Near the end of my second hour spent gazing at *Fall and Redemption of Man*, I was still puzzled. After looking at the piece for so long, I had gotten past the initial disgust I had felt for the nearly-naked man in the center of the painting, and for the graphic depictions of Christ. I had also gained a pretty thorough understanding and appreciation of the many, many symbols the piece portrayed. Still, I had this nagging feeling that there was more to this piece than a mere portrayal of symbols. It wasn't until I learned and fully realized the historical context of the piece that it hit me that the majority of the painting's audience, especially members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints check off the piece as a nice, symbolic display of Christ, and miss what this painting is saying! *Fall and Redemption of Man* is a highly radical piece for its time, arguing that man is saved by his faith in the grace of Jesus Christ alone, and nothing man can do will earn him his salvation. Through its juxtaposing structure and choice of specific details, Lucas Cranach's piece fiercely and blatantly challenges the beliefs, doctrine, and authority of the 16th century Roman Catholic Church, arguing for the Lutheran Protestant-Reformation belief that we are saved by grace alone (Royal Academy of Arts). As Latter-day Saints, many of us miss this view because we view it through our own world-lens and look for how it supports our beliefs, which are biased toward the idea that we can earn our way into Heaven, to some extent, by our works.

Lucas Cranach was a painter in the early 16th century Germany whose work reflected both the German Renaissance movement, and the Protestant Reformation. He lived during a time when the Roman Catholic Church was the most prominent and powerful church in Europe, a time commonly called the dark ages because of the corruption in the church (Arnold). He originally supported traditional Catholic views in his works, but he switched later to support Lutheran ideas, as he became a close friend and supporter of Martin Luther, and
embraced the Protestant Reformation (BU School of Theology). In *Fall and Redemption of Man*, Cranach portrays the Lutheran idea that salvation does not come from good works, but is a free gift from God, coming only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the redeemer from sin (Rev. Haak).

While I sat in front of the painting, it was so interesting to hear different people's interpretations as they walked by. A mother said to her group of girls: “See, girls, that man in the center represents any person, and Christ is pointing to himself on the cross, saying that He has saved him. We got it girls! We're so good.” More than one said, “There's so much symbolism! Look at all the symbols!” A very small girl murmured a simple, “Oh,” when she came to this painting.

While all of these statements are based on evidence from the painting, I could not help but laugh to myself. Every person saw different things in the piece, based on the lens they view the world with. I knew from my research, for example, that the man in the center represented Adam, and the man to the right represented John the Baptist (BU School of Theology). I thought it was fine for people to have their own interpretation, but I knew it was key to see the painting through the eyes of people who lived in Cranach's time to fully appreciate its meaning, something one could only do by knowing the historical context of the piece.

Finally, as I was about to leave, a tour group came by. The tour guide was pointing out the two blank plaques in the painting. He said that they originally had words on them, but somebody at some unknown time had scraped off the words. I began to wonder what they had said, and why someone would scrape off the words. Was there something written there that someone did not want others to see?

Another thing that stuck out to me in the painting were the two, seemingly-faded-out St. George's Cross flags. I couldn't understand why Lucas Cranach, a German Christian in the 16th century would include flags from the Roman Catholic Church in his painting. St. George's Cross flags can be seen in several pieces from the German Renaissance anyway, but why would Cranach use them if he did not support Roman Catholicism? This moment was quite an epiphany for me. All the parts of the piece began to make sense because I realized everything in it points to Christ. I realized that the use of the flag in this painting could be considered blaspheme to the Roman Catholic Church, because the painting blatantly opposed its doctrine as it was at that time, specifically that man was not saved through faith in Christ, but “by faith in the church and good works
prescribed by the church” (Arnold). The flag appears in two places: on the post with which Christ pierces a
skeleton, or death, and on a post carried by a white lamb, which symbolizes Christ. It seems as though Cranach
was claiming his piece as representing true Christianity by using the symbol of a crusader, suggesting he was a
crusader for Christ in fighting for the truth.

First of all, the painting is divided into two halves: the left half is composed of scenes from the Old
Testament, dealing mainly with Moses; the right half includes scenes from Christ's life, representing His
Conception, Crucifixion, and Resurrection (BU School of Theology). In Greek, “testament” means “covenant”
(The Holy Bible). The left half represents the old law of Moses, or the old covenant, which, according to the
New Testament, is dead and replaced by Christ. Cranach uses this imagery of dead versus alive to demonstrate
that the old covenant is no longer applicable, and the new law is flourishing and necessary. The evidence for
this is that the tree—which divides the painting into the two halves—has brown, bare, dead branches on its left
side and living, green branches on its right. Another evidence for this is that the left side focuses more on death,
with the Fall and the brown-hued skeleton, while on the right side, the centralized scene is Christ rising from the
grave, piercing through a white skeleton, symbolizing Him conquering death.

This juxtaposition between the two halves of the painting powerfully opposes the 16th century Roman
Catholic Church doctrine. Cranach suggests, by selecting the scene of Moses raising up a brazen serpent for the
Children of Israel, that the Old Testament pre-figures the New Testament, and that the old covenant is
completely done away with the new covenant: redemption through faith in Christ (Schmeling). The Roman
Catholic Church at this time taught that man was saved by his external obedience, and not through faith in
Christ. This brought great corruption, as leaders of the Church were not truly converted to Christ. Pope (14th
century) Boniface VII said, “We declare, state, define and pronounce that for every human creature to be subject
to the Roman pope is altogether necessary for salvation” (Arnold). By suggesting that the old covenant is
fulfilled in Christ, Cranach is saying that we are not at all saved by the law, but solely through Christ, thus
contradicting the Catholic Church's absolute authority, and that of its leaders.

Cranach uses the event of Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit to prove that without Christ,
man has no hope or way of returning to Him. If one looks closely, one can make out a road that travels from the
brown skeleton near Adam and Eve, back behind the tree, past Christ, and into the distance, leading to a white city that may represent Heaven or God's Kingdom. This road is not portrayed as difficult, nor is it implied that man must walk on it. But, it does pass by Christ, almost as if it leads to Christ first, and then to the city.

Then come the two, now-blank plaques that originally had words on them, but at some unknown time, someone scraped them off. It is very possible that they could have said something that directly opposed the Roman Catholic doctrine, so the Church scraped them off, perhaps something like, “By grace are ye saved.” We will never know what was once there, but the fact that it was removed tells us that someone did not want others to see it.

It is interesting to consider the lens through which Latter-day Saints view this piece. If all Latter-day Saints who looked at Fall and Redemption of Man truly understood its message, most would be more than unsettled: they would be extremely opposed to the ideas presented. In fact, Fall and Redemption of Man supports the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, that we are saved by Christ's grace, but it paradoxically opposes the prominent Latter-day Saint culture seen in the Church today, which places an emphasis on doing, works, and the idea that you can earn your way into Heaven.

In The Book of Mormon, King Benjamin teaches his people that God “doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted to him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast? . . . Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 2:24-25). Church doctrine, which is outlined by The Book of Mormon, claims that nothing we do will save us, for our good works cannot bring us ahead in our standing with God. We cannot be saved, “save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Unfortunately, many Latter-day Saints do not realize that it is through Christ's grace alone we are saved; keeping the commandments does not save us. Once we have turned to Christ, we will naturally do good works and keep the commandments, for, “can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?” (2 Nephi 31:10).

The piece also supports the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's doctrine in that it claims that the Old Covenant foreshadowed the New Covenant. We as Latter-day Saints believe that all the Old Testament prophets had the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Bible Dictionary). The Book of Mormon testifies that
the Law of Moses pointed to Christ, especially in the instance of the brazen serpent lifted up on the staff. Cranach deliberately put this scene in his painting. As Jacob in the Book of Mormon said, “For this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him [Christ]” (Jacob 4:5). The prophet Nephi taught of the event of the brazen serpent, “And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life with is eternal” (Helaman 8:15). The doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints includes the idea that both the Old and New Testaments testify that Christ is the only way we are saved, and Cranach's piece shows this by the scene of the brazen serpent lifted up on the cross, in similitude to Christ being on the cross on the other half of the painting.

When I initially looked at *Fall and Redemption of Man*, I did not understand all the symbols and what the overall underlying meaning was. Careful examination of the historical context of this piece, however, brought the pieces of this puzzle together for me. *Fall and Redemption of Man* challenges the views of people in Cranach's day, which is difficult to recognize through our 21st century lenses. It argues that it is Jesus Christ alone, not our works, that save us, portraying this through the symbolism of the deadness of the Mosaic, works-based law, and the living state of the new law of Jesus Christ. The more I studied and understood this, the more I felt an overwhelming appreciation for what my Savior Jesus Christ has done for me. My love for Him has deepened. This piece helped me more fully realize that no matter how hard I try in this life, it will never be enough. I am saved only through the grace of Christ, and the more I love and appreciate Him, the more I will naturally and automatically live the righteous life He would have me live. Cranach's piece has indeed accomplished its purpose of convincing others that by looking to Christ, we will live.
Works Cited


School of Lucas Cranach. *Fall and Redemption of Man*. Early 16th century. Oil on Canvas. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo.