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**INDIFFERENT THINGS? REFLECTIONS ON  
REFORMATION AND ART IN THE BALTIC  
REGION**

The introduction by Krista Kodres to *Indifferent Things? Objects and Images in Post-Reformation Churches in the Baltic Sea Region* begins with the word 'paradoxically'. This comment describes the situation in which scholars now find themselves as 'facing difficulties if they wish to work on topics' on 'the Reformation, the emerging evangelical tradition of that era and the church's material assets'.<sup>1</sup> A close reading of the book suggests that the term applies to other issues raised as well, and the present essay offers reflections on them in the hope of stimulating further discussion. Recognising the risk of oversimplification, it addresses aspects of scholarship on questions concerning the Reformation and the arts especially in the Baltic region.

The title of the book invokes and simultaneously problematises the notion of indifferent things with the use of a question mark, thus suggesting discussion has not been closed. 'Indifferent things' is a good translation into English of 'adiaphora', the term Philipp Melanchthon adopted from the Greek 'ἀδιάφορα and introduced into theological disputes about the role of objects and images. This was

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1 Krista Kodres, 'Introduction: Indifferent Things – Really?', *Indifferent Things? Objects and Images in Post-Reformation Churches in the Baltic Sea Region*, ed. by Krista Kodres, Merike Kurisoo, Ulrike Nürnberger (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2020), 11.

the subject of a conference held in Tallinn in 2017 on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin's Luther's posting of his 95 theses in Wittenberg, which the subtitle brings into focus.<sup>2</sup> But the question mark at the end of the main title also applies to several subjects other than its avowed topic: the introduction's opening words suggest the first of them, historiography.

The paradox to which the introduction refers describes the current state of research (*Stand der Forschung*), saying: 'it is not easy to write about topics concerning the Reformation...at a time when so many works have appeared on this subject over a short space of time'.<sup>3</sup> However, this was not the situation not very long ago. A short summary of the historiography of the Reformation and the arts indicates much has changed radically in the past half century. Fifty years ago, the study of Protestantism and the arts seemed to constitute a huge *Forschungsdefizit* (gap in research). True, many accounts of individual monuments had been published, as well as a few broader studies, including an important survey of Protestant pulpits.<sup>4</sup> But the legacy of some major thinkers had shaped a negative view of the impact of the Reformation on art. Put simply, Hegel's contention that with the advent of Protestantism in art was no longer venerated, and was replaced by an emphasis on the Word<sup>5</sup>, conjoined with Marx's argument that with the advent of capitalism traditional beliefs dissolved as the modern era began<sup>6</sup>, and with Durkheim's theses that the world had been secularised<sup>7</sup> formed general impressions of Protestantism and art. These were expressed by such familiar

2 The conference was one in the Series of 'Homburger Gespräche' sponsored by the Böckler-Mare-Balticum-Foundation, and its publication the third in Edition Mare Balticum; it was also the 'Fifth Conference in Honour of Prof. Sten Karling', supported by the Art Museum of Estonia (it was held in the Niguliste Museum), the Estonian Academy of Art, and the Institute of History, Archaeology and History of Tallinn University: The Board of the Böckler-Mare-Balticum-Foundation, 'Preface', *ibid.*, 7–9.

3 Kodres, 'Introduction', 11.

4 Peter Poscharsky, *Die Kanzel. Erscheinungsformen im Protestantismus bis zum Ende des Barocks*. Schriftungsreihe des Instituts für Kirchenbau und Kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963).

5 *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Arts*, ed. by Thomas Malcom Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; first edition 1975).

6 See most succinctly Marx's *Communist Manifesto* where this is expressed poetically as 'all that is solid collapses into thin air, all that is sacred is profaned'.

7 Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) provides a good summary of discussions by Durkheim and other thinkers (for example Weber) on secularisation.

clichés as: the Reformation enshrined the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, emphasising the Word at the expense of the image; Protestantism was antagonistic to the veneration and hence making of images; it replaced image worship with iconoclasm; Protestantism effectively inhibited the making of religious art. The massive number of earlier religious objects surviving in Protestant churches, the creation of important new objects and new genres, and the existence of multiple and complex attitudes toward the arts could have already provided contrary evidence, but they were largely overlooked or ignored by most scholars and the general public alike.

The situation started to change in the 1970s, as historical commemorations sparked exhibitions and publications.<sup>8</sup> These began with the *Dürerjahr* of 1971, and continued with that of Cranach, the quincentennial of whose birth was celebrated in 1972.<sup>9</sup> Dürer and Cranach were among several of the so-called 'Old German Masters' (Hans Baldung Grien, Hans Holbein the Younger, Albrecht Altdorfer, et al.) who gained renewed interest. As a result such topics as Dürer's treatment of Reformation themes, Cranach's close association with Luther, his portraits of Luther, Melanchthon, and other reformers, the works he created containing polemical imagery, the (Protestant) altarpieces done by his shop and by others were increasingly discussed. Scholarship on art and the Protestant Reformation began to revive.

Yet older opinions persisted as well. Michael Baxandall's *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* provides a good example.<sup>10</sup> This much-admired book still depended on older assumptions and repeated earlier opinions.<sup>11</sup> Among them was the belief that the Reformation had a negative impact on art. Despite his seemingly subtle treatment of Luther's attitude toward iconoclasm and his ideas about *adiaphora*, Baxandall claimed that the Reformation

8 For example, *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, ed. by Werner Hofmann (Munich: Prestel, 1983). Significantly, this book carried on the presentation of this theme into the nineteenth century, a project that has not been much followed (but see below).

9 For example, *Lukas Cranach: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik*, ed. by Tilman Falk, Dieter Koepplin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1974); Werner Schade, *Die Malerfamilie Cranach* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1974).

10 Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

11 See Eberhard König, 'Gesellschaft, Material, Kunst Neue Bücher zur deutschen Skulptur um 1500', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 47 (4) (1984), 535–558.



FIG. 1. HANS DEGLER, ALTAR OF MARY IN THE ST ULRICH'S AND ST AFRA'S ABBEY (AUGSBURG, GERMANY), 1604–1607. PHOTO: GERD EICHMANN, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.



FIG. 2. THE LANDSHUT RESIDENCE (INNER COURTYARD), 1536–1545. ITALIAN BUILDING (*ITALIENISCHES BAU*). PHOTO: H. HELMLECHNER, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

was a 'general disaster for the craft of sculpture'<sup>12</sup> (cf. Fig. 1). This assertion ignored much that was created not only in other media but even in sculpture other than limewood. Baxandall's ultimate thesis coincides with another widely held, if problematic, view that the Renaissance (which the general period of art was called) ended in Germany around 1525.<sup>13</sup>

Baxandall's work is also noteworthy because it shares some basic traits with other exemplars of the 'new art history' of the 1970s and 1980s that have had a significant impact on the field. While these supposedly innovative writers asked different sorts of question and

<sup>12</sup> Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 75.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City. The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *Nuremberg, A Renaissance City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) and Smith, *German Sculpture of the Later Renaissance, c. 1520–1580: Art in an Age of Uncertainty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

seemed to approach material in ways other than earlier scholars had done, unlike previous pioneering art historians they neither challenged the established canon of artists or fields nor expanded the time periods or geographical areas they considered.<sup>14</sup> In the present context, this meant that ‘Old German Masters’ (in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts in particular) still formed the canon. Accordingly, the period after approximately 1550 (the long-lived Cranach died in 1553), when Luther’s Reformation had become well established (as seems to be intended by the notion of ‘Post-Reformation’, which appears in the sub-title of *Indifferent Things?*), continued to be treated as a period of decline in which German art sank back into provinciality, while art in the Baltic region remained an outlier as ‘peripheral’<sup>15</sup> (cf. Fig. 2).

However, a trailblazing book by R. W. Scribner that appeared in 1981, a year after Baxandall’s, created a new path for scholars of the Reformation.<sup>16</sup> Although Scribner included works by Dürer and Cranach and other ‘Old German Masters’, he explicitly disregarded what he called the ‘aesthetic quality’ of the material concerned. He concentrated on prints, regardless of their author or supposed artistry, examining broadsheets and chapbooks for information on what his sub-title called ‘popular propaganda for the German Reformation’. While nominally a historian, Scribner utilised such familiar art historical tools as semiology and iconography to interpret visual data. To them he added methods taken from the toolkits of the psychologist and especially the anthropologist to investigate issues of belief and propaganda. Scribner recognised that his study of graphic imagery corresponded to another trend of the time – interest in what was

14 See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, ‘What is New about the “New Art History,”’ *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts*, ed. by Philip Alperson, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 515–520.

15 Baxandall, *Limewood Sculptors*, 216 – describes the entire artistic scene in Germany (including specific mention of Landshut, where the city palace is now believed to have been made after a design by Giulio Romano) as ‘all very provincial’. Cf. Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City*, and idem ‘What is German about the German Renaissance?’, *Artistic Innovations and Cultural Zones*, ed. by Ingrid Ciulisová (Bratislava: Veda; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2015), 256–283; also published in *Vidět - Slyšet - Číst - Rozumět / See - Hear - Read - Understand*, ed. by Magdaléna Nová, Marie Opatrná (Prague: Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University, 2015), 1–14. For more on the geographical dimension, Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

16 Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk. Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; first edition Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). In his second edition Scribner provided a good guide to what was happening in studies on Reformation and image-making until the mid-1990s.

then called popular culture, the title of one of his chapters. Scribner’s linking of widely circulated images with popular culture not only set a course for further Reformation studies but may be regarded as one of the props of what was also then being formulated as visual culture: visual culture brought all kinds of images, not just ‘high art’, into its purview.

As Scribner and other scholars have noted,<sup>17</sup> historical commemorations of this time, specifically those around the *Lutherjahr* of 1983, called attention to the relation of Reformation to the image. Publications of the early 1980s accumulated a raft of new information as well as interpretations that also indicated approaches were changing. On both sides of the Wall that still divided Europe the importance of politics and economics was emphasised. In the Federal Republic of Germany scholars associated with the Ulmer Verein treated iconoclasm as a social phenomenon and stressed the political aspect of imagery.<sup>18</sup> In the German Democratic Republic, where both Wittenberg and Weimar and numerous other sites associated with the Reformation were located, interpretations continued to emphasise the impact of socio-economic factors.<sup>19</sup> As many readers of this journal do not need to be reminded, their governing perspective was avowedly Marxist-Leninist: the Reformation and the imagery related to it was characterised as an expression of the ‘Early Bourgeois Revolution’.<sup>20</sup> Both approaches undermined a basic (if not always articulated) assumption of older art history, the belief that art lived in its own sphere independent of other factors.

By the end of the decade trends related to the anthropological turn in the Humanities had become more significant. Although their

17 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 258–260; Sergiusz Michalski, *Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), xi–xii.

18 For example, *Bildersturm: die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, ed. by Martin Warnke (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1988; first edition 1973), and the periodical *Kritische Berichte*.

19 See for example, *Kunst und Reformation* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1982), which contains a sampling of essays from the 1970s, and *Von der Macht der Bilder: Beiträge des C.I.H.A.-Kolloquiums ‘Kunst und Reformation’*, ed. by Ernst Ullmann (Leipzig: Seemann, 1983).

20 See the explicit statement by Ullmann, ‘Nachwort des Herausgebers’, *Kunst und Reformation*, 150; several other essays in the volume (for example Gerhard Brendler, ‘Das Menschenbild in der frühbürgerlichen Revolution’, 53–59; Ernst Ullmann, ‘Albrecht Dürer und die frühbürgerliche Kunst in Deutschland’, 87–100, make the same point.

claim to originality<sup>21</sup> as well as the substance of their interpretations have been challenged, two books in this vein that appeared around 1990 were soon recognised as important for considerations of the cult of images and of the Protestant image question.<sup>22</sup> Neither drew distinctions between high and low art, between canonical and non-canonical objects, nor in general between types of image, art and other artefacts. And while both shared with the earlier 'new' art history a disrespect for traditional methods of art history such as iconography, connoisseurship, and style history, they went farther along the path of an ahistorical approach to the study of the past. David Freedberg discussed the 'power of images'<sup>23</sup>: this was also what Scribner had thought was still being ignored until the appearance of books like Freedberg's.<sup>24</sup> Freedberg addressed the psychodynamics of the visual in his exploration of responses to images, which he dealt with regardless of when and where they were made. Of relevance to the present paper is that Freedberg offered a lengthy discussion of idolatry and iconoclasm. Another highly influential work, by Hans Belting, participated in what Belting explicitly called the anthropology of the image, his project to recast art history. Belting's central thesis laid out a broad and familiar argument: a fundamental break occurred in the early sixteenth century. Religious art declined when theologians of the Word 'seized power' during the Reformation, and when during the (Italian) Renaissance viewers began to look upon images as works of 'art'.<sup>25</sup>

21 See Ernst H. Gombrich, 'The Edge of Delusion', *New York Review of Books*, 17 (2) (February 15, 1990), 6; Stephen Campbell, 'On Renaissance Non-Modernity', *I Tatti Studies*, 20 (2) (2017), 268.

22 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 261, 274, 298; Michałski, *Reformation and the Visual Arts*, xii.

23 David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

24 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, xxv.

25 Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990). Jeffrey Hamburger, 'Hans Belting's "Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst", 1990', *The Burlington Magazine*, 153 (1294) (January 2011), 40–45 offers an acute evaluation of the place of Belting's book in historiography, including its originality or lack thereof, and its subsequent effect.

Although Belting's characterisation of medieval art has been firmly challenged and Freedberg's trenchantly critiqued<sup>26</sup>, both books have had a significant effect, notably on two widely discussed English-language books of the 2000s, which also seem to pour old wine into new bottles.<sup>27</sup> One, by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, is explicitly anti- (art) historical in several respects.<sup>28</sup> For instance, it considers a wide variety of images regardless of their categorisation as art, and espouses the 'anachronic', a conception that is explicitly based on the rejection of chronology as a fundamental principle of history writing. Nevertheless, despite their apparent effacement of period distinctions and historicism, Nagel and Wood still use a period concept, Renaissance, which they single out while they seek to redefine it in reaction against earlier scholarship. Their book concludes with an interpretation of Raphael's painting as epitomising a fundamental break said to have occurred around 1500 when the aesthetic replaced the fullness of the medieval cult image. The other book, by Joseph Koerner, rephrases arguments about the difficulties that Lutheranism had with the image by seeking a new kind of origin of the modern in the premodern with the image smashing and desecrations of the Reformation. To this older paradigm Koerner applies Bruno Latour's idea of conflicting images, formulating the thesis that the Reformation combined image and word in moments of 'iconoclasm'.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast with such postfactual approaches and postmodern theories, many empirical studies of the Reformation and the arts have also appeared during the past quarter-century. They have answered many of the desiderata that Scribner noted as needing attention in 1994: studies of epitaphs, tapestries, political iconography, the presentation of social classes, the 'other', and warfare, among other

26 For Belting, see for example *Intellektualisierung und Mystifizierung mittelalterlicher Kunst: 'Kultbild' – Revision eines Begriffs* (*Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst*, 10), ed. by Martin Büschel (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2010); for Freedberg, Gombrich, 'Edge of Delusion'.

27 For the effect of Belting on Nagel and Wood and this point see the review of Gerhard Wolf of the book cited in the next note, *The Art Bulletin*, 94 (2012) (1), 135–141.

28 Alexander Nagel, Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

29 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Campbell, 'On Renaissance Non-Modernity', provides a cogent critique of these books, and positions them in historiography.

subjects.<sup>30</sup> Information continues to be assembled in abundance, as the beginning of the Introduction to *Indifferent Things?* notes. The bibliography in this book and another bibliography that appeared in an essay collection accompanying an exhibition for the *Reformationsjahr* of 2017, another nodal point of celebrations that brought forth a stream of shows and studies, document some of the range and extent of publications specifically related to the Baltic region.<sup>31</sup>

*Indifferent Things?* can be situated between what can be called empirical and theoretical poles. On the one hand, the papers do present 'a large amount of completely new empirical material', as Professor Kodres suggests in the introduction.<sup>32</sup> Some contributions focus on individual monuments and locations, corresponding to a general trend in the Humanities toward micro-studies. These are exemplified by papers by Burkhard Kunkel on the transformation of St Anne's Church in Annaberg, Elina Räsänen on the altarpiece now in Rauma, Finland, Herman Bengtson on the differing uses of Uppsala Cathedral as it went back and forth between conflicting confessions, Peter Gillgren's related essay on rituals with the presentation of the Dead Body of Christ, Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen on a Danish devotional object, Merike Kurisoo on the impact of the 1606 Tallinn church order on the ritual use of ecclesiastical objects, and Juha Strupule on paintings in Riga Cathedral. Other papers treat broader topics, including Ulrike Nürnberger's on the images in the Duchy of Schleswig, Gehard Weilandt's survey of the fate of church furnishings on the southern littoral, a related study by Anu Mänd on the eastern littoral in Livonia, Ojārs Spārītis on confessionals and the practice of confession in Courland, and finally Piotr Birecki on the representation of social standing in ducal Prussia. All support the contention made by the book's introduction that the collection does 'supplement the general view of art and culture of the Lutheran Reformation on the Baltic littoral'.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the introduction expresses the hope that the articles could lead not only to a reappraisal of established

30 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 260.

31 *Luthers Norden*, ed. by Kirsten Baumann, Joachim Krüger, Uta Kuhl (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2017), 306–318.

32 Kodres, 'Introduction', 11.

33 Ibid.

interpretations but also to a discussion of the 'validity of new interpretive focuses'.<sup>34</sup> Some of the 'interpretive' focuses that have become popular have indeed left traces in the book. They appear in papers including Birecki's treatment of church patronage from the point of view of social history, Raisenen's and Bengten's emphasis on cult and the latter's mention of the 'performative', and Gillgren's treatment of spectacle, just to cite a few examples. The consideration of confessionals and banners by Spārītis and Birecki might also be related to the expansion of the subjects now often treated by historians and art historians. This development could be associated with what Kodres and Raisenen call the material turn: the choice of words such as church furnishings or objects (rather than art) suggests the effect of material culture studies. Material culture provides a pendant to visual culture as concepts that replace art history; both can be traced to the influence of anthropology.

However, as suggested above, some of the more significant newer 'interpretive focuses' have not challenged 'established interpretations', but rather repeated them. Part of the paradox of *Indifferent Things?* is that the empirical information offered by the articles in the book often seems to contradict the very interpretations of the Reformation and the arts that older prejudices propounded and newer ones perpetuated, although some of these new interpretations seem to inform some contributions (and the introduction) in *Indifferent Things?*. Some possible resolutions of this apparent paradox follow, with suggestions for future research.

First, the evidence provided by several individual papers should help finally lay to rest perhaps the most frequently repeated cliché found in both older and newer treatments of the Protestant Reformation and the arts: Protestantism's greatest effect on art consisted in provoking widespread iconoclasm, leading to the replacement of the image by the Word. Nürnberger's overview of what happened in Schleswig and Anu Mänd's survey of the treatment of Catholic material in Livonia provide counterevidence. The survival of major works of art in Estonia, for instance those in the Nicholas Church in Tallinn,<sup>35</sup> of approximately 500 retables from Antwerp

34 Kodres, 'Introduction', 11

35 Kurisoo, 'The Tallinn Church Order of 1606 and Ecclesiastical Objects in Ritual Practices', *Indifferent Things?*, 133.



FIG. 3. APOSTLES ALTARPIECE IN THE ST NICHOLAS CHURCH (FOLKÄRNA, SWEDEN), CA 1490–1500. PHOTO: *ANTWERP ALTARPIECES*, VOL. 1 (ANTWERPEN : MUSEUM VOOR RELIGIEUZE KUNST, 1993), 27.

alone (90% dating before 1500) in Sweden,<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 3) and of very numerous panel and medieval wall paintings (as well as sculpture) in Denmark<sup>37</sup> offer corroboration from other places around the Baltic Sea. All support the conclusions reached in Gerhard Weilandt's overview of church furnishings south of the Baltic. As Weilandt suggests, in practice (and not just in image theory) matters were more complicated. What Weilandt concludes applies to other parts of the Baltic (and some other European regions) as well. Images of the old faith, while being regarded as harmful or indifferent, and destroyed if they were harmful, were given new interpretations,

36 Ghislaine Derveaux-Van Ussel, 'De Antwerpse retabels in Zweden', *Antwerpse retabels 15de–16de eeuw. Essays*, ed. by Hans Nieuwdorp (Antwerp: Muzeum voor Religieuze Kunst, 1993), 89.

37 See Sissel F. Plathe, *Gotikkens kalkmalerier: de oversete dekorationer i Danmarks kirker* (Copenhagen: Gads, 2019); Sissel F. Plathe, Jens Bruun, *Danmarks middelalderlige altertavler: og anden billedbærende kirkeudsmykning af betydning for liturgien og den private andagt* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2010).

and while the role of scripture was emphasised, as Weilandt says 'numerous Lutheran churches preserved their medieval furnishings far better than Catholic churches did'.

One project for future scholarship is to determine what if anything was unique to the Baltic region in regard to the destruction or preservation of religious objects. This entails among other tasks a comparison of the destruction caused by Protestant iconoclasts with what Catholics did during the sixteenth century and later. Another much needed comparison is between what Protestants did in the sixteenth century with what happened in Protestant churches later. For the first task, a telling comparison might be drawn with what happened in France, where it has been demonstrated that much more was destroyed by the eighteenth-century renewal of (Catholic) churches than by the deliberate iconoclasm of the French Revolution.<sup>38</sup> Another comparison might be made with Italy, where changes in taste (and in religious practice) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and later) caused many objects to be removed from churches and even destroyed, in part accounting for why so many older objects are now in museums. The second question, the comparison of what happened during the initial decades of the Reformation with what happened later in Protestant churches, remains to be examined in greater detail. In some striking cases like the Schlosskapelle in Torgau altars and altarpieces that were specifically made for Lutheran purposes were damaged or removed, and not for theological reasons.<sup>39</sup> What further factors may have been involved that led to destruction or removal then and in later centuries, as in nineteenth-century secularisation, puristic reconstruction (Marienburg/Maßbork), and 'restoration' (the Neo-gothicisation of Schwerin Cathedral) of Protestant churches? While some works were preserved during these actions, how much was destroyed or lost? Furthermore, destruction and loss through other causes than war have occurred in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Catholic churches (e.g. related to changes in the liturgy resulting from the Second Vatican Council and subsequent decrees, the proliferation

38 John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Régime: A Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960).

39 Hans-Joachim Krause, 'Die Schlosskapelle', *Torgau—Stadt der Renaissance*, ed. by Tillmann von Stockhausen (Dresden: Sandstein, 2009), 38–39.

of new saints and the rededication of altars, new donations and dedications, etc.). It would be worthwhile to study more broadly what in comparison has occurred in Protestant churches in more recent times that has also led to the removal, destruction, or loss of objects.

More context also needs to be provided for the often repeated view that what was specific to (Lutheran) Protestantism was a theology stressing *scriptura sola* leading to promotion of the Word and to a diminution, or complication, of the efficacy of the religious image in theory and practice. *Indifferent Images* hints in passing but does not expand much on the challenging argument that the justification of images promulgated by the last session of the Council of Trent is not so far from some of the more moderate indifferentist Lutheran position or from its possible effects on art. Even this limited recognition still implies that the Post-Tridentine period may be treated as a symptom of Counter-Reformation. The counter-argument that Luther's and other Protestant Reformations belonged to a longer history of Reform movements in Western Christianity has long been made, however: there exist many books and articles on the period of the fourteenth to the seventeenth century in Central Europe that handle the whole period as an age of reform.

While a socio-economic approach implied for example by Birecki's interpretation of the assertion of social position in Prussian Protestant churches might seem to support a third commonly expressed cliché, that growing secularisation resulted from (or accompanied) the rise of Protestantism, this opinion also needs to be challenged further. Birecki calls into evidence the existence of separate choir stalls, banners, and the appearance of coats of arms on epitaphs and tombs in Protestant churches. However, similar features appear in Catholic churches in Italy, on which scholarship long ago demonstrated that an effort to express one's social standing was a major motivator for patronage both in the ecclesiastical as in the secular domain.<sup>40</sup> A new monograph on the sculptor Willem van den Blocke is but the latest addition to a growing literature on Netherlandish sculpture in Central and Northeastern Europe that reminds us that there were similar motivations behind the making of tombs and epitaphs by the same artists for Catholic and Protestant patrons in the Baltic

40 See Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) and Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

region alike, including, in Van den Blocke's case, major monuments in both ducal and royal Prussia.<sup>41</sup> A comparable phenomenon is the execution of major commissions for Catholic patrons by committed Lutherans like Cranach (or later Marten de Vos).<sup>42</sup>

If we consider function as well as form and content, as a more anthropological approach would imply, Lutheran art also does not seem to diverge so far from its predecessors. Strupule's essay on the role of interior paintings in Riga Cathedral suggests that Catholic iconographic types inspired Lutheran imagery, while Spārītis's survey of confessionals also suggests that both their proliferation and form were comparable. Jürgensen's interpretation of Protestant devotional practices should also be questioned, as the role of the written word in Catholic devotion should not be overlooked. Many Books of Hours, and other Catholic prayer books which we might think of as being illuminated, did not necessarily contain images, yet in both devotional theory and practice they flourished well into the sixteenth century through the initial period of Protestant reform. Oratories overlooking chapels were not only made for important Protestant patrons, but for prominent Catholics: Jürgensen discusses the oratory built and decorated for Christian IV in Frederiksborg, but, *mutatis mutandis* his great opponent, Albrecht von Waldstein also had one (and one for his spouse) overlooking the chapel in his Prague palace (Fig. 4). Gillgen's subtle treatment of the use of images of the Risen Christ suggests that the power of images could have worked similarly regardless of the theological motivation behind them: the affective power of images cuts a number of ways.

This observation leads finally to a series of reflections on a central issue that is not discussed. Why speak of objects and images rather than art? The choice of such words rather than art (or painting or sculpture) does have the advantage of expanding the universe of discourse. Still, a more comprehensive treatment of the historical development of Lutheran attitudes toward art and art-making is possible that allows for discussion of art and aesthetics. An important recent book by Bridget Heal, not cited in *Indifferent Things?*, treats art as an expression of Lutheran identity through three centuries. Heal deals with Lutheranism as a 'magnificent faith', as she discusses

41 Francisczek Skibiński, *Willem van den Blocke. A Sculptor from the Low Countries in the Baltic Region* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

42 Andreas Tacke, *Der katholische Cranach: zu zwei Grossaufträgen von Lucas Cranach d.Ä., Simon Franck und der Cranach-Werkstatt (1520–1540)* (Mainz: Ph. von Zabern, 1992).



FIG. 4. WALDSTEIN PALACE (PRAGUE), ORATORY, 1623–1624. PHOTO: AUTHOR'S ARCHIVE.

developments that are also largely 'Post-Reformation', that is, dating from the later sixteenth century onward. Moreover, she deals with Brandenburg (which was connected with Prussia, surely related to the Baltic region), as well as Saxony. In her discussion of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Heal deals with such important

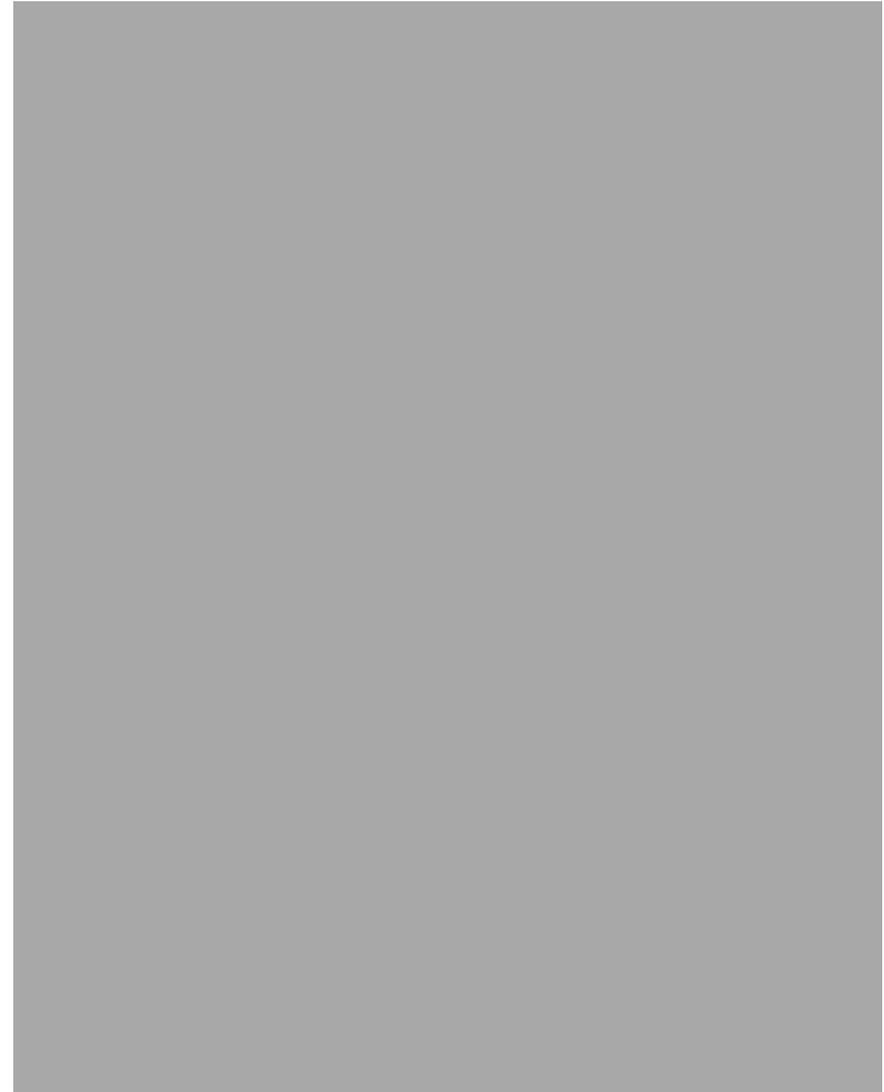


FIG. 5. ADRIAEN DE VRIES, PRINCE ERNST'S CENOTAPH AND MONUMENT OF RESURRECTION IN THE MAUSOLEUM OF PRINCE ERNST (STADTHAGEN, GERMANY), 1617–1620. PHOTO: RABANUS FLAVUS, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

figures as Andreas Schlüter. Why does the idea of 'Post-Reformation' in *Indifferent Things* stop when it does, if artists of Schlüter's calibre, not to mention many important earlier artists and works are left out?<sup>43</sup>

43 Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith. Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Epitaphs and tombs are now taken along with altarpieces and pulpits as characteristic of art of the Nordic Renaissance in an authoritative recent history of the Baltic (and it might be noted that Schlüter made works in all such categories around 1700 as well)<sup>44</sup> (Fig. 5) Several relatively recent treatments of Lutheran funeral monuments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries complement Heal's account, illustrating that many such monuments are also of what can be called high quality.<sup>45</sup> Even Scribner did not dismiss the idea that Protestant church art existed, implying such art differed from the works he discussed in its aesthetic quality. To leave out the aesthetic dimension represents a loss for a consideration not to mention an appreciation of how Lutheran artefacts might be considered as *works of art*.

The avoidance of the concept of art in favour of church materials or furnishings thus seems in the end not only self-defeating but also self-contradictory in as far as anthropological or psychological considerations are concerned. As it has been constructed, the argument for the power of the image emphasises how the image affected sensuous reactions among other responses. It was however precisely the idea of the non-rational, the sensuous as a mode of apprehension that was developed into aesthetics in philosophy.<sup>46</sup> The introduction by Professor Kodres brings up the interesting questions of how the image question and its affect upon art theory relate to the development of idea of art, along with far-reaching changes and iconography, new genres, and the secularisation of art.<sup>47</sup> Some of these considerations have been mentioned in this paper, but many of the issues directly concerning Lutheranism and the arts were still not resolved in the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

44 Michael North, *The Baltic. A History*, transl. by Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 115.

45 See Oliver Meys, *Memoria und Bekenntnis. Die Grabdenkmäler evangelischer Landesherren im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2009); Inga Brinkmann, *Grabdenkmäler. Grablegen und Begräbniswesen des lutherischen Adels. Adelige Funeralrepräsentation im Spannungsfeld von Kontinuität und Wandel im 16. und beginnenden 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010); and, within a broader account, Marcin Wisłocki, *Sztuka protestancka na Pomorzu 1535–1684* (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodow w Szczecinie, 2005).

46 To be sure, an extensive recent literature on neuroaesthetics and neuroarthistory exists, but it does not frame some important basic questions, as it has approached issues differently and has not in the main addressed historiographic considerations of intellectual and cultural history such as those broached here.

47 Kodres, 'Introduction', 15–17.

48 See further Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith: Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany*', *The Burlington Magazine*, 160 (March 2018), 256.

It should be emphasised that key figures in the history of aesthetic philosophy were all Lutherans, several of them extremely pious: Leibniz, Baumgarten, Kant, Herder, and later the Schlegels and Hegel. Moreover, two of the most important of them came from the Baltic region: Kant, who lived his life in Königsberg, and Herder, who was born in Prussia, educated in Königsberg, and worked for a productive period as a clergyman in Riga. One story that still needs to be told is how Lutheranism could merge with and into aesthetics.

THOMAS DACOSTA KAUFMANN: *INDIFFERENT THINGS?* REFLECTIONS ON REFORMATION AND ART IN THE BALTIC REGION

KEYWORDS: INDIFFERENT THINGS (ADIAPHORA); AESTHETICS; ICONOCLASM; VISUAL CULTURE; ANTHROPOLOGICAL TURN; MATERIAL CULTURE

## SUMMARY

This chapter presents reflections on issues raised by *Indifferent Things? Objects and Images in Post-Reformation Churches in the Baltic Sea Region*. It discusses the recent historiography of interpretative approaches, periodisation, the canon, iconoclasm, theories of response, comparative contexts, and issues of aesthetics.

## CV

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