Article

Mater dolorosa—Martin Luther's Image of Mary of Nazareth: An Example in Lucas Cranach the Elder

Pablo Blanco-Sarto 🆔

Facultad de Teología, University of Navarra, 31009 Pamplona, Spain; pblanco@unav.es

Abstract: Protestantism is usually thought of as rejecting the figure of Mary as a collaborator in Christ's redemption. In Luther's commentary on the *Magnificat* (1521), we can see that this doctrine would continue to evolve throughout his life, and would not always be free of apparent ambiguities. Luther extolled the figure of Mary, but at the same time he could not avoid reinterpreting her according to the presuppositions of the doctrine of justification and his theology of the Cross, and he understands the figure of Mary as a *Mater dolorosa,* as one who participates in a special way in the sorrow of her Son. Her union with the Saviour means she shares his pain. In these lines, we intend to look at the main points proposed by the German reformer in his new perspective on Mariology, and the possible influence of this change in spirituality on painting, for example, in *The Crucifixion* (1532) by Luther's personal friend Lucas Cranach the Elder, and we propose a comparison with *The Lamentation of Christ* (1502), painted before the Reformation.

Keywords: Christianity; Christology; Mariology; Martin Luther; justification; theology of the Cross; suffering; iconography; Lucas Cranach the Elder

1. Introduction

A Catholic theologian held that the love of Mary would bring to the Christian faith "religious depth, warmth, and the ability to radiate" (Scheffczyk 2015, p. 270). Mary is—in the words of St Augustine—an *excellens membrum,* the first representative of the redeemed community, the "nascent Church" as the Vatican II text *Lumen gentium* 52–69 reminds us. "Mary's position in theology and religiosity cannot be compared to that of any saint or apostle, since no saint or apostle has as an individual person a position or significance in the salvific order" (Scheffczyk 2015, p. 280). In addition, a Lutheran author has argued that "Protestants can take over neither the structure of Catholic thought nor Catholic statements on Mariology" because of the doctrine of *solus Christus* (Borowsky 1977, pp. 9–10). In these lines, however, we summarize the main points of Lutheran Mariology, as well as the influence of the theology of the Cross, more than the *theologia gloriae* founded in the doctrine of Incarnation (we follow the theological expositions in Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84; Preuss 1954; Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49; Düfel 1968; Pelikan 1996; Tappolet and Ebneter 1962, 1996; Wright 1989; White 1998). Feminism and Ecumenism can change this perspective on the role Mary in the history of salvation (Findley-Jones 2019, 61ff.). The Lutheran ideas and their influence on painting could have had an influence on *The Crucifixion* (1532), attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder. On the contrary, the earlier *The Lamentation of Christ,* painted in 1503, shows a different and more peaceful interpretation of this fundamental moment (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 36–37; Noble 2009, pp. 163–73; Blanco-Sarto 2023, pp. 273–303). We turn to this painter because of his affinity and closeness to the German reformer, as a graphic way of exemplifying Lutheran teachings. In this article, however, we do not intend to analyze the complexities of interpreting the visual culture of the time, since this is not a study of art history but of the history of ideas. Moreover, we have to keep in mind that Cranach's intentions are at best not discernible and, more likely, debatable, since he is in the service of his patrons.

2. Mother of God

Luther's Marian Theology was developed out of the deep Christian Marian devotion on which he was brought up, and it was consequently clarified as part of his Christocentric theology and piety. The German reformer asserted dogmatically what he considered to be firmly established biblical doctrines, such as the divine motherhood of Mary, while adhering to the assumption and the immaculate conception of Mary (Findley-Jones 2019, p. 65); however, at the end of Luther's theological development, his emphasis was placed on Mary as merely a receiver of God's love and grace (see Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84, 236–37). Luther's Mariology depends on his consideration of her as the mother of Jesus, and, as a consequence, on his Christocentric piety and theology; that is, it depends directly on his Christology and Soteriology. According to the times and their spiritualities, Lutherans hold Mary in high esteem: Luther also saw her as the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, as proposed by the Council of Ephesus (431) (see Luther 1883–2009, *Weimarer Ausgabe* (=WA) 40/III, pp. 703, 26–704, 4; 47, pp. 732, 7–13; 15–8; 21–24; 47, pp. 705, 6–14; 50–589, 21–8); however, the doctrine of *sola fides* latent in his doctrine caused him to regard the hypostatic union as completely absurd and incomprehensible to reason (Luther 1979, *Studienausgabe* (=StA) 1, pp. 360, 33–361, 4). We shall now see what Luther's re-reading of the place of Mary in Christian devotion consists of, as well as his interpretation, in 1521, of the *Magnificat*.

2.1. Luther's Mariology

It is clear that the German reformer maintained, throughout his life, a belief in the divine maternity of Mary, her perpetual virginity *(ante, in et post partum: virgo concepit, virgo peperit, virgo permansit:* WA 11, pp. 319, 32–320, 7; cf. pp. 324, 10–8; p. 49, pp. 174, 4–8; pp. 182, 30–2; pp. 183, 31–7), and her immaculate conception *(haec nostra fides; si das verlieren, amittimus salute:* sic), although the emphasis of his theology and preaching was more along the lines of considering Mary as the recipient of God's love and grace. However, he also maintained that Mary would be purified of all sin at the moment of the Incarnation (WA 46, pp. 230, 3–26; pp. 136, 4–13; 24–30; see also Gritsch 1992, pp. 236–37; Ghiselli 2010, pp. 183–84). Thus, by considering her to be fully human, he tended to see her as burdened by original sin, since only Christ has been exonerated from all sin by being God-man (see WA 36, pp. 143, 13–144, 1; 47, pp. 860, 35–8; 9, pp. 149, 1–7; 39/II, pp. 107, 7–13). On the assumption he preached that the Bible said nothing about Mary's exoneration of the death, he rejects it altogether in 1523 (WA 10/III, pp. 268, 14–20; 11, pp. 159, 13–4; cf. Bäumer 1994, p. 190). His opposition to seeing her as a mediator or co-redeemer was part of an extrapolation of his doctrine of the *solus Christus* (see Gritsch 1992, p. 238); however, Luther's consideration of the figure of Mary increased from 1524 onwards, after his reading of the *Magnificat,* and after considering the scene of Jesus lost and found in the Temple (see WA 15, pp. 415, 4–14; 17/II, pp. 19, 1–11, 17–22, 24–8; 23, pp. 8–19; 25, pp. 11–8; 26, pp. 20–7, 9).

The usual interpretation of Luther's attitude towards Mary is ambiguous but not negative, as inherited by much of Protestantism. However, when we turn to his texts, we find more than one surprise. Moreover, the strong Christocentrism of Lutheran preaching is not always to be understood in an exclusive manner, for the principle of the *solus Christus* admits interpretations that are not entirely radical nor dialectical. There is, of course, a form of Mariology that is isolated from the rest of the Christian mystery. Thus, "in Luther's theology, Mariology does not constitute a *locus* by itself, but must be related to the *loci of* Christology and soteriology" (Ghiselli et al. 1992, p. 173). In Luther's preaching, Jesus' Mother is proposed as a model for all Christians, as an archetype (*das Urbild*) and an example (*das Vorbild*). At the same time, Mary is only human and fully human, yet adorned in a special way by God's grace. Luther regards Mary as the best recipient of God's grace and mercy. When Mary utters the words, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), God's grace and mercy are best received in Mary's humility, and she then conceives by the Holy Spirit (see WA 27, pp. 230, 27–31; 41, pp. 354, 7–14).

As is logical and to be expected, Luther reinterprets Mary's role in salvation history according to his Theology of the Cross. In the *Magnificat*—he explains—it can be seen how God has looked upon a poor maiden, instead of entrusting this mission to the rich and powerful: he chooses her perhaps because he sees nothing in her. *Coram Deo*, no one can be a worthy depositary of a divine mission. Everything comes from God's grace and mercy, and not from Mary's personal worthiness (see StA 1, pp. 329, 36–43). Luther emphasizes both the gratuitous act on God's part and Mary's humility and unworthiness, as was usual in medieval Mariology. It was Mary's virtue that made her worthy in God's eyes, so there is a certain merit and exercise of freedom on her part, as she was chosen as the mother of his Son. Some authors claim that this insistence on Mary's humility is part of the pre-Reformation Luther, but later it became less important. In fact, these statements on the importance of humility appear mostly in his early commentaries on the psalms (1513–1515), although this idea will remain in his Mariology. Mary's humility—reinterpreted by *theologia crucis*—is a place created by God's external work *(opus alienum)* to build his kingdom (see Ghiselli et al. 1992, p. 174).

2.2. The Magnificat Commentary (1521)

In the commentary on Mary's hymn to her cousin St. Elizabeth, in which there are undoubtedly many Catholic traces, the reformer reminds us that God's work can be perceived by us as our own work *(opus proprium)*. This work becomes evident in difficulties, which we must use to understand that we cannot work on our own. True help comes only from God, who makes the impossible possible for us. That is why we must accept humiliation and sufferings, for in them, God's power is manifested (see StA 1, 356, 25–34). Mary's humility makes her unworthiness clear: she does not aspire to honor, even though she is called to be the Mother of God. She performs the same tasks as she did before, and she was entrusted with such a privileged mission: cooking, washing, washing up... No one considers her better than before. She does not want to be different from the others, but wants to remain at their side. In Mary, greatness takes on a small appearance: "Oh, exclaims the Reformer, how simple and pure is her heart, what an excellent person!" (StA 1, pp. 341, 34–342, 1).

Therefore, there is a certain excellence in Mary that comes precisely from the secret nature of her humility, and she insists on her discretion: "True humility never knows that it is humble" (StA 1, pp. 131, 5). Humility makes us aware of our situation: of having been closer to idols than to God. We cannot separate self-knowledge from knowledge of God: we experience our sin, which makes us welcome his love and mercy. In his commentary on Psalm 51 (1538), Luther reminds us that God loves the unfortunate: he is the God of the poor whom we can approach only through suffering. God only looks and waits for us to say to him: "Help us, my God!" (WA 40/II, pp. 458, 7–459, 10). This is the paradox of the theology of the Cross, which mere reason cannot know, but which can be grasped only by simple faith *(sola fide)*. This wisdom is acquired only through poverty and need: it gives us the certainty of God's grace, even when we seem to be mired in misfortune. In the midst of doubt and uncertainty, we can be sure that God is with us (see WA 40/II, pp. 463, 8–12).

Luther dialectically opposes *humilitas* with *superbia:* God can help only the humble, precisely because they are aware that they need help. Only the humble know how to learn, because they are helpless before God and yet trust in his help. This was the attitude of Mary, who was elevated to the status of Mother of God (see WA 37, pp. 92, 15–29). As we can see, Luther imbues the figure of Mary with his doctrine of justification, seeing her, above all, as the *sorrowful Mother*. Her divine motherhood entails great suffering for her. After the Annunciation, she is regarded as an adulteress and abandoned in her helplessness: even Joseph—the reformer argues—thinks of leaving her, which would mean the immediate penalty of death by stoning for the allegedly unfaithful woman.

In public life, his mother experienced the envy and contempt of Jesus' enemies; she also had to witness the terrible death of her Son, and her grief and loneliness remain iconic. If Mary experiences all this pain, it cannot be bad, and each one of us can endure—in

Christ—such great desolation, which should not frighten us (see WA 41, pp. 363, 5–20; pp. 629, 27–35). Mary experiences a foretelling of the sufferings she will undergo in the prophecy of Simeon (cf. Lk 2:34–35), when it is suggested to her that she will have to give birth in a stable and then flee to Egypt (cf. Mt 1:18–25; 2:13–15). These sufferings of Mary are also described in Luther's commentary on the visit to the Temple when Jesus was twelve years old (cf. Lk 2:42–52): she experiences the forgetfulness and forsakenness of her own Son, when he says that she has to be "about her Father's business" (see WA 17/II, pp. 18–28; 10/I, pp. 1, 65, 5–10; pp. 63, 15–21).

Mary's suffering at the foot of the Cross is so immense that Luther, here, sees a special form of solidarity and importance (see WA 17/II, pp. 19, 34–37). Mary is the model for all sufferers who walk through this valley of tears. The suffering she undergoes for her Son are comparable to the pains of hell. It is the hardest trial that God has sent to any mortal, although she is the holiest among the saints. Luther calls it *desertio gratiae*, when she experiences this abandonment: Mary sees that God wants nothing to do with her, and sees only suffering and anguish around her (see WA 17/II, pp. 20, 31–38). Thus, she is fully human, far from being a goddess or a divine being: she works like all her neighbors and experiences in her heart the same doubts and sufferings as her contemporaries. She has to overcome pride again and again in order to attain humility, and, thus, make room for the unique action of grace (see WA 17/II, pp. 22, 16–28). Compared to the other saints and martyrs, the Mother of God suffers most of all, although these sufferings are only interior. There is no relief possible in the heart of Mary, who needed the special grace that dwells within her (see WA 17/II, pp. 21, 39–42, 10). However, she thinks that martyrs are not to pursue suffering; nor does God abandon Mary in her suffering, but comes to meet her *in* it. Then Mary utters the definitive words: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38; see WA 52, pp. 633, 1–2).

Luther sees this as an expression of Mary's obedience and humility, and, thus, a manifestation of her declared desire to follow God's will (see WA 52, pp. 633, 2–5). The German reformer thus proposes Mary as a model for all Christians who have to suffer in this world in following God's will; she is, thus, a paradigm of how to make the best of this pain: we must not despair, but find comfort and manage our tribulations (WA 17/II, 20, pp. 39–41, 4). As a consequence, Mary plays the dual role before people that the saints do: on the one hand, she evokes fear and rejection among those who live carelessly and complacently; on the other hand, she gives comfort and consolation to those who are burdened (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 8–9). Through Mary's example, God wants to encourage repentance and to avoid conformism in one's own life. The saints, too, must have experienced pain and suffering. We cannot have a "thick skin", he reminds us. Even Mary had to struggle within herself for three days before she met Jesus again in the Temple (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 9–17). Following Mary's example, the one who suffers can obtain this consolation and confrontation, so that God works through us in this way. Even she is not spared this suffering; however, with this example, Christians can understand that they are not alone in the face of tribulation: they can learn to hope for God's help, just as the saints have done; they constitute mirrors in which they can also look at themselves (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 25–36; pp. 27, 6–9).

3. Servant in the Faith

Mary is also an example of faith, for the message brought to her by the archangel Gabriel is not without its absurdity. She would be the first believer, the first Christian. But faith is always seen through Luther's prism of the doctrine of justification and the theology of the Cross: to be a virgin and a mother is repugnant to reason and common experience, so we have to face the Protestant principle of *sola fides*. It cannot be based on natural reason, so the Lutheran critique of the reason of the theology of the Cross applies to this exceptional case. Even the fact that a maiden of Nazareth begets the Son of the Highest is a challenge to an exclusively human reason. The only possible rationalization is to trust in the words of the archangel (see WA 17/II, pp. 399, 24–400, 4; pp. 400, 21–7). Luther defines faith in

the following words: "The true nature of faith consists in simply trusting all that is in one's heart in the word that rings in one's ears" (WA 27, pp. 74, 25–28). So, in the commentary on the *Magnificat*, he had insisted on the "darkness of faith", where there is no light and where it cannot be "seen, felt or understood" (StA 1, pp. 321, 12–4). Mary is the teacher of faith.

As explained in previous studies (we follow Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84; Preuss 1954; Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49; Düfel 1968; Pelikan 1996; Tappolet and Ebneter 1962, 1996; Wright 1989; White 1998), the German reformer insists on this obscurity of faith, according to his interpretation of Heb 11:1: "Faith is the foundation of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen". But now, the word of God is not understood by speculative reason, but is based on sense perception (StA 1, pp. 353, 3–14). Experience is just as important as knowledge, and Mary finds herself before the embassy of St. Gabriel: she is only a virgin who trusts in his words, and then, the miracle and the blessing of God is fulfilled. The power of God's word goes far beyond what we can perceive; even when we cannot understand his Word, it remains credible and true (see WA 34, I, pp. 365, 12–28). In the darkness of faith, God's word is a *verbum efficax*; but the darkness of faith demands the acceptance of grace against the evidence of the senses and reason. Mary trusts in the word of God and draws strength from the Spirit. Faith is the "benevolent trust in the invisible grace promised to us" (St A 1, pp. 322, 15–6).

But Mary is a being of flesh and blood, and so faith and reason struggle within her. Reason does not lessen the archangel's message, and the mother of Jesus trusts only in the divine word; faith is based only on trust in the word of God. Thus, we have only a fiducial faith, mere confidence and no rational knowledge (see WA 17/I, pp. 399, 11–5; pp. 404, 13–6), as an expression of the theology of the Cross. In Luther's interpretation, St. Gabriel asks Mary to put reason aside: she must choose between faith and reason *(unvorstandt)*, for she does not know how the angel's words are to be fulfilled. The reason lies in the incomprehensibility intrinsic to the angelic message; Mary listens, does not object and says: "let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38; see WA 9, pp. 925, 14–8). Reason must remain silent and we must ignore the light of intelligence, and then she conceives the Son of God, and, thus, God is born spiritually in us (see WA 9, pp. 925, 18–23).

She is the first believer: she is nevertheless better than any of us, although she is no exception to the common mortal for she doubts, but faith prevails: she takes this leap into the void, into the darkness, just as we should do. This new perspective can be seen as an evolution of the former Mariology. The doubts are also a moment of the act of faith, but "blessed is she who has believed" (Lk 1:45). This trust in God and in his love is born in times of difficulty, and allows us to experience God's action in our own lives and to better understand God himself. It also enables us to love others above ourselves (StA pp. 320, 2–9; 1, pp. 318, 12–6; pp. 323, 35–7). The experience sets faith in motion and, through it, Mary goes to meet Elizabeth, for St. Gabriel has told her of her cousin's condition. Other motives that lead her to undertake this journey are joy, love, humility and concern for her relative, which are born of her living faith (see WA 29, pp. 445, 1–2; 5–9; pp. 446, 11–6).

Luther's Mariology, thus, arranges faith and love together, for the latter is the product of the former: where there is faith, there is love and humility (see WA 20, pp. 452, 8–9). The reason for this is that both faith and love are brought by the same Spirit. The believer necessarily loves God and their neighbor, as Mary shows us again with her life. The experience of God's love enables the Mother of Jesus to love God above all things. In fact, she represents the purest of loves: she loves God for Himself; she does not seek her own benefit at all: "This is a high, pure and sensitive way of loving and giving glory, which fits perfectly with the beautiful and lofty spirit that Mary has" (StA 1, pp. 326, 4–10).

God's purest love is the love of the Cross, for which he wants to give us all his possessions. Mary is not concerned with the gifts she has received from God and does not take advantage of them, but simply submits to God's will. Luther uses the term *gelassen*, which is very common in his mystical theology, to describe Mary (see StA 1, pp. 327, 24–30; 1, pp. 346, 42). "How rare is a soul that is not proud of God's gifts and remains untouched in its poverty!" (WA 15, pp. 644, 1–3). Mary expresses her love of God in the *Magnificat*

in the form of thanksgiving: she thanks God because he has performed "great things" for her. It shows how God's love has a *unitive way:* God shares his love with Mary and she becomes the mother of his Son. Mary's love manifests itself in her praise, in her absolute trust in God's will and in the help she gives to her sons and daughters (see StA 1, pp. 319, 34–320, 9; 41, pp. 365, 12–18).

4. Mary in Cranach's Pictures

Cranach the Elder (c. 1472–1553) has long been known as the artist of the Lutheran Reformation. He began as a painter for Catholic patrons, and then later became a painter for Luther. There is a wealth of excellent scholarship on his relationship with Luther and on his work as a Protestant propagandist (Michalski 1993, p. 42; Ziegler 2019, p. 6). As court painter to the electors of Saxony in Wittenberg, Lucas Cranach resided at the very heart of the emerging Protestant faith. His patrons were powerful champions of Martin Luther's reform of the Church, and Cranach has justifiably been called its "official artist." Cranach created numerous painted and engraved portraits of Luther, who was his close friend, and provided woodcut illustrations for his German translation of the Bible (Newfields n.d., Related Texts). But at the same time, could not Cranach's representation of the Virgin relate to his own Catholic background or do we really think he was consulting with Luther over every placement in every painting?

In *Law and Gospel and Christ blessing the children* (1537), "Cranach approaches the Lutheran preaching and a vision of the religious set of images most linked to the Scriptures" (Ziegler 2019, p. 1; see 11–16). Both Luther and Cranach were forward in their intellectual relationship, and the artist received direct suggestions from the "German Hercules", as Dürer painted Luther (1498/1499): "The reformer's position on devotional images cannot be explicitly defined either," writes Michalski. "He rejected some devotional representations such as Veronica's cloth, but he did not reject popular types of Christological iconography such as the 'Man of Sorrows'. He clearly preferred 'historical' subjects such as the Last Supper or the Crucifixion but did not oppose continued representation of the thematic cycle of the way of the Cross, not even in the workshop of his friend Lucas Cranach. The theme thus passed only gradually into oblivion in Lutheran art" (Michalski 1993, p. 42; see also Checa 2007, pp. 17–18, 297, 531; Noble 2009; George 2012, pp. 63–4).

Let us now look at an example of the transposition of this theology to the painting of the time. Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Lamentation of Christ* (1503) (Figures 1 and 2) reflects, in the colors and the expressions of the figures, a different interpretation of this fundamental moment of the death of Christ in the Cross. To the left are the two criminals who were crucified together with Jesus (who is on the right). In the center are Mary and John the Evangelist. This is an early work of Lucas Cranach, which is now in the *Altepinakothek* of Munich, and was painted shortly after his Vienna period. What is special about this work is that the crosses are not in line but together form a closed space, in which Mary and John are central (Art and the Bible n.d., online: https://www.artbible.info/art/large/521.html, accessed on 27 February 2023). With an evident expression of sorrow, Mary is found in this picture well before the beginning of the Reformation. *Stabat Mater dolorosa:* she stands at the foot of the Cross; the proximity of the virgin to the thief on the Cross (sinner) should be considered.

Figure 1. *The Lamentation of Christ*, painted in 1503 (Figure 1, in black paint on a piece of white paper painted as a tromp l'oeil at the bottom edge of the painting, 137.8–138 × 98.3–99.3 × 0.8–1.5 cm. https://lucascranach.org/en/DE_BStGS_1416/, accessed on 27 February 2023).

At the same time, she appears next to John, the beloved disciple, who seems to act as a buffer between Mary and the Cross (divine). Was Cranach thinking about this painting or other visual influences of other painters in his circle? The colors of her clothes combine white with red and blue, which are warmer tones. In the background, a brightly colored landscape contrasts with the scene. Now it is Mary who is looking upwards, to her Son, while John is looking down at her, as if to comfort the one who had been given to him as a mother. Could the intertwined and encircled hands of both have something to do with purity? Mary's hopeful gaze seems to be directed not only at death, but also maybe at the hope of the resurrection (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 36–37; Noble 2009, pp. 163–73).

Figure 2. *The Lamentation of Christ*, detail, painted in 1503 (Figure 2, in black paint on a piece of white paper painted as a tromp l'oeil at the bottom edge of the painting, 137.8–138 × 98.3–99.3 × 0.8–1.5 cm; https://lucascranach.org/en/DE_BStGS_1416/, accessed on 27 February 2023).

We can see later that these Lutheran ideas of the theology of the Cross influenced the painting, attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, titled *The Crucifixion* (1532) (Figures 3 and 4), where the emphasis upon the recognition of Christ's sacrifice by witnesses to his death on the Cross is a clear reference to one of the central tenets of Luther's Theology. The scene is crowded with figures which are symbolically arrayed at the right and left hand of Christ. To his right, in a way which is different to the former picture, the Virgin collapses into the arms of John the Evangelist, while the grieving Magdalene embraces the Cross. The Good Thief and Longinus, the Roman spear bearer who converted at Christ's death, gaze directly at him. They are contrasted with the brutish soldiers on his left, who ignore him and cast lots

for his garments at the foot of the Cross. Cranach positioned the contemporary figures of a monk, a cardinal, and a Turk behind the Cross, among the unenlightened (Newfields n.d., Related Texts).

Figure 3. *The Crucifixion* (1532), painting on beech wood, 76 × 54.5 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Clowes Collection: https://lucascranach.org/en/US_IMA_2000-344, accessed on 27 February 2023).

In this rather late painting, Mary can be seen with another woman (Mary Magdalene?), dressed in blue and white, painted in rather cold tones and with a gesture of still, serene resignation. Dark blue is considered the color of sadness. The two women's hands are intertwined as if united in grief, not in the same way as she held John's hand. *Juxta crucem lacrimosa:* she appears to be fainting from pain. Mary closes her eyes as if in a reverie of suffering, while John looks—behind her—at Christ, as a symbol of his whole Gospel. There seems to be a reference more to the present death than to the later resurrection (it is not a *crux gloriosa*); as reflected in the colors and the expressions of the figures, this is a different interpretation of this fundamental moment.

In contrast, to his left, brutish soldiers ruthlessly cast lots for his garments. Behind the Cross are a monk, a cardinal, and a Turk, who represent the unenlightened—probably included as a critique of the Catholic Church and Islam. Three restless horses, facing each other, appear in the background of the scene. Here, the tensions caused by the religious crisis are manifested visually, emphasizing a central tenet of Lutheran theology: that sinful mankind can be reconciled to God only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Everything in this painting denotes the tension characteristic of the theology of the Cross, far removed from the peace expressed in the previous, peaceful, *Madonnas* (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 35–36; Michalski 1993, p. 42; Noble 2009, pp. 168–73; Koerner 2017, pp. 216–41; Newfields n.d., Gallery Label).

Figure 4. *The Crucifixion* (1532), detail, painting on beech wood, 76 × 54.5 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Clowes Collection: https://lucascranach.org/en/US_IMA_2000-344, accessed on 27 February 2023).

As we have seen, in the comment on the *Magnificat*, the German reformer also interpreted the issue of Mary according to his theology of the Cross. These ideas and their influence on painting can be seen, especially, in *The Crucifixion*, attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder (Figure 2). The emphasis upon the recognition of only Christ's sacrifice by witnesses to his death on the Cross is a clear reference to one of the central tenets of Luther's Theology: that sinful mankind can be reconciled to God only by faith. This work is quite different, in colors and expressions, from the former *The Lamentation of Christ*, painted in 1503 (Figure 1). Although, paradoxically, Cranach's latest representations were especially of *Madonnas*, which corresponds rather to the *theologia gloriae* of Incarnation, this painting of 1532 shows us how, for the later Luther—the theologian of the *theologiae crucis* of the death of Christ—earlier Mary was particularly exemplary of *Mater dolorosa:* she almost seems to be a different person, and the maternal attitude is changed to a suffering dismay. This last representation of the Lutheran theology seems to have helped Cranach to understand the situation better (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 31–36; Noble 2009, pp. 170–73; Koerner 2017, pp. 266–74).

5. Conclusions

As we have seen, Luther believed to the end of his life in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, and that she always remained for him worthy of veneration, even if he was concerned that she might be placed on the same level as Christ. However, he finds it difficult to regard Mary as "helper and advocate" (*Fürsprecherin*) because of his Christocentrism, for this would imply her own merit and self-sufficiency; and he cannot always see her as *Fürbitterin*, or an intercessor who intercedes on our behalf with God. He asks, however, that the "Hail Mary" should continue to be recited in her honor and praise (the "full of grace" he translates as "gracious", saying that "we could not give a better name to her who is gracious and favourable", although he allows the usual translation to remain enforced). This recommendation will appear only in the catechism of Michael Agricola (1510–1557), evangelizer of Finland (see WA 10/III, p. 321; pp. 1711, 409; 10/III, pp. 321 and 325; Preuss 1954, 26ff.).

It is only natural that the reformer also honored Mary in a special way among all the saints, for Luther saw in her a model of humility: "Yes, she will put us to shame at the last day, when we look upon her as the glorious Virgin and she turns to us, our pride gone, and says to us: I have not become proud and have had more than you, empress or queen, could that have had anything in comparison to the fact that I have been the Mother of God and that the angels and the saints have exalted me, that I am the blessed and most gracious of all women? And yet I have not become proud". Using his frequent coarse language, in comparison with Mary men are "an object where the devil wipes his feet" (WA 52, p. 684). In other words, she is sinless, while we are full of pride and many other faults. As we have seen, he proposed her as a model of faith, through which justification comes to us: "Therein lies the true marvel, that the Virgin Mary believed that such things would come to pass, thereby encouraging us also to believe, for this gospel places us before a doctrine and an admonition" (WA 7, p. 189; see 17/II, p. 399).

Likewise, the German reformer saw in Mary a source of consolation for the poor who wander through this earth on pilgrimage and wander through this vale of tears in sorrow (WA 10/III, p. 433; 41, p. 363; 7, p. 569). He often allegorically relates it to the Church (WA 10/I, pp. 1 and 140; 17/2, p. 69; see Preuss 1954, p. 18), although Mary as *mater Ecclesiae* is mainly a Catholic image. In 1532, he called her *domina super coelum et terram,* and on 2 July 1537 he preached of her: "No woman equals you. You are above empresses and queens, exalted above all nobility, wisdom and holiness". In 1543, three years before his death, he affirmed Mary's holiness at the moment of the Incarnation—although it may seem contradictory to what has been said above—and affirmed that he always believed her to be free from all personal sin (WA 36, pp. 208ff.; 17/II, p. 400; 23, p. 728; 45, p. 105). The role of Mary in our salvation is, at least symbolically, important.

Mariology and devotion to Mary has, however, enjoyed an uncertain future in the various Protestant denominations, although in recent times—as a consequence of the Ecumenism and the revaluation of the role of women in social life—it has also been the subject of attention among theologians (see Scheele 2016). Some authors maintain that Christ is more important for Protestant piety, but at the same time the current Evangelical thought also sees the Church as the living body of Christ. Maybe they overlook that the veneration of the saints, especially of the Mother of God, does not diminish but rather strengthens the worship of Christ, as is shown by the prayers that the Church dedicates to Mary, the angels and the saints, which all end by glorifying Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity (cf. Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49). But in this whole panorama, the influence of *theologia crucis* is definitive, and, as we have seen, these ideas and their influence on painting could be seen in *The Crucifixion* (Figure 2), attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, in contrast to the earlier *The Lamentation of* Christ, painted in 1503 (Figure 1). For Luther, Mary was, especially, *Mater dolorosa.*

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