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ATTITUDES TO RELIGIOUS ART AND THE CONFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF THE SAXON COMMUNITY

Passion Cycles in the Context of Lenten Observance and Easter Celebrations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania*

The Lutheran church of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), once upon a time the parish church of the city, still holds the remains of one of the altarpieces used to decorate it in the late medieval period. This suggests that at some point during the long history of the church, the altarpiece was dismantled and the panels, being recognized for their historical and aesthetic value, displayed on various walls of the nave. Besides raising interesting questions as to the context of the altarpiece's dismantling, this makes it difficult for art historians and historians alike to reconstruct its original format and iconography. They can not rule out alterations to the iconography made in order to adapt the altarpiece to Protestant worship.

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Possibly its best-preserved feature is the eight-episode Passion cycle, which decorated the exterior of the mobile and the fixed wings of the altarpiece and was visible when the polyptych was closed. Dated 1512 by inscription, this cycle is surprising in that some of the panels, such as the 'Flagellation', the 'Crowning with Thorns', the 'Ecce Homo', and 'Pilate Washing his Hands', show a compositional similarity with Albrecht Dürer's 'Engraved Passion' (1507-1512).¹ It is, however, much more difficult to determine a visual source for the other panels of this particular polyptych. The most intriguing panel of this altarpiece is that depicting the 'Last Supper', which is placed within an architectural setting reminiscent of the 'Last Supper' from Dürer's 'Large Passion' (1510). However, the rest of the composition bears no similarity to this woodcut,² or to the 'Last Supper' from the 'Small Passion' (c. 1508-1509).³ In both these cases, Christ is centrally placed and depicted in the act of comforting John. The rectangular table used in the Sibiu panel is closer to the one used in the 'Large Passion' and certainly very different from the round one which appears in the 'Small Passion'. The lateral placing of Christ in the composition in Sibiu is similar to a drawing of the 'Last Supper' Dürer produced in 1523. It has been suggested that Dürer had reverted in this drawing to the ancient eastern iconography, in which Christ is placed at the end of the table and shown in profile.⁴ There is a second, rather striking feature of the panel in Sibiu, which again suggests analogies with Dürer, but this time with the 'Last Supper' woodcut of 1523. The bread (placed in a large wooden basket) and the wine (placed in a jug which is placed in a cauldron) are arranged symmetrically on the floor on either side of the panel. (**Figure 1: Sibiu, Last Supper**). They are thus depicted on an equal plane, in the foreground of the composition. This is a similar treatment to that found in the Dürer woodcut of 1523, where the basket with bread and the jug of wine are also placed next to each other on the floor, while the empty charger is placed in full view of the spectator in the foreground of the composition. Finally, in the Sibiu panel, only eleven disciples are present. Although Jesus is making gestures that suggest that he is comforting John, the latter is not really visible in this composition. One of the disciples is depicted cutting the bread with a knife (a detail which does not appear in any of Dürer's compositions). So we could say that in many ways the panel in Sibiu is highly innovative as well as being strongly reminiscent of Dürer's later work. In other ways the panel in Sibiu is closer to the older, traditional model of the 'Last

Supper'. There is emphasis on Judas' betrayal, with the latter represented in profile, holding the purse in his hand and accepting the bread offered by Jesus, while the lamb is found on the table on its usual platter. This raises interesting issues as to the dissemination of Dürer's work as well as the dating of this altarpiece.

First of all, the panel clearly suggests familiarity with Dürer's art. However, the inclusion of elements which only appear in Dürer's later work (1523), suggests either that the panel in Sibiu was produced later than has been generally believed or that it had been repainted in order to include a 'Last Supper' with a particular, perhaps more Protestant message. This latter reading is encouraged by the depiction of the species of the sacrament in the Sibiu panel, which is reminiscent of Dürer's woodcut of 1523 both in terms of form and content.

With few exceptions⁵ it has been argued that Dürer's woodcut of the 'Last Supper' of 1523 and the drawing that preceded it refer to Karlstadt's advocacy of communion in both kinds.⁶ This has been suggested by the explicit Eucharistic symbols present in those compositions. Much has also been made of the absence of the charger with the lamb, which stresses that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice. It has consequently been concluded that, in so conspicuously emphasizing the sacramental chalice, while eliminating the sacrificial lamb, Dürer was expressing his adherence to a Lutheran point of view. It has also been argued that the scene represents not the 'Last Supper' itself, but its aftermath, as described exclusively by St John. Judas has left the room and only the faithful apostles remain (which explains why there are only eleven disciples in the composition). The emphasis is on Christ's words, which disclose not the sin of the traitor but the human frailty of Peter, who has been appointed Christ's successor, and the institution of a new commandment, which forges the evangelical community.⁷ This analysis, focused on the relationship of the composition to its source (John 13, which differs profoundly from the synoptic Gospels by leaving out the Eucharist entirely) has been interpreted as emphasizing the Protestant content of the 1523 woodcut.⁸

In the case of the Sibiu panel matters are complicated by the apparent lack of coherence in the composition, which includes both innovative and traditional elements. On the one hand, the panel in Sibiu is reminiscent of Dürer's 1523 woodcut of the 'Last Supper': through the placement of the species of the sacrament in the foreground of the composition and on an equal plane, which suggests advocacy of communion in

both kinds, and the presence of only eleven disciples, which suggests it represents the institution of a new commandment and the formation of the evangelical community. On the other hand, other elements – Christ's lateral position, the presence of Judas and the emphasis on betrayal, and the lamb in its usual position on the charger – convey more traditional sacrificial messages. Some of the inconsistencies in this composition, especially the absence of John and the unprecedented placement of the sacramental species, suggest the panel may have been altered in order to convey a Lutheran view of the sacrament at the time the central panel of this polyptych was painted over (1545), removing the saints from a probably complex narrative depiction of the Crucifixion. The theological intent is explicit as inscriptions (Isaiah 53: 11-12 and Matthew 11: 28-29) were added to the central panel, encouraging a Protestant decoding of the composition.⁹

Although the fate of the altarpiece in Sibiu illustrates the shifting attitudes to the presence of religious art in the churches of southern Transylvania, the continuing presence of this altarpiece in the parish church raises a number of interesting questions. The survival of the Passion cycle on the exterior of the wings is by no means unique. Transylvanian altarpieces from the late medieval period, generally produced between 1450 and 1525 (either to accommodate fashion or out of genuine enthusiasm for this type of religious artifact), have survived more or less *in situ* in a number of parish churches, both urban and rural.¹⁰ These polyptychs were commissioned by village and town communities with the involvement and sometimes supervision of their priest. In many cases the original format, narrative succession and iconography have been preserved (**Figure 2:** The altarpiece of Hălchiu, closed position).

Does this survival of late medieval iconography point to continuities in the function of religious art before and after the Reformation? Were these Passion cycles meant to transmit the same theological messages or different ones? Were they meant to elicit the same emotional responses from the faithful? Or were they meant merely to instruct? The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate whether a comparative investigation of the uses of Passion cycles, prior to and after the Reformation, could highlight change or reveal continuities in the understanding of religious art and allow us to assess the pace of the reformation process. How long did it take for a community to be reformed and actually integrate a Protestant ethos, including attitudes to art, ritual, ceremonial and

devotional behavior? How can distant observers of the phenomenon in question – as historians inevitably are – know that a particular religious affiliation was the result of a conscious choice that led to a new construct of piety for the people who adopted it? This study therefore also tries to assess whether attitudes to religious art can contribute to constructs of confessional identity and become deeply embedded in the new religious culture of the laity.

The relationship between religious art and the Lutheran Reformation has long come to the fore of scholarly attention. Research, mostly concentrating on Germany, has examined both the theological background to the elimination of art from the context of worship and actual changes in the appearance of the church. Moreover, studies have focused on the new artistic repertoire forged in the Lutheran context and its development both within and outside the church.¹¹ Given the expansion of Lutheran ideas both in imperial cities and territorial principalities throughout the empire, attitudes towards religious art were affected by a diversity of political, social and cultural contexts. This became increasingly apparent when the peripheries of a world that was culturally German began to be explored. Research centered on places like Silesia and Pomerania has highlighted the inefficiency of the *pars pro toto* principle in assessing the emergence of Lutheran churches and the development of Lutheran identity.¹²

In order to highlight change or reveal continuities (as the case may be), we can compare medieval and Reformation uses of religious art, explore its place in actual acts of worship, and investigate the commitment to ritual and gesture focused on images. Perhaps surprisingly, this study is focused on the visual, on imagery and its role both in late medieval piety and in Protestant worship. Why does imagery come into all this? Why were images important? Why are they relevant to assessing change in the process of Reformation? Why do issues such as the relationship between image and ritual or the relationship between images and acts of worship matter so much when trying to estimate the depth of people's allegiance to the new faith? In late medieval times imagery played an important role in the religious experience of the faithful. Prayer largely focused on images and was aided by them. For many, prayer involved contemplation and meditation and was triggered by images. For a few, images even triggered visions (visionary experiences focused on the Eucharist or on events in the life of Christ).¹³ A widely accepted theory is that the Reformation changed all this and that images were no longer central to constructs of

piety. Images, if they remained in the church at all, were only deployed as educational props. They were no longer the objects of devotion which so easily led to an idolatrous mode of thought.¹⁴ Such statements, however, fail to take into account the complex relationship between images and ritual. Images may not have been the focus of devotion, but by remaining within the sacred space of the church they were still seen in a liturgical, and hence ceremonial and ritual context.

In recent decades, a re-examination of the forms of religious life has unearthed interesting connections to social and political activity. A lot of attention has focused on ritual, and its role within a particular religious culture has been reconsidered.¹⁵ It has been suggested that religion had the potential to create solidarities and help forge social and personal identities and that, within this context, ritualistic behavior could be significant in defining group (including confessional) identity and social relations.¹⁶ Within the theoretical framework outlined by Victor Turner, it has been argued that a particular religious culture can be expressed through ritual, which can symbolize underlying differences of doctrine.¹⁷

Among all rituals and ceremonies promoted by the new churches, liturgy (perhaps the most inclusive act of a church's worship experienced by all levels of society) still held pride of place. It continued to be the central ecclesiastical ceremonial used to focus the religious experience of the community and can be used to define and distinguish a particular religious group.¹⁸ Liturgies can not be separated either from the beliefs which created them or the physical space in which they are performed. It has further been argued that the ordered rhythms of words and actions in a particular locality was intended to engage the intellect and senses, triggering responses at once emotional and cognitive. Therefore, liturgy as an act of the community, was meant to express the cultural belief of that community about God.¹⁹ The crux of the argument is that despite statements to the contrary, liturgy and ritual were much more than indifferent matters to Lutherans in the late Reformation, they had turned into markers of confessional identity. In this context, the emphasis on ritual had a double benefit. On the one hand, it helped Lutherans distinguish themselves from other denominations; while, on the other, it helped build greater confessional loyalty and cohesion.²⁰ As both the words of the liturgy themselves and the use of the vernacular grounded people in their local community, Saxons were also encouraged to develop a communal identity as German speakers.

Consequently, this investigation needs to consider a number of assumptions concerning confessional identity (understood from the perspective of a concern for the consolidation process that inevitably followed changes in religious affiliation) that have begun to dominate the existing secondary literature. This need for consolidation is obvious, whether authors believe in the rapid spread of the Reformation or not.²¹ Reformation scholars have found evidence of the persistence of the old ways of worship, while adherence to the new ways (for example, attendance at catechism) was less enthusiastic than expected by the ecclesiastical authorities.²² The Reformation of a community does not occur simply because new theological tenets are offered through the discourse of the clergy.²³ Perhaps it does not even occur when the liturgical format has changed and new rituals have been implemented.²⁴ However, one can be reasonably sure that a Reformation process is complete when actual acts of worship have changed.²⁵

Patterns of devotion, acts of worship, are a tricky subject to study for the simple reason that they are difficult to assess. They tend to conflate the discourse of the church (official discourse) with popular practice, which has sometimes developed outside the constraints imposed by the latter. Patterns of devotion involve both discourse and response and force us to take into account both sides of the elite-popular divide.²⁶ On the one hand, the church provides discourse, not only in oral form (sermons), but also in visual form through images and ritual, ceremony and gesture. These all include particular understandings of events in sacred history. On the other hand, the laity is not entirely a passive recipient of these messages as they decode them within a framework of existing cultural codes and previous religious experience.²⁷

Placed within the framework of this ongoing theoretical and methodological debate, this study can deepen our understanding of specifically Protestant patterns of worship. It can highlight the significant changes fostered by the discourse of the newly reformed church and can also stress the resilience of various acts of worship communities were accustomed to. Such a study can refine our understanding of confessional transformation, the true process of reformation within a given society.

Looking at the situation of religious art in Saxon churches of Transylvania after the adoption of Lutheranism by this community in 1545,²⁸ it is clear that a moderate attitude towards images of the ecclesiastical authorities of the new church²⁹ existed in parallel with the coexistence of a degree

of urban iconoclasm with more conservative treatment of images in rural areas.³⁰ This has led to the survival of a significant amount of religious art in church buildings which was gradually invested with new meaning through deliberate associations of episodes and the introduction of inscriptions that encouraged a different reading of the compositions.³¹

Consequently, the hypothesis put forward in this particular case study is that the Saxon community of Transylvania can only be considered Protestant when its patterns of worship changed, when it no longer deployed medieval ritual to shape its piety or needed elaborate ceremonies to integrate its acts of worship, when the acts of worship themselves had become free of all the traits typical of late medieval piety; when its devotional choices, including attitudes to religious art eventually helped it define its confessional identity and make strong statements about its particular brand of Protestantism.

Passion Cycles in Late Medieval Devotion

Before starting this analysis we need to consider the choice of episodes in these distinctive Passion cycles. We should take into account not only the frequency with which certain episodes are depicted but also the particular sequence of scenes.³² If we consider these Passion narratives in eight episodes, we come to the conclusion that they are focused on the events of the Holy Week itself, from the 'Last Supper' to the 'Resurrection' – in fact more often from the 'Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane' to the 'Crucifixion'. Thus the standard sequence would be: the (1) 'Agony in the Garden', (2) the 'Arrest', (3) the 'Hearing', (4) the 'Flagellation', (5) the 'Crowning with Thorns', (6) 'Ecce Homo', (7) the 'Bearing of the Cross' and (8) the 'Crucifixion'. This we find in Cund (Reussdorf, Kund), Hălchiu (Heldsdorf, Höltdövény), Roadeş (Radeln, Rádos), Fişer (Schweischer, Sövényseg), and Beia (Meerburg, Homoródbene), (**Figure 3**: The Altarpiece of Cund). Finding an explanation, a reason for this particular choice helps us understand the way these images were used. By taking a closer look at the selection of episodes we notice a certain preference for certain events which took place between the Thursday of the Last Supper and the Sunday of the Resurrection. This clearly points to a preference for particular aspects of the story over others, as the most elaborate Passion narratives include

a much larger range of events, ranging from 'Christ Taking Leave of his Mother' to the 'Descent of the Holy Spirit'.

It is true that such elaborate Passion narratives were quite frequently depicted on the walls of churches. For instance, the Arena chapel, commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni, a wealthy merchant from Siena, and painted by Giotto (finished between 1308-1313), was decorated with compositions from the New Testament. It has been suggested that the iconography was chosen to accommodate the services celebrated in this chapel from Advent to Pentecost.³³ In the same vein, in Transylvania, the narrative cycle on the northern wall of the nave in Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerék) dated to the mid-fourteenth century, provides one of the richest depictions of Passion episodes (19) in a strict chronological sequence and enjoying detailed narrative treatment, from the 'Last Supper' to the 'Ascension'.³⁴

This narrative richness can be explained by the fact that wall paintings were influenced by or interacted in significant ways with manuscript illumination and book illustration. Moreover, it has been suggested that the revolution triggered by printing had a significant impact on the way Passion narratives were conceived, structured and ultimately disseminated. On the other hand, the visual Passion story gained a degree of independence from the written text and became a sequence of narrative scenes each inviting individual contemplation, albeit this innovation did not necessarily have anything to do with printing.³⁵

Obviously, with altarpieces the selection is determined by the availability of space, although some Passion cycles depicted on altarpieces are in fact fairly elaborate. For example, Duccio's *Maestà* panel (painted in 1311) for the high altar of the *Duomo* in Siena has 26 scenes from the Passion depicted on the back of the altarpiece, from the 'Entry into Jerusalem' to the 'Apparition on the Road to Emmaus'.³⁶ In central Europe, the altarpiece in Roudniče (1522) has a twelve-episode Passion cycle, telling the story chronologically, from the 'Last Supper' to the 'Resurrection',³⁷ while there is an extensive Passion narrative, in 24 episodes, on the exterior of the wings of the altar dedicated to St Elizabeth in Košice (Kaschau, Kassa).³⁸

This great diversity in the choice and number of episodes in Passion narratives, even when taking into account their location on altarpieces, leads us to consider the popularity of the eight-episode Passion cycle and this particular selection of episodes. While we can safely state that

this selection is not unheard of, it is still not sufficiently common that its popularity can be explained in terms of a prevailing fashion.³⁹ There are some central European examples, for instance the altarpiece produced in 1531 by the Master of the altar in Slavotin,⁴⁰ but if we limit our discussion to medieval Hungary, we can only conclude that eight-episode Passion cycles were not particularly common.⁴¹ Hungary also provides a number of examples where the Passion narrative is represented in just four episodes.⁴²

We might speculate as to whether these eight-episode Passion cycles can be accounted for by the popularity of certain models, the development of a certain fashion. Instead, however, I would like to propose a different explanation. It is worth considering whether these eight-episode Passion cycles were meant to shape piety, to define a particular type of devotion with images of Jesus as its centre.

Passion cycles were regularly used in the late medieval period to help shape devotional models, for the faithful were meant to pray while contemplating the various episodes of the Passion of Christ.⁴³ This took place within the context of an increasing interest in the religious experience of secular society.⁴⁴ It has often been suggested that the average lay person was incapable of higher-order spiritual experience without images to assist contemplation, so various exercises which involved keeping the Passion in mind were considered helpful.⁴⁵ These meditative techniques, initially developed by the monks for nuns, were used to shape the piety of secular society. In this way, the visual, both in terms of image and vision, came to occupy a significant place in the devotional mechanisms of the people.⁴⁶

This was clearest in the Rosary devotion, which developed gradually during the late Middle Ages and became increasingly popular with the laity. The Rosary was particularly suitable for fostering this type of piety, as it combined an 'imitatio' exercise – contemplation on the Life and Passion of Christ – with a quantitative expiatory ritual also reinforced by an indulgence. As a new devotional practice, the Rosary resonated with the growing need of lay society for greater religious participation and new exercises of personal piety to supplement public observance of the corporate offices of the church.⁴⁷

It has been further suggested that meditating sequentially on the life of Christ was inevitably linked to the Hail Mary because of the emphasis on the re-enactment of the life of Jesus in spiritual exercises. Through this

process of appropriation, 'Life of Christ' narratives became part of the Rosary.⁴⁸ Rosary devotions were mostly encouraged by their presentation in book form, their inclusion in 'Books of Hours', where the text, for most people, was both a visual and a verbal one.⁴⁹ It was the success of this picture version that made the Rosary text so attractive, as the prayer not only served as a comforting recourse against anxiety about purgatory, it also shaped the religious life of the laity. Users were encouraged to look at the illustrations (while repeating the *Ave Maria*) and think about the Life and Passion of Christ. It has thus been argued that the emphasis on the person of Jesus and the events of his life in effect transformed the *Ave Maria* prayer into a Jesus prayer, a shift that reflects the popular impulse towards *Imitatio Christi* piety. Thus, in narrative form, the Rosary devotion became the rehearsal of an epic story, reiterating the momentous events of the Incarnation and God's redemption of mankind, becoming essentially a compendium in condensed form of the doctrine of faith. As confraternities often commissioned paintings of the Rosary mysteries, altarpieces, sculptures and frescos made it possible for the illiterate, or those who had no books or prints, to learn and practice the narrative meditations.⁵⁰

In conclusion, it is tempting to associate the choice of episodes on the altarpieces of Transylvania with the prayer of the Rosary, which explicitly connects prayer (a personal devotional act) with episodes from the Passion of Christ. The Rosary initially included meditation on the 'Five Joys of the Virgin', the events of the birth and childhood of Christ, the 'Five Sorrows', the events of the Passion ('The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane', the 'Flagellation', the 'Crowning with Thorns', the 'Bearing of the Cross', and the 'Crucifixion'), and the 'Five Glories', the 'Resurrection' and the glorious events which followed. The number five was arrived at through association with the five wounds of Jesus. This sequence appears in the 'Venice Statutes' of Johannes of Erfurt (1480) and the 'Ulm Picture Rosary' (1483). The number of joys and sorrows was eventually increased to either seven, nine or fifteen, but rather than include further scenes from the Passion, the sorrows tend to include dramatic events from Christ's childhood, such as the 'Circumcision'.⁵¹ However, if we compare existing examples of panel painting or manuscript illustration with the Transylvanian eight-episode Passion, we come to the conclusion that the 'Seven Sorrows of the Virgin' do not match exactly the episodes chosen by the Transylvanian commissioners and their advisers. For instance,

Albrecht Dürer's 'The Seven Sorrows of Mary', painted in 1494-98, depicts Mary in the center as *Mater Dolorosa* surrounded by panels depicting the 'Circumcision', the 'Flight to Egypt', 'The Twelve Year Old Jesus at the Temple', 'The Carrying of the Cross', the 'Nailing to the Cross', the 'Crucifixion', and the 'Lamentation'.⁵²

The sequence in the Transylvanian altarpieces actually comes closer to illustrations of the 'Hours of the Virgin' in the 'Books of Hours', which include series of pictures illustrating either Christ's Infancy or the Passion. Some 'Books of Hours' include the so-called 'Hours of the Cross', or the much longer 'Hours of the Passion', which comprise a narrative episode for each of the eight canonical hours.⁵³ The 'Hours of the Passion' include: (1) the 'Betrayal by Judas', (2) 'Jesus before Pilate', (3) the 'Flagellation', (4) the 'Carrying of the Cross', (5) the 'Crucifixion', (6) the 'Deposition', (7) the 'Entombment', (8) and the 'Resurrection of Christ in Majesty'.⁵⁴ This selection was consonant with the liturgical calendar. Moreover, the connection with the actual offices is also explicit. The visual themes for the standard text of the 'Books of Hours' comprised the 'Agony in the Garden' for Matins, the 'Betrayal' for Lauds, 'Christ before Pilate' for Prime, the 'Flagellation' for Terce, 'Christ Carrying the Cross' for Sext, the 'Crucifixion' for None, the 'Deposition' for Vespers, and the 'Entombment' for Compline.

Although in Transylvania we do not find a perfect match between the selection of episodes on altarpieces and the standard illustration for 'Books of Hours', it is still possible to retain the idea of prayer, which involves meditation on these particular events. There is only one problem: the recipient of the prayers in this exercise is the Virgin rather than Christ. However, addressing the Virgin directly through prayer, especially when reciting both prayers dedicated to her ('Obsecro Te' and 'O Intemerata') one after the other, the reader is reminded by the text and the illustrations of the two major themes: the Virgin's joys during Christ's Infancy and her sorrows during the Passion.⁵⁵

It has been argued that the viewers experienced the same emotions when using the 'Books of Hours' as when contemplating similar images in church. The connection between images and devotional actions, the role of the visual in piety or, more broadly speaking, within the religious experience of the laity, raises the issue that altarpieces, as well as devotional panels and prayer books traditionally used in private devotion, could be deployed to trigger this sort of meditation.⁵⁶

However, the problem of the dissimilarities between the Transylvanian eight-episode Passion cycles and both the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin panels and illustrations for the Hours of the Virgin in Books of Hours must also be taken into account. We are led to conclude that these particular Transylvanian compositions, the eight-episode Passion narratives, although they may have focused the attention of the congregation and stimulated structured prayers throughout the liturgical day, do not seem to have been the focus of Rosary devotion, which, after all, emphasizes Mary's role in the process of salvation.⁵⁷ Thus, this particular function can not account for the choice of episodes. Consequently, we must look to other explanations.

We can not help but notice that all these episodes are connected to Christ's emotional and physical suffering, given that several specific elements of Christ's torments are present (e.g. hair pulling, the wounds all over Christ's body, justifying the use of the metaphor of 'quasi leprosus', the staves used to press down the crown of thorns, the rope used to lead him to Calvary '*sicut oves*').⁵⁸ This emphasis is particularly evident in the episodes depicting Christ's 'Arrest', the 'Hearing' in front of Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate, the 'Mocking', the 'Flagellation' and the 'Crowning with Thorns', and, finally, the 'Carrying of the Cross'. In the scene of the 'Arrest', Christ is depicted surrounded by his enemies, several of whom are waving clubs and sticks as well as various other weapons, suggesting the violence of the scene (**Figure 4: The Arrest, Sibiu**).⁵⁹ Sometimes he is already being physically assaulted, his clothes are being pulled in all directions while a man is preparing to put a noose around his neck. In Mediaș (Mediasch, Medgyes), a very passive Christ, not even facing him, subjects himself to Judas' kiss. This is in tune with the tradition in which Christ often shows a passive pose during the episode of the 'Arrest'. Although he may be facing Judas, he does not respond to the embrace. During the 'Hearing' Christ is sometimes led by a rope (**Figure 5: The Hearing, Cund**) and surrounded by wildly gesticulating men. His feet are bare and sometimes his hands are tied. Occasionally, the 'Hearing' is conflated with a separate episode depicting the 'Mocking of Christ'. This is the case in Dupuș (Tobsdorf, Táblás), where in the foreground we see Christ being pulled in all directions, a man is leading him by a rope, and Pilate in the background is washing his hands (**Figure 6: The Mocking of Christ, Dupuș**). During the 'Flagellation' scene Christ is seen as he is violently beaten by several men using a variety of implements – whips,

branches and even chains and a sophisticated whip with metal spikes⁶⁰ (**Figure 7: the Flagellation, Mediaș**) – while his body is covered in blood and wounds.⁶¹ The ‘Crowning with Thorns’ is depicted according to the northern tradition, with emphasis on the staves used to press the crown of thorns into Christ’s head to cause additional suffering (**Figure 8: the Crowning with Thorns, Sibiu**). Christ is usually depicted seated and is sometimes clad in a purple mantle (to suggest his royal status), while a reed is placed in his hand (as a scepter).⁶² Wounds are sometimes visible all over his body, his hair is being pulled, and his face is bleeding from the thorns. Sometimes he is dressed in a white garment (perhaps to suggest innocence) while a man is shown kneeling before him, hat in hand, petitioning him in jest. The ‘Carrying of the Cross’ is depicted in equally dramatic terms: Christ is barefoot, he sometimes stumbles and falls under the weight of the cross, his hair and beard are being pulled, he is being hit (**Figure 9: the Carrying of the Cross, Mediaș**), he is led by a rope while a man presses down on the cross to increase its weight. Christ’s humiliation is captured in the ‘Disrobing’ episode, present only in Dupuș (**Figure 10: the Disrobing of Christ, Dupuș**). This imposed nudity highlights his helplessness and his transformation into a sacrificial victim.⁶³ This same status is emphasized by the episode of Christ’s resting before the Crucifixion, depicted in Mediaș (**Figure 11: *Rast Christii*, Mediaș**). Christ is shown sitting patiently on the beam of the cross, his hands folded in his lap, his head bent to one side. This image suggests that he has accepted his fate.⁶⁴ Christ’s anguish is further stressed by compositions such as the ‘Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane’ and ‘Ecce Homo’. The ‘Agony in the Garden’ has a rather constant iconographical scheme. Christ is shown in prayer, while three disciples are sleeping.⁶⁵ This is meant to emphasize that he is facing his fate alone, while his companions fail him by their inability to stay awake. The chalice on a rock in front of Christ anticipates the events, reminding us of the Gospel text and alluding to the sacrament.⁶⁶ Sometimes an angel appears next to the chalice, and occasionally holding a cross, clearly foreshadowing the events to come (**Figure 12: the ‘Agony in the Garden’, Hălchiu**). In the ‘Ecce Homo’ compositions Christ, a man standing alone, is being shown to a rather violent mob that is ready to take him to the place of Crucifixion. Sometimes the cross is visible in the background. Often Christ’s pose, his crossed arms, his wounded body, highlight his helplessness and the acceptance of his fate (**Figure 13: *Ecce Homo*, Mediaș**).

One particular reading, which merits some attention, is the tendency for this emphasis to be placed on the suffering of Christ within the devotional context of the times and to analyze it in connection with devotional literature produced by the Mendicants, especially the Franciscans (e.g. Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae*, *Vitis Mystica seu tractatus de passione Domini*, *De perfectione vitae ad sorores*, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* of Pseudo Bonaventure, the *Dialogus Beatae Mariae et Anselmi de Passione Domini*, once attributed to Anselm and *De meditatione Passionis Christi per septem diei horas libellus* formerly ascribed to Bede, the *Vita Christi* of Ludolphus of Saxony, or the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*), as both James Marrow and, more recently, Anne Derbes have done.

James Marrow examines the rise of devotion to the suffering Christ in the late Middle Ages, which led to analogous developments in literature and art: on the one hand, the emergence of the first comprehensive biographies of Christ containing regular and extensive interpolations of extra Gospel texts, while, on the other, narrative treatments of Christ's Passion in art.⁶⁷ Anne Derbes analyzes a shift from the notion of the triumphant Christ, rooted in texts such as the Letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 1: 2-3), promoted up until the Middle Ages, to the *Christus patiens*, which was preferred in the late Middle Ages. She also suggests that while Passion episodes are depicted more frequently than those relating to the Infancy or Ministry of Christ, within the Passion narrative itself the episodes highlighting Christ's suffering take pride of place. Within this context, the changes in the narrative that invited the reader to empathize and offered stimuli to sympathetic and affective participation are explained through the influence of devotional literature, which enriched the narrative beyond the terse biblical text and elicited emotional responses in the readers, and reflects, in Derbes' opinion, a radical revision in the understanding and depiction of the Passion.⁶⁸ Both these readings seem to suggest that the new presentation of the Passion story was meant to elicit emotional responses from the audience and to stimulate a desire to imitate the life of Christ.

Although the selection of episodes in Transylvania sits rather well with this interpretation, and therefore can not be disregarded, I would like to suggest other possible readings of this iconography. While mere appeal to emotional responses seems somewhat insufficient as an explanation of the presence of this iconography on the main altar of parish churches, imitating the life of Christ may have been something of a tall order for

the ordinary lay person. There must be something more at stake, beyond the obvious visibility of the episodes and the overriding wish to instruct. My hypothesis is based on the fact that these episodes are found on an altarpiece, the main altar of the parish church, which places it firmly in a liturgical context. Saying there must be a connection between imagery and liturgy may sound like stating the obvious, but if we consider the actual use of the altarpiece we touch upon a number of more complex aspects of religious ceremonial.⁶⁹ Thanks to its particular format, the altarpiece with mobile wings allows for a carefully staged presentation of the iconography and, we might speculate, its well-directed reception. The closing and opening of the wings encourages an alternative presentation of the iconography of the polyptych.⁷⁰ The altarpiece was kept closed on most days of the liturgical year, being opened only for High Mass on Sundays and major feast days.⁷¹ This means the faithful would not have been able to view the Passion cycle when attending Sunday Mass or special services on feast days. Does this mean its complex redemptive message, its suggestive commemoration of Christ's suffering, was lost? Careful consideration of the use of the altarpiece in relation to the liturgical year suggests this was not the case. There were also other times of the year when the altarpiece was kept closed in the context of liturgical ritual. This was the so-called Lenten period, the 40 days before Easter, starting with Ash Wednesday, which is best defined as a penitential time.⁷²

Traditionally, certain subjects have been deemed most suitable for the exterior decoration of altarpieces that are visible when the polyptych was closed simply because their celebration occurred during Lent. One very good example of this is the Annunciation (March 25th), which is frequently depicted in *grisaille* on the exterior of Netherlandish triptychs.⁷³ The use of *grisaille* itself was considered a Lenten observance, a 'Lenten garment' as Bernhard Decker calls it.⁷⁴ I wish to suggest that Passion cycles might have been considered an equally suitable subject for the exterior decoration of altarpieces. For example, in the case of the Master of Saint Veronica's 'Triptych of the Passion' (1410), a Passion episode, the 'Bearing of the Cross', is depicted on the exterior of the wings.⁷⁵ This fairly early example is not unique. Hieronymus Bosch painted a number of altarpieces where the Passion of Christ is painted in *grisaille* on the exterior of the wings or on the back of the panel or roundel.⁷⁶ The tendency to depict Passion episodes on the exterior of the wings of altarpieces suggests the eight-episode Passion cycle, so frequently used in Transylvania, may have been chosen precisely

because it was considered suitable for viewing during the overtly penitential period of Lent and the dramatic period of the Passion Week.

Moreover, the choice of episodes coincides with the narrative of the Passion Week, which concentrates on the events that occurred between Thursday and Sunday. This is in agreement with the liturgy that was celebrated at the high altar during those days. Holy Week, the period from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, constituted the heart of the late medieval liturgical year, just as the Passion of Christ, something solemnly commemorated at that time, lay at the heart of late medieval Christianity. The ceremonies of Holy Week were elaborate and each day had its distinctive ritual observances. The last days of the Holy Week, from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday, formed a distinctive unity of their own. These comprised the *Tenebrae* services, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and the Easter Vigil. The Easter *Triduum* began with Maundy Thursday, when Mass was celebrated with great solemnity. After Mass, the altars of the church were stripped of their coverings and ornaments, while a series of responsories from the Passion narratives and the Prophets were sung. These were celebrations of the divine office during which, in some parts of Europe, candles were snuffed out one by one to symbolize the abandonment of Jesus by his disciples. Good Friday was a day of deepest mourning. No Mass was celebrated and the main liturgical celebration of the day was a solemn and penitential commemoration of the Passion. The entire narrative of St John's Gospel was read. After the Gospel, there was a series of solemn prayers. A veiled Crucifix was then brought into the church, while the *Improperia* or Reproaches were sung, a series of scriptural verses contrasting the Goodness of God with the ingratitude of the people. The Cross was then unveiled. This was followed by the adoration of the cross. The service concluded with the recitation of vespers without any musical accompaniment. In some churches, after the liturgy had ended, Christ was buried in the Easter sepulcher. This was generally located on the east side of the chancel and in many churches was a permanent architectural or sculptured feature. A watch was continuously kept over it until Easter. On Easter morning, before Mass was rung, the Crucifix was solemnly raised from the sepulcher and carried triumphantly around the church, while the bells were rung and the choir sang the anthem 'Christus Resurgens'.⁷⁷ Although we have no detailed descriptions of such ceremonies in Transylvania, there are signs they did take place in the kingdom of Hungary thanks to the existence of an actual Easter sepulcher

in the church in Hronský Beňadik (Garamszentbenedek, Sankt Benedikt) (1480).⁷⁸ There are also some Crucifixes that survived, such as that later placed in the shrine of the altarpiece in Șoroștin (Schorsten, Sorosthély), which could have been used for such purposes, or the wooden Crucifix donated by Nicholas Apafi to ornament the wall of the Franciscan Friary of Târgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely, Neumarkt) in 1537.⁷⁹

If we accept that such elaborate celebrations did take place in Transylvanian churches, we must still consider the role played by the imagery on the altarpiece within these complex rituals. First of all, the closed altarpiece was clearly viewed by parishioners in this ceremonial context, suggesting that the very act of their viewing was carefully staged. First of all, therefore, we must look at the staging of the events. All through Lent a large painted or embroidered veil (*Fastentuch*) was suspended in front of the rood screen, the *lectorium*, which closed off the chancel, or at least around the high altar. This veil was lifted on Palm Sunday while the whole parish knelt and the hymn *Ave Rex Noster* was sung.⁸⁰ We know that such Lenten veils were deployed in Transylvanian churches as well, because the inventory of the parish church in Sibiu from 1442 mentions ‘Item ornamenta ibidem pendencia pro quadragesima’.⁸¹ Consequently, we must question the purpose of the veil, which obscured the host from the faithful, and even all the clergy, excepting the celebrant himself. It has been suggested that the veil was there precisely to act as a temporary ritual deprivation of the sight of the consecration. Its symbolic effectiveness derived from the fact that for a time it obscured something that was normally accessible. In the process, it increased the value of the spectacle it temporarily concealed.⁸² During this time the altar with the imagery on its altarpiece would not have been visible either. So the veil also obscured the viewing of the imagery invoking the events reiterated in the liturgy. We must also think about what happened when the veil was lifted. On such occasions, the faithful could see the polyptych on the main altar in its closed position and featuring the Passion of Christ – in fact the sequence of events that precisely matched the pace of the liturgical celebrations throughout the *Triduum*. It has been noted that even the narrative pace of the Gospels significantly decreases for the Passion and they give a careful and detailed account of the events leading up to Christ’s Crucifixion and burial, involving a variety of characters and settings. The subject matter is ideally suited to serial representation and consequently the sequential mode of meditation.⁸³

Thus, even in the parish churches of the Saxon communities, the laity could meditate on the Passion of Christ and its salvific value while contemplating actual images depicting Christ's sacrifice. Consequently, their piety, their devotional acts, included the viewing of images that triggered both emotional responses and complex mental projections. Moreover, the viewing of these images was carefully staged, for it was part of an elaborate ritual and complex ceremonial. They were seen in a specific liturgical setting, framed by the penitential context of Lenten observance and the events and services of the Holy Week. Ritual and image both helped to decode the meaning of the events of the Passion Week for the faithful. Moreover, the story of the Passion was familiar to the laity from the 'Books of Hours', being included in the latter as an extra reading taken from John (10: 1-19, 42). It was this account that was read or chanted on Good Friday, helping medieval Christians to come into contact with the New Testament.⁸⁴

Passion Cycles within Protestant Devotion

For the second part of this analysis we must consider what happened when these communities became Lutheran and how the altarpieces were used in Protestant worship. The altarpieces have remained *in situ* on the high altar of the church, but we must look at whether they were framed by the same ceremonies, the same ritual, the same acts of worship; whether they continued to trigger intense emotional responses.

First of all, we know that the image of the Crucifixion and the events of the Passion, especially if they had scriptural backing, were considered acceptable by Lutheran church synods. From the decisions of the 1557 synod of the Lutheran church we learn that those images which had scriptural backing were to be kept, for they could be used to teach grave and serious matters.⁸⁵ Moreover, the synod of 1565 mentions that an image of the Crucifixion itself ought to be enough to help the faithful envisage the events of the Passion.⁸⁶ On the one hand, this suggests a minimalist approach to imagery, as graphic details of the suffering of Christ were obviously no longer deemed necessary. On the other, it also suggests that image was still to play a significant role in the mental processes of the faithful. When they saw an actual image (the Crucifixion) they were supposed to envisage, to represent, to see mentally the actual events of the

Passion. This may suggest that very little had actually changed and that the Protestants continued to deploy images as powerful devices, central to their devotional patterns.

However, if we look at the context in which the congregation viewed these images, we can assess whether changes in church ceremonies and ritual took place. First of all, these images were seen by the faithful in the context of the liturgy. Consequently, we need to find out how liturgy had changed. A first clue is provided by the church synod of 1565, which mentions that the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated according to the customs established in Wittenberg.⁸⁷ This is interesting as it has often been argued that Martin Luther had a very cautious approach to liturgical reform.⁸⁸ It has been suggested that although Martin Luther had called for reform of the Mass as early as 1519, and even gave strong indications as to how this was to be achieved, the implementation of his ideas was slow to materialize. The latter were presented in the *Formula Missae* of 1523 and the *Deutsche Messe* of 1526. In reforming the divine office, Luther retained Latin and followed the traditional structure and content.⁸⁹ Consequently, while Martin Luther, like the other reformers, divorced the idea of the mass from that of a good work and sacrifice, he retained to a considerable degree the liturgical trappings of the traditional service, including altars, candles, crucifixes, vestments, images, music and communion hosts.⁹⁰ Although this may seem rather surprising, it has been suggested that medieval traditions and Evangelical convictions were closely interwoven, sometimes in a contradictory manner, in the programs of the reformers brought up in the late medieval world.⁹¹

We must then ask whether this traditional model of the liturgy had been adopted and was consequently celebrated in Transylvanian churches. When Pierre Lescalopier was travelling in Transylvania in 1572, he mistook a Lutheran for a Catholic service, mostly due to the use of Latin, the presence of vestments and the survival of religious art.⁹² Does this mean that the liturgy in Transylvanian churches remained virtually unchanged? A closer look at the decisions of the synods of the Lutheran church may suggest an answer to this complex question.

The *Reformatio Ecclesiarum Saxonicarum in Transylvania* of 1547 had already provided detailed instructions for the celebration of Mass. The overwhelming impression is that, although it did retain quite a lot of the liturgical format, the Transylvanian mass rejected all forms of elaborate ritual. For instance, the procession through the church during mass was

explicitly forbidden.⁹³ The synod of 1557, while not providing very detailed descriptions of the ceremonial, insisted on the rejection of candles, vestments and all papist rituals.⁹⁴ Correct ritual was also emphasized in the decrees of the 1565 synod, which recorded that ‘panis azymus’ should be used, because that was what Christ had used when he instituted the sacrament.⁹⁵ Appeal to the historical circumstances and to scriptural foundation was thus very strong. The decrees of the new Lutheran church insisted that the liturgical format had to conform to scriptural requirements, and although antiphonies with the Psalms were to be retained the tendency was often to relegate ritual matters to the realm of the *adiaphora*.⁹⁶ The *Formula pii consensus inter pastores* (1572) even contained a chapter entitled ‘De adiaphoris ritibus et caerimoniis’ and stated that the sign of the true church was not in these *adiaphora*, but rather in the scriptural foundation of doctrine and true faith.⁹⁷

However, certain devotional practices bordering on superstition, some involving the liturgical context and the sacrament, were condemned in no uncertain terms as ‘impious and forbidden by God’.⁹⁸ This category of practices included the ‘ridiculous gestures and ceremonies’, because ‘these obscure doctrines were the backbone of superstition’ and counteracted efforts towards discipline and order.⁹⁹ If the church did not maintain ‘decent rituals’ according to the words of God, it would be very easy for the people (the *vulgus*) to slide into superstition.¹⁰⁰ This once again brings to the fore the complicated issue of popular religion and its relation to learned or, more simply, the official discourse of the church. Clearly the clergy wished to implement a certain type of piety within society at large, and equally clearly, in their efforts, they encountered a certain amount of resistance. But what did this resistance consist of? What was this impious behavior of the *vulgus* and what did their propensity for superstition refer to? Superstition can be defined as fragments of past faith, ritual and thought which linger in the consciousness and behavioral patterns of people as testimony to the enduring capacity of popular beliefs and practices to survive in a developing and changing intellectual and cultural climate. In the early modern period, the term carried less benign meanings and was generally used to denounce the beliefs of others or even to condemn ignorance and falsehood in past cultures. ‘Superstition’ was used in religious discourse as a pejorative and all-inclusive description of the beliefs and values of opponents.¹⁰¹ In the Transylvanian Lutheran church synods, the notion of superstition seems to be equated with excessive

ritual and ceremonial, while also firm in the belief that it could express obscure doctrines. On the one hand, this falls within the familiar polemical patterns in which the beliefs of 'others' are under attack, whether these 'others' are older (medieval Catholicism) or contemporary (Reformed) religious systems. On the other, it points to an awareness that ritual was able to embody theological tenets.

The 'Articuli Summam Doctrinae' of 1573 serve to deepen our understanding of the Lutheran attitude towards ritual, as this was seen as a sign of the 'true church'. The correct performance of ritual during the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist was considered a marker of confessional identity, as these were able to reveal the true church to the people.¹⁰² The articles explicitly condemn ceremonies instituted by men and not God, especially candles and ornaments.¹⁰³ Correctness of ritual is based on its scriptural foundation, in other words, divine sanction. Correct performance of ritual as a marker of confessional identity was especially prominent in the discussion concerning particular liturgical rituals.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most sharply worded condemnation of ritual and ceremonial can be found in the 'Articles of Christian Religion' compiled by the University of Saxon Pastors in 1578. The Lord's Supper was to be celebrated with veneration because it had been instituted by Christ, not according to 'papist' customs, which turn it into a 'theatrical spectacle or horrible idolatry'. The emphasis was to be on the teaching of correct sacramental doctrine, consubstantiation.¹⁰⁵ It has been suggested that because the sacrament was the principal bone of contention between Lutherans and Calvinists, as well as between Lutherans and Catholics, liturgical variations in its celebration were bound to cause disagreement and controversy, especially since they expressed important doctrinal tenets, such as the real presence, in the Lutheran case, the teaching of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which Lutherans cited to emphasize Christ's physical presence in the elements.¹⁰⁶

Thus, it was not so much the liturgical format but the ceremonial or ritual aspects which distinguished the Lutheran from the late medieval Catholic liturgy, despite the ambivalence expressed by the texts concerning the ability of ceremonies and rituals to act as markers of confessional identity. Perhaps confusingly, ritual was mentioned either as part of the *adiaphora*, which were not able to express the true church, or as a significant marker of confessional identity able to reveal the nature of the

church to the congregation. We must ask whether these two attitudes were strictly contemporary or whether they developed over time. In the early days of the Transylvanian Lutheran church, ritual was considered less important (among the *adiaphora*), while later church synods increasingly began condemning incorrect ritual, culminating in the articles of 1578. By that time a new church had developed fully, a new clergy had been created, and a new congregation had been forged. There was therefore an increasing concern for the shaping of the confessional identity of this new denominational group. Instruction and familiarity with doctrinal tenets and their various forms of expression became an important step in this process. Consequently, from a chronological perspective, concern for instruction increased and the condemnation of incorrect ritual became stronger as the institutionalization of the church progressed. In time, ritual matters ceased being treated as *adiaphora* and were increasingly seen as important in preventing people being drawn to 'superstition'.

We can conclude that confessional identity had become important in the context of denominational rivalry. Initially, Evangelical ideas were taking hold in Transylvania, both among the Saxon inhabitants of the royal, free towns and the Hungarian nobility of the counties. Gradually, the latter came to prefer the *Confessio Helvetica* and the Heidelberg catechism, while the magistrates of the Saxon towns managed to prevent a 'radicalization' of reform, i.e. the evolution of their community towards Reformed views. In this context, views on the Eucharist were central to the identity of each denominational group, and the way they could be expressed, visually as well as textually, in liturgical or domestic context became significant carriers of meaning. I have argued elsewhere that as confessional rivalry within Transylvania grew stronger, the Lutheran church became increasingly concerned with defining its sacramental theology and expressing this by all possible means, especially visually.¹⁰⁷ This dovetails with conclusions reached by historians of the German Reformation, who found that followers of the Augsburg Confession often maintained practices that had been criticized as 'catholicizing' because they had become useful to them in distancing themselves from the Calvinists.¹⁰⁸ This places the Transylvanian tendency to retain traditional liturgical ceremonial in a whole new light. Consequently, it has been suggested that the sacrament and the manner in which it was celebrated remained, for Lutherans, Catholics and Calvinists alike, an important marker of confessional identity. Even if people failed to comprehend the subtle theological differences,

they would still be able to recognize the visible differences in ritual (they suggested the different understandings of the sacrament).¹⁰⁹ Thus, Transylvanian Lutherans could express their corporate identity by forging a liturgical ceremonial able to stress a specific sacramental theology, a liturgical ritual that was visibly their own.

We must investigate how this attitude to the liturgy in general affected Lenten observance and Easter celebrations. Although the instructions in the decrees of the church synods are not as explicit as we would like them to be, it is clear that while there is a degree of conservatism regarding liturgical format, the regulations concerning ritual were merciless. 'Domine non secundum' was to be sung during Lent, while at Easter 'salve festa dies' and 'victimae paschali' with a hallelujah were deemed appropriate.¹¹⁰ More importantly, a correct understanding of events was particularly encouraged and consequently, during Lent, the Gospel was to be read in German.¹¹¹ Emphasis on understanding the meaning of the day, the meaning of the historical events themselves, is highlighted by the fact that during Lent, until the evening service, the young should study the catechism and aim to master the 10 commandments, the Creed, the *Pater Noster*, the words of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹¹² They should also be able to participate in the service by joining in song.¹¹³

Despite the widespread belief that Martin Luther was the father of congregational singing in church, which he encouraged in his provisions for the liturgy,¹¹⁴ it has recently been argued that the Latin mass of 1523 was entirely choral, with no provision for the participation of the people, except as hearers of the sermon and recipients of the sacrament.¹¹⁵ However, people were encouraged to sing, most certainly the German hymns, or the *Credo*, in German, and this contributed increasingly to the definition of their confessional identity, to their sense of solidarity within the group, their sense of belonging to a particular confessional community.¹¹⁶

Familiarity with prayers also deserves some further comment. Keith Thomas has already suggested that public prayer had the symbolic function of demonstrating a community's solidarity as well as seeking God's help.¹¹⁷ William Christian, on the other hand, has argued that such devotions can have a continuous role over time, not just in reflecting social realities but also in shaping them.¹¹⁸ Prayer can also be understood as performance, and scholars have researched new questions, such as who does the praying, in what setting and when, while gestures of prayer have

become increasingly important in interpreting the expression of religious experience.¹¹⁹

Concern for the correct understanding of the Lord's Supper (the sacrament of the Eucharist) is constant, while the means of disseminating the orthodox doctrinal tenets are interesting in themselves. For instance, the 1565 church synod stipulated that the congregation should become familiar with pious songs containing the doctrine and correct use of the Lord's Supper.¹²⁰

The correct observance of the new type of piety was ensured with the help of visitations, which attempted to root out not just errors, confusions and innovations, but also the 'bad habits of the people'. This was meant to promote order and discipline and to avoid controversy.¹²¹ Interestingly, the articles of the 1577 visitation insist on the instruction of children during the Lenten period. The young were expected to understand why they had received baptism.¹²² Finally, punitive provisions were meant to enforce this observance, and the sacrament was to be denied those who did not succeed in learning the catechism.¹²³

This investigation aimed to unravel the uses of imagery in the context of Lenten observance and Easter celebrations after the reformation of the Saxon community. Passion cycles, because of their scriptural foundation, were considered an acceptable visual expression of doctrine and useful for their didactic function. However, the evidence suggests this imagery was deployed to achieve different goals, by both the clergy and the laity, in the new Protestant context. Although altarpieces featuring Passion cycles survived in village churches and continued to decorate the high altar, they were used in a completely different way, especially during the Lenten period and Easter because they were no longer framed by elaborate ritual or regarded as the centerpiece of excessive ceremonies. Complex liturgical drama was no longer staged to re-enact the empathetic theatrical performance of Christ's suffering. However, the correct deployment of ritual retained its importance, since it reflected the scriptural reference of the ceremonial itself, helped avoid flight into the realm of superstition, and was able to define the 'true church' as well as shape the confessional identity of the congregation. The viewing of the altarpiece in the context of complex ceremonies was replaced by an emphasis on instruction and a correct understanding of the events of the Passion. This appears to suggest that images would primarily play an educational role, supported by the imaginative use of other media, such as song.

Conclusion

This appears to suggest that attitudes to religious images changed significantly after the Saxon community adopted Lutheranism. A clearer perspective on this change is given by a comparative view of the use of imagery during the late Middle Ages and the Reformation in liturgical context, especially during the Lenten period and Easter celebrations.

During the late Middle Ages, the viewing of the altarpiece was framed by elaborate ritual meant to enhance not just an understanding of theological tenets, but also intense emotional responses. Passion cycles in particular were viewed in their liturgical context and their connection to the liturgy was emphasized by the selection of episodes. However, beyond their obvious didactic potential, images also played an important role in the religious experience of the people. This involved the stimulation of mental projection and the deployment of actual images in both communal and individual worship.

During the Reformation, although images had been retained in the church, they were no longer framed by the same elaborate rituals. Moreover, excessive ceremonies were specifically condemned by the decrees of the Saxon Lutheran church synods, despite the fact that, according to some views, they would have been part of that fluid realm of *adiaphora*. Emphasis was instead placed on the correct understanding of the sacraments and images, which, along with music, were to prove instrumental in that endeavor. Images were no longer placed in the context of prayer, individual or communal acts of worship.

However, there remains one slightly blurry area. This is suggested by the fact that the faithful were still required to envisage events, to project mentally, while contemplating images, suggesting that images were still being linked to mental processes – what we might call imagination in the context of specific religious experiences. The other interesting aspect is that the visual elements of ritual, as highlighted by its correct performance, were considered central to the representation of the true church and the shaping of the confessional identity of the Saxon community. Besides privileging the visual, the sense of sight, this also leads us to consider the role of the ritual performance itself within the religious experience of the new confessional group. Despite the efforts of the ecclesiastical authorities in regulating ritual, and thereby framing the use of images in a new way, the very insistence on this aspect indicates that allegiance

to ritual was an important element of the religious experience of late medieval Christians, one that could successfully be deployed to reinforce the confessional identity of the Lutherans. This comparison has helped refine the assumption that the Protestant church was a space completely devoid of images and that Lutheran worship was free of visual elements having completely eliminated the sense of sight. It has shown that the new faith had a complex relationship with imagery, one not limited, as has often been stated, to its educational role.

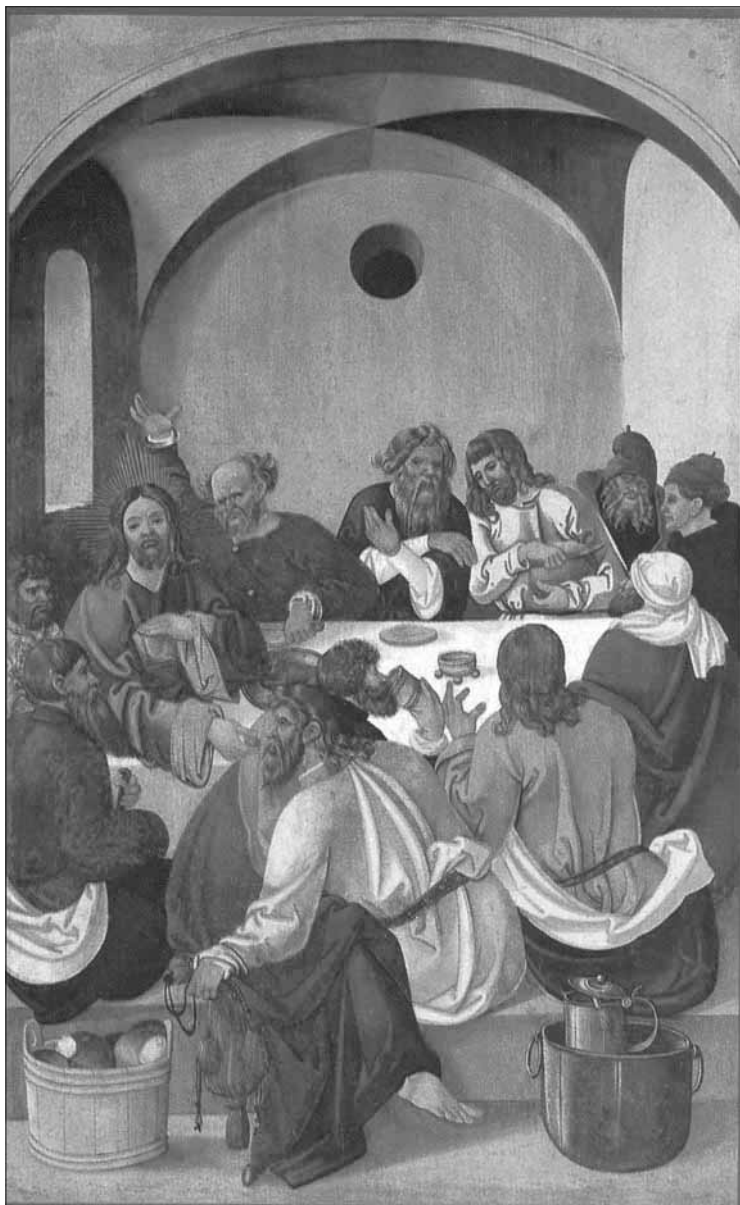


Figure 1: Sibiu, Last Supper



Figure 2: The altarpiece of Hălchiu, closed position



Figure 3: The Altarpiece of Cund



Figure 4: The Arrest, Sibiu



Figure 5: The Hearing, Cund



Figure 6: The Mocking of Christ, Dupuş



Figure 7: The Flagellation, Medias

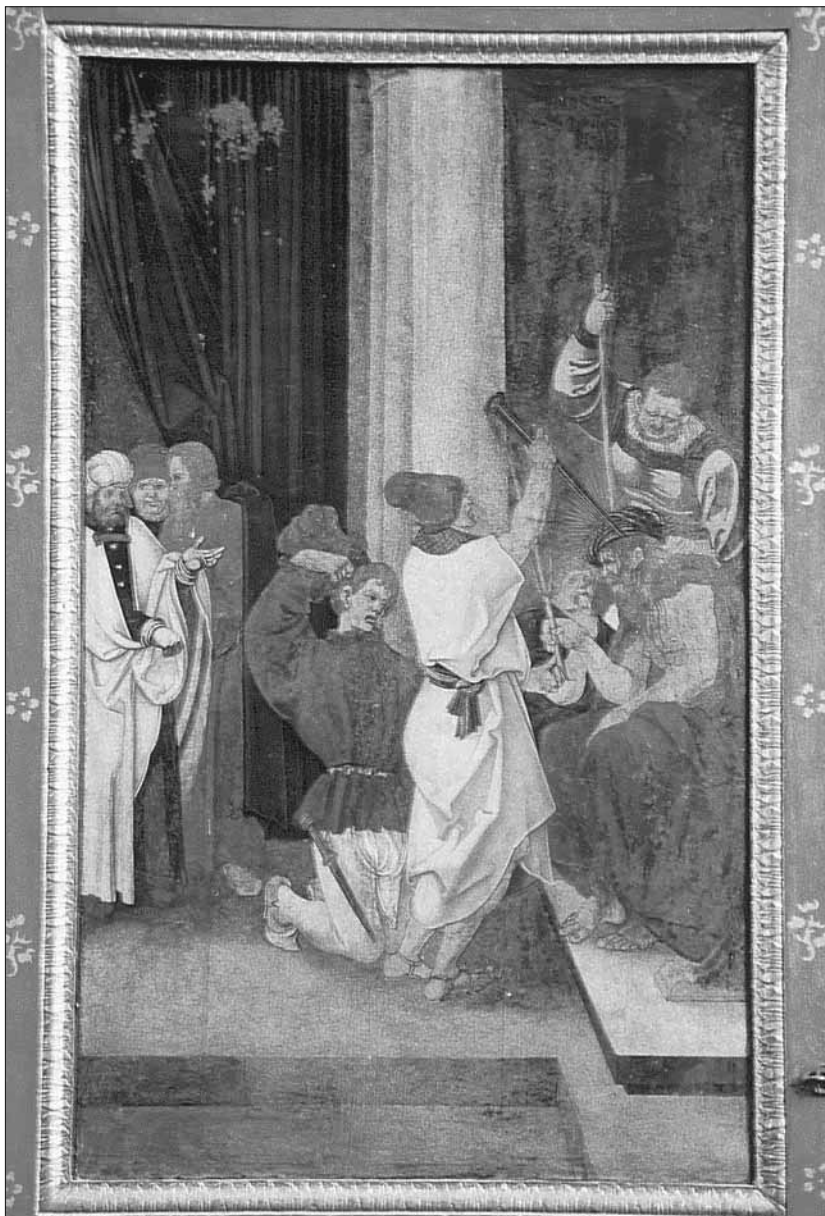


Figure 8: The Crowning with Thorns, Sibiu

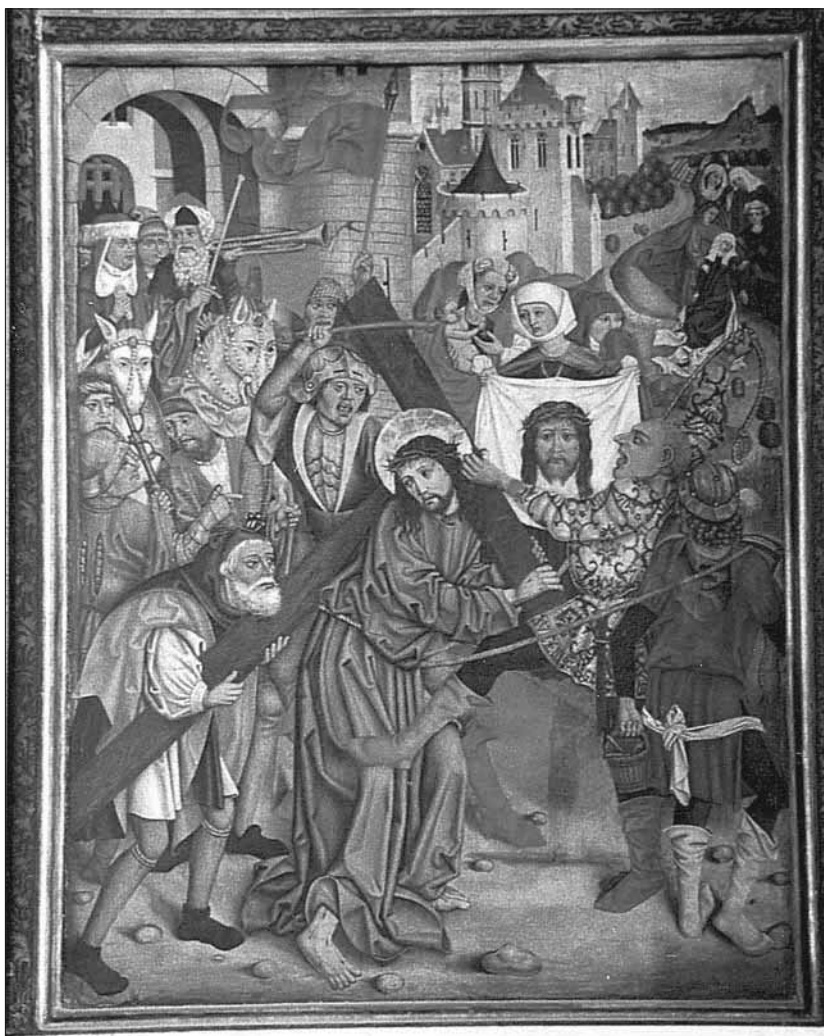


Figure 9: The Carrying of the Cross, Medias

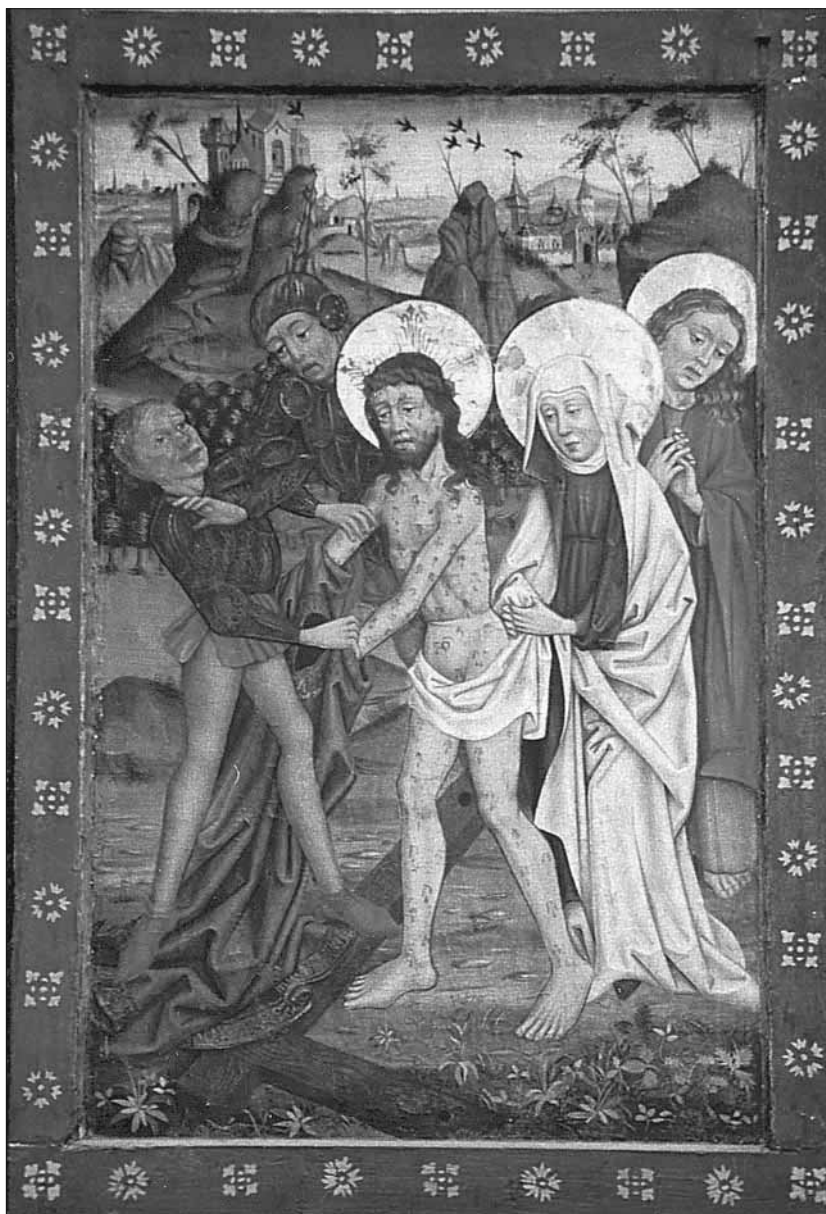


Figure 10: The Disrobing of Christ, Dupuș

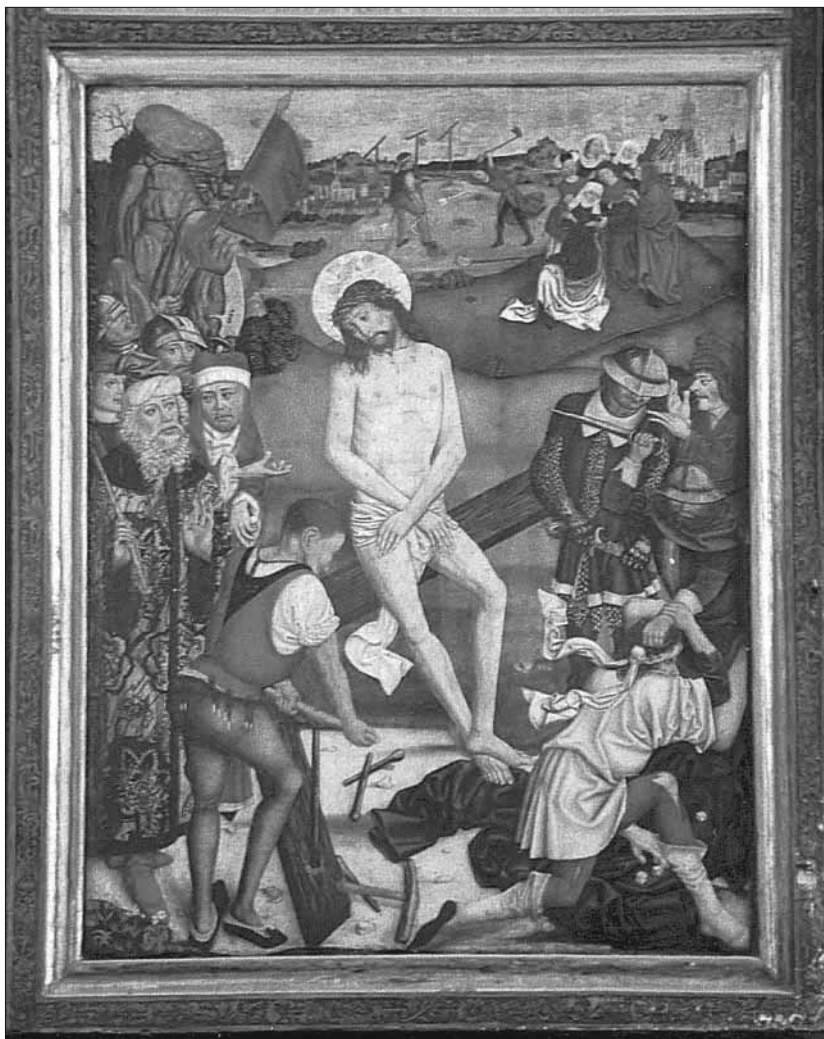


Figure 11: *Rast Christi*, Medias



Figure 12: The 'Agony in the Garden', Hălchiu



Figure 13: Ecce Homo, Medias

NOTES

- ¹ Walter L. Strauss, *The Complete Engravings, Etchings and Drypoints of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), pp. 128-129, 130-131, 132-133, 134-135.
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- ³ Strauss, ed., *The Complete Engravings*, p. 349.
- ⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 221.
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- ⁶ Strauss ed., *The Complete Engravings*, pp. 568-569.
- ⁷ Panofsky, pp. 221-223.
- ⁸ David Price, *Albrecht Dürer's Renaissance: Humanism, Reformation and the Art of Faith* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 255-256.
- ⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the theological meaning of these texts in Protestant context, see Maria Crăciun, 'Eucharistic Iconography and the Confessional Identity of the Saxon Community of Early Modern Transylvania' in László Kontler, Jaroslav Miller eds., *The Missionary of Knowledge* (Budapest: CEU Press, forthcoming).
- ¹⁰ This is the case in Mediaș (Mediasch, Medgyes), Dupuș (Tobsdorf, Táblás), Feldioara (Marienburg, Földvár), Beia (Meerburg, Homoródbene), Fișer (Schweischer, Sövényseğ), Șoroștin (Schorsten, Sorosthely), Cund (Reussdorf, Kund), Roadeș (Radeln, Rados), Hălchiu (Heldsdorf, Höltövény), Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) and Șmig (Schmiegen, Somogyom).
- ¹¹ Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979). Carl C. Christensen, 'Reformation and Art' in Steven Ozment ed., *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (St Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), pp. 249-270. Carlos M. Eire, *War Against the Idols. The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Carl C. Christensen, *Princes and Propaganda: Electoral Saxon Art in the Reformation* (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, 1992). Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts. The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993). Bob Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford: University Press, 1994). John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics. Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Andrew Morrall, *Jörg Breu the Elder. Art, Culture and Belief in Reformation Augsburg* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004). Bridget Heal, *The*

- Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany. Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500-1648* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ¹² Marcin Wislocki, 'Ort und Rolle vorreformatorischen Tradition in protestantischen Pommern in 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Ein Beispiel von Adaptationen mittelalterliche Altäre' in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung* 47 (1998), pp. 345-370. Marcin Wislocki, *In the Service of the Lutheran Faith: Protestant Art in the Duchy of Pomerania* PhD Dissertation, Wroclaw, 2001. Marcin Wislocki, 'Saints in Protestant Theology. Devotion and Art in Pomerania' in *Colloquia* XII/1-2 (2005), pp. 41-65.
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- ¹⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual. An interpretation of early modern Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997).
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- 18 Nischan, 'Baptism' pp. 31-50, Nischan, 'Ritual' pp. 142-158, Bodo Nischan, 'Fractio Panis': a Reformed Communion Practice in Late Reformation Germany in 'Nischan, pp. 17-29, Bodo Nischan, 'The Elevation of the Host in the Age of Confessionalism: Adiaphoron or Ritual Demarcation?' in Nischan, pp. 1-27. Davis, p. 325.
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- sive *Annales Hungarici et Transsilvanici* (Coronae, 1847), pp. 53-54. For the survival of religious art in village churches see István Wesselényi, *Sanyáru világ. Napló 1703-1708*, II in Lajos Demény, András Magyari eds., (Bukarest: Kryterion, 1985), p. 502. Maria Holban ed., *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. II (București, Editura Științifică, 1972), p. 430. In Movile (Hundertbücheln, Szászhalom) a panel of the altarpiece dedicated to St Valentine was later used as a door to one of the storage towers. Juliana Fabritius Dancu, *Cetăți țărănești săsești din Transilvania* (Sibiu: Revista Transilvania, 1983), fol. 17.
- 31 Maria Crăciun, 'Iconoclasm and Theology in Reformation Transylvania. The Iconography of the Polyptych of the Church in Biertan' in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History* 95 (2004), pp. 61-97. Maria Crăciun, 'Rural Altarpieces and Religious Experiences in Transylvania's Saxon Communities' in Heinz Schilling, István György Tóth eds., *Religion and Cultural Exchange in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 191-220, especially 212-214. Sergiusz Michalski, 'Inscriptions in Protestant Paintings and in Protestant Churches' in Arja Leena Paavola ed., *Ars Ecclesiastica. The Church as a Context for Visual Arts* (Helsinki: University Press, 1996), pp. 34-47.
- 32 An analysis of the frequency with which the episodes are depicted highlights the fact that the 'Crucifixion' is the most frequently represented composition (on 14 altarpieces, on 9 altarpieces with eight-episode cycles). It is also a composition which as an iconic type is the subject of the central panel in both Prejmer (Tartlau, Prázsmár) and Sibiu. Other frequently depicted episodes are the 'Flagellation' (13 altarpieces, 11 of the narrative group), the 'Crowning with Thorns' (11 altarpieces, 10 of the narrative group) the 'Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane' (10 altarpieces, 9 of the narrative group) the 'Arrest' (9 altarpieces, 9 of the narrative group) the 'Hearing' (8 altarpieces, 7 of the narrative group), 'Ecce Homo' (8 altarpieces, 8 of the narrative group), the 'Bearing of the Cross' (9 altarpieces, 9 of the narrative group). Finally, there are some episodes, which appear quite often, although not necessarily in the narrative sequence discussed: the 'Lamentation' and the 'Last Supper' (which appear in 6 altarpieces but only once and twice in the narrative group respectively) and the 'Resurrection', which is present in 5 altarpieces, but only three times in the narrative group. The 'Descent from the Cross' and the 'Entombment' are only present on two altarpieces, and only the 'Entombment' appears in the narrative cycle. Several episodes, some of them part of the events of the Holy Week ('Christ Taking Leave of his Mother', the 'Washing of the Feet of the Apostles', the 'Mocking of Christ', the 'Disrobing of Christ', 'Rast Christi' and the 'Washing of the Hands of Pontius Pilate'), only appear once on various altarpieces. Events following the Death and Resurrection of Christ are also rarely depicted (the 'Three Marys at the Grave', the 'Doubting Thomas', the 'Resurrected Christ

- Appearing to the Virgin', 'Christ Appearing to the Apostles on the Road to Emmaus', the 'Ascension' and the 'Descent of the Holy Spirit').
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- 34 Vasile Drăguț, 'Picturile murale din biserica evanghelică din Mălâncrav' in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei* 14 (1967), pp. 79-94. Due to the impact of the Reformation and its iconophobia, which led to a number of Transylvanian churches being whitewashed, too little of the Passion cycle has survived to give a clear idea of the narrative sequence, but there seem to have been cycles in Ghelnița [Gelence] (14th century), Vlaha [Magyarfenes] (14th century), Chileni [Kilyénfalva] (15th century), Suseni [Marosfalfalu, Pränzdorf] (15th century), Vișta [Magyarvista] (15th century), Sighișoara [Schässburg, Segesvár] (15th century), Cisnădie [Heltau, Nagydisznód] (15th century), Rîșnov [Rosenau, Barcarozsnyó] (1500), Ocna Sibiului [Salzburg, Vizakna] (1522), Dîrlos [Durles, Darlac] (1535-1544), Vasile Drăguț, *Iconografia picturilor murale gotice din Transilvania (Considerații generale și repertoriu pe teme)* (București: Editura Academiei RSR, 1972), pp. 68-69.
- 35 Alexander Sturgis, 'Eight Scenes from the Small Passion' in Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 140-143. Among the artists dealing with the subject, we must mention the Master E.S. (1450-1467), Martin Schongauer (c. 1450-1491) and Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), who produced three series of Passion prints. The more extensive treatment of the Passion is provided by the so-called 'Small Passion' (1509-1511), which comprises 37 prints. The 'Large Passion' (1511) consists of 12 full-page woodcuts, while the 'Engraved Passion' (1507-1512) has 15 separate scenes. The variety and number of scenes suggests that there was no standard way of dividing the Passion narrative. An early Netherlandish Passion, printed in 1457, contains almost all the episodes depicted in Dürer's 'Small Passion' from the 'Last Supper' onwards and includes two additional ones. The closest German precedent to the 'Small Passion' in number, choice and treatment of scenes is a Passion series by Hans Schäufelein, published in 1507, to accompany Ulrich Pinder's *Speculum Passionis*.
- 36 Diana Norman, 'A noble panel: Duccio's Maestà' in Norman ed., pp. 57-59.
- 37 Jaroslav Pešina, *Tafelmalerei der Spätgotik und der Renaissance in Böhmen 1450-1550* (Prague: Artia, 1956), pp. 230-233.
- 38 Gyöngy Török, *Zu Fragen der skulpturelen Ausstattung des Altars der Hl. Elizabeth in Kaschau*, in Hartmut Krohm, Eike Oellermann eds, *Flügelaltäre des späten Mittelalters. Internationales Colloquium Münsterstadt, 1990 Staatliche Museen in Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 157-166.

- 39 German altarpieces produced in Nürenberg tended to combine Marian and Christocentric iconography in order to express doctrines related to redemption and the incarnation that made it possible. For examples see: Peter Strieder, *Tafelmalerei in Nürenberg 1350-1550* (Königstein im Taunus: Hans Köster Verlagsbuchtragung, 1993). For instance, the Marian and Passion altarpiece produced in Nürenberg, Cat. No. 67, p. 218. None of the altarpieces in Kärnten discussed by Otto Demus include such a cycle on the exterior of the wings. Otto Demus, *Die Spätgotischen Altäre Kärntens* (Klagenfurt: Verlag des Geschichtsvereins für Kärnten, 1991).
- 40 Pešina, p. 288.
- 41 They are found on the Bishop altarpiece in L'ubica (Leibic) [1521], the high altar in Armășeni (Csíkmenaság) [1543], the high altar in Lelicieni (Chíkszentlélek) [1510], the altar in Hrabušovic (Kaposzfalva) [1516-1520], the Coronation of the Virgin altar in Spišská Kapitula (Szepeshely, Zipser Kapitell) [1499]. Gyöngyi Török ed., *Gotikus szárnyasoltárok a középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2005), pp. 80, 84, 85, 8, 102, 106, 107.
- 42 The Virgin altarpiece in Liptovsky Ondrej nad Vahom (Liptószentandrás) [1480], the altarpiece in Liptovská Mara (Liptószentmária) [1450-1460], the altarpiece in L'ubica (Leibic) [1521], the St Martin and St John altar in Doval's 1520, the Christ Altar in Bardejov (Bártfa, Bartfeld) [1480-1490]. Török ed., *Gotikus*, pp. 30-37, 40-41, 72.
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- 44 Anne Winston Allen, *Stories of the Rose. The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 73-79.
- 45 Winston Allen, pp. 16-33. Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close Up in Fifteenth century Devotional Painting*, (Beukenlaan: Davaco Publishers, 1984), pp. 16-19. Sixten Ringbom, 'Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions. Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety' *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 13 (1969), p. 159. Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, pp. 10-28, 50-60, 104-129, 136-150. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 80-100. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, pp. 111-148, pp. 149-190. Roger Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1997), p. 18.
- 46 Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, pp. 111-148.

- 47 André Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages. Religious Belief and Devotional Practices* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 111-114.
- 48 Winston Allen, pp. 66, 80, 136.
- 49 Wieck, p. 22.
- 50 Winston Allen, pp. 27, 38, 79, 118. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, pp. 63-79.
- 51 Winston Allen, pp. 31-64.
- 52 Doris Kutschback, *Albrecht Dürer, Die Altäre* (Stuttgart, Zürich: Belser Verlag, 1995), p. 88. Another relevant example is Adriaen Isenbrandt, 'Our Lady of Seven Sorrows' (1518-1535).
- 53 Wieck, pp. 22, 82-85.
- 54 Winston Allen, pp. 37-38.
- 55 Wieck, pp. 22-23, 40, 90, 99.
- 56 The placement of the altar in the chancel makes the iconography of the altarpiece accessible to both clergy and laity. This has been discussed in detail for Duccio's *Maestà*. See Norman, pp. 70-71.
- 57 Wieck, pp. 86-87.
- 58 James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemment Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 44-50, pp. 50-54, pp. 68-76, pp. 96-99, pp. 132-145, pp. 163-164.
- 59 Cund, Șoroștin, Sibiu, Hălchiu, Mediaș.
- 60 Șoroștin, Hălchiu, Sibiu, Dupuș, Mediaș.
- 61 Șoroștin, Sibiu, Dupuș, Prejmer.
- 62 Cund, Șoroștin, Hălchiu, Sibiu, Mediaș.
- 63 Marrow, pp. 83-94.
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- 65 Cund, Șoroștin, Hălchiu, Sibiu, Dupuș.
- 66 Cund, Șoroștin, Sibiu, Dupuș.
- 67 Marrow, pp. 6-11, pp. 19-26.
- 68 Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy. Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 2-22, 47-73, 168.
- 69 Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece. Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). Henk van Os, *Sieneese Altarpieces 1215-1460. Form, Content, Function* (Groningen: Bouma Boekhuis, 1984). Judith Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table. The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain (1350-1500)*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989). Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood*

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- 79 Today this Crucifix is in Eremitu (Nyaradremete) on the main altar of the church. Denes Rádocsay, *A középkori Magyarország faszabrai* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), p. 204.
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- 90 Nischan, 'Elevation', p. 6.
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- 92 See Lescapelier's account in Holban, vol. II, p. 430. Spinks, p. 159.
- 93 Teutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. I, p. 32.
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- 102 Teutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 187-188.
- 103 Teutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 190.
- 104 Nischan, 'Fractio Panis', pp. 17-19. Spinks, pp. 159-160.
- 105 *Articuli de praecipuis Christianae religionis capitibus 10 June 1578*, in Teutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 224.
- 106 Nischan, 'Ritual', p. 149. Nischan, 'Fractio Panis', p. 28. In simple terms, this doctrine states that the divine attributes of Christ's nature – his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence – are communicated to his human nature.
- 107 Crăciun, 'Rural Altarpieces' *passim* argues that confessional identity centered on views of the Eucharist was expressed through the preservation of Eucharistic imagery on altarpieces invested with new correct meanings. Maria Crăciun, 'Reforming Church Space: Altarpieces and Their Functions

in Early Modern Transylvania' in *Church History and Religious Culture* 87/1 (2007), pp. 1-28 considers the relationship between these artifacts and the ritual context that framed them, while assessing their ability to shape different patterns of piety and a new confessional identity. For the relation between church furnishings and confessional identity, see Maria Crăciun, 'The Construction of Sacred Space and the Confessional Identity of the Transylvanian Lutheran Community' in Evelin Wetter ed., *Formierung des konfessionellen Raumes in Ostmitteleuropa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), pp. 97-124.

- 108 Nischan, 'Ritual' p. 145, p. 158. Bodo Nischan, 'Becoming Protestants: Lutheran Altars or Reformed Communion Tables?' in Maag, Witvliet eds., p. 104.
- 109 Nischan, 'Ritual', p. 157. Nischan, 'Fractio Panis', p. 18.
- 110 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, , p. 34, p. 67.
- 111 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. I, p. 33.
- 112 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. I, p. 34. p. 69.
- 113 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. I, p. 69.
- 114 Broadhead, p. 124.
- 115 Herl, p. 6.
- 116 Davis, p. 325.
- 117 Thomas, pp. 146-147.
- 118 Christian, *Local religion*, chapters 5-6.
- 119 Davis, p. 335.
- 120 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 105. Bodo Nischan, 'Demarcating Boundaries: Lutheran Pericopic Sermons in the Age of Confessionalization', in Nischan, pp. 205-208.
- 121 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 172.
- 122 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 205.
- 123 Deutsch, *Urkundenbuch*, vol. II, p. 209.

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