The sixteenth century was an age of iconoclasm. Never since the eighth and ninth centuries had images been subjected to so concerted an onslaught as in the century of Raphael and Titian, Durer and Bruegel. Protestant theologians attacked the validity of art itself, and attempted to restrict or redefine its uses. A few wished to do away with all representational images, but the majority were specifically concerned with religious art. Catholic theologians sprang to the defence of images, using arguments which had been forged in the great Byzantine controversy as well as by authorities who ranged from Gregory the Great to Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. But art was not simply a theological matter, and the use of images was criticized and mocked in countless plays, poems and satires, both in Latin and in the vernacular. Whether spurred on by the symbolic connotations of particular images, or by the wealth they represented, or even by the theological arguments, everywhere men assaulted the images about them. Nowhere did they do so more spectacularly than in the Netherlands in 1566. There iconoclasm raged from the South of Flanders to the farthest regions of Friesland, before burning itself out, all in the space of a few weeks. These are all matters which I have dealt with at some length elsewhere, here the aim is to examine at closer quarters some of the interdictions and prohibitions which arose in the course of the debate about images and as a result of the great iconoclastic outbursts, and then to ask what both phenomena reveal about the status of images in the sixteenth century.

'If any abuses creep into these holy and salutary practices, the Holy Synod firmly desires that they be eradicated forthwith.' Thus began the section of the Council of Trent's decree on images. Although the decree is one of the best known documents in the history of sixteenth-century art, not all of its implications for the history of images have been explored. It was only passed at the final session of the Council, just before Christmas 1563, when the Church's need to formulate an official stand on art had become crucially apparent, not only in the face of ever-mounting criticism, but also as a result of recent outbreaks of iconoclasm in France. The first half of the decree consisted of a highly traditional justification of religious imagery, but it is the second half...
that we must consider now. There were to be no images of false dogma, the
decree insisted, lest the faithful — and especially the illiterate faithful — be led
into dangerous error. All superstition was to be eradicated in the invocation
of saints, the veneration of relics and the use of images; all improper financial
gain eliminated; and all lasciviousness avoided. Images were neither to be
painted nor adorned with seductive charm. The celebration of saints’ days
and the visitation of relics were not to be abused by drunken behaviour and
junketing, as if one held such festivals, the Council acerbically remarked, in
order to honour the saints by wantonness and revelry.

By 1563 this kind of criticism was commonplace. Indeed, images had been
criticized in very similar terms by both Reformed and Catholic writers. Erasmus,
for example, grumbled about the extraordinarily pagan-like character of the
processions in which Christian images were carried round — a criticism, inci-
dentally, which may be judged on the basis of the many surviving prints of such
processions (plate 1); and everyone expressed concern about lascivious and
indecent images. What the Council of Trent tried to do was to deflect the
attacks on images by attempting to remove the abuses associated with them.
We will discuss in a moment whether the decree was effective or not; but first
let us pursue that matter of interdiction a little further.

Fear of the spread of heresy was the first ostensible motive of the Council’s
decree, and in this respect it should be seen in the context of the great indices
of prohibited books which appeared with such regularity throughout the
sixteenth century. Associated with these were the prohibition and censorship
of all kinds of theatrical performances, as in the ruthless placard issued by
Charles V in the Netherlands on 22 September 1540. That placard, as many
others, was directed against ‘those heresies which were not yet extirpated and
pullulated everywhere’. But the indices and the placards have received suffi-
cient attention elsewhere, and so, to a lesser extent, have the Italian writers
on art like Paleotti, who took up and expanded the Council’s decree on
images. Here I wish to deal at greater length with the situation in the
Netherlands, and concentrate on one writer in particular, in order to exemplify
some of the general observations to be made later on.

One of the immediate consequences of iconoclasm in the Low Countries
in 1566 was the publication of a great spate of treatises justifying the use
of religious imagery, largely on the basis of the Tridentine decree. Most of
them simply rehearsed the old arguments, derived largely from the Byzantine
writers and a few selected medieval authorities. But there was one writer whose
discussion was both more understanding and more thorough than the others,
whose influence extended far beyond the borders of the Netherlands, and whose
detailed prescriptions reveal an awareness of actual artistic production not
paralleled until then by any of the other theological treatises on art. Joannes
Molanus was King’s Censor, Professor of Theology at Louvain, the author of
a number of hagiological works and editor of St Augustine. His book on
religious art — the De Historia sanctarum imaginum et picturarum — appeared
first in 1570 (Louvain), again in 1594 (Louvain), in 1617 (Cologne, Antwerp),
1619 (Lyons), 1626 (Antwerp) and finally in Louvain in 1771 — and there
can be no doubt that it was widely read. Let us examine the kinds of imagery


4. Willem Key, *Holy Family with St John*. Whereabouts unknown. 130 × 100 cm.


to which he objected. Like almost every other sixteenth-century writer on art, Molanus took up and expanded the Council's condemnation of lascivious and indecent imagery, but as he was primarily concerned with these problems in relation to religious art, a few words should be said about attitudes in the Netherlands towards indecency in the representation of profane subjects. Nudity, needless to say, was the main concern, and thus we find a whole variety of writers, from the poetess Anna Bijns to the theologian Martin Donk, phrasing their objections in a way which also served — they thought — to undermine the Protestant stance on images. Why, they asked, did iconoclasts do away with images of Christ and the saints instead of strange histories and pagan narratives? They destroyed what inspired devotion but not what roused unchastity. In their own homes they had unedifying and immoral representations of Lucretia, Venus, and other female goddesses. The kind of picture we can imagine such writers were referring to may be represented by Jan Massys's evidently popular portrayals of female nudes (plates 2 and 3); works like these reached the height of fashion in the half-dozen years immediately preceding iconoclasm. But for Molanus the depiction of a holy subject in an unedifying way was still worse. Not only did he go so far as to proscribe the representation of the naked Christ Child (lest children, above all, be corrupted) (plate 4), he also felt that it was unnecessary to show David luring Bathsheba into Adultery, the Dance of Salome, or even the Magdalen unchastely represented in her pre-conversion state as a woman of the world, instead of as a penitent (plates 5 and 6). Here, of course, one has also to do with the notion of decorum, and one moves away from the field of expressly lascivious imagery — though most of these images were certainly that too. Molanus went to some length to ensure that sacred subjects were not represented in an indecorous manner. Like Erasmus he objected to the representation of St Peter red-faced from the effects of too much drink in paintings of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, such as those which were produced on several occasions by Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer, in Molanus's lifetime (plate 7; cf. plate 8). Details such as this were proscribed not merely because they were indecorous, but for another reason: there was no reference to them in the Bible. Although it is often claimed that the Council of Trent expressly forbade all subjects of an apocryphal or non-canonical nature, the only specific objections are to images of 'false dogma,' and to those regarded as 'contrary to custom' or 'unwonted' (insulae). But writers like Molanus — and Paleotti later on — were to expand this concern into a wide-ranging and critical review of all subjects for which there was no firm canonical or historical basis. The detailed enumeration of traditional subject-matter in both Molanus and Paleotti provides evidence of the extent and depth of their critique; but Paleotti never got round to completing or publishing his third, fourth and fifth books (though the detailed table of contents which survives gives some idea of what he planned to include in them). Molanus's thorough investigations, on the other hand, were to be the most influential of all the post-Tridentine theological writers; and it is he who reveals most clearly the tension between stricture and practical exigency that characterizes many of the phenomena we will be describing.

He deplored the representation of midwives at the Nativity — as had long
been depicted in paintings like Campin’s *Nativity* in Dijon — on the grounds that their inclusion was based on the apocryphal book *De Infantiia Salvatoris*;\(^2^6\) like several others before him he did not wish to have the Virgin shown dying on her sickbed because she died, just as she had given birth, without any pain;\(^2^7\) and he went to quite extraordinary lengths to demonstrate why it was wrong to represent the third magus as black, in paintings of the *Adoration of the Magi* (plate 9).\(^2^8\) Finally, there was a class of imagery which was not only uncanonical, but could also be seen as a kind of threat to received dogma. Amongst such images were those which showed Christ in the form of a homunculus descending amongst the rays to the Virgin in paintings of the *Annunciation* (as in the central panel of the Mérode altarpiece in New York) (plate 10),\(^2^9\) and pictures of the *Resurrection* where the cover of the sarcophagus was removed (cf. plate 11)\(^3^0\) on the grounds that the miracle of the event consisted precisely in the fact that Christ had risen from the closed tomb.\(^3^1\) Fifteenth-century works as well as contemporary ones have deliberately been chosen to illustrate the kinds of subjects which Molanus wished to proscribe. They testify not only to his awareness of the art around him — a rare enough phenomenon amongst the theological writers on art — but also to the strength of certain pictorial traditions. In this respect, as will become apparent, Molanus was tilting at windmills.

But there was another, more tolerant side to Molanus. Amongst the subjects to which he objected but which he thought could be tolerated were, for example, the *Seven Joys* and *Seven Sorrows of the Virgin* (plates 12 and 13).\(^3^2\) Though apocryphal, such subjects were harmless and too firmly rooted in popular tradition to be easily eradicated, as Molanus himself acknowledged.\(^3^3\) For similar reasons he was prepared to allow representations of St Christopher carrying the Christ Child or of the Apostles surrounding the Virgin’s tomb in paintings of the *Assumption of the Virgin* — despite the fact that they were apocryphal too.\(^3^4\) Popular prints showing the wounded hands, feet and heart were also permissible, on the grounds that they inspired devotion and could be used for salutary meditation.\(^3^5\) These examples are mentioned here to show that despite his apparent censoriousness, Molanus was prepared to display a quite unusual degree of tolerance. Indeed, he reminded his readers that those who squeeze too tightly draw blood — *Nam qui nimium emungit elicet sanguinem*.\(^3^6\) But at the same time these broadminded sections of his work serve to emphasize the extraordinarily careful and comprehensive nature of Molanus’s criteria for prohibition and censorship.

This listing has exemplified only a few out of the vast set of rules provided by Molanus, and those familiar with the Italian writers on art will recognize at least some of them, and be able to add many others. One thing, however, is clear. Hardly any of these attempted interdictions can be said to have been successful; several of the illustrations reproduced here serve as a demonstration of that. Indeed, even the official interdictions — against books, music and theatre as well as against paintings — were notoriously ineffective. In most cases established pictorial traditions and iconographic habits were simply too strong; and the fact that particular restrictions failed to apply to those who were above them — like Philip II himself — can hardly have helped to weaken the
8. Joachim Beuckelaer, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. 171 × 250 cm.


10. Attributed to Robert Campin, detail of the *Annunciation* (central panel of the Mérode altarpiece). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection

12. Pieter Aertsen, *The Seven Joys of the Virgin*. Zoutleeuw, Church of St Leonard. 175 x 140 cm

survival of customary forms of representation. But how is it that — contrary to what one might expect — the arguments of the Protestant writers against images often provided a direct impulse to iconoclasm,\(^3\) while the prohibitions which Catholic theologians wished to introduce had so little effect? Admittedly attempts \textit{were} made to cover up the nudities in the Sistine Chapel\(^3\) and one finds an occasional artist like Ammanati, who expressed his remorse at having sculpted lascivious figures in his rash youth.\(^4\) But these are exceptions rather than the rule.

Historians of art may feel that there is a relatively simple answer to the question of why so many interdictions fail to work. Artistic styles, modes and fashions cannot be made to change at the whim of a theological decision; whatever theologians may say, artists themselves are — by and large — more concerned with aesthetic matters than the intricacies of orthodox dogma. Thus, when confronted with complaints about the heretical ideas contained in Botticini’s (?) \textit{Assumption} now in the National Gallery in London, Vasari simply dismissed the problem by saying that ‘As to whether this is true or false, I cannot be expected to judge; it is enough that the figures painted therein ... are entirely worthy of praise ... all varied in diverse ways and the whole executed with good design’;\(^5\) while an amusing story about Toto del Nunziata betrays a wry — and sophisticated — awareness of the fact that the fault lay as much in the mind of the beholder as in the artist’s intention. When a citizen once confessed to him that certain painters displeased him because they only treated lascivious subjects, and then went on to say that he wanted a Madonna which should be modest and not an incitement to desire, Nunziata painted him one with a beard.\(^6\) Artists had little choice in the matter. The fashion, or rather the mode, was to paint charming Madonnas, and there was plenty of scriptural authority for her beauty. Even if one wanted to, one was hardly likely to paint stern and forbidding Virgins: they simply would not have sold very well.

But all this is begging the question. The fact is that interdictions \textit{were} formulated and artists expected to submit their works to rigorous ecclesiastical supervision. Following the promulgation of the Tridentine decrees, church officials insisted on seeing preliminary designs for new altarpieces, and periodically visited artists’ studios in order to ensure that their stipulations and requirements were not infringed.\(^7\) For a long time afterwards, the Church Visitors made the rounds of the parish churches, insisting on alterations to indecorous imagery in one place, and the eradication of superfluous or aberrant imagery in another. But even this kind of control seems to have been largely ineffective.\(^8\) Only once one has established why interdictions arse in the first place, and what their motives are, can one begin to see the fundamental reasons for their success or failure. First we should attempt to define the function of the interdictions enumerated here and then examine more closely the relationship between their intended purpose and their actual effect.

In general terms, the sixteenth-century rules were intended to counter and weaken Protestant charges against images: by removing the abuses associated with religious art, Catholic theologians hoped to eliminate those aspects which offended the critics. But the charges were more substantial than that, and
required, as we shall see, a more basic defence of the validity of images. At this point it should be made clear that we are seeking the social origins of these interdictions, and attempting to define their role and function in the particular society we are considering. I have, in short, borrowed from Durkheim in replacing the ethnographer's taboo — in any case a much debated term — with the less specific term of interdiction.\(^1\) Interdictions are simply an embodiment of that which is forbidden — rather than that which is prescribed — in a particular social group.\(^2\) They have two main objects: first, to separate different classes of the sacred, and second — and more significantly — to separate the profane from the sacred. Both aspects of interdiction arise from a collective awareness and acknowledgment of the sacred.\(^3\) Let us see how this applies to the prohibitions we have been considering.

The relative tolerance extended to paintings of subjects such as the Sorrows and Joys of the Virgin, or St Christopher, for example, represents the separation of different classes of the sacred;\(^4\) and the fact that various attempts were made to diminish the importance of the representation of saints and to confine them to the side panels of triptychs and polyptychs is further testimony to this kind of interdiction. For the rest, however, the interdictions — whether attempted or real — are to be seen in terms of the separation of the sacred from the profane. This applies, for example, to the rule about processions: Holy images were not to be carried about or saints' days celebrated as if they were profane feasts or heathen ceremonies.\(^5\) There is an unspoken awareness and concern here about the fact that many of the religious festivals grew out of much older pagan rites, though it is perhaps best not to press the point too far. Sacred subjects should not be represented as profane ones. Even the concern about nudity in art may be seen in these terms. Ostensibly, nudity may have been forbidden because of the fear of carnality; but there was possibly another reason. The statues and subjects of pagan antiquity were represented as nude forms, as Clement of Alexandria knew as well as Molanus,\(^6\) and one needed to avoid all possible confusion with that, in order to ensure that the distinction between Christian sacredness and pagan profanity did not become blurred. But the profane was not only to be equated with the remains of non-Christian rites and customs. It was also necessary to maintain the distinction between the everyday and the sacred. Here lies the root of many of the interdictions to be found in the sixteenth century — including, for example, the concern about representing the Virgin suffering in childbirth or dying on her sickbed in the way ordinary women do. This is the root of the recurrent objections to painters like Caravaggio who appear to confuse the everyday with the sacred.

Now all this may seem fairly obvious, and I am aware that the Durkheimian distinction between sacred and profane has been charged with being too blunt to be serviceable. We will in fact modify it later, but the nature of these interdictions has been rehearsed at some length because they all imply one thing: a recognition, however confused, of the polarity of the sacred and non-sacred. At the same time, they bear witness to the contagiousness of the sacred, to the tendency of what is regarded as sacred to be carried over into apparently non-sacred objects and to leave its traces there. This is one of the reasons for the fear, articulated by the theologians, of so wide a range of visual


\(^2\) For examples, see *Les parties élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, p. 342, where Durkheim discusses the distinction between sacred and profane images in the context of the ethnographer's taboo.

\(^3\) For examples, see *Les parties élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 342-343, where Durkheim discusses the distinction between sacred and profane images in the context of the ethnographer's taboo.

\(^4\) See *Les parties élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 342-343, where Durkheim discusses the distinction between sacred and profane images in the context of the ethnographer's taboo.

\(^5\) See *Les parties élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 342-343, where Durkheim discusses the distinction between sacred and profane images in the context of the ethnographer's taboo.

\(^6\) See *Les parties élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 342-343, where Durkheim discusses the distinction between sacred and profane images in the context of the ethnographer's taboo.
imagery. It is obvious that the profane may contaminate the holy, but sacred contagion is just as significant, and is more or less inevitable; both factors, as we shall see, account for the relative ineffectiveness of the interdictions we have been considering. Here we move one step closer towards an understanding of the status of the image in the sixteenth century; but first we must ask ourselves what the image itself was supposed to be, not merely the subject or its material and physical form, but the image as a whole; not signified or signifier, but the sign itself. The Council of Trent's decree on images again provides a starting point.

The decree began with an assertion of the value of invoking the saints and venerating their relics; only then did it give the reasons for retaining images in churches and for honouring and worshipping them. It is the first of these reasons that must concern us here. Images were to continue to be venerated not because any divinity was believed to inhere in them, nor because of any particular virtue for which they might be worshipped, nor indeed because one sought anything from them, or placed one's faith in them, as the heathen used to do when they placed their faith in idols. One worshipped and venerated images because the honour paid to them passed on to the subjects they represented. The decree then went on to restate the value of images in instructing the people and reaffirming their faith, in terms derived indirectly from Gregory the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas; but it is the passage taken out of context from St Basil, that the honour paid to an image passes to its prototype, which is crucial.

One of the commonest forms of the Protestant criticism of images was that in venerating them one merely venerated inanimate pieces of wood and stone; the official Catholic response, therefore, was. No, it is not the wood and stone that we worship, it is what the images represent. In these two opposing standpoints one finds the theological expression of one of the basic questions about the nature of images in the sixteenth century. The present task, however, is not to determine what the ritual status of images was supposed to be, but rather what it actually was. Here we are treading on difficult ground. In the first place it is clear that the theological arguments had a specific polemical function, and cannot therefore provide a guide to the nature of men's response to images. Although the Protestant argument has some element of truth in it, it really is rather specious. However splendid the material objects were (and in this respect Martin Luther made similar criticisms to St Bernard), men worshipped them only because they represented something else, something holy. The Catholic rebuttal, on the other hand, has all the air of an academic distinction: Is it likely, we may ask ourselves, that the countless men who went on pilgrimages to particular images, who sought aid from a favourite painting or sculpture, or who went to be healed by the miracle-working powers of a specific shrine made this kind of distinction? All the evidence suggests not. They expected such things not simply from St Anthony or the Virgin, but from specific physical embodiments of them, from a St Anthony in a favoured chapel, from the Virgin at a renowned pilgrimage shrine. In all ages men have tended to fuse image and prototype, to attribute the powers of the signified to the sign itself. But why is this so, and what are the implications for the study of the art of a
particular period, in our case the sixteenth century? The totem, to put it in Durkheimian terms again, is above all a symbol of something else; and the sentiments something arouses in us spontaneously attach themselves to the symbol representing it. Thus it comes about that it is the image of a saint which works miracles or exercises power; not the saint himself, but the saint in or working through a particular image. This is the fusion of image and prototype just referred to, and this is why all images retain traces of the life, in the sense of the anima, of the signified. Under certain conditions, as in the countless medieval miracle legends, such as those by Caesarius von Heisterbach and Gautier de Coincy, images may actually come alive; men destroy images not only because they are symbols of a rejected or hated or repressive order, but because they feel that by destroying them they somehow break or diminish the power of the images concerned. Hence the mutilation of statues by the removal of their most vital parts, their arms, legs or heads; or the eradication of that which expresses their lifelike quality most of all, their eyes. Here a cautionary note may be added: I am not saying that by destroying or mutilating a painting or sculpture one somehow damaged the being it represented, by a magical or any other kind of process. All that is being suggested is that such actions sought to diminish the particular power of an image.

But what is the connection between the animism of images and the interdictions with which this paper began? In his Natural History of Religion, Hume accounted for the attribution of life to inanimate objects by saying that 'there is a universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious' — a passage which was also quoted by Freud in his discussion of animism in Totem and Taboo. Now all this seems self-evident, but it is precisely the tendency to transfer qualities with which men are familiar that blurs the distinction between sacred and profane, between the holy and the everyday, the numinous and the physical. We have already seen how the basis of the Catholic interdictions lay in the need to preserve this distinction, but the same need also informs one of the best-known and most emphasized of the Protestant interdictions: that of the prohibition against representing God in human form. One of the most remarkable of the many examples to be found of the kind of censorship which resulted from this prohibition is represented by the alteration of engravings after Marten de Vos, as exemplified by the transformation illustrated in plates 14 and 15. It is common enough to find paintings or engravings where the figure of God the Father has been covered over, but the alteration of the copper plate itself is more unusual, and provides a striking instance of the attempt to preserve the sacredness of the divine by stripping it of every possible human — and therefore profane — reference. The transfer of qualities with which we are familiar to an object, as described by Hume, has no possibility here. God is not objectified at all — he has been replaced by a radiant emptiness, filled not by an image but by words. The human and the physical has been supplanted by the numinous, by the obviously sacred. But in the mutilation of the tragic sheet illustrated in plate 16 one is dealing with a somewhat different phenomenon (whether it was cut up at the end of the sixteenth century or later does not really matter). This


is the point at which interdiction becomes iconoclasm. The mutilation is not merely an instance of the objection to showing God the Father in human form; it is an attempt to deprive the image of its very life. Fear of the power inherent in an image is at least one of the reasons for its destruction. All images, even apparently secular ones, retain something of the powers associated with their subjects. It is the recognition of this that leads on the one hand to the elaboration of a system of interdictions, and on the other to iconoclasm.

It has been suggested that almost every interdiction arises from the need to separate the sacred from the profane. But here one confronts a problem that is implicit in the whole discussion presented here. By what criteria may one distinguish between the sacred and the profane? The question arises not only because many of the interdictions appear to have failed precisely because of the variety and potential variability of the criteria, but also because it raises some of the basic methodological issues at stake in any study of the place of images in society. Perhaps, it will be argued, one has to define more precisely the kinds of images to which the interdictions were supposed to apply. Did they apply only to altarpieces in public places, or to all paintings with religious subjects? Did they extend to secular imagery? Was the purely narratival less important — from the point of view of the interdictions — than the intentionally devotional? But these questions do not resolve themselves very easily. There are many cases from the sixteenth century where the matter seems ambiguous. What is one to make, for example, of Lucas van Leyden’s Triptych of the Golden Calf (plate 17), where the narratival function seems to replace the religious function;\(^3\) of paintings like Patinir’s St Christopher which seems nothing more than a pretext for a landscape (plate 18);\(^4\) of Joachim Beuckelaer’s Market Scene with Ecce Homo (plate 19) where the market scene seems more important than the religious one, explicitly hidden in the distance;\(^5\) and of Bruegel’s 1565 Woman Taken in Adultery (plate 22)\(^6\) where the real meaning is possibly implicit and in this sense hidden?\(^7\) And, perhaps more importantly, what would those who formulated interdictions have made of such pictures?

It may all seem a matter of function, and we may think that the problem of definition resolves itself once we have established the ritual function of the painting concerned, or whether it hung in a private house or in a church, in a tavern, a town hall, or a chapel. But unfortunately the matter is not as simple as this. Even if one establishes — to take a typical and vexed example — that Bruegel’s Adoration of the Magi (plate 20)\(^8\) hung in a secular context, and had no ostensible ritual function, it is still probable that the individual beholder would have responded to it in terms of the associations which this particular religious subject was capable of arousing, irrespective of its context. We have, therefore, to consider not only the intended and recognized function of an image — its manifest function — but also its unintended and unrecognized function, which we may call latent, to borrow a distinction used in the now classical analysis of functional explanation by R.K. Merton.\(^9\) What this implies, of course, is that one cannot speak in terms of a single meaning for a particular image; most art historians will have learned that its meaning may be modified according to its immediate context, and this is perhaps too obvious to need elaboration here. But what I would like to add is that it can also retain elements
of its meaning in other contexts. This is why apparently decorative images, as in the case of Madonnas in Flower Garlands, may still retain traces of their original religious function.  

All this contributes to the difficulty of interdiction. Let us turn again to one of Pieter Aertsen's many paintings of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary (plate 7) of the kind which so irked Erasmus, as well as Molanus.  

At first sight it seems nothing more than the representation of a kitchen scene, with an extensive depiction of vegetables and meat. But recent research has proved that the real meaning of the picture is to be found only when one takes the trouble to look into the background.  

The clear implication of the scene of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary is that one is not to be diverted from faith (the 'one thing needful' in the biblical account of the scene), nor from amor dei, by sensual distraction, amor carnis. In addition, it has been suggested that the painting implies a recommendation of the contemplative life over the active one — Martha being the personification of the latter, and Mary (who chose the good part, the 'one thing needful' of Luke 10, 38) of the former.  

Similarly, in one of Aertsen's most typical scenes (plate 23) an amorously engaged couple is set amidst a great quantity of market produce, their actions stressed by the presence of the birds whose symbolic connotations are now well known. But the moralistic point, as one comes to expect, is made by the scene in the background — predictably of Christ and the Adulterous Woman. What kind of picture is this, we may now ask ourselves, and what would the censors have made of it? If they objected to its lascivious imagery, then the point could always have been made that it had, in fact, a moralistic intention, perfectly in accordance with Christian dogma. And if it hung in a tavern — or dining room — then it would have served that purpose even better.  

Although pictures like these, with the religious subject placed well into the background of abundant kitchen and market scenes already begin to be produced in the 1550s, it is in the 1560s, in the very decade of iconoclasm, that they enjoy their greatest vogue. Could it be that these apparently secular paintings were felt to be less subject to Protestant attack, even to damage and destruction, than straightforward religious subjects? The ways in which accepted definitions of the borderline between sacred and profane were capable of modification provide some of the major clues to the ineffectiveness of interdiction, whether Protestant or Catholic.  

Bruegel's painting of The Woman Taken in Adultery (plate 22) unlike Aertsen's, presents a different and more difficult kind of problem. If, as seems possible, it was intended to be read as a plea for tolerance, then this kind of meaning can only be discovered by the use of the biblical story as a symbol of tolerance in other literary or visual contexts; and its meaning could not have been defined as such, as a plea for tolerance, outside a circle (of which Bruegel may have been part) to whom such an idea would have been important or sympathetic. Otherwise its meaning would have remained on the level of the manifest, and would certainly have been immune from charges of heterodoxy. A similar problem is raised by the great picture of the Carrying of the Cross (plate 21). It may be that there are Anabaptist allusions here — which seems unlikely, despite the efforts of certain scholars to discover them but

22 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Woman Taken in Adultery*. London, Courtauld Institute of Art Galleries, Prince's Gate Collection. 24.1 x 34.4 cm.

23. Pieter Aertsen, *The Woman Taken in Adultery*. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum. 122 x 180 cm

24 Pieter Aertsen, *The Road to Calvary*, 1552
Formerly Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, destroyed, 1945
77 x 116 cm

25 Henri met de Bles, *The Road to Calvary*
Princeton University Art Museum 114 3 x 82 2 cm
when it looked so obviously similar to other pictures of the same subject at the time, such as several paintings by Pieter Aertsen (plate 24) and the many paintings of the mysterious Brunswick Monogrammist and Herri met de Bles (plate 25) then it must have been capable of having the same relatively straightforward meaning as they had.

Paintings like these have been discussed — perhaps too elliptically — because they highlight some of the main problems of arriving at a more precise analysis of the status of images in the sixteenth century. It is clear that images may have both a manifest and a latent meaning, according to their context, and to some extent a hidden, subconscious one as well. But Victor Turner has defined two further kinds of meaning which are of some relevance to a study of the kind suggested here. The operational meaning of a symbol — what we have called its function — is derived from the use made of the symbol, the social composition of the groups responding to it, and the affective qualities of the symbol in terms of the rituals or other social processes associated with it, while the positional meaning is constituted by the relationship of the symbol to other symbols in the total social or ritual system. In any given context, as we have seen, only a few of the meanings of a polysemous symbol may be stressed.

What this paper has tried to suggest are the ways in which a symbol may nonetheless generate associations from its use in other contexts; or, as Turner put it, that the latent and to a certain extent the hidden meanings of a dominant symbol in one context may be discovered by using exegetic reports on its significance in another. While the main aim of the art historian may as well be to discover dominant meanings, it is only by taking into account the potential fluidity of meaning that he can define more precisely the status of a work, and — incidentally — account for the failure of interdiction.

I have discussed the matter of attempted interdictions and some kinds of images produced contemporaneously with them in order to show how the Durkheimian distinction between sacred and profane may be capable of modification according to function and context. But this is not to say that the distinction is too blunt to be of use. Durkheim himself never held that the distinction was fixed, and he devoted some attention to the matter of the contagiousness of the sacred, in ways that may be exemplified by several of the images referred to in this paper and by the responses to them. In any case, his system was not intended as a means of classifying objects, but rather of explaining the polarities of social consciousness — the polarities, it should be emphasized, and not the merging elements of the spectrum. I have also examined the implications of the fusion of image and prototype, both by those who were in favour of images and those who were against them, to show that although for the purpose of analysis it may be best to separate sign and signified, they are liable to amalgamate, sometimes with quite dramatic consequences, in both the psychological and the social sphere. The matter of interdiction itself strikingly demonstrates the problem of confronting the fluidity of the signified when it is conditioned by the status of the sign.

It will perhaps have been observed that the first part of the title of this paper has been used at least twice before. Apart from Hubert Schrade's study of the representation of God in Israel and the Ancient Orient — Der
Verborgene Gott Gottesbild und Gottesvorstellung in Israel und im Alten Orient – which provides the basic material for some of the theological underpinnings of Western attitudes towards images, I refer, of course, to Lucien Goldmann’s masterly description of the vision of God in the work of Pascal and Racine, entitled Le Dieu caché. Although Goldmann’s hidden god is an entirely different phenomenon from that described here, the approach to cultural artifacts – in the one case literary, in the other visual – proceeds from the same conviction. ‘The mode of behaviour which enables us to understand a particular work is not that of the author himself, but that of a whole social group.’ This claim is not a particularly novel one, and it has since been superseded by many refinements on the theme of the comparative inconsequence of authorial meaning. But historians of art have been unusually slow to attend to its rich implications, even though they have always made gestures in that direction. Works of art are not autonomous manifestations of the individual creative spirit, and to study them as if they were is to be careless of the material processes of history. Indeed, the artist’s intention, the meaning which they had for him, may well not coincide with the meaning they acquire in their social context. This paper began with a discussion of iconoclasm and interdiction, and went on to discuss the problem of meaning, in order to show that it is possible for the historian to determine not only what an image was supposed to mean, or indeed, to be, but also what it actually meant to those who beheld it, not only what the artist intended it to signify, but also what it signified in terms of the society for which it was made. Such issues are just as amenable to investigation as the more traditional forms of art historical analysis, whether iconographic, stylistic or functional, although the analytic procedures may be different. Problems of response, particularly on the part of the unlettered, have tended to be regarded as incapable of anything other than sociological analysis, but this seems to me to take rather an ungenerous view of the possibilities of historical examination. The historian of images seems better equipped than most to deal with past data concerning the relations between material objects and socialized forms of perception: from the internal relations of images themselves he may arrive at conclusions not only about their status, but also about the ways in which they were perceived; from collective notions about what images are supposed to be and how they are supposed to work he may proceed inductively to reinforce the admittedly scattered historical evidence for effect and response – even in the absence of written testimony. There are dangers in turning from behaviour to cognition, or, indeed, in the a priori assumption of cognitive processes; but if he can turn from his traditional preoccupation with how images are made to the way they work it may no longer be necessary to justify the retreat into positivism on the grounds of the lacunae of the past.

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This paper was first presented as the first of the 1979 Baldwin Lectures at Oberlin College, Ohio, which provided the opportunity to develop some of the ideas originally presented in the articles cited in notes 1, 2, and 14. I am grateful to William Hood and Richard Spear for their helpful suggestions on that occasion, and to Sir Ernst Gombrich, Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath for their attempts to introduce some clarity into earlier versions of this paper. Frances Carey and Antony Griffiths drew my attention to the important instances of censored engravings illustrated in plates 14-16.


2 E.g. in D. Freedberg, 'The Representation of Martyrdoms in the Early Counter Reformation in Antwerp', Burlington Magazine, CXVIII, 1976, pp. 128-58, and 'The Problem of Images' (see previous note), pp. 25-45

3 'In haas autem sanctas et salutares observationes quia abusus irreprenderit, eos prorsus aboleb sancta synodus vehementer cupit', p. 775 in the reference cited in the following note.

4 Decretum De invocatione, veneratione et religius sanctorum et sacris imaginibus (Sessio XXV), readily available in J. Albergo et al., Conciliorum Oecumenorum Decreta, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, ed 3a, Bologna, 1973, pp. 774-6

5 See especially the important article by H. Jedin, 'Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets uber die Bilderverehrung', Theologische Quartalschrift, CXVI, 1985, pp. 142-82 and 404-28.

6 ' . . .ita ut nullae fals dogmatis imagines, et rudibus periculosos errores occasionem praebentes statuantur. Quod si alquando historias et narrationes sacrae scripturae cum id indoeae plebi expediret, exprimi et figurari congeterit, doceatur populus, non propterea divinitatem figurari. . . Omnis porro superstitione in sanctorum invocatione, Reliquiarum veneratione, et imagum sacro usu tollatur, omnis turpis questus elminetur, omnis denique lascivia vittertur ita, ut prociaci venustate imagines non pingantur, nec ormentur, et Sanctorum celebrazione, ac Reliquiarum visitatione homines ad commessationes atque ebreatates non abantur, quasi festi des honorum sanctorum per luxum ac lasciviam agantur' Decretum De . Imaginibus, in Conciliorum Oecumenorum Decreta (see note 4), pp. 775-6.


9 That fear is made explicit in the course of Veronese's interrogation before the tribunal of the Inquisition concerning his Feast in the House of Simon 'Do you not know that in Germany and in other places infected with heresey it is customary with various pictures full of scumlousness and similar inventions to mock, vituperate and scorn the things of the Holy Catholic Church in order to teach bad doctrines to foolish and ignorant people?' Translated by Elizabeth Gilmore Holt in A Documentary History of Art, II, New York, 1958, p. 67 (Minutes of the Inquisition Tribunal of 19 July 1573, available in P Caliari, Paolo Veronese, Rome, 1888, pp. 102 ff.).


12 G. Paleotti, Discorso intorno alle Immagini Sacre e Profane, Bologna, 1582, translated into Latin as De Imaginibus Sacris et Profanis, . . . Libri Quinque, Quibus multiplices corum abusus tuxta sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini
18 See, for example, the Referenzen van Anna Byns, ed A Bogaars and W L van Helten, Rotterdam, 1875, pp. 106, 118 and 124 for this species of critical challenge. Cf Martin Donk's similar acid suggestion that it were better to purify one's own home before worrying about the churches. M Donk (Duncanus), Een Cult Onderseheyt tuschen Godliike en Afgodliisse Beelden, Antwerp, 1579, B iv recto and verso ('Waarom en gaen wy met sersten ons eygen huysen reyn maken van suelcke Afgoden over welcke wy macht hebben eerwy de kercken ontreynen en violeren'). See too Ronsard's bitter comments on the iconoclasts in the Discours des miseres de ce temps, in Oeuvres completes, ed P. Laumonier, IX, Paris, 1946, pp. 179-84.


20 In addition to the paintings cited in the previous note (the Stockholm picture is signed and dated 1561), see, for example, the Brussels Lot and his Daughters of 1565, the Brussels Susanna of 1567, the Louvre Bathsheba of 1562 (illustrated in plate 5) and several Judths — all illustrated in Friedlander, XIII, nos 11, 14, 13, 15, 16, 17, etc.

21 Willem Key, Holy Family with the Infant St John, formerly Lucerne, Gallery Fischer, sale 26 June 1962, Friedlander, XIII, no 271a Cf the even more blatant treatment of this subject in the early painting by Jan Massys in the Art Museum, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Inv no 10-44, Friedlander, XIII, no. 27. See the following note for references to Molanus's views on the naked Christ Child.

22 Jan Massys, Bathsheba, Paris, Louvre, no. 2030B, Friedlander, XIII, no. 13, and Jan Massys, The Magdalene, formerly with Frohlich Vienna, Friedlander, XIII, no. 33. For Molanus's comments on all the subjects referred to here, see Molanus, pp. 122-3 and 314 (the latter on the representation of the Magdalen, in the chapter entitled 'Maria Magdalene absque vestium pompa pingatur', Lib II, Cap. XXV), and D. Freedberg, 'Johannes Molanus' (see note 14 above), pp. 238-9 for translation and notes on Molanus's objections to representations of the naked Christ Child.


24 Pieter Aertsen, Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Inv. no. 1108, dated 1553, Friedlander, XIII, no 307, Joachim Beuckelaer, 146
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Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. A1451. In the latter painting, however, Peter is not clearly depicted, for a closer parallel to the Aertsen, one has to turn to Beuckelaer's painting of this subject in Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, no 323 (illustrated in P.K.F. Moxey, 'The "Humanist" Market Scenes of Joachim Beuckelaer Moralsizing Exempla or "Slices of Life"', Jaarboek, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen, 1976, pp 109-87, Fig. 46. Cf. the other paintings of this subject by Beuckelaer in Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. 2251 and by Aertsen in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. no. 6927 (dated 1552), Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Inv. no. 3574 (dated 1559), and formerly in Vienna, Galerie Lucas, 1935 (Fredlander, XIII, nos 306, 308, 309). It seems to have escaped the attention of commentator on these works that the subsidiary scene with Peter amongst domestics sitting by a fire may well be an allusion to the scene in Mark 15, 67 and Luke 22, 55-6, where he warms himself by a fire. The moment is most explicit in the Brussels painting of 1559 listed above. This plausible interpretation was first suggested to me by Professor Creighton Gilbert.

25 Cf. note 6 above and the opening sentence of Molanus, p. 2678 (Lib. II, Cap. XXVII). See also Molanus, pp 275-6. For Italian examples from the fourteenth century, see D. Robb, The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the Fourteenth Century, New York, 1954, p. 189. For the objections in the Summa Theologiae of the Archbishop Antoninus, see C. Gilbert, 'The Archbishop' (see note 17 above), pp. 76 and 80 (with one later example added to those of Robb).

26 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Resurrection, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Inv no 121, pen and brown ink with grey wash, 431 x 409 mm. Cf. also plate 21, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Inv. no. 6927 (dated 1559), and formerly in Vienna, Galerie Lucas, 1935 (Fredlander, XIII, nos 295 and 294.) Molanus, p. 93 'sic etiam ex simplici & populari devotione pinguntur Septem Dolores & Septem Gaudia Manae Virgins'. Cf. his criticism of Erasmus's mocking references to the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, amongst several subjects (ibid, p. 90). It is perhaps worth commenting here on the rapid disappearance of this pair of subjects in painting from the latter half of the sixteenth century on, although it continued to be represented, less surprisingly, in prints such as those by the Wierix brothers (M. Mauquoy-Hendrickx, Les Estampes des Wierix, I, Brussels, 1978, nos 771-5).

27 Quae communi quodam consensus receptae sunt' (Molanus, p. 90, cf also p. 93, 'quaedam magis ex populam & simplici devotione pinguntur, quam ex solidis vel Scripturae vel Patrum testimonio', with a similar sentiment again on p. 319).

28 P. Aertsen, The Adoration of the Magi (fragment of the wing of an altarpiece), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. A1909, Fredlander, XIII, no. 296. Cf. also plate 21, but the black magus is so common a feature of this scene in Netherlandish painting of both the fifteenth and the sixteenth century that it seems surprising that Molanus should have gone to such lengths in his discussion of the matter. See Molanus, pp. 239-44.

29 R. Campin (?), Detail of Annunciation (centre panel of the Mérode altarpiece), New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters. Molanus, pp 275-6. For Italian examples from the fourteenth century, see D. Robb, The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the Fourteenth Century, New York, 1954, p. 189. For the objections in the Summa Theologiae of the Archbishop Antoninus, see C. Gilbert, 'The Archbishop' (see note 17 above), pp. 76 and 80 (with one later example added to those of Robb).

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31 Quae communi quodam consensus receptae sunt' (Molanus, p. 90, cf also p. 93, 'quaedam magis ex populam & simplici devotione pinguntur, quam ex solidis vel Scripturae vel Patrum testimonio', with a similar sentiment again on p. 319).

32 P. Aertsen, The Seven Joys of the Virgin and The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin (both centre panels of altarpieces), St Leonard's, Léau (Zoutloureu), Fredlander, XIII, nos 295 and 294 Molanus, p. 93 'sic etiam ex simplici & populari devotione pinguntur Septem Dolores & Septem Gaudia Manae Virgins'. Cf. his criticism of Erasmus's mocking references to the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, amongst several subjects (ibid, p. 90). It is perhaps worth commenting here on the rapid disappearance of this pair of subjects in painting from the latter half of the sixteenth century on, although it continued to be represented, less surprisingly, in prints such as those by the Wierix brothers (M. Mauquoy-Hendrickx, Les Estampes des Wierix, I, Brussels, 1978, nos 771-5).

33 Quae communi quodam consensus receptae sunt' (Molanus, p. 90, cf also p. 93, 'quaedam magis ex populam & simplici devotione pinguntur, quam ex solidis vel Scripturae vel Patrum testimonio', with a similar sentiment again on p. 319).

34 Molanus, pp. 319, 330 For the view that subjects like these (and many others) could be accepted on the grounds that they were probable, even though apocryphal, see Lib. II, Cap. 28 'Circa imaginem quae errorem continent non percelsum quid tolerandum cavendumque sit ' Herc Molanus expresses his disapproval of the Legenda Aurea (rather, he says on p. 84, the 'Legenda Plumbata'), but refrains from wholly condemning it 'nem quaedam ex apocryphis sumpta alhunde habent probabilitatem' (ibid, p. 89, cf. on the
following page, 'Multa in picturis & imaginibus esse toleranda, que probableia sunt apud doctos quosdam aut vulgum')

35 Ibid., p. 93 The passage is a telling instance of Molanus's mode and approach 'Item Vulnera Christi per figuras Pedum, Manuum & Cordis abscessorum, non quidem contra scriptura. os non comminuetis in eo (nam pictura haec non significat Christo os esse comminutum, aut abscessum. sed popularis, & Deco non ingrata simplicitas, ita sibi propinat singularum Meditationem erga quinque beneficia Christi Vulnera.'

36 Ibid., p. 14 See the references in the preceding four notes as well as several other passages in which he insists on caution and discretion in removing or correcting undesirable images. Just as one tolerates certain things in speech so one should also tolerate them in paintings (p. 14), in correcting the abuses associated with images 'zel is to be tempered by discretion' (p. 75), and so on.


40 'Il che se è vero o non vero, non se ne aspetta il giudizio a me, basta che le figure che Sandro vi fece, veramente sono da lodare, per la fatica che e' durò nel girare i cerchi de' celi, e tramezzare tra figure e figure d'Angeli e scorci e vedute in diversi modi diversamente, e tutto condotto con buono disegno' (Vasari, Le Vite . . . ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols, Florence, 1878-85, III, 1878, p. 315 (sub Botticelli)), London, National Gallery, no 1126, as 'ascribed to Botticini'. For the attempts to cover the work and place the chapel in which it stood under interdict, see A. Blunt, Artistic Theory (see note 38), p. 109.

41 Vasari-Milanesi, VI, 1881, pp. 555-6.

42 For several examples see D. Freedberg, 'The Problem of Images' (see note 1), pp. 29-31. The last paragraph of the Tridentine decree was quite explicit about ecclesiastical supervision and control, and its recommendations were repeatedly taken up by the provincial synods, as well as by all the theological writers on art.

43 E. van Autenboer, 'Het Concile van Trente en de Kunst in het Mechelse', in Studia Mechlonensa Bydragen aangeboden aan H Jooos ter Gelegenheid van zijn 65ste Verjaardag, ed. A. Monballieu et al., Mechlin, 1976, pp. 219-29 gives good examples of local attempts at this kind of control in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, on the basis of the Mechlin diocesan Vastationes Decanales. See especially pp. 222, 225-6 and 228-9 for illustrations of the ineffectiveness of the instructions to remove or alter nuditates or imagines indecentes in local churches.


45 Durkheim, p. 299.


47 Cf. Durkheim, pp 301-2 for the separation of different classes of the sacred.

48 Implied by the passage from the Tridentine decree quoted in note 6 above, but see also Molanus, Lib. II, Cap. XXXIII ('Superstitionem omnem tollendam esse in sacrarum imaginarum circumgestatione') and Cap. XXXIV ('Imaginum in Supplicazione circumgestatio a superstitione contra Haereticos defendidur'), pp. 95-8, as well as Erasmus in the Modus Orandi, Opera (ed. cit), V. cols 1102A-1121B ('Rursum in publicis supplicationibus ac pompis ecclesiasticis, quantum videmus apud quasdam gentes superstitiones, unusquisque opificum ordo circumfert suos divos, ingentes mulies portantur a multis sudantium ... sunt enim ista vestigia paganismi', etc. etc.)

49 See the passage translated by Molanus from Clement of Alexandria in Lib. II, Cap. XLII ('in pictures cavendumque esse quidquid ad
libidinem provocat') 'Et rursum ad verba Clementis Alexandrinarum presbyteri, qui post acrem reprehensionem Paganorum, eo quod, in cubili decemcentem, Venerem nudam respicunt in tabulis depictus habebant quoque Panoscos, & nudas puellas, & ebros Satyros, & membrorum erestiones, quae Picturum nudantur, tandem conclusit 'Horum non solum usus, sed etiam aspectus & auditus, deponentem esse memoram vobis annunciamus' (Molanus, p. 124, from Clement of Alexandria, Protreptikos, Cap 4, PG VIII, cols 161-2). Cf. also Molanus, Lib. II, Cap. LVII ('Quod Ethnicae Picturae & Statuae non debent Christians placere'), although this chapter is not specifically concerned with nudity.

50 'Imagines porro Chnsti, Deiparae Virginis, et aliorum Sanctorum in templis praesertim habendas et retrinendas,isque debuit honorem et venerationem impertiendam, non quod credatur lUae repraesentant' (Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, p 775)

The last point, made by every Counter Reformation writer on images (and mocked by Calvin in Lib. I, Cap. XI of the Institution de la religion chrétienne (1560), especially sect. 10) derives from the famous passage from St Basil's often cited letter to the Bishop of Marseilles (who had removed the images from churches in his diocese) 'Idcirco enim pictura in Ecclesias adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt, & in parietibus videndo legant, quae legere in Codicibus non valent', in PL LXVII, cols 1027-8

51 'Illud vero diligenter doceant episcopi, per historias mysteriorum nostrae redemptionis, picturis vel alis similitudinis expressas, erudiri et confirmari popularum in articulis fidei commemorandis et assidue recolendis . . quia Deus per sanctos miracula et salutaria exempla oculis fiducia in imaginibus ut agitanda, vel quod fiducia in imaginibus sit figenda, veluti olim fiebat

52 'Fuit autem trplex ratio institutionis imaginum in ecclesia. primo ad instructionem rudium qui eis quasi quibusdam liberis edocent. secundo ut impressiones mysterii et sanc- torum exempla magis in memoria essent dum quotidie oculis representantur, tertia ad excit-

53 Thomas Aquinas clearly articulated the three main functions of images in the following terms 'Fuit autem trplex ratio institutionis imaginum in ecclesia. primo ad instructionem rudium qui eis quasi quibusdam liberis edocent. secundo ut impressiones mysterii et sanc- torum exempla magis in memoria essent dum quotidie oculis representantur, tertia ad excit-

54 This threefold division of the function of images appeared as a fundamental part of every justification of images from the Middle Ages on. Cf. Bonaventure's very similar formulation in his commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard 'Introductae enim fuerunt propter triplicem causam videlicet propter simplicium ruditatem, propter affectuum tarditatem & propter memoraem labiditatem. 1. ut simplices qui non possunt scripturas legere in huanumod sculptus et picturus tamquam in scriptus apertius possint sacramenta nostrae fidei legere 2 ut homines qui non excitantur devotionem in his que pro nobis Chnstus gessit, dim illa aure percipiant, saltem excitentur dum easdem in figuris et picturis tamquam praeestea oculis corporis cernunt. 3. sio dispensatione Dei factum est, ut imagines fierent praeceptae in ecclesiis, ut uidentes eas recordemur de beneficiis nobis impensus et sanctorum operibus virtuosus (Expositio in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum, Lib III, dist. IX, qu. 2) The texts given here are based on a recension of the fifteenth-century editions in the British Library.


56 The Gregorian position is made clear in the often cited letter to the Bishop of Marseilles (who had removed the images from churches in his diocese) 'Idcirco enim pictura in Ecclesias adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt, saltem in parietibus videndo legant, quae legere in Codicibus non valent', in PL LXVII, cols 1027-8

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58 andum affectum quod ex visu efficacius initiatur quam ex auditis' (Commentarium Super Libros Sententiarum, Commentum in Librum III, dist. 9, art. 2, qu. 2, a passage that is rarely correctly cited, and hardly ever actually quoted). This
pauperibus eget. Suos lapides induit auro, et suos filios nudos deserit. De sumptibus egenorum servitur oculus divitum'; and so on. Luther's attacks on misplaced splendour and richness of church ornament are also frequently aligned with suggestions that the money spent in this way might better be expanded for more worthwhile social purposes, from his earliest works on see, for example, the Sermon on Indulgences in D. Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar, 1833 ff. (henceforward W4), I, p. 236, and then W4, I, pp. 556, 598 (the poor are the living temples of God), X, p. 32 (Sermon of 12 March 1522, expressing the classic view that 'Man thut auch got kein dienst noch wolgefallen dannne wenn wir jm ein bilden machen, und theten besser, wenn sie emem armen menschen einen gulden geben dann gotte em gulden bilde', etc. etc.), and Br. X, p. 558 (letter to Count Ernest of Saxony) and many other places. For further references and discussion see now also C. Christensen, Art and the Reformation in Germany, Athens, Ohio, 1979, especially pp. 42-65, and M. Baxandall, The Lombwood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany, New Haven and London, 1980, pp. 88-93 (with an interesting selection of the views of Zwengli and some of the lesser Reformed writers).

57 Cf. Durkheim, p. 113 ('the totem is not merely a name; it is an emblem, a veritable coat of arms whose analogies with the arms of heraldry have often been remarked'), and especially p. 206. On p. 205 Durkheim asserts that 'it is obviously not out of the sensations which the things serving as totems are able to arouse in the mind' that men have been led to 'construct the idea' of totemism. Art historians have yet to ponder the implications of this point of view for a history of art that has so often excluded run-of-the-mill images from its consideration (Durkheim's insight here seems to me to be unpugned by the subsequent discrediting of the whole concept of totemism).

58 The major compilations are Caesaris of Heisterbach's Dialogus Marculorum and the Libri VIII Marculorum (accessible in the editions edited by J. Strange, 2 vols, Cologne, 1851, and A. Meister, Rome, 1901 respectively) and Gautier de Coincy's highly influential Les Miracles de Notre Dame (the handiest edition is that of V.F. Koeng, 4 vols, Geneva, 1955-70 (Textes litteraires franfais, nos 64, 95, 131, 176), which were much adapted in the fifteenth century. For the fullest treatment of these compilations, their origins, and the other compilations to which they are related, see A. Massafia, 'Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Marienlegenden', Sitzungberichten der Philhist. Classe der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, CXIII, pp. 917-94, CXV, pp. 5-92, CXIX, Abh. 9; CXXIII, Abh. 8, and CXXXIX, Abb. 8, Vienna, 1886-96. See also A. Massafia, 'Uber die von Gauthier de Coincy benutzten Quellen', Denkschriften der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philhist. Classe, XLIV, Vienna, 1896 I am in the course of preparing a study of the art historical implications of these and the other collections of miracle legends.

59 Very good examples are recorded in the case of the Anabaptist iconoclasm in Munster in 1534/35, see M. Warnke, Durchbrochene Geschichts? Die Bildersturme der Wiedertaufer in Munster, 1534/35', in M. Warnke, ed., Bildersturm, Die Zerstorung des Kunstwerks, Munch, 1973, pp. 65-98, especially sections 6 ('Die Angnff auf die Herrschafssymbole') and 7 ('Deformationsformen').


62 J. Collaert after M de Vos, The Creation of Eve (from a set of 13 engravings representing the Creed of the Apostles), plate 14 published by A. Collaert, plate 15 published by C. Visscher The altered plate illustrated as plate 15 here presumably came from a seventeenth-century Dutch Bible or cycle of Biblical scenes, such as those which were put together in great numbers under the auspices of C. Visscher, but I have been unable to identify the precise edition. These examples come from the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, as do further similar cases, such as the altered plates showing the Resurrection of the Flesh and the Heavenly City from the same cycle after Martin de Vos, where the representation of God the Father has also been removed (A.W. Aspital, Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College Cambridge, Woodbridge (Suffolk), vol. III, pt 1, 1980, nos 388 (the plates illustrated here, 401-9, 404-5).

63 J. Collaert after J. Snellich (2), The Seven Days of Creation, engraving (A.W. Aspital, cat. cit., no. 488, as 'Anonymous').

64 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. no. A 3841, painted around 1530. Published and discussed by N. Beets, 'De Dans om het Gouden Kalf. Een hervonden triptiek van Lucas van Leyden', Oud-Holland, LXVII, 1952, pp. 183-200. See D. Freedberg, 'The Problem of Images' (see note 1) p. 35 and note 91 for further references to works which cast some light on the iconography — not yet fully explained — of this work. P. Parshall, 'Lucas van Leyden and the Rise of Pictorial Narrative', PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974 has an illuminating discussion of this work within the context of Lucas's output as a whole.
65 El Esconal (Museos Nuevos, Pinacotheca).

The same elusiveness of definition and status applies to the many other sixteenth-century
Netherlandish paintings showing St Christopher
in an extensive landscape. It is true that one
would not want to claim a significant
devotional element for any of these works, but
certainty is undermined by the not in-
considerable number of fifteenth-century works
where similarly represented scenes do occur in
devotional contexts, even if on the side panels of
altarpieces (as in the case of the 'Pearl of
Brabant' altarpiece in Munich; Alte Pinakothek,
no. H.G. 78). But cf. p. 141 above for a further
discussion of the problems of definition.

66 Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, no. 321
For a brilliant discussion of the painting by
Beuckelaer and the kind of reading it requires, see J.A. Emmens 'Eins aber ist notig' — Zu
Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und
Kuchenstucken des 16. Jahrhunderts', in
Album Amicorum J.G van Gelder, ed. J.
Bruyn et al., The Hague, 1973, pp. 93-101,
now reprinted in J.A. Emmens Verzameld
Werk, 4 voix, Amsterdam, 1981, pt 4
(Kunsthistorische Opstellen, II), pp. 189-221.

For an opposing interpretation see the article
by Moxey cited in note 24 above, where a
number of other paintings by Aertsen and
Beuckelaer combining religious subjects like
the Ecce Homo with extensive market scenes
are illustrated. There seems little doubt,
however, that they all carry a similar moralizing
point. Imitate Christ, do not be seduced by
the amor carnis, nor, indeed (in the case of
Beuckelaer's Ecce Homo with Fish Market
also in Stockholm, no. 324) by excessive
indulgence in the outward practices of the
Christian faith (e.g. the eating of fish during
Lent). This reading is supported by
the scene of the Ecce Homo — or a similar
one — in the background. The same applies
to the many related scenes by P. Aertsen, on
which see more on p. 142 above and notes
72 and 75 below. For a strong statement
of the moralizing view, see also A. Grosjean,
'Toward an Interpretation of Pieter Aertsen's Profane Iconography', Konsthistorisk Tidskrift,
XLI, 1974, pp. 121-43.

67 London, Courtauld Institute of Art Galleries,
Prince's Gate Collection, Inv. no. 6.

68 For further comment, see p. 142 above and
note 79 below.

69 London, National Gallery, no. 3556, signed
and dated 1564.

70 R.K. Merton, Social Theory and Social
Structure (revised edition), Glencoe, Illinois,
1957. See the important modifications to this
view of functional explanation by M. Spro,
'Religion Problems of Definition and

Explanation', in M. Banton, ed.,
Anthropological Approaches to the Study
of Religion (ASA Monographs 3), London,
1978, pp. 108-9, with further bibliographic
references

71 Elaborated in D. Freedberg, 'The Origins and
Rise of the Flemish Madonnas in Flower
Garlands Decoration and Devotion', Munchner
Jahrbuch der Bildende Kunst, XXXII, 1981,
pp. 135-50

72 See p. 135 above and note 23.

73 J.A. Emmens, 'Eins aber ist Notig' (see
note 66 above), p. 94.

74 Ibid., p. 95. Cf. also note 66 above.

75 Indeed, the passage from Luke 10 is
excerpted in an inscription above the fireplace
in Pieter Aertsen's 1552 painting in Vienna
(Inv. no. 6927, with the words 'Maria heeft
uitvercoren dat beste deel') and the inscription
on the floor of Beuckelaer's 1565 painting of
the subject in Brussels (Inv. no. 782) also
refers to Luke 10. For other paintings of this
subject, see note 24 above.

76 Pieter Aertsen, Christ and the Woman taken
in Adultery, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum,
no. 2106. Freedlander, XIII, no. 305. Cf. the
painting of the same subject by Aertsen in
Frankfurt, Staedelisches Kunstinstitut, no. 1378
(signed and dated 1559).

77 The fate of religious paintings, by both Aertsen
and Beuckelaer is recorded with considerable
regret by van Mander. See, for example, C. van
Mander, Het Schilder-Boeck, Haarlem, 1604,
fol. 238v, 244 and, especially, 244v, where
he tells of how a widow of Alkmaar was unable
to prevent the destruction of an altarpiece
by Aertsen, despite the offer of 100 pounds
to the iconoclasts in the hope of preventing
them from proceeding further. Van Mander
also reports, significantly, Aertsen's own
anger at the destruction of his works by the
iconoclasts (fol. 244v)

78 Reference in note 67, see too the following
note.

79 The painting was first published by F.
Grossman, 'Bruegel's 'Woman Taken in
Adultery' and other Grisailles', Burlington
Magazine, XCIV, 1952, pp. 218-29. Here
Grossman notes that 'the grisailles, generally
speaking, were produced by the artists either
for themselves and their fellow artists or for
their connoisseur friends', and suggests that
they may provide some evidence for the
heterodox ideas held in Bruegel's circle (see, for
example, A.E. Popham, 'Pieter Bruegel and
Abraham Ortelius', Burlington Magazine,
LIX, 1951, p. 87), but he cautiously concludes that
'tit would ... be wrong to see in it a
proof of Bruegel's secret Protestantism (sic?)'
If we want to see in it more than a general
plea for Christian charity, we can at best
interpret it as a penitent confession of human
weakness. This, at least, would be in keeping with Ortelius's conviction. But there remains a temptation to take the subject, emphasized by the inscription (from John 8) on the engraving after it (Lebeer, no. 88, 'Qui sune peccato est vestrum, primus in ilam lapidem mittat') and the vernacular equivalent written by Christ on the floor before the Pharisees ('Die sonder ist die...') as indicative of those irenic views which we know were widely held in Bruegel's circle at a time of considerable religious dissenion and persecution. In Bruegel, The Paintings Complete Edition, London, 1973 (3rd ed., revised), p. 196, Grossman is far more explicit, and claims that in the article mentioned above 'I tried to deduce both from the obvious meaning of the biblical story which is told in John VIII, 3-11, and by drawing upon Ortelius's letters that this graille has to be understood as a plea for toleration in the religious strife of Bruegel's time.'

80 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. no. 1025.

81 See especially M. Auner, 'Pieter Bruegel — Umsse eines Lebensbildes', Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien, LII, 1956, pp. 103-9. Apart from a series of hypotheses about lesser elements within the picture — the peddlers on the lower left, for example, being representative of the Wanderkramer of whom Auner says 'In der Geschichte des niederländischen Taufertums spielen sie eine bedeutsame Rolle. Sie sind die eigentlichen Sendboten des Taufertums' — the central suggestion is this: 'Der Chrstus der Wiener Kreuztragung wird erst aus der Christologie des Taufertums aus dessen Lehre von der Menschheit Chrstis verständlich. Diese Lehre vom menschlichen Christus, der in seiner Armut und Ermiednung verlassen war bis in der Tod, hat dem Taufertums eine so grosse Schlagkraft verliehen. Er allein ist der wahre Christus, der Christus der Armen und bedruckten, im Gegensatz zum Reichtum und der weltlichen Macht des falschen Chrstus' (p. 106). In any case, the central doctrine of Anabaptism — according to Auner — 'ist eine Lehre des Kreuzes. Ihm haben wir in seinem Leben, Leiden und Sterben zu folgen und in aller Trubsal bis zur Wiedergeburt mit ihm auszuhalten' (p. 108). None of these arguments is conclusive.

82 This example is the painting formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, no. 726, destroyed in the Flakturn disaster of 1945, Friedlander, XIII, no. 312, dated 1552. Other examples by Aertsen include the one formerly with the Galerie Sankt Lukas in Vienna (1553) and that presently in Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, no. 862 (Friedlander, XIII, nos. 309 and 311, cf. also nos 314 and 315). There are several closely related examples by Brueckelaer as well, including those in the Wetzlar collection in Amsterdam (dated 1562) and in the Kunsthalte in Hamburg (dated 1563). All these paintings by Aertsen and Brueckelaer are reproduced by D. Kreidl, 'Die religiöse Malerei Pieter Aertsens als Grundlage seiner kunstlerischen Entwicklung', Jahrhuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien, LXVIII, 1972, pp. 43-108, plates 48-52.

83 'Hem met de Bles', Chrst Carrying the Cross, Princeton University Art Museum, no 50-1. There are many extant examples of a similar treatment of this subject in paintings given to Herrn met de Bles, such as those in Vienna, Akademie der Bildenden Kunst, and in Castagnola, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection (Friedlander, XIII, no. 67). For the paintings attributed to the Brunswick Monogrammist in Paris (Louvre), Basle (Kunstmuseum), and the de Boer Collection in Amsterdam, see D. Schubert, Die Gemalde des Braunschweiger Monogrammst, Cologne, 1970, plates 6, 13 and 44, Cat nos 2, 4, 17. See also Schubert's excursus 'Zur Bildtradition der Kreuztragung' (pp. 109-13) with further details of the derivation of this form of representation from Van Eyck onwards.

84 The same caution may be made with respect to subjects like The Preaching of St John the Baptist and the Ecce Homo, drawing again upon the examples from the oeuvres of the Brunswick Monogrammist and Herrn met de Bles.


87 Turner and Turner, Image and Pilgrimage, p. 248, but also pp. 244-7.

88 I do not think that the matter of fluidity of meaning is wholly resolved by the distinction between meaning and significance, what is required, perhaps, is refinement of the notion of associational range. Elsewhere I hope to examine the implications for the study of images of the view of meaning offered by H. P. Grice, notably in 'Meaning', Philosophical Review, LXVI, 1957, pp. 377-89, a useful supplementary sketch is W. P. Alston, 'Meaning and Use', Philosophical Quarterly, XIII, 1963, pp. 107-124.

89 Durkheim, pp. 222 and 319-25.
The assault runs, as far as I can determine, along four main paths: (i) the phenomenological, (ii) the semiotic, (iii) the neo-marxian, and (iv) that of modern hermeneutic theory. Endless permutations of these four approaches are possible, with frequent incursions into debates in ordinary language philosophy about speech act theory and the possibility of synonymy. Meaning began to be detached from the author and the possibility of stable meaning undermined as a result of the work of both Husserl and the later Wittgenstein, on wholly different grounds, but the most sustained damage emerges from the work of H.G. Gadamer (see especially his *Wahrheit und Methode Grundzüge einer philosophische Hermeneutik, 3 erweiterte Auflage*, Tubingen, 1972), sometimes from the work of Barthes and the other semioticians (views neatly summarized in J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, London, 1975), and in the literary hermeneutics of H. Jauss and W. Iser (especially now *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, London-Baltimore, 1978), both of whom have developed elaborate and suggestive theories of response to texts. For a wholly intellectualized view of the sociological implications of the death of the author, see J. Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, London, 1981 (with characteristic English neglect of the potential usefulness of Pierce and the American pragmatic tradition). The most spirited modern defender of the validity of authoral meaning has been E.D. Hirsch, Jr., in *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven, 1967, and *The Aims of Interpretation*, Chicago, 1970.

This is not to espouse the notion of 'actual meaning' or even of the possibility. A clearly desirable aim of the historian of images must be to establish, as closely as possible, the associative range of particular images, but that task has yet to reach an adequate level of theoretical sophistication. Adverbial use here ('actually') does not imply either ease of attainment or of definition.

One could, of course, argue that he is — or should be — best equipped to deal with present data about these relations as well, but that is another story.