TABLE AND REFORM. ICONOGRAPHY AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE LAST SUPPER IN THE TRIDENTINE PERIOD

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Abstract: *During the Catholic Reformation, renewed archaeological interest led to the revival of early Christian imagery, notably the* triclinium *and the apostles reclining at table, seen in artists such as Santi di Tito, Stradano, and Barocci. Contrasting interpretations emerged, ranging from Tintoretto's humble, intimate compositions to Veronese's grand, ceremonial banquets. These works reflect the tension between emotional expressiveness and Eucharistic solemnity. This study highlights the layered meanings and allegorical dimensions of these representations, particularly the* Coena Domini*, linking medieval traditions with Lutheran iconographic parallels.*

Keywords: *Catholic Reformation;* Coena Domini*; eucharistic symbolism; table iconography; Lutheran influence.*

Resumo: *Durante a Reforma Católica, o renovado interesse arqueológico levou ao ressurgimento da imaginária cristã primitiva, nomeadamente o triclínio e os apóstolos reclinados à mesa, visíveis em artistas como Santi di Tito, Stradano e Barocci. Surgiram interpretações contrastantes, que vão desde as composições humildes e intimistas de Tintoretto até aos grandiosos e cerimoniais banquetes de Veronese. Estas obras refletem a tensão entre a expressividade emocional e a solenidade eucarística. Este estudo destaca os significados estratificados e as dimensões alegóricas dessas representações, particularmente a* Coena Domini*, estabelecendo ligações entre as tradições medievais e os paralelos iconográficos luteranos.*

Palavras-chave: *Reforma Católica;* Coena Domini*; simbolismo eucarístico; iconografia da mesa; influência luterana.*

INTRODUCTION

Tables represent part of our common human experience and cultural heritage, and they symbolise the character of a community as well as the place of the individual within that community. The Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși was inspired by the traditions of his homeland when he designed the *Monumental Ensemble* in Târgu Jiu (1937-1938) to commemorate the victims of the First World War. One part of this ensemble, the *Table of Silence* is composed of two cylindrical blocks of stone surrounded by twelve monolithic seats (Fig. 1). The refined formal and spatial unity

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Fig. 1
Constantin Brâncuşi, 1937-1938. *Table of Silence*. Târgu Jiu, Romania
Photo: Danboia. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masa_t%C4%83cerii#/media/Fi%C8%99ier:Masa_tacerii_T%C3%A2rgu_Jiu.jpg

of the seats and the table suggest meditation, while the material and the technique that he employed to create them (in rudely worked stone) evoke folk art, particularly the wooden «low table» (masa joasă) used by peasant families from Oltenia, as well as the stone tables placed in the courtyards of Orthodox churches intended for funeral offerings. Being left empty, the table and seats imply the absence of family members, missing in war or disaster. The table, however, spiritually reunites the community in remembrance[1].

The manifold symbolic functions of the table in Christian tradition are exemplified by representations of the Last Supper. According to Dominique Rigaux, this crucial event is a solemn feast permeated by a sense of departure and remembrance: «Repas de fête et repas d'adieu avec l'annonce de la trahison, mais aussi repas sacramentel avec l'institution de l'Eucharistie; le seul où Il ne soit pas simplement hôte mais amphitryon, convive mais nourriture». The table is the place where the solemn Eucharistic benediction of the bread and wine and the dramatic event of the announcement of the betrayal of Christ take place: «Tout se passe come si l'espace matériel et concret de la table s'imposait comme le lieu nécessaire, sinon obligé, du repas eucharistique pour les Primitifs de l'Italie» (Rigaux 1989, pp. 29-30).

Rigaux observes that in the earliest representations of the Last Supper, such as the folio of the *Codex Purpureus* of the Cathedral of Rossano (around 570), or the fresco of the Church Sant'Angelo in Formis (11th century), the liturgical gesture of Christ is associated with Judas's extended hand as he places the piece of bread in the bowl, thus revealing himself as a traitor. In this way, the gesture of the Saviour would imply a double meaning: the benediction of the bread and wine and the identifying

[1] The *Table of Silence* should be viewed in relation to the other two components of the *Monumental Ensemble*, the *Gate of the Kiss* and the *Endless Column*, as these mark the phases of the human life. Balas 1987, chap. 3.

of the traitor (Rigaux 1989, p. 33). The same manifoldness can be observed in the mosaic of the baptistery in Florence (1285-1295), in which we see Judas kneeling before Christ, receiving the piece of bread as in Holy Communion. Judas's gesture is comparable to that of the penitent woman washing the feet of the Saviour during the feast in the house of Simon (mosaic in the Cathedral of Monreale, 12th century) (Rigaux 1989, pp. 24-35).

1. PRACTICES OF THE CONFRATERNITIES DURING THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The ritual of the washing of the feet as an act of humbleness and reconciliation appears on the page of the *Codex Rossano*, and it remains part of Christian liturgical practice of Holy Week. During the Middle Ages and the Catholic Counter-Reformation the members of Christian confraternities gathered in their oratories and chapels and performed similar rites. The *Corpus Christi* confraternities were parish-centered lay organisations that were engaged in the veneration of the Holy Sacrament, and they performed various charitable and religious work, the most important of which was to accompany the Body of Christ to the house of the sick within the parish (Rubin 1991, pp. 232-243).

In Venice Corpus Christi confraternities possessed a chapel within the parish church, furnished with a *banco del Sacramento* (seats designed for the twelve leaders of the confranternity), above which hung paintings, such as the triptych in the church of Santa Margherita commissioned from Jacopo Tintoretto titled *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, the *Last Supper* and *The Washing of the Feet of the Disciples* (1576). The latter scene symbolised self-abasement and brotherly love, as well as purification from sins, which were considered essential before partaking in Holy Communion. Charitable actions performed by the members of the confraternity are symbolised by the Last Supper scene in which poor beggars appear in the foreground (Worthen 1996, pp. 715-716).

All of Jacopo Tintoretto's depictions of the Last Supper in Venice were placed in chapels of confraternities that were dedicated to the veneration of the Holy Sacrament. Consequently, the iconography, the character of the apostles and their gestures, as well as the setting, express the humbleness of confraternal piety (Rosand 1997, pp. 153-159)[2]. The low, rectangular table turned at an angle to the picture plane in the Last Supper scene in the San Trovaso (1564-1566) extends in the direction of the spectator, who thus becomes engaged in the dramatic event. The agitated figures of the apostles are arranged around the low table on simple chairs (Fig. 2). The apostles in the Last

[2] Rosand points out that the style of Tintoretto was considered in contemporary sources, for example Ridolfi, as «humble» and «devout» (humili sedie, gesti divoti). RIDOLFI, Carlo, 1648. *Le Maraviglie d'arte*, vol. 2. p. 39, cited by Rosand 1997, p. 241, note 70.



Fig. 2. Jacopo Tintoretto, 1564-1566. *Last Supper*. San Trovaso, Venice
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacopo_Tintoretto_-_Last_Supper_-_San_Trovaso_Venice.jpg

Supper scene in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (1579-1581) are also depicted in a characteristically humble recumbent position. In the Last Supper scene in San Polo (1574-1577), Christ communicates with two apostles with His hands extended, while one of the disciples offers bread to a beggar, thus combining the essence of Holy Communion with the vocation of the confraternities to help those in need.

In the same period, in Rome Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595) offered his followers a model of self-perfection achieved through spiritual experiences in the San Girolamo della Carità combined with voluntary visits paid to the hospitals to cure the sick and abandoned (Russo 2001, p. 9). In his reformatory activity Saint Philip continued the late medieval tradition of the Confraternita della Carità (the Brotherhood of Charity) to which he himself adhered, yet he also reformed the customs of the medieval confraternities by introducing new practices of devotion, such as listening to and discussing lectures given by learned lay members of the Oratorian community, or making pilgrimages to the main Roman basilicas on Maundy Thursdays. The preaching style of the oratory was compared by Philip's close follower, the future historian Cesare Baronio, to a modest meal, in which the Word of God is distributed among the ordinary people as bread.

> *As it is known to your Sanctity, the old custom of our Oratory is that on each and every day in the afternoon hours, the bread of the Word of God is broken to the poor unlike that more sublime manner that one witnesses during the holy sermons, but in somewhat inferior and more familiar style destined to move the spirit of the attendants (as it was proved by the everyday experience).*

> *Nota est Sanctitati vestrae vetus consuetudo Oratorii nostri, in quo singulis diebus, pomeridianis horis, panis verbi Dei sic parvulis frangitur, ut non illo sublimi dicendi genere, quod in sacris concionibus adhiberi solet, sed aliquanto submissiore, ac magis familiari, verum ad permovendos audientium animos (ut diuturno experimento comprobatum est), valdé accomodato* (Baronius 1624).

2. THE RISE OF ARCHEOLOGICAL INTEREST

Saint Philip Neri's meditations in the early Christian catacomb of San Sebastiano and the pilgrimages of the Oratorian community to the Seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome (Giro delle Sette Chiese) gave rise to an interest in Christian archeology (Nicolai 2000). The return to the origins of the Church also formed part of the official representation of the Roman Curia in the second half of the Cinquecento. Medals issued in 1599 commemorating the reconstruction of the Altar of the Sacrament in the transept of the Lateran Basilica under Pope Clement VIII depict the scene of the Last Supper in an archaic fashion[3]. Christ and the disciples are sitting around a table close to each other, as was customary in representations from the early Trecento, such as Pietro Lorenzetto's fresco (1316-1319) in the Lower Basilica of Assisi. The imitation of the Byzantine style at the end of the 16th century can be understood as a voluntary revitalisation of an archaic form.

According to ancient tradition, the very table that served for Christ and the disciples for the Last Supper was preserved as a relic in the Lateran Basilica[4]. This relic was kept in the Chapel of Saint Thomas in the east portico until 1647, yet Pope Clement VIII commissioned a bronze relief (1597) from Curzio Vanni to decorate the Altar of the Sacrament, which was destroyed during the Napoleonic era and substituted by a 19th century copy of Leonardo's Last Supper (Fig. 3). According to a drawing kept in the Royal Library in Windsor, Vanni's relief depicted the apostles sitting at a long table, parallel to the picture plane, facing the viewer in the fashion that was customary in Tuscany and elsewhere in Italy during the 15th century (Freiberg 1995, pp. 149 and 307-309). Vanni's relief, although it did not have any connection with the relic of the table, which was preserved as mentioned in the Chapel of Saint Thomas, was covered by a metal grille throughout the year and theatrically unveiled on the occasion of the most important religious feasts. Moreover, on Holy Thursday the relic of the table was exposed for veneration on

[3] Emilio Bonis, Medal of Clement VIII commemorating the Lateran sacrament altar. Medagliere Vaticano. Published by Freiberg 1995, p. 151.

[4] Freiberg quotes Nicolò Signorili's *Descriptio Urbis Romae*, dating from around 1430, which mentions the presence of the relic in the papal vestry also known as the chapel of Saint Thomas, located in the east portico (Freiberg 1995, p. 249, note 76 and cat. II.C.3).

the high altar of the Basilica, to emphasise the continuity between the apostles and their successors, the popes.

While Curzio Vanni's relief adopted the scheme of the traditional long table that was customary in Central Italian tradition, some contemporary historians in Florence and in Rome suggested that the artists should return to the form of the *triclinium* as described in ancient sources. According to Anthony Blunt, the works of certain learned scholars such as the Florentine Girolamo Mercuariale (*Artis gymnasticae libri sex* 1569) and Pedro Chacon (*De Triclinio* 1588) inspired a group of Italian artists to intepret the Last Supper in a particular fashion (Blunt 1939). This was in fact a revitalisation of the ancient custom of lying on couches during meals, a scene also adopted by the early Christian representations of the Last Supper. While this interpretation remained somewhat scarce in Italy, being confined to artists in contact with the aforementioned antiquarians, such as Lodovico Cardi (also called Cigoli) and Giovanni Stradano (Jan van der Straet) (Fig. 4), it gained enormous popularity in 17th century France, albeit for different reasons[5]. The importance of the *triclinium* for our discussion is that it was contemporary with the reconstruction of the Lateran



Fig. 3
Lateran Basilica. *Altar of the Sacrament*.
Original bronze relief by Curzio Vanni (1597),
later substituted
Photo: Ferenc Veress



Fig. 4
Jan van der Straet (1523-1605), end of the 16th century,
Study for the Last Supper. Vienna, Albertina, inv. 7952
Source: https://sammlungenonline.
albertina.at/?query=search=/record/
objectnumbersearch=[7952]&showtype=record

[5] According to Blunt, Poussin, Philippe de Champaigne and Le Brun adopted the *triclinium* because it became a hallmark of the antique style. Blunt 1939, pp. 274-275.

Basilica and other manifestations of the interest in the origins of Christianity, such as Cesare Baronio's *Annales Ecclesiastici* or San Carlo Borromeo's treatise on church architecture (Sénécal 2000; Ostrow 2009).

3. LEONARDO AND DRAMATIC ASPECTS OF THE LAST SUPPER SCENE

Contemporary and later scholars alike understood that one of Leonardo da Vinci's main concerns in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan was to represent the Last Supper as a dramatic event. The first witness of the artist's efforts was his friend Fra' Luca Pacioli, a mathematician and author of the treatise titled *De divina proportione*. In 1498, Pacioli described the scene in the refectory of the Santa Maria delle Grazie as a drama, showing the emotional reactions of the apostles to Christ's announcement that one of them would betray Him[6] (Fig. 5).

Moreover, the new dramatism originated from the so-called Albertian principle of Renaissance painting, which aimed to emphasise the emotional state of the figures at a particular event as echoed by Leonardo's observations on the states of mind of the human figures.



Fig. 5. Raffaello Morghen, 1800. *Last Supper.* Vienna, Albertina, inv. DG2013/155
Source: https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[DG2013/155]&showtype=record

[6] Luca Pacioli's dedicatory introduction to *De divina proportione* is quoted in Pomilio and Chiesa, eds., 1978, p. 96.

> *All those who are present at some event deserving notice, express their admiration, but in various manners. As when the hand of justice punishes some malefactor. If the subject be an act of devotion, the eyes of all present should be directed towards the object of their adoration, aided by a variety of pious actions with the other members; as at the elevation of the host at mass, and other similar ceremonies* (Vinci 1802, CLXI; Arasse 1997, pp. 283-284).

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe emphasised that

> *Here* [i.e. in Milan, in the refectory of the Santa Maria delle Grazie] *was no attempt at imitating an uncertain antiquated costume; it would have been highly improper to stretch out the holy company upon cushions in this place. No, the picture must be brought near to the present, Christ must take his last supper with the Dominicans at Milan* (Goethe 1867, p. 243).

Goethe understood that Leonardo respected the Florentine tradition of the Last Supper scenes, which were originally designed for refectories where communities of friars had their everyday meals. Stendhal believed that the ancient costume of the lying figures and the *triclinium* would have diverted Leonardo from interpreting the true drama between the Master and His disciples (Stendhal 1854, chap. XLV and chap. LIV). Christ's gestures undoubtedly have a multiple message and they should be interpreted in the light of the tradition of Last Supper scenes as well as according to Leonardo's new interest in representing the states of mind of the human characters (Wasserman 1983).

The new dramatism of Leonardo's art influenced Andrea del Sarto's *Last Supper* in the Monastery of San Salvi, Florence (1526-1527) and Federico Barocci's *Last Supper* in the Cappella del Santissimo, in the Cathedral of Urbino (1590-1599), among others[7].

4. FEDERICO BAROCCI AND THE NEW DEMANDS OF THE TRIDENTINE CHURCH

The monumental *Last Supper* (1590-1599) by Federico Barocci was commissioned for the Cathedral of Urbino in the chapel of the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament (Emiliani 1985, II, pp. 331-341). The dramatic scene focused on the figure of the Saviour as he blesses the bread and the wine strongly reminds one of Leonardo's Cenacolo in Milan. On the other hand, the virtue of humility expressed by the figures of servants recalls Tintoretto's Last Supper in San Giorgio, Venice (1594). Yet, Barocci also had to

[7] For Andrea del Sarto see Natali and Cecchi 1989, pp. 106-107; for Federico Barocci see Giannotti and Pizzorusso, eds., 2009, pp. 276-277.

satisfy new demands of decorum from the reformed Catholic church: as the figures of the assistants washing dishes offer models of self-humiliation and penance to the viewer, the figures of the apostles bear some clearly recognizable attributes to help their identification. As suggested by Judith W. Mann, Saint Bartholomew in a yellow tunic is recognizable from a knife alluding to the martyrdom of flaying, while Saint Andrew crosses his hands on his chest, thus recalling the form of the X-shaped cross. Andrew and Peter are placed on Christ's right and left side as they were brothers; consequently, they are placed symmetrically and have comparable physiognomical traits. Simon and Thaddeus (to Saint Bartholomew's left) sat one beside the other because of their joint martyrdom; furthermore, James the Lesser (on the far left) bears a clear resemblance to Christ due to a medieval iconographic tradition (Mann 2012, p. 227).

Sacred art as an instrument of popular education, as an expression of a clear and simple spirituality, accessible to the masses was claimed by influential churchmen, such as Gabriele Paleotti, bishop of Bologna (Paleotti 2012). Author of the *Discourse on the Sacred and Profane Images* (1582), Paleotti held Federico Barocci in great esteem, as proved by a letter from 1586, in which the bishop asked for the artist's opinion about the altarpiece of his private chapel in Saint Peter's in Bologna. The painting was to represent *The Virgin with the infant Jesus and Saint Petronio and Saint Francis*, the protectors of the city of Bologna. As has been proved, Paleotti fully relied on the opinion of the artist as for the composition and the details, demanding exclusively the representation of a conventional subject (Massari 2009, p. 126). Paleotti was probably aware of Barocci's artistic reputation and the fact that Barocci's new realism was favoured by the Oratorians and their founder, Saint Philip Neri, who involved him in the decoration of the Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome.

Following some important commissions from the Oratorians, such as the *Visitation* (1583-1586) and the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (1603) in the Santa Maria in Vallicella, Barocci was asked by Pope Clement VIII to depict the *Communion of the Apostles* (1607) for the Aldobrandini Chapel in the Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome (Moretti and Zuccari 2009, pp. 156-166). The scene differed from that of the traditional Last Suppers and was probably chosen to emphasize the teachings of the Council of Trent regarding the act of Communion and the veneration of the Holy Eucharist[8]. To avoid any doubt regarding the interpretation of the scene, Pope Clement VIII asked the artist to represent a nocturnal scene lit by candles, to depict Christ's hand separated from his chest, as well as to eliminate the figure of

[8] Mâle 1932, pp. 73-76. The Communion of the Apostles was a rather rare subject in Western art, yet Joos van Ghent depicted it on his altarpiece (1474) once in the Church of Corpus Domini in the Pian di Mercato in Urbino, where Federico Barocci saw it. The gothic church was demolished in 1704 and the painting is today in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in Urbino. See Lavin 1967.

the devil present in the preliminary study behind Judas, who originally appeared as kneeling before Christ[9]. All these modifications aimed at the faithful interpretation of the Holy Scriptures claimed by the Catholic Reform.

5. PETER PAUL RUBENS AND HIS IMPACT IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Federico Barocci's proposal to depict the main altarpiece of the Santa Maria in Vallicella remained unaccomplished because the Oratorians favoured a rising artist, the young Peter Paul Rubens, who was impressed by Barocci's style (Costamagna 1995). Rubens's altarpiece entitled *Angels Adoring the Madonna della Vallicella* (1606-1608) incorporated an old icon of the Virgin Mary, the icon being unveiled for the public on special occasions, as in the case of the table of the Last Supper in the Lateran Basilica.

Rubens's *Last Supper*, today in the Brera in Milan, was originally painted in 1632 for the Chapel of the Corpus Christi Brotherhood in the Cathedral of Saint-Rombouts in Mechlin in Flanders (Judson 2000, pp. 50-57) (Fig. 6). Rubens represents Christ and the apostles seated round a rectangular table that is placed at an angle and covered by a strongly lit white tablecloth. As in Barocci's Urbino painting, Rubens depicted Jesus as a bearded young man directing His gaze upwards to His Heavenly Father, holding the bread in His left hand and blessing it with His right. All the disciples seem to concentrate on Christ's prayer, with which He institutes the Eucharist, with the exception of the traitor, Judas, who turns away from the others and stares into the distance. To the right of the table there is a sideboard with burning candles and an open Bible recalling the Jewish tradition of Pesach. Behind the sideboard the depiction of the *aedicula* with its curved columns, which are decorated with vine leaves, represents an allusion to the Eucharist and the New Testament.

Rubens's altarpiece was originally endowed with a predella depicting the following scenes: *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* and *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet*[10]. The latter scene reminds us of Tintoretto's triptych that once adorned the Santo Stefano, and is today in the Santa Margherita Church in Venice, which also recalls the humble practice of the brotherhoods of the Holy Sacrament performed on Maundy Thursday. It was also customary for rulers to perform this rite, as in the case of the Habsburg Court in Vienna, when members of the Imperial family offered a meal to the poor after washing their feet (Scheutz 2005, pp. 189-257).

[9] See the preliminary study by Barocci preserved today in Chatsworth, published by Emiliani 1985, II, pp. 378-380.
[10] Today both panels are in Dijon, in the Musée des Béaux-Arts. Judson 2000, pp. 55-57.



Fig. 6
François Ragot (1630-1670).
Etching after Rubens's Last Supper.
Vienna, Albertina. Inv. H/II/21/16
Source: https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/?query=search=/record/objectnumbersearch=[H/II/21/16]&showtype=record

In the former Chapel of Saint Rosalia, today the Chapel of Pope Pius X, in the Kirche am Hof Jesuit Church in Vienna, we see a Last Supper scene on the right wall. This is a copy after Rubens's painting in the Brera, yet through the mediation of an etching by Boetius à Bolswert and François Ragot which places Judas on the left side of the table (Judson 2000, p. 53). Another scene from the vault of the Chapel of Saint Rosalia (today not visible) depicts Saint Elisabeth of Hungary washing the feet of the poor (Schicht and Telesko 2007, p. 550). Saint Elisabeth served as a model for members of the Imperial family who often participated in the festivities delivered in honour of the Holy Eucharist on the last days of the Carnival (Forty Hours Devotion), when ephemeral decorations were built in front of the main altar of the Kirche am Hof. On the feast of Corpus Christi dramatic plays were performed by Jesuit students on the square in front of the Kirche am Hof[11].

Rubens's rendering of the scene of the Last Supper had an important impact on the Baroque interpretations of the event, for example on Ulrich Loth's altarpiece (1644) in Saint Peters' Church (Pfarrkirche St. Peter), Munich, or Joachim von Sandrart's altarpiece (1651-1652) in the Parish church in Linz, both of which were ordered by

[11] I briefly mentioned the Quarant'ore decoration from 1643 in my study dedicated to the Chapel of Saint Rosalia. See Veress 2024, p. 75. A new study by Ferenc Veress and Sylvia Stegbauer dedicated to this subject will be published in the future.



Fig. 7a. Ulrich Loth, 1644. *Last Supper*. Munich, Pfarrkirche Sankt Peter
Photo: Pfarramt (with permission)



Fig. 7b. Joachim von Sandrart, 1651-1652. *Last Supper*. Linz, Stadtpfarrkirche
Photo: Diocese Linz – Department of Art and Conservation (with permission)

confraternities of the Holy Sacrament[12] (Figs. 7a and 7b). Sandrart's career and his treatment of the subject is significant in the light of his Calvinist faith, which did not impede him from fulfilling commissions by Catholic religious orders as well as by the Habsburg Court in Vienna. Is there any sign of the painter's Protestant persuasion in the *Last Supper* altarpiece in Linz? It has been argued that the gesture of one of the apostles to the right end of the table (probably Saint Peter), who is earnestly pouring wine from the pitcher, may allude to Communion under two kinds or «species»[13]. Christ's blessing gesture on the other hand, as well as the attitudes of the disciples, follows the Catholic iconographic tradition, as does the nocturnal scene, which bears the imprint of the Dutch painters trained in Rome, such as Gerard van Honthorst.

[12] For Ulrich Loth see Baumstark et al. 2008, pp. 215-218. For Sandrart see Klemm 1986, pp. 199-203.
[13] «Oder, um eine noch leichtfertigere Vermutung auszusprechen, kritisiert hier der Calvinist Sandrart das Fehlen des Laienkelches in der katholischen Messe, indem er den ersten Bischof von Rom darstellt, wie er, von Gemeinde und Heilsgeschechen abgewandt, nur sich selbst Wein einschenkt?» (Klemm 1986, pp. 199-200). See also Meier 2012, pp. 83-89.

6. THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE LAST SUPPER IN THE 18TH CENTURY IN CATHOLIC, LUTHERAN AND ORTHODOX CONTEXT

In the 18th century, we witness a persistence of earlier iconographic subjects, such as the *Communion of the Apostles* in the Venetian area. A fine example is the altarpiece by Giovanni Battista Pittoni (1730-1735) today in the Parish Church of Leno-Brescia (Boccazzi 1979, p. 133). All attention in concentrated on the gesture of the standing Christ, who delivers the host to the kneeling apostles. Another apostle is represented as praying behind the communicant, while a third disciple kisses the steps in the right foreground. The background is enlivened by theatrically gesturing apostles behind a table. One of the leading masters of the Central European baroque painting, Franz Anton Maulbertsch, knew Pittoni's composition through an etching by Pietro Monaco (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana). Maulbertsch's etching (c. 1767-1768, Vienna, Albertina) is a free, more intimate interpretation of Monaco's print: Christ is turned towards the beholder and the apostle kneeling before him directs his eye to heaven, thus his ecstatic view becomes the emotional focus of the composition (Haberditzl 2006, p. 231).

The other iconographic type of the Last Supper, characterized by a long horizontal table, depicted by Federico Barocci in the Cathedral of Urbino, is reemployed by Maulbertsch in the sanctuary of the Augustinerkirche in Korneuburg, near Vienna (1773). Theatricality and optical illusion, hallmarks of Andrea Pozzo's repertoire, left an imprint on Maulbertsch's composition, since the figures of the apostles appear behind painted pillars which appear as counterparts for the three-dimensional columns of the altarpiece, a spectacular *theatrum sacrum*. The Augustinian church in Korneuburg also housed a relic of a bleeding host from 1305; as a consequence Maulbertsch's painting can be interpreted in the light of a surviving medieval tradition (Jernyei 2012, p. 126).

It might seem surprising to discover Rubens's Last Supper composition on a Lutheran pulpit altar from Györköny (1796) in the County of Tolna, Hungary (Harmati 2019). Albeit theological differences, there was a continuous artistic dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans in Hungary, who, however, could benefit from a full religious freedom only after the *Edict of Toleration* (1781), that was issued by Joseph II of Habsburg. The pulpit is placed high above the altarpiece and is highlighted by two angels blowing trumpets (Figs. 8a and 8b). Above the rather modestly formed mensa there is an altarpiece depicting the Last Supper, which is clearly executed following the aforementioned compositions by Rubens and Bolswert. The structure of the pulpit altar conforms to Martin Luther's teaching titled *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* (1522). Luther argued that the words of Christ with which He instituted the Eucharist are even more important than the





Figs. 8a and 8b. Pulpit altar from Györköny, Hungary, 1796
Photos: László Béla Harmati (with permission of the author)

sacrament itself, because the words of God bless the sacrament, the words thus being the true instruments (vehicles) of God's power and action. Luther maintained that Communion guarantees a complete union with Christ, since there is no better or deeper union than the coalescence of food (bread and wine) with the one who consumes it (Reuss 2022, p. 126).

By the 17th and especially the 18th century, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic art in the Carpathian Basin had absorbed influences from Western art, which transformed the traditional appearance of the icons. In Orthodox churches, such as in the Serbian church of Eger (1784, Northern Hungary), the mensa is crowned by a baldachin and is located behind the iconostasis (Figs. 9a and 9b). The sanctuary behind the iconostasis is accessible only for the priests, who alone can enter through the Royal Gate, or the main entrance of the iconostasis. The icon placed exactly above the Royal Gate depicts the Last Supper, or more precisely, the Last Communion of the Apostles (Ouspensky 1982, chap. XII). In Serbian churches in the Balkan region, Holy Communion takes places under two species: Christ Himself (represented twice in the composition) delivers the bread and the wine to His disciples, who appear not seated, but standing in front of Christ. Yet, in the Serbian church in Eger the Western iconography of the Last Supper is adopted, depicting Christ and His disciples seated around a rectangular table (Vukoszályev 2013, pp. 219-227).





Figs. 9a and 9b. Iconostasis and altar from Eger, Hungary, 1784
Photos: Zorán Vukoszályev (with permission of the author)

The Communion of the faithful takes place before the iconostasis, on a special area defined as the *solea*. The disposition of the icons of the iconostasis, as well as their iconography, stresses the union of the faithful with Christ and His saints, which is realised in the act of Communion[14].

7. THE TABLE OF THE LORD AS A UNIVERSAL ALLEGORY

During the period of the Counter-Reformation, the scene of the Last Supper and the distribution of the Eucharist were also interpreted as allegories for the salvation of mankind. These allegories sometimes even highlight the role of Christianity as a mediator between different cultures, as in the case of a painting titled *Coena Domini* in the collection of the Benedictine Monastery of Pannonhalma, Hungary[15] (Fig. 10). The painter, probably a master from Veneto who was active in the second half of the 16th century, placed the table of the Last Supper in the centre of his composition. It is a simple table, covered with a white linen tablecloth, and behind it the seated, frontal

[14] In the Orthodox liturgy, Communion is preceded by a long preparation and a celebrative entry from the *prothesis* (place of the preparation of the offerings) to the sanctuary. See Schulz 1980, chap. 5/B2-C.
[15] Oil on canvas, 93.5 x 64 cm. Inv. no. PFM. KM. 234. Urbach 1996, pp. 48-51.



Fig. 10
Unknown Master from northern Italy, second half of the 16th century. *Allegory of the Church*. Pannonhalma, Benedictine Monastery (with permission of the Pannonhalma Abbey)

figure of the Messiah is accompanied by two angels. He distributes the Eucharist from a golden plate to Saint Peter the Apostle, who is kneeling on the opposite side of the table, holding a white veil in his arms, thus reminding us how Communion was practised.

The presence of the Apostle Saint Paul, two Evangelists (Saints John and Matthew) and two Western Church Fathers (Saints Jerome and Gregory), as well as a protomartyr (Saint Lawrence) and a number of other saints around the table, reminds us of the *communio sanctorum*, the heavenly community of saints. Among the saints, the founders of the mendicant orders, Saint Francis of Assisi (standing close to Christ as if in an ecstatic vision) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (kneeling in the foreground, writing the words of the famous Eucharistic hymn *In Coena Domini* in a book), are particularly remarkable. As all these figures are placed near the front of a Christian church building, appearing on the left side of the composition, we may assume that the new order has superseded the old one, which is represented by a pagan temple and a ruined tower on the right.

The pagan sanctuary appears to be a distinctive motif of the painting as it is endowed with a portico with columns and crowned by a figure of a pagan god. A male

figure holding a lance leads a group of men in Oriental attire in the direction of the table of the Lord, while another group of men, wearing fantastic robes, arrives from the opposite side. These two groups are separated by a wall and a ruined, tower-like edifice (to the right) from the background. In the far distance we see scenes of pastoral life: a ploughman with oxen as well as a company dining in the open air. Moreover, we observe three men on horseback, evoking the Three Magi and other groups of figures in ancient costume approaching the table or attending.

The meaning of this complex allegory can only be understood as one of universal salvation: Christ's meal is offered to all. Holding the lance with which he had pierced Christ's side, Longinus, the Roman soldier who testified that the touch of Christ's blood had cured his visual disorder, invites a community of men from the pagan temple to adore Christ's body[16]. Longinus is not the only one who gives testimony to the salvation accomplished by Christ's sacrifice: there is also Dismas, the good thief, kneeling next to Saint Peter the Apostle. Dismas was associated with the idea of penance, moreover, he was believed to accompany the souls of the dying to the other world, being one to whom salvation was promised by the dying Messiah (Mâle 1932, pp. 65-72). Furthermore, there is also an allusion to humility and the washing of feet through the female figure that is discernible under the table of the Lord.

Mary Magdalene, Longinus and Dismas appear in the allegories of Christ's Holy Blood, some of which can be viewed as counterparts of the Eucharistic allegory in Pannonhalma. I refer to the Good Friday vision of Girolamo Savonarola (on the 1st of April, 1496), who described the blood pouring from the wounds of the crucified Christ as a river, in which the pagans and the Moors were ready to bathe, and thus convert, while most of the Christians remained reluctant. The splendid woodcut illustration of this vision was published in Girolamo Benivieni's treatise (1496) in defence of the doctrines of Savonarola (Turelli et al. 1985, p. 43). In the period of the Counter-Reformation this subject remained popular, as suggested by Andrea Mainardi's allegory (1594) titled *Christ under the Mystic Press* in the Sant'Agostino in Cremona. There are several representations in different media of the allegory of Christ's blood, even in the 17th and 18th centuries[17].

A typical medieval allegory of Christ's real presence in the transubstantiated Host was the depiction of the *Mass of Saint Gregory* yet this type differed from the *Coena Domini*, particularly because a dominant role was reserved for the clergy, while laymen appeared outside the main event, in the background or behind a curtain, as in

[16] In a similar way, Joos van Ghent depicted (1472-1474) a Jewish scholar who converted to Christianity and testified to the verity of the Eucharist (altarpiece of the Corpus Domini Church in Pian di Mercato, Urbino, today in the Galleria Nazionale). See Lavin 1967, pp. 13-17. According to Lavin, the converted Jew in Oriental attire, pointing at the Eucharist, is Isaac, a historical figure, who was a Spanish doctor and ambassador of the Persian Shah to Pope Sixtus IV.
[17] For Mainardi see Gregori, ed., 1985, pp. 231-233. For the 18th century examples see Veress 2021.

the case of Hieronymus Bosch's *Bronchorst triptych* (around 1495), today in the Prado, Madrid (Falkenburg 2007). This subject remained present in the Tridentine period as illustrated in Jacopo Zucchi's *painting* (1575-1576) in the sacristy of the *Trinità dei Pellegrini*, in Rome (Preimesberger 1997). However, other types of Eucharistic allegories were also favoured during the Baroque period, for example in the *Multiplication of the loaves and fishes*, which also referred to the widespread nature of the Lord's teaching. In particular, I would like to highlight a large allegorical canvas by Leandro Bassano (1592-1594), placed originally in the refectory of the Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino, which comprises a great number of historical personalities or founders of various religious orders, such as Saint Philip Neri[18].

A question remains to be answered: what is the relation of the Christian scene to the pagan world that is represented behind the wall in the case of the *Coena Domini* allegory? While the Communion scene is clearly separated from the distant figures by a wall, certain groups are approaching the table, as if inspired by the Vergilian message of salvation. The three men (the Magi?) on horseback were traditionally interpreted as representatives of distant cultures, who come to pay homage to the newborn Messiah (Trexler 1997). Are the groups of figures dining in the open-air completely ignorant of the new faith and remain silent to the call, or is there a path of salvation open to them? The interrelated groups approaching from the middle suggest their participation: one of them is led by a shepherd boy, representing simple, ordinary men unaware of the birth of the Messiah, who responded to the angels' call and approached the manger with their offerings. Although the manger is not present, and the identification of some of the figures with the shepherds is also hypothetical, the rural context and their clothing seem to sustain this assertion. In the Santa Maria Maggiore Basilica in Rome, the tabernacle (1589), which was commissioned by Pope Sixtus V, was built over the relic of the manger, thus following the medieval tradition according to which in the Christmas Mass the Host was placed on the manger to suggest its relationship with the newborn Jesus in the manger (Ostrow 1996, p. 46).

Coda

The table's rich symbology and its strong relationship to the culture of the past and present continues to inspire artists and thinkers. I have introduced my study with Constantin Brâncuși's *Table of Silence*, and I would like to conclude it with a work by one of the leading female artists in contemporary Hungarian art, Ilona Lovas (1946-2021). It is a site-specific installation titled *Station No. 28*, executed in 1995 as part of a series of works that combine organic materials such as specially prepared cow's intestine with modern techniques to evoke and suggest a highly spiritual meaning.

[18] This was destroyed in the Second World War, and is known from a photograph. Tempesta 1995.



Fig. 11
Ilona Lovas, 1995. *Station No. 28*. Installation in the Óbudai Társaskör Gallery, Budapest Photo: József Rosta. Courtesy of the artist and INDA Galéria (with permission of INDA Galéria, Budapest)

Station No. 28 was installed in the simple, vaulted space of the Óbudai Társaskör Gallery in Budapest and was lit by spotlights from above[19] (Fig. 11). The installation consisted of a long, metallic «table», divided longitudinally by a metal pan covered by the cow's intestine, which was applied as swaddling bands. Six «plates» were arranged on the either side of the pan, each of them in a special position, some of them bearing wafers (flatbreads) of different sizes. The placement of the plates alluded to the twelve participants of the meal and each plate was different as they symbolised individual responses to the words of God. Although the participants were absent, their presence was strongly suggested by the arrangement of the plates and the organic wafers[20]. The table was laid for twelve in the austere space lit by unearthly light, and was thus saturated with mysticism, invoking meditation and questioning our relationship to the crucial event of the story of salvation.

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[20] In the case of another variant of the work titled *Station No. 30*, installed in the Catacomba Gallery in Bucharest in 1996, a huge bowl alluded to the ritual of the washing of the feet. Sturcz 2009, pp. 44-47 and Bálványos 2022, pp. 64 and 128.

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