenced by Titian and Pontormo’s paintings of Noli me Tangere (Figure 170 and Figure 92), as well as Cima da Conegliano and Ludovico Mazzolino’s paintings of the Doubting Thomas (Figure 171 and Figure 172). It is noteworthy that Pontormo’s painting was also made in collaboration with Michelangelo and that all of the aforementioned paintings exhibit an interest in the gesture of touch between Thomas/Mary Magdalene and Christ as the main focal point. I argue that the key to Sebastiano’s work lies in the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century reflection on the kind of accessibility to God-made-man that an altarpiece could offer the faithful.

In this vein, Enrico Parlato rightfully argues that the Viterbo Pietà should be seen in context of contemporary questions pertaining to sacred painting and the altarpiece.

According to Parlato, Michelangelo, was deeply invested in a “reflection on the

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75 Amy Powell has recently argued with respect to Jan Mostaert’s Deposition form the Cross (c.1520) that the burial shroud, pushed up to the picture plane and almost within the viewer’s reach, simultaneously signals Christ’s visibility (it reveals him) and his invisibility. The shroud’s contiguity with the real white cloth covering the altar would have sustained the fantasy of a bodily reception of Christ, while at the same time announcing his disappearance and absence. See Amy Knight Powell, Depositions: Scenes from the late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 216-26.

76 Calvin, in his Institutes (1539), reflects on the way fallen human reason perceives and misperceives God and argues for the inadequacy of the natural knowledge of God – that is, knowledge of God through visible nature. See David C. Steinmetz, “Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God” in Hieko A. Oberman and Frank A. James, Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 154-6. Giles of Viterbo was equally concerned with how man acquires knowledge of religious truth, and whether it was innate to man or attained only through divine grace. This question finds its expression most clearly in his Commentary on Peter Lombard’s Sentences, where Giles draws upon the authority of Augustine, who affirmed that the former was possible. For a discussion of Giles’ reflection on knowledge of God, see John W. O’Malley, Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 22-9.

77 Enrico Parlato “Durata e persistenza della visione nella Pietà di Viterbo” in La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo, 47-8.
Eucharistic corporeality of Christ” and the tradition of the imago pietatis in his London Entombment (Figure 173), and continued to think about the issue of the sacred in art into old age in his late, sculptural Pietàs.78 The collaboration, argues Parlato, should be seen as an exchange of reflections on the subject of devotional painting and the corporeality of Christ. Like Michelangelo, he claims, Sebastiano is interested in the corporeal presence of Christ and emphasizes his volumetric and tactile body through smooth application of oil paint and chiaroscuro, and by his position nearly at the lower edge of the painting.79 Parlato also notes the body’s unusual tonality, which he attributes to an intended effect of livor mortis, an observation he terms worthy of a pathologist of anatomy.80

Parlato is one of the few scholars who draws attention to the importance of investigating the collaboration in terms that go beyond the colorito/disegno debate and the reconciliation of their regional styles: “It is clear, at this point, that the contrast between disegno and colore, between Tuscan and Venetian tradition, which formed the departure point for the discussion of the Pietà, moves away from the binaries of the paragone between two diverse pictorial traditions and leads instead to questions pertaining to sacred painting and to the altarpiece, in which […] Sebastiano had no competitors in the Rome of the second decade of the Cinquecento.”81 It is an important move, one that comes much closer to the concerns that occupied Sebastiano and the culture of the early Cinquecento. Expanding on Parlato’s claim, I propose that it was

78 Ibid., 47. “Dalla tavola londinese […] emerge con chiarezza la riflessione sulla corporeità eucaristica di Cristo, cui viene dato particolare risalto attraverso la posizione verticale del corpo […]”
79 Ibid., 47 and 49.
80 Ibid, 48.
81 Ibid., 47. “È chiaro, a questo punto, che il contrasto tra disegno e colore, tra tradizione toscana e veneta, da cui è partita la discussione sulla Pietà si allontana dai binari del Paragone tra due diverse tradizioni pittoriche e conduce invece a questioni pertinenti alla pittura sacra e alle pale d’altare, nelle quali, con questo straordinario Andachtsbild, Sebastiano non ha concorrenti nella Roma del secondo decennio del Cinquecento.”
Sebastiano’s collaboration and intellectual exchange with Michelangelo that informed his conception of Christ’s body and his framing of our relation to it. Sebastiano’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings reveals a highly novel approach to the role that another artist’s visual intelligence can play in his work.

However, for Parlato, Sebastiano’s engagement with the problem of Christ’s accessibility is signaled by the artist’s evocation of the tactile corporeality of Christ, more asleep than dead, on the burial cloth. While it is true that Christ’s tactile corporeality becomes of principal concern for Sebastiano in his later paintings, starting with his series of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, his Viterbo *Pietà* thinks through the issues of proximity and distance between the viewer and God in a uniquely different way. Specifically, in this painting, Sebastiano creates effects of ambiguous and disjunctive space. The result is a collapse of physical and temporal space – ours and the picture’s, present and past – thus offering a reflection on the distance between divine eternity and man’s temporal existence. Rather than offering the viewer proximity and tactile access to Christ’s body, the work instead visualizes Christ’s distance from the viewer and the effort involved in bridging that gap by means of “eternal looking” which in turn becomes a kind of internalized meditation.

Scholars, in fact, have frequently remarked on the disjunctive quality of the Viterbo *Pietà*. The Virgin and Christ, for example, appear to be executed in somewhat

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82 Parlato “Durata e persistenza della visione nella *Pietà* di Viterbo,” 47.
83 See Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 164 for a description of the Virgin and Christ as opposites from chromatic point of view – her sculptural, petrified color versus his soft, flesh-colored, Venetian *sfumato*. See also Alessi, “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 47 for a discussion of the “conceptual distance” between the figures; Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini “Il processo di elaborazione dell’immagine in Sebastiano del Piombo: la *Pietà* e la *Flagellazione* di Viterbo,” in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo*, 158-165 use radiograph analysis to compare painting and underdrawing. They point to areas that strongly resemble elements in Michelangelo’s work and deem Sebastiano’s attitude towards Michelangelo’s *modello* “extremely respectful, even idolatrous.” Christ’s left hand, for example,
different manners. The former is a figure in dramatic torsion. Her knees point towards the left (towards Christ’s chest), her shoulders and arms twist away to the right, her head turns back in the same direction as her lower body and tilts upwards towards the sky. To adopt this pose oneself is to realize how tense and unnaturally held each part of her body is. Her S-shaped twist recalls the Madonna of Michelangelo’s Doni Tondo (c.1507) (Figure 157). The Virgin’s body is also broad in form, muscular to the point of masculinity, and has warm-hued skin. The skin, bone structure, and musculature of her arms and hands has been carefully and meticulously described.

In contrast to the Virgin, the figure of Christ is slender, rigid and straight especially in his legs, and his skin has a polished, cold-hued, glowing quality about it. One is pressed to find a passage here that matches the naturalism of the Virgin’s hands. Instead, the figure of Christ is characterized by soft, sfumato-like shadowing that creates smooth, undulating gradations throughout his body. The smooth, undisturbed, and unreal quality of his skin is further thrown into relief by the crisp contours of his white loincloth and of the burial cloth, with its many folds and gatherings of material under his arm, hand, and thigh. The cloth bunches under Christ’s right foot and pulls taught; from there, it extends out towards the foreground of the painting, which is dotted by small plants and flowers. The painting gives a strong sense of coming forward towards the viewer, but only here at the bottom of the canvas.

The figure of Christ feels not only close to the foreground, but also incongruous with the rest of the scene. His horizontality and the fact that his toes and hair nearly touch appears isolated and autonomous, and reads like it was translated from a separate study. So do the Virgin’s hands and right elbow and Christ’s left leg and foot. Michel Hochmann, *Venise et Rome 1500-1600: deux écoles de peinture et leurs échanges* (Genève: Droz, 2004), 185 argues that the Pietà is an eclectic collage, where the figures and landscape are not unified but separate.
the edges of the canvas (the cloth actually does touch the edges) puts him somewhere closer to the picture plane than inside the painting. His “outsided-ness” is further suggested by the stillness of his drapery. Unlike the Virgin’s billowing dress and the wind-swept trees, Christ and the white drapery do not seem affected by the wind. Instead, the folds of the latter take on a rippling effect, suggesting a kind of flow, outward from the body of Christ. The overall effect is not unlike what Sebastiano has done in the Hermitage Lamentation (c.1516) (Figure 174), where the white cloth at Christ’s feet seems to fold down as if it is falling off the edge of a table. Though Christ is clearly continuous with the group of mourners around him and is lying on the ground, the painting is ambiguous about where his lower body, particularly his feet, extends to. This ambiguity is further heightened by the trompe l’oeil cartellino just to the left of the hanging triangle of white drapery, which adds to the already startling effect of a vertical wall at the bottom of the canvas rather than a continuation of the ground on which Mary Magdalene kneels.

The sense of Christ’s presence and availability to the viewer is undermined by the dark shadow cast over his face. His three-quarter profile catches the light on his nose, forehead and cheekbone, giving the impression that his dark facial features might be revealed to us if only the light or his head moved slightly.\(^8^4\) Sebastiano’s Venetian works do this too. The face of St. John in the Crisostomo Altarpiece (Figure 5) is similarly cast in shadow and set in profile to the viewer. The figures in the foreground on either side of him appear to step back and turn their bodies so as to lead the viewer’s gaze up the stairs.

\(^8^4\) Titian’s Entombment (1523-6), Louvre enacts a similar veiling of Christ’s face in shadow. For the theological significance of this, the *topos* of veiling and unveiling, and a discussion of Titian’s work in terms of the exegesis of light and nocturne – that is, seeing with the mind’s eye rather than with the corporeal eye – see Paolo Alei, “Obscuratus est sol: Unveiling the Hidden Divinity in Titian’s Louvre Entombment” Venezia Cinquecento XVI, no. 32 (2006): 85-132.
and into the center of the painting. Instead of illuminated clarity, however, one encounters St. John with his front cast in shadow and his head set against a series of dark columns. Likewise, the organ shutters for S. Bartolomeo (Figure 6), in their closed form, have St. Bartholomew and St. Sebastian pose before an archway that leads into a dark abyss. Their heads and contrapposto stances are directed outward, leaving a black, empty gulf of space between them into which the eye is drawn.

To point out Christ’s “outsided-ness,” however, is not to imply that he and the Virgin are unconnected in space. Three cast shadows are visible in the entire painting: under the Virgin’s raised arm, underneath Christ’s chin, running across his chest, and behind the toes of his (proper) right foot. The shadows could not be cast by the faint and dispersed light of the moon; instead, they respond to a more focused light source outside and to the left of the painting. It might have come, for example, from the window on the wall adjacent to the wall on which the Pietà was installed. Thus, both the Virgin and Christ share a space that responds to the world outside the painting. At the same time, the Virgin participates in the world of the painting – its wind, moon and rock upon which she sits.

To sum up what I have noted so far, the figure of Christ is so close to the foreground and unresponsive to the atmospheric effects of the scene that it appears to be not quite in the painting. On the other hand, two cast shadows unite him and the Virgin, and intimate that they both exist in the secular space of the chapel. The Virgin, thus, partakes of both spatial worlds as an intermediary between the “there” and “here.” What could have motivated Sebastiano to create this unusual effect of ambiguous and disjunctive space? Why would he have wanted to make the illusion of the dead Christ
lying at the feet of the Virgin after the Crucifixion less convincing, to make us doubt that he is really there?

One way to answer the first two of these questions is to look at a painting that I will argue acted as a precedent for Sebastiano’s Pietà and that inspired his strange conception of figures in pictorial space. Here I want to propose that Sebastiano saw Marco Basaiti’s Agony in the Garden (1510) (Figure 168) before he left for Rome in 1511, which inspired the novel approach to his subject. Basaiti’s painting was installed in the church of S. Giobbe, where Sebastiano would have easily seen it, along with the work of his master, Giovanni Bellini. If the praying Christ and the sleeping apostle in the Agony are to be taken as Basaiti’s counterparts to Sebastiano’s Virgin and Christ respectively, then, I believe, one can begin to make sense of Sebastiano’s composition. Basaiti stages Christ’s address to his Father as a scene on the other side of an archway. To this side of the arch, stands a group of saints; St. Francis is reading on the left and St. Dominic stands on the other side looking ahead as if lost in meditative thought. The tiled floor, which implies a continuation of the space of the real church, ends abruptly under the arch. The painting suggests that we are looking through the arch onto an imagined

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85 Despite the obvious difference in subject matter, the similarities between the two works are striking: the reclining apostle/Christ lying on barren but foliage-covered ground, dramatically parallel to the picture plane; the tree stump and castle/ruins on the left; bent trees in the background; the praying figure of Christ/the Virgin draped in pure blue; directly above him/her is a lamp/moon with clouds passing behind/in front of it; the pyramidal shape of the sleeping apostles/Virgin and Christ; and the warm, earthy-brown color palette. I am departing from the oft stated opinion that Sebastiano was directly inspired by Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà in this work. While I believe he knew of the sculpture, there is very little evidence of it here aside from the subject matter itself.

86 Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice, 255.

87 To further support the connection between Basaiti’s sleeping Apostle and Sebastiano’s dead Christ is another work, attributed to Basaiti, of the Dead Christ with Two Angels at the Gallerie dell’Accademia (Fig. 19). The work is highly unusual in its composition and close-up of Christ lying rigidly on the ground and alone, aside from the two angels who play with his toes, hair and crown of thorns. That the faces of the praying Christ and the horizontally-oriented Apostle in Basaiti’s Agony in the Garden look nearly identical, like doubles of each other, further suggests that Basaiti intended the Apostle to recall the figure of Christ and that Sebastiano picked up on this subtext.
space, a scene visualized by the inner eye of St. Dominic lost in contemplation and by the reading of St. Francis. The scene is mediated for the viewer through the space and prayer of the saints.

My claim is that Sebastiano visualized Christ as a figure “on this side of the archway,” that he used Basaiti’s novel pictorial composition to think through how he might make it so that his Christ could be shown to exist in our space – within, of course, the limitations of pictorial illusion and without resorting to a relief or sculpture literally outside of the painting. In the process of adapting Basaiti’s idea, Sebastiano removed the archway, for which he had no need, and produced the ambiguity of space under discussion.

2.4 Rethinking the Eucharistic Body of Christ

I now turn to examine the role that knowledge of the Northern Pietà tradition – works like Ercole de’ Roberti’s Pietà predella, Cosmè Tura’s Pietà with Saints, or Bellini’s Pieta – played in Sebastiano’s conception of his Pietà. Sebastiano’s unusual treatment of pictorial space and his placement of Christ in isolation on white drapery on “our” side of the painting raises two important questions: should Sebastiano’s work be seen as an extension of the Eucharistic message that these works denote and is Sebastiano articulating something different about the nature of Christ’s Eucharistic body by singling it out in this way and diverging from canonical representations? To answer these questions, we should turn to paintings of Christ from the Northern Italian tradition.

That the body of Christ in a painted altarpiece could have been understood in Eucharistic terms is evident most explicitly in Girolamo Romanino’s Mass of St. Apollonius (c.1525) (Figure 175), Santa Maria in Calchera, Brescia which aligns on its vertical axis a gold-ground altarpiece of a Pietà with the administering of the Sacrament
before it. That Romanino sought to emphasize the link between the historical suffering of Christ with the taking of the Eucharist in the present, as well as the function of the altarpiece to forge this link, is further underscored by his citation of Vincenzo Civerchio’s *Lamentation over Christ with Saints* (1504) for the gold-ground Pietà and his elimination of Vincenzo’s anachronistic saints. Romanino’s is what Martin Kemp calls a case of one of the “relatively few examples of what may be called self-referential altarpieces”; it demonstrates what an altarpiece does by picturing the liturgical celebration that takes place before it and by visualizing in concrete terms what the Eucharist stands for.  

Romanino’s painting raises important questions for Sebastiano’s panel: Are we to understand the body of Christ in the Viterbo Pietà in similarly Eucharistic terms? Does Romanino’s painting accurately reflect the way Sebastiano’s altarpiece would have functioned for Botoni and other viewers? And how does Christ’s new position at the feet of the Virgin, rather than in her lap, complicate the meaning of the work?

That Sebastiano wanted to allude to the Eucharistic meaning of Christ’s body is suggested both by the landscape and the treatment of Christ’s isolated body. The white moon and faint, red circle in the sky (on the right-hand side) may be taken as allusions to the darkening of the sun and moon during the Crucifixion, as mentioned in Matthew (Mt 24:29-30) and commonly figured in painted Crucifixion scenes. Examples of this are Raphael’s *Mond Crucifixion* (c.1502-3) (Figure 176), made for a side chapel in S. Domenico in Città di Castello, and Perugino’s Monteripido Altarpiece (1503-4) (Figure

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177) for the friars of the Convent of Monteripido in Perugia. These works focus on the Eucharistic significance of Christ’s body – his blood spills out into chalices held by the angels in reference to the wine taken during Mass. Like these Crucifixions, Sebastiano’s Pietà pictures the sun and moon surrounded by clouds and, hence, recalls for its viewer the Eucharistic body of Christ on the cross. Moreover, Sebastiano’s Christ lies on white drapery that recalls the white altar cloth and occupies a space at the bottom of the canvas that would have placed him right above the actual altar table of the chapel. His idealized and unblemished body asks to be compared to the timeless body of Christ in the Eucharist, and, as I argue in the following section, it calls to mind the rendition of Christ on Venetian epitaphios cloths that were placed over the altar on Good Friday, thus heightening its Eucharistic significance.

Yet Sebastiano’s unusual reformulation of the canonical Pietà complicates our reading of Christ as the body present in the Eucharist on the altar table. Rather than establishing a confident affirmation of divine presence in the host, as Romanino’s work does, the painting is a reflection on how one can access God through the host. The painting suggests that Christ’s body is not subject to temporal, material reality, nor that can it be reached from the physical position of the viewer. By means of Christ’s out-of-reach position, not quite within the space of the church, Sebastiano shows his body and divinity to be unavailable to touch and the physical senses.

Sebastiano’s rendition of Christ resonates with reformers’ stance on the Eucharist. They criticized laypeople’s obsession with seeing and touching the host – a corruptible object that was made an idol by the way it was worshipped – and sought to dismantle the
notion that Christ was still bodily present with man.\textsuperscript{89} Artists in Northern Italy were preoccupied with the nature of eucharistic presence, as Romanino’s \textit{Mass of St. Apollonius} has already shown. Just a few years prior, Romanino produced another painting on the subject, \textit{The Miracle of the Eucharist} (c.1522) (Figure 178) for the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament in the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista, Brescia. As Campbell has argued, the work is a reflection on eucharistic presence at a time when reformers were questioning the validity of host miracles and pointing to the cannibalistic implications of the doctrine of real presence.\textsuperscript{90} The visual attention given to the host by the clergy, religious orders, and laity who surround it underscores the tradition of ocular communion, whereby the host is received through sight rather than orally – a belief that the Council of Trent ultimately overruled.\textsuperscript{91} Additionally, a child stands on axis with the Christ Child in the host as if to underscore their nonequivalence and to say that the world

\textsuperscript{89} Erasmus, in his \textit{Praise of Folly} (1511), criticizes laypeople for their obsession with material things through satirical praise by the character Folly: “The Christian religion on the whole seems to have a kinship with some sort of folly, while it has no alliance whatever with wisdom. If you want proofs of this statement, observe first of all how children, old people, women, and fools find pleasure beyond other folk in holy and religious things, and to that end are ever nearer the altars […].” Later Erasmus rephrases this sentiment: “Thus a devout man does [consider the spiritual under the visible], and such is his contemplation. The crowd, on the other hand, believes that the sacrament is no more than coming to the altar, as close as may be, hearing the noise of the words, and watching the whole pageant of ceremonial details […] Wherefore, since there is so great contrariety between the pious and the vulgar, it comes about that each appears to the other to be mad – though in my opinion, to be sure, the word is more correctly applied to the pious than to the others.” Erasmus Desiderius, \textit{The Praise of Folly}, trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 188 and 122. Zwingli published his \textit{Commentary on True and False Religion} in 1525, which includes a section on the Eucharist where he criticizes its abuse by the Church and people’s obsession with seeing and touching it: “For I fear that if there is anywhere pernicious error in the adoration and worship of the one true God, it is in the abuse of the Eucharist […] Now we are all bent upon handling holy things, or having them about us – yea, I will say it plainly, upon making holy by our own merit, forsooth, things that perhaps are not holy […] The result is that we worship with embraces and kisses wood, stones, earth, dust, shoes, vestments, rings, hats, swords, belts, bones, teeth, hair, milk, \textit{bread}, quadras, tablets, \textit{wine}, knives, jars, and anything that pious men have ever handled. And (most foolish thing of all) we think ourselves distinctly blessed if we have got just a look at any such thing. [my italics]” Ulrich Zwingli, \textit{Commentary on True and False Religion}, eds. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1981), 198-99. See also Amy Nelson Burnett, \textit{Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) for a discussion of the Eucharistic debate between Luther, Zwingli, Karlstadt and others.

\textsuperscript{90} Campbell, “\textit{Renaissance Naturalism},” 306.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 306.
of the everyday (and images themselves) can only represent the divine by means of metaphor – whereas the Eucharist is itself the body of Christ. Romanino’s reflection on how the layperson might be able to access the divine and on the relationship between the eucharistic body of Christ and the everyday reality of the viewer resonates with Sebastiano’s own (and different) take on Christ’s body and its relation to the viewer: in his Viterbo Pietà, the figure of Christ is ultimately made unavailable to the senses. Both artists are responding to the same intellectual climate that sparked reflection on the nature of the Eucharist and what it meant for the layperson to attain access to God through it.

That Sebastiano’s Pietà had influence over Roman artists is unlikely due to its location in Viterbo; however, the Borgherini Flagellation (the subject of the following chapter), which continues Sebastiano’s exploration of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, had a great impact on Rome and was imitated by Federico Zuccaro, in the Oratory of the Gonfalone in Rome (1573), Girolamo Muziano, in the Cathedral of Orvieto (1584) and Caravaggio, in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples (1607). The Santa Prassede Flagellation that has recently been attributed to Giulio Romano and a collaborator, and dated to c.1520-1, also clearly shows knowledge of Sebastiano’s Borgherini Flagellation. The attribution and dating, however, are highly questionable and have been contested by Maurizio Calvesi, who more convincingly identifies it as a late sixteenth-century work by the Milanese painter and first master of Caravaggio Simone Peterzano.

Before moving on to a discussion of Sebastiano’s solutions to questions of divine presence, I would like to address his fascination with a viewer’s attentiveness to an image

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93 Maurizio Calvesi, "Caravaggio: i documenti e dell'altro" *Storia dell'Arte* XLIII, no.128 (2011): 31-44.
as a meditative experience. Sebastiano’s interest in stone and citationality, discussed below, should be seen in context of broader attempts at this time to refashion man-made images into something less corruptible when tasked with helping attain and reveal divine truth.

2.5 Painting with a Longer Memory: Citation of Sculpture and the Epitaphios Cloth

I propose that Sebastiano uses the juxtaposition of Michelangelo’s invention (the figure of the Virgin) against his (the figure of Christ) to make a point: the meeting of modern sculpture and icon painting, motion and stillness, and of the *maniera moderna* and the *maniera greca*, in the modern altarpiece. By reaching back to older artistic tradition, Sebastiano’s work shows itself to be painting “with a longer memory.” These citations reveal this to be a painting about the “eternity of looking,” where Sebastiano conceives of painting as perpetual meditation.\(^{94}\)

The Virgin and Christ in Sebastiano’s *Pietà* do not exactly integrate with their setting and assert their separateness from each other. Only by imagining her and Christ at the very forefront of the painting, in a shallow space between our viewing position and the point somewhere behind the tree stump and rock where the landscape begins to quickly recede in depth, can the viewer believably integrate the figures and landscape together. By her monumental presence, the Virgin recalls free-standing sculpture, such as Michelangelo’s Rachel (Figure 156), planned in 1513 but not executed until twenty years later for the Tomb of Julius II, but also his *Moses* (c.1513-15) (Figure 179) and the *Rebellious Slave* (Figure 180), completed right around this time. The citation of

\(^{94}\) I would like to thank Stephen Campbell for his suggestion of both terms. The latter captures the idea of pictorial meditation as an analogue for the internal meditation that transpires within the pious viewer and the end goal of the soul’s stillness when it reaches union with God. See Krüger, “Authenticity and Fiction,” 43, 60, 66-8 for a discussion of images as aids to contemplation. The former conveys the idea that the citation of older models need not be at odds with the modern *maniera* and that the latter can encompass older models without being thought of as “archaizing.”
Michelangelo, an artist practically synonymous with sculpture at this time in Rome, would have signaled to viewers that the altarpiece was incorporating sculpture into its fabric.

The surviving drawing at the Albertina gives us some idea of how Sebastiano adopted the sculptural effect of Michelangelo’s graphic work. On its recto is another drawing by Michelangelo – a preparatory study for an ignudo for the Sistine ceiling (Figure 181) that appears to have played a role in Sebastiano’s formulation of the figure of the Virgin in the Pietà. She possesses the same effect of Michelangelo’s ignudo: a body in isolation from its surroundings and incredibly close to the picture plane. Michelangelo’s seated youth sits firmly and securely, yet at the same time is seated without support and is in a space undefined by context. The sheet of paper provides its own kind of space; the monumental figure comes close to or touches all four edges and, in this way, is contained by the sheet itself. The nearness of the body to the foreground is palpable: the (proper) right knee of the youth threatens to break through the picture plane, as do the elbow and shoulder nearest us, and the legs of the figure fade out into the bottom right-hand corner, and hence feel much nearer than the torso set further back in space.

Likewise, Sebastiano’s Virgin is seated securely; her seat is an inconspicuous rock that is partially visible to the right of her drapery and that blends in with the dark landscape. As in Michelangelo’s drawing, it is her body’s posture that produces the entire effect of being seated. Her knees and elbow also protrude forward dramatically; this is achieved through highlighting and a crisp, definitive line comparable to the style of the drawing. What is more, the arms and torso of the Virgin reveal a sensitive attention to
musculature that is not found elsewhere in the painting, in particular, in the figure of Christ. Her powerful arms, shoulders, and abdomen demonstrate Sebastiano’s interest in the way Michelangelo defines the musculature of bodies in motion.95 Her hands and wrists, in particular, show a minute attention to bone and musculature and are reflective of the multiple hand studies that investigate this same area on the Albertina sheet.

In his explicit citation of sculpture via Michelangelo, Sebastiano drew on Renaissance associations with sculpture’s longevity, durability and eternity. Moreover, by evoking sculpture and its eternalness, the Pietà, in turn, involves the viewer in a kind of perpetual meditation before the work. The painting thus stages the fiction of what I call eternal looking.

That sculpture stood for everlasting durability and eternity is evidenced by Renaissance artists’ and writers’ engagement with and theorization on sculpture. In the paragone between sculpture and painting, Petrarch, for example, considered sculpture superior due to its vividness in representing reality, and its tactile presence and durability. In his Remedies, Petrarch has the interlocutor Reason say: “Sculpture is nearer to nature than painting. Pictures appeal much to the eye, but sculptures can be touched, feel substantial and solid, and are of durable body.”96 Michelangelo’s poem “Com’esser, donna, può quel c’alcun vede” (c.1545) expresses a similar sentiment of sculpture’s longevity in being able to outlast its maker, time and even death:

How can it be, Lady, that,
as long experience clearly shows,

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95 Scholars have noted this by drawing attention to the Virgin’s masculinity. See, for example, Alessi “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 47.
the living image in hard, alpine stone
lasts longer than its maker,
whom the years reduce again to dust?

The cause bows and yields to the effect,
and so nature is conquered by art.
This I know, who prove it in beautiful sculpture,
that confronted with a work of art
time and death fail in their task.

[...]

Com’esser, donna, può quel c’alcun vede
per lunga sperienza, che più dura
l’immagin viva in pietra alpestra e dura
che ‘l suo fattor, che gli anni in cener riede?

La causa a l’effetto inclina a cede,
onde dall’arte è vinta la natura.
I’ ‘l so, che ‘l pruovo in la bella scultura,
c’all’opra il tempo e morte non tien fede. 97

[...]

Likewise, in 1526, Tullio Lombardo wrote to his patron Marco Casalini of Rovigo,
praising his choice of sculpture as the medium for his altarpiece, which Lombardo had
executed. Lombardo writes: “Now regarding how the altarpiece is progressing in the
work you write me, I respond that it will be a beautiful finished work, and it will be an
everlasting memorial, as your nobleless can judge; whereas painting is a transitory and
changeable thing, sculpture is much more without comparison and hardly to be compared
with painting, and whereas the sculpture of the ancients has survived to this day, nothing
whatever remains of their painting.” 98 Lombardo’s altarpiece for S. Francesco in Rovigo

98 “Hor quanto alla palla va nel’opera me scriveti rispondo che la sarà una bella opera finita, et sarà una memoria sempiterna, come vostra nobeltà pol guidicar perché la pittura è cosa caduca et instabile, la scultura è molto piú senza comparitione, et non da paragonar con pittura per niun modo, perché de antiqui se ritrova sino alli nostri tempi de le sue sculture, con pitture veramente nulla si pol vedere.” The letter of July 18, 1526 is quoted in full in Anna Pizzati and Matteo Ceriana, *Tullio Lombardo: Documenti e
happens to be a Pietà with Sts. Lawrence and Bellinus (Figure 182). Its barren, stone background (there are no saints or setting) and treatment of the figures in relief calls to mind Sebastiano’s painted Pietà, where the dark, evenly-toned landscape pushes the Virgin and Christ forward toward the picture-plane, as if placing them in a liminal space between our space and that of the painted illusion.

Lombardo’s altarpiece also anticipates Sebastiano’s later work, such as the Christ Carrying the Cross (1530s) (Figure 3) in Budapest, painted in oil on slate. Here Sebastiano allows the dark grey stone ground to show through and makes it the sole “setting” for Christ. Like in Lombardo’s S. Francesco Pietà, Sebastiano’s work calls upon stone to generate an altarpiece that would be “an everlasting memorial” – the difference being, however, that Sebastiano’s altarpiece is painted. The metaphoric implications of Sebastiano’s “petrified color” will be addressed in a later section of this chapter, which discusses the poetry of Francesco Maria Molza and Gandolfo Porrino, who equated Sebastiano’s colors to stone. For now, I want to propose that Sebastiano knew of sculptural altarpieces like that of Lombardo (another was made by the shop of Pietro Lombardo in c.1501 for the Gussoni altarpiece in S. Lio, Venice (Figure 183) while he still lived in Venice and that he was equally conscious of his work’s engagement in the so-called paragone between painting and sculpture.

By citing Michelangelo’s sculptural figure of the Virgin and evoking relief altarpieces like that of Lombardo, Sebastiano claimed for painting the eternal and monumental quality of stone.99 The Virgin’s pose, with hands uplifted and locked in

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99 Later in his career, Sebastiano would go on to actually paint on stone and his contemporaries understood this as the act of making painting “eternal.” In a letter of 1530 to Pietro Bembo, the Venetian cardinal...
prayer, and the sculptural quality of her figure work to create the appearance of perpetual prayer. It is by employing this aesthetic of sculpture that the Pietà achieves a fiction of eternal looking – it arrests its viewer in place into a kind of meditative eternity. The Virgin acts as a mirror to the beholder and invites the viewer to imitate her act of prayer.

The idea of a viewer rendered motionless and speechless before a work of art would have held currency in Sebastiano’s time by means of a popular trope that had its roots in Petrarch’s Canzoniere and Dante’s Rime: that sculpture froze its beholder as if he were himself stone by virtue of its beauty and magnificence. Cellini’s Perseus and Medusa (1545-50) stages this very idea by exposing the beholder to the head of Medusa that Perseus holds straight out in his extended arm. Cellini implies that the magnificence of his sculpture is akin to the deadly power of Medusa’s gaze to turn her enemies into stone. Likewise, in Anton Francesco Doni’s I Marmi (1552), Michelangelo’s sculpture of Aurora transfixes a viewer by her liveliness as if changing him to marble: “I touch her in stone and she moves my flesh… nay I am become marble, and she is flesh.” Only when she moves, does the viewer awaken too.

The eternity of looking that is staged by Sebastiano’s Pietà finds its theological equivalent in Renaissance and early Christian writers who associated internal meditation

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Vittore Soranzo attributes the invention of painting on slate to Sebastiano, calling it “eternal painting” that “nearly petrifies” color. Sebastienello nostro Venetiano ha trovato un secreto di pingere in marmo a olio bellissimo, il quale sarà pittura poco meno che eterna. I colori subito che sono asciutti, si uniscono al marmo di maniera che quasi impietriscono, ed ha fatto ogni prova ed e durevole [...]” Cited in Costanza Barbieri “Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col martello.’ Fortune e sfortune di Sebastiano” in La Pieta di Sebastiano a Viterbo, 57. Varchi and Vasari also called Sebastiano’s painting “eternal.” Varchi cites both Molza and Porrino’s verses and states: “e così [queste pitture su marmo] saranno etere a un modo, allogando l’esempio di fra Bastiano e quegli versi del Molza à lui, che dicono [...]” See Benedetto Varchi, Due Lezzioni... nella quale si disputa della maggioranza delle arti. Disputa seconda. Qual sia più nobile, o la pittura o la scultura (Florence, 1549), 97. Vasari states: “Avendo poi cominciato questo pittore un nuovo modo di colorire in pietra, ciò piaceva molto a’popoli, parendo che in quel modo le pitture diventassero etere, e che nè il fuoco nè i tarli potessero lor nuocere.” See Vasari, Le Vite, V, 579.


101 Cited in ibid., 48.
with external stillness or the fixed gaze of the worshipper. Giustiniani, for instance, describes the importance of physical stillness in meditating on God and countering the tendency for the mind to wander and be distracted by worldly pursuits (more on this in the final section). In his *De trinitate*, Augustine similarly reflects on how physical vision approximates spiritual vision: “So let us use for preference the evidence of the eyes; this is the most excellent of the body’s senses, and for all its difference in kind has the greatest affinity to mental vision.” Augustine writes that achieving a vision of God requires a contemplative gaze characterized by fixity; mortal man, however, can only achieve this contemplation of God in the briefest of moments: “Lift up your eyes to that light and fix them on that if you can... but you are unable to fix your gaze there in order observe this clearly and distinctly.” Moreover, the mind, with its attention and affection directed outward, "binds itself to these images with so strong a love as even to regard itself as something of the same kind." Augustine views the soul as being fitted together or imprinted with external images – it takes the shape of the object of its focused attention. Elsewhere Augustine describes the passionate over-attachment of the soul to

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102 “They [hermits] must strive to maintain constant stability in the hermitage and in the cell [...] Those who have less taste for stability might be seized by restlessness or spurred by some devil or other, so that they would spend the whole day wandering from one room to another [...]” Dom Jean Leclercq, *Alone with God*, trans. Elizabeth McCabe (New York: Rarrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961), 79-80. McCabe’s book is an English translation of Leclercq’s French original Dom Jean Leclercq, *Seul avec Dieu: La Vie Éremitique:d’après la doctrine du bienheureux Paul Giustiniani* (Corbeil: Crété, 1955). For the original Latin manuscript, see RVE f.102, 102’. RVE refers to Giustinianii’s *Regula vitae eremitae* (1520), preserved in the Sacro Eremo Tuscolano of Frascati.
104 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.6.50.
things outside itself as becoming “stuck to them with the glue of care.” This emphasis on the ability of physical images to imprint on the soul by means of the active, fixed gaze and the idea of physical vision as a model for spiritual seeing resonates with the way Sebastiano employs sculpture (and the trope of the petrified beholder) to convey the eternity of looking and, in turn, the soul’s meditation on God.

Though one might argue that Sebastiano is not unique in recalling sculpture in his work, since Bellini’s Pietà likewise draws on the Northern sculptural Pietà type that circulated in Venice, it becomes apparent that Sebastiano’s citation of sculpture differs dramatically from Bellini’s. Unlike Bellini, Sebastiano breaks the distinguishing feature of the sculpture – its physical and psychological unity between mother and son. Sebastiano’s interest in sculpture is not confined to replicating the Northern prototype in painting; in fact, he pointedly undoes it. Instead, his Virgin conjures up very different associations with sculpture by drawing on the popular trope – rooted in Petrarch’s Canzoniere and Dante’s Rime (and later staged by Cellini and Francesco Doni, as mentioned above) – of sculpture’s eternity and capacity to immobilize its viewers as if they were stone themselves. By doing so, the Virgin turns her viewer into an immobilized beholder. By means of this external fixity of the gaze, the viewer engages in internal meditation that approximates eternity.

In contrast to the Virgin, Sebastiano’s Christ is rendered with a smoothness that betrays an entirely different interest – one not grounded in Michelangelo’s monumental, dynamic figures and anatomical naturalism. This effect has to do with Sebastiano’s citation of Byzantine Lamentation scenes to evoke the maniera greca.

107 Augustine, TheTrinity., 10.5.7.
Sebastiano’s Christ evokes Byzantine Lamentations by the way his straight legs seem to overlap one atop the other; Christ’s (proper) left leg hovers above rather than behind his right and the shared contour between his thighs, knees and calves emphasizes this reading. The gradations from dark to light increase the spatial ambiguity between the front and back leg, rather than clarify the legs’ respective positions. The back leg comes forward in a way that tilts Christ’s whole body up, for greater visibility, producing the same effect seen in Byzantine Lamentation scenes. The linearity of Christ’s loincloth and drapery, the platform-like structure that the drapery takes on, the definition of his torso, ribs and abdomen (achieved by soft shadows that nonetheless recall the linear divisions in the Byzantine counterparts), and the body’s smooth, brown coloring with sharp areas of highlight all recall the Christ of the Lamentation fresco (1164) (Figure 184) in the Church of the Panteleimon in Nerezi. That Giotto’s Lamentation (Figure 185) in Padua strongly recalls this image type suggests that traveling icons of it existed. The fourteenth-century San Marco epitaphios cloth (Figure 186), in fact, strongly recalls this type of Lamentation Christ.108

The epitaphios cloth (literally “upon the tomb”) – which had developed out of the smaller cloths called aeres that were used to cover the chalice and paten during the climax of the Byzantine procession, known as the Great Entrance – came to be used exclusively during Holy Week during Good Friday service in the Orthodox tradition.109 It appeared around the late thirteenth century and continued to be used into the fourteenth century.


century. The large cloth would be carried in a funerary cortege commemorating the burial of Christ out of the church and through the city, and then displayed in the church on Good Friday and Holy Saturday – covering the Gospel Book, which represented Christ. Such cloths would have been available to Sebastiano in Venice (in fact, the San Marco Christ holds a Gospel Book, thus testifying to the cloth’s use in this context) and would have provided an associative link to the Eucharistic body of Christ – both visually and by its liturgical use, being understood as the shroud of Christ during his burial.\footnote{For a discussion of the Gospel Book in the San Marco epitaphios cloth, see Hans Belting, “An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium” \textit{Dumbarton Oaks Papers} Vol. 34/35 (1980/1981): 15.}

The strong formal parallel between Sebastiano’s Christ and the Christ on the Venetian epitaphios cloth is striking, particularly in the isolation of his body from a narrative context, surrounded by the burial cloth and textile patterning on all sides. Belting calls attention to this fact that the epitaphios image explicitly distinguishes itself from a narrative Lamentation scene.\footnote{Belting, \textit{The Image and its Public}, 128.} The cloth image shows Christ lying in the grave, flanked by two angels with liturgical fans. A Byzantine enamel in Leningrad and a fresco in the Greek Church of Samari attest to this liturgical reading by the inscriptions that accompany the images; the inscriptions stress that Christ’s body should be understood as a Eucharistic offering.\footnote{The inscriptions are illustrated and translated in Ibid., 124. The Leningrad enamel inscription reads, “Christ is presented here as an offering and also participates in the godhead.” The Samari fresco inscription reads, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood...” (John 6:56).} Thus, Sebastiano draws on the idea of old icons as carriers of Eucharistic meaning and eternal presence, and reproduces the effect in his figure of Christ.

By recalling the Byzantine tradition, yet without ever abandoning his dedication to the modern \textit{maniera} (the figure of Christ is anything but archaizing), Sebastiano
fashions painting whose visual memory extends from his time back to images of early Christianity. Notably, the meeting of modern sculpture and icon is aligned with the meeting of motion and stillness in the Pietà. Modern sculpture, exemplified at this moment by Michelangelo’s Moses (1513-15) in San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome and his Rebellious Slave (1513-16), Louvre, certainly made bodily movement one of its main concerns. The S-shape and physical torsion that characterizes the abovementioned sculpture is repeated in the Virgin’s seated contrapposto. The iconic stillness of Christ, on the other hand, comes from Sebastiano’s familiarity with the Venetian epitaphios cloth where Christ’s body lies in isolation, circumscribed by the limits of the cloth, much like in the painting.

Yet Sebastiano also conspicuously traverses the two modes by implying movement issuing outward over the white cloth, implied by its rippling folds – with Christ as the center and origin of this flow – and by fixing the Virgin’s movement into a kind of perpetual state of meditation. It is also of interest to consider the epitaphios cloth’s ceremonial use in procession, as it appears to inform Sebastiano’s deliberation on pictorial movement and stillness.\footnote{I would like to thank Nino Zchomelidse for her thoughtful suggestion to follow up on the processional ceremony in which the epitaphios cloth is involved.} As Per-Arne Bodin writes, the liturgical act performed what was depicted on the icon, and in turn, the icon pictured what happened in the liturgy (she notes the incense and liturgical fans that appear on epitaphios cloths, for example, which were not present at Christ’s real burial and hence refer to the ceremony that was occurring in the present).\footnote{Per-Arne Bodin, \textit{Eternity and Time: Studies in Russian Literature and the Orthodox Tradition} (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2007), 88.} As part of the liturgical ceremony, the cloth was placed on a catafalque in the middle of the church for veneration, where it came to stand
for a frozen moment in time.\textsuperscript{115} But it was also carried in a series of processions – both into the altar room during the Easter Eve midnight service, and out of the altar room, representing the Deposition – thereby activating the timeless icon in real time and setting it in motion by means of the procession. In turn, the slow moving character of the procession and the sung hymn created the sense that time had almost come to a standstill.\textsuperscript{116} In this way, the \textit{epitaphios} image could be understood as both timeless and in motion, and as traversing these two modes. These same concerns with the relationship between movement and stillness – something like the stilling of motion and the activation of stillness – can be discerned in the \textit{Pietà}, as will be further addressed in the following section.

Moreover, Sebastiano employs the visual effects of both sculpture and icon for their association with longevity and presence. Their citation signals a reflection on the way modern painting can absorb various modes of art making, both old and new.\textsuperscript{117} In this way, Sebastiano’s work shows itself to be both modern and rooted in tradition. That the \textit{Pietà}, through such citation, is also able to pose questions about the longevity and eternity of painting itself is significant within the context of early Cinquecento concern with the unstable temporality of human experience and the ephemeral, corrupt nature of man-made works in contrast with God’s eternity.\textsuperscript{118} The concern with the longevity and

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{117} For the most recent discussion of painting’s citationality and absorption of other media, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, \textit{Anachronic Renaissance} (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 335-45.
\textsuperscript{118} Concern over the sanction and corruptibility of images is illustrated by works such as Andrea del Sarto’s Madonna of the Harpies, Filippo Lippi’s St. Philip Casting out Mars from the Temple, and Pontormo’s St. Veronica. For scholarship on the anxiety these works exhibit in differentiating between man-made images, true images, and idols see Stephen Campbell, ““Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva”: Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 84, No. 4 (2002): 596-620; Nagel, \textit{The Controversy of Renaissance Art}, 115-124; and Philippe Hélas and Gerhard Wolf, “The shadow of the wolf: the survival of an ancient god in the frescoes of the Strozzi chapel (S. Maria Novella, Florence) on Filippo Lippi’s
“truthfulness” of images should be understood within broader attempts at this time to refashion religious devotion and man-made images into something less corruptible and less empty when tasked with helping attain and reveal divine truth.

It is important to note that Sebastiano continues his interest in stone and the capacity of images to be “eternal” in his later works, such as the Borgherini Flagellation, painted on the chapel’s stone wall, and in his Budapest Christ Carrying the Cross, painted on slate, both of which will be treated in subsequent chapters. Sebastiano’s sculptural aesthetic was understood by his contemporaries and phrased as the idea of literal petrification of color into stone. In a letter of 1530 to Pietro Bembo, the Venetian cardinal Vittore Soranzo attributes the invention of painting on slate to Sebastiano, calling it “eternal painting” that “nearly petrifies” color. Moreover, by coupling sculpture and icon, and in maintaining their separateness, the Pietà considers how motion and stillness can act on each other in painting in order to shape the viewer’s devotional experience and highlight its subjective dimension. In the context of personal devotional, the gap between physical and spiritual reality emerged as a topic of debate among reformers like Contarini, Giles of Viterbo, and Luther, all of whom Sebastiano would have likely had contact with in his travels between Venice, Rome, and Viterbo.


119 “Eternal” is a term Vasari uses to describe Sebastiano’s paintings. “Avendo poi cominciato questo pittore un nuovo modo di colorire in pietra, ciò piaceva molto a’popoli, parendo che in quel modo le pitture diventassero eterne, e che nè il fuoco nè i tarli potessero lor nuocere.” See Vasari, Le Vite, V, 579.

120 “Sebastienello nostro Venetiano ha trovato un secreto di pingere in marmo a olio bellissimo, il quale sarà pittura poco meno che eterna. I colori subito che sono ascritti, si uniscono al marmo di maniera che quasi impiebriscono, ed ha fatto ogni prova ed e durevole [...]” Cited in Barbieri “‘Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura,’” 57. Varchi repeats the idea: “e così [queste pitture su marmo] saranno eterne a un modo, allogando l’esempio di fra Bastiano e quegli versi del Molza à lui, che dicono [...]” See Varchi, Due Lezizioni, 97.
2.6 Giles of Viterbo and St. Augustine, Time and Eternity

Fervor for Augustine’s conception of time and eternity was revived in the early sixteenth century by the Augustinian prior general Giles of Viterbo. I propose that the question Augustine raises about man’s ability to conceptualize God in the concrete terms of oratory or writing – a question that continued to concern Sebastiano’s contemporaries and his patron for the Pietà – captivated Sebastiano as an artist whose task entailed the visualization of God in painting as something graspable and reachable for the viewer in the present, while at the same time conveying that the divine went beyond such material means of representation. Augustine’s conception of God as a still, motionless eternity that is outside time and yet seen through temporal phenomena strongly resonates with Sebastiano’s painting. The Pietà asks: how can a picture convey the fixed, unchanging presence of God to the viewer, who sees everything within time? In creating a confrontation between pictorial motion and stillness, the painting visualizes the transformative shift between temporality and eternity as a means of mirroring the repeated interior conversion of the pious viewer before the altarpiece. By doing so, it mirrors the “movement of the soul” by which the faithful strives to ascend to God’s state of rest.

I propose that the painting looks odd precisely because of the intended tension and continuity created between Christ’s embeddedness in sacred history and his presence as a sacramental body in the present. The former implies absence and distance from the beholder in time and space, while the latter implies presence and communication with the beholder (much like the icon portrait, a relic, or the Eucharist itself). As argued previously, his Hermitage Lamentation does this even more explicitly and rhetorically.

Christ’s body seems to “spill out” from history into our present or, alternatively, to begin in our present and slowly make one realize its participation in historical narrative as well. Both the Pietà and the Lamentation thus assert simultaneous pictorial dimensions of present and past.

Why would Sebastiano have wanted to do this? My claim is that Sebastiano experiments with the bridging of past and present because he was taken with the problems and possibilities raised for painting by St. Augustine’s conception of time and eternity; this was the Augustine voiced by Giles of Viterbo, with whose ideas Sebastiano came into close contact during his years in Rome and especially during his Botoni commission in Viterbo. More specifically, the liturgical function of the Pietà—a meditation on Christ’s death—and its explicit allusion to the devotion to the Eucharist directly implicates concerns of temporality. According to the Gospels, Christ was resurrected three days after his death, and the forty-hour period of his entombment was observed from the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century during Easter in the ceremonies of the Devotio and Elevatio; this was a widespread Eucharistic practice,

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122 Giles of Viterbo was not the only one reviving Augustine at this time in the context of reform. Johann Amerbach published the works of Augustine in Basel in 1505 and 1506—2,200 copies were produced. This was the most comprehensive collection of the church father's oeuvre to date. Individual books had been published before, as well as smaller collections of Augustine's writings. Augustine also appeared as an authority in collections of sentences, such as Peter Lombard's Sentences (which Giles had read) or in the extensive, thirteenth-century summae, like those of Thomas Aquinas. In all of these works, authoritative citations from Augustine featured prominently and gave a fragmented idea of the original texts. Moreover, the overall production of what was believed to be Augustine made him one of the most printed authors around 1500. Other readers among the first generation of Reformers included Martin Luther, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Philip Melanchthon and Ulrich Zwingli. For further discussion of the republication of Augustine in the early 1500s and the reformers who read him, see Arnoud S. Q. Visser, Reading Augustine in the Reformation: the Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
123 I would like to thank Felipe Pereda for his thoughtful comments on a talk version of this chapter and for bringing to my attention the temporal dimension of Christ’s death. His suggestion to look into precedents for the Forty Hours Devotions informs the discussion that follows on the ceremonies of Devotio and Elevatio.
common in England, Germany, France, and Italy. On Good Friday, at the Devotio, a cross or consecrated host (or both) were placed in a model of the holy sepulcher as a reenactment of the burial of Christ. The faithful then took turns watching before the sepulcher for forty hours, awaiting the symbolic Resurrection. On the morning of Easter Sunday, at the Elevatio, these elements were removed from the sepulcher and placed on the altar, thus bringing to a close the watch of prayer of the symbolic tomb.

The watch before the sepulcher was known in the thirteenth century as the Oratio quadraginta horarum, and continued to be practiced through the fifteenth century. This Easter Vigil was nearly an all-night ceremony and the watch beside the tomb had a penitential character that was combined with fasting and the lighting of the Paschal candle, representing Christ. This medieval ceremony became the foundation for the Forty Hours Devotions in Italy – established in Milan in 1527 in the Church of the Sepulcher, and gradually spreading to other Italian cities. Continuing the tradition of the Easter Vigil, for exactly forty hours, a consecrated host was exhibited in a monstrance on an altar, and was surrounded by an ornate, perspectival scene depicting an allegorical biblical story that simultaneously framed and interpreted the Eucharist.

124 Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 294. See also James Monti, A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), Sections 14 and 15 for an overview of the Easter Vigil ceremony from the Middle Ages to the 16th C, with a focus on Italy, Spain, France and England. Monti provides excerpts from rubrics, ordos, missals, and sacramental manuals. For another detailed study of the Easter ceremony, see Neil C. Brooks, “The Sepulcher of Christ in Art and Liturgy” University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 7, No.1 (1921): 7-110. For a reference to primary documents testifying to the burial of the host in Depositio after Mass in Parma (1417) and Venice (1523), see p.35.


The *Oratio quadraginta horarum* of the Medieval and Renaissance Easter Triduum would have emphasized not only a sense of waiting and anticipation of Christ’s Resurrection, but also the known, finite amount of time that had to pass before Christ would rise. The sense of drama and expectation would have been further heightened by a dramatization of the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, known as the visitation of the tomb or the *Visitatio sepulchri*. The ceremony entailed a procession through the city to the church, and a reenactment of the three Marys approaching the tomb, with ointment jars and cloths. It occurred at the same sepulcher as that of the *Depositio*, and it made the linen cloths with which the cross or host were wrapped evidence of Christ’s Resurrection.

In fact, in meditation books, there is an analogous emphasis on both extended waiting and certainty (or finite time) in the narrative of the Visitation. In inviting the reader to reflect on the period between Christ’s death and Resurrection, Thomas à Kempis’ *Meditations on the Life of Christ* pauses to consider the Virgin’s state upon Christ’s entombment:

And although she did not go with the other devout women to visit Thy Sepulcher, it was not from want of love, nor from fear, nor from excessive grief that she failed in this duty; but it was because she knew for certain that Thou wouldst rise again. She stayed at home in the sure hope that on the third day Thou wouldst come to her; and so, engaged meanwhile in holy prayers, she longingly awaited Thy coming. 

Et quamvis cum aliis devotis mulieribus ad visitandum sepulchrum tuum non transivit, non hoc ex tepore aut timore vel prae nimio dolore omisit, sed certissime te resurrecturum sciens et firmissime tertia die ad se 

129 I am grateful to Felipe Pereda for this intriguing idea.
130 The *Visitatio* was mostly discontinued in the latter half of the 16th Century. Brooks, “The Sepulcher of Christ in Art and Liturgy,” 49.
venturum sperans domi remansit et orationibus sanctis interim vacans adventum tuum desiderio magno expectavit.  

The author of the *Meditations* thus instructs the reader to meditate on the death and Resurrection of Christ by considering the Virgin’s steadfast faith, but also her longing to see her son rise – an emotionally charged narrative that would have had its communal counterpart in the nocturnal Easter Vigil, concluded by the *Visitatio sepulchri*.  

Sebastiano’s *Pietà* should be understood in light of these traditions, both literary and ceremonial. In fact, Costanza Barbieri has already made this connection by grounding her interpretation of the *Pietà* within the liturgical context of the Easter ceremony.  

And though I am not entirely persuaded by her symbolic reading of the moon and the various types of vegetation in the painting, I do think that the nocturnal setting can be read – on one level – as an allusion to the Paschal Vigil and the anticipation of the day of the Resurrection, given that the Offices of Good Friday and Holy Saturday were celebrated together at night. Moreover, the Eucharistic body of Christ pictured at the bottom edge of the painting, surrounded by the white burial cloth, recalls the cloths in which the host or cross would have been wrapped at the *Devotio*, and, as mentioned earlier, the *epitaphios* cloth that was used as part of the Byzantine liturgy of Holy Week.

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134 Thomas Hemerken a Kempis, *Opera omnia: Orationes et meditationes de vita Christi* (Friburgi Brisigavorum: Herder, 1902), 253.
136 Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 78 and Costanza Barbieri, “Sebastiano del Piombo and Michelangelo in Rome: Problems of Style and Meaning in the Viterbo Pietà” (Diss. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1999), 49-50 and 154-60. Some of Barbieri’s evidence is less convincing, most notably the presence of the moon, which she sees as a symbol and reference to the way that the date of Easter was and is still determined – on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon. Yet, Easter specifically did not fall on a full moon and its presence in the painting cannot be attributed this meaning.
137 Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 78.
To be clear, I am not suggesting that the meaning of Sebastiano’s painting is confined solely to the Easter liturgy. Rather, I contend that its association with personal and communal meditation on the temporality of Christ’s death – by means of one’s own waiting and expectation for a finite amount of time – would have prompted Sebastiano to reflect on God’s divine and human nature, on Christ’s state in death, and on the transformative effect of patient prayer and meditation. As the discussion below will demonstrate, the Pietà evokes a sense of both temporality and stability as a way of thinking about the difference between God and Man, and does so by drawing on Giles’ revival of the Augustinian conception of time as movement and stillness.

First, it is necessary to examine the writing of Augustine himself to fully appreciate the way his ideas are then taken up by Giles in his writings and sermons and by Sebastiano in the Pietà. In Book XI of his Confessions, Augustine differentiates between eternity and human time and asks how the two could be compared. For Augustine, time is always in motion and is never all at once present because of the movement of present into past and future into present. In contrast, God is eternity; he is always present as a whole and stands still, outside of time. The relevant passage is as follows:

They [people] attempt to taste eternity when their heart is still flitting about in the realm where things change and have a past and a future; it is still “vain” (Ps. 5: 10). Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity, so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendor of a constant eternity? Then it may compare eternity with temporal successiveness which never has any constancy, and will see there is no comparison possible. It will see that a long time is long only because constituted of many successive movements which cannot be simultaneously extended. In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present. But no time is wholly present. It will see that all past time is driven backwards by the future, and all future is the consequent of the past, and all past and future are created and set on their course by that
which is always present. Who will lay hold on the human heart and make it still, so that it can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past times?\textsuperscript{138}

Augustine then proceeds to ask whether he is capable of fixing God’s eternity either in speech or in writing, which are man-made creations and hence bound by time: “Can my hand have the strength for this? (Gen. 31: 29). Can the hand of my mouth by mere speech achieve so great a thing?”\textsuperscript{139} For Augustine, man is constrained by his human existence within time. He struggles to understand divinity, which is not bound by such fleeting existence because it exists in an eternal present. At stake is man’s (and Augustine’s own) ability to conceptualize the eternity that is God. A solution to the problem seems to come in Book XIII, where Augustine resolves that God himself does not exist in time, yet makes things appear in time:

But you, Lord are always working and always at rest. Your seeing is not in time, your movement is not in time, and your rest is not in time. Yet your acting causes us to see things in time, time itself, and the repose which is outside time.\textsuperscript{140}

Human time and God’s eternity cannot be compared because they operate in entirely different ways; yet the former is a reflection of the latter.


This strongly resonates with Giles’ conception of God, the visible world, and human existence in time. As with Augustine, Giles’s conception of man’s knowledge of God is through the visible, changeable world of temporal events. In his sermon, delivered in St. Peter’s Basilica in 1507, Giles states:

There are two kinds of good things, human and divine. By human I mean here anything that is brought forth: I call divine him by whom everything other than himself is brought forth. The one is finite offspring, subject to change; the other is God, the immutable Father, infinite.141

The idea of two realms, the changeable and the immutable, vividly calls to mind Augustine’s reflection on man’s fallen existence within time, which he contrasts with God’s eternity and atemporality.

Furthermore, in Chapter XVII of the *Commentary on the Sentences of Petrus Lombardus*, Giles builds on Augustine’s idea in the *Confessions* of divine, eternal rest and the soul’s inquietude until it finds rest in divinity. Giles makes explicit reference to Augustine’s notion of the intellect in motion and the will as divine rest and fulfillment.142 He imagines a banquet hall that serves nectar and ambrosia, where the former represents the will and the latter the intellect.143 The imagery is an allegorical interpretation of, first, the pleasure of the intellect, and finally the repose of the will (“a stable and motionless rest in some happy reality and the eternity – or, so to speak, the immortality – of that happiness”). Giles makes clear the association between the will as rest and fulfillment,

141 The sermon is translated in full in Martin. *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar*, 222-84, for this particular passage see p.236.
142 This passage is discussed in Nodes, *Giles of Viterbo: The Commentary*. 11.
143 Ibid., 53. “Et de voluntatis actibus ab antiquis dicitur quod diis, hoc est, beatis apponitur nectar et ambrosia. Nectar inebrians voluptatem significat, ambrosia vero, quietem et stabilem immotamque rei felicis, et felicitatis aeter nitatem, et ut ita dicam, immortalitatem.”
and the intellect as motion towards that goal. The same sentiment can be found in Giles’ sermon entitled “Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II,” which he delivered in St. Peter’s Basilica in 1507. Here, Giles describes the four stages of Etruscan education that make use of the two powers, intellect and will, to make it so that “the soul should come to know itself.” He goes on to say that philosophy, concerned with intelligence rather than love, deals with “material facts, transient matters, and fluid things perceived by the senses.” By rising up through the stages, the soul frees itself from “the flux and fog of matter.” Giles’ writing and sermons time and again describe the soul’s coming to know God as an ascent from a state of motion to one of stillness, achieved by “unceasing meditation, mindfulness and vigilance.”

Moreover, like Augustine, Giles sees history as the earthly fulfillment of divine will, writing that beneath every ordinary event lies sublime hidden meaning and the truth of God. In his Scechina (1530), Giles writes, “sacred history is nothing else than a likeness of the ten Sefiroth [the dynamic energies of God], a mirror to the dispositions of providence, and an imitation of the divine realities.” For Giles, history’s secrets are disclosed to view in their entirety in God; secular events, beneath the surface, hold an

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144 Ibid., 53. “Quies non intellectus est, ad quem finis terminusque motus animae non est, qui in voluntate quiescit. Bonum enim absens movet; quo prae sente quiescimus. Sed motus ille est appetitus, actus voluntatis et amoris. Ergo eiusdem est quies abeunte motu”
146 Ibid., 234.
147 Ibid., 234.
148 Ibid., 234. These passages vividly call to mind Augustine’s provocative reflection on time and eternity, which I discussed in section three. Augustine’s consideration of immaterial movement, contrasted with the movement of material (celestial) bodies, leads him to posit that the mind “certainly experiences movement in its thoughts.” He locates time in the movement of the soul and employs what Ricoeur calls a “quasi-spatial language” to convey this idea. See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.
149 For a discussion of Giles’ view of the relationship between human history and God, see O’Malley, Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform, 72 and 181-4.
150 Giles of Viterbo, Scechina, Vol I, 130. “nihil esse aliud historiam sacram quam sephirot figuae, providentiae imago, exemplarium processio, rerum imitamenta divinarum.” Translation is O’Malley’s, see O’Malley, Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform, 100.
inner core of spiritual truth.\textsuperscript{151} In this way, historical events are a shadowy, terrestrial reflection of divinity and thus, acquire a meaning that is beyond the concrete conditions of time and place.

Giles’ close friend and Sebastiano’s patron, Giovanni Botoni, wrote a letter to Giles on February 24, 1502 that reveals a similar preoccupation with the invisible God and his revelation to man through the visible world. Botoni writes,

We mortals, stirred by numberless emotions, separated by many mountains and spaces, in the same way as the weakness of the flesh is separated from our soul, we have to react with crying out, with writing and talking so that the ignorant might understand the learned one and turn away from the wrong road. In seeing all this, our most merciful God, the invisible and unconfined spirit, the God who was made word, willingly assumed flesh and presented himself visible to us mortals, to be heard and to be felt.\textsuperscript{152}

Botoni’s words “to be heard and to be felt” add emphasis to an already evident pronouncement of God’s incarnation as Christ. However, they also underscore man’s need to experience God through the earthly senses and through language because he has no other way. The subtle note of urgency in the words “we have to react with crying out, with writing and talking” and in God revealing himself upon seeing this state of things, suggests a limitation to words and language as a way to comprehend God.

I propose that the question Augustine raises about man’s ability to conceptualize God in the concrete terms of oratory or writing (a question that continued to concern

\textsuperscript{151} Giles of Viterbo, Seechina, Vol. II, 113. “Historia sacra speculum est ubi umbram suspicitis divinorum; eadem si interiora penetres, aenigma est sub quo recondita mysteria contemplamini.” The translation is O’Malley’s, see O’Malley Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform, 101.

\textsuperscript{152} Egidio da Viterbo O.S.A. Lettere familiari, ed. By Anna Maria Voci Roth, vol I (Rome: Institutum Historicum Augustinianum, 1990), 152-3. “ita nos mortales innumeris agitati affectibus, quia tot seiungimur montibus, tot distamus spatiis, quot carnis inffrititas animis nostris illecebras proponit, innectit, clamore, vocibus ac scripto opus est, ut doctum imperitus intelligat et a via mala convertatur. Id prospeciens peintissimus Deus, spiritus invisibilis incircumscripsusque, verbum quod Deus erat, carnem sumere voluit ut mortalibus visibilem, audibilemque et palpabilem se preberet” Unless specified otherwise, translations are Costanza Barbieri’s. See Barbieri, “Sebastiano del Piombo and Michelangelo in Rome,” 119-21.
Sebastiano’s contemporaries as Botoni’s letter and Giles’ sermon show) captivated Sebastiano. He conceives of the altarpiece as an image tasked with the visualization of God as something grasppable and reachable for the viewer in the present – outside time, yet seen through temporal phenomena. To borrow Augustine’s language from the quotation cited earlier: “If only men’s minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future time.” Augustine’s exclamation reflects on whether man could understand God’s eternity from his temporal existence and on how he could achieve this understanding.\textsuperscript{153} The passage suggests that in order to contemplate God’s eternity man must stand still himself – it suggests that an interior transformation must take place. Sebastiano engages with Augustine’s questioning by visualizing temporality as a tumultuous, nocturnal landscape. He gives it pride of place within the painting: all the parts of the landscape are fused into an unbroken whole through the continuous, warm purple-brown tonalities. The landscape encircles the Virgin’s body, while the wind catches her garments. Yet, the figure of Christ remains “out-of-time,” ideal, unmoving, and bloodless. Sebastiano literally collapses movement in the sleeping figure of Christ, where motion comes to a standstill. Sebastiano’s Christ is neither moved in time, nor rests in time, which is felt all around him in the landscape and in the Virgin’s movement.

That Christ is meant to be seen as an iconic core, around which things happen, is further supported by Zelli’s homage to Sebastiano’s work in his own Pietà (1517) (Figure

\textsuperscript{153} Augustine’s question is evoked in Contarini’s letter of 1512 to Giustiniani, showing that it still held meaning in 16\textsuperscript{th}-century Italy: “Still I hope that maybe, when I shall least expect and believe it, his goodness will deign to rekindle my heart, to drive out every vain fear and restlessness, and make my soul clear, pure, constant, and strong, so that I will be able to say to myself: “My heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; my heart is established [...]” [my italics]. Letter cited in full in Gasparo Contarini, “Three letters of Gasparo Contarini to Paolo Giustiniani and Pietro Querini, 1511-1523” in Reform Thought in Sixteenth-century Italy (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1981), 28-31; see p.30 for the quotation.
187) currently also housed in the Museo Civico in Viterbo. Specifically, it is Zelli’s interest in Sebastiano’s Byzantine-looking, rigid, dark-brown Christ that points to the way contemporary viewers responded to Sebastiano’s unusual painting and what they saw in it. Zelli picked up on the iconic subtext of Sebastiano’s Christ and reinserted him back into a traditional Pietà format. In doing so, he emphasizes the figure’s rigidity and straightness across the laps of the mourners in his work.

In this way, the painting engages in the contemporary debate on man’s place between the physical and spiritual world and on man’s ability to bridge the gap between his temporal existence and God’s eternity. In his treatise Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animae (1482), which was itself informed by Augustine, Marsilio Ficino states that "eternity must be granted to a mind which transcends time and despises temporal things for the sake of the eternal God." For Ficino, contemplative knowledge can be attained only by overcoming external, transient things. He goes on to analogize this contemplative knowledge of God to the clarity of celestial things. This clarity, however, cannot be maintained by man for long as it becomes obscured again by his temporal, sensory world:

[The soul] could never imagine that these [separated Reasons] exist in the order of things, if it could not for a short time at least chase the clouds of sensible images from its sight. But soon the clouds gather again because of the nature of this earthly region and because of habit, and hinder the clearness of celestial things.

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154 Zelli’s work has been connected to Sebastiano’s by Parlato, “Durata e persistenza della visione nella Pietà di Viterbo,” 48 and Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 44. Hirst calls Zelli’s dark brown, “wretched” figure of Christ an “unwitting parody” of Sebastiano’s beautiful coloristic effects of livid death.


156 Cited in ibid., 306. For original Latin, see Ficino, Opera omnia, 715.
Likewise, the fourteenth-century anonymous treatise *Theologia Germanica*, which Luther discovered and published in 1516 and again in 1518, posits that while some deny that the soul, while in the body, can “reach so high as to cast a glance into eternity,” this union is possible to attain if the soul strips itself of all images, the flesh, and things pertaining to the senses.\(^{157}\) In both cases, the senses and man’s temporal existence are an impediment to the soul’s ascent to God.

Sebastiano’s *Pietà* pictures the celestial orb of the moon, partially obscured by clouds (calling to mind the passage from Ficino), and the Virgin surrounded by a tempestuous, dark landscape. In doing so, however, the painting does not suggest that one’s temporal existence is a hindrance to understanding God’s eternity. Christ’s stillness, I argue, is set not in opposition to the Virgin and landscape, but rather, is inflected by them. The *Pietà* offers a reflection on man’s unfixed place between fleeting time and fixed eternity, and his affinity to either state. The darkness and solitude of the scene need not be read as signs of self-loss, sin or human ignorance.\(^{158}\) Rather, they invoke the idea of man’s union with God by an inward withdrawal into oneself where God is found. The Virgin’s solitude should thus be read as a mirror and model to the viewer’s own solitary meditation on Christ. Moreover, rather than conceiving of images as a hindrance to union with God, as Ficino and Luther do, Sebastiano appears invested

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\(^{157}\) Susanna Winkworth, trans. *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther* (Courier Dover Publications, 2004), 45. The relevant passage is in Chapter VIII: “For if the soul is to rise to such a state, she must be quite pure, wholly stripped and bare of all images, and be entirely separate from all creatures, and above all from herself.” The writer then cites St. Dionysius: “For the beholding of the hidden things of God, shalt thou forsake sense and the things of the flesh, and all that the senses can apprehend, and all that reason is able to comprehend and know [...] and enter into union with Him, who is, and who is above all existence and all knowledge.”

\(^{158}\) Barbieri argues that darkness in this painting stands for sin, from which man is saved by the Virgin Mary. See Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 83. In Giles’ sermons, darkness acts as a metaphor for ignorance. The relevant sermons are cited and translated in full in Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar*, see esp. 232, 287, and 299.
in their utility in contemplation: the Pietà offers a reflection on both the difference and affinity between time and eternity, between man and God.

At the tragic death of her son, the Virgin directs her prayers upward to God. No excessive emotion registers in her face, but her dramatic bodily movement and firmly clasped hands, rotated to the side, emphasize the dynamism of her reaction. By moving her gaze away from Christ, the painting creates two focal points that diverge from each other. It is difficult to hold in focus both figures at once. In order to place attention on Christ’s body, the viewer’s gaze must descend and move against the direction of the Virgin’s upward-directed gaze and vertically-oriented figure. Moreover, the Virgin’s temporal reaction and Christ’s atemporal stillness are held in tension in a way that demands of the viewer to work at moving from one figure to the other and to consider this disparity. The purposeful positioning of Christ at the foot of the painting, so to speak, instead of in the Virgin’s lap, complicates the viewer’s experience of the painting; he can neither easily project the entire scene back in time, nor concentrate on the Pietà group as a unit. Disunity is an intended effect of the painting; as is the painting’s exhortation to the viewer to bring together these diverging elements.

The effect created is of Christ as a sacramental body in the present (signaled by the fiction of his lying in the real space of the church altar table) and his embeddedness in sacred history. By insisting on this simultaneity, the painting suggests continuity between present and past. We are made to meditate on the movement of time and on Christ’s Passion. At the same time, we are reminded that his body exists out of time and is not subject to the same temporal effects as man and nature. By taking Christ out of the historical narrative, as it were, Sebastiano offers his body up for contemplation in the
present and asserts God’s eternal proximity to man. Yet, here too, both proximity and distance determine our relationship to Christ’s body. Christ’s presence and accessibility are subverted by the dark shadow that partly conceals his face. Fixed eternity seems at once within and beyond reach. The viewer is made aware of the distance that must be traversed to attain knowledge of God from his own time- and sense-bound world. That the senses are part of the journey is insinuated by the moving shadows, clouds, wind, and other natural phenomena that stir around Christ’s body. Quieting these tumultuous elements lies in the work of meditation and in the journey that leads closer to God.159

Other passages in the painting offer further reflections on the proximity and distance between divinity and man. The moon, an evocation of divinity in the heavens, appears both close and far away – close in the literal distance that must be traversed over the picture plane up from the Virgin’s eyes, but far as a celestial body within the illusion of the painting.

In this way, the Pietà reflects on the notion of still eternity and moving time, and on the proximity and distance between them. To return to my initial questions: How does the painting enact the pious viewer’s conversion? How is man’s soul made to stand still? My final claim is that man’s interior transformation is located by the painting in the mutability of natural phenomena – seen in the sky, clouds, wind, waterfall and red light in the landscape. Meditating in front of the work, the viewer participates in its turbulent movement, but his eye also finds rest in the still body of Christ. Painting thus visualizes

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how the viewer strives to bridge the gap between his temporal existence and God’s eternity through the work of meditation.

The idea of the space between mundane and spiritual experience is addressed by Janette Vusich in her dissertation on Fra Bartolommeo; she notes the complex ways in which the artist’s *The Vision of St. Bernard* (Figure 189) visualizes the barrier between earthly and divine reality that must be breached in order to achieve mystical union.\(^\text{160}\)
The painting attends to the gap between the mundane and the miraculous, between text and vision, and between the illusionistic inset Crucifixion panel at the bottom edge of the painting and St. Bernard’s (but not the viewer’s) mystic experience. In this way, the painting acts as a guide to mystical union and as “a meta-commentary on the superior effectiveness of images as aids to rapture.”\(^\text{161}\) The shift from corporeal to spiritual sight is made analogous to the practice of beholding a painting and witnessing a vision.\(^\text{162}\) By picturing this space between the mundane and the divine, Fra Bartolommeo’s visualizes the effort of meditation.

Sebastiano’s *Pietà*, likewise, pictures the space between two realms – temporal and eternal. However, where Fra Bartolommeo’s work is about restricting the viewer’s access to St. Bernard’s vision and exhorting the viewer to have his own vis-à-vis the Crucifixion panel, Sebastiano’s work identifies with the viewer’s interior state. It pictures the tumultuous movement of the soul that makes up the meditative experience via the figure of the Virgin, who, by her size, upright position, frontality, and nearness to the

\(^\text{160}\) Jannette Vusich, “*Divinus Amor Extasim Facit*: Fra Bartolommeo and Mysticism in Renaissance Florence” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 37-41.
\(^\text{161}\) Ibid., 40
\(^\text{162}\) Ibid., 41.
picture-plane, mirrors the viewer standing before the work and underscores the immediacy of the scene.\textsuperscript{163}

2.7 Stillness and Motion, Metaphoric Language

The Pietà concretizes the shift of movement into stillness. It does not merely picture the one and the other, but rather pushes on pictorial and coloristic effects to express visual transformation. This pictorial conversion acts as a metaphor for the repeated interior conversion that the faithful undergoes each time in meditating on God. In this way, the work visualizes the process by which the faithful arrives at knowledge of God – it visualizes meditation on the divine. The Pietà, in fact, performs all kinds of shifts and transformations – movement to stillness, painting to sculpture, absence to presence, history to present, darkness to light, and marmoreal to fleshy surfaces. The use of the rhetoric of transformation had parallels in the oratory of Giles of Viterbo and is best understood as Sebastiano’s response to Giles’ call for a reformed relationship between man and religion.\textsuperscript{164} In his sermons and writing, Giles focused on the distance between man’s soul and God, and on interior renewal that would bridge that distance. He emerges as a direct precursor to the Evangelical movement that spread over Italy in the 1530s and 40s in an effort of internal Catholic reform.\textsuperscript{165} His search for a more individual spirituality, based on prayer and meditation in solitude, became a model for later

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{164} Giles uttered his famous words, “People must be changed by religion, not religion by people” in his Inaugural Oration of the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512. See Martin, Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar, 286.
\textsuperscript{165} Jung, “On the Nature of Evangelism,” 513. Jung also places Savonarola, Tommaso Giustiniani, Vicenzo Quirini, and Gasparo Contarini in this group of early reformers whose mysticism, Biblicism, and exhortation to reform the Church became a model for the Evangelicals.
reformers who reformulated external and material Christian ritual in favor of what they saw as a more immediate, personal, and less mediated relation to God.166

Giles was invested in cultivating the use of figurative rhetoric to convey theological wisdom and infusing scholastic arguments with poetic truth and beauty. His sermons repeatedly speak to the movement of the soul in its ascent towards God, who, for Giles, represents a final state of rest and stillness. The concept was not new – Plato, Augustine, and Ficino each addressed the question of how the soul rises, transcends the physical world and reaches God.167 And indeed these thinkers’ works emerge as principle subtexts to Giles’ discussion of movement and stillness of the soul. But it is the way in which Giles expressed this notion – through highly metaphoric language that evoked tempestuous imagery of storms, darkness, and light – that invites further scrutiny. Specifically, Giles’s public and influential sermons delivered in St. Peter’s Basilica (1507), the Lateran Basilica (1512), and S. Maria del Popolo (1512) in the spirit of reform and Sebastiano’s concurrent residence in Rome raises the question of Sebastiano’s uptake of and response to Giles’ metaphoric portrayal of theological truth.

It emerges that Sebastiano, like Giles, had high stakes in the potency and authority of metaphoric imagery. His paintings of Christ are metaphoric representations because they do not claim to be exact, mimetic portrayals of Christ within the narrative of the Passion.168 Instead, the figures are like idealized classical sculpture – elegant, still,

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166 For a discussion of Evangelical values, see ibid., 520.
167 See Chapter 2, no.24.
168 Metaphoric painting functions according to figurative and analogical language, rather than exact likeness, to convey an idea. The poets Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Tasso supported the idea of hiding truth behind a pleasing veil of fiction, that is figurative language and obscurity, as a function of poetry. It was seen to enhance the mystery of divine things, which could not be known directly by mortals anyway according to Neoplatonic thought. Gilio credited Michelangelo with the invention of metaphoric painting in his Last Judgment (though Gilio dissapproved of it due to its potential for multiple meanings). The notion of metaphoric-poetic painting, however, was actually much more widespread and appeared earlier than Gilio.
and abstracted – and the landscapes visualize internal states of mind rather than real historical places.

In this section, I ask: is Sebastiano’s painting metaphoric? And if so, what kind of metaphor is Sebastiano proposing and to what ends? I argue that Sebastiano’s work makes highly original use of transient weather effects as a figure for the movement of contemplative thought and a sculptural aesthetic as a figure for the eternal nature of God and the viewer’s desire to reach that state. The latter is what Augustine would call the mind’s “attention” or *attentio animi* to the present, which approximates eternity without ever reaching it; the former recalls his notion of *distentio animi* or the mind’s distension and slippage across threefold time. Analogously, the painting traverses states of movement and stillness, shifting between transitory, historical time and God’s existence out of time, and thereby mirroring the viewer’s own mental shift between wandering and concentrated contemplation. Like Giles of Viterbo, whose *Commentary* evokes Augustine’s reflection on time and eternity, Sebastiano transforms the historical narrative of the Passion into a painting that reflects on the effort of meditation itself – on the gap between the viewer’s agitated, temporal existence and Christ’s out-of-time, ever-present state. And like Giles, Sebastiano uses tempestuous imagery and metaphors of light and darkness to suggest the rising of the soul toward knowledge of God, and hence, interior conversion. In asking how one comes to know and understand God, the painting shifts

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169 Augustine, “The Confessions” ed. Rotelle, 300-1. For an excellent discussion of Augustine on time and eternity, which greatly informs my reading of Augustine and Sebastiano’s work, see Chapter One of Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative.*
from the Virgin’s movement to Christ’s immobility and from human time to divine non-
time. It does so by use of metaphor.

Though Sebastiano’s Pietà is set in a natural setting that evokes specificity of place, it is also unlikely that this scene was meant to act as a convincing historical representation of the Passion and even less likely that it was meant to represent Viterbo itself, as some scholars have it. The setting, though it recalls antiquity by means of Roman architecture, is also a kind of nowhere space. The buildings, both the Roman arches on the left and the humble wooden dwelling on the right, are in ruin and overshadowed by the expanse of rolling hills and grassland enveloped in darkness. The architecture furthest away, high up on the horizon and behind the row of trees, is nearly lost to sight. Though intact, its minuteness implies that the scene is set outside the city and the presence of people. The painting underscores nature as a place of mental retreat and solitude. The moon and single blue cloud in the vast dark sky act to emphasize the Virgin’s own solitude – they echo her in color and receive her gaze and prayers as if to call attention to the fact that no one else is there. Mary is alone in her grief and appeal to God. The scene, in fact, recalls the words of Giles’s letter of 1502 to Botoni, where the former agrees to the need to rebuild Viterbo’s religious community:

You declared that love for our own native province and kindred ought to move us, and that we owe this service to the age-old kindness of our Lady, who long ago defended the city against the darkness of Deucalion and long-lasting night.

170 The debate on whether God can be known and revealed to man is discussed by Steinmetz, “Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God.” See also Diana Stanciu, “Accomplishing One’s Essence: The Role of Meditation in the Theology of Gabriel Biel,” in Meditatio – Refashioning the Self, 127-152.
171 See Alessi “Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo,” 16-23.
172 Giles’ letter is cited in full in Martin, Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar, 348.
Giles’ reference to the darkness of Deucalion and long-lasting night is meant to evoke the barrenness and solitude of the earth after Jupiter’s generation of the devastating flood. It also recalls the Christian story of Noah surviving the flood.\textsuperscript{173} Giles uses this image of darkness as a metaphor for the demonic attack of 1320 on Viterbo, which was characterized in historic documents by wind, fire, flooding, and the darkness of night, and from which was borne the cult of the Madonna Liberatrice in Viterbo.\textsuperscript{174} Similarly, rather than give a detailed and descriptive account of the Passion, Sebastiano’s painting seeks to convey an internal state of mind, that is, the solitude of the Virgin. She, in turn, acts as a mirror to the viewer’s private meditation on Christ’s humanity and death.

The painting invites us to follow the Virgin’s upward gaze into the bare and abstracted sky, where horizontal striations of purple, brown and maroon fill almost two-thirds of the entire canvas. The horizon line tilts up and disappears into this dark area of color, especially on the right-hand side. The Virgin gazes up and we have the distinct impression that she looks up at the moon, though it is actually behind her. On the flat picture plane, on the other hand, her gaze does seem to meet the moon directly above her, but in depth we take the moon to be behind her and far away in the purple-black sky. We experience her prayer as intimately tied to and directed at the moon because we can see it, though she cannot. In this way, her solitary experience is mirrored by our own position in front of the work and our completion of what she cannot physically see behind her. She also acts as a model and mirror to the viewer’s own private prayer – she lifts our gaze

\textsuperscript{173} Giles’ Eclogue “On the Resurrection of Our Lord” makes reference to “Deucalion’s waters” in context of God’s sending down the flood to extinguish “iniquity’s fires” See Martin, Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar, 415.
\textsuperscript{174} See Barbieri, “Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto,” 82-3.
up from Christ’s physical body in order to contemplate God with the inner, spiritual eye.\footnote{175}

The painting shows nature as a place of transient effects, which Sebastiano summons to visualize the “movement” of the Virgin’s soul. More specifically, the transient weather effects stand as a \textit{figura} for the movement of contemplative thought, modeled by the Virgin in solitude and encouraged during meditation on Christ in Augustinian reformist circles.\footnote{176} Sebastiano, like Giles, is concerned with the notion of transformation. Where the theologian draws on metaphors of ascent and transformation to convey his desired renewal of the Church at a time of threat from the schism and dissatisfaction with its corruption, Sebastiano employs pictorial motion and transformation to convey the interior conversion of the individual before the altarpiece.

In his sermon at Santa Maria del Popolo delivered on November 25, 1512, Giles addresses the problem of the “detestable schism” and reads the recent disasters that have befallen mankind as God’s plan to restore man.\footnote{177} He imagines the restoration of human souls as a movement out of darkness towards light that mimics the succession of events by which the world was made:

\begin{quote}
Now, when things are to be restored, this has to be done on the same principles whereby they were set up in the first place; and since Moses described the creation of the world in a series of days, it is customary to think of the restoration of human affairs under the figure of successive days, similar to those which saw the world’s birth. By the common
\end{quote}

\footnotetext{175}{See Powell, \textit{Depositions}, 222 for a discussion of the Virgin as the medium through which the viewer can know and access an otherwise invisible God in Jan Mostaert’s \textit{Deposition from the Cross} (c.1520), Brussels.}
\footnotetext{176}{See Eric Leland Saak, \textit{High Way to Heaven: the Augustinian Platform Between Reform and Reformation, 1292-1524} (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 612-613 for the importance of \textit{figura} in Augustinian spiritual ascent and of Scripture to the soul’s rising during contemplation. On Jordan of Quedlinburg’s \textit{Meditationes de Passione Christi} (c.1364) and the role of meditation as a means to attaining knowledge of God and bring the contemplative soul closer to God and beyond the realm of the senses, see also ibid., 477-85.}
\footnotetext{177}{Martin, \textit{Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar}, 298}
consent of the Academy, the Old Testament, and the New, every restoration of human souls by which life is granted to men is represented as a movement whereby they struggle out of darkness and rise up with all their might to seek and gaze upon the sun.  

Here and elsewhere in his sermons, Giles evokes images of ascent and flight to reach the light of God out of the darkness of ignorance.

Moreover, Giles conjures up imagery of violent winds and tempests to convey the fallen state of the Church and imagery of peaceful nature to portray the revived Church.

In “The Inaugural Oration of the Fifth Lateran Council” given at the Lateran Basilica on May 3, 1512, Giles speaks in support of papal authority and, above all, of his belief in Councils as a means to reform the Church. He states:

Today, petitions to the Holy Spirit were decreed by the Council fathers. After the fathers again took refuge in the Council at his admonition, they emended and composed everything as quickly as possible. After they mastered the winds and gales, they were carried, so to speak, into the safest of harbors, where they compelled violence to yield to reason, outrage to justice, vice to virtue, tempest and flood to peace and tranquility.

To the Holy Spirit, the God of fishermen, sea, and waters, they sang the hymn: Many waters cannot quench charity (Sg 8:6), and the hymn: Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone... Arise, my love (Sg 2:11.13). For the Bride lies sleeping, like trees in winter.

Through the efforts of Councils, she rises and grows green again, just as woodlands put forth leaves in springtime when the sun returns. As sunlight waxes, fruitful zephyrs blow, and productive plantations germinate. Through the illumination of Councils and the Holy Spirit, breezes blow, and the dead eyes of the Church revive and receive light [...] 

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178 Ibid., 299
179 See ibid., 209, 211, 232, 234, 235, 287, and 299.
In this passage, Giles uses the idea of transformative nature as a metaphor for the renewal of the Church – brought about with the help of Councils. Winds and gales yield to safe harbors, tempest and flood to tranquility, winter to spring, and barren trees to greenery. Similarly, Giles conjures up the elements to convey both the flux of matter and the unstable nature of man’s soul. In his sermon “Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II” delivered in St. Peter’s on December 21, 1507, Giles describes the confinement of the soul within the body and the effect matter has on the state of the soul:

Matter, as people say, is very like the sea-god Proteus: “it transforms itself into all kinds of uncanny shapes, into a fire, or a horrible wild beast, or a flowing river.” These four kinds of matter [fire, earth, air, water], however, are continually at loggerheads and warring among themselves; and this is why souls confined in human bodies composed of mutually hostile elements are continually tossed hither and thither.181

For Giles, the flux of matter causes the soul to be unstable as well. In this way, Giles vividly evokes the opening of Augustine’s Conferences where Augustine states, “our heart is unquiet until it finds rest in you.”182

After two years of living in Rome under the sway of Giles’ metaphorically-styled sermons, Sebastiano produces his first religious commission with a landscape that is activated by the movement of wind and light. Sebastiano pushes on the landscape to communicate not only a moment of the Passion, but also the Virgin’s contemplative state of mind in solitude. Like Giles’ use of metaphors of winds, tempests, rivers and fire to

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convey the soul’s state of unrest, Sebastiano employs metaphoric landscape to mirror the process by which the beholder meditates on the divine. For Giles, transformation is a central part of his conception of the reform of the Church and that of the individual. His famous statement “Man is to be changed by the sacred, not the sacred by man,” spoken at the Fifth Lateran Council, reveals his investment in individual reformation.  

He immediately follows this line with the statement, “Since the divine are movements devoid of change, they do not need reform. But the heavenly and the human require reformation, inasmuch as they are subject to modification.”  It is man’s changeable nature that puts him in need of interior transformation.

The idea of the changeability of natural or physical phenomena standing in as a figure for something as incorporeal as the soul is a concept that Sebastiano takes from Giles and responds to in his painting. The Pietà performs all kinds of shifts and transformations – movement to stillness, painting to sculpture, absence to presence, history to present, darkness to light, and marmoreal to fleshy surfaces. Sebastiano manipulates color to evoke both painted and sculpted forms. The quality of paint changes from dark, translucent and watercolor-like in the landscape, painted freely without the use of underdrawing, to opaque and polished in the figures. Gradations of light and dark appear separate from the bodies they are cast on, surging over surfaces rather than defining them, but at the same time contained within the carefully-rendered contours.

The rolling forms of the landscape, on the other hand, are modeled entirely by color,

\[183\] Martin, *Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar*, 286.
\[184\] Ibid., 286.
\[185\] The kind of effect I am describing is examined by Shearman in his study of Leonardo’s color and chiaroscuro. Shearman describes Leonardo’s invention of the early 1500s as the liberation of color from form, thus allowing it to move across the surface: “so that colour, now independent, was free to surge dynamically over the picture surface.” Shearman sees this as the expression of the continuity of the world in art. See John Shearman. “Leonardo's Color and Chiaroscuro,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 25 (1962): 13-47.
which creates a sense of movement unrestrained by line. The two modes are not by any means isolated from one another; they interact creating the sense that paint can be sculptural, transient weather effects can be quieted, and darkness can be illuminated by multiple sources of light – by the moon, the red glow on the horizon, or the window outside the painting.

Notably, Sebastiano’s interest in what can be decidedly called “Venetian” landscape appears only in Rome. This suggests that he self-consciously adopted the manner to assert his identity as a Venetian artist. The setting of the Pietà should be understood as emerging out of Venetian experimentation with the possibilities of landscape in the altarpiece and devotional painting. Works like Bellini’s *Madonna and Child* (1480-90), Accademia Carrara, and Giorgione’s Castelfranco Altarpiece push on landscape to stand for more than just a continuation of our mundane world. 186 By means of landscape, the artists introduce the elegiac mood of pastoral lyric into religious painting and, thus, create a natural idyll that evokes the divine realm of heaven. The notion of landscape as a place in which to contemplate higher things by reflection on natural phenomena, as Stephen Campbell argues to be the case in Giorgione’s *Tempest*, is translated by the artists into sacred painting. 187 Sebastiano similarly makes landscape a

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186 Rona Goffen, “Bellini’s Altarpieces, Inside and Out,” *Source* 5 (1985): 23-32. Something similar can be said of the genre of the hermitage landscape, which emerged in the North in the period of 1550-1640. The expansive landscapes of Jan Brueghel the Elder and Joachim Patinir can be compared to Petrarch’s vision of roaming in the countryside as an image for the soul’s transformative liberation. The hermitage landscape painting becomes a fictive, psychological landscape for the journey of the soul. See Leopoldine Prosperetti, “Crafting Repose: Aesthetic and Cultural Aspects of the Hermitage Landscape by Jan Brueghel the Elder” in *Image and Imagination*, 358-64. The idea of a psychological landscape as a mirror to the viewer’s inner journey of the soul resonates with Sebastiano’s use of landscape in the Viterbo Pietà.

locus of meditation, and exhorts the viewer to attend to the shifts and changes of the ephemeral effects of landscape as a way to contemplate the passage from the mundane, changeable world to the constancy of the divine. His landscape destabilizes, rather than fixes, meaning.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, Sebastiano employs a sculptural aesthetic for his figures. The figures appear isolated from the landscape in their clearly defined contours and exhibit the effects of the wind to varying degrees, from the Virgin’s billowing drapery to the stillness of Christ’s cloth. The stillness of his sleep is underscored by the stiffness of his body. Unlike Michelangelo’s Christ in the St. Peter’s Pietà, whose body sinks into Mary’s lap – with the drapery of her robe seemingly grasped between the fingers of his right hand – and whose head tilts back as in a state of sweet sleep, Sebastiano’s Christ appears motionless. And unlike Michelangelo’s compositions, which depend upon figures in contact and movement, Sebastiano stresses immobility, isolation and separation. Perhaps most striking is Christ’s skin, which appears marmoreal – smooth, bloodless, even in quality. Instead of giving the impression of bone underneath, as for example in the Virgin’s hands, it is modeled to give the illusion of a perfect and untouched surface. His body is not fleshy, but hard. This effect is enhanced by the use of soft shadowing, which surges over his body and ripples across his rib cage as if it were sculpture.

Notably, Giles’ “Letter to Antonio Zoccoli and the Roman People” (1503-8) describes statue in terms of its hardness, heaviness and immobility. His analogy appears in context of his description of man’s love for God, which gives him wings and carries

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188 For Nagel’s discussion of Michelangelo’s Christ see Nagel, Reform of Art, 100.
189 Lucco, however, who describes Christ’s skin as rendered in “soft flesh-colored, Venetian sfumato.” See Sebastiano del Piombo, 164.
him upward; when that love becomes faded, however, man becomes hard and unmovable and cannot rise up and is like a heavy statue:

For every action of mortals lies still and stiff and cannot raise itself to the blessed life unless love adds wings. But with this love they fashion twin wings, one that carries the prayers of mortals to heaven, another that carries gifts from above to mortals. [...] If someone grows still in a faded life, even though he may have some salt, it is frozen, hard and unmovable and is thus unable to rise up. Turned back into the heaviest statue, it cannot be moved from its place and be lifted up or forward by any power. It can no more be moved than a huge quantity of iron.  

Giles’ analogy between stiffened love and statue demonstrates his use of sculpture as a metaphor for frozen immobility.

That the poets Francesca Maria Molza and Gandolfo Porrino analogized Sebastiano’s color to sculpture, while praising its ability to retain its vaghezza, further hints at the way Sebastiano’s work functioned for its contemporaries. Their comparison, I argue, goes beyond the literal paragone between painting and sculpture, where the former seeks to outcompete the latter in longevity of material and portrayal of three dimensional form. It contains metaphoric connotations as well. That the poets’ verses were a pendant to Sebastiano’s Portrait of Giulia Gonzaga on slate (now lost; Figure 190 is thought to be closest to the original) further suggests a poetic dimension to Sebastiano’s aspirations as painter.

Sebastiano’s Portrait of Giulia Gonzaga was a commission that brought together the two litterati, Molza and Porrino, and Sebastiano into a game of poetic and painterly ekphrasis. Molza compares Sebastiano’s color to sculpture:

You, who with great care equalizes the paintbrush to the hammer/ and the monumentality/ that only sculpture already possesses/ you give to the

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190 Giles’ letter is translated and cited in full in Martin, Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar, 209.
191 For a discussion of the verses and portrait as a poetic and painterly game of ekphrasis, see Barbieri “Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi,” 59.
colors and with no lesser beauty, so that painting rises to greatness only for you.

Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col martello, e la grandezza / che sola possedea già la scultura/ ai colori doni e non minor vaghezza, / si che superba gir può la pittura, / sola per te salita a tanta altezza.\(^{192}\)

Molza’s verses can be read as a celebration of the “sculptural monumentality” of Sebastiano’s color and a praise of the artist’s handling of the paintbrush as if it were a sculptor’s tool, which he equates or equalizes (pareggiare) to the hammer – that is, Sebastiano makes his painting compete with sculpture.\(^ {193}\) In this way, Molza evokes not only Sebastiano’s competition with sculpture on a two-dimensional surface, but also his ability to work color as if it were sculpture – as if the vaghezza of color could be chiseled and smoothed by the burin and hammer into something solid, stable and marble-like.

Porrino’s verses written for the same painting corroborate this reading:

And with that art, with which you alone/ honor our century and make it illustrious and beautiful,/ with a new mode you equate your colors/ to the hammer’s and the anvil’s strengths.

E con quell'arte, di che solo onori/ il secol nostra e lo fai chiaro e bello,/ con nuovo uso agguagliando i tuoi colori/ alle forze d'incude e di martello.\(^{194}\)

The last two verses evoke the literal hardness or stoniness of Sebastiano’s color. This play on the literalness of the analogy – on the fiction that color can be shaped by the hammer like a sculptor’s materials – concretizes the metaphor inherent in Molza’s notion of “equalizing” the paintbrush to the hammer. Together, the poets frame Sebastiano’s

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\(^{194}\) Gandolfo Porrino’s poem is published by Serassi and erroneously attributed to Molza, see “stanza XLII” in *Delle poesie volgari e latine*, 148. See also Barbieri “Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi,” 61.
portrait between two types of comparison: literal and metaphoric. Moreover, they point to Sebastiano’s double mastery of color’s sculptural solidity and its vaghezza.

I believe that together the poets make explicit an important and recurrent theme in Sebastiano’s works: that his colore is like sculpture and is itself sculpted. Molza describes Sebastiano’s color as endowed with the grandeur of sculpture without losing its quality of vaghezza. He and Porrino, even more emphatically, describe Sebastiano as a sculptor who manipulates his colors with a hammer. His colors are petrified and stone-like, yet still have that unstable quality that can induce a state of mental wandering in the viewer. The poets’ verses suggest that Sebastiano’s work traverses effects that have to do with the changeable and the fixed. The Viterbo Pietà employs the aesthetic of sculpture – its frozenness and association with eternity – to create an effect of stillness. At the same time, stillness comes to stand figuratively for an atemporal state of being, that is, for Christ’s divine nature and the viewer’s aspiration to achieve that state of divine rest out of his fallen temporal existence, which is visualized by the painting as transient nature.

2.8 Augustinian Monastic Reform, Solitude and Meditation

To return to my earlier question: how did Sebastiano’s work answer Giles’ call to seclusion, solitude and asceticism as the means to reform devotion? I argue that the work pictures an eremitical ideal of meditation that speaks to the reformist ideas advanced by Sebastiano’s patron Botoni, Botoni’s friend and prior general of the Viterbese Augustinian Order, Giles of Viterbo, as well as the broader monastic reform movement at the turn of the century whose ideals are best described in the writing of Paolo Giustiniani.

The viewer’s direct and immediate access to the figure of the Virgin – a mediator

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195 This, in effect, invalidates the commonly held view in scholarship that Sebastiano and contemporaneous writers on art were invested in an opposition of colore and disegno.
between himself and God – allows for identification with her. She serves as a model for solitary prayer and hence as an example of the eremitical state of meditation. Moreover, the effect of “eternal looking”, discussed earlier, that Sebastiano achieves through the citation of sculpture is important in that it conjures up the meditative ideal of a stabile eternity.

Sebastiano’s use of sculpture to evoke stability and eternity would have resonated with Botoni’s commitment to monastic reform. Botoni’s letters to Giles reveal a strong desire to revive the monastery in Viterbo, as well as a concern with the turbulence of mortal emotions and the power of prayer and communication with God to quiet them.196

In one letter to Giles, Botoni writes,

When troubled, we see the world as the prey of much turbulence, much pestilence and many serious needs [...] we are daily oppressed by the calamities of tormented unhappiness. What words are more eloquent or greater that human beings could dispose of? Those heavenly prayers directed to the Savior.197

In another letter, he once again refers to the turbulence of the senses:

We mortals, stirred by numberless emotions, separated by many mountains and spaces, in the same way as the weakness of the flesh is separated from our soul, we have to react with crying out, with writing and talking so that the ignorant might understand the learned one and turn away from the wrong road [...].198

196 Botoni’s desire to reform and revive the Augustinian monastery in Viterbo is evident in his letter of May 6, 1502: “I beg you to continue the work undertaken in renovating the convent, so that the wishes of many will be fulfilled.” “Cepam operam pro restitutione cenobii prosequare obsecro ut multitorm desiderium fiat satis.” It can also be inferred from Giles’ letter addressed in response to Botoni in 1503, which opens with the phrase, “In a way typical of your conscientious piety you made your case with great labor and zeal when you urge us not to disdain our monastery in Viterbo [...]” Letter translated in full in Martin, Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar, 25-7. “Multo nos labore ac studio compegisti, quae tua est religio, ut monasterium nostrum Viterbensem non asperraremur [...]” For the full letters in Latin see Voci Roth, Egidio da Viterbo O.S.A. Lettere familiari, I, 154 and Giuseppe Signorelli, Il Cardinale Egidio da Viterbo Agostiniano: Umanista e Riformatore (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1929), 218-19.

197 Voci Roth, Egidio da Viterbo O.S.A. Lettere familiari, I, 152.

198 Ibid., 152-3.
Botoni’s language has a sense of urgency in its tone; speaking and writing assume the form of “crying out” and are necessary to appease the stirring emotions of mortals so that they do not stray down the wrong road. In addition, by virtue of their close friendship, Giles likely represents the kind of meditative life of solitude that Botoni sought himself. Giles’ letter addressed to his brethren in Lecceto (undated) describes his joy and delight in staying at the wooded retreat of Cimino near Viterbo in solitude: “The remainder of the year was spent in meditation: there was nothing that I wished for; I was not shaken or disturbed by any desire or any fear. Imprudently I compared my state to heaven […]”\textsuperscript{199}

It is important to situate Botoni and Giles’ interest in solitude and private meditation as a means to attain unity with God within the broader monastic reform movement at the turn of the century. Both the Augustinian and the Camaldolese Orders called for solitary meditation and an eremitical lifestyle as the means to individual reform.\textsuperscript{200} Tommaso Giustiniani, a Venetian who entered the Camaldoli hermitage and took the name Paolo in 1510, wrote the \textit{Rule of the Eremitic Life} (1516), which describes his vision for the Camaldolese order and his monastic ideals of contemplation – the need for a physical place of solitude, silence, and constant stability. I argue that these strongly resonate with the way Sebastiano pictures the meditative ideal by using the Virgin as a model of prayer; she, in fact, was one of the models chosen by reformers – in one of his manuscripts, Giustiniani makes mention of “the solitary Mary”, Christ and Adam as

\textsuperscript{199} Letter cited in Martin, \textit{Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar}, 361.

models of solitary prayer. Moreover, the interest among Venetian elites (Querini and Contarini among them) in the Camaldoli hermitage as a place of escape from the city’s worldly distractions would have been familiar to Sebastiano during the years that he lived and worked there. Contarini’s letter of 1512 to Giustiniani demonstrates this belief in the monastery as a desirable escape from the city, as well as Contarini’s hope that he can one day make the transition: “It [my disposition] does not allow me to escape the multitude of the city [Venice] and find a little solitude which is plentiful in any religious order, or to leave my friends and relatives who live here.”

In his manuscript, Giustiniani writes, “For solitary places have always greatly helped true solitude of the soul.” He goes on to say that if “the hermits truly wish to safeguard their solitude, they should exert all their efforts on the task of seeing that the forests around the hermitage belonging to them, should not be thinned out, but should be kept intact and developed.” Yet, even as he stresses the importance of physical place for the soul’s solitude, for Giustiniani, true solitude is ultimately attained within, independent of external place: “No physical solitude can confer peace of mind, without the help of the true solitude which is interior [...] Perfection is not attained by details of place or time.” The idea of solitude, both external and internal, strongly resonates with Sebastiano’s Pietà. The Virgin in the Pietà, a model of solitary prayer, is surrounded by

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202 Contarini, “Three letters of Gasparo Contarini,” 25. Contarini’s letters, however, also show his sadness and anxiety about being separated from his friends – he pleads with them to leave their solitude - and his desire for conversation with them as a means to attain knowledge of God. Such letters reveal that eremitic solitude was not an easy choice and was not the only way by which the faithful sought proximity to God. See Constance Furey, “The Communication of Friendship: Gasparo Contarini’s Letters to Hermits at Camaldoli” *Church History* 72, No. 1 (2003): 71-101.


the kind of forested sanctuary that Giustinian describes. The absence of mourners, the Cross, or other elements that would locate the scene just after the Crucifixion or before the Entombment suggests that the location is significant in a different way. Rather than picturing a literal place within the narrative of the Passion, Sebastiano locates the Virgin in a setting that more closely recalls the forested environment that would surround the ideal monastic hermitage. She is alone physically, with the city far behind her on the horizon and partly concealed by trees. The rising Roman architecture on the left is also located at a distance on the other side of the stream and waterfall, and, in its ruinous state, further signals the absence of people.

The dark, expansive night sky is an evocative way by which Sebastiano portrays the Virgin’s interior state. The horizontal striations of color lead the eye up, following the Virgin’s gaze, and evoke her (and our own) mental passage from earthly, sensate experience to knowledge of God in heaven. An example of this in Sebastiano’s other works is the glowing and stormy cloud juxtaposed against the Virgin’s head in profile in his Madonna and Child tondo (c. 1513) (Figure 165) at the Fitzwilliam Museum. The cloud appears outside the interior space, cut off by the vertical line of the wall. Nevertheless, its proximity to the Virgin’s head and its coloristic echo of her white

206 Sebastiano is here playing with the poetics of place. The painting transposes the Virgin to a pastoral setting in order to evoke a particular mood, rather than convey historical accuracy. The transposition is underscored through effects of disjunction and non-integration between the Venetian landscape and the sculptural and foregrounded forms of the figures. The novel combinatory composition is inspired by his experience working with Giorgione and Titian. On the idea of poetic *translatio* and the Renaissance practice of grafting pastoral and Christian, see Campbell, “Naturalism and the Venetian "Poesia,"” 115-20.

207 The figures in pastoral landscape are reminiscent of Giorgione’s *The Tempest* (1506-8), Gallerie dell’Accademia where the city also appears far in the distance and a lightning bolt illuminates the cloudy sky. Other similarities include the antique ruins, waterfall, large expanse of sky, and grassy foreground. *The Tempest* has been interpreted in many overly-elaborate ways and has become a kind of art historical puzzle. Campbell has put forth a highly persuasive account of the work, seeing it as a visualization of Lucretian materialism and an escape from the city to contemplate the forces of nature. See Campbell, “Giorgione’s Tempest, Studiolo Culture,” 299-332. I propose that Sebastiano is drawing on his knowledge of the work. He makes nature act as a signifier of an internal state of solitude and similarly stresses sense experience as a means to knowledge, here a path toward knowledge of God.
headdress produces an empathic effect between landscape and the Virgin. Her lowered gaze, along with the goldfinch in the Christ child’s hand, signals her meditation on his future sacrifice. Similarly, the landscape in the Pietà serves to convey not only the solitude of physical place, but also that of “true solitude which is interior.”

Giustiniani also makes explicit the connection between solitude and silence when he writes, “Without silence, there is no solitude.”208 Once again, for Giustiniani, exterior silence is indicative of an interior meditative state: “The silence of religious solitary life was not instituted to make us dumb animals, but to enable us to cease external conversation and to speak constantly to God in prayer or to speak usefully to ourselves in meditation.”209 He goes on to say, “sweet, solitary stillness […] lifts my soul closer to God, renders more translucent the veil through which I glimpse the Redeemer’s infinite sublimity.”210 Giustiniani connects external silence to internal conversation with God. Notably, the Virgin in the Viterbo Pietà raises her eyes up to the moon, without exhibiting the pathos of a number of Michelangelo’s Pietàs, such as the Study for the Colonna Pietà (c.1538), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Figure 116), or the tears of the Virgin in Mario Cartaro’s print after Sebastiano’s work (Figure 191). The Virgin’s mouth remains closed and her facial expression controlled. Her brilliant white eyes are the most expressive part of her face; they strain upward as if to emphasize the longing for union with God and the desire to see through the obscurity of the night. As Giustiniani writes, “You [solitude] enable the soul to adhere always to God the Creator, all good and almighty, who caresses the soul like a cherished bride.”211

208 Leclercq, Alone with God, 72. Leclercq, Seul avec Dieu, 69. FA: 22v
209 Ibid., 71. Leclercq, Seul avec Dieu, 68. Q III: 79.
210 Ibid., 71. Leclercq, Seul avec Dieu, 68. F I: 47.
Finally, Giustiniani describes the importance of stability in countering the tendency for the mind to wander and be distracted by worldly pursuits. He writes, “They [hermits] must strive to maintain constant stability in the hermitage and in the cell [...]” and “Those who have less taste for stability might be seized by restlessness or spurred by some devil or other, so that they would spend the whole day wandering from one room to another [...]”\(^{212}\) The spirit of wandering refers to a hermit’s desire to walk around or take up several tasks only to drop them.\(^ {213}\) To counter this, a hermit is advised to practice solitary and silent prayer in his cell, which will bring stability to his mind and soul, to strive to stay in the same place and at the same task, not yielding to boredom or change, and to be mindful of stability. The *Pietà* does not merely instruct its viewer in how to correctly practice meditation. Instead, it visualizes what that internal process might look like and the conflicting forces at play. The Virgin appears immovable and resolute, with the wind fluttering her drapery around her waist, while the landscape produces the effect of changeability and restlessness. In contrast to the stillness of Christ, however, the Virgin appears in a state of dramatic movement and engrossed in contemplation directed upwards and outside herself. The notion of wandering, or *vagare*, both literally and figuratively (as discussed earlier in context of Sebastiano’s metaphoric language picked

\(^{212}\) Leclercq, *Alone with God*, 79-80. Leclercq, *Seul avec Dieu*, 75-6. RVE f.102, 102’. See also Paolo Giustiniani, *Trattati lettere e frammenti dai manoscritti originali dell’Archivio dei Camaldolesi di Monte Corona: I primi trattati dell’amore di Dio*, vol. 2, ed. Eugenio Massa (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1967), 68-9 for Giustiniani’s reflection on perfection and stability, specifically its absence in earthly things: “In this way, certainly, the soul itself is incomplete: around it indeed imperfect objects whirl around. And indeed at any time can things seen in their beauty which are not perfect, be compared to the beauty of God, to which the eye of the flesh cannot ascend? Earthly things are heard and seen, all are deficient, fallen and slippery. And we cannot benefit from them. Our advantage is given but most briefly. How can our desire for these things be fixed, where none are firm, constant or stable?” “Hoc certe modo imperficitur animus ipse: circa enim obiectum imperfectum versatur. Que enim unquam visa pulcritudo non imperfecta est, si ad pulcritudinem Dei, ad quam carnis oculus non ascendit, conferatur? Terrena sunt que audiuntur, que videntur; omnia deficientia, caduca, labilia. Non possumus eis frui. Usus nobis, et per quam brevissimus, datus est. Quomodo figi potest desiderium nostrum in his, ubi nulla firmitas, nulla constantia, nulla stabilitas est?”

\(^{213}\) Ibid., 80. Leclercq, *Seul avec Dieu*, 75. f.102’.
up on by the poets Molza and Porrino), is an important point here. The *Pietà* visualizes the meditative process by which the viewer traverses his state of temporal movement and wandering to divine rest and immobility.

Earlier I argued that in asserting painting’s relationship to both poetic metaphor and sculpture, Sebastiano was exploring the metaphoric potential of painting and investigating how the transience of historical narrative could be transformed into something more stable and ever-present in the now. The divine nature of God, when conceived through metaphor, comes to be figured in sculptural terms. Similarly, the viewer’s meditation on Christ is visualized as movement that strives to stand still. In this way, the Viterbo *Pietà* is a meditation on subjectivity and subjective time that is experienced in the mind of the beholder. Like Augustine, Sebastiano privileges the “now” (which approximates eternity) as the point from which we view and understand time.²¹⁴ Grossman’s study of literary representations of the self in relation to time convincingly shows that Medieval/early Renaissance poets like Dante and Petrarch explored the formal tensions between temporal narrative (the self speaking in time) and immutable time (the self conceived as a divine architect).²¹⁵ Like the works of these poets, Sebastiano’s painting reflects on subjective time and divine atemporality. Moreover, it visualizes in metaphoric terms the shift between the immaterial movements of the mind and its stillness as the process by which God comes to be known and understood by the faithful.

By virtue of this, the *Pietà* should also be understood as affective painting. By *visualizing* the meditative shift described by Giles and Augustine, the painting also works

on its viewer to *affect* this transformation of the mind and soul. The beholder is stilled in his soul, that is, he himself is made to stand still like eternity itself, by the painting. This is as if in answer to Augustine’s question, cited earlier in the chapter, “Who shall hold the heart of man, that it may stand still, and see how eternity ever still-standing, neither past nor to come, uttereth the times past and to come?” Here Sebastiano uses it to convey a theological reflection on man’s existence in time in relation to God’s existence out-of-time, and on how one overcomes this existential chasm through meditation and prayer. But by doing so, the work lays claim to a metaphoric language.
Chapter Three. Mediation and Scripture in the Borgherini Chapel

According to Vasari, Pierfrancesco Borgherini commissioned Sebastiano to decorate his chapel in S. Pietro in Montorio, Rome (Figure 11 and Figure 192), with the expectation that the work would be of joint authorship.¹ Michelangelo, a friend of Borgherini as several of Michelangelo’s letters reveal, was to provide the design for the work.² No contract survives that would indicate when the agreement was reached or what was decided, but Hirst has convincingly shown that the unified program was likely agreed upon before Michelangelo left Rome in July 1516.³ With Michelangelo away in Florence, Sebastiano worked on the chapel from 1516 until March 1524, when it was publically unveiled. During this time, Sebastiano and Michelangelo corresponded, mostly through Borgherini’s business representative Leonardo Sellaio, and Michelangelo had sent Sebastiano a drawing, a provision that seems to have been a condition of the commission.⁴ The drawing has been lost, but a copy by Giulio Clovio of the Flagellation exists in Windsor Castle (Figure 73) and is widely acknowledged to be an accurate copy after Michelangelo’s drawing for Sebastiano.⁵ The reason the project took eight years to complete was due to its interruption from 1517-19 when Sebastiano was commissioned

⁴ In a letter dated August 9, 1516 (the first surviving letter that pertains to the commission), Sellaio replies to a lost letter of Michelangelo’s, asking him to send the awaited drawing to Sebastiano: “Avete a mandare el disegno a Bastiano. E richordovi el quadro di Pier Francesco, e a voi mi rachomando.” Hirst connects this drawing to the “piccolo disegno” that Vasari refers to in his Life of Sebastiano as having been made by Michelangelo for this commission. See ibid., 50-1.
by Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici to paint the *Raising of Lazarus* in competition with Raphael, whose *Transfiguration* (Figure 9) ultimately won the competition and ended up on the high altar of the same church as Sebastiano’s Borgherini commission.

Hirst has put forth a tentative chronology of Sebastiano’s work on the chapel, based on the letters exchanged. He traces the commission from its inception in the form of sketches and cartoons to a proposal of the sequence in which Sebastiano executed the various parts of the chapel – starting with the *Prophets* in the spandrels and working his way down to the *Transfiguration* in the half-dome and finally the *Flagellation* in the central altar image flanked by *St. Peter* and *St. Francis* on either side.6 Here I will not contest or add to Hirst’s outline of how the work progressed; his proposal, in fact, looks quite sound.7 Instead, the focus of this chapter will be on the way the images work together as a program – on the questions they raise when viewed in relation to one another – and on Sebastiano’s approach to Michelangelo’s drawings – their transformation in his hands into the images, executed in fresco and oil, we see today in the chapel. Notably, Sebastiano made his own preparatory drawings for the work as well and it is important to understand these in the context of the collaboration.

Sebastiano’s drawing *Prophet Addressed by an Angel* (Figure 132), for example, has the figure holding a partly-opened book and pointing urgently with the same hand’s finger toward the Transfiguration of Christ. The drawing illuminates Sebastiano’s repurposing of a Michelangelo drawing (Figure 77), made for the *Raising of Lazarus*, in order to make a statement about the relationship between text, image, and revelation. The

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6 Ibid., 53-54.

drawing also foregrounds a recurring theme throughout the chapel decoration – the presence of tablets, scrolls, and opened and closed books. The latter are, in fact, directly inspired by Raphael’s Sibyls in the Chigi Chapel in S. Maria della Pace. Together, these books, tablets, and scrolls are juxtaposed against an inscription below the altar and IHS monogram that reads APERIETUR IN TEMPORE or “Let it be opened in time” (Figure 193).\(^8\) Josephine Jungić has understood this inscription as a quotation from Amadeus’ Apocalypsis Nova, and, with the recurrence of books and the Flagellation in mind, argues the chapel decoration to be a response to the fallen state of the Church and Joachimist prophecies of Church renewal.\(^9\) While I am not entirely convinced by Jungić’s association of Sebastiano’s work with the Apocalypsis Nova via the legend and effigies of Amadeus or her interpretation of the Flagellation as dark and pessimistic, I do believe that both the inscription and the recurrence of books is central to understanding the chapel imagery. In this chapter, I explore the significance of books and revelation, which I see as the unifying element of the program.

Images of textual revelation and inspired prophecy – like those in Raphael’s Chigi Chapel, Sebastiano’s Borgherini Chapel, and Michelangelo’s Sistine ceiling (which is peopled by sibyls and prophets throughout) – attest to the increasing interest in and, as

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\(^8\) “Aperietur / in / Tempore.” See Strinati et al., Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, 176 for a high quality image of this part of the wall.

\(^9\) Josephine Jungić, “Joachimist Prophecies in Sebastiano del Piombo's Borgherini Chapel and Raphael's Transfiguration” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 51, (1988): 66-83, esp. 76-8. The Apocalypsis Nova, a Book of Revelations written by Amadeus Menez da Silva, was discovered in manuscript form in S. Pietro in Montorio in 1502. Jungić connects the inscription to an oral legend in which Amadeus lies in his tomb with his book, on the cover of which are written the same words, and to effigies of the saint holding the book with the inscription. She argues that the Flagellation is a stark image about the state of wretchedness of the Church and that the Transfiguration above signals the Church’s renewal. The argument, however, does not take into account the patron’s or artist’s interests and makes doubtful connections between Savonarola and Bernardino Carvajal, proponents of these Joachimist prophecies, and Borgherini himself. Moreover, I disagree that the tone of the Flagellation is dark and pessimistic, and a reflection of the suffering of the Church. Rather, Sebastiano’s Christ is beautiful, idealized, and without pain.
will become clear, tremendous concern with the growing prophetic culture of Rome at the turn of the century. I contend that it is this concern with false prophecy that, in part, triggers a crisis over the mediated knowledge of God – that is, the acknowledgment that God is known only through authorized texts and images, and never seen directly.

In light of this problem, we can better understand why images and their relationship to Scripture had become a topic of such intense debate in the early sixteenth century. Erasmus, in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1503), criticized the veneration of images and relics as ends in themselves; proper worship was to be directed to spiritual, rather than material, reality. According to Erasmus, the worshipper was to turn to Scripture, which provided the best “picture” of God, since the portrait of God’s mind that “the skill of the Holy Spirit has portrayed in the writing of the Gospels” was to be found there. The words of the Son, the written symbols of Scripture or litteris, were the closest image of God and not man-made images – Scripture was an image of God in itself, but without the threat of idolatry. By pitting Scripture against images as the proper and true way of knowing God, Erasmus was responding to the emerging problem of having to reconcile the Word of God with the Church’s tradition of biblical exegesis and use of images in devotion. As this chapter will go on to show, Sebastiano’s Borgherini Chapel should equally be understood as a reflection – within the Roman Catholic world – on questions of textual and visual mediation.

Returning to the question of collaboration and the relationship between Sebastiano’s chapel images and Michelangelo’s drawings, I see a general failure in scholarship to properly address the problem of dual- (or even multi-) source style in the

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Borghini commission. In focusing their energies on the division of labor between Sebastiano and Michelangelo in this work or on the ongoing rivalry between Sebastiano and Raphael (exemplified by the artists’ nearly contemporaneous painting of the Transfiguration and the resemblance between Sebastiano’s Prophets and Raphael’s Sibyls in S. Maria della Pace), scholars have neglected to ask how this mixture of borrowed ideas in the form of sketches and Sebastiano’s own studies, whether inspired by Michelangelo and Raphael or made independent of direct models, conditions the way in which the chapel program works as a whole. Moreover, what hasn’t been asked is what Sebastiano achieves by this combinatory technique and what this says about his investment in collaboration or synthesis as a means to create works of art. Why did he solicit Michelangelo for drawings for some parts and not others? How do we explain the varying medium, scale, and style between the spandrels, half-dome, center and sides?

Finally, I examine how Sebastiano’s second version of the Flagellation (Figure 100), an independent panel made upon Giovanni Botoni’s request, draws upon the Borgherini version and ask what this reveals about the artist’s aims in visualizing Christ’s

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11 See Rona Goffen, Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 227-60; Marcia Hall, The Sacred Image In the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 152; Marcia Hall, "Sebastiano del Piombo, Flagellation, Transfiguration, Prophets" in Color and meaning: practice and theory in Renaissance painting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Costanza Barbieri, “The competition between Raphael and Michelangelo and Sebastiano's role in it” in The Cambridge Companion to Raphael, 141-64; Cecil Gould, The Raising of Lazarus. (London: National Gallery, 1967); and Rudolf Preimesberger, “Tragic motifs in Raphael’s Transfiguration” in Paragons and Paragone: Van Eyck, Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Berini (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 5-6. More recently, Costanza Barbieri has considered the diversity of the drawings and groups them into three types: (1) those provided by Michelangelo (Flagellation), (2) those made by Sebastiano that were inspired from Michelangelo’s Sistine ceiling (Moses and Isaiah in the Transfiguration) or taken and adapted from Michelangelo’s old drawings (the Prophets in the spandrels), and (3) those made by Sebastiano that were inspired from other sources (either real life or classical sculpture) and that were his own autonomous invention (the heads for St. Peter and St. Francis). Barbieri, however, does not provide an explanation for this diverse range and mixture of sources. See Costanza Barbieri, “‘Bastiano è d’animo di fare chose grande’: un modello inedito per la capella Borgherini” in Sebastiano Del Piombo e La Cappella Borgherini nel Contesto della Pittura Rinascimentale, eds., Santiago Arroyo Esteban et al. (Firenze: Nardini, 2010), 80.
body and his investment in self-repetition. Not much has been written about either work, but what has been proposed tends to neglect the visual evidence of the paintings in favor of allegorical readings of the Flagellation as a subject in itself or seeing the works in terms of the pathos of Mannerist and Counter-Reformation style. Speaking of the Botoni Flagellation, Tullia Carratù suggests it to be a sort of “extreme Mannerist formalism,” where “the iconic potential of the image” anticipates the crisis and pathos of the Counter-Reformation. In this chapter, I offer a more nuanced interpretation of these works, one that grounds them in their historical moment – that is, the years building up to and leading into the Reformation – and better accounts for the relationship between them, addressed so far only in terms of style.

3.1 Michelangelo’s Drawings for the Borgherini Chapel and Other Sources

The chapel decoration is a synthesis of different sources, scales and mediums deployed boldly across the spandrels, half-dome, altar wall and sides. Sebastiano’s compositions take inspiration from what had been the most current works painted by Michelangelo and Raphael, from his own drawings for the commission, and those he received from Michelangelo. This combinatory method of working has earned Sebastiano a highly negative critical history that current scholarship continues to uphold, either deeming the work disjunctive or the artist creatively impoverished. Yet Sebastiano’s

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12 Hirst has proposed that the Borgherini Flagellation reflects the anti-Turkish sentiment of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in S. Pietro in Montorio and represents an image of the Church attacked “per flagellum Turcarum” – words spoken by the Bishop of Patras at the tenth session of the Lateran Council in May 1515. See Hist, Sebastiano del Piombo, 56-7. And, as I have already noted, Jungic reads the Flagellation as the suffering that would precede the renewal of the Church.


14 Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 57 and 59 makes the following statements: “Beside Raphael’s composition [the spandrel area of the Chigi chapel in S. Maria della Pace], Sebastiano’s seems clumsy, his figures overgrown in relation to the wall space available, and his prophets show still, at this date, his uncertainty in organizing monumental forms for wall decoration” and “this kind of planning is difficult to ascribe to Sebastiano unaided [...]” See also Paul Joannides’ catalog entry for “Study of the Raising of Lazarus” in Strinati et al., Sebastiano del Piombo 1485-1547, 338. Joannides states the following on the Borgherini
investment in synthesis as a means to create images needs to be reevaluated in light of the kind of collaborative model of art making that Sebastiano and Michelangelo were pioneering at this moment in Rome. In this section, I examine the various drawings that Sebastiano received from Michelangelo for the Borgherini commission and the changes he made to them. I take these changes to be indicative of meaningful choices made by Sebastiano that ultimately altered how the chapel program looked as a whole.

It is important to understand the differences as productive of meaning, rather than accidental or as artistic failures, because it is in these changes that Sebastiano’s separate and distinctive pictorial intelligence can be located. As will be shown below, Sebastiano transformed Michelangelo’s drawings in ways that accentuated the meditative dimension of the chapel’s program, which I will propose happened in tandem with the artist’s own meditation on the drawings themselves. At the same time, these pictorial transformations also shifted the meditative plane onto the viewer standing in the real space of the church. The distinction between the two artists emerges in these differences of execution, marking Sebastiano as an artist who honed in on creating a contemplative connection between image and viewer, while Michelangelo fostered psychological detachment and pictorial autonomy. It is here also that Sebastiano’s interest in pictorial heterogeneity emerges, which stands in contrast to Michelangelo’s more uniform compositions that seem to multiply a single body over and again across the pictorial field. These differences and their broader significance is the subject of this section.

chapel: “The weakness of Sebastiano’s painting, its overcrowding, its relative rhythmical confusion, alien to the compositional austerity and rigorous control of emphasis and subordination seen in Michelangelo’s movable paintings, reinforce Vasari’s report [that Michelangelo provided drawings for some parts of the work].”
There are three drawings by Michelangelo (Figure 77, Figure 78, and Figure 99) that have been connected to Sebastiano’s chapel program with certainty, specifically for the figure of the left-hand prophet and the scene of the Flagellation on the altar wall. A fourth drawing by Giulio Clovio after Michelangelo at Windsor Castle (Figure 73) comes closest to the composition of the Flagellation and is taken to reflect the final compositional drawing Michelangelo gave to Sebastiano. Additionally, there are six extant drawings by Sebastiano – the head of St. Francis, two heads and one figure for the Apostles in the Transfiguration, and figures of the two Prophets (Figure 134, Figure 133, Figure 136, Figure 135, Figure 132, and Figure 137).

Notably, Sebastiano’s drawing *A Prophet Addressed by an Angel* (Figure 132) draws upon a drawing that Sebastiano received from Michelangelo for his commission of the *Raising of Lazarus* (1517-19) during these same years and during which Sebastiano stopped work on the Borgherini chapel. Michelangelo’s red chalk drawing of Lazarus (Figure 77) shows the awakened Lazarus undoing his grave clothes with two attendants aiding him. Sebastiano takes the figure and with slight modifications transforms it into St. Matthew, who now holds a book and is approached by an angel in a configuration reminiscent of Michelangelo’s Prophets on the Sistine ceiling. I contend that the repurposing of Michelangelo’s drawing did not come about due to Sebastiano’s poverty of invention or for lack of convenient visual sources. The unexpected translation of a figure from one commission to another – of Lazarus into prophet – can be explained by Sebastiano’s interest in transforming a figure *being* awakened or enlightened into a figure that *is the means* by which enlightenment can occur.
Paul Joannides, in his catalogue entry for the drawing, suggests that Michelangelo’s *Lazarus*, which carries a message of resurrection, is adapted by Sebastiano to convey a prophet’s intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.¹⁵ Joannides points to the angel’s hand placed on the prophet’s shoulder in the fresco “encouraging him to close the book to which he still clings, and to submit himself to revelation.”¹⁶ Thus, according to Joannides, the image is about “an angel [who] awakes a Prophet from spiritual slumber.”¹⁷ However, the notion that Sebastiano underscores the prophet’s blindness to revelation, where the angel has to distract him from his book, lacks supporting evidence. I propose instead that the prophet is actually the vehicle for revelation. Sebastiano stabilizes Lazarus’ precarious position, giving the prophet a more secure seated pose on top of the arch and gives the hands a place to rest — on top of his book, across which he points down to the Transfiguration. The Prophet’s pointing finger is in fact reminiscent of Christ’s in the *Raising of Lazarus* (Figure 8), suggesting that it not only carries authority but also agency, where the book acts on or activates the image below, much like Christ’s words and gesture raise Lazarus from the dead. The relationship between Scripture and image is the subject of the next section, but for now I want to underscore that rather than being a deterrent to revelation, the book is very much the path to it and rather than being in need of enlightenment, the prophet is the means by which the viewer can attain it. In this way, Sebastiano shifts the responsibility of meditative enlightenment away from the figures in the scenes to the viewer before the

¹⁵ Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo 1485-1547*, 268.
¹⁶ Ibid., 268.
¹⁷ Ibid., 268.
The chapel depicts figures that are not just detached models of meditation to be looked at and emulated, but rather implicate the viewer in completing the chapel’s meaning. The realization of spiritual revelation, that is, the meditative plane, is transferred onto the viewer, who thereby determines the relationships between the scenes of the chapel – such as the one between St. Matthew and the transfigured Christ.

Lower down in the chapel, for the Flagellation, Michelangelo seems to have provided Sebastiano with a series of drawings that evolve towards greater compactness and fewer figures. Giulio’s Windsor Castle drawing after Michelangelo (Figure 73) narrows in on the scene, eliminating the expansive architectural setting and multitude of figures present in the version that preceded it (Figure 99). Sebastiano’s Botoni Flagellation (Figure 100) continues this paring-down of the composition to its core subject – Christ surrounded by the soldiers – suggesting that Sebastiano played a role in the evolution of Michelangelo’s compositional designs, guiding his collaborator to produce the desired effect. Most notably, the dynamism of Michelangelo’s drawing at the British Museum is dramatically transformed in the final painted image. Sebastiano stills the sense of urgent action and Christ’s violent rotation away from the blow of the whip, and instead concentrates on a kind of graceful dance between Christ and the soldiers. Violent movement gives way to a composition with “slower,” almost ritualized motions frozen in mid-action. This could only have been intentional. That Sebastiano was perfectly capable of conveying dynamic action is evidenced by his drawings for the Apostles for the Transfiguration, who twist their bodies and crane their heads up in awe.

18 I’d like to thank Amy Sheeran for her thoughtful comments on this passage and her suggestion that Sebastiano shifts the meditative plane onto the viewer.
Another change that Sebastiano implements is the covering of Michelangelo’s nude figures with clothes and loincloths. He does so strategically in coordinated colors of white and dark forest-green, which emphasize both similarities and differences between the figures. While the soldiers are for the most part set off from Christ by their clothes, Sebastiano leaves the right-most soldier nearly nude, wearing only a white loincloth like Christ’s. The mirroring of their bodies underscores the difference between Christ’s idealized beauty and the soldier’s grotesque body but also the similarities between them. This unusual decision brings Christ and the soldier into a more intimate and more problematic relationship, which will be explored towards the end of this chapter in context of Christ’s dual nature and theological paradox.

Despite these changes, Sebastiano chooses to retain the odd incongruities in the two rear soldiers’ bodies, whose legs, heads and arms don’t quite connect up in a logical manner. These figures remain unresolved in Michelangelo’s and Giulio’s drawings, characteristic of Michelangelo’s multi-contour, rough sketching out of bodies, and Sebastiano not only keeps but enhances the ambiguities. The soldier to the right of the column in the back, for instance, whose head seems to be displaced from his body, also has it raised and looking directly out at the viewer rather than downcast and more in line with his body as in Giulio’s drawing. Likewise, the shadowing on the left makes it difficult to resolve whose legs belong to which soldier. How these odd juxtapositions and overlayings of body parts serve to create paradoxical pictorial effects will be explored in the final two sections of this chapter.

Michelangelo’s Christ at the Column (Figure 79) is another drawing that Sebastiano received for the scene of the Flagellation and, like the one of Lazarus, it was
one that Sebastiano would return to in his drawing (Figure 131) for the *Christ Carrying the Cross* series (more on this in Chapter Four). This act of figural repetition and recontextualization is itself indicative of Sebastiano’s working method. It is not entirely clear what purpose the drawing served – whether, for example, it was meant to clarify Christ’s body in more detail apart from the compositional drawing, as such single-figure drawings typically did. Nevertheless, it likely came after the drawing that Giulio reproduces since Christ now bears the loincloth that we see in the final work. But since we cannot know how refined and finished Michelangelo’s compositional drawing was (it is unlikely though that Michelangelo brought it to the degree of finish as Giulio’s), it is difficult to say how the drawing of Christ in isolation built on the preceding drawing.

What can be said with certainty is that Sebastiano returned to it over and again for very different subjects. This translation of a very rough, almost grotesque-looking figure in its abstractedness – with face smudged, head and arms shrunken in size, and all attention directed at the massive torso – tells us a great deal about Sebastiano’s use of and relationship to Michelangelo’s drawings. In this case, as in many others, the body of Christ constitutes a kind of nucleus of absolute stasis for Sebastiano’s works, a disproportioned and fragmented figure around which the he stages his scenes. The fact that Sebastiano chose to reuse a detail of just Christ’s body in isolation and that he reused it for similarly Christ-centric paintings underscores this. Thus, Michelangelo’s drawings play a significant role in how Sebastiano repeatedly arrives at his focused meditation on Christ’s body. The tension between the focus on Christ’s body in the *Flagellation* and *Transfiguration* and the diverted attention of the Saints and Prophets

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framing these scenes (to be discussed below) suggests that Sebastiano is thinking through the nature of what it means to meditate on Christ.

The very act of holding and examining a drawing by another artist can in itself be considered an act of contemplation and meditation. The fragmentary quality of the drawing, its very “grotesque” incompleteness, seems to have motivated re-visitation and re-consideration for Sebastiano. He re-used it in the Botoni Flagellation and made it the starting point for the figure of St. Agatha and the figure of Christ in his later works. That the drawing spurred new compositions shows that another artist, and possibly a point of imperfection, acts here as an origin for artistic invention. At the same time, the marked difference in the treatment of the two Christs in the Borgherini chapel, one thin and elongated, the other muscular and heroic, suggests a kind of pictorial transcendence in addition to the theological message of bodily transcendence.\textsuperscript{20} The Christ in glory, glowing white, signals a metamorphosis of Christ’s appearance – following the Gospels’ accounts of the Transfiguration, where his clothes become white and his face radiant – and this transformation is made all the more pronounced by the vertical axis on which stand the transfigured Christ and, below him, the flagellated Christ in his humanity (painted in a dark, near-monochrome palette).

In light of the exegetical tradition that saw the Transfiguration as a moment of clarity assumed by Christ (and the theological questions posed about the capacity of his mortal body to assume glory), the two Christs in the Borgherini Chapel can be

\textsuperscript{20} I would like to acknowledge Michael Fried’s thoughtful observation of Sebastiano’s play on the notion of theological and pictorial transcendence – that is, the idea that Sebastiano is drawing attention to the transformative power of his art and his capacity to transcend his model by recourse to the message of Christ’s metamorphosis in the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration. Other artists like Rosso, Pontormo, Bronzino and Daniele da Volterra were equally invested in the use and the transformation of Michelangelo as their model of art into something that was often quite far from the original model. For a discussion of this, see Stephen J. Campbell, “Fare una cosa morta parer viva: Michelangelo, Rosso and the (un)divinity of Art,” \textit{Art Bulletin} 84, No.4 (2002): 596-620.
understood as a commentary on the act of citation and artistic invention – that is, Sebastiano shows his debt to Michelangelo as someone who brings artistic clarity or “divine” inspiration to his work, but also his capacity to transcend his prototype. The doubling, in effect, suggests the generative nature of the collaboration, in that it brings about imitative multiples that surpass the original model. The two Christs can also be seen as Sebastiano’s reflection on the dual or composite identity of his art: the two bodies offer two alternative artistic models – one Raphaelesque, the other taken directly from Michelangelo – much like they underscore Christ’s dual nature.

The chapel is calculated to create a dynamic effect, moving the eye between stilled and agitated, large and small figures, between claustrophobic and open spaces, between dark and light, and between narrative scenes and solitary framing figures. The chapel certainly looks heterogeneous. What does this effect say about Sebastiano’s conception of style and borrowing? In referring to Raphael’s Sibyls (Figure 194) from S. Maria della Pace and his Transfiguration, and in incorporating not only Michelangelo’s drawings directly, but also drawing more loosely on his Sistine ceiling Prophets (Figure 195), is this really a game of rivalry and one-upmanship with respect to the heroic nude and figural composition between Raphael, Michelangelo and Sebastiano, as most scholars would have it?

21 Aaron Canty, Light and Glory: The Transfiguration of Christ in Early Franciscan and Dominican Theology (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 217-50 and 197-202. Additionally, Cajetan uses the Transfiguration as a metaphor of renewal and transformation, in context of Church reform, in his oration given on the Feast Day of the Transfiguration; discussed in Jungić, “Joachimist Prophecies, 69. See also Chapter One for a discussion of Sebastiano’s letters and his making of Michelangelo into his “divine” light and external source of inspiration.

22 Sebastiano would have had fresh in his mind Raphael’s Transfiguration for Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici, which was in turn a response to Sebastiano’s Raising of Lazarus. Sebastiano thus seems to continue the dialogue and puts forth a composite model of art-making that combines different artistic models; he does so, notably, just as Raphael had died. Sydney Joseph Freedberg, Painting in Italy, 1500-1600 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 115.
I suggest that the multiple sources and the connections being drawn indicate a different kind of dynamic between Sebastiano and the two other prominent artists of Rome at this time. In the Borgherini chapel, Sebastiano lays claim to a multi-source style much more explicitly than he first did in his Viterbo Pietà. While the maniera is distinctly his own, this chapel marks the beginning of Sebastiano’s investment in pictorial heterogeneity, citation, and appropriation as a means of constructing images.23 This point is significant in light of Vasari’s insistence on an ideal of art-making that was based on single-authorship style and a reconciliation of heterogeneous styles under the umbrella of Tuscan disegno and Michelangelo’s divine perfection.24 For Vasari, Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s collaboration meant the resolution of differences, of Venetian colorito made complete by Tuscan disegno. Yet, as this analysis has shown, it is much more fitting to describe the collaboration in terms of pictorial heterogeneity that was kept and even heightened, rather than discarded. It also appears apt to describe the relationship between artists like Sebastiano, Michelangelo and Raphael working in Rome at this time as performers of composite artistic identity rather than rivals, and whose imitation of one another was more productive than antagonistic.25

24 Vasari, Le Vite, V, 568. Vasari suggests that Michelangelo took Sebastiano “under his protection” so that by assisting him in design he could rival Raphael because the resulting style would combine the best of Venetian colorito and Tuscan disegno: “Destatosi dunque l’animo di Michelangelo verso Sebastiano, perché molto gli piaceva il colorito e la grazia di lui, lo prese in protezione; pensando che se egli usasse l’aiuto del disegno in Sebastiano, se potrebbe con questo mezzo, senza che egli operasse, battere colore che avevano si fatta opinione [...]” Elsewhere Vasari claims that Sebastiano paints “under the direction of Michelangelo” See ibid., 570. Moreover, the Vita concludes by aligning Michelangelo’s termination of their friendship and collaboration with Sebastiano’s artistic decline, stating that he will be most missed for his pleasant conversation and that he produced no great pupils of his art. This further suggests that Sebastiano’s art was incomplete without Michelangelo’s disegno. See ibid., 584-6.
25 For a discussion of composite identity in Venetian art making, see Stephen J. Campbell, “Naturalism and the Venetian "Poesia": Grafting, Metaphor, and Embodiment in Giorgione, Titian, and the Campagnolas” in Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art. For how followers of Michelangelo in Rome understood
Furthermore, as Richard Schiff notes in his discussion of acts of taking, repetition need not be viewed as the enemy of genius or originality. By invoking a precedent, an artist expresses a kind of collective anonymity, where followers draw on the art of their predecessors, thereby participating in the transmission of common pictorial values, interests, and problems. In this case, those interests have to do with the role of prophetic figures and the means by which Christian truths are revealed, as this chapter will go on to show. At the same time, appropriation does not imply sameness; rather, according to Robert Nelson, an act of appropriation relies on the viewer’s recognition of difference; in other words, the cited object and its original meaning are used by the artist to generate a new set of meanings, perceived by the viewer on account of his or her familiarity with the original. Thus, one consequence of Sebastiano’s citation of Raphael and Michelangelo’s sibyls and prophets in the Borgherini chapel’s spandrels is a reflection on the role of images as vehicles of divine revelation – a point I will come back to below – and, in doubling the figure of Christ, on art’s generative capacity to create new images.

3.2 The Chapel Program as a Response to the Debate on Mediation

To date, only Josephine Jungić has given serious thought to the chapel as a unified program, suggesting it to be a response to Joachimist and Savonarolan prophecies of church renewal, which were supported by the Franciscan friars of S. Pietro of Montorio and expounded upon in the *Apocalypsis Nova*, a Book of Revelations that was discovered in the church in 1502. Yet the visual evidence does not support Jungić’s argument. For one, no effigy of Amadeus or Apocalyptic references appear in any of the


26 Schiff, “Originality,” 149.


28 See Chapter 3, no. 9.
imagery; nor is there evidence of Pierfrancesco’s interest in Joachimist prophecy, let alone of his having been advised by its supporters. Unlike this more recent interpretation, scholarship has most commonly singled out the Flagellation and Transfiguration for discussion since the two images lend themselves most easily to reaffirming the Sebastiano-Michelangelo-Raphael rivalry model. The Flagellation and Transfiguration also create a prominent vertical axis between the two figures of Christ who are counterposed to emphasize the submissive, defeated stance of the former and the glorious, light-filled quality of the latter. This observation has led to a number of hypotheses concerning Christ as a metaphor for the corrupted state of the Church at the turn of the century – the Church afflicted by the flagellum turcarum. Alternatively, scholars examine each fresco and mural individually, focusing on Sebastiano’s sources, without consideration for how they were meant to be seen in relation to one another.

However, such an approach misses the richness of Sebastiano’s pictorial coordination of figures, framed within their respective architectural settings, yet set against each other in calculated ways. Sebastiano’s program for Borgherini’s chapel, when seen in its entirety, is a highly dynamic and unusual combination of images. The prophets (Figure 196), looming large and weighty at the top of the vertical composition, condition the way the viewer approaches the images set within the chapel. Their location on the front-most wall, in contrast to the concavity of the chapel wall and half-dome, is

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31 While Hirst looks at all of the chapel’s imagery, he is nevertheless mainly concerned with Sebastiano’s sources, need of Michelangelo’s drawings, and attributing parts of the work to each artist based on the existence of drawings. In this way, the chapel gets broken down into single components. See Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 55-65.
makes them the closest figures to the viewer. Their immediacy is heightened by the fact that they also most explicitly interact with the architecture of the church (though many of Sebastiano’s figures here do this to some extent). Both prophets lean on the arch articulating the dome, using it as support for their bodies, and protrude out from the limits of the spandrels. Their heads, along with the heads and wings of the angels, overlap the fictive top-edge frame. Their bulky bodies, particularly their knees, protrude out from the dark, illusionistic space.

Most notably, the prophets hold a book and scroll respectively, which is indicative of their identities as an Apostle on the left and an Old Testament prophet on the right. The Apostle (Figure 197) rests the spine of the large book on the arch, tipping it forward out of his space with one hand and, in a feat of illusionism, points across it with his other hand towards the Transfigured Christ below. It should be added that the pointing index finger does not necessarily stop the viewer’s gaze at the Christ of the Transfiguration, but rather continues it down to the flagellated Christ directly below. Thus, Sebastiano juxtaposes the images from the New Testament against the two figures who wrote about the events: St. Matthew, narrator of the Transfiguration, on the left and Isaiah, prophesier of the Flagellation, on the right.32

The framing of the Transfiguration and Flagellation occurs not only at the spandrels, but also at the sides – via the figures of Sts. Peter and Francis, Pierfrancesco’s name saints (Figure 198). On either side of the symmetrical, light-grey-toned scene of the Flagellation, Sebastiano creates a distinctly separate architectural space, thus breaking up

32 Tullia Carratù identifies the prophets as Matthew and Isaiah in her catalog entry for Sebastiano’s Borgherini chapel in Strinati et al., Sebastiano del Piombo 1485-1547, 174. See, however, Jungić, “Joachimist Prophecies,” 77 who identifies the left prophet as Ezekiel based on the figure’s resemblance to Michelangelo’s Ezekiel on the Sistine ceiling. I am less persuaded by this interpretation as the similarity is rather weak, nor does it mean the figures are the same prophet. Moreover, this identification does not fit with the Passion scenes depicted below.
the continuity of the curved chapel wall by means of fictive wall cross-sections and a
darker color palette. These two dark, shallow spaces act like bookends to the central
scene, which in turn recedes back, aided by its perspectival construction, as if we were
looking at it through a window. Notably, Sts. Peter and Francis also hold books, like the
prophets above, and appear engrossed in reading them. Like the prophets, they too
protrude out of their shallow, austere spaces – note, for instance, St. Francis’ raised hand,
St. Peter’s key at his feet, and the book pedestals of both.

This dynamic movement from proximate to more distant planes, from outside to
inside, and from top to bottom, is important in understanding the unity of the chapel
program. Though Sebastiano is often criticized in scholarship for his static re-
interpretations of Michelangelo’s drawings, his work at S. Pietro in Montorio attests to
his keen consideration of the viewer’s gaze moving across such large, architecturally-
defined images.33 His attention to the way viewers would have interacted with the chapel
space as embodied beholders, viewing one image through its neighboring images from
their own position within the church, illuminates an important dimension to this work: its
concern with the reading of images in layers – through what is found outside their
borders, closer to the real space of the viewer. Put another way, Sebastiano stages the
Transfiguration and Flagellation through framing images that emphasize reading and
Scripture and that self-consciously foreground the importance of texts.

Sebastiano’s staging of Christ’s Passion through Scripture’s account of it is
significant. With planning and execution carried out during the turbulent years of

33 Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 61 characterizes Sebastiano’s Botoni Flagellation as “carr[ying] to an
almost grotesque extreme the aims to which Michelangelo was surely response when he devised the design
of the prototype. The compositional rhythms still pervading the mural have now been reduced or eliminated
altogether.”
reformist reconsideration of Church rituals and reinterpretation of Scripture, the chapel should be understood as the artist’s own response to these heated debates – on whether the meaning of Scripture could be accessed directly and, more to the point, on the problem of mediation in texts and images.34 Highly germane to an understanding of Sebastiano’s imagery in the Borgherini Chapel was the growing popularity of prophetic preaching in Italy. As I will demonstrate in the discussion that follows, the intimate and increasingly problematic relationship between unauthorized prophetic preaching and accepted Scriptural exegesis exacerbated a perceived falsity in Church authority over biblical interpretation at large, which in turn raised questions about the mediated nature of divine knowledge. In other words, the rise of diverse prophetic interpretations of Scripture drew attention to the Apostolic tradition of intervening between the laity and God, and called into question the feasibility of maintaining a belief in the immediacy of the Word of God, as if it came to the laity uninterpreted. Moreover, images were directly implicated by these issues and made the subject of prophecy a locus of reflection on what constituted theological mediation.

I would like to begin the discussion with a brief overview of the prophetic enthusiasm that swept Italian urban culture at the end of the fifteenth century. Prophetic preaching by itinerant hermits – dressed as saints and Old Testament prophets – as well as by official, learned clerics speaking from their pulpits and popular mendicant

34 Luther’s ideas and criticisms reached Rome largely through print. Bernardino Stagnino reprinted Luther’s *Appellatio ad Concilium* in 1518. By February 1519, Francesco Calvo purchased from Froben some Lutheran pamphlets that had been recently translated into Latin. Luther’s 95 Theses were known in Italy through a work by the Master of the Sacred Palace. Additionally, the Dominican Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio had his *In praesumptuosas Martini Lutheri conclusiones de potestate papae dialogus* printed in summer of 1518. See Ugo Rozzo and Silvana Seidel Menchi, “The Book and the Reformation in Italy” in *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-Francois Gilmont, trans. Karin Maag (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 335-7.
preachers took hold and attracted widespread interest from the lay public. Mendicant preachers, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans, preached most widely. Listeners viewed them as the embodiment of the Word of God, transmitting God’s message to the public with the purpose of transforming the listener and bringing him closer to God.

Prophetic preaching spoke to a new and pressing demand among the laity for Church reform at the turn of the century, promising the renewal of the Christian faith and the cleansing of Church corruption following God’s retribution in the form of natural, military, and political catastrophes that would afflict Rome (drawing on themes such as the coming of the Antichrist and the Day of Judgment); these were catastrophes that people saw confirmed in the very instability of their time. Sermons in Venice especially included prophecies of military or political disasters – something Sebastiano hence would have been familiar with even prior to his arrival to Rome. Additionally, prophecy in verse became one the most prevalent literary genres in popular publishing, and on the same squares where itinerant and disheveled hermits prophesied the coming of divine wrath, printed prophecies were sold in large numbers, with the word Profezia in most of the titles. Old prophetic texts were also reprinted because they resonated with current

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events, which were easily read into these older texts were rarely adapted or changed for this reason.\(^{39}\)

Thus, reform and prophecy came to be deeply intertwined in the minds of Renaissance lay people: the latter seemed to provide an answer in the form of the enlightened interpreter of Scripture – assuming the role of messenger between God and his people – and thus drove and shaped the former. Most importantly, it offered the laity personal access to Scripture – which it sought as part of its demand for a more inclusive Church – by unveiling its hidden meaning, thereby bringing the faithful closer to God. As Jonathan Green writes, a prophet was above all a “middle participant in a two-part conversation.”\(^{40}\) He was not merely a foreteller of future events, but rather an enlightened interpreter – a medium – through which one heard God speak.

What should be emphasized is that Christian prophecy relied on various sources: astrology, numerology, divination, the magical arts, divine revelation, and Scripture, to name a few.\(^{41}\) It is the latter – the connection between prophecy and Scripture – that is of interest to the discussion at hand. In Florence, expounding Kings and Revelations, Savonarola found in Scripture a textual prefiguration of Florence’s mission and the reform of the Church.\(^{42}\) He stated:

> Believe then, Florence, that this is the time of the reformation of the Church and of your city, as I have told you. […] If you do not want to believe me, I wish to demonstrate to you through Holy Scripture and by the prophecies of Saint John that this is true.\(^{43}\)


\(^{40}\) Green, *Printing and Prophecy*, 1.

\(^{41}\) Minnich, “Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council,” 64.

\(^{42}\) Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, 144.

\(^{43}\) Quoted in ibid., 157.
Savonarola believed that the Florentines were the elect people and their future was prefigured in Scripture. This meant that Scripture told not of things past and completed, but of the future to be fulfilled, and that one had to possess the light which showed how to interpret these Scriptural mysteries. In 1530, The Dominican Fra Zaccheria da Fivizzano likewise prophesied God’s “scourges” upon Florence before the renewal of the Church, basing his prophecy on a prophetic passage in Joel (2:28) and, stating the sources of his authority, placed the Bible first on his list: “I speak to you as a preacher according to Holy Scripture, according to the doctrine of the saints, according to the order of divine providence, as well as we can known it, and according to reason and natural discourse […]” Written prophecy, such as Francesco da Meleto’s *Convivio* of c.1512-13, similarly prophesied the coming of the apocalypse, preceded by the conversion of the Jews and the elimination of Muslims, by interpreting Isaiah and the Book of Revelations as foretelling the future of the Church. Prophetic preaching and writing thus underscored that understanding Scripture was inherently an interpretive process of reading, rather than fixed, transparent, or self-sufficient. As James Brenneman suggests in his study of conflicting prophetic texts, the production of new hermeneutical options by means of new claims to truth “expands the plurality of meanings in any biblical text or tradition with each resignification or repetition.” In other words, repeated acts of reading (or of re-assigning meaning, as in the case of prophetic exegesis) produce new understandings of a given text and multiply out the available options of truth for a

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community. In effect, biblical exegesis is the process of reworking and revising earlier
textual traditions, or the interplay between an older text cited or alluded to and its new
setting and meaning.\textsuperscript{47} To think of the rise in popularity of Renaissance prophecy as one
manifestation of a push for interpretive license in the reading of Scripture is to appreciate
the instability of biblical hermeneutics at this moment in the Church’s history.

Moreover, according to Brenneman, different prophetic readings – those accepted
as “true” and aligned with orthodoxy, and those labelled “false,” which compete with and
are set in contradistinction to accepted or true prophecy – amount to a clash of canons
and power ideologies.\textsuperscript{48} He describes “the clash of canons and their canon-making
communities” as equivalent “to the clash of prophetic ideologies between true and false
prophets.”\textsuperscript{49} The notion of true and false prophecy as a conflict of ideologies and claims
to knowledge will be useful in thinking about the Fifth Lateran Council’s handling of
prophetic preaching, which will be discussed below.

Much like prophecy lay claim to Scripture as its authoritative source of divine
illumination and thus generated new readings of the text, new translations of the Bible
appearing at the turn of the century likewise claimed interpretive license. In this way,
prophecy exacerbated an existing and growing awareness that the Bible was in fact a
historic, non-universal text subject to error in the process of translation. The Old
Testament was originally written in Hebrew, followed by an authoritative translation into
Hellenistic Greek called the Septuagint.\textsuperscript{50} The New Testament was written in Greek.
Both were translated by St. Jerome into the Latin Vulgate, which was promoted by the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 139
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 137
\textsuperscript{50} Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Reformation of the Bible/The Bible of the Reformation}, 10-11
Church and central to shaping the development of biblical study and publishing. At the same time, it was a highly corrupted translation. The need to establish a correct text for the printed editions of the Latin Bible that were beginning to appear in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century gave greater urgency to the philological enterprise of textual criticism and brought about the publication of multiple new translations derived from the original languages.\(^{51}\) In 1516, Erasmus published and printed the first edition of the New Testament in Greek with a Latin translation. The translation was not a new edition of the Vulgate; it was a new translation by Erasmus himself.\(^{52}\) The Spanish scholar Elio Anotnio de Nebrija, who had studied at the University of Bologna and spent ten years in Italy, was involved in the correction of the Latin text of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (1514-17), clearing up mistakes and ambiguities by consulting the original languages.\(^{53}\) Italy also produced new translations: Antonio Bruciolo published an Italian New Testament in Venice in 1530, and the Dominican Santi Pagnini produced the first printed translations of the whole Bible into Latin from the original Hebrew and Greek in 1532.

The reading of the Bible in its original languages, accompanied by new translations into Latin and the vernacular, brought to the forefront the problem of Scriptural interpretation itself. Translators faced multiple choices: choice of vocabulary (to transliterate the original technical terms or to find analogues in the vernacular), grammar, and syntax (to adhere to a literal translation which could sound awkward or to stay true to how one speaks in the vernacular and risk overstepping interpretive

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{53}\) Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Augustinus Oberman, and James D. Tracy (eds.), *Handbook of European History 1400 - 1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation* (Brill, 1994), 68. Ultimately, Nebrija was frustrated by the project’s conservative outcomes; the Vulgate was placed next to the original texts for comparison rather than undergoing serious revision.
Languages were the medium of God’s word, and yet their variability foregrounded difference of interpretation, and at that, of a text that was supposed to be fixed and unchanging. This endeavor to recover the true meaning and understanding of the biblical text was a major branch of the Reformation – a “reformation of the bible” as Jaroslav Pelikan terms it.55

The generation of new readings of Scripture as a consequence of translation and new methods of exegesis alarmed Roman authorities and led to a heightened attention to regulating prophetic speech. While certain prophecies continued to be valued and considered legitimate, others came to be associated with falsity or heresy. In March of 1514, the aforementioned, self-proclaimed prophet Meleto was summoned to Rome by Vincenzo Querini to question him on his prophecies. He was again named by the Synod of Florence in 1516, which took up the Lateran Council’s decree on preaching, and condemned Meleto for his un-Catholic, erroneous exegesis of Scripture.56 In 1523, Fra Girolamo da Verona – whom Niccoli identifies as the Augustinian preacher interested in the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore – was imprisoned in Piacenza “as a Lutheran” (the words of papal nuncio Girolamo Aleandro written in a letter to the apostolic protonotary) for spreading heresy, and upon release from prison continued to be prohibited from preaching by the bishop of his city, Goro Gheri.57 Girolamo’s case demonstrates the easy

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54 Ibid., 41-7.
55 Ibid., 24.
57 See the letter of Girolamo Aleandro to Ambrogio Recalcati, Venice, 16 June 1535 in Nunziature di Venezia, vol I, ed. Franco Gaeta (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l’età moderna e contemporanea, 1958), 316-17. The letter reports that “Friar Girolamo, Veronese, also called Piumazzo […] was once retained in Piacenza on the orders of the bishop of Fano [Gregorio Goro Gheri], then governor of that city, and [was] condemned to perpetual imprisonment as a Lutheran. He was sent to Bologna, where he remained in jail for six or seven years and then, at the bidding of I know not what important person he was pardoned. No
slippage from prophecy to perceived heresy that could occur in the early sixteenth century, even when the preacher had no intention of preaching Lutheran doctrine.\textsuperscript{58}

Stephen Bowd suggests that the distinction between what was judged to be true and false prophecy lay in the political and religious message of the prophecies; that is, they were tolerated or supported as long as they served the purposes of the Church.\textsuperscript{59}

Yet, as Minnich has shown, the Church was on the whole ambivalent on the question of what constituted valid prophecy: doctrine that was dangerous to orthodoxy was labelled false prophecy, yet many churchmen such as Giles of Viterbo and Thomas Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio) who were involved in drafting the 1516 decree on preaching \textit{Supernae majestatis praesidio} simultaneously believed in the reality of true prophecy – in fact, many of the members of the Lateran Council were supporters of prophets like Savonarola, Amadeus of Portugal, and Joachim of Fiore.\textsuperscript{60} As a result, the pope was unable to enact a sweeping condemnation. Instead, rules of conduct were set up to censor what was said so as to limit public anti-papal sentiment and heterodox opinion. As will be shown below, the decree on preaching was general in its terms, telling preachers to base their sermons on Scripture as it was interpreted according to the common understanding of the approved doctors of the Church, instead of twisting the meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{61}

Preachers were not to add anything at variance with the teachings approved by the
Church, or predict firmly the fixed time of future events on the basis of Scriptural text or to claim that they received knowledge of these things from the Holy Spirit or divine revelation. The prohibition on prophecy was not absolute – it asked clerical preachers to obtain approval from the Holy See before preaching their revelations and affirmed that true prophecy did exist.62

The beginning of the sixteenth century was dominated by a general sense that preaching practice (not just prophetic preaching) required reform and that absentee bishops, who were typically away at the papal court, needed to attend to their dioceses. Gasparo Contarini’s 1517 treatise *The Office of a Bishop*, which addressed preaching among other duties, emerged as part of the official response to the problem of lapsed preaching practices in the face of a growing threat of heterodox interpretation of Scripture. It was written several months before Luther posted his ninety-five theses, attesting to the larger effort by the Church at internal reform. In acknowledging the problem of preaching, the Fifth Lateran Council was driven, in part, by fears of preachers like Savonarola and Bernardino Ochino, who had recently threatened the social order. As Emily Michelson observes, the Council saw apocalyptic and prophetic preaching as a dangerous exegetical trend to be repressed in favor of frequent and consistent orthodox preaching, which could be used as a weapon against heresy.63 Mendicant preachers, who were in the majority and who preached to the masses most widely, were therefore tasked with bringing laypeople back into the Catholic fold through persuasion and by actively teaching proper understanding of Scripture.

62 Ibid., 86.
Notably, government authorities in cities north of the Alps exhibited similar concern with regard to preachers who could potentially confuse or mislead the lay public. In Germany, urban reforming preachers had grown in popularity and attracted large audiences, delivering messages that differed widely from preacher to preacher. In response, by the 1520s, city authorities began to issue preaching mandates, or Scripture mandates, which called for preachers to preach “only according to Scripture” or “only what is consistent with Scripture.”64 These appeared in Basle, Zurich, Erfurt, Berne, Nuremberg, and other cities. One goal of these mandates, suggests Euan Cameron, was to arbitrate rival beliefs among preachers, and to prevent public disorder caused by preachers attacking each other from the pulpits. For instance, in 1522, the Erfurt councilors summoned two rival preachers, the traditionalist Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen and the Lutheran preacher Johann Culsamer, and instructed them to preach “only what could be proved from Scripture.”65 Another aim was to reign in preaching friars who had developed a reputation for preaching without scriptural basis. Thus in 1525, the Cologne city guilds demanded that the four orders of friars “preach nothing but the right Word of God, and no fables, otherwise henceforth be silent.”66 The problem of divergent Scriptural exegesis was directly related to the expanding popularity of decentralized and unregulated preaching.

To return to Italy, it emerges from this discussion that growing prophetic enthusiasm greatly exacerbated the problem of unauthorized Scriptural exegesis. Prophecy was of concern to the Church precisely because it could lead laypeople to

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64 Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 238.
65 Ibid., 239.
66 Ibid., 239.
interpret Scripture themselves, and consequently fall into superstition.\textsuperscript{67} Both mendicant and diocesan preachers now faced the problem of how to preach properly on Scripture – a problem they had to address in the face of novel heresies that interpreted Scripture in their own ways.\textsuperscript{68} The Council’s attempt at standardizing preaching practices, grounding them both in Scripture and in traditional apostolic teaching, offered a response to the situation.

I would like to focus on the Church’s response to this issue, issued by the eleventh session of the Fifth Lateran Council, held on December 19, 1516, and to attend to the specifics of the decree’s language. The decree addressed proper preaching in an attempt to suppress the proliferation of prophecies from clerics claiming to have had a revelation from God.\textsuperscript{69} Niccoli, in fact, draws a connection between the decrees of the Fifth Lateran Council of 1516 and Italy’s prophetic culture in order to point out the ineffectiveness of the Council’s attempt to reign in these unauthorized interpretations, which often evoked biblical prophets and more recent ones (Savonarola among them) to defend their own authority to prophesy and thus sanction their heterodox views.\textsuperscript{70} The Council labeled such interpretations false prophecies that mislead the laypeople and strayed from the truth of Scripture:

\begin{quote}
A number of them [preachers] are no longer preaching the way of the Lord in virtue and are not expounding the Gospel, as is their duty, but rather invented miracles, new and false prophecies and other frivolities hardly distinguishable from old wives' tales.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} Bowd, \textit{Reform Before the Reformation}, 187.
\textsuperscript{68} Michelson, \textit{The Pulpit and the Press}, 46.
\textsuperscript{69} Minnich, “Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council,” 63.
\textsuperscript{70} Niccoli, “The End of Prophecy,” 668. Joachim of Fiore, Amadeus of Portugal and Girolamo Savonarola were among the key “prophets” whose authority was evoked. See Minnich, “Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council,” 66.
\textsuperscript{71} Norman P. Tanner, \textit{Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils} (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 636. “In praedicationibus non viam amplius Domini in virtute docentes, non evangelium, ut deberent, explanantes, sed conficta miracula et nova ac falsa vaticinia, aliaque levia et ab anilibus fabulis parum distantia [...]”
The fear of private interpretation and preachers’ claim to the status of modern prophets deeply disturbed Rome’s curia. It declared that,

In their public sermons [clerics] are not to keep on predicting some future events as based on the sacred writings, nor presume to declare that they know them from the Holy Spirit or from divine revelation [...] Rather, at the command of the divine word, let them expound and proclaim the gospel to every creature [...] 72

The various reinterpretations of Scripture at this time raised questions about the mediated nature of divine truth. While reformers like Zwingli criticized the Church for obstructing the accessibility and clarity of the Word of God through its interpreters and insistence on the need for human agency during Mass, the Church was put in a position to defend its teachings as true to the Gospel.73 The Council wanted to restore harmony and uniformity, which it had deemed lost in the myriad of new, personal readings that had challenged Church authority and tradition:

We command all who undertake this task of preaching, or will later undertake it, to preach and expound the gospel truth and holy scripture in accordance with the exposition, interpretation and commentaries that the church or long use has approved and has accepted for teaching until now, and will accept in the future, without any addition contrary to its true meaning or in conflict with it. They are always to insist on the meanings

72 Ibid., 637. “[...] qui hoc onus assumint ne de cetero in sermonibus suis publicis, alia quaeque futura ex literis sacrís constanter praediceré, nce illa a Spiritu sancto vel divina revelatione se habuisset afirmaré, et alienas inanesque divinationes asservandae, aut alio quocumque modo tractanda assumat, sed ex divinae vocis praecepto evangelium omni creaturae [...]”

73 Zwingli delivered and published the sermon The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God in 1522, in which he stated: “Listen, you quibblers who have no trust in the scriptures: the word of God, which is God himself, enlightens everyone. Away then with your own clarifications that you would bestow upon the word of God through your interpreters.” He further states: “Note who the teacher is: not doctors or fathers of the church, not popes, not theologians or councils of the church, but the Father of Jesus Christ. You dare not ask if you can be taught by human instructors as well. [...] Even if you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ from an apostle, you cannot act upon it unless the heavenly Father teaches and draws you by the Spirit. The words are clear; divine teaching illuminates, instructs, and grants certainty without the need for human wisdom.” And again: “The word of God interprets itself and offers the correct understanding. It illuminates the soul with full salvation and grace [...] Those who are careful to seek their own advantage, however, defending human teaching instead of faithfully holding up the doctrine of God, are false prophets.” Cited in Scott H. Hendrix, Early Protestant Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 45-9.
which are in harmony with the words of sacred scripture and with the interpretations, properly and wisely understood, of the doctors mentioned above.  

Yet the Council’s appeal to staying “in harmony with the words of sacred Scripture” is qualified by obedience to Church doctrine – to interpretation “that the church or long use has approved and has accepted for teaching.” In both of the passages cited above, the Council stresses the authority of the divine Word, which it sets in contrast to personal predictions and interpretation; at the same time, however, in repeatedly making recourse to “approved” and “accepted” teachings, its statements reveal anxiety regarding the feasibility of staying to the “true meaning” of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture alone to expound truth, without human mediation, emerges as an unfeasible task.

Yet the claim to such a possibility can be seen as a direct response to the kinds of criticisms that were percolating by 1516. Luther’s criticism of the idea that Scripture needed a mediator or interpreter was a continuation of the religious crisis that had already begun several years earlier.  

Perceived fraud and insanity in cases of prophetic preaching, as well as the broader ignorance of Scripture, led the Venetian Camaldolese hermits Vincenzo Querini and Tommaso Giustiniani to call for a return to Scripture and proper forms of worship to remedy superstition and ignorance among the laity and clergy.  

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74 Ibid., 637. “Mandantes omnibus qui hoc onus sustinent, quique in futurum sustinebunt, ut evangelicam veritatem, et sanctam scripturam iuxta declarationem, interpretationem, et ampliationem dictorum, quos ecclesia vel usus diuturnus approbat, legendosque hactenus recepti, et in posterum recipiet, praedicent et explanent nec quidquam eius propio sensui contrarium, aut dissonum adiicient, sed illis semper insistant, quae ab ipsius sacrae scripturae verbis, et praefatorum doctorum interpretationibus, rite et sane intellectis, non discordant.”

75 According to Luther, all the histories in Scripture pointed towards Christ; he is the Bible’s center and its periphery and no interpreter was necessary to understand its message: “Scripture is its own interpreter” he wrote in 1520 in a sermon on the Psalms, and again “Scripture is itself its own light. It is therefore good when Scripture interprets itself” in a sermon in 1522. Cited in Joseph Leo Koerner, The Reformation of the Image (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 201.

76 Bowd, Reform Before the Reformation, 181.
Following the election of Pope Leo X in 1512, Querini and Giustiniani sent the new pope their *Libellus*, in which they outlined reforms they hoped he would implement through the Fifth Lateran Council. In it, the authors repeatedly insist on the primacy of Scripture: “Nothing can instruct people about matters divine and human as can the sacred Scripture of the Old and New Testaments” (*nihil magis omnes homines de Divinis, humanisque rebus instruere, posse, quam Sacrosanctam veteris, novique Testamenti Scripturam*). Bishops, they write, should have knowledge of holy scripture and be faithful “to the discipline of the sacred scriptures” (*sacrae scriptuarea disciplinam amplectentes*). Furthermore, they condemn “the nitpicking talents and sure-fire distortions of dialectics which are customarily styled sophistry […]. At your command, let individuals be prohibited in such a way that no one will take the initiative to lecture publically on these arts in the future […].” (*Dialectriorum cavillationes, ingeniorum certe depravations, quae sophistica arts appellari solet […] Te iubente, ita prohibeantur, ut nullus sit, qui deinceps eam valeat publice profiteri […]*) – likely referring to the scholastic mode of biblical exegesis. Most importantly, they stress the need to return to the original authors and to bypass commentators and expositors of Scripture:

As in all intellectual pursuits, the original authors are the preferred reading, not the expositors. The amount of time we spend in the diligent search for all commentators is both astounding and deplorable. We learn nothing from them that we could not grasp rather easily, if we had the will to sweat over the original authors rather than their expositors.

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Si in omnibus studiis non expositors auctorum, sed ipsi auctores potius legantur. Mirum enim est, et miserabile, quantum temporis consumimus, dum expositors omnes perquirimus, et nihil addiscimus de his, quae facilius addiscere poteramus, si in auctorum potius, quam in expositorum lectione insudare voluissetm.80

This emphasis on the autonomy of Scripture, on the bypassing of biblical expositors that risk distorting the original text, and on the prohibition of false exegesis especially in public, underscores the authors’ belief in the primacy of Scripture as a source of knowledge for purifying morals and religious practices among the clergy and laity.81

This is not to say that Querini and Giustiniani did not support the patristic exegetical tradition; rather, the Libellus should be understood in context of the broader concern among members of the Roman Church, in the 1510s and 20s, to re-establish the clarity and primacy of Scripture in light of attacks on the corrupted nature of unauthorized exegetical methods and translations. The Lateran Council’s attempt to ground interpretation in Scripture should be seen as an anxious response to the critique of mediation when it came to divine truth, which ought to “interpret itself.” Reformers both within and abroad raised questions about the role of exegetical tradition and the self-sufficiency of biblical text: how is Scripture to be mediated, should it be, and is there a way to achieve unmediated immediacy?

Sebastiano’s work was planned the same year that the eleventh session of the Fifth Lateran Council convened to address proper preaching and suppress the proliferation of prophecies from clerics claiming to have had a revelation from God.82

The Council’s decision to legislate on this topic was not part of its original agenda and was voted on in the last four months of the five-year long Council proceeding. This

81 Bowd, Reform Before the Reformation, 179.
82 Minnich, “Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council,” 63.
indicates the felt urgency of the problem as it had arisen in the very years Sebastiano was working on the Borgherini chapel.\textsuperscript{83}

The \textit{Apocalypsis Nova}, a Book of Revelations by Amadeus of Portugal, likewise emerged out of this environment; its highly prophetic character was heavily criticized by Spanish Cardinal Bernardino Carvajal, for having introduced new doctrines to those of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{84} Amadeus had arrived in Italy from Spain in 1452; he became a Minorite, founded a congregation of friars, and was given the monastery of San Pietro in Montorio by Pope Sixtus. The \textit{Apocalypsis Nova} was discovered by the church friars in 1502 in a small cavern or “cavernula.”\textsuperscript{85} Mariano da Firenze, who wrote a history of the Minorite Order in 1517, reports on the friars’ awe and fear upon seeing it, refusing to open it for fear of death. It was Carvajal who finally ordered the book to be taken into the church and placed on the high altar, accompanied by the saying of Mass, and then handed to Franciscan theologian Giorgio Benigno to be opened. Afterward, the book was closely guarded by Carvajal and kept secret. The book’s recent discovery at San Pietro in Montorio attests to the proximity of prophetic culture to Sebastiano as he set out to work on Borgherini’s chapel.

The relevancy of the Council’s statements on the problematic mediation of Scripture to Sebastiano’s work is further affirmed by Pierfrancesco’s own connection to the Roman Curia and its oversight of the Council’s attempts at implementing reforms.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{84} Anna Morisi-Guerra, “The \textit{Apocalypsis Nova}: A Plan for Reform” in \textit{Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period}, ed. Marjorie Reeves (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 28 and no.6. See also Minnich, “Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council,” 74-5. The introduction of new doctrine, religious novelties, unusual ways of praying and singing, and new ceremonies became a widespread concern. Cajetan condemned another “false prophet,” a Florentine Benedictine monk named Teodoro di Giovanni da Scutari, who was forced to confess publicly in 1515 that he had feigned his visions and falsely presented himself as the prophesied Angelic Pastor.
\textsuperscript{85} Jungić, “Joachimist Prophecies,” 70 and no.20 and no.21 for a quotation of Fra Mariano’s description of the discovery.
Under a bull of December 1, 1514, issued by Pope Leo X, Pierfrancesco, who was already the Secretary of Briefs, received the Office of the Secretary of Apostolic Letters. In this position, Pierfrancesco would have been tasked with writing Apostolic letters addressed to bishops and the faithful. The fact of Pope Leo X’s overseeing the closing sessions of the Fifth Lateran Council, combined with his failure to implement the reforms drawn up, means that it is almost certain that Pierfrancesco would have had very intimate knowledge of matters of the Council and its participants. While the religious leanings of Pierfrancesco are not clearly known, it can be said that he would have had some investment in the debates surrounding the interpretation of Scripture and the way the Council chose to address them. Moreover, Pierfrancesco and his father, Salvi Borgherini, though Florentines, had close ties to the Roman milieu. The family had established a branch of their bank there and acquired Roman citizenship, and thus passed time between both cities. Pierfrancesco’s ties to Rome reinforce his embeddedness in the city and its centrality to the kinds of conversations that were surrounding the very urgent problem of Church reform with respect to human mediation of divine truths.

Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that in the wake of the Council’s declarations on true and false interpretation and in the midst of reformist calls to return to the truth and immediacy of Scripture over the falsity of images, Sebastiano’s program for

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86 ASFi, Castellani Borgherini, Inv. 423, No. 91.
87 On August 26, 1506, Salvi Borgherini was given Roman citizenship, whose privileges were to be extended to his descendants. See ASFi, Castellani Borgherini, Inv. 423, No. 88. A document also records Pierfrancesco and his mercantile partners’ plans to purchase the gardens of S. Agata and the adjoining Palazzo of Cardinal Federigo di Roberto di Sanseverino on January 9, 1512, furthering his ties to Rome. The sale was to be made by Pandolfo Mirani, the cardinal’s procurator. See ASFi, Castellani Borgherini, Inv. 423, No. 90. For more background on Pierfrancesco Borgherini and his family, such as his Republican politics, banking, and marriage to Margherita Acciaiolo in 1515, see Allan Braham, “The Bed of Pierfrancesco Borgherini” Burlington Magazine 121, No. 921 (1979): 754-63 + 765; James F. O’Gorman, “Sarto’s Borgherini Holy Family” Art Bulletin (1965): 502-4; Peter Francis Lynch, “Patriarchy and Narrative in the Borgherini Chamber Decorations” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1992), 11-27.
Pierfrancesco makes a pronounced statement on the relationship between word and image and their status as vehicles for the revelation of truth. The chapel program presents itself as a set of images, those of Christ’s Passion, mediated through Scripture and by doing so grounds (visual) interpretation in Scripture. The prophets in the spandrels and the saints on either side frame the two images of Christ; none look at Christ and instead have their eyes lowered reading or, in the case of St. Matthew, turned away to face an angel – a symbol of his divine inspiration. No one sees Christ, but rather knows him through texts.

In light of the Council’s anxious statements on “new and false prophecies and other frivolities hardly distinguishable from old wives' tales,” and its insistence on preaching “in accordance with the exposition, interpretation and commentaries that the church or long use has approved,” it is especially illuminating to note that Sebastiano has chosen to depict St. Peter with a book (Figure 199). St. Peter is rarely depicted in the act of reading and the book is likely to be none other than his own writings. One passage from the Second Book of Peter stands out as of particular relevance here:

> Understanding this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is made by private interpretation. For prophecy came not by the will of man at any time: but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost. But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there shall be among you lying teachers, who shall bring in sects of perdition, and deny the Lord who bought them: bringing upon themselves swift destruction.88

In the face of false prophecies, St. Peter assures his reader that false prophets who speak heresies have always existed and will continue to exist.

Peter’s assertion that no true prophecy is private interpretation – that real prophecies come from God and not the will of man – strongly resonates with the imagery

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of Sebastiano’s chapel and with the current crisis faced by the church. Sebastiano’s chapel emphasizes books and their authors as necessary for understanding sacred history. The status of Peter, Francis, Matthew, and Isaiah as authors is underscored by the subtle comparison of Matthew’s book to Moses’ tablet, upon which the law was written without human hand and which Moses now holds up in confrontation with Christ’s divine light (Figure 196). At the same time, the New and Old Testament prophets St. Matthew and Isaiah are each accompanied by an angel indicating their divine inspiration, positing an equivalency between the two. In this way, the chapel points to the divine source of true prophecy and its historical continuity between the Old and New Testament.

St. Peter, in fact, goes on to stress the continuity of divinely-received revelation, where prophecy is passed down from the old prophets to the new ministers and ultimately preached to the reader:

> Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them [the prophets] did signify: when it foretold those sufferings that are in Christ, and the glories that should follow: To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you they ministered those things which are now declared to you by them that have preached the gospel to you, the Holy Ghost being sent down from heaven, on whom the angels desire to look. 

To evoke St. Peter’s assurance of the truth of Scripture and continuity of true prophecy in early sixteenth-century Rome would have spoken to laypeople’s deep need for reassurance in fixity when it came to their understanding of Scripture. Zwingli, for

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89 Zwingli, for example, exhibited concern in his *Expositions of the Sixty-Seven Articles* over false prophecy and false signs, turning to the Gospel for assurance: “Christ says in Mt 24:24, ‘There will be false Christs and false teachers or prophets. They shall do signs and wonders so great that they would, as much in their power, deceive the elect even.’ Now tell me whether these deceivers are going to be holy? Indeed, there have already been and there shall be more of them yet […] From all this it follows that we cannot of our own strength recognize the signs when they appear, whether they are of God or of the devil. But if one recognizes them for sure, it comes from God and not from human boasting which can never assure anyone.” Huldrych Zwingli, *Huldrych Zwingli Writings: The Defense of the Reformed Faith*, trans. E. J. Furcha, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 169-70.

90 Douay-Rheims American, 1 Peter 1:11 – 12.
example, exhibited concern in his *Expositions of the Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523) over false teachings, turning to the Gospel for assurance and recalling that “Christ says in Mt 24:24, ‘There will be false Christs and false teachers or prophets [...] Indeed, there have already been and there shall be more of them yet [...]’”

The program of the chapel calls on the mind to reflect on the relationship between past and present and between Scripture and what it stands for. The fact that Peter appears twice, as a witness to the Transfiguration and then again on the side of the altar wall as biblical author, underscores his proximity to and physical witnessing of Christ’s body, but also the eventual distance from which he writes of and ponders Christ’s Passion. In this way, the chapel visualizes temporal and physical distance and, thus, reflects on the viewer’s own distance from Christ. This distance, in fact, is portrayed as constructive, as something to bridge, for meditating on Christ’s body.

It has often been noted that Sebastiano looked to Raphael’s *Sibyls* and *Transfiguration* in his decoration for the Borgherini chapel. To this should be added Raphael’s frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura, particularly the *Disputa* (c.1509) (Figure 200), from which Sebastiano cites the kneeling youth on the left side of the steps in green and white (he is evoked in Sebastiano’s St. James who appears under Moses’

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91 The passage in full reads: “Christ says in Mt 24:24, ‘There will be false Christs and false teachers or prophets. They shall do signs and wonders so great that they would, as much in their power, deceive the elect even.’ Now tell me whether these deceivers are going to be holy? Indeed, there have already been and there shall be more of them yet [...] From all this it follows that we cannot of our own strength recognize the signs when they appear, whether they are of God or of the devil. But if one recognizes them for sure, it comes from God and not from human boasting which can never assure anyone.” Zwingli, *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, 169-70. This excerpt comes from Zwingli’s Exposition of the 20th Article entitled “That God wants to give us all things in his name. It follows from this that we need no other mediator but him beyond the present time.” [my italics]

92 Peter’s writings emphasize his witnessing of Christ. DRA 1 Peter 5:5 states “The ancients therefore that are among you, I beseech, who am myself also an ancient, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ: as also a partaker of that glory which is to be revealed in time to come.” Likewise, 2 Peter 1:16 states “For we have not by following artificial fables, made known to you the power, and the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we were eyewitnesses of his greatness.” The doubling of Peter mirrors other doublings in the chapel, such as that of Christ and the pairing of Peter and Moses as foundational biblical figures.
tablet), but also borrows more generally from the overall composition and dynamic 
gesturing.\(^93\) The aforementioned works all share a common theme of predominately 
displayed books and writing. In thinking through the problematics of textual mediation of 
divine truth, Sebastiano turned to Raphael, which whom he came into continuous contact 
and competition in Rome, to work out a solution.

In the *Disputa*, four angels hold open the Gospels, looking both up at Christ and 
down at the monstrance containing the wafer on the altar. Enthroned in heaven are 
figures from the Old and New Testament who hold their books or are shown in the act of 
writing. Below, the Church Fathers and Doctors, popes and theologians engage in active 
discussion over the nature of the Eucharist, with the books of the Church Fathers strewn 
around them on the steps.\(^94\) Further out, on either side, are figures that lean out in 
vigorous poses – the one on the left holds a book, gesturing to it, as he turns away from 
the scene. The attention of both figures that lean on the parapet is directed back toward 
the Eucharist by a young and old man respectively. The fresco displays various forms of 
human knowledge with regard to divine presence in the host, committed to books and 
held up for dispute. The figures who turn away from the mystery of the host, at times 
identified as heretics, indicate that not all written knowledge is equal.

One reading of the *Disputa*, recently put forth by Nagel and Wood, grounds it in 
the contemporaneous print culture and the consequent change in the way knowledge was 
transmitted: intellectuals and theologians had conceded that knowledge had become

\(^93\) Note, for example, the parapet/podiums on either side that frame the scene, the tiled floor, the build-up of 
clouds, and the verticality of the central axis set against the horizontal expanse of the bottom tier.

\(^94\) Four of the books have clearly legible titles: next to St. Jerome lies the Bible and his *Letters*, next to St. 
Gregory is the *Liber moralium*, his commentary on the Book of Job, and next to St. Augustine is his *De 
Civitate Dei*. All four books could be found in the personal library of Pope Julius II in multiple copies. See 
mediated, and thus open for misinterpretation because cut off from its origin. According to Nagel and Wood, Raphael’s work is structured around a dense center of authoritative figures, which opens up onto looser, more diverse groups of individuals at the periphery. In this way, the Disputa reflects on the diffusion and dissemination of a message outward, while transforming it into more multiplex meanings; the mystery of the Eucharist flows from God above to the books of theologians below. Yet some figures holding books are at the same time interrupted and rebuffed by listeners, as if to suggest the troubling passage from orality to text. The fresco stages the conflict between oral and written transmission of knowledge and the problems of transmission and authority that painters faced around 1500. For Nagel and Wood, the work stages a new mode of artifacts’ relation to the past and to one another, emphasizing, rather than hiding, the “drifting” nature of mediated communication within chains of replicas.

Pursuing this point further, I propose that Raphael is thinking not only about transmitted knowledge generally, but also, more specifically, about the relationship between divine mystery and its mediation through Scripture and other authoritative writings. The work explores the passage from orality to text, but more to the point it is about the unmediated immediacy of the host as compared to the mediated nature of written knowledge, which can only aspire to the perfection of the Eucharist as a representation of God. Sebastiano takes up Raphael’s consideration of texts – the Gospel and its interpretations, both sanctioned and not – and in his hands the referential, 

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95 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, Anachronic Renaissance (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 347-65. The authors focus on the School of Athens in their discussion of the program of the Stanza della Segnatura, but the Disputa is also implicated in this problem. See 353 and 364.
96 Something similar is evidenced in the School of Athens with respect to the bare-chested, scroll-bearing youth; see ibid., 359-60.
mediated nature of such texts becomes less troubling and more of an explicitly-stated reality. Where Raphael’s *Disputa* shows text as problematic in relation to the Eucharist as a constant origin, Sebastiano’s chapel emphasizes books and their authors as necessary for understanding the mystery of the Eucharist.98

In fact, rather than a movement outward (the flow of divine mystery from the center to the books) as seen in the *Disputa*, the chapel reverses the direction of the passage of knowledge and suggests that the texts lead their readers toward the center – to meditate on Christ’s two natures and presence in the Eucharist (more on this in the following section). This is achieved most explicitly by having St. Matthew both point to and away from his book: his left hand rests on the pages of the book, palm up as if presenting the object as an end in itself; his right hand, however, placed immediately next to his left points beyond to the Transfiguration of Christ and, further down, to the Flagellation. Following the arc of his left arm and hand, the viewer is thus suddenly diverted at a 90 degree angle by the finger of the other hand down to what the Gospel represents. In this way, Scripture is shown to be a transmitter of divine truth – a representation that points beyond itself – and its authors and interpreters are shown to be figures that intercede between the text and the reader/viewer. While St. Peter appears deeply engrossed in his reading, with brow furrowed and his knuckles pressed against his cheek and temple, St. Francis looks down to his book and gestures out with his left hand as he holds his other to his chest – as if expounding on its content (Figure 199). The two states can be described as introspective and instructive, respectively, and the figures, in

98 In order to secure the infallibility of Scripture, Luther and other Reformers sought to exclude human agency and mediation from Scripture and formulated what Kemper calls the “verbal dictation theory of inspiration.” According to this theory the real author is God the Holy Spirit and the biblical writers were not authors at all, but passive agents, penmen consigning divine revelation to writing. See Kemper Fullerton, “The Reformation Principle of Exegesis and the Interpretation of Prophecy,” *Source: The American Journal of Theology* 12, No. 3 (1908): 433.
their monumentality and spatial isolation are strongly reminiscent of Bellini’s Sts. Nicolas, Peter, Mark, and Benedict in the Frari Triptych, a work which would have been well known to Sebastiano (Figure 201).

Yet what Scripture points to is another representation: an image of Christ. The theme of framing and representational distance is continued in the dome and altar wall of the chapel (Figure 196 and Figure 192); just like the books and scrolls frame the two scenes from the Passion, offering them up for view at a remove, additional figures surround the two figures of Christ. His body is both frontal and central, suggesting immediacy, and at the same time mediated through witnesses who gaze upon his body. In this way, though upon first glance Christ appears immediately accessible and at the foreground of each image, he is in fact twice removed from the viewer’s space—mediated first through the texts that tell the stories and then again through the historical personages that witness his presence.

This discovery of distance from Christ by means of layers cues the viewer to the figurative nature of textual and visual systems of representation, where such systems always point away from themselves to their referent.99 The images announce themselves to be representations, images derived from the act of reading, and the distance between the viewer’s physical space and that of the two bodies of Christ is made all the more apparent. The books and their authors mediate the viewer’s experience; he is prevented

99 For a discussion of figura or figural interpretation of history in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, and how this system continues into the Middle Ages, see Erich Auerbach, “Figura” in Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach, ed. James I. Porter, trans. Jane O. Newman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 110. According to Auerbach, figural interpretation in both texts and images creates “a connection between two events or persons in which one signifies not only itself but also the other—and that one is also encompassed or fulfilled by the other.” He terms this system “historically real prophecy,” meaning that the historical event is no less concrete or real even as it stands as a figure or prophecy for a future event, like the coming of Christ. See also Campbell, “Renaissance Naturalism,” 316 and 320 for a discussion of the ways in which Northern Italian artists made images that consciously drew attention to their figurative or referential, and hence mediated dimension.
from taking the images literally and direct his prayers to them. Instead the images act as visualizations of texts, created by the mind’s eye while reading. By mediating the passage from the viewer’s space to Christ at the center, the chapel program resists being read literally. Instead, it suggests that both Scripture and artistic images are equally unlike Christ in that they do not stand for truth themselves.

This mediation is underscored by Sebastiano’s insistence on the non-transparency of the biblical text. He visualizes the text of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (1:6 and 63:1-2), who holds a scroll in the top right spandrel, as prophecy and prefiguration of the Flagellation of Christ, pictured below. Like St. Matthew, Isaiah is shown as a divinely-inspired writer with an angel at his side. The Old Testament is thus presented in figural terms rather than as literal history. By departing from Isaiah’s text, Sebastiano reflects on the figural nature of images, for they too function as metaphors that point away from themselves and to the true reality of Christ in the Eucharist. Sebastiano depicts Christ as free of “wounds and bruises and swelling sores” and in so doing does not lay claim to the image as a literal representation of sacred history.

The chapel space invites the viewer to read its program in layers, and thus, to understand the Passion of Christ not so much as immediate sensory experience, but rather to be read and accessed through textual sources and intercessory figures. The highly stylized violence of the Flagellation (addressed in more detail below) further cues the viewer to the ahistorical, non-narrative meaning of the image. The non-literal nature of the Flagellation and Transfiguration, and the images’ relationship to the Eucharist that

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100 Douay-Rheims American, Isaiah 1:6. “From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores: they are not bound up, nor dressed, nor formented with oil.” Isaiah 63:1-2. “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Borsa, this beautiful one in his robe, walking in the greatness of his strength. I, that speak of justice, and am a defender to save. Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the winepress?”

would have been celebrated by Pierfrancesco on the altar table below, is the subject of the following section.

3.3 Seeing Double, Christ’s Two Natures

The doubling of Christ along the chapel’s vertical axis is an unusual choice to decorate the wall and dome of a chapel. The repetition seems redundant, even in accounts that see this as a message of the Church’s triumph over worldly corruption. This striking portrayal of his human, corporeal, suffering body below and his divine, glowing, transfigured body above requires explanation. The two figures of Christ without a doubt call to mind the debate that was about to break out among reformers on the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist – on the meaning of “This is my body,” on what it meant for Christ to have a body, and the consequences this had for images and the celebration of Mass. I propose that Sebastiano’s doubling of Christ on the wall directly above Borgherini’s altar table should be taken as a reflection on Christ’s two natures – divine and human – at a time of tremendous uncertainty about what exactly was contained in the Eucharist and how it was contained.

The key to understanding the juxtaposition of the Flagellation and Transfiguration is to be found in the writings of St. Francis, pictured on the right reading from a book and making a gesture that appears expository. To date, few scholars have included Sts. Francis and Peter in their accounts of the chapel program and those that have, do not offer an explanation for the books they are holding.102 The fact that they are the patron’s name saints and that the church was Franciscan and dedicated to St. Peter is without question; yet I suggest that they carry an additional significance that has to do

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with the way Sebastiano conceives Christ’s Eucharistic body, doubled along a vertical axis immediately above the altar table.

In the very opening of *The Admonitions*, St. Francis reflects on the relationship between the humanity of Christ and the divinity of God. The passage begins by proclaiming that those that have seen Christ have also seen God. At the same time, however, it stresses the inaccessibility and invisibility of divinity to external sight because it is spirit.

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me. If you had known Me you would, without doubt, have known My Father also: and from henceforth you shall know Him, and you have seen Him. Philip saith to Him: Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus saith to him: Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known Me? Philip, he that seeth Me seeth [My] Father also. How sayest thou, Show us the Father?” The Father “inhabiteth light inaccessible,” and “God is a spirit,” and “no man hath seen God at any time.” Because God is a spirit, therefore it is only by the spirit He can be seen, for “it is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.”103

According to St. Francis, God cannot be seen by the external eye. It follows from this that the truth of Christ likewise cannot be seen:

For neither is the Son, inasmuch as He is equal to the Father, seen by any one other than by the Father, other than by the Holy Ghost. Wherefore, all those who saw the Lord Jesus Christ according to humanity and did not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Divinity, that He was the Son of God, were condemned.104

Those that see Christ “according to [his] humanity” alone were condemned because they did not see his divinity. The use of past tense indicates that the condemned were those that witnessed Christ’s life on earth. What follows is St. Francis’ comparison of the

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104 Ibid., 5-6.
blindness of the pagans to that of the modern layperson, if he does not see the real body
and blood of Christ within the sacrament lifted up by the priest at the altar:

In like manner, all those who behold the Sacrament of the Body of Christ
which is sanctified by the word of the Lord upon the altar by the hands of
the priest in the form of bread and wine, and who do not see and believe
according to the Spirit and Divinity that It is really the most holy Body
and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are condemned, He the Most High
having declared it when He said, “This is My Body, and the Blood of the
New Testament,” and “he that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood
hath everlasting life.”  

External and spiritual seeing are recurring themes in the writing of St. Francis.
The idea expressed in *The Admonitions* appears again in his *Testament*: “In this world, I
see nothing corporeally of the most high Son of God Himself except His most holy Body
and Blood [...] and I will see that these most holy mysteries be honored and revered
above all things [...]” St. Francis repeatedly stresses that what we see of Christ is found
bodily in the Eucharist, while the truth of his divinity is invisible to the external eye. He
confidently upholds the view that the bread and wine actually contain Christ’s body and
blood – sanctified by the word of God and the hands of the priest.

Such a position would have held great appeal to viewers at a time of debate on
what was contained in the Eucharist and how. Zwingli denied that Christ was really
present, arguing that the Eucharist was a symbolic remembrance of his sacrifice, citing
his words “Do this in remembrance of me” and “The flesh profiteth nothing.” In his
*Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525), Zwingli asserts that eating the Host is a

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105 Ibid., 6-7.
106 Ibid., 82.
107 For a discussion of how Luther, Zwingli, and other reformers in the North reconceived human agency
and the role of the priest during Mass, and Christ’s presence in the Host, see Lee Palmer Wandel, *The
Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),
99-109. The Council of Trent ultimately affirmed the status of the priest and his participation in Mass, the
efficacy of which depended upon his action. Ibid., 225-9.
matter of belief – that it is spiritual, rather than literal – and that bodily objects perceived by sense, such as the bread and wine, do not require faith. According to Zwingli, it is a perversion to think that things that can only be understood spiritually, can in fact be grasped “in a bodily and material sense, which yet you do not perceive or experience.”\(^{109}\)

He goes on to say:

> For the senses cannot be persuaded to say that they perceive what they do not perceive at all [...] And now, when this counterfeit faith, which has reached this decision about sensible flesh, imposes it upon the senses in spite of themselves, so that contrary to all their own laws they are forced to confess that they perceive what they do not perceive, they constantly refuse to submit.\(^{110}\)

The recurrence of the problematic notion of “perceiving” divinity in the Eucharist by means of the physical senses – an idea that, according to Zwingli, is entirely “impose[d]” upon the senses and “contrary to all their own laws” – points to a larger problem that was being articulated by reformers in Europe. The problem had to do with the perceived notion of ritualized deceit, of being tricked into thinking one actually “saw” God in mundane objects. Later on, in the 1530s in France, the Protestant pastor Antoine Marcourt would argue that Mass and church rituals had made people believe that Christ’s body was literally present in the Host and that this was diametrically opposed to Scripture.\(^{111}\) He maintained that this kind of practice confused the eternal and temporal and that it placed faith in visible, corruptible objects. Moreover, he called Transubstantiation sophistry, with no foundation in Scripture. As Christopher Elwood notes, a pervasive motif in reformist writing is that heavenly things should be sought in heaven and that worshippers’ interest should be

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 215.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 220-21.

steered away from visible objects toward invisible, spiritual reality.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, reformers focused on reconceptualizing how the divine majesty of God could be present and \textit{perceived} in the visible forms of bread and wine. The answer was certainly not at all clear.

This leads to an important tie between the writings of Zwingli and other reformers and those of St. Francis. St. Francis maintained that one must “see and believe” that the bread and wine are the very body and blood of Christ. Yet the conflation of seeing and believing is the very point that Zwingli found so contentious. For Zwingli, one cannot see Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine because it is there symbolically and hence belief does not depend on corporeal sight.

It should be added that the question of what was contained in the Eucharist and of what exactly qualified as a truthful representation of God was addressed by other artists in Italy at this time. Andrea del Sarto’s \textit{Lamentation} (c.1524) for the main altar of San Pietro de Luco places the body of Christ on a white cloth, recalling the altar table itself, with the Eucharist and chalice before Christ at the very bottom of the altarpiece. Mary Magdalene, seated at his feet, directs her gaze down simultaneously at both Christ’s body and the Eucharist, thereby drawing attention the link between them. Similarly, Girolamo Romanino’s \textit{Mass of St. Apollonius} (c.1525), Santa Maria in Calchera, Brescia – discussed in Chapter Two – underscores the connection between the historical suffering of Christ with the taking of the Eucharist in the present by aligning an altarpiece of the Pietà with the administering of the Sacrament before it. The painting demonstrates not only the relationship between the Eucharist and Christ’s body, but also the function of the altarpiece to visualize this link. The message is that the Eucharist is the most direct way

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 44-46.
of knowing Christ. Unlike reformers, who championed Scripture as the most truthful representation of God, Romanino’s painting suggests that Church ritual authorizes the equivalence between Christ and the Eucharist. It does so by articulating a network of relationships between the host in the priest’s hand at center, the altarpiece behind him, and official ceremony – indicated by candles, incense and the symmetrical placement of pious worshippers around the central event. In like fashion, Sebastiano’s Borgherini chapel reflects upon and visualizes the complex relationships between various types of representations of God – textual, visual, and liturgical.

Sebastiano reflects on the question of what is contained in the Eucharist and how, and how one perceives this. In his doubling of Christ, Sebastiano appears to respond to and visualize St. Francis’ affirmation, in these passages, of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist and the importance of “seeing” beyond his humanity, and beyond the accidents of the bread and wine, to apprehend his invisible divinity. Thus, seeing beyond Christ’s humanity becomes analogous to seeing beyond the accidents of the Eucharist. The two bodies of Christ – the lower representative of his human suffering and the upper of his revealed divinity – lead the eye up above the altar table. Standing before it, Pierfrancesco would have needed to look no further than the Flagellation on the front wall (Figure 202) to appreciate the physicality of the sacramental bread and wine, an act which re-enacted Christ’s sacrifice. Raising his eyes higher, following the vertical of the column to which Christ is tied, he would have encountered the Transfigured Christ, thus inviting him to “see and believe” that through transubstantiation the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Christ. This transformation is mirrored by the Transfiguration of Christ and by the reactions of the historical figures who witness Christ’s presence. The
three Apostles – Peter, James, and John – are caught precisely in the moment in which they are shown Christ’s divinity.¹¹³ In contrast, in the Flagellation scene below, the witnesses are Roman soldiers blind to Christ’s divinity, thus echoing St. Francis’ words: “those who saw the Lord Jesus Christ according to humanity and did not see and believe according to the Spirit and the Divinity, that He was the Son of God, were condemned.”¹¹⁴

Notably, the figure of St. Francis on the right has his eyes averted from the scene of the Flagellation (Figure 199), suggesting that seeing Christ does not entail the physical gaze. According to St. Francis, God appeared to the “fleshly eyes” of the Apostles just like he now shows himself in the sacred bread and as they contemplated him with their “spiritual eyes” so does the pious worshipper see and believe the bread to be the true body of God:

Behold daily He humbles Himself as when from His “royal throne” He came into the womb of the Virgin; daily He Himself comes to us with like humility; daily He descends from the bosom of His Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as He appeared in true flesh to the Holy Apostles, so now He shows Himself to us in the sacred Bread; and as they by means of their fleshly eyes saw only His flesh, yet contemplating Him with their spiritual eyes, believed Him to be God, so we, seeing bread and wine with bodily eyes, see and firmly believe it to be His most holy Body and true and living Blood [...].¹¹⁵

St. Francis stresses the Apostles’ ability to see with spiritual eyes even though they with “their fleshly eyes saw only His flesh.” The Borgherini chapel insists on this duality, doubling Christ into the body seen by fleshly eyes and that seen by spiritual ones. That

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¹¹³ Sight as the vehicle of revelation is emphasized in Matthew’s account of the episode: “And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias, talking with him” (Mt 17:2-3) and “Tell the vision to no man” (Mt 17:9).
¹¹⁴ Francis of Assisi, *The Writings of St. Francis*, 5-6 and Chapter 3, no.106.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 7.
both Sts. Francis and Peter look away into their books, unlike the three Apostles who gaze up in awe at Christ’s Transfigured body, models for the pious viewer that the way to see God in the Eucharist is not by means of the senses, but rather by the internal, spiritual eye. By splitting Christ’s human and divine nature literally into two bodies, the chapel suggests that they ought to be perceived differently, by means of different types of vision.

The chapel compares external and spiritual vision and this is reinforced once more by St. Peter, who stands on the opposite side of the Flagellation immersed in his book. Notably, the First Book of Peter opens with the statement:

That the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, you love: in whom also now, though you see him not, you believe: and believing shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified.116

St. Peter commends faith over corporeal sight; the latter, in fact, emerges as testimony to the power of belief. The chapel compares the blindness of the Roman soldiers with the clarity of the Apostles’ vision on the mountain, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, it juxtaposes the momentariness and violence of the revelation to the Apostles with the protracted concentration of Sts. Peter and Francis reading. The dramatic gesturing and twisted positions of the Apostles, as well as Christ’s billowing drapery with a build-up of cloud behind him, suggest that the dome depicts the moment in which God speaks from the cloud that descends upon the Apostles and announces Christ to be his son: “And the disciples hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid.”117

The unsustainability of seeing Christ’s divinity is indicated not only by the violence and awe

116 Douay-Rheims American, 1 Peter 1:7-8.
117 Douay-Rheims American, Matthew 17:6.
of their reactions, but also by St. Matthew’s last line before the Apostles descend from the mountain: “And they lifting up their eyes saw no one but only Jesus.”

Other artists in Rome at this time were also thinking through the relationship between external and internal vision. Perhaps no example is more relevant than Raphael’s Transfiguration (Figure 9), commissioned in 1516 by Giulio de’ Medici and completed in 1520, in which he competed alongside Sebastiano’s Raising of Lazarus. Scholars have long suggested that Raphael stalled work on his painting and secretly borrowed from Sebastiano’s Raising of Lazarus. Debate continues regarding Sebastiano’s Transfiguration in the Borgherini chapel and whether it was Sebastiano who borrowed from Raphael’s work of the same subject or the other way around. The resemblance between the two works, however, goes beyond the commonly identified similarities – that is, the figure of Christ, the hovering figures of Moses and Elijah, and the vigorous movements of the three Apostles below. Instead, the more salient point that Sebastiano and Raphael’s works have in common is the subject of visionary experience and revelation.

Raphael’s Transfiguration shows the Transfiguration of Christ as the experience of internal vision. The painting juxtaposes two seemingly disparate events along a vertical axis: below, the Apostles fail to heal a possessed boy because they have little faith; above, Christ is transfigured on the Mount of Tabor. The Apostle in red, whose

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118 Douay-Rheims American, Matthew 17:8. Matthew further underscores the blindness of their physical vision in his description of the blinding light of the transfiguration: “And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow.” (Mt 17:2)


120 Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 58 suggests that the direction of influence should perhaps be reversed – that it could have been Raphael that borrowed from Sebastiano’s Transfiguration for his own work of the same subject.

121 Preimesberger, Paragons and Paragone, 12-13.
hand breaks through to the top scene and whose eyes remain closed, appears to be having an ecstatic vision and sharing the vision of the apostles above. Thus, what is pictured is a relationship between illuminated, internal vision above and the inadequacy of physical, external vision below.

Sebastiano picks up on this contest of visions by similarly stacking two scenes, one above the other, that convey spiritual blindness and spiritual illumination. However, a key departure from Raphael’s work is the new role given to books. Sebastiano replaces the foregrounded, seated Apostle who consults a book as he twists with a violent extension of his arm and leg with a dynamic, but relatively calmer St. Matthew who gestures across his book as he looks up at an angel. Moreover, the figure of St. Peter in Sebastian’s *Flagellation* is a deliberate quotation of Raphael’s seated Apostle. Yet this figure gestures towards the viewer, interceding on his behalf, as he appears again below in the act of reading. Thus, the inadequacy of the book as a stand in for earthly knowledge in Raphael’s work (it constitutes a kind of blindness to the vision of Christ above) is replaced with an affirmation of written knowledge, specifically the knowledge attained from consulting Scripture, as a means to access the divine.\(^{122}\) Both works speak to the larger crisis current in Rome at this time – that of mediated knowledge and the status of books – but arrive at very different conclusions.

Sebastiano similarly manipulates the composition to suggest a different means by which to access the top scene: no pathway between the top and bottom zones exists, aside from the gestures and interiorized states of the framing figures. St. Matthew points to the Christ of the *Transfiguration*, but also further down to the Flagellated Christ, establishing

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\(^{122}\) See ibid., 375 for a discussion of the seated apostle, pictured as erroneously consulting a book of human wisdom to resolve a spiritual problem.
a link between them by the authority of Scripture. Meanwhile, Sts. Francis and Peter appear engrossed in reading, like Isaiah above them, suggesting that what unites the two zones and allows one to perceive Christ’s human and divine nature is an interiorized vision, but one that is brought about by knowledge set down in writing. This kind of mediated knowledge of sacred history and of Christ’s divinity is put forth as more humanly attainable than what is afforded by a direct and momentary view of the divine, as visualized in the violent reactions of the Apostles in the dome contrasted against the meditative poses of Sts. Peter and Francis.

The affirmation of Scripture as a path to sacred truth and understanding of Christ’s dual nature is summed up in the inscription set below the altar table that reads: APERIETUR IN TEMPORE or “it will be opened in time” (Figure 193). The meaning of this inscription has not been addressed by most scholars. Below I suggest an interpretation of the inscription in context of the themes of textual mediation, revelation and illuminated vision discussed thus far.

3.4 “Aperietur in Tempore,” Prophecy and Revelation

The most recent interpretation of the inscription has been forth by Jungić, who argues that it replicates the words on the cover of a Book of Revelations – the Apocalypsis Nova – which she connects to effigies of the author, St. Amadeus, holding the book with the inscription written on the front. In the Apocalypsis Nova, the Archangel Gabriel prophesies the Second Coming of Christ where Christ transfigured symbolizes his return as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This account continues Joachim’s prophecy of history according to the Three Ages and the Three Comings of

Christ. Jungić further argues that Cardinal Carvajal, who was an important patron of the arts in Rome, very specifically associated the idea of Church renewal with the Transfiguration story in his oration given on August 6, 1492, the Feast Day of the Transfiguration. Thus, for Jungić, Sebastiano’s *Transfiguration* portrays the Second Advent of Christ as a metaphor for Church renewal and the *Flagellation* as a metaphor “of the great flagellum that will take place prior to the coming of this age.”

The difficulty I have with this argument is the limited and definitive association between the *Apocalypsis Nova* and Sebastiano’s chapel. No effigy of Amadeus appears in any of the imagery, nor is there evidence of Pierfrancesco’s interest in or support of the Joachimist prophecies advanced by Savonarola and Carvajal, let alone of the suggestion that Carvajal and Zanobi Acciaiuoli (a Savonarola follower) advised him on the chapel’s program. Moreover, I disagree that the *Flagellation* looks dark and pessimistic, which Jungić sees as reflective of the punishment that will be given out prior to Christ’s Coming. Instead of arguing for a one-to-one correlation between a single textual source and Sebastiano’s inscription, I propose seeing the inscription as Sebastiano’s invention in context of the larger debates that were going on in and outside of Rome. What needs to be examined is the use of similar words and concepts – of an opening or revelation that will occur in time – by contemporaneous thinkers and reformers in order to answer the question: what “will be opened” and why will this happen “in time”?

The inscription calls to mind the gospel of St. Matthew (7:7-8): “Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every

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124 Ibid., 72.
125 Ibid., 68-9.
126 Ibid., 76.
127 Jungić suggests their involvement in advising Pierfrancesco. See ibid., 78.
128 Ibid., 76.
one that asketh, receiveth: and he that asketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, *it shall be opened.* [my italics]” It also implicates Luther’s exegesis of Psalm 113:1 in his *Dicta super psalterium* (1513-15), where Luther associates Matthew’s statement with Christ’s Advent, stating: “So also the spiritual advent comes through grace, and the future [advent] through glory […] out of the sheer promise of the merciful God. For he promises as follows for the spiritual advent: ‘Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and *it shall be opened to you* […]’”[my italics]”129 Not coincidentally, St. Augustine, an author Sebastiano was familiar with through his acquaintance with Giles of Viterbo, had also quoted Matthew in the very last line of his *Confessions*:

> Some of our works are indeed good, thanks to your Gift, but they will not last forever, and when they are done we hope that we shall rest in your immense holiness. But you, the supreme Good, need no other good and are eternally at rest, because you yourself are at rest.

> What human can empower another human to understand these things? What angel can grant understanding to another angel? What angel to a human? Let us rather ask of you; seek in you; knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so *will the door be opened to us.* [my italics]130

Both Luther and Augustine read Matthew in terms of the discovery and reception of God’s grace and sanctity. Luther goes further to draw a connection between God’s giving of grace in his Second or spiritual advent with the revelation of Christ’s glory in his Third Advent.131

This final revelation is, in fact, anticipated by the momentary glory of Christ’s Transfiguration. Peter himself describes the Transfiguration as proof of the inevitability

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of the Last Judgment. He stresses the visionary quality of the revelation of glory – a preview of what’s to come – as does an entire exegetical tradition going back to Thomas Aquinas and to the Fathers of the Church. Thus Sebastiano’s *Transfiguration* should be seen as a revelation or “opening” of glory; here I am in agreement with Jungić, though I arrive at this conclusion by means of different evidence that is meant to add to the evidence of the *Apocalypsis Nova*, which emerges out of the same prophetic tradition. The ascent to glory and spiritual illumination is encapsulated by the light tone of the frescoed dome of the chapel – a kind of heavenly, cloud-filled space – contrasted against the more deeply shadowed and largely monochromatic altar wall painted in oil.

Yet the inscription also triggers a pictorial play on words: it alludes to the opening of Christ’s glory, but also to the closed and open books pictured throughout, suggesting that it is the reading of Scripture and its interpretation – its opening or unlocking – that will lead to spiritual illumination. That the inscription appears on a curled scroll emerging from between the closed pages of a book, tucked underneath the IHS sign, similarly suggests that the book’s opening will lead to the revelation of Christ’s glory. At the same time, the contrast between the heraldic flatness of the IHS and the foreshortened illusionism of the book, above which the sign seems to float, highlights a kind of casualness to the book. Its placement on a diagonal on the shelf-like space, together with the scroll that seems to bookmark a page, gives the impression of it having been handled and placed there deliberately. One can imagine Pierfrancesco reading from a real book (perhaps a book of meditations) during his prayers and identifying with the pictured book as being his own, as if put away for safekeeping during his absence from the chapel. This

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132 There is a long tradition of interpreting the Transfiguration as a preview of Christ’s glory in his Second Coming. See Jack M. Greenstein, "How Glorious the Second Coming of Christ": Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" and the Transfiguration," *Artibus et Historiae* 10, No. 20 (1989): 41-44.
detail emphasizes the preciousness of books as personal items of ownership, in contrast to their reproach in Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, where they are shown as deterrents to spiritual illumination. The inscription’s location directly below the IHS monogram further suggests a contrast between revelation in the form of a sign and in the form of a palpable, material object.

Moreover, the reference to time indicates that the revelation has not yet come. This is reinforced by the fact that the *Transfiguration* appears above the *Flagellation*, as if preceded by it and the spiritual blindness it represents, when in fact the historical sequence should be the other way around. This brings us back to the notion of prophecy. The theme of prophecy emerges prominently in the Gospel of Matthew, which was commonly understood as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies. Notably, Sebastiano’s figure of Matthew points down to the scenes of the Passion, while Isaiah looks into his scroll. The scroll and codex underscore the historical distance between the two authors, where the latter writes about what is to come and the former writes of and shows the prophecies’ fulfillment.

Prophecy and its fulfillment are pictured in the chapel in the juxtaposition of Isaiah and Matthew, but are also suggested by the inscription itself. The “opening” of prophecy “in time” can be understood as the revelation of Old Testament Scripture as prophetic text. At a time when reformers like Luther and Calvin were heavily critiquing the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament as a “twisting” (*torqueri*) of meaning and calling for a historically-grounded, literal understanding of it, the chapel insists on a

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133 I wish to thank Shana O’Connell for her suggestion that the image under the altar table underscores the preciousness of the book.

prophetic interpretation.135 Moreover, whereas Luther was against the need for mediators, the chapel shows them to be necessary, since meaning has to be “opened” to the reader and viewer, that is, to Pierfrancesco and other celebrants. With the book and inscribed scroll – itself a kind of prophetic text – tucked away below the altar table, Pierfrancesco could look at the complex visual program before him and imagine that his engrossment in reading, like that of his models and name saints Sts. Peter and Francis, was the path to opening the mystery of Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist.

3.5 Books and Heresy: A Crisis of Orthodoxy in Rome

Sebastiano’s preoccupation with books and mediated knowledge was, in fact, part of a greater religious crisis overtaking early sixteenth century Europe that was felt most strongly in Rome. The locus of papal authority, Rome saw itself as the leader and defender of the Catholic Church and took on the role of investigating emerging opinions that it deemed unorthodox to traditional Christian belief.136 With increasing propagation of publications by independent minded reformers who were re-interpreting Scripture and challenging the papal claim to spiritual authority, the question of how knowledge of God reaches man became a pressing concern.137 Books became the vehicles for the transmission of diverging views and they consequently became suspect by religious authorities who strove to centralize knowledge. Sebastiano’s chapel program is one among many that engaged in the widespread reevaluation of what it meant to receive “truth” indirectly. The appearance of highly didactic imagery concerned with themes of

books and intermediary figures like sibyls, prophets, or Church doctors in private chapels at this time should be understood as a manifestation of a wider crisis, particularly in Rome, of having to reconcile sixteenth-century Church teachings with the authority of Scripture – the original Word of God – and the legitimacy of the latter being mediated by the former.

Filippino Lippi’s Carafa Chapel in S. Maria Minerva in Rome (Figure 203, Figure 204) – conspicuously decorated with inscriptions, scrolls, open and closed books, and sibyls in its vault – is a case in point. It was commissioned by Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, a member of the Roman Curia who was part of the community that sought reform in Rome in the years before Luther came on the scene.138 As a Dominican, he supported papal power as the supreme authority of the Church and, though initially both agreed in their ideas on reform, he confronted Savonarola with charges of heresy as the latter became more critical of the papacy in the 1490s.139 His chapel, which was a locus for papal celebration of the Nativity of the Virgin and the Feast of Thomas Aquinas, visualizes Thomas’ stance on prophecy as written in the Summa Theologica – that it is revealed by God but transmitted to mortals through intermediaries.140

Following Gail Geiger’s reading of the chapel, above, in the vault, the sibyls begin the chapel’s thematic sequence of frescoes, which focus on the notion of transmitted knowledge by means of books. The sibyls were seen as ancient sources that prophesied Christ’s coming and they’re thus the first stage of man’s knowledge of God in

139 Ibid., 30-1.
140 Ibid., 67.
the chapel.\textsuperscript{141} The \textit{Triumph of St. Thomas} (Figure 203 and Figure 206), depicted on the lower west wall of the chapel, shows how God, through the revelation of his grace through Thomas’ writing, infuses man’s natural reason with knowledge of Christian mysteries.\textsuperscript{142} This is reinforced through a multitude of inscriptions, such as the two tablets held up by the standing putti, which read “The revelation of thy words gives light” and “It gives understanding to the simple.”\textsuperscript{143} Thomas is surrounded by heretics who denied the dogma of the Early Church, specifically the doctrine of Christ’s humanity and divinity as part of the Trinity. They are shown wearing exotic dress and clinging to their books, which are also scattered on the ground before them, and are identified by their errors in the inscriptions.\textsuperscript{144}

Notably, the fresco is based on traditional Trecento panels of the Triumph of Thomas Aquinas.\textsuperscript{145} The panel of Francesco Traini (Figure 207), for example, visualizes how knowledge of God reaches man; it does this by means of rays of light – which stand for divine wisdom – that connect the heads of the laypeople to Thomas’ open book, which in turn acts as the focal point of lines converging from the books of ancient Philosophers (to either side) and the Evangelists, Moses and St. Paul (above), as well as from the mouth of God himself.\textsuperscript{146} By drawing on this model, Lippi thus shows Thomas as a teacher of sacred texts and an intermediary (in a line of intermediaries, both pagan and Christian) between laypeople and God. This message is underscored once again in the fresco of the lunette above, whose subject is debated, but which is thought to depict

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\item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 70.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 90.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 93. \textit{Declaratio sermon(um) / tuorum illuminat / et intellectum / dat paruulis}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 97.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 100.
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either the Miracle of the Speaking Cross or the Miracle of Chastity (Figure 204). In the scene St. Thomas kneels before a Crucifix with two angels by his side and beneath which stands a large open book. That the subject could have been read (or misread) as the Miracle of the Speaking Cross by contemporaries is attested to by Vasari’s Life of Filippino Lippi. Vasari describes it as “the scene when, as St. Thomas is praying, the Crucifix says to him, ‘You have written well of me, Thomas.’” Thus, here too St. Thomas appears as an authoritative and divinely sanctioned intermediary. It is also noteworthy that Raphael’s *Disputa* takes its cue from Lippi’s composition and his thematic treatment of books as mediators of knowledge.

Both Roman works are ones that Sebastiano would have been familiar with and both engage with the issue of heterodox, textual intervention in a manner that celebrates the Roman Church and the triumph of orthodox faith. Lippi, in particular, turns Thomas’ theological doctrines into a message of institutionalized and centralized authority meant to resonate with his contemporaries (the view of the city of Rome in the background makes this all the more evident). This interest in the authority of written knowledge and the status of prophets as legitimate intermediaries can be seen in the work of Michelangelo and Raphael and in the sibylline imagery in S. Pietro in Montorio itself, where Sebastiano’s own work was painted. The Sistine ceiling – which is peopled by sibyls and prophets in a state of inspired frenzy, as they scrutinize their books and scrolls in the company of angels – communicates the efficacy of the written word and the

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147 Geiger, *Filippino Lippi’s Carafa Chapel*, 75.
149 Geiger, *Filippino Lippi’s Carafa Chapel*, 90.
importance of reading for understanding Scripture.\textsuperscript{150} According to Meredith Gill, not only do these prophetic figures affirm the status of authoritative texts in mediating sacred history, but they also amplify the visionary content of Michelangelo’s pictorial invention.\textsuperscript{151} It is the very invention Raphael goes on to borrow in his sibyls above the arch of the Chigi Chapel in S. Maria della Pace.

Even closer to Sebastiano’s work on the Borgherini Chapel, would have been the four sibyls decorating the external arch of the chapel of St. Anthony of Padua (just two chapels over from Sebastiano’s, on the same side of the nave). The fresco has been dated to 1509 and variously attributed to Baldassare Peruzzi, Pinturicchio, and Giovanni Pinura.\textsuperscript{152} Appearing from right to left are the Eritrean, Delphic, Tibertine, and Cumean sibyl. Their respective scrolls prophesy the birth of Christ; from right to left, they read: “In the last epoch, God will humble himself and the Word of God will render itself human (\textit{In ultima aetate humiliabitur Deus et humanabitur proles divina}), “The prophet will be born of a mother without sexual intercourse” (\textit{Nascetur propheta absque matris coitu}), “Christ will be born in Bethlehem” (\textit{Nascetur Christus in Bethlehm}), and “The new progeny is sent down from the high heavens” (\textit{Jam nova progenies coelo demittitur altro}).\textsuperscript{153} Together, the scrolls underscore the relationship between the written word and the arrival of Christ.

To return to Lippi’s work, another detail of the chapel decoration can also be understood as a response to the crisis of Church reform – that is, the Veronica veil and the Man of Sorrows roundel pictured in the fictive frieze above the \textit{Triumph of St.}

\textsuperscript{150} Meredith J. Gill, \textit{Augustine in the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{153} Vannicelli, \textit{S. Pietro in Montorio}, 122-3.
Thomas and surrounded by other liturgical objects (bottom of Figure 204). Both correspond to the Eucharist that would have stood below during Mass on the chapel’s altar table, thus reinforcing the message of real presence and the agency of these images of Christ. The roundel also echoes the larger one below it, held up by putti and enclosing an open book that reads, “For my mouth shall speak truth and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.” Sanctioned and canonical images of Christ are thus juxtaposed against books throughout the chapel, affirming that the books speak truths.

Like in the Carafa Chapel, where books appear everywhere as the patron’s personal emblem and as markers of prophecy and sanctioned mediation, the Borgherini Chapel reflects on the necessity of mediation to arrive at knowledge of God. Sebastiano, however, does not resort to heresy as a counter-point to true mediation or prophecy, nor does he fill his chapel with didactic inscriptions or books that can be read. Whereas St. Thomas points emphatically at the heretics across the trampled personification of Evil, Sebastiano’s St. Matthew directs the viewer’s attention to Christ. In this way, Sebastiano’s chapel is much less of a doctrinally moralizing work and has more to do with the patron’s personal relationship to God, which he achieves through meditation on his prayer books and the imagery set before him.

The works of so-called reformation artists at this time similarly exhibit a preoccupation with books and mediation, responding in diverse ways to the circumstances in Italy and farther out. Dürer’s two panels known as the Four Apostles (1526) (Figure 208), painted just two years after Sebastiano finished the chapel and donated by Dürer to the city council of his native Nuremberg (thus marking them as an appeal to the authorities of his city), similarly display a preoccupation with false...
prophesy and heresy as it pertained to human intervention or “misguidance” between the laity and the Word of God.\(^{155}\) St. John the Evangelist and St. Paul both hold bibles – with John and Peter shown reading from the Gospel of John – while biblical inscriptions, taken from Luther’s 1521 translation of the New Testament, appear below the writers of the New Testament. The main inscription reads: “All worldly rulers in these dangerous times should give good heed that they receive not human misguidance for the Word of God, for God will have nothing added to His Word nor taken away from it. Hear therefore these four excellent men, Peter, John, Paul and Mark, their warning.”\(^{156}\) The inscriptions that proceed to quote from Luther’s translation of the four authors make reference to Peter’s passage, among others, on the existence of “false prophets” and “damnable heresies” – words that were also chosen by the Lateran Council in 1516 when castigating heterodox interpretations of Scripture.

Thus, Dürer cautions both radicals and Papists alike against human mediation and twisting of God’s Word, while directing his viewer to the truth of Scripture.\(^{157}\) The monumental figures of the biblical authors, rendered in broad, simple forms and set against a black background with lengthy inscriptions below them, signal a cerebral, rather than sensual or figural, painting. The “content” of the panels thus lies in the act of reading, both theirs and our own. Yet, unlike Sebastiano’s chapel, which also foregrounds the act of reading (that of Sts. Peter, Francis and our own), Dürer stresses Scripture as the final resting point of the viewer’s concentration. In contrast, Sebastiano’s chapel directs

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\(^{155}\) Carl C. Christensen, “Dürer’s ‘Four Apostles’ and the Dedication as a Form of Renaissance Art Patronage” *Renaissance Quarterly* 20, No. 3 (1967): 327.


the viewer’s attention beyond reading, to the images at center and, with the transfigured Christ’s raised hands and face, beyond that as well.

The chapel should perhaps be taken as a response to the “cerebral” art of the reformers, not Dürer’s panels specifically, but rather the broader concern in the North with grounding images in text and the Word of God. Sebastiano’s program similarly grounds the reading of images in (or through) Scripture – the images remain at a remove, framed by intellectual pursuits – thereby denying the viewer any kind of sensual or visceral experience of Christ’s Passion. Yet Sebastiano’s approach also differs in a significant way from Dürer’s. The program presents both images and texts as equals, rather than suggesting that the former is reliant on the latter. Neither claims to afford a direct, unmediated encounter with God; instead, both lead the mind’s attention away from themselves to encourage an interiorized meditation upon the Eucharist.

The concern with the status of books and images as intermediaries continued through the years leading up to Trent. This is evidenced, for example, by Tintoretto’s Christ Among the Doctors (c. 1541) (Figure 209), where the scholars vigorously search for answers in their enormously-sized books, especially prominent in the foreground, while Christ appears seated and preaching against the distant wall beneath a pagan idol. The juxtaposition seems to suggest the futility of written, doctrinal knowledge to portray God, much like the idol is similarly an inert and false sign. Conversely, the tall woman in the left foreground, who turns to face Christ, demonstrates a more direct and unmediated way to access Christ. The continued creation of such imagery reflected the Church’s failure to assert a clear stance on the issue of reform, that is, on the status of images as

I wish to thank Nathan Dennis for his suggestion that Sebastiano responds to reformers’ art as cerebral images, yet does not outright reject this quality, but rather incorporates and transforms it in his chapel.
intermediaries, as well as the relation between contested Church traditions and the authority of Scripture.  

The Borgherini chapel is intimately tied to its Roman milieu and the preoccupation with the Church’s insistence on centralized authority. Rome’s status as a religious center, self-appointed to investigate heterodox views and writings deemed peripheral to Church teaching, was threatened by the plurality of interpretations emerging outside the city. In light of this challenge, it is significant that Sebastiano’s chapel re-centralizes knowledge and makes books lead back to the center – to the Eucharist – which, unlike images and texts, has only one meaning: Christ. At the same time, it marks both image and text as necessary mediators that intervene between the viewer/reader and God, creating the temporal and physical distance that make meditation possible.

3.6 The Sublimation of Violence into Beauty

Having discussed the chapel program as a whole, I would now like to turn my attention to the scene of the Flagellation (Figure 202), which Sebastiano painted using Michelangelo’s drawing for him and then reproduced again (Figure 100) upon request for another patron – Giovanni Botoni – for whom he had painted the Pietà in Viterbo roughly a decade earlier. Both of these images show Sebastiano’s investment in pictorial paradox as a way to convey the paradoxical nature of Christ’s body. He pairs violence and gracefulness, beauty and ugliness, sameness and difference, bodily and spiritual experience. His increasing concentration on Christ’s body and the paring down and flattening out of the composition in the Botoni Flagellation further underscores

Sebastiano’s interest in generating pictorial shifts between Christ and the Roman soldiers, thereby producing a reflection on how he is both like and unlike other things in the pictorial world. Moreover, as will be shown, Sebastiano’s emphasis on bodily wholeness and beauty transforms the violence associated with the mystical tradition of meditating on Christ’s blood and wounds into a more distanced and controlled viewing experience.

The Borgherini *Flagellation* is a strange composition that moves back and forth between a highly measured-out, receding architectural space and the tight grouping of Christ and the Roman soldiers pushed up to the very foreground of the image. The space is constructed through a series of columns and a floor marked by rectilinear divisions that draw closer in as they recede in depth. At the center, in the back, appears a golden half-dome that frames Christ and the other figures. The dome is bisected by the central column in the foreground to which Christ is tied. The column begins at the top edge of the chapel wall and ends just behind Christ’s foot, at the intersection of two grey bands on the floor, without reaching the bottom edge of the wall. Christ at the column forms a kind of nucleus around which the soldiers converge. His body is frontal and central, while the soldiers appear in various rotational states of motion. The faces of the two soldiers in the back and the contour of the nude soldier’s shoulder crowd in around Christ’s upper body. Against the largely monochromatic setting, consisting mostly of shades of white and grey, the figures come forward, united by their tawny skin tones and framed by the golden dome behind them, whose curved shape echoes their own semi-circle around Christ.

The group represents a kind of densely-arranged, choreographed dance between Christ and the Roman soldiers. The left and right soldier, for example, mirror one another
in their motions – arms raised above their heads, holding whips, and bodies turned inward toward Christ, allowing the viewer to see the front of one soldier and the back of the other. The bodies of the two soldiers on the left nearly overlap, producing some confusion regarding whose legs belong to whom. Looking just at their lower bodies, all the soldiers’ legs appear to step forward along the axis of the diagonally-cast shadows visible on the floor.\(^{160}\) In addition, the colors of the soldiers’ garments are coordinated and limited to white and dark green. This movement around and towards Christ, who stands in one spot and whose front leg remains firmly planted on the floor as if a continuation of the column, feels very calculated. The mirroring of motion across the column, the arrangement of figures along a diagonal and a semi-circle, the contrast between circulating movement and stillness at the center, as well as between the soldier’s centripetal motion towards Christ and their arms extended backwards are certainly intended effects of the image. The extension of the three whips backwards especially contributes to a sense of an elastic pull around Christ, as if the soldiers are gravitating towards him.

The coordination of figures reveals an unusual aspect of the work: the violence of Christ’s flagellation seems paradoxically graceful. On one hand, the body of Christ twists and reacts to the physical assault of the flagellators; on the other hand, it appears untouched and unmarked.\(^{161}\) Christ stands in front of the column in an off-balance

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\(^{160}\) Hirst has made a similar observation regarding the construction of the figural group on a diagonal axis. See Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 61.

\(^{161}\) Striani makes the insightful observation that like in the Viterbo Pietà, Christ in Sebastiano’s Flagellation seems untouchable because the whips do not mark him. He identifies the isolation and untouchability of Christ as a recurrent theme in Sebastiano’s work and one that separates him from Michelangelo’s pictorial aesthetic. See Strinati “Notturno,” 16. Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano criticizes Sebastiano’s Christ for this very quality – the absence of flagellation wounds and blood, which does not conform to the way Christ really looked after the Crucifixion. See Giovanni Andrea Gilio, Dialogo degli errori della pittura, ed. Paola Barocchi (Firenze, 1986), 39–40.
contrapposto, with his right leg sharply bent and drawn behind the column and his shoulders and upper body leaning over to his left. His torso bends at his midriff, with his arms raised up behind him and head lowered forward. The entire pose looks counter-balanced, each part compensating for the violence inflicted in order to stay upright. Yet, no marks or blood appear on Christ’s body. Three soldiers raise their arms and whips and approach from either side, framing Christ’s body, itself frontal and central, by their dramatic movements. Their backward extended arms, legs set apart or in mid-step, and fluttering draperies suggest the simultaneous onslaught of the whips – to which Christ reacts by the lowering of his head and twisting of his head. And yet Christ’s body remains unmarked. What is more, the column to which he is tied bears three dark, marble striations that run parallel to the direction of Christ’s loincloth, tied diagonally around his hips, and his sideways lean. In this way, Sebastiano emphasizes the relationship between body and column. If the whips of either soldier in the foreground were to come down, the marks they would leave on Christ’s body would bear remarkable resemblance to those on the column. It is as if the violence of the flagellation has been transferred from Christ’s body onto the column, thus leaving his body untouched and free of suffering. It is only from our frontal position before the scene, that we can appreciate this strange sublimation of pain from the body onto the column. That Christ is free of blood and wounds is further underscored by the figure of St. Francis, who holds up his hands and prominently displays his stigmata.

The whole, untouched body of Christ surrounded by a coordinated group of Roman soldiers strongly recalls another work by Sebastiano: his *Martyrdom of St. Agatha* (Figure 210), completed in 1520, at the same time that the artist was working on the
Borgherini chapel. The two works bear a remarkable resemblance to one another – from the pose, bound arms, and sideways lean of the bodies of Christ and St. Agatha, to the diagonally-draped loincloth around their hips and the concentrated groupings of soldiers who gaze intently at their victims. Both are martyrs, yet are shown bloodless and free of signs of suffering. An extant drawing by Sebastiano shows that he likely worked out the figure of St. Agatha based on a combination of working from life and from a fragmented sculpture of Venus. The result is a pristine, marmoreal body that seems to resist the physical violence inflicted on her. This is made most explicit by the knife resting on the ledge on the right, which faces outward, away from her body, rather than in, as well as by the awe visible in the soldiers’ faces. Much like St. Agatha deflects the onslaught of violence, retaining her chastity and bodily wholeness (she is most commonly portrayed holding her severed breasts on a plate), so too does Christ. And like St. Agatha, who, in gazing across the distant landscape and beyond the onlookers, communicates her ability to deflect violence and remain unblemished as a result of her durability of faith, the Transfigured Christ of the Borgherini chapel likewise transcends the physicality of his double below. The saints to either side of the flagellated Christ further distance the viewer from a bodily engagement with Christ’s torture.

The paradox of violent beauty and of graceful violence conveyed by Sebastiano’s Flagellation speaks to a long-standing tradition of describing Christ in terms of dialectical oppositions. Moreover, as Rosalie Colie has shown in her book Paradoxa Epidemica, devoted to the study of paradox in Renaissance art and literature, negative

theology specifically addressed the human inability to know and define God by means of negative affirmations of God’s incomprehensibility or infinity, by juxtaposition – of the lowest (i.e. still-life) to the highest (God) – and by metaphors of extreme contrast. In many ways Sebastiano’s Flagellation seems to participate in this tradition of describing God in terms of what he is not. This can be seen best in another unsettling relationship: the marked differences between Christ and the soldiers, but also the striking similarities between them. On one hand, in contrast to the soldiers’ dark tawny skin and white-and-green garments, the nearly-nude figure of Christ appears whiter, paler and more brightly lit. The light tone of his body finds its parallel in the golden dome behind him, whose radiant arc breaks the monotony of the marble architecture. The soldiers and Christ are contrasted in other ways as well – the coarseness of their facial features and bodies compared to his calm expression and idealized, slender, Apollonian figure, their vigorous assault compared to his submissive pose, and the three soldiers’ dressed state compared to his near-nudity. The contrasts suggest that Sebastiano sought to isolate Christ from the group, emphasizing his idealized beauty, rather than his pain or suffering.

On the other hand, there are strong parallels between them as well: Christ’s step backward echoes that of the soldiers in mid-step and the soldier on the right, nude except for a white loincloth, stands out from the rest for his similarity to Christ himself. The highly calculated comparison of Christ to the semi-nude soldier destabilizes the expected opposition between Christ and the soldiers. Christ is shown as human yet also divine, suffering yet unblemished, bodily contorted yet beautiful. Strangely, it is his relationship

165 Hirst observes that “the contrast between the tawny flesh tones of the flagellants and the ashen whiteness of Christ’s body is itself almost brutal.” Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 63.
to the soldiers – through dialectical opposition – that brings this doubling and, in turn, his divinity to the forefront.

At the same time, the image can perhaps be best understood in context of a growing and increasingly problematic mystical tradition of meditating on the wounds and suffering of Christ. In *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, Megan Holmes describes the Central Italian cultic phenomena of miraculous images, particularly crucifixes that moved and bled before their viewers. The rise of miracle-working and affective or performative images was especially connected to female monasticism and generally the increasing participation of women in rituals of piety. For instance, in his *Opera a ben vivere* (1455), written specifically for Dianora Tornabuoni Soderini, Archbishop of Florence and Observant Dominican friar Antonino Pierozzi advises Dianora to meditate on Christ’s body and suffering using the “eyes of the mind,” in the tradition of mystical devotion:

> After you have heard the mass or before, or in your own bedroom, kneel in front of a crucifix and, with the eyes of the mind rather than with your bodily eyes, consider His face. First, [consider] the crown of thorns penetrating into His head, reaching His brain; then the eyes, full of tears, blood and sweat; then the nose, full of snot, tears and blood; the mouth, full of gall, dribble and blood; His beard, also dripping with dribble and blood and gall, and full of spit, with its hairs pulled out; then the face, all dark, covered in spit, and marked by beatings and lashes, and bleeding.

Quando avete udito messa o innanzi, o volete in chiesa o volete in camera vostra, inginocchietevi dinanzi ad un Crucifisso, e cogli occhi della mente, più che con quelli del corpo, considerate la faccia sua. Prima, alla corona delle spine, fittegliele in testa, insino al celabro; poi gli occhi, pieni di lacrime e di sangue e di sudore; poi lo naso, pieno di mocci e di lacrime e di sangue; la bocca, piena di fiele e di bava e di sangue; la barba, similemente piena di bava e di sangue e di fiele, essendo tutta sputacchiata

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167 Ibid., 54-5.
The spiritual guidebook goes on to instruct the reader to consider Christ’s hands and think “deeply in your heart about the way they are torn and bleeding,” and following that, to consider the wound in Christ’s side, and finally his body as a whole, both broken and beautiful. This emphasis on Christ’s humanity was meant to engage the senses and create an empathic understanding of his suffering before rising to a higher level of contemplation; the work was made in the tradition of affective devotional writing for women by mendicant friars.

An attention, in one’s meditation, to the very real details of Christ’s suffering and its emotional impact was also common in texts written by women. Later on in the century, the mystic Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi would experience visions, during which she took down the crucifix from her wall, hold it in her arms, and kiss it in a frenzy of love, crying out:

My love, what pierced your holy feet but the malice of the creatures? My Jesus, last Friday you made me foresee very clearly the martyrdom I am suffering now so intensely; [You showed me] that those who are malicious pierce your holy feet. Oh, my Jesus, why am I not on the cross as I see you now?

Amor’mio chi v’ha confitto, e’vostri santi Piedi, se non la Militia della creatura? Ben’Jesu mio, mi facesti vedere il Venerdì passato, quella che con tanto martirio hora provo. Che quelli che vivono malitiosamente

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169 Ibid., 170. “Poi rivolgete gli occhi della vostra mente alle mani, e considerate ben di cuore, come sono stracciate e sanguinate […]”
conficcano, e’vostri Santi Piedi. Hoime’ perché Jesu miom non sono io hora, come te veggo stare in su questa Croce? 

With religious authorities suspicious of such personal visionary experience, Maria Maddalena’s actions and visions were transcribed by a nun, in a text called I quaranta giorni (1584), and shown to the convent’s confessor.

The tradition of affective devotion went back to the Middle Ages – to images and Passion texts that emphasized Christ’s wounds in order to emotionally move the audience and to elicit a reflection on his bodily and spiritual suffering. Drawing on the Franciscan tradition, Angela of Foligno, for example, – a thirteenth-century author and mystic from Umbria – sought bodily identification with Christ (for herself and her reader) in her meditative practice and writings. In the Third Consolation of the Passion of Christ from her Book of Divine Consolations, she writes:

I was meditating one time upon the great sufferings borne by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross, and more especially upon the nails, which I did hear were of such a sort that they had driven the flesh of the hands and feet into the wood; and I desired to behold those little pieces of flesh which the nails had so violently driven into the wood. Then did I feel such great pain because of Christ’s pain that I could not stand upon my feet, but I bent mine head and sat me down on the ground; and I beheld Christ, who inclined His head upon mine arms which I had stretched out upon the ground. Then He showed unto me His throat and His arms, whereupon my grief was instantly changed into joy so great and so different from all other joys that I neither saw nor felt aught else; for the beauty of that throat was a thing most great and ineffable.

\[^{172}\text{Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi, I quaranta giorni, eds. Ermanno Ancilli, Claudio Maria Catena, and Pelagio Visentin (Firenze: Centro internazionale del libro di B. Nardini, 1960), 134.}\]
\[^{173}\text{Rogers, Women and the Visual Arts, 207.}\]
\[^{174}\text{Wounds In the Middle Ages (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 1-14. For a discussion of the significance of Christ’s blood in Germany, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).}\]
Quadam vice cogitabam de magno dolore quem Christus sustinuit in cruce et cogitabam de clavis illis, quos ego audieveram dici quod clavi illi de minibus et pedibus eius carneum portaverunt intus in lingo. Et desiderabam videre vel saltem illud parum de carne Christi quod portaverunt calvi in lingo. Et tunc habui tam magnum dolorem de illa poena Christi, quod non potui stare in pedibus, sed inclinavi me et sedi et inclinavi caput super brachia mea quae proieceram in terra, et tunc ostendit mihi Christus gulum et brachia. Et tunc prior tristitia conversa est in tantam laetitiam quod de ea non possum manifestare aliquid, et fuit nova Laetitia ab aliis laetitiis, et non videbam nec audiebam nec sentibam nisi illud.177

Reflecting on Christ’s suffering flesh and fragmented body – the nails that lacerate and drive the skin into the wood – Angela fully explores the details of his torture.178

Attesting to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century viewers’ interest in the materiality of images and their capacity to manifest Christ’s suffering, as a sign of divine presence, Megan Holmes points to the emergence of miraculous images that involved their own material transformation – moving, speaking and exuding bodily fluids like sweat, tears and blood – in correspondence with the rise of image cults and regional devotional culture.179 In September of 1399, for example, Luca Dominici reported:

The Crucifix that the Florentines carried was that from Santa Croce [and] after they placed it on the altar of the Church in Passignano, it miraculously poured out living blood in great quantities from many parts of the body and from its head and from its kidneys and from its arms and other places.

Il Crocifisso che portarono i Fiorentini fu quello di S. Croce, avendolo ellino posato in sull’altare della Chiesa di Passignano, gittò sangue vivo in gran quantità per molte parti del corpo e per il capo e per le reni e per le braccia e per altri luoghi miracolosamente.180

Yet, in the early sixteenth century, this emphasis on Christ’s wounds and blood became problematic as a result of reformers’ critiques that viewers did not move their thoughts beyond Christ’s suffering and thus obsessed idolatrously over the corporeality of his body. Lay interest in blood cults and the materiality of Christ’s body also threatened the Church’s control over pious devotion and behavior; material miracles and highly personal forms of piety made it more difficult for ecclesiastical officials to manage images, relics, bloody Eucharistic wafers, and other miraculous objects of worship that cropped up without official sanction. In Pistoia, for example, authorities investigated the fourteenth-century fresco of the Madonna dell’Umiltà in 1490 for miraculously issuing bodily sweat. Later in the century, the Council of Trent would ultimately encourage the suppression and regulation of image cults through official approval by the bishop.

Critiques of performative images, in fact, can be seen even earlier, in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries: religious and secular authorities became concerned about overly literal interpretations of divine presence in the image, labelling this kind of devotional behavior idolatrous – as something resorted to by the unlearned and the simple-minded. The immediacy, direct access, and the unmediated relationship that such cultic veneration of the sacred afforded the viewer came to be viewed as a threat

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184 Ibid., 57.
185 Ibid., 449-50.
because it undermined the Church’s orthodox position on the image as a sign of the
divine prototype.\textsuperscript{186}

As Una Roman d’Elia has shown in her study of the reformist circles of Vittoria
Colonna and Bernardino Ochino, the emergence of highly visceral and personal ways of
meditating on Christ’s Passion in the Cinquecento attracted new pictorial modes of
expression from artists.\textsuperscript{187} In his drawing of \textit{Christ on the Cross} for Colonna (Figure
115), Michelangelo renders the body of Christ as both finished and colorless (rendered in
fleshy \textit{colorito} and muscular \textit{disegno}), twisted in pain and bloodless, thereby
simultaneously inviting a corporeal and intellectual response to the image. In this way,
the drawing, like Colonna’s poetry, shows a deep ambivalence toward the contemplation
of suffering in Christ’s Passion. It both denies and insists on Christ’s bodily suffering,
and paradoxically its transcendence. Roman d’Elia shows that Michelangelo and his
circle of reformers meditated on Christ’s physicality and the violence of his death by
means of poetry and art. That Colonna’s way of meditating on Christ was in need of
defense is further evidence of the ways in which reform-minded individuals
experimented with theological complexity and affective devotion, and the problems such
personal and variable meditative practices posed for conventional Church dogma.\textsuperscript{188}

Sebastiano’s friendship with Michelangelo, who continuously engaged with
reform thought (that of Savonarola and then Vittoria Colonna), provides a plausible link
between Sebastiano and these emerging strategies of meditation. Sebastiano’s depiction

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 450 and 456. I take the term “performative image” from Christine Göttler, and use it in the sense
of images that spurred viewers into pious actions and generated meaning by means of viewer response.
Rather than being self-sufficient, such images were actively engaged by viewers’ prayers. For this
definition, see Christine Göttler, \textit{Last Things: Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform}
(Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 46.

\textsuperscript{187} D’Elia, “Drawing Christ’s Blood,” 100-2, 113, and 125.

\textsuperscript{188} See ibid., 112-13 for a discussion of Rinaldo Corso’s defense of Michelangelo’s mourning angels in the
drawing.
of Christ in the Borgherini Chapel can be understood as part of the official Church resistance to such newly emerging theologies and personal ways of meditating on the mystery of God. Instead of encouraging the viewer to meditate on Christ’s suffering and wounds, Sebastiano’s chapel program creates a more tempered experience of Christ’s Passion, where visceral violence and blood are abandoned and replaced with Christ’s complete, intact body. Moreover, the immediacy of the bleeding crucifixes and meditative experiences described above is supplanted by a more distanced view of suffering, mediated through the writings of authors officially sanctioned by the Church. Unofficial regional devotional practice and the tradition of meditation based in mysticism are thereby undercut by a return to a more centralized and controlled mode of personal devotion in Sebastiano’s work.
Chapter Four. *Imitatio Christi* and the Path to Salvation in Four Pictures of *Christ Carrying the Cross*

In his *Vita* of Sebastiano, Vasari describes one of the artist’s late works: “a Christ bearing the cross, painted halfway up, which was very much praised, and especially for the head and the hands, where Bastiano was truly excellent.”\(^1\) The work in question is most likely Sebastiano’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* in Budapest (Figure 3).\(^2\) In singling out the head and the hands of Christ, Vasari was doing more than just expressing praise for parts of the painting (at this late point in Sebastiano’s career, the Venetian having allegedly “lost” Michelangelo’s *disegno*, Vasari rarely praises any work as a whole); Vasari was pointing out one of the most striking and intriguing aspects of the work: the downcast head and forward-thrust hands of Christ’s figure. It is a theme that runs through an entire series of works, four altogether, on the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross that Sebastiano executed between the 1510s and 30s – though the precise dates are still debated (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 12). While the setting, composition, palette, and orientation of the figure – seemingly flipped across the vertical axis – vary from painting to painting, the placement of Christ’s head and hands remain a consistent and prominent component of each work. This odd relationship merits consideration – not only because Vasari paused to take note of it, but because Sebastiano himself dwelled on the matter over such an extended period of time, in paintings made for different patrons and locations. Sebastiano had apparently deemed it a successful formula given the extent to which he replicated it. The subject of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* series, in a way,

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\(^2\) Roberto Contini concurs with this in Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 244.
becomes the very exploration of the relationship between head and hands. It is what makes these works appear so emphatically “modern” to scholars today – dramatically foreshortened, minimal, breaking through the picture-plane, and insistent on making the same point over and again.³

At the same time, however, it is important to understand the works not as a self-contained and premeditated series, but as developing out of Sebastiano’s ongoing preoccupation with the affective power of devotional painting. The relationship between a picture’s inside and outside space, and between proximity to and distance from the divine, is a problem that Sebastiano interrogated in both his Viterbo Pietà for Giovanni Botoni’s chapel in San Francesco alla Rocca and in his program for Pierfrancesco Borgherini’s chapel in S. Pietro in Montorio, Rome. In both cases, Sebastiano’s inquiry stemmed from geographically localized and historically-determined concerns brought on by religious reformers like Giles of Viterbo, who preached in Rome and Viterbo, or the convening of the Fifth Lateran Council in Rome. The crisis of allegedly false human mediation of the divine continued to evolve and raise new concerns as the century drew on. By the 1520s and 30s, the Reformation was in full swing and the need for a more personal, interiorized spirituality became an ever more pressing matter. It is within this turbulent religious crisis that Sebastiano’s works should be examined.

In this chapter, I go beyond the predominantly stylistic account given to date of Sebastiano’s works on the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross. Additionally, I aim to push further readings that suggest in passing that Sebastiano’s work has some relationship to reform or to the Counter-Reformation “avant la lettre” in order to interrogate the question of Sebastiano’s relationship to reformist reinterpretations of the imitatio Christi tradition. The notion of taking up one’s cross in order to follow and imitate Christ is quite pertinent to Sebastiano’s works, which make the cross a prominent and intimate element of the composition. The cross protrudes forward as if to invite the viewer’s active participation in taking up its extended arm and meeting Christ head-on on his walk to Calvary. Sebastiano’s reflection on the weighty cross in Christ’s arms can be seen as a response to the increasing need for a more direct and unmediated relationship with God, stemming from his contact with reform-minded thinkers like Giulia Gonzaga and Vittoria Colonna, who themselves reflected on the role of traditional Church ceremony and human works in their private devotion. Sebastiano, it appears, likewise considered what the path to salvation ought to look like and what it meant to imitate and conform to Christ. Oddly, the resulting scenes exhibit a tension between proximity to and distance from the divine. Moreover, Sebastiano’s increasing interest in the nearness and ambiguity in scale of Christ’s body, achieved by means of visual cropping or framing, suggests yet another concern: the possibility of experiencing the devotional image as

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4 For scholarship focused on style, see Pallucchini, Sebastiano Viniziano, Lucco, L’Opera Completa, and Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo.
vision and the movement from the external, material image to an internal image in the viewer’s mind.

To date, the subject of *imitatio Christi* as it manifested itself in devotional painting has been successfully explored by relatively few scholars. Paolo Sanvito’s study, for example, focuses on Venetian art and seeks to encompass both Quattrocento and Cinquecento works, claiming that *imitatio Christi* (the notion of taking up one’s own cross and following Christ) was a concept that explains much of the counter-reformation and pre-reformation years – dating back to the *Devotio moderna* of the fourteenth century.\(^6\) He sees it as a source of new, reform imagery in devotional art, which arose out of the need for private devotion and prayer.\(^7\) The motivation behind the uptake of *imitatio Christi* by devotional imagery is important to consider; yet the sweeping scope of his study precludes any meaningful and context-specific understanding to be had of any of the works he treats.\(^8\)

Maria Calí has also attempted such a study, though it too remains a surface treatment of the question. Cali suggests a relationship between Sebastiano del Piombo, Michelangelo and the reform circle in Viterbo.\(^9\) She rightly proposes a connection between Michelangelo’s Christ at Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Sebastiano’s series of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, and the numerous publications of the *Imitation of Christ*, particularly the editions of 1518, 1531 and 1534, which portray Christ carrying the Cross on the frontispiece. Yet, while Cali emphasizes the shared religious atmosphere of these artists, which she rather hastily terms “protestant Catholicism,” she does not pursue a

\(^7\) Ibid., 24 and 26.
\(^8\) Sanvito focuses on grouping works into categories or types, rather than explaining their individual meanings.
\(^9\) Maria Cali, *Da Michelangelo all’Escorial: Momenti del dibattito religioso nell’arte del Cinquecento* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1980), 131-8 and 160-64.
more in-depth analysis of how exactly these new spiritual currents were picked up by artists apart from their works’ Christ-centric subject matter and “extreme simplification” in form.  

Massimo Firpo has done some of the most promising research on the impact of Juan de Valdés on the visual arts. His studies of Lorenzo Lotto and Pontormo suggest insightful connections between these artists’ works and reform-minded writers and thinkers. His scholarship illuminates the novelty of Lotto’s altarpieces and Pontormo’s drawings for the lost S. Lorenzo frescoes, showing how, by straying from traditional iconography, the works conceive of God’s relationship to man in highly compassionate, merciful terms. However, Firpo proposes that Pontormo’s works were literally based upon Valdés’ texts, his Catechisms and other writings, where no such direct correlation is evidenced. Similarly, for Lotto, Firpo suggests that his works were, in part, “founded” on texts such as the Imitazione di Cristo, the Gospel of St. Luke, and Valdés’ Dialogi sette. Such a reading restricts the paintings to an illustrative role of the text, where, in

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10 Ibid., 162. “semplicazione estrema”
13 Massimo Firpo, “I casi di Iacopo Pontormo e Lorenzo Lotto” in Storie di Immagini, Immagini di Storia, 9. Firpo believes that Pontormo’s images were literally an attempt to transcribe Valdés’ catechism Qual maniera si devrebbe tenere a informare insino dalla franciallezza i figliuoli de’ christian della cose della religione: “Quegli affreschi [...] erano propriamente il tentativo di trascrivere in immagini il testo del catechismo di Juan de Valdés [...]” See also Firpo, Gli Affreschi Di Pontormo, 92-122, esp. 103-4.
14 Firpo, Artisti, Gioiellieri, Eretici, 264-7 and 284. Regarding, Lotto’s Louvre Cristo Portacroce, Firpo comments: “Un’immagine tradizionale nella pittura veneziana, ma non priva di analogie con una delle xilografie con scene della Passione e Resurrezione poi inserite nell’edizione dei Dialogi sette ocheniani apparsa a Venezia nel 1542.” Regarding, Lotto’s Recanati Annunciation and Cingoli Madonna of the Rosary, Firpo says the ideas reflect “la familiarità con il testo evangelico [di Luca].” And with respect to Lotto’s Penitent St. Jerome at the Prado and Doria Pamphili, Firpo says “Un’immagine volta dunque a suggerire non solo e non tanto una pietà cristocentrica fondata su quell’Imitazione di Cristo che il Lotto conosceva (e di cui anche il Valdés e il Flaminio avrebbero poi raccomandato la lettura), quanto la superiorità della grazia sulla legge [...] del “beneficio di Cristo” sui meriti [...]” Thus, though Firpo in
fact, the works are best seen as interventions in a broader religious debate on what it meant to embark on the path to salvation and union with God.

In this chapter, I expand on Firpo’s proposal that artists read, conversed with, and were aware of reformist ideas; at the same time, I re-evaluate his conception of the ways in which such ideas manifested themselves in images. Rather than seeing reformist texts as “sources” that artists illustrated verbatim, I contend that the dialogue between texts and images was a much more nuanced and confrontational one. The intervention of image-makers within the debate on personal salvation, the nature of one’s relationship to God, and the role of the Church in that relationship is important to consider given the artist’s crucial position in shaping that relationship by means of private and public images. It is thus my goal to interrogate the dialogue between re-interpreters of *imitatio Christi* and image-makers in context of Catholic reform, specifically as it took shape in Sebastiano’s series of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, executed between the late 1510s and the 1530s. As an artist who spent most of his working career in Rome and who was extremely sensitive to ideas issuing from Catholic reformers, Sebastiano is an important figure to study in order to better understand the Roman response to the assault on the city’s spiritual authority and centrality.

**4.1 What is Known about the Works**

Sebastiano made four paintings on the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross, whose production could span, if the earliest and latest dates proposed by scholars are taken, from roughly 1510 to 1540 (though I will propose a narrower time frame, closer to 1520-40 below). Four different patrons were the recipients of the works. Fernando Benito...
Domenech has reconstructed the history of the Prado *Christ Carrying the Cross*, the earliest work from the series, done in oil on canvas (Figure 2). Don Jeronimo Vich y Valterra, ambassador to Rome for King Ferdinand the Catholic between 1507 and 1516 and subsequently to King Charles V until 1519, brought the work back to Spain after finishing his duties for the former. Whether the work was commissioned by Valterra himself or was being transported for another recipient, like either of the Spanish kings, is not known. We know that Valterra arrived in Valencia in 1521 and had with him the Prado *Christ Carrying the Cross*, along with a triptych that no longer exists in one piece – the Hermitage *Lamentation* (Figure 174) as the central panel with the Prado *Christ Descending into Limbo* (Figure 211) for one wing and a now-lost panel of the Mourning of the Apostles for the other wing. Both works were kept by his family until 1656, at which point they were given over to King Philip IV. Mauro Lucco has suggested that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* dates to around 1513, when the Viterbo Pietà was conceived, and compares it stylistically to Sebastiano’s early portraits from even earlier, done in 1510.

My sense of the dating would place the work to no earlier than 1516, which is the earliest possible date for the *Christ Descending into Limbo*, but likely somewhere between 1519 and 1521. The formal relationship between the triptych wing panel and the painting is striking, and it is more probable that Sebastiano had already executed the wing panel before making an independent painting that echoed the figure of Christ in the former. Moreover, as I will argue below, Sebastiano’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* is a

16 Ibid., 7-8.
17 A document written by Don Diego Vich, the great-grandson of Don Jeronimo Vich, reports the presence of Sebastiano’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* at the Vich Palace. Cited in ibid., 10.
18 Mauro Lucco, “Christ Bearing the Cross” in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 150.
clear response to Raphael’s *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*, also known as *Lo Spasimo*, of 1514-16 (Figure 212). Raphael’s altarpiece, executed in Rome and, around 1517, shipped to the Sicilian monastery of Santa Maria dello Spasimo in Palermo, is surely the nearest model to Sebastiano’s exploration of the subject, rather than the Northern Italian devotional panels such as Titian’s *S. Rocco Christ Carrying the Cross* (Figure 213), which some scholars have erroneously proposed to have been Sebastiano’s inspiration. The connection between Titian’s work and Sebastiano’s has most recently been rejected, though this is not to say that Sebastiano did not have in mind the Northern models when he was making his own re-invention of the subject. However, as Hirst has rightly noted, no precedent exists in Venetian or Roman painting for a Christ moving towards us under the weight of the cross.

Raphael’s *Lo Spasimo*, on the other hand, has never been mentioned to date in relation to Sebastiano’s work. Given Sebastiano’s working proximity to Raphael and previous instances of borrowing, it is worth examining the work as a possible response to Raphael’s invention. This would put the date of the inception of Sebastiano’s painting to after 1516 and its completion to a few years after that – although given Sebastiano’s engagement with the *Raising of Lazarus* during the years 1517-19, which made him put his other commissions on hold, it is more probable that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* dates closer to 1519-21. This means Sebastiano painted the work as he was working on the Montorio chapel for Borgherini, specifically the altar wall, and the resemblance between the flagellated Christ and this one is once again worth noting. This would

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20 Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 150.
suggest that Sebastiano was rethinking the image of Christ not only in another artist’s altarpiece, but also his own.

The other Christ Carrying the Cross at the Prado (Figure 12), much smaller in size and executed in oil on slate, is a later version, though its date remains even more uncertain. It has been proposed that it was meant as a gift to a Spanish royal, from a prominent Italian figure residing in Rome, based on Sebastiano’s existing pattern of exporting his Roman works to France and Spain.\footnote{Strinati et al., \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547}, 236 and Hirst, \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 131. For a discussion of Sebastiano’s pattern of exporting his works to Spain and France, see Piers Baker-Bates, “Between Italy and Spain: cultural exchange in the Roman career of Sebastiano del Piombo” \textit{Renaissance Studies} 21, no. 2 (2007): 254-65.} It has been variously dated to the 1530s and 40s, though given its relationship to the Hermitage version (discussed below), a date of around 1537-40 is probable.\footnote{I tend to side with scholars who see it as a later work given its simplifications and the absence of the crown of thorns, which brings it closer to the conception of the Budapest Christ Carrying the Cross. Moreover, the subtle raising of Christ’s gaze slightly forward rather than downward as seen in the first Prado version makes the painting come closer to the Budapest conception.} It is still contested whether it predates or postdates the latter; some scholars argue that the picture would have come after given its simplifications – the absence of the crown of thorns for instance – while Miguel Falomir dates it to 1532-5, just before the completion of the larger version.\footnote{For the proposal of a late date, see Strinati et al., \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547}, 236. For an earlier date, see Mena Marqués, “Sebastiano Viniziano, eccellentissimo pittore,” in \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo y Espana} (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1995), 108 and Miguel Falomir, “Sebastiano del Piombo, Christ Carrying the Cross (1532-5), oil on slate” Museo del Prado Online Library Catalogue, accessed June 21, 2013, http://www.museodelprado.es/en/research/library/acceso-al-catalogo/.} It has been suggested that the patron may have been the Pope himself, noting the letter dating to June 8, 1530 from Vittorio Soranzo (the Pope’s privy Chamberlain) to Pietro Bembo, which alludes to possibly this work.\footnote{Hirst, \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo}, 125. See also Roberto Contini “Christ Bearing the Cross” in \textit{Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547}, 236.} The letter mentions a “secret painting with oil on marble”
by “Sebastianello our Venetian,” saying that Luciani “has painted an image of Christ and shown it to our Lord.”

The Hermitage *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Figure 1) is a late work by Sebastiano since it carries the initial F. for friar, the title that the painter began to use from 1531 onwards when pope Clement VII appointed him Papal Sealer. Much more is known about it. It was commissioned by Don Fernando Silva, Count of Cifuentes, a fact that is corroborated by the inscription, and it is disparagingly mentioned in a letter of May 3, 1537 from the Mantuan agent Nicolò Sernini to Ferrante Gonzaga: “You would have been very disappointed, because not only was it not liked, but it was offensive to see” (non solamente [non] piaceva, ma offendeva a vederlo). It is not clear what exactly in the painting provoked the offense – this is a valuable question regarding the reception of the painting – but the letter does allow us to establish a *terminus ad quem* for the work. The date of execution would fall between 1531 and 1537, and its completion to around 1537, the date that Sernini saw it in Sebastiano’s studio. The bottom edge of the stone support is cut. The work was inventoried at the Escorial under Philip II in 1589 in the

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26 Cited in Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 124. “Dovete sapere che Sebastianello nostro Venetiano ha trovato un segreto di pingere in marmo a olio bellissimo il quale farà la pittura poco meno che eterna. I colori subito che sono asciutti si uniscono col marmo di maniera che quasi impetriscano, et ha fatto ogni prova et è durevole. Ne ha fatto una imagine di Christo e halla mostrato a N. Sig.”

27 I am using the translation and original Italian provided by Michael Hirst, who notes that *giaceva* is an incorrect transcription of *piaceva* in the original letter. See Michael Hirst, “Sebastiano’s Pietà for the Commendator Mayor” in *The Burlington Magazine* no. 834 (1972): 590. He consulted Bibl. Estense, Autog. Campori, Filza Nino Sernini, letter 31 a, cc. 1 verso and 2 recto. Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 238 wrongly keeps the word “giaceva” and translates the phrase as “not only was [Christ] lying down, but he was offensive to look at.” The incorrect transcription originates in Giuseppe Campori “Sebastiano del Piombo e Ferrante Gonzaga” in *Atti e Memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le provincie Modenesi* Vol. 1, ed. Carlo Vincenzi (S.L.:s.n., 1865), 197. “se V. E. havesse veduto un Christo con la croce in collo ha dipinto per il Conte di Sifentes, harebbe poca speranza del fatto suo, perche non solamente giaceva (sic), ma offendeva a vederlo.”

28 Miguel Falomir sees this comment not as an expression of Sernini’s dislike of the painting itself, but rather “his own refusal of a reduction of the painting to a purely devotional object, precisely that which would have meant its success in Spain.” Falomir, “Sebastiano and “Spanish Taste,” 69.

29 Ibid., 133-4.
choir above the prior’s seat and stayed there at least until 1605. The painting’s darkness and focus on Christ’s suffering is often tied to Sebastiano’s personal despair after the Sack of Rome in 1527 – though this is a psychological reading that I wish to steer away from, especially since the invention originated years before the Sack and continued to be used by Sebastiano for years after.

The facts about Sebastiano’s Budapest version (Figure 3) of the subject are somewhat vague and the dating is even less exact. Vasari is our only source for this work; he describes a Christ Carrying the Cross by Sebastiano, painted on stone half-way up, for the Patriarch of Aquileia. Several members of the Grimani family who served in the office – Domenico, Marino and Giovanni – have been singled out as possible patrons of Sebastiano’s painting. Giovanni Grimani, who was Patriarch of Aquileia from 1545 to 1550 and again from 1585 to 1593, is most commonly accepted as the patron. Yet the dates of the painting’s execution (generally ascribed to the late 1530s) and those of Giovanni’s office do not match up. Hirst has suggested that Vasari carelessly identified him by his office, which Giovanni held at the time of Vasari’s writing, though not at the time when the painting was commissioned.

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30 Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 238.
31 For the suggestion that the darkness and suffering is tied to Sebastiano’s personal change after the Sack, see ibid., 238.
33 See Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 244 and Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 134 for a discussion of the patronage of this work; both favor Giovanni Grimani as the patron. Pallucchini, *Sebastiano Viniziano*, 68 believes Domenico Grimani commissioned Sebastiano during his trip to Venice.
35 Ibid., 134. Hirst does not offer a clear reason for why he believes it was Giovanni and not Marino Grimani who owned the work, saying only: “But although Marino was an active patron, Sebastiano’s may rather have been an even more celebrated member of the family, Giovanni Grimani.”
I propose a less circuitous explanation – that Marino Grimani was, in fact, the likely recipient of Sebastiano’s work.\footnote{In the final stages of this chapter, I discovered Daniele Ferrara’s article, which comes to the same conclusion. See Daniele Ferrara, “Intorno a Sebastiano: situazioni e personaggi tra Venezia e Roma” Konsthistorisk tidskrift/ Journal of Art History 81, No. 4 (2012): 222.} Marino held the office of Patriarch of Aquileia in 1517-29 and again 1533-45. He remained in Venice until 1528, when he became cardinal and transferred to Rome, staying there until 1535.\footnote{Elena Calvillo, “Romanità and Grazia: Giulio Clovio’s Pauline Frontispieces for Marino Grimani” The Art Bulletin 82, No. 2 (June 2000): 281-2.} He was back in Rome by 1538, after spending a few years in Perugia as papal legate. The dates of his office line up with the approximate time of execution of Sebastiano’s painting. Moreover, Marino’s presence in Venice just as Sebastiano had gone there himself c. 1528-9 to flee the Sack and his subsequent move to Rome (around the time when Sebastiano himself would have returned in the spring of 1529) shows him to have had the opportunity to meet the artist and commission the work.\footnote{For a chronology of Marino’s travels and residency, see ibid., 281-2.} Moreover, as will be discussed below, Marino’s championing of the Roman Church, but also his concern with its reform and questions of doctrinal orthodoxy, further suggests that he would have had an interest in the message communicated by the painting.

Having gone over the known facts and probable dates, I would like to pose an important question as to the meaning of the works, made during the years in which the Reformation was in full swing and the Church was beginning to articulate a more cogent response to the problems raised by reformers. The question already has been asked very explicitly by Hirst, though he did not think there was an answer to be had:

Many years earlier it appears that [Sebastiano] had already achieved a reputation as an almost exclusively religious painter. What was his attitude to the commissions of the post-1530 period? And what weight, if any, did the views of the reformists with whom he demonstrably came into contact have on him? Is the reference to “cose pietose” just a reflection of a
prevalent, current anti-Spanish feeling? To these and similar questions sure answers seem to me impossible to find.39

Surely, Sebastiano’s connection to reform currents is not as difficult to establish as Hirst would have it. Hirst himself notes that Sebastiano’s friends and sitters during the 1520s, 30s and 40s – Giulia Gonzaga, Vittoria Colonna, Reginald Pole, and Michelangelo to name a few – were prominent advocates of reform.40 This fact, combined with what I have shown to be Sebastiano’s deep investment in rethinking image-making under the weight of reform in his earlier commissions for Botoni and Borgherini, suggests that Sebastiano was attentive to the religious change that was sweeping over Europe.41 It was, in fact, very near and present through his circle of acquaintances.

4.2 Michelangelo as a Point of Origin

In examining four paintings that scholarship has not, to date, singled out as products of Sebastiano’s collaboration with Michelangelo, I aim to do address a different and unexplored aspect of Sebastiano’s use of Michelangelo’s drawings in this chapter. I will show that Sebastiano’s relationship to Michelangelo was not always one of direct solicitation of drawings for specific commissions. In the case of the Christ Carrying the Cross series, Sebastiano effectively opens up a single drawing, received for another commission, to multiple pictorial re-interpretations. He arrives at new inventions through his own highly articulate and distinctive drawings, which merit more attention than they currently receive in scholarship.

39 Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 136.
40 Ibid., 136. Hall, After Raphael, 175 also makes this observation; She does not, however, take the discussion beyond a stylistic account of Sebastiano’s art as reformist in its counter-maniera style.
Though it may appear that Sebastiano’s works on the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross do not exhibit any reliance on Michelangelo, I suggest here that they do, in fact, originate in a Michelangelo drawing, though now several times removed as a result of Sebastiano’s interest in self-replication and his repeated reinterpretation of his own work. Hirst has been one of the few scholars to note the connection, stating that in the Budapest version “there lurks the influence of another bound image invented by the friend of the Venetian: the Montorio Christ. But the ideals of that masterpiece, many years completed, have been reinterpreted in the spirit of a different age.”⁴² Though said in passing and not pursued further, the observation is an important one and can be explored with respect to all four treatments of Christ Carrying the Cross. While for Hirst the resemblance is indicative of Sebastiano harkening back to his earlier work years later, it is rather the case, given new evidence of the early dating of the Prado Christ Carrying the Cross, that Sebastiano was simultaneously reworking the Christ figure into his other, nearly contemporaneous works.

Despite notable differences, such as the direction of the body’s lean and the state of undress, the Prado Christ recalls the figure of Christ bound to the column in the Borgherini Flagellation. The sharp bend of the torso at the hip, the tilt of the shoulders, the step forward of one leg, and the broad extension of the arms – in one case in front of the body, in the other case behind it – create the impression of an echo, or even a mirror image, between the two bodies. This same general figural shape can be found in the Prado Christ Descending into Limbo and the figure of St. Agatha from the Palazzo Pitti Martyrdom of St. Agatha (Figure 210). The latter, in her nudity, the attention given to the musculature of her shoulders, arms and torso, the bend at the waist, and her arms bound

⁴² Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 136.
behind her, comes closest to the Borgherini Christ. The Christ in Limbo borrows almost exactly the stance of the Borgherini Christ from the waist down, in addition to the grey-toned columnated setting, while simultaneously anticipating the forward-thrust body and arms that Sebastiano adopts in his early Prado Christ. The most prominent similarity between these works is the treatment of the head and hair: the head tilts to the side, while the long, flowing hair cascades down one shoulder, revealing the opposite ear.

All five works are known to date from the period of 1516-25. We also know from a letter of August 9, 1516 that Sellaio asked Michelangelo to send the awaited drawing to Sebastiano for the Montorio Flagellation scene and that among the drawings that Sebastiano received was the isolated figure of *Christ at the Column* (Figure 79), dated to 1516/17, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

Certainly one reason that these five works share a common figural language is because they were executed around the same time, when Sebastiano was preoccupied with this particular solution for the figure of Christ. His dexterity with the Michelangelesque figure – its reinvention for different contexts – is evident in these permutations and variations on a similar figural type. However, it is also fruitful to consider the Christ Carrying the Cross series specifically in light of the abovementioned drawing that Sebastiano received from Michelangelo. The drawing appears to have acted as a catalyst for Sebastiano’s inventive process, which took him increasingly further away from Michelangelo’s original conception – emphasizing psychological interiority over its absence, as will be shown below. As Sebastiano builds on his own work through a strategy of self-replication, he distances himself from Michelangelo’s invention in fundamental ways.
A drawing at the Louvre, the *Head of Christ* (Figure 131) by Sebastiano, documents the artist’s continued interest in Michelangelo’s drawing, beyond the Borgherini commission. There is no doubt that Sebastiano was looking at Michelangelo’s drawing of *Christ at the Column* (Figure 79) – the contours of the hair and ear, the three-quarter profile, and even some lines delineating Christ’s chest and collar bone appear to be echoed in Sebastiano’s drawing. The Louvre drawing shows both a distant relationship to Michelangelo’s invention, and a new point of interest: Sebastiano focuses on Christ’s upper body, raising up the arm and rethinking the entire movement of the figure – conceiving it from a more lateral rather than frontal angle. Most notable of all is the fact that Christ’s face, which is smudged in Michelangelo’s drawing, becomes the most worked and attended to area in the hands of Sebastiano. Christ’s parted lips, lowered eyes, and hair flowing sensuously down the side of one shoulder remain a central preoccupation for Sebastiano in this series of works. A sense of psychological interiority, which is absent in Michelangelo’s drawing, becomes the defining feature of Sebastiano’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* series.

It is important to acknowledge this drawing in Sebastiano’s working procedure because it demonstrates the role that drawing played for Sebastiano more broadly in working with Michelangelo’s inventions. It shows his investment in working from an external source to arrive at a new idea, which he then goes on to repeat and re-imagine through multiple renditions. This can be seen in the exploration of differences across the Christ Carrying the Cross series.

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43 The date of the drawing is uncertain. It has been dated to the 1520s, while the *recto* has a drawing of God that has been tentatively dated to the early 1530s. See Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 306.
The small, slate version of *Christ Carrying the Cross* at the Prado and its larger counterpart at the Hermitage (Figure 12 and Figure 1) offer a slightly different conception of the subject than the large Prado (on canvas) and Budapest versions (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Comparing the large Prado and Hermitage Christs (Figure 2 and Figure 1), is it remarkable the degree to which small changes create two very differently conceived works. In the latter painting, Sebastiano has moved the head of Christ further away from the cross, raised his arm to shoulder level, bending it at a ninety degree angle and effectively moving the cross further to Christ’s right side rather than in front of him, and sharpened the angle at which Christ leans to the side by inclining the diagonal of the shoulders more. Sebastiano has also removed one arm, leaving a single hand with widely-spread fingers in an arachniform pattern the focus of attention. These changes, along with the switch to a solid black background, fundamentally alter the invention. Christ no longer appears to be walking towards the viewer as he firmly holds onto the cross in front of him with fingers clenched; instead, he becomes less a figure in forward motion and more a figure paused in an introspective moment. Moreover, the weight of the cross is belied by the hand that holds it – flexed in a highly affected manner with fingers spread nimbly over the cross’ two facets. The carrying of the cross takes on a decidedly different feel here, one which this chapter will aim to explain.

Sebastiano’s mode of invention has frequently been characterized in scholarship as a pedantic copying of Michelangelo’s drawings and as an artistic dependency, where Sebastiano is unable to invent his own images without Michelangelo’s contribution.44 Yet the Louvre drawing and its relationship to Michelangelo’s *Christ at the Column* as well as to Sebastiano’s investment in seriality and self-repetition, reveal a very different kind

of relationship. It appears, rather, that Sebastiano often preferred to begin his work from existing prototypes and models that weren’t his own in origin – whether in the Borgherini Chapel or in the preparatory head study for *Christ Carrying the Cross*. However, he then went on to generate multiple iterations on the same theme that allowed him to explore greater psychological complexity and conceptual shifts within that theme.

It is noteworthy that in a letter of July 1532, Sebastiano comments that the drawing of Christ that Michelangelo has sent him resembles too closely the Montorio Christ, but that despite the similarity he will find a use for the new drawing.\(^\text{45}\) The work in which Sebastiano made use of the drawing, and the drawing itself for that matter, are believed to be lost today.\(^\text{46}\) Yet Sebastiano’s somewhat disgruntled statement bears an interesting relationship to the discussion at hand, since it appears to go against Sebastiano’s predominant working method during these years and earlier, that is, his ongoing self-repetition on the same figural theme. How do we reconcile Sebastiano’s apparent hesitation to accept a drawing that looks too much like one of his earlier works with his highly repetitious and thematically interconnected *oeuvre*? One possible answer may be that Sebastiano had grown tired of the repetition and that he had exhausted the idea in the works he executed between 1516 and 1525.

**4.3 Simon of Cyrene Takes up the Cross**

I would like to draw attention to the defining feature that most dramatically distinguishes Sebastiano’s very first version of Christ Carrying the Cross at the Prado (Figure 2) from the works that follow: the setting of the road to Calvary in the

\(^{45}\) Barocchi and Ristori (1973), 419. “Io ho recevuto in più partite 3 vostre littere con el disegno, dil che vi ringratio quanto si po regratiaire; et satisfami assai. Però el Cristo, da le braze et la testa fora, è quasi simile a quello de Sancto Pietro Montorio; ma pur io me accomodarò meglio che potrò.”

\(^{46}\) Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 129.
background and the figures of the soldier and Simon of Cyrene to the left of Christ. Simon holds up one arm of the cross with his large hands as he looks up at the cross, rather than at Christ himself. The look on his face is one of awe; with his lips parted and eyes raised he recalls the profiles of the Apostles who look up at Christ in the Borgherini Transfiguration or the soldiers who gaze at St. Agatha who withstands their torture. The painting offers an image of reciprocity – of both Simon and Christ holding on to the cross whose lower arms appear of oddly equal length, forming a kind of X-shape (the upper V-segment being shorter than the lower). More than that, Simon follows Christ from behind echoing his forward stoop and even resembling Christ in his clothing. Simon’s bright-lit face, turned towards the cross, seems to invite identification on the part of the viewer who must similarly attend to the prominent cross that cuts across the entire picture plane from top to bottom.

In following Christ while holding the cross and imitating the action, Simon can be understood as a model for the viewer to take up his own cross. This concept – of Simon as a stand in for the pious viewer and a prototype of imitatio Christi – appears in medieval accounts of the procession to Calvary and in other contemporaneous images.47 According to biblical accounts, Simon of Cyrene was forced by the Roman soldiers to take up the cross of Christ, but medieval opinion was divided on how he had accepted his burden – that is, whether it was willingly or not.48 In some medieval dramas, he is represented as finally carrying the cross of his own free will and in many instances Simon is seen as the prototype of the Gentiles who accepted Christ when the Jews would not.

47Pseudo-Bonaventure’s Meditationes vitae Christi used the example of Simon taking up the cross as an exemplar for the reader of the true way of the cross that leads to Christ. See Abigail Brundin, Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 62.
In the early Cinquecento, a number of images took up the subject in ways that stressed the viewer’s or maker’s identification with the figure of Simon. In the second edition of Luther's *Passional Christi und Antichristi* of 1521, Lucas Cranach introduced a woodcut of Christ staggering under the weight of the cross and Simon of Cyrene stepping forward to carry it in his stead (Figure 214). Notably, Cranach gives his own features to Simon of Cyrene. Cranach’s woodcut emphasizes the intimate rapport between Simon and Christ, thereby allowing the viewer to experience a moment of proximity to the suffering Christ via the figure of Simon. The image stands in marked contrast to another type of *portacroce*, which juxtaposes Christ’s suffering with the cruelty and grotesque faces of the soldiers. Both types were especially popular in Northern Italy as seen in the *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Titian (1505-6) (Figure 213) and Lorenzo Lotto (1526) (Figure 215), both Venetian painters, and north of the Alps, as seen in the work of Bosch (Figure 216), dating to the early fifteenth century.

Yet Sebastiano’s work is different from the abovementioned paintings and woodcuts of the same subject in several respects. Rather than turning Christ’s head toward the viewer in an appeal for identification with Christ’s suffering, Sebastiano stresses the solitude of bearing the cross. Both Simon and Christ appear individually engrossed in the carrying of the cross and isolated by the dark interior from the procession in the background. Christ’s eyes are lowered, refusing to make contact with the viewer, and instead the painting offers up the physicality of his hands gripping the cross. The physicality and weight of the action is palpable; the two pairs of hands – one

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50 Gibson, “’Imitatio Christi,’” 86.
Simons’, the other Christ’s – at the bottom edge reinforce the possibility of touching the cross from our location outside the painting.

What is most relevant to Sebastiano’s work, however, is that the ideal of imitatio Christi was being revived and articulated in the sixteenth century in a new way with the republication and translation of the famous devotional book of the same name, variously attributed to Thomas à Kempis and Jean Gerson.\footnote{For a discussion of its publication, translation and distribution in Spain and Italy, see Maximilian von Habsburg, Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425-1650 (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011), 67-9.} Indeed, the title page of vernacular translations of Imitatio Christi often displayed an image of Christ bearing the cross.\footnote{Paul F. Grendler, “Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books” Renaissance Quarterly 46, No. 3 (1993): 467.} An early example is the woodcut for a German edition of 1498, based on an engraving of c.1475 by Martin Schongauer (Figure 217). Christ looks directly out at the reader, while Simon of Cyrene enters the frame behind him and assists him with the Cross. They are the only two figures in the scene. The image calls to mind the first line of the text: “He that follows me, walks not in darkness [...]”\footnote{“Wer mir nachfolgt, der wandelt nicht in der Finsternis [...]” Cited in Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen, Reformation und Gegenreformation, vol. 1 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 19.} Likewise, the Italian translation of 1518 in Venice (Figure 218) shows the resurrected Christ holding a cross reaching out to hold the hand of a believer who kneels below the words “Sequere me” or “Follow me.” In another Italian publication, the frontispiece (Figure 219) of a Florentine edition of 1494 shows Christ standing with the cross and his hand held out bleeding over a cup.

These frontispieces give visual form to the central salvific message of the book and its theme of conforming oneself to Christ. In Book II, Chapter XII of the Imitazione di Cristo, Christ exhorts the reader to “take up the cross daily,” echoing the Gospel of Matthew, in order to attain salvation:
Why, then, do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection from enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross is highest virtue, in the cross is perfect holiness. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross. Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. He Himself opened the way before you in carrying His cross, and upon it He died for you, that you, too, might take up your cross and long to die upon it. If you die with Him, you shall also live with Him, and if you share His suffering, you shall also share His glory. Behold, in the cross is everything, and upon your dying on the cross everything depends. [my italics]54

The notion of a way that is opened by taking up one’s own cross and following Christ is a predominant theme of the books, particularly of the conversation that transpires in Books III and IV between Christ and the Disciple, and it is contained in the first phrase that opens the Imitatio. It is a concept that was enthusiastically picked up by Sebastiano’s contemporaries in their search for a more personal relationship to God and in their quest to reform the corrupt state of the Church.

With the large number of publications of the Imitatio Christi in Italy (particularly in Venice) starting from the late fifteenth century, the subject of the carrying of the cross acquired new and heightened meaning.55 The question of salvation was on everyone’s mind. The efficacy of outward Church ceremony and good works was challenged both outside and within Italy and a crucial question arose: What was the right path to

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54Thomas à Kempis, Imitation of Christ (Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 48-9. Marc’Antonio Parenti, Della imitazione di Cristo libri quattro secondo l’antico volgarizzamento toscano, ridotto a corretta lezione col riscontro di varj testi (Modena: Co’tipi della Regio ducale camera, 1844), 81-2. “Adunque perché temi di pigliare la Croce mediante la quale si va al Regno? In Croce è la salute a la vita; in Croce è la defensione delli nimici; in Croce si trova la fortezza e la fermezza della mene nostra; in Croce si trova il gudio spirituale; in Croce si trova la perfezione della virtù e della santità. Non si trova la salute dell’anima e la speranza dell’eterna vita, se non in Croce. Adunque togli la Croce e seguita Gesù, e perverrai alla vita immortale. Il Signore è andato inanzi portando la sua Croce, ed è morto in sulla Croce per tuo amore; e tu ancora porta La Croce, e desidera morire in Croce. Imperocché se tu insieme morrai col Signote in Croce, senza dubbio viverai insieme con esso lui; e se tu sarai compagno in pena, sarai ancora compagno in riposo. Ecco dunque che tutta la nostra salute è in Croce; e non c’è altra via la quale ci candua alla eterna beatitudine, se non la via della Croce e della continua mortificazione di sè medesimo.”

salvation? By what means did one achieve it? The notion of a path or way to God took on new currency. Luther echoed the language of the Imitatio by his use of the term “via crucis” or “road of the cross” for man’s resignation to divine will, which later became his theology of the cross. The road of the cross is a prominent theme in his Lectures on the Romans (1515-16) and in his 1517 sermon for the feast of Epiphany where Luther writes “This is a short road, the road of the cross, which leads one most expeditiously to life.” It is likewise a theme that was taken up by Dürer in two sketches (Figure 220) now in the British Museum, which portray an individual carrying a cross as he walks forward, following Christ of the Passion, with his hands clasped in prayer and echoing Christ’s footsteps.

A look at some of the statements issued by the Fifth Lateran Council begins to suggest the wide reach of the question of salvation and its impact on art making – that of Sebastiano and other Italian artists. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Sebastiano was familiar with the problems that were being tackled by the Roman Curia through Pierfrancesco Borgherini – his patron at this time. The Lateran Council’s eleventh session, held on December 19, 1516 and surely reflected upon by Sebastiano thereafter, was dedicated to proper preaching and was implicitly a response to spreading reformist ideas, which it saw as a challenge to official Church orthodoxy. It underscored the error

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57 Cited in ibid., 96. The Imitatio Christi also had an enormous impact on Erasmus, who similarly stressed one’s personal following of Christ and evangelical values such as interior moral conversion. See Anthony Levi, Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 201.
58 Joseph Leo Koerner, The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 76. The inscription “Domine da quod iubes et iube quod vis” echoes a passage in Thomas à Kempis’ De imitatione Christi, further supporting the connection between the notion of the cross as a personal path to salvation and the ideal of imitating Christ championed by Kempis. See ibid., 463, no.39.
of preaching against official teaching and stressed that this caused the laity to stray from
the path to salvation:

When [preachers] turn aside from the official sacred teachings, which they
ought particularly to follow, they separate and move far from salvation
those who listen to them. For, as a result of these and similar activities, the
less educated people, as being more exposed to deceit, are very easily led
into manifold errors, as they wander from the path of salvation and from
obedience to the Roman church [my italics]. 59

Both the Council and defenders of Catholic orthodoxy like Cajetan stressed the
importance of not straying from the true path to salvation. Cajetan was explicit about the
fact that he was writing against Luther’s “poisonous views,” fearing that these were
“infecting even the hearts of the faithful.” 60

Rome, in the years leading up to Sebastiano’s first version of the Christ Carrying
the Cross series – between 1514 and 1517 – saw the founding of the Theatine movement
by Gaetano da Thiene and Gian Pietro Carafa in the form of the Roman Oratory of
Divine Love, approved by papal legislation in 1524. 61 The organization was a branch of
the original Oratory that had been first established in Genoa in 1497 and was dedicated to
pastoral and charitable work, and to the task of reforming the clergy. Both Gaetano and
Carafa believed that intense inner spirituality would help counter the intellectual and
moral decay of the Church. 62 They championed faith and charity over works and
Scripture over Church tradition. Significantly, the idea of imitatio Christi lay at the heart

ii sub confictorum miraculorum mendaciis varios errores fraudesque disseminant [...] a sacrisque
constituitionibus, quas maxime sequi deberent, deviantes, auditores suos amovent ac longe faciunt a saulte.
Per haec namque et alia huiusmodi simpliciores homines, ut ad deceptionem procliviore, a via salutis et
obedientia Romanae ecclesiae deviantes, in errores varios perfacile inducuntur.”
60 Thomas Cajetan, “Faith and Works, 1532” in Cajetan Responds: A Reader in Reformation Controversy,
62 Ibid., 21.
of the Roman Oratory. The Rule for the Order, written by Carafa, concluded with the statement:

He will also understand what is the greatest and the most useful thing of all, that is, the force of the vows, the goal of those who make them, the purpose for which we have come together in unity in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he will be taught daily through experience the Lord’s word and its power as he says: “He who wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” Let him enter through the narrow gate and walk through the sorrow of penitence until he comes to the bosom of widespread charity. [my italics]63

Likewise, the desire to imitate and follow Christ runs deeply through the writing of Gaetano in his letters to a Brescian nun, Laura Mignani, whom he befriended at this time. In a letter of January 28, 1518, addressed to Mignani from Rome, Gaetano speaks about the need to humble himself to serve God and fight worldly enemies that stand in the way of following Christ:

He calls me to be humble, and yet I am proud. That Illuminator and Way says, “You must follow me,’ and yet I remain in the world [...] Still I remain cold, lazy and tied to the affections of this miserable life [...] For so many years, though, and in every moment, I have certainly tolerated mortal wounds delivered to my depraved soul – indeed I have thanked and praised the flesh, the world and my enemies. Now it is definitely time, Mother in Christ, that I undertake constant warfare against these, my three pestiferous enemies, and overcome them with the help of the cross.” [my italics]64

On January 1, 1523, writing to Paolo Giustiniani from Venice, Gaetano exclaims:

Alas, alas, He is weeping over this noble city. Certainly there is none here who seeks Christ crucified. It is amazing that in such a city I have not found, perhaps because of my sins, even one noble who despises honor for the love of Christ. Alas, not one, one! Christ waits, no one moves. [my italics]65

63 Cited in ibid., 69-70.
64 Cited in ibid., 72.
65 Cited in ibid., 86.
And again, in a letter of August 22, 1524 to Ferdinand and Girolamo Thiene from Rome:

“I long for the day before I die to take some step toward Him, so that at this hour I am notifying you that I have decided to reduce my possessions and no longer be so rich.”  

In his letters, Gaetano stresses human action and determination in leading the spiritual life and in pursuing salvation. The need to follow, to move, “to take some step” towards Christ, who is the Way, is key to attaining salvation for Gaetano. Moreover, his writing betrays knowledge of the conformitas tradition of bodily spiritual exercises recommended by Ludolph in his Vita Christi, in which the reader “conforms” to Christ by imagining himself within scenes of Christ’s life and Passion. In the abovementioned letter of 1518, Gaetano writes:

If that gift is given to me, I shall never abandon [the Virgin Mary], no more than the vigilant spouse abandoned her with little Jesus. Rather I shall be with her through Egypt and the desert and her other struggles, to the cross and to the sepulcher.

What follows are highly participatory and emotive descriptions where Gaetano “found [him]self” at various moments of Christ’s life. At the holy manger, he writes of how his heart remained hardened as iron even though he “took the tender child, incarnation of the Eternal Word, from the hand of the cautious Virgin.” At the circumcision, he laments that “still my senses were not circumcised.” And at the appearance of the Magi, Gaetano exclaims: “nothing other than iron, waste, and useless gifts was found in me.”

The language that Gaetano uses – his senses were not “circumcised,” nothing but “useless gifts” were found within him – to describe his interior state echoes the defining action or

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66 Cited in ibid., 87.  
67 Ibid., 34.  
68 Cited in ibid., 73.  
69 Ibid., 73.  
70 Cited in ibid., 73.  
71 Cited in ibid., 73.  
72 Cited in ibid., 73.
feature of each scene. Gaetano thereby internalizes the scene by metaphoric language that breaks the boundary between biblical history and the internal state of his heart or spirit.

Gaetano’s language, in its desire to physically and mentally enter the scene, is not unlike Lorenzo Lotto’s *Christ Bidding Farewell to His Mother, with Elisabetta Rota* (1521) (Figure 221). Painted for Elisabetta Rota, she, the patron, is inserted into a scene that is modernized to look like a Lombard palace or church. Lotto’s painting acts as an aid to help Rota visualize her mental prayer and was likely inspired by contemporaneous devotional books that encouraged such self-involvement through the imagination. Yet perhaps an even closer parallel lies between Sebastiano’s Prado *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Figure 2) and Lotto’s *Annunciation* (1527) (Figure 222), an altarpiece painted for the oratory of the Confraternity of Santa Maria sopra Mercanti, Recanati. In orienting the Virgin to face the viewer, with Gabriel approaching her from behind, Lotto re-imagines the traditional scene from the viewer’s perspective – as if he were personally and directly involved in the sacred event.

The scene is not merely frontal, in the conventional sense, where figures face the viewer to achieve maximum visibility and to give the latter a privileged viewpoint; rather, it literally absorbs the viewer into its spatial logic and should be distinguished from the former type of composition. As Mary Pardo contends, speaking of Leonardo’s lost

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74 Ibid., 123.
76 In their respective articles, Mary Pardo and Lorenzo Pericolo have explored images of this sort – oriented out towards the viewer and seemingly incomplete without the viewer’s physical presence and participation. Pericolo examines Antontello da Messina’s *Virgin Annunciata* and couches it in a cinematographic narrative that, he argues, is meant to awaken the viewer’s imagination by implicating figures and actions “off-scene.” Pardo looks at Savoldo’s *Mary Magdalene* and argues that the painting absorbs the viewer into the space between its two fictions (the painted Magdalene and the implied Resurrected Christ), thereby making him the painting’s accomplice, completing its meaning and witnessing the Magdalene’s conversion.
Angel (Figure 223) and Louvre St. John the Baptist (Figure 224), as well as Antonello da Messina’s Palermo Virgin Annunciate (Figure 225), “the piercing of the frontal plane through foreshortening became a visual metaphor for the direct intrusion of the divine into the realm of the human, and an effective means of implicating the viewer as the receptor of a message of Incarnation.”77 I suggest that this intrusion of the divine into the human realm, conveyed in pictorial terms by Lotto and Sebastiano, should be understood in context of the perceived divide that was seen to be widening and distancing the laity from God. In calling on one’s bodily participation in sacred history, these works, like Gaetano’s letter, respond to a common need to bridge that gap.

In evoking the idea of conformitas and imitatio, Gaetano’s letter demonstrates the way that a pious viewer might have approached Sebastiano’s painting. Sebastiano’s Prado Christ Carrying the Cross invites the kind of deeply personal and phenomenological response that is exhibited in Gaetano’s writing. The extended arm of the cross and Christ’s walk forward suggests that the scene consciously includes its viewer, inviting him to step forward to meet Christ head on and take the cross. The extremely near juxtaposition of the heads of Simon and Christ, separated by a narrow area of shadow, which at the same time allows for their close proximity, further underscores the viewer’s proximity to Christ. It insinuates the privacy of Simon’s rapport (and ours) with Christ by pushing the soldier back into the shadow and bringing Simon’s face forward. The image incites its viewer to actively bring about his own spiritual conversion, as exemplified in Simon’s conversion, signaled by his absorption, both as he concurrently experiences his own. See Lorenzo Pericolo, “The invisible presence: cut-in, close-up, and off-scene in Antonello da Messina’s Palermo Annunciate” Representations 107, No. 1 (2009): 22-3 and Mary Pardo, “The Subject of Savoldo's Magdalene” The Art Bulletin 71, No. 1 (1989): 67-91.

77 Pardo, “The Subject of Savoldo's Magdalene,” 78.
visually and physically, in the cross – this at a time when Giles of Viterbo exclaimed that “man must be changed by the sacred, not the sacred by man” at the opening session of the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512.78

Moreover, the fact that Jeronimo Vich also carried with him Sebastiano’s triptych on the theme of salvation and redemption may be taken as indication of Vich’s interest in the ongoing debate of the role that man plays in his own salvation.79 In the left wing panel, Christ Descends into Limbo (Figure 211), Sebastiano has Christ extending his palm over Adam and Eve, whose hands make gestures of prayer and supplication. Hidden under Adam’s elbow are the faces of sinners who suffer in purgatory, while behind Christ appears to be the Good Thief holding the cross.80 The scene suggests that salvation can be achieved by trusting and following Christ out of a state of sin. This message is underscored by Adam and Eve’s position in the lower left-hand corner – a common position for the patron in triptychs and private devotional panels. Moreover, the formal resemblance between the Good Thief and Simon, both of whom hold a cross and stand behind Christ, demonstrates Sebastiano’s consideration of a common theme across two works that date to roughly the same time – that of personal conversion and salvation by faith in the cross.

79 Domenech, “Sobre la influencia,” 7-8 proposes that Vich’s triptych conveyed the theme of Redemption and Salvation as victorious over death.
80 Mitchell Merback shows that a cult of the Good Thief existed because he was a figure exalted for attaining glory through humility and suffering. Merback cites examples where the Good Thief appears in images next to Christ, particularly in a 15th century German woodcut of the Descent into Limbo. See Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment In Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25-6. Similar examples exist in Italy, such as Jacopo Bellini’s (Museo Civicco, Padua), Domenico Beccafumi’s (1530-35, Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale), and Bronzino’s (1552, Refectory in Santa Croce, Florence) *Christ’s Descent into Limbo.*
4.4 Venetian and Roman Responses to the Question of Personal Salvation

That painters took it upon themselves to respond to new strategies of private devotion and worship to aid viewers in attaining salvation is testified by numerous unconventional reinventions of traditional subjects that emerged at this time. Lotto is often singled out as one of the most reform-minded artists of this period and it is his reinvention of the iconography of the penitent St. Jerome that stands out as relevant to Sebastiano’s own project of reinvention of existing pictorial models. His two paintings of the *Penitent St. Jerome* (Figure 226 and Figure 227) at the Galleria Doria Pamphilj and the Prado, executed around 1544-6 – the latter for the Ospedale dei Derelitti ai Santi Giovanni e Paolo (one of the main centers of Catholic reform in Venice) – are unique in the heroic nudity of St. Jerome and his unusual open-armed prostration before the crucifix on the ground. Rather than beating himself with a stone in an act of self-flagellation, as seen in Lotto’s earlier versions dating to the period of 1506-16, the later St. Jerome prioritizes imitation of Christ – signaled by his bodily mirroring of Christ on the cross – over penance for one’s sins. As Massimo Firpo contends, the works convey “the superiority of grace over law, of faith over works, of the “benefit of Christ” over merits, and with this the need to entrust one’s faith in salvation to the redemption of the cross alone.” This is signaled most strongly by the fact that St. Jerome has put aside his instruments of penance, and focuses solely on Christ on the cross, empty-handed and naked save for his loincloth.

Moreover, it should be noted that the crucifix is highly foreshortened and oriented away from the viewer in a way that renders it difficult to see. It is made inaccessible to

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81 Notably, the *Imitazione di Cristo* is among the books that Lotto owned in his later years. See Adriano Prosperi, “The Religious Crisis in Early-Sixteenth Century Italy” in *Lorenzo Lotto*, 24.
the viewer as an object of personal devotion. The painting thus models an individual rather than communal relationship to Christ on the cross: it encourages the viewer, by means of the skull that peaks out from behind the rock – one of the typical attributes of St. Jerome, but here reoriented to address to viewer – to seek out his own cross. While I am not suggesting a direct link between Sebastiano and Lotto’s works (the latter postdate Sebastiano’s last rendition of Christ Carrying the Cross), I do want to propose a common historical interest in *imitatio Christi*, and more specifically a phenomenological interest in what it means to imitate or follow Christ, out of which both works emerged.

Much closer to Sebastiano, Michelangelo also explored pictorial parallels to the doctrine of justification by faith and the workings of divine grace in the 1530s and 40s. His presentation drawings for Vittoria Colonna sought out a more interiorized conception of faith and his letters to her adopted the language of the theological debate on grace and good works. And, as Roman d’Elia has shown, Michelangelo’s *Christ on the Cross* (c.1541) (Figure 115) for Colonna explored meditative strategies that drew upon paradoxical effects of bodily suffering and transcendence, of emotion and intellect. Sebastiano’s Christ, especially of the Budapest version, certainly owes something to Michelangelo’s drawings of the late 1530s where Christ appears in isolation, suffering, yet also abstracted and simplified, insisting on the *disegno* of the drawing. Sebastiano’s Budapest Christ is similarly abstracted, but also highly evocative, particularly in his blood-red eyes and sensuous facial expression with mouth agape. This emphasis on the salvific suffering of Christ, both emotive and abstracted, demonstrates both artists’ dual

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85 These are illustrated in Nagel, “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,” esp. 658.
interest in the physical immediacy of Christ’s body and in the intellectualized meditation that transcends it. It also testifies to Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s shared concern with Christ’s body (and physical contact with it) as a source of divine grace.\footnote{See Nagel, \textit{Michelangelo and the Reform of Art}, 179-87 for a discussion of Michelangelo’s drawings for Colonna and their emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s body in transmitting divine grace.}

Yet when it came to the altarpiece and the private devotional panel, Sebastiano would not find a model in Michelangelo’s work for how to picture the workings of individual salvation. Nor does his Christ, who hunches over under the weight of the cross, resemble the self-supporting, miraculous body of Christ in Michelangelo’s drawings, made in the tradition of the Man of Sorrows.\footnote{Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 148-51.} Instead, Sebastiano gravitated toward Raphael’s work to formulate his own very different conception of the believer’s relationship to God. Sebastiano’s Christ emerges as distinctly human and subject to his body’s suffering, without clear indicators of his divinity.

In the two sections that follow, I investigate the ways in which Raphael’s work served as a productive thinking board for Sebastiano. Raphael’s \textit{Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary} (1517) (Figure 212) was the most recent Roman work on the subject of Christ carrying the cross and would have been of interest to Sebastiano who decided to grapple the same subject in numerous versions. The differences between Raphael and Sebastiano’s conceptions show the extent to which the latter reinvented the image of Christ Carrying the Cross and arrived at a different solution to the theological issues raised by the subject.

The theological issue of distance between the worshipper and God and how one embarked on the path to salvation and ultimately to union with God – whether it was individual or guided by the rituals of the Church, granted as gift or earned through works
– were questions that artists approached in multifaceted ways. In arguing this, I take a different approach from that of Marcia Hall, who presupposes, in her book *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*, that all Roman and Florentine artists sought to distance the viewer from the divine so that “no worshipper will mistake the synthetic image for the original,” that is, to avoid idolatry. They achieved this distance, according to Hall, through the foregrounding of artifice or *maniera* to signal difference from the divine prototype and to remind the viewer of the status of the image as Art and as a mediated, artistic interpretation.

I would like to shift attention to another, perhaps more pressing reason that mediation had become a primary concern for artists at this time. In addition to thinking about the relationship between image and prototype, artists were being asked to reconsider the mediated nature of divine knowledge as it pertained to image-making. As Chapter Three has shown, this was an issue that the Fifth Lateran Council had to grapple with itself in the face of reformers’ staunch critique of the intercessory role of the Church. Raphael (and Sebastiano at certain points of his career, such as in the Borgherini Chapel) showed support for the position that images were mediators or metaphors by nature and that interpreters were necessary intercessors between the lay person and divine truths. I will come back to this.

89 Ibid., see esp. 90. Some of Hall’s examples are Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna* and *Transfiguration*, Andrea del Sarto’s *Madonna of the Harpies*, and Rosso’s *Dead Christ with Angels*. The driving force behind Hall’s discussion of artifice is the problem of naturalism, as she puts it in the preceding chapter. Hall argues that naturalism blurred the line between the terrestrial and celestial and that viewers would have mistook the image for the prototype because of its naturalistic persuasiveness. See ibid., 60. Yet to posit an antagonistic relationship between naturalism and artifice – as if the latter remedied the former when it came to picturing the divine – is to polarize styles into categories. I believe pictorial style does not lend itself easily to either a “naturalistic” or “artificial” category of art, nor did artists see themselves as remedying one with the other.
I believe that Hall imposes too flattening a reading over the paintings of this turbulent and unpredictable period in history, as if all artists “approved” of mediation by virtue of being on the so-called Catholic side of the debate.\textsuperscript{90} A more productive approach is to see the early Cinquecento as involving a diversity of artistic approaches to mediation and the ways in which paintings of the divine address viewers, rather than one fostering an outright rejection of divine immediacy. A number of artists’ works clearly do not correspond with Hall’s characterization of the problems at hand (Sebastiano’s are certainly among them) and I would like to turn to these in order to better understand Sebastiano’s work in context of the Roman response to questions of individual action and participation with respect to salvation.

4.5 The Dramatic Close-Up: A Response to Raphael’s *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*

Sebastiano would not have missed the opportunity to study Raphael’s *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*, also known as *Lo Spasimo* (1514-16), while it was still in Rome. This was an artist whose work he followed closely and who frequently acted as a point of inspiration for his own work. *Lo Spasimo* is significant in that it was the most recent Roman exemplar of a subject common to Northern Italy. Yet compared with Raphael’s work, Sebastiano’s comes much closer to the “close-up” format employed by artists like Vincenzo Catena and Giovanni Bellini in their renditions of Christ bearing the cross.\textsuperscript{91}


\textsuperscript{91} See Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: the Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornsijp: Davaco, 1983), 54-7 for a discussion of the “crystallization” of Christ Carrying the Cross from the Carrying of the Cross as a development of devotional painting out of istorie, thereby allowing the action to come to a standstill to heighten the viewer’s contemplative and emotional
It is apparent that Sebastiano leans on his Venetian experience in his reworking of Raphael’s invention in his first treatment of the subject at the Prado. He takes what is most explicit in Raphael’s work – the emphasis on the procession to Calvary that begins at the far right, winds to the center foreground, and back “into” the painting at middle-ground left – and isolates the moment of Christ’s staggering under the cross. Sebastiano’s conception has less to do with Raphael’s specificity of place and action – the visual description of witnesses and their various reactions (whether the Virgin swooned or not, for example) – and more with a kind of abbreviated representation of the event. The painting pares down the procession to just the two figures of Christ and Simon and the head of the soldier. It also rearranges Raphael’s composition, which proceeds from indoor to outdoor, relegating the crowd to the back and heightening the intimacy and solitude of Simon’s encounter with Christ. The idea of a dark interior that opens up to the outside my means of a rectangular window in the top corner of the composition further suggests a connection to the Venetian tradition of portraiture – one that Sebastiano employed with flexibility across genres, such as in his *Martyrdom of St. Agatha*.

That Sebastiano chose to represent Christ bearing the cross in this fashion suggests that his interests were quite different from Raphael’s. In eliminating the crowd that surrounds Christ in *Lo Spasimo* and, more importantly, in taking away the poignant moment in which the Virgin reaches out her arms towards Christ who cannot reciprocate, for both his hands are working to support his body (he can only look back at her),

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92 For a discussion of artists’ and theologians’ interest in and their divergent positions on whether Mary swooned at the foot of the cross, see Harvey E. Hamburg, “The Problem of Lo Spasimo of the Virgin in Cinquecento Paintings of the Descent from the Cross” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, No. 4 (1981): 45-75. Though Raphael’s subject is not the Descent from the Cross, it still shares the same kind of interest in historical specificity and action as the works examined by Hamburg – among which is Raphael’s Borghese *Entombment*. 
Sebastiano re-imagines the scene as a non-interaction with Christ. Despite the viewer and Simon’s proximity to Christ, the latter withholds his gaze and the former raises his head past Christ’s to look at the cross instead. The nearness of their bodies and heads is in striking contrast to the complete, individual engrossment of each in the cross. This is to say that Sebastiano stages Christ’s movement as a seemingly perpetual, sustained walk towards the picture-plane, rather than a pause in which the viewer would typically be invited to empathize with and meditate on Christ’s suffering. In this respect, the blood is barely perceptible on Christ’s forehead and no tears are visible. And though we look up at Christ’s face and body, which occupy the immediate foreground, the cross competes for our attention by its sheer size and expanse across the picture plane. Simon’s gaze seems to insist that the viewer redirect his attention away from Christ to the cross he carries.

That other artists who copied the work felt the need to add extra figures suggests that something was deemed to be missing from Sebastiano’s image. It appears that Christ’s downcast face, directed at no one, did not make sense given the traditional iconography of this subject. Francisco Ribalta, in his Christ Carrying the Cross with the Virgin (Figure 228) in Valencia, copies Sebastiano’s image but also extends the composition to the left, adding the procession and mourning witnesses that are left out in Sebastiano’s version. 93 In doing so, Ribalta’s work comes much closer to Raphael’s in its focus on the momentary exchange between Christ and the Virgin, and on the latter’s pathos. Though Ribalta still has Christ look down, the focus shifts away from the solitude and interiority of Christ’s walk to the charged, empty space between the two figures.

Another of Ribalta’s works, The Vision of Father Simón (1612) (Figure 229) for the burial chapel of the parish priest Francisco Gerónimo Simón in S. Andres in Valencia, 93 Domenech draws attention to Ribalta’s copy after Sebastiano in his article “Sobre la influencia,” 19-20.
gives further insight into what was perceived to be missing from Sebastiano’s painting and the ways in which viewers might have approached the image. Ribalta once again reinserts the procession of soldiers and a trumpeter on the left and two mourners, St. John the Evangelist and the Virgin, on the right.94 In the foreground, Ribalta has the patron, Father Simón, kneeling next to Christ with arms extended outward and eyes lifted up to Christ’s. Christ, in turn, looks down at Simón and draws his hair back from his face with the hand that simultaneously holds up the cross. The painting draws on contemporary accounts of Simón’s recurrent visions of Christ carrying the cross, which he had in the Calle de Caballeros, a street along which condemned criminals were led to execution.95 It, like Ribalta’s other work, intercepts and blocks our physical proximity to Christ by inserting another main figure to the side, in the same plane as Christ. The figures of the Virgin and Simón respectively become the receivers of Christ’s gaze and bodily orientation. In doing so, Ribalta highlights the immediacy of Sebastiano’s scene to the viewer, unimpeded by other figures, whether historical or contemporary. At the same time, Ribalta’s works, particularly The Vision of Father Simón, demonstrate how a contemporary viewer might have approached Sebastiano’s painting.

Desirous of physical contact with Christ, Simón lifts up his arms to his vision and makes eye contact with Christ’s open eyes. The viewer of Sebastiano’s work, on the other hand, can only get hold of the forward-thrust arm of the cross, as Simon of Cyrene demonstrates behind Christ. Ribalta’s altarpiece reveals an aspect of private devotion that is implicit and not shown in Sebastiano’s image: the desire to reach and touch Christ’s

95 Ibid., 87.
body.\footnote{For a discussion of private visions, images, and viewers’ desire to physically touch Christ’s body, see, for example, John R. Decker, The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sins Jans (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 81-2. Decker discusses Geertgen’s Man of Sorrows (c.1495) and a fifteenth-century tract titled The Orchard of the Loving Soul on bodily identification with Christ’s wounds. It invites the reader to taste the pain, merge with Christ’s open heart, and feel the burden that Christ bore. See also Allie Terry, “Criminal vision in early modern Florence: Fra Angelico’s altarpiece for “Il Tempio” and the Magdalenean gaze” in Renaissance Theories of Vision, 46-8 for a discussion of Fra Angelico’s Lamentation Over the Dead Christ from the oratory of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio and how it invited the repentant criminal to discard the body in favor of a spiritual reward. Yet, paradoxically, this was achieved precisely by activating the senses in “an environment of synesthesia” where the criminal was invited to participate bodily and to touch, smell, and taste the representation, creating a “somaesthetic” experience. The visual encounter between the viewer and the image was thus made more potent by a cultivation of bodily experience.} Strangely, Sebastiano withholds this and frustrates the viewer’s desire for such an exchange. The painting plays with two kinds of effects – one of direct, unmediated proximity to Christ, whose hands can almost be touched, the other of psychological distance produced by Christ’s unreciprocated gaze. The former is significant in light of another, contemporaneous context in which we find Sebastiano exploring the viewer’s relationship to the figure of Christ: the Borgherini chapel. Contrary to the chapel’s emphasis on mediated viewing, which acts to distance Christ from the space of the believer, the Prado Christ Carrying the Cross brings Christ to the very forefront where he seems to step forward, about to enter our space.

Thus, in the Borgherini chapel and the Prado Christ Carrying the Cross, Sebastiano explores in tandem two alternative strategies of meditation. The former invites distanced contemplation of images as interceding and metaphorical representations of the divine, as well as the reading of authoritative texts, whose authors occupy the liminal space that must be traversed to arrive at the central image of Christ; the latter offers a much more personal and experiential approach to divinity, giving the viewer a direct encounter with Christ, unimpeded by the framing and distancing conventions of art.
4.6 Between Historical Event and Internalized Vision

The discussion above brings me back to my initial question regarding the relationship between Raphael’s altarpiece and Sebastiano’s reinvention of it, and to Hall’s contention that Raphael’s work supports the mediated dimension of images. As Ribalta had done in his reworkings of Sebastiano’s images, Raphael returned to his preferred (locally established) representational norms in the *Lo Spasimo*, which is itself a reworking of Lucas van Leyden’s engraving of *Christ Carrying the Cross* (1515) (Figure 230). In Lucas’ engraving, we see Christ similarly fallen, supporting himself on a rock as he turns around, with St. Veronica holding out and offering the cloth to Christ. The composition is characteristic of Northern Italian images of Christ carrying the cross in its focus on just two figures, its close-up, horizontal format, and the absence of a distinctive setting. In contrast, rather than distilling out Christ in a way that articulates the viewer’s intimate access to the divine, in the case of Lucas’ print, through the touch of the Veronica cloth, Raphael’s *Lo Spasimo* underscores the historical narrative of Christ’s Passion and the witnesses that were present.

The conceptual differences between Raphael and Sebastiano’s paintings, as well as Ribalta’s reworking of Sebastiano’s painting into a visionary experience, underscore a subtle ambiguity in Sebastiano’s Prado *Christ Carrying the Cross*: the tension between our proximity to Christ’s body and Simon’s complete absorption in the cross (instead of in Christ), between the procession in the background and our physical remove from it (partitioned off by the wall of a dark interior), and between Christ’s advancement forward and our position immediately in the way of his path, raise questions about whether we are meant to understand the image as a representation of the historical event of Christ’s

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procession to Calvary or as an internal vision. The compressed, isolated feel of the composition, the focus on the cross, combined with the impossibility that we could actually be witnessing the Passion – we are reminded of this by the fact that we physically obstruct Christ’s way – suggests that the painting in fact occupies an ambivalent status between historical and trans-historical representation. To borrow Klaus Krüger’s terminology, the image calls attention to “the gaze of the imagination falling onto it.”\(^{98}\) In other words, the viewer stands before the event, but must also internalize the outer image into inner visual experience.

According to Krüger, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century images frequently charged their viewers with “the task of becoming aware of themselves as perceiving subjects in the very act of seeing.”\(^{99}\) This pictorial strategy was a consequence of what Krüger argues was the ambivalent status of the image between the material and the invisible realm. In asserting its medial character, the image is both a concrete medium of transmission and a gateway to a higher reality that is invisible. The medium of the image thus lends a concrete shape to the desired experience of proximity to the divine; at the same time it points to its very inaccessibility. In doing so, the mediality of the image – its oscillation between being seen as object and illusion – and the viewer’s awareness of this are taken as an integral part of the aesthetic experience. This is because the Renaissance theological conception of the divine demanded a kind of “nonidentity” between the image and the divine referent.\(^{100}\) Krüger’s examples where this kind of visual hermeneutics is at play include works such as Mantegna’s *St. Mark* (Figure 231) and the Milan *Dead Christ*


\(^{100}\) My summary of the argument is partially indebted to the book review provided by Falkenburg, “Das Bild als Schleier,” 593-597.
Figure 232) or Lazzaro Bastiani’s Virgin and Child (Figure 233), where certain elements bridge the surface of the picture plane across the window sill, marble slab, and frame respectively, much like Christ’s hands and cross do in Sebastiano’s painting of Christ carrying the cross. The result is an assertion of both physical proximity to the divine through the possibility of touch and a reminder – by virtue of a withheld gaze, an impossible perspective, or the frame itself – that we are seeing a fictive surface.

The suggestion that what we are seeing is more like a vision than a concrete event is rather subtle in the early Prado painting, but it becomes much more compelling in Sebastiano’s later versions of the same subject where Christ appears alone against a dark background.\(^{101}\) The sense of scale is made ambiguous by the absence of other figures and by the expanse of the cross that extends beyond the boundaries of the image. The figure of Christ fills up almost the entire breadth of the picture plane; his left arm and sleeve disappear beyond the picture’s edges in the late Prado and Hermitage versions. The implication is that the viewer is looking at a vision of the divine that is larger, closer, and beyond a scale that the material image is capable of grasping. These close-ups of Christ, together with his inward contemplative gaze, ask the viewer to internalize the physical image.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) In Krüger’s discussion of portacroce images, Leonardo’s drawing of c.1490-5 is taken as a transitory moment where Christ, as he passes, turns to the viewer, who stays behind like Veronica. Ribalta’s Christ Carrying the Cross similarly places Simón in the role of Veronica, to whom Christ turns and looks over his shoulder. Krüger thus grounds these works in the reciprocal exchange of gazes as a means of admonishing the viewer to generate his own internal image. See Klaus Krüger, Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien (München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001), 90-91. Since Sebastiano’s paintings are instead about the withholding of the gaze, I suggest that they too are about leading the viewer into an inward, contemplative gaze, but do so by means of disrupting the specificity of the historical narrative, rather than by making the viewer a participant in the event.

This fictiveness and the invitation to generate one’s own internal images on the Passion is made even more explicit in Luis de Morales’ *Christ Meditating on the Passion* (c.1560) (Figure 234), which is a later work loosely inspired by his close study and imitation of Sebastiano’s Hermitage *Christ Carrying the Cross*.\(^{103}\) Morales’ work is of the Christ in Repose or Christ in Distress iconographic type, which isolates the “melancholic” Christ from the narrative of the Passion so as to instill a state of inward reflection in the viewer.\(^{104}\) Christ has put down his cross and takes on a meditative pose, seated on a wooden block, with the instruments of the Passion (the cross building tools: the hammer, awl, nails and broom) scattered before him on the floor and with the column of the flagellation behind him. The setting is an otherwise barren space rendered in dark and light brown tones. The absence of any scenery, the “blankness” of the room, and Christ’s engrossment in the relics of his own Passion call on the viewer to join him in meditation by creating internal images of the events leading up to the Crucifixion based on the objects presented. This is what Krüger would call painting’s capacity to show not of the imagination in constructing images, as well as the problematic relationship between material image and referent during the Reformation.

\(^{103}\) For a discussion of Morales’ imitation of the Sebastiano’s *portacroce*, see Isidre Puig Sanchis, *Cristo con la cruz a cuestas: seguidor de Luis De Morales* (Lleida: Centre d'Art d'Època Moderna, Servei Cientificotècnic de la Universitat de Lleida, 2008).

\(^{104}\) For a discussion of the Christ in Repose iconographic type as a *Meditationsbild*, formulated by artists in early sixteenth-century Northern Europe, see Mitchell B. Merback, “The Man of Sorrows in Northern Europe: Ritual Metaphor and Therapeutic Exchange” in *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, eds. Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 97-112. Merback remarks on how this type of Man of Sorrows, and particularly its largely-vacuous field, would have worked on the viewer to instill inward reflection on the Passion: “Now that the visual field has been evacuated of everything extraneous to it, the beholder’s attention can fix exclusively on the very thing that mirrors it: Christ’s own meditations on the Passion […] it becomes something like the emblem of a cognition that mirrors our own, unfolding in real time, perhaps even in response to ours. Not a stilled action but an active stillness, form now figures the beholder’s properly inward attitude towards the passion and models the self-examination essential to it.” Ibid., 98.
just the object of vision, but also “the process of its imaginative creation and contemplation.”105

The notion of the image as a medium and fiction through which the viewer is able to create internal images for contemplation also finds expression in a work likely painted for the Accademia di San Luca in Rome – the St. Luke Painting the Virgin with Portrait of Raphael (Figure 235). Its dating is controversial; it has been variously dated to the early sixteenth century (c.1525) and attributed to the shop of Raphael, and to the late sixteenth century (c.1593), as the work of Federico Zuccaro.106 The image shows the artist as successor to Luke and emphasizes the exclusiveness of the vision, oriented towards the two artists, who act as its authoritative interpreters – for it is their painting on the easel that ultimately gives us access to the divine original. The insistence on the mediation of divine vision and on painting’s mediality is much more explicit here than in the case of Sebastiano – the picture within a picture construct creates distance between the viewer and the vision, whereas Sebastiano invites the viewer into a more personal rapport with the image, which acts as a stepping stone to an internal vision.

However, given the controversial dating and attribution of the St. Luke painting, and the greater likelihood that it dates to the second half of the sixteenth century based on its commonalities with other images of the artist as visionary in the guise of St. Luke (such as those by Vasari and Il Passignano), I wish to avoid drawing generalizing conclusions about Raphael and Sebastiano’s stances on artistic mediation. One conclusion that can be drawn from the comparison between Sebastiano’s early Prado

Chris Carrying the Cross and Raphael’s Lo Spasimo – which I believe is the more immediately relevant one – is that in response to Raphael’s depiction of the Passion as an expansive and monumental historical narrative, Sebastiano sought a more contained and pared-down view, one that interrogates the role of sight in mediating the relationship between internal and external images. The juxtaposition of Simon and Christ’s gazes – one immersed in the image of the cross, the other directed down in apparent introspection – thematizes the constructive movement from material images to the production of internal images.

I would like to bring into this discussion other portacroce images to consider for a moment the relationship between Sebastiano’s close-ups of Christ in the late Prado and Hermitage and Budapest versions, and the more expansive scenes typical of the subject. Specifically, I want to consider the relationship between Sebastiano’s focus on the face of Christ and the Veronica cloth, which features prominently and frequently in portacroce images. This is the moment when Christ’s face imprints on the material cloth, authorizing the making of physical images of his likeness. In Pontormo’s Certosa fresco of the Way to Calvary (c.1523-5) (Figure 236), Veronica appears in the foreground, with her back to the viewer, extending the cloth to Christ, who draws the cloth to his face. The scene is based on Dürer’s 1511 engraving from the Small Passion (Figure 237), where we similarly see the Veronica cloth from the back. Giovanni Cariani’s Christ Carrying the Cross (c.1515-20) (Figure 238) likewise shows the intimate rapport between Veronica and Christ; here St. Veronica holds up the already imprinted cloth. The fact that the carrying of the cross could be portrayed with a focus on different incidents during the course of the procession – Christ’s fall, Simon’s carrying of the cross, the imprint of the
Veronica cloth, and Christ’s mockery by the soldiers – creates a network of interrelated images surrounding the same event. Thus, the close-up on Christ’s face in Sebastiano’s three subsequent renditions calls to mind that at nearly the same moment Veronica miraculously obtains a physical impression of his likeness. Sebastiano’s portraits of Christ, like the Veronica cloth in the *portacroce* scenes, can be understood to be about the generation of images.

The connection between artistic image and the *acheiropoetic* impression – the former repeated in multiples in a process of artistic self-replication, the latter obtained through a miraculous imprinting – suggests that Sebastiano authorizes his portrait of Christ by recourse to the *vera icon* and simultaneously through the internal consistency of the series – showing that artistic images are self-generating and give rise to other like images. Yet Sebastiano’s portrait of Christ is turned to the side, rather than frontal, and specifically is not the Holy Face. I will come back to this point in the last section of this chapter, where I discuss the Budapest *Christ Carrying the Cross*.

To compare Sebastiano’s Prado Christ to that of the Borgherini chapel, is to see the different positions Sebastiano could adopt between his works. These differences indicate that Sebastiano was experimenting with what it meant to pictorially adopt manifold positions across his words. To the question of if and how God could be reached

107 For a discussion of Leonardo’s close-up of Christ carrying the cross, as well as paintings after the drawing (or possibly a lost painting) by followers, see Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier*, 85-91. Krüger contends that by focusing on the exchange of looks between Christ and the viewer, the latter becomes a witness to the Passion, taking on the role of Veronica, who offers Christ the cloth – evoking the kind of intimate exchange of looks that we see in Giovanni Cariani’s *Christ Carrying the Cross*. However, instead of showing the viewer the physical impression of Christ’s face on the Veronica cloth, Leonardo admonishes the viewer to form an internal image, and turn the transitory moment shown in his drawing into a lasting impression in the mind. Following this line of thinking, I propose that Sebastiano’s close-ups of Christ, by alluding to the Veronica cloth, are likewise a medium for constructing a mental image.

108 The subject of the *portacroce* can be thought of as a self-reflection or meta-narrative on the production of images: the scene shows the mode of production by which the Veronica comes into being. See Vera Beywer, “How to Frame the Vera Icon?” in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, eds. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 72 and 74.
and known by the lay person, Sebastiano’s Viterbo Pietà and his Borgherini chapel program propose a fundamental gap between the believer and God. In the former, the gap has to do with temporal and atemporal existence and was visualized as the soul’s traversal from movement into stillness; in the latter, it is the result of human mediation of divine truths. By the 1520s and 1530s, Sebastiano’s approach to picturing God shifts: his works begin to suggest the possibility of attaining proximity to Christ’s body. His Prado version in particular shows the imitation of Christ as an awe-inspiring and overpowering, bodily engrossment in the cross, while the latter versions insinuate that the viewer stands before the illusion of a visionary experience. Yet within the series of Christ Carrying the Cross, there are other significant differences in conception, which the following section will address, demonstrating that in these works Sebastiano is tackling a new theological problem – the role of human agency in the path to salvation.

4.7 “Lo vero e certo camino”: Valdés and the Cross as a Path to Salvation

Sebastiano’s two subsequent renditions of Christ bearing the cross, executed between the years 1532-7, continue the artist’s fascination with imitatio Christi and the true path that a believer must take for spiritual salvation. It was during these years that Sebastiano came into contact with Giulia Gonzaga who was an avid disciple and friend of Juan de Valdés and with Vittoria Colonna, a member of the spirituali movement and writer of highly personal and reform-minded poetry. Sebastiano’s portraits of Gonzaga and Colonna, dating to the period 1530-5, point to his continued exposure to new ideas and spiritual movements focused on personal piety through his acquaintanceship with these women.\footnote{For discussion of Sebastiano’s portrait of Giulia Gonzaga, see Alberto Maria Ghisalberti, \textit{Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani}, vol. 57 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1960), 786 and Costanza} Notably, the \textit{Imitatio Christi} was a key inspiration for reformers like
Valdés and Bernardino Ochino and its reinterpretation in the 1530s was a vital aspect of the spiritual climate and reformist circles that Sebastiano gravitated towards — much like Michelangelo himself.  

Valdés read the *Imitatio Christi*; its presence is perhaps most felt in his *Alfabeto Cristiano*, which was written in Naples around 1536 and dedicated to Giulia Gonzaga. The book emerged out of their conversations together, which Giulia requested to be written down, and thus its content and ideas date to slightly earlier (to the end of 1535 or the beginning of 1536) when Valdés was in Fondi (near Rome), after having fled the Spanish Inquisition in 1531. The *Alfabeto* was first published in Spanish and is in many ways a direct product of the religious climate dominating Spain in the early sixteenth century. It came out of widespread dissatisfaction with the Church’s mediation of divine truth and out of reformers’ promotion of means by which individuals could determine their own paths to salvation. Spain, like Italy, saw the publication of numerous books devoted to personal spiritual meditation. Ludolph’s *Vita Christi* was among those revived texts - translated into Spanish in 1502 by Ambrosio Montesino and

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Barbieri, “‘Tu che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col martello’ Fortune e sfortune di Sebastiano” in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo*, 59-62. See also Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 115-18 for a discussion of both portraits. Gonzaga’s portrait has the more exact date of 1532, though it is thought that none of the surviving copies are autograph. Vasari mentions Sebastiano’s portrait of Colonna in his *Le Vite*, V, 578. It remains unclear however whether the Barcelona and Harewood *Portrait of a Woman* depict the likeness of Colonna. See Roberto Contini “Portrait of a Woman” in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 192 and 220.  
110 Massimo Firpo, “Reform of the Church and Heresy in the Age of Charles V: Reflections of Spain in Italy” in *Spain in Italy: politics, society and religion 1500-1700*, eds. Thomas James Dandelet and John A. Marino (Boston: Leiden, 2007), 464-5.  
printed in Alcalá – that contributed to the development of new movements within Catholic Reform.¹¹³

In particular, Marcel Bataillon has emphasized the importance of the Spanish publication of Erasmus’ *Enchiridion* in 1525 (with twelve more reprintings by 1556) for the development of the *alumbrados* movement in Alcalá, Spain.¹¹⁴ Valdés was a strong supporter of Erasmus, with whom he corresponded from 1528 onwards and whose work, according to Bataillon, informs his own *Diálogo de doctrina cristiana* of 1529: Valdés took from the *Enchiridion* its emphasis on direct experience of the divine and on receiving God’s grace without human intervention such as ceremonies and sacraments.¹¹⁵

More recently, scholars like Stefania Pastore have questioned the extent to which external European religious currents (those of France and the Low Countries in particular) and categories like “Lutheranism” or “Erasmianism” help to explain Spanish piety.¹¹⁶ The notion that Spain imported its spiritual concerns from abroad does not fully account for its own religious roots and internal culture. Instead, Pastore focuses on local networks and points to influential figures like Pedro Ruiz de Alcaraz, proponent of the *alumbrados* movement, and Archbishop and monk of the Order of St. Jerome, Hernando de Talavera,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 376-88.
¹¹⁶ Stefania Pastore, *Un’eresia spagnola: spiritualità conversa, alumbradismo e inquisizione (1449-1559)* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2004), V-VI, IX-XIII. Pastore challenges the unhelpful and restrictive labels placed on Spanish spirituality by scholarship: “Erasmianism remains to this day a category fossilized around the image of the reassuring framework of mediation, the mask of a Lutheran doctrine, that has worn itself out in wearisome discussions over categories that are stamped over the fluctuating Spanish heterodoxy of the first half of the sixteenth century.” “L’erasmismo rimane a tutt’oggi una categoria fossilizzata attorno all’immagine di rassicurante cornice di mediazione, maschera di una dottrina luterana, che si è consumata nelle estenuanti discussion sulle etichette con cui bollare la fluctuante eterodossia spagnola della prima metà del Cinquecento.” Ibid., XI-XII.
as Valdés’ more immediate points of reference in Alcalà and Granada. It is from these models, she argues, that Valdés takes and develops his concern with interior piety, over exterior ritual, as a way of approaching God, and with reading and meditating on Scripture.

Valdés’ *Alfabeto Christiano* speaks to the author’s commitment to experiential knowledge of God, charity stemming from faith, and interior piety. It stages a dialogue between Valdés as spiritual guide and teacher and Giulia Gonzaga, his disciple, who suffers from confusion and incertitude in mind and soul and seeks Valdés’ guidance. Giulia’s search for personal salvation is emblematic of lay people’s demand, at this time, for a more direct encounter with God.

The full title of Valdés’ book when it was published in Venice in 1545 – *Alfabeto Christiano: che insegna la vera via d’acquistare il lume dello spirito santo* – is in itself telling in framing the desired effect that reading of the text is meant to achieve. The emphasis on finding the true spiritual path, “il camino di Dio” or simply “il camino,” a term which recurs frequently throughout the text, emerges as a main preoccupation for Giulia and Valdés. Valdés opens the book with a dedication to her that presents the goal of his writing: “to show you the way [il camino] by which you may arrive at Christ and become united with him.” The true path entails imitation of Christ by taking up one’s own cross and following him, and it is Christ’s voice which directs the disciple’s first steps toward that path:

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117 Ibid., 179-201.
118 Ibid., 224.
120 Ibid., 271. “le dimostra il camino, per lo quale potrà arrivare à Christo, e unirsi con Christo.”
People] hearing in their souls the voice of Christ which says, “turn within yourselves, you who go wandering; it is not the right path in which you are walking because you cannot reach the kingdom of heaven this way,” they turn within themselves, and realizing that they are lost, leave the path they were pursuing [...] Such persons presently hear Christ, who says to them, “whoever will walk by the true and certain way, let him deny himself, take up his cross on his shoulders, and follow me, imitating me in what he can.”

Le persone] sentendo nell’anima la voce de Christo che dice tornate in voi, che andate perduti, non è buono il camino per lo quale caminate, perché non si vá per quello al regno de cieli, tornano in se, et conoscendo, che vanno perdutem abbandonano il camino, che seguivano [...] Queste tali senteno incontinenti Christo che loro dice, Chi vorrà caminare per lo vero, et certo camino, neghi se stessa a pigli la croce sua sulle spalle, et seguami, imitandomi in ciò, che mi puote imitare.121

A few paragraphs later, it is Christ’s voice again that calls on the believer to follow the true path that will lead out of confusion to a state of peace and satisfaction, to which Giulia responds: “I absolutely wish to enter upon this way, it remains for you to take me by the hand, instructing me in those footsteps by which I believe you have walked.”122

A notable feature of the Alfabeto is its continual emphasis on private devotion over outward ceremony. Valdés attributes “excessive ceremonies,” “pernicious superstitions,” and “false worships” to the paths that Satan sets before people as the right paths.123 He counsels Giulia to first attend to the interior rather than to outward services and puts forth a self-directed, highly individualistic mode of meditation:

I do not wish you to take these small portions of time that I mention for these considerations superstitiously, assigning them one hour more than another, or one part of your house more than another, because I wish you to take them with freedom of spirit, at the hour that will be most agreeable to you, and in the part of the house that will satisfy you most [...] And you can already see that everything that I have told you so far, you can do

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121 Ibid., 287.
122 Ibid., 288. “Io determinatamente voglio entrare in questo camino, resta, che voi mi portiate per la mano, insegnandomi quelli passi, per le quali credo, che voi habbiate caminato.”
123 Ibid., 287. “Di qui nascono le soverchie cerimonie, nascono li pernitiose superstizioni, e nascono le false devotioni.”
without any worldly person hearing or noticing you. And you can also see that all this is of the kind [of activity] that no one can hinder or disturb you in, except only your own ill inclinations, forgetfulness, and negligence of God.

Non voglio, che pigliate superstitiosamente questi pochi tempi, ch’io dico per queste considerationi, assegnando loro più, che una hora, che un’altra, o una parte della casa vostra più, che una altra, perche voglio, che gli pigliate con libertà d’animo all’hora, che più v’aggraderà, e nella parte della casa vostra, che più vi sodisfarà [...] Et già vedete, che tutto quanto fin qui v’hò detto lo potrete fare senza che persona del mondo vi senta ne intenda. Et così anchora vedete, che tutto ciò è di qualità che nessuno lo vi puote impedire ne disturbare, se non solamente la militia vostra, la vostra dimenticanza e la trascuragine di Dio.124

Valdés advocates for “a private way by which you can go to God without being seen by the world.”125 Yet it is this very focus on interiority that leads Giulia to question her ability to follow it, saying “It rather appears to me so private that I find no difficulty in it greater than its privacy [...] because it is so inward that, if I do not find its direction, nor see it with my bodily sight, I do not know whether I can discover how to walk by it.”126 Giulia goes on to question Valdés on how she should conduct herself “in matters of outward devotion” – in mass, preaching, reading, prayer, fasts, confession, communion and alms – asking, for example, “And does it seem to you that I should hear mass every day?”127

This question and the ones that follow are suggestive of a general mistrust or ambivalence toward the efficacy of outward devotion in bringing one closer to God. Though scholarship often characterizes Valdés’ *Alfabeto* as evasive in its criticism of Church doctrine – that it denounces official ceremony only by leaving it out – it is rather

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124 Ibid., 330.
125 Ibid., 341. “uno camino secreto, per lo quale andiate à Dio senza essere veduta dal mondo.”
126 Ibid., 341. “Anzi mi pare tanto secreto, che in lui non ritruvo altra difficoltà maggiore, che il secreto [...] perché è tanto interiore, che come non gli trovo il verso, ne lo veggo con gli occhi del corpo, non sò se indovinerò à caminare per esso.”
127 Ibid., 346 and 348. “[...] diteme, come mi governerò nelle cose devote esteriori.” “Et parvi, ch’io debba udire messa ogni dì?”
the case that Valdés addresses these public displays of devotion in highly equivocal
terms.\textsuperscript{128} He advises Giulia to participate in traditional ceremony, but at the same time to
follow a more private, self-determined route. For instance, though he states that in order
for prayer to be efficacious “it should be private,” he does not outright reject outward
services, “because vocal prayer frequently kindles and elevates the mind to mental
prayer.”\textsuperscript{129} Likewise, “if the confessor be a person who feels and relishes spiritual
things,” says Valdés, “I wish you to disclose and display to him the affections that move,
incline and carry you on to offences and sins”; at the same time, one is not obligated to
confess to a priest, nor is one pardoned because he has confessed but because “God has
forgiven you, because you believe in Christ, love Christ, and have placed your hope in
Christ.”\textsuperscript{130}

There is a palpable tension in the \textit{Alfabeto} between inward spirituality and
outward conduct. It is felt both in Valdés’ advice to Giulia and in Giulia’s confusion as to
how this personal devotion would correspond to her outward and worldly behavior. The
debate on the merits of good works, as compared to the doctrine of justification by faith
alone, seems to inform the kinds of questions that Giulia asks and how Valdés answers
them. The dialogue is emblematic of a struggle to establish a personal relationship to God
that does not rely on the conventional outward signs of worship. It also stems from the

\textsuperscript{128} On Valdés’ evasion of discussing Church structure see for example Daniel A. Crews, \textit{Twilight of the
Renaissance: The Life of Juan de Valdés} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 105-6.
\textsuperscript{129} Valdés, “Alfabeto Christiano,” in \textit{Obras Completas}, 349 and 350. “Per queste parole c’insegna
Christo, che l’oratione nostra hà da essere secreta [...].” “perche la oratione vocale molte volte accende, et
inalza l’animo all’oratione mentale [...].”
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 353-4. “Et se ‘l confessore è persona, che senta, e gusti le cose spirituali, voglio che gli
appalesiate, e discoprirate gli affetti, che vi muovono, inclinano e portano alle offese e peccati [...]” “Ma
mirate, che non voglio, che pensiate che per cotesto, ve gli hà perdonato, perchè ve gli havete confessati,
purchè questo sarebbe attribuire a voi ciò, che non è vostro. Per ciò voglio, che pensiate, che ll’dio ve gli hà
perdonati, perchè credete in Christo, amate Christo, et havete collocato la speranza vostra in Christo [...].”
question of what that relationship would look like and how the believer would embark on it without the help of familiar Church teachings.

During Sebastiano’s meetings with Giulia Gonzaga in the early 1530s it is likely that such conversations about personal devotion and public conduct transpired between the two. It was a subject that touched on both their lives – the former’s invention of devotional works and the latter’s personal salvation were at stake – and that reflected the broader debate between reformers and defenders of catholic orthodoxy at this time about the respective role of faith and works in attaining salvation.\textsuperscript{131}

It is during these years that Sebastiano made his two subsequent works on slate on the subject of Christ bearing the cross. As mentioned earlier, they differ from his first version in the solid-black ground and absence of other figures, in the close-up format which puts even greater attention on Christ’s furrowed brow and the hand grasping the cross, and in Christ’s posture, now seeming to be more of a lean sideways than a step forward. In the following section, I propose that Sebastiano’s second and third versions of \textit{Christ Carrying the Cross} dispense with the very elements that might be taken to pertain to good works in order to explore the relationship between outward ceremony and interior faith. By doing so, the works imagine \textit{imitatio Christi} as something that is achieved not by means of good works, but rather by meditation on Christ’s countenance and his hidden, inner suffering.

\textsuperscript{131} In defense of the external practices that came to be associated with Roman Catholic identity, in his role as theological advisor, Cajetan wrote his treatise \textit{Faith and Works} for Pope Clement VII in 1532. In it he articulated a defense of works, working in addition to faith, as meritorious of eternal life and forgiveness of sins. This treatise was a direct response to Luther; the dedication explicitly states that its aim is “to refute the poisonous Lutheran views on faith and works.” See Cajetan, “Faith and Works, 1532,” 219-39.
4.8 Increasing Abstraction of Setting and Space

In introducing these changes, Sebastiano brings the Hermitage and small Prado Christ Carrying the Cross much closer to the models established in Venice by Bellini (1505-10) (Figure 239) and Vincenzo Catena (1520s) (Figure 240). The similarities to these works beg the question of whether it was Sebastiano’s renewed contact with Venice in 1528-9 that brought about the new focus on Christ close-up and set in isolation against a dark background. Yet, rather than positing a historical relationship between the works based purely on formal resemblances, it is worthwhile to consider the cultural and spiritual context that may have led Sebastiano to produce these paintings; though comparable, they remain quite distinct from those of Bellini and Catena, particularly in the frontal orientation of Christ and the withholding of his gaze.

One notable development of the 1520s and 30s in Italy was the increasing exploration of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, or *sola fide*, by those who did not consider their beliefs at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church.\(^{132}\) As the discussion above has shown, Gonzaga was greatly invested in an approach to God that dispensed with the centrality of good works and instead probed the possibilities of a more personal relationship to the divine. Vittoria Colonna and her circle of *spirituali*, who followed the teachings of Ochino and read the *Beneficio di Cristo*, were likewise in search of an alternative relationship to Christ, one defined largely by imagined personal participation and presence at Christ’s Passion, as well as by direct meditation on the Passion that was free of doctrinal complexity.\(^{133}\) And though the doctrine of *sola fide* was controversial, in the years before the Council of Trent opened, the distinction between

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\(^{132}\) Nagel, “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,” 649.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 662-3. See also D’Elia, “Drawing Christ’s Blood,” 100-103.
orthodox and reformist positions was difficult to define.\textsuperscript{134} Sebastiano’s encounter with both Gonzaga and Colonna happened in the early 1530s, as the dates of his portraits of them suggest, and would have likely colored his thoughts on his own work, which persistently focused on Christ.\textsuperscript{135}

It is worth noting that in his proofs of the Heidelberg Disputation theses (1518), Luther made sure to clarify that taking up the cross to imitate and follow Christ was not a “good work.”\textsuperscript{136} He stressed that the suffering experienced by the believer in taking up his own cross was not a penance that was performed to satisfy God’s justice or to reduce one’s time in purgatory. At stake, in the reformist stance, was a resistance to the notion that faith, or cross-bearing, was a human work that merited justification and that it was

\textsuperscript{134} See for example the Commentaries on Romans and Galatians by Marino Grimani, who also happened to be the patron of Sebastiano’s Budapest version of \textit{Christ Carrying the Cross}. For a discussion of these, see Marvin W. Anderson, “Luther's Sola Fide in Italy: 1542-1551” \textit{Church History} Vol. 38, No. 1 (March 1969): 25-42. The commentaries were published in Venice in 1541 and reveal the extent to which evangelical vocabulary and Pauline theology permeated even figures deep within the Roman Curia. Grimani’s writing is much more reticent than Cajetan’s about the role of works in being the proximate cause of salvation. Though unwilling to give up works subsequent to faith, Grimani uses the term “sola fide” frequently and makes the statement that man can be saved in no other way, ”but by the faith alone of Christ.” See however Calvillo, “Romanità and Grazia” for a more orthodox reading of the commentaries and Giulio Clovio’s frontispieces for Grimani, in which good works work in tandem with faith. For a discussion of the doctrinal uncertainty regarding \textit{sola fide}, see Elisabeth G. Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome and Reform (California: University of California Press, 1993), 268-9 and 294-6.

\textsuperscript{135} A relationship between the \textit{Christ Carrying the Cross} at the Borghese Gallery – executed by a follower of Sebastiano, though at times wrongly attributed to the artist himself – and the reformist spirituality and poetry of Vittoria Colonna, particularly its focus on the way of the cross, has been suggested by one scholar, Kristina Herrmann-Fiore. Yet her argument fails to go beyond the literal matching of verses to painting. See Kristina Herrmann-Fiore, “Sebastiano del Piombo e il Cristo portacroce della Galleria Borghese.” \textit{Storia dell’arte} n. 110 (2005): 33-74.

\textsuperscript{136} Ronald K. Rittgers, \textit{The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 121. See also Luther’s proof for Thesis 21, where loving works and loving the cross are made antithetical to one another, so that suffering under one’s cross should never become a work. Martin Luther, \textit{Luther's Works, Career of the Reformer}, Vol. 31, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Fortress Press, 1957), 53. “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified.”
anything but freely bestowed upon the believer. Thus it was reprehensible to attribute to man what was really God’s work. In response to the question of how works could merit some benefit from God, Cajetan stated that “meriting eternal life is less our own action than the action of Christ who is head on us and through us.”¹³⁷ The disagreement over how salvation was attained was intimately tied to questions about the relationship between the believer and God and whether the former played an active role in his or her own salvation. How and by whose action was the believer justified?

It is as if Sebastiano’s paintings seek to explore the distinction between cross bearing as a human work and as a stand in for imputed faith, with which the believer conforms to Christ. The second and third versions are no longer as emphatically about the bearing of the cross; they dispense with Simon, whose hands had previously been self-consciously revealed by having the cross lean sideways; Christ’s hold on the cross is opened up and his body rotated so that the effect of carrying is significantly lessened; finally, the crown of thorns is gone in the Prado work, thereby taking out the remaining reference to Christ’s suffering for man’s salvation. Where the first version conveys a message of exemplar action and invites the viewer to actively participate in the carrying of the cross, the latter versions seem to ask something quite different of the viewer – to contemplate Christ in a spaceless void, without having to enter the picture. In fact, Christ’s proximity to the foreground and his large, open sleeve bar any such entry from taking place. Rather than inciting proper outward behavior as a way to ensure salvation, the paintings focus on producing a physical and affective visual description of Christ.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ This parallels Vittoria Colonna’s poetry, such as the Pianto, which Nagel reads as an exploration of an “affective experience” of Christ’s Passion. Colonna is interested in the transformative effect of seeing and
Though few in number and mostly dating to after Sebastiano’s paintings, several contemporaneous Roman and Tuscan works also dispensed with good works in favor of a message of grace, interior conversion, and faith. In addition to his presentation drawings of the 1530s and 40s, discussed above, Michelangelo had produced a cartoon of *Noli me Tangere*, after which Pontormo had executed his painting (Figure 92), around 1531, for Vittoria Colonna. Though the painting was commissioned by Alfonso d’Avalos, he gave it to Colonna as a gift and it is very likely that the idea for the subject came from her. The work portrays Christ and the Magdalene in the very foreground, with Christ’s open tomb behind them. Conventionally shown at a remove and unable to touch Christ, the Magdalene here lunges forward toward him with her left arm extended forward, disappearing behind his body. The Magdalene’s desire for proximity and physical contact with Christ would have spoken to Colonna’s own identification with the saint and her dedication to a highly experiential form of devotion – Vittoria prized the redemptive efficacy of physical proximity to Christ. In making the Magdalene as prominent as the figure of Christ and in emphasizing the dynamism of her pose, Pontormo’s work stresses the power of conversion and faith over wrongful deeds. The idea of conversion likewise links this work to Colonna, for whom personal spiritual conversion was a vital step in reforming and renewing one’s relation to God.

Moreover, the index finger of Christ’s extended hand touches and even appears to press into the Magdalene’s left breast. Christian Kleinbub draws a connection between Christ’s unusual gesture and St. Augustine’s exegesis of the Noli me tangere with the feeling Christ’s closeness and the transmission of grace effected by this proximity. See Nagel, “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,” 662-3.

139 Barbara Agosti, “Vittoria Colonna e il culto della Maddalena (Tra Tiziano e Michelangelo)” in Vittoria Colonna e Michelangelo, ed. Pina Ragionieri (Firenze: Mandragora, 2005), 71-5, esp. 75.

140 See Nagel, “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,” 662-3 for a discussion of her poetry and interest in the transformative power of grace.
metaphor of Christ as Gardener, sowing the seed of faith in the heart.\textsuperscript{141} He shows Michelangelo and Colonna’s use of this metaphor in their poetry (drawing on Petrarch’s appropriation of it for the abject lover) in the form of a conversational address to God. In doing so, Kleinbub demonstrates the rhetoric of the Noli me tangere to be “one of direct address,” that is “a pictorial visualization of the author’s longing for spiritual insemination with divine grace, a private act that would result in flower and good fruit for the souls, a soul located explicitly in the heart, which is of itself barren.”\textsuperscript{142} The painting’s visualization of a direct imprinting of the divine image into the heart would have spoken to Colonna’s interest in the gift of divine grace and the immediacy and intimacy of this reception.

Pontormo’s lost S. Lorenzo frescoes (1546-56) in Florence, though executed after Sebastiano’s works and outside Rome, should also be mentioned. The drawing of \textit{Christ the Judge with the Creation of Eve} (Figure 241) is particularly noteworthy for deviating from standard iconography.\textsuperscript{143} Christ appears at center as benevolent judge, surrounded by angels, with Adam and Eve directly below him at his feet and God making the sign of benediction to Eve as he takes her hand. The message of forgiveness for one’s sin through faith – a gift given by Christ, who looms in glory over the first sinners – and of the salvific power of meditating of Christ’s image marks Pontormo’s drawing as a close parallel to Sebastiano’s own reflection on the role of images and of human works in bringing the believer into more direct contact with God.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{143} Vasari was appalled at the lack of order or clear meaning. See Vasari, \textit{Le Vite}, VI, 286-7.
\textsuperscript{144} Firpo, \textit{Gli affreschi di Pontormo}, 104-5.
Giulio Clovio’s four frontispieces for Marino Grimani’s Commentary on Romans and Galatians, an evolving text in two versions dating to c.1537 and c.1542, should be considered here both as a work made for the same man who obtained Sebastiano’s Budapest Christ Carrying the Cross and one that also touched on the subject of justification by faith alone. A recent study by Elena Calvillo shows Marino to have been deeply concerned with defending the authority of the Roman Church against the Lutheran attack, particularly his Lectures on Galatians published in 1535 and 1538, which broke most clearly with the Roman position on justification.145 In his 1542 Commentary on Galatians, Marino supports the necessity of good works in addition to faith and, as Calvillo points out, Clovio’s miniature in Paris of The Theological Virtues (Figure 242) depicts Hope, Charity (Love) and Faith together, working reciprocally (Clovio signals this by evoking the Three Graces in their bodily orientation), though with an emphasis on Charity at center.146 Calvillo further contends that by citing Raphael’s figures for his Hope and Charity, Clovio equates the Roman artistic cannon with religious orthodoxy.147

Given that Marino expressed support for the orthodox position on good works, how do we explain his acquisition, during this very period, of Sebastiano’s Budapest Christ Carrying the Cross? Given the paucity of information regarding the commission, it is difficult to say definitively how and under what circumstances Marino acquired Sebastiano’s work. One possible answer may be that Marino’s belief in the necessity of both faith and the cooperation of the individual through works was not at odds with the acquisition – in that either Marino did not perceive the work’s message running counter to his beliefs or that Sebastiano’s image of Christ bolstered and provided a spiritual

146 Ibid., 291.
147 Ibid., 292.
counterpart to Marino’s existing collection of religious paintings. Contrary to Calvillo, Marvin Anderson, for instance, argues that Marino’s commentaries reveal the extent to which evangelical vocabulary and Pauline theology permeated even figures deep within the Roman Curia.148 Marino’s writing is much more reticent, Anderson contends, than Cajetan’s about the role of works in being the proximate cause of salvation. Though unwilling to give up works subsequent to faith, Marino uses the term “sola fide” frequently and makes the statement that man can be saved in no other way, "but by the faith alone of Christ."149 It is thus likely that Sebastiano’s work played to Marino’s interest in the alliance of works and faith. It is also possible that Sebastiano’s work was a stylistically welcome addition to the collection, which contained a great number of Flemish and Northern Italian works, as well as drawings by Raphael and Michelangelo, inherited from his father Domenico Grimani.150

It should be said, however, that Sebastiano did consciously depart from the Roman style – from the models of Raphael and Michelangelo housed in the Vatican. The very resemblance between Sebastiano’s Christ Carrying the Cross and Michelangelo’s sculptural Risen Christ at S. Maria sopra Minerva (Figure 243), for instance, only acts to underscore the stylistic and conceptual distance between these works.151 It seems that Sebastiano was well aware of the comparison that would have been made between his work and Michelangelo’s and Raphael’s by viewers and that he welcomed it.

Sebastiano’s stylistic choices could not have been accidental since he borrowed from

148 Anderson, “Luther’s Sola Fide in Italy.” 25-42.
149 Grimani’s comment on Romans (5:1-2), cited in ibid., 29.
151 As already mentioned, Calì has noted that the common context for both these works were the frontispieces of the Imitatio Christi, where Christ stands alone with a cross or carries it with Simon of Cyrene behind him. See p.171, no.345 of this dissertation.
those very models, which he ultimately transformed, thereby signaling his distance from them. It is this reliance on but also distance from his models that marks the borrowings as intentional and calculated acts.

The discussion above shows that Sebastiano’s images of Christ Carrying the Cross were decidedly novel, both in how early the artist began to think about the efficacy of human agency in salvation and in employing the format of altarpiece and private devotional work to convey his message. The export of Sebastiano’s altarpieces and devotional works meant that patrons abroad purchased the works likely to be kept in their private chapels or palaces, as Vich had done. This move away from public fresco work, which Sebastiano took on more at the beginning of his career in Rome, parallels Michelangelo’s exploration of the workings of divine grace in the restricted context of his presentation drawings for Colonna.

4.9 Breaking the Picture Plane: Proximate Hands and Distant Eyes

As mentioned before, in his Prado Christ Carrying the Cross and even more so in the three versions to come on the same subject, Sebastiano moves towards a more direct, sensorial relationship to Christ – one that implicates the viewer’s own body and sense of sight and touch – as compared to the Borgherini chapel, which stresses books and intercessory figures as a means to approach the divine. In implicating these senses, however, the paintings do not satisfy both equally as one might expect; instead Christ fails to reciprocate the viewer’s desiring gaze. How do we explain Christ’s withdrawn gaze, which seems to undermine the paintings’ overall effect of proximity to Christ?

The question is most pertinent to the small Prado and Hermitage versions on slate (Figure 12 and Figure 1), where Christ’s downcast face seems less the result of carrying the burden of the cross, and more of an unfocused, reflective gaze down and to the side.
Christ’s lighter grip on the cross further heightens the indeterminacy of his pose and the reason for why he leans off to the side. This lowered gaze and the absence of the crown of thorns in the last two versions underscores the psychological depth of Christ’s suffering and refocuses away from external markers of pain.

This increasingly contemplative and introspective dimension to Sebastiano’s *Christ Carrying the Cross* is significant in light of early Cinquecento debate on the nature of Christ’s suffering during the Passion – whether it was bodily or psychological – and, in turn, whether the believer could partake of the unique suffering of the divine Christ.152 At this time, reformers north of the Alps were challenging the traditional emphasis on the imitation of Christ by means of reenactment of his external, bodily suffering.153 Erasmus, for example, advocated for a religion of inwardness, compared to the external and material popular religion of the Roman Church.154 Luther likewise criticized those who responded with compassion to Christ’s suffering instead of weeping for their own sinfulness. For him meditation on the Passion had to do with the believer’s inner spiritual transformation and not with ritual re-enactments of Christ’s pain.155 Closer to when Sebastiano had painted his later versions of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Calvin posited a distinction between Christ’s bodily and mental pain in his *Institutes of the Christian*

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152 See Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 31-88 for Early Modern English and German discourses on pain and the distinction between bodily and psychological pain that was made with respect to Christ’s passion. See also Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering* for a study of the reformation and changing notions of suffering with respect to imitation of Christ.
154 Ibid., 53-4.
155 Ibid., 54-5.
Religion (1536) and stressed the greater significance of his psychological suffering for the salvation of the soul.¹⁵⁶

Sebastiano’s paintings exhibit an ambivalence regarding Christ’s suffering as physical and visible or that an image can give full access to it. On one hand, Sebastiano’s Hermitage Christ shows Christ’s furrowed brow, open mouth, and crown of thorns, with the thorns clearly piercing his skin. Likewise, the Budapest Christ has visibly red eyes, with an aged countenance and a graying beard compared to the former work. All these elements suggest the visibility of his bodily suffering. On the other hand, his averted and downcast eyes – particularly in the small Prado and Hermitage versions – deny the viewer a clear view and understanding of Christ’s pain. By averting his eyes, Christ’s pain remains private, interior, and hidden from the believer. Moreover, the absence of prominent blood and the disappearance of the crown from the later versions further underscore that Christ’s pain is self-generated – a kind of mental agony caused by human sin rather than whips, thorns, or nails.

In this way, Sebastiano’s later versions of Christ Carrying the Cross no longer involve the worshipper primarily through imitation of external markers of suffering, but rather through the contemplation of Christ’s psychological agony and its inaccessibility to corporeal sight. His suffering is revealed and withheld at the same time. It is the invitation to meditate on Christ’s psychological portrait and his not-fully-accessible suffering that make Sebastiano’s second and third variations on the subject continuous with his earlier pictorial interests. Sebastiano had tackled the question of divine accessibility in his previous works; the subtle shifts exhibited in these paintings indicate a complex and changing conception of personal identification – of imitatio Christi – and of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 56-7.
what exactly constituted the object of the viewer’s sustained meditation. By locating Christ’s suffering outside of imitable human action in his small Prado and Hermitage versions, Sebastiano shifts the meaning of Christ’s Passion away from experiential identification with his body to an intense concentration on his inner-life.

In doing so, Sebastiano’s project once again aligns with Lotto’s – in that the latter also transformed his self-flagellating St. Jerome into one who imitates Christ’s state of being on the cross rather than his physical pain. Both artists’ works are concerned with the salvation of the soul and suggest that it is more surely achieved through a kind of grafting of oneself onto Christ – as modeled by Lotto’s *Penitent St. Jerome* – in order to conform to Christ in soul rather than in body.

4.10 The Image of Christ: Copies, Originals and Images Made Without Human Hand

Sometime after presenting Giulia with the *Alfabeto*, Juan de Valdés sent her his translations and commentaries on the Romans and the first Epistle to the Corinthians. In his preface to these, he continues a theme that runs deeply throughout the *Alfabeto* – conformity to the “image and likeness” of Christ – but now Valdés uses a pictorial metaphor:

Here it must be understood that, had the Corinthians been spiritual, [St. Paul] would not have said to them: “Imitate me, draw your portrait from that which I have drawn of Christ,” but he would have said to them, as he said to the Ephesians who were spiritual: “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children; endeavor to recover the image and likeness of God; *drawing it not from any man, but from God himself.*” [...] You see here that in counseling you to draw the picture of the very image of Christ and of the very image of God, I tell you no new or unpracticed thing [...]” [my italics].

157 The English translation is in part taken from Benjamin B. Wiffen, *Alfabeto Cristiano, which teaches the true way to acquire the light of the Holy Spirit. From the Italian of 1546; with a notice of Juan de Valdés and Giulia Gonzaga* (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1861), 218.
Valdés aconseja que pretendáis sacar retrato de la propia imagen de Cristo, I de la propia imagen de Dios, no os digo cosa nueva, ni no platicada.158

Valdés emphasizes the need to conform to Christ’s image and likeness not through man-made, intermediary portraits, but by looking directly to God.159 His criticism of relying on derivative, secondary images of God and his insistence on bypassing intermediary portrayals of God may help us understand an unusual detail found in Sebastiano’s large Prado and Budapest versions of *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Figs. 1 and 4) – the prominent, round shadow cast by Christ’s face onto the cross. I suggest that the cast shadow is meant to be read as an amorphous imprint of Christ’s face onto the object’s surface – something that would have evoked for viewers the archetypal image made without human hand, the Veronica cloth produced on the way to Calvary as Christ bore the cross, and at the same time, would have signaled the inadequacy of man-made replicas. The imprint on the cross remains an indistinct blur, a mere shadow of Christ’s face, suggesting, like Valdés’ text does, that any picture of God produced by the painter (or the writer in Valdés’ case) can never bring one as close to Christ as drawing the picture directly from him.

Sebastiano’s painting is self-conscious of being an imperfect, man-made image of God and does not lay claim to being an original picture of God. Like Valdés, Sebastiano

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158 Juan de Valdés, *La Epístola de san Pablo a los Romanos: i, la I. a los Corintios* (Madrid: Impr. de Alegria, 1856), IX.

159 For a discussion of Valdés’ privileging of a theological system defined by interiority, where the act of contemplation is a personal process free of secondary interpretations that are taken to be derivative and an impediment to true faith, see Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics*, 43.
seems to counsel his viewer to draw on the image to aid in his *imitatio Christi*, but also to remember the limitations of the image in attaining union with God. That Sebastiano was self-consciously deliberating the differences between replicas and originals has been demonstrated in a recent article by Calvillo.⁶⁰ In his Úbeda Pietà (Fig. 44), Sebastiano signals to the viewer a network of distances between the real Veronica found in Rome, its presentation in the painting, and his own rendition of Christ’s face.⁶¹ He does so by means of the slate support, which, Calvillo argues, would have recalled the touchstone by which forgeries of gold were detected and by the painting’s distance from its origins in Michelangelo’s drawing.⁶² In his Budapest *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Sebastiano even more emphatically foregrounds the slate support, leaving it an unpainted background, and similarly juxtaposes the face of Christ against a foreshortened “imprint” of it.

The implied momentariness of the shadow cast onto the brightly-lit, narrow facet of the cross underscores another aspect of Sebastiano’s painting – that it, like a shadow, is the product of color (light) applied to a surface.⁶³ This is not to say that Sebastiano is suggesting his image to be a transient one; Christ’s forward stoop in this undefined space feels much more like perpetuated rather than transient action. Instead, he appears to be highlighting the key role that color plays in his image. The use of light and shadow in Sebastiano’s stark definition of Christ’s highly foreshortened figure, when viewed against the visibly matte slate support that resists the reflection of light, begs the question of how

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⁶¹ Ibid., 480-2.
⁶² Ibid., 486-7.
such a juxtaposition and the differentiated treatment of the picture surface ought to be understood.

The use of light and dark to model the figure, on one hand, and the categorical exclusion of it from the background on the other, calls to mind the *paragone* between painting and sculpture. As Leonardo wrote in his notebooks, in sculpture, it was natural light itself that defined the surfaces, whereas in painting, light was artificially feigned by the painter.\textsuperscript{164} By having Christ seemingly step forward out of a hard, unpainted slate surface, Sebastiano reminds his viewer of the artist’s hand in constructing the fictive image, but also of the material distinction between paint and stone. Though the monochrome, largely-grey color palette unites figure and background, suggesting that the former partakes in the material of the latter, Sebastiano’s Christ, at the same time, signals his made-ness (or painted-ness) with respect to the stone support and thereby distinguishes himself as different from it. This is most evident in Christ’s falling drapery on the right where Sebastiano exploits the existing darkness of the stone support to create the illusion of shadows within the folds and uses paint to add only the highlights. In this way, the painting calls attention to how it is made – by *adding* color to a surface. Like the shadow on the cross’ facet directly opposite Christ’s face, the figure of Christ asks to be

\textsuperscript{164} Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo On Painting: An Anthology of Writings*, eds. Martin Kemp, and Margaret Walker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 42-44. Leonardo writes that “sculpture is nothing other than it appears to be [...] clothed in shaded and illuminated surfaces as are other natural objects; and this art is produced by two masters, namely nature and man, but the work of nature is the greater. If she did not render assistance to the work with shadows of greater or lesser darkness and lights of greater or lesser brightness, the whole undertaking would exhibit a color of uniform lightness and darkness, like a flat surface.” And elsewhere: “In the first place sculpture requires a certain light, that is from above, a picture carries everywhere with it its own light and shade. Thus sculpture owes its importance to light and shade, and the sculptor is aided in this by the nature, of the relief which is inherent in it, while the painter whose art expresses the accidental aspects of nature, places his effects in the spots where nature must necessarily produce them.” See Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, Complete*, trans. Jean Paul Richter (Public Domain Books, 2004), 655.
seen as a projection of light and color onto a surface; but unlike the shadow, it is a man-made image.

Sebastiano further signals that this is a man-made image by playing with and undermining the expected naturalism of painted surfaces and textures. The apparent stoniness or marmoreal quality—both in color and surface quality—of the sleeves and folds of drapery, as well as of Christ’s bony fingers, stands in marked contrast to the sensuousness of Christ’s hair, beard and overall facial expression where the brow, eyelids and mouth are physically distorted with anguish. Moreover, the multiple, smooth facets of the cross reinforce once more for the viewer the presence of the stone support and its flatness as a grey backdrop.

These elements highlight the fictiveness of the image—shaped by the hand of the artist—and its difference from the Veronica cloth, an image made without human hand and one that was often depicted floating above its material support. The authority of the Veronica cloth as a divine image was frequently conveyed by this resistance to earthly materiality. In cases where the distinction between the face of Christ and the cloth support breaks down—as in Filippino Lippi’s Veronica cloth (Figure 244) in *St. Philip Exorcizing the Demon from the Temple of Mars*, where Christ’s face is subsumed by the cloth’s folds—it has been provocatively suggested that the artist was evoking an alternative type of image, something in between idol and icon, as a way to reflect on the nature of man-made images. Here, by illusionistically and literally fusing the divine image and its support, Sebastiano calls attention to the materiality of his image and

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165 See Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 89-94
alludes to the ways in which it is unlike the divine image, which ought to transcend its material conditions.

Notably, when contemporaries praised Sebastiano for having invented a technique of working on slate that “petrified color” so as to “make painting eternal,” they were foregrounding the artist’s and their own fascination with the materiality of stone and paint.167 By bringing paint closer to the durability and permanence of stone (metaphorically at least, for the slate support was easily breakable as contemporaries attest), particularly in an image of Christ, Sebastiano put forth a metaphor about the eternity of his colors and of the divine as image. Notably, the eternity of his colors is brought about by the material support rather than by recourse to the authority of Christ as prototype or the authority of the Veronica cloth.

Sebastiano’s series of Christ Carrying the Cross pushes for a direct and intimate encounter with God. The works bring Christ closer to the viewer by removing mediating figures and barriers, and by extending his arms forward as if the cross could be grasped on our side of the picture plane. They also reflect on what it means to imitate and conform to Christ – whether this entails human works, as modeled by Simon of Cyrene, or meditation on Christ’s psychological and hidden suffering. At the same time, when seen in context of Valdés’ reprimand against using man-made images to try to truly understand God, Sebastiano’s Budapest Christ Carrying the Cross shows itself to be a mere shadow of Christ’s face. It suggests, like Valdés’ text does, that any man-made picture of God can never bring one as close to Christ as drawing the picture directly from

167 For the proposal that Titian and, to a lesser degree, Sebastiano sought to stress the materiality and objecthood of their paintings on slate by means of the stone support see Christopher Nygren, “Vibrant Icons: Titian's Art and the Tradition of Christian Image-Making” (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2011), 300-5.
him. It seems that in desiring a more direct, unmediated encounter with God, Sebastiano came to the conclusion that his images would ultimately fail and sought to build in a material distinction between the man-made and divine image.

Sebastiano’s changing position across his works on the mediated nature of divine knowledge and access is intriguing both for the artist’s flexibility in thought and in the subtlety and fluidity with which his ideas transform, all the while coming back to the same models — both his own and Michelangelo’s. Sebastiano’s reflection on the viewer’s proximity and distance to the divine begins in his Viterbo Pietà and continues through his Borgherini chapel program to his Christ Carrying the Cross series. His changing conception of the relationship between the believer and God and his reflection on the gap between the two — what engenders it, whether it can be bridged, and how — is continually informed by the ongoing and shifting debate of the early Cinquecento on the function of texts and rituals in shaping the believer’s relation to the divine.
Chapter Five. The Holy Face and the Face of Art in the Úbeda Pietà

In 1533, Ferrante Gonzaga requested that Sebastiano complete a painting, which he planned to present to Charles V’s chancellor, Francisco de los Cobos, as a gift to adorn the latter’s funeral chapel. The chapel was initially planned for the Andalusian church of San Tomás in Úbeda – from which Sebastiano’s Úbeda Pietà (Figure 10) gets its name – but was instead established in the newly erected church of El Salvador in the same city.¹ The painting was finished no earlier than 1539, and did not arrive in Spain until 1540.²

The circumstances of the commission are perhaps most notable for the negotiation that transpired between Sebastiano and his patron via Gonzaga’s agent, Nino Sernini, on the subject matter of the work. In a letter dating to June 1533, Sernini reports Sebastiano’s proposal to paint:

Our Lady that has her dead Son in her arms in the manner of the one of the Fever [Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà], which the Spaniards, to appear good Christians and devotees, are usually fond of these pious things; or instead he might want Our beautiful Lady, with the Son in her arms and a St. John the Baptist who fools around with him a little as is usually painted most of the time.³

Una nostra donna ch’avesse il figliol’morto in braccio a guisa di quella dela febre, il che gli spagnuoli per parer buoni cristiani et divoti sogliono amare questi (sic) cose pietose o pur vuole una nostra donna bella, con figliuolo in braccio, et un San Giovani battista che faccia seco un poco di moreschina come il piu delle volte si sogliono dipingere.⁴

It is apparent that Sebastiano chose the former as the subject of his painting and while scholarship has frequently remarked on Sebastiano’s use of the Casa Buonarroti Study of

² Roberto Contini, “Úbeda Pietà” in Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, 240.
³ I would like to thank Danilo Piana and Stephen Campbell for their help with the translation of “moreschina.”
a Male Torso and the Louvre Study of a Torso by Michelangelo as models (Figure 76 and Figure 75) – the latter drawing is thought to have lain around the artist’s studio for a while – little has been made of Sebastiano’s remarkable use of Michelangelo’s sculpture in St. Peter’s (Figure 148) as a point of inspiration.\(^5\) Even more, few have noted that despite the artist’s explicit intention to ground his invention in Michelangelo’s, the final work looks decidedly different from the model that Sebastiano promises his patron his work will resemble. The Virgin and Christ have been separated from one another, the Virgin now looks away holding two contact relics from her son’s Passion, and additional figures have been added.

Even the differences between painting and drawing have led to some highly disparaging conclusions about Sebastiano’s artistic abilities. As Hirst writes,

> Yet even on this relatively modest scale, how much has been lost between drawing and painting. The dense plasticity of the chalk modelling scarcely features in the painting [...] The Venetian may even have altered Michelangelo’s invention by adding figures the latter never intended.\(^6\)

What has not been considered is the possibility that Sebastiano’s transformation of Michelangelo’s sculpture and drawing was very much intentional and carried meaning – not just for the artist, but for the viewer as well. In fact, I propose that it was the public nature of the St. Peter’s Pietà that allowed Sebastiano to stage a comparison between his work and Michelangelo’s, and between his theological message and that of his partner. It is on this point that I disagree with Hirst, who contends that

> [the Pietà’s] greatest interest lies in the fact that it was the last product of the partnership to appear; the “amicitia individuata e singulare” which had

\(^6\) Hirst, Sebastiano del Piombo, 131-2.
been publically proclaimed with one Pietà, now, twenty years later, ended in conditions of secrecy with another.\textsuperscript{7} To suggest that this last product of their partnership was made in secrecy, based solely on Vasari’s silence about the commission, is to assume that Sebastiano’s borrowing was not evident to viewers and that Sebastiano became increasingly dissatisfied with his work’s link to Michelangelo that he himself had established.\textsuperscript{8}

In this chapter, I investigate the significance behind Sebastiano’s simultaneous borrowing and departure from the Michelangelo prototype – and the ways in which the painting creates new meaning. The work is remarkable both for its unusual iconography, which conflates the iconography of the Pietà and the Man of Sorrows, and for how it treats the subject. The striking juxtaposition of the nails and ointment jar, the Veronica cloth turned so that the viewer can scarcely see the Holy Face, and the sensuous face and body of the dead Christ, taken from Michelangelo’s drawing, raises questions regarding Sebastiano’s reflection on the power of mimesis and the efficacy of images and material objects as substitutes for divine presence. This chapter explores how Sebastiano conceptualizes the relationship between man-made images, relics, and Christ’s body in his Úbeda Pietà; I contend that the Virgin and dead Christ, the subject of both his first and last joint endeavor with Michelangelo, is where the artist seems most compelled to reflect overtly on his art making and its ability to convey divine presence.

\textbf{5.1 The Funerary Altar of Francisco de los Cobos and Devotion to Relics}

To consider, for a moment, that Sebastiano’s altarpiece would have furnished the funerary altar of Francisco de los Cobos and that its depiction of relics would have been

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{8} See ibid., 128 for Hirst’s suggestion that Vasari’s silence on the Ubeda Pietà collaboration meant that he did not know about it because Sebastiano was becoming more secretive and reticent about it.
augmented by the real liturgical items displayed on the altar is to appreciate the extent of Sebastiano’s reflection on the relationship between such holy objects and the body of Christ. We know that in 1541, in continuing preparations for his altar in the chapel of San Salvador, Cobos entered into contract with a silversmith, commissioning him to make a monstrance, two partly gold-plated chalices, an altar cross, and candelabra. Though post-dating the making of the painting, it is not unlikely that Sebastiano expected such items to adorn the altar, as they typically did. The resulting effect would have been the extension of the triangulation formed by the painted ointment jar, nails, and Veronica cloth around Christ into the real space of the altar. The draped white cloth under and around Christ would have further emphasized the shared space of the altar table and the painted field. The purchase of a monstrance and chalices indicate that Cobos intended to hold Mass at this altar and probably to have Mass said for him after his death, while the cross would have acted as yet another representation of Christ’s body.

We can imagine that Sebastiano’s painting was meant to reinforce the function and efficacy of these liturgical objects, making explicit visually the relationship between the Host and Christ’s body, to which the worshipper sought proximity. By physically drawing a comparison between contact relics of the Passion and the liturgical objects on the altar table, the painting posits a parallel between different kinds of representations of God. The linking of relics with these holy objects, some of which – like the Host – were highly abstract forms of representations of the divine (worshippers were asked to

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10 The Veronica had long been associated with the Eucharist because it was considered to stand for the whole of Christ’s body by the principle of synecdoche. See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 333-7. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 127 for a discussion of the way worshippers conflated images, relics, and the Eucharist and revered them in similar ways, accompanying them with incense and candles.
overlook what their eyes told them and believe that the Host became Christ’s body),
consolidated the connection between objects that had touched Christ’s body and those
that were meant to be it.\textsuperscript{11}

The devotion that Cobos held toward relics is evident in his treasured possession
of four heads of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, along with a cedula that confirmed their
authenticity as relics, which he housed in the same chapel in Úbeda as Sebastiano’s
painting.\textsuperscript{12} To this can be added his visit to the local Veronica relic in Jaén (today still a
revered relic in the Capilla Mayor of the Cathedral) on the Good Friday of 1525 at the
onset of the construction of another chapel - his Chapel of the Conception of our Lady at
San Tomás.\textsuperscript{13} It is perhaps no surprise then that Sebastiano catered to his patron’s
devotion to relics.

At the same time, as will be shown in the sections that follow, this kind of
assemblage of holy objects around Christ’s body – inspired by the original context of
Michelangelo’s Pietà – raises questions about relationship of such material
manifestations to the divine. How did they bring one closer to God? Where was devotion
ought to be directed? And by what means was the worshipper raised beyond the visible to
the divine and immaterial? On one hand, having been asked to make a painting that
presumably should have affirmed the cult of relics in keeping with Cobos’ values and his
treasured possession of a relic in the very same chapel, Sebastiano makes a concerted
effort to adhere to this in his work. On the other hand, even as he tries to find new
strategies to do this, it appears that his need to counterbalance the materiality of such

\textsuperscript{11} For the problematic abstractness of the host as signifier of Christ’s body see Sarah Blick and Laura
\textsuperscript{12} Keniston, \textit{Francisco de los Cobos}, 67. The relic was acquired in Cologne on June 9, 1521 from Charles
V, though its current location is unknown.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 90.
devotion results in a painting that is strangely unresolved in the message it communicates. By giving near equal prominence to non-image based devotion, it will be shown that ultimately the painting equivocates on, as much as it reinforces, the complex relationship between relics that once touched Christ’s body, the ceremonial objects that were believed to become it in the viewer’s present, Christ’s historic body, and his now immaterial presence in heaven.

In proposing this, I wish to complicate Claudia Cieri Via and Miguel Falomir’s recent interpretations of the painting’s message as an unambiguous endorsement of the cult of relics. The presence of relics like the Veronica, the nails of the crucifixion, and the Magdalene’s ointment jar does not in itself constitute a firm espousal of relics as objects of devotion in the face of reformist attacks, as Via contends. It is the way in which they are portrayed that should inform our understanding of Sebastiano’s contribution to the debate on the cult of relics. Nor do I completely follow Falomir’s take on the painting as “a sort of anti-protestant statement that underscores the mediating role of saints (St. John and the Magdalene) and the value of relics: the nails of the cross and the Veronica cloth, which the Virgin displays so prominently.” (“una sorta di perorazione antiprotestante che sottolinea il ruolo mediatore dei santi (san Giovanni e la Maddalena) e il valore delle reliquie: i chiodi della croce e il panno della Veronica che tanto ostensibilmente esibisce la Vergine.”) While the notion of mediation will be important for my reading of the work, I would not go so far as to call the painting anti-protestant.

15 Falomir, "Dono italiano,” 17.
Such a position assumes that the cult of relics in the Catholic world was not subject to its own set of questions and concerns.

5.2 Transforming Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà: Substitutes for the Body of Christ

What did it mean for Sebastiano to promise the patron to take Michelangelo as his model, and deliver this painting instead? I will first examine the physical context in which Michelangelo’s Pietà was located when Sebastiano decided to make it his point of departure and then begin to offer an explanation of the changes that Sebastiano introduces to the sculpture.

Michelangelo’s Pietà was originally commissioned by the French Cardinal Jean de Belhères Lagraulas for the chapel of Santa Petronilla – a rotunda with an octagonal interior belonging to the King of France – in Old St. Peter’s, where the sculpture first stood as a funerary monument in one of its eight niches. Sometime before 1520, it was relocated to S. Maria della Febbre as construction was beginning on the New St. Peter’s, which replaced the former church. There is some confusion in early sources as to the new location since two different locations bore that name – the eastern rotunda of Sant’Andrea that was Santa Petronilla’s twin, originally dedicated to St. Andrew and later renamed to S. Maria della Febbre due to the thaumaturgic image housed there (Figure 245), and the Secretarium of Old St. Peter’s, a rectangular chapel at the south east corner of the nave, which was also known as S. Maria della Febbre because the image had been transferred there either under Pope Julius II or Sixtus IV.16

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According to Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, who examined the early sources and found the S. Luigi documents from 1524 to be the earliest clear confirmation of the sculpture’s relocation, the Secretarium was indeed the correct new location of the *Pietà*.\(^\text{17}\) It was installed on the first altar to the left of the entrance. Severed from its original association with the French monarchy in Santa Petronilla, the sculpture maintained its funerary function as several people were buried at its base. And though masses were continued to be said there for the cardinal’s soul, contemporaries like Varchi and Vasari misidentified the name of the patron.\(^\text{18}\)

It is by this new location that Sebastiano refers to Michelangelo’s work according to Sernini’s letter of 1533 – offering to base his painting on the Virgin and dead Christ “di quella dela febre.” The mention of the location, the chapel itself, is significant. During the sculpture’s temporary residence there, it would have shared the chapel space with the fourteenth-century, miracle-working Marian icon that had been moved to the chapel’s high altar and after which the chapel takes its name. On a broader scale, beyond the walls of the chapel, St. Peter’s housed the Veronica – a fact that would not have been lost on viewers because of the relatively recent Sack of Rome during which the relic had been

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 227. These documents, specifically ASL, Registro 2, folio 8 recto and verso and ASL, Cartone 9, foglio B, are published on p.246-47. The relevant passages read: “Dicta imago propter novam constructionem seu fabricam dicte Basilice fuit translata de loco ubi posita feurat ad cappellam eiusdem beate Virginis Marie de Febribus nuncupatam sitam prope porticum et ante valvas eiusdem Basilice in parte tendens versus cimiterium quo Campum Sanctum vocant. Et ad altare ubi reposita est a pluribus annis citra cappellania predicta in divinis deserviri solita est prout de presenti anno 1524 deservitur per Dominum Zaccheriam presbiterum [..."] and “Do notarsi che la detta cappellania, osia cappella presentemente nell’anno 1525 è donde da prima, siccome l’a attualmente, fu trasferta alla cappella della Madonna SS.ma delle Feb[br]i così chiamata che rimane poste al portico dinanzi alle porte della basilica Vaticana e l’altare della cappellania del Card[inale] S. Dionisio è quegli in cui osservarvi quella grande, e singolarissima scultura in marmo [..."]

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 227.
looted and then purportedly rediscovered and put back in its rightful place perhaps as early as 1533 (coinciding with the commission of the *Pietà*).  

It appears then that Sebastiano responds not just to Michelangelo’s sculpture, but also to its physical context. The presence of the miracle-working Marian icon and the newly-returned Veronica cloth housed in the same church seem to have spurred Sebastiano to think about relics and images – which feature prominently in his painting – and what they grant of God’s presence to worshippers, as this chapter will show. Moreover, the clear acknowledgment but also the transformation of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* in the Úbeda *Pietà* is indicative of Sebastiano’s reworking of a famous Roman work to convey a very different message about material devotion and its capacity to conjure God’s presence.

To begin with, like in Michelangelo’s sculpture, the heavily-cloaked torso of Sebastiano’s Virgin rises above Christ’s semi-nude body. His head lolls back and to the side, exposing his neck and allowing his long hair to cascade down his shoulder. The poses of both figures evoke the original sculpture – from the Virgin’s open arms, with her right hand clasped and her left opened up gently with palm facing up, to Christ’s loosely-arranged limbs, which nearly echo those of Michelangelo’s Christ despite the fact that the latter is in a reclining rather than upright position. The wounds are faintly visible on both bodies, though Sebastiano even more conspicuously brings both hands forward to the bottom edge of the painting as if to present the stigmata to the viewer – Christ’s right

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19 Calvillo, “Romanità and Grazia,” 491.
hand no longer grasps a fold of the Virgin’s mantle as it does in the St. Peter’s Pietà, but rests firmly on the draped surface, with index finger bent supporting the hand.

Yet despite the many similarities between the two works, differences abound the longer one looks. As in the first Pietà Sebastiano had painted in Viterbo with Michelangelo’s contribution, he separates Christ from the Virgin. Christ no longer sinks into the Virgin’s heavy mantle nor is held by her. Rather, he is separated and pushed forward by a support that resembles an architectural barrier. Christ appears set off within this architectonic space, with the Virgin, Mary Magdalene and St. John the Evangelist in turn isolated from him.  

Neither does the Virgin look down at Christ’s body as she does in the St. Peter’s Pietà, where she grasps Christ with one hand and presents him with the other. Oddly, she makes no contact with him and does not seem to acknowledge his presence in any way. The Virgin’s attention is fully diverted to the cloth in her open hand, on which appears an imprint of Christ’s face, but one that is difficult to make out given the extreme foreshortening of the cloth. Crucially, the painting is not foremost a presentation of Christ’s body, but also of his image. Yet even the latter does not seem to be given to us without certain qualification – an admonition about the relationship between images and their prototypes – since the viewer is denied a clear view of the Veronica.

21 Mary Magdalene can be identified both by her ointment jar, next to Christ’s right elbow, and her clasped hands – which is how Sebastiano depicts her in his Hermitage Lamentation. St. John typically accompanies the Magdalene in Man of Sorrows iconography. For a corroboration of these identifications, see Strinati et al., Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547, 344 and Elena Calvillo, “Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals: Lucretian Metaphor, Painting on Stone, and the Problem of Originality in Michelangelo’s Rome” Renaissance Quarterly 66, No. 2 (2013): 482.
Indeed, there is something deeply disturbing and perhaps tragic about holding up the Veronica next to Christ’s deathly face.\textsuperscript{22} It juxtaposes and compares Christ’s extinguished humanity to the contact relic, a physical object which persists beyond his life on earth and continues to be venerated by Christians as charged with his original image and presence. Yet the Úbeda Pietà seems to convey something much less optimistic about the kind of access to divinity that such objects give to their worshippers. On the one hand, Sebastiano appears to affirm that the Veronica bears a relationship to Christ’s divine presence, by virtue of its nearness to his body and the frontal, open-eyed face that appears imprinted on it. The imprinted face can be said to be more “alive” and eternal than the face of the dead Christ. On the other hand, the face on the Veronica is distorted by perspective – as Christ’s is foreshortened by the backward roll of his head – and the viewer has no easy access to it. The authority conveyed by its usual frontality has been subtly undermined.

The Veronica is, in fact, part of a larger set of signs of the Passion surrounding Christ’s body, which includes the nails held by Mary Magdalene and the vase below her, which Claudia Cieri Via has suggested to be a reference to the ointment jar that the Magdalene brought to Christ’s tomb.\textsuperscript{23} Felipe Pereda has considered the significance of these signs with respect to so-called “Spanish taste,” that is, the Italian perception of the Spanish devout style and the perceived piousness of Spanish painting as a kind of overcompensation for a lapse in sincere devotion.\textsuperscript{24} Pereda persuasively shows that Sebastiano equivocated in his depiction of the signs of the Passion – giving them a

\textsuperscript{22} See, however, Felipe Pereda, “\textit{Ad modum Hispaniae:} simulating devotion in Renaissance Rome,” paper presented at Hypocrisy and Dissimulation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem, Israel, June 6-8, 2012 for a different reading of the cloth as the sudarium.
\textsuperscript{24} Pereda, “\textit{Ad modum Hispaniae}.”
prominent place in the image to cater to Spanish devout taste, on one hand, yet revising his work as he went to diminish their prominence, on the other, for fear that his patron would be suspected of insincere devotion. The latter was possible given the religious climate, where suspicion of moral hypocrisy – that is, a discrepancy between public forms of behavior and the private thoughts they pretended to signify – was strong.\(^{25}\)

Sebastiano’s revision of the nails is evident from an analysis of the underdrawing. As Pereda notes, reflectography shows that the composition changed little during the painting process, except for the nails in the Virgin’s hand: these were originally noticeably longer than they are in the final painting, suggesting that Sebastiano was struggling “to find a balance between two almost incompatible requirements.”\(^{26}\) That is, between the display of visible signs of devotion and counteracting possible criticism of his patron’s devotional insincerity – of a “simulated” piety masked by outward signs of devotion which would have amounted to hypocrisy. The signs of the Passion are thus highly charged and contentious elements of the work, as Sebastiano aims to circumvent the possible charge of hypocrisy for his patron. As Pereda puts it, Sebastiano “struggled to meet the requirements of his patron, or what it was thought his patron would have liked, while at the same carefully lessening what would have exposed him to moral criticism.”\(^{27}\)

I wish to build on Pereda’s important observation, putting aside for the moment the way that Sebastiano catered to the imagined Spanish viewer, and to focus on how the presence of these Passion signs affects the way the image works as a whole, particularly with respect to their relation to Christ’s body. The signs of the Passion – the nails,

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) Ibid.
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
ointment jar, and Veronica cloth – are puzzling given that the subject appears to be a Pietà. In Italian Pietà iconography signs of the Passion are uncommon, and the presence of the Veronica among them is particularly unusual, thus requiring further explanation. The prominent display of these signs, taken together with the fact that no single figure looks at Christ (all appear turned away in introspective states), creates a highly unusual configuration around his body. Neither the Virgin nor Mary Magdalene or St. John seem to play their usual roles; no one weeps over Christ’s body and the very presence of the latter two is unconventional.

In fact, the composition comes closer to certain Northern works such as Hans Memling’s *Virgin Holding the Man of Sorrows* (1475 or 1479) (Figure 246), where the Virgin appears directly behind Christ in a manner that combines the iconography of the Pietà with that of the Trinity, while symbols of the Passion – such as the *arma Christi* – assaulting hands, as well as enemies and executioners of Christ from the Passion are dispersed across a golden background. Christ’s head similarly leans to the right, with thin strands of hair falling down the shoulder, while one of his hands rests with palm facing up at the bottom edge of the painting. Both Christs are surrounded by a “seat” of white drapery, though in the case of Memling, the arms of the seat appear to be the arms of the Virgin – her right hand emerges from underneath the drapery, holding Christ’s side and drawing attention to the blood pouring out of his side wound.

Memling’s panel is commonly thought to have been part of a triptych and has been connected with two wing panels by the same artist – the *Angel with a Sword* in London’s Wallace Collection was the right wing of this triptych and the Louvre *Angel*

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with an Olive Branch is a fragment of what would have been the left wing. The work is considered to be a copy after an original by Roger van der Weyden and a number of copies and variations on it exist, several of which are today found in the Museo de la Capilla Real or private collections in Granada, Spain (Figure 247 and Figure 248).

Memling’s Virgin Holding the Man of Sorrows, or possibly the original van der Weyden, is listed in the 1516 and 1524 inventories of Margaret of Austria. Margaret was the aunt of Charles V, whom she appointed her universal and sole heir before she died in 1530. Consequently, it is possible that the work may have come into the hands of Charles V. At the very least, the presence of copies in Granada attributed to Memling and his followers suggests the import of this iconographic type into Spain. It is thus likely that Sebastiano knew either this work or one of the numerous copies made after it. Its presence in Spain and Sebastiano’s network of Spanish patronage, which was especially active in commissioning works from him during the 1520s and 30s, makes is probable that the artist came to know the iconographic type through his patrons.

Among other things, this would explain the presence of the Veronica cloth in an image of the Pietà. Though not present in Memling’s work, the Veronica often figures among the arma Christi in Northern Man of Sorrows panels, such as seen in the Triptych of Abbot Antonius Tsgrooten by Goossen van der Weyden (Figure 249), where Christ gestures directly to it with his hand. This is also true of a Florentine Man of Sorrows engraving attributed to Cristofano Robetta (Figure 250) and an anonymous Spanish panel of the Mass of St. Gregory (c.1500-1520) (Figure 251) that has Christ walk out of an altar

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29 Ibid., 62.
30 Barbara G. Lane, Hans Memling: Master Painter in Fifteenth-Century Bruges (London: Harvey Miller, 2009), 19-21 and 326.
with the instruments of the Passion and the Veronica cloth, all of which recall the Man of Sorrows type.\textsuperscript{32} Notably, in all three works, the Veronica is completely frontal and facing the viewer – strongly contrasting with how it is pictured in Sebastiano’s work – while Christ himself looks away or to the side. The presence of St. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene, along with the Virgin Mary, is likewise common in \textit{Imago Pietatis} iconography, as evidenced in Giovanni da Milano’s \textit{Man of Sorrows} (1365) (Figure 252) and in the Utrecht panel of the same subject by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (c.1485-95) (Figure 253).\textsuperscript{33}

Yet Sebastiano’s \textit{Pietà} departs from these works and Memling’s work in particular in many other ways. Where the latter focuses the viewer’s attention wholly on Christ as the object of meditation, Sebastiano creates numerous competing points of attention. The juxtaposition of the Veronica cloth and Christ is the most prominent of these, though the nails in her other hand and the vase below these contribute to the effect as well, especially since together the three end up framing Christ’s body. A diagonal is created by the oblique angle of the Virgin’s outstretched arms and, together with the vase near the bottom-left corner of the painting, the three objects enclose Christ in a triangulated configuration. Other aspects of the painting create further distractions. The shadowy figures of Mary Magdalene and St. John, oddly facing away from the scene and each other, create another diagonal behind the Virgin that causes the picture to recede deeper into the dark background. The figures appear withdrawn in their interior


\textsuperscript{33} Giovanni da Milano’s \textit{Man of Sorrows} comes from a room in the convent of San Girolamo sulla Costa, Florence. See Daniela Parenti, \textit{Giovanni da Milano: capolavori del Gotico fra Lombardia e Toscana} (Firenze: Giunti Editore S.p.a., 2008), 232. The original owner and location of the \textit{Man of Sorrows} by Geertgen tot Sint Jans are unknown, though it’s probable that it was commissioned for the Commandery of the Knights of St. John in Harleem. See John R. Decker, \textit{The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sint Jans} (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 68.
contemplation. Mary Magdalene clasps her hands in devotion as she looks down; St. John likewise has his eyes downcast, and the Virgin stands between them, again facing a different direction and separated from Christ by the tall, draped construction around him.

These features are all the more arresting given that in his re-interpretation of Sebastiano’s Pietà roughly twenty to thirty years later (Figure 254), Luis de Morales unites the Virgin and Christ in an intimate and vigorous embrace.\(^{34}\) The Virgin’s hands clasp at Christ’s chest with fingers outstretched, encircling his torso, while her face bows down making contact with his cheek as she brings his body up closer to hers. Notably, Morales has also dispensed with the relics of the Passion and the Magdalene and St. John, focusing instead on the Virgin’s grief for her son’s death – his cheeks and lips have already turned blue – and the salvific blood pouring out of Christ’s body.

Conversely, the introspective states of the surrounding figures in Sebastiano’s Pietà, combined with Christ’s isolation from them, both physically and psychologically, signals their distance from Christ’s body and the objects surrounding it. It is strange to find the Magdalene and St. John turned away and looking down, neither touching not looking at the relics that surround Christ, since it was usually only through remote viewing that one could hope to benefit from their power.\(^{35}\) Contact relics had become increasingly inaccessible to laypeople; they were hidden away in reliquaries, under the

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\(^{34}\) The connection between these two works was brought to my attention by Felipe Pereda, whose critical reading of this chapter has been instrumental to the development of the ideas presented here.

\(^{35}\) See Georges Didi-Huberman, “Face, Proche, Lointain: l’empreinte du visage et le lieu pour apparaître,” in The Holy Face and Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 101-8 for a discussion of the Veronica cloth as paradoxically thematizing both proximity and distance. As an object of contact, it engenders nearness, yet its presentation in liturgical ceremony emphasizes distance and disappearance from sight. I suggest that the Veronica in Sebastiano’s painting stands for this kind of duality of proximity and distance by virtue of it appearing to be an imprint of the pictured Christ (a contact relic), but also in its strong foreshortening, which causes it to disappear from sight. The interplay between proximity and distance is evident throughout the painting, as this chapter will demonstrate.
jurisdiction of the Church. Thus, it was through sight rather than touch that lay viewers
gained access to the power of relics.

It follows that Magdalene and St. John, despite being relegated into the shadow,
are crucial for understanding how the viewer is meant to approach these relics, held out
so near to the picture surface. The two figures look down and away from the scene; their
psychological remoteness is underscored by the presence of the nails and the Veronica
cloth respectively just below the face of each. Both seem to simultaneously drop their
heads down in the direction of the relic and to disregard its presence. Sebastiano has
reoriented two saints traditionally present as devotees (though the Virgin Mary often was
present instead of or in addition to the Magdalene) in the Man of Sorrows panel type
away from Christ and from the arma Christi that often surround him. A comparison of
Sebastiano’s work with two Ferrarese and Florentine engravings (Figure 255 and Figure
250) illustrates the extent of Sebastiano’s refashioning of this altarpiece type:
Sebastiano’s two devotees no longer look towards or touch Christ, and the Veronica,
which is positioned frontally in Robetta’s engraving, is dramatically angled – thereby
involving the viewer more critically in understanding the relationship between it and
Christ’s body.

By assigning the Magdalene and St. John these new positions, they are made to
model a different, more interiorized form of devotion – one not based on touch or sight –
in approaching relics, and by extension images of Christ. A palpable tension can be
discerned between the modalities of sight and touch: the Virgin holds the nails and
Veronica in her hands, yet the saints look away. And objects that once touched Christ’s
body are held up as visible proof of his human suffering, but Christ himself remains
isolated and untouched – his body no longer open to such immediate, physical access. It is not immediately clear from the painting how the palpable materiality of the relics is meant to be understood in context of our contemplation of his body.

5.3 Sacred Relics, Artistic Images, and the Body of Christ: Rethinking the Relationship

In reflecting on the viewer’s physical access to Christ, it should be noted that Sebastiano’s Pietà bears a striking resemblance to Rosso’s Dead Christ (1524-7) (Figure 256), painted for Leonardo Tornabuoni during Rosso’s sojourn to Rome. Like Sebastiano’s Úbeda Pietà, it too takes its cue from Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà. The work looks decidedly different from Rosso’s Florentine works and it is surely his response to Michelangelo’s manner that informs the monumental nudity of Christ’s body.

Comparing Sebastiano and Rosso’s reinterpretations of Michelangelo’s Pietà tells us a great deal about the shared theological concerns of the artists and the different ways they go about addressing them. Both artists explore the portrayal of Christ’s body in a state of death or near-death, surrounded by figures that witness and respond to it. The idea for additional figures, emerging out of the darkness behind Christ, may have even come from Rosso’s work, which Sebastiano could have seen while it was still in Rome. Moreover, both Christs appear seated, but in a way that pushes them out toward the picture plane, front and center, with the body twisted into an S-shape so that it flattens before us. Neither body appears securely set into its seat. As Stefaniak rightly observes, Rosso’s Christ seems to stand on two flexed toes as the darkness underneath his buttocks

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makes it seem like there is nothing there to support him.\textsuperscript{37} Sebastiano’s Christ likewise protrudes forward out of his seat, supporting himself and nearly autonomous, save for the arm rest. His head rests on his own shoulder rather than on the pillows behind him and his legs veer off to the side, giving the sense that his body is suspended weightlessly rather than firmly seated. Thus, both bodies are brought to the very foreground for contemplation.

Yet with one significant difference: Rosso’s Christ can apparently be touched and felt – his side wound is delicately prodded by the angels and his body appears to exude heat that bends the candles on either side – while Sebastiano’s remains isolated and, oddly, as if unseen by all the figures. He is the main figure across which the eye must move between the nails in one hand and the Veronica cloth in the other, yet the picture does not invite a focused attention on just his body. Rather, he is part of a network of comparisons among related, but not analogous, signs of his body.

The inability to focus on, to touch, Christ’s body appears to be purposeful. Its placement within this circle of material contact relics, on one hand, suggests a kind of conviction in the capacity of the latter to bring one into closer proximity to the divine: Christ is at the center of these material remains, which had made recent contact with his body and which the Virgin herself now touches. On the other hand, this attention to the materialism of Christian worship appears to be counterbalanced by the Magdalene’s and St. John’s turning away from the relics to engage in inward contemplation.

Sebastiano’s painting thus asks the viewer to consider the role of material substitutes for Christ’s body in contemplating the divine. And while Christ is available to our sight in the very foreground, he is also a reinvention of Michelangelo’s art and thus

\textsuperscript{37} Stefaniak, “Replicating Mysteries of the Passion,” 701.
another substitute, like the relics, for the real body located in heaven. This and the saints thus function as prompts for the viewer to redirect his devotion inward, away from visible, material objects. This redirection toward internal vision is further signaled by the Veronica cloth, an imprint of Christ’s face not made by human hands. The viewer is likewise asked to construct his own image of Christ from the artistic one presented and to be cognizant of the difference between the substitute and the prototype (more on this in the last two sections).

5.4 The Debate on the Cult of Relics

A parallel can be drawn between Sebastiano’s emphasis on non-equivalence between material image and divine prototype and the message conveyed about devotion to relics in *De Maria Magdalena* (1517) by Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples. A theologian who never sought to separate from the Catholic Church but rather to reform it from within, Lefèvre conceives of the problematic relationship between the materiality of relics and Christ himself such that he is able to worship Christ above and separate from visible things. He relates the approach of a friend whom he uses an exemplar of proper devotion:

> I keep my faith centered on what is represented by the things I’m told, especially which I know the Church celebrates, and I raise my mind to heaven, to the models on which the visible things are patterned, which are evident to the eyes of the mind, but not of the body.

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38 Calvillo, “Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals,” 481.
39 As Klaus Krüger has shown with respect to Northern and Central Italian altarpieces, pictures could work as provocations for how to construct internal visions from material images. See Klaus Krüger, “Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy” in *Image and Imagination*, 37-69.
Sed eam in iis quae per narrata mihi repraesentantur teneo, maxime quae ecclesiam celebrare cognosco, et mente in coelum eleuata, ad ipsa rerum visibilium exemplaria oculis mentis non corporis patentia.41

Moreover, the anonymous friend explicitly acknowledges the existence of false relics and potential accusations of idolatry, yet maintains that showing devotion even to false relics is acceptable as long as they are but a stepping stone to honoring Christ:

And when certain things might chance to be offered to him to kiss as sacred objects, when he did not know what they were or whose they were, he still kissed them saying to himself, “I kiss these things for the sake of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and to his honor, and to the honor of the Saints which the Church recognizes, and who continually serve CHRIST the Lord, and are always with him in heavenly glory [...]” And he did not think that someone who venerated them in this way was sinning, even if he had unknowingly kissed the bones of Nero or Caiphas.

Et cum illi forte fortuna offerebantur nonnulla, sacrorum loco deosculanda, quae, quid essent, aut quorum, ignorabat, osculabatur quidem, secum dicens, propter dominum nostrum IhesVM ChristVM, et ad eius honorem, haec oscula figo, et ad honorem sanctorum quos sancta nout ecclesia, et qui CHRISTO domino iugiter serveunt, eique semper assistunt in coelesti gloria [...] Neque quemquam sic venerate, peccae putabat, etiam si ossa Neronis, aut Caiphae, ignorans osculatam fueisse.42

Levère’s exaggerated separation of devotion to relics from devotion to God (the unusual reference to the bones of persecutors of Christians/Christ underscores the point) should be seen as a manifestation of the increasing discomfort with the growing materialism of Christian faith, as Caroline Walker Bynum has shown in her book

*Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe.*43 Bynum points to what she calls “slippages” in the writings of theorists in the late Middle Ages between

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42 Ibid., 246-7.
43 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*. 

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describing matter as eternal and corruptible, as dead and alive.\textsuperscript{44} According to Bynum, such slippages are an indication of writers’ explorations of both the dangers and potentialities of contact relics and sacramentals used in Christian ceremony and that they were, in fact, part of a larger discourse on how matter manifests and conjures God.

While scholars like Michael P. Carroll argue that the Reformation pushed Italy toward more interiorized devotion – he points to the Evangelical movement as one major instance of this (and Levêfre’s passage could be cited as yet an example) – Bynum contests that viewing this emphasis on interiority, advocated by some late Medieval and Renaissance theologians, in isolation misses the larger picture.\textsuperscript{45} Her study shows that this was but one reaction among many to the increased enthusiasm for matter in devotion to God. Seemingly contradictory reactions to material objects of worship, in fact, stimulated one another – one position made the other possible or even necessary. Her characterization of the Reformation as neither a rejection of earlier “superstitions,” nor a reaction against “desiccated, lifeless externals,” but rather a strong sense of unease as a result of the proliferation of the material stuff of Christian devotion, should alert us to the complexity of a painting like Sebastiano’s, which puts the materiality of Christian worship on display for consideration.\textsuperscript{46}

In response to the larger question raised at this moment of whether images could satisfy a worshipper’s desire for contact with the body of Christ, Sebastiano’s reflection on the matter suggests the importance of thinking, in one’s devotion to Christ, about the relationship between external and internal images, replicas and originals, and between the

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 220-7
\textsuperscript{46} Bynum, \textit{Christian Materiality}, 272-3.
singleness of Christ’s body and its duplication through material substitutes. The Úbeda Pietà does not give up its focus on material substitutes for Christ’s body, but neither does it allow an easy acceptance of their equivalence to the divine.

I have not found indication that Lefèvre’s publication on the Magdalene reached Italy in the 1520s and 30s (though he did make several trips to Italy himself in 1491-2, 1500 and again in 1509, attesting to his exposure to Rome’s culture). Yet the same suggestion of nonequivalence or nonidentity between material objects of veneration and the higher divine reality can be found in the communication of Baldassare Castiglione, just a few years prior to Sebastiano’s work – indicating some shared common ground with Lefèvre in terms of spiritual concerns. I am referring to Castiglione’s letter of 1528 to Alfonso de Valdés, written in the position of papal nuncio in Spain, which violently and passionately denounces Valdés’ Dialogue on the Sack of Rome.

Valdés’ Dialogue was circulated privately as a manuscript within a limited circle of the writer’s friends. It was brought to the attention of the Emperor by Baldassare Castiglione – apostolic nuncio to the court of Spain – who had obtained a copy from his secretary through much effort and denounced it as profane, scandalous and unchristian.

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47 For an overview of Lefèvre’s travels to Italy, see Lefèvre D’Etaples, Jacques Lefèvre D’Etaples, 19.
48 I would like to thank Felipe Pereda for this lead. His suggestion that Castiglione’s letter may not be as confident an endorsement of relics as it appears on first glance was a valuable contribution to this argument.
49 Benjamin B. Wiffen, Alfabeto Christiano, which teaches the true way to acquire the light of the Holy Spirit. From the Italian of 1546; with a notice of Juan de Valdés and Giulia Gonzaga (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1861), 75
It is heavily critical of the pope, the morality of priests, and the veneration of relics, stating – through the mouthpiece of Lantancio – that the Sack was God’s just punishment for Rome’s spiritual corruption.\(^5^0\)

In many respects, Castiglione – in response to the *Dialogue* – conveys his clear support for relics and for the materialist tradition of the Church, writing in his letter to Valdés:

If in those days God wanted his temple, his altars and tabernacles to be adorned with gold, silver and gems, and the vestments of his priests to be very rich and precious, it does not please him now that they are despoiled, robbed, and so maltreated.

Se in quel tempo Dio voleva che il suo tempio e i suoi altari e tabernacoli fossero adornati d’oro e d’argento, e di gioie, e i vestimenti dei suoi sacerdoti tanto ricchi e preziosi, non gli piace adesso che siano spogliati, rubati e tanto mal trattati.\(^5^1\)

Further, he expresses his deep compassion for the good, pious people who “lived through and were forced to see with their eyes this hellish spectacle […] seeing the armed soldiers go by without respect […] throwing to the ground many holy relics, many devotional images, the bones and blood of holy martyrs […]”\(^5^2\) Yet at the same time, Castiglione acknowledges the errors of some priests and even the existence of false relics and images. Like Lefèvre, he resolves this by distinguishing between veneration directed at relics and what they represent. What is perhaps most striking, is Castiglione’s claim that it does not

\(^{50}\) Bataillon writes of the work: “Never had the religious, moral and political thought of Spanish Erasmanism more resolutely found passage.” (“Jamais la pensée religieuse, morale et politique de l’érasisme espagnol n’a cherché plus résolument passage.”) Bataillon, *Érsame e l’Espagne*, 399.


\(^{52}\) Ibid., 552. “a quelli, che vissero e furono sforzati a vedere con gli occhi quello spettacolo infernale […] scorrere soldati armati senza rispetto […] gittano in terra tante sante reliquie, tante divote immagini, l’ossa e il sangue de’ santi martiri […]”
matter whether the relics are real or false – all Holy objects are equally efficacious in his view because they are representations (a claim that is only implied in Lefèvre’s position):

There are many who know how to worship and who honor the relics of saints properly, that is, not the relics in themselves but for what they represent; and for that which is visible, they lift their thoughts to contemplate that which is unseen. And in this case, even if the relics were false, they do not commit idolatry because it is good, whatever the cause, that moves devotion in the souls of supplicants to venerate and pray to God with an ardor of faith that many times makes us behold miracles.

Vi sono molti che sanno onorare e che onorano le reliquie de’ santi come devono, cioè non per rispetto de esse medesime, ma per quello che rappresentano; e per quello che veggono, levano il pensiero a contemplare quello che non veggono, e in tal caso, ancora che le reliquie fossero false, non per questo chi adora commette idolotria, perché buona è qualsivoglia cagione, che muove la divozione negli animi de’ supplicant ad adorare e pregare Dio con quell’ardor di fede, che molte volte fa che vediamo miracoli.53

He adds,

Yet I will not refrain from giving, to that which you say in this regard, a short response, but which I think will suffice. You claim that those priests that deceive the common people with false relics in order to make money, and likewise those who receive the Holy Sacrament while in mortal sin commit the greatest of errors […] no person of good judgment would deny this. But I cannot imagine – as you do – that the citing of these problems is relevant in demonstrating that it is not wicked to despoil relics (real or false), kill the clergy, rob altars, desecrate everything sacred, and ruin the churches by turning them into stables for horses.

Pur io non restarò di dare, a quel che voi dite in questo proposito, una breve risposta; la qual però credo che basterà, ed è che quei sacerdoti che ingannano il volgo con reliquie false per guadagnar denari; medesimamente quei che ricevono il santissimo Sacramento, stando in peccato mortale, fanno grandissimo errore […] né persona di buon giudizio sarà che questo vi neghi. Ma io non so immaginarvi come voi abbiate pensate che l’allegar questi inconvenienti sia a proposito per dimostrare che poco male sia lo spogliar le reliquie, o vere o false che sieno, e che l’ammazzar i chierici, rubar gli altari, e profanar tutte le cose sacre, ruinar le chiese e farle stalle da cavalla.54

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53 Castiglione, “Repuesta” in *Alfonso de Valdés: Obra Completa*, 547
54 Ibid., 546-7.
Castiglione thus acknowledges some of the abuses typically leveled against the Church, but is appalled by those who are so ignorant that they do not know that “the remedy for evil is not the perpetration of a greater evil.” Nevertheless, a tension can be discerned between the materialism of Christian worship and the need to transcend it, both in the passage above and as the letter goes on: “And even though God has no need of material things,” writes Castiglione, “it is proper, nonetheless, to use gold and silver and other valuable things for divine objects.”

For both Lefèvre and Castiglione, this tension is resolved by the separation of sign and referent, so that false relics and images can be venerated for what they represent. However, in some passages of Castiglione’s letter, like the one just quoted, the contradiction remains unresolved.

In choosing to make a painting of Christ surrounded by his contact relics, but also by figures who explicitly turn away from them, Sebastiano seems to have been aware of and concerned with the very issues raised by Lefèvre and Castiglione’s texts. While there is no hard evidence that directly demonstrates his interest in relics, a combination of several facts – taken together with the evidence in the painting – begins to suggest that he considered the veneration paid to relics. For one, the effects of the Sack of Rome were felt deeply by its residents, Sebastiano included among them. In an often quoted passage from his letter of 1531 to Michelangelo, he exclaims “I don’t seem to be the same Sebastiano I was before the Sack; I can never again return to that frame of mind.” Not only did Rome’s treasured relics not save the city from pillage or protect themselves from

55 Ibid., 547. “che il rimedio del male non è fare il peggio.”
56 Ibid., 548. “E ancora che Dio non abbia bisogno di roba, convien però nelle cose divine molte volte usar l’oro e l’argento, e altre cose preziose.”
the soldiers who desecrated them, but the most venerated relics – the Veronica cloth – had been lost, to be returned to its rightful place in the St. Peter’s Basilica the very year that Sebastiano set out to paint his Pietà ( picturing the Virgin holding the Veronica in her hand) and suggested Michelangelo’s sculpture as his model. It is reasonable to conclude that Sebastiano’s painting was in some way inflected by these events and the ways in which the subject of relics was approached by both Spanish and Italian thinkers.

It is worth recalling here that Sernini’s letter of 1533, in which the agent first tells of Sebastiano’s proposed subject for the painting, relates Sebastiano’s facetious statement on Spanish taste.58 Suggesting that he paint a Virgin and Christ “in the manner of the one of the Fever,” Sebastiano goes on to say, “which the Spaniards, to appear good Christians and devotees, are usually fond of these pious things.” The perceived piousness of the St. Peter’s sculpture, and more specifically, Sebastiano’s perception of Spain’s displaced spiritual values – as discussed by Pereda in context of the notion of moral hypocrisy – implicates the elevated status of the work of art in the eyes of patrons wishing to obtain “pious things.”59 The view of the work of art as one possible artifact among other cose pietose raises interesting possibilities as to the status and function of art in religious worship. It also points to Sebastiano’s interest in what he takes to be devout Spanish taste and construction of pious identity, tinged with a note of parody of Spanish devotion. Panofsky, in fact, observes “the spirit of mockery” in Sebastiano’s business transactions and in his letter to Michelangelo regarding a fresco that had been intended for the lantern of the Medici Chapel commissioned by Pope Clement VII ( Giulio de’ Medici); Sebastiano

58 Pereda discusses this comment, as an expression of Sernini’s and not Sebastiano’s opinion on the perceived devoutness and also hypocrisy of Spanish devotion, in Pereda, “Ad modum Hispaniae.” 59 “Una nostra donna ch’avesse il figliol’morto in braccio a guisa di quella dela febre, il che gli spagnuoli per parer buoni cristiani et divoti sogliono amare questi (sic) cose pietose [...]” Hirst, “Sebastiano’s Pietà,” 587 and Chapter 5, no.4.
proposes a figure of Ganymede, likely referencing the one from Michelangelo’s drawing for Tommaso Cavalieri, which “would look nice there,” adding: “you could give him a halo so that he would appear as St. John of the Apocalypse carried to Heaven.”

Panofsky sees Sebastiano’s comment to Sernini as yet another joking proposition.

While the skeptical reader may pause at this point to wonder why Cobos would have wanted a painting that was not clear about its endorsement of the cult of relics, I propose that the final outcome of Sebastiano’s approach to the work may not have been entirely intentional. The tension between materiality and image-less devotion generated by the composition of the Pietà appears to be the result of competing demands of affirming the efficacy of relics on one hand, and moderating the disproportionate devotion paid to visible signs for the divine, on the other. As Pereda’s revealing analysis of the work’s reception demonstrates, other factors – apart from the patron’s explicit or implicit requests and the artist’s wishes to cater to these – were involved in shaping the trajectory of Sebastiano’s pictorial solutions to the problem at hand. These factors revolved around broader concerns about perceived stereotypes of Spanish identity, as Pereda has shown, but also, as this chapter suggests, more local concerns regarding the equivalence between different types of Holy objects and the relationship between internal and external images.

Sebastiano’s Pietà is in many ways ambivalent about the means by which the divine is accessed through relics. The work has Christ surrounded by material objects of worship, but the relationship it establishes among them, as well as between them, the

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60 I would like to thank Felipe Pereda for alerting me to Panofsky’s discussion of mockery in Sebastiano’s writing style. See Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes In the Art of the Renaissance (New York: Oxford university press, 1939), 213 and 216. For Sebastiano’s letter, see Milanesi, Les Correspondants de Michel-Ange, 104-6. “A me parebbe che li staese bene el Ganimed e farli lo diadema che paresse san Joanni de l’Apocalipse quando è furato in cielo.”
body of Christ, and the divine realm that transcends them, is strangely unresolved. On one hand, the physical and psychological isolation of the Magdalene and St. John, lost in contemplation, suggests the need to transcend such substitutes for Christ’s body in one’s personal devotion. On the other hand, the Virgin holds out the Veronica cloth next to Christ – albeit at an angle that precludes its visibility – and casts her gaze down upon it as if to confirm its visual efficacy. The painting seems to invite the viewer to look and to look elsewhere at the same time, that is, to endorse both an external and an internal gaze when it comes to approaching Holy matter. In the section that follows, I interrogate further the presence of the Veronica cloth – which I see as central for an understanding of the work as a whole – and consequently how the painting presents the role of images and relics in mediating the divine.

5.5 The Holy Face and the Face of Art

In her recent article on artistic imitation and originality in Rome, Elena Calvillo contends that Sebastiano reflects on the relationship between divine prototype and artistic copies in his Úbeda Pietà. Calvillo shows that Sebastiano creates the illusion that the body of Christ in the painting is the original prototype from which the Veronica cloth receives its imprint; at the same time, however, the illusion is undermined by Sebastiano’s allusion to the fact that the real original is an artistic image, that is, Michelangelo’s sculptural Pietà, and not a divine one.⁶¹ Thus, Sebastiano announces the “divinity” of Michelangelo’s art as a worthy archetype. Yet despite the authority of the divine Michelangelo, according to Calvillo, the painting ultimately locates divine presence elsewhere – asking the viewer to look to Rome where the true Veronica could

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⁶¹ Calvillo, “Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals,” 481.
be found. According itself as a fictive, man-made representation and its difference from the *vera icon* – most notably by the oblique view of the veil and the stone support – the Úbeda Pietà asserts the authority of the relic above that of the artistic representation, as well as the authority of the Virgin as a stand in for the Roman Church as keeper and protector of it.

I concur with Calvillo that the oblique view of the Veronica frustrates any attempt at obtaining a clear view of the Holy Face and seems to ask the viewer to look elsewhere for real divine presence. Moreover, the notion that Sebastiano plays on the idea of divine originals by citing the prototype of the “divine” Michelangelo – and thereby asks the viewer to discern between artistic image and Christ’s historical body – is indeed quite pertinent to the meaning of the work. In simultaneously affirming Michelangelo as a worthy prototype but also denying that divine presence can be located within the painting – not only because of the compromised view of the Veronica, but also as a result of Sebastiano’s explicit allusion to an artistic, rather than divine, image as his prototype – the painting may be understood as a commentary on the relationship between man-made copies and divine originals. To use Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s terminology, the painting visualizes the chain of substitutions inherent in artistic images; rather than collapsing the differences between models, the citation of Michelangelo brings to the forefront the drift or distance from the divine that is created by relying on man-made images as prototypes.
Yet I remain unconvinced of Sebastiano’s confident endorsement of the authority of the real Veronica cloth in Rome – that in occluding our view of it in the painting, we are consequently meant to defer to the authority of the real relic. Rather, I am inclined to see the Veronica’s occlusion and its juxtaposition against Christ’s frontal body as well as other relics, as a more tempered reflection on the ways in which Holy objects achieve their efficacy in bringing about proximity to the divine: as I will go on to show, the painting appears to present an equivocal view of the materialism of such objects of veneration.

To begin, the acheiropoietic imprint or replica of Christ’s face in the cloth to which the Virgin directs her attention makes explicit the act of generating images and invites the viewer to construct his own mental image of Christ from the artistic one presented – as modelled by Mary Magdalene and St. John. As Jeffrey Hamburger has shown, the Veronica often acted as a stimulus to monastic devotions and a conduit to inner vision for nuns in convents of Late Medieval Germany, but also more broadly for fifteenth-century devotees in Germany. And it is notable that several accounts refer explicitly to the “Roman face” or the Roman icon in their visions. At the same time, a

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66 The prevalent copying of the Veronica cloth and the acknowledged link back to a single prototype itself constituted a generation of new, albeit material, images of Christ. What is pictured in this painting is the fiction of the original imprint being taken (though this is of course not a historically accurate representation as it was the Veronica and not the Virgin who gave Christ the cloth). This act became the justification for the making of artistic images; for example, Benedetto da Maiano’s commemorative portrait of Giotto (1490) in the Florence Duomo has the artist working on, not coincidentally, a mosaic of the Holy Face. On the copying of the Holy Face, see Herbert L. Kessler, “Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face” in The Holy Face and Paradox of Representation: Papers From a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 129-51. See also Herbert L. Kessler, Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God’s Invisibility in Medieval Art (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), 104-148, esp. 127 and 136 for a discussion of the Medieval tradition of theologians writing on images as conduits to intellectual seeing, that is a God seen “with the eyes of the mind” rather than with corporeal eyes – a concept used by Augustine in his De Genesi ad literam.


68 Ibid., 350-1.
chronicler at one convent stressed the difference between the material representation and
the interior vision in his narration of nun Guta Jüngin’s vision:

[She] desired... with great devotion to see the desirable face of our Lord as he himself impressed it on a cloth [...] That same day, as she was by her prayers at Vespers, she saw a clear light and realized that she had embraced God, body and soul. And she looked into herself and saw that her heart and her soul and her spirit were entirely open, and that the face of our Lord was shining into her soul. And then it was said to her: “That is my face, not the one that Veronica received, but my true and divine face, the one that should remain eternally in your soul.”

Begert... mit großer andacht zu sehen daz begirlich antlütz unsers hern, alz er ez selber trücket in ein tuch [...] Dez selben tagez, da sie waz an irm gebet zu vesperzeit, da sahe sie ein klares licht und enpfand, daz sie got het ümvangen an sel und an leib. Und sach in sich selbs und sahe, daz ir hertz und ir gemüt und ir geyst ward auf getan, und daz antlütz unsers herren ward scheinen in ir sel. Und da ward gesprochen zu ir: “daz ist mein antlütz , nicht daz Veronica enpfing, sunder mein wares und götliches anlütz, daz ewiklich beleiben sol in deiner sel.”

The visionary face is specifically not the face on the Veronica, but Christ’s true and
divine visage impressed into her soul. By drawing on the Northern tradition of the
Veronica’s capacity for inner-image formation, Sebastiano’s painting redirects the
viewer’s devotion toward internal vision and deflects the charge of idolatry. The
painting’s admonishment to the viewer to look away from material Holy objects towards
“things unseen” parallels the solution arrived at by Lefèvre and Castiglione in their
separation of the representation from the divine referent.

Another painting from roughly this time – Ugo da Carpi’s Veronica Between Sts.
Peter and Paul (c.1524-7) (Figure 257) made for the altar of St. Veronica in Old St.
Peter’s – draws attention to a similar distinction by the making of an artistic copy that

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69 Cited in ibid., 348 and 563, no.69.
simultaneously feigns the “living” image not made by human hands. Ugo da Carpi achieves this with the inscription that notifies the viewer that the image was “fata senza penello,” or made without a brush, and with the dark-toned, archaic Holy Face that evokes the venerated St. Peter’s relic itself. The artist thus turns away from self-conscious artistic technique and from conventional pictorial practice to the mimicking of the original gesture of contact that produced the Veronica – he soaks the cloth directly with paint. The visible effort taken by Ugo da Carpi to bypass markers of personal, artistic maniera and the attention given to the acheiropoietic image-replica of Christ by Sebastiano points to the artists’ shared interest in the generation of alternatives to artistic images - whether divine or mental. More broadly, it shows the shared search for ways that artistic images could move away from the problematic claim to containing divine presence, whether by effacing personal style in the case of the former or by redirecting the viewer’s focus toward the generation of interior images in the case of the latter.

A similar concern with the relationship between sacred relics, artistic images, and the body of Christ can be seen in Pontormo’s Veronica (1515) (Figure 258) in the Capella dei Papi at the convent of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. The figure of the Veronica kneels and faces the viewer in a powerful contrapposto, inspired by Michelangelo and Donatello’s figures, twisting her upper body to her right and thereby moving the Veronica cloth to the side so that it is no longer frontal. Much like Sebastiano does in his Pietà, Pontormo foregrounds his art and mastery of the human figure rather than the sacred image. And like in Sebastiano’s work, Veronica’s pose makes is deliberately difficult to access the Holy Face imprinted on the cloth. Stephen Campbell has

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71 Ibid., 196-7.
persuasively written about this fresco as a staged *paragone* between the artistic and cult image – one that seeks to carve out a new category for man-made images where they do not lay claim to substituting for real divine presence nor fall into the category of empty idols.\(^{72}\) Sebastiano, Ugo da Carpi, and Pontormo can all be understood as approaching the same problem in different ways – of defining their works against relics and divine images at a time when material manifestations of God became subject to charges of idolatry. Having been painted on the occasion of the visit and procession of Pope Leo X through Florence, Pontormo’s *Veronica* inevitably implicates Rome and its role in authorizing and housing such sacred relics.

### 5.6 Relics and the Hierarchy of Holy Objects

As I have suggested above, the conflicting demands at play in the Úbeda *Pietà* – the materialism of relics on one hand and their status as aids for non-image based devotion on the other – ask the viewer to reflect on the veneration of sacred objects as proxies for Christ’s body. Here, I want to consider what the work suggests about the purported equivalence between such objects – between contact relics, artistic images, and the implied Host on the altar table standing before the painting. Oddly enough, there is a point on which Alfonso de Valdés and Castiglione seem to agree (though they do not acknowledge this): the necessity to differentiate between different types of Holy objects, thereby clarifying a hierarchy among them, where the Host stands above all man-made images and relics.\(^{73}\)


\(^{73}\) I would like to thank Stephen Campbell for his insightful proposal of the notion of hierarchy in thinking about Sebastiano’s *Pietà* and the relationships it posits among Holy objects. I’ve found that the theme plays out not only in the painting, but in contemporaneous writing on relics as well.
The notion of hierarchy with respect to Holy matter is raised in a statement made by Castiglione in the same letter to Valdés quoted from earlier. Castiglione recounts Valdés’ story, which compares the disproportionate veneration paid to an icon over the Holy Sacrament, and suggests that a more moderate solution was in order:

You also narrate, for the sake of being facetious, the offense done by the inspector who broke the image of Our Lady. It seems to me that he could have, in this case, shown a little more modesty by removing the image from this place, and teaching the people and conveying to them how much more dignified was the Holy Sacrament than this image.

E poi narrate medesimamente per facezia lo egregio fatto di quell provisore che spezzò l’immagine di nostra Signora, il quale al parer mio poteva in tal caso usare un poco più di modestia, come sarebbe stato il levarla di quell luogo e ammaestrare il popolo e fargli conoscere di quanta più dignità era il santissimo Sacramento che quella immagine.74

Castiglione is here referring to Lactancio’s story of an inspector who, upon visiting a bishopric, sees a miracle-working image of the Virgin on an altar opposite the Holy Sacrament, and that “all who entered the church turned their backs on the Holy Sacrament – in comparison with which all the images in the world are worthless – and threw themselves on their knees before the image of Our Lady.”75 Lactancio goes on to praise the inspector for removing the image and thus eliminating superstition from the church. While their degree of outrage with regard to the incident differs, and despite their larger differences of opinion as to what constitutes improper piety, both authors condemn the raising of images above the Holy Sacrament. While Valdés wants images completely removed from churches to remedy such practices, Castiglione asks that people be taught the proper hierarchy of sanctity.

74 Castiglione, “Repuesta” in Alfonso de Valdés: Obra Completa, 553.
75 Valdés, Alfonso de Valdés: Obra Completa, 346. “quantos entravan en la iglesia volvían las espaladas al Sanctissimo Sacramento, a cuya comparación quantas imagines ay en el mundo son menos que nada, y se hincavan de rodillas ante aquella imagen de Nuestra Señora.”
Another passage in Valdés’ *Dialogue* points to the problem of a perceived dissolution of important hierarchies among Holy objects – particularly relics. After a lengthy explanation of the falsity of relics, Lactancio concludes that even relics that are true and certain “cause men to fall into idolatry” because they see them “as something divine.” The example he gives is a hypothetical display of St. Christopher’s slippers and the Holy Sacrament in the same church:

If in the same church on one side were the shoes of St. Christopher in a golden shrine and on the other was the Holy Sacrament, in comparison with which all the images in the world are worthless, people would prostrate themselves preferentially before the slippers rather than before the Holy Sacrament.

Lactancio then goes on to say, “Jesus Christ left us His whole Body in the Sacrament of the Altar, and having this I do not see why we need any other visible example,” and that “it should be made clear to the public that all these relics are nothing in comparison with the Holy Sacrament, which they may see and receive every day.”

The competing juxtaposition of relic and Host in the St. Christopher example bears a relationship to Sebastiano’s painting, which similarly compares sacred objects – those that substitute for Christ’s body and those that are it, namely the Host. Moreover, Valdés’ emphasis on the visibility of the Host, its reception through sight, and its superiority over other visible Holy objects raises questions about the role of vision in

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76 Ibid., 342. “Pero vengo a las otras cosas que siendo inciertas, y aunque sean ciertas, son tropiezos para hazer al hombre idolatrar [...] ya va infinita gente a verlas por una cosa divina.”

77 Ibid., 342-3.

78 Ibid., 344. “Por eso nos dexó Jesu Cristo se cuerpo sacratíssimo en el Sacramento del altar, y teniendo esto no sé yo para qué havemos menester otra cosa.” “No se mostrassen al pueblo sino que le diessen a entender cómo es todo nada en comparación del sanctísimo Sacramento que cada día veen y pueden recevir si quieren.”
Sebastiano’s painting, where the Magdalene, St. John, and the Virgin model different kinds of devotional behavior – a fact that again speaks to the insistence in both of the abovementioned authors on teaching the public proper forms of outward piety and the superiority of the Sacrament.

Sebastiano’s Pietà can be understood as a response to this emerging need to clarify hierarchies in the face of a perceived dissolution of differences among Holy objects. While the nails, ointment jar, and Veronica cloth appear to be displayed in a balanced, triangulated configuration around Christ on first glance, the suggestion of hierarchical, rather than levelled, relationships can be observed in the privileged holding up of the Veronica and the direction of the Virgin’s gaze, which directs ours to the cloth as well. Its efficacy is grounded in its visibility – a touch relic and miraculous image not made by human hand that would have been presented to the public on rare occasions, and seen but not touched. Its reception by sight thus ties the Veronica to the Sacrament itself – positioned before the painting on the altar – by virtue of their shared efficacious visuality. As Valdés emphasizes, immediately after he questions the need for any other visible sign of God, the Sacrament is something lay people “may see and receive every day.” Indeed, in Eucharistic worship of the early Cinquecento, the practice of *manducatio per visum* (eating by sight – that is ocular or spiritual communion) rather than *manducatio per gustum* (eating by taste) was the most common means by which the layperson received the Eucharist.79

At the same time, the Veronica is turned dramatically sideways. As discussed in the previous section, the viewer is consequently invited to consider alternatives to

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material images and, following the Northern tradition of the Veronica’s capacity for inner-image formation, to turn towards the internal image. And, as in devotion to the Eucharist, where the change of the substance of the bread into the body of Christ did not fall under the dominion of the senses and was un-seeable to the corporeal eye, the Pietà considers alternatives to physical sight that can grant access to the divine. Touch, corporeal sight, and spiritual sight are thus assessed alongside one another as possible modes of contemplation, inviting the viewer to consider their respective virtues and limitations.

Moreover, the nails, ointment jar, and Veronica are displayed as proxies for Christ’s body, which rests at the center of the composition, but which is itself taken from Michelangelo’s drawing, thereby announcing itself as an artistic image. In this way, the painting considers what happens when these objects – relics and artistic images – are placed side by side as if they were equals (both at equal distance to Christ and nearly parallel to the surface of the picture plane, despite the forward extension of the Veronica). The Pietà reflects on and pictures the very dissolution of hierarchical distinctions, even as it attempts to clarify them. In responding to the concern over improper devotion towards artistic images and relics – mentioned by both Valdés and Castiglione – and the consequent leveling out of important differences between these and the Eucharist, Sebastiano produces a painting that does not arrive at a clearly resolved stance on the role of Holy matter in meditating on Christ. Rather, it leaves unresolved the competing demands of material-based and image-less devotion, and considers differences among classes of Holy objects against the background of their dissolution.
Finally, by including the Veronica and crucifixion nails, both relics that Rome boasted of owning and for which pilgrims made long journeys to the city, Sebastiano implicates Rome in a work for a Spanish patron. Of course, the citation of Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s Pietà acts as yet another reminder of the staged dialogue with Rome. It is important briefly to consider next the consequences of these citations in order to better understand Sebastiano’s engagement with Rome as a self-proclaimed artistic and spiritual center, where visiting pilgrims would have encountered some of the most talked and written about works of art and cult images.

5.7 The Cult of Art and the Cult Object

Scholars have frequently remarked on Sebastiano’s acute sense of his audience’s tastes and his catering to foreign interests such as those of France and Spain. So what did it mean to cite Michelangelo’s sculpture in the company of relics based in Rome in this painting for his Spanish patron? In this final section, I consider the way in which Sebastiano reframes Michelangelo’s Pietà – specifically the figure of Christ – locating its meaning within a network of sacred, non-artistic objects. This recontextualization of the master’s sculpture asks the viewer to reconsider the status of art at a time when it was seriously called into question as an aid to devotion.

According to Bynum, Renaissance art tends to stress its “non-objectness” by recourse to illusionism, whereas works of the late Middle Ages assert their materiality

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80 The Veronica cloth was housed in St. Peter’s, while two of the crucifixion nails were held at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and Santa Maria in Campitelli respectively. See Mitchell B Merback, Pilgrimage & Pogrom: Violence, Memory, and Visual Culture at the Host-Miracle Shrines of Germany and Austria (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 196 and H. M. Gillet, The Story of the Relics of the Passion (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1935), 50.
and non-mimetic objecthood. Yet, interestingly, what we see here is Sebastiano calling attention to, or rather formulating, a relationship between the artistic, mimetic image and the sacred object. By placing the sensuous and bloodless dead Christ, modeled on Michelangelo’s work, squarely between non-artistic objects of worship, Sebastiano integrates the artistic *simulacrum* into a triangulation of objects that are understood to be parts of Christ (and not mimetic representations of him). The nails, the jar, and the cloth reframe Christ’s body making it similarly object-like; isolated in its frontality and by its strong, dark contours, and set upright with hands emphatically brought forward to show the stigmata, the body shares the lower, white space with its relics – perhaps suggesting that it too is a kind of holy object to visit in Rome’s St. Peter’s.

To have claimed for the Michelangelesque body the privileged status among revered relics of the Passion, was to suggest that modern works of art could occupy an equal position to such holy matter. In the face of reformist attacks north of the Alps on the man-made image, Sebastiano’s painting considers the status of the artistic image as a contender with relics and icons in its ability to conjure divine presence. The Holy Face and the face of Michelangelo’s Christ are literally suspended side by side. It is worth recalling once again Sernini’s letter of 1533. In it, Sebastiano proposes to paint a Virgin and Christ in the manner of the one of the Fever, adding: “which the Spaniards, to appear

83 For a discussion of the blurry divide between the cult image and the work of art – in part, the consequence of art theorists’ construction of a reverential aura around the cult of the image – see Fredrika Jacobs, “Rethinking the Divide: Cult Images and the Cult of Images” in *Renaissance Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008), 95-114. For other Italian artists’ exploration and juxtaposition of the man-made image and the cult image, see Philine Helas and Gerhard Wolf, “The Shadow of the Wolf: The Survival of an Ancient God in the Frescoes of the Strozzi Chapel (S. Maria Novella, Florence), or Filippino Lippi’s Reflection on Image, Idol and Art” in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, 155-6 and Campbell, “
good Christians and devotees, are usually fond of these pious things.” It appears that Sebastiano comments not on the piousness of the relics that we see in the final painting (of which the letter makes no mention) but on the subject and ostensibly Michelangelo’s sculpture itself. The perceived piousness of the St. Peter’s sculpture and Sebastiano’s perception of Spain’s displaced spiritual values, implicates the elevated status of the work of art in the eyes of patrons wishing to obtain “pious things.” The view of the work of art as one possible artifact among other cose pietose raises interesting possibilities – explicitly explored in this painting – as to the status and function of art in religious worship. It becomes up to the geographically-distant viewer to judge Rome as a locus of artistic and cult objects, and its blurring of the line between them, brought about in part by the social elevation of the likes of the “divine” Michelangelo.

To this should be added the fact that Cobos recently had come into possession of a marble statue of the young St. John, which Francesco Caglioti has recently attributed to Michelangelo, in the very years that Sebastiano was working on his Pietà. According to Caglioti, Michelangelo’s statue – mentioned by both Condivi and Vasari – was made in 1495-6 for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici; it got passed down to his heir Cosimo I de’Medici, who then gifted the work to Cobos in 1537 in a diplomatic gesture of goodwill. This is supported by letters from 1537 that detail Cosimo’s gifting of a statue to Cobos. The Úbeda statue that belonged to Cobos, which Caglioti identifies as the most likely candidate for Michelangelo’s St. John (out of a number of others that have been put forth), was broken into pieces in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War. In addition to

84 “il che gli spagnuoli per parer buoni cristiani et divoti sogliono amare questi (sic) cose pietose [...]” Hirst, “Sebastiano’s Pietà,” 587 and Chapter 5, no.4.
85 Francesco Caglioti, “Il “San Giovannino” mediceo di Michelangelo, da Firenze a Ubeda” Prospttiva: revista de historia de l’arte antica e moderna 145 (2012): 2-81. I would like to thank both Stephen Campbell and Felipe Pereda for alerting me to the existence of this article.
86 Ibid., 24-33
photographs of it before its damage, the statue has recently been restored by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence.

Existence of this sculpture, and its identification as Michelangelo’s, is particularly relevant given that it was placed in Cobos’ funerary chapel of El Salvador – the same chapel where Sebastiano’s painting was to be installed. The nearly simultaneous arrival of these two gifts at the chapel should alert us to the possibility that Sebastiano would have known about the St. John – a work by his friend and collaborator on the Pietà painting – and that knowledge of this had consequences for the decisions he made as he worked on the painting. Christ’s heroic nudity and Sebastiano’s decision to use a stone support for his work can be taken as the artist’s continued interest in the paragone between painting and sculpture. Christ’s supporting seat, covered in white draperies, likewise evokes marble in its rectilinear blocks – and the idea of a figure that emerges from its stone encasing, revealed by the skill of the artist. The anticipated comparison to Michelangelo that would have been drawn when Sebastiano’s painting joined Michelangelo’s St. John at the chapel further highlights the intertextuality at play in the work – its forging connections not only with the St. Peter’s Pietà specifically, but also with Michelangelo’s preferred subject and medium. Rather than seeing this as a case of artistic rivalry, Sebastiano’s Michelangelism can be understood as part of a mode of viewing that plays on connections between objects – those meant for sight and touch, artistic and non-artistic, painted and made in stone – and reflects on how they are like and unlike one another.

To sum up, in one sense, Sebastiano’s painting can be taken as a reaffirmation of the proper form of devotion before relics of Christ’s body at a time when popular
devotion was increasingly directed at material objects rather than looking through them to God. It questions the relationship between relics and the body of Christ, querying the extent to which divine presence can be located within material objects, and it simultaneously emphasizes their visibility and materiality, while directing the viewer to form internal, mental images from external ones. At the same time, the painting stages a reflection on the perceived equivalence between relics, artistic images, and the Host – an equivalence that became highly problematic by the 1530s in Italy when the dissolution of hierarchies among Holy objects in lay devotion threatened the integrity of important distinctions between them and the intended object of veneration.

Most notably, Sebastiano alters Michelangelo’s invention – separating the Virgin from Christ and inserting between them various material substitutes for his body – to bring to the foreground the problematics of mediating the divine through matter. Sebastiano’s work asks the viewer to consider how the idealized, complete body at center – itself a citation of another artistic image – is related to the contact relics that surround it. This citationality calls attention to the notion that contact relics have a physical connection to their origin, in a way that a painting does not. Yet the allusion to mediated distance inherent in the artistic image also questions the immediacy of divine presence that is granted by the relics, themselves imperfect matter, and according to some thinkers, objects which were unworthy of the undue amount of reverence that worshippers were granting them. Sebastiano’s Pietà stages a reflection on the layers of mediation that

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material objects of worship create and asks its viewer to consider the implications of this materiality for their personal devotion and relationship with God.
Conclusion

This study began by drawing the reader’s attention to a number of recurring and unusual tendencies in Sebastiano’s work: the artist’s interest in frontality and flatness, in closing in on the figure of Christ, in setting figures in isolation from one another, but also close to or seemingly breaking through the picture plane, and in the effect of pictorial “slowness.” The resulting appearance of a kind of pictorial irresolution stemming from these tendencies raised questions that were specific to each individual work and the ways that Sebastiano refashioned traditional iconographic types, such as the Pietà, the Flagellation of Christ, and the Carrying of the Cross. The artist’s interest in visual heterogeneity also drew attention to the role that Michelangelo’s drawings play in his work and the consequences this has for notions of authorship and authorial style. My discussion demonstrated that these aspects of Sebastiano’s work amounted to the expression of a key artistic preoccupation: the articulation of effects of distance and proximity to the divine. Each chapter, in turn, traced the broader significance of this concern in context of the central debates among reform-minded thinkers in Rome.

Sebastiano’s interest in the simultaneous assertion of Christ’s proximity and distance to the viewer finds its first expression in the Viterbo Pietà, where Christ is set at the bottom of the canvas, both near the viewer and seemingly outside the material world as it is perceived by the senses. I showed that the painting experiments with a participatory or empathic mode of representation, mirroring the means by which the pious viewer traverses the distance between himself and the divine. Sebastiano’s appropriation of the metaphoric language of Giles of Viterbo further speaks to his
commitment to finding new ways of expressing the layperson’s knowledge of the divine – the role played by, but also the limitations of, the senses in achieving union with God.

The Borgherini chapel likewise insists on a focused meditation on Christ, but one that is mediated by intercessory figures in the foreground as necessary interpreters of Scripture. The problem of human mediation of divine truths and improper interpretation of Scripture had been most recently addressed by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1516, which, as I have shown, propelled Sebastiano to reflect on the relationship between sacred texts, divine truth, and artistic images.

The tension between proximity and distance re-emerges in Sebastiano’s series of Christ Carrying the Cross. The close-ups of Christ’s face and body invite a direct and intimate encounter with him; at the same time, the positioning of the viewer directly in front of Christ’s path and the absence of time or location-specific context within the background suggest that the viewer is invited to recognize the limitations of the physical image and internalize it as inner vision. Sebastiano’s reflection on personal cross-bearing and the relationship between outward action and internal thought reveals his interest in contemporaneous re-interpretations of Thomas à Kempis’ Imitatio Christi, particularly the Alfabeto Christiano by Juan de Valdés, which he would have heard about through his contact with Giulia Gonzaga.

Finally, the Úbeda Pietà, Sebastiano’s last collaborative work with Michelangelo, reveals the artist’s interest in the materiality of Christian devotion as a means of attaining proximity to the divine. The painting alters Michelangelo’s invention – separating the Virgin from Christ and inserting between them various material substitutes for his body – to bring to the foreground the problematics of mediating the divine through matter. In
responding to the concern over improper devotion towards artistic images and relics – mentioned by both Valdés and Castiglione – and the consequent leveling out of important differences between these and the Eucharist, Sebastiano produces a painting that does not arrive at a clearly resolved stance on the role of Holy matter in meditating on Christ. The Pietà reflects on and pictures the very dissolution of hierarchical distinctions, even as it attempts to clarify them.

The works examined in this study contribute to a better understanding of Sebastiano del Piombo’s artistic output in Rome, and the relationship between his art and reform. Rather than a dependent follower of Michelangelo, Sebastiano emerges as a critical and searching thinker, whose works reveal themselves to be intellectually-engaged, pictorial reflections on unresolved questions about image-based devotion. Sebastiano’s work participated in the broader sixteenth-century struggle to define what it meant to mediate divine truths through texts, images, and liturgical objects of veneration. His ongoing thinking about the material and medial status of art in transmitting knowledge of the divine allows us a glimpse into the kinds of self-conscious reflections on the function and hermeneutics of artistic images that occurred in Catholic Reformation Rome.

Sebastiano developed pictorial strategies that invite a phenomenological experience of the work of art and that also generate reflection on the limitations of the material artistic image. These preoccupations underscore Sebastiano’s thinking about the viewer’s role in actively completing the meaning of the work by means of meditation on the external image. My analysis of these strategies revealed that the man-made image occupied a difficult place among other objects of veneration and that artists had to
confront the conflicting demands of the materialism of image-based devotion on one hand, and the need to transcend it, on the other. In this way, this study of Sebastiano and the self-reflexivity of his work situates itself within recent scholarly inquiry into the material and bodily dimension of the religious image and Christian devotional practices.¹

This study, equally engaged with questions of authorship and collaboration raised by Sebastiano’s incorporation of a second authorial identity into his work, also adds to current research on pictorial intertextuality and the performance of style. I have shown that despite his interest in assimilating and transforming Michelangelo’s inventions from the onset of his arrival in Rome, Sebastiano ultimately was not interested in absorbing the artist’s style. His borrowings remain isolated and external to the composition, as if to underscore the sentiment he expresses in his letters – of Michelangelo’s *fantasia* implanting things in the mind “that it did not have” before. Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s alliance allows us to understand such working relationships in terms that do not privilege the giver over the receiver, and that complicate our notions of artistic invention.

Due to the scope of this study, which focused on Sebastiano’s Roman career, as well as the genesis rather than reception of his work, a number of important avenues for research on Sebastiano remain. His Venetian period constitutes a key part of his *oeuvre* and, though it was not treated here, deserves more critical attention. Likewise, Sebastiano’s *Raising of Lazarus* merits renewed consideration in light of the concerns

raised in this dissertation regarding the predominance of collaborative dynamics among Renaissance artists over those grounded in rivalry.

This discussion also raises more questions about the emerging trend of the sharing of drawings among artist friends. Though addressed in Chapter One as a precedent for Sebastiano and Michelangelo’s more long-term alliance, this pattern of gift-exchange within the context of friendship deserves greater consideration as a topic all on its own. A more comprehensive study is necessary to examine other cases of such exchanges in order to better understand how this trend differed from presentation drawings given as gifts to patrons and other non-artist friends, as well as whether, among artists, complete, polished drawings or *modelli* constituted a different class of gifts than those that were more incomplete and perhaps *ad hoc* gifts.

Related to these problems is the question of Michelangelo himself and his reasons for entering into collaboration with Sebastiano, Venusti, Pontormo, Condivi, Daniele da Volterra, and others. The list of collaborators is not small and merits further consideration. I have intentionally framed this study from the perspective of Sebastiano and his interests in entering into an alliance with Michelangelo, but it is worth asking what Michelangelo stood to gain from such alliances. We know that he disliked painting and considered himself a sculptor. Additionally, there is the contemporaneous criticism leveled against him for excelling only at his mastery of the human form and *disegno*. When art critics compared him to the Venetians or to Raphael, and drew attention to what he lacked, perhaps Michelangelo took it to heart, as Vasari suggests. Or perhaps this is more Vasari’s version of events than the reality of Michelangelo’s motives. These are
speculations, of course, but they point to future directions for research into collaboration among Renaissance artists.

A further question raised by this investigation into the origins of Sebastiano’s work is its reception abroad, in particular, its impact on artists and patrons in Spain. Several important studies have been done on this subject, among them Felipe Pereda’s work on Italian-Spanish artistic relations, and they are part of a growing interest in looking at art from a more global perspective. From one angle, scholars are asking how Sebastiano may have catered to so-called Spanish-taste in his commissions for export; from another, his works for export also raise questions about the role of Sebastiano’s style in representing the Italian manner in Spain. How was he refashioned there to meet local concerns? And how was he – a purveyor of the Italian and Michelangelesque style – received and understood? These are questions that are important to explore in future work on Sebastiano and other artists whose work was brought to Spain or who chose to relocate themselves.

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