

Albrecht Dürer and the Influence of the Reformation

デューラーの絵画における宗教改革の影響

外国語学部 国際文化交流学科 4 年

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本論文は、16 世紀の画家アルブレヒト・デューラー (Albrecht Dürer, 1471-1528) の作品におけるマルティン・ルター (Martin Luther, 1483-1546) の宗教改革の影響を考察するものである。

1517 年に発表されたルターの 95 条の論題にはじまった宗教改革は、当時の神に対する考え、信仰のあり方を変えたのみならず、絵画の価値に対する考え方にも変化を及ぼしたとされている。16 世紀ヨーロッパを席卷した宗教改革に伴う偶像崇拜への批判は、無数の絵画や聖像の破壊へとつながった。

ゆえに、当時 50 歳を目前にしていたデューラーが宗教改革をどう捉え、自らの作品をどのように

位置づけたのか、という問題は、この時代に絵画 (宗教画) がどのように捉えられていたのか、そして画家はいかにして宗教画における偶像崇拜の問題と向き合ったのかということを考える上での重要な事例と言えるだろう。

デューラーは、この問題を重大なものとして捉え、宗教画の価値を常に自身に問い続けた。そして、ルターの宗教画に対する考え—絵画は偶像崇拜の要因となってはならない—を尊重していた。

本論文は、デューラーの作品における当時の宗教的要因の影響を考察するとともに、従来のカトリック的思想とも関連付けながら、彼が目指した新たな宗教画の形態について検討する。

The influence of Reformation on Albrecht Dürer's art has been discussed by many scholars. It is commonly acknowledged that Albrecht Dürer, both as a concerned Christian and as a thinking artist, was deeply affected by the Protestant Reformation.¹

The rise of Reformation which was lead by Martin Luther, not just have changed the attitude toward God and belief, but also have changed the way of thinking and the value of paintings. In the realm of higher culture certainly one of the most notorious consequences of the Protestant Reformation was the destruction of countless paintings and statues in the wave of iconoclasm that swept parts of Europe in the sixteenth century.²

At the time when the wave of Reformation was rising, Dürer was getting towards fifty. As a mature, experienced painter, it is said that he was in a two-year interval between the spring of 1518 to the summer of 1520. Only a few works dating from this period have survived, and it seems almost as if the creative energy of the artist, who was not yet fifty, had temporarily dried up.³ However, from 1518 onwards, Dürer's art starts to change. It is said that at this time he was particularly interested in

conveying an impression of space, achieved solely through the extreme plasticity of his figures, which were mostly half-length or only head and shoulders.⁴ He concentrated on the most expressive parts, the head and the hands, stressing their individuality and thereby making even his pictures with religious subjects seem like portraits.⁵ These would be an important point when looking through other paintings which he had done onwards.

In this Reformation breakthrough, word and faith eclipsed all other religious objects and practices.⁶ Therefore, it is an interesting theme to think how Dürer was influenced by Reformation and to what extent. How did he deal with the problem of iconoclasm, and how did he maintain his life as an artist in this trial.

The iconoclastic riots and the questioning of the value and function of art that accompanied Luther's tenets of faith affected Dürer more particularly than is commonly assumed.⁷ It is obvious that for the first time, encountering the Reformation, Dürer had a struggling time. One of the main facts supporting the idea that Dürer spent time questioning the value of religious art is the radical decline in his artistic

production after 1522/23.⁸

Dürer withheld publication of his St. Philip engraving for three years (from 1523 to 1526) at least partly because during that time he was pondering the use and abuse of religious art.⁹

Luther, as one of the leader of Protestant Reformation, however thought paintings are important. On one hand he viewed image making as a natural part of the psychological processes of man.¹⁰ On the other hand he mentioned that images must not be allowed to become the occasion of idolatry.

If so, how did Dürer find his way out. Thinking about the value of paintings and its functions, Dürer too, was against the excesses of image worship.¹¹ However, he could not have conducted the abolition of all religious images, since this would have meant not only losing much of the work on which his livelihood depended, but also that an essential part of his work so far would be called into question.¹²

In this instable situation as an artist, Dürer, with reserve, executes the woodcut, *The Last Supper*. (figure.1) This has been interpreted as an expression of support for the evangelical movement.¹³

In portraying a Last Supper of explicit doctrine at this time, Dürer clearly conveyed his deep involvement with the Reformation movement and his awareness of its doctrinal concerns.¹⁴ It represents the announcement of the betrayal by Judas¹⁵ which is an important theme related to Christ's sufferings.



Fig.1. Dürer, *The Last Supper*. Woodcut. 214 × 300.

As we look through this woodcut, it appears that without any color, as a woodcut, the theme of *The Last Supper* is described in a simple way.

There is almost nothing on the table but just a one glass (chalice), no food or other object. Instead of

that, there are loaves of bread and a pitcher located on the right hand side of the painting. This seems interesting and makes us think why the bread is not on the table.

From the way of locating these objects, it seems that Dürer's *The Last Supper* has a deeper meaning in symbolism. The bread and the pitcher on the floor, makes us think about the themes in Eucharist. The most widely accepted arguments for the image's Protestant content have concerned the Eucharist and the Mass.¹⁶

It is argued that this woodcut has been understood as an expression of Protestant utraquism. The visual evidence for utraquism is the prominence of the chalice on the drastically foreshortened tabletop.¹⁷ Utraquism, which is related to the Bohemian reform movement, is said to be galvanizing issue in the early part of the German and Swiss Reformation. Therefore, it could be suggested that this woodcut of *The Last Supper* underpins the movement of the Reformation.

Concerning the relationship with Luther, it is clear that Dürer tried to respond to the new movement of Reformation by molding the theme of *The Last Supper* into a new style. The presence of both eucharistic elements, bread and wine, the emphasis on the sacramental cup (from which so many newly converted laymen desired to drink) and the absence of the sacrificial lamb, the emphasis on Christ's establishment of the evangelical community and the de-emphasis of the traditional drama of betrayal (Judas, like the lamb, is now absent)¹⁸ are said to be the elements which clearly indicates that Dürer attempted to create his work with a new Lutheran point of view, not the traditional Catholic one.

Drawing only from the historical evidence, it seems justifiable to assume that Dürer, who reacted immediately to the eucharistic controversy, would also have responded to the problems of idolatry and iconoclasm.¹⁹

These themes are seen prominently in other Dürer's painting which was done in this period.

In 1526, Dürer executed *The Four Apostles*. (Figure 2) This was dedicated to the city council of his native Nuernberg.²⁰

In this painting, it is said that Dürer seems to have arranged the biblical writers according to a Protestant hierarchy so as to display, in their

foreground placements, the primacy of John and Paul, the main source of Luther's teachings on salvation.²¹ Moreover, what is interesting about this painting is that the title of this painting does not match, as only the Apostles John, Peter, and Paul are represented on the two panels; the fourth figure is Mark the Evangelist.²²

The reason why St. John and St. Peter is so emphasized in this painting is related to the Luther's *Septembertestament*. Luther established the very concept of canonical hierarchy, claiming that some books were "nobler" than others: "Therefore John's Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them."²³



Fig.2. Dürer, *The Four Apostles*. 1526. Oil. 204 × 74 each. Munich.

There are other important themes in this painting, and one of this is about the inscription written below in the painting. It has long been recognized that the Biblical inscriptions painted at the base of the panels constitute an important part of the work and must be taken into consideration in any attempt to understand its full meaning.²⁴ The texts are taken from the writings of the four holy men represented and pertain to the dangers of 'false prophets,' heresy, and Pharisaism.²⁵

The meaning of the words are mentioned as "All worldly rulers in these dangerous times should give good heed that they receive not human misguidance

for the Word of God, for God will have nothing added to His Word nor taken away from it."²⁶

However, there are still arguments concerning the meaning of this phrase. Scholars are discussing whether this has a meaning of Protestant radicalism or a comeback of the idea of Catholicism.

It is interesting to think what Dürer intended when he dedicated this panel to the city council. He dedicated this as a 'gift', and he was rewarded for this.

As thinking why Dürer dedicated this to a city council, not to a church, is a debatable thing.

There are arguments that this was not intended to be dedicate to the council.

One cannot fail to observe that the shape of the two panels is very reminiscent of that of the wing sections found in a triptych of the traditional medieval type.²⁷

From these points of view, we could somehow see the unstable position of Dürer. It makes us think that he perhaps dedicated this painting to the council so that his painting has his own 'place' to settle.

Concerning about the style of the painting – which is considered to resemble a wing sections found in a triptych – makes us think that Dürer still kept the tradition in his mind, even he was influenced by the Reformation.

This theme, the mixture of influence of Reformation and the tradition, seems to be seen in the paintings of *The Madonna with the Pear*, (Figure 3) which was dedicated in the last period of his life.



Fig.3. Dürer, *The Madonna with the Pear*. 1526. Oil. 43 × 32.

This was the last picture of Madonna in his life. The carefully thought-out composition, delicate colors and sensitive expressions that characterize this painting testify to Dürer's continuing veneration of the Madonna.²⁸

The Madonna (Virgin) looking toward the child with tenderness, is holding a pear as a symbol of Christ's love for mankind.²⁹

The face expression and the angle of the Virgin somehow resemble the early Dürer's works of Madonna. (Figure 4) It seems like as if Dürer turned back to his early style. However, the *The Madonna with a Pear* is dressed like ordinal women, and the child wearing clothes, which might be related with the influence of Luther and the Reformation. What is interesting about this painting is that after being influenced and struggling, thinking about the value of the painting in Religion, he finally came back to depict the simple theme of Virgin and the Child. It is said that by 1525 Dürer clearly defended the religious (as well as aesthetic) value of art.³⁰



Fig.4. Dürer, Virgin and Child in Front of an Archway. 1494. Oil. 47.8 × 36.

As Dürer visited to the church of St. Ursula to visit the grave of the martyr, and visited Antwerp and even attended a confession there³¹ it could be suggested that the image of God and the church was still connected to his way of thinking. Considering the influence of Reformation on Dürer's work, Therefore, it could be suggested that Dürer was somehow taking a balance between Luther's idea and the Catholic tradition.

脚 注

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- 2 Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 13.
- 3 Fedja Anzelewsky, *DÜRER: His Art and Life*. (Great Britain: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1980), 191.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 20.
- 7 Harbison, "Dürer and the Reformation", 368.
- 8 *Ibid.* 370.
- 9 *Ibid.* 368.
- 10 Christensen, *Art and the Reformation*, 51.
- 11 Anzelewsky, *DÜRER*, 225.
- 12 *Ibid.* 225.
- 13 David Hotchkiss Price, *Albrecht Dürer's Renaissance: Humanism, Reformation, and the Art of Faith*. (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 250.
- 14 Harbison, "Dürer and the Reformation", 370.
- 15 David Price, "Albrecht Dürer's 'Last Supper' (1523) and the 'Septembertestament'", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 59 (1996) 579.
- 16 Price, *Albrecht Dürer's Renaissance*, 252.
- 17 *Ibid.* 253.
- 18 Harbison, "Dürer and the Reformation", 368.
- 19 *Ibid.* 370.
- 20 Carl C. Christensen, "Dürer's 'Four Apostles' and the Dedication as a Form of Renaissance Art Patronage", *Renaissance Quarterly* 20 (Autumn, 1967) 325.
- 21 Price, *Albrecht Dürer's Renaissance*, 258.
- 22 Anzelewsky, *DÜRER*, 234.
- 23 Price, *Albrecht Dürer's Renaissance*, 258.
- 24 Christensen, "Dürer's 'Four Apostles'", 327.
- 25 *Ibid.* 327.
- 26 William Martin Conway, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, (1958), quoted in "Dürer's 'Four Apostles' and the Dedication as a Form of Renaissance Art Patronage", *Renaissance Quarterly* 20 (Autumn, 1967): 327.
- 27 Klaus Lankheit, "Dürer's 'Vier Apostel'", (1952), quoted in Carl C. Christensen, "Dürer's 'Four Apostles' and the Dedication as a Form of Renaissance Art Patronage," *Renaissance Quarterly* 20 (Autumn, 1967) 328.
- 28 Anzelewsky, *DÜRER*, 236.
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- 30 Harbison, "Dürer and the Reformation", 371.
- 31 Anzelewsky, *DÜRER*, 218.

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