Did Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* Cross a 17th-century Line of Decorum?

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ABSTRACT

The *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* is arguably Bernini's most controversial work. The debate surrounding the statue centers on the question: Did the statue transgress the boundaries of decorum as understood by seventeenth-century Catholicism? Defenses of Bernini's decorum rest on three claims: (1) Bernini faithfully followed the literal description of Teresa's transverberation as described by the saint herself; (2) the Church understood that mystical union often entailed erotic elements and thus had no problem with religious art depicting that reality; and (3) since there is no nudity in Bernini's statue it cannot be accused of violating decorum. Through detailed analysis of contemporary catechetical teaching, Teresa's writings and other primary texts, and of the statue itself, the present essay argues that none of these defenses is either true or valid.

INTRODUCTION

Unveiled in 1651, the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (fig. 1) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) is arguably his most controversial work, and this for reasons having to do not with aesthetics but with what in seventeenth-century Europe was called decorum. The debate centers on the question: Did the sculpture cross an early modern line of decency? Did the artist's radically non-traditional depiction of Teresa's transverberation transpose the scene from the sacred to the disturbingly profane? Did he turn Teresa’s sublime experience of mystical union with the divine, to quote Jacob Burkhardt (1818-97), into a "scandalous degradation of the supernatural," and thus created the kind of "lascivious" religious art "adorned with a beauty exciting to lust" against which the Council of Trent famously warned?[1]

No, say the defenders of the orthodoxy of Bernini's statue for the artist "conscientiously" (to use Walther Weibel's defensive adverb) illustrated the saint's own description of the event.[2] No, some further assert, the real "line-crossing" factor in religious art is nudity and there is no nudity in this statue, the saint's bare feet not falling into the category of problematically bare flesh.[3] Furthermore, others claim, the claim of profanity is anachronistic, raised only well after the artist’s death and intensified in the post-Freudian age.[4] Instead, the early modern Catholic Church well understood that mystical union inevitably had its sensual, even erotic, manifestations, which is in fact the lesson drawn from the biblical Song of Songs. Indeed, as the saint herself notes, her mystical experience was spiritual, but "the body doesn't fail to share in some of it, and even a great deal."[5] Finally, with just one lone exception of supposedly dubious nature, it is frequently pointed out, contemporary documented reaction to the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* was enthusiastically positive, the work incurring no censure from any ecclesiastical entity at any point in time. Therefore, the conclusion is, the Church had no problem whatsoever with vividly realistic

visual presentations of religious experience such as Bernini produced in the Cornaro Chapel.

Although affirmed and repeated many times, none of these "defenses" is in reality accurate and therefore valid. The first major "defense" (that Bernini is merely illustrating Teresa's own literal account) ignores the fact that, while, yes, adhering to a few sparse details of the core narrative, Bernini nonetheless takes daring artistic license with the historical record, a record that was well known during his lifetime. In so doing, Bernini, deliberately and provocatively, also cast aside the by-then firmly established, consistent and prudently chosen iconographic conventions that had developed around depictions of Teresa's transverberation in paintings and engravings. Far from rendering a literal depiction of Teresa's narrative, Bernini, instead, threw caution to the wind and cast reality far aside in several glaring ways that simply have no counterpart in the historical record or previous renditions of the scene: not merely the most obvious details of Teresa's impossibly juvenile chronological age and idealized, dainty features, but also the not-so-subtle suggestive disposition of her near-prostrate body and her unmistakably splayed-apart legs, and the silky sensuousness of her luxuriously voluminous dress, as well as her undress, that is, her conspicuously loosened wimple and, most especially, her two bare feet, one of them directly hitting the eye of the viewer, front and almost center.

Now, no single isolated element of Bernini's depiction of Teresa may be considered in itself the cause of the indecorous nature of Bernini's statue; but when they are all placed together in one sensually wrought statue in gleaming white marble, as Bernini does in his *St. Teresa,* they result in a work that indeed crosses a line, a seventeenth-century line, of decorum. At the same time, the crossing of the line on Bernini's part may not have been so extreme that it deserves Burkhardt's condemnation as a "scandalous degradation of the supernatural" or even less so Simon Schama's labeling of it as a luridly profane "peep show."[6] Nonetheless, it was sufficiently transgressive so as to have been capable of disturbing, if not shocking, his contemporaries, as the present essay will now argue. The essay consists of four parts: the first re-presents the Church's ancient and consistent teaching about "lust of

the eyes" (a concern born out of the doctrine of original sin) beginning with St. Augustine and tracing its unceasing presence in the mainstream of Catholic catechesis through the Middle Ages and Renaissance; the second discusses the Council of Trent's decree on religious art and its enforcement in the long post-Tridentine aftermath; then, arriving at Bernini's lifetime, goes on to reconstruct the pervasive religious *mentalité* of seventeenth-century Catholic culture as it pertains both to "lust of the eyes" and decorum in art; the third undertakes a very close examination of the statue itself, after first having reviewed the conventional pre-Bernini Teresian iconography; and the fourth takes a revealing look "behind the scenes" of the history of the Cornaro Chapel commission, which helps us understand the motivation behind Bernini's daring conception of the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*.

I. ORIGINAL SIN AND "LUST OF THE EYES:"
A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD CATECHESIS

Before taking a close look at Bernini's *St. Teresa*, we need to address the second major "defense" of Bernini's decorum, namely, that early modern Catholicism did not problematize the commingling of the spiritual and the earthily carnal or erotic in visual representations of mystical events. The claim is simply not true. It may have accepted without censure realistic verbal descriptions in prose and poetry of such phenomena, but when those explicit descriptions were given visual form in painting and sculpture, that acceptance came to an end for reasons we now take up in detail. We begin with this issue because it represents the larger, all-important, all pervasive spiritual background against which we must then go on to view again Bernini's *St. Teresa* if we are to judge the work from the perspective of spiritually alert seventeenth-century spectators, and not twenty-first-century audiences. That this "peaceful co-existence" claim has gone on repeated and unrebutted for so long is due to the fact that defenses of Bernini's *St. Teresa* have consistently failed to take into consideration a crucial, omnipresent seventeenth-century spiritual concern that inevitably looms large in any well-informed discussion of the decorum of this work or any work of early modern art: that concern is the sin of lust, for when we question

the decorum of Bernini's work, we are questioning more specifically its capacity for leading spectators – seventeenth-century ones – into what in traditional Roman Catholic parlance is called "the near occasion of sin," in this case, lust.

Ignored by literally all previous scholars discussing the decorum of Bernini's *St. Teresa* (as far as my research of the past twenty years has shown me) is what by 1650 was a massive, dense body of over a thousand years of consistent, unequivocal, mainstream Christian teaching about the sin of Adam and Eve, that is, the sin of concupiscence. Concupiscence, lustful desire, was considered the most primordial and powerful temptation of the human race, one that was born specifically out of an act of sight, namely, Eve's indulgent gazing upon an object seductive to her eye in the Garden of Eden, the fruit of the forbidden Tree. Indeed, according to the doctrine first formulated by Church Father, Saint Augustine (354-430) and not long after his death adopted as a fixed cornerstone of Christian orthodoxy, this was the "original sin" of humankind, one that infected, in myriad manifestations, all the progeny of the First Parents.[7] Augustine's warning about this putative, inescapable and congenital human propensity towards lust ignited by the titillating sights of the material world was subsequently repeated with unabated alarm by an endless, unbroken stream of preachers, theologians, and biblical exegetes. It is a catechesis that extends uninterruptedly throughout the long Middle Ages and the Renaissance, all the way to the Council of Trent, and beyond the Council, into the seventeenth century and Bernini's lifetime.

Augustine founded his doctrine of original sin upon his analysis of the description of the "Fall of Humankind" recounted in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 3. One of the central verses in Augustine's analysis is Genesis 3:6 describing the "mechanics," as it were, of the first sin itself. Once Eve had listened to the beguiling discourse of the serpent, she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it looked lovely and was delightful to behold, so she took some of the fruit and ate it." This first sin precipitating the "Fall of Humankind" thus comprises two elements: one verbal, the serpent's spoken enticement of Eve; and one visual, Eve's gazing at the forbidden fruit, which was so delectable to the eye that it immediately

ensnared her and she, in turn, ensnared her husband. In his two commentaries on Genesis,[8] Augustine points out but does not expound upon the latter, visual component of the Fall. However, it was assuredly not far from his mind as he read and interpreted the text. That this phenomenon, the misuse of the eyes as a prime conduit leading to sin, was a moral issue extremely close to Augustine's heart, we know from his *Confessions*, a consistent "bestseller" of Christian literature since its publication. Augustine assuredly had the sin of Eve in mind when he included therein his discussion of "lust of the eyes," there extending in effect, to "lust" of all the senses:

> Beside the concupiscence of the flesh that lies within the delight of all senses and pleasures whose slaves perish as they go far from You, the mind has, through these same senses, a certain vain and curious desire not to delight in the flesh, but to experiment through the flesh under the auspices of knowledge and learning. As this is part of man's appetite for knowledge, and the eyes are the foremost instrument of the senses used in attaining knowledge, the Holy Writ has called it "the lust of the eyes" [1 John 2:16]; this because seeing is the domain of the eyes, though we use the word "seeing" of the other senses too when we employ these senses in seeking knowledge. We do not say, "Hear how it flashes!" or "Smell how it glimmers!" or "Taste how it dazzles!" or "Feel how it glitters!" For all these we use the word "see." Yet we do not only say "See how it shines!," something that only the eyes can perceive, but also "See how it sounds," "See how it smells," "See how it tastes," and "See how firm it is." This is why the Holy Writ has called the entire experience of the senses "the lust of the eyes," because the function of seeing is a prerogative of the eyes that the other senses take upon themselves because of the similarity of the action of their senses when they are exploring.[9]

In the century after Augustine's death, another Church Father and eminent teacher of similarly pervasive and long-lasting influence picked up the same issue of "the lust of the eyes" and in so doing further impressed it upon the psyches and moral consciences of the Christian faithful as one of life's grave dangers. That teacher was Pope St. Gregory the Great

(540-604) and he does so in one of his most enduringly popular, most influential works, the *Moralia in Iob*, a collection of moral teachings based on the Book of Job. Echoing Augustine, Gregory too underscores the fact that it was Eve's indulgent gaze upon the luscious appearance of the forbidden fruit that was the cause of her sin and, therefore, the cause of the downfall of humankind. Furthermore, Gregory continues, and still following Augustine, Eve's fatal weakness was passed on to all of her progeny, that weakness being an all-too-easy propensity to commit sin when provoked by any sight in the material world that is delightful to the eyes – any titillating sight, let us note, not just that of naked flesh. The passage in Gregory's *Moralia* here in question is his commentary on Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes that I should not even think about a maiden" (*Moralia*, 21, II, 4):

> Holy Job … sees the guilt of sin before it arises and closes the windows of the body against the death that lies in ambush…. So that he might be able to keep the thoughts of his heart chaste, he made a covenant with his eyes lest he should look around carelessly at what he would later love unwillingly. This is most serious: the flesh pulls down the mind, and once a beautiful form encumbers the heart through the agency of the eyes, hardly will it be freed even by means of a fierce struggle…. In order that the thoughts of the mind might remain pure, the eyes must be forcibly distracted from the wantonness of their pleasure, since they are potential ravishers for sin. Eve certainly would not have touched the forbidden tree if she had not first looked at it carelessly. It is indeed written, *The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it looked lovely and was delightful to behold, so she took some of the fruit and ate it*.

For this reason, instructs Gregory, a rigorous "custody of the eyes" (*custodia oculorum*) must be exercised by all Christians as the utterly necessary, and, indeed, the only virtue-protecting remedy against the snares of lust:

> From this we should learn how absolute our control over our eyes should be, by which we restrain them from looking upon forbidden objects as long as we live in

> this mortal life, since the mother of all living was enticed into death by her eyes. That is why the prophet says, assuming the voice of Judea, who looked upon what was outside her territory with longing eyes and thus lost her internal goodness: *My eye has despoiled my soul* [Lamentations 3:51].[10]

This call for a "custody of the eyes" was to be repeatedly and widely promulgated through the centuries by preachers and spiritual writers, thanks to the veritable boom, starting in the High Middle Ages, in the production of Biblical commentaries, preacher's manuals, encyclopedias of vices and virtues, ready-made sermon collections, and penitential handbooks, all created to educate the clergy and facilitate the execution of their teaching ministry. Within this multitude of manuals from the Middle Ages, time and space allow us only two quick but prominent examples of the perpetuation and dissemination of Gregory's warning about "lust of the eyes" and the need for "custody of the eyes." The first example is in fact perhaps the most famous among the works in question, the monumental *Glossa ordinaria* (more formally, *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria*), a compilation of succinct verse-by-verse notes (literal and moral) upon the Bible, compiled in the course of the twelfth century by various authors and drawn primarily from the Church Fathers. For many long centuries, the *Glossa* was an omnipresent, indispensable reference work in the library of every religious order and religious scholar. Though a medieval work, it was notably republished even after the reforms of the Council of Trent and into the seventeenth century (e.g., Venice 1588 and 1603, Lyon 1589, Antwerp 1617 and 1634). When we turn to the *Glossa's* moral commentary on Genesis 3:6, we find prominently featured Gregory's admonitions about the eyes and their propensity to sin.[11]

The same situation obtains in our second example, another "bestseller" among medieval preachers' handbooks, the *Summa de virtutibus et vitiis* by Dominican Guilelmus Peraldus (William Perault, c. 1190-1271). This *summa*, an encyclopedic treatise on the virtues and vices, could be found alongside the *Glossa ordinaria* in the library of virtually every religious order and teaching institution, especially those of the Dominican Order, each of which was required by official decree of the order's Master to hold a copy.[12] In his

discussion of the virtue of "temperance of delights through sight, hearing and taste," Peraldus duly reproduces Gregory's discussion of the dangers of "lust of the eyes," citing his source as the *Moralia in Iob*.[13] Like the *Glossa,* the medieval Peraldus was regularly republished even in the post-Tridentine years, and well into Bernini's lifetime (e.g., Cologne, 1614 and 1629; Lyon, 1668).

If one were to comb the body of medieval and Renaissance spiritual literature in its various genres, many more examples of the echoes of the Augustinian-Gregorian teaching on "lust of the eyes" would be easily found. This is true even in cases where the names of neither Augustine or Gregory are explicitly cited, such as in the popular preaching of Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), "the voice most eagerly listened to" in early Renaissance Italy.[14] For example, in a sermon on the love of one's neighbor, Bernardino exclaims: "How many things do we begin to desire simply at the sight of them?"[15] With this opening question, Bernardino is introducing a warning against the public display of the painted and sculpted coats of arms of the troublesome, warring political factions of his day, the cause of so much hatred of one's neighbor. Having stated the question, he does not explain or otherwise elaborate upon it; instead he immediately proceeds to give one stark, convincing example of the claim, doing so in his customary frank style: "If one of you women were to strip naked and stand up right here . . . how many men and how many women do you think would fall into temptation? I say: many and many just by seeing her."[16] In posing this rhetorical question, the learned friar (whose sermons are filled with citations from all the leading spiritual authorities) was assuredly drawing upon the thousand-year teaching about sight and sin that has its roots in Augustine and Gregory.

As far as Bernardino's awareness of the dangerous potential of visual art to incite lust is concerned, we need go no further in his sermons than the one quotation that I first came across in my doctoral dissertation research in 1980 and introduced to the art historical literature in 1999, a shockingly blunt statement found in his Latin treatise, *De inspirationibus* (On the discernment of spirits): "I know of a person who, while contemplating the humanity of Christ on the cross – it is shameful to say and horrendous just to think – sensually and

foully polluted and defiled himself."[17] In its original context, the example serves to illustrate the preacher's warning that sometimes what may initially appear to be an innocent spiritual pleasure may in reality become titillatingly sensual, and therefore, the occasion for sin. And let us note: his example comes from the realm of visual art, of specifically religious art, a fact of direct relevance to the subject of the present discussion. Bernardino goes on to say that one should not use this example in public preaching but this example from real life would have made an indelible impression upon the many readers of his treatise, which, like all of his Latin works, was meant to be practical handbooks for preachers and spiritual teachers.

II. ART AND DECORUM AT TRENT AND BEYOND

We come now to the fateful year of 1517 and its long aftermath. In the wake of the doctrinal onslaught of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response to that onslaught, the Council of Trent (1545-63), the Roman Church "cleaned house" in many areas and came out of the reform process, in many ways, a markedly different institution, doctrinally and otherwise. However, one area of Catholic belief that remained essentially as before was the doctrine of original sin, formally re-affirmed at the fifth session of the Council of Trent. As is well known, Augustine's doctrinal invention was a matter of great public debate between Protestants and Catholics: both groups fundamentally accepted the doctrine but diverged significantly in its interpretation. The details of that debate need not detain us here; suffice it to say that, as a result, "[t]he sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a renewed consciousness of the pervasive nature of original sin and of the severity of its effects."[18] The resurgence of the doctrine of original sin meant at the same time the re-publicizing of Augustine's reading of Genesis, including that of 3:6, which, in turn, inevitably meant also the re-publicizing of Gregory's reading of the same verse, with its alarm over "lust of the eyes" and its call for their "custody."

Just as important to our present discussion is another issue taken up at Trent in response to Protestant attack, that of the legitimacy of religious figurative art. Many

Reformers considered religious art the cause of idolatry, superstition, and offense to decorum. This opposition, as we know, gave rise to public acts of violent iconoclasm, especially in Calvinist and Puritan localities, resulting in the utter destruction of countless works of art. The Roman Catholic Church could thus not ignore the issue, even though more pressing concerns meant that it was not taken up until the very last session (the twenty-fifth) of the Council of Trent, in December 1563, pursuant to the late arrival of the French bishops who had witnessed shocking Huguenot iconoclasm in their country. The Church's response came in the form of the decree, "On the Invocation, Veneration and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images."[19] Therein the Church Fathers defended the legitimacy and usefulness of sacred images, specifically addressing the issues of idolatry and offense to decorum given by certain forms of religious art. Regarding the concern of the present discussion, the issue of decorum, the Council Fathers issued this terse but crystal clear and grave admonition: henceforth in the future production of religious art "all lasciviousness [must] be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust."[20] It is simply impossible not to hear the voices of Augustine and Gregory about "lust of the eyes" consciously or unconsciously resounding in the minds of the Council Fathers who wrote those words and of those bishops who subsequently had the duty to enforce them in their dioceses.

The post-Tridentine attempts at enforcing the mandate of the Council and, in effect, bringing about a systematic, universal, and enduring reform of religious art are today well known having received much attention from scholars in recent decades. Among the most zealous ecclesiastical representatives of this movement are the three cardinals Carlo Borromeo (1538-1584), Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), and Girolamo Rusticucci (1537-1603). As informative and insightful as the art historical scholarship has been on the policing of art after Trent and the larger issue of sensuality in post-Tridentine art, nonetheless, it – that is, all the scholarship that I have examined over the past twenty years – can be inadvertently misleading in two ways. The first is to leave some readers with the impression that the concern of the post-Tridentine reformers about "beautiful art arousing to lust" was an issue born only in the sixteenth century, culminating in the Council of Trent's decree on

sacred art: that is to say, it passes in silence over the fact that, as we have seen, for the preceding 1100 years, beginning with Augustine, the Church had been consistently teaching and warning about "lust of the eyes" inflamed by the seductive beauty of material objects. True, the concern certainly grew much more intense in the course of the sixteenth century which, in the field of the visual arts, saw the development and diffusion of an ever more sensually realistic style and which culminated in the next century in the Baroque of Rubens and Bernini. Nonetheless, the danger lurking in religious art existed even before, as we are reminded by Bernardino of Siena.

The second way in which the scholarship in question could mislead readers is by focusing attention especially on works of art containing nudity or troubling amounts of bare flesh. In doing so, it potentially leaves the impression that the real concern of the ecclesiastical reformers was only naked flesh, as if this one element were the single or the principal violation of decorum in religious art. Let us recall, instead, that the text of the Council's decree of December 1563 warns, simply and generically, against "*venustas*" – that is, "beauty" in any form – that could lead to sin, for naturally the Council Fathers knew that depictions of even the clothed human body could arouse spectators to lust. Yes, to be sure, nudity was the most troubling, most obvious problem, and it indeed looms large in the writings of the reformers in the decades immediately after the Council of Trent, but decorum could be violated even in the absence of nudity. For example, in the course of the visitations by Pope Clement VIII (r.1592-1605) of Roman churches, Scipione Pulzone's *Lamentation* altarpiece of 1593 in the Church of the Gesù (now Metropolitan Museum of Art), a work that would strike most viewers today as one of perfect piety and modesty, was cited as offensive to decorum. It was not the display of Jesus's near nudity therein that gave offense, but rather the demeanor of Mary Magdalene: with her luxuriant, freely flowing blond hair, she is resting her head directly on Jesus's knee, her hands intimately caressing his feet. To cite another example, again involving Mary Magdalene, both Gabriele Paleotti in his *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* and Giovanni Andrea Gilio (d. 1584), in the second of his *Due dialoghi* devoted to "errors of painters," criticize artists who, in depicting in the scene of the Crucifixion, display Mary Magdalene all decked out in luxurious,

sensually alluring garb, as if she were still working as a prostitute.[21] Of course, even more famous cases are Caravaggio's various infractions of decorum (such as in his first version of *St. Matthew and the Angel* or *The Death of the Virgin*), none of which involved blatant nudity but which nonetheless caused these commissioned works of art to be rejected by their ecclesiastical patrons.[22]

By 1605 (the election of the Borghese pope Paul V) the zealous fires of reform surrounding religious art that had raged in the decades immediately following the Council of Trent seem to have largely spent themselves. After the deaths of the aforementioned cardinal-reformers, no one of equal prominence or passion rose up among the ecclesiastical ranks to take their place. Moreover, the reformers had failed to gain what was probably their ultimate desideratum, that is, the creation by the papacy of a vigilant curial body, with universal and perpetual jurisdiction (such as an Office of the Index of Prohibited Images, as called for by Paleotti) that would police the entire realm of artistic commissions for churches and other religious venues. Nonetheless, despite this failure – or perhaps because of it – in the subsequent years of the seventeenth century, orthodox warning about "lust of the eyes," rooted in Augustine's and Gregory's commentary on Eve's "original sin," remained omnipresent in the ecclesiastical literature and mentality of the age. For instance, when we turn to one of the most frequently consulted reference works of the century (and beyond), "the universal commentary of the Baroque Age," Cornelius a Lapide's multi-volume *Commentaria in Sacram Scripturam* (first volume, 1613), and read its gloss on Genesis 3:6, we find the familiar warning about concupiscence of the eyes and the same exhortation to keep the eyes in custody, taken by Lapide, as he explicitly notes, from Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* 21.[23] Elsewhere Lapide reinforces the same moral message in his glosses on the other Biblical passages relating to the same theme of sin entering the body through the eyes, which even in preceding centuries had been invoked as ancillary "*auctoritates*" for this teaching: David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2, "from the roof he saw a woman bathing"), Susanna and the Elders (Book of Daniel 13), and, among the teachings of Jesus, his statements, "And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away" (Matthew 5:29 and 18:9) and that regarding the sinfulness of mere "adultery of the eyes" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Later in the same century, a prominent preacher, scholar and Jesuit "Father General," Gian Paolo Oliva (1600-81), compiled his own verse-by-verse "moral" commentary on select biblical books, *In selecta Scripturae loca ethicae commentationes* (1677-79), and therein as well, in his gloss upon Genesis 3 repeats the same warning about lust and the eyes, derived from the same source, Gregory's *Moralia*, which, in turn, as we have seen, rests upon Augustine's reading of Genesis. In his public sermons Oliva treated even more extensively the subject of the dangers to the soul of an undisciplined use of the eyes, as we read in the published collections compiled by him during his lifetime.[24] His insistent message of alarm: Be ever on your guard! All it takes is that one tiny spark to ignite a veritable conflagration in our hearts! The demon of lust is omnipresent and ready to strike! All of this danger, Oliva explicitly states, began with Eve: "With a most vigilant custody of the senses, keep temptation far from the soul. Because she was negligent in this, Eve saw, ate and fell."[25] Earlier in the century, another churchman of great eminence and popular influence, Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino (1552-1621) had repeatedly communicated the same message, on the basis of the same venerable ecclesiastical authorities, in several of his treatises, spiritual guides, and sermons.[26] One of the most notable examples of this is to be found in what is perhaps the most influential of his works of popular spirituality, *De arte bene moriendi* (The Art of Dying Well, 1st ed. 1620). In this oft-reprinted treatise Bellarmino describes in detail the anointing of the five senses, a ritual that is a central component of the sacrament administered to the dying, Extreme Unction (as it was then called), and in so doing is careful to point out at length the moral dangers stemming from the sense of sight. Each of the five senses, observes Bellarmino, represents a "doorway through which all manner of sin enters the soul." As far as the power of sight to lead us into the sin of lust, Bellarmino points out (citing Matthew 5), it is Jesus Christ, our greatest teacher, who himself warns us explicitly about that.[27]

Yet another influential prominent *erudito* and prolific author of seventeenth-century Rome (as well as an intimate of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's), Cardinal Sforza Pallavicino (1607-67) found occasion to issue the same warning about lust and the sense of sight, most

explicitly in his ponderous tome on moral philosophy, *Del bene* (On the Good, 1st ed. 1644). In discoursing therein on the power of "painted figures" to "sharply pierce the human heart" – this, despite the fact that one knows that they are mere artificial reproductions – Pallavicino observes:

> This fact is proven, for good and for bad, by both the devout tears that often are shed by spiritual people at the sight of finely executed portraits of our Redeemer in his suffering and the pestilential flames that are ignited within young hearts by obscene images, which, thanks to the ignominy of human audacity, are at times acquired at a great price to serve as bellows upon [the embers of] dormant lasciviousness: thus is the very desire to sin purchased as if it were some precious possession.[28]

The latter remark by Pallavicino regarding "pestilential flames" has been recently and most appropriately quoted by Joris van Gastel to illustrate how "not all sculpted flesh" in early modern art was seen as "innocent and sweet."[29] However, van Gastel's discussion of the issue (in an otherwise excellent study) fails to insert the remark into the larger context – that is, the centuries-old mainstream teaching on original sin and lust of the eyes reviewed in this essay – or to, at least, avert to the existence of that ancient and universal catechetical tradition. This is thus yet another example of how modern scholarship on early modern art and decorum can unwittingly lead readers to believe that the moral alarmism on the issue is simply the idiosyncratic view of a few, disparate individuals living in a chronologically restricted time period in church history. It is neither.

For a final example of the omnipresence of the theme of sight and sin in seventeenth-century Rome, we turn to a pope, Urban VIII (r. 1623-44), Bernini's early mentor and generous patron. In his younger days as Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban applied himself to the writing of poetry, producing quite a large and technically skillful quantity of elegantly classicizing religious verse in both Italian and Latin that saw numerous editions during his lifetime. In a sonnet entitled "Quanto importi custodir gli occhi dal rimirare mortal beltà" (How important it is to prevent the eyes from gazing upon mortal beauty), Maffeo too

sounds the alarm about the dangers of the sight of sensual beauty – all sensual beauty, not just unclad human flesh. To deliver its message, the sonnet employs what was by then a conventional "incendiary" topos:

> Mortal beauty holds hidden within itself a veritable fire
> in order to assault those who do not restrain their gaze:
> Oh, if these incautious ones do not incline their eyes downward
> then immediately will passion rush into their veins.
> For the eye is the direct passage to our heart: right to the heart
> the image of the object of one's gaze heads and there firmly impresses itself.
> If that indeed be the case, then you who value the salvation of your soul,
> must take care not to let your gaze alight upon unseemly sights....[30]

III. BERNINI'S *ECSTASY OF SAINT TERESA*: A VERY CLOSE LOOK

This immense body of catechetical teaching on the dangers of sight and lust, imparted from so many sources and in so many forms, saturated – if at times only unconsciously – the mentality of early modern Catholics, including the artists among them. Thus, artists before Bernini would have well understood the need for extreme prudence in illustrating the eros-tinged experience of Teresa's transverberation. And their prudence is well apparent in the images that by 1647 had in effect established the conventional features of the iconography of that event and thus in the popular imagination. One of the earliest and most consequential is that produced by Adriaen Collaert (1555-1623) and Cornelis Galle the Elder (1576-1650) to illustrate the extremely popular life of Teresa, the *Vita B. Virginis Teresiae a Iesu*, first published in 1613 (fig. 2). The Collaert-Galle Teresa engravings were directly copied by or strongly influenced many other illustrated lives of the Carmelite reformer, especially in the depictions of her transverberation. This is clearly evident in subsequent engravings, such as the well-circulating one (fig. 3) by Anton Wierix III (1596-

1624).[31] It can also be seen in paintings, mostly notably the altarpiece (fig. 4) by Palma Giovane (1548/50-1628) created in 1615 right after Teresa's beatification for Santa Maria della Scala, the principal Carmelite church in Rome.[32]

All of these images would have been readily accessible to Bernini. In the case of Palma Giovane's canvas, given both the eminence of its executor and the relevance of its subject to the Cornaro commission, Bernini assuredly paid a visit to Santa Maria della Scala to examine the work closely in person.[33] All of these images uniformly present a more historically correct Teresa – that is, a middle-aged, matronly woman, of non-idealized facial features, decorously encased in her seemingly lead-weighted, inert Carmelite habit, piously kneeling at the altar rail of her convent's chapel, with a blank, expressionless face. They also show her with a conspicuously closed mouth, emitting no sighs, no moans, no gasps; the one exception is Palma Giovane who, however, depicts the saint with a just barely open mouth that does not lead one to imagine that she is emitting any audible sound. Furthermore, witnessing and validating the experience – and importantly for the sake of decorum, rendering it in effect a more "public" event – is the presence of Jesus Christ (if not God the Father as well [fig. 3]) and several angels, cherubs accompanying the protagonist seraph.[34] After viewing these antecedents in the prevailing Teresian iconography, one cannot help but be startled, if not shocked, by the stark contrast of Bernini's rendition: though, to be sure, producing a work of great artistic genius and technical skill, the artist simply and deliberately chose to discard all of the decorum-saving features of his predecessors' renditions, all of them.

Scholarly scrupulosity requires us to ask the question: Could it be that Bernini himself was somehow unaware of the moral dangers to the viewers involved in depictions of Teresa's transverberation and that thus he could be unrestrained in his imaginative recreation of it? This seems extremely unlikely: Bernini was by 1647 a thoroughly catechized, sermon-attending Roman Catholic and since the very inception of his professional career, had worked for and frequently socialized with popes, cardinals, and the learned men of the Roman court. In conversations among these men – which included

for example the aforementioned Oliva and Pallavicino – the topic would certainly have been raised. Well before the Cornaro commission, Bernini is likely to have heard it being discussed by an associate of his, an eminent member of the Barberini social-intellectual circle, Agostino Mascardi (1590-1640). Most known today as the author of the treatise *Dell'arte historica* (1636), Mascardi also delivered and published discourses on various spiritual topics, which he called "orations." One such oration, dating to the canonization year of 1622, was dedicated to Teresa and subsequently published in his many-times re-issued collection of essays and orations, the *Prose vulgari* (first edition 1625), of which Bernini probably had a copy in his personal library. (Mascardi's *Prose vulgari* would have likely been given as a gift to Bernini by the author who was sufficiently intimate with the artist to have had his portrait done by his own hand.)[35] Therein Mascardi spends much time in a detailed recreation of the transverberation and at one point, introducing to the scene the seraph bearing the fiery arrow, Mascardi abruptly interrupts his narrative to berate those sacrilegious individuals who might project the "filth" of their own carnal imaginations unto Teresa's sublime mystical experience:

> And, now, what profane sower of lies is here going to come to me foolishly invoking the name of that archer Cupid, depicted in painting with his golden bow and arrows, who was born not out of the primal Chaos as dreamt up by Hesiod but rather out of the inane confusion of the human imagination? It is not he, no, no, Gentlemen, who shows up here, that false semi-god, hunter of human hearts. Instead, what show ups here [in this obscene invocation] is the vileness of mortal beings that brings forth out of its sloth and that nourishes out of its lust its misbegotten, doubly sacrilegious desires and which masks the infamy of its own filthy pleasures under the cover of [this scene of] the honors [bestowed upon a human being] by the divinity. . . . [36]

In other words, Mascardi warns: Do not commit the sacrilege of imagining here the scene of Cupid arriving at the bed of the naked Venus to plunge his arrow of erotic desire into her heart. How dare anyone equate Teresa's sublime “seraphic” encounter with that utterly profane but widely reproduced scene in art of Venus's encounter with Cupid! At the same

time that he was denouncing it, or rather, precisely because he felt the need to denounce it, Mascardi was implicitly acknowledging that that was indeed what his contemporaries were doing. Like it or not, they could not help but make this profane equation for, objectively speaking, the physical and emotional effects of mystical union with the divinity are inescapably similar to sexual union between two human beings. And no amount of fulmination from the pulpit would prevent them from doing so.

It did not prevent Bernini either. He chose not to escape the temptation of making this equation but rather embraced it fully, as no one before or after him, as we shall now see in detail. In turning to examine the statue – with the thousand-plus years of catechesis on "lust of the eyes" present in our minds – we shine a more raking light on certain features that, if not overlooked in earlier scholarship, in any case failed to arouse any curiosity or perplexity on the part of those claiming that the work faithfully reproduces the narrative set down by Teresa or otherwise conforms to contemporary iconographic conventions and standards of decorum. These features are the ways, earlier listed in this essay, in which Bernini either violated or added capriciously – and indecorously – to the historical record in recasting Teresa's transverberation. The artist did so in too many ways and to such a degree that it is untenable to claim, as one scholar has stated, that "his interpretation of the experience adheres with the closest exactitude to Saint Teresa's account of it," or that, yes, he did endow his recreation of the scene "with touches of sensual mysticism" but "without, however, running any risk of detaching himself from the hagiographic orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism," as another scholar has categorically asserted, as if that claim were unassailably self-evident to all.[37]

The saint's age and facial features

Teresa (1515-82) died only sixteen years before Bernini's birth (1598) and only thirty-two years before the inception of her official cult as a result of her beatification in 1614. She was thus not one of those saints whose life and likeness were shrouded in mystery; both of those were well-documented and publicized. As far as her physical appearance is concerned, two features of Bernini's sculpture that are readily and universally conceded as

departures from the historical record is the fact that his Teresa shows neither the chronological age nor facial features that the saint would have had at the time of her transverberation (or rather, her first transverberation for she had had more than one, as she makes clear in her autobiography).[38] We need not belabor this obvious point but simply emphasize a few salient facts.

Virtually all contemporary portraits of Teresa in circulation in the 1640s would have been based upon the authentic portrait executed in life by Carmelite friar, Juan de la Miseria in 1576. Sixty-one years of age when Juan executed her portrait, Teresa, even in her younger days, would still have had the corpulent round face and other distinctive features that we see in the painting and that are also described in print, for example, in the authoritative, much-circulated biography by Jesuit Father Francisco de Ribera (1537-91).[39] The highly refined, delicate, completely idealized features of Bernini's Teresa bear not the least resemblance to any portrait of her, painted or engraved, that Bernini would have seen. Even though the accounts of the saint's life available to Bernini, including Father Ribera's biography, do not give a precise chronology regarding the transverberations, they all nonetheless communicate the same information, namely, that this extraordinary form of mystical experience began in what was then considered advanced middle age.[40] Bernini simply ignored what he and everyone knew of Teresa's age at that time of her life and dramatically turned back the clock on her. Indeed, the recent cleaning of the statue, undertaken for the anniversary of her birth and having removed years of dust and black soot, has starkly revealed how even more dramatically the clock was turned back than appeared to be the case prior to conservation: she now looks to be a maiden of no more than sixteen years of age.

Irving Lavin explains away this non-conformity to known truth about Teresa's age by claiming that in so doing "Bernini followed a tradition in which her features, rather than approximating those known from portraits . . . appeared ideally young and beautiful; we shall see later that he may have had a special reason for doing so."[41] Strangely, Lavin never specifies what tradition to which he is referring and, as for his promise that "we shall see

[the reason for this feature] later," that explanation is never given in his subsequent exposition. One supposes that he is referring to the artistic "tradition" whereby the Blessed Virgin Mary was never shown as anything otherwise than in the flower of youth, as most famously in Michelangelo's *Pietà*. However, as far as I know, that piously flattering concession was never applied to other saints, especially those for whom there existed a reliable historical record and physical description, if not a contemporary portrait.

Her dress, bare feet and the position of her head

With regard to Teresa's manner of dress in Bernini's sculpture, as I have already had occasion to observe: "That garment is not the coarse, limp, much-washed habit in cotton and wool of a poor, humble Carmelite with a limited budget for wardrobe. It is, rather, a silky, sumptuous piece of apparel, looking more like the expensive, luxurious ball gown of a well-endowed, worldly patrician woman."[42] This impression of worldly vanity is precisely what Teresa was attempting to prevent in the succinctly but unequivocally worded description of the Carmelite mode of attire in the *Constitutions* that she herself drew up for her reformed order:

> The habit should be made of coarse cloth or black, rough wool, and only as much wool as is necessary should be used. The sleeves should be narrow, no wider at the opening than at the shoulder. Circular, without pleats, and no larger in the back than in the front, the habit should extend in length to the feet. The scapular should be made of the same material and four fingers shorter in length than the habit.... They should use as little cloth as possible, attending also to the necessary rather than to the superfluous.[43]

In summary, only humble, inexpensive material should go into dressing a Discalced Carmelite and only as much fabric as strictly necessary. In this way, in their very manner of dress, the nuns would manifest their poverty, modesty, and *contemptus mundi*. This is why, after giving his detailed description of Teresa's physical appearance and commenting on Fra Juan de la Miseria's painted portrait, her aforementioned biographer Father Ribera ends

by scolding those painters who have depicted her wearing a sartorially refined religious habit, of a type that she would have never worn in her life. Indeed, Ribera emphasizes, she never allowed even a shade of stylishness in any part of her clothing.[44] Thus, Teresa, we can safely conclude, would have been most unhappy with the voluptuousness with which Bernini has clothed her.

Teresa would have been even more unhappy about the glaring display Bernini made of her bare feet, her perfect, delectably plump, bare feet. Regarding the latter feature, perhaps no greater misunderstanding has been allowed to go transmitted in the art historical literature about Teresa and her Carmelites than the detail of what they wore on their feet. Despite their formal name, "Discalced," Teresa and her Reformed Carmelite sisters did not go barefoot. They may not have worn shoes, but they were never barefoot. There is no confusion on this point in Teresa's *Constitutions* that dictate in detail what her sisters were to wear on their feet: "Let *sandals* made from hemp be worn, and, *for the sake of modesty*, stockings of rough wool or cloth made from rough tow."[45] Neither Bernini nor his contemporaries would ever have seen a Carmelite nun in bare feet or in sandals without stockings. Indeed, they would never have seen any woman, whether vowed religious or "decent" laywoman, with bare feet in public. That mode of undress would have been considered a shocking violation of modesty, that is, decorum. Bernini may not have been the first to display Teresa deprived of both sandals and stockings, but the great notoriety of his statue seems to have started a trend in subsequent representations of her in painting and sculpture.[46]

Does this mean that all these artists, Bernini included, necessarily believed that Teresa was accustomed to go about barefoot? No. What we are seeing in these depictions of a barefoot Teresa, instead, is most likely not the literal depiction of reality but rather the symbolic attribute of the saint, that is, a visual clue aiding in her identification by the general public: in just the same way that the arrows or tower or grill that Saints Sebastian, Barbara, and Lawrence respectively hold in devotional art help us identify them correctly, so too do Teresa's bare feet.

Yet, the problem with the bare feet of Bernini's *St. Teresa* is not only that they are historically inaccurate or sensually wrought but also that they are given so prominent a placement in the statue: there is no missing them, at least not the left foot. Teresa's left foot is literally in our face, placed by Bernini at the point in nearest proximity to the viewers, almost at their eye level, and almost at the center vertical line of the statuary group.[47] Even Bernini's defender, Walther Weibel recognized the patent sensuousness of this feature of her anatomy: "Even the feet feel the inner ferment. One hand is free, the other is supported by the clouds; but in both, the toes are arched in such a way that we imagine we can trace the painful voluptuousness which thrills her to the uttermost extremity."[48] Viewers today, growing up surrounded by, indeed, bombarded by, images of the unclothed human body, have become inured to such small displays of naked flesh as we see in Bernini's *St. Teresa*: this was decidedly not the case in Bernini's time. As the great company of preachers warned the faithful, all it takes is a tiny spark to ignite a mighty storm of lust in the human heart.

A further small detail of Bernini's dressing, or rather undressing, of Teresa – far more subtle and hence overlooked in all descriptions of the statue – is the manner in which the artist has treated her wimple (fig. 5). The wimple, or coif, is the white, close-fitting headdress worn under the veil that wraps around the perimeter of the nun's face, binding it tightly on both sides of the cheeks, under the chin, and above the forehead.[49] In contemporary portraits of Teresa, as indeed is the case in the majority of vowed women religious in pre-Vatican II Council days, the wimple encloses the woman's face so as to preclude, for modesty's sake, any sight of her hair and ears. Instead, in Bernini's *Teresa*, because of the backward thrust of her head – a position that intensifies the erotic charge of her pose – her wimple consequently hangs loosely around her face, especially in the area of her neck. This gives one the impression that it is coming undone, reinforcing the theme of undressing conveyed by the gratuitous gesture of the angel who is laying open saint's mantle, gratuitous because unnecessary since the supernatural power of the angelic arrow would be able to penetrate any obstacle standing in the way of Teresa's heart. And Teresa's heart, in fact, is covered by

at least three further substantial layers of clothing – her scapular, tunic, and undergarment – which naturally would have been easily penetrated by the flaming arrow.

The impression of undressing is even further strengthened if we contrast the treatment of the wimple in the completed statue with its counterpart in the artist's extant *modello* of the statue in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (fig. 6). In the *modello* we see a more substantial wimple, and, above all, one that is securely in its place, thus fulfilling its role in safeguarding Teresa's modesty. The wimple in the *modello* is securely in place because, unlike in the finished statue, Teresa's head is not in a state of pronounced backward thrust; it simply and more gently hangs limply to one side. The positioning of Teresa's head is thus yet another way in which Bernini, in order to increase the erotic charge of the scene, cast aside all previous, decorum-preserving depictions of the scene which show the saint's head either serenely in its normal upright position or leaning just slightly downward and toward the viewer. And, finally, again let us note, in no previous artistic representation of the scene is the saint's mouth open, except in Palma Giovane's altarpiece and even there just barely so.

Her prostrate position and splayed legs

In her autobiography Teresa never specifies where she was and what she was doing at the moment when overtaken by the transverberations. It is highly unlikely that she would have been laying down, fully clothed but barefoot, on her bed or on the floor. Despite its being usually described as autobiography, Teresa's *Book of My Life* (especially from Chapter 8 onward) is more accurately an exposition of her experiences in striving for spiritual perfection through an ever-deepening series of forms of prayer, composed at the request of her confessor. Hence, although she does not say so explicitly, we assume that the transverberations occurred while she was at prayer, which is how cloistered Carmelites spend most of their day, in any event. If at prayer, then she was most likely in a chapel. It also means that she was most likely and most devoutly on her knees, which was the usual posture for prayer in pre-modern times. This is how we see Teresa in all of the aforementioned pre-Bernini depictions of the scene: firmly kneeling either on the ground or

at a communion rail. In great contrast, Bernini has the saint in a semi-prostrate position, as if she were about to fully recline on a bed or the floor. If she started out in a kneeling position at the beginning of the experience, she had decidedly left that state behind by the time we reach the moment depicted here by Bernini, as the angel raises his arrow and unwraps her mantle. Irving Lavin acknowledges this anomaly vis-à-vis documented truth but quickly explains it away by claiming that in reality Bernini is here combining a representation of the transverberation with a reference to Teresa's known episodes of levitation, as evidenced by the cloud which supports her.[50] Perhaps. But if that is the case, then Lavin invalidates the oft-repeated claim (albeit never made by him) that the artist was simply and faithfully illustrating Teresa's own literal account of the transverberation.

Not only does Bernini idiosyncratically place Teresa in a near prostrate position, he deliberately places her two legs in an unmistakably open position. Although only her two bare feet are visible, we can easily trace the exact position of Teresa's legs thanks to the contours of the drapery and the position of her feet. The result is a Saint Teresa not only about to be fully prostrate but also with her legs patently splayed apart. They are not exceedingly wide-open, granted, but nonetheless open enough to draw attention to this egregious detail – egregious, because like a person's dress in early modern art and society, her or his "body language" was precisely coded. And in that code, what did the open legs of a prostrate (or even semi-prostrate) woman signify? There is no mystery about this: copulation, consensual or otherwise, as we see conspicuously in Titian's *Rape of Europa* (fig. 7).

Irving Lavin did not notice Teresa's splayed legs or, if he did, chose not to mention them. However, regarding her prostrate position, he again attempts to come to Bernini's defense on the matter by claiming that such a position is fully justifiable inasmuch as the artist was invoking the entirely conventional theme of Teresa's mystical marriage to Jesus – or so he presumes, since Bernini himself left not a word of description or explanation regarding his *St. Teresa*. The theme of mystical marriage in the case of female mystics (such as the two Saint Catherines, of Siena and of Alexandria) is indeed conventional and a

decorous reference to it may have been here justified. But, if that is what Bernini indeed was invoking, his visual depiction of the event is neither conventional nor decorous: among all representations of the mystical marriage of a female saint, you will never find an intimate scene involving the couple alone, Jesus standing over a prostrate female whose legs are open in anticipation of the consummation of that union. Indeed, more often than not the Jesus who appears is the *infant* Jesus held by his mother Mary, with the female saint piously kneeling, her expressionless face humbly directed downward, usually in the company of other saints or angels as witnesses. We see this, for example, in Correggio's *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria*, a composition entirely typical of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century renditions of the scene that remained fundamentally unaltered despite the profound changes in artistic style over time (fig. 8).

The overall compositional structure

Bernini may have decisively rejected what had already become conventional features of artistic depiction of Teresa's transverberation, but that does not mean he did not borrow from the artistic tradition when casting his scene. He did indeed look to the past and borrowed from it what he considered a suitable model for the overall composition of his work. Though he left no written statement of this, that older model was patently evident to his contemporaries, most notably, that one anonymous critic of his, author of the anti-Bernini diatribe of circa 1670, *Il Costantino messo alla berlina* (Constantine brought to the pillory). This is the critic who famously denounces Bernini who "in forming his St. Teresa in the church of the Vittoria, dragged that most pure Virgin not only into the Third Heaven, but into the dirt, to make a Venus not only prostrate but prostituted...."[51] This anonymous contemporary is too often dismissed as if he were simply a disgruntled, jealous "Bernini-hater" whose judgments are to be discounted or ignored because he dared to find fault with the great artistic genius and pious Catholic Bernini who could do no wrong. Instead, we need to take very seriously his criticism.

Say what one may about the character of our anonymous critic, the fact is that he understood correctly what assuredly many others at the time noticed: that Bernini's statuary

group is at its fundamental compositional level an unmistakable recasting of the traditional, extremely popular, but also extremely profane scene of the Venus reclining in bed, attended by Cupid, carrying his ever-ready arrows of lust. In reality, the artist's inspiration may have come more directly from the very similar composition of *Danaë and the Shower of Gold*, an equally popular subject in painting, one of the most famous versions of which is that by Correggio, once belonging to Queen Christina of Sweden and now in Rome's Galleria Borghese (fig. 9). In seventeenth-century Italy it would have been virtually impossible not to have been familiar with either of these two subjects in art, so present were they in so many famous renditions as well as in the numerous painted and engraved reproductions of those renditions. And in recognizing the reclining Venus or Danaë underlying Bernini's Teresa and Seraph group, contemporary spectators would have found it almost impossible to prevent the glaring visual reference to those profane subjects from effectively influencing, if not indeed completely determining, their response to the scene. It would have been, in the best of circumstances, an annoying distraction that they would have struggled to banish from their imaginations. In the worst, it could have overtaken their imaginations entirely, despite their best efforts, making it impossible for them to focus on the sacred nature and spiritual message of the scene.

The automatic associative response here posited on the part of the seventeenth-century viewer is an inescapable reality of the psychology of human sight. Modern psychology and neuroscience have demonstrated that the act of seeing is inexorably subjective: we see what we choose to see and we see what we are accustomed to seeing.[52] In viewing a new object or image, moreover, the human mind is quick to make associations with what is stored in it from the past and "[o]nly a slight hint is enough to activate the associative faculties of the mind, and the nature of the suggestion may be of an unexpected source."[53] But this was understood even in seventeenth-century Rome, as we learn from the discourses on art by the aforementioned Sforza Pallavicino: according to Pallavicino, "looking at art implies an interaction between what is perceived and what is present in memory. The success of art is determined … by its capacity to reactivate the beholder's previous experience."[54] Directly relevant to the present argument is a case study of early

modern Italian art by Maria Loh, involving viewer response to a small canvas that depicts a charming little cupid sitting on a wall: as Loh points out, the canvas in question represented in effect a work of censorship inasmuch as it had been cut out from a larger scene depicting the familiar erotic scene of *Cupid and the Reclining Venus*. However, as an act of censorship, Loh argues, the physical removal of the naked Venus was unsuccessful

> because the presence of the cupid inescapably implied the Venus. Different versions, replicas, and copies of such images were so ubiquitous in the sixteenth century that it would have been virtually impossible not to envision the Venus that was so violently amputated from canvas. . . . Absence was in the end another form of presence, and it would have been hard for the viewer to resist filling in the obvious blank.[55]

It is hard as well to imagine the case being otherwise with Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, with its obvious echoes of the reclining Venus or Danaë underlying its composition, especially since Bernini did nothing to prevent or mitigate such a response in designing the work.

Modern scholars – like Maurizio and Marcello Fagiolo dell'Arco and Irving Lavin – acknowledge this borrowing by Bernini from the realm of erotic art, but do not problematize it as far as the issue of contemporary decorum is concerned, as if it were a morally neutral technical detail. [56] Nor did apparently Bernini himself, giving a deaf ear to the warning we heard from Mascardi about not introducing visions of Cupid and Venus when contemplating Teresa's transverberation. The anonymous author of the *Costantino messo alla berlina,* instead, did not refuse to problematize it and we can be sure he was not alone in doing so during Bernini's lifetime, even if he alone committed his condemnation to writing. It behooves us to pause on the fact of this single condemnation, since it is frequently invoked as proof that Bernini's *St. Teresa* met with fundamental praise and acceptance by his contemporaries. First, as any professional taker of popular opinion polls knows, if one person admits to feeling a certain way, you can be sure that a certain significant percentage

of the population does so as well: this is what makes sample polling reliably informative about the mindset of a large cohort of people. Secondly, that we find only a single condemnation in print is not entirely surprising to any scholar who has researched contemporary reception of works of art in early modern Italy: unfortunately, it is the rule rather than the exception that for the majority of the works of art and architecture of the period, there is relatively little documented contemporary response, positive or negative, even in the case of works universally considered masterpieces at their unveiling. There were simply few vehicles for recording, disseminating and preserving such responses and apparently less of a felt need to do so.

Furthermore, the absence of any other condemnation in print of Bernini's *Teresa* could also be explained by the great reluctance of people of that age to criticize, and much less condemn, the statue in print, for any criticism of it would have been an insult to a very powerful and wealthy cardinal belonging to a very powerful family who might not have been above seeking reprisal. In that age of absolutism, even in Rome, dissimulation – which could at times take the simple form of silence – was deemed a virtue and a necessary act of self-protection. As contemporary muckraking author (ultimately beheaded upon orders from Pope Urban VIII) Ferrante Pallavicino (1615-44) was warned at one point in his risky literary career: "As far as the personal interests of the powerful are concerned, one should either keep quiet or else praise them. The ink of those pens that are not used to celebrate their names usually end up mixed with blood."[57] Finally, we must remember the geographical location and status of the church in question: it was not a "downtown" church in the midst of a dense residential neighborhood. In 1650, the neighborhood in which the small and relatively new church of Santa Maria della Vittoria was built still represented a sparsely inhabited area within the ancient Roman walls but on the very edge of the "*abitato*" (the populated area of the city), surrounded by vineyards, farm land, gardens, and large swaths of land containing ruins of the Roman baths. True, that corner of Rome had increased in importance in the previous century as a result of the ambitious urban development program of Sixtus V (reigned 1585-90) that brought the vital element of water (the *Acqua Felice*) to the neighborhood and connected it to the rest of the city by means of new, straight roads.

However, it was still not quite on the most regularly beaten trail of the city's residents, pilgrims, and tourists. Had Bernini's chapel been installed in one of the major churches close to the center of town, it probably would have provoked even more reaction in print, whether positive or negative.

But, what about the chorus of praise accorded Bernini's *Teresa* by his contemporaries? Do they not over-rule the lone voice of the anonymous critic? No, they do not. If one examines this body of texts – and again it is a very small body indeed – they all come from partisan sources that would not utter a negative word about the Cornaro chapel, or from other sources that were simply judging it from an aesthetic perspective, not a spiritual or moral one. Two documents that fall within the latter aesthetic category are the one public notice in a contemporary issue of the *avvisi di Roma* (handwritten newsletters circulated anonymously by journalists avant-la-lettre) that records the inauguration of the chapel and a paragraph of praise of the statue included in the *Vita di Guido Ubaldo Abbatini* (a member of the Bernini workshop) by Giovanni Battista Passeri (c.1610-79).[58] In the former partisan category belongs the rest of the known documented praise: the passages in the completely "authorized" (i.e., propagandistic) biographies of Bernini by Filippo Baldinucci (1625-82) and the artist's son Domenico (1657-1723) and the small group of anonymous encomiastic poetry devoted to the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. If not directly commissioned by the Bernini family to generate positive publicity for the work, this poetry assuredly came from the hands of Bernini allies wishing to ensure a more enthusiastic reception of the work, a common propaganda strategy in Baroque Rome.[59] As if anticipating negative reactions to the erotized scene, one of the poems, by the way, ends with a pious prediction – "Thus due to your workmanship, the stone will inspire a blessed state of mind in you and in many others, when the spectator will drink divine and wondrous love which offers itself as sweet drink"– but this was mere wishful thinking.[60]

Finally, we also have a public statement from the Carmelites themselves of Santa Maria della Vittoria likewise bestowing praise upon the Cornaro Chapel and its Teresa, the February 20, 1652 letter of dedication addressed to the cardinal and signed by the prior and

the brothers of the community.[61] In order to understand correctly any such declaration from the order, however, we must remember that as of January 1647 (as we shall see below) the Cornaro Chapel effectively "belonged" to its patron Federico Cornaro (1579-1653), an eminent and powerful exponent of both the College of Cardinals of the Roman Court and the Republic of Venice. (His sculpted portrait is included by Bernini in the company of the deceased Cornaro luminaries filling the side choral loggias of the chapel.) Hence, the Carmelites dared not speak a negative word about the chapel in honor of him and his family; they too had to dissimulate for reasons of prudence and self-protection. (And as we shall also see below, in the late 1640s, the Carmelites of Santa Maria della Vittoria had an especially acute need of protection.) Furthermore, for the Carmelites to publicly criticize any aspect of the chapel would in effect detract from the honor and glory they sought to bestow upon their foundress, Teresa. As William Barcham, Cornaro's first modern biographer, states categorically: "publications praising St. Teresa, Cornaro and the chapel and issuing under the auspices of the Discalced are undeniably biased and single-minded in point of view; these writings were interested in neither the patron's motives nor the artist's resources but only in exalting the Spanish mystic over the altar."[62]

IV. THE CORNARO COMMISSION: HIDDEN BEHIND THE SCENES

The sensual luxury and extravagant cost (amounting to over 12,000 *scudi*) of the Cornaro Chapel and Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* were and are flagrantly contrary to the spirit of a vowed celibate woman who made a return to radical poverty and simplicity of lifestyle the objectives of her apostolic mission as reformer of the Carmelite order. We are led to wonder: during the planning phase of the chapel's design, did the Carmelite friars have any say in the matter? Was their input solicited? There is no evidence to suggest an affirmative answer to either question. Indeed, what we know about the origins of this project[63] instead suggests

that they would have been obliged to be entirely submissive to the desires and demands of Cardinal Cornaro while Cornaro, in turn, setting firmly aside any concerns for both expense and decorum, would appear to have given unbridled liberty to the artistic fancy of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, himself giving free rein to his own imagination and, perhaps, also unconscious drives. What motivated all of the parties involved in this unprecedented, "envelope-pushing" work of artistic-spiritual-dynastic ambition? In two words, zeal and desperation.

The origins of the Cornaro chapel commission begin with a most curious fact: on January 22, 1647 the Carmelites ceded to Cardinal Cornaro full, perpetual rights to the chapel absolutely free of charge. This is a phenomenon virtually unheard of in the history of early modern Rome: to ensure their financial survival, Roman churches depended on the "sale" (for devotional purposes only, of course) of side chapels and any other monetizable space within their buildings. So why did the Carmelites make such a generous offer? The most recently published, newly uncovered evidence strongly suggests that the act, if generous, was not gratuitous or disinterested. In Rome, the prevailing maxim of interpersonal transactions, even in ecclesiastical spheres, was "One hand washes the other." In the first modern, critical, and thoroughly documented biography of Federico Cornaro, *Grand in Design* (2001), the already-cited William Barcham revealed for the first time the behind-the-scenes series of events that led up to the 1647 Carmelite "gift" to Cornaro. What Barcham uncovered makes it extremely difficult, for him and for us, to avoid the conclusion that the Carmelites offered this extravagant gift, to put it bluntly, as a bribe: specifically, to prevent the closing of their scandal-ridden seminary (physically attached to the church) by purchasing the favor of one of the three cardinals on the ad hoc papal inspectional committee, Federico Cornaro. "In other words, was there a *quid pro quo*? . . . Though the actual dialogue of the script is lacking, every piece of information points to this scenario."[64] On a more pious, but still pragmatic note, in addition to Cornaro's crucial intercession needed to avoid a public scandal involving their order, the Carmelites, through their gift, would also finally obtain the monument to their foundress that they had long desired but could not afford.

Cornaro, apparently, readily agreed to the chapel's dedication to Teresa of Avila for at the same time he too obtained what he longed desired, a permanent monument on Roman soil to the memory of his family's illustrious history. This would be the most plausible answer to the long-discussed question of how to explain Cornaro's not-at-all self-evident choice of a Carmelite Church and a chapel dedicated to Teresa of Avila as the locus of his family's funerary monument. Before Barcham's research, virtually all scholars had simply accepted the pious explanation first given by Bernini's youngest son and biographer, Domenico:

> In the same year during which Urban's death took place, Cardinal Federico Cornaro renounced the patriarchy of Venice, his homeland, after fulfilling the duties of that office with an outstanding display of virtue for the space of twelve years. He subsequently returned to Rome where he lived as a true mirror of probity to the world in the continual exercise of works as pious as they were glorious. Already of advanced age, the cardinal attended to nothing more assiduously than to preparing himself for that first and last great journey that is death. Since he bore special devotion to Saint Teresa, he resolved to honor this saint by erecting a magnificent chapel in the Church of Our Lady of Victory of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, in which chapel he would also construct his own tomb.[65]

Repeating unquestioningly Domenico's claim of Federico's "special devotion" to Teresa, modern scholars (most notably, Irving Lavin) have explained that the cardinal's devotion to Teresa and to the Discalced Carmelite order began during his tenure as Patriarch of Venice.[66] Instead, Barcham's lengthy investigation into the question arrives at entirely different conclusions: "[I]n point of fact, Federico's episcopal tenure had nothing to do with the order's establishment in Venice during his reign nor did he form close relations with the Discalced in that twelve-year period . . . . In sum, evidence of Cornaro's devotion to Teresa before he built the chapel is entirely wanting."[67]

Moreover, recent archival research into the Roman life of Federico, specifically his finances – conducted by both Barcham and Caterina Napoleone – also gives the lie to the white-washed, spiritually edifying portrait of the cardinal propagated by apologist Domenico Bernini and repeated by historians thereafter: Cornaro did not come to Rome in order to end his life in pious, ascetic retirement. Rather, out of what the Venetian Ambassador to the Roman Court famously called a "most zealous (*zelantissimo*) desire for the advancement of his homeland" – and of his family that was inextricably connected to the destiny of that homeland – he came to Rome to take up an active life as a "Venetian politician working at the papal court," with all the behind-the-scenes maneuvering and deal-making that such a life requires. In the process, he lived and spent extravagantly.[68] This has recently been demonstrated on the basis of ample financial documentation: Federico, notes Caterina Napoleone, "led a life of great luxury, as indicated ... from his private expenditures, recorded in payments registered at the Banco di Santo Spirito."[69] Such a glaringly unedifying lifestyle makes it hard to believe he would have been also seeking the papal throne in these years, as some might suppose: his sort of luxury-loving behavior may have been acceptable in a papal candidate before the Protestant Reformation, but decidedly not afterwards.

As for reports, contemporary and later, claiming that Cornaro had departed Venice for Rome for reasons of poor health, Barcham again corrects the record, pointing out that "[l]etters he wrote to the government asking for permission to leave his post [as Patriarch of Venice] reveal that his primary concerns were political." In Federico's case, those political concerns were also dynastic for, as the Cardinal himself had written, he had long dreamed of immortalizing in some magnificent public way "the memory of the grandeur and prosperity of our House."[70] To be sure, Cornaro would have probably preferred that his family's immortalized memory be housed in some far more historic and centrally located church in Rome, but those locales were far harder to come by (due to the costly factor of supply and demand) and so, why not take advantage of the opportunity offered by the plight of the Carmelites of Santa Maria della Vittoria?

When we turn to the artist responsible for the Cornaro Chapel, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, we complete the picture of a web of blatantly pragmatic, conveniently intersecting self-interest here motivating the decisions and behavior of the major players in this drama. In January 1647, in the tragic aftermath of the utter failure of his dismantled bell towers for St. Peter's basilica – an enormous shame for him, both professionally and financially – Bernini was just as desperate as the Carmelites.[71] At the very nadir of his career, he too would exploit the opportunity of the very wealthy Federico's desire to build a chapel monument to the Cornaro clan in order to extricate himself from his own dire personal situation. He would restore his public image by creating something extravagantly "marvelous" that would stupefy his contemporaries with its artistic originality and technical skill, beyond anything he had done thus far produced. And he would do so even if it meant "pushing the envelope" to a shocking degree, as far as religious decorum was concerned. Cornaro's commission was a way out of the shipwreck of Bernini's career. This was the state of mind in which Bernini conceived and executed his *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Although – or precisely because – transgressive, Bernini's *Saint Teresa* would not only rescue him from ruin but would also make both the cardinal and the Carmelites happy: it would attract crowds of almsgiving people to that chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria meant to celebrate a dynasty and a saint in the form of the jaw-dropping artistic spectacle conjured up by Bernini. And so indeed it has, in every increasing number, since its unveiling all these centuries later.[72]

We today may appreciate Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* as a poignantly more accurate, more insightful depiction of the true physical and emotional reality of mystical union than those of his predecessors, a work far ahead of its times. Nonetheless, in the seventeenth century, when it came to the serious business of religious art for public consumption, the Church was well aware of the mighty power of sight to ignite, with even the meagerest amount of fuel, the ever-latent spark of lust within the human heart. It thus placed priority upon the moral safety and the distraction-free – certainly, titillation-free – spiritual edification of the faithful, far above physical or emotional accuracy and insight. It also expected artists creating works for devotional purposes to respect that same priority. Thus, *pace* Walther Weibel and the artist's other defenders, it is precisely when we examine

that work from the more thoroughly reconstructed historical context and mentality of contemporary Catholic catechism here proposed, that we must conclude that Bernini had indeed crossed a seventeenth-century line of decorum.

But this leaves us, however, with question: Why would Bernini have run the risk of doing this further damage to his reputation at such a delicate moment in his life? My answer: Because he knew he could get away with it. He knew he could deflect charges of indecency by making the same arguments that his modern defenders make: “I was only following the saint’s own description.” “There is no nudity and hardly any bare flesh in the work.” And: “Do you not know from the Song of Songs and the personal accounts of mystics throughout the ages that mystical union often entails elements of the carnal and the sensual?” But these arguments, as this essay has endeavored to demonstrate, would have been as specious in the seventeenth century as they are today.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, 1648-50. Rome: Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 2. Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle the Elder. *The Transverberation of St. Teresa*, from the *Vita B. Virginis Teresiae a Iesu*, first ed. 1613. Image: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library, Williamstown, MA.

Figure 3. Anton Wierix III. *The Transverberation of St. Teresa,* ca. 1614-22. Image: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 4. Palma Giovane. *The Transverberation of St. Teresa,* 1615. Image: Basilica of San Pancrazio, Rome.

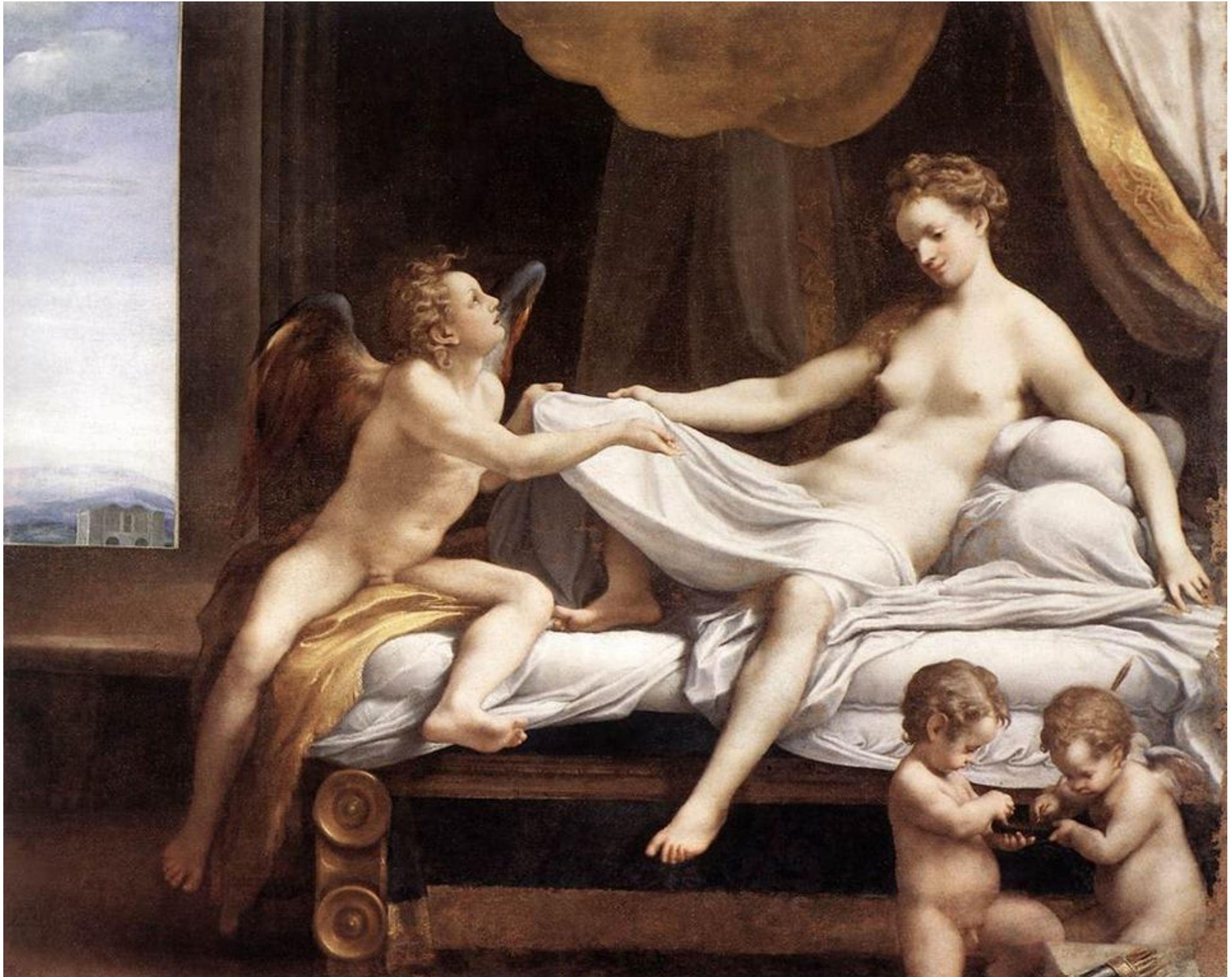
Figure 5. Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, detail.

Figure 6. Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *Modello* for *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, 1648-49. Image: Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Figure 7. Titian. *The Rape of Europa,* 1650-52. Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 8. Correggio. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, 1510-15. Image: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Figure 9. Correggio. *Danaë*, 1530. Rome, Galleria Borghese. Image: Wikimedia.



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NOTES

[1] Burckhardt's *Der Cicerone* (7th ed., Leipzig, 1898, 910) quoted by Weibel, 77. The Council of Trent's decree on art, "On the invocation, veneration, and relics of saints, and on sacred images," was promulgated at Session 25, December 3-4, 1563. All translations are my own, except where otherwise stated. I have supplied the original texts for sources for which there exists no scholarly modern English translation.

[2] Walther Weibel's pages on Bernini's Teresa in his *Jesuitismus und Barockskulptur in Rom* (1909) represent the most influential of the modern defenses of the statue's decorum. Weibel's defense has been accepted and echoed by many scholars, one of whom describes it as "a pioneering attempt to historicize Bernini's representations of ecstasy rather than judge them by anachronistic moral standards" (Currie, 141n.412). Instead, the present essay argues, Weibel's superficial "historicization" leaves much to be desired in its understanding of orthodox Catholic thought on the issue in the early modern period. For other defenses of Bernini's decorum, see Salinger, 108 ("Although Bernini showed the saint as a frail and delicately youthful figure, quite different from the sturdy, capable woman described by her biographers, his interpretation of the experiences adheres with the closest exactitude to Saint Teresa's account of it, except that the angel appears on her right hand rather than her left, as she so explicitly stated"); Cannata, 414; Lavin, 107-23; Sturm, 2015, 123; and the already cited Currie, 141. In representing the views of Bernini's "defenders," I also have in mind the unpublished comments made at public presentations of my argument at professional conferences, including the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting, Boston, 2016.

[3] Sutherland Harris, 111: "Bernini evidently did not intend a lascivious interpretation as he covered Teresa's body with layers of heavy drapery so that only her face, one limp hand, and her feet can be seen."

[4] Weibel, 85: "The reproach of lasciviousness was, therefore, first made by later generations; but this invalidates it, since we can only judge the intentions of the artist with the eyes of his own time."

[5] Teresa of Avila, 1976, 193-94 (29.13). Teresa was specifically speaking in this line about the pain she felt, but the same remark, of course, is applicable to the whole of her experience.

[6] Schama, 78.

[7] For Augustine's invention of original sin, see Pagels, 98-126; and Greenblatt, 81-119.

[8] For modern editions in English of both commentaries, see Augustine of Hippo, 1991.

[9] Augustine, 2018, 227-28 (10.35).

[10] Gregory the Great, 286-87 (21.II.4).

[11] *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria*, 93-94.

[12] Corbett, 383-84.

[13]Peraldus, 207-98 (Tomus Primus, Tractatus tertius, "De temperantia," Caput XVIII, "De temperantia delectationum secundum visum, auditum et olfactum").

[14] Wilkins, 133.

[15] Bernardino of Siena, quoted in Mormando, 1999, 118. The original Italian text reads: “Se una donna di voi si spogliasse innua, e fusse costà ritta . . . a quanti uomini e donne credi che venisse tentazione? Io ti dico: solo per vedere, a molti e molti."

[16] Mormando, 1999, 118.

[17] Bernardino of Siena, 1950-65, 259: "Novi personam quae, dum contemplabatur humanitatem Christi pendentis in cruce (pudet dicere et horrendum est etiam cogitare), sensualiter et turpiter polluebatur et foedabatur; quod aperte praedicare discretum non reputo." For discussion of the larger context in which this passage is found, see Mormando, 1996, esp. 38-39.

[18] Harrison, 243.

[19] For the history behind the Tridentine decree on religious art, see O'Malley, 28-48.

[20] *Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, 235-36.

[21] For the criticism of Pulzone's *Lamentation* in the Clementine visitation report, see Mansour, 146-47. For Paleotti's and Gilio's criticisms, see Mormando, 1999b, 114.

[22] These cases can be readily found in any of the scholarly biographies of Caravaggio.

[23] For Lapide’s work as the “universal commentary,” Creehan, 216. The *Commentaria* were published in many separate volumes over a span of years, with the first complete edition appearing in Antwerp in 1681.

[24] For Oliva's career and sermon publications, see Mormando, 2018, 187-94.

[25] The quotation about Eve's fall comes from Oliva, 1712, Vol. 1:316, Sermon 27, "Nella vigilia del Beato Luigi:" "[C]on esattissma custodia de' sensi, si tenga lontana la tentatione dall'anima. Negligente in ciò Eva, perche vide, mangiò, e cadde." For the image of the spark of lust becoming a conflagration, see the same sermon, 322, para. 41. For the same subject, see, e.g., Oliva, 1670, 707-09, para. 419-20 (sermon on St. Filippo Neri).

[26] I thank Mr. Thomas Santa Maria for bringing to my attention Bellarmino's teachings on the five senses. For further information on the topic, see Santa Maria's Masters of Sacred Theology thesis, "The Senses and Their Custody in the Sermons and Spiritual Writings of Robert Bellarmine," Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry, 2016.

[27] Bellarmino, 175-76 (I.16).

[28] Pallavicino, 424 (3.2.50): "Il dimostrano con buona, e con rea operazione, e le divote lagrime, che spesso traggon dagli occhi alle persone spirituali i ben formati ritratti del tormentato Redentore, e le fiamme pestilenti, che sono accese ne' petti giovanili dalle immagini oscene, le quali con obbrobio dell'umana sfacciataggine tal'ora pagansi gran danaro per esser mantici della sopita lascivia: comperandosi, come prezioso, il desiderio medesimo di peccare."

[29] van Gastel, 2017, 169-170. Note, however, that the translation provided by van Gastel is not literal: for some reason he substitutes Pallavicino's metaphor of sensual images as "bellows" inciting flames with, instead, that of "doormen" opening doors, thus eliminating the author's adherence to the traditional and more emotionally charged "inflammatory" vocabulary used to describe the grave sin of lust.

[30] Barberini, Sonnet 49: "Mortal bellezza ascoso il foco tiene / Per assarlir chi'l guardo non reprime: / Ahi mentre cauto à terra non l'adime, / Ratto l'ardorgli scorre entro le vene. / Ch'è varco l'occhio al cor, onde sen viene / L'imagin dell'oggetto, e vi s'imprime. / Se dunque sia, che sua salute stime, / Schivi mirar là dove non conviene."

[31] For the influence of the Collaert-Galle's images, see Costa Saldanha, para. 24 (unpaginated).

[32] The painting was later moved to the Basilica of San Pancrazio, where it is currently located. Recent restoration of the altarpiece revealed the date, 1615, painted on the canvas, thus likely making it the very first public altarpiece dedicated to Teresa in Rome (Pamela Jones, personal communication, February 27, 2021). For further discussion of the altarpiece, see Kalina, 198-99. Palma also created an engraving based upon the same altarpiece, used in an illustrated life of the saint, which can be viewed at https://coelifluus.wordpress.com/2016/08/27/proper-preface-of-saint-teresa-in-the-carmelite-missal/

[33] Kalina, 198-99, suggests that the altarpiece "could have inspired Bernini, who perhaps wanted to compete with a work he must have known well."

[34] Of near identical composition (minus the altar rail) are the engravings by Karel van Mallery (1571-1635), reproduced by Lavin, fig. 263; and Anton Wierix II (1555-1604), which can be viewed at https://colonialart.org/artworks/100A (taken from Marie Mauquouy-Hendrickx, *Les estampes des Wierix*, Bruxelles: Bibliotheque Royale Albert 1er, 1978-83, cat. 1295). As for the presence of God the Father, Jesus, and the other angels that we see in visual representations of the transverberation, Teresa makes no mention of their presence in her autobiography: their inclusion in the works of art in question may thus not only be a means of further solemnizing the scene but also, I would argue, of safeguarding its decorum through the addition of multiple, holy eyewitnesses to the event.

[35] Bernini's portrait drawing of Mascardi, fully and exquisitely executed, is now in the collection of the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

[36] Mascardi, 140: "E qual profane seminator di menzogne mi và hora scioccamente rammemorando quell'arciero Cupido, che non dal Chaos, come Hesiodo sognò, ma dalla confusione degli humani pensieri originato, vien dipinto con l'arco d'oro, e con le faci? Non è, non è, Signori, questo bugiardo Nume sagittario de' cuori, ma la viltà de mortali, che nell'otio partorisce, e co'l lusso và nutricando le sue voglie malnate, doppiamente sacrilege, con gli honori della divinità cuopre l'infamia de' suoi sozzi piaceri…"

[37] Salinger, 108; Sturm, 123: "venato di sensuale misticismo senza tuttavia correre alcun rischio di distaccarsi dall'ortodossia agiografica del cattolicesimo romano." Sturm prefaces his assertion repeating the conventional defense of Bernini, i.e., that he based the "realism" ("realismo") of his sculpture "directly upon Teresa's own authentic autobiographical writings" ("direttamente sugli autografi autobiografici di Teresa").

[38] Teresa of Avila, 1976, 193 (29.13): "The Lord wanted me while in this state to see *sometimes* the following vision" (emphasis added).

[39] Ribera, 211 (Libro 4, Cap. 1).

[40] Ribera, 37 (Libro 1, Cap. 10) for the transverberations. We now know that the first transverberation seems to have occurred around the year 1559 (Berbara, 278).

[41] Lavin, 112.

[42] Mormando, 2011a, 164.

[43] Teresa of Avila, 1985, 322, para. 12.

[44] Ribera, Libro 4, Cap. 1, 212.

[45] Teresa of Avila, 1985, 322, para. 12 (emphasis added).

[46] The first to depict Teresa barefoot seems to have been Parisian publisher-engraver Jacques Honervogt (Jacob Honervogt or Honnervogt, ca.1623-ca.1694) in his frontispiece for the oft-reissued *Compendio della vita della serafica vergine S. Teresa di Giesu*, first edition, 1647 (Lavin, fig. 287). Honervogt (born of a German father of the same name) also depicts her, again seemingly for the first time, in the aftermath of the transverberation, reclining on the ground as if she had fainted, supported by an angel with a cloud of heavenly witnesses above. As for the *Compendio,* it circulated anonymously in the seventeenth century but in a later century its author was identified as Fra Alessio della Passione.

[47] In the extant terracotta *modello* by Bernini of the statue in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (fig. 6), the left foot is now missing, having broken off at some point over the centuries (Anthony Sigel, personal communication, August 14, 2020).

[48] Weibel, 84.

[49] In the habit of many female orders but not the Carmelites, the forehead is also bound with a separate covering, the bandeau.

[50] Lavin, 121-22.

[51] Bauer, 53. For a new, unabridged edition of the text see Montanari, 2016, 304-18, who also corrects the long-standing scholarly mistake that had dated the text to 1725.

[52] Mather, 53.

[53] Taylor, 153.

[54] van Gastel, 2013, 206.

[55] Loh, 95-96.

[56] Fagiolo dell'Arco, 261; Lavin, 123. They cite as model for Bernini not *Cupid and the Reclining Venus* but rather *Danaë and the Shower of Gold*. Lavin, 121 and 123, explicitly acknowledges Bernini's eroticization of the scene in general, but, again, refuses to problematize any of it.

[57] For dissimulation in Bernini's Rome, see Mormando, 2011a, 36-38; 51, for the warning to Ferrante Pallavicino about the dangers of criticizing the rich and powerful (contained in a letter from Antonio Lupis, another popular author of the time).

[58] For the *avviso* on Bernini's *St. Teresa* and Passeri's praise thereof, see Mormando, 2001a, 159.

[59] As Montanari, 2003, 180, points out.

[60] "Inde tibi multisque dabit, te auctore, beatam / E saxo mentem, cum qui se dulce propinat / Divinum mirumque bibet spectator amorem." Montanari, 2003, 194, IX, from the poem beginning "Exanimes artus animat, iam numine plenos."

[61] For the Carmelite dedicatory letter to Cornaro, see Lavin, 82-84. The letter was dedicating to the cardinal the Italian translation of a Spanish volume on mental prayer.

[62] Barcham, 2001, 352.

[63] For the most recent histories of the building and decorating of the Cornaro chapel, see Lavin, 107-24; Barcham, 1993; Napoleone; Carloni; Barcham, 2001, 328-87; and Sturm, 116-24.

[64] Barcham, 2001, 346-47; see 344-49 for the investigations into the scandal-ridden seminary.

[65] Mormando, 2011b, 158.

[66] Kalina, 193: "The purchase of this common view [that Cornaro's devotion to Teresa began early in his career] together with the well-deserved authority of Lavin's monograph [*Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*] has meant that some authors continue to adhere to this thesis...." Kalina's n.3 gives a list of some of the authors in question.

[67] Barcham, 2001, 331, 348. For an explicitly political explanation of Cornaro's commission – i.e., his desire to further ingratiate himself with the Spanish Hapsburgs – see Kalina.

[68] Barcham, 2001, 355 and 360, for the "*zelantissimo*" quotation; Barcham, 1993, 822 for the "Venetian politician" quotation.

[69] Napoleone, 174; for the same conclusion, see Barcham, 1993, 821-22.

[70] Barcham, 2001, 244.

[71] For a summary of the bell tower fiasco, see Mormando, 2011a, 150-54, with further bibliography.

[72] For the competition among Roman religious orders to attract crowds of pilgrims, tourists, and the ordinary faithful into their churches – necessary for the economic survival of both the buildings and the orders themselves – see Mormando, 2018, 200-01.