

Thesis Title (provisional)

Lucas Cranach the Elder as a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation, and his relationship to the theology of Martin Luther.

Thesis Outline

It will be proposed that Lucas Cranach the Elder was a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation who had a mature understanding of Martin Luther's theology and was able to portray this, through his images, panels, and altar pieces. Cranach painted the key teachings of the Lutheran Reformation and must be called a theologian of the Reformation.

This thesis will establish that Cranach was able to express this theology as a personal conviction and that it grew from his association with Martin Luther and his attendance at services, hearing his sermons and hymns, sitting at his meal table and participating in the table talk, associating with him in Wittenberg, and reading Luther's reformational writings.

I will examine what defined Cranach as an artist and a Reformation theologian in his own right, the way he and Luther related, the extent of Luther's input and his reaction to Cranach's art. Although a worker in the publishing house at Wittenberg claimed that Luther directed the illustrations of the *Lutherbibel* 1534,¹ I will argue that Cranach's theological understanding was such that he was not in a student-teacher relationship with Luther, but his relationship was rather that of colleague and companion.

Various art historians have not always favoured Cranach's work, and in fact some have gone so far as to say that he was responsible for the 'falling off' of the standard of art at that time.² I will engage with these art historians and address some of these claims in Chapter 1.

Cranach, although heavily involved with painting for the Catholic Church and its dignitaries, was considered a minor painter at the beginning of the Reformation. But as time went on, he found his purpose as a painter cum theologian of the Reformation. The fact that he is still remembered today, and that his work as a painter has been researched, discussed and criticised by many, from art historians to theologians, counters the notion that he was only a minor player and artist.

As a Catholic and a court painter for Frederick of Saxony, Cranach had been painting religious scenes and portraits of saints and other dignitaries prior to his connection with Luther, and I will map the evolution of his work as he became more familiar with the theology of Luther and grew in his understanding and acceptance of it. This research will include a study of the evolution of his portrayal of the cross and the crucified Jesus as well as, among other things, changes in the way he depicted the Sacraments.

I have chosen four key doctrinal 'loci' which are determinative of Luther's reformational theology, and which are also represented in Cranach's images, panels and altarpieces. A mutuality exists between Luther's theology and Cranach's art; the one interprets the other. Cranach's art is informed by Luther's theology, but at the same time it explicates that theology in a visual rhetorical way. The visual rhetorical method of interpretation will provide an important tool to expose the theological potency of Cranach's sacred art.

Visual Rhetoric is a theoretical framework of interpretation that differs from an aesthetic analysis of art and design, in that it is held to communicate symbolic cultural meaning rather than being

¹ Füssel, 2009, .31

² Koerner, 2008; Friedländer, 1978

examined solely for its appeal and aesthetic appreciation. It is used to analyse and describe the way in which the images communicate meaning and can persuasively put forth an argument or belief. Visual Rhetoric also includes understanding creative choices made with the image such as coloring, shading, and object placement.³

It is important to note that if a person sees the image but has no knowledge of its ‘story’ the message cannot be communicated. Therefore, for an image to be assessed as visual rhetoric, it needs to have three characteristics: it must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be explained to an audience for the purpose of communicating.

The theological topics to be visually rhetorically interpreted are the theology of the cross,⁴ the law–gospel distinction, the theology of the ‘church’ (including the role of the laity), and sacramental theology.

Cranach was a theologian and a servant of the gospel, and his artwork, together with Luther’s catechesis, Bible translation, hymns, and sermons, served to reinforce the teaching of the Wittenberg Reformation.⁵ Cranach’s art was more than simply didactic; it served the proclamation of the gospel and the propagation of the core teachings of the Reformation.

Objectives

While much has been written about Lucas Cranach the Elder’s art, both sacred and profane, little has been written on Cranach as a theologian of the Reformation, or on a visual rhetorical interpretation of Luther’s theology.

Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Lucas Cranach is a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation through a comprehensive visual rhetorical study of his art and the reformational theology of Martin Luther.

I intend to demonstrate the way in which his sacred art portrayed the distinctiveness of Luther’s reformational theology and promoted the growth of the Protestant church of that time. Furthermore, I will highlight the relevance of Cranach’s art for the church today.

The primary objective of the proposed research, therefore, is:

- to demonstrate that Lucas Cranach the Elder is a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation, who produced woodcuts, altar pieces and panels that represent a faithful interpretation and understanding of Luther’s core reformational teachings

The secondary objectives of the proposed research are:

- to apply a visual rhetorical method to Cranach’s interpretation of the key doctrinal topics of, the theology of the cross, law–gospel distinction, the theology of the ‘church’ (including the role of laity) and his sacramental theology
- to contribute to the vast literature on Cranach and Luther scholarship
- to demonstrate the relevance of Cranach’s theological art for today
- to further interest in and an understanding of Cranach’s sacred art in Australia

³ Foss, 2005 303-304

⁴ Luther’s understanding of the Theology of the Cross had significantly changed by 1518 and only this later understanding will be the studied in this thesis.

⁵ Noble, 2009, 34-35; Ozment, 2011, 130-134; Dillenberger, 1999, 96-108

- to raise the research profile of the sponsoring institution (Australian Lutheran College, University of Divinity)

Originality and significance

The originality of this project lies in the analysis of Lucas Cranach the Elder, not solely as an artist of the Wittenberg Reformation, but as a theologian in his own right, who had a full understanding of Martin Luther's reformational theology and the capacity to communicate this visually through his art.

There has been considerable research on individual works of Cranach, but no comprehensive analysis of his art through a theological lens. This thesis will make a comprehensive study and a visual rhetorical analysis of all his sacred art that relates to Martin Luther's core theology.

I intend to show that:

- the emphasis on Lucas Cranach as a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation is a unique approach to his art
- the use of a visual rhetorical method of analysis, while it has not been completely ignored, is an appropriate and helpful method to apply to Cranach's sacred art when explicating Luther's core theology⁶

Methodology

In order to establish Lucas Cranach the Elder as a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation, I will apply the following two methodologies:

- historical theological literary research
- visual rhetorical research⁷

I will employ the above two methodologies to the appropriate tasks below:

- establish the current state of research and literature base on the theological interpretation of Lucas Cranach the Elder's art
- apply a visual rhetorical method of interpreting Cranach's art in relation to Luther's theology
- discuss Lucas Cranach the Elder as an artist and a theologian of the Wittenberg Reformation
- discuss art historians on Lucas Cranach the Elder⁸
- determine and study Martin Luther's theological writings (including sermons, letters, and table talk) relating to this project⁹
- discuss Martin Luther, his theology and his attitude to images
- research the relationship between Lucas Cranach the Elder and Martin Luther
- establish the correlation between Lucas Cranach the Elder's theological art and Martin Luther's mature theology

⁶ Dykema, 2014; Plett, 2004; Noble, 2004 These three authors have applied a visual rhetorical method to analyse Cranach's work, but the number of works are limited.

⁷ Foss, 1994

⁸ Koerner, 2008; Ozment, 2011; Dillenberger, 1999; Friedländer, 1978

⁹ *Luther's Works* 1955-

- establish the relationship between Lucas Cranach the Elder’s theological art and the way in which the distinctiveness of the Lutheran faith can be communicated, through these images, to the church today
- establish a database of relevant primary and associated secondary resources including articles and monographs, bibliographies, and dissertations
- study and note primary and associated secondary literature in a resource document, categorised according to the chapter disposition of this project

Scope

The study will restrict itself to the study of Lucas Cranach the Elder’s religious woodcuts, paintings, and panels, with the exclusion of polemical material and pamphlets, images of the saints and any other work whose exact provenance has not been established.

Where appropriate, any of Lucas Cranach the Elder’s work completed by Lucas Cranach the Younger or the Cranach Workshop will be acknowledged accordingly.

Theological, reformational historical, art historical, and biographical resources will be utilised. Luther’s writings will be cited according to the Weimarer Ausgabe as well as the American Edition where available.

Chapter Disposition (provisional)

I proposed to arrange the thesis in the following chapters—

- Introduction
 - Visual rhetorical analysis of sacred art
- Chapter 1—Lucas Cranach the Elder
 - Lucas Cranach the Elder as an artist
 - Lucas Cranach the Elder as a theologian
 - Art Historians on Lucas Cranach the Elder
- Chapter 2—Theology of Martin Luther
 - Summary of Luther’s core theology
 - Word and image
- Chapter 3—Relationship
 - Relationship between Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach
 - Martin Luther and images
- Chapter 4—Theology of the cross—In the Art of Cranach
- Chapter 5—The law-gospel distinction—In the Art of Cranach
- Chapter 6—Theology of church and laity—In the Art of Cranach
- Chapter 7—Sacramental Theology—In the Art of Cranach
- Conclusion
 - Cranach’s art for today

Anticipated benefits

The anticipated benefits of this research are:

- promoting the art of Cranach and his role as a theologian in the Wittenberg Reformation

- increasing the awareness in Australia of the art of Cranach and his role as a theologian in the Wittenberg Reformation
- acknowledging the role of Cranach's images at the time of the Wittenberg Reformation and their use in the church then, and their utility today
- establishing the suitability of using Cranach's theological art as a means of communicating the faith today¹⁰

Resources

I have a group of casual national and international advisers who will complement the expertise of my proposed supervisors: Professor Dr Oswald Bayer, Professor Bridget Heal, Dr Matthew Rosebrock, Dr Michael Press, Dr Jeff Silcock, Dr Maurice Schild and Dr Stephen Pietsch.

I have access to the following resources:

- Australian Lutheran College Löhe Memorial Library and its extensive holdings, e-book, periodical, and research collections.
- University of Divinity online databases
- Inter-Library Loan service, Löhe Memorial Library, Australian Lutheran College

The following resources are also required –

- Access to the Adelaide University Library - Art History holdings

A desirable resource –

- Access to the Weimar Edition of Luther's Works online
 - *Luthers Werke im WWW*

Skills

Language

- This project requires the ability to read and understand basic theological German and Art History texts. I have completed an interactive online class for reading theological German, taught by Dr Thorsten Moritz, designed for students preparing for PhD studies.¹¹ A Certificate of ability is attached.

Practical Skills

- Library skills in reference, acquisitions and faculty liaison in the Löhe Library, Australian Lutheran College
- Research skills around my own research and as a volunteer researcher for ALITE—the research institution of Australian Lutheran College
- Experience with technology and the accompanying software required for my research

Any other information

¹⁰ Dyrness, 2008 shows how art can be used to extend and enrich Christian conversations.

¹¹ <http://theologicalgerman.com/>

This thesis will also build on findings from my previous research and from assistance and activities such as:

1. Attendance at the 2017 International Congress for Luther Research, Wittenberg, Germany, 30 July to 4 August 2017—registered in the Cranach Seminar—*Luther, Cranach and the Reformation of the Image*, led by Professor Bridget Heal
2. Published article in *Gesher 2017—Luther and art: the role of images and their artists in the Wittenberg Reformation, with particular reference to Lucas Cranach the Elder and the Cranach workshop*.¹²
3. Seminar presentation at the Luther Conference, North Adelaide, South Australia, 28 October 2017—*Lucas Cranach as companion of the Reformation*
4. Oral and written correspondence with Cranach researchers: Professor Dr Bridget Heal, Dr Matthew Rosebrock and Rev Margaret Arnold (a researcher for Ozment's *The serpent and the lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the making of the Reformation*)

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¹² <http://ccjvic.org.au/gesher/>

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