PART 2

Domesticating the Divine

Domestic Portraiture in Early Modern Venice: Devotion to Family and Faith

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Thirty years ago, Peter Burke urged scholars of early modern Italy to envision portraits of the period not in museums, as we often encounter them today, '[...] but in their original setting, the houses or "palaces" of the upper classes [...]' and part of a larger culture of consumption oriented towards articulating the social role of individual and family.¹ This essay aims to answer Burke's call by examining portraits in the Venetian domestic interior, which typically contained, as I have argued elsewhere, 'props of identity' that were spiritual in scope.² Devotional images of the Virgin Mary, Christ, or saints hung on walls of both bedchambers and more public entrance halls, and religious goods, such as paternosters, devotional jewellery, prayer books and benches, and occasionally even altars, further added to the sometimes dense material culture of piety and prayer in the home.³ By considering the domestic interior as a devotional environment of which the portrait was a part, this essay challenges traditional notions of portraiture as a secular, and even autonomous, art form.⁴ I argue that in the context of the pious household, portraits may have functioned as

- 1 Burke P., *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge: 1987) 151.
- 2 The phrase 'props of identity' comes from Burke, *The Historical Anthropology* 151. On the religious goods in Venetian homes see Morse M.A., "Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian *casa*", *Renaissance Studies* 21, 2 (2007) 151–184.
- 3 Morse, "Creating Sacred Space" 159–177; and "The Venetian *portego*: Family Piety and Public Prestige", in Campbell E.J. – Miller S.R. – Consavari E.C. (eds.), *The Early Modern Domestic Interior, 1400–1700* (New York – London: 2013) 89–106. See also Kasl R., "Holy Households: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Venice", in Kasl R. (ed.), *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion* (Indianapolis: 2004) 59–89.
- 4 Classic studies of early modern Italian portraiture include: Burckhardt J., "Das Porträt in der Italienischen Malerei", in Burckhardt J. (ed.) *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte von Italien* (Basel: 1898) 145–294; Burckhardt J., *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: 1954); Pope-Hennessy J., *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art (Washington, 1963; reprint, 1966); Boehm G., *Bildnis und Individuum: Über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der Italienischen Renaissance* (Munich: 1985); Campbell L., *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries* (New Haven and London: 1990).

FIGURE 5.1 Titian, "Nobleman of the Maltese Order", 1510–1515. Oil on canvas, 80 × 64 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

PHOTO: NICOLA LORUSSO. © ALINARI / ART RESOURCE, NY

part of a domestic devotional network to establish and reinforce the religious identity and public prestige of families and individuals, all while securing salvation. Given portraiture's historical relationship with sacred imagery – in the form of donor portraits, ex-votos, and icons – as well as contemporary perceptions of salvation and the role of the family in achieving deliverance, the religious visual cultural in the home may have influenced, at least at times,

the creation, display, and ultimately, understanding of so-called independent portraits.

The religious dimension of an early modern portrait is not always obvious upon first impression. Some likenesses do make clear the pious identity of the subject with the inclusion of specifically Christian symbols or accessories, such as prayer books and rosary beads. For example, the half-visible, eight-pointed white star on the cloak of the sitter in Titian's portrait of a Knight of Malta [Fig. 5.1], from around 1515, announces the sitter's affiliation with this prestigious religious lay order, while the jewelled crucifix and glossy, black prayer beads that engage his hands signal his devout persona. In other portraits, the sitters may take on the guise of saints, such as John the Baptist, Catherine of Alexandria, or Mary Magdalene, to express their pious, and sometimes penitential, character.⁵ It is easy then to see why portraits from the period with no such clear religious markers have been labelled as secular and their function as a commemorative record of appearances.

Portraits, however, are conditional expressions whose meanings are not intrinsic to the canvas or panel itself; they depend on context – the knowledge, values, spaces, and experiences of makers and viewers.⁶ In recent decades, scholars have begun to explore this relational nature of portraiture. Burke considered the multiple social roles portraiture conveyed by 'framing' early modern likenesses in the social and cultural climate of the time;⁷ others have followed suit, investigating topics such as gender, class, and concepts of self, identity, and interiority.⁸ Bronwen Wilson has demonstrated how, in

5 Owen Hughes D., "Representing the Family: Portraits and Purpose in Early Modern Italy", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, 1 (1986) 7–38; Matthews Grieco S.F., "Models of Female Sanctity in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy", in Scaraffia L. – Zarri G. (eds.), *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: 1999) 159–175.

6 Garton J., *Grace and Grandeur: The Portraiture of Paolo Veronese* (London: 2008) 12.

7 Burke, *The Historical Anthropology* 150–167.

8 Simons P., "Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture", *History Workshop* 25, 1 (1988) 4–30; Dülberg A., *Privatporträts: Geschichte und Ikonologie einer Gattung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1990); Brilliant R., *Portraiture* (London: 1991); Gentili A. – Morel P. – Cieri Via C., *Il ritratto e la memoria: materiali* 1–3 (Rome: 1989–1993); Berger H., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture", *Representations* 46 (Spring 1994) 87–120; Simons P., "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism of Representations of Renaissance Women", in Brown A. (ed.), *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: 1995) 263–311; Woodall J., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: 1997); Syson L. – Mann N. (eds.), *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance* (London: 1998); Cranston J., *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: 2000); Wilson B., "The Renaissance Portrait: From Resemblance to Representation", in Martin J.J. (ed.), *The Renaissance World* (New York and London: 2007)

the context of portrait books with their sequence of images, readers were invited to read portraits along with the biography of the sitter, and consider one face in relation to another.⁹ Lina Bolzoni and Jodi Cranston have highlighted the affinity between portraits and poetry, and the dialogue the portrait can establish between the portrayed, the viewer, and the literary work of art.¹⁰ This relational model of understanding early modern portraiture – of considering the art form as part of an ever-shifting exchange¹¹ – indicates that there were multiple ways to understand portraits, and suggests the possibility of a likeness's meaning also being affected by the religious climate of the time. In a period when religion and piety were ever-important aspects of individual and communal identity, it seems pertinent to consider presentations of the self with respect to contemporary spiritual thought and practices of faith, and the devotional home – the setting in which Renaissance viewers typically encountered portraits – constitutes an important environment in which to begin these explorations.

Venice was a city well known for its domestic portraiture [Fig. 5.2]. The artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari made note of the Venetian tradition of portrait collections of one's kin, stating that, 'there are many portraits in all the houses of Venice, and in many gentlemen's homes one may see their fathers and grandfathers back to the fourth generation, and in some of the more noble houses back further still'.¹² The high number of portraits listed in Venetian household inventories from the sixteenth century supports Vasari's claim. The 1587 inventory of the wealthy nobleman Giovanni Simone Donà, for instance, records several portraits of his relatives, including the late Francesco Donà, who served as doge from 1545–1553, his father Gerolamo, his wife Luchesa Trevisan, Giuseppe Trevisan, and a 'Zuan Donà', in addition to an image of

452–480; Campbell L. – Falomir M. – Fletcher J. – Syson L. (eds.), *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, exh. cat., National Gallery (London: 2008); Christiansen K. – Weppelmann S. (eds.), *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: 2011).

9 Wilson B., *The World in Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto: 2005) 186–255.

10 Bolzoni L., *Il cuore di cristallo. Ragionamenti d'amore, poesia e ritratto nel Rinascimento* (Turin: 2010); Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*.

11 Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture* 1–2.

12 Vasari G., *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. G. Bull (Hammondsworth: 1987) 68. Translated quote from Fortini Brown P., *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (New Haven and London: 2004) 16. Marcantonio Michiel also documents numerous portraits in *Notizia d'opere del disegno. Edizione critica*, ed. T. Frimmel (Vienna: 1888; reprint, Florence: 2000).

FIGURE 5.2 Palma il Vecchio (Jacopo d'Antonio Negretti), "Portrait of a Gentleman", ca. 1520–1525. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 69.5 × 55.6 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art

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himself. The notary lists these portraits directly after a catalogue of religious paintings, which included: two Madonnas, one of which also featured St. John; three images of Christ, two of these depicting him carrying the cross; a Mary Magdalene; and St. John the Baptist. A couple of the religious paintings also

bore the Donà arms, thereby associating these pious figures with familial identity.¹³ While the notary gives no clear indication of the display of the paintings in the Donà collection, it is quite possible that family members viewed the portraits in relation to the sacred images that also adorned the walls. When paired with a religious painting or other Christian symbol, the portrait could become a model of virtue and the devout self, a reminder to pray for departed family members, and a means to secure the fate of souls. Hanging portraits with or near religious images and goods also clearly announced the pious and moral nature of the family to all visitors of the home. The domestic portrait in the early modern Venetian interior was not simply a secular form of commemoration, but potentially enmeshed in a devotional network that involved viewer, sitter, and divine – thereby fostering the mingling of piety to family and faith.

The Donà residence was not unique in its presentation of religious pictures. Sixteenth-century Venetian inventories indicate that over ninety percent of the Republic's households contained articles of religious significance and function.¹⁴ These post-mortem inventories list household goods of patricians and wealthy merchants, as well as artisans and individuals of lower classes.¹⁵ The number and type of devotional goods increased in most households over the course of the Cinquecento. This accumulation of religious objects indicates that Renaissance Venetians conceived of their homes as sacred space where devotional practices could be pursued and expressions of religiosity were paramount.¹⁶ Such a view of the household interior corresponds with the ideal domestic condition described by the Venetian Benedetto Arborsani in his memoir/vernacular treatise of household economy, written around 1543. Arborsani stressed the Christian and moral character of the home, even using the term *sagrestia*, or sacristy, to define the family residence as a model of divine order.¹⁷ It is within this sacred domestic environment that we should re-examine the so-called independent portraiture of the early modern period.

13 Donà also displayed the likeness of Doge Andrea Gritti (1521–1523) and a battle scene in his home. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea Notai Diversi (hereafter Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div.) busta (hereafter b.) 43, n. 57, 3 February 1587, m.c.

14 Palumbo-Fossati I., "L'interno della casa dell'artigiano e dell'arte nella Venezia del Cinquecento", *Studi Veneziani* VIII (1984) 109–154: 131; Morse, "Creating Sacred Space" 158–159.

15 Palumbo-Fossati, "L'interno della casa" 111, 117, 131.

16 Morse, "Creating Sacred Space" esp. 152.

17 Grubb J., "House and Household: Evidence from Family Memoirs", in Marini P. – Lanaro P. – Varanini G.M. (eds.), *Edilizia privata nella Verona rinascimentale* (Milan: 2000) 118–133; 121–122. The Arborsani memoir can be found in ASV, Scuola Grande di Santa

While the contents of household inventories provide evidence of how Venetians conceived of their dwellings, the documents are also frustratingly vague. They list all of the movable goods of an interior, but offer limited information about issues of display and use of objects. Venetian inventories did, however, typically catalogue objects by room, and they often list portraits in the midst of other images, the majority of which depicted religious subject matter. If we assume that the notary recorded the paintings on the wall of a room in the order in which they were displayed, portraits were likely exhibited in relation to devotional works of art, either directly adjacent to or in close proximity. Genevieve Carlton recently made a similar argument in the case of the display and reading of maps in early modern Venetian homes. She noted that maps that hung on walls were frequently coupled with religious images, most commonly the Virgin Mary. According to Carlton, such intentional pairings highlighted a family's devotion to religion as well as a particular place.¹⁸ In a similar manner, the proximate display of portraits with religious images likely persuaded the viewer to create – consciously or unconsciously – visual and mental relationships between picture types.

An example of this kind of presentation of portraits comes from the 1557 inventory of Francesco della Vedova. The notary listed consecutively, in the *camera granda*, or the principal chamber, a large gilded painting of the Madonna – presumably in the style of an icon as was common in Venetian households [Fig. 5.3] – a painting of Christ, a portrait of Francesco's father, Gaspare, a portrait of Francesco, a copper cross with pearls, and a small wooden crucifix. With the exception of an old mirror, these are the only items hanging on the walls recorded in the room, so even if they did not all hang next to one another, there was likely some intentionality on the part of Francesco to display these items together in the space.¹⁹ Francesco could see himself paired with the Mother of God, her Son, or other symbols of the faith and be reminded of his pious character and obligation to his devotion. The portrait of Gaspare may have served as a reminder of his lineage, but when viewed in relation to the Virgin Mary, Christ, and/or the crucifixes, Francesco may have been prompted to pray for the soul of his deceased father.

The 1537 inventory of Antonio Roda offers another instance where a family member exhibited a portrait with religious works. The notary listed several

Maria della Valverde o della Misericordia, b. 50, n. 2, fols. 1r–13v and 14r–23v, the term 'sagrestia' on fol. 2r.

18 Carlton G., "Viewing the World: Women, Religion, and the Audience for Maps in Early Modern Venice", *Terrae Incognitae* 48, 1 (2016) 15–36, at 31–32.

19 Carlton, "Viewing the World" 32.

FIGURE 5.3 Anonymous Cretan painter, "Virgin and Child", late 15th or early 16th century.
 Oil on wood, 332 × 332 cm. Louvre, Paris, France
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items hanging in a child's room, in the following order: an old, gilded painting of the Madonna 'alla grecha'; a gilded painting of Christ; a gilded copper mirror; a damascened oil lamp; six engraved scenes of the Passion of Christ; an old portrait of the head of the household, Antonio; a wooden crucifix; and five silk wall-hangings.²⁰ Given the way the notary recorded the items, the portrait of Antonio likely hung nearby one or more of these religious pictures and sculptural pieces. Beginning in the early fifteenth century and continuing through the late sixteenth century, domestic treatises advocated hanging pious images in the home for the spiritual and moral edification of children.²¹ In the case of the Roda home, the child who primarily dwelled in this room would have also seen his or her father in relation to these images and signs of the Christian faith.

We know from the 1551 inventory of Giacomo Barbaro that the nobleman displayed in his bedchamber a painting of Christ at the column, presumably a flagellation scene, and an *ancona* – or an image with a tabernacle-like frame – featuring the Madonna. Further down the list of goods in this room the inventory records, one after the other: a small wooden crucifix, a small iron basin for holy water, and a portrait of Andrea Barbaro, whose relation to Giacomo was not stated. The grouping of these items suggests a kind of shrine; Giacomo could pray before a pendant of portrait and crucifix – viewing simultaneously family and faith – and sacralise the activities, and himself, with the use of the holy water hung nearby.

The presentation of these portraits amidst holy images imbued the painted likenesses with spiritual overtones. As the examples I have given suggest, Venetians may have displayed portraits as complements to sacred pictures and objects so that when a member of the household looked upon an image of a holy personage, event, or symbol while engaging in his or her devotions, the likeness of the loved one would have also been in view and thus considered in relation to the divine. As will be outlined below, the relationship between portraits and holy images was not unusual for this period, despite the tendency in modern scholarship to separate the two, and there are several reasons – stemming from formal, historical, religious, and social concerns – why early

20 ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 52, 8–18 April 1537.

21 Coté A.B., *Blessed Giovanni Dominici. Regola del governo di cura familiare, parte quarta. On the Education of Children*, Ph.D. dissertation (The Catholic University of America: 1927) 34; *Decor Puellarum: Questa sie una opera la quale si chiama Decor puellarum: Zoe honore de le donzelle: la quale de regola forma e modo al stato de le honeste donzelle* (Venice, Nicolas Jenson: 1471) 44r; and Antoniano S., *Dell'educazione Cristiana e politica de' figliuoli* (Verona, Sebastiano delle Donne e Girolamo Stringari: 1584; reprint, Florence: 1852) 151 and 316. See also Maya Corry's essay in this volume, 310–341.

modern viewers in Venice would have made connections between these art forms.

Precedents both inside and outside the domestic sphere may have shaped viewing experiences and practices in the context of household devotions. The portrait diptych contained two hinged panels that typically featured a holy figure – usually the Madonna and Child or Christ – on one half, and a portrait of the owner on the other. Deriving from portraits of book owners in late medieval Books of Hours, the format established a direct and intimate relationship between devout donor and the divine figure before whom he prayed.²² But portrait diptychs were largely a Northern European phenomenon, and Venetians, despite being ardent admirers and collectors of Flemish and Netherlandish painting, had no such known tradition. Venetian portraits were, however, sometimes double sided or kept within covers that were also painted, often with coats of arms and allegories that would stand for the sitter's intangible traits.²³ These covers could slide up or to the side until the two pictures would eventually be in a position where they could be viewed together, and hence, relationally; the succession of actions provokes the viewer to make connections between different image types, with each one acquiring new meanings in this state of comparison that neither might have held otherwise.²⁴ While these portrait covers tended to be allegorical, they demonstrate the relational nature of viewing and interpreting portraits in the early modern interior.

Donor portraits serve as another obvious bridge between portraiture and religious art in Venice. The presence of worldly figures in divine contexts made their spirituality and devoutness visible and concrete. Several sixteenth-century altarpieces bear portraits of their patrons, perhaps the most famous being the Pesaro altarpiece by Titian in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.²⁵ Patricians and wealthy merchants of the city also employed the devotional portrait format in domestic works. The cavalier Andrea Maioli, for example, from the parish of San Zulian in Venice, displayed in his *camera* a painting of the Madonna that included a portrait of himself and his wife, who were most likely shown in the act of prayer or as witnesses to a miraculous

22 Hand J.O. – Metzger C.A. – Spronk R. (eds.), *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych*, exh. cat., The National Gallery of Art (Washington DC: 2006); Gelfand L., “Devotional Portrait Diptychs and the Manuscript Tradition”, in Hand J.O. – Spronk R. (eds.), *Essays in Context: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (Cambridge, MA: 2006) 46–59.

23 Dülberg, *Privatporträts* 100, 190–191, 238–239, 293.

24 Bolzoni, *Il cuore di cristallo* 309; Cranston, *Poetics of Portraiture* 22, 28.

25 Humfrey P., *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: 1993) 104–110. Venice also had a strong tradition of votive portraiture, particularly featuring the doge, which generally hung in the Doge's Palace, *ibid.* 82–83.

FIGURE 5.4 Lorenzo Lotto, "Madonna and Child with Two Donors", ca. 1525–1530.

Oil on canvas, 87.6 × 118.1 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA

DIGITAL IMAGE COURTESY OF THE GETTY'S OPEN CONTENT PROGRAM

vision.²⁶ While Maioli's painting cannot be identified today, a number of surviving domestic images from the Veneto region exist that may be akin to the Venetian gentleman's Madonna, such as Lorenzo Lotto's *Madonna and Child with Two Donors* [Fig. 5.4], painted around 1525–1530 and today housed at the Getty Museum. In Lotto's painting the wealthy couple kneels before the divine mother and her offspring, and look up at the Christ Child, who rewards their faithfulness with a blessing.

Donor portraits were the product of worldly and wealthy individuals concerned with social prestige and lasting fame, but who remained deeply religious and were all the more anxious over the salvation of their souls.²⁷ They played efficacious roles as 'surrogate selves' engrossed in perpetual prayer,

26 ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 46, 9 April 1571.

27 Rosenberg C.M., "Virtue, Piety and Affection: Some Portraits by Domenico Ghirlandaio", in Gentili A. – Morel P. – Cieri Via C. (eds.), *Il ritratto e la memoria: materiali 2* (Rome: 1993) 173–196.

carrying out what the patron could no longer do once he or she had left this world.²⁸ Portraits of donors placed within devotional images and religious narratives also helped the viewer imagine the divine, offering a relatable route by which to perceive and ultimately exceed the limits between physical reality and the spiritual world in one's own prayers.²⁹ Lina Bolzoni has suggested that it seems unlikely that the strength of the iconography of the pious donor within both public and private religious images – and the devotional codes associated with this format – would not have translated to so-called autonomous portraits.³⁰ The example of donor portraits thus underscores the familiarity Renaissance Venetians presumably had with seeing the likenesses of contemporary individuals in relation to religious images.

In independent portraits, however, the sitter is not always shown praying or in a pose of supplication, as in the donor image.³¹ Instead the figure is typically presented half- or bust-length, in frontal or three-quarter view. What is striking about these autonomous portraits is that despite frequent attributes that marked a sitter's status, profession, or worldly interests, they can look quite similar to the devotional imagery of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints that was being produced around the same time.³² The reasons for these shared formal strategies may extend beyond overall stylistic trends of the period to tie portraiture to religious imagery and its devotional meanings.

By the end of the fifteenth century, artists in Venice and elsewhere depicted divine and earthly figures alike with an increased naturalism, and turned the sitters to face the picture plane as a means to amplify their presence and enhance a sense of interaction between them and the viewer. Both portraits and a popular genre of devotional images featured a single individual often

28 Gelfand L.S. – Gibson W.S., "Surrogate Selves: The *Rolin Madonna* and the Late Medieval Devotional Portrait", *Simiolus* 29, 3/4 (2002) 125–126; Tsoumis K., *Bernardino Licinio: Portraiture, Kinship and Community in Renaissance Venice*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Toronto: 2013) 153; Wheaton R., "Images of Kinship", *Journal of Family History* 12, 4 (1987) 392–395.

29 Bolzoni, *Il cuore di cristallo* 235.

30 Ibid., 235–236. Tsoumis argues that donor images introduced family portraiture into the Venetian home, *Bernardino Licinio* 155. She also connects these family group portraits with *sacra conversazione* and images of the Holy Family 157–161.

31 The profile pose used in portraits mainly from the early and mid-fifteenth century was likely borrowed from donor portraiture to carry associations of Christian piety and virtue. Wright A., "The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture", in Ciapelli G. – Rubin P.L. (eds.), *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: 2000) 92.

32 Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture* 17, 43–44, 76–77, 89–92.

presented in bust or half-length, close to the picture plane and devoid of a specific narrative setting.³³ For example, Antonello da Messina's *Ecce Homo* [Fig. 5.5] in Piacenza and his *Portrait of a Man* [Fig. 5.6], today at the Louvre, share similar compositional formats. While the plainly dressed gentleman with a look of certainty and determination is a far cry from the naked and pitiful Christ, in both images Antonello presents bust-length figures who look out intently toward the viewer from behind a stone parapet that bears a realistic *cartellino* featuring the artist's signature. Highlighted before dark backgrounds, the subjects in each painting are vividly concrete and present, and 'exist both eternally and specifically in the moment of viewing'.³⁴

The visual similarities between many portraits and devotional images, and the emphasis on the presence of the subject that such formal strategies achieved, are rooted in legends of the sacred origins of portraiture and notions of exemplarity and substitution. The three-quarter and frontal view poses assumed by subjects in portraits derived from icons of the Madonna, believed to be copies of the portrait of the Virgin Mary St. Luke painted from life, as well as images of the Holy Face, reworked facsimiles of the *vera icona*, or veil of Veronica, that bore the visage of Jesus Christ.³⁵ Such images were said to be true portraits of the Madonna and Christ as they replicated the original, unmediated likenesses of these divine figures that came about as the result of direct encounters. The presence of the sacred thus existed on the material surface of the canvas or panel. As such, the Holy Face and Madonna icons established an ideal of portraiture as medieval and early modern artists continued to advance the Christian legend with copies of these miraculous images.³⁶ Even in the later sixteenth century, theorists such as Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo and the Catholic reformer Gabriele Paleotti cited these examples as holy sources of

33 Ringbom S., "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions. Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 73 (1969) 159–170, and *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, 2nd edition (Doornspijk: 1984) 184. On Venetian portraiture in the later fifteenth century, see Humfrey P., "The Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Venice", in Christiansen – Weppelmann (eds.), *The Renaissance Portrait* 48–63.

34 Corry M., "The Alluring Beauty of a Leonardesque Ideal: Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan", *Gender & History* 25, 3 (2013) 576.

35 Syson L., "Witnessing Faces, Remembering Souls", in Campbell et. alia, *Renaissance Faces* 21–22.

36 Syson, "Witnessing Faces" 21–22; Belting H., *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago and London: 1994) 21–22.

FIGURE 5.5 Antonello da Messina, "Ecce Homo", 1475. Oil on wood, 48.5 × 38 cm. Museo Civico, Piacenza, Italy
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portraiture.³⁷ The frontal and sometimes three-quarters format of these bust- and half-length holy sitters, oriented close to the picture plane, enhanced

37 Lomazzo Giovanni Paolo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scultura ed architettura divise in sette libri* (Milan, Paolo Gottardo Pontio: 1585; reprint Rome: 1844) II: 377; Paleotti Gabriele, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. W. McCuaig (Bologna, Alessandro Benacci:

FIGURE 5.6 Antonello da Messina, “Portrait of a Man (Il Condottiero)”, 1475. Oil on wood, 36.2 × 30 cm. Louvre, Paris, France

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their presence, as well as the sense of interaction between viewer and divine. Jodi Cranston has described portrait sitters from the period engaging in ‘self-conscious poses that are oriented toward being seen’, in a manner similar to images of Christ, the Madonna, and saints; this is because both portraits and

1582; reprint: Los Angeles: 2012) 212–213. See also Pommier E., *Théories du portrait de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: 1998) 159–160.

devotional images in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries served as substitutes for the absent figure represented, and as such depended on a viewer to complete a dialogue, centred on prayer, faith, remembrance and, ultimately, salvation.³⁸ With such conventions of pose and figural orientation serving as memory markers, Renaissance viewers could have equated portraits and devotional images in their viewing experiences given the similar functions of the two art forms.

Portraits of saints further developed this notion of a spiritual presence captured in a portrait. Paleotti emphasized that saints were worthy of representation because of the virtuous lives they led, and the act of fixing their images in a portrait offered a model of devoutness for the beholder and a vehicle for continued reverence. Similar motivations, at least in theory, compelled the creation portraits of worldly men and women. Paleotti warned against portraits of the impious, heretical, and dishonourable as a harm to public good, but he also advocated the painting of persons 'whose moral goodness or Christian sanctity may act as an incentive to others to practice the virtues'.³⁹ The quality of exemplarity fused the Christian tradition of remembrance of the saints with that of the growing cult of fame. Virtuous figures were worthy of commemoration in art as their representation would be valuable to future beholders.⁴⁰ In his treatise *Do tirar polo natural* (1549), Francisco de Holanda stressed this emulative function of the portrait: 'It is right that children should keep the memory of their fathers and mothers and grandparents in portraits from nature, in order to have them always present, for the augmentation of their virtue and their consolation, imitating their ancestors as far as they can in goodness and enhancing their genealogy with them'.⁴¹

The devotional environment of the Venetian domestic interior provided the ideal setting for familial portraits to operate successfully as virtuous archetypes. In addition to replicating the formal qualities, or 'commemorative codes', as described by Allison Wright, of devotional art to ensure the character of exemplarity in familial portraits, Venetians could hang their likeness next to or in close proximity with these religious images, as well as other kinds of pious goods.⁴² This manner of display allowed viewers to readily liken the moral virtue of a saint with the portrait of a contemporary or ancestor exhibited nearby, or see that earthly likeness within a devotional context and recognise

38 Cranston, *Poetics of Portraiture* 8.

39 Paleotti, *Discourse* 205.

40 Wright, "The Memory of Faces" 88; Jenkins M., *The State Portrait. Its Origins and Evolution* (New York: 1947) 4–7.

41 Quote from Woodall J., *Anthonis Mor: Art and Authority* (Zwolle: 2007) 251.

42 Wright, "The Memory of Faces" 89.

it as a paradigm of a devout character and lifestyle, perhaps even prompting the viewer to pray.

Prayers for the soul were a primary concern for early modern Venetians well into the sixteenth century, directly tied to contemporary concepts of purgatory and salvation and perhaps even motivating the production of portraiture during the period.⁴³ One of the greatest perceived threats to the attainment of eternal paradise was purgatory, yet activities here on earth could minimise the time suffered in this intermediary place.⁴⁴ Devotions, the possession of certain objects, acts of charity, and pilgrimages made to holy sites to view relics were all means by which one could obtain Church-sanctioned indulgences that normally carried a defined period of remittance in purgatory. In addition to acts like these to prepare for one's own destiny in the hereafter, the living could work for the benefit of the already departed. In 1476 the system of salvation widened when Pope Sixtus IV officially declared that indulgences could be extended to include the souls of the dead.⁴⁵ The pressure to acquire indulgences expanded as individuals were now responsible for praying for the soul of a departed loved one.⁴⁶ But to be prayed for, one had to be remembered, and portraiture cemented such redemptive commemoration in domestic space.⁴⁷ The partnership was mutually beneficial, for it was believed that those who had reached heaven would in turn intercede on behalf of the living who had helped expedite their journey to salvation.⁴⁸

Wright has argued that portraiture functioned as a response to recognition of the mortal nature of human existence and the need to be remembered; she allied the role of remembrance in portraiture with the remembrance that lies at the heart of Christianity – the observance of Christ's sacrifice, which images of the faith and saints facilitated.⁴⁹ As the belief in and practice of indulgences in early modern Europe indicates, remembrance served as the foundation of salvation. The nearly universal requests in wills for prayers and masses of remembrance, sometimes made more elaborate with the construction of memorial chapels and other visible markers of the deceased, were not merely formulaic demands but emerged from a legitimate belief in the

43 Ibid. 87; Syson, "Witnessing Faces" 16–21.

44 Gelfand – Gibson, "Surrogate Selves" 125.

45 Sabene R., *La fabbrica di San Pietro in Vaticano: Dinamiche internazionali e dimensione locale* (Rome: 2012) 54, n. 20.

46 Swanson R.N., *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge: 1995) 217–224; Welch E., *Art in Renaissance Italy 1350–1500* (Oxford: 1997) 147.

47 Syson, "Witnessing Faces" 16; Wright, "The Memory of Faces" 87.

48 Welch, *Art in Renaissance Italy* 148.

49 Wright, "The Memory of Faces" 86–87.

necessity of prayer and other concrete means of commemoration for eternal salvation.⁵⁰ While the salvific function of donor portraits embedded in altarpieces or effigies prostrate on church tombs has long been recognised, it is entirely possible that independent portraits operated at times in similar ways. The Venetian domestic interior, beset with visible markers of faith, might have made such sacred commemoration of the individual part of religious practices in the home.

The early modern belief that likenesses and effigies were believed to be the physical embodiments of the persons they depicted advanced this devotional function of the portrait. In Florence, for example, citizens frequently left wax votive images of themselves, which were sometimes described by contemporaries as particularly lifelike, in churches before religious pictures as thanks and continued homage to the holy figure for his or her sacred intercession.⁵¹ As substitutes for the figure represented, these wax portraits 'could establish a relationship with its audience, heavenly and terrestrial alike', and as such continued to engage in spiritual activity to ensure salvation and communicate with the divine even after the departure of the donor.⁵² Painted portraits had a comparable effect. In the early fifteenth century, the theorist Leon Battista Alberti wrote that, 'Painting contains a divine force which not only makes the absent present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive'.⁵³ In a similar manner, but about a century and a half later, Paleotti acknowledged that people might ask for a portrait of a relative or a friend, 'so as to make good the hurt of his absence by means of the presence of the picture'.⁵⁴ Domestic portraits thus served as substitutes for the family members they represented, living or dead, in a manner akin to devotional images of holy figures.⁵⁵ The similar surrogate function of portraiture and devotional pictures,

50 Ambrosini F., "Ortodossia cattolica e tracce di eterodossia nei testamenti veneziani del Cinquecento", *Archivio Veneto* 136 (1991) 5–64.

51 Panzanelli R., "Wax Effigies in Renaissance Florence", in Panzanelli R. (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure* (Los Angeles: 2008) 13–40.

52 Van der Velden H., "Medici Votive Images and the Scope and Limits of Likeness", in Syson – Mann, *The Image of the Individual* 133. See also Bauman G., "Early Netherlandish Portraits, 1425–1525", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 43 (1986) 17–18. The circulation of portraits between courts, and the collections of exemplary likenesses that were increasingly amassed by intellectuals and rulers during this period also indicates that portraits were understood to be direct substitutes for their sitters, and functioned as a way of bestowing immortality to the worthy subject depicted, Woodall, *Portraiture* 1–3.

53 Translated quote from Syson, "Witnessing Faces" 14.

54 Paleotti, *Discourse* 204.

55 Van der Velden, "Medici Votive Images" 133; Syson, "Witnessing Faces" 15; Daninos A., "Wax Figures in Italy: Outline for a Story yet to be Written", in Daninos A. (ed.), *Waxing*

along with the aforementioned formal affinities to establish a dialogue with the beholder, suggests that the pairing of the art forms in domestic spaces may have been a logical extension of spiritual and commemorative practices to secure salvation for both the living and departed.⁵⁶

Domestic portraits also pronounced in more public ways the devout and moral standing of the family. In addition to hanging portraits in bedchambers with devotional works as the aforementioned examples demonstrate, Venetians displayed them prominently within the *portego*, a space continually accessed by both members of the household and its guests.⁵⁷ The other rooms of the home flanked the *portego* on both sides, and stairs from the street, courtyard, or canal entrances all were directed into this large hall. The *portego* acted as a kind of receiving area and was often the only room of the house that a visitor would ever see, since not all guests would be invited into a family's personal chambers.⁵⁸ Given its large dimensions and central location in the house, the *portego* became a site for the assertion of social standing and success.⁵⁹ The display of portraits within this central space has prompted some scholars to describe the hall as an embodiment of dynastic ambition, but it is important to remember that in addition to likenesses of family members, Venetians also frequently filled the *portego* with religious images.⁶⁰ The visual and physical juxtaposition of religious images and portraits in the *portego* reinforced how the family wished to be seen: devout, moral,

Eloquent: Italian Portraits in Wax, exh. cat. Palazzo Fortuny, trans C. Bolton (Venice: 2012) 13–42; Perkinson S., “Rethinking the Origins of Portraiture”, *Gesta* 46, 2, *Contemporary Approaches to the Medieval Face* (2007) 142; and Belting, *Likeness and Presence* 10.

56 Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture* 75, 92.

57 Fortini Brown, *Private Lives* 71, 75; Palumbo-Fossati, “L'interno della casa” 144. Wolfgang Wolters suggests that the popularity of portraits in Venetian homes during the sixteenth century was linked to the absence of the likenesses of *uomini illustri*, or illustrious men, from recent history in the city's public edifices – with the exception of the Palazzo Ducale – largely due to the Republican mentality that disallowed the glorification of particular individuals. Wolters W., *Storia e politica nei dipinti di Palazzo Ducale. Aspetti dell'autocelebrazione della Repubblica di Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Venice: 1987) 70.

58 Fortini Brown, *Private Lives* 1, 71; Schmitter M., “The *Quadro da Portego* in Sixteenth-Century Venetian Art”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, 3 (2011) 695.

59 Fortini Brown P., “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites”, in Martin J. – Romano D. (eds.), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore: 2000) 307–308; Fortini Brown, *Private Lives* 71–75; Palumbo-Fossati I., “La casa veneziana”, in Toscano G. – Valcanover F. (eds.), *Da Bellini a Veronese. Temi di arte veneta* (Venice: 2004) 474; Lucco M., “Sacred Stories”, in Brown D.A. – Ferino-Pagden S. (eds.), *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting* (New Haven – London: 2006) 106; and Schmitter, “The *Quadro da Portego*” 694.

60 Lucco, “Sacred Stories” 106; Morse, “The Venetian *portego*” 95–101.

and favoured in the eyes of God. For example, Francesco Dall'Oca's inventory reveals that he hung a portrait of his father, Marc'Antonio, in his *portego*, along with a canvas depicting Jesus and the Four Evangelists, and a large painting of the Prodigal Son, perhaps a reference to paternal guidance and compassion when displayed in the same space with his father's likeness.⁶¹ In the 1561 inventory of the merchant Piero Antonio Gentili, the first item listed in his *portego* is a Madonna – presumably a painting although the notary does not actually specify – followed by portraits of Piero Antonio and his wife, a fountain with an iron basin for washing hands, and a holy water stoup.⁶² Similar to the aforementioned inventory of Giacomo Barbaro, the grouping implies a small shrine of sorts – perhaps to encourage viewers to pray on the couple's behalf – and a display of the piety of this merchant and his spouse.

Portraiture had long had a religious component, intimately tied to devotion, and ultimately, salvation of the living and deceased. The emergence of the so-called independent portrait in the Renaissance may have signalled a new way of thinking about individuals and their worth during this period, but the separate frame around the panel or the canvas did not automatically mean that distinct perspectives of portraits simultaneously arose, particularly when these likenesses continued to be displayed in contexts – in this case, the domestic sphere – with images and items of spiritual import. Portraits hung near religious works throughout the Venetian domestic interior, from more private bedchambers to the semi-public *portego*, and likely functioned in conjunction with the sacred to attach the personal to the more universal messages of the faith, secure salvation, and construct a visible message of pious familial identity to all who visited the home.⁶³ The spiritual dimensions of portraiture thus emerged when these likenesses of individuals operated as part of an ensemble with religious pictures and other Christian goods. Just as the Venetian household interior was not strictly secular space, neither were the portraits displayed there. Instead, the art form formed an integral part of domestic devotions.

61 ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 32 (1566).

62 Ibid., b. 40, n. 9.

63 On portraiture's ability to link the personal to universal values, see Rubin P.L., "Art and the Image of Memory", in Ciapelli – Rubin, *Art, Memory, and Family* 74.

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