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The (New?) Materiality of the Spiritual

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The Luther commemorations of the past decade, culminating in 2017, have undoubtedly opened new approaches, but also rekindled old discussions, on the character of the Reformation. Many of these debates, particularly in the public sphere, have focused on the role of Martin Luther himself, but much scholarship has also used the wider interest in the topic to address all-too-dearly-held assumptions about confessional differences and their expressions in the Reformation era. One of these "myths of the Reformation" centers around the root-and-branch-dismissal of images in Protestantism, whose supporters preferred the word and the Word over the visual and material representations of the sacred in Christian worship. This perceived dichotomy has been much contested in recent years. Bridget Heal, for instance, has convincingly argued that the traditional distinction between "the Catholic Eye and the Protestant Ear" no longer captures more recent scholarly interpretations of the spiritual practices of the different confessions and their changes in the Reformation period (2013, 2016). Heal supports her arguments with an analysis of the church furniture and decorations in Lutheran churches in the Holy Roman Empire (2017). Lutheran churches were and remained exuberant with images of traditional Catholic sacred iconography. In many of these churches, for instance in Nuremberg, the first Imperial city to adopt the Lutheran faith in 1525, the Catholic interior with rood screens, statues, altars and altarpieces, tabernacles, and

3

paintings remained intact and unchanged. Heal's studies are complemented by similar investigations into Lutheran churches elsewhere in Europe (for instance, Spicer 2012). They bring together scholarship of the Reformation, which investigates the perception and use of sacred space as one arena in which confessional difference, change, or continuity was most poignantly visible. Church buildings, as focal points of Christian worship, have thus become a key topic of this scholarship. Investigations into church interiors have profited from new scholarly approaches to "space" and the challenges to perceived dichotomies between the sacred and the profane, the public and the private. Key themes that have been and are explored in this context concern the hierarchies of the sacred and the demarcation of social power among the clergy, church patrons, and ordinary people in churches, as well as the liminality of these spaces (Coster and Spicer 2005; Hamilton and Spicer 2005). While altarpieces or particular monuments have traditionally been and still are intensely studied, often by art historians but also by Reformation historians (Heal's own study is particularly focused on church art), the (re)arrangement of these pieces of art as well as other church furniture within the complex composition of their built environment has raised further academic interest. Rather than focusing on one particular object and its creator, as has often been the case in art history, its embeddedness within its spatial context is now further explored. This is not an easy task. How churches were (re)arranged in the sixteenth century and thereafter is often difficult to trace. The enigmatic and much-discussed seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings of "church interiors" by artists such as Pieter Saenredam, Hendrick van Vliet, and Emanuel de Witte often painted an idealized, rather than an accurate, version of the "cleansed" Reformed churches of the Netherlands (Pollmer-Schmidt 2013; Vanhaelen 2012; Helmus 2002). Moreover, the timeline of changes to the interior could be and often was blurred: what was left,

for instance, by the English reformers under King Edward VI would suffer from further iconophobic attacks by the Puritans during the English Civil Wars and their aftermath. Contemporary accounts further muddied a clear chronology of destruction and rearrangement. For early modern responses to the English Reformation, Philip Schwyzer has detected the use of the peculiar temporality of "lateness", especially as witnessed in its destructive impact on buildings and monuments. "Persisting through much of the seventeenth century and into the early Restoration era", he argues, "the perception of a 'recent Reformation' seems to have been equally prevalent among Catholic sympathisers and conventional, even militant, Protestants" (Schwyzer 2016). The destruction of Bishop Grandisson's tomb in Exeter Cathedral provides a striking example of this observation. Probably destroyed in the 1530s, its desecration was referred to in a series of texts from the 1580s through the 1660s as a "late" event. Accounts could and did conflate the initial destruction of the tomb and later assaults during the English Civil Wars, in 1643, when Exeter Cathedral was again subject to iconoclasm. Those observations, as well as Heal's interpretation of the "preserving power of Lutheranism," raise further questions about the role of contemporary perceptions of and attitudes towards objects in churches (Fritz 1997). The sheer "survival" of traditional Catholic artwork and church furnishings in Lutheran churches, Heal argues, should not in itself be understood as an indication of the survival of the practices and belief-systems associated with them before the Protestant takeover. The role and the spiritual meaning of the altarpieces and other artworks that were kept in place changed and were "neutralized" by the focal points of the Lutheran liturgy of the word. Traditional practices, such as processions with statues or the burning of candles on altars or in front of sacred images, gradually disappeared. They were replaced by an emphasis on the sermon and the quiet contemplation of individual churchgoers. However, it is not always

easy to support this argument with contemporary evidence. Analyzing the English 1552 inventories of church goods, Eamon Duffy (2012) argues that these rich documents reveal that the orders of the Edwardian commission to inventorize what was still left in English parish churches at the time were obeyed. But this does not necessarily imply that these lists demonstrate the parishioners' enthusiastic embrace of reforms to their church space. Alexandra Walsham further elaborates on the theme by introducing the concept of "recycling" into the study of the material memories of—in her particular case—the English Reformation. She convincingly argues that converted objects, often taken from their initial church space into private households, "served to perpetuate and complicate social and cultural memory" (2017, 1121). It thus remains difficult to assess the enduring or renewed role and meaning of objects that had sacred connotations for generations. Luther's and Calvin's approach to statues and other church furnishings—and, to some extent, images—as adiaphora, i.e. indifferent or non-essential, was not shared by all reformers or their followers (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online; Friedrich 2007; Jonckheere 2012). Moreover, Luther himself conceded the beauty of images, their role in creating a solemn sphere necessary for Christian worship, and their didactic role in reminding the viewers of a Christian life (Heal 2005). Studies produced around the 450th anniversary of the Iconoclastic Fury in the Low Countries in 1566 have emphasized the disruptive power of iconoclasm, which was much criticized by contemporaries as an assault of the established social order, rather than hailed as a dawn of a new confessional regime expressed in the rearrangement of the very heart of the Catholic church: its buildings. For the Low Countries, 1566 remained an exceptional year, and much of what had been destroyed was subsequently restored and further embellished (van Bruaene et al. 2016). Likewise, many of the newly built Calvinist temples in places such as Leiden, Gorcum,

and Haarlem were destroyed once the Habsburg regime had regained full power (Spicer 2007, 106–118, 134–147).

As Caroline Bynum has recently alerted us, "periodization of religious change is complicated by attention to objects, which often carry practice into a future untransformed by assertions of new doctrinal interpretations" (Bynum 2016, 101). Objects themselves—statues, church furniture, vestments—often tell a different and much more nuanced story than that conveyed by texts. Moreover, objects that seem to be firmly embedded in the realm of the sacred, such as relics, can acquire (or perhaps always had) multi-layered meanings. David de Boer has carefully analysed the role of the skull of the city's patron saint Rombout, which was dramatically rescued in the Iconoclastic Fury of 1580 in Mechelen's main church, dedicated to the saint. In the later accounts of the events and the eventual restoration of the relic into the church after the return of the Catholic order, Saint Rombout's role—and, by extension, the meaning of the relic for the citizens of Mechelen—had shifted from sacred to civic space, symbolizing civic identity in the besieged and eventually rescued city (de Boer 2016).

The following essays address these issues. They are based on papers presented at the international conference "Zwischen Kanzel und Altar. Die (neue) Materialität des Spirituellen" held at the Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek, Emden in April 2016. Continuity and change in church interiors were key concepts addressed at the conference. The studies presented here analyse the impact of confessional change on church interiors and intentionally move away from the cathedrals and parish churches in the political and religious centres of early modern Europe. They argue that church spaces have different, multi-layered meanings. Their descriptions were embedded in local or regional discourses which often went beyond the realm of the religious. (Re-)Arrangements of church spaces responded to local needs and requirements. The cases presented here cover what might be labelled

the peripheries of confessional change by focussing on border areas and/ or churches in villages and small towns, which are often overlooked in scholarship. They draw attention to the local specificities in which changes within church spaces were realized or rejected.

Steven Ellis investigates the Collegiate Church of Saint Nicholas in Galway, Ireland, thus addressing a much under-studied area of the Tudor Reformation. In comparison to our knowledge of the English Reformation, which has kindled much debate and ground-breaking research into the impact of confessional change on the material culture of church interiors, sacred space and its transformation has so far not been the topic of thorough research on Tudor Ireland (Duffy 1992; 2001). Here, attempts to instigate worship according to the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer as the cornerstone of the rituals of the Elizabethan (and later Anglican) church were half-heartedly introduced and lacked the financial backing required, for instance, to train ministers for the new service. Ellis combines a detailed investigation into the orders of the new liturgy, including the role of psalm singing, with the rearrangement of space in the church or the failure to adequately accommodate the requirements for change in St. Nicholas. The changes in the church interior were not fully undertaken—there was not sufficient personnel to implement them—and, eventually, the church services lacked the support of the local population, who preferred Catholic alternatives which were still available. Here, as in England, later developments under the Stuarts and particularly during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell added an additional political layer to confessional change. Here, as in England, the chronology of the changes to the "scenic apparatus of divine worship"[1] is difficult to disentangle. In

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1   Thus the much-quoted letter of Bishop John Jewel to Peter Martyr from 1559, *The Zurich Letters or, the correspondence of several English bishops and others, with some of the Helvetian Reformers during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, 1558-1579* (Robinson 1842, 23).

St. Nicholas, as in other Irish churches, layers of destruction and renewal were interwoven in later descriptions. A particular lack of sources for the Irish scenario makes research into these changes very difficult, but not impossible, and certainly would reward further investigation.

Equally complicated, and perhaps comparable, is the scenario in the Dutch border regions of the Generality Lands in the seventeenth century. In 's Hertogenbosch, as in Galway, the administrators of the new Reformed church were confronted with a predominantly Catholic population. In 's Hertogenbosch's Sint Jan's Cathedral, as in St. Nicholas in Galway, confessional change had a very political undertone with (mostly) unwanted outsiders representing the new church and failing to receive sufficient support to maintain the building and its service at the desired standards. Raingard Esser's study also addresses the recent academic call to investigate the sensory elements of sacred space and the attempt to capture contemporary experiences of this space, which are also implicit in Bynum's appeal to take contemporaries' approaches to (formerly) sacred objects seriously. In the Low Countries, a richer heritage of sources describing church interiors and their changes in chorographies, travel accounts, and diaries enable us to catch a glimpse of what mattered to people at the time, and what could be neglected. Jacob van Oudenhoven's surveys of the Sint Jan in 's Hertogenbosch again highlight the temporality and the hierarchies of church art and church furnishings—and the meaning ascribed to them by one informed commentator, at least.

The following two contributions specifically focus on the iconographic programme of particular genres in church furnishings. Jacolien Wubs discusses the subtle accommodation of visualizations and decorations in Dutch Calvinist text boards in the seventeenth century. She convincingly argues that the traditional perception of the rejection of images in Dutch Calvinism must be further nuanced and presents a series of striking images

of the prophet Moses on the popular and widespread depictions of the Ten Commandments, which often replaced traditional altarpieces in converted churches. She points out that the use of the figure of Moses, which was recognizable through both his description in the Old Testament and through printed texts, was palatable and acceptable in Dutch Calvinist circles. With the rejection of crucifixion scenes in Calvinist churches, Moses could have served as a fitting replacement of Christ. Striking and very fitting in this present context is the wealth of material that Wubs has unearthed, particularly for smaller, provincial churches in the Netherlands.

Piotr Birecki presents a, so far, unique ensemble of images in a small Lutheran church in early modern Ducal Prussia. What makes his example remarkable is not only the emphasis on this, otherwise often neglected, geographical area in the study of confessional change and sacred space. He also convincingly argues for the close link between confessional change and its political message, as exemplified in the rich paintings in Rodowo's Lutheran church. His study contributes to our understanding of the Lutheran appropriation of church space as an image of the social hierarchy and order represented by the *Landesherr*, the territorial ruler, his clergy, and the parishioners under their guidance. Not only is the iconographic programme in Rodowo a colourful illustration of the leadership qualities of the territorial ruler; in conversation with biblical role models, it also served as a visualized *aide-memoire* for the minister, who could relate to the messages of a Christian social order as represented in the paintings of the church. Birecki also carefully reconstructs the various spaces in the church allocated to the respective messages and their relationship to each other. Both Wubs' and Birecki's contributions, therefore, address Lutheran art as "verba visibilia" in its different forms and expressions. The paintings in Rodowo were commissioned and executed in the mid-eighteenth century; therefore, they transgress the traditional focus of research into church

interiors beyond the confessional age. The Lutheran agenda of the just ruler is entangled with Enlightenment perceptions of quiet prayer and contemplation as well as rulers' qualities taken from French examples of the iconographic programme developed in praise of the Catholic ruler Louis XIV.

The present collection therefore not only addresses the entanglement of religious objects in different confessional and political agendas. It also alerts us to the different "paces" of change beyond the textual landmarks which have so often been used to press the confessional age into a distinct chronology.

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