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

by
Marsha Libina

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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.

Advisor: Stephen J. Campbell

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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

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[1] Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 59-60.

aspects of his work.[2] His paintings are perhaps most commonly singled out for their

effect of "slowness" or "timelessness."[3] 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.[4]

   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.[5]

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.[6]

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[2] *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485 – 1547,* exh. cat., eds. Claudio Strinati, Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, and Roberto Contini (Milan: 24 ORE Motta Cultura srl, 2008), 164.

[3] Andrea Alessi, "Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo: further reflections on the Viterbo *Pietà*," in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485–1547*, exh. cat, eds. Claudio Strinati, Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, and Roberto Contini (Milan: 24 ORE Motta Cultura srl, 2008), 45-51.

[4] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 60 and 135; Claudio Strinati, "Notturno" in *Notturno Sublime: Sebastiano e Michelangelo nella Pietà di Viterbo*, ed. Costanza Barbieri (Viterbo: Viviani Editore s.rl., 2004), 15-19. 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").

[5] 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 techniche 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.

[6] 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).[7] 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.[8] 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: Pauolo 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 […] comunche gli riuscisse, cercò d'avanzarsi più che poteva, sporato dalla 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, 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 sì fatta openione.") Finally, Vasari characterizes Sebastiano as "leisurely and lazy," (agiate ed infingrade") ceasing to do work at the moment that Michelangelo breaks off their friendship.

[8] Michel Hochmann, *Venise et Rome*, 190 and Cecil Hilton Monk Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus* (London: National Gallery, 1967) both echo this narrative.

left, when they are subsequently taken off him, looking like that absurd crow which was described by Horace."[9]

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."[10] 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.[11] 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.[12] 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.

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[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."

[10] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 74-5.

[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, a 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.[13] 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.[14] 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, Radolfo 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 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.

[14] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 43-6; Alessi, "Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo," 45-50*;* Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini write that Sebastiano had an "almost idolatrous" ("quasi idolatrico") attitude towards Michelangelo. See 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*, 164.

his collaborator's style in his drawings in order to bridge the gap.[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

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[15] Hirst, *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.[16] 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.[17] 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.[18] Instead, my understanding of citation and borrowing as a generative artistic

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[16] 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. Giovanni Andrea Gilio*, Dialogo degli errori della pittura,* ed. Paola Barocchi (Firenze, 1986), 39-40. Hollonda is critical of Sebastiano's "negligence and failure," while Gilio, later in the century, is concerned with the absence of visible blood and wounds in Sebastiano's Borgherini *Flagellation*. Pietro Aretino and Michelangelo Biondo on the other hand are quite enthusiastic about Sebastiano's art. See Pietro Aretino, *Il Primo Libro delle Lettere*, ed. Fausto Nicolini (Bari: G. Laterza & figli, 1913), 17; Michelangelo Biondo, *Della nobilissima pittura et della sua arte, del modo, & della dottrina, di conseguirla, ageuolmente et presto* (Vinegia: alla insegna di Appolline, 1549) 16, 17.

[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.

[18] For scholarship that speaks of Michelangelo's "influence" on his followers, see Francis Ames-Lewis and Paul Joannides, *Reactions to the Master: Michelangelo's Effect on Art and Artists in the Sixteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)*,* 3 and Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and his Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 19-33.

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 re-

deployment 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-

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[19] For an overview of intertextuality – the notion that "imitation is not repetition but the completion of an act of interpretation" – its coinage by Julia Kristeva (as well as Kristeva's use of Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic self in relation to the "other") see María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept" Atlantis 18, no. 1/2 (1996): 268-285. According to Kristeva, ""any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another." Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora , Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66. I am also drawing on the work of Stephen J. Campbell and Stephen J. Milner, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Morten Steen Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror: del Vaga, da Volterra, Tibaldi* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2013), and concur with the need to reconsider the notion of "influence" in more active, confrontational terms, in this case, to better reflect the realities of collaborative endeavors. In doing so, I push against Harold Bloom's idea of an "anxiety of influence," where borrowing necessitates anxiety, antagonism, and feelings of unsurpassability towards the source, in arguing that Sebastiano's appropriation of Michelangelo's drawings can be understood in postitive terms – as a critical and self-aware act. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press US, 1997).

[20] I owe my re-thinking of these oppositions to Derrida's articulation of the notion of *différance* and the play of hierarchical binaries in his essay "Différance." 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, *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.[21] 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.[22] Sebastiano's representations of the divine turn

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[21] On heterogeneity and pictorial irresolution in Venetian art, 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,* eds. Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 123-7.

[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

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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.[23] 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.[24]

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

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the review Reindert L. Falkenburg "Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der
Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien by Klaus Krüger" *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 3 (2007): 593-597.
Moreover, as Hans Belting stresses, mediality cannot be reduced to the materiality of images. He defines
mediality as the transmission of images, which "controls the perception of them and creates the viewer's
attention," and which is "controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power (even when it,
as we experience it today, hides behind a seemingly anonymous transmission)." Hans Belting, "Image,
Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology" *Critical Inquiry* 31, No. 2 (2005): 305. Richard Grusin
similarly explains mediality as the way in which media work as an institutionalized form of power through
the public mediation of affect. Richard Grusin*, Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Palgrave
Macmillan, 2010). I am interested in this dimension of authoritative control over image transmission, and
the possibility of an emphasis or self-effacement of mediality. For issues of framing and self-reflexivity in
art, see Victor Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaktion Books,
1995). For current research on mediality, aesthetics, and media culture, see for example Erika Linz, Irmela
Schneider, and Ludwig Jäger. *Media, Culture, and Mediality: New Insights into the Current State of
Research* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010) and Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark. "Mediality,
Materiality, Aesthetic Meaning." Department of Aesthetics and Communication.
http://dac.au.dk/en/research/research-programmes/mediality-materiality-aesthetic-meaning/research-profile
(accessed August 12, 2014). For the application of media studies theory to the study of "multimediality" in
medieval preaching, see René Wetzel, Fabrice Flückiger, and Robert Schultz, *Die Predigt im Mittelalter
zwischen Mündlichkeit, Bildlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit/ La prédication au Moyen Age entre oralité,
visualité et écriture* (Zürich: Chronos, 2010).
[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.
[24] I owe my thinking of the way Sebastiano's work implicates bodily experience, as well as the sense of
sight and touch, to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the relationship between bodily experience and vision.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Theory of Difference: Readings in Contemporary
Continental Thought*, ed. Douglas L Donkel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 87-115.

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.[25] 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.[26] 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" ("vieppiù incupito nella sua malinconia").[27] 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.[28]

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.[29] 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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[25] Federico Zeri, *Pittura e Controriforma: L'"arte senza tempo" di Scipione da Gaeta.* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2001), 23.
[26] Mauro Lucco, *L'Opera Completa di Sebastiano del Piombo* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1980), 122.
[27] Ibid., 122.
[28] Marcia B. Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 152 and Claudio Strinati, "Sebastiano del Piombo tra Michelangelo e Raffaello nella Capella Borgherini" in *Sebastiano del Piombo e la Cappella Borgherini nel Contesto della Pittura Rinascimentale*, eds. Santiago Arroyo Esteban, Bruno Marocchini, and Claudio Seccaroni (Firenze: Nardini, 2010), 96; Strinati, "Notturno," 16.
[29] Hall, *The Sacred Image,* 152.

remains a clear need to investigate Sebastiano's work in less speculative and more

historically-grounded terms.[30] 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 commisions 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.[31]

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.[32] 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."[33] The

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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.

[31] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 136.

[32] Costanza Barbieri, "'Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col Martello.' Fortune e sfortune di Sebastiano" in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo*, 50-65; Costanza Barbieri, "Sebastiano's portraits in *paragone*: sculpted paintings, praise through images" in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 53-7; Christopher Nygren, *Vibrant Icons: Titian's Art and the Tradition of Christian Image-Making.* (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2011), 301-371; 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): 453-508.

[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

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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*.[34] 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.[35] 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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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 Barbieri "'Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi*,*" 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 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. Varchi cites both Francesco Molza and Porrino's verses and states: "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 Lezzioni,* 97. Vasari credits Sebastiano with the invention: "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.

[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

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[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

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[38] Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus*; Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals*, 246-55; Marcia Hall, "*La Resurrezione di Lazzaro* di Sebastiano e la sfida al colore di Raffaello," in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo*, 27-41. Sebastiano's *Raising of Lazarus* is also frequently illustrated in introductory textbooks of Renaissance Art History for its demonstration of the competition between Raphael, Sebastiano and Michelangelo. See John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 2nd ed (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 373 and Stephen J. Campbell and Michael W. Cole, *Italian Renaissance Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 389.

[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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[40] Michelangelo first received the epithet "divine" in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of 1516. See Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, vol. 2, ed. Emilio Bigi (Milano: Rusconi Libri S.p.A., 1982), 1374, Canto XXXIII.2. "Michel, less mortal, than Angel divine." ("Michel più che mortale, Angel divino.")

and Rome by means of travelling and collaborating artists.[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 *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 *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

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

Pietà. The position of Christ at the bottom of the canvas, seemingly set outside the

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[41] See Carmen C. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bette Talvacchia, *Raphael* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2004); Andrew Ladis and Carolyn Woods (eds.) *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop*. (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995). For a detailed testimony of such encounters see Hochmann, *Venise et Rome, 141-242*.

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 the 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.[1] 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.[2] The goal is to contextualize Sebastiano and Michelangelo's partnership within this tradition of

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[1] See, for example, Andrew Ladis and Carolyn Wood, *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995); Carmen C. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bette Talvacchia, *Raphael* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2007); Edmund Pillsbury, "The Sala Grande Drawings by Vasari and His Workshop: Some Documents and New Attributions" *Master Drawings* 14, No. 2 (1976): 127-146+187-200.

[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.[3] 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.[4] 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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[3] I am drawing on the work of Stephen J. Campbell and Stephen J. Milner, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Morten Steen Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror: del Vaga, da Volterra, Tibaldi* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2013), and concur with the need to reconsider the notion of "influence" in more active, confrontational terms, in this case, to better reflect the realities of collaborative endeavors. For scholarship that speaks of Michelangelo's "influence" on other artists, see Ames-Lewis and Joannides, *Reactions to the Master,* 3 and Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and his Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 19-33. For a brief overview of art historical scholarship on imitation and influence, see Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror*, 7-11.
[4] For this view, see Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (New Haven: University Press, 2002), 227-35 and Costanza Barbieri, "The competition between Raphael and Michelangelo and Sebastiano's role in it" in *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael,* ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141-66. See William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo and Marcello Venusti: a case of multiple authorship" in *Reactions to the Master,* 147 for the same argument with regard to Venusti and Michelangelo. I contend that it is problematic to impose mid-century art theory and particularly the Vasarian model of *disegno's* superiority over *colorito* on early 16th century artistic working practices.

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.[6] 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.[7] 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.[8]

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."[9] 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.[10] In certain cases, such as Marcantonio's *The Bather* (c.1509) or Agostino Veneziano's *The*

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[6] David Landau and Peter W Parshall. *The Renaissance Print: 1470-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 116.
[7] Ibid., 113-15.
[8] See Talvacchia, *Raphael*, 204.
[9] Landau and Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 154.
[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.[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

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[11] See for example ibid., 170.

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under the sponsorship of the Monastery of San Marco.[12] Profits from their commissions

were divided equally between Mariotto and the Monastery of San Marco, attesting to the

artists' equal partnership.[13] Their partnership dissolved in 1513 and a document records

their agreement to divide a number of works held in common between themselves.[14]

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.[15] 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.[16]

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.

[13] Ludovico Borgo, "The Works of Mariotto Albertinelli" (PhD diss. Harvard University, 1968), 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.[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 *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 *modelli* (Figure 22 and Figure 23) that show Fra

Bartolommeo's earlier conception of the altarpiece as a *Sacra Conversazione,* with a

Madonna enthroned at center. Moreover, as Ludovico Borgo notes, it is Albertinelli's

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.[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 *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.[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 *Deposition* (Figure 26) has also been linked to this commission. It is

believed that the *Annunciation* and *Deposition* were framed together as part of a storied

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[17] See ibid., 136-8 for a discussion of this commission and the preparatory studies for it.
[18] Ibid., 135.
[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

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[20] Ibid., 140.
[21] Ibid., 143-4.
[22] Keith Vernon Shaw, "The Ovetari Chapel: Patronage, Attribution and Chronology" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 61-3.

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

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[23] Keith Christiansen, *Andrea Mantegna: Padua and Mantua* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1994), 14.
[24] Ibid., 15-16.
[25] Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini, "Working Together: Technique and Innovation in Masolino's and Masaccio's Panel Paintings" in *The Panel Paintings of Masolino and Masaccio: The Role of Technique*, eds. Carl Brandon Strehlke and Cecilia Frosinini (Milan: 5 Continents Editions srl, 2002), 43.
[26] Paul Joannides, *Masaccio and Masolino: A Complete Catalogue* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1993), 61.
[27] Keith Christiansen, "Some Observations on the Brancacci Chapel Frescoes after Their Cleaning" *The Burlington Magazine* 133, No. 1054 (1991): 13-15.

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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[28] Luciana Berti and Rosella Foggi, *Masaccio. Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence: Cantini, 1989), 19 and 104. See also John T. Spike, *Masaccio* (New York: Abbeville Publishing Press, 1995), 43 and Perri Lee Roberts, "Collaboration in Early Renaissance Art: The Case of Masaccio and Masolino," in *The Cambridge Companion to Masaccio*, ed. Diane Cole Ahl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.

[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

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[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."[31] 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.[32] 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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[31] See, for example, Alexander Perrig, *Michelangelo's Drawings: The Science of Attribution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 105-18. The giving of highly finished drawings as gifts to patrons or non-artist friends is a different scenario, beyond the scope of this discussion, and has received consideration in Alexander Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna" Art Bulletin 79 (1997): 647–68 and Alexander Nagel, "Art as Gift: Liberal Art and the Religious Reform in the Renaissance" in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-modern Figurations of Gift Exchange*, eds. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, and Bernhard Jussen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 319-60.
[32] Marco Carminati, *Cesare da Sesto, 1477-1523* (Milan: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1994), 120.

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).[33] 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 Arrezzo 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.[34] 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.[35]

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[33] For the details of these commissions, see David Franklin, "Documents for Giovanni Antonio Lappoli's Visitation in Sante Flora e Lucilla in Arezzo" *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 41. Bd., H. 1/2 (1997): 197-205 and Eugene A. Carroll, "Lappoli, Alfani, Vasari, and Rosso Fiorentino" *The Art Bulletin* 49, No. 4 (1967): 297-304.

[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; perchè 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 natirale."

[35] Vasari, *Le Vite*, VI, 11.

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.
>
> Per queste e molte altre opere essendo passata la fama di questo nobilissimo artefice insino in Francia ed in Fiandra, Alberto Durero tedesco, pittore mirabilissimo ed intagliatore di rame di bellissime stampe, divenne tributario delle sue opere a Raffaello, e gli mandò la testa d'un suo ritratto condotta da lui a guazzo su una tela di bisso, che da ogni banda mostrava parimente, e senza biacca, i lumi trasparenti, se non che con acquerelli di colori era tinta e macchiata, e de' lumi del panno aveva campato i chiari: la quale cosa parve maravigliosa a Raffaello; perchè egli gli mandò molte arte disegnate di man sua, le quali furono carissime ad Alberto.[36]

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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[36] Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 353-4.

nackette Bild gemacht und hat sy dem Albrecht Dürer gen Nornberg geschickt, Im sein

hand zu weisen.")[37] 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.[38] 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.[39] 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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[37] Quoted in Christopher S. Wood, "A Message from Raphael" in *Konturen im Fluss: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Zeichnung und des Diagramms*, eds. Friedrich Teja Bach and Wolfram Pichler (Munich: Fink, forthcoming).
[38] Ibid.
[39] *Masterworks from the Musée Des Beaux-arts, Lille* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1992) 214.

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 conescendolo 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

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[40] Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 319.
[41] Luke Syson, *Renaissance Siena: Art for a City* (London: National Gallery Company, 2007), 255-6.

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.[45] 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.[46] 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]

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[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.")[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 *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.[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."[50] The same is true, he says, of Michelangelo's *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

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[48] Quoted in idbi., 39.
[49] Ibid., 44.
[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.[51] 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.[52] 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

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[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

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[53] Roberto Bartalini, "Da Raffaello al Sodoma. Sulla camera nuziale di Agostin Chigi alla Farnesina," in *Late Raphael*, eds. Tom Henry and Paul Joannides (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2013), 83-4.
[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 modegli con gran numero di cartoni finiti per far pitture, e parte d'opere fatte, che venutogli fantasia 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 si privò questo paese di tante e sì 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

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[55] Vasari, *Le Vite*, VII, 202.
[56] Perrig, *Michelangelo's Drawings*, 2.
[57] Pina Ragionieri, *Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 105.
[58] Paola Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo,* III (Firenze: Sansoni, 1973), 340. Also cited in Elizabeth Pilliod, "The influence of Michelangelo: Pontormo, Bronzino and Allori" in *Reactions to the Master*, 34.

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.

[61] Dale Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8-12.

[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

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[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."[65] 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."[66] In disclosing these jointly-authored works, Michiel appears

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[65] Marcantonio Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI esistenti in Padova Cremona Milano Pavia Bergamo Crema e Venezia,* ed. Jacopo Morelli (Bassano: Bassano del Grappa, 1800), 64. "La tela a oglio delli tre Filosofi nel paese, dui titti, e uno sentado che contempla li raggi solari, con quell sasso finto cusì mirabilmente, fu incominciata da Zorzi da Castelfranco, e finita da Sebastiano Veneziano."

[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

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[67] See, for example, David Alan Brown et al, eds. *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art , 2006), 22 and 31; Marie Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dreams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 94; Sydney Joseph Freedberg, *Painting In Italy, 1500-1600* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 134-5.

[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.[71]

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.[72] Campbell defines Venetian poetic painting as a process of recombination, that is, of insetting or "grafting" of heterogeneous elements.[73] 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.
[72] 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*, 123-7.
[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

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[74] W. R. Valentiner, "A Combined Work by Titian, Giorgione and Sebastiano del Piombo" *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit* 7, No. 6 (1926): 62-65.
[75] For a brief account of various scholarly attributions see Jaynie Anderson, *Giorgione: the Painter of 'poetic Brevity,' Including Catalogue Raisonné* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 326.

Sebastiano in this painting as he did in the *Pastoral Concert,* which, until recently, was credited to Giorgione or to both Giorgione and Titian.[76] 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.[77]

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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[76] Stephen Campbell, "Painting in Venice: 1540-1590," Class seminar, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. February 22, 2011.
[77] Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "An Enigmatic Venetian Picture at Detroit" *The Art Bulletin* 9, No. 1 (1926): 73.

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.

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[78] William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo and Marcello Venusti," 147. See also Barbara Agosti, Marcella Marongiu, and Roberta Scarpelli, *Michelangelo, amici e maestranze: Sebastiano del Piombo, Pontormo, Daniele da Volterra, Marcello Venusti, Ascanio 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.

[79] Wallace, "Michelangelo and Marcello Venusti," 140 and 153.

[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.[81] 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).[82] The Casa Buonarroti version was likely for

Alessandro Vitelli, executed by either Pontormo or Bronzino, his collaborator.

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[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.[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.[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 *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 *Pietàs* and the *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 *Christ at the Column* for the Botoni *Flagellation* (Figure 100), and possibly other commissions that will be discussed later in Chapter Four.

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[83] Ibid., 244.
[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 *Pietà* (Figure

113 and Figure 114)*,* which were based on Michelangelo's presentation drawings for

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[85] Johannes Wilde, "Cartonetti by Michelangelo" *The Burlington Magazine* 101, No. 680 (1959): 377.

[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.[89] 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.[90]

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[89] Wallace, "Michelangelo and Marcello Venusti," 147-52.
[90] Wilde, "Cartonetti by Michelangelo," 374.

Yet this attempt to elevate one collaborator above the rest feels quite forced, if not arbitrary, and is lacking in evidence.[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 *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.[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.[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.[94] She examines two of their joint works: the double-sided *David and Goliath* (1550-1) (Figure 117) and *Mercury*

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[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., *Michelangelo, amici e maestranze*, 361.

[92] The term comes from Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press US, 1997).

[93] Agosti et al., *Michelangelo, amici e maestranze,* 333. See also Letizia Treves, "Daniele da Volterra and Michelangelo: A collaborative relationship" *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 "*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.

[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

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[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.[99] 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

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[100] Phyllis Borland, "A Copy by Venusti after Michelangelo" *The Burlington Magazine* 103, No. 703 (1961): 434; Hugo Chapman, "Michelangelo Drawings. Paris" *The Burlington Magazine* 145, No. 1203 (2003): 469.

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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[101] Hugo Chapman, *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 265-6.

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

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[102] Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror,* 91 and 75.

Leonardo Sormani complete them.[103] 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[104]
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."[105] 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 littere con el disegnio, dil che vi rengratio quanto si po rengratiare; et satisfami assai. Però el Cristo, da le braze et la testa in fora, è quasi simile a quello de Sancto Pietro in Montorio; ma pur io me accomodarò 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:

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[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 gudicio non è falso; dunce non mi negate più d'essere unico, quando io ve lo scrivo, perchè n'ò troppi testimony, e écci un quadro qua, Idio grazia, che me ne fa fede a chiunche 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 havete 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 cossì 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 pocco 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.
[110] Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio,* I, 190. "Avete a mandare el disegno a Bastiano. E richordovi el quadro di Pier Francesco, e a voi mi rachomando."
[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.[112] 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."[113] Yet, she continues, "[Michelangelo's] interest in the project or in helping Sebastiano was clearly waning" and thus "his reply was silence, or darkness."[114]

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 groso 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 sopra 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 più che fidato, non le mandate; più presto aspetarò insino a la venuta vostra, et vui le portarete. Sì che io non ve dirò altro. Cristo sano ve conservi.[115]

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[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 pocco 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).[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 [*fuocho*] of the kind that places things in the

mind that it does not have, and will be nearly impossible to remove."[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.[118] Sebastiano's very

substitution of (God's) grace for (Michelangelo's) light in his quotation from *Veni Sancte*

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[116] Ibid., 388, no. 3.

[117] Ibid., 388. "la fantasia vostra se acenderia un fuocho de sorta che se li meteria cosse [nel] ciervelo che non le ànno, et saria quasi impossibile a levargele."

[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

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[119] Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio*, III, 272. "Ma se quella non puotesse collorire, comme essa mi disse a bocha, almeno vorebe che Sebastiano vostro lo colorisse, dil che Vostra Signoria mi promisi advisarci [...]"

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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.

> Avendo Pier Francesco Borgherini, mercante fiorentino, preso una
> cappella in San Piero in Montorio entrando in chiesa a man ritta, ella fu
> col favor di Michelagnolo allogata a Sebastiano, perché il Borgherino
> pensò, come fu vero, che Michelagnolo dovesse far egli il disegno di tutta
> l'opera.[120]

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.[121] One of the letters, dating to

October 20, 1515, has Michelangelo say:

> Know that I do not want to give any burden or annoyance to Pierfrancesco
> 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.
>
> Sappi che io non voglio dar charicho né noia a nessuna a Pier Francesco
> Borg[h]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.[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 *Vita* of Pontormo, Vasari praises Pontormo's *Noli me Tangere* and *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:

> 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

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[121] See his letters of October 6 and 20 and November 3, 1515 in Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio,* I, 181-3.
[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:

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[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'avere il Pontormo, che glielo conducesse di pittura, avendogli detto il Buanarroto, che niuno poteva meglio servirlo di costui. Avendo dunque condotta Iacopo questa opera a perfezzione, ella fu stimata pittura rara per la grandezza del disegno di Michelagnolo e per lo colorito di Iacopo, onde avendola veduta il signor Alessandro Vitelli, il quale era allora in Fiorenza capitano della guardia de' soldati, si fece fare da Iacopo un quadro del medesimo cartone, il quale mandò e fé porre nelle sue case a Città di Castello. Veggendosi adunque quanta stima facesse Michelagnolo del Puntormo e con quanta diligenza esso Puntormo conducesse a perfezione e ponesse ottimamente in pittura i disegni e cartoni di Michelagnolo, fece tanto Bartolomeo Bettini, che il Buonarruoti 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, Iacopo 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 [...] [125]

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.

Però di nuovo vi prega el satisfarli [il monsignor di Capua], con vostra comodità però, et in panno o in tavola, a vostro modo, che la electione si assuo volere, che di tutto si satisfarà, così del grande o piccole le figure. [...] E questo dico da me: se vi paressi fare uno schizzo di carbone o giesso in sul cartone d'un fogl[i]o reale e mandarli intanto, credo saria bene. [126]

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

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[125] Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio,* III, 340. And cited in Pilliod, "The influence of Michelangelo," 34.
[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 desengno da voi fatto in casa vostra."
[128] Barocchi and Ristori, *Il Carteggio*, V, 122. "Io desiderarei che per mezzo Vostro messer Marcello [Venusti] ne facesse dua [quadri], di quelli medesimi desegni, e costassero ciò che volessero."
[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." [130] 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. [131] 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.

> Et benché io sappia che gl'anni forse con altra persona vi potrieno scusare, credo che meco non vi vorrete di tal scusa servire, sì che almeno non pigliate il carico del disegnio di seta opera, et di farla gettare e pulire ai miglior maestri che di costà potrete trovare. [132]

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[130] Ibid., 234 and no.1. "[…] aspettando di mandare la resolutione et insieme la expeditione de' denari per l'opera che, per mezzo Vostro et per servitio della Regina madre, Danielle 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, *Vite*, 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.[133]

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.[134]

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[133] For a discussion of copying versus imitation, see Richard Schiff, "Originality" in *Critical Terms for Art History,* 2nd ed., eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 148-9.

[134] Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 94-5. "Poi è noto a ciascuno, che Michel'Angolo gli faceva i disegni: e chi si veste

- Ludovico Dolce, *Aretino*

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 Franciso 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.[135] 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.[136] Others, like Claudio

Strinati, have stressed important differences in the two artists' styles and pictorial

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

[135] Cecil Hilton Monk Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus* (London: National Gallery, 1967); Goffen,
Renaissance Rivals; Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). See
also Treves, "Daniele da Volterra and Michelangelo," 36 who maintains Dolce's combat-inspired terms for
describing Sebastiano as "the perfect weapon against Raphael's supporters, proving to be of use later as
Michelangelo's informer and mediator during the latter's absence from Rome."

[136] Costanza Barbieri "'Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col martello.' Fortune e sfortune di
Sebastiano" in *La Pieta di Sebastiano a Viterbo,* 50-65; Enrico Parlato "Durata e persistenza della visione
nella *Pietà* di Viterbo" in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo,* 42-9*;* Tullia Carratù, "La Flagellazione di
Cristo di Viterbo: una replica *ad hoc,*" in *Notturno Sublime,* 49-52; Andrea Alessi "Dante, Sebastiano and
Michelangelo: further reflections on the Viterbo *Pietà*" in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*; Marcia B.
Hall, *The Sacred Image In the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio* (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 2011), 152.

interests, thereby refocusing the discussion on the uniqueness and specificity of

Sebastiano's project that was "absolutely and completely his own".[137]

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."[138] 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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[137] Claudio Strinati, "Notturno," in *Notturno Sublime*, 19. "l'affermazione di una specificità del progetto artistico di Sebastiano che è assolutamente e totalmente suo […]"

[138] Leonardo da Vinci, Codex Urbinas Latinus, fol. 39v; Quoted in Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker, eds. *Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 193-4.

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.[139] 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.[140]

In that same passage, he goes on to characterize Sebastiano as "someone who cannot make a design."[141] 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."[142]

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 giostava di pari con Rafaello, se bene haveva in mano la lancia di Michel'Angolo: e questo, perche 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.[143] The other crows chastise it for not being content with what Nature had bestowed on it.[144] 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.[145]

> 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.[146]

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[143] Phaedrus, "Graculus Superbus et Pavo," in *Babrius and Phaedrus,* ed. and trans. Ben Edwin Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 195-7.

[144] Ibid., 196-7. "'Contentus nostris si fuisses sedibus et quod 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."

[145] Translation by Gregson Davis, *A Companion to Horace* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 296.

[146] Horace, *Satires and Epistles,* ed. Edward Parmelee Morris (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 39.

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].[147]

> Voglio che 'l nostro cortegiano un tutto l'abito sia pulito e delicate ed abbia una certa manera feminile o vana, né piú in una cosa che nell'altra, come molti ne vedemo, che pongon tanto studio nella capigliara, che si scordano il resto; altri fan professione de denti, altri di barba, altri di borzachini, altri di berrette, altri di cuffie; e *cosí intervien che quelle poche cose piú culte paiono lor prestate, e tutte l'altre che sono sciocchissime si conoscono per le loro*. E questo tal costume voglio che fugga il nostro cortegiano, per mio consiglio [my italics].[148]

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.[149] This stricture against affectation in

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[147] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation, An Authoritative Text Criticism*, ed. Daniel Javitch, trans. Charles Singleton (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 2002), 89-90.
[148] Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano,* ed. Silvano Del Missier (Novara: Istituto Geografico de Agostini, 1968), 209-10.
[149] Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 75; Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano,* 178. "travestito porta seco una certa libertà e licenzia, la quale tra l'altre 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.[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.

> Ascanio della Ripa Transone durava gran fatica, ma mai non se ne vedde il frutto nè in opera nè in disegni, e pestò parecchi anni intorno a una tavola, che Michelangelo gli aveva dato un cartone; nel fine se n'è ito in fummo quella buona aspettazione che si credeva di lui, che mi ricordo che Michelangelo gli veniva compassione sì dello stento suo, e l'aiutava di suo mano; ma giovò poco.[151]

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

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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.

[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.

[151] Vasari, *Vite*, vol. 7, 273-4.

and paintings" and thus produced a work in which there was "nothing that was not borrowed."[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 dì 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.[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 *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 *maniera*.[154] In his *Vita* of Mariotto Albertinelli, he describes the artist as Fra Bartolommeo's closest friend, "his

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[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 *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.

[153] Ibid., 281.

[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 *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."[155] "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."[156] 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.[my italics]

> 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 [my italics].[157]

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 domestichezza con Baccio della Porta. Che erono un'anima ed un corpo […] Perchè prese tanto animo, vedendo riuscir sì 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.[158]

Vasari is similarly approving of Pontormo's *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."[159] And as with Albertinelli, it is important for Vasari that Pontormo was imitating the *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."[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 *fantasia*

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[158] Paolo Pino, *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 aggiontovi il colore di Titiano […]."
[159] Vasari, *Vite*, vol. 6, 277. "ella fu stimata pittura rara per la grandezza del disegno di Michelagnolo e per lo colorito di Iacopo."
[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.[161] 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

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[161] Vasari, *Vite*, 55-6. See David Jaffé, "Daniele da Volterra's Satirical Defense of His Art"
Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 54 (1991): 247-252 for a discussion of Vasari's account
and the drawings after the stucco reliefs. For dating of the reliefs, see Vittoria Romani, *Daniele da Volterra
Amico di Michelangelo* (Firenze: Mandragora s.r.l., 2003), 87.

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].[162]

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 ΠΑΡΑΓΓΕΛΛΩ ΜΗΔΕΝ ΥΠΕΡ ΤΟΝ ΜΕΤΡΟΝ) which begins at the top and continues below.[163] Hansen has convincingly shown these inscriptions together to mean that knowledge of ideal measurements, the mark of artistic perfection, lies within the artist

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[162] Vasari, *Vite*, vol.7, 55-6.
[163] Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror*, 62. Jaffé misreads the Greek inscription, divided between top and bottom, to say "My advice to all [artists] is nothing," and separately, "beyond measure." See Jaffé, "Daniele da Volterra's Satirical Defense," 250.

and can only be known through understanding one self.[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.[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.[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

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[164] Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirro*r, 63.
[165] Cited in ibid., 63.
[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.[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).[168] In this way, the gesture becomes an indication of "dual or shared authorship, blurring the limits between Daniele and Michelangelo."[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

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[167] Romani, *Daniele da Volterra Amico di Michelangelo,* 41-2 and Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirro*r, 66.
[168] Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirro*r, 66.
[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.[1] 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.

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[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

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[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."[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 16th-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.[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

Pietàs 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.[6]

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[4] Ibid., 48

[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.

[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 Altar-
Piece 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

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Manca, *The Art of Ercole de' Roberti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51. Cosmé Tura's Louvre *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* was a lunette for the Roverella Polyptych in Ferrara. See Stephen J. Campbell, *Cosmè Tura: Painting and Design In Renaissance Ferrara,* ed. Alan Chong (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2002), 101-7 for a discussion of the work and the Roverella family; see Fig. 87 on p.108 for a reconstruction of the Roverella altarpiece, after Roberto Longhi.

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 Sebastiano'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 Sebastiano'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 Sebastiano'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 Sebastiano's work that appealed to their interests in countering *maniera* art. Their copies after Sebastiano'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 Sebastiano'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.[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 *Pietà*.[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.[12] I tie the abovementioned concerns to the early 16th-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

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[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 *Pietà* is a reflection on this dynamic. For a discussion of the altarpiece and its functions in the early 1500s, see Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and Patricia Meilman, *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, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[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.

[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, *Sebastiano del Piombo,* 60 and 135; Stefania Pasti, "Sebastiano's Influence on Post-Council Figurative Production," in *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.

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.[13] 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.[14] 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 where 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.

[14] Klaus Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy" in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self In Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* eds. Reindert L. Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007), p. 43, 60, 66-8.

transformation.[15] 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.[16] His Christocentric piety, his focus on interior renewal, and his search for a simplified and more individual spirituality became a model for later reformers.[17] 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.[18] He was invested in the idea of a "poetic theology."[19] This can be best observed

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[15] Walter S. Melion, "Introduction: Meditative Images and the Psychology of the Soul" in *Image and Imagination,* 1-36

[16] Eva-Maria Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism in Sixteenth-Century Italy" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, No. 4 (1953): 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.

[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.[20] 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."[21] 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 Nodes, *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 metaphoric language to convey his call for individual reform. I argue that Sebastiano was greatly invested in the metaphoric potential of painting. His representation of Christ is metaphoric 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.[24] 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.[25] The painting as a whole becomes a

meditation on interior transformation effected by contemplation of the divine.

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[24] The "movement of the soul" towards God is a concept that recurs throughout the writings of St. Augustine, Marsilio Ficino, and Giles of Viterbo. See Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: The Confessions,* ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: New City Press, 1990), 113,179, and 310, Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology,* trans. Michael J. B. Allen and John Warden, eds. James Hankins and William Bowen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), *3.1.10, 3.1.12-16, 4.1.25, 14.10.17, 15.12.7-8, 16.7.7, 18.10.2*; and Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar*, 233-4.

[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.[26] 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 Camerae 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.[27] 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 Betonti 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.[28] Another document records the construction of a singing gallery or "coro pensile" on the opposite transept wall, which Botoni had built in 1519.[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.[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).[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.[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

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[28] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 44.

[29] Archivio di Stato, Viterbo, Notaio N. di Ser Angelo, 1607*,* cc.14 recto and verso. Cited in ibid., 44 no.10.

[30] The archival documents however specifically refer to a "capella" rather than an "altare" when speaking of Botoni's monetary donations and provisions.

[31] Simonetta Valtieri, "La chiesa di S. Francesco a Viterbo." *Biblioteca e Società* V, no.9 (1983): 13 and 27 no.53.

[32] Ibid., 13. Bibl. Com. Vit. Riforme, 74, fol. 71r (24 giugno 1605). "I Rev. Padri di S. Francesco hanno dato il Memoriale che si legge et in substantia continebat che ritrovandosi la volta della lor sagrestia rotta e crepata in due parti et minaccia rovina, et se per avventura cascasse, rovinerebbe quella bellisima imagine della Pietà, opera così nobile et segnalata. Supplicano gli si concesa quella elemosina che N.S. le spirenà per riparare a detta rovina, poichè il d° Convento oltre l'esser povero, si ritrova sino a cento scudi di debito." Cited in ibid., 27 no.54.

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.[33] 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.[34]

 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.[35]

 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.[36]

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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[33] See plan of the Friars' convent and the church, Figures 39 and 3 in Valtieri, "La chiesa di S. Francesco," 19 and 5.

[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.

[35] For a discussion of how liturgical space can function as a threshold between the visible and the invisible and between human and divine see Jacqueline E. Jung, "Seeing Through Screens: The Gothic Choir Enclosure as Frame" in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives On Religious Screens, East and West,* ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 185-213.

[36] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece In Renaissance Venice*, 73-4.

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.[37] 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.[38] 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.[39]

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

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[37] Ibid., 70-4.
[38] Cesare Pinzi, *I Principali Monumenti di Viterbo: Guida pel Visitatore* (Viterbo: Sette città, 1993).
[39] Valtieri, "La chiesa di S. Francesco," 7 and 26, no. 27. See Archivio di Stato, Viterbo, Notaio Battista D'Antonio, 262, f.112.

great number of Popes, Emperors, and Governatori del Patrimonio.[40] 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.[41] 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.

> Chorus antiquus in ecclesiae parietibus undique apertus extat et in eo Layci tantum sedent. Alius vero Chorus in quo frates divina officia recitant est a dextris altaris maioris eminenter collocatus. Habet sedilia lignea vetera. […] Est undique septus et in eo layci no sedent. Habent organum, et a fibus diebus festis pulsatur.[42]

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[40] P. M. Alfonso and M. Jacobelli, *La Chiesa Monumentale di S. Francesco d'Assisi in Viterbo* (Viterbo, 1935), 15. This small booklet can be found inserted among the folios of the Archivio Dioecesano, Visita Apostolica (1929-41). See also Valtieri, "La chiesa di S. Francesco," 7.

[41] Tarcisio Auda, *Basilica di S. Francesco alla Rocca in Viterbo* (Viterbo: Agnesotti, 1961), 22.

[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.[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.[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

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[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.
[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

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[45] Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 568.
[46] See Lorenza Melli, "Disegni di Michelangelo per la Pietà di Sebastiano," in *Notturno Sublime*, 33-7.
[47] See, for example, ibid., 33-5 and Barbieri "Disegno fiorentino, colore veneto," 60.
[48] Alessi, "Dante, Sebastiano and Michelangelo," 48-9.
[49] Ibid., 47.

explicitly and intentionally un-Michelangelesque, especially when compared to the Virgin, and thus Sebastiano's invention.[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.[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.[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

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[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 sì fatta openione, 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

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[56] Ibid., 46.

Venice.[57] 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.[58] 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.[59]

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."[60] 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.[61] 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.
[60] Ibid, 190. "[...] les lunettes de la Farnésine prouvent qu'il était mal à l'aise dans la représentation de la figure humaine au moment de son arrivée à Rome. En cherchant à imiter ou à trascrire directement les dessins de Michel-Ange, Sebastiano était donc probablement convaincu de devoir se soumettre à une tradition supérieure a celle de sa ville natale." The idea that Sebastiano was an inept draughtsman or that he renounced his Venetian style upon perceiving the superiority of the Roman manner has been voiced by other scholars. See Cecil Hilton Monk Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus* (London: National Gallery, 1967), 11. Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), *227, 254-5, 261;* Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 39.
[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.[62] The Christ child retains the heroic, adult body – signaling his ties to Roman antiquity and perhaps a recollection of Michelangelo's

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[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,

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[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.

[64] Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 234.

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

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[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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[66] Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, eds., *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6.

trajectory, thus, traces the "conflicting demands of drama and symbol."[67] Likewise, for David Rosand, altarpieces were innovative in the early mid-16th century for their narrative instability and asymmetry. Their responses to site conditions "freed" them from "the controls of iconic centrality."[68] 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,

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[67] Ibid., 225
[68] David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 51.

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

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[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 Annunication* re-orients 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 Tempestini, *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.[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.[72] Bellini's *Dead Christ Supported by Angels*, despite its belonging to a different

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[71] Stephen J. Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 76.

[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

Otto Pächt, *Venetian Painting in the 15th Century: Jacopo, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna*, ed. Margareta Vyoral-Tschapka and Michael Pächt, trans. Fiona Elliot (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2003), 167.

[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.[74] 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.[75] 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.[76]

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.[77]

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

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[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.[82] 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*.[83] 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 Pieta 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

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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.[84] 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

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[84] 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.[85] 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.[86] 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.[87]

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'Academia (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

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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.[88]

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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[88] Martin Kemp, "Introduction" in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, 12. For a discussion of this work as a self-conscious demonstration of the legitimacy of images in liturgy, see Stephen J. Campbell, "Renaissance Naturalism and the Jewish Bible: Ferrara, Brescia, Bergamo, 1520-1540," in *Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism,* eds. Herbert L. Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 300.

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.[89] Artists in Northern Italy were

preoccupied with the nature of eucharistic presence, as Romanino's *Mass of St.

Apollonius* has already shown. Just a few years prior, Romanino produced another

painting on the subject, *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.[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.[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

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[89] Erasmus, in his *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, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 188 and 122. Zwingli published his *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, *bread*, quadras, tablets, *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, *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, *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.
[90] Campbell, "Renaissance Naturalism," 306.
[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*.[92] 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.[93]

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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[92] Tom Henry and Paul Joannides, *Late Raphael* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2012), 178-81.
[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

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[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.
[96] Petrarch, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De Remediis Utrivsque Fortune,* vol. I, trans., Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 130.

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

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[97] Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Michelangelo: The Poems*, ed. and trans. Christopher Ryan (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 192-3.
[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 perchè la pittura è cosa caduca et instabele, la scultura è molto più senza comparitione, et non da paragonar con pittura per niun modo, perchè de antiqui se ritrova sino alli nostri tempi de le sue scolture, 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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Testimonianze (Verona: Scripta, 2008), 177-8; also cited in Lionello Puppi, "Per Tullio Lombardo," *Arte lombardia*, XVII/I (1972), 100-3 and Humfrey, *The Altarpiece In Renaissance Venice*, 274.

[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.[100] 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."[101] 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

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 eterne 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 eterne, e che nè il fuoco nè i tarli potessero lor nuocere." See Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 579.

[100] John Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 48.

[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).[102] 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."[103] 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."[104] 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."[105] Augustine views the soul as being fitted together or imprinted with external images – it takes the shape of the object of its focused attention.[106] 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 Érémitique:d'après la doctrine du bienheureux Paul Giustiniani* (Corbeil: Crété, 1955). For the original Latin manuscript, see RVE f.102, 102ᵛ. RVE refers to Giustiniani's *Regula vitae eremiticae* (1520), preserved in the Sacro Eremo Tuscolano of Frascati.

[103] Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21ˢᵗ Century: The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: New York City Press, 1991), 11.1.1. See Margaret R. Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's 'De trinitate' and 'Confessions'" *The Journal of Religion* 63, No. 2 (1983): 125-142 for a discussion of Augustine's recurring use of physical vision as a metaphor for spiritual vision. Augustine emphasizes the necessity of human effort, concentration and training the physical eye to achieve a spiritual vision of God.

[104] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.6.50.

[105] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 10.6.8.

[106] Augustine, *TheTrinity*, 11.2.2-3.

things outside itself as becoming "stuck to them with the glue of care."[107] 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.*

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[107] Augustine, *TheTrinity*,. 10.5.7.

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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

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[108] See Hans Belting, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages: form and function of early paintings of the Passion,* trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle: A.D. Caratzas, 1990), 124-9 for a discussion of the meaning and history of the cloth-borne image of the *epitaphios* and the San Marco cloth specifically.

[109] Anastasia Drandaki, Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and Anastasia Tourta, eds. *Heaven & Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2013), 156; Warren Woodfin, "Liturgical Textiles" in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557),* ed. Helen C. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art , 2004), 296-7.

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.[110]

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.[111] 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.[112] 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 *maniera* (the figure of Christ is anything but archaizing), Sebastiano

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[110] 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" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* Vol. 34/35 (1980/1981): 15.

[111] Belting, *The Image and its Public*, 128.

[112] 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).

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.[113] 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).[114] 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

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[113] 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.

[114] Per-Arne Bodin, *Eternity and Time: Studies in Russian Literature and the Orthodox Tradition* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2007), 88.

for a frozen moment in time.[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.[116] In this way, the *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 *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.[117] In this way, Sebastiano's work shows itself to be both modern and rooted in tradition. That the *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.[118] The concern with the longevity and

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[115] Ibid., 87.
[116] Ibid., 88.
[117] For the most recent discussion of painting's citationality and absorption of other media, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 335-45.
[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" *The Art Bulletin* 84, No. 4 (2002): 596-620; Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art,* 115-124*;* and 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) on Filippino 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.[119] 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.[120] 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.

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reflection on image, idol and art," in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, eds., Michael W. Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 133-159.

[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 asciutti, si uniscono al marmo di maniera che quasi impietriscono, 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 Lezzioni,* 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 embededness 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).[121] As argued previously, his Hermitage *Lamentation* does this even more explicitly and rhetorically.

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[121] Anthony Grafton, "Historia and Istoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context*" I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 8 (1999), 67-8.

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.[122] 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.[123] 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.[124] 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.[125] 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.[126] 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.[127] 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.[128]

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[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.

[125] Howard E. Smither, "The Function of Music on the Forty-Hour Devotion of 17th- and 18th-century Italy" in *Music from the Middle Ages Through the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Gwynn S. McPeek*, eds. Carmelo Peter Comberiati and Matthew C. Steel (Routledge, 1988), 150.

[126] Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred,* "The Easter Virgil: An Overview."

[127] Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 115 and Smither, "The Function of Music," 150.

[128] Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 27-8.

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.[129] 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*.[130] 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.[131] 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.[132]

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.[133]

> 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

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[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.

[131] Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred,* "The Easter Virgil: An Overview."

[132] Brooks, "The Sepulcher of Christ in Art and Liturgy," 47.

[133] Thomas à Kempis, *Prayers and Meditations on the Life of* Christ (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1908), 233.

venturum sperans domi remansit et orationibus sanctis interim vacans adventum tuum desiderio magno expectavit.[134]

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*.[135]

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.[136] 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.[137] 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.

[135] For the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and its relationship to the Triduum liturgy, see Denise L. Despres, "Sacramentals and Ghostly Sights" *Religion & Literature* 42, No. 1 (2010): 105.

[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?[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?"[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.[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.

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[138] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press, 1991), 228-9; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 152-3. "conantur aeterna sapere, sed adhuc in praeteritis et futuris rerum motibus cor eorum volitat et adhuc vanum est. quis tenebit illud et figet illud, ut paululum stet, et paululum rapiat splendorem semper stantis aeternitatis, et comparet cum temporibus numquam stantibus, et videat esse incomparabilem, et videat longum tempus, nisi ex multis praetereuntibus motibus qui simul extendi non possunt, longum non fieri; non autem praeterire quicquam in aeterno, sed totum esse praesens; nullum vero tempus totum esse praesens; et videat omne praeteritum propelli ex futuro et omne futurum ex praeterito consequi, et omne praeteritum ac futurum ab eo quod semper est praesens creari et excurrere? quis tenebit cor hominis, ut stet et videat quomodo stans dictet futura et praeterita tempora nec futura nec praeterita aeternitas?"

[139] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., Henry Chadwick, 229; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell, 153. "numquid manus mea valet hoc aut manus oris mei per loquellas agit tam grandem rem?"

[140] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., Henry Chadwick, 304; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell, 205. "tu autem, domine, semper operaris et semper requiescis, nec vides ad tempus nec moveris ad tempus nec quiescis ad tempus, et tamen facis et visiones temporales et ipsa tempora et quietem ex tempore."

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,

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[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 embrosia. Nectar inebrians voluptatem significat, ambrosia vero, quietem et stabilem immotamque rei felicis, et felicitatis aeternitatem, et ut ita dicam, immortalitatem."

and the intellect as motion towards that goal.[144] 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."[145] 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."[146] By rising up through the stages, the soul frees itself

from "the flux and fog of matter."[147] 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."[148]

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.[149] 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."[150] 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 praesente quiescimus. Sed motus ille est appetitus, actus voluntatis et amoris. Ergo eiusdem est quies abeunte motu"

[145] Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar,* 233-4.

[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 figurae, 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.[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.[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

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[151] Giles of Viterbo, *Scechina*, 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.

[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 infirmitas animis nostris illecebras proponit, innectit, clamore, vocibus ac scripto opus est, ut doctum imperitus intelligat et a via mala convertatur. Id prospiciens peintissimus Deus, spiritus invisibilis incircumscriptusque, 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 graspable 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.[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

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[153] Augustine's question is evoked in Contarini's letter of 1512 to Giustiniani, showing that it still held meaning in 16th-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.[154] 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."[155] 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.[156]

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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.

[155] Cited in Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Theory of Immortality in Marsilio Ficino" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, No. 3 (1940): 314. Translations are Kristeller's. For original Latin, see Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia* (Torino, di A. Barrera, 1959), 318 f.

[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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[159] For a discussion of the senses as an aid to meditation and a path to the soul's salvation, see Allie Terry, "Criminal vision in early modern Florence: Fra Angelico's altarpiece for "Il Tempio" and the Magdalenian gaze" in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, eds. John Shannon Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 47-8.

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.[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."[161] The shift from corporeal to spiritual sight is made analogous to the practice of beholding a painting and witnessing a vision.[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

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[160] Jannette Vusich, "*Divinus Amor Extasim Facit*: Fra Bartolommeo and Mysticism in Renaissance Florence" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 37-41.
[161] Ibid., 40
[162] Ibid., 41.

picture-plane, mirrors the viewer standing before the work and underscores the immediacy of the scene.[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.[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.[165] His search for a more individual spirituality, based on prayer and meditation in solitude, became a model for later

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[163] Ibid., 63.

[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.

[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 dissaproved 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.[169] 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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suggests. See Bernadine Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgment: A Renaissance Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 93-102.

[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.[170] 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.[171] 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.[172]

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[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.[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.[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

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[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.
[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.[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 *figura* for the movement of contemplative thought, modeled by the Virgin in solitude and encouraged during meditation on Christ in Augustinian reformist circles.[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.[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:

> 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

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[175] See Powell, *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 *Deposition from the Cross* (c.1520), Brussels.

[176] See Eric Leland Saak, *High Way to Heaven: the Augustinian Platform Between Reform and Reformation, 1292-1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 612-613 for the importance of *figure* in Augustinian spiritual ascent and of Scripture to the soul's rising during contemplation. On Jordan of Quedlinburg's *Meditationes de Passione Christi* (c.1364) and the role of meditation as a means to attaining knowledge of God and brining the contemplative soul closer to God and beyond the realm of the senses, see also ibid., 477-85.

[177] Martin, *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.[178]

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.[179]

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 [...][180]

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[178] Ibid., 299

[179] See ibid., 209, 211, 232, 234, 235, 287, and 299.

[180] Ibid., 287. "Rursus cum eo monente spiritu, cui hodie supplicationes decretae funt, patres ad synodum confugerunt, quamprimum emendavere composuereque omnia, ventis, turbinibusque imperavere, & quali in tutissimum portum delati impetum rationi, injuriam justitiae, vitia virtuti, tempestates ac fluctus serenitati tranquillitatique cedere compulerunt, hymnumque cecinerunt sancto Spiritui, piscatorum, maris atque aquarum Deo: Aqua multae non potuerunt extinguere caritatem. & illud: Jam hiems transiit, imber abiit & recessit: furge amica mea. Jacet enim sponsa, ut hieme frondet arborum: furgit revireseitque synodorum studio, ut silvae veris tempore revocate sole frondescunt, ad Solis redeuntis radios & fecundi spirant Zephyri & laeta plantaria germinant: ad lynodorum lumen & divini spiritus flant aurae, & emortui ecclesiae oculi reviviscunt ac recipiunt lucem." Quoted in Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum*

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 *Confessions* 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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conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, vol. 32 (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960),
669.
[181] Ibid., 226-7. "Marino, ut aiunt, Protheo simillima materia *omnia transformat sese in miracula rerum,
ignemque horribilemque feram fluuiumque liquentem*. Atqui quattuor haec corpora perpetuas inter se
inimicitias atque odia exercent. Quo fit ut hu/manis animi membris inclusi, inimicarum inter se rerum
societate constantibus, hue atque illuc perpetuo iactentur." Quoted in John W O'Malley, "Fulfillment of the
Christian Golden Age Under Pope Julius II: Text of a Discrouse of Giles of Viterbo, 1507" *Traditio* 25
(1969): 283.
[182] Augustine, "The Confessions," ed. Rotelle, 39, 1.1.1.

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.[183] 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."[184] 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.[185] The rolling forms of the landscape, on the other hand, are modeled entirely by color,

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[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*.

[187] For a rich discussion of Giorgione's *Tempest* as a painting that belongs to the *studiolo* culture of collecting and that takes the natural world as a means to contemplate higher things see Stephen J. Campbell, "Giorgione's Tempest, Studiolo Culture, and the Renaissance Lucretius," *Renaissance Quarterly* 56 (2003): 299-332. For the response of another artist, Fra Bartolommeo, to Venetian landscape and its capacity to encourage contemplation see Vusich, "*Divinus Amor Extasim Facit*," 196-7. Vusich examines the landscape inset below the Virgin and Child in Fra Bartolommeo's Carondelet altarpiece.

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.[188] 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.[189] 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.[190]

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.[191]

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, / sì 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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[192] Francesco Maria Molza, "Stanze sopra il ritratto della Signora Giulia Gonzaga, stanza XV," in *Delle poesie volgari e latine di Francesca Maria Molza*, I, ed., P.A. Serassi (Bergamo: Pietro Lancellotti, 1747), 139. Molza's poem is also cited in Barbieri, "Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi*,"* 61.

[193] See Barbieri, "The competition between Raphael and Michelangelo," 151-2 and Costanza Barbieri, "Sebastiano's Portraits in *Paragone*: Sculpted Paintings, Praise Through Images," in *Sebastiano del Piombo , 1485-1547,* 54.

[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*.[195] 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]

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[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." "Ceptam operam pro restitutione cenobii prosequere obsecro ut multorum 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 urged 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 monsterium nostrum Viterbiensem non aspernaremur [...]" 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.

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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 [...]"[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.[200] Tommaso Giustiniani, a Venetian who entered the Camaldoli hermitage and took the name Paolo in 1510, wrote the *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

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[199] Letter cited in Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar* , 361.

[200] For a discussion of the Camaldolese Order, its members and their reformist aims, see Stephen D. Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation: Vicenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002). For Augustinian reform and specifically for scholarship on the role and philosophy of Giles of Viterbo see Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar;* Daniel J. Nodes, "A Hydra in the Gardens of Adonis: Literary Allusion and the Language of Humanism in Egidio of Viterbo (1469-1532)" *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, No. 2 (2004): 494-517; John W. O'Malley, "Giles of Viterbo: A Reformer's Thought on Renaissance Rome" *Renaissance Quarterly* 20, No. 1 (1967): 1-11; O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform.*

models of solitary prayer.[201] 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."[202]

In his manuscript, Giustiniani writes, "For solitary places have always greatly helped true solitude of the soul."[203] 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.[204] 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."[205] 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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[201] Passage cited in Dom Jean Leclercq, *Alone with God,* trans. Elizabeth McCabe (New York: Rarrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1961), 66. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 64. See Q III: 208, preserved in the Sacro Eremo Tuscolano of Frascati. The number immediately after the letter refers to the number of the folio that contains the beginning of the quoted passage.

[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.

[203] Leclercq, *Alone with God*, 68-9. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 66. RVE f.41ᵛ.

[204] Ibid., 69. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 66. RVE f.41ᵛ

[205] Ibid., 70. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 67. Q I: 37 ᵛ.

the kind of forested sanctuary that Giustiniani 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.[206] She is alone physically, with the city far behind her on the

horizon and partly concealed by trees.[207] 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

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[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'Academia 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]

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[208] Leclercq, *Alone with God*, 72. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 69. FA:22ᵛ
[209] Ibid., 71. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 68. Q III: 79.
[210] Ibid., 71. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 68. F I: 47.
[211] Ibid., 68. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 66. F VII: 101.

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

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[212] Leclercq, *Alone with God*, 79-80. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 75-6. RVE f.102, 102 ᵛ. 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 imperfectu<m> versatur. Que enim unquam visa pulcritudo non imperfecta est, si ad pulcritudinem Dei, ad quam carnis oculus non ascendit, confferatur? Terrena sunt que audiuntur, que videntur; omnia defficientia, 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. Leclerq, *Seul avec Dieu,* 75. f.102ᵛ.

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

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[214] See Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 82 for a discussion of Augustine's conception of time and the present.
[215] Marshall Grossman, *The Story of All Things: Writing the Self in English Renaissance Narrative Poetry* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 83.

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

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[1] Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti*, V, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 568. "[...] avendo Pier Francesco Borgherini, mercante fiorentino, preso una cappella in San Piero in Montorio entrando in chiesa a man ritta, ella fu col favor di Michelagnolo allogata a Sebastiano, perché il Borgherino pensò, come fu vero, che Michelagnolo dovesse far egli il disegno di tutta l'opera."

[2] See his letters of October 6 and 20 and November 3, 1515. Paola Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo,* I (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), 181-3.

[3] Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 50-1.

[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.

[5] See Sydney J. Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 390, Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 51, and Johannes Wilde, *Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum: Michelangelo and his Studio* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1953), 28.

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.
[7] The chronology Hirst proposes has also been put forth by Pallucchini and Freedberg. See Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Sebastian Viniziano (fra Sebastiano Del Piombo)* (Milano: Mondadori, 1944), 52-56 and Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance*, 389-91.

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.[10] 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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[10] Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship From Erasmus to Calvin*, 41. See *Enchiridion*, AS I, 202. "mulo religiosius honoranda mentis illius imago, quae spiritus sancti artificio expressa est litteris evangelicis."

Borgherini 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.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] 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.[14] 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.

[13] Tullia Carratù, "The Flagellation of Christ," 204.

[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.

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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 arc 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

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[15] Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo 1485-1547,* 268.
[16] Ibid., 268.
[17] Ibid., 268.

chapel.[18] 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.

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[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 solider 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.[19] 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 re-used 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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[19] See for example Bette Talvacchia, *Raphael* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 173.

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.[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

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[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," *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.[21] 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.[22]

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?

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[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]

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[23] See Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 161-3 for a discussion of artistic appropriation and its difference from the passive concept of "influence."

[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, 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, se potrebbe con questo mezzo, senza che egli operasse, battere colore che avevano sì fatta openione [...]" 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.[26] 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.[27] 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.[28] Yet the visual evidence does not support Jungić's argument. For one, no effigy of Amadeus or Apocalyptic references appear in any of the

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combined authorship, style, and imitation, see Morten Steen Hansen, *In Michelangelo's Mirror: del Vaga, da Volterra, Tibaldi* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2013).
[26] Schiff, "Originality," 149.
[27] Nelson, "Appropriation," 161-66.
[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.[29] 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*.[30] 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.[31]

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,

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[29] See Claudio Strinati, "Sebastiano del Piombo tra Michelangelo e Raffaello nella Capella Borgherini" in *Sebastiano del Piombo e la Capella Borgherini,* 94-6; Hall, "Sebastiano del Piombo, *Flagellation, Transformation, Prophets,*" 137-42, and Hall, *Renaissance Rivals*, 245-50.

[30] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 57. See also Mauro Lucco, *L'Opera Completa di Sebastiano del Piombo* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1980), 109 and Alessandro Zuccari, "I grandi maestri del Cinquecento" in *La Spagna sul Gianicolo. I. San Pietro in Montorio* (Rome: Eurografia, 2004), 107.

[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

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[32] Tullia Carratú 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

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[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

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[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 praesumtuosas 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.[35] Mendicant

preachers, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans, preached most widely.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38] Old prophetic texts were also reprinted because they resonated with current

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[35] For a discussion of prophetic preaching and the spread of prophetic texts by means of the press, see Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People In Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Nelson H. Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517)" in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. Marjorie Reeves (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Stephen D. Bowd, *Reform before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance In Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 200); Jonathan Green, *Printing and Prophecy: Prognostication and Media Change, 1450-1550* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011); Emily Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press in Reformation Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
[36] Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press,* 18-19.
[37] Ottavia Niccoli, "The End of Prophecy" *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 61, No. 4 (Dec., 1989): 668.
[38] Niccoli, "The End of Prophecy," 667-8; Niccoli, *Prophecy and People,* 7.

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]

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[39] Niccoli, *Prophecy and People,* 19-20.
[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 […]"[44] 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.[45] 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."[46] 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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[44] Quoted in Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, 117-18. The sermon is published in full in Carlo Gargiolli, "Predica fatta la domenica" *Il Propugnatore* 12, no.1 (1879): 434. "vi parlo come predicatore secondo le Scritture Sacre, secondo la dottrina dei Santi, secondo l'ordine della providentia divina, per quanto lo possaimo cognoscere, e secondo la ragione e discorso naturale […]"
[45] Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 197.
[46] James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23. For a discussion of what Brenneman calls "intertextuality as process", see p. 22.

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.[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.[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."[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.[50] The New Testament was written in Greek. Both were translated by St. Jerome into the Latin Vulgate, which was promoted by the

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[47] Ibid., 22.
[48] Ibid., 139
[49] Ibid., 137
[50] Jaroslav Pelikan, *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

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[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.

license).[54] 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 pronotary) 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.
[56] Stefano Dall'Aglio, "L'altra faccia dello pseudoprofeta Francesco da Meleto scrivano della SS. Annunziata di Firenze" *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 67, No. 2 (2005): 343. Giustiniani condemned Meleto as a heretic at the Florentine synod for his interpretation of Psalm 79. See Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 198-99.
[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 severn 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.[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.[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 *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.[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.[61] Preachers were not to add anything at variance with the teachings approved by the

sooner was he out of prison that he went to Verona, and despite the prohibition of the bishop he insisted on preaching, whereupon, returning to his vomit, he was by the diligence of that bishop with the arm of the Signoria sent out of that city and diocese." "Frate Girolamo, veronese, alias chiamato Piumazzo […] fu altre volte ritenuto in Piacenza dalla bona memoria del vescovo di fano, allhora governatore di quella città et, condonnato ad perpetuos [sic] carceres per lutherano, fu mandato in Bologna ove stette in carcere per sei o sette anni et poi, ad instantia di non so qual prenciple havuta la gratia, non fu così tosto fuori di prigione che andò in Verona et non ostante la prohibition del vescovo volse predicare; dove, ritornando al vomito, per diligentia di esso vescovo col braccio della Signoria fu mandato fuora di quella città et diocese."
[58] Niccoli, *Prophecy and People,* 109 and 120.
[59] Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 191-2.
[60] Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council," 66.
[61] Ibid., 85.

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.

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[62] Ibid., 86.
[63] Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press*, 21. See also Frederick J. McGinness, *Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 33-4.

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.[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.[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.[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.[70] The Council labeled

such interpretations false prophecies that mislead the laypeople and strayed from the truth

of Scripture:

> 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.[71]

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[67] Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 187.

[68] Michelson, *The Pulpit and the Press,* 46.

[69] Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council," 63.

[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.

[71] Norman P. Tanner, *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 [...]"

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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

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[72] Ibid., 637. " [...] qui hoc onus assument ne de cetero in sermonibus suis publicis, alia quaeque futura ex literis sacris constanter praedicere, nce illa a Spiritu sancto vel divina revelatione se habuisse affirmare, et alienas inanesque divinationes asservaranda, 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.[74]

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.[75] 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.[76]

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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 approbavit, legendosque hactenus recepit, et in posterum recipiet, praedicent et explanent nec quidquam eius proprio sensui contrarium, aut dissonum adiiciant, 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*).[77] Bishops, they write, should have knowledge of holy scripture and be faithful "to the discipline of the sacred scriptures" (*sacrae scriptuarea disciplinam amplectentes*).[78] 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.[79] 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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[77] The English translation is taken from Giuseppe Alberigo, "The Reform of the Episcopate in the Libellus to Leo X by the Camaldolese Hermits Vincenzo Querini and Tommaso Giustiniani" in *Reforming the Church Before Modernity*, eds. Christopher M. Bellitto and Louis I. Hamilton (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 143. For the original in Latin, see Vincenzo Querini and Tommaso Giustiniani, "Libellus ad Leonem X," in *Annales Camaldulenses ordinis Sancti Benedicti; quibus plura interseruntur tum ceteras Italico-monasticas res, tum historiam Ecclesiasticam remque diplomaticam illustrantia,* eds. Giovanni Benedetto Mittarelli and Anselmo Costadoni, (Farnborough: Gregg, 1970), 681.

[78] Alberigo, "The Reform of the Episcopate," 147; Querini and Giustiniani, "Il Libellus," 697.

[79] Alberigo, "The Reform of the Episcopate," 144; Querini and Giustiniani, "Il Libellus," 677.

> 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 voluissemus.[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

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[80] Alberigo, "The Reform of the Episcopate," 144; Querini and Giustiniani, "Il Libellus," 677.
[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.[83]

The *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.[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 *Apocalypsis Nova* was discovered by the church friars in

1502 in a small cavern or "*cavernula*."[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.

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[83] Ibid., 75.
[84] Anna Morisi-Guerra, "The *Apocalypsis Nova*: A Plan for Reform" in *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 publically in 1515 that he had feigned his visions and falsely presented himself as the prophesied Angelic Pastor.
[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.[86] 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.[87] Pierfrancesco's ties to Rome reinforce his embededness 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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[88] Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition (DRA), 2 Peter 1:20 – 2:2.

of Sebastiano's chapel and with the current crisis faced by the church.[89] 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.[90]

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 [...]"[91]

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.[92] 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'

[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

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[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 Paul Taylor, "Julius II and the Stanza della Segnatura," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* , 72, (2009): 108.

mediated, and thus open for misinterpretation because cut off from its origin.[95] 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.[96] 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.[97] 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.
[97] See Stephen J. Campbell, "Renaissance Naturalism and the Jewish Bible: Ferrara, Brescia, Bergamo, 1520-1540," in *Judaism and Christian Art,* 306 for a discussion of the problem of representation and mediation in the work of Girolamo Romanino and other Northern Italian painters.

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

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[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

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[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.[100] 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.[101]

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?"
[101] Douay-Rheims American, Isaiah 1:6.

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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[102] See Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 64-5 and Jungic, "Joachimist Prochecies," 67-8.

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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[103] Francis of Assisi, *The Writings of St. Francis,* trans. Father Paschal Robinson (Philadelphia: The Dolphin Press, 1905), 4-5.
[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."[105]

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 [...]"[106] 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.[107]

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."[108] 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.

[108] Ulrich Zwingli, *On True and False Religion*, eds. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1981), 218-23.

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

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[109] Ibid., 215.
[110] Ibid., 220-21.
[111] Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: the Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 35-7.

steered away from visible objects toward invisible, spiritual reality.[112] Thus, reformers focused on reconceptualizing how the divine majesty of God could be present and *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 *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 *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

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[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

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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

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[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."[118]

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*.[119] 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.[120] 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.[121] 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)

[119] Joseph C. Forte, Fictive Truths and Absent Presence in Raphael's Transfiguration" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 3, No. 4 (1984): 52. Preimesberger, "Tragic motifs in Raphael's Transfiguration," 5.

[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 Sebastiano'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.[123] 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

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[123] Jungić, "Joachimist Prophecies," 77-8.

Christ.[124] 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.[125] 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."[126]

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.[127] 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.[128] 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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[129] James S. Preus, "Old Testament Promissio and Luther's New Hermeneutic" *The Harvard Theological Review* 60, No. 2 (1967): 157-8.

[130] Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. Rotelle, 380. Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell, 205. "et sunt quaedam bona opera nostra ex munere quidem tuo, sed non sempiterna: post illa nos requieturos in tua grandi sanctificatione speramus. tu autem bonum nullo indigens bono semper quietus es, quoniam tua quies tu ipse es. et hoc intellegere quis hominum dabit homini? quis angelus angelo? quis angelus homini? a te petatur, in te quaeratur, ad te pulsetur: sic, sic accipietur, sic invenietur, sic aperietur."

[131] Preus, "Old Testament Promissio," 157.

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.[132] 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.[133] 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.[134] 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.

[134] See for example Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase On Matthew,* trans. Dean Simpson, ed. Robert D. Sider (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 44, 60 and 210.

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

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[135] See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Richard Patterson, and Richard Duane Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 74. See also Fullerton, "The Reformation Principle," 422-42, esp. 430. Calvin criticized the Evangelists for seeming to twist the meaning of the Old Testament prophets. In fact, he says this specifically of Matthew's citation of Isaiah.

[136] For a discussion of John Eck's treatise defending papal authority see Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157-64.

[137] See Rozzo and Menchi, "The Book and the Reformation," 319-67.

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

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[138] Gail L. Geiger, *Filippino Lippi's Carafa Chapel: Renaissance Art in Rome* (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986), 26.
[139] Ibid., 30-1.
[140] Ibid., 67.

the chapel.[141] The *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.[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."[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.[144]

Notably, the fresco is based on traditional Trecento panels of the Triumph of

Thomas Aquinas.[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.[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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[141] Ibid., 70.
[142] Ibid., 90.
[143] Ibid., 93. Declaratio sermon(um) / tuorum illuminat / et intellectum / dat paruulis
[144] Ibid., 97.
[145] Ibid., 100.
[146] Christopher R. Lakey, "The Curious Case of the 'Chiarito Tabernacle': A New Interpretation*" Getty Research Journal*, No.4 (2012): 19.

either the Miracle of the Speaking Cross or the Miracle of Chastity (Figure 204).[147] 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.'"[148] 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.[149]

    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.
[148] Vasari, *Le Vite,* III, 468. "Evvi anco quando orando San Tommaso, gli dice il Crucifisso: 'Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma.'"
[149] Geiger, *Filippino Lippi's Carafa Chapel*, 90.

importance of reading for understanding Scripture.[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.[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.[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 (*In ultima aetate humiliabitur Deus et humanabitur proles divina*), "The prophet will be born of a mother without sexual intercourse" (*Nascetur propheta absque matris coitu*), "Christ will be born in Bethlehem" (*Nascetur Christus in Bethlehm*), and "The new progeny is sent down from the high heavens" (*Jam nova progenies coelo demittitur altro*).[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 *Triumph of St.*

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[150] Meredith J. Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171.
[151] Ibid., 171.
[152] Luigi Vannicelli, *S. Pietro in Montorio e il tempietto del Bramante* (Roma: 1971), 122-3. Laura Gigli, "Padre Ludovico da Modena" in *Sebastiano del Piombo a la Cappella Borgherini*, 17 no. 22.
[153] Vannicelli, *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."[154] 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

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[154] Ibid., 93. Verit / atem / medit / abitu / r guct / ur meu[m] / et labi / a mea d / etest / abunt / vr imp / ium

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.

[156] John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics: Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth-Centiry Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73

[157] Erwin Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer* , vol. I (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1943), 234.

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.[158] 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

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[158] 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.[159]

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

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[159] Alan Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 165-181. See also Una Roman D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform*" Renaissance Quarterly* 59, No. 1 (2006): 95 on the fluidity between orthodoxy and heterodoxy before the convocation of the Council of Trent.

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.[162] 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.[163] Moreover, as Rosalie Colie has shown in her book *Paradoxia Epidemica*, devoted to the study of paradox in Renaissance art and literature, negative

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[162] Jill Burke, "Sex and Spirituality in 1500s Rome: Sebastiano del Piombo's 'Martyrdom of Saint Agatha'" *The Art Bulletin* 88, No. 3 (September 2006): 486.
[163] See Peter Parshall, "The Art of Memory and the Passion" *The Art Bulletin* 81, No. 3 (1999): 460 and Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder" *The American Historical Review* 102, No. 1 (1997): 12. Bernard of Clairvaux describes divine mysteries in terms of paradox. Roger Bacon writes of "the terror and sweet wonder of the Eucharist."

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.[164] 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.[165] 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

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[164] Rosalie Little Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1966), 24-6.
[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.[166] 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.[167] 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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[166] Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), esp. 39-59 and 163-77.
[167] Ibid., 54-5.

e spelazzata; poi la faccia, tutta oscurata, e sputacchiata, e livida per le percosse dele godate e della canna, e tutta senguinosa.[168]

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.[169] 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.[170]

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.[171] 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 is 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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[168] Antonio, Santo. *Opera a ben vivere*, ed. Cesare Angelini (Milan, 1926), 169-70.

[169] Ibid., 170. "Poi rivolgete gli occhi della vostra mente alle mani, e considerate ben di cuore, como sono stracciate e sanguinate […]"

[170] Theresa Flanigan, "Art, Memory, and the Cultivation of Virtue: The Ethical Function of Images in Antoninus's Opera *a ben vivere" Gesta* 53, No. 2 (2014): 176.

[171] Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy c.1400-1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 203-4. See also Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

conficcano, e'vostri Santi Piedi. Hoime' perché Jesu miom non sono io hora, come te veggo stare in su questa Croce?[172]

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.[173]

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.[174] 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.[175] 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.[176]

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[172] 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] Tinagli and Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts*, 207.

[174] Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr, *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).

[175] Amy Hollywood, "Mysticism and Catastrophe in Georges Bataille's *Atheological Summa*," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia,* eds. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 168-9.

[176] Angela of Foligno, *The Book of Divine Consolations of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*, trans. Mary G. Steegmann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), 205-6.

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 carnem 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 gulam
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]

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[177] Ludger Thier Angela and Abele Calufetti. *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno: Edizione Critica.* 2nd
ed. (Grottaferrata, Romae: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Quas, 1985), 13-14.
[178] Hollywood, "Mysticism and Catastrophe," 168.
[179] Megan Holmes, "Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence" *Art History* 34, No. 3 (2011): 437-48.
See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*
(New York: Zone Books, 2011), esp. 93-123.
[180] Luca Dominici, *Chronache di Ser Luca Dominici,* vol. I (Pistoia: A. Pacinotti, 1933), 113. Also quoted
in Holmes, "Miraculous Images," 448.

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.[181] 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.[182] In Pistoia, for example, authorities investigated the fourteenth-century fresco of the *Madonna dell'Umiltà* in 1490 for miraculously issuing bodily sweat.[183] Later in the century, the Council of Trent would ultimately encourage the suppression and regulation of image cults through official approval by the bishop.[184]

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.[185] 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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[181] Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 14-15. See also no.234 of Chapter Two of this dissertation for a note on Erasmus and Zwingli's attitudes to the false veneration of material objects.
[182] Bynum, *Christian Materiality,* 167-8.
[183] Homes, *The Miraculous Image*, 174.
[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.[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.[187] In his drawing of *Christ on the Cross* for Colonna (Figure 115), Michelangelo renders the body of Christ as both finished and colorless (rendered in fleshy *colorito* and muscular *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.[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

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[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, *Last Things: Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 46.

[187] D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood," 100-2, 113, and 125.

[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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[1] Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti*, V, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 578. "un Cristo che porta la croce, dipinto in pietra dal mezzo in su, che fu cosa molto lodata; e massimamente nella testa e nelle mani, nelle quali parti era Bastiano veramente eccellentissimo."

[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.

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[3] See, for example, Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547,* 238, Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 135-6, Mauro Lucco, *L'Opera Completa di Sebastiano del Piombo* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1980), 124, Radolfo Pallucchini*, Sebastiano Viniziano: Fra Sebastiano del Piombo* (Milan: Casa Editrice Mondadori, 1944), 99-101, and Marcia Hall, *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)*,* 176.

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.[4] 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.[5] 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.*

[5] For scholarship that cautiously posits a relationship between Sebastiano's work and reform art, see Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 136 and Carlo Volpe, "Senso intelletto e pietà" in Lucco, *L'Opera Completa,* 9. For a much firmer affirmation of the connection, one that dates back to 1957, see Federico Zeri, *Pittura e Controriforma: L' "arte senza tempo" di Scipione da Gaeta* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2001). For Sebastiano's so-called Counter-Reformation style, see Lucco, *L'Opera Completa,* 122, Pallucchini, *Sebastiano Viniziano,* 68 and Marcia B. Hall, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 147.

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. Calí 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 Calí emphasizes the shared religious atmosphere of these artists, which she rather hastily terms "protestant Catholicism," she does not pursue a

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[6] Paolo Sanvito, *Imitatio: L'amore dell'immagine sacra* (Citta di Castello: Stampa Petruzzi, 2009), 23-5.
[7] Ibid., 24 and 26.
[8] Sanvito focuses on grouping works into categories or types, rather than explaining their individual meanings.
[9] Maria Calí, *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.[10]

Massimo Firpo has done some of the most promising research on the impact of Juan de Valdés on the visual arts.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] 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*.[14] Such a reading restricts the paintings to an illustrative role of the text, where, in

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[10] Ibid., 162. "semplificazione estrema"

[11] Massimo Firpo, *Artisti, Gioiellieri, Eretici: Il Mondo Di Lorenzo Lotto Tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Roma: Laterza, 2001); Massimo Firpo, *Gli Affreschi Di Pontormo a San Lorenzo: Eresia, Politica e Cultura Nella Firenze Di Cosimo I* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1997); and Massimo Firpo, *Storie di immagini, immagini di storia: Studi di iconografia cinquecentesca* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010).

[12] Firpo, *Storie di immagini, immagini di storia,* 11 and 23, and Firpo, *Gli Affreschi Di Pontormo,* 104.

[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 franciullezza i figliuoli de' christiani delle 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* ochiniani 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

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certain respects acknowledges the artist's own pictorial ideas at work, they all ultimately stem from the texts or the images contained within them, never going against or beyond the ideas of the text.

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.[15] 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.[16] Both works were kept by his family until 1656, at

which point they were given over to King Philip IV.[17] 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.[18]

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

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[15] Fernando Benito Domenech, "Sobre la influencia de Sebastiano del Piombo en Espana." *Bulletin del Museo del Prado* 9 (1988), 10.
[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.[19] 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.[20] 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.[21]

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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[19] See Lucco, *L'Opera Completa,* 117 and Pallucchini, *Sebastiano Viniziano*, 68-9.
[20] Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 150.
[21] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 81.

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.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24] 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.[25] The letter mentions a "secret painting with oil on marble"

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[22] Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 236 and Hirst, *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" *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 254-65.

[23] 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.

[24] For the proposal of a late date, see Strinati et al., *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 236. For an earlier date, see Mena Marqués, "Sebastiano Viniziano*, eccellentissimo pittore,"* in *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/.

[25] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 125. See also Roberto Contini "Christ Bearing the Cross" in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 236.

by "Sebastianello our Venetian," saying that Luciani "has painted an image of Christ and shown it to our Lord."[26]

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*).[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] 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 bellisimo il quale farà la pittura poco meno che eterna. I colori subito che sono asciutti si uniscono col marmo di maniera che quasi impetriscono, 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. I 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.[30] 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.[31]

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.[32] 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.[33] Giovanni Grimani, who was Patriarch of Aquileia from 1545 to

1550 and again from 1585 to 1593, is most commonly accepted as the patron.[34] 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.[35]

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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.

[32] Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 578.

[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.

[34] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 134 and Firpo, *Artisti, Gioiellieri, Eretici, 336*.

[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.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38] 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

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[36] 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.

[37] Elena Calvillo, "Romanità and Grazia: Giulio Clovio's Pauline Frontispieces for Marino Grimani" *The Art Bulletin* 82, No. 2 (June 2000): 281-2.

[38] For a chronology of Marino's travels and residency, see ibid., 281-2.

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.

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[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.
[41] See Camilla Russell*, Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies of Sixteenth-Century Italy*
(Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 12 no. 20.

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. Agath*a (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

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[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.[43] 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

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[44] See Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals*, 254 and Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo,* 49 and 74-5.

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.[45] The work in which Sebastiano made use of the drawing, and the drawing itself for that matter, are believed to be lost today.[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

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[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 rengratiare; 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 brightly-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.

[47]Pseudo-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.

[48] Walter S. Gibson, "'Imitatio Christi': The Passion Scenes of Hieronymus Bosch" *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6, No. 2 (1972 - 1973): 86 and 86, no.13.

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.[49] 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.[50] 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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[49] Roland H. Bainton, "Dürer and Luther as the Man of Sorrow" *The Art Bulletin* 29, No. 4 (1947): 271-2.
[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.[51] Indeed, the title page of vernacular translations of *Imitatio Christi* often displayed an image of Christ bearing the cross.[52] 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 [...]"[53] 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:

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[51] 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.

[52] Paul F. Grendler, "Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books" *Renaissance Quarterly* 46, No. 3 (1993): 467.

[53] "Wer mir nachfolgt , der wandelt nicht in der Finsternis [...]" Cited in Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen, *Reformation und Gegenreformation*, vol. 1 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 19.

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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[54]Thomas 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 ducal camera, 1844), 81-2. "Adunque perchè 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 fermessa della mene nostra; in Croce si trova il gaudio 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. Imperocchè 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 canduca alla eterna beatitudine, se non la via della Croce e della continua mortificazione di sè medesimo."
[55] See von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations,* 67-9.

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.[56] 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."[57]

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.[58]

A look at the 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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[56] Hergert David Rix, "Luther's Debt to the Imitatio Christi" *Augustiniana* 28 (1978): 96.

[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

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[59] Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 635. "Cumque ii sub confictorum miraculorum mendaciis varios errores fraudesque disseminant [...] a sacrisque constituionibus, quas maxime sequi deberent, deviantes, auditores suos amovent ac longe faciunt a saulte. Per haec namque et alia huiusmodi simpliciores homines, ut ad deceptionem procliviores, 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*, ed. Jared Wicks (Washington: Catholics University of America Press, 1978), 219.
[61] William V. Hudon, *Theatine Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 21-23.
[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]

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[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."[66]

In his letters, Gaetano stresses human action and determination in leading the spiritual life and in pursuing salvation.[67] 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.[68]

What follows are highly participatory and emotive descriptions where Gaetano "found [him]self" at various moments of Christ's life.[69] 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."[70] At the circumcision, he laments that "still my senses were not circumcised."[71] And at the appearance of the Magi, Gaetano exclaims: "nothing other than iron, waste, and useless gifts was found in me."[72] 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] Cited in 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.[73] 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.[74] 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.[75]

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.[76] As Mary Pardo contends, speaking of Leonardo's lost

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[73] Mauro Lucco, "Christ Bidding Farewell to His Mother, with Elisabetta Rota" in *Lorenzo Lotto: Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance*, eds. David Alan Brown et al. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 122-3.

[74] Ibid., 123.

[75] Peter Humfrey, "Annunciation" in *Lorenzo Lotto,* 191-2.

[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 Annunciate* 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

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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.

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[78] Giles makes the statement in his "Inaugural Oration of the Fifth Lateran Council" (1512). See Francis X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo, 1469-1532* (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1992), 286.

[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 Civico, 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.[81] 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."[82] 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.

[82] Massimo Firpo, *Artisti, Gioiellieri, Eretici*, 284.

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.[83] 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.[84]

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.[85] 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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[83] Alexander Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna" *The Art Bulletin* 79, No. 4 (1997): 647-668.

[84] Una Roman d'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform" *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no.1 (2006): 103-13.

[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.[86]

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.[87] 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 *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

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[86] See Nagel, *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.
[87] Nagel, Michelangelo and the Reform of Art, 148-51.

– 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.[88] 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.[89]

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.

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[88] Hall, *The Sacred Image*, 71-80.

[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.[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.[91]

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[90] Jill Burke's discussion of the problematics of assuming a monolithic, classical "High Renaissance" style is of relevance here. See Jill Burke, "Inventing the High Renaissance, from Winckelmann to Wikipedia: An Introductory Essay" in *Rethinking the High Renaissance: The Culture of the Visual Arts in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome*, ed. Jill Burke (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 1-23.

[91] See Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: the Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: 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.[92] 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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absorption. Ringbom places this development in the 15th century, but it is evident that such distillations could be made for other reasons and under different circumstances.

[92] For a discussion of artists' and theologians' interest in and their divergent positions on weather 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,

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[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

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[94] See Neil MacLaren and Allan Braham, *The Spanish School,* 2nd ed. (London: National Gallery, 1970), 87-89 for a detailed description of Ribalta's work.
[95] Ibid., 87.

body.[96] 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.

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[96] 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 Magdalenian 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.

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).[97] 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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[97] Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 218.

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*

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[98] Klaus Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy" in *Image and Imagination,* 66.

[99] Klaus Krüger, "Andrea Mantegna: Painting's Mediality" *Art History* 37, Issue 2 (2014): 248.

[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 Unsachtbaren: 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.
[102] For a discussion of the generation of mental images in the medieval tradition of meditation, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43-9 and 161-203 for a discussion of the role

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 icononographic 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-examiantion 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

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[105] Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction," 67.
[106] Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 77-9; Waźbiński, Zygmunt. "San Luca che dipinge la Madonna all'Accademia di Roma: un "pastiche" zuccariano nella maniera di Raffaello?" *Artibus et historiae* 6, no. 12 (1985): 27-37.

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.[107] Sebastiano's portraits of

Christ, like the Veronica cloth in the *portacroce* scenes, can be understood to be about

the generation of images.[108]

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

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[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.[109] Notably, the *Imitatio Christi* was a key inspiration for reformers like

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[109] For discussion of Sebastiano's portrait of Giulia Gonzaga, see Alberto Maria Ghisalberti, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani,* vol. 57 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1960), 786 and Costanza

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.[110]

Valdés read the *Imitatio Christi*; its presence is perhaps most felt in his *Alfabeto Christiano*, 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.[111] 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.[112] 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

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.

[111] Massimo Firpo and John Tedeschi, "The Italian Reformation and Juan de Valdés" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, No. 2 (1996): 355 and 358.

[112] See Russell, *Giulia Gonzaga and the Religious Controversies,* 44-71 for a discussion of the spirituali movement in Spain and Italy.

printed in Alcala – 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 repritings 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,

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[113] Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-sixteenth-century Spain* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), 28.

[114] Marcel Bataillon, *Érsame et l'Espagne: recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1937), 179-242.

[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 fluttuante eterodossia spagnola della prima metà del Cinquecento." Ibid., XI-XII.

as Valdés' more immediate points of reference in Alcalà and Granada.[117] 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 experiental knowledge of God, charity stemming from faith, and interior piety.[118] 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.[119] 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."[120] 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.
[119] See, for example, Juan de Valdés, "Alphabeto Christiano," in *Obras Completas*, ed. Angel Alcalá (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 1997), 287, 302, 312, 325, and 330.
[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 và 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 councils 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 determinantamente 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 quì nascono le soverchie cerimonie, nascono li pernitiose superstitiosi, 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 ritruovo altra difficultà 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.[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."[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."[130]

There is a palpable tension in the *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

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[128] On Valdés' evasion of discussing Church structure see for example Daniel A. Crews, *Twilight of the Renaissance: The Life of Juan de Valdés* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 105-6.
[129] Valdés, "Alphabeto Christiano," in *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 [...]"
[130] Ibid., 353-4. "Et se 'l confessore è persona, che senta, e gusti le cose spirituali, voglio che gli appalesiate, e discopriate 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, perche ve gli havete confessati, perche questo sarebbe attribuire a voi ciò, che non è vostro. Per ciò voglio, che pensiate, che Iddio ve gli hà perdonati, perche 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.[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 *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 *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.

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[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 *Faith and Works* for Pope Clement VII in 1532. In it he articulated a defense of works, working in addition to faith, as meritous 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.[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.[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."[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

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[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 *Christ Carrying the Cross*. For a discussion of these, see Marvin W. Anderson, "Luther's Sola Fide in Italy: 1542-1551" *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 *sola fide*, see Elisabeth G. Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome and Reform (California: University of California Press, 1993), 268-9 and 294-6.

[135] A relationship between the *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." *Storia dell'arte* n. 110 (2005): 33-74.

[136] Ronald K. Rittgers, *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, *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]

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[137] Cajetan, "Faith and Works, 1532" in *Cajetan Responds*, 232.
[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.[139]

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.[140]

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.[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."[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 *Christ

the Judge with the Creation of Eve* (Figure 241) is particularly noteworthy for deviating

from standard iconography.[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.[144]

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[141] 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): 103.
[142] Ibid., 107.
[143] Vasari was appalled at the lack of order or clear meaning. See Vasari, *Le Vite*, VI, 286-7.
[144] Firpo, *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

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[145] Calvillo, "Romanità and Grazia," 285.
[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

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[148] Anderson, "Luther's Sola Fide in Italy." 25-42.
[149] Grimani's comment on Romans (5:1-2), cited in ibid., 29.
[150] Elena Calvillo, "Imitation and Invention in the Service of Rome: Giulio Clovio's Works for Cardinal Marino Grimani and Alessandro Farnese" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2003), 54-57.
[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.
[153] See Jan van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion,* 53-67 for a discussion of the reformist critique of Catholic Passion devotion.
[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 brown, 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

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[156] Ibid., 56-7.

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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]

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[157] The English translation is in part taken from 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)*,* 218.

> Adonde se ha de entender, que si los de Corintio fueran espiritales, no les
> dijera, imitadme á mí: secad vuestro retrato del que yo he sacado de
> Cristo. Pero les dijera, como dize á los de Efeso, que eran espirituales: sed
> imitadores de Dios, como hijos mui amados: entendiendo, pues sois hijos
> de Dios, I mui amados de Dios, attended á recobrar la imajen I semejanza
> de Dios, *sacándola, no de hombre ninguno, sino del mesmo Dios* […]
> Veis aquí como aconsejándoos que pretendais sacar retrato de la propria
> imajen de Cristo, I de la propria imajen de Dios, no os digo cosa nueva, ni
> no platicada [my italics].[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 Epistola 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.[160] 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.[161] 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.[162] 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.[163] 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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[160] 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): 453-508.
[161] Ibid., 480-2.
[162] Ibid., 486-7.
[163] For a discussion of the Tuscan view that *colore* acted as a superficial, "accidental" layer of skin over a work's *disegno* and the association of *colore* with nontangible light and optics, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 229 and Rudolf Preimesberger, *Paragons and Paragone: Van Eyck, Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Bernini* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 3-5 and 44.

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.[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

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[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.[165] 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.[166] 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
[166] 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) on Filippino Lippi's reflection on image, idol and art," in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, 154-7; Stephen J. Campbell, "*Fare una cosa morta parer viva*: Michelangelo, Rosso and the (un)divinity of Art," *Art Bulletin* 84, No.4 (2002): 606-8.

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

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[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 Tomàs 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*

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[1] Michael Hirst, "Sebastiano's Pietà for the Commendador Mayor" *The Burlington Magazine* 114, No. 834 (1972): 587.
[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."
[4] Cited in Hirst, "Sebastiano's Pietà," 587.

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

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[5] Contini, "'Úbeda Pietà," 240. For discussion of the Louvre drawing and the one preserved at Casa Buonarroti, Florence, see Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 129-31 and Erwin Panofsky, "Die Pieta von Ubeda. Ein kleiner Beitrag zur Lösung der Sebastianofrage," in *Festschrift fur Julius Schlosser zum 60. Geburtstage Herausgegeben Von Árpád Weixgärtner Und Leo Planiseig*, eds. Arpad Weixlgärtner and Leo Planiscig (Zürich [etc.]: Amalthea verlag, 1927), 150-61.
[6] Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 131-2.

been publically proclaimed with one Pietà, now, twenty years later, ended in conditions of secrecy with another.[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.[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.

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

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[7] Ibid., 132.
[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.[9] 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.[10] 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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[9] Hayward Keniston, *Francisco de los Cobos, secretary of the Emperor Charles V* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg, 1960), 279.

[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.[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.[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 Tomas.[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

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[11] For the problematic abstractness of the host as signifier of Christ's body see Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand, *Push Me, Pull You* (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), 451-2.

[12] Keniston, *Francisco de los Cobos*, 67. The relic was acquired in Cologne on June 9, 1521 from Charles V, though its current location is unknown.

[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.[14] 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.")[15] 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.

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[14] Claudia Cieri Via, "Sebastiano del Piombo e la Pietà di Ubeda fra narrazione e devozione" *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 8, No. 4 (2012): 266-7; Miguel Falomir. "Dono italiano e "gusto spagnolo" (1530 - 1610)," in *L'arte del dono: scambi artistici e diplomazia tra Italia e Spagna, 1550-1650: contributi in occasione della giornata internazionale di studi, 14-15 Gennaio 2008, Roma, Biblioteca Hertziana, Istituto Max Planck per la Storia dell'Arte* (Milan: Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2013), 17.
[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 Belhéres 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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[16] Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "Michelangelo's *Pietà* for the Cappella del Re di Francia" in *Michelangelo, Selected Scholarship in English: Life and Early Works*, ed. William E. Wallace (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), 218, 227, and 241, no.123.

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*.[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.[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

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[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 frabricam 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 quot 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 presentamente nell'anno 1525 è donde da prima, siccome l'a attualmente, fu trasferta alla cappella della Madonna SS.ma delle Feb[b]ri così chiamata che rimane posto al portico dinanzi alle porte della basilica Vaticana e l'altare della cappellania del Card[inale] S. Dionisio è quegli in cui osservargli quella grande, e singolarissima scultura in marmo [...]" Rudolf Preimesberger, *Paragons and Paragone: Van Eyck, Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Bernini* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 94 concurs with Brandt that Michelangelo's *Pietà* was relocated to the Secretarium of Gregor the Great, which housed the much-visited fourteenth century Marian image on its the high altar.
[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*).[19]

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.[20] 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.
[20] The distinction between icon and relic had become a blurry one given the ascribed efficacy of both. See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Face, Proche, Lontain: L'Empreintre de Visage et le Lieu pour Apparatre" in *The Holy Faces and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale: 1998), 97.

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.[21] 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.

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[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.[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.[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.[24] Pereda persuasively shows that Sebastiano equivocated in his depiction of the signs of the Passion – giving them a

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[22] See, however, Felipe Pereda, "*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.
[23] Claudia Cieri Via, "Sebastiano del Piombo e la Pietà di Ubeda fra narrazione e devozione" *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 8, No. 4 (2012): 264 and 267.
[24] Pereda, "*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,

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[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.[28] 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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[28] Dirk de Vos, Dominique Marechal, and Willy Le Loup, *Hans Memling* (Ghent: Ludion, 1994), 62.

with an Olive Branch is a fragment of what would have been the left wing.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31]

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.

[31] On Sebastiano's Spanish patronage, see Piers Baker-Bates, "Between Italy and Spain: cultural exchange in the Roman career of Sebastiano del Piombo" *Renaissance Studies* 21, No. 2 (2007): 254-265.

with the instruments of the Passion and the Veronica cloth, all of which recall the Man of Sorrows type.[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 *Imago Pietatis* iconography, as evidenced in Giovanni da Milano's *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).[33]

Yet Sebastiano's *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

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[32] Catherine R. Puglisi, William L Barcham, and Xavier J. Seubert. *Passion in Venice: Crivelli to Tintoretto and Veronese: the Man of Sorrows in Venetian Art* (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2011), 96.
[33] Giovanni da Milano's *Man of Sorrows* comes from a room in the convent of San Girolamo sulla Costa, Florence. See Daniela Parenti, *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 *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, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sins 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 apparaitre," 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.[36] 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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[36] Vasari saw the painting at mid-century in the house of Giovanni della Casa, who may have inherited the work. See Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettoti*, V, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 162 and John Shearman, **"**The 'Dead Christ' by Rosso Fiorentino" *Boston Museum Bulletin* 64, No. 338 (1966): 148-50.

makes it seem like there is nothing there to support him.[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

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[37] Stefaniak, "Replicating Mysteries of the Passion," 701.

another substitute, like the relics, for the real body located in heaven.[38] This and the

saints thus function as prompts for the viewer to redirect his devotion inward, away from

visible, material objects.[39] 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.[40] 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.

[40] The distinction goes back to Thomas Aquinas who defined the reverence given to non-divine images as *dulia* and that for God alone as *latria*. See Alan Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 81-115.

> 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 nouit ecclesia, et qui CHRISTO domino iugiter seruiunt, eique
> semper assistunt in coelesti gloria [...] Neque quemquam sic venerantem,
> peccare putabat, etiam si ossa Neronis, aut Caiphae, ignorans osculatus
> fuisse.[42]

Levèfre'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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[41]Jacques Lefèvre D'Etaples, *Jacques Lefèvre D'Etaples and the Three Maries Debates,* ed. and trans. Sheila M. Porter (Genève: Droz, 2009), 242-5.
[42] Ibid., 246-7.
[43] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.

describing matter as eternal and corruptible, as dead and alive.[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 Levèfre'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.[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.[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

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[44] Ibid., 220-7.
[45] Michael P. Carroll, *Veiled Threats: The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 192-6; Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 269-72.
[46] Bynum, *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.[47] 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.*[48]

Valdés' *Dialogue* was circulated privately as a manuscript within a limited circle

of the writer's friends.[49] 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.[50]

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.[51]

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 […]"[52] 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

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[50] Bataillon writes of the work: "Never had the religious, moral and political thought of Spanish Erasmianism more resolutely found passage." ("Jamais la pensée religieuse, morale et politique de l'érasmisme espagnol n'a cherché plus résolument passage.") Bataillon, *Érsame e l'Espagne*, 399.

[51] Baldassare Castiglione, "Repuesta de Conde Baltasar Castiglione, Nunio en España, a la carta de Valdés de Agosto de 1528" in *Alfonso de Valdés: Obra Completa*, ed. Ángel Alcalá (Madrid: Fundacion Jose Antonio de Castro, 1996), 551.

[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, cioé 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 pregar 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 basterá, 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 giudicio sará che questo vi nieghi. Ma io non so immaginarmi 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 si 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."[55] 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."[56]

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."[57] Not only did Rome's treasured relics not save the city from pillage or protect themselves from

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[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, conviensi però nelle cose divine molte volte usar l'oro e l'argento, e altre cose preziose."
[57] Gaetano Milanesi, ed., *Les Correspondants de Michel-Ange I: Sebastiano del Piombo,* trans. by A. Le Pileur (Paris, Librarie d'Artt, 1890), 38. "Ancora non mi par esser quell Bastiano che io era inanti el sacco; non posso tornar in cervello ancora."

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

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[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."[60] 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 Ganimede e farli lo diadema che paresse san Joanni de l'Apochalipse 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.

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be found.[62] Announcing 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.[63]

      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.[64] 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. [65]

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[62] Ibid., 481.

[63] Ibid., 483, 486, and 491.

[64] Michelangelo first received the epithet "divine" in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of 1516. See Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, vol. 2, ed. Emilio Bigi (Milano: Rusconi Libri S.p.A., 1982), 1374, Canto XXXIII.2. "Michel, less mortal, than Angel divine." ("Michel più che mortale, Angel divino.")

[65] Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood. *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 7-20.

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.[66] 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.[67] And it is notable that several accounts refer explicitly to the "Roman face" or the Roman icon in their visions.[68] 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*.
[67] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 345-55.
[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."[69]

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.[70] 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.[71] 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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[70] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 195-200.
[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]

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[72] Stephen J. Campbell, "*Fare una cosa morta parer viva*: Michelangelo, Rosso and the (un)divinity of Art," *Art Bulletin* 84, No.4 (2002): 607-8.

[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 is 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'imagine 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.

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[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 Sanctíssimo 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."[76] 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.
>
> Se en una misma iglesia están de una parte los çapatos de Sanct Cristóbal
> en una custodia de oro y de otra el Sancto Sacramento, a cuya
> comparación todas quantas reliquias son menos que nada, antes se va la
> gente a hazer oración delante de los çapatos que no ante el Sacramento.[77]

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."[78]

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 tropieços para hazer al hombre idolatrar [...] ya va infinita gente a verlas por una cosa divina."

[77] Ibid., 342-3.

[78] Ibid., 344. "Por esso nos dexó Jesu Cristo se cuerpo sacratíssimo en el Sacramento del altar, y teniendo esto no sé yo para qué havemos menester oltra cosa." "No se mostrassen al pueblo sino que le diesen 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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[79] Barbara Maria Savy, *Manducatio per Visum: Temi Eucaristici nella Pittura di Romanino e Moretto* (Padua: Bertoncello Artigrafiche s.n.c., 2006), 52-3.

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.[80] 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.[81] 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.
[81] Baker-Bates, "Between Italy and Spain," 254-65; Miguel Falomir, "Sebastiano and 'Spanish taste'" in *Sebastiano del Piombo, 1485-1547*, 67-71.

and non-mimetic objecthood.[82] 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.[83] 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

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[82] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 58.
[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."[84] 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*. [85] 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. [86] 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

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[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" *Prospettiva: revista di storia dell'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

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devotion was increasingly directed at material objects rather than looking through them to God.[87] 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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[87] Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 224-5, 346-7. Camille calls this the "crisis of overproduction" – the inflation of relics and the proliferation of images of the divine, like those of the Virgin and Christ, bringing about their fragmentation.

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

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[1] Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Una Roman D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetics of Reform*" Renaissance Quarterly* 59, No. 1 (2006); Jodi Cranston, *The Muddied Mirror: Materiality and Figuration in Titian's Later Paintings* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

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.[2] 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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[2] Felipe Pereda, "Ad modum Yspaniae: Simulation, hypocrisy and confessionalism in the Spanish Renaissance" (in-progress) and Felipe Pereda, "Painters as 'Go-Betweens': Brussels, Venice, Seville" (paper presented at the conference Beyond Italy and New Spain: Itineraries for an Iberian Art History (1440-1640), Columbia University, New York, April 27-8, 2012; Piers Baker-Bates, "Between Italy and Spain: cultural exchange in the Roman career of Sebastiano del Piombo" *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 254-65; Thomas James Dandelet and John A. Marino (eds.), *Spain in Italy: politics, society and religion 1500-1700* (Boston: Leiden, 2007); Marieke von Bernstorff and Susanne Kubersky-Piredda, *L'arte del dono: scambi artistici e diplomazia tra Italia e Spagna, 1550-1650: contributi in occasione della giornata internazionale di studi, 14-15 Gennaio 2008, Roma, Biblioteca Hertziana, Istituto Max Planck per la Storia dell'Arte* (Milan: Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2013).

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Vita

Maria Libina, known to her friends and colleagues as Marsha, was born on October 25, 1984 in Moscow, Russia. She graduated with honors from the University of Toronto in June 2007 with a dual degree in Art History and Biology. She earned her M.A. from Johns Hopkins University in March 2010, specializing in Italian Renaissance Art, with a minor in Modern French painting. Marsha began working on her dissertation in Fall 2011. While at Johns Hopkins, she received the Singleton Travel Grant in 2011 and 2012, in addition to the Singleton Graduate Fellowship and the Sadie and Louis Roth Fellowship, which supported her research and travel abroad. In 2011, she was a Kress Language Study Fellow in Art History in the Italian Summer Language Program at Middlebury College, returning again the following year. Between Fall 2012 and Spring 2015, Marsha taught *The Body in Art* in The Expository Writing Program at Johns Hopkins, and received the Allan Grossman Teaching Fellowship in 2013-14.