

Counter-Reformation and Baroque.

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In *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750*, Rudolf Wittkower, claims that 'Nothing could be more misleading than to label – as has been done – the art of the entire Baroque period as the art of the Counter-Reformation'.¹ In the parenthesis, Wittkower is referring to the book by W. Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation*.² In the present article, the intention is not to consider the accuracy of Weisbach's description when applied to the whole Baroque period but to ask under what circumstances and in what period, if any, it might be useful and illuminating to link the two terms together. The fact is, however, that neither 'Counter-Reformation' nor 'Baroque' is an easy term to work with. In the first place, there are several versions of how the term 'Counter-Reformation' is to be understood. Three of these versions are introduced here.³

The first version is that of H. O. Evennett, in *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, reproducing the text of the Birkbeck Lectures of 1951. Evennett objected to the concept of the Counter-Reformation

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- 1 Rudolph Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1958), 93.
 - 2 W. Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (Berlin: P. Cassirer, 1921).
 - 3 R. de Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1978) can be read as suggesting that we know more or less what the Counter-Reformation was, but by studying the attitudes of various Counter-Reformation students and critics of Michelangelo's works, we can get clearer and more nuanced insights of it.

as essentially ‘reactionary’ and backward-looking, because that view obstructed a better alternative view to the effect that the Counter-Reformation was ‘the evolutionary adaptation of the Catholic religion and the Catholic Church to new forces both in the spiritual and the material order’.⁴ Paradoxically there was a backward-looking element in Evennett’s version of the Counter-Reformation, for some elements of it predate the Reformation.⁵ It was however the fight against Protestantism that eventually lent a certain rigidity to the spiritual revival and transformation of Catholicism when humanist ways of thought had become suspect and Lutheranism had crystallized.⁶

If we want to know why Evennett called his book *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, we get some enlightenment from his remark that ‘The *spirituality* (my emphasis) of the Counter-Reformation sprang from a triple alliance as it were between the Tridentine clarifications of the orthodox teaching on Grace and Justification, the practical urge of the day towards active works, and certain new developments in ascetical teaching and practice which promoted this outlook’.⁷ Particularly important was the role of the Jesuits, who succeeded in stamping their outlook onto many aspects of Catholic life.⁸ And the origin of the spirituality of the Jesuits is to be found in St Ignatius and the Spiritual Exercises.

The structure and organisation of the Jesuits, Evennett supposed, also reflected a new kind of political thinking and acting which characterised the politics of Western Europe in the early modern period. Alongside the ‘new monarchies’ came not only a new flowering of papal supremacy,⁹ but also a re-orientation of the religious life, especially by the new congregations of clerks regular or secular, who were, like the Jesuits, devoted to pastoral activity.¹⁰ ‘The Jesuits were definitely encouraged not to mortify their bodies to excess by fasting,

4 H. O. Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, ed. J. Bossy. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968), 3.

5 Ibid., 10.

6 Ibid., 29.

7 Ibid., 32.

8 Ibid., 42.

9 Ibid., 93.

10 Ibid., 73.

self-scourging, or denial of sleep to the extent of harming their studies; mortification in the bodily sense was no longer a matter of common rule, but one of allowable private enterprise strictly controlled, nevertheless, by a sensible and ever-observant authority'.¹¹

On the other hand papal ecclesiastical government via the offices of the Curia in Rome long remained unreformed despite much hostile criticism. There was no commonly perceptible change before the papacy of Gregory XIII. The counter-reformation reorganisation of church government began with the cardinals, who by the end of the century had accepted the view that they were papal creations, and therefore papal servants, a bureaucracy, in fact, for transacting the new kind of business that developed in the Counter-Reformation. Particularly important was Sixtus V's bull *Immensa Dei* (1588), which established specialised congregations to help the pope in the government of the Church. In 1622, the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* was established to have oversight of all missions.¹² Religious reorganisation and social and political change proceeded more or less *pari passu*. Finally Evennett re-emphasised his conviction that 'in the Counter-Reformation we have to do with something much larger, much more complex in nature and origin, than a mere conservative reaction to the Protestant challenge in the sphere of religion'.¹³

What then of the Council of Trent and of the Holy Roman Inquisition? The second of these questions perhaps finds an answer in John Bossy's postscript to the 1968 edition, where he says 'Evennett was in these lectures concerned to draw attention to the positive aspects of the Counter-Reformation'.¹⁴ With regard to the first, Bossy says, 'Anyone who has read these lectures will have been surprised that Evennett found it possible to construct a convincing and at least a reasonably comprehensive plan of the Counter-Reformation without mentioning the Council of Trent. The omission may not have been as important as it seems at first sight: Evennett may well have felt that further thought about the Council was best left until the completion of

11 Ibid., 75.

12 Ibid., 122.

13 Ibid., 124.

14 Ibid., 132.

Jedin's *History*, then thought to be fairly imminent. But he must in any case have been less convinced than Jedin of the 'fact that a whole epoch of the Church has been fashioned by this Council'.¹⁵

Given these thoughts about Evennett and Jedin, it is permissible to include as the next account of the Counter-Reformation that of Hubert Jedin in his four-volume work *History of the Council of Trent* (1951-1976). This is what Jedin says it is, a history of the Council that for political reasons met at an obscure town in the foothills of the Alps to implement a reform programme outlined by Paul III in the bull *Licet at initio* (1542). The first sentence of this bull reads:

...it had always been a purpose fixed in our heart that the Catholic faith should flourish and increase everywhere, and that all heretical depravity should be driven by our diligence far from those who are faithful to Christ so that, not seduced by diabolical fraud, they should recognise the way of truth and be brought back to the bosom and the unity of the Church; and if some, led by perversity of mind, should persist in their condemned purpose, they should be so punished that their punishment should pass as an example to others...

By the beginning of the papacy of Paul III heresy was spreading rapidly in Italy, but it had not been possible to call a council immediately, which would *inter alia* deal with it. As a temporary measure, Paul therefore established an updated version of the Inquisition under the leadership of Cardinal Carafa. The Church was faced with two other main problems. One was a matter of doctrine; the other of discipline. The Trent Fathers did not try to deal with these two topics in sequence, but kept them both on the boil at the same time. The canons condemned the principles and practices of Protestantism on all disputed points: long standing dogma was reaffirmed and made explicit. The decrees were intended to effect a reformation in discipline and administration. How successful these decrees were is a moot point. But it was very clear that on the doctrinal front there were to be no concessions to the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

Protestants, and so the schism would remain unhealed.

Jedin's *History of the Council of Trent* is a very detailed account first of pre-conciliar thoughts and reports on the reform problem precipitated by the Lutheran revolt; and then of the three separate periods of the Council (1545-47, 1551-52, 1562-63) under the leadership of three different popes (Paul III, Julius III, Pius IV). Its canons and decrees, which often emerged from lengthy discussions involving serious differences of opinion, were formally confirmed by Pope Pius IV in 1564. Then came the problem of getting the decrees implemented. There was no trouble in Italy, but France and the Habsburg Empire did not consider themselves automatically obliged to recognise and realise the Tridentine deliberations.¹⁶

It seems clear however that there could be neither difficulty nor oddity in describing the Counter-Reformation as the creation and implementation of the Trent decrees. That being so, dates can be fixed for it: 1564, when the work of the Council was complete; and 1648, when, in the Peace of Westphalia, all parties recognized the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, so that each prince would have the right to determine the religion of his own state, the options being Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism (the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*). These dates are consistent with the ones implied by Evennett, who thinks of the Counter-Reformation as a 16th-17th century matter.¹⁷

Inevitably, on this view, the nature of the Counter-Reformation reflected the way in which it originated and developed, a matter that involved not only the persons, powers and interests of those who attended and those who controlled the Council, but also the political context in Christian Europe, which drastically limited the possibilities. This can

16 A. Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica*. (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

17 'If the problems that I have so far suggested lie mainly around the beginnings of the Counter-Reformation, what are we to say about its end? In about the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the demarcation of territory between Catholicism and the other forms of Christianity that had grown up in the previous 150 years, had, by and large, been stabilised...It is surely clear that by the end of the seventeenth century changes had come over the mind and face of Europe which marked the working out of the first political and spiritual revolutions of the sixteenth century and the inauguration of a new period...' - Evennett, *Counter-Reformation*, 19.

be seen, for example, in the difficulties of assembling the Council, even when Trent had been chosen as the location, and Pole and Morone had already been nominated as legates. Jedin certainly has his views on all these issues, but his, as will be seen shortly, is not the only way of telling the story. First we need to grasp his historiographical principle. For Jedin, much depended on two terms already current while he was writing his magisterial *History*. 'Catholic Reformation' and 'Counter-Reformation' were used as alternatives to describe the same historical process. Jedin proposed to use these terms to pick out different aspects of this process, with the first of them being the more important since it predated and animated the second, and took legislative form in the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent. Jedin used 'Counter-Reformation' to refer to the struggle against Protestantism. However, too much should not be made of the distinction between them for they frequently overlapped.

To return to ways of telling the story. Was Jedin perhaps too respectful in his attitude to the popes and the Church? One might perhaps think so on reading Adriano Prosperi's *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica*, which suggests a much more nuanced and critical picture of what went on at Trent. Here, for instance, is the gist of his remarks about the pope who called the Council, and two of the members of his family:

...the pope who had to work through the council and for the reform of the Church was a perfect representative of the worldly pope, corrupt and nepotistic, against whom the conscience of Christianity had risen up in the course of the century. He practised power politics with unflinching astuteness in the interests of his family, constructing a future as a territorial prince for his own son Pier Luigi, a coarse and unattractive soldier, who amongst other things had boasted of having violated a young bishop. The pope's political councillor was the Cardinal Nephew Alessandro, a great patron of the arts and collector of art-works, who was wholly insensitive when faced by the problem of the Reformation. In their relationships with the Habsburgs

and the French monarchy, the Farnese proceeded by way of matrimonial alliances in order to create for themselves a future as a sovereign lineage.¹⁸

Such a pope, with such a family, was central in the political reality that surrounded and conditioned the Council, yet, like his successors, he was virtually above criticism as far as Catholics were concerned.¹⁹ Much more damaging, however, for Jedin's thesis was the criticism of it that Massimo Firpo made in *Inquisizione Romana e Controriforma: Studi Sul Cardinal Giovanni Morone e Il Suo Processo d'Eresia*.²⁰

This brings us to the third version of the Counter-Reformation proposed for examination in this article. Firpo speaks of 'a history much rougher, conflictual and tortuous than a traditional image, aimed at highlighting the ideal continuity and compactness of intentions which inspired the period of Catholic Reform, leads us to suppose'. For how can this view accommodate the extraordinary story of the arrest and imprisonment in Castel Sant'Angelo on a charge of heresy of the powerful Cardinal Morone, exonerated and released after the death of Pope Paul IV, to become the legate at the Council of Trent who finally brought that assembly to a successful conclusion, only again to fall under suspicion as a heretic, when Pius V, the Cardinal Michele Ghislieri, who had presided at the trial under Paul IV, himself became pope in 1564? There are many ambiguities and contradictions in this whole incident. Firpo devotes a series of penetrating pages to unravelling the meaning and significance of this astonishing incident and its historiographical implications. He starts with Contarini's influence on Morone from the time of the Diet of Ratisbon, where the former unsuccessfully attempted to secure a doctrinal agreement with the Protestants on the problem of justification. This influence led Morone to seek Contarini's assistance in dealing with the problems of his own diocese of Modena, where heterodox views of a Lutheran kind had gained substantial support. Could these views be made consistent with the teaching and authority

18 Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento*, 29-30.

19 Ibid., 163-164.

20 Massimo Firpo, *Inquisizione Romana e Controriforma: Studi Sul Cardinal Giovanni Morone e Il Suo Processo d'Eresia*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

of the Roman Church? The answer was 'no'.

There were two consequences. One was the gradual fragmentation of Italian Evangelism led by Contarini and the increasing influence of the 'spirituali', a group in which the authority of Pole and Flaminio, both influenced by Valdes, was paramount; the other had been expressed by Gian Pietro Carafa: 'Heretics should be treated as heretics'.²¹ It is the Carafa point of view that is important in this article; and that point of view is centred on the Inquisition tribunal and the use that the 'intransigents' who sided with Carafa made of it. They used it unscrupulously and with great efficacy, 'not only to define the contours of Catholic orthodoxy even before – and so independently of – the deliberations of the Council, but above all to fight the decisive battle of those years with no holds barred'. This was the struggle on both sides of the Alps against the Protestant heresy, against disobedience and the refusal of the principle of authority. *Inter alia*, it involved a tenacious and methodical commitment to collecting testimonies and documents with which to prove the heresies of the 'spirituali'. These included a group of high-ranking prelates all more or less closely connected to the imperial party, for example, Cardinals Pole and Morone.

The institutional secrecy of the Inquisition tribunal allowed it to evade all control and so to carve out an almost absolute autonomy with respect to the authority of the pope. So it was that the ecclesiological models, the incontrovertible truths of the faith, the ideal values and the institutional practices that those trials had sanctioned became in good part the very foundation of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.²² In fact, the transformations and the changes 'that convulsed the Catholic world between the Sack of Rome and the battle of Lepanto' were destined to leave a profound impression on the institutional structure, on the cultural models, on the identity and historical self-consciousness of the Church to the point of legitimating the very concept of Counter-Reformation and its use as a historical category for marking out a period.²³ On this view, the Counter-Reformation was the work of the Holy Roman Inquisition, and *prima facie*, it was an Italian phenomenon restricted to countering

21 Ibid., 10-12.

22 Ibid., 13-16.

23 Ibid., 9.

the Reformation in Italy between 1542 and about 1572, the date of the death of Pope Pius V. By the end of the century, the Protestant heresy in Italy had been for the most part expunged (though doubtless Nicodemites survived) and the Holy Roman Inquisition had no power to operate elsewhere. Ironically, the main targets for Carafa and Ghislieri – Pole and Morone – escaped conviction. Pole died in England in 1558, and Morone’s universally admitted ability as a diplomat and his undoubted loyalty to the Habsburgs, probably saved him in spite of the views that he shared with the ‘spirituali’, which were neither forgotten nor forgiven, with the consequence that he was never again even remotely plausible as *papabile*. For Firpo, Morone in the last years of his life appeared as a kind of enigmatic phantasm of the past whose profile as the prestigious president of the Council of Trent was compromised by his reputation as an impious heretic whom Paul IV had subjected to a *processo* by the Inquisition. These were contradictions that were too damaging to be tolerated in the years of the great certainties in controversialism and apologetics during the Counter-Reformation Triumphant, engaged on reconstructing its own history and hagiography.²⁴ Firpo’s introduction at this late stage of the notion of a Counter-Reformation Triumphant (and therefore of a Counter-Reformation Militant) explains the reservation made above that *prima facie*, it was an Italian phenomenon restricted to countering the Reformation in Italy between 1542 and about 1572, the death of Pope Pius V. With the introduction of the notion of a Counter-Reformation Triumphant, there is no reason at all to restrict the Counter-Reformation to Italy; nor to the 30 years between 1542 and 1572; nor again to the work of the Holy Roman Inquisition. A Counter-Reformation Triumphant in the whole of Europe – the work of Catholic monarchs, armies, diplomats, and missionaries – who fought it out until it was clear that a resurgent Catholicism could recover no further ground from Protestantism, is of course a story already in part told in this article. Though taking this view considerably reduces the importance in the wider view of events in Italy, it in no way diminishes the significance of Firpo’s work in demonstrating that Jedin’s account of the history of the Italian Church in the sixteenth century mostly in terms of a smooth development of Catholic Reform will not stand up to

24 Ibid., 319.

close examination.

Are these three versions of the Counter-Reformation compatible, so that they could be assembled at least in part to create a plausible view of the Counter-Reformation as a whole? Perhaps not, for according to Firpo²⁵ it seems odd that the practices and activities of a local tribunal should be so influential in underpinning the beliefs and practices of the entire Catholic Church in the early modern period. But this may not be a serious obstacle: it depends firstly on the international prestige and authority of the papacy – were its views and practices automatically decisive or at least influential in Catholic Europe as a whole? – and secondly on the way in which the relationship between politics and art in the early modern period is characterized.

To decide on this second point requires an understanding of ‘Baroque’, the other controversial term that occurs in Weisbach’s, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation*. This term has been used to pick out a period (perhaps 1600-1750) – ‘The Baroque period’ – and to refer to a style of music (for example that of Bach, Handel and Vivaldi) as well as to indicate a particular kind of art, sculpture and architecture that flourished in Catholic Europe during that period. Notice first, that on this view of the Baroque period (1600-1750), it only overlaps partially with the dates that are given for the Counter-Reformation (1564-1648): politics and culture are not synchronised. One reason for this is that periods and styles have neither precise definite beginnings nor precise definite endings, and are always changing and developing. These terms ‘Baroque period’ and ‘Counter-Reformation’ are, of course, historians’ inventions, which have been introduced to facilitate the handling of complex material. Though they may be enlightening with regard to some aspects of the material, they may blind us to other equally important aspects.²⁶ There is absolutely no guarantee that the terms which political historians find useful would be found equally useful by cultural historians. For cultural historians it may indeed be the case that it is useful and enlightening to group music, sculpture, architecture and painting under the concept ‘Baroque’, though *prima facie*, at any rate,

25 Ibid., 13-16.

26 See J. W. O’Malley, *Trent and all That. Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 125, 127.

the reasons for doing so are not obvious. *A fortiori*, why are Baroque artists, a very motley collection, classified as ‘Baroque’? The best way of answering that question is to give a series of uncontroversial examples. There are many, but the following will be sufficient here: the Spaniards Diego Velazquez (1599-1660), Francisco Zurbaran (1598-1664), Jose de Ribera (1591-1652); the Frenchmen, Georges de la Tour (1593-1652), and Louis Le Nain (1593-1648); the Flemings, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), and Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641); the Italians Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), Luca Giordano (1634-1705), and Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). There are always marginal cases such as El Greco (1541-1614), who was if anything a Mannerist perhaps but really belonging to no conventional school, and Titian (1490-1576), who might be described as proto-Baroque. Why do all these examples fall under the concept ‘Baroque’? The easiest way of dealing with this conundrum is to invoke the notion of cluster concepts. The classic articulation of this notion was of course Wittgenstein’s in *Philosophical Investigations* I 66:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games’. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’ – but *look and see* whether there is anything in common to all. For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.²⁷

The notion of family resemblances, also discussed by Wittgenstein, makes much the same point.

Whether these notions of Wittgenstein’s can accommodate the application of the term ‘Baroque’ to architecture, sculpture and music as well as painting is a thorny question, but certainly Baroque architecture is a very easily recognizable genre: it employs, so to speak, the classical

²⁷ <http://itisonlyatheory.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/cluster-concepts.html>, accessed 8 December, 2012

vocabulary (derived from Greek and Roman architectural practice) of columns, capitals, arches, pediments, domes, entablatures, etc. but uses it in a very free theatrical, flamboyant and rhetorical fashion. Similarities and relationships are everywhere apparent not only in Italian Baroque, but also in Austrian Baroque, French Baroque, Swiss Baroque, Bavarian Baroque. Why so? It seems likely that Baroque style originated in Italy by natural evolution from the Renaissance style²⁸ and was then extended to some areas north of the Alps by Italian artists who went there by invitation or on their own initiative in search of employment. One was Guarino Guarini (1624-1683), who was born in Modena, but worked not only in Piedmont, but also in Sicily, France and Portugal. In the Habsburg Empire, Italians were mostly responsible for introducing Baroque. Examples are Carlo Lurago (1615-1684), born in Pello Superiore, near Como, who worked in Prague; Lukas von Hildebrandt (1668-1745) who was born in Genoa, and studied under Carlo Fontana, before becoming, after Fischer von Erlach, the most important architect in the Habsburg lands. Johann Fischer von Erlach (1656-1723) born in Austria, worked and studied in Italy – with Bernini among others – between the ages of 16 and 32. Though it is not possible in all areas of Western Europe to make such direct links with Italian Baroque architecture, it is easy enough to understand how, once introduced, the fashion would have been imitated elsewhere.

With ‘Counter-Reformation’ and ‘Baroque’ thus given a rudimentary characterisation and exemplification, the question of their relationship can now be raised. It is ridiculous to suppose that there could be any logical connection between these concepts, but it is possible at any rate to show how the first can be related to art, by referring to the second version of ‘Counter-Reformation’ discussed above, which regards it as the creation and implementation of the Trent legislation. The canons and decrees of the Council of Trent allow sacred images but rule out all lasciviousness ‘so that images shall not be

28 How this might proceed has been worked out by Wölfflin in *Principles of Art History*, who formulated five pairs of opposed or contrary precepts in the form and style of art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which demonstrated a shift in the nature of artistic vision between the two periods. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_W%C3%B6lfflin#Principles_of_Art_History, accessed 10 December, 2012.

painted and adorned with a seductive charm'.²⁹ Confusion, profanity, indecorousness were also condemned.³⁰ Under the Trent legislation, it became the responsibility of the bishops to enforce this ruling.³¹ Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment' was an obvious candidate for censure and amendment. It had already been condemned by the 'Theatine' cardinals when the fresco was first available for public inspection on 31 October 1541. They objected to the many nude figures included in it.³² At that time, their complaints fell on deaf ears. Twenty three years later, when the critics had the weight of the Trent decree behind them, they quickly took up the cudgels again, none more so than the Dominican Andrea Gilio da Fabriano, who published his *Degli Errori dei Pittori* later in the same year. The Flemish theologian Molanus extended the range of the critique of religious art in *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris, pro vero earum usu contra abusum*, 1570. Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti even contemplated an Index of Prohibited Pictures: he evidently feared that when pictures were the bibles of the illiterate, heretical views might lurk in them undetected.³³

Adriano Prospero has provided an example of how this could be so. 'In various interpretations of the Crucifixion, and the Pietà, Michelangelo had given form to the mysticism of the Redemption of the group dominated by Reginald Pole to which belonged Giovanni

29 See the reform decree of chapter 21, the 24th session, 11 November 1563: H.J. Schroeder, ed., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. (Rockford Illinois: Tan Books, 1978), 216.

30 It was no doubt indecorousness that led Vasari and Duke Cosimo to undertake renovations in Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce. See Marcia B. Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation. Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

31 '... every superstition shall be removed ... all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust... there be nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God. And that these things may be the more faithfully observed, the holy Synod ordains, that no one be allowed to place, or cause to be placed, any unusual image, in any place, or church, howsoever exempted, except that image have been approved of by the bishop ...', Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 217.

32 R. de Maio, *Michelangelo e La Controriforma*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1978), 17.

33 M. Firpo, *Gli Affreschi di Pontorno a San Lorenzo. Eresia, politica e cultura nella Firenze di Cosimo I*. (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 141.

Morone, Vittoria Colonna, Marcantonio Flaminio, and other readers of the *Beneficio di Cristo*.³⁴ Pole, Morone et al., were anathema to Carafa and Ghislieri, the principal advocates of Counter-Reformation as Firpo understands it.³⁵ In his long, detailed and ingenious work of 1997, Massimo Firpo furthermore claims to have detected an even more shocking example of heresy perpetrated in pictorial form in the frescoes that Pontormo painted in the Medici Church of San Lorenzo, Florence, which no longer exist. These frescoes, the argument is, were a pictorial version of the Catechism of the heretic Juan de Valdes.

As to the problem of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel nudes, the solution eventually adopted was not to have them removed but to put breeches on them, a compromise that enabled the popes who had to live with them (the Sistine Chapel was the pope's own chapel) to avail themselves of Michelangelo's great power of communication.

There is however not enough mileage in associating Counter-Reformation with art via a very brief reference to the decree of 11 November, 1563, to make it really useful in considering the relationship between Counter-Reformation and Baroque. Hence the perhaps irritated remark of Alain Tallon: 'Il est impossible de fonder un esthethique sur les decrets conciliaires...L'art dit de façon abusive 'tridentin' n'a que rapports bien lointains et indirects avec Trente'.³⁶

A very much more powerful association between Art and Counter-Reformation has however been provided by Simon Ditchfield in his contribution 'Il Papa come pastore?' – to the volume edited by Maurilio Guasco and Angelo Torre, *Pio V nella società e nella politica del suo tempo*.³⁷ The following is particularly important:

It suffices rather to visit the church of Santa Croce at Bosco Marengo and reflect on the visceral power of its iconography and its space, which even if today altered and incomplete, remains an incredibly eloquent testimony of that Tridentine aesthetic which was born

34 Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento*, 162.

35 Firpo, *Inquisizione Romana e Controriforma*.

36 Alain Tallon, *Le Concile de Trente*. (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 77-78.

37 'Il Papa come pastore?' in M. Guasco and A. Torre, eds., *Pio V nella società e nella politica del suo tempo*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), 159-78.

after Trent, in a form which elsewhere was invariably subjected to negotiation and contestation. The first Italian church fully constructed in accordance with the dictates of the Counter-reformation, in which art and space were combined to subject the spectator to the majesty and power of orthodoxy, is not then the Church of the Gesu in Rome, or San Fedele at Milan, but Santa Croce di Bosco Marengo, which has remained relatively unknown on account of its location outside the most frequently followed cultural itineraries.³⁸ Santa Croce was the direct artistic consequence of an extraordinary political (and personal) alliance between Cosimo dei Medici and Pio V, in which in exchange for the investiture with the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, the former furnished the latter with the architectonic and artistic instruments to erect a mausoleum which proclaimed Ghislieri's deepest values. These values are found at the centre of the 'huge machine almost like a triumphal arch' by Giorgio Vasari and his pupils, a Last Judgment, with St Michael who brandishes his sword over the terrified damned. It is supported by a predella in which are painted the types and antitypes of the Eucharist, and crowned by an almost life-sized statue of Christ Crucified. It is anchored spatially at the crossing of the shallow transept...³⁹

At Bosco Marengo, Vasari may well have given a vivid impression of the values of the Counter-Reformation Militant as Carafa thought of them – 'heretics must be treated as heretics'. But as has been seen above Adriano Prosperi's reference to Michelangelo's great power of communication puts things into perspective: while Vasari may indeed have terrified the damned in the Last Judgement in Santa Croce, there is little doubt that a much greater artist, Michelangelo, terrified the living

38 For more information on Santa Croce di Bosco Marengo, see *Pio V e Santa Croce di Bosco: aspetti di una committenza papale*. (Alessandria, Palazzo Cuttica, Bosco Marengo, Santa Croce, 12 aprile-26 maggio, 1985.)

39 Ditchfield, 'Il Papa come pastore?', 177.

in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. It is said that the pope, Paul III, who commissioned the fresco, when seeing it for the first time turned pale and crossed himself.

It would not be controversial to claim that the proclamation of values, the moving of emotions, and the communication of ideas (the list is not exhaustive), are all possible uses to which art in its various manifestations and styles can be put. But it takes ability of the highest order before we should speak of the visceral power of iconography. Though who has this ability is a perennially debatable question, it would be agreed, no doubt, that no one style has the monopoly of it. Whether Baroque is a style particularly suitable for expressing the values and assumptions of the Counter-Reformation as outlined above is a question that is at the heart of this article. It may, however, be possible to suggest that Mannerism is not particularly suitable, by referring to the Trent decree on art, for that decree bans not only sensuality and lasciviousness, but also confusion and the indecorous. Is there any way in which Mannerism might be described in these terms? Here again, Mannerism is not an easy term to work with, for in addition to the 'high maniera', the search for perfection via a kind of art for art's sake, there is an earlier Mannerism that might be described as 'anti-Renaissance', in other words the rejection of the clarity and intelligibility of the High Renaissance art by the rejection of nature through distortion (often by elongation, for example, Pamigianino's 'Madonna with the Long Neck'); decentering of the subject (Tintoretto's 'St George and the Dragon') and multiple location of the subject (Pontormo's 'Joseph in Egypt'). The rejection of clarity and intelligibility would certainly be one way of creating confusion. It also runs the risk of a lapse into the indecorous by accident. When the aim of art is *inter alia* the proclamation of values, the moving of emotions, and the communication of ideas, the 'anti-Renaissance' version of Mannerism is obviously a non-starter: the artist must proclaim the right values, move the right emotions and communicate the right ideas. But this still leaves the later version of Mannerism as a possibility: *prima facie*, there is nothing to stop it, and it certainly seems to have done what was required of it in Santa Croce at Bosco Marengo.⁴⁰

40 There is a problem in fitting-in architecture as a powerful method of communication.

It is difficult to provide a simple explanation of the context and motivation of Baroque religious painting, but here, at any rate, it is easy to describe the emotional power that the best work in this *genre* can have. Here are a few examples. Sometimes it is horrific, as with Jose Ribera, a painter of tortured saints and gruesome martyrdoms; sometimes it is severe, sombre, and solemn, as with Francisco Zurbaran, regularly a painter of monks, nuns and martyrs; and sometimes it is dramatic and dynamic, as in the painting of *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* by Sebastiano Ricci. What about the more humdrum Baroque religious painting, where the pictures remind the spectator of the essentials of the Catholic faith, or key moments in Catholic history, or the experiences and sufferings of the martyrs and the saints? *Inter alia* such pictures instruct the faithful in what they have never known, or have known and are in danger of forgetting. They can be an adjunct to the preacher ('I hear and I forget; I see and I remember...') or they celebrate the key festivals of the Catholic year. Sometimes they are allegorical, sometimes they are painfully literal. It would be the right and even the duty of those who commissioned the works to lay down in the contracts what the content should be, and how it should be executed. The work could be rejected if it were considered in any way unsuitable. Thus, Caravaggio's 'Death of the Virgin', which was commissioned by Laerzio Alberti, a papal lawyer, for his chapel in the Carmelite church of Santa Maria della Scala, at the Trastevere, in Rome, was rejected

Is there any agreement on what meaning a building is communicating? Presumably most buildings communicate the meanings that are frescoed on their walls, or dramatised by the sculptured figures built into the fabric or left free-standing, and no further questions are asked. What, however, of buildings with no such accoutrements? Buildings certainly have structure – a necessary condition for all meaning, but not a sufficient condition – and a building might inspire certain feelings in a spectator, but these will be subjective only. Sheer size can be awe-inspiring. This is perhaps one of the aspects of the idea of the sublime in Edmund Burke and in Immanuel Kant, but even as an example of conspicuous expenditure, it certainly makes a point, though not the same point for all spectators. This problem cannot be solved by reference to the intentions of either the architect or the patron. In most cases we do not know what the architect's or patron's intentions were. More importantly the real question is not 'what did the architect or patron think it was?', but 'what does the spectator think it is?' Such problems also occur in trying to establish the meaning of a literary text, and lead to the formulation of Reader-response theory: a text has whatever meaning a reader can find in it.

by the parish in the belief that the model for the Virgin was either one of Caravaggio's mistresses, or a prostitute.⁴¹ Likewise it would be important to avoid creating an unfavourable impression on the agents of the Inquisition, a lesson that had to be learned for example by Paolo Veronese whose 'Last Supper' for this reason had to be re-titled 'Feast in the House of Levi'.

To establish the motivation for the commissioning of individual pictures or buildings would in all cases require painstaking research into individual cases, for which this article is not the place. Such research would however bring out the importance of the role of the patron and raise the question of what was in it for him. Although for some sheer piety would have been a powerful inducement, for others the belief that punishment for sin could be avoided in this way, and for others again, the need to acknowledge a divine favour,⁴² it is tempting to suppose that many patrons were politically motivated: art can be a way of glamourising individuals, families or institutions, and raising their prestige, power and alleged importance. There was in this respect, nothing new in the Baroque period, when under Urban VIII, Bernini worked on St Peter's and the piazza and colonnade in front of it. The greatest patrons of the arts in the 15th and early 16th were Nicholas V and Julius II, particularly the latter whose legendary patronage was extended to Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo to the great glory of the Church.

The easy way of answering the question with which this article began – Under what circumstances and in what period, if any, might it be useful and illuminating to students of early modern history to link the Counter-Reformation with Baroque? – is to invoke the term 'propaganda'. This is a term already in use in the Baroque period (1600-1750), as can be seen from the fact that the *Collegio di Propaganda fide* was founded by Urban VIII (1623-1644). Its purpose was for training missionaries but spreading the word is a task that can be done in various ways. The term 'propaganda' is now disreputable primarily because of

41 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_the_Virgin_\(Caravaggio\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_the_Virgin_(Caravaggio)), accessed 22 December 2012

42 As a votive offering for the city's deliverance from the plague, the Republic of Venice vowed in 1630 to build a church dedicated to the Virgin – Santa Maria della Salute.

its association with lying, but there is every reason to suppose that the Baroque propagandists of the 17th century and their patrons were totally convinced that what they were claiming was true. Maybe they were not objective in that they did not mention that there was another way of representing Catholic 'truth', but they did not intend to deceive. Rather they sought to influence the audience and to produce an emotional rather than a rational response.⁴³

What made Baroque, at its best, so effective a means of supporting and propagating the Counter-Reformation?⁴⁴ There were many aspects of the Baroque style of art that helped it not only to communicate with, but also to appeal to, an audience: for example, its directness, intelligibility, theatricality, flamboyance, emotionality, and sensationalism. It wore its heart mostly on its sleeve. It is very hard to think of it in any way as intellectual or subtle, though perhaps Velazquez might be considered as the exception that breaks the rule. Though it was in fact, the art of the Counter-Reformation, for Catholic patrons like Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, admired it and paid for it; and the public seems to have reacted to it in the intended way, this was not inevitable. Forms of artistic expression wax and wane, and the waxing of Baroque (a development from the High Renaissance style) happened to coincide with the Counter-Reformation, without the one causing the other.

43 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda>

44 It should be emphasised that Baroque art is here discussed only in terms of its utility. No aesthetic judgement is being made or implied.