

Luther, Cranach, and the Reformation of the Image

Seminar Leader: Bridget Heal

Reporter: Bridget Heal

A week in Wittenberg provided a welcome opportunity to discuss »Luther, Cranach and the Reformation of the Image«, and to spend time considering in detail the many wonderful prints and paintings on display in the town's museums and in the parish church of St Marien. Cranach the Elder (c. 1472–1553) has long been known as *the* artist of the Lutheran Reformation. There is a wealth of excellent scholarship on his relationship with Luther and on his work as a Protestant propagandist. More recently, his son, Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515–1586) has emerged from his father's shadow, thanks to a series of exhibitions and publications timed to coincide with the 500th anniversary of his birth. It was under Cranach the Younger, in the context of the relative religious and political stability engendered by the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, that the Cranach workshop's production of paintings and prints for Lutheran patrons truly flourished.

The seminar opened with a little ice-breaker, an opportunity for the participants to discuss, in small

groups, what marks particular images out as Lutheran. A consideration of a few examples—Cranach the Elder's 1539 Schneeberg Altarpiece, Andreas Schlüter's 1703 pulpit for the Marienkirche in Berlin and a 1768 church interior from Upper Lusatia—led to a lively discussion of the relative significance of iconography, style and format. The first session then addressed Cranach the Elder's pre-Reformation work, and the appearance and functions of religious images during the late Middle Ages. Looking at works such as Cranach's 1501 Crucifixion, his 1502 St Jerome, and his 1504 Rest on the Flight into Egypt, we considered the important role that images played in pre-Reformation devotional life, the contribution of the artist and of the patron to the production of such works and the historiographical traditions surrounding Cranach's *oeuvre*. We covered Cranach's early career in Vienna, his work for humanist patrons and his appointment in 1504 as court painter to Elector Frederick the Wise.

In each of the subsequent three sessions, the participants led dis-

cussion. Session two focussed on Cranach the Elder and art in Wittenberg during Luther's lifetime. *John Maxfield* spoke on the importance of Luther's war against idolatry, defined primarily as a matter of the heart rather than as an external or physical practice. A discussion of Luther's writing on images was followed by a trip to the Cranach-Haus. There *Margaret Arnold*, surrounded by the tools of Cranach's trade, spoke about his successful career as a businessman and printer. In the Cranach-Haus the group also examined and discussed particular works by Cranach and his contemporaries: Albrecht Dürer's 1498 Apocalypse woodcuts, for example, that provided the model for Cranach's cycle in the 1522 New Testament, and the pages of the 1509 Wittenberg *Heiltumsbuch*.

Session three focussed in more detail on printed images. *Stefan Pietsch* presented on Cranach's woodcut illustrations for the Lord's Prayer that were included in the 1529 Wittenberg (Rhau) edition of Luther's *Large Catechism*. These images were, he showed, expressions of Cranach's reception of Luther's teaching, and constituted a carefully conceived invitation to Christian readers to implement that teaching in their lives. Cranach's

images, Pietsch argued, »bring scripture forward as the stuff of [...] contemporary Christian life«. Their sophisticated visual narratives draw the viewer into a deeper understanding and appreciation of texts that they accompany. The session also focussed on key examples of early printed propaganda, in particular Karlstadt's 1519 *Wagen* and the 1520 *Passional Christi und Antichristi*. We considered the theological messages these works were intended to convey, but also discussed what makes effective visual propaganda, and how, during the 1520s and 1530s, the Cranach workshop mastered the genre.

The final session focussed in particular on the large-scale works produced in the Cranach workshop for Lutheran churches. *Christopher Brown* used the Weimar Altarpiece as a way into exploring the theological status of the artist, and spoke of the attitudes of Luther's pupils and successors, above all Johannes Mathesius, towards images. *Carl Axel Aurelius* discussed Cranach altarpieces, in particular the Wittenberg and Salzwedel examples, as visualizations of the Gospel intended for the whole community, and offered in addition a preacher's perspective on the value of these works. The session—and the semi-

nar—ended with a trip to the Stadtkirche, where the ideas and themes from the preceding days came alive

in front of the church's magnificent 1547 altarpiece and rich collection of Lutheran epitaphs.

Religious Colloquies of the 1520s and 1530s

Seminar Leader: Gordon A. Jensen

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The seminar involved three presentations, and ample time for discussion. The seminar began with *Henning Bühmann* (Georg-August-University Göttingen) giving an introduction to his habilitation project on disputations in the early reformation period, which is currently funded by the pan-European research group »Humanities in the European Research Area« and is part of the research project »Protestant Legacies in Nordic Law.« The disputations held in Wittenberg were an embodiment of a pan-European disputation culture. This disputation culture provided an important background for the development of reformation theology as well as its spread within the republic of letters. Bühmann focussed on the relationship of the medium of disputations and its impact on the development of reformation theology.

First, Bühmann used the entry of the Dean's book of the theological faculty of Wittenberg to examine the *Sitz im Leben* of Luther's *Theses against Scholastic Theology*. Those theses were defended in September 1517 in a disputation by one of Luther's students in order to acquire the degree of *Baccalaureus Biblicus*. Understanding this academic function is essential to evaluate their role for the development of reformation theology. Furthermore, the fact that a graduate student was able to defend Luther's attack on scholasticism shows that the new theology was very established in Wittenberg at this time.

In the second part of his presentation, Bühmann described the publication history of disputation theses from Wittenberg. While the publication of printed theses belonged to academic rituals, theses from Wittenberg were collected