

*'A Man of Sorrows, and Acquainted with Grief'*

**Imagery of the Suffering Christ in the Art of the Late Medieval Low Countries and  
Counter-Reformation Spain**

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## Introduction

During the later Middle Ages in Europe, there was a great increase in private devotion: a rise in the production of Books of Hours, the increase of mendicant orders and the new development of private chapels in churches and cathedrals all contributed towards religion being much more personal and intimate than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Especially in Northern Europe, where the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas à Kempis<sup>2</sup> gained previously unknown popularity, private devotion was encouraged. The *Devotio Moderna*, which took hold especially in the Low Countries and Germany, emphasised a systematic and personal approach to prayer.<sup>3</sup> Devotional images, which could engage with believers on a one-on-one, personal level, were majorly important features of way of practising religion, and the use of images as foci for devotion was encouraged by many writers, not only Thomas à Kempis, but also Pseudo-Bonaventure and Ludolph of Saxony.<sup>4</sup> Especially images of Christ's Passion lent themselves well to the purpose of meditation.<sup>5</sup> After the twelfth century, the focus of images and artists switched from Christ as Saviour, as victor over death, to a human, suffering and tortured Christ.<sup>6</sup> This type of imagery allowed the viewer to contemplate Christ's suffering and respond to it in a personal manner: this response was a 'key aspect of late medieval western religion'.<sup>7</sup> A type of imagery which evoked some of the most passionate responses, and became very popular especially during the fifteenth century in the Netherlands, was that of the 'Man of Sorrows'.

During the Middle Ages, the image of the Man of Sorrows was thought to have its origins in a Byzantine icon, which has long been seen as the archetype of all Man of Sorrows imagery (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> This icon, which was actually made around 1300, was acquired by the Roman church of Sta Croce in Gerusalemme around 1380, and immediately became a cult object that was much propagandised and about which many myths were told.<sup>9</sup> It was said and thought to be much older in date, and one of the many popular legends told about it was one involving Saint Gregory the Great. A woman who did not believe in the transubstantiation of the host attended a mass of Pope Gregory the Great. When he heard of the woman's scepticism, he

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<sup>1</sup> Duffy 2003, 59-60.

<sup>2</sup> The *Imitatio* was first composed between 1418 and 1427. For a Latin version of Thomas's *Imitatio*, see Eichler *ed. and trans.* 1966; for a modern English translation see Sherley-Price *ed. and trans.* 1952.

<sup>3</sup> Freedberg 1989, 174; Finaldi, MacGregor, and Avery-Quash 2000, 118.

<sup>4</sup> Pseudo-Bonaventure *ed. and trans.* Ragusa and Green 1961; Ludolph of Saxony *ed. and trans.* Bodenstedt 1973; Finaldi, MacGregor, and Avery-Quash 2000, 112; Schiller 1966, 204; Kasl and Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ringbom 1984, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Swanson 1998, 1; Mersmann 1952, xxxi.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson 1998, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ridderbos 1998, 145; Panofsky 1927, 261.

<sup>9</sup> Belting 1981, 67-68.

prayed at the altar, where the image of the suffering Christ hung. The image of Christ, with all his blood and suffering, then came to life to convince the woman of the true presence of Christ in the Host. This legend, along with the many indulgences that were promised by the church for prayer to the image, ensured its widespread popularity, and the rise of other closely-related imagery, such as the Mystic Mass of St Gregory.<sup>10</sup> Although the icon in Sta Croce cannot be seen as the archetype of Man of Sorrows imagery anymore, as it was introduced in western art when the type already existed, it continued to have that reputation, and artists paid homage to what they thought was the original icon: most famous are the engravings made by Israhel von Meckenem (Figure 2).

The combination of the Man of Sorrows motif with the ideas of the *Devotio Moderna* proved to be a powerful one in the later Middle Ages. Especially in the Low countries, it was widely adapted and re-imagined, which gave rise to a whole host of new, iconographically closely related and interwoven motifs. The realistic, intimate, contemplative style of panel painting in the Low Countries seemed to suit the image type extremely well. Although the motif also appeared in other countries, such as Italy, France and especially Germany, the Netherlandish panels, often in small format and with Christ depicted at half or three-quarter length, stand out for their realism and focus on Christ's human suffering and invitation to contemplation.<sup>11</sup> Many art historians have been convinced that the motif of the 'Man of Sorrows' almost disappeared completely during the Reformation. Indeed, an image which was so 'medieval' in the function it fulfilled and the manner people interacted with it, can hardly be thought to have survived the rationalism of the Reformation, and the iconoclasm which was so violent in the Low Countries. However, the Counter-Reformation, which in its nature was so similar to the religion of the late Middle Ages, provided another opportunity for this type of art to flourish: in Spain, during the seventeenth century, there was a large increase in imagery of this type, but now in the form of polychromed sculpture.<sup>12</sup> Spanish artists tackled the imagery of the Suffering Christ with new vigour, inventing new interpretations of the motif, but keeping to the same roots as the Netherlandish images: a work of art where the main focus was on Christ, on his suffering, and to show what tortures Christ had endured for the salvation of humanity. These images were made to provoke the beholder to empathy and contemplation.

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<sup>10</sup> Freedberg 1989, 294.

<sup>11</sup> Panofsky 1956, 100; Wolff 1989, 118.

<sup>12</sup> Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997, 80.

Spanish sculpture of the Counter-Reformation has suffered a bad reputation, and has therefore not been studied thoroughly outside of Spain and the Spanish context.<sup>13</sup> However, there seem to be many comparative elements between the Early Netherlandish and the Counter-Reformation Spanish types. Unfortunately, the limitations of the study of the Man of Sorrows, and the iconographical classifications that have traditionally been used in art history, have caused the Spanish corpus to have been largely overlooked. The Man of Sorrows, and related imagery, although an extensively studied topic throughout the history of art, has suffered from the need to classify and the terminology used therein. The image type has been tackled by many art historians, including well known figures such as Panofsky, who wrote one of the seminal works on the 'Schmerzensmann'.<sup>14</sup> However, even though a large amount of research has been done on the topic, art historians still grapple with its iconographical classification, its meaning and definition, and its role in the religion of the late medieval and early modern era.<sup>15</sup> These issues are not dealt with easily, but the first chapter of this dissertation will offer some of the author's insights into what this devotional image meant, how it has been studied over time, and how its study could benefit from a reassessment of the subject area. The different types of the Man of Sorrows motif have always been classified under different names, even though they overlap and influence each other greatly. By implementing the same terminology used throughout art history, parts that should be included in the corpus have been left out, or underappreciated, such as the Spanish works. Therefore, the first chapter of this dissertation will provide a reassessment of the terminology traditionally used in the study of the 'Man of Sorrows' and devotional imagery, to ensure that this dissertation can indeed highlight all aspects of the image type.

This dissertation will then try to provide some clear comparisons between the Netherlandish images and the Spanish sculpture, by first analysing the images in their separate contexts in chapters 2 and 3. The final chapter will then draw these individual contexts together to form some conclusions towards the functions of these images, the way they were perceived and whether an overall line of influence can be traced from the Dutch to the Spanish art. When concluding, this dissertation will also try to provide some insights which are of wider implication in the study of art history and devotional imagery.

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<sup>13</sup> McKim-Smith 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Panofsky 1927.

<sup>15</sup> Most recently in Puglisi and Barcham 2013; especially Hourihane 2013.

## Chapter 1

### The Man of Sorrows – A Reassessment

The traditional approach of studying the Man of Sorrows has been through the iconographical analysis of Northern, mostly German art historians of the late 1920s to the 1950s: after Erwin Panofsky's work of 1927, Gert von der Osten, Wiltrud Mersmann and Romauld Bauerreis all wrote seminal works on the 'Schmerzensmann', analysing the different types of the motif in great detail.<sup>16</sup> Von der Osten is especially thorough in his analysis, focusing mostly on German sculptural images of the Man of Sorrows, meticulously dividing his known corpus into categories which include: 'Man of Sorrows with Hands Pointing Down'; 'Man of Sorrows Embracing Himself' and 'Freestanding Man of Sorrows Showing his Wounds'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, he subdivides Man of Sorrows' imagery into ten different categories, which he all studies separately. Perhaps the whole topic seemed exhausted after these four major works, as no seminal works appeared until 2013,<sup>18</sup> and when the imagery was discussed, Panofsky is usually cited very early on, and not much critical analysis of the above works is done. Even in 1997, in the exhibition catalogue for an exhibition focusing on the Body of Christ, it is simply stated that "the literature on the topic is vast", and the above authors are once again cited, Panofsky first. No further criticism is mentioned, neither is an acknowledgement that although the literature might be 'vast', most of it is also at least over five decades old.<sup>19</sup> Although, of course, this does not mean it is therefore worthless, it should also be acknowledged that the way art is studied, and the way the role of art in the late Middle Ages is perceived, has changed drastically over this time, and the study of the Man of Sorrows should not stay behind.

When studying the Man of Sorrows, what becomes immediately clear is that the motif is incredibly closely related to many other Passion motifs of its era.<sup>20</sup> Not only did imagery of the Mass of St Gregory probably develop from single Man of Sorrows images, and often includes a half-length depiction of the Man of Sorrows in the larger image, but there are the Gnadenstuhle, or Not Gottes, and the Pietà, which include an image of the suffering Christ with God the Father or his Virgin Mother. Furthermore, there is the so-called 'Engel-pietà' which includes an angel presenting the suffering Christ, there is the Lamentation which can be seen as an early version

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<sup>16</sup> Bauerreis 1931; Mersmann 1952; Osten 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Osten 1935, 39-82.

<sup>18</sup> Puglisi and Barcham 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Sallay 2000, 47.

of the Pietà, there is Christ at the column, Christ during the Flagellation, Christ of Pity,<sup>21</sup> the Salvatus Coronatus.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, and perhaps most importantly when talking about the Man of Sorrows, there is the Ecce Homo, or Christ presented to the people, which, just as the Man of Sorrows imagery, increasingly became a freestanding half length depiction of the suffering Christ. Indeed, the imagery was so closely related, that art historians have often confused the motifs when classifying an image. This has resulted in often confusing identifications, such as the ambiguous title 'The Man of Sorrows ("Ecce Homo")',<sup>23</sup> a statue identified by Schiller as a 'Man of Sorrows' standing in the 'Ecce Homo-chapel', in the Church of Our Lady in Munich, Germany,<sup>24</sup> or even new classifications being added, such as in the National Gallery in London, where several images are now labelled 'Christ Crowned with Thorns'.<sup>25</sup>

This confusion on classification is a hindrance that can affect the entire study of the topic. Firstly, it can be questioned whether medieval artists ever made the distinction between all these categories in their minds, when they sat out to make an image of the Man of Sorrows. Certainly, it cannot be proven that the terminology was one that was used in the late Middle Ages,<sup>26</sup> but it can be shown that medieval artists used characteristics of what we call the Man of Sorrows in images depicting the Ecce Homo, and vice versa.<sup>27</sup> What really needs to be questioned then, is not whether the confusion in classification is an issue, but whether the classification should be used at all. Have we not, over the past decades, moved away from the need to iconographically structure all topics in art? Is there any use still in terminologies such as those used by Von der Osten, described above? As was briefly set out in the introduction to this dissertation, the Man of Sorrows and all its related imagery became increasingly popular in the Later Middle Ages because they reflected exactly the popular religion of the time, and were used as aids in this religion. Images of the suffering Christ, especially those where he is displayed in close up, as a single or clearly central figure, were used as foci for meditation, for the imitation of Christ. They were used to imagine the pain and suffering Christ was put through for the salvation of humanity, to focus on the wounds and the blood, and to say prayers to the different aspects of Christ that were depicted.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it can be argued, that the function of these

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<sup>21</sup> Also known in German as Christ im Elend or French Christe de Pitié.

<sup>22</sup> Osten 1935, 7; Hourihane 2013, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Amongst others a sculpture by Pedro de Mena in Bray 2009, 140 (Figure 29).

<sup>24</sup> Schiller 1966, 216.

<sup>25</sup> Hourihane 2013, 19; See for examples NG 712 and NG 1083.

<sup>26</sup> The term Man of Sorrows is derived from a quotation in Isaiah, 52:2-3 "He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men, a **Man of sorrows**, and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

<sup>27</sup> Sallay 2000, 47; Hourihane 2013, 28-34.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell 1998, 63.

images is what made them important, popular, and worth studying by modern art historians, more than their iconographical characteristics. Furthermore, for modern art historians to focus on their function, we might have to do away with terminology and classification, and simply discuss the imagery in terms of its function. 'Images of the Suffering Christ' seems an appropriate umbrella term.

However, by simply calling these images 'Suffering Christ', we might not yet have gotten to the bottom of what these images represent. One term that cannot be avoided when discussing this type of imagery, is Panofsky's 'Andachtsbild'. An 'Andachtsbild', which translates to something like 'Focal Image', according to Panofsky, was an image that was neither narrative nor representational. A representational image could be merged into an Andachtsbild by lifting known groups or single figures from their representational context to a new, undefined context, pausing whatever gesture or action they were undertaking to create a context that could not be defined in terms of time or space.<sup>29</sup> However, the term has been ascribed different meanings in differing contexts over time, which has made it difficult to now use the term without offering an appropriate context. Clifton (et al.)<sup>30</sup> state that devotional image and Andachtsbild can be used interchangeably, but there is no unanimity on its definition. Furthermore, they argue that not only Andachtsbilder can be on the receiving end of prayer, but Andachtsbilder are specifically intended to be receptacles, as opposed to images that take on that role without that being its original function. Furthermore, Sixten Ringbom<sup>31</sup> adds to this that an Andachtsbild can be used to symbolise a theological concept or mystery of faith, as a sort of summary which would otherwise be too difficult to express in terms of painting or sculpture. Thus, the images of the Suffering Christ could be used to summarise the whole Passion, and by emphasising on the shedding of blood, it could even evoke the Eucharist.

Since the term Andachtsbild has so many connotations and such a broad overall meaning, this dissertation will try to avoid the word as much as possible. Instead, it will use the term devotional images, and specify between devotional images used for private prayer, or public devotion.<sup>32</sup> This is the crux of the matter then: by classifying these images into all their separate categories, and by labelling them under the conspicuous term of 'Andachtsbild', the study of these images is actually hindered and pulled backwards, rather than advanced. The modern researcher, who tries to investigate these Suffering Christ images, needs to use so many

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<sup>29</sup> Panofsky 1927,264-268; Ringbom 1984, 53-56.

<sup>30</sup> Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Ringbom 1984, 53-56.

<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in this the author follows the advice of Hans Belting, who stated that it is "not recommended to differentiate between the terms 'Andachtsbild' and 'devotional image', Belting 1981, 83.



different terms to research, that the topic becomes muddled and unclear. Instead, it should be acknowledged that these type of images, the Ecce Homo, the Man of Sorrows, the Mass of St Gregory, the Gnadenstuhl, the Engelpietà, are different types of the same image, the same concept, the embodiment of the same thoughts. They are images that reflect the way people thought about religion in the later Middle Ages, around the time these images were first conceived. Although some might seem more of a narrative character, and some seem to be more of a close-up, focal image for devotion, they are all “different interpretations of the same conception”,<sup>33</sup> and should therefore be treated as thematically the same. Thus, the study of the Suffering Christ imagery can be improved, developed and renewed.

The above statements can be illustrated with several examples. Firstly, it is beneficial to think in terms that were used around the time these images were conceived, instead of using modern labels. Thus, we again try to exclude terms like ‘Man of Sorrows’ and ‘Andachtsbild’, clear inventions of later eras, and try to return to the term that were most likely used in the Middle Ages: ‘Imago Pietatis’ and ‘Pitié de Nostre Seigneur’.<sup>34</sup> Both these terms are much more general, and indeed focus on the suffering aspect of the Christ figure, rather than on the specifics of the image. It is the suffering of Christ, his humanity, the focus on his wounds, his blood, and the empathy we are expected to feel for him when looking at these images, that are of crucial importance. These images were designed with one specific function in mind: to arouse certain feelings and emotions in the viewer. The beholder’s share is of paramount importance when it comes to an image of the Suffering Christ.

Secondly, the fact that all the different types of Suffering Christ imagery are related, influenced each other, and were expressions of the same concept can be shown through the works of one of those most well-known pre-Reformation masters. Albrecht Dürer made seven series of woodcut prints and engravings depicting the stages of the Passion; the three series he finished all had a frontispiece designed.<sup>35</sup> The images on these frontispieces are interesting to examine in terms of the arguments stated above. All three images, according to traditional classification, depict a different type of Christ. They could respectively be called a ‘Christ Mocked’ (Figure 3), a ‘Christ of Pity or Man of Sorrows’ (Figure 4), and a ‘Christ at the Flagellation’ (Figure 5**Error! Reference source not found.**). However, there could be some confusion relating to these classifications, as all the images borrow motifs from each other. To class them in this way would therefore not do justice to the role these images play on the frontispiece, and the role

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<sup>33</sup> Sallay 2000, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Schiller 1966, 220.

<sup>35</sup> Finaldi, MacGregor, and Avery-Quash 2000, 134; Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997, 66-67; Mersmann 1952, xix.

Dürer intended for these images to have. A frontispiece is meant as a preview, or a summary, of the whole work. In this case then, it is meant to summarise the Passion. As a summary of the Passion, Dürer chose to use different types of Suffering Christ imagery. Inside the booklets, Dürer has depicted narrative scenes of the Passion of Christ, with an abundance of personages filling the surface and clearly set within their spatial and temporal surroundings. As a frontispiece, he has used a single figure of the Suffering Christ, in a non-narrative, a-temporal setting, for the viewer to contemplate the image, and understand what the rest of the booklet will entail.<sup>36</sup> Although, according to iconographical tradition, Dürer chose three different images, using the arguments outlined above, it can be argued that Dürer sought to portray a concept, and chose to do so in three slightly different, but overall very similar, ways.

The devotional images of the Suffering Christ in the art of Northern Europe during the late Middle Ages can now be seen to have shared several important characteristics. Firstly, they are extra-biblical: they depict scenes that are not necessarily part of the chronological Passion story, but have been invented by theologians and artists to serve as images to focus prayer and empathy on.<sup>37</sup> This leads to their second characteristic, which is the focus on the human aspect of the Christ figure: no longer is Christ the ever-ruling saviour, but he is a human incarnate suffering from the horrible pains that have been inflicted on his body. The focus of the image is, for a large part, Christ's bodily characteristics: his caved-in stomach, the pained look in his eyes, the blood that is seeping from his wounds and the bruises that taint his skin.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, the image is suspended in both time and place. Although some images, especially those of the *Ecce Homo*, might have some references to a narrative, most images are in close-up, either half or three quarter length, have very few characters taking place in the scene, and allow the beholder to make direct eye contact and feel close to the image.<sup>39</sup> Christ is usually portrayed in what seems a transitional stage between dead and alive, but with his eyes open to allow direct contact with the viewer.<sup>40</sup> In line with the meditational guidelines of the *Devotio Moderna*, the viewer is actively encouraged to look, feel and empathise with the suffering Christ depicted.<sup>41</sup> According to Michael Camille, these images communicate "not theological ideas but sensations."<sup>42</sup> If these paintings are sometimes accompanied with text, this text can be seen as an invocation towards

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<sup>36</sup> Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Kirkland-Ives 2015, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Panofsky 1956, 111.

<sup>39</sup> Camille 1998, 187-90; Finaldi, MacGregor, and Avery-Quash 2000, 135.

<sup>40</sup> Ridderbos 1998, 162.

<sup>41</sup> The *Devotio Moderna* proscribed a meditational process in three steps, to achieve emotional empathy. The first step involved focusing on an image and excluding all surroundings, the second an "episodic progression" by breaking down the story in as many separate aspects as possible and the third was to actively engage with and cultivate the emotions that arose (Freedberg 1989, 175).

<sup>42</sup> Camille 1998, 197.

the viewer, the words are “direct cues for vocalisation”, to produce a “mantra-like sound.”<sup>43</sup> ‘Ecce Homo’ then becomes: ‘look at this man,’ encouraging the viewer to behold, to feel, to empathise. Lastly, then, all these images are conceived for their function of encouraging empathy, and can therefore be used mostly interchangeably. This has led to depictions of images with the words ‘Ecce Homo’ inscribed, or Christ of Pity, where the Christ figures show the wounds of the crucifixion, even though these scenes technically take place beforehand. Again, this simply emphasises that the medieval artist, when setting out to make an image of the Suffering Christ, did not set out to paint a ‘Man of Sorrows’, or an ‘Ecce Homo’, but to create an image which could be focused on and identified with, which could mean using different characteristics which were originally taken from narrative scenes. All the Suffering Christ images merged into each other in the minds of medieval artists and viewers.

So far, this chapter has discussed the Suffering Christ imagery only in its first temporal context, that of the late Middle Ages, when popular piety and private devotion rose drastically in popularity and countless new artistic motifs provided a pictorial version of these ideas. Unsurprisingly perhaps, traditional art history has always drawn the line for research into these images at the end of the Middle Ages. Since the religion in the Low Countries and Germany during the Reformation and immediately afterwards was seen as rational as opposed to emotional, and therefore in no need of images as a visual aid, it seemed natural to assume that the Man of Sorrows motifs almost completely disappeared. Indeed, Mersmann states that no significant Man of Sorrows imagery was produced after the 1530s, with Dürer being the last artist to be responsible for a heyday of the motif in the 1510s.<sup>44</sup> However, more recently, art history has begun to take an interest in the religious art of Spain and the Americas during the Counter-Reformation. Several exhibitions have been held throughout the world, highlighting Spanish religious art, especially its polychromed wood sculpture, acknowledging the ‘critical misfortunes’ the study of this art has suffered from, and finally studying this art from a serious, art historical perspective.<sup>45</sup> When studying this art form and keeping in mind the reassessed terminology laid out above, it cannot be denied that the Spanish polychrome sculpture is thematically related to the Suffering Christ imagery, indeed can be seen as a reincarnation of the theme from the Low Countries.

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<sup>43</sup> Camille 1998, 197.

<sup>44</sup> Mersmann 1952, v; xxx.

<sup>45</sup> Exhibition catalogues include ‘Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World’, (Kasl, Rodríguez G. de Ceballos, and Indianapolis Museum of Art 2009); ‘Spanish Polychrome Sculpture 1500-1800 in United States Collections’, (Stratton et al. 1993); ‘The body of Christ in the art of Europe and New Spain, 1150-1800’, (Clifton, Nirenberg, and Neagley 1997) and finally, perhaps most significantly, ‘The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture, 1600-1700’, (Bray et al. 2009).

The religion of Spain during the Counter-Reformation can, in many ways, be compared to the dominant ideas about religion in the Late Medieval Low Countries. Indeed, the Counter-Reformation in Spain has sometimes been seen as a revival of the Middle Ages, with the Renaissance only as a brief interruption in between.<sup>46</sup> After the Council of Trent finally approved the educational use of images, the role of the devotional image was once again confirmed. Furthermore, there was a clear revival of mystics and their popularity, and a rise in the role of confraternities. New orders of nuns and monks were created and the writings of St Ignatius of Loyola, the *Spiritual Exercises*, so similar to those medieval works of Thomas à Kempis and Pseudo-Bonaventure, were published and became incredibly popular.<sup>47</sup> Under these circumstances then, it is not surprising that there was also a revival, or a restoration, of the art that was abundant during the later Middle Ages: the Suffering Christ imagery. The Spanish tradition of polychromed wood sculpture seems to have especially loaned itself to this type of motif, and increasing amounts of half length busts of the Suffering Christ covered in bruises, welts and whiplashes, crowned with huge crowns of thorns, started being made. Furthermore, full-length images of Christ at the Flagellation and Christ at the Column became part of the corpus. Famous Spanish artists of this time, including Pedro de Mena and Gregorio Fernández, conceived large amounts of works of art of the Suffering Christ.

All these polychromed wood sculptures have a great deal in common with their Dutch counterparts: later in this dissertation, the stylistical similarities and potential influences will be analysed in far more detail. In this chapter, however, it is more important to highlight the importance of the Spanish polychrome sculpture as part of the corpus of imagery of the Suffering Christ. The term 'Man of Sorrows' is one that is hardly used in Spanish Art. Rather, the half length figures of Christ, often accompanied by a Mater Dolorosa, or Virgin of Sorrows, have been labelled as 'Ecce Homo'. The Ecce Homo, however, was one of the most popular ways to depict Christ in polychromed wood sculpture. Therefore, it needs to be questioned why, in so many works that are written on the Man of Sorrows, or on devotional imagery in general, the Spanish Counter-Reformation art and the late medieval art from the Low Countries, are hardly ever mentioned as part of the same thematically and culturally related movement. The Spanish polychromed sculpture is of an obviously and overtly devotional nature. Some of the sculpture is even carried through the streets during processions, which again emphasises the human characteristics of these sculpture. They are hyper realistic, when using them as a focus for prayer, the beholder is hardly able to establish whether this is a sculpture or a real man: when seen in movement during a procession, this distinction is blurred even further. They therefore

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<sup>46</sup> Kasl and Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 29.

<sup>47</sup> For an English edition of Ignatius, see Rickaby 1923; a Latin version can be found in Ignatius 1855.

fulfil an almost identical role as the late medieval imagery: they serve to invoke emotion and empathy, so the beholder is encouraged to reflect on Christ's pain and suffering during his Passion. These images stand outside time and place, include a Christ who has his eyes open and usually gazes at the viewer, are often carried out in half or three quarter length, and are focused more on the feelings and emotions they should invoke rather than any theological concept. Thematically, they belong very clearly to the group of Suffering Christ imagery, and should be studied as thus. Whether it is because of the difference in terminology, being called *Ecce Homo* instead of *Man of Sorrows*, because of the temporal division between the two groups due to traditional periodification of eras, or because of the general prejudice against the hyper real and overtly religious Spanish art, these reasons should be discarded, and Spanish polychrome sculpture of the Counter-Reformation should emphatically be included in the corpus of devotional images of the Suffering Christ. The study of these images should no longer be hindered by faulty terminology.

## Chapter 2

### Early Netherlandish Images of the Suffering Christ

In the art of the Low Countries in the later Middle Ages, imagery of the Suffering Christ connected seamlessly with the ruling ideas about empathetic religion that were so popular at the time. It is therefore probably no wonder that especially artists from the Low Countries started exploring these kind of images in great detail, focusing more and more on the Christ figure, on his individual wounds and on the agony in his gaze. The realism that especially Flemish artists from Antwerp and Brussels managed to include in their panel paintings was hailed and admired throughout Europe, and imitated in several mediums, including prints. The original paintings and their copies and imitations spread and became part of some of the most famous art collections of Europe, including work of Rogier van der Weyden which ended up in Munich through the Boisserée collection, Memling's panels which were incorporated in the Royal Chapel of Granada's Cathedral and diptychs by Dirk Bouts and his son Aelbrecht which ended up in the collection of the National Gallery in London.

During the centuries that motifs of the Suffering Christ kept growing in popularity, the Netherlandish artists kept coming up with new characteristics of Christ in the image. As stated in the previous chapter, a clear preference towards a half or three-quarter length image started arising, where Christ was either the only, or the central, focal figure, and the image was suspended in time and place. However, the particulars of many of these images were slightly different, and different figures or attributes were used on different panels to heighten the bond between the viewer and the image. This chapter will analyse several of the Netherlandish panel paintings with different characteristics, set out their individual features and explain how they were understood during the time of their conception, and explain why they are all part of one very important and influential corpus of devotional imagery of the Suffering Christ.

Starting with a famous work from one of Flanders' most influential panel painters, the first painting that will be analysed in this chapter is of Hans Memling, painted around 1480, and currently placed in the Royal Chapel of the Cathedral of Granada (Figure 6**Error! Reference source not found.**). It has traditionally been called several different titles, including 'Man of Sorrows presented by the Virgin', although the iconographical classification of 'Pietà', has also often been used, even though it seems somewhat of a misnomer. The image, although it includes the Virgin, seems clearly focused on Christ: it is his image which makes up the largest part of the panel, all the light is focused on his body, and his suffering seems to exude from the painting.

Classifying it as a Pietà seems to imply that the suffering of the Virgin is the main feature of the painting, which does no justice to the central motif which is at play here, that of the Suffering Christ. The Virgin, although her role in the painting is important, plays a secondary role to that of Christ, she is quite literally there to support Christ, both physically as in the interpretation of the image. The first title then, seems more accurate, although 'Suffering Christ supported by the Virgin', in this case, might be even more appropriate. However, the role of the Virgin, although secondary, should not be underestimated: feeling empathy with the Virgin was also encouraged as a form of *Imitatio Christi*, which means her place in the picture was certainly of importance.<sup>48</sup>

The image then, depicts a Christ, displayed exactly in half-length: the painting cuts off at the height of his groin, the loin cloth he is wearing only partially fitting on the panel. His body displays all the wounds of the Passion; his right hand, which clearly depicts a nail-hole in its palm, pushes forwards the wound on his side, his left hand forms a bowl-shape at the bottom of the panel, as if ready to catch the blood that is oozing down his body. His head, tilted towards the right, which seems part of a universal way of depicting Christ in pain, carries the crown of thorns: the horrible wounds it has left drip blood over Christ's forehead, temple, neck and chest. The Virgin stands behind Christ, seemingly supporting his weight, her head tilted to the left, her hands support Christ's sides. The floorplan of this image is unclear, the Virgin towers above Christ but does not obviously seem to stand on a higher surface, and Christ does not appear to be sitting either.

Imagery of the Suffering Christ depended on humanising Christ in such a way, that the viewer could imagine and envision how bad his suffering must have been. Only if Christ was perceived as a man capable of feeling human suffering, could the beholder imitate and identify with his pain.<sup>49</sup> For the viewer to focus on the wounds of Christ, these wounds had to be displayed centrally and obviously. This is exactly what Memling does in this image, and he depicts Christ actually raising his side-wound for the viewer to focus on. Von der Osten would probably have classified this image as a 'Man of Sorrows showing his wounds', or an 'Ostentatio Vulnerum'.<sup>50</sup> The humanisation of Christ, which is displayed by the blood and his painful gaze, is heightened by the presence of his suffering, earthly, human mother.<sup>51</sup> This depiction of Mary with the Suffering Christ is a characteristic that first only occurs in the depictions North of the Alps and which would develop into much more complex imagery in later decades, as will become

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<sup>48</sup> Schuler 1992, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Bynum 1991, 92 Panofsky 1956, 111.

<sup>50</sup> Panofsky 1927, 289; Bauerreis 1931, 127; Osten 1935, 74-113.

<sup>51</sup> Panofsky 1927, 268-275.

apparent later in this chapter.<sup>52</sup> By depicting Christ in half-length, as Memling has done here, the viewer is allowed a very direct access to Christ's body: the wound in his side, which, in the later Middle Ages, was thought to have punctured his heart, is raised so the viewer is allowed access to Christ's broken flesh.<sup>53</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, devotional imagery of the Man of Sorrows could sometimes evoke those mysteries of the church which were otherwise difficult to depict in art. Here, the Eucharistic significance of the Suffering Christ is displayed: the emphasis is on his flesh and his blood, the bread and the wine, and Christ's cupping hand at the bottom of the picture, ready to catch the dripping blood, is reminiscent of the Eucharistic chalice, which is sometimes displayed more explicitly in this kind of imagery.<sup>54</sup>

Another fascinating, and often reoccurring, aspect of the Suffering Christ imagery displayed on this panel is the Arma Christi. These images on the background of the panel recount episodes of Christ's suffering by means of small, almost comic-book type images. Not only the obvious instruments of torture, including the column of the flagellation, several whips, Longinus's spear, the nails and of course the cross itself, are included, but several personages of the Passion story are depicted: Pilate and a Jewish High Priest, a Roman soldier and even the apostle Peter, with the woman who asked him if he knew Christ, are displayed in conversation.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, there are loose feet and hands depicted in the moment of kicking or slapping. These images served as mnemonic prompts: by identifying the images in the correct way, the viewer is encouraged to bring to mind the complete Passion story, which is summarised by the overall Suffering Christ at the centre of the image. These mnemonic prompts tie in very well with two medieval manners of thinking which have influenced the Suffering Christ imagery: the *Devotio moderna* and the Art of Memory.<sup>56</sup> Both of these schools of thought believed in the use of images as a way to call certain stories to mind. Ludolph of Saxony, in his *Vitae Christi*, encourages the devoted to divide the story of Christ's passion into as many and as vividly detailed passages as possible.<sup>57</sup> Only by re-imagining these events step by step could the believer thoroughly imagine the suffering that Christ must have gone through. These images provide the pictorial equivalent, or even interpretation, of this school of thought. The fact that this proved a very popular and valuable combination, the suffering Christ with the Arma Christi, can be seen in the abundance of images

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<sup>52</sup> Schiller 1966, 211.

<sup>53</sup> Ringbom 1984, 130.

<sup>54</sup> Sometimes called the 'Eucharistic Man of Sorrows', see Sallay 2000. Figure 7 is an example of such imagery.

<sup>55</sup> Christ predicted that Peter would betray him three times before the cockerel would crow. The third time, when Peter is asked by a woman whether he knew Christ, and he denies it, he hears the crow and realizes Christ's prediction has come true. The cockerel of the story is also part of Memling's Arma Christi: it is standing on top of the flagellation column.

<sup>56</sup> More on memory in the Middle Ages can be found in Carruthers 1990.

<sup>57</sup> Kirkland-Ives 2015, 37.



that included them. Painters included increasing amounts of different images, almost as if they were competing with each other to see who could imagine the most: later additions include the 'washing of hands in innocence', the Sudarium and more different characters.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, with the popularity of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and the individual prayers to the wounds which were included therein, the Suffering Christ with Arma Christi at some point becomes abstracted, with increasing focus on the wounds themselves and less on the person. Later types of these images, then, include merely the wounds and the Arma being depicted, the figure of Christ no longer necessary for these mnemonic prompts to work.<sup>59</sup>

Moving on from Memling's image, which includes so many defining aspects of the Suffering Christ, it is time to investigate an image, which, at first sight, seems very different from Memling's, but on closer inspection actually turns out to have a great many similarities. It is a very small panel, measuring no more than 25x25 cm (Figure 9). The work is by Geertgen tot Sint-Jans, a painter active in Haarlem between 1470-1490, about whom not much is known, except that he lived in the convent of the Order of St John as a lay brother, and probably made most of his art under their protection.<sup>60</sup> The image, which is much more populated than Memling's, also focuses on Christ as the central figure: Christ stands, slightly left of the centre of the image, in a bent, slouching pose, leaning on his cross. His knees rest on the edge of a sarcophagus on the bottom of the panel, ensuring Christ is depicted in three-quarter length. There are other Arma Christi displayed on the panel, either carried by the three angels or painted on the right side. The three other figures on the panel, who are all crying, are Mary Magdalen, the Virgin Mary, and St John.

Christ's body is completely covered in cuts and bruises. The blood flows freely down his chest, legs, arms and head, and some blood spatters even are suspended in mid-air. The image is much more bloody, much more gruesome, perhaps, than many of the panel paintings depicting the suffering Christ, and seems to owe its motifs to the Man of Sorrows images which were common in illuminated manuscripts and later engravings and woodblock cuttings.<sup>61</sup> However, Christ's imploring gaze, which looks out towards the viewer with a pained and compassionate expression, makes the focus of the painting shift from the abundance of blood and gore. Rather, Christ's gaze establishes a relationship between him and the viewer, and makes the painting feel more intimate than cruel: the incredibly small format helps with this interpretation. It also ensures that the painting, even though it includes so many characters on such a small format,

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<sup>58</sup> Decker and Kirkland-Ives 2015, 40-49.

<sup>59</sup> See for example Figure 8.

<sup>60</sup> Defoer 1994, 9.

<sup>61</sup> See Figure 10 Figure 11.

does not feel crowded. Christ's centrality is almost perfectly circled by the other characters: they stand on the outer edges of the panel, and especially Mary Magdalen, St John and one of the angels seem to have been cut off abruptly. This effect, however, was fully intended by Geertgen: thorough research in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has shown that the image was never cut down during its lifetime, it is not originally part of a larger composition.<sup>62</sup> Again, this is a pictorial tool used by the painter to increase the focus on the Christ figure in the middle.

Geertgen's painting seems more complex than Memling's, in the way it incorporates so many characters. Where Memling's painting has sometimes been confused for a Pietà, Geertgen's painting borrows characteristics from paintings which have traditionally been identified as the Lamentation, the Road to Calvary and Christ bearing the Cross. Furthermore, the weeping angels holding the Arma Christi ensure that these instruments do not merely serve as a mnemonic backdrop to the painting, but actually play an active part in the composition, incorporating all these stories into one complex narrative.<sup>63</sup> Sixten Ringbom has called this 'an attempt to vivify' the imagery of the Man of Sorrows.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the suffering of Christ is, once again, deeply emphasised, and his connection with the Virgin is once again established in this painting. However, rather than the active role she played in Memling's painting, here, she is merely a woeful observer of the scene, her function still secondary. This separation of the Virgin and Christ figures would grow further during the late fifteenth century, when eventually diptychs were made with the Virgin in her own, separate panel, bringing her on equal footing with the suffering Christ. Geertgen's tiny work then, incorporates all those details that Memling incorporated in his 'Suffering Christ supported by the Virgin': the sorrowing Mother, the Suffering Christ, the blood and the emphasis on his wounds, the Arma Christi, the independence from space and time. However, Geertgen seems to excel at combining all these aspects into what almost seems a narrative circle,<sup>65</sup> where 'emotion and theological depth are put into a harmonious balance, just as cruel suffering and loving compassion are moulded into one theme'.<sup>66</sup> All this emotion is projected outward, ensuring that the beholder would receive the full amount of complex feelings. Due to its small format and the clear outward projection in Christ's imploring look, it is safe to assume that this image was intended for deeply private contemplation with the beholder at a very close distance from the image.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Defoer 1994,9.

<sup>63</sup> Defoer 1994, 8-9. Panofsky 1927, 290.

<sup>64</sup> Ringbom 1984, 170.

<sup>65</sup> Schiller 1966, 214.

<sup>66</sup> Defoer 1994, 10-11.

<sup>67</sup> Panofsky 1927, 292.

As stated before, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, painters from the Low Countries kept experimenting with new ways of depicting the Suffering Christ, always attempting to increase the emotional impact it had on the beholder. One of these innovations was to 'zoom in' even further on the figure of Christ, and move from a half-length figure to a figure en buste. This led to diptychs, with both the Virgin and Christ in 'buste' format, connected through their shared Passion. The Christ figure, often depicted with crown of thorns but without the other wounds of the Passion, was dubbed 'salvatus coronatus', and the invention of this type of Suffering Christ imagery was attributed to Dieric Bouts.<sup>68</sup> A fine example of this type of diptych is part of the collection of the National Gallery in London, painted probably between 1470-75 (Figure 13). Although the attribution is not entirely certain, and this might be a workshop copy, the high quality of the diptych could indicate this is a Dieric Bouts original. However, the motif was clearly incredibly popular at its time, and numerous copies by Bouts (Figure 12), his workshop, his son Aelbert (Figure 14, Figure 16, Figure 15) and other Netherlandish painters such as Rogier van der Weyden (Figure 17) and Gerard Davids exist (Figure 18).<sup>69</sup> There has been much discussion on what painting provided the archetype for this series, but, as of yet, this has not yet been conclusively found.<sup>70</sup>

The diptych then, shows on the right a panel of the Suffering Christ wearing the crown of thorns. Furthermore, he also wears the red cloak which Christ's tormentors wrapped him in when they mockingly called him the 'King of the Jews'. Although this would almost seem an indication of tying the picture to a specific time, namely just before the 'Ecce Homo' moment in St John's Gospel,<sup>71</sup> this can be waylaid by the large amount of images which show Christ wearing the robe but also displaying the stigmata, including some by Bouts himself and his son Aelbert:<sup>72</sup> again, it seems clear that these types of images were not dependent on any spatial or temporal setting for their emotional impact to work. On the National Gallery panel, a red-eyed Christ holds his hands clasped together: due to the way the painting cuts off at the bottom, it is unclear whether he would have the Crucifixion wounds in his palms. Blood is dripping from the wounds left by the crown of thorns, and some of those thorns can be traced even under the surface of Christ's skin. Christ's head is inclined slightly to the right, as we have seen before, but, exceptionally, there are tears rolling down his face. Furthermore, unlike Geertgen's Christ imploring, outwards stare, Bouts's Christ seems to mostly avoid eye contact with the viewer, instead looking towards

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<sup>68</sup> Barclay 1999, 22.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell 1998, 63 Furthermore, works by sixteenth-century Netherlandish artists such as Jan Mostaert (Figure 19), Colijn de Coter (Figure 20) and Adriaen Isenbrandt (Figure 21) could have been inspired by these works.

<sup>70</sup> Asperen de Boer et al. 1975, 294.

<sup>71</sup> St. John's Gospel, 19, 5 – 6.

<sup>72</sup> Campbell 1998, 52-55; see Figure 15, Figure 16.

his Mother out of the corners of his eye. This adds an additional empathetic element to the painting, which makes it even more suited as an aid to private devotion. The Virgin, on the panel on the left, is also in tears and directs her suffering look towards her son, her hands held together in prayer. Thus, their compassionate bond is formed, and Christ's humanisation is complete: not only is Christ himself rendered to tears because of his suffering, but his Mother, now set on equal footing with her son in this new diptych format, cries over the suffering her son is going through.<sup>73</sup> Both these aspects of the diptych are in line with the reigning thoughts of the *Devotio Moderna*: it encouraged viewers to empathise with Mary's grief as a way of *Imitatio Christi*. Ludolf of Saxony recommended this as a way to sympathise and then move towards Christ.<sup>74</sup> This merging of the suffering of both the Mother and Christ himself must have made for an image of great emotional impact, and because of its close-up, intimate character, it must have been easy to empathise with this image specifically. Comparing this image with Bouts's earlier work of the *Suffering Christ* in the National Gallery (Figure 22), which is executed in half-length and focuses much more on the gore and physical suffering of Christ, one can imagine it would have been easier to empathise with the later image, even if many of the characteristics of the two paintings are similar.

This chapter, using four main works of the early Netherlandish panel painting, and a large amount of comparative material, has set out to provide an explanation for certain phenomena in the imagery of the *Suffering Christ*. It seems clear that a great deal of the innovations and differing aspects of these images were created by their painters in order to increase the psychological and emotional impact that these images were supposed to provide. In line with that dominant form of private devotion, the *Devotio Moderna*, the *Imitation of Christ* was encouraged through contemplation and prayer when focusing on these images. However, although the *Devotio Moderna* was mostly called to a halt by the reformation, these images had an afterlife which was much more extensive and continued to influence artists throughout later centuries, as will become apparent in the next chapters.

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<sup>73</sup> Wolff 1989 119-120.

<sup>74</sup> Schuler 1992, 13-14.

## Chapter 3

### Counter-Reformation Spanish Polychrome Sculptures

Spanish polychrome sculpture of the Counter-Reformation is an art form which has been largely ignored in main stream art history. Although the painters of the same period, including Velázquez and Murillo, have received critical acclaim and mass popularity, their colleagues who preoccupied themselves with wood sculptures have hardly received either recognition or praise outside the Iberian peninsula itself. Several reasons for this neglect could be offered. Firstly, the art of polychroming wood was already seen as old fashioned during the sixteenth century, when the Italian Renaissance encouraged a preference for the grand, tranquil, white marble statues influenced by classical ideas, rather than the brightly coloured statues which seemed to call to mind the High Middle Ages.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the way these images made use of mixed mediums, which included ivory, glass, postizo and sometimes even human hair,<sup>76</sup> seemed so far in violation of the traditional rules of art criticism, thought out by Vasari, that “its obscurity in critical theory can only demonstrate how irrelevant it already was outside of Spain.”<sup>77</sup> Additionally, its position did not improve over the following centuries. Although the art of Spain was imported in its new colonies, and became especially popular in Mexico and Brazil,<sup>78</sup> other European countries still did not feel any connection with this type of art. Its hyper realistic and overtly religious character, with its often gruesome details, did not make it suitable for private collections. Furthermore, the art world, which became increasingly interested in names, and dependent on attributions to certain famous artists, probably did not know how to deal with sculpture which was often produced anonymously, in workshop or guild settings, with a division of labour between the sculptor and the polychromer.

However, in contrast to the feelings on this sculpture outside of Spain, within the Spanish world, it was incredibly popular. Driven by the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation, these images were pushed as the embodiments of the degrees that were ushered in the Council of Trent on images.<sup>79</sup> Even artists and art critics such as Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644), who mostly took their inspiration from Vasari and the Italian Renaissance, praised the use of polychrome sculpture within churches. Indeed, Pacheco thought that the principal aim of art should be “to persuade men to piety and to lead them to God,”<sup>80</sup> an aim that could be easiest carried out through this most realistic of art forms. These sculptures, which were so realistic the

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<sup>75</sup> McKim-Smith 1993, 14-19.

<sup>76</sup> Stratton-Pruitt 2009, 26.

<sup>77</sup> McKim-Smith 1993, 18.

<sup>78</sup> Gates et al. 2009, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Romero Torres 2009, 34; Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 46.

<sup>80</sup> Kasl and Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 232.

viewer could literally feel as if they were in the presence of the divine, were placed on altars in chapels and cathedrals all throughout Spain, and especially in the major art centres of Sevilla, Valladolid and Granada.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, during important religious processions, these sculptures were raised on boards or floats and carried through the town centres, further blurring the distinction between the realistic and the art. This is a tradition that continues in Spain today, and still, reports of reactions of extreme affection and empathy towards these statues are recorded.<sup>82</sup> This chapter will look at some of the most famous motifs of these statues, that of the Suffering Christ, and analyse how they contributed to the religion of Counter-Reformation Spain. It will analyse sculptures which share the characteristics of Suffering Christ imagery that were outlined in the first chapter, being those that show a Christ who is alive, or at least has his eyes open, with an indefinable context, making it impossible to assign a specific space and time to the image.

One of the most famous sculptors of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, and the initiator of the school of Valladolid, was Gregorio Fernández (1576-1636). He was active during the early seventeenth century, and was responsible for the invention of several new motifs within the imagery of the Suffering Christ.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, his refined, sensitive style usually focuses on the psychological suffering of his figure, and is intimate in a quiet manner, which stops his images from being too gruesome or gimmicky.<sup>84</sup> One of the new motifs he was responsible for was the full-length depiction of Christ at the Column, with a column in half-length. One of this type was commissioned for the Church of Vera Cruz in Valladolid, where it still stands today, and was finished before 1619 (Figure 23). The artist responsible for the polychromy on the sculpture is unknown. Although the lack of the wounds of the Crucifixion and the appearance of the flagellation column have caused many to conclude this image must symbolise part of a narrative sequence, this was not the objective of the motif. Rather, the focal point of the image, as we have seen before, are the wounds, and therefore the suffering, of Christ, which have been so diligently applied, probably by the polychromer with whom Fernández collaborated. The column and the chain with which Christ is attached to it merely serve as visual reminders of Christ's torture, to call to the viewer's mind the manner in which Christ obtained those wounds that are to be focused on.<sup>85</sup> The image with the column displayed in this way became very popular in the seventeenth century, and was based on the 'true' column of the Flagellation, which had been

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<sup>81</sup> Bray 2009, 17-18.

<sup>82</sup> McKim-Smith 1993, 18; 22.

<sup>83</sup> Trusted 1996, 80.

<sup>84</sup> Bray et al. 2009, Cat No. 18.

<sup>85</sup> Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 50.

discovered in Rome and still stands in the church of Sta Prassede today.<sup>86</sup> This sculptural arrangement has been copied often over time, one of its imitations being part of the sculpture collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which unfortunately has no remaining polychromy (Figure 24).

The wounds that are displayed on Christ's body are abundant and seem to cover his whole body: his knees are severely chapped, his arms are covered in cuts and especially his back is a display of painful bruises, welts and cuts. Standing in a slightly crouched pose, his head is tilted to the right, and his gaze strict gaze looks directly down at the viewer. Combined with his slightly opened mouth, Fernández and the polychromer have here created a deeply cutting image which seems to implore the viewer for compassion.<sup>87</sup> The sculpture is naturally thematically related to Velázquez's painting of Christ after the Flagellation (Figure 25), but is much more focused on the bruises and cuts scattered over Christ's body than the painting, which seems much more serene.<sup>88</sup> Fernández's Christ is intended to arouse emotion in any viewer, whichever social standing they may be part of or background they may have. The image is isolated, independent of time and space, to allow the viewer to contemplate the whole statue as an entity, its slightly crouched pose increases the pathos one might view: Christ, deprived of strength, can just barely still stand upright, leaning on the column on which he was tortured. This image ties in perfectly with Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, in which he wrote that a dialogue should be created between the viewer and Christ, in which the beholder should meditate on his personal sins and ask for the Saviour's pardon.<sup>89</sup>

Another image by Fernández which was especially suited for this purpose was his full-length version of the Ecce Homo (Figure 26 Figure 27), which is very closely related to the Christ at the Column. Rather than being tied to the column, in this sculpture, Christ's hands are tied together, crossed in front of his chest. The rest of Christ's stature, however, is similar: his pose is slightly slumped and his head is tilted to the right, to emphasise his pain. His imploring gaze and open mouth seem to call for the viewer's compassion, and the rope around his wrists bring to mind the tortures Christ has experienced. These two sculptures, created by one of the most famous sculptors of his time, seem to bring across the message of the Counter-Reformation perfectly: they move the viewer towards empathy, allow them to contemplate their sins and how Christ offered himself for the sins of humanity, and tie in with the ideas of one of Spain's most important theologians, Ignatius.

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<sup>86</sup> Trusted 1996, 60.

<sup>87</sup> Freedberg 1989, 241.

<sup>88</sup> Bray et al. 2009, cat no 19.

<sup>89</sup> Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 50.

Another sculptor who seemed to perfectly incorporate all these aspects in his art was Pedro de Mena (1628-1688), who became especially famous for his many versions of the 'Ecce Homo', or 'Man of Sorrows' in half length, which seem to epitomise all those aspects that make up the Suffering Christ imagery. Active mostly during the 1670s, his interpretations of the Suffering Christ seem almost synonymous with Spanish Counter-Reformation art.<sup>90</sup> Unlike Fernández, de Mena was also trained in the art of polychroming, and was therefore usually responsible for his own painting. Especially worth mentioning are a sculpture of the Suffering Christ dressed in a red cloak, carrying a bamboo rod, with his hands tied together high on his chest (1680-88)(Figure 28), the other shows a bare-chested Christ with tied hands, his upper body covered in bruises, welts and cuts (1673)(Figure 29). These life-size images, which were usually placed on the right sides of altars, were often accompanied by forms of the Sorrowing Mother, the Mater Dolorosa, of which de Mena also made many.<sup>91</sup> As we have also seen in the images in the early Netherlandish sample, the images moved towards the half-length close-up, which allowed for a more intimate connection with the viewer, and the inclusion of the Virgin as part of the ensemble allowed additional emphasis on Christ's humanity and the compassion felt with the Mother who suffered because of her son's Passion.

Many of Pedro de Mena's statues, including these two Suffering Christ half-lengths, were commissioned by monastic orders to serve as foci for private contemplation in the chapels or churches of their orders. The many lashes and wounds that cover Christ's body were true to what the devotional literature and preachers were telling about Christ's suffering: these described in the smallest detail exactly how many whip lashes Christ had been given and what types of wounds were produced by these.<sup>92</sup> However, as can be seen when comparing these two works by, as his career progressed, Pedro de Mena increasingly opted for sculptures that focused less on the physical wounds of Christ, and more on the facial expression and gaze of the Saviour. Where his earlier Christ has a downcast look, with eyes half closed which are almost overshadowed by the enormous crown of thorns he wears, the later Ecce Homo has a gaze which is much more open and upwards, with the eyebrows rounded to emphasise his lost expression. Furthermore, Christ's hair and features are more stylised, and therefore make it easier for the viewer to focus on his facial expression. His eyes, eyelashes and teeth, which in the earlier version are so meticulously shaped out of glass, human hair and ivory, in this later version are all made of painted wood. It seems then, that Pedro de Mena, as his career progressed, became increasingly preoccupied with enhancing the psychological impact on the

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<sup>90</sup> Trusted 1996, 90.

<sup>91</sup> Bray et al. 2009 Cat No 21a&b; See Figure 30.

<sup>92</sup> Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 52.



viewer, and focus on the psychological suffering Christ had gone through, more than the physical. Therefore, he could take a small step back from the hyper-realism of polychromed sculpture, and focus purely on conveying emotion.

In contrast with de Mena's later, more restrained style, his younger contemporary José de Mora chose to expand the physical indications of pain and suffering on his sculptures, rather than reduce it. De Mora, who, like de Mena, had taken the exam of *pintor de ymagineria*, allowing him to do his own polychromy according to the rules of the guilds, made heavy use of increasingly expressive flesh tones in order to depict suffering in his images.<sup>93</sup> A particularly interesting example of this style can be seen in the couple of busts he made for the Convent of Santa Isabel la Real in Granada (Figure 31). The two busts, again depicting a Suffering Christ and a Sorrowing Virgin, contain a large amount of 'realistic' details, such as glass eyes and tears, and real hair in the eyelashes. Furthermore, he has mixed some of Christ's tears with the blood falling from his wounds, and has used bluish tones to create severe bruises on Christ's torso and cheeks, also shaping heavy bags under his eyes which are turned upwards. The eyelids of both the Virgin and Christ are heightened with red, giving them a swollen, puffy look, as if they both have been crying for an extended period of time. Painting the Virgin and Christ in this manner has again increased the emphasis on the physical suffering of Christ, and in this situation also that of his mother. The Virgin's extensive crying has caused her complexion to be affected, even if her suffering is more psychological than physical.

The fact that sculptors started applying polychromy on their own statues thus changed the way these sculptures were conceived, putting more of an emphasis on skin tones and displaying the wounds only in painting, rather than in sculpture also.<sup>94</sup> José de Mora became especially famous for making sculptures in this way. The accuracy of the anatomy of these statues, combined with their incredibly life-like polychroming and their true-to-life size made them perfect vehicles for carrying across the highly emotional message that was conveyed in them. Furthermore, the choice of the bust-size sculptures, even more intimate and direct than the half-length ones, increased the ease of identification with these sculptures. Additionally, the fact that these brought to mind the relic busts which had spread throughout Europe during the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period, must have contributed to their overall religious feel: there was an immediate association with the real presence of the divine.<sup>95</sup> José de Mora's work, which evokes Pedro de Mena's sets of Virgin and Christ half-lengths, has also made use of the Virgin as

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<sup>93</sup> Bray 2009, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Bray 2009, 26; Barbour and Ozone 2009, 62.

<sup>95</sup> Trusted 1996, 105.

a way of humanising Christ, the psychological and in this situation, even physical pain of the mother serves to humanise Christ in such a way, as to increase the empathy felt for both. These busts, which were set in wooden frames in their original setting, were not intended, like Fernández work used above, to be carried along during processions. Rather, they were part of often private commissions for convents or aristocracy, placed in separate chapels within churches. With their heightened coloured skin tones, placed in often dark interiors of a chapel and illuminated only by candlelight, the lifelike qualities of these sculptures must have seemed particularly realistic, making them extremely potent as objects of focus for prayer and empathy for suffering.<sup>96</sup>

In de Mora's work, a link with the art of the Netherlands analysed in the previous chapter seems more apparent than in the work of any other Spanish sculptor or polychromer. The works, in their close-up style, seem to re-invoke those images which Sixten Ringbom researched when he was talking about the 'rise of the dramatic close-up in fifteenth-century art.'<sup>97</sup> Looking especially at the diptychs by Dieric Bouts and his son Albert, which were praised for their increasingly realistic representation of Christ's suffering, it can hardly be avoided to form a comparison with this later Spanish work. However, a comparison between what has always been seen as two separate worlds, separate branches of art, can also be made in more generalised terms, and does not necessarily only need to apply to specifically de Mora's sculpture or Bouts' diptychs. The following chapter, therefore, will compare the different features of the Netherlandish and Spanish imagery of the Suffering Christ, to show that they have a significant amount of aspects in common, and set out to analyse whether this influence would have been historically possible or logical.

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<sup>96</sup> Trusted 1996, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ringbom 1984.

## Chapter 4

### Comparison and Analysis: Netherlandish Influences on Spanish Polychrome Sculpture

In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was shown that Spanish art should be allowed to be studied as part of the corpus of the Suffering Christ imagery as much as the Netherlandish, German and other art, which has traditionally been viewed as more 'classical' or more worthy of study. Indeed, the Spanish art is as much focused on devotion and prayer, usually depicting a Christ figure suspended in time and space, without clear references to any biblical story, with Christ displayed in a state which seems somewhere between dead and alive, gazing pleadingly at the viewer, asking for compassion and prayer. All these characteristics, which makes the image strongly devotional in nature, show that the intended function of the image was of the utmost importance, perhaps even more important than the manner of its execution. These images, the Netherlandish ones as much as the Spanish, served to encourage the viewer to empathise with the suffering Christ, to imitate him, to feel compassion. Therefore, in their essentials, these two art forms are very similar. However, besides their similar underlying ideology, these images share more common denominators. This chapter, by comparing and contrasting the Netherlandish and the Spanish schools specifically, will show that not only is this imagery part of the same corpus and thematically related, but that the Spanish school was also heavily influenced by the art of the Netherlands and copied several of its motifs.

Firstly, for a relationship to exist between these two art schools, which are separated quite significantly both in real and chronological distance, there needs to be motif and opportunity: for what reason would Spanish artists start using dated imagery, and if so, how did this influence come about. How were Spain and the Netherlands connected? Firstly, it needs to be emphasised again that the cultural environment that created these art forms was very similar indeed. As stated before, the Spanish Counter-Reformation was a revival, or even a continuation of the Middle Ages: the way religion was practiced and images were engaged with during these periods was similar in all its essentials. Furthermore, there was a surge in the amount of new religious orders, the building of convents and monasteries, and mystics.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, because of the development of the printing press, mystical writings, spiritual guidance booklets and other miraculous occurrences could be spread around the country much more quickly, making the religious hold on the country even more tight. Religion and religious life in Spain during the Counter-Reformation was strikingly similar to that of the Netherlands at the closing of the

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<sup>98</sup> Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 47.

Middle Ages. Therefore, it is not so strange to see that artists started using very similar ways to give shape to these ideas, to embody them in sculpture.

Popular religion then contributed to the Suffering Christ imagery becoming popular once again. However, the artists of Spain must also have had a great deal of opportunity to be influenced by the work of the fifteenth-century Netherlandish artists. Firstly, political connections between the two countries were very tight. Charles V, who himself was of Burgundian Netherlandish descent, has been recorded to have brought art and artists back to Spain with him after state visits to the Burgundian Netherlands.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, he might have contributed to the Netherlandish art becoming popular in Spain in general, and have encouraged Netherlandish artists to settle in Spanish artistic centres. Several of these artists have been recorded to live and work in Madrid during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Juan de Colonia and his sons, and Gil de Siloé.<sup>100</sup> Even Netherlandish art traders settled in Spain, and sold their art to wealthy patrons of chapels, churches and cathedrals, which has resulted in some of the Netherlandish panel painters to still be in situ in those places today.<sup>101</sup> Lastly, with the invention and development of the printing press, the spread of written word and images was much easier achieved. Thus, the works of Thomas à Kempis and Pseudo-Bonaventure, still of prime importance and popularity during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially in Catholic countries, were still printed and read. Although no medieval copies of the *Imitatio Christi* survive in Spain,<sup>102</sup> there is a very high chance that it was still being read, especially since St. Ignatius's work seems very similar in tone. The printing press also contributed to the spread of images, with print versions of famous images being spread throughout Europe, and allowing people from less wealthy backgrounds to also own and engage with art on a daily basis. Prints such as Lucas Vorsterman's (Figure 10) version of a painting by Anthony van Dyck may have been seen by Spanish artists and used as points of influence. In conclusion then, there would have been plenty of opportunity for Spanish artists to view, analyse and emulate the imagery of the Early Netherlandish paintings, and since the time period also called for a similar approach to art, this would have certainly encouraged artists to look back towards this period.

Seeing that, through circumstantial evidence, it can be shown there was a great deal of opportunity for Spanish artists to be influenced by the Netherlandish ones, it is interesting to proof this by the comparison between the two sets of imagery. The emphasis on realism is of

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<sup>99</sup> Ringbom 1984, 67.

<sup>100</sup> Stratton-Pruitt 2009, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Such as, for instance, Memling's Suffering Christ Supported by the Virgin, in Granada cathedral (Figure 6).

<sup>102</sup> Axters 1971.

major importance in both schools. Early Netherlandish, and especially Flemish, devotional art has traditionally been praised for its ever-increasing realism.<sup>103</sup> This realism was reflected in the wounds scattered across Christ's body, the blood that would drip down, and especially in later representations such as by Albert Bouts, the pale colour of his skin tone and horrible bruising leave a haunting impression of realistic suffering on the viewer. Furthermore, Christ's tilted head with his imploring gaze is a feature that reoccurs in nearly all images, both the Spanish and the Netherlandish. This gaze is one of the features in these works of art that most significantly aids to its interpretation: it establishes the connection with the viewer, drawing them in, inviting them to empathise with the suffering that Christ is going through. The intense realism of the Spanish sculptures, then, is one of the features that the Spanish polychromers have taken the pictorial traditions of their Netherlandish predecessors.<sup>104</sup> However, in Spanish sculpture, this realism has been moved a few steps forward: its realism is even more pronounced, has been called, 'starker', or 'hyper-realism'.<sup>105</sup> In search of this 'hyper-realism', Spanish polychromers started adding aspects to sculpture that were made of mixed media, including ivory, human hair and cork.<sup>106</sup> The fact that these mixed media were used, may have contributed to the division that seems to have arisen between Netherlandish and Spanish imagery, with the Netherlandish panel painting traditionally being seen as the 'high end' of art, complying by the rules which art seemingly needs to adhere to, and Spanish sculpture being seen as 'grotesque' and 'overtly religious'.<sup>107</sup> Spanish polychrome sculpture did not fit within those boundaries of established art, which were set out by Vasari so long ago.<sup>108</sup>

Some of the aspects that made the Netherlandish art so realistic were the very real looking tears which were shed by many of the characters depicted on the panels, and on some even by Christ himself: in depictions of the Suffering Christ of both Geertgen tot Sint Jans as Dieric Bouts, clear round tears can be seen to be rolling down Christ's cheeks (Figure 9 Figure 13). In Netherlandish art, this is still an unusual feature, which has been pointed out by several authors writing on the paintings.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, in Gregorio Fernández work, where less use is made of postizo additions to the sculpture, these tears are not apparent. Rather, it seems that Fernández and his polychromer were influenced by the head tilted slightly to the side, the upwards gaze and the open mouth with visible teeth of Dieric Bouts's representation: these features all return in Fernández's work, although displayed in a slightly more lively manner. However, the tears

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<sup>103</sup> Camille 1998, 205.

<sup>104</sup> Bray 2009, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Bray 2009, 15;17.

<sup>106</sup> cork was often used for bloody wounds, to imitate the effect of coagulating blood.

<sup>107</sup> McKim Smith 1993, 20.

<sup>108</sup> McKim Smith 1993, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Including Lorne Campbell, see NG exh cat.

make a rather impressive return in the work of Pedro de Mena and José de Mora, where, although they are usually reserved just for the Virgin, even Christ is sometimes displayed with a glass tear on his cheek (Figure 31). Displaying the Suffering Christ in the act of crying would make him especially vulnerable in the eyes of the viewer, this seems to almost wholly ignore Christ's divine status and focus purely on his humanity: he is reduced to tears through the pains of his torture. The Virgin Mary, so often placed next to him, as part of the same ensemble, is more regularly displayed in tears: it is a feature of the art of Memling, Bouts and Geertgen, and many others. The perfect raindrop-shaped tears that appear on the panel paintings are very similar to those of the Spanish polychromers, which were shaped out of glass. However, again, the Spanish sculptors and polychromers seem to have taken their level of reality one step further, and rather than simply attaching the glass tears to the cheeks of their personages, they also recreated tear-trails running down from the eye towards the tear.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, we have seen José de Mora going as far as to mingle the tears and blood streaming down his suffering Christ's face, which attributes greatly to its high emotional impact, which he may have copied of Dieric Bouts's panel at the Hermitage (Figure 12). The use of blue-ish coloured skin, especially under Christ's eyes and around the thorns of the crown, which José de Mora uses to heighten the look of despair and anguish, and to contribute to Christ's almost sickly look, is a manner that was also made use of by Dieric Bouts and his son Aelbert (Figure 22). The blue tones, which immediately create an unnatural skin colour, cause the viewer to realise just how much inhumane suffering Christ must have gone through during his Passion, to cause this to appear.

When looking at the sizes of Spanish polychrome sculpture, it becomes apparent that, although full-length statues were more the norm during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, with Pedro de Mena's re-popularising of the image of the suffering Christ in half-length, the half-length and bust formats really come back into popular devotion. The half-length format for devotional images, which goes back via Netherlandish art to Byzantine icons, was found especially suitable for private devotion, as it allowed the viewer to be on the same height as Christ while kneeling in prayer.<sup>111</sup> The peculiarities of the Netherlandish half-length, which often included the top of Christ's loin cloth in the picture, can be found again in the work of Pedro de Mena. Furthermore, the move toward the smaller bust sculptures, either with or without hands, was one that was also apparent in Netherlandish art, Bouts having traditionally been credited its invention, along with the diptych format of the Virgin and Christ. These busts in diptych format, then, is one of the features of the Netherlandish art that is most significantly reused by Spanish sculptors and polychromers: contrasting the Suffering Christ with his

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<sup>110</sup> See Figure 30.

<sup>111</sup> Ringbom 1984; Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 2009, 29.

Sorrowing Mother, as stated before, was used to emphasise the humanity of Christ's character. Furthermore, through imagining the suffering of the Virgin, who was of human nature and therefore perhaps more approachable than Christ, one could then take a step further and imagine Christ's pain as well. This set-up, which had proved to work very effectively in the art of the Netherlands in the later Middle Ages, was consciously repeated by the Spanish Counter-Reformation artists.

These similarities, along with the need for similar art created by the spirit of popular religion, all seem to suggest that the art of Spain of the Counter-Reformation was significantly influenced by the Netherlandish art of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. However, there are obvious differences between the two data sets which cannot simply be overlooked, and require some form of explanation. First, and most importantly, is the choice of medium: where the Netherlandish artists flourished in panel paintings, and saw those as their most important and most prestigious art form, the Spanish imagery of the suffering Christ is all captured in sculpture. There are, of course, images of the suffering Christ made in painting, such as Velázquez famous painting at the National Gallery (Figure 25) and the image of the Man of Sorrows by Antonio Pereda y Salgade (Figure 32). However, these paintings all seem to have opted for a much more tranquil approach to the subject of the Suffering Christ. Christ is portrayed with an anguished look on his face, but any evidence of real suffering, such as the blood, whip lashes and bruises displayed on the sculpture, is here left aside or kept to a minimum. The extreme realism that has become so synonymous with imagery of the Suffering Christ, only comes out in the sculpture of the Counter-Reformation period. If the Spaniards copied their knack for realistic display from the Netherlandish artists, why then, did they opt for a different medium? And why is sculpture so much more gruesome than painting in Spain in the seventeenth century? Firstly, there are some practical reasons for the difference in level of 'gruesomeness' between painting and sculpture: the sculpture, which was often intended to be carried around in processions, might have needed exaggerated proportions in order for the impact of the sculpture to be experienced even from a further distance. The raised, bloody wounds, painted in striking colours, would have caught the attention even of those people standing much further away. Furthermore, the amount of wounds and lashes would have to be increased compared to painting, as the meaning and message of the sculpture would have to be seen in one quick glance, rather than a painting which would usually allow for a longer period of contemplation. However, even with these reasons, the contrast of the norm between painting and sculpture polychromy is great. There seems to be a certain 'squeamishness' in seventeenth-century painters which the polychromers were not bothered by, and which cannot simply be explained by the practicalities mentioned above.

Imagery of the type of the Suffering Christ then loaned itself well to sculpture: it allowed for the sculptor to apply a large amount of striking visual detail without stepping outside of the subject matter. However, there were also theological reasons for sculpture being the ideal vehicle for realistic Suffering Christ imagery during the Counter-Reformation. The Counter-Reformation was very much a conscious effort by the ruling and religious classes to re-immense Spain into the dominant religion of the late Middle Ages.<sup>112</sup> This effort was paired with the active promotion of certain art forms over others, as some forms of art were seen as more effective in bringing the religious message across. The tradition of polychromed wood sculpture, which had spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, was chosen as the most effective art form to serve this purpose. Not only was there a dominant idea, first voiced by St Bernard of Clairvaux, that the more colour a sculpture had, the holier it was perceived, but, on top of that, preachers in Spain during the Counter-Reformation believed that sculpture, as an art form, was much more effective than painting in order to bring the Christian message across.<sup>113</sup> The popularity of polychromed sculpture, therefore, was not accidental, but was consciously promoted by the church, in order to make the 'sacred truly palpable.'<sup>114</sup> However, the extreme reality of the sculptures seems to be an aspect that was emphasised by the artists themselves. Indeed, Pacheco writes that every polychromer should sit the examination for *pintor de imagería* in order to ensure that their work is of the highest possible standard. If not, Pacheco states, badly painted sculpture would lose the ability to 'communicate higher ideas.'<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the realism and right execution of these statues was an essential part of their use. .

There are, naturally, more differences between the Spanish and the Netherlandish art, aside from their choice of medium. The Spanish statues, although not majorly, have had some influence from the Italian Renaissance. This influence appears especially in some of the full-length sculptures such as those by Fernández, which comply to the rules of classical sculpture in their contra-posto pose and their muscular physique. The Italian Renaissance, although never very forceful in Spain, did leave an influence on some aspects of sculpture.<sup>116</sup> Another important change in Suffering Christ imagery during the Spanish Counter-Reformation was the role the Arma Christi played. Although they are often of major importance in the Early Netherlandish representations of the Suffering Christ, used as mnemonic tricks to recount the whole story of the Passion, they lose this primary role in Spanish art, serving merely as an attribute for Christ

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<sup>112</sup> Gates et al. 2009, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Bray 2009, 17-19.

<sup>114</sup> Bray 2009, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Bray 2009, 25; Pacheco ed. *Fallay d'Este* 1986, 113-4 pp 91-100 on painting versus sculpture.

<sup>116</sup> Stratton-Pruitt 2009, 21-22.



to explain some of his tortures. Therefore, the Arma only include the rope around Christ's neck or tying his hands together, and occasionally a whip, the column of flagellation or the red mantle Christ was forced to wear when being mocked. These instruments all relate directly to Christ, refer immediately to his suffering, and are attached to his body. There are no longer the slightly 'cartoonesque' images of the Middle Ages, serving as mnemonic reminders of all Christ had gone through during his Passion. This contrast can be explained in several ways. Firstly, the medieval manner of interacting with the Arma Christi was very much consistent with the medieval art of memory: the idea that one could train themselves to use a mnemonic reminder, a visual symbol, in order to bring to mind an entire sequence of actions, here an episode out of the Passion monograph. This Art of Memory, which was actively promoted and praised during the later Middle Ages, disappeared mostly during the 'rationality' of the Reformation. Since there was no real reason for the Spanish theologians and rulers to revive this aspect of the Middle Ages during the Counter-Reformation, as it was not directly related to the way religion was practiced, it was an aspect of medieval theoreticians that was kept in the past. Furthermore, from a practical point of view, there may have been more reasons not to include the Arma Christi in the way they had been in the Middle Ages: they were usually included on the background of the painted surface, used as a backdrop to the figure of Christ. Naturally, in sculpture, seeing Christ was a single standing figure, there was no place to include such a plethora of symbols. Thus, the Arma Christi, in the form they were known in during the Middle Ages and in art theory today, disappeared in Spanish art, only a diluted version of this rich iconography surviving the centuries.

This chapter has used the different examples analysed in previous chapters of this dissertation to establish that there is evidence for a connection between the arts of the late medieval Netherlands and Counter-Reformation Spain. This connection is visible in the imagery of the Suffering Christ, both in its manner of execution and in its underlying theological and theoretical framework. All these images were created for the same purpose: to move, to empathise and to draw in viewers, in order for them to understand which tortures and suffering Christ endured for the sake of the salvation of humanity. The Counter-Reformation in Spain was a conscious effort by some of the authorities, including Charles V and his son Philip II, who themselves had strong connections with the Netherlands, to re-establish a medieval way of thinking about and engaging with religion. The religious climate in these two countries, even though far apart in time, was extremely close in its nature. The Spanish artists set out to achieve the same aims as the Netherlandish ones, and did so in similar ways, influenced by the art they made, evidence of which was available throughout Spain and the rest of Europe. The differences in the execution of the Suffering Christ imagery, such as the choice of medium and the disappearance of certain

aspects, can be explained by practical aspects and influence from other periods and schools of thought. In essence, however, the two art forms are extremely similar, and the influence of the Netherlandish artists is very clear.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has provided a comparison between the arts of the Netherlands and Spain, proving there are strong links of influence between the images of the Suffering Christ. This comparison, although raised by some art historians in the last decade,<sup>117</sup> has so far not been made in great detail. This is due to several aspects, but most importantly has to do with the reputation that the art of Counter-Reformation Spain has suffered from: due to its overt religiosity and extreme realism, it has been snubbed for not being true art, or 'art for art's sake'. Furthermore, there seems to have been an issue with the terminology used for Passion imagery so far. The term 'Man of Sorrows', traditionally used for the images of the Suffering Christ in the late medieval Netherlands, was abandoned in favour of the term 'Ecce Homo', which seems to suggest a biblical context for the image. Therefore, I believe these individual iconographic labels have hindered the study of the imagery, as it has served to exclude certain motifs and include others. By categorising all devotional images that depict Christ while suffering, with Christ as the main devotional context, under the name 'Suffering Christ', the corpus of relevant works of art is suddenly much larger, and spans many more centuries than before. The reassessment of the terms traditionally used in the study of the Man of Sorrows, or Passion Iconography, is therefore essential in order to allow a thorough analysis of the motifs, the meanings and the functions of the imagery of the Suffering Christ.

The similarities that can be found in the suffering Christ imagery in Counter-Reformation Spain and in the late medieval Netherlands can be explained by the great similarities in the religion and culture between the two countries at these points in history. Indeed, the Counter-Reformation in Spain has sometimes been called a conscious effort to revoke the religion and theological thought of the Middle Ages. It could even be argued that Counter-Reformation Spain was more a continuation of the Middle Ages rather than a revocation: the Renaissance only caused a minimal interruption, both in art and in theology, and the ideas of Renaissance humanism, rather than catching hold by themselves, were taken by religious organisations such as the Jesuits and attempted to harmonise with the ideas of the Counter-Reformation.

Three main themes have arisen out of the analysis done in this dissertation. Firstly, it has to be emphasised again that many images, especially when relating to religion, cannot simply be studied for their artistic merit. Indeed, sometimes the function of the image so overshadows its artistry, that it has not been traditionally classed as art, which has been the case with the Spanish polychromed sculptures. However, by broadening our views of what art is, and

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<sup>117</sup> Bray 2009. 135; 144; Stratton-Pruitt 2009, 17.

analysing images not only from an iconographic point of view, but also from a sociological and cultural one, we can come to new insights. Secondly then, tying in with that, is the fact that traditional iconography does not always suit such an interpretation: therefore, sometimes for new research to work, the old terminology and iconography needs to be reassessed, so that the subject matter can be widened. Thirdly, by showing how Spanish art of the seventeenth century depended heavily on that of the late medieval Netherlands, and actively sought to re-imagine that art, it has been highlighted once more how the idea of the 'progress of art history,' which has been a ruling idea for so long, first posed by Vasari but often quoted by later authors, cannot stand up in modern art historical research. The history of art is not a clear linear progression, but it twists and turns, is influenced by history and influences history in its turn. Especially the theme of the Suffering of Christ is one that is apparent throughout the history of art, and occasionally flares up and is depicted with an intensity that emphasises the pathos and affective power of the image.

## Figures



Figure 1 Byzantine Man of Sorrows, c. 1300.  
Rome, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.



Figure 2 Israhel van Meckenem, *Vera Icon*,  
engraving, c.1490. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett  
Staatliche Museen.



Figure 3 Albrecht Dürer, *Large Woodcut Passion - Frontispiece*, ca 1511. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Dept. of Prints Drawings and Photographs.



Figure 4 Albrecht Dürer, *Small Woodcut Passion*, ca 1511. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Dept. of Prints Drawings and Photographs.



Figure 5 Albrecht Dürer, *Engraved Passion*, 1509. Yale University Art Gallery

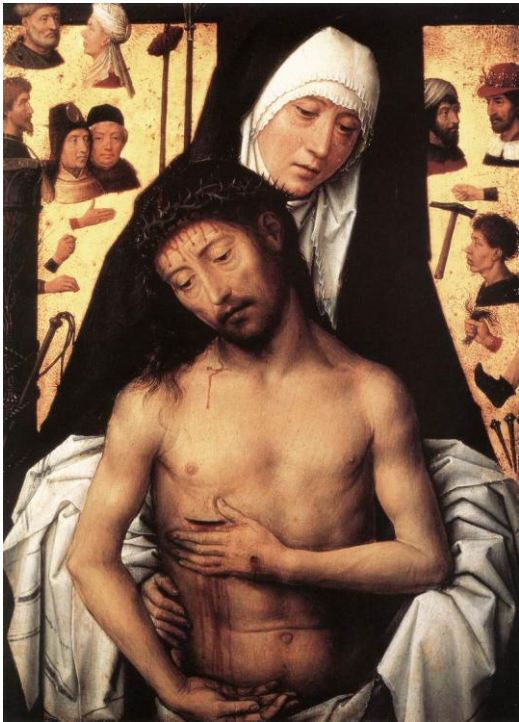


Figure 6 Hans Memling, *Virgin Supporting the Man of Sorrows*. Granada, Capilla Real.



Figure 7 Jacob Cornelisz, *Man of Sorrows with a chalice*, ca1510. Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh.



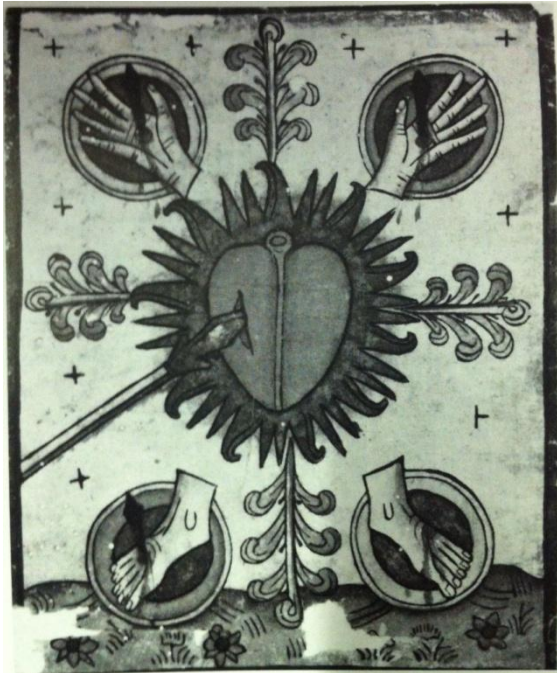


Figure 8 Anonymous, *Five Wounds of Christ with Arma Christi*, ca 1455-1470. Munich.



Figure 9 Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *Man of Sorrows*, ca 1470-1490. Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent.



Figure 10 Lucas Vorsterman (after Anthony van Dyck), *Ecce Homo*, ca 1624-1666. Vienna, Kupferstichkabinett der Akademie der bildenden Künste.



Figure 11 Anonymous, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, fifteenth century. Munich, L Rosenthal.



Figure 13a and b Workshop of Dieric Bouts, *Diptych of Mater Dolorosa and Christ Crowned with Thorns*, ca 1470-1475. London, National Gallery.



Figure 12 Dieric Bouts, *Man of Sorrows*, 1470s. St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.



Figure 14 Albert Bouts, *Diptych of Christ Crowned with Thorns and Mater Dolorosa*, 1455-1549. Luxembourg, Musée National d'Art et d'Histoire.



Figure 16 Albert Bouts, *Christ Crowned with Thorns, (Man of Sorrows)*, 4th quarter of the fifteenth-first half of the sixteenth century. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

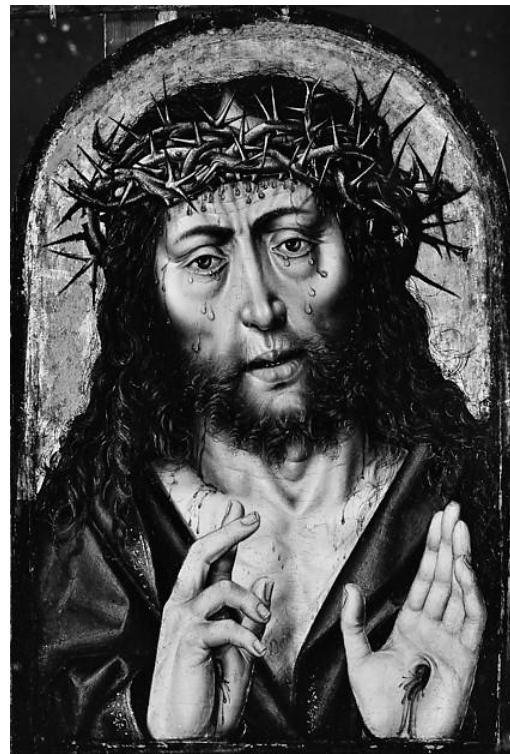


Figure 15 Albert Bouts, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, ca 1525. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 17 Rogier van der Weyden (copy?), *Mater Dolorosa and Man of Sorrows*, ca 1476-1500 Bruges, Groeningemuseum.

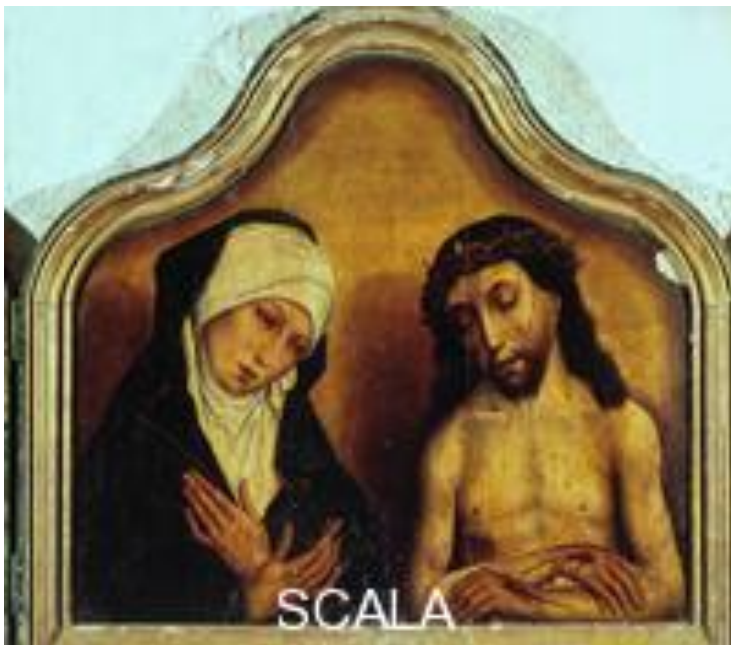


Figure 18 Gerard Davids, *Mater Dolorosa and Man of Sorrows (Central Panel of a Triptych)*, ca 1450-1520. Cagliari Cathedral.

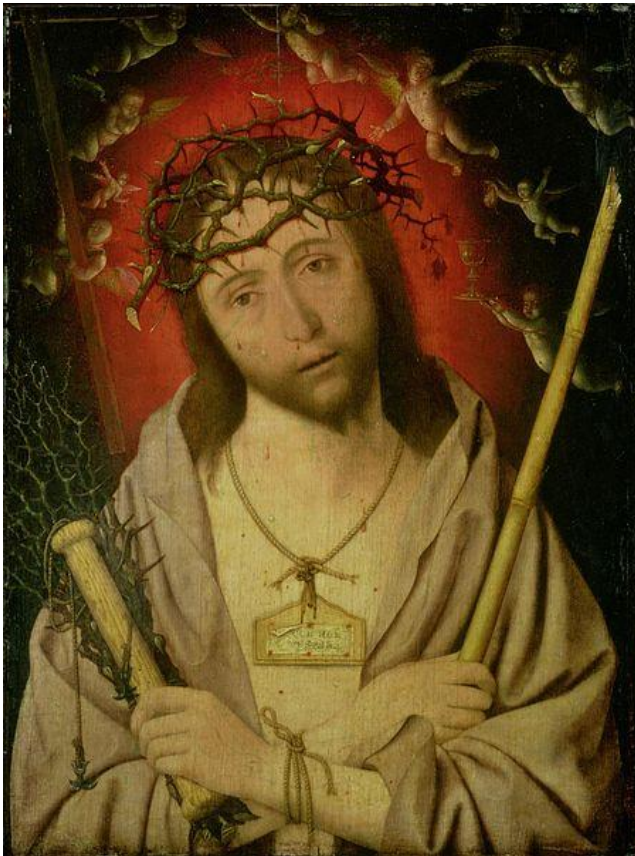


Figure 19 Jan Mostaert, *Ecce Homo Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, ca 1510-1525. Hamburg, Kunsthalle.



Figure 20, Colijn de Coter, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows (Ecce Homo)*, ca1510. Sothebys 11 december 2003.



Figuur 21 Adriaen Isenbrant, *Christ Crowned with Thorns (Ecce Homo) and the Mourning Virgin*, ca1530-40. New York, Metropolitan Museum.



Figure 22 Dieric Bouts, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, ca1470. London, National Gallery.



Figure 23a and b Gregorio Fernández, *Christ at the Column*, before 1619. Valladolid, Church of Vera Cruz.





Figure 24 Anonymous, *Standing Christ (Christ at the Column)*, ca 1680-1710. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 25 Diego Velázquez, *Christ after the Flagellation Contemplated by the Christian Soul*, ca 1628-29. London, National Gallery.



Figure 26 Gregorio Fernández, *Ecce Homo*, before 1621. Valladolid, Museo Diocesano y Catedralico Valladolid.



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