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Painterly Vernacular and Pictorial Piety: Rogier van der Weyden, Robert Campin, and Jan van Ruusbroec

By

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Painterly Vernacular and Pictorial Piety: Rogier van der Weyden, Robert Campin, and Jan van Ruusbroec

By

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B.A., Brigham Young University, 2007

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Art History

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Abstract

Painterly Vernacular and Pictorial Piety: Rogier van der Weyden, Robert Campin, and Jan van Ruusbroec

By Elliott Daniel Wise

Historians of Netherlandish art have long hailed Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399–1464) and Robert Campin (c. 1375–1445) as founding innovators of northern Renaissance painting, renowned for their virtuosic naturalism, detail, and affective piety. Campin's work has frequently been cited for dizzying theological erudition, while Rogier's panels find praise for their emotion and formal elegance. I argue that the devotional tropes employed in many of these artists' sacred paintings evince an important engagement with vernacular mysticism, particularly the work of the great Brabantine recluse and exegete, Jan van Ruusbroec (1293–1381). Ruusbroec's texts were actively disseminated among reform-minded groups within the Church by the Carthusians, an order that also exerted a pronounced impact on Rogier's work. In fact, Rogier's son became a Carthusian at the Charterhouse of Herne, a historic center for copying Ruusbroec's treatises.

Ruusbroec expounded his complex theology in the untried lexicon of the vernacular, frequently punctuating his prose with highly visual analogies and colorful, rhetorical flourishes. I contend that his descriptions of divine vision and his vivid explication of Scripture resonate closely with the imagery employed by Rogier and Campin, who explored similar themes in their paintings, such as tailoring the soul to align with Christ, using images to commune with the incarnate "image" of God's son, and seeking mystical unification with the Father through the Eucharistic Christ. My dissertation examines the ways that Rogier and Campin borrowed, extrapolated, and reinterpreted Ruusbroec's literary tropes to construct the arguments in many of their paintings. Viewers of their work—particularly Carthusian custodians of Rogier's panels—would have been prompted to recall their own reading of Ruusbroec's texts as they meditated on the images. Ruusbroec, however, is just one of the sources that informed Rogier and Campin's *oeuvres*. Their compositions are by no means "illustrations" of his texts, and their allusions and tropes are distinct from his and also distinct from each other. Even so, Ruusbroec's Middle Dutch treatises offer an important and largely overlooked methodology for plumbing unprecedented devotional depth in northern Renaissance painting, a depth that extends well beyond formalism and iconography.

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The genesis of my dissertation came during the spring term of 2011 when, as an exchange student at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, I took a directed readings course with Geert Warnar. One of the foremost authorities on Jan van Ruusbroec, Warnar was the first to suggest that I work on the interface between this mystic and Rogier van der Weyden. He guided me through Ruusbroec's difficult prose and suggested other important literature. I am grateful for the hospitality and kindness of Marc and Corrie Reijnders who enabled me to live in the Netherlands during this semester abroad.

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This dissertation is dedicated
to Rachel,
my wonderful sister and
fellow historian of northern Renaissance art.

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Introduction

Historians of Netherlandish painting have long hailed Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399–1464) as one of the founding innovators of the northern Renaissance, positioning him with Robert Campin (c. 1375–1445) and Jan van Eyck (c. 1370–1441) in a kind of artistic "triumvirate." The voluminous literature on these three masters bears witness to an ongoing scholarly dialogue that has not ceased to generate new theories and criticism over the decades. In terms of historiography, however, Rogier's *oeuvre* stands apart from the other two. Although research on Campin, and especially on Van Eyck, has consistently engaged complicated theological analysis and rigorous methodology, studies on Rogier traditionally do not progress far beyond formal analysis. This has been particularly true in recent decades, during which time Lorne Campbell has exerted a powerful sway over scholarship on Rogier and museum exhibitions of his works. Campbell's publications feature brilliant archival work, careful connoisseurship, and beautiful descriptions of line, color, and balance, but they stop short of actively engaging with the paintings in contextual or theoretical ways. His perspective builds on a foundation of venerable, albeit largely formalist, literature, including the work of Martin Davies, Max Friedländer, and Erwin Panofsky. It is certainly true that Rogier composed formal elements with masterful skill, prompting Davies to extoll the lyric grace of the "Rogerian Gothic," while Panofsky, and later Dirk de Vos, wrote evocatively of Rogier's rich, "polyphonic" contribution to the "musicological" *Ars nova* of Netherlandish painting.[1]

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[1] Martin Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden, an Essay with a Critical Catalogue of Paintings Assigned to Him and to Robert Campin* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 15, 19–21; Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 150–151, 249. 261. Although Panofsky first compared early Netherlandish *ars nova* painting to polyphony, Dirk de

In juxtaposing Rogier's more Spartan assemblies of line and color against Eyckian virtuosos of "microscopic and telescopic" detail, Panofsky famously described the former's compositions as "physically barer and spiritually richer than Jan van Eyck's [world]."[2] This "spiritual richness"—often equated with the poignant emotion that pervades Rogier's paintings—became a critical touchstone for later scholarship, regularly discussed alongside the formal elements of his work. De Vos, for instance, argued that, unlike Van Eyck and Campin, Rogier did not make important inroads in *Ars nova* naturalism but rather gave emotive voice to "human tragedy or, in a wider sense, human drama."[3] Along these same lines, James Marrow noted that in the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels the narrative details of Christ's death give way to an overwhelming catharsis prompted by the severity of the scene (Fig. 1.8).[4] Craig Harbison similarly described these Philadelphia paintings as visionary and beyond the boundaries of logic and reason.[5]

Another *Crucifixion*—the monumental Escorial panel, which Rogier gave to the Charterhouse of Scheut—has been cited not only for its stark formalism and bleak emotion but also for a mystical quality reminiscent of works by Hugo van der Goes (Fig.

Vos develops the metaphor with particular subtlety in his analysis of Rogier's Escorial *Deposition.* Dirk de Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden: The Complete Works,* trans. Ted Adkins (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 17.

[2] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 3, 249.

[3] Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 139.

[4] James H. Marrow, "Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance," *Simiolus* 16 (1986): 158.

[5] Craig Harbison, "Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Painting," *Simiolus* 15 (1985): 108–110; ibid., "Realism and Symbolism in Early Flemish Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 66 (December 1984): 597. For a similar perspective dwelling on formal and emotive qualities, see Malcolm Vaughan, "Rogier van der Weyden in America," *International Studio* 90 (July 1928), 43–44.

1.1).[6] Toward the end of Hugo's career, his paintings increasingly bear witness to his involvement with the *Devotio moderna,* a quasi-monastic movement that promoted mystical and meditative spirituality among the lay devout.[7] Rogier's own mystical and emotional predilections have been discussed in concert with mystery plays and other examples of sacred theatricality in the late Middle Ages. Otto Pächt's analysis of Rogier follows this frame of reference, characterizing the artist's work as a dynamic, emotional reformation to the cerebral theology of Van Eyck and the more static compositions of Campin.[8] In short, although Rogier's intense and affective spirituality is regularly discussed in the scholarship, it is only vaguely defined, frequently with nebulous references to religious movements, theatre, and mysticism.

This dissertation argues that vernacular devotion, exemplified by the treatises of the great Brabantine mystic, Jan van Ruusbroec (1293–1381), helps clarify the hazy contours of Rogier's unique spirituality and brings the vibrant, visual piety of his work into sharper focus. There are compelling reasons for forging a link between Rogier's painting and the so-called "vernacular theology" promulgated by mystical writers in the fourteenth century. Like Campin, Van Eyck, and several other contemporary artists, Rogier was an inventor and a rule-breaker, and the coming chapters will treat a sampling of his theological and devotional ingenuity. His nuanced troping of materials—so often self-reflexive concerning the practice and theory of craftsmanship—is without precedent. In many cases he daringly altered iconic representation of hallowed subjects, and in other

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[6] Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Henk van Veen, eds., *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2005), 133.
[7] Ibid. See also **Bernhard Ridderbos, "Die 'Geburt Christi' des Hugo van der Goes. Form, Inhalt, Funktion," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 32 (1990): 137–152.**
[8] Otto Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting: From Rogier van der Weyden to Gerard David,* trans. David Britt (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 11–76, esp. 20–40.

cases he created new icons. In fact, the formal elegance of Rogier's paintings that so often fuels—and also stalls—the scholarly discussion of his work, is precisely the place where the artist encoded some of his most innovative and theoretical expositions of devotion. In this vein, Alfred Acres has used Rogier's formal elements to argue cogently for spiritual displacements of time and fascinating conversations between word and image in his work.[9]

Ruusbroec, and vernacular authors like him, were also innovators and rule-breakers. Their "vernacular theology" occupied a distinct place alongside monastic bastions of learning and the scholastic investigations at universities and cathedral schools.[10] Ruusbroec definitely acknowledged patristic authority and drew from the Church's canon of exegesis and scholarly writing, but his use of the vernacular also destabilized hegemonic theology. The Latin language had provided a careful and learned vocabulary for ecclesiastical discourse with terminology that had been vetted by generations of theologians.[11] Of necessity, vernacular mystics like Ruusbroec had to be imaginative in selecting—and in some cases inventing—corresponding words in the mother tongue, an endeavor that was often greeted with hostility from academicians.[12] There is a freshness to their language that may have sounded unfamiliar and even

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[9] See Alfred Acres, "Porous Subject Matter and Christ's Haunted Infancy," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages,* ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 241–262; ibid., "Rogier van der Weyden's Painted Texts," *Artibus et Historiae* 21 (2000): 75–109; ibid., "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," *The Art Bulletin* 80 (September 1998): 422–451. For an assessment of the potential for deep meaning in Rogier's formal elements, see Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 142; Shirley Neilsen Blum, "Symbolic Invention in the Art of Rogier van der Weyden," *Särtryck ur Kontshistorisk Tidskrift* 46 (1977): 103, 120–121.

[10] On these three divisions of theological study, see Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350),* vol. 3, in *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 19–21.

[11] Ibid., 21.

[12] Nicholas Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature,* ed. David Wallace (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 544–545; Warnar, *Rusbroec,* 84.

dissonant, and innovative tropes and unusual metaphors abound. In many ways, their work is a kind of "translation" of Latin theology, but it is also "translatable" in its own right because vernacular approximations invariably allow for a good deal of slippage in meaning. To curb this slippage, particularly in instances where a semantic misstep could lead to accusations of heresy, scholars sometimes translated prominent works of vernacular mysticism into Latin.[13] This imbued the texts with academic luster and provided for an international readership, even if it did not completely remove their vernacular timbre.[14] Latin translations of Ruusbroec's treatises will be mentioned later in this introduction.

Ruusbroec's *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden blinkenden steen*) contains a particularly good example of vernacular thinking and creative translation. Incidentally, this was also one of the mystic's works to be translated into Latin. The text treats a passage from the *Book of Revelation* in which the saved are given a new name engraved on a luminous stone, rendered in the Latin Vulgate as *calculus*. Middle Dutch commentators previous to Ruusbroec, unsure of an acceptable vernacular word for this revelatory rock, left it untranslated, as *calculus*. Ruusbroec, by contrast, not only refers to it with the Middle Dutch *steen* but also with the term *terdelinc,* meaning "pebble."[15] From this distinctive Middle Dutch word, he then builds an exegetical argument comparing the humiliated Christ to a miniscule "pebble," scorned, dismissed, and trodden upon. Ruusbroec, thus, does much more than simply write in his mother tongue. To

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[13] McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism,* 22–23. Curbing potential heresy was particularly at issue in Geert Grote's Latin translation of Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Espousals.* See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 233–234.
[14] McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism,* 22–23.
[15] For the discussion of *calculus* and *terdelinc,* see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 160.

borrow Nicholas Watson's characterization of illustrious Middle English mystics, Ruusbroec "thinks creatively in the vernacular."[16]

There are, of course, fundamental difference between the pictorial idiom of Rogier and his associates and the modes of expression employed by vernacular authors. Even so, artistic ingenuity, inventions, and alterations of images have a good deal in common with the slippage of meaning, creative translations, and highly visual tropes employed by vernacular mystics. In fact, Rogier himself was compared to a translator in Otto von Simson's groundbreaking article on the Escorial *Deposition* (Fig. 2.3). Simson discusses the immeasurable contribution to Marian piety of two Netherlandish theologians: Thomas à Kempis and Dionysius van Rijkel, more commonly known as Denis the Carthusian. Although both men wrote primarily in Latin, they were active participants in the reform-minded collaborations of Carthusian monasteries and *Devotio moderna* houses that read and promulgated the work of Ruusbroec and other vernacular mystics. Simson argues that the emotional appeal of Thomas and Denis's ideas fueled new and vivid devotion to the Compassion of the Virgin mourning beside her son. Using the metaphor of translation, he claims that Denis "couched scholastic Mariology in the familiar language of popular devotion."[17] Rogier's wrenching *Deposition,* he continues, does something similar, albeit in reverse. Its cathartic representation of the co-suffering Virgin imbues "popular devotion" with "the solemn precision of theological doctrine" derived from Denis and Thomas.[18]

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[16] Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," 552.
[17] Otto von Simson, "Compassio and Co-Redemptio in Roger van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross," *Art Bulletin* 35 (1953): 15
[18] Ibid.

The argument and methodology of my dissertation is indebted to Simson's notion of fluid "translations" between art and theology, pictorial compositions and literary pathos. I contend, however, that the critical hinge linking artists like Rogier and Campin with mysticism is not a shared bulwark of "solemn precision of theological doctrine." On the contrary, it is the slippage of meaning and surprising inventions that come from emotive and experiential ventures in image-based devotion. As will be demonstrated, for all of Ruusbroec's rhetoric against images, he is a deeply visual writer. My dissertation demonstrates that investigating the symbiosis between vernacular mysticism and fifteenth-century panel painting opens up a revolutionary method for understanding the devotional ingenuity of Rogier, Campin, and their contemporaries. For Rogier, whose subtly calibrated assemblies of color and composition align with Ruusbroec's profound exploration of the passions and exegetical erudition, this methodology offers a timely change of course to a largely formalist historiography.

My dissertation primarily deals with Rogier, but Campin, who employed him as a journeyman in his Tournai studio and had a momentous impact on his work, features in the fourth chapter. I argue that works like the *Mérode Triptych,* with its bafflingly elusive symbolic program, can also be illuminated and enriched by Ruusbroec's texts, which have almost never been read alongside Campin's paintings.[19] In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will first present Ruusbroec's life and work in more detail and suggest historic intersections between his treatises and Rogier and Campin. Next, I will

[19] Ruusbroec's texts are applied to Campin's Dijon *Nativity* in Bret Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 1. His *Mérode Triptych* appears briefly in Edward Bekaert's discussion of Ruusbroec's influence on Rogier's Louvre *Annunciation.* Edward Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting: Exploring the Spiritual Affinity between John of Ruusbroec and Rogier van der Weyden," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 82 (December 2011): 373–374.

contextualize the complicated role of images in his writing, and finally, I will introduce the paintings and texts to be discussed in each chapter. The different types of readers addressed by Ruusbroec's treatises will receive special focus here, for they determine the kinds of textual and pictorial imagery to be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Rogier, Campin, and Ruusbroec's Image Theory

Dutch literature enshrines Jan van Ruusbroec as one of the dominant figures of the medieval Low Countries. Born in 1293 in rural Brabant, Ruusbroec came to Brussels as a child and, after being ordained to the priesthood in 1318, served for twenty-five years as a chaplain in the Collegiate Church of St. Gudula. He subsequently retired to the Zonien Forest surrounding the city to found a priory in the "Green Valley" of Groenendaal, where in 1350 Ruusbroec and his followers became Augustinian canons. He spent nearly four decades secluded in this woodland monastery, writing treatises in Middle Dutch until his death at almost ninety years of age. His texts are densely theological, frequently exegetical, and always mystical in their meditations on spiritual ascent and union with the divine. He deplored heresy, hypocrisy, and lax priests, and not surprisingly, his work garnered the support of reform-minded groups in the Church, including the *Gottesfreunde,* the *Devotio moderna,* and the Carthusians.[20]

The Carthusian, Gerard of Saintes, had a particularly close relationship with Ruusbroec, editing his compositions and inviting him to speak at the Herne Charterhouse. Carthusian scriptoria were, in fact, among the greatest disseminators of Ruusbroec's work, and this mystic from Groenendaal was so closely associated with the Order of St. Bruno that, during the fifteenth century, the English *Confirmacio ordinis Carthusiensis*

[20] See Geert Warnar, *Ruusbroec: Literature and Mysticism in the Fourteenth Century,* trans. Diane Webb, in *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History,* ed. A. J. Vanderjagt, vol. 150 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 83, 147, 151, 171.

erroneously included him among the names of the great Carthusian luminaries.[21] Groenendaal was permitted to use the charterhouse liturgy, and fittingly, the priory was consecrated to the protection of the Carthusians' two most preeminent patron saints: the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist.[22] One of the Order's greatest theologians, Denis the Carthusian, held Ruusbroec and his mystical insight in such high esteem that he called him a "second Dionysius [the Areopagite]."[23] It may be that Denis, whose Latinate name was Dionysius, also intended a secondary meaning to this statement, one that forged a personal connection between Ruusbroec and himself.

Ruusbroec's decision to write on mystical ascent using the theologically imprecise terminology of the vernacular incited the ire of the powerful prelate, Jean Gerson, a conflict that will be discussed in chapters one and four. Perhaps the experiential, living quality of Ruusbroec's mother tongue seemed particularly appropriate for framing a discourse on spiritual phenomena that was beyond the grasp of even the most erudite lexicon and had to be experienced to be understood.[24] Furthermore, the mystic is particularly well known for advocating a "common life" religion that perfectly synchronizes the contemplative, "Latinate" life of the cloister with the active life of a

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[21] *Confirmacio ordinis Carthusiensis* (Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS O.8.26), cited in Warnar, *Ruusbroec*, 282. See also Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 339.

[22] For Groenendaal's association with the Virgin and the Baptist, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 193. On Carthusian devotion to these saints, see Victoria Reed, "Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint John Triptych* for Miraflores and a Reconsideration of Salome," *Oud Holland* 115.1 (2001): 3.

[23] On the Carthusian liturgy at Groenendaal, see ibid. For Dionysius van Rijkel's assessment of Ruusbroec, see Denis the Carthusian, *De natura veri et aeterni Dei,* in *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani opera omnia in unum corpus digesta ad fidem editionum coloniensium cura et labore monachorum sacri ordinis Cartusiensis favente Pont. Max. Leone XIII,* vol. 34 (Tournai: Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis, 1902–1913), 14D–15B, cited and discussed in Kent Emery, Jr., "Fondements théoriques de la réception de la beauté sensible dans les écrits de Denys le Chartreux (1402–1471)," in *Les chartreux et l'art. XIV^e–XVIII^e siècle. Actes du X^e colloque international d'histoire et de spiritualité cartusiennes (Villeneuves-lès-Avignon, 15–18 septembre 1988),* ed. Alain Girard and Daniel Le Blévec (Les Éditions du Cerf: Latour-Maubourg, 1989), 312; Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 125–126, 282–283.

[24] See Paul Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Joseph Alaerts, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 3, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout, Tielt: Brepols, Lannoo, 1988), 16.

"vernacular" world. Ruusbroec not only uses Middle Dutch language to advocate a devotion that simultaneously turns inward to the soul and outward in active works of charity, but to this end he also marshals poetic allegories, descriptive imagery, colorful metaphors, and even sections of rhymed verse.

Although literary scholarship has stopped short of pinpointing connections between Ruusbroec and the visual arts, it is precisely at this crossroads of mystical theology, vernacular prose, and highly visual "word images" that Ruusbroec's treatises make their most compelling foray into the pictorial piety of the Netherlands. In 1986 Colin Eisler called Ruusbroec's *Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*) the "central modern mystical text for Eyckian art," and more recently, Reindert Falkenburg asserted that the vernacular spirituality of late medieval writers is a critical but largely untapped resource for understanding Renaissance devotional art.[25] For the most part, however, art historians have been slow to engage with these rich textual resources. This is particularly surprising in the case of Ruusbroec, given his extensive opus and prestigious endorsement by the influential and revered monks of St. Bruno.

Ruusbroec's name only surfaces now and again in the literature, usually as part of a brief, contextualizing discussion of mysticism. Bret Rothstein, John Decker, and Edward Bekaert are exceptions to this trend. Their work applies Ruusbroec's notions of spiritual vision and soul formation to panel paintings by Rogier, Van Eyck, and Geertgen

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[25] Colin Eisler, Review of *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck,* by Carol Purtle, *The Art Bulletin* 68 (December 1986): 677; Reindert Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the *Merode Triptych*," in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia, Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 4.

tot Sint Jans.[26] Their citations, however, come almost exclusively from *The Spiritual Espousals,* and they tend to focus on general theological principles rather than the kaleidoscope of metaphors and vivid imagery that punctuates Ruusbroec's texts and harmonizes with the intense and mysterious spirituality of meditative paintings.[27]

During the fifteenth century, Ruusbroec's readership expanded to include a wider range of men and women, religious and lay, during the same time that Rogier was working as city painter of Brussels and living just a few hours' walk from Groenendaal.[28] There are several potential points of intersection at which Rogier could have encountered the words and legacy of the mystic. In fact, Rogier's long-time affiliation with the Carthusians, and particularly with the monks at Herne, makes it quite likely that he had direct contact with Ruusbroec's treatises, since Gerard of Saintes had made the Herne Charterhouse an important bastion of Ruusbroec copying and collecting. This critical juncture between Rogier and Ruusbroec will be discussed in more detail in chapter one. The Carthusian connections uniting the city painter and the mystic are compelling enough that the three paintings by Rogier discussed in this dissertation have been selected because of their probable Carthusian provenances. It has also been suggested, moreover, that Ruusbroec's writings could have been in circulation at the Carthusian library of Chercq in the southern Low Countries. Located on the outskirts of Tournai, this

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[26] John R. Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sint Jans* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009); Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality;* Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting."

[27] Bekaert's article represents the most complete study on Rogier and Ruusbroec to date. Although he makes greater use of specific tropes and images in Ruusbroec's writing, his analysis is heavily dominated by *The Spiritual Espousals.*

[28] There is a marked increase in copies of Ruusbroec's work after 1450. See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 197, 199; Thom Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Thom Mertens, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vols. 5–6, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), I 69. For the texts' popularity among female religious in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 270.

charterhouse would have been well within the ambit of both Rogier and Campin during the years that they worked together.[29]

Beyond this interface provided by the Order of St. Bruno, however, Rogier could have encountered Ruusbroec's work through his own interaction with the Groenendaal priory. In 1659, Antonius Sanderus published a history of Brabant, in which he cites a series of "very beautiful" paintings adorning a chapel at Groenendaal. He hesitantly ascribes the works to Rogier and identifies one of them as a depiction of pagan philosophers who died for the Faith, having been newly Christianized by St. Catherine of Alexandria.[30] This connection to Groenendaal via artistic patronage is admittedly tenuous, but there is also evidence that Rogier made recourse to the scholarship of the woodland hermitage. During his life, Rogier was most celebrated for his *Justice* panels, which adorned the Brussels Town Hall until their destruction during the French invasion of 1695. It has been argued convincingly that the narrative and learned inscriptions associated with the Trajan and Herkinbald portion of the paintings were taken from the work of Arnold Geilhoven, a canon based at Groenendaal.[31] It is tempting to conjecture that Rogier may have perused the great codex containing Ruusbroec's compiled works in the Groenendaal library at the same time that he was consulting the writing of Geilhoven.

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[29] See Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 342, 345–346, 358–359. Bekaert argues primarily for Rogier's contact with Ruusbroec's texts in Tournai, rather than Campin's.

[30] Antonius Sanderus, *Chorographia sacra brabantiae sive celebrium aliquot in ea provincia ecclesiarum et coenobiorum descriptio, imaginibus aeneis illustrata* (Brussels: Vleugart, 1659), 27, quoted and cited in Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 357: "In Viridi valle, vulgo Groenendael. In sacello laterali picturae sunt etiam admodum venustae ab ignoto hactenus auctore, quae tamen putantur esse Rogerii Bruxellensis. In alijs exhibetur passio philosophorum à B. Catharina Virgine & martyre conversorum"; Elisabeth Dhanens, "Rogier van der Weyden: Revisie van de documenten," *Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België* 57, no. 59 (1995): 144.

[31] Bekaert, "Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 356. Bekaert explains that Geilhoven's *Gnotosolitos sive speculum conscientiae* (1424) not only provides a version of the legend of Trajan but also approximates the original story of Herkinbald narrated by Caesarius of Heisterbach in his *Dialogus miraculorum*. Rogier's inscriptions were closest to Caesarius's version of the story.

Finally, the well-known epitaph at the artist's grave in the Cathedral of Saints-Michel-et-Gudule in Brussels also has a connection to Groenendaal. Dated to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the poetic inscription praises Rogier, primarily in reference to his *Justice* panels: "In the city hall of Brussels, the following verses can be read in memory of the most famous painter Rogier, whose art is to be found on the same place: may fame keep Rogier alive, whose body has died, but whose art will find no match."[32] Interestingly, this verse appears in only one other location: a fifteenth-century manuscript from Groenendaal, a fact that prompted Elisabeth Dhanens to conjecture that a monk from Ruusbroec's monastery was its author.[33] Saints-Michel-et-Gudule was formerly the Collegiate Church of St. Gudula, where Ruusbroec spent two and a half decades serving as a priest. It is marvelously coincidental that the modern-day cathedral contains a commemorative plaque acknowledging Rogier's burial positioned right beside a memorial statue to Ruusbroec.

Unfortunately, the above-mentioned interactions between Rogier and Groenendaal's Augustinian canons all lack firm documentation. Archival records do indicate, however, that both the city painter of Brussels and his wife, Elisabeth Goffart, had an important affiliation with another house of Augustinians—the canons of Saint-Jacques sur Coudenberg. Located prominently in the center of Brussels, this church is just a brief stroll from Ruusbroec's former chaplaincy at St. Gudula, and it housed the prestigious Confraternity of the Holy Cross, to which Rogier and Elisabeth belonged. Their names appear on the confraternity's 1462 registry, and the widowed Elisabeth made

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[32] Ibid., 357, note 109: "In domo civiu[m] Bruxellen[sium] in memoria[m] Rogeri notabilissimi pictoris cuius ars ibide[m] apparet su[n]t hi versus. Copore defu[n]ctu[m] c[on]servet fama Rogeru[m]; Ars cuius post hic no[n] habitura parem."

[33] Dhanens, "Rogier van der Weyden: Revisie van de documenten," 92; Bekaert, "Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 357.

several donations to Saint-Jacques for candles and memorial masses for herself and Rogier.[34] Significantly, this church maintained an important relationship with its sister Augustinian foundation in the Zonien Forest, and its archives cite Groenendaal in a number of entries dealing with land and property.[35]

Having identified likely sites where Rogier's professional and personal orbits would have encountered the memory of one of Brabant's most venerable hermits, it will now be important to discuss the compatibility of fifteenth-century pictorial piety with Ruusbroec's theory of images. As stated earlier, Ruusbroec's texts abound with metaphors, colorful analogies, and vivid passages that articulate landscapes, gemstones,

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[34] On Rogier and Elisabeth's membership in the Confraternity of the Holy Cross, see Lorne Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and Tapestry," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed. Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 238; Albert Châtelet, *Rogier van der Weyden: Problèmes de la vie et de l'oeuvre* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1999), 41–42, 44, 53. Elisabeth Goffart's donations to Saint-Jacques are recorded in Denise van Derveeghde, ed., *Inventaire analytique des archives ecclésiastiques du Brabant,* vol. 2, *Inventaire des archives de Saint-Jacques sur Coudenberg. 1re partie. Inventaire analytique des chartes (1190–1756)* (Brussels: Archives générales du royaume, 1962), 260, inventory number 1145: 5 October 1464 "Le prévôt de Saint-Jacques sur Coudenberg fait savoir qui'il a reçu vingt peeters destinés à l'achat de rentes pour la célébration de l'anniversaire de maître Roger vander Weyden et d'Elisabeth Goffart, sa femme"; 279, inventory number 1232: 3 July 1476 "Soul le témoignage de Jean vander Noot et maître Gilles de Zeebroeck, échevins de Bruxelles, il est annoncé qu'Elisabeth Goffart, veuve de maître Roger vander Weyden, a cedé à plusieurs institutions trois florins et demi des trente-six florins du Rhin qu'elle possède sur la ville de Bruxelles. Un demi florin est destiné au luminaire qui brûle sur l'autel Notre-Dame de l'église de Saint-Jacques sur Coudenberg"; 281, inventory number 1240: 20 October 1477 "Soul le témoignage de Lancelot de Gindertale et Gérard Berckman, échevins de Bruxelles, il est annoncé qu'Elisabeth Goffart, veuve de Roger vander Weyden a cedé, par devant le seigneur foncier, quatre florins du Rhin de rente pour la célébration d'une messe hebdomadaire sur l'autel Sainte-Barbe dans l'église Saint-Jacques sur Coudenberg. Si cette rente assignée sur les biens de la ville Bruxelles était rachetée, d'autres revenus devraient être acquis avec son prix de vente"; 281, inventory number 1241: around 20 October 1477 "[acte incomplet] Le prévôt et le couvent de Saint-Jacques font savoir qu'Elisabeth Goffart, veuve de Roger vander Weyden, leur a donné une rente de quatre florins du Rhin sur le ville de Bruxelles pour célébrer une messe chaque semaine à l'autel Sainte-Barbe de l'église de Saint-Jacques."

[35] Ibid., inventory numbers 579, 593, 599, 682, 752, 925, 927, 1018, 1170, 1172.

and brilliant sunbursts of heavenly light with painterly eloquence. At the same time, though, Ruusbroec's highest level of divine communion is emphatically aniconic: "a stilled emptiness" and "glorious abyss" with neither "time nor place … nor shape, nor color."[36] As a result, he repeatedly enjoins aspiring mystics to "be empty and free of the images of all things."[37] Even so, the plaguing "encumbrance with images," as he often terms it, is a slippery and multivalent concept in Ruusbroec's work.[38] He argues that "since God is a spirit and no man can make a proper image of him," images comprise the opposite of the divine essence.[39] Ruusbroec is hardly an iconoclast, however. The physicality of images, as tangible artifacts of a created and fallen world, is far less sinister than their power to distract and replace God in the hearts of the faithful. To this end, Ruusbroec's use of the term, "image" (*beeld*), refers less to the idea of pictorial representation than it does to a "disorderly affection for creatures," the worldly noise of "all things … seen and heard," and a distracted imagination.[40] An unbalanced fixation on the active life is another symptom of being "encumbered with images," to the extent that

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[36] D5:228, E5:222, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* ed. Thom Mertens, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vols. 5–6, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), D589, E588: "ene gestilde ledecheit"; D1733, E1619, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* ed. Guido de Baere, trans. André Lefevere, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 8, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), D365, E364: ".i. glorioos abys"; D2048/2049, E1910/1911, in ibid., D395, E394: "tijd noch stat […] forme noch ghedeente noch varwe." In citing Ruusbroec's texts, I will use an "E" to refer to the English translation of the text with corresponding page numbers and a "D" to refer to the original Middle Dutch.

[37] D909/910, E758/759, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen, Vanden vier becoringhen, Vanden kerstenen ghelove, Brieven,* ed. Guido de Baere, Thom Mertens, and H. Noë, trans. André Lefevere, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 10, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), D179, E178: "dat hi ledich sy ende onghebeelt van allen dien dinghen."

[38] D350, E293, in ibid., D131, E130: "verbeeltheit."

[39] D43/44, E37/38, in ibid., D105, E104: "want god es een gheest die niemen eyghenlijc ghebeelden en can."

[40] D42, E36, in ibid.: "ongheordende liefde ten creatueren"; D910, E759, in ibid., D1179, E178: "allen dien dinghen … ghesach ochte ghehoorde"; Db135/137, Eb117/119, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* ed. Joseph Alaerts, trans. Helen Rolfson, in Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia, vol. 3, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout, Tielt: Brepols, Lannoo, 1988), D297, E296.

the faithful "are caught up with themselves and their works in the manner of images and intermediaries."[41]

Ruusbroec's aspiration to cultivate a "heart free of images" and "to stri[p] [the] memory of sensory images, and [the] understanding, of spiritual images" is fundamentally a call to turn wholeheartedly to God.[42] As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, the inward and outward "turnings" of the heart comprise one of the most foundational aspects of Ruusbroec's mystical practice, "so that a person could turn within himself, imageless and unhindered, as often as he wishes and as (often as) he thinks on his God."[43] Far from negating the visual and the discernible, Ruusbroec's *turning* from images actually deepens vision and perception. The call to "see" surfaces constantly in his work and has special prominence in *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*), a point that will be discussed in depth in chapter two. For instance, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*) speaks of "a bare vision above … understanding," an "imageless wideness," in which "a person feels that the eye of his understanding is always open, and without labor, contemplates and gazes on the revelation of eternal truth."[44] For Ruusbroec, fleeing the "encumbrance of images" necessitates a drastic enough break with the degenerate world that he compares it to death. This death, however, anticipates rebirth in a divine light that is undistracted and

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[41] D392/393, E328/329, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D135, E134: "want si <sijn> verbeelt ende vermiddelt met hem selven ende met haren werken."
[42] D4:1815, E4:1730, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D523, E522: ".i. onverbeelt herte"; D219/221, E209/210, in ibid., D1285, E1284: "dat wi onse memorie ontbloeten van senleeken beelden, ende onse verstennesse van gheesteleeken beelden."
[43] Db151/153, Eb131/132, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D299, E298: "dat hem die mensce inkeeren moghe onverbeelt ende onghehindert, alsoe dicke alse hi wilt ende hem sijns goods ghedinct."
[44] D5:4991/4994, E5:4701/4704, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1087, 1089; E1086, 1088: "een bloet ghesichte ende ontpluuct sine ghedachte in ene onghebeelde wijtheit. Daer ghevoelt hi dat sine verstendeghe oeghe altoes open steet ende scout ende staert sonder arbeit in die oppenbaringhe der ewegher waerheit."

unmediated by any earthly attachment: "to have died to all ownness, that is: ownness of will, in the free will of God; imagedness of understanding, in the unimaged truth that God Himself is. The bare onefoldness of mind is the dwelling of the Divinity."[45]

Images are by no means unilaterally negative in Ruusbroec's writing. Indeed, the transformative, redemptive, and metaphorical associations imparted to them by the mystic from Groenendaal make his texts an ideal backdrop against which to interpret devotional works of art. Ruusbroec makes one of his most straightforward arguments in favor of visual devotion in *The Sparkling Stone,* when, after just barely warning against an "encumbrance from images," Ruusbroec maintains that "in his (spiritual) practice, man should concentrate on good images, such as the passion of our Lord, and all things that may rouse him to higher devotion."[46] Most of Ruusbroec's texts—including *The Sparkling Stone, A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* (*Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*), *The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rijcke der ghelieven*), and *The Spiritual Tabernacle*—follow this maxim in their very structure, for the devotion they prompt derives not just from scriptural exegesis but from extended visual allegories. *The Spiritual Tabernacle* in particular chronicles the preparation of the votary's heart by fastidiously parsing the metaphorical significance of the dimensions, curtains, precious objects, and rites of the Old Testament tent sanctuary.[47] Ruusbroec even asks his reader to assess their spiritual progress according to how exactly these elements of the tabernacle are imaged in their hearts: "Now, you should test and examine yourself earnestly as to whether you find and

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[45] D1376/1379, E1285/1288, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D329, E328: "ghestorven te sine alre eighenheit, dat es eighenheit des willen in den vrien wille gods, verbeeldheit des verstennessen in die onghebeelde waerheit die god selve es. Die blooete eenvuldecheit der ghedachten dat es de wooeninghe der godheit."

[46] D44/46, E38/40, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D105, E104: "inder oefeninghen sal de mensche goede beelden vore nemen alse dat doghen ons heeren ende alle die dinghe diene verwecken moghen te meere devocien."

[47] See Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 29–37.

feel in yourself all that rightly pertains to this tabernacle. And if you do not feel such, then you must surely know that you are not the tabernacle of God."[48]

In another part of this text, Ruusbroec compares the will of a prophet or saint to a silver capital "imaged and engraved according to the free will of God" with emblems of their lives, including "many an adornment with distinction, more or less, according to the manner of their martyrdom or their suffering."[49] Later, he adds that the noble gifts of understanding and knowledge, "which also pertain to our inward 'man' in his eternal going-up to God," depend on "intellectual images" and "sensible images."[50] This kind of rationale may be at work in Ruusbroec's memorable description of the colors and reflective properties of precious stones in the breastplate of the Jewish high priest, which he uses as a visual primer to expound the mysteries of the Nicaean Creed.[51] Not surprisingly, sight is one of the most important vehicles of divine apprehension in Ruusbroec's mysticism, and in some places he overtly privileges vision over the reading and hearing of sacred words. A good example comes from his advice to Clarissan nuns keeping their liturgical offices: "And if you do not understand the words, or if you are elevated to a higher state, then stay with that and keep your simple sight on God as long

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[48] D2:60/63, E2:59/62, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D285, E284: "Nu seldi proeven ende merken u selven met erenste och ghi in u bevint ende gevoelt al dat desen tabernakel van rechte toe behoert. Ende en ghevoeldi u selven alsoe niet, soe moghedi seker weten dat ghi dat tabernakel goeds niet en sijt."

[49] D2:110, E2:105/106, in ibid., D289, E288: "ghebeeldet ende ute ghegraven na dien vrien wille goeds"; D2:146/147, E2:138/140, in ibid., D293, E292: "meneghe cierheit met onderscede, min ende meer na di manire dat hare martilie ochte haer doghen was."

[50] D5:360/361, E5:343/344, in ibid., D603, E602: "die onsen inwindegen minsce noch toe behoren in sinen ewegen opgange te gode"; D5:371, E5:353/354, in ibid., D605, E604: "verstendeghen beelden"; D5:373/374, E5:356, in ibid.: "sinleke beelden."

[51] For a brief summary of Ruusbroec's visual exegesis on this point, see D5:1581/1596, E5:1499/1513, in ibid., D753, E752.

as you can and mind and love always the honor of God."[52] In *The Realm of Lovers,* Ruusbroec makes the point even more emphatically: "For Scripture cannot teach the goodness and the bliss that God shows His friends in this light, nor can one write about it as experientially or as perfectly as God shows it to the loving spirits."[53]

Moreover, the imagination, which Ruusbroec sometimes decries as a distraction, can also be repurposed for essential spiritual progress. In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* he urges that "always, when we hear Mass or go to the Sacrament, we are to imagine [*verbeelden*] … and remember His love, so that we forget ourselves and renounce all alien love in His honor."[54] The use of the term, "alien love" in this passage helps distinguish between salvific mental images and distracting ones, since Ruusbroec often refers to the latter as "alien thoughts" and "alien images," associated with a "disorderly affection for creatures."[55] In a related manner, *The Realm of Lovers* speaks of "reason consider[ing] very closely, in creaturely fashion, in created light, so that it might find recreation and happiness in rational images and in works welling out of the bottomless Godhead."[56] This same treatise acknowledges that the angelic choir of Virtues "can enlighten a person by their light and by inspiration in images and likenesses," and in *The Spiritual Espousals,* imagination becomes a tool of God's

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[52] D182/185, E172/175, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D211, E210: "Ende verstadi oec der warde niet ochte sidi in een hooeghere verhaven, soe blijft daer bi ende houdt uwe eenvuldeghe ghesichte soe ghi langst mooght te gode, ende meint ende mindt altoes de eere gods."
[53] D5:2660/2663, E5:2543/2545, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* ed. Joseph Alaerts, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 4, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), D409, E408: "Want dat goet ende de weelde die god toent sinen vrienden in desen lichte, dat en mach de scriftuere niet leeren; noch men maechs niet scriven also bevoellike noch alsoe volcomelike alst god toent den minnenden gheesten."
[54] D873/876, E823/825, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D279, 281; E278, 280: "altooes alse wi messe hooeren ochte ten sacramente gaen, soe selen wi ons hier mede verbeelden ende sijnre minnen ghedinken, op dat wi ons selfs vergheten ende in sijnre eeren alre vremder minnen vertyen."
[55] D186, E175, in ibid., D211, E210: "vremde ghepeinse ende vremde beelden."
[56] D4:2263/2265, E:2165/2167, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D369, E368: "de redene marct vele nauwe creatuerliker wijs in ghescapenen lichte, op dat si haer vermake ende verblide in vernufteghen beelden ende in uute wallenden werken uut der grondeloeser godheit."

"prevenient grace," in "recalling the torments and the sufferings of our Lord."[57] Finally, imagination and other kinds of images are key to Ruusbroec's explanation of revelatory visions:

> [T]hen they are addressed through words, or shown by images and by likenesses, some truths which they or others need, or future things. These are called revelations or vision. If they are sensible images, he receives them in his imagination … If it is an intelligible truth, or (if they are) spiritual likenesses where God shows Himself as fathomless, then he receives them in his understanding, and he can bring it forth in words insofar as it can be verbalized.[58]

It is natural for a mystic with aniconic leanings to favor immaterial images of the mind over pictorial representation, but there is also a privileged place for corporeal sight in Ruusbroec's writings. A fervent preacher of the Church's saving sacraments, Ruusbroec compares these sacred rites to the physical "signs and figures of the Jews," explaining that the sacraments "will remain until the end of the world and then they, too, will vanish."[59] At that "last day," however, he describes a fundamentally corporeal vision of the Lord, "when with our glorious body we come into heaven, we shall all be with Him and close to Him, and we shall contemplate His glorious countenance with our bodily eyes."[60] Ruusbroec makes a similar point in a discussion on resurrection in his short treatise, *The Christian Faith* (*Vanden kerstenen ghelove*): "With the eyes of our

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[57] D4:960/962, E4:904/905, in ibid., D245, E244: "moeghen den mensche verclaren met haren lichte ende met in sprekene in beelden ende in gheliken;" D108/115, E92/97, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D163, 165; E162, 164: "voergaende gracie … herdinckene der pynen ende des doghens ons heeren."

[58] Db550/558, Eb472/478, in ibid., D347, 349; E346, 348: "[H]em wert toeghesproken met woorden, oft ghetoent met beelden ende met gheliken eenighe waerheit diere hem noot is ochte anderen menschen, ochte toecomende[n] dinghen. Dit heten revelacien ochte visione. Sijnt lijflijcke beelden, hi ontfeetse inder ymaginacien … Eest verstendighe waerheit, ochte gheestelijcke gheliken daer hem god in vertoent grondeloes, hi ontfeedt inden verstane, ende hi maghet voertbringhen met woorden alsoe verre alsment waerden mach."

[59] D611/613, E576/577, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D255, E254: "teekene ende figueren der joden … Ende onse sacramente selen bliven tote in dat inde der werelt, ende dan selen si oec vergaen."

[60] D1109/1112, E1035/1038, in ibid., D303, E302: "Want na den lesten dagh, alse wi met onsen gloriosen lichame in den hemel comen, soe selen wi alle met heme ende bi heme sijn, ende selen bescouwen sijn gloriose anschijn met onsen lijfleken ooeghen."

body we shall behold our Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious mother with all the saints and all the physical beauty I told you of before."[61] This vision is, of course, subservient to that of the "inner eyes," when "we shall see the mirror of the Wisdom of God in which all things that have ever been made and can bring us joy shall glitter and shine."[62]

It is deeply significant, though, that these "inner" perceptions of ineffable, incorporeal light are routinely described using an arsenal of highly visual metaphors. Speaking of the relationship between God and the saints in paradise, Ruusbroec writes that "the state of the saints is transparent and glorious and they therefore receive that brightness unmediated," an abstract idea, which he explains with the evocative image of "the high mountains in the promised land [where] there is no shadow."[63] In *The Spiritual Espousals,* "divine brightness … blinds all created sight in the encounter with it, because it is abysmal," a phenomenon Ruusbroec likens to "the eye of a bat in the brightness of the sun."[64] At the end of that treatise, Ruusbroec utilizes fire imagery to inspire those seeking the lofty privilege of "contemplate[ing] God with God, without intermediary, in this divine light," entreating them to "cleave to God within by devoted intention and love, just like a kindled, blazing fire that can no longer be extinguished."[65]

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[61] D249/252, E211/213, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden kerstenen ghelove,* D413, 415; E412, 414: "Wi zelen met onsen lijfleken ogen ane sien onsen here Jhesum Cristum ende sijn gloriose moeder met allen heilegen, ende alle die lijfleke scoenheit die ic u vore genoemt hebbe."

[62] D252/254, E213/215, in ibid., D415, E414: "Wi selen met onsen inwendegen ogen aensien den spiegel der wijsheit gods, daer alle die dinge inne blicken ende lichte<n> selen die yegeworden, die ons verbliden mogen."

[63] D755/759, E631/634, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D167, E166: "die hoghe berghe inden lande der gheloften, daer en es ghene scadue … die staet der heilighen es doerscinich ende glorioes, ende hier omme ontfaen si die claerheit onghemiddelt."

[64] Db1504/1507, Eb1292/1295, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D457, 459; E456, 458: "godlijcke claerheit … die verblindet in haren ghemoete alle ghescapene ghesichten om dat si afgrondich es … alse de oghe der vledermuys in claerheit der zonnen."

[65] Dc53/62, Ec44/51, in ibid., D579, 581; E578, 580: "gode met gode bescouwen sonder middel in desen godlijcken lichte … van binnen gode aenhanghen met toevoeghender meyninghen ende minnen, rechte alse een onsteken gloeyende vier dat nummermeer gheblust en mach werden."

The Realm of Lovers describes a similar level of beatitude, which fulfills Christ's prayer "that we should become one just as He and His Father are one."[66] Votaries who momentarily reach this level in the endlessly recapitulating cycles of mysticism are compared to "thrones" for God, "for they have possessed God and He them in turn," and they are "much like the firmament of heaven that is adorned with the planets and with the stars."[67] Interestingly, Ruusbroec uses the Ark of the Covenant, one of the primary works of pictorial artifice in the Mosaic sanctuary, as a prompt to discuss the highest strata of mysticism in *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* Here, an image of cherubim wrought from gold is translated into a "picture of words" and seemingly ironically used to explicate *un-imaged* devotion:

> These two cherubim were two angels of gold, by which we are to understand two things which are proper to the loving spirit in its highest nobility, where it belongs entirely and totally to the love of God, in an emptiness of itself. The first thing which we find in such elevated spirits is an eternal staring or contemplating without flinching in the divine, simple light. The other is an eternal, enjoyable inclination in a divine imageless bareness.[68]

Most significantly, Ruusbroec's notion of mystical ascent into the formless void ultimately turns on a pair of images—the image of God replicated in the creation of every human soul and Christ, the incarnate "image" of the Father. It is difficult to overstate the importance of these concepts, both as structural building blocks for Ruusbroec's texts and as the rationale for the soul's potential to be unified with the divine. Christ, who,

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[66] D41990/1999, E4:1900/1901, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D343, E342: "dat wi .i. werden souden <alsoe> als hi ende de vader .i. sijn."
[67] D4: 1986/2004, E4:1890/1905, in ibid., D343, 345; E342: "trhoni want si gode beseten hebben ende hi hem weder … wel ghelijc den firmamente des hemels, dat es gheciert met den planeten ende met den sterren."
[68] D6:313/319, E6:297/302, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1293, 1295; E1292, 1294: "Dese .ii. cherubynne dat waren ..ii. inghele van goude, daer wi .ii. dinghe mede verstaen die den minnenden gheeste eyghen sijn in sijnre hoechster edelheit, daer hi der ewegher minnen gods gheheel es ende al in eenre ledicheit sijns selfs. Dat ierste dat wi in al selke verhavene gheeste venden, dat es een ewech staren ochte scouwen sonder falieren in enen godleken eenvuldeghen lichte. Dat ander es een ewech ghebrukeleec neighen in eene godleeke onghebeelde bloetheit."

according to St. Paul, is the "brightness of [the Father's] glory and the express image of his person," mediates both the Trinitarian microcosm created in human souls and their hopeful apotheosis into the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[69] These ideas will be discussed at length in the second and fourth chapters of this dissertation, but a few citations from Ruusbroec's treatises will be helpful in nuancing this image-based theology.

A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness uses reflections to analogize the relationship between God and the votary:

> And He has created each person's soul as a living mirror, whereupon He has impressed the image of His nature. And so He lives imaged in us, and we in Him; for our created life is one, without intermediary, with the image and with the life that we have eternally in God. And the life that we have in God is, without intermediary, one in God. For it lives with the Son unborn in the Father, and it is born with the Son out of the Father, and flows out of them both with the Holy Spirit … For our createdness lives in our eternal image that we have in the Son of God.[70]

This "eternal image … in the Son of God" is the means by which the faithful acquire the attributes of the Trinity. *The Realm of Lovers* speaks of the votary "transformed from splendor to splendor, that is, from created splendor to uncreated splendor, by means of his eternal image, that is, the Wisdom of the Father."[71] Ruusbroec recommends that the

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[69] *Hebrews* 1:3. On Christ, images, and image theory in Ruusbroec's work, see Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* esp. 23–27; Paul Mommaers, introduction to *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Guido de Baere, trans. André Lefevere, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 8, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 19–27.

[70] D1790/1800, E1671/1681, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D371, E370: "Ende hi heft ieghewelcs menschen ziele ghescapen alse eenen levenden spieghel daer hi dat beelde sijnre natueren in ghedruct heeft. Ende alsoe leeft hi ghebeeldt in ons ende wi in heme. Want onse ghescapene leven es een sonder middel met dien beelde ende met dien levene dat wi eewelec in gode hebben. Ende dat leven dat wi in gode hebben, dat es sonder middel een in gode. Want het leeft met den sone ongheboren in den vader, ende het wert gheboren met den sone ute den vader, ende vloeyt ute hen beiden met den heileghen gheeste … Want onse ghescapenheit leeft in onsen eeweghen beelde dat wi hebben in den sone gods."

[71] D4:2747/2749, E4:2626/2628, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D417, E416: "werdet hi ghetransformeert van claerheiden in claerheiden, dat es van ghescapenre claerheit in onghescapenre claerheit, overmids sijn ewighe beelde, dat es dies vader wijsheit."

faithful use the Christological "image" of God as a pattern for imitating both the human *and* divine natures of the Lord: "Now this enlightened person will go out and examine his state and his life within and without, as to whether he bears a perfect likeness to Christ with respect to His humanity and also with respect to the Godhead."[72] Somewhat paradoxically, *The Sparkling Stone* asserts that this "image of the Father" secures the votary's unification "free of images":

> And we shall remain there onefold, empty and free from images, lifted by love into the open bareness of our mind. For where we pass away from all things in love and die to all consideration in unknowing and darkness, we are wrought and transformed by the Word eternal, which is an image of the Father.[73]

Texts, Readers, and Viewers

Against this backdrop of vibrant and "painterly" vernacular, my dissertation argues for quotations, echoes, and reinventions of Ruusbroec's mysticism in works by Rogier and Campin. Certainly, the Middle Dutch of Ruusbroec's treatises would have made them more accessible to Netherlandish artists and the lay men and women who viewed their paintings. In particular, chapter four addresses the confluence of Campin, vernacular mysticism, laymen, and that uniquely northern European sphere of religiosity that hovered between the active and contemplative worlds, best characterized by the *Devotio moderna,* the *Gottesfreunde,* and the beguines. The first three chapters, on the other hand, examine the spiritual symbiosis that links Rogier's Carthusian paintings with one of the Order of St. Bruno's most admired writers.

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[72] Db1026/1028, Eb883/885, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D405, E404: "Nu sal dan dese verclaerde mensche ute gaen, ende merken sinen staet ende sijn leven van binnen ende van buten, ochte hi een volcomen ghelijc draghet Cristi, na sire menscheyt ende oec na der godheyt."

[73] D530/535, E443/447, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D147, E146: "Ende daer sele wij bliven eenvuldich, ledich ende onghebeelt, overmids minne verhaven in die openne bloetheit onser ghedachten. Want daer wij in minnen overliden alle dinc ende sterven alles ghemercs in niet wetene ende in donckerheiden, daer werden wij ghewracht ende overformt met den eewighen woorde, dat een beelde des vaders es."

It should be remembered that many of Ruusbroec's readers, particularly the monastic ones, were literate in Latin and accustomed to digesting dense theology in the *lingua franca* of the Church. As already mentioned, the vernacular possesses a living immediacy that correlates well with the experiential quality of Ruusbroec's mysticism. These traits, combined with Middle Dutch's potential for shifting and unstable modes of religious expression, may have seemed particularly well suited to pictorial adaptation and embellishment.[74] Far from "illustrating" a narrative of mysticism "simplified" by the vernacular, however, Rogier and Campin quote and extrapolate from Ruusbroec's vivid exegesis, colorful analogies, and the rich associations of his Middle Dutch prose. In doing so, they create a parallel, pictorial spirituality, equally profound in its formal and emotional qualities.

My dissertation, then, bridges a notable gap between an impressive tradition of literary scholarship on Ruusbroec and the surprisingly sparse art historical studies making reference to him. I do this by investigating complementary modes of image making employed by Ruusbroec, Rogier, and Campin. As noted earlier, there are essential differences in the construction, presentation, and apprehension of pictorial versus literary images. Thus, Rogier and Campin create devotional arguments that operate independently from Ruusbroec's mystical arguments, even while they bear marks of fruitful engagement with his texts. It should also be remembered that Ruusbroec's *corpus* of work does not advance one, monolithic exposition on mysticism.[75] It is true that

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[74] On a related note, Jamie Smith has recently written a fascinating dissertation arguing that Jan van Eyck celebrated his virtuosity in the new medium of oil-based pigments by comparing the practice of painting to the process of translating Latin into the vernacular. Jamie L. Smith, "'So *moeti den schilt draghen; Dien God veruwede met roder greine': Jan van Eyck's Critical Principles of Oil Painting and Their Middle Dutch Antecedents"* (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 2008).

[75].

Ruusbroec returns repeatedly to certain theological tenets, but despite the similarities in his work, each treatise contains its own directives, visual analogies, and exegetical theses.[76] They are as distinct from each other, in fact, as one panel by Rogier is from another. Moreover, it goes without saying that despite Campin's momentous impact on Rogier's style and subject matter, the patronage and methods of devotional engagement in his work diverge in significant ways.

Each chapter in this dissertation treats a single painting alongside one, primary text by Ruusbroec. The painting's devotional argument is discussed, with reference to its historical context, secondary scholarship, and provenance. The structure of Ruusbroec's treatise is also addressed, with emphasis on its apparatus of visual tropes, its readership, and dissemination. The paintings strongly suggest that both Rogier and Campin were familiar with Ruusbroec's texts and that many viewers were as well. Engagement with the mystic would have ranged from honed study of his work among the Carthusians to a more general dissemination of his ideas among the lay. In imagining the reading knowledge that informed the construction and interpretation of these paintings, it is probably most natural to imagine artists and viewers browsing through several of Ruusbroec's texts, rather than focusing attention exclusively on a single treatise. Thus, although I link each of my case studies to a dominant text by Ruusbroec, each chapter also includes supplementary material drawn from one or more of the mystic's other treatises.

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[76] On the similarities in Ruusbroec's work, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 293. It is also interesting to note that several Ruusbroec adaptations from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries use pairings of his treatises. They extract quotes from two of his texts and read them side-by-side to indicate their complementary nature. Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 76; chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 212–216.

The first chapter deals with one of Rogier's most austere paintings—the Escorial *Crucifixion.* Given by the artist to the newly founded Charterhouse of Our Lady of Grace at Scheut, the panel depicts Christ, the Virgin, and St. John in a nearly monochromatic palette ranging from dusky grays to pale, off-whites. A brilliant, vermilion cloth of honor suspended behind the crucified Lord dramatically arrests these somber colors. The chapter argues that the blood-red curtain, along with the trance-like stare of St. John and the bowed posture of the Virgin, serve as meditative "prompts." Read alongside Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* the cloth recalls the Mosaic curtains of the Old Testament tabernacle, typifying Christ's Passion and correlating with the text's devotional exercise in fashioning a tent-sanctuary for Christ within the heart. Ruusbroec's heavily Eucharistic work, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, enhances the sacramental nature of the painting and adds revelatory significance to St. John's penetrating gaze into the darkness.

The Spiritual Tabernacle is an extremely dense explication of the allegorical and typological significance of the Hebrew tabernacle. Dizzyingly complex and with nearly endless categories and sub-categories of exegetical analysis, it is by far the longest of Ruusbroec's treatises. It was also the most esteemed of his works during his life, and it has survived in more manuscripts than any of his other texts.[77] Gerard of Saintes, Ruusbroec's editor at the Herne Charterhouse of Our Lady of the Chapel, was particularly impressed by its scholarly and spiritual rigor.[78] In his prologue of 1360 to a collection of five of Ruusbroec's works, Gerard gave sweeping praise to this first Biblical commentary in Middle Dutch: "Further on, the book about the tabernacle praises itself, for there is not

[77] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 200.
[78] See ibid.,198.

any person in the body of holy Church, from the pope to the most humble state, who might not take spiritual advantage with it, if he would read it and understand it."[79] Gerard's compilation, which is no longer extant, once included *The Realm of Lovers, The Spiritual Espousals, The Sparkling Stone,* and the *Little Book of Enlightenment* (*Boecsken der verclaringhe*), in addition to *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*

Although the treatise was translated into Latin by Ruusbroec's learned disciple, Willem Jordaens, it seems to have circulated primarily in the Low Countries.[80] The provenances of the forty-two surviving transcriptions and excerpts from *The Spiritual Tabernacle* speak to a variety of readers, if not quite the "pope-to-pauper" range envisioned by Gerard. The majority of the manuscripts come from monasteries of Canons or Canonesses Regular, many of which had been *Devotio moderna* houses before adopting the Augustinian Rule of the Chapter of Windesheim. Two Franciscan convents are represented by the extant texts, as well as a beguinage and three Carthusian charterhouses.[81] There are also instances of lay ownership, including Anthonijs de Vos, who inherited a complete version of the treatise copied, perhaps by his father, Jacob de Vos, in circa 1382.[82] Moreover, a portion of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* and Ruusbroec's

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[79] Willem de Vreese, "Bijdragen tot de kennis van het leven en de werken van Jan van Ruubroec," *Het Belfort* 10 (1895) II: 15, quoted and cited in Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 65: "Voirt dat boec van den tabernakel prijst hem selven, want hem is negeen persoen in den lichaem der heyligher kerken, van den paeus tot den nedersten state, hi en mochter sine gheestelike bate in doen, lase hijt ende verstonde hijt." For *The Spiritual Tabernacle* as the first Middle Dutch Biblical commentary, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 199–200.
[80] Ibid., 197–198.
[81] See chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 169–216.
[82] Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel* (Bruges, Grootseminarie, 457), cited in chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 177–178. For the treatise's audience, including clerical and religious as well as lay, see Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 52–56.

The Seven Rungs (*Van seven trappen*) was in the possession of Hillegont Vossendochter, daughter of Peins Jacops, at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[83]

Ruusbroec wrote much of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* while he and his *confrères* were establishing their hermitage at Groenendaal. Geert Warnar sees an important analogy between these reclusive priests organizing life and liturgy in the forest outside Brussels and the children of Israel who received detailed instructions from God for the rites and ornaments of the tabernacle during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness beyond Egypt.[84] The treatise's extensive discussion of priestly office was likely directed toward Ruusbroec's Groenendaal disciples in a pointed way, but the text was also valued by successive generations of secular priests.[85] Warnar cites two clerics from the second half of the fifteenth century who owned copies of *The Spiritual Tabernacle:* Hendrik Stevens from Brielle in the northern Low Countries and Bartholomaeus Moens of the Brussels Church of St. Nicholas.[86]

The priestly sections of the text seem to have been less valued by un-ordained readers,[87] but for Gerard of Saintes and the Carthusian audience discussed in chapter one of my dissertation, Ruusbroec's priestly preoccupation must have been of paramount importance. In fact, Gerard's editing tactics reveal a great deal about the studious reading habits expected in a charterhouse. This Carthusian scholar punctuated the Herne copy of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* with numerous annotations and cross-references, which are preserved in about half of the extant manuscripts.[88] The survival rate of Gerard's edits

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[83] Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van seven trappen, Van den geesteliken tabernakel* (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Ltk. 348), cited in chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 204.
[84] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 187–199.
[85] Ibid., esp. 190–191, 196.
[86] Ibid., 196.
[87] Ibid., 197.
[88] See ibid., 198.

bears witness to the far-reaching impact of the Herne scriptorium and also testifies to popularity of the Carthusian ideal for close, careful reading, particularly in a text as complex as *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*

It has been suggested that this particular treatise was often read aloud and consulted for sermons.[89] There is also evidence, however, that many readers—especially the monastics who viewed Rogier's Escorial *Crucifixion*—poured over Ruusbroec's words in the solitude of their cells. The Carthusian customary encourages monks always to have two books from the charterhouse library in their chambers for personal reading.[90] In the fourteenth century, Ruusbroec's works were often produced in small-scale, individual manuscripts.[91] The diminutive size would have been ideally suited to private reading and easy transportation to and from the library. Several manuscripts of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* fit this category, including a copy originally conserved at the Herne Charterhouse measuring just 10.3 x 6.8 cm.[92] This volume only contains the first half of Ruusbroec's treatise and presumably was accompanied by another manuscript containing the remainder of the text.[93]

It is not difficult to imagine Carthusian monks closely engaging with such a manuscript—one volume at a time—as they pondered Ruusbroec's exegesis, amplified by Gerard's commentaries. The very structure of *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* with its

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[89] J. M. Willeumier-Schalij, "Ruusbroec's werk in het middeleeuwse tijdsbeeld. Een receptie-onderzoek," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 55 (1981): 298–393 esp. 346, cited in Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 71.
[90] See 28, 3.25/26, in Guigo I the Carthusian, *Coutumes de Chartreuse,* ed. and trans. A Carthusian, 3rd ed., in *Sources chrétiennes,* vol. 313 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 222, 224.
[91] See Hans Kienhorst and Mikel Kors, "Corpusvorming van Ruusbroecs werken," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 72 (1998): 3–53, cited and commented on in Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 69.
[92] Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 3091). See also Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 69; chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 185–186.
[93] Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 69.

arduous survey of every portion of the tent-sanctuary, would have encouraged a process of slow, meditative learning as readers strived to "construct" a visual representation of the tabernacle in their minds.[94] Furthermore, allusions to refuge in a solitary wilderness—including the children of Israel in the desert and Ruusbroec's priests in the Zonien Forest—would have been particularly consonant with the notion of a Carthusian cell as a *locus* of spiritual isolation and eremitism. Chapter one of this dissertation will suggest that the Scheut Carthusians of Our Lady of Grace followed a similarly exacting method of devotional prayer in front of Rogier's Escorial *Crucifixion* as they read, interpreted, and expanded its meditative argument in light of *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*

Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* will be used to supplement *The Spiritual Tabernacle* in chapter one and will be the key text in chapter four's discussion of the *Mérode Triptych.* The demographics of readership for *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* are more difficult to reconstruct than some of those of Ruusbroec's other treatises. Among the primary texts used in this dissertation, it is the only one not included in Gerard of Sainte's edited compilation from 1360. This is probably due, in part, to the fact that Ruusbroec did not write *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* until 1359. Annotations in various copies of the work indicate that the text was sent to "one of the nuns of St. Clare who had long begged [Ruusbroec] for it."[95] Geert Grote's Latin translation situates this nun in Brussels, making it likely that she was part of the learned group of women cloistered in the Coudenklooster of Rich Clares, many of who were devoted admirers of Ruusbroec.[96] *The Seven Enclosures* (*Vanden seven sloten*), for

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[94] Ibid., 22–23.
[95] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 253: "enre nonnen van sunte Claren die hem langhe daer om ghebeden hadde."
[96] Ibid., 253–254.

instance, was prepared for Margriet van Meerbeke, one of these Brussels Clares and possibly also Ruusbroec's half-sister.[97]

Unlike *The Seven Enclosures,* however, which is carefully calibrated to the life of a professed nun, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* addresses a broader audience and deals with the kind of fine-tuned Eucharistic theology normally reserved for Latin treatises.[98] Indeed, the text has been compared to the *Summa theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas and is sometimes referred to not as *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* but as *The Holy Sacrament* (*Vanden heylighen sacrament*).[99] For these reasons, some scholars contend that the bulk of the treatise was actually not written for a Clarissan nun but that Ruusbroec simply sent a copy to her, with the text's preliminary sections comprising a personalized letter that introduces the main, pre-existing body of the work.[100] There is further reason to believe that this female recipient was not yet living the full regimen of a religious. Elisabeth van Heverlee, the aristocratic widow of Gerard van Coekelbergh, has been suggested as a likely candidate. Elisabeth had been a donor to Ruusbroec's priory at Groenendaal, and her transition to the cloistered life was a protracted process that was only completed in 1364 when she made her profession at the Coudenklooster.[101]

All of this is to say that *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* does not seem to have been solely the province of wealthy Clares. There are twenty-seven main manuscripts extant containing the entire treatise or portions of it. Their provenances are mostly connected to houses of female religious, including Canonesses Regular and tertiaries, but there is also a significant group that comes from houses of male monastics: Canons

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[97] Ibid., 246–251.
[98] Ibid., 246–251, 258–263, 265–270.
[99] Ibid., 258, 260.
[100] Ibid., 265.
[101] Ibid., 253–254.

Regular of the Chapter of Windesheim, the Monastery of Our Lady at Groenendaal, Franciscans, Crutched Friars, and probably a Brabantine charterhouse.[102] Warnar has further cited a copy of *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* among the belongings of the Dominican theologian Michael de Stoct in the early fifteenth century and another copy in the library of the Windesheim canons at Rooklooster around the same time.[103] Several decades later, Anthonis de Roovere borrowed portions of Ruusbroec's text for his *In Praise of the Holy Sacrament* (*Lof vanden heylighen sacramente*).[104]

In the Coudenklooster, it is likely that Ruusbroec's texts were read aloud during meals, as a supplement to selections from sermons, *vitae* of saints, and the Rule.[105] This is certainly not the only context of readership for the mystic's "Clarissan" treatises, however. Even in the case of *The Seven Enclosures*—so personalized to the cloistered life of Ruusbroec's half-sister—the text is also presumed to have been studied outside the convent walls.[106] With a work like *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* the potential audience is even broader, and monks, such as the Carthusians of Scheut and Herne, may well have given its nuanced theology and mystical imagery a level of scrutiny not far removed from their esteem for *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* Chapter four of this dissertation will treat *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* again, this time outside the sphere of cloistered religious or even friars. Warnar has already drawn attention to elite lay women of the fourteenth century, like Duchess Johanna of Brabant and her sister, Maria, wife of Reinoud III, duke of Gelre, who would have encountered Ruusbroec's "Clarissan" works

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[102] See chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* 137–163.
[103] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 265–266.
[104] Ibid., 266.
[105] Ibid., 251.
[106] Ibid., 251–253.

through their association with Groenendaal and the Coudenklooster.[107] Moreover, the founder of the *Devotio moderna,* Geert Grote, was interested in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* an endorsement that would have increased the text's impact on lay contemporaries of Campin during the fifteenth century.

Chapters two and three compare Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin* and the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels, usually attributed to Rogier (Fig. 2.4). Recent technical discoveries have greatly expanded the devotional scope of the *Philadelphia* paintings, making for an ideal association with Rogier's most profoundly Marian triptych. The arguments of the *Miraflores* and Philadelphia ensembles are significantly deepened when read in terms of Ruusbroec's treatises, particularly *The Spiritual Tabernacle* and *The Spiritual Espousals.* In the latter text, the theme of seeing the Christological Bridegroom's coming and its discussion of going out to meet him resonates deeply with the motifs of portals, pierced hearts, and compassionate co-suffering in both compositions. Moreover, Ruusbroec's explication of the four sacred colors of the sanctuary curtains in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* contributes new depth to the valence of cloth in the paintings. Most significantly, the works give evidence for a kind of "translation" of Ruusbroec's Christ-centered theology into Marian-inflected mysticism.

The Spiritual Espousals enjoyed special prestige during the mystic's life, and modern scholars of Dutch literature regard it as his greatest work. As with all of Ruusbroec's treatises, *The Spiritual Espousals* largely stayed within local circles of readership during the fourteenth century, but intimations of its international scope were

[107] Ibid., 251–254.

already manifested during Ruusbroec's life.[108] Within twenty years of its creation, the text appeared in Low Alemannic, the German dialect spoken by the great Dominican Johannes Tauler, who was an early admirer of Ruusbroec. The Strasbourg Gottesfreund, Rulmann Merswin, was responsible for that translation. Not long after, a Latin version of the treatise was prepared by Jordaens at Groenendaal, and in 1375, Grote made another careful translation into Latin. These Latin versions were initially geared toward monastics, Jordaens' for the Cistercians of Lissewege and Grote's for the Carthusians.[109] Certainly translations into the universal language of Europe's educated populace would have broadened Ruusbroec's pool of international readers, but Carthusian scriptoria were also active promoters of the original Middle Dutch. Fifteenth-century translations include Middle Frankish, High Alemannic, and Hessian.[110] The thirty-six surviving manuscripts of all or portions of *The Spiritual Espousals* are associated with beguines, Carthusians, Franciscans, and especially houses of the *Devotio moderna.*[111] Fittingly, in his prologue to Ruusbroec's texts, Gerard of Saintes asserted that the mystic's work reached "even as far as the mountains."[112]

Scholars assume that although the first readers of *The Spiritual Espousals* were largely monastics and cloistered women, it also appealed to anyone seeking a more devout form of life, be they religious or lay.[113] Chapters two and three of this dissertation will scrutinize Ruusbroec's literary imagery from a context of cloistered readership,

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[108] Ibid., 134.
[109] See chapter 2: "The Early Translations," in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* esp. 114–115.
[110] See chapter 3: "The Other Witnesses," in ibid., 116–120.
[111] See chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in ibid., 97–112
[112] Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* 13. For the prologue of Brother Gerard, see Gerard of Saintes, *Dei prologe van her Gerardus,* cited in Wolfgang Eichler, *Jan van Ruusbroecs 'Brulocht' in oberdeutscher Überlieferung. Untersuchungen und kritische Textausgabe* (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969), 30: "dat hi dat (gemeint ist das Brulocht-Buch) hielde over seker ende goed, ende dattet ghemenichfuldicht waer toten voeten des berchs."
[113] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 136.

similar to the Scheut model described above. Rogier's *Triptych of the Virgin,* which is the subject of chapter two, was bequeathed to the Spanish Charterhouse of Santa María de Miraflores by King Juan II of Castile and León, and I argue that Rogier may well have designed the composition with a Carthusian destination in mind. The monks of St. Bruno are known to have loaned books to one another, and if any text of Ruusbroec's were to reach northern Spain in the fifteenth century it would likely be *The Spiritual Espousals.*[114] Nevertheless, I am not aware of any evidence that the Miraflores Carthusians possessed a Latin translation of *The Spiritual Espousals*. This Castilian charterhouse would likely have been interested in a mystic of Ruusbroec's reputation, though, and the fact that their library possessed a sixteenth-century copy of Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* in Castellaño indicates that they had a predilection toward vernacular devotion.[115]

Whether or not the monks knew Ruusbroec's work, their painting draws from *The Spiritual Espousals* in compelling ways, indicating that Rogier must have studied the text, perhaps in the libraries of Herne or Scheut. He may also have encountered it through discussions with the Carthusians of those houses, or via the open lectures and readings given by the *Devotio moderna,* known as *collationes* (collations). A celebrated artist like Rogier, whose work is marked by profound mystical exploration, would certainly fit in the sweep of devout readers—religious and lay—addressed in *The Spiritual Espousals.* It is especially likely that Rogier would calibrate his *Triptych of the Virgin* to Ruusbroec's eloquently articulated notions of spiritual ascent, knowing that the painting was intended for a Carthusian monastery. Given the Carthusians' zealous

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[114] Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 342.
[115] See Francisco Tarín y Juaneda, *La real Cartuja de Miraflores (Burgos): su historia y descripción,* 2nd ed. (Burgos: Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez, 1926), 233.

veneration of the Virgin and the triptych's compelling references to *Maria sponsa,* the bridal imagery in *The Spiritual Espousals* seems particularly pertinent. At the same time, my analysis of the *Miraflores* "Mary Altar," as it is often called, will also include recourse to *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* This compendium of Old Testament typology is starkly different from the style and textual image-making employed in *The Spiritual Espousals.* For a triptych as theologically dense as the *Miraflores,* however, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* lends valuable insight, especially in connection to the painting's notion of salvific portals, "veiled" in cloth.

The Spiritual Tabernacle is a more obvious match for the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels. Their monumentality and austere pathos, so like that of the Escorial *Crucifixion,* evokes the hours of silent pondering a Carthusian would spend before a sacred image or silently engrossed in an exegetical text. The provenance of the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* is much more obscure than the *Miraflores* or Escorial panels, and chapter three will explore several possibilities, ranging from French Augustinians to Netherlandish Carthusians to other orders in Spain. Moreover, recent technical discoveries have brought the Marian connotations of the *Crucifixion* paintings unambiguously to the fore. The panels have much more in common with the profoundly Marian *Miraflores Triptych* than has previously been noted, and as a result, the bridal allegory in *The Spiritual Espousals* will also be important for chapter three's discussion.

The complex visual tropes in both the Philadelphia panels and the Miraflores "Mary Altar" evince prolonged and interpretive engagement with Ruusbroec on the part of Rogier and the monastics who viewed the paintings. These ensembles not only translate Ruusbroec's literary imagery into distinct pictorial inventions, but they also

transform the mystic's deeply Christological philosophy into allusions and metaphors mediated primarily by the Virgin. It is wholly conceivable that a careful reader—such as a learned monk or a prominent artist preparing for a commission—would expand beyond the framework of *The Spiritual Espousals* in such a manner, for Ruusbroec's advocacy of experiential mysticism and his abundant visual analogies license interpretive exploration on the part of the reader.

Campin's *Mérode Triptych* is the subject of chapter four (Fig. 4.2). As mentioned earlier, this portion of the dissertation moves the discussion of Ruusbroec and pictorial piety outside the walls of the monastic cloister and into a world of lay donors and lay spirituality. The literature on the *Mérode* is vast, and it may at first seem redundant, if not a bit audacious, to once again sift through the array of emblematic objects in these three panels. The triptych's composition, however, bears marked resemblance to a central passage in Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* which extols the Virgin Annunciate as the perfect exemplar for those preparing to receive the Eucharist. Campin's depiction of the Christ Child's soul descending into Mary's room even complements Ruusbroec's exhortation that the faithful receive the infant Jesus in Communion, just as the Virgin received him at the Annunciation. The mystic's words embellish the sacramental themes long acknowledged in the *Mérode Triptych,* and Campin's remarkably early representation of the Annunciation in a domestic space makes an ideal case study for vernacular mysticism read outside the charterhouse but still within the shadow of Carthusian mentoring.

It should be noted, however, that Ruusbroec's presence in the *Mérode Triptych* is markedly different from the allusions to his texts in Rogier's monastic panels. Campin's

painting includes devotional tropes from a wide variety of sources, ranging from Franciscan motifs to rosary spirituality, of which Ruusbroec is only one facet, albeit an important and overlooked one. Furthermore, the donors of the painting would not have studied the mystic's writings with the same intense, exegetical pondering that took place in a charterhouse. Their engagement with the texts would have been less focused, less informed, and certainly less scheduled. Yet this chapter also demonstrates that detailed elements from Ruusbroec's vernacular theology made an important impact on piety in the active life, albeit in a more diffused and less concentrated manner. To this end, I discuss the role of the Carthusians, as well as that of quasi-religious groups such as the beguines, the *Devotio moderna,* and the *Gottesfreunde,* in disseminating Ruusbroec's ideas among the lay. Some secular men and women may have had access to manuscripts of his texts, but most probably encountered Ruusbroec's writings in sermons, collations, and other public venues in which they would be quoted and expounded by reform-minded spiritual leaders from organizations such as the *Devotio moderna.*

The Realm of Lovers, which I use as a supplementary text to *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* in this chapter, is particularly significant in this regard. It was Ruusbroec's first composition, and scholars regard it as an overly abstruse forerunner to the mystical argument in *The Spiritual Espousals.*[116] The labored complexity of its encyclopedic categorization of angels, beatitudes, creation, and heavenly spheres has earned it the appellation, *Summa theologiae.*[117] Ruusbroec seems to have intended that only a small group of priests have access to the text, but unbeknownst to him Gerard of Saintes

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[116] See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 52–54, 59–62.
[117] Joseph Alaerts, introduction to *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Joseph Alaerts, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 4, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 13.

obtained a copy, which he then had transcribed at Herne.[118] Fifteen manuscripts of *The Realm of Lovers* have been identified, many of which only contain portions of the full text. Most of these come from former *Devotio moderna* houses that were later incorporated into the Chapter of Windesheim.[119] This strengthens the supposition that some lay exposure to Ruusbroec occurred through Grote's "Modern Devout." It has been suggested, in fact, that the passages of poetry that conclude each section of *The Realm of Lovers* may be adaptations for sermons.[120] These memorable summaries of the text would likely have appealed to the didactic interests of many lay and quasi-lay readers and listeners. Interestingly, one of the surviving manuscripts containing portions of *The Realm of Lovers* is a *rapiarium,* or a book of quotations from various sources, which brothers and sisters in the *Devotio moderna* regularly used to record meaningful passages from their personal reading or collations.[121]

As the core of this dissertation, these four compositions take Rogier, Campin, and Ruusbroec beyond the scholarly parameters that have defined them thus far. The dialog between "painterly" mysticism penned on vellum and painted mysteries brushed onto panels engages larger questions, including the interaction of text and image in Netherlandish art, the endless cyclings of mystical and devotional time, the emblematic nature of cloth, and votive soul formation. Ultimately, this project seeks to more clearly delineate the particular and stirring piety of two of the most revolutionary artists in the northern Renaissance.

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[118] See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 50–65.
[119] See chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* 111–132.
[120] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 63–64.
[121] *Rapiarium* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB IV 423), originally owned by the Canons Regular, Chapter of Windesheim, at the Monastery of Ter Nood Gods in Tongeren, cited in chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* 127.

Chapter 1

The Escorial *Crucifixion:* Reading, Rending, and Re-Fashioning Ruusbroec's "Twice-Dyed" Veil of Blood

The Charterhouse of Our Lady of the Chapel at Herne likely facilitated an important intersection between Rogier van der Weyden and Jan van Ruusbroec. Founded in 1314, this monastery took the lead in copying and distributing a variety of manuscripts throughout Brabant during the second half of the fourteenth century, and, significantly, Herne produced the earliest surviving copy of a Ruusbroec text—a portion of his *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*), dated 1350–1375.[1] In about 1362, the Herne Charterhouse invited Ruusbroec to visit, lecture, and expound upon a statement he had made in his *The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rijcke der ghelieven*) that man could be united to the Trinity "without difference," a tenet in mystical theology that was both easily misunderstood and increasingly identified with heretical factions in the Church.[2] In his *Little Book of Enlightenment* (*Boecsken der verclaringhe*), Ruusbroec summarizes his meetings at Herne and describes the motive for his visit:

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[1] On Herne's book production, see Frederik Kwakkel, *Die dietsche boeke die ons toebehoeren: de kartuizers van Herne en de productie van Middelnederlandse handschriften in de regio Brussel (1350–1400)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

[2] D4:1995, E4:1898, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D343, E342: "sonder differencie." Rob Faesen convincingly argues against the interpretation that Ruusbroec's visit to Herne was a somewhat hostile challenge for the mystic to prove his innocence from heretical groups like the "Free Spirit." On the contrary, Faesen demonstrates that the Carthusians regarded Ruusbroec with warmth and deference, asking him to clarify issues of mystical theology, which seemed all the more pertinent to define in the wake of of Pope John XXII's bull, *In agro dominico* of 1329, which had condemned certain teachings by Eckhart and suggested clarification on other, potentially heretical notions in his writings. See Rob Faesen, "Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne: How Did the Carthusians React to the Eckhart Shock?," in *A Fish Out of Water? From Contemplative Solitude to Carthusian Involvement in Pastoral Care and Reform Activity. Proceedings of the Symposium* Ordo pre ceteris commendatus *Held in Zelem, Belgium, September 2008,* ed. Stephen J. Molvarec and Tom Gaens, trans. John Arblaster, in *Studia Cartusiana,* ed. Frans Hendrickx and Tom Gaens, vol. 2, in *Miscellanea Neerlandica,* ed. Frans Hendrickx, vol. 41 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 107–125. For another perspective on Ruusbroec's visit to Herne, highlighting potential elements of challenge and criticism from the Carthusians, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 273–283.

> Some of my friends desire, and have prayed me to show and explain in a few words, to the best of my ability, and most precisely and clearly, the truth that I understand and feel about all the most profound doctrine that I have written, so that my words may not mislead anyone but may serve to improve each one.[3]

The mystic's time at Herne further solidified the monks' esteem for him, and the charterhouse procurator, Brother Gerard of Saintes, went on to compose a vernacular prologue for a collection of five of Ruusbroec's texts, which, in its structure, resembles an *accessus ad auctorem,* a formal, authorial introduction.[4] Ruusbroec, in fact, is the only Middle Dutch writer to have been honored with this title of "author" (*auctor*) because, according to Brother Gerard, his texts do not merely summarize or interpret but draw on divine wisdom (*sapientia*) to unfold truths.[5] The procurator explains that "in those days, there was a great need of a sacred, complete doctrine in vernacular, because of some heresies and contrary doctrines which had arisen," and he prescribes Ruusbroec's words so that he himself "and other people might profit from them" by their "concordance with the faith of the Holy Church and with the teachings of the highest doctrine."[6] The support of Carthusians like Brother Gerard helped enable Ruusbroec's writings to successfully weather the intense accusations of unorthodoxy leveled against them by Jean Gerson, the powerful chancellor of the University of Paris, who condemned

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[3] D24/28, E20/23, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Boecsken der verclaringhe,* ed. Guido de Baere, trans. Ph. Crowley and Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 1, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout; Tielt: Brepols; Lannoo, 1989), D109, E108: "Selke van minen vrienden begheren ende hebben mi ghebeden, dat ic met corten waerden tonen ende verclaren soude, na mijn vermoghen, die naeste ende die claerste waerheit die ic versta ende ghevoele van alle der hoechster leren die ic ghescreven hebbe, op dat minre waerde niemen vererghert en werde maer ieghewelc ghebetert."
[4] On Ruusbroec as "author" and the significance of the *accessus ad auctorem* in Brother Gerard's prologue, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 121–171, esp. 126–127.
[5] Ibid., 127–128.
[6] Gerard of Saintes, *Dei prologe van her Gerardus* (Brussels, Royal Library, MS 3416–24 and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 693), cited in Faesen, "Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne," 119: "Want doen der tijt was heiligher ganser leringhe in dietscher tonghen groet noot, om enighe heresienende contrarien die doe op gheresen waren"; ibid.: "Ende want icse eendrachtich vant metten ghelove der heyligher kerken ende metter leeringhe der hoechster leeren, soe screef icse ende vergaderse in dit volumen, op dat ic ende andere menschen onser sielen orbaer in doen souden."

the third book of *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*) in around 1399, most likely after receiving a copy of the text from a monk at Herne.[7]

Early copies of Ruusbroec's texts still would have held a prominent place in the Herne library when, in 1449, Rogier's son, Cornelis, entered the historic charterhouse as a novice. This new, familial tie to the Order of St. Bruno would have only amplified the persistent interest in Carthusian spirituality that reoccurs throughout Rogier's work. Of particular note is the artist's frequent and sensitive treatment of the *Compassio* of the mourning Virgin, which had been famously expounded in the Marian theology of Denis the Carthusian.[8] Ultimately, Rogier became one of the greatest benefactors of his son's monastery, giving generous sums of money, including funds for a new brewery; donating a panel painting; polychroming a statue of St. Catherine for a chapel dedicated in her honor; and even pledging a sizeable portion of his estate to the charterhouse following the deaths of his wife, Elisabeth Goffart, and Cornelis.[9] As such an important donor to

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[7] Some of Gerson's main qualms with Ruubroec included the revelatory and experiential nature of his texts, the use of the vernacular to explicate complex theology, and his insinuation that created man could be united to the uncreated God. See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* esp. 1–9, 278–283. Brother Gerard encouraged Ruusbroec to write his *Little Book of Enlightenment* to explain these types of theological concepts that could be too easily misunderstood. See ibid., 273–278; Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* I 65, 67, 69, 70.

[8] See Simson, "Compassio and Co-Redemptio," 9–16.

[9] Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 420: [1464, after 18 June] "Beneficia Rogerii de Pascua. Magister Rogerius de Pascua post professionem Cornelii fratris nostri filii sui dedit domui centum petros. Item ad constructionem novi braxatorii lx libras. Et in testamento suo reliquit in promptis pecuniis centum coronas. Insuper contulit tabulam positam in capella beatae Katarinae. Et fecit depingi ymaginem eius. Praeterea reliquit domui post mortem uxoris suae tertiam partem bonorum suorum immobilium et tertiam partem domorum Bruxellae situatarum, si et in quantum frater noster Cornelius diutius viveret quam mater. Si autem ante matrem moritur frater, contulit omnium praedictorum tantum quartam partem sed semper post mortem matris. [added after 10 December 1477] Post cuius mortem recipimus centum septuaginta florenos renenses." See also Penny Howell Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions* and Their Relation to Fra Angelico at San Marco," *Oud Holland* 95 (1981): 119; and Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 348–351. The statue of St. Catherine was a gift from Rogier's friend a fellow benefactor of Herne, Gilles Joes. Both Jolly and Bekaert believe that the painting offered to the Herne chapel was likely Rogier's Philadelphia *Crucifixion.*

Herne, Rogier would have had the freedom to consult texts from the monastery library, including Ruusbroec's works.[10]

When, in 1455, the city of Brussels established another Carthusian foundation at Scheut, it is not surprising that Rogier and Elisabeth made significant donations to the new Charterhouse of Our Lady of Grace. Most importantly, Rogier presented his Escorial *Crucifixion* to Scheut (Fig. 1.1).[11] The brothers there were likely well versed in Ruusbroec's writings since their first monks, their first prior, and possibly even their first books were imported from Herne.[12] The *Crucifixion* seems to have been a personal gift from Rogier, specially crafted to enhance the Carthusian spiritual tradition embraced by his son, a tradition of rigorous and austere devotion to the Passion.[13] In the pages that follow, Rogier's painting will be situated within its original monastic context, which would have fostered a devotional sensibility colored by Ruusbroec's texts. In elucidating the meditative argument of the Escorial panel, this chapter will draw in particular from Ruusbroec's massive typological treatise, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*), as well as from his shorter distillation on Eucharistic devotion, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* (*Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*).

Politics and Piety at the Charterhouse of Our Lady of Grace at Scheut

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[10] Bekaert, "Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 358–359.

[11] The Escorial *Crucifixion* is usually dated to around 1455, the year of the founding of the Scheut Charterhouse. Panofsky posited a date as late as 1462, describing the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions* as part of Rogier's "*ultima maniera.*" Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* I 285, 288. Jolly further adds that the composition of the two paintings was inspired by Rogier's trip to Italy during the Holy Year of 1450 when he may have seen frescos by Fra Angelico in the Dominican Monastery of S. Marco. Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Phildadelphia *Crucifixions*," 113-126.

[12] See Lorne Campbell, "The Charterhouse of Scheut," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed. Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 461; Bekaert, "Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 339–342.

[13] There has been much speculation about the personal nature of the gift. See, for instance, Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 23; Lorne Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language of Roger van der Weyden," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed. Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 47.

In order to reconstruct the spiritual and political backdrop for Rogier's *Crucifixion,* it will be necessary to first discuss the fraught history of the Scheut Charterhouse, which has been the subject of many scholarly studies.[14] The primary source for the origins of the monastery and the Marian shrine that preceded it is a document written after 1471 by Adriaen Dullaert, the recently reprimanded and disgruntled municipal secretary of Brussels, whose heavy involvement at Scheut attests to the city's unusually prominent role in orchestrating the site.[15] Dullaert's text, somewhat suspect in its chronology and presentation of facts, was foundational for a second account of the monastery, commenced in 1480 by Marcel Voet, second prior of Scheut.[16] These sources tell that in 1445, a local peasant named Peter van Assche created a shrine for a small statue of the Virgin Mary in a tree along the road to Ninove. Four years later on the Vigil of Pentecost, the image was miraculously illuminated by heavenly light, and

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[14] See, for instance, Michel de Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut: Pèlerinage «populaire» et monastère «patricien»," *Annales de la société royale d'archéologie de Bruxelles* 55 (1978): 1–26; Yvonne Yiu, "Discipline or Security? An Analysis of the Power Mechanisms Used to Regulate the Late Medieval Pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Grâce at Scheut Near Brussels," *Peregrinations* 2 (2005): 36–61; Robert Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde. De stichting van het klooster Scheut," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 12–37; Mario Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut. Het glasmecenaat van een kartuizerklooster, 1450–1530," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 78–111; Bart Fransen, "Restanten van een meesterwerk. De bouwsculptuur van de kapel van Scheut," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 112–128; Mario Damen and Robert Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria.* The Carthusian Monastery of Scheut as a Crossroads of Urban and Princely Patronage in Fifteenth-Century Brabant," *Publication du Centre européen d'études bourguignonnes (XIVe–XVIe s.)* 52 (2012): 29–48.

[15] Adriaen Dullaert, *Origo sive exordium monasterii nostrae Dominae de gratia, ordinis Carthusiensium, juxta Bruxellam in Schute* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbiliothek, *Series Nova* 12.779). For the fairly unprecedented civic involvement at Scheut, see Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 12–14.

[16] Marcel Voet, Josse Smit, and Jan Tourneur, *Liber fundationis* (The Hague, KB 71 G 25). On Dullaert—the charges of corruption levied against him, his relationship to the state, and the resulting biases in his text—see Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 4–7; Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 15–17.

throngs of pilgrims from the surrounding area began journeying to Scheut to venerate the statue.

The sudden popularity of the shrine incited the consternation of Jean VI de Bourgogne, Bishop of Cambrai, whose indictments of idolatrous groves and unsanctioned worship space seem to just barely conceal a desire for diocesan control of the pilgrimage and its offerings.[17] The episcopal representative in Brussels intervened to halt Cambrai's plan to relocate the miraculous image to the parish church of Anderlecht, and the city launched an investigation into the burgeoning cult. Dullaert characterizes the ensuing turmoil as a conflict between the *vulgus,* whom he identifies with sin, ignorance, and disorder, and the city government, which itself was struggling with ecclesiastical leaders over rights to police proceeds from the shrine.[18]

During the city investigation, the Virgin of Scheut appeared to a local woman in a dream and revealed herself as "Our Lady of Grace." Thereafter, a plaque affixed to the Virgin's rustic sanctuary proclaimed it to be "Godshuys van Onser Vrouwen van Gratiën."[19] Interestingly, in 1452—just a few years after this Marian vision—another cult dedicated to "Our Lady of Grace" was inaugurated at Cambrai Cathedral with the reception of an icon believed to have been painted by St. Luke and venerated as "Notre-Dame de Grâce."[20] It is difficult not to wonder whether this new devotion at the cathedral may reflect some lingering bitterness from the Bishop of Cambrai in the aftermath of his squabble with Brussels over the renegade pilgrimage to Peter van

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[17] Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 13–14, 17; Yiu, "Discipline or Security?," 45.
[18] Ibid., 16; Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 18; Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 35–36.
[19] Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 18.
[20] Canon Fursy de Bruille first brought the icon to Cambrai in 1440, but it was not placed in the cathedral until 1452. See Jean Philippe Bègne, *Histoire de Notre-Dame de Grâce: patronne du diocèse de Cambrai* (Oscar Masson, 1910), 3.

Assche's statue.[21] The glowing image of Scheut, however, quickly attracted a crowd of more elite devotees who joined Dullaert's hoards of *vulgus* worshipers. This development at Scheut ignited a fascinating transition from a local, forest cult with a vernacular *titulus* and accusations of unrest and disorder to a carefully legislated and richly endorsed Carthusian protectorate governed by monastics with a reputation for such austerity and stability that their order proudly claimed to have "never [been] reformed because [it was] never deformed."[22]

Before long, the city commissioned Gilles Joes to build a stone chapel for the miracle-working image. Joes had overseen recent construction at St. Gudula's church, where Ruusbroec had served as a chaplain, and he was a friend of Rogier and fellow benefactor of the Herne Charterhouse. On February 21, 1450, Charles of Charolais, heir to the duchy of Burgundy, set the first stone in place. Charles and his mother, Isabella of Portugal, became fervent devotees of Our Lady of Grace, the prince offering stained glass windows, a silver falcon, and a silver portrait to the church and visiting on numerous occasions, including a special appearance in 1455 with Louis XI, dauphin of France.[23] This cooperative colonization of Scheut by the city of Brussels and the Valois ducal family—just five years after Peter van Assche installed his simple Marian statue in the tree—is memorialized by a miniature accompanying Dullaert's history of the site (Fig.

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[21] For a similar conflict between institutions over miracle-working images and pilgrimage, see Paul Binski, "The Crucifixion and the Censorship of Art Around 1300," in *The Medieval World,* ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (New York: Routledge, 2001), 342–360.

[22] Anne D. Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion* and Carthusian Devotional Practices," in *The Sacred Image East and West,* ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 192. For the Carthusians as a solution to Brussels' fear of conflict and dissension at the shrine, see Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 32. Yiu makes a similar argument regarding the transfer of power from local worshipers to representatives of the Church, city, and ducal family. See Yiu, "Discipline or Security?," esp. 52–54.

[23] For Isabella's adherence to the cult, see Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 31. Furthermore, members of the extended family of the duchess donated stained glass windows for the pilgrims' chapel. Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut," 87, note 42; Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 42.

1.2). The statue of Our Lady of Grace, vested and crowned, sits within a small shrine perched in the fork of a tree. On either side, Sts. Michael and Gudula, patrons of Brussels, stand watch, while below, the ducal coats of arms join the blood-red heraldic device of the city, with Dullaert's own family insignias at the base of the page.[24]

The impetus behind the plan to entrust the shrine to Carthusians stems largely from Dullaert and the eminent Jan van Edingen, lord of Kestergat, *ammannus* of Brussels, and officer of the Council of Brabant. The Van Edingen family had established the Herne Charterhouse over a century before, and Jan continued their legacy of Carthusian patronage with such fervor that the chronicle of Scheut calls him the "greatest friend of this cloister."[25] Filial piety and personal devotion, however, do not seem to have been the only factors propelling Dullaert and Van Edingen. Brussels was eager for Philip the Good to establish his primary residence in the city, and the love of the ducal family for the Order of St. Bruno was legendary.[26] The Valois tombs were safeguarded at the Chartreuse de Champmol in Dijon, where Philip the Bold had been interred, dressed, at his request, in a simple, white Carthusian habit. His grandson, Philip the Good, was also deeply vested in the order, as was his wife, Isabella of Portugal, who practiced Carthusian spiritual exercises and provided generous financial support for several charterhouses. Although a few Carthusians had been living temporarily in Brussels since 1440, the city must have long sensed the disadvantage they labored under in seeking to

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[24] Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 36.
[25] Voet, Smit, and Tourneur, *Liber fundationis,* fols. 58r–59r, see also 102v, cited in Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut," 86, note 36: "in dein tijdt die meeste vriendt van desen cloostere." On the involvement of Dullaert, Van Eingen, and other political figures in the foundation of Scheut, see Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 21–23; Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 22.
[26] Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 23–27; Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 22.

curry the duke's favor without a permanent charterhouse within their walls.[27] Thus in 1453, Dullaert, Van Edingen, Gilles Joes the architect, and a few other city officials met with the Carthusian priors of Herne, Antwerp, and Ghent to discuss plans and inspect the grounds at Scheut. The following year the Grande Chartreuse accepted their proposal for a new charterhouse and endorsed the cooperation of the three neighboring priors in aiding with the preparations. On March 22, 1455, the Brussels city council ratified the project, and in April Joes began to remodel the pilgrims' chapel, creating a choir for the monks, who would begin their residence on the site in seven cells made from clay.

On October 14, 1455, the Carthusian Monastery of Our Lady of Grace at Scheut was officially established.[28] As the principal financer for the new charterhouse, Brussels required the monks to offer three masses per year in honor of the city: on Pentecost, commemorating the miracle of the shining Virgin of Scheut; on the Vigil of St. John the Baptist, when the city council was selected; and on the Feast of St. Hubert, for the deceased citizens of Brussels. That the Valois wholeheartedly accepted the city's "gift" of the Scheut Charterhouse is indicated by their vigorous endorsement of the monastery.[29] When the ducal family and the French dauphin visited the charterhouse two weeks after its founding, Philip the Good promised to supply the monks with an annual allotment of fuel. Then in 1463 he pledged a fountain,[30] a gesture which may have hearkened back to his grandfather's bequest of the great Well of Moses, carved by Claus Sluter, to the Dijon Chartreuse de Champmol. In significant ways, in fact, Scheut became a new Champmol,

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[27] Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 32–33; Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 27–28. Stein notes that Brussels' main competitors for the ducal residence—Dijon, Ghent, Bruges, and Valenciennes—all had charterhouses of their own.

[28] Dullaert gives the date of the founding as 1456, but this seems to have been an intentional misconstrual in order to align the monastery with the centenary of the Battle of Scheut in 1356. Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 36.

[29] Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 23–24.

[30] See Fransen, "Restanten van een meesterwerk," 126, note 50.

richly patronized and specially loved by the Valois.[31] Duchess Isabella, who had paid for two stone cells at the historic Dijon Charterhouse in 1432—as well as for others at the Carthusian monasteries of Basel, Gosnay, and Montrenaud—endowed four cells for Scheut, in addition to assisting her son, Charles, pay for yet another one. Perhaps the city officials were already anticipating a Carthusian monastery to rival Champmol when they arranged for Charles to lay the first stone for the Marian shrine at Scheut in 1450. After all, the crown prince's great-grandmother, Margaret de Mâle, had been given the same honor at the foundation of the Dijon Charterhouse. Most significantly, in 1469 Charles built a ducal oratory onto the new church under construction in the Scheut monastery, precisely like the oratory of Philip the Bold at Champmol.[32]

Given the outpouring of gifts from city officials and members of the Valois court, it should come as no surprise that Rogier—city painter of Brussels, friend of Joes, and esteemed benefactor of the Herne charthouse—should feature prominently among the growing list of donors. On May 15, 1462 Rogier gave money to enable the Carthusians to purchase more land.[33] Furthermore, the Scheut *Obituary* prescribes a yearly mass to be offered each year on June 24th, the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, for the repose of the souls of Rogier and Elisabeth, in memory not only of the money given by the artist but also in gratitude for the paintings he presented to the monastery.[34] Foremost among these unnamed paintings must have been Rogier's Escorial *Crucifixion,* which is

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[31] For the implicit connections between Scheut and Champmol, see Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut," 78; ibid., 88, on parallels in stained glass donations; Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 12, on similarities of wealth; ibid., 38, on the common monastic cell type at both charterhouses .
[32] Robert Stein, "De groei van Scheut," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 43.
[33] Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 419: [1462, 15 May] "Item heeft 't voorschreven cloester anno lxij, in den mey, meester Rogier Van der Weyden, vercocht sonder quitinge ende sonder de fundatie goede te belastene, om te crigene de vorgenoemden goede die Philipse de Pape toebehoirden jairlix erfelec te xx stuivers den Rynsschenguldene: iij Rynsschguldenen. Dese voerscreven Rinsguldenen syn afgheleyt."
[34] Ibid., 420: "Anniversarium magistri Rogerii de Pascua, pictoris, ac consortis ejus, dedit semel tam in pecuniis quam picturis valoris circa xx libras grotas Brabantiae."

mentioned more specifically in an annotation regarding its sale in 1555, most likely to Philip II of Spain.[35] After gracing the altar of his private retreat at the Bosque de Segovia, the king gave the painting to the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, where it is documented in the sacristy by 1574.[36]

Standing a monumental three-and-a-quarter meters high and nearly two meters wide, Rogier's gift to the Scheut Carthusians, which originally hung in the monks' choir, would not have seemed out of place alongside the grand offerings of stained glass donated by other well-to-do Brussels citizens, a few of whom were probably Rogier's associates from the city government.[37] By contrast, the glass installed on the other side of the monks' choir, in the public, pilgrimage portion of the church, came from a more elite class of donors: Charles of Charolais, Jan van Edingen, and other friends and family of the duke.[38] In April of 1450, the Archbishop of Reims had issued an indulgence available for contributors to the Marian shrine, and many of the donors of windows probably had a similarly penitential motivation behind their gifts, memorializing in glass their names and acts of generosity in close proximity to the grace of the Lady of Scheut and the prayers of her Carthusian custodians.[39] Rogier likely sought the welfare of his own soul in offering his *Crucifixion,* but like Dullaert, Joes, and Van Edingen, he was as much an employee of the city as he was a personal devotee of the Order of St. Bruno, and

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[35] Dhanens, "Rogier van der Weyden: Revisie van de documenten," 130: [1555] "Item summa receptorum de quadam imagine Crucifixi vendita ex ecclesia nostra nobis donata a magistro Rogere pictore 1clb."
[36] Ibid., 134: [1574] "Una tabla grande en que está pintado Christo Nuestro Señor en la cruz, con Nuestra Señora y sant Juan, de mano de Masse Rugier, que estava en el Bosque de Segovia, que tiene treze pies de alto y ocho de ancho estava en la cartuja de Brussellas."
[37] On the Escorial *Crucifixion* as a gift befitting Rogier's status within the city, see Fransen, "Restanten van een meesterwerk," 124.
[38] Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut," 87–88; Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 41–42.
[39] Damen, "De schenkers van Scheut," 78–79. Damen suggests that the light passing through the glass may have signified the redemption and healing of the donors' souls. Moreover, Dullaert's account of the founding of Scheut dwells at length on sin and penance. See Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 8, 17–19.

Brussels was in the midst of a massive municipal project to establish a monastery and shore up a shrine. It is only natural, then, that Rogier's role as city painter casts a long shadow on the creation of this deeply pious gift.[40]

Few Netherlandish Crucifixion scenes are so wrenchingly somber and penitential in mood, and in Rogier's rendition of the subject for Scheut, the blood-red cloth of honor suspended behind the body of the dead Christ may not only evoke Rogier's compunction for his own sins but also a civic penance, since the escutcheon of Brussels was itself figured as a scarlet shield. Often an image of St. Michael appears emblazoned against the red, but at other times, the city's heraldic device is reduced to a simple field of glowing color, as in the miniature from Dullaert's history of Scheut (Fig. 1.2). Dullaert's account of the monastery's origins dwells at length on the sins of the *vulgus,*[41] and Rogier's painting may capture part of the city's incentive to quell the violence, squabbles, and noisy disorder at the shrine with a heavy stone church, an austere and profoundly silent order of monks, and a quiet, motionless distillation of the Passion, in which Christ hangs before the city's heraldry, renewing Brussels' escutcheon in his absolving blood. Rogier further intertwines his personal and civic personae by arranging for the Carthusians to offer mass for his wife and himself on the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the day after Scheut celebrated one of its three annual masses in honor of Brussels: a liturgy for the selection of the city council, recited on the Vigil of the Baptist's feast.

The civic connotations in Rogier's painting may explain why Dirk Bouts' famous *Justice of Otto III* panels for the Leuven Town Hall, dated ca. 1471–1475, are each nearly

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[40] Fransen, "Restanten van een meesterwerk," 128.

[41] Furthermore, the beginnings of the cult of Our Lady of Grace occurred around the time of the jubilee year of 1450, an important season of penance. Waha, "Aux origines de la chartreuse de Scheut," 8, 17–19. Rogier himself embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1450, which certainly would have included indulgenced visits to the major churches of the city.

exactly the same height and width as the Scheut picture (Fig. 1.3).[42] Another civic commission, the *Crucifixion* of the Paris Parliament, sometimes attributed to Rogier's nephew, the Tournai-based Louis Le Duc, is also similar to Rogier's composition (Fig. 1.4). The stance of St. John in the Paris Parliament painting accords with the way he appears in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* and his white mantle draped over a red robe seems to recall Rogier's unprecedented conception of the mourning evangelist dressed completely in ghostly white and standing against a scarlet veil.[43] The Paris Parliament painting has been dated to ca. 1455, although Yvonne Yiu's recent reappraisal of the archival documents now argues that it was probably finished by 1454 and the initial composition determined by 1452, if not earlier.[44]

If the Parliament *Crucifixion* quotes from Rogier's Escorial panel, it would imply that the latter was completed earlier than has previously been thought. In fact, it would have to have been finished before the Scheut Charterhouse was founded, indicating that Rogier gave his monumental *Crucifixion* not to the Carthusians but to the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Grace.[45] Yiu counters the traditional suggestion that Rogier may have had notice that a Carthusian monastery was to be constructed and started working on his painting in advance.[46] She claims that there is no evidence that a charterhouse had been discussed prior to 1453. Due to the secret nature of the deliberations attended by a select group of officials, including Dullaert, Van Edingen, and the Carthusian priors of Herne,

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[42] Yvonne Yiu, "The Date of Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion of Scheut:* A Reassessment of the 15th Century Documents," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 75 (2012): 192. Yiu further draws attention to important similarities between Bouts' *Justice* panels and the now-lost *Justice* scenes Rogier painted for the city of Brussels.
[43] Ibid., 183–185. For the attribution to Louis Le Duc and an important analysis of the Paris Parliament *Crucifixion*, see Charles Sterling, *La peinture médiévale à Paris: 1300–1500,* vol. 2 (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1990), cat. no. 2, especially 47–49.
[44] See Yiu, "The Date of Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion of Scheut,*" especially 186–187.
[45] Ibid., 188–189.
[46] See Campbell, "The Charterhouse of Scheut," 462.

Ghent, and Antwerp, she asserts that Rogier would almost assuredly not have known about the projected foundation until 1455, when the proposal was approved by the city.[47]

Yiu's reading of the documents is carefully studied and persuasive, but it is important to recall that Dullaert's chronology of Scheut cannot entirely be trusted. He changes, for example, the year of the monastery's foundation from 1455 to 1456 so that it neatly aligns with the centenary of the Battle of Scheut, fought in 1356.[48] Furthermore, it does not seem completely convincing that Rogier was entirely in the dark about the early plans for a charterhouse at Scheut, especially since he knew Dullaert and Joes and certainly had a good relationship with Hendrik de Loen, the prior of his son's monastery at Herne, who was doubtlessly well aware of Rogier's substantial investment in the Herne Carthusians, both personally and monetarily. In fact, since De Loen was tapped to be the first prior of Scheut, he may well have encouraged Rogier to extend his financial and artistic beneficence to this new charterhouse that would soon be under his care. If Rogier did begin work on his great *Crucifixion* while Scheut was still in the planning stages, it may have been at the instigation of De Loen.

Brussels' final decision to give the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace to the Carthusians, as opposed to the mendicants,[49] must not have come as a surprise to Rogier, since, as mentioned earlier, the city felt the absence of Philip the Good's beloved order acutely and had already fostered a small group of Carthusians since 1440. It is also significant that the earliest document explicitly citing Rogier's *Crucifixion*—the notation of its sale, penned in 1555 by Jan Tourneur, procurator of the Scheut Carthusians—

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[47] Yiu, "The Date of Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion of Scheut,*" 189.
[48] Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 36.
[49] For more on the city's choice of Carthusians over mendicants, see Stein, "Van publieke devotie naar besloten orde," 13; Damen and Stein, "Collective Memory and Personal *Memoria,*" 32.

specifies that it had been "given to us by Master Rogier" (*nobis donata a magistro Rogere picture*). Like Dullaert's chronicle of Scheut, however, Tourneur's annotation could have errors. Yiu rightly points out that since he was writing approximately a century after the painting had been executed, it is possible that distinctions between whether it had been given to the monastery itself, as opposed to the shrine before the Carthusians arrived, or whether it had actually been commissioned by the city and never intended as a personal gift could have blurred together over the years.[50]

Still, the years bracketing the execution of the Escorial *Crucifixion* are exceedingly close to those of the Paris Parliament picture, and considering the margin of error in the archival documents, it seems impossible to draw any unimpeachable conclusions. If the Paris painting is, in fact, the work of Rogier's nephew, Louis Le Duc, then it is all the more likely that the Tournai artist could have had access to sketches and preparatory material from the Escorial *Crucifixion,* even while it was still in the earliest stages of completion. Le Duc became a master painter in 1453, most likely after training under Rogier's hand in Brussels.[51] His Paris commission, then, would have come directly on the heels of his participation in his uncle's workshop, during a time when plans for Rogier's *Crucifixion* may have already been underway. On the other hand, it is also possible that both the Paris and Escorial *Crucifixions* borrow from a now-lost composition, perhaps one that also had civic overtones. In this regard, it is interesting that the facial type of St. John in the Escorial painting is unlike any other depiction of the

[50] Yiu, "The Date of Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion of Scheut,*" 189–192.
[51] Lorne Campbell, "The Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed. Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 106.

evangelist in Rogier's oeuvre,[52] making it conceivable that the entire figure of St. John could itself be a quotation from another work of art.

In any case, the records of Herne and Scheut indicate that Rogier was an important donor of both money and paintings to the Carthusians, and this chapter will maintain the traditional argument that his *Crucifixion* was his grandest gift to the Scheut Charterhouse. Some of the strongest evidence for this lies in the painting itself, which resonates with the intense Passion spirituality of the Order of St. Bruno, not only in its austerity and minimalistic palette but also in its thoughtful engagement with the writings of Jan van Ruusbroec, so admired by the Carthusians of the Low Countries. On the other hand, if Rogier had indeed painted the panel for the newly-constructed Marian shrine, as Yiu argues, it would be puzzling why such an arrestingly somber and monumental Crucifixion scene would have seemed an appropriate gift to honor a miracle-working image of the Virgin and Child.

Moreover, recent dendrochronological analysis of the thirteen Baltic oak panels comprising the painting provides further evidence for maintaining a Carthusian provenance. Published in the catalog accompanying the first public exhibition of the newly restored *Crucifixion,* this report gives the year 1457 as the earliest likely date for Rogier's composition, two years after the founding of the Scheut Charterhouse.[53] Dendrochronology is not without its own margin of error, but this discovery nevertheless supports the idea that the Escorial and Paris Parliament *Crucifixions* either drew from the

[52] Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 51
[53] Carmen García-Frías Checa, "The Recovery of a Masterpiece: Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion* in the Monastery of El Escorial," in *Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula,* ed. Lorne Campbell (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2015), 58.

same model—be it workshop sketch or lost composition—or else that Rogier borrowed his St. John from the Paris painting.

The Escorial *Crucifixion* was certainly an austere painting when it was created, but its current severity has been heightened by damage to the panel, loss of paint, and negligent restoration (Fig. 1.1).[54] An over-life-sized image of Christ hangs from the cross, flanked by the sorrowing Virgin and St. John, whose ethereal white robes echo the pale body of the Lord and likely make reference to the distinctive white habits worn by Carthusians.[55] Within the narrow chromatic range of the painting, their bleached clothing creates a haunting effect against the passages of vibrant red, sage green, and blue-gray. It is rare to find the *Mater dolorosa* dressed in white, and for the grieving St. John, it is particularly anomalous.[56] The evangelist wears a white cloak over a red tunic in a *Crucifixion* from circa 1495 attributed to Jan Provost (Fig. 1.5). Furthermore, in a late fifteenth-century Carthusian miscellany from the St.Margaretha Charterhouse in Basel the sorrowing Virgin of Golgotha is dressed in a white mantle, which likely helped the

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[54] Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 47; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* I 288; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 211. Recent scholarship has found that the panel is not as severely damaged as was once thought, bringing into question the assumption that it was partially burned in the fire of 1671 in the Escorial Palace. Catherine Metzger, "An Assessment of the Escorial 'Crucifixion': Condition, Quality, and Maker," in *Rogier van der Weyden in Context: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, Held in Leuven, 22–24 October 2009,* ed. Lorne Campbell et al. (Paris; Leuven; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 159-168, esp. 159–160.

[55] The connection to Carthusian habits was first cited in Carl Justi, "Altflandrische Bilder in Spanien und Portugal," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 21 (1886): 96–97. Most publications thereafter follow suit. See in particular Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions,*" 120–121; See Liesbeth Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding: Een onderzoek naar de functie van kunst in Nederlandse kartuizerkloosters 1450–1550" (PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 2010), 181–182. Although Jos Koldeweij's observations on this subject draw heavily from Rogier's Philadelphia panels, they are still pertinent to the Escorial painting. Jos Koldeweij, "Representatie en devotie in het oeuvre van Rogier van der Weyden (1400–1464)," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 168–169, note 100.

[56] See Yiu, "The Date of Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion of Scheut,*" 184–185, note 19; Moshe Barasch, "Renaissance Color Conventions: Liturgy, Humanism, Workshops," in *Color and Technique in Renaissance Painting Italy and the North,* ed. Marcie B. Hall (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1987), 141. Barasch also cites Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* as another instance of a white-clad *Mater dolorosa.*

monks identify more closely with the beloved patroness of their order (Fig. 1.6).[57] Another white-clad, Carthusian *Virgo doloris* appears in a stained glass window from 1484 by Niclaes Rombouts, installed at the Miraflores Charterhouse near Burgos in northern Spain (Fig. 1.7). The white attire in these examples may derive from Rogier's invention, perhaps via the Paris Parliament panel, in the case of the Provost painting.

Backed by a stone wall and the crisp creases of a newly-unfolded red curtain, the figures in the Escorial *Crucifixion* appear to have been lifted from the hill of Calvary and the narrative of the Gospels and reassembled as the focus of a timeless and "transhistorical" devotion in the dark, Gothic chapel of Our Lady of Grace.[58] And yet Rogier's *Crucifixion* does not entirely retreat from a storyline. The Lord's closed eyes and pierced side reveal that he has recently died. Although no sky is visible in the painting, the image is noticeably dark, like the nearly black heavens in his Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* a 'sister composition" to the Escorial image (Fig. 1.8). Both paintings evoke the darkness that descended on Jerusalem around the time of Christ's death, and their blood-red curtains solemnly recall that during those turbulent hours, the veil of the temple

[57] Zuidema makes a similar argument regarding the ability of the white clothing in the Escorial *Crucifixion* to engage Carthusian viewers. Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 188–189. For the *Crucifixion* miniature from Basel and, in particular, its relationship with Rogier's Escorial and Philadelphia panels, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "The Writing on the Wall: Inscriptions and Descriptions of Carthusian Crucifixions in a Fifteenth-century Passion Miscellany," in *Tributes in Honor of James H. Marrow. Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance,* ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne S. Kortweweg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), esp. 243. Hamburger does not, however, specifically make a connection between the Virgin's white mantle in the miscellany and the clothing of Rogier's *Mater dolorosa*.

[58] Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion* and Carthusian Devotional Practices," 195–196; Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions,*"116–118; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* I 285; Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding,"188; Acres, "Rogier van der Weyden's Painted Texts," 98, note 92; Wim Blockmans, "From Tournai to Brussels—From Hainaut to Brabant," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed. Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Zwolle, the Netherlands; Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 31.

was "rent in twain."[59] The *Glossa ordinaria* adds to the salvific significance of this moment, for it makes an important connection between the "cutting" of sunlight and the "cutting" of the temple curtain, which opened salvation for the children of Adam, whose original sin in the Garden of Eden had been discerned by God at the waning of the sun, "in the cool of the day."[60]

At least by the mid sixteenth century—and likely before that time—the Escorial panel resided near the Gospel pulpit in the monks' choir, possibly as part of a shrine to the reserved Sacrament.[61] According to the charterhouse records, a red curtain of silk

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[59] *Matthew* 27:51. For the dark sky in the Philadelphia panel, see Mark Tucker, "Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia 'Crucifixion'," *The Burlington Magazine* 139 (October 1997), 681. See Hedeman, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion*," for the hypothesis that the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* was painted for the Carthusian Charterhouse at Herne.

[60] See comment 4634, in *Glossa ordinaria super Matthei evangelium*, in *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria Walafridi Strabonis aliorumque et interlineari Anselmi Laudunensis* [Strasbourg: Adolf Rusch for Anton Koberger, 1480/1481], ed. Martin Morard, Fabio Gibiino, Marie-José Sorbet (Paris: 2014), 409: "Nota sole a centro mundi recessuro crucifigitur Dominus, quia propter peccata moritur, et Adam post meridiem cum peccasset vocem Domini audivit et ordo est rationis, ut quo tempore prevaricanti Ade clausit, eo tempore penitenti latroni ianuam reseret paradisi. Quia Marcus ait hora tercia crucifixisse Dominum, ideo est ut Iudeos qui se excusant magis crucifixisse ostendat linguis quam milites quorum manibus factum est qui hora tercia ut crucifigeretur inclamaverunt, quando enim crucifixus est, hora erat quasi sexta, id est non adhuc plene sexta"; comment 3006, in *Glossa ordinaria super Luce evangelium*, in *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria,* 304: "Sol retraxit radios, ne aut pendentem videret Dominum, aut ne impiis blasphemantes sua luce fruerentur. Et nota quod sexta hora, id est sole recessuro a centro mundi crucifigitur, diluculo id est oriente sole resurgit, quia: 'Mortuus est propter peccata nostra et resurrexit propter iustificationem nostrum'. Adam peccante post meridiem, id est inclinata luce fidei vox Domini auditur. Eodem igitur temporis articulo, quo tunc peccanti Ade obcluserat, nunc latroni penitenti Dominus paradisum reserat"; comment 3008, in ibid.: "Velum templi scissum. Hoc expirante Domino gestum est, sed Lucas preoccupat, volens miraculum solis coniungere miraculo veli. Scinditur autem velum, ut archa testamenti et omnia sacramenta legis que tegebantur appareant, et ad gentes transeant. Iosephus ait: virtutes angelicas presides quondam templi tunc pariter conclamasse, fugiamus ab his fedibus." For the scriptural citation of evening in the Garden of Eden, see *Genesis* 3:8.

[61] Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 169–170. On the location of Sacrament houses in northern medieval churches, see Achim Timmermann, *Real Presence: Sacrament Houses and the Body of Christ, c. 1270–1600,* in *Architectura Medii Aevi,* ed. Thomas Coomans, vol. 4 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009), 32.

was suspended in front of the image, effectively "doubling" the painted veil within the composition with a real veil outside it.[62] The painted canopy with green fringe running along the top of the panel may even have been crowned by a covering of more red silk, entirely enfolding the crucified Lord in a "tent" of fabric, both fictive and real.[63] The ensemble would have been particularly striking in a sacramental context since late medieval ciboria containing the Eucharistic body of Christ were often similarly enveloped beneath cloth baldachins.[64]

Continuing in this play of illusion and reality, it is significant that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visitors to the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial who saw the painting in more pristine condition routinely noted the *trompe l'oeil* quality of the figures, which at first seemed to be carved from stone.[65] The nearly monochromatic forms of the Virgin and St. John resemble "demi-grisaille" sculptures, with only their faces and hands colored.[66] Indeed, when the Carthusian brothers pulled back the red silk curtain covering the monumental panel, perhaps as part of the mass or liturgical office, it would have seemed that the same miracle that had transubstantiated the sacramental bread and wine

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[62] Jean Tourneur, procurator of Scheut, recorded a great image of the *Crucifixion* near the "pulpiturum Evangelii." Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 291: [1555] "… est alia imago crucifixi mire magnitudinis habens a dextra beatam Virginem, a sinistra vero illius discipuli quem diligebat Jesus imaginem. Clauditur cortinis de rubro saieto." See also Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 169–170, 176. For the effect of the painting enclosed in real and fictive cloth, see Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 292.

[63] Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 176-179, connects the red color of the painted curtain and the "tent-like" enclosure surrounding the panel to St. Paul's exposition of the Holy of Holies in his *Epistle to the Hebrews*. She does not mention, however, the rending of the curtain at Christ's death or corollaries to Ruusbroec's work.

[64] Ibid. 176. The curtained baldachin in Rogier's *Medici Madonna* has been similarly identified as a tabernacle for the Eucharistic Christ Child. See Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 120, 317; Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 178.

[65] Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 48.

[66] Ibid., 50. See also Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions,*" 113–116, for comments on "demi-grisaille."

into the living presence of Christ had also transformed the painted figures into three-dimensional humans tinged with the color of living flesh.[67]

Rogier's emulation of carved stone may have also had political significance within the context of Scheut as a "new Chartreuse de Champmol" for the ducal court at Brussels. In 1395 Philip the Bold commissioned his court sculptor, Claus Sluter, to carve a large Calvary group for the great cloister of the Dijon Charterhouse. The crucified Christ, together with the mourning Virgin, St. John, and the Magdalene, were to surmount a well, ornamented with Old Testament prophets and weeping angels (Figs. 1.9 and 1.10). The ensemble evoked the life-giving blood of the Christological *fons vitae,* and its still, noiseless waters would have conformed to the strict silence prescribed by the Carthusian rule.[68] Embellished with gold and rich polychromy under the supervision of the ducal painter, Jean Malouel, the Calvary group and its armature of prophets became a famous artistic and spiritual landmark. It received three major indulgences for pilgrims, first in April of 1418 by an envoy of the Holy See, Cardinal Giordano Orsini; then in 1432 by the former Carthusian, Cardinal Niccolò Albergati, who extolled the beauty of the cross as a "*sumptuoso opere fabricate*"; and finally in 1445 by the papal nuncio, Petrus de Monte, Bishop of Brescia.[69] A wooden canopy protected the Great Cross from the elements, and it may have been the collapse of this structure that destroyed the Calvary

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[67] Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 188. For additional information on the sculptural appearance of the figures and the illusion of a cloth baldachin, see Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 195; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* I 288–289.

[68] Henri David and Aenne Liebreich, "Calvaire de Champmol et l'art de Sluter," *Bulletin Monumental* 92 (1933): 443–445, 448; Kathleen Morand, *Claus Sluter: Artist at the Court of Burgundy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 95, 97.

[69] Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 101. Penitent pilgrims could claim 100 days of indulgence if they prayed before the Great Cross on Saturdays, Good Friday, and during the octaves of certain feast days. See ibid., 106–110, 341–342; Laura D. Gelfand, "'*Y Me Tarde*': The Valois, Pilgrimage, and the Chartreuse de Champmol," in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles,* 2 vols., ed. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), especially 574.

group sometime in the succeeding centuries.[70] Careful study of the Well of Moses and the remaining fragments from its Crucifixion group indicate that the cross once rose 3.9 meters above its base of angels and prophets.[71]

The exact appearance of the lost figures is unknown, but several surviving Sluteresque Calvary sculptures approximate the original posture and clothing of the mourning Virgin and St. John, two statues from Prémeaux being among the most frequently cited (Fig. 1.11). Like so many of Sluter's images, the sorrowing mother and beloved apostle at Prémeaux have been wrapped in billowing robes, St. John's cloak drawn under his hands and slung over his shoulder and the Virgin's mantle folded over her head, leaving much of her face in shadow.[72] Christ's mother appears to be twisting away from the cross and then bowing back toward it, arms crossed over her heart. The evangelist leans back and gazes high above him in rapt attention.[73] Other figures deriving from Sluter's mourners at the Great Cross adopt similar stances, including examples from Mouthier-le-Vieillard near Poligny, Flavigny-sur-Ozerain, and the abbey of Baume-les-Messieurs.[74]

Although more removed in iconography and style, the bejeweled reliquary Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus at Esztergom Cathedral, also falls within the ambit of Sluter's Crucifixion, particularly since Philip the Bold received it from his wife, Margaret

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[70] Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 344.
[71] David and Liebreich, "Calvaire de Champmol et l'art de Sluter," 461–462; Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 345–346.
[72] Ibid., 346
[73] Ibid., 346–347.
[74] For a discussion of works believed to emulate the the Virgin and St. John, see ibid.; David and Liebreich, "Calvaire de Champmol et l'art de Sluter," 466–467; Georg Troescher, *Die Burgundische Plastik des Ausgehenden Mittelalters und Ihre Wirkungen auf die Europäische Kunst,* 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Prestel-Verlag, 1940), 110–115, plates LXXIV–LXXVI; Henri Drouot, "Figures bourguignonnes de Calvaires," *La Revue de l'Art* 49 (January–May 1926): 123–126, 151–159.

de Mâle, as a New Year's present in 1403, when the duke would have been anticipating the completion of the polychromy on the Great Cross (Fig. 1.12).[75] As with the other Sluteresque examples, the Esztergom St. John looks dramatically upward, while the Virgin bows her head, buried in the folds of her veil. Beneath them a series of prophets support the pearl-studded hill of Calvary, just as in the Champmol Well, only here they frame a secondary scene depicting Christ's imprisonment in the high priest's palace.[76]

Rogier's own "Great Cross"—given to the Scheut Charterhouse not by a ducal sculptor but by a city painter who was highly esteemed and patronized at the court of Philip the Bold's grandson—shares much in common with Sluter's masterpiece. Only about 65 centimeters shorter than the stone cross in Dijon, the Escorial *Crucifixion* is similarly monumental. In fact, among all painting from the Burgundian Low Countries in the first half of the fifteenth century, only Rogier's *Justice* panels rival it in size. Moreover, Rogier's imitation of stone in the chiseled gray folds of the Virgin and St. John's robes may well be a conscious effort to transfer to Brussels some of the spiritual and dynastic aura of the Chartreuse de Champmol with its richly indulgenced Calvary, fashioned by one of the most gifted sculptors in the Burgundian duchy.

Rogier's "demi-grisaille" figures, which both crystalize his feat of *paragone*-like artistry and also advance an important allusion to Carthusian habits, pay homage to and perhaps even compete with Sluter and the Dijon Charterhouse. At the center of the monks' choir at Champmol, Sluter's tomb for Philip the Bold stood encompassed by a miniature funeral *cortège* in stone, consisting of two Carthusians, several clerics, and many weeping *pleurants* (Fig. 1.13). Although these sorrowful figures were purportedly

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[75] Éva Kovács, *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus in the Treasury of Esztergom Cathedral,* trans. László Boros (Budapest: Corvina, 1983), 30, 32; Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 348.
[76] Kovács, *The Calvary of King Matthias Corvinus,* 26.

intended to be polychomed with black mourning cloaks, Malouel opted to make them demi-grisaille after Sluter's death, brushing their vestments, books, rosaries, and a few other objects with gold and colored pigment but leaving their faces, hands, and most of their clothing in white alabaster. As with Rogier's painted fusion of modeled flesh and colorless stone, it has been argued that Malouel's decision was intended to honor the simple white of the Carthusians who received Philip's corpse—shrouded in one of their own habits—into their church and who would ever after petition heaven for his soul and the souls of his descendants.[77]

Furthermore, the dress and position of Rogier's mourners at the cross bear important similarities to the Prémeaux statues mentioned above, which likely preserve something of Sluter's original Calvary composition. Rogier's St. John, and particularly his Virgin Mary, wear the heavy and abundant drapery characteristic of Sluter's style, which pools around their feet and, like the Prémeaux Virgin, hoods a substantial portion of the face of the Mother of God.[78] Perhaps most interestingly, though, Rogier's Virgin twists forward, lowers her eyes, and bows her head, while his St. John gazes dramatically upward, much like the Sluteresque derivatives. Moreover, the Escorial painting's potential reference to the blood-red escutcheon of Brussels has a corollary in archival

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[77] Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 132.

[78] Otto Pächt has also commented on the heavy drapery of the Escorial Virgin and St. John. He connects it, however, to sculpture in the generation following Sluter. Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 33. It should be noted that Susie Nash has argued persuasively that Sluter's Calvary group from Champmol only contained the figure of the Magdalene. This hypothesis negates the possibility that Rogier emulated sculptures of the Virgin and St. John from the Dijon Charterhouse, but it does not undermine the supposition that the city painter of Brussels was paying homage to Sluter's Great Cross. The similar dimensions between the sculpture and the painting, the figures' Sluteresque drapery, and their stone-like quality still stand as convincing evidence. For Nash's important scholarship on the Calvary, see Susie Nash, "Claus Sluter's 'Well of Moses' for the Chartreuse de Champmol Reconsidered: Part I," *The Burlington Magazine* 147 (December 2005): 798–809; ibid., "Claus Sluter's 'Well of Moses' for the Chartreuse de Champmol Reconsidered: Part II," *The Burlington Magazine* 148 (July 2006): 456–467; ibid., "Claus Sluter's 'Well of Moses' for the Chartreuse de Champmol Reconsidered: Part III," *The Burlington Magazine* 150 (November 2008): 724–741.

documents attesting to the incorporation of the heraldic devices of the duke and duchess in the Great Cross of Dijon,[79] and it is tempting, although entirely speculative, to consider the possibility that Rogier may have modeled the unusual features of his St. John after Sluter's rendition of the evangelist.

Finally, Sluter's *fons vitae,* with its well waters imaginatively stained scarlet as the prophet Moses parts the Red Sea and the blood of the crucified Christ drips down from the stone cross, finds a parallel in the brilliant red cloth, which floats behind Rogier's dead Lord like a lake of blood. Ruusbroec's mystical texts bring new depth to both the saturated scarlet of this cloth of honor and to the stance of the Virgin and St. John. Intriguingly, it has even been suggested that Sluter himself could have been impacted by Ruusbroec's spirituality via Geert Grote and the *Devotio moderna.*[80] In April of 1404, in fact, the court sculptor retired to the Monastery of Saint-Étienne where he spent the last two years of his life as an Augustinian, the same order that Ruusbroec and his priory at Groenendaal joined, fifty-four years previously.

Ruusbroec and the "Twice-Dyed" Veil of Blood

Having discussed the spiritual and political relevance of the Marian shrine and Carthusian monastery at Scheut, it is now possible to examine Rogier's gift to the charterhouse in light of Ruusbroec's vernacular mysticism. Many of the painting's original viewers would have been conversant with these texts from careful reading and

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[79] It has been assumed that these coats of arms were part of the Calvary composition, but it is also possible that they could have been affixed to the Well of Moses. See Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 346. On another note, there is tentative reflectographic evidence from the underdrawing near St. John's head that Rogier may have applied gold leaf to portions of the background in the Escorial painting. J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, J. Dijkstra, and R. van Schoute, *Underdrawing in Paintings of the Rogier van der Weyden and Master of Flémalle Groups,* in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1992), 151. This possibility may make a further connection to the magnificent polychromy and gold that once ornamented Sluter's Great Cross.

[80] Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 19–21.

copying, and, as mentioned earlier, Rogier himself would have had access to them as well. The prominence of the framing canopy of red curtains—both inside and outside the Escorial *Crucifixion*—calls to mind imagery from Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* with its careful description of the sacrifices, furniture, and holy curtains of the tent-sanctuary constructed by the Israelites following their exodus from Egypt. Written primarily after Ruusbroec's own "exodus" from his chaplaincy at the Brussels Church of St. Gudula and subsequent retreat into the wilderness of Groenendaal, the text opens with a Pauline injunction: "'Run so that ye may obtain'."[81] In the seven books that follow, the mystic explains how faithfully to complete this scriptural "race of love" by receiving the sacraments of baptism and penance, reaching outward in charity for humankind, turning inward in love for God, fostering an orderly life, and emulating the virtues and union with divine love typified by the eponymous tabernacle.[82] Ruusbroec's exegetical commentary—ideally suited to the long hours of silent rumination in a Carthusian monastery—illuminates and enriches several important meditative prompts in the Escorial *Crucifixion.* The first is the scarlet curtain suspended in the center of the image, and related to it are the carefully arranged postures and gazes of the Virgin and St. John. While the *Mater dolorosa* folds herself in her cloak and looks down in grief, the evangelist stares trance-like into the darkness, wrapped in a revelatory epiphany with his brow furrowed in concentration.

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[81] D0:1, E0:1, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D257, E256: "'Loept alsoe dat ghi begripen moegt'." See also 1 *Corinthians* 9:24. For Ruusbroec's "exodus," see Warnar , *Ruusbroec,* 188–189.

[82] D0:9, E0:8, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D257, E256: "den loep der minnen." Roughly contemporary with Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle* is the *Expositio dominicae passionis,* written by a fellow Augustinian, Jordanus of Quedlinburg (ca. 1300–1380). Jordanus' text also uses the construction of the Mosaic tabernacle as a trope for spiritual experience, and Hamburger notes a citation from it at the commencement of the fifteenth-century Carthusian Passion miscellany from Basel. Hamburger, "The Writing on the Wall," 236.

Brocade cloths of honor are a common motif in Netherlandish painting, and Rogier's oeuvre is no exception. However, the deeply saturated color of the Escorial veil, its sharp creases, and its simple, patternless material are fairly unique in Rogier's work. In fact, set against the dark shadows and muted colors of the composition, the curtain vies with the Lord and his holy mourners as the primary focus of devotion in the painting. Curtains would have been a familiar sight in the fifteenth-century church. They were suspended from racks around the altar and drawn during the Consecration of the Sacrament, hung behind images, and used as a backdrop to spotlight the Host.[83] In a Eucharistic context, they recalled the veil that once divided the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple.[84]

This veil was imbued with poignant significance by St. Paul in his *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in which he juxtaposed Christ's sacrificial death with the annual oblation of the Jewish high priest. Whereas the presiding Levite entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of an animal to atone for the sins of the people, Christ— the "high priest of good things to come"—offered "his own blood" in the Holy of Holies of a "greater and more perfect tabernacle."[85] His priestly ministration reconciled God and man, removing the Mosaic textile that barricaded the innermost sanctuary of the tabernacle so that his people could with "boldness … enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living

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[83] In discussing the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions,* Panofsky draws attention to a miniature from Haarlem's Teyler Stichting, MS 77, fol. 56, to exemplify the practice of hanging a cloth behind a sculpted image. See Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* I 285, note 4; also see Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 195; Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 50; Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 176. Interestingly, a red veil was also suspended behind the Eucharist at the Basilica of S. Marco in Venice. See Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas," *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975): 498.

[84] Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 176–179; Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 497–498.

[85] *Hebrews* 9:11.

way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."[86] This moment is recounted with dramatic intensity in the Gospels when Christ, having poured out his blood on the altar of the cross, closes his eyes in death as "the veil of the temple [is] rent in twain from the top to the bottom."[87] With sacramental synchronization, a soldier then literally rends the "veil of Christ's flesh," piercing his side with a spear.

Building on St. Paul's exegesis, Ruusbroec reveals Christ's Passion as the underlying blueprint for the dimensions, materials, and rituals of the Jewish tabernacle. In book one, he describes Moses's holy tent as a type for the ecclesiastical fabric of Christ's mystical body, a spiritual sanctuary built from the "living stones" of faithful Christians with the Lord himself as architect.[88] The text soon switches gears, however, as Ruusbroec exhorts his readers to become architects themselves: "Now … I am going to teach us how each rational person shall make a spiritual tabernacle for God, in which he shall eternally dwell united with God."[89] Through the exercise of virtues and the discipline of vices, the votaries are to prepare mystical candlesticks and dyed badger skins, altars and silver capitals, and ultimately welcome the incarnate God into a Mosaic shrine replicated within their hearts.

The walls of this mental sanctum cordon off a site for "mutual indwelling," in which the devotee dwells in Christ's tabernacle-body, and Christ dwells in the devotee's tabernacle-heart. "Mutual indwelling" is a critical concept for the transcendent unification with the Holy Trinity that is the climax of Ruusbroec's mystical ascent. The

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[86] *Hebrews* 10:20.
[87] *Matthew* 27:51.
[88] See D1:13/19, E1:13/18, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D261, E260; D4:89/96, E4:86/92, in ibid., D337, E336.
[89] D4:97/99, E4:93/95, in ibid., D337, E336: "Nu wille ic voert mire materien volgen ende wille ons leren hoe iegewelc redelec minsche gode sal maken .i. geestelec tabernakel daer hi verenecht met gode ewelec inne woenen sal."

path to this lofty aspiration is mediated through Christ's humanity. The votary imitates the mortal, suffering Christ and receives the Eucharist in order to be united to the Lord in his human nature, clothed in the flesh of fallen man. Since Christ is both perfect man *and* perfect God, he can then lead the worshiper seamlessly into the Trinitarian unity of his divine nature. In a bold and poetic passage from *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* Ruusbroec writes that "[Christ] remained God and became human, that humans might become God," or that they might become "heavenly divine human being[s]."[90]

Allegorical curtains feature prominently in the construction of meditative tabernacles. Woven from four different colors, the curtains' white, "heaven-colored" blue, violet, and "deep fiery-red" segments each represent different virtues.[91] Ruusbroec explains that the red material is dyed twice in the blood of worms to symbolize the charity of the crucified Lord, and echoing St. Paul, he conflates the scarlet cloth with the "veil" of Christ's bleeding flesh:

> He is also clad in twice-dyed red color on account of His love and His mercy. And therefore, He delivered the little worm, that is, His worthy body, unto death. And this is twice-dyed-red color, for He has washed us and honorably tinted us in His blood and clad Himself in the most honorable garment of love and of martyrdom that anyone can imagine.[92]

No illustrations accompany Ruusbroec's text describing the rending of the Mosaic veil and the Jewish sanctuary's re-consecration in Christ's blood, but so vivid is his

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[90] D979, E920, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D289, E288: "Hi bleef god ende wart mensche, op dat de mensche god worde." D43, E41, in ibid., D197, E196: "hemelsch, godlec mensche."
[91] D4:518/20, E4:498/502, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D379, E378: "Dierste varue es wit gelijc bocrane, die andre hemelvaruwech, die derde violeit, die vierde dobbelvierech roet."
[92] D2:268/273, E2:253/258, in ibid., D305, E304: "Hi es oec gecledet met dobbel roeder varuwen overmids sine minne ende sine ontfaermecheit. Ende hier omme hevet hi dat woermken gelevert ter doet, dats sinen werdegen lichame. Ende dit es dobbel roede varuwe, want hi hevet ons ghewasschen ende eerleke geverwet in sinen bloede ende hem selven gecledet met den eersamsten clede der minnen ende der martilien datmen gedinken mach."

descriptive language that the account of the Christianized tabernacle with its new doorway to heaven seems to have been painted in brilliant, twice-dyed red.[93] In one of these scarlet-colored verbal images, Ruusbroec compares Christ to the sacrificial red heifer, his "precious" and "fragile" body rent and stained "bloody-red on account of the strokes of the scourges."[94] In another section of the text, he is the "red stone" upon which the apostles built *Ecclesia,* "and they died within it and have sealed it, like Christ their master, with their blood."[95]

Ruusbroec's repeated references to the blood of worms invite readers to associate this "deep fiery-red" with a specific pigment—vermilion, which derives from the Latin, *vermiculus,* meaning "little worm."[96] The etymology of this color connects Ruusbroec's description of the suffering Christ to a passage from the twenty-second psalm, which he cites explicitly in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*: "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people."[97] It is likely that Rogier painted the Escorial cloth of honor with the same vermilion pigment that he is known to have used in

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[93] D5:4558/4594, E5:4293/4327, in ibid., D1047, 1049; E1046, 1048. William Durandus' *Rationale divinorum officiorum* is an important precedent for Ruusbroec's discussion of symbolic curtains. The Bishop of Mende discusses the veil of the Old Testament Holy of Holies and assigns allegorical meanings to the colors of various cloths hung in the Church during the ecclesiastical year. As in Ruusbroec's text, white is associated with purity and red with charity, and the curtains are imaginatively used to ornament the soul with good qualities. William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments: A Translation of the First Book of the* Rationale divinorum officiorum, ed. John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, 3rd ed (London: Gibbings and Company, 1906), 57–61. The vestments of the Mosaic priesthood are even described as "scarlet twice dyed." Ibid., 64

[94] D5:4534/4536, E5:4270/4272, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* E1042, 1044; D1043, 1045: "Ende in deser wijs offerde Cristus sinen eighenen lichame in die doet, die precioes was ende teeder al selke martilie te doeghene, bloedich roet overmids die slaghe der gheeselen."

[95] D5:1567/1571, E5:1487/1489, in ibid., D751, E750: "Ende hier omme fundeerden si een gewarech kersten gheloeve op den roeden steen, dat Cristus es […] Ende si sijnre inne ghestorven ende hebbent ghelijc Cristum, heren meester, met heren bloede gheseghelt."

[96] I am indebted to C. Jean Campbell for this important observation.

[97] *Psalm* 22:6. See also D326/327, E309/311, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D225, E224. I am grateful for Walter S. Melion's observations on the exegetical significance of worms.

the Philadelphia *Crucifixion*.[98] The broad expanse of this costly color, finely ground from cinnabar crystals and compounded with oil, would have pointed viewers of the painting toward Ruusbroec's writing in a remarkably tangible way. The pigment's crushing and mixing with oil even evokes the mystic's description of Christ's blood flowing like oil from an olive press: "He gave Himself to the press, and there He suffered unto death, and He poured out all His blood."[99] In fact, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* associates this dye made from worms so fundamentally with Christ's precious blood that to both Rogier, who applied the vermilion to the panel, and to the monks who contemplated it, the glistening pigment may have seemed like a relic of the Holy Blood or a glowing pool of sacramental wine.

Rogier's entire oeuvre reveals a consistent sensitivity to the color and structure of textiles.[100] In his Escorial *Deposition,* for instance, he articulates fur-trimmed wool, shimmering cloth of gold, and luxurious satin velvet (Fig. 2.3).[101] Unfortunately, given

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[98] Tucker, "Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia 'Crucifixion'," 681. Note that following the panel's restoration in 1946–1947, Leo van Puyvelde described the cloth as "vermilion." See Metzger, "An Assessment of the Escorial "'Crucifixion'," 161. For comments on Rogier's use of vermilion and especially red lake pigments, see Marika Spring, "The Materials of Rogier van der Weyden and His Contemporaries in Context," in *Rogier van der Weyden in Context: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, Held in Leuven, 22–24 October 2009,* ed. Lorne Campbell et al. (Paris; Leuven; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 97–99. Warnar also notes Ruusbroec's allusion to red dye. He connects the "little worms" to the insect-derived coccine. Geert Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 201.

[99] D5:2087/2088, E5:1977/1978, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D803, E802: "Doe leverde hi heme ter persen ende daer doghede hi al toter doet ende hi storte ute al gader sijn bloet." For a related discussion on the blood of Christ and its connection to the artistic practice and materials of Jan van Eyck, see Smith, "'So moeti den schilt draghen'."

[100] Margaret Scott, "Dress and Reality in Rogier van der Weyden," in *Rogier van der Weyden 1400–1464: Master of Passions,* ed.Lorne Campbell and Jan Van der Stock (Davidsfonds: Leuven, 2009), 130. Scott also quotes Cyriacus of Ancona who, upon seeing a *Lamentation* by the master in 1449, noted the "… many drapieries and cloaks of many colours, clothes exceptionally elaborated with purple and gold … and everything else that you would say had not been created by the hand of a craftsman but by nature, the mother of all." See Dhanens, "Rogier van der Weyden: Revisie van de documenten," 104: [1449–1450] "…velamina tanta plurigenumque colorum paludamenta, elaboratas eximie ostro atque auro vestes … et coetera omnia , non artificis manu hominis, quin et ab ipsa omniparente natura inibi genita diceres."

[101] See Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings 1300–1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 129–130.

the compromised condition of the Escorial *Crucifixion,* it is difficult to determine the precise type of fabric Rogier intended to evoke by the vermilion cloth of honor. On the one hand, the material could be silk, which would perfect the *trompe l'oeil* interplay between the painted cloth and the real red silk covering the panel.[102] This would also enhance the connection to Christ's worm-like condescension, since both Ruusbroec's bloody dye and the silk of Rogier's fictive cloth derive from worms.

The Escorial textile's color and sheen, however, point more to fine wool, rather than to silk, dyed, not with the vermillion pigment used in compounding artists' paints, but with kermes, a vibrantly-colored insect whose name, incidentally, also derives from the Latin *vermes,* meaning "worms."[103] Woolen cloth was an important export from Brussels, scarlet being the most precious, and a length of this kind of material would often be creased, as in Rogier's painting, from being folded and safeguarded in a chest.[104] The material's deep economic significance, combined with its potential reference to the scarlet escutcheon of Brussels, makes the painting seem almost like a civic votive offering, appropriately given to the monastery by the city's official painter. Displayed in the choir, where the Carthusians would regularly pray for the people of Brussels and offer three annual masses for their welfare, the panel displays an emblem of the city's valuable wool trade, washed and sanctified in the priceless blood of the crucified Christ.

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[102] The curtain is assumed to be silk in the recent report on the conservation of the painting. García-Frías Checa, "The Recovery of a Masterpiece," 68.

[103] I am grateful to the following scholars, who discussed the fabric hangings in the Escorial and Philadelphia paintings with me and whose advice and expertise in cloth and dyes helped me recognize the strong possibility that these textiles were intended to be read as woolens: Melinda Watt and Elizabeth Cleland, associate curators of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Margaret Scott, former head of the Department of the History of Dress, The Courtauld Institute of Art; Lisa Monnas, independent scholar of textiles and historical costume; Florica Zaharia, conservator in charge of the Department of Textile Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[104] Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters,* 25; Margaret Scott, *Medieval Dress and Fashion* (London: British Library, 2007), 29.

Guild and craft organizations had long ennobled their vocations through association with saints and sacred history, and in a similar manner, a flawless textile produced by the Burgundian wool industry could have implied deep spiritual meaning, especially in the devotional context of the Escorial *Crucifixion.* The fine cloth readily evokes the wool of the Biblical "lamb without blemish and without spot," stained in his own "precious blood."[105] The prophecies of Isaiah even make an analogy between the torments patiently suffered by the Lamb of God during his Passion and the gathering of wool for cloth production: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."[106] The evocation of Christological wool likely extends to the heavy, habit-like clothing of St. John and the Virgin as well. Carthusians scapularies were fashioned from white wool,[107] and the monks contemplating this painting may have recognized in the color and fabric of the clothing of Christ's mourners more than just an allusion to the life of purity and simplicity required of St. Bruno's white-robed monks. Rogier's panel may have prompted them to see the very material of their habits as a reminder that those who eat the sacramental flesh of the Lamb of God must emulate him so closely that they also figuratively don the wool sheared from his suffering body.

Imitators of Christ would then share his woolen vesture, whether standing in the shadow of his cross on Calvary or communing with him in solitary meditation in their stone cells. Incidentally, Isaiah's voiceless sheep would have had special meaning for

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[105] 1 *Peter* 1:19.
[106] *Isaiah* 53:7.
[107] See the description of Carthusian clothing depicted in Sluter's tomb for Philip the Bold. Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 354.

these silent Carthusians, whose unimpeachable propriety became the quieting salve for what Dullaert characterized as sinful ruckus and disorder at the Scheut pilgrimage. Certainly the contrast of white and red woolens in the painting would have recalled the mystery of penance explained in St. John's own apocalyptic vision, in which the red dye of Christ's blood miraculously bleaches soiled garments: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."[108] In a related scripture, Isaiah positions the white coat of the Lamb of God at the center of the mystery: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."[109]

Significantly, the *Glossa ordinaria* also connects the stripping of Christ's garments—like the "sheering" of Isaiah's sheep—to the faithful's redemptive clothing in virtues. The prophecy from the *Psalms* that "[t]hey part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" finds its typological fulfillment when the centurions at Golgotha divide Christ's garments into four piles and gamble for his coat, which "was without seam, woven from the top throughout."[110] The *Glossa* notes that these four piles represent the dispersion of Christ's Church. Like the undivided coat, however, the Church is united in peace, truth, and charity, in accordance with St. Paul's exhortation to "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."[111]

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[108] *Revelation* 7:14.
[109] *Isaiah* 1:18.
[110] *Psalm* 22:18; *John* 19:23.
[111] See comment 4619, in *Glossa ordinaria super Matthei evangelium*, in *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria,* 407: "Diviserunt. Hoc Iohannes distinctius: vestimenta in quattuor partes, ut ecclesia in quattuor partibus mundi signetur. Tunica sortita, significat omnium partium unitatem vinculo caritatis que sorte, id est gratia Dei provenit non humano arbitrio"; comment 1918, in *Glossa ordinaria super Marci evangelium,* in ibid., 215: "Vestimenta Domini mandata sunt quibus tegitur corpus eius quod est ecclesia, quia dividuntur inter milites gentium ut sint quattuor ordines, cum sit una fides, id est coniugati, viduati,

Three miniatures from a manuscript on the lives of the saints from the Utrecht Charterhouse of S. Salvator/Nieuwlicht[112] provide an important visual corollary for the connection between Carthusian habits, the wool of the Lamb, and sanctifying virtues (Figs. 1.14, 1.15, and 1.16). Produced ca. 1445, a little over ten years before the Escorial *Crucifixion* was painted, the illuminations depict St. John the Baptist—an important patron saint of the Order of St. Bruno—introducing a group of kneeling Carthusians to a company of largely female saints. St. Catherine and the holy figures accompanying her are dressed in vibrant blues, greens, and reds, accented with golden haloes. Even St. John the Baptist, although presented as a fittingly ascetic protector for his Carthusian charges, wears a colored hair shirt or, in one instance, a red belt. In the midst of all this polychromy, the kneeling block of monks creates a jarringly white island of colorless habits. Two of the miniatures, in fact, barely distinguish the brothers from the white walls of their monastery or the white of the blank page surrounding them. In all the images, the Baptist shepherds his little flock of monks with his right hand while in his left he carries a small white lamb, silhouetted—in two of the illuminations—against a brilliantly red book. The compositions invite a parallel between the Carthusians, whose simple woolen habits cause them to fade humbly into the background, and the woolen coat of the diminutive Lamb of God, framed in blood-red.

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prepositi, separati. Sortiti sunt tunicam indivisam que est pax et veritas in cunctis in modum regalis amictus vel annuli"; comment 2563, in *Glossa ordinaria super Iohnnis evangelium,* in ibid., 226: "Quadripartita vestis significat eccelsiam toto orbe qui quattuor partibus constat diffusam omnibus partibus equaliter, id est concorditer distributam. Tunica sortita omnium partium significat unitatem que charitatis vinculo continetur"; comment 2567, in ibid., 227: "Ne aliquando dissolvatur unitas ecclesie. Et ad unum pervenit, quia omnes in unum collegit sicut et in duodecim unus Petrus pro omnibus dicit: «Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi» et ei pro omnibus dicitur: «Tibi dabo claves regni celorum» unus pro omnibus, quia unitas est in omnibus"; comment 2569, in ibid.: "Quia charitas supereminet omnibus per totum, quia nemo est eius expers qui pertinere videatur ad totum a quo toto sicut greca indicat lingua 'catholica' vocatur ecclesia que in sorte Dei gratia commendatur." For the citation to St. Paul's epistle, see Colossians 3:14.

[112] *Vitae sanctorum* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB 8729-31, verso of the introductory page, fols. 42v, 76r)

The imposing length of red cloth in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* backing an image of the crucified Christ, also recalls Ruusbroec's description of the altar of incense in *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* Ruusbroec notes this altar's position in front of the veil of the Holy of Holies and construes its four gilded horns anointed with animal blood as a type for the four, blood-stained arms of the cross.[113] He writes that it is at this "inward altar of [Christ's] free will, which is Holy of Holies unto the Lord," that the votary freely chooses to offer himself with the dejected, suffering Christ in order to be united to God.[114] Appropriately, the sacrificial victim in Rogier's painting, like the bloodstained altar before the veiled sanctuary, also mediates access to the divine. The concentrated hue of the veil draws special attention to the red wound in his side, which, like a mystical portal, invites worshipers to make Christ their entryway as they approach the God who "dwellest between the cherubims" of the Ark of the Covenant, hidden on the other side of the tabernacle curtain.[115]

Significantly, although the curtain, the cross, and the mourners are all slightly off center, the Lord's wound occupies the exact median of the composition.[116] As the focal point of the painting, this "tear" in the "veil" of Christ's flesh provides a glimpse through the rent fabric of his body to the creased "veil" of his blood, as if newly unfolded from his side, like a precious textile from a wooden chest, and draped against the stone wall behind him. By displaying the dead Christ in two forms—his body hanging from the cross and his "shorn wool" dyed in blood hanging from the green-fringed canopy—

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[113] D5:731/745, E5:701/714, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D645, 647; E644, 646.
[114] D5:746/747, E5:715/16, in ibid., D647, E646: "den inwindegen outaer sijns vrien willen, die den here es heilech der heilegen." For Ruusbroec's full discussion of the significance of the altar of incense, see D5:714/840, E5:684/802, in ibid., D643, 645, 647, 649, 651, 653, 655; E642, 644, 646, 648, 650, 652, 654.
[115] *Psalm* 80:1.
[116] Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language" 51.

Rogier imitates the double elevation of the Eucharistic Lord under the species of first bread and then wine. This layering of veils, with the "curtain" of Christ's flesh crucified against the red veil of his blood, conceals and reveals God the Father beneath the fleshy "fabric" of the Incarnation, so that Christ's battered humanity becomes a living veil shrouding the imageless Trinity.

Paradoxically, the obscuring, curtain-like blood of Christ simultaneously funcations as a lens for fine-tuned exegetical insight, mystical vision, and ultimately divine apprehension. Indeed, the wound in the Lord's side—which is also a "tear" in the curtain of his flesh—contributes markedly to the ocular quality of Rogier's *Crucifixion.* Votaries look through the wound in the same way that they look through the semi-transparent veil of Christ's blood. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* transformed the curtain of the Jewish temple into a prefiguration for Christ's broken body, an exegetical point that moves logically from type to antitype. Rogier and Ruusbroec complicate this Pauline analogy in interesting ways. By positioning the veil alongside the crucified *corpus,* they not only move from type to antitype, but also invite movement from antitype back to type. In other words, it is not just the bleeding body of Christ that layers significance onto the Mosaic cloth, but the cloth itself—with its carefully described pigmentation, material, and positioning—that also layers new insight onto the body of Christ. In this circular assembly of literary and pictorial images, of curtains "twice-dyed" and mysteries doubly veiled, it is as if the Lord himself becomes a type for the curtain that already typifies him.

Rogier's invention, which gives such poignance to the veil of the tabernacle, builds on an older pictorial tradition, exemplified by a stained glass depiction of the

Chariot of Aminadab conserved at Saint-Denis and dating to Abbot Suger's glazing campaign in the mid twelfth century (Fig. 1.17). In this scene, God the Father towers over the Ark of the Covenant, surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists and with the lower portion of his body hidden both by the veil of the Holy of Holies and by the crucified body of his son, which he carries before him. Interestingly, the cross bears the same foliate decorative pattern as the Ark, implying that it is meant to be read as a crucifix, a sacred but fabricated object, like the gilded Mercy Seat.[117] Moreover, the engraved pattern also recalls the design of a fine textile, eliding the crucifix with the temple curtain, itself another fabricated object, woven, according to legend, by the Virgin Mary at the time of the Annunciation. The window's insistence on manufactured materials screening away the majesty of the Old Testament God calls attention to another veil woven by the Virgin at the Annunciation—the "veil" of Christ's flesh, fabricated in her womb. This veil, hung with nails from the cross, rather than strung up between the doorposts of the Holy of Holies, is the ultimate mediator that hides and reveals God the Father.

The ninth-century apse from the Church of SS. Nereo ed Achilleo in Rome provides an even earlier variation on this theological allusion (Fig. 1.18). In the upper left corner of the arch over the apse, the Angel Gabriel approaches the Virgin Annunciate, who is engaged in weaving the temple curtain. Originally the mosaic below in the apse proper contained a great cross, backed by a blood-red curtain, the cloth presented as the

[117] For an analysis of the Saint-Denis *Chariot of Aminadab,* including the fabricated nature of the crucifix, the mediating role of images, and the relationship between the body of Christ and the veil of the Holy of Holies, see Herbert L. Kessler, "The Function of *Vitrum Vestitum* and the Use of *Materia Saphirorum* in Suger's St.-Denis," in *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art,* ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), 192–94; ibid., "Turning a Blind Eye: Medieval Art and the Dynamics of Contemplation," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages,* ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 432.

fruit of both the loom and the womb of the Mother of God. The image of Christ transfigured, positioned just above the former location of the cross and veil, would have completed the composition's argument by manifesting the divinity of the God who "veiled" himself in flesh.[118] Yet another visual meditation on the temple curtain, just as subtle in its theology and much closer to Ruusbroec and Rogier in time and geographical location, is the depiction of the Trinity as *Genadestoel,* or "Throne of Grace." Widespread in the Burgundian Low Countries during the fifteenth century, this image generally represents God the Father enthroned, as if on the Ark of the Covenant, wearing the papal tiara, and looking solemnly at the viewer as he lifts the body of his dead son. Christ's pierced hands and feet are foregrounded, and he gestures to the wound in his side as evidence of his pierced heart, which bled onto the Mercy Seat in expiation for the sins of the world.

The occasional presence of curtains or lengths of cloth in these scenes deepens their reference to the Old Testament Holy of Holies. In Robert Campin's *Trinity* from the Hermitage Museum, for instance, a baldachin of white fabric enfolds God's throne, the arms of which are carved with types for Christological redemption: the pelican feeding its young with blood from its wounded heart and a lion roaring life into its stillborn cubs (Fig. 1.19). A second depiction of the *Genadestoel* in the tradition of Campin includes several angels dressed as acolytes, two of whom assist God the Father by reverently holding the Lord's body in a long, shroud-like swath of white cloth (Fig. 1.20).[119] The

[118] On this mosaic and its relationship to the temple curtain, Ark of the Covenant, and Christ's dual nature, see Kessler, "Turning a Blind Eye," 424–425.

[119] This important painting, from the collection of the M - Museum Leuven, has recently been attributed to the workshop of Rogier van der Weyden. See Veronique Vandekerchove, Livia Depuydt-Elbaum, Pascale Fraiture, and Jana Sanyova, "The Levuen 'Trinity.' A New Look at a Fifteenth-Century Painting in the M - Museum Leuven," in *Rogier van der Weyden in Context: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Symposium*

Throne of Grace appears yet again in a silverpoint drawing of the Eucharist from a series on the Seven Sacraments attributed to Rogier's workshop (Fig. 1.21).[120] While a priest elevates the consecrated Host, a vision of the *Genadestoel* bursts forth from the heavens, rimmed by a rippling half-circle of cloth-like clouds. In a copy of the composition embroidered onto the hood of a luxurious cope, this curving bank of clouds is rendered in sky-blue, as if the curtains of the heavens had parted to manifest the Real Presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament (Fig. 1.22).

The fabric that appears in each of these paintings, however, is not the most important reference to the temple curtain. Rather, the dead body of Christ, "woven" by the Virgin Mary and "draped" over the lap of God the Father, becomes the primary sacred textile mediating the divine presence. Campin's Hermitage *Trinity* draws special focus to the connection between the pale white curtains hung on either side of God's throne and the pallid flesh of Christ lifted pitifully before it. In fact, as the Lord exposes the wound in his side, he pushes back his own skin in folds, mirroring the folds of the curtains. Viewers, then, comprehend the depth of mercy available at the "Throne of Grace" through the lens of the New Testament. As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* they are invited to gaze through the ocular "tear" in the side of Christ to behold his pierced heart and by so doing look through the rent veil of the Holy of Holies and parted curtains of Campin's baldachin to see the hidden face of the Mosaic God.

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for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, Held in Leuven, 22–24 October 2009, ed. Lorne Campbell et al. (Paris; Leuven; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 179–193.

[120] On the *Eucharist* silverpoint, conserved at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, see Micheline Sonkes, *Dessins du XV^e^ siècle: Groupe Van der Weyden. Essai de catalogue des originaux du maître, des copies et des dessins anonymes inspirés par son style* (Brussels: Centre national de Recherches «Primitifs flamands», 1969), 161–162, 283, Plate XXXIX C38. For the impact of Rogier van der Weyden's on the Throne of Grace, see Joseph de Borchgrave d'Altena, "Roger de le Pasture – Rogier van der Weyden et les scultures," in *Rogier van der Weyden en Zijn Tijd: Internationaal Colloqium 11–12 Juni 1964* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1974), 29–30.

In a similar manner, Ruusbroec emphasizes that the meditative Holy of Holies constructed within the believer's heart differs from the historic tabernacle in that it has become a profoundly Christological shrine for the "mutual indwelling" of the incarnate God. The treasures of the Old Testament ark have been transformed into Eucharistic emblems of Christ's Passion and mercy. In place of the tablets of the old Law, "Christ has laid His soul and His body for us as two stone tablets on which with His finger, that is with His Spirit, God has written the whole law and all the commandments."[121] The vase of manna becomes a "golden pail full of heavenly bread, that is, our common charity in holy Church," and the budding rod of Aaron reaches its full typological bloom as the wood of the cross that "grew and blossomed and brought us the fruit of eternal salvation."[122]

The wound in Christ's side, so carefully positioned and highlighted in Rogier's painting, marks the threshold to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, welcoming votaries into the Holy of Holies of the Lord's tabernacle-body with the same vibrant vermilion that colors Ruusbroec's poetic syntax. The devotion of the Scheut Carthusians to the wounds of the crucified Lord, and particularly his bleeding heart, is attested to by a surviving graduale from their monastery, dated to 1471. Several of this manuscript's initials are ornamented, but the "S" beginning the introit for the Feast of Pentecost (*Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarium*) has been illuminated with particular care into a figural representation (Fig. 1.23).[123] This was one of the three annual masses that the Charterhouse of Our

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[121] D6:167/169, E6:161/163, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1279, E1278: "In de arke kerstens gheloefs heeft ons Cristus gheleecht sine siele ende sinen lichame alse .ii. steinene tafelen daer god in ghescreven heeft met sinen vinghere, dat es met sinen gheeste, al de wet ende alle de ghebode."
[122] D6:178/179, E6:171/172, in ibid., D1279, E1278: "Enen guldenen eemer vol van hemelschen broede, dat es onse ghemeine caritate in der heilegher kerken"; D6:154/155, E6:147/148, in ibid., D1277, E1276: "Maer sine roede groeide ende bloeide ende brachte ons de vrocht ewegher salicheit."
[123] *Gradual* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB IV 86, fol. 99v).

Lady of Grace celebrated for the benefit of the city of Brussels, since it had been on the Vigil of Pentecost that the image of the Virgin of Scheut shone with miraculous light. In the initial for this important feast, the "S"—rendered in brilliant blue—wraps around a golden ground speckled with blood on which four pink flowers sit, dripping more blood in reference to the four wounds in Christ's hands and feet.

The Sacred Heart occupies the center of the composition, and the curling band of the "S" passes through the middle of the image like a blue river, creating the fifth wound of the Crucifixion as it pierces the Lord's heart. Incidentally, the watery blue of the "S" seems to have been deliberately chosen to complement the stream of blood pouring from the Sacred Heart, for the *Gospel of St. John* records that after "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced [Christ's] side … forthwith came there out blood and water."[124] Furthermore, it is interesting that the *Crucifixion* of the Paris Parliament, which shares the coloring and stance of St. John in the Escorial panel, also betrays a similarly intense focus on Christ's heart. Not only does the red wound in Christ's side stand out dramatically against his pallid skin in the Paris painting, but on the left, St. John the Baptist gestures pointedly to the heart of the lamb he carries on top of his book. Mirroring the placement of the Baptist, but on the right of the altarpiece, St. Denis holds

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[124] *John* 19:34. Beyond evidencing special devotion to the Sacred Heart among the Scheut Carthusians, the illustration in the initial does not seem at first to relate directly to the feast it accompanies. The liturgy of Pentecost does not reference the bleeding heart of Christ, but heart imagery does occur throughout the text: the Collect speaks of "instruct[ing] the hearts of the faithful" (*corda fidelium Sancti Spiritus illustratione docuisti*); the famous Sequence, *Veni Sancte Spiritus,* calls on the "blessed Light divine" (*lux beatissima*) to "shine within these hearts of thine" (*reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium*), to "heal our wounds" (*sana quod est saucium*) and "bend the stubborn heart and will" (*flecte quod est rigidum*); the Gospel bids the faithful to "let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid" (*non turbetur cor vestrum, neque formidet*); the Secret asks that God will "cleanse our hearts by the light of the Holy Spirit" (*et corda nostra Sancti Spiritus illustratione emunda*); and the Postcommunion reiterates that the Lord may "cleanse our hearts … by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: render them fruitful by the inward sprinkling of his heavenly dew" (*Sancti Spiritus, Domine, corda nostra mundet infusio: et sui roris intima aspersione foecundet*). See *The Roman Missal in Latin and English for Every Day in the Year, in Conformity with the Latest Decrees,* ed. Abbot Cabrol, 9th ed. (Tours, France: A. Mame & Sons, [ca. 1936]), 577–581,

his decapitated head, his own martyrdom emulating the Lord as his heart pumps a fountain of blood, not from his side, but from his severed neck.

In *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* the spear wound also takes a place of prominence, standing at the very threshold to the entire exegetical argument of the text. The mystic from Groenendaal begins his seven-point discourse on the "race of love" with a discussion on how to be "freed of all sins."[125] The remaining six points of his treatise, he claims, are contained within this foundational injunction to be purified in the blood of Christ.[126] Ruusbroec then speaks of two cleansing 'stream[s] of grace" emanating, in particular, from the spear wound.[127] In the first of these streams, "Christ mingle[s] with water His inmost blood which ran from His side" to wash away the stain of Adam in baptism.[128] Thereafter, he provides "the sacrament of penitence, which is the other stream of His holy blood" that, like the broad field of red cloth pooling behind the wounded Christ in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* "overflows all rims" and "cannot dry up."[129]

The double flood of Christ's charity, epitomized by the twice-dyed fabric, serves as a pattern for Ruusbroec's readers to follow as they prepare their own spiritual curtains to adorn the sanctuary of their hearts. The mystic describes their meditative labor in language redolent of craftsmanship and artistry, which, in light of the civic associations in Rogier's painting, also calls to mind Brussels' cloth-making industry. The faithful work with a mental warp and woof, beginning with "fine linen twined, bright white, of soft

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[125] D0:31/32, E0:30/31, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D259, E258: "ghevrijt van allen sunden."
[126] See D0:32, E0:31, in ibid.
[127] D1:128, E1:124, in ibid., D273, E272: "riviere van ghenaden."
[128] D1:109/110, E1:105/106, in ibid., D271, E270: "Alsoe ghelikerwijs mingede Cristus sijn innechste bloet, dat ute sire siden liep, met watere."
[129] D1:141, E1:135/136, in ibid., D275, E274: "dat sacrament der penitencien, dat es de andere rivire sijns heilechs bloeds"; D1:147/148, E1:142, in ibid.: "vloeit te allen boerden over"; D1:130, E1:126, in ibid., D273, E272: "Ende si en mach niet verdroeghen."

flax," the color of "goat-hair," before adding segments of blue and violet.[130] For the section of red, these devout artisans shed their own blood to make the dye, "rend[ing] [their] hearts with compassion."[131] This rather violent step in the process of cloth production has a penitential overtone to it, recalling Ruusbroec's counsel from the first book of the treatise that the faithful should approach confession "with sorrow and with woe of heart."[132] The imagery also resonates with the two streams of absolving blood that spilled from Christ's own compassionate heart, "rent" with a spear. In imitation of him, the faithful doubly "tint [their] life" with their own blood as they offer heartfelt love to both God and their fellowmen:

> If we but want to be tiny humble little worms, and to shun what the world seeks […] thus can we make the noble red color which adorns all virtue. For whoever practices charity in virtues spends, by means of his affection and his devotion, his own blood in honor of God, and in service of his fellow Christian.[133]

Moreover, in place of the nails and spear that rent the curtain of Christ's bleeding flesh, Ruusbroec's readers pierce their mystical cloth with needles as they embroider the virtues they wish to emulate—"sweet-smelling red roses" for purity, marigolds for obedience, birds for the guidance of the saints, water lilies for generosity, and a spangling of stars for prayer and pious devotion.[134] The mystic leaves open the possibility for many more allegorical embroideries, each uniquely invented and sewn into the individual curtains of the votary: "Furthermore, onto these four colors we are to set all the

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[130] D4:522/23, E4:503, in ibid., D381, E380: "dobbel byssinen, blickende wit, van sachten vlasse"; D4:519, E4:499, in ibid., D379, E378: "gelijc bocrane."
[131] D2:246/247, E2:232/233, in ibid., D303, E302: "Aldus soude wi onse herte scoren met compassien."
[132] D1:138, E1:133, in ibid., D275, E274: "met rouwe ende met wee van herten."
[133] D2:247, E2:233, in ibid., D303, E302: "verwen onse leven met onsen bloede"; D4:567/574, E4:545/551, in ibid., D385, E384: "Eerst alsoe dat wi cleine oetmoedege woermkene willen sijn ende scuwen dat de werelt soect […]. Alsoe moge wi die edele roede varuwe maken die alle dogede verciert. Want so wie karitate in dogeden ufent, overmids sine affectie ende sine devocie verteret hi sijn eigen bloet in der eren goeds ende in orbore sijns evenkerstens."
[134] D4:599, E4:575, in ibid., D389, E388: "rode rosen van suten gore"; see also D4:593/651, E4:569/623, in ibid., D389, 391, 393, 395; E388, 390, 392, 394.

adornment of virtues which our free will and our understanding, in upright obedience, can devise."[135] Ultimately, this spiritual handiwork should depict "letters and […] images" from the "loving life of our Lord Jesus Christ" to be "rehearse[d] incessantly."[136] In essence, the finished curtains seem to function like mirrors for the soul, presenting the faithful with stitched likenesses of Christ, virtues, and saints to be used as models for imitation and guides as they assess their progress in Ruusbroec's "race of love."[137]

The bloody veil, then, operates both as a lens, through which the votary looks to apprehend God, and also as a mirror-like repository of edifying images that arrest the gaze. In this latter regard, a few of Ruusbroec's specular analogies may help explain the way the embroidered curtain serves as a reflecting, introspective aid. In a discussion of doves to be offered at the temple altar, Ruusbroec compares the scriptures and legends of the saints to the glassy surface of a pool into which the birds gaze to avoid being caught by eagles, flying above them.[138] Later, in an extrapolation on the qualities of ritually clean fish, according to the Mosaic dietary laws, he envisions the inward self dressed first in brown fish scales to emulate the humble Christ and his meek mother, then red scales for the martyrs, green for confessors, and finally white for the virgin saints.[139] The mental image of the reflective surface of these scales enriches Ruusbroec's commentary on pious imitation, as if the soul had donned a suit of armor made from colored mirrors:

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[135] D4:652/654, E4:624/626, in ibid., D395, E394.
[136] D4:2013, E4:1918, in ibid., D543, E542: "met letteren ende met beelden"; D4:2022/2025, E4:1928/30, in ibid.: "ende altoes in onser memori en vernuwen ende veranderen al dat wonder dat god gewracht heeft met sinen vrienden van beginne der werelt, ende sunderlinge die hystorie ende dat minleke leven ons heren Jhesu Cristi."
[137] For the role of meditative images in evaluating the state of a votary's soul, see Walter S. Melion, "Introduction: Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul," in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* ed. Reindert Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).
[138] D5:3849/3855, E5:3621/3626, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D976, E974.
[139] See D5:6209/6252, E5:5855/5895, in ibid., D1209, 1211, 1213; E1208, 1210, 1212.

> After that, we are to clothe our exercise with red scales. That is, that we are to be mindful that, out of love, the Son of God was tortured for our sake. And His passion we are to bear in our memory, as a glorious mirror before our inward eyes, so that we might be mindful of His love and rejoice in every suffering.[140]

In a similar manner, the glowing curtain in Rogier's painting would have inspired the penance and loving devotion of the Carthusians at Scheut as they gazed, as if into a red mirror, on the boundless blood of their redemption, with the crucified Christ and his steadfast mourners arrayed before it like a mystical "embroidery pattern" for imitation. The monks may have thus been prompted to internalize, replicate, and painstakingly sew that image of the pale Calvary group into the curtains of their souls. Drawing their own blood with every stitch, the material of their hearts would eventually conform to the bloody, red wool of Rogier's panel with the body of the Lamb of God hung before it, "shorn" of his garments and seamless coat by the Roman executioners.[141] The brothers could then join Ruusbroec's readers who, after weaving and dying their own sections of vermilion cloth, gaze into their souls and behold Christ's "humanity, which is the mirror of us all."[142]

Turning Outward and Turning Inward

The remainder of this chapter will consider the gazes and gestures of St. John and the Virgin Mary, which operate as additional meditative prompts in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* bolstering the significance of Christ's "twice-dyed" veil of blood. In exploring the new depth that Ruusbroec brings to these prompts, it will be helpful to

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[140] D5:6219/6223, E5:5864/5868, in ibid., D1209, E1208: "Hier na sele wi onse ufeninghe cleeden met roeden scellen. Dat es dat wi ghedinken selen dat de gods sone van minnen ghemaertilijt es omme onsen wille. Ende sine passie sele wi draghen in onse memorie alse enen glorioesen spieghel vore onse inwendeghe oeghen op dat wi sijnre minnen ghedinken ende ons verbliden in allen doeghene."
[141] See *John* 19:23: "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout."
[142] D5:582, E5:553/554, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D627, E626: "sijnre menscheit, die onser alder spiegel es."

consider his *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* alongside *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* Penned in 1359 and sent to a Rich Clare nun, the text frames the Eucharist as the assurance of salvation, the medium for conforming to Christ's image, and the vehicle enabling divine vision. Several mystical mirrors aid the faithful communicant in being united to the Holy Trinity. To this end, Ruusbroec discusses the primordial reflection of God's likeness in each human soul, the spotless and commendable mirror of the Virgin Mary, and Christ, the mirror-image of God.[143] Using these mirrors, contemplatives can open the inner, "onefold eye" to ascertain the blinding light of the Trinity and "gaz[e] with bare sight on the light with the same light. There is eye to eye, mirror to mirror, image to image. With these three [they] are like to God and united with Him."[144]

Divine vision has long been an important attribute of St. John the Revelator, from his discernment of the pre-incarnate Word "in the beginning […] with God" to his singular insight into the nature of the dying Christ, "lifted up" on Calvary's cross as a preamble to his exaltation, when he would be "lifted up" in heaven.[145] Contemplatives regarded the beloved apostle as the great exemplar of the mystical life,[146] and, not surprisingly, the shadow of St. John lies just beneath the surface of many of Ruusbroec's

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[143] See, for instance, D898/969, E844/910, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D283, 285, 287, 289; E282, 284, 286, 288; D1790/1803, E1671/1682, in ibid., D371, E370; D513/514, E482, in ibid., D243, E242.

[144] D1838/1842, E1717/1720, in ibid., D375, E374: "eenvuldeghe ooeghe," "staert met blooeten ghesichte dat licht met den selven lichte. Daer es ooeghe jeghen ooeghe spieghel jeghen spieghel, beelde jeghen beelde. Met desen .iij. sijn wi gode ghelijc ende heme gheeeneght." See also Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* I 28–29.

[145] *John* 1:1, 3:14, 12:32. On the double meaning of crucifixion and exaltation in St. John's use of the phrase, "lifted up," see Josef Heer, "The Soteriological Significance of the Johannine Image of the Pierced Savior," in *Faith in Christ and the Worship of Christ: New Approaches to Devotion to Christ,* ed. Leo Scheffczyk, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 35–36. For the evangelist's witness of Christ as the divine Logos, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17; Robert Deshman, "Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images," *The Art Bulletin* 79 (1997): 538, 541–542.

[146] Hamburger, *St. John the Divine,* 1–2.

comments on spiritual vision. For instance, in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* Ruusbroec digresses from his lengthy explanation of the vices associated with various birds prohibited under Mosaic dietary laws to extol the eagle's special gift of sight. The reference to St. John via his evangelist symbol is not difficult to infer as the mystic compares this bird, which 'stares into the brightness of the sun without flinching," to the contemplative who beholds truth unhindered by images:

> Whoever in his inward-turning can empty himself of all images and forms, and all consideration, and elevate his mind in a bare emptiness, is king in nature, above other people, for he flies unto the greatest height of which nature is capable. And he makes his nest and his rest in his essential being, and he stares into the simple truth […] And his sight is simple and without consideration. And therefore he contemplates the truth without recoiling and without flinching.[147]

At another point in the treatise, Ruusbroec elaborates on passages from the *Book of Ezekiel* and the *Gospel of St. John* to describe the privileged few who, upon reaching a pinnacle of uninhibited vision of God, "receiv[e] the face of the eagle, and a hidden knowledge of God."[148] Not surprisingly, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* which chronicles the votary's journey to see and be united with the Holy Trinity, is punctuated with many citations from St. John, and Ruusbroec's summary of the attributes of a "common life" mystic at the end of *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden blinkenden steen*) imitates language from the prologue to the *Gospel of St. John.*[149]

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[147] D5:6269/6270, E5:5911/5912, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1215, E1214: "staert in claerheit der sonnen sonder wiken"; D5:6277/6284, E5:5918/5926, in ibid., D1215, E1214: "so wat menschen die in sinen inkeere heme gheledeghen can alre beelden ende formen ende alles ghemercs ende sijn ghemoede verheffen in ene bloete ledicheit, hi es een coninc in der naturen boven andere menschen want hi vliecht in dat hoechste dat nature vermach. Ende hi maect sinen nest ende sine raste in sijn wesen ende hi staert in die eenvoldeghe waerheit […] Ende sijn ghesichte es eenvoldich ende sonder ghemerc. Ende daer omme scout hi die waerheit sonder wederslach ende sonder wiken."

[148] D5:4995/4996, E5:4705/4706, in ibid., D1089, E1088: "staet een anschijn des aers ende .i. verborghen kinnesse gods."

[149] I am indebted to Geert Warnar for the observation of references to St. John in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*. For linguistic allusions to St. John's prologue in Ruusbroec's *The Sparkling Stone,* see D936/939, E781/783, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D181, E 180.

In the Escorial *Crucifixion,* the evangelist gazes with a rapt concentration that aligns him with one of Ruusbroec's highest aspirations for mystical experience—a spiritual vision of the divine. As mentioned earlier, Rogier draws further attention to St. John by giving him an unusually portrait-like face, which departs notably from his more standard appearances in the artist's oeuvre. In his white "habit," the beloved disciple models the kind of focused sight that the Carthusians at Our Lady of Grace should have imitated as they gazed at both the painting and the Blessed Sacrament enshrined near it. It is significant that St. John's exemplary stare is unique in the composition. The eyes of the Lord are sightless in death, and the eyes of his grieving mother are downcast and nearly shut. Only the evangelist looks, and yet his sight is not trained directly on the broken and bleeding body of the Lord. Rather, he looks off to the side and into the darkness beyond the red curtain and the stone wall. Ironically, the revelatory epiphany, that has left him astonished with creased brow and slightly opened mouth, remains invisible to viewers of the painting.

Interestingly, in Ruusbroec's writings the transcendent height of spiritual vision is equally austere, barren, and paradoxically imageless. It is "a stilled emptiness" with neither "time nor place … nor shape, nor color," "empty of heart," and a "waste void in the bareness of our essence."[150] In this same vein, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* exhorts readers to "lift up [their] eyes" to behold the "living life" flowing from the Trinity, only to characterize the sacred vista before their "gazing eyes" as an impenetrable emptiness—a "glorious abyss" and a bottomless, formless chasm "of the richness of

[150] D5:228, E5:222, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D589, E588: "ene gestilde ledecheit"; D2048/2049, E1910/1911, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D395, E394: "tijd noch stat […] forme noch ghedeente noch varwe"; D165, E156, in ibid., D209, E208: "ledegh van herten"; D4:1854/55, E4:1769, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D527, E524: "dese woeste idelheit ane te siene ende te besittene in bloetheit ons wesens."

God."[151] In a complementary way, the lightning bolt of revelatory sight transfixing St. John's face coincides jarringly with the dismal aftermath of Christ's death, when the heavens darkened and the temple curtain was torn asunder. And yet this moment of greatest despair and emptiness was also a moment of converting vision for one of the Romans attending the execution on Calvary: "And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that [Jesus] so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."[152] A similar epiphany is said to have enlightened the soldier who pierced the side of Christ, identified in legend as the blind St. Longinus. Blood from the Sacred Heart ran down the spear and anointed St. Longinus's eyes, healing him from both physical blindness and the spiritual blindness of his paganism. The darkness that gave way to a revelatory eyewitness for both St. Longinus and the centurion make them apt comparisons for the Escorial St. John and the stirring vision that enlightens his eyes, even in the dismal shadows of the cross.

Many Crucifixion scenes, including the right panel of the *Diptych of Jeanne de France,* associated with Rogier's workshop and dated to ca. 1460, include St. Longinus and the centurion among the throng of spectators at Golgotha (Fig. 1.24). In this particular painting, these two men bridge the divide separating the Lord's tormentors from his grieving disciples and structure a fascinating commentary on corporeal versus spiritual sight. In the upper left of the panel, St. Longinus points to his blind eyes, while a soldier helps him direct his lance toward the dead Christ. The righteous mourners, grouped just below the blind man along the left edge of the composition, willfully choose

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[151] D1730/1733, E1617/1620, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D365, E364: "Nu heft dan op uwe ooeghen boven redene ende boven alle unfeninghe van dooghden, ende siet ane met minnenden gheeste, met starenden ooeghen dat levende leven, dat orsprong ende sake es alles levens ende alre heilecheit. Dat es ane te siene alse .i. glorioos abys der rijcheit gods […]"
[152] *Mark* 15:39.

to be sightless themselves by averting their eyes from the execution, as if no longer needing physical sight to confirm the perfect vision of their faith. The Magdalene is the one exception. She gazes up at the Lord and lifts her hands in a manner similar to St. John in the Escorial *Crucifixion.* The right portion of the panel, by contrast, is given over to the unbelievers, who fulfill prophecy in failing to perceive Christ's divinity, even though nearly all of them stare intently at him: "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."[153] The believing centurion sits on his horse in the right foreground, directly across from the Magdalene. Like her, his corporeal sight of the cross has not obstructed the vision of his heart, and he lifts his hand dramatically into the dark sky as a banderole proclaims his declaration of faith, "*Vere filius Dei erat.*"

St. Longinus is mentioned specifically in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* as the "knight who pierced [Christ's] dead body," and Ruusbroec even characterizes him as a priest, since his spear opened the floodgates of "holy baptism and the other sacraments which purify us from sins."[154] It is appropriate that the mystic refers to these streams of Christ's cleansing blood as the "floods of night," "which wash away, in faith, the night of darkness," since St. Longinus performed his priestly act inadvertently, during the

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[153] *John* 12:40.

[154] D5:4626/4628, E5:4357/4359, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1053, E1052: "die riddere die met den speere den doeden lichame in sine side stac. Ende daer ute vloyde ons die heileghe doepe ende die andere sacramente die ons suveren van sonden." As an interesting side note, a manuscript from 1515 reveals that the Gospels' account of the converted centurion was planned to feature in one of the windows making up the extensive stained glass cycle undertaken in the Scheut cloister during the early sixteenth century. Mostly dedicated to Old Testament typology, the cycle also contained some New Testament scenes, including six devoted to the Crucifixion. In one, the centurion stood with a banderole reading, "Verus filius Dei erat Iste." See Yvonne Bleyerveld, "De bijbelse geschiedenis in glas. Een geschreven beeldprogramma voor een reeks glasramen in de pandgang van het klooster Scheut (circa 1515)," *Millennium tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies* 23 (2009): 44–77, esp. 70.

darkness of his unbelief and just after the shadows enveloping Jerusalem had lifted.[155] Newly "baptized" in blood, the blind soldier could suddenly see past the dead man nailed to the cross and behold the divinity of the Son of God with blinding clarity.

In the same manner, St. John's eyewitness on Calvary extends beyond the suffering humanity of Christ to glimpse his divinity. Immediately after reporting the piercing of the Lord's side, the evangelist writes: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, … They shall look on him whom they pierced."[156] In the Vienna *Crucifixion* and the Uffizi *Entombment,* Rogier underscores the authority of the apostle's testimony of the Passion by depicting a pen and ink well in his possession (Figs. 1.25 and 1.26).[157] The Escorial panel, by contrast, does not invite viewers to corroborate the painted narrative with St. John's written account so much as it encourages them to join him in looking on the pierced God. Although most viewers could not have duplicated the penetrating gaze of the eagle-eyed evangelist into the blinding abyss, they could have emulated his spiritual insight at different levels of vision. His invitation to faith—"that ye might believe"— urges them to follow his gaze through the rent veil of the Old Law and into the new Holy of Holies of the divine tabernacle. It is the same directive indicated by the hand of the dead Savior in Campin's Hermitage *Trinity,* who gestures the votary to look to redemption through the parted curtains of his wounded side.

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[155] D5:1438/1440, E5:1361/1363, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D737, E736: "die vloede der nacht … die ave dwaen in den gheloeve die nacht der donkerheit."
[156] *John* 19:35–37.
[157] See Acres, "Rogier van der Weyden's Painted Texts," 97–101.

To this effect, Rogier's blood-red cloth of honor that so elegantly re-fashions the Escorial panel's narrative of Christ's death into a "transhistorical" icon becomes a pivotal mechanism in the painting, prompting viewers to meditate on deeper theological mysteries, akin to, if not identical with, St. John's imageless revelation in the darkness. On the one hand, the sharp creases in the textile, its green fringe, and its probable reference to the Burgundian wool industry foreground the materiality of the cloth as a skillfully painted illusion of real, tactile material. Yet at a certain point, Rogier's stark composition, so constrained in its color palette, invites a much more abstract view of the red rectangle behind Christ, fostering a kind of contemplation that focuses simply on the intense scarlet hue, independent of the fictive fabric it describes. This type of meditation—centered in something as immaterial, formless, and "unimaged" as a field of color—allows for a new level of mystical discernment, one that goes well beyond the trope of the veil as a mirror-like repository of embroidered images. Indeed, it becomes a type for the supernal, visionary cognition that transcends all "figured" types.

Ruusbroec helps explain the way that votaries could use this expanse of saturated color backing the crucified Christ to hone their spiritual perception. One of the most strikingly visual sections in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* is its typological exposition on the Apostles' Creed. The mystic associates each of the precious stones in the breastplate of the Jewish high priest with one of the twelve disciples, using the jewels' physical properties of color and light refraction to craft nuanced visions of Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and divinity. This rhetorical masterpiece engages the reader in an apostolic confession of faith expressed through abstract images, like visionary manifestations formed from the colored light shining through the gems' translucent facets. For instance,

St. Thomas's sapphire is described as "yellow with purple color, and seems mixed with gold powder," thus evoking Christ's Entombment: "For when His noble soul went to hell, His body lay in the grave: yellow, by being bereft of the soul; purple, by His bloody wounds; mixed with gold powder, by the fact that it was united to the godhead."[158] St. James the Great's witness of the Incarnation is set forth even more abstractly, with the image of the Word made flesh taking shape from the verdant associations implicit in the color green:

> In this article we liken the son of God to the lovely stone, called emerald, which is so green that leaves and grass and everything that is green cannot compare to its greenness. And it fills and feeds each person's vision which considers it, by means of its greenness. That the eternal Word of the Father became man is the greenest color that was ever seen.[159]

Similarly, the green of St. James the Less's jasper stone imprints the mystery of the Ascension on the mind of the viewer like a mental "after-image" emblazoned on the retina: "And therefore we liken it to the ascension of our Lord, which was green and lovely in the eyes of the apostles and so enjoyable that afterward, they could not forget it their whole life long."[160] By contrast, St. Andrew's testimony of Christ's humanity relies not on color but on the dazzling refraction of sunlight in an uncarved topaz:

> And in the reflection of the sun, the topaz transcends all stones in brilliance. So, likewise, is the humanity of Christ transcending in brilliance […] [a]nd in this

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[158] D5:1263/1264, E5:1198, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D719, E718: "gheel met purpur varuwen ende scijnt met gout pulvere gheminghet"; D5:1267/1270, E5:1201/1204, in ibid., D721, E720: "Want doen sine edele ziele voer ter hillen, doen lach sijn lichame in den grave, gheel overmids beroevinghe der zielen, purperen overmids sine bloedeghe wonden, gheminct met gout pulvere overmids dat hi gheenecht was der godheit."

[159] D5:1193/1198, E5:1133/1137, in ibid., D713, E712: "In desen artikele gheliken wi dien sone goods dien graciosen steene die smaragdus hetet, die alsoe groene es dat loef ende ghers ende al dat grune es, sijnre groenheit niet gheliken en mach. Ende hi vervult ende spijst elcs menschen ghesichte diene anesiet overmids sine groenheit. Dat dat eweghe woert dies vaders mensche worden es, dat es die groenste varuwe die ie ghesien wart."

[160] D5:1294/1297, E5:1228/1230, in ibid., D723, E722: "Ende hier omme ghelike wine der opvaert ons heren, die groene was ende gracious in dien ogen der apostelen ende alsoe ghelustelec dat sijs daer na in al haren levene niet vergheten en mochten."

> way, by means of its great brilliance, the topaz also draws into itself and fills with images the vision of all to whom it is present.[161]

Of special pertinence to Rogier's painting is Ruusbroec's discussion of red jewels. He associates St. Peter's declaration of faith in God the Father at the opening of the Creed with carnelian, "blood-red, like red earth" and "the least expensive of all gemstones."[162] He then explains that, like the undervalued carnelian, Christ was overlooked, rejected, and killed by ignorant builders who failed to acknowledge him as the great rock anchoring together the fabric of *Ecclesia* at the "head of the corner."[163] Incidentally, St. Peter, whose name means "stone," plays a complementary role in this analogy as the bedrock of leadership undergirding Christ's newly constructed Church. Moreover, those who are "united by faith and love to the noble red stone, that is Christ Jesus, […] are enlightened, and led by faith into a supernatural knowledge of His Father."[164] Indeed, St. Peter's apostolic vision of God is mediated through Christ, as if the "prince of the apostles" were looking through the carnelian itself:

> And by the revelation of the Father, [St. Peter] became a son of sight. And therefore, he saw, in spirit the Son united to our humanity, and he said: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." And he also saw, into the midst, that is, between the Father and the Holy Spirit, the centermost Person, the same Son in the unity of divine nature. And by means of the same intermediary, that is, by the Son, he also saw the eternal Father, who is the eternal beginning of the Holy Trinity.[165]

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[161] D5:1156/1165, E5:1097/1106, in ibid., D709, E708: "Ende in dien wederblicke der sonnen onthoecht die thopaes in claerheiden allen ghesteinte. Alsoe ghelikerwijs es die menscheit Cristi onthogende in claerheiden … [e]nde in deser wijs trect ende verbeelt oec die thopaes alle ghesichten in heme die hi jeghewordech es overmids sine groete claerheit."

[162] D5:1098/1099, E5:1043/1044, in ibid., D703, E702: "bloedachtech roet ghelijc roeder erden ende hi es die ondierste gemme onder alle ghesteinten."

[163] See D5:1123/1129, E5:1066/71, in ibid., D705, 707; E704, 706; *Matthew* 21:42.

[164] D5:1100/1103, E5:1044/1047, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D703, E702: "Want alse wi gheenecht werden overmids gheloeve ende minne den edelen roeden stene, dat es Cristus Jhesus, soe werden wi overmids hem verlicht ende met gheloeve gheleid in een overnaturlec kinnesse sijns vader."

[165] D5:1109, E5:1053, in ibid., D705, E704: "die een prince es der apostelen"; D5:1110/1117, E5:1054/1060, in ibid. D705, E704: "Ende hi wart overmids oppenbaringhe des vaders een sone des ghesichs. Ende hier omme sach hi in den gheeste den sone gheenecht onser menscheit ende sprac: 'Du best Cristus, dies levende goods sone.' Ende hi sach oec in midden, dat es tusschen den vader ende den

Ruusbroec gives extra weight to the spiritual vision afforded by this Christological gem, for he also associates the stone with Reuben, son of the patriarch Jacob, who is a typological "figure for St. Peter" and whose name means "a son of sight, or the one who sees the son, or the one who sees into the midst, or by means of the intermediary."[166] The inexpensive, "blood-red" carnelian underscores that, in a paradoxical way, the abased, undervalued humanity of Christ—colored red with the blood of his Passion—does not impede apprehension of the divine God hidden in mortal flesh. Rather, for a "son of sight" like St. Peter, the visage of the tortured man on Calvary becomes a translucent medium, opening a vision into Christ's resplendent unity with the Trinity.

Ruusbroec's sentiments on vision, translucence, and red stones resonate intriguingly with a series of Holy Face images, literally made from precious, orange-red amber not long after the mystic's death. Their manipulation of color and material is instructive in understanding the mediating role of the field of "twice-dyed" scarlet in Rogier's painting. During the late Middle Ages, amber was mined in Prussia and exported by the Knights of the Teutonic Order to wealthy patrons and market centers, such as Bruges. A Holy Face from Munich's Bavarian National Museum (Fig. 1.27), one from the Wallace Collection in London (Fig. 1.28), and a recently acquired specimen at the Cloisters Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Fig. 1.29) represent some of the oldest extant carvings in the medium. Dated circa 1380–1400, all

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heileghen gheest, den middelsten persoen, den selven sone in enecheit godleker naturen. Ende hi sach oec overmids dat selve middel, dat es overmids den sone, den eweghen vader, die een ewech ane beghin es der heilegher triniteit."

[166] D5:1105/1108, E5:1049/1052, in ibid., D703, 705; E702, 704: "Want Ruben, die ierste sone her Jacobs, die ene figure was van sinte Petre, dese Ruben luud alsoe vele als een sone dies ghesichs, ochte die siet den sone, ochte die siet in midden ocht overmids dat middel."

three images are associated with either Bruges or Königsberg and represent the countenance of Christ floating against his cruciform halo in the tradition of the *Mandylion* of Edessa, an icon-portrait created miraculously when cloth was pressed to the Lord's face.[167]

Like the jewels extolled by Ruusbroec, amber can be radiantly translucent, a quality that doubtlessly contributed to its popularity as a material for rosary beads, which would have glowed with sunlight as worshipers strung them through their hands or carried them on their belts. In the case of the Munich and London Holy Face carvings, the luminous nature of the amber has been compromised by silver mounts affixed to the sides and backs of the stones.[168] The New York example, however, has either lost its mount or never had one.[169] Illuminated with light, the swirling layers of fossilized tree sap still effect a liquid-like consistency, the polished stone seeming to pool and flow as it shifts in timbre from pale gold to murky vermilion. The material's correspondence with blood is difficult to overlook, especially given amber's natural warmth.[170] Carved to mimic Edessa's sacred copy of Christ's mortal features, the very substance of the stone bears witness to God's Incarnation in flesh and blood. The images, however, could also reference another miraculous self-portrait of the Lord—the *sudarium* of St. Veronica, "painted" by Christ with his own sweat and blood as he wiped his face on a cloth during his agonizing march to Calvary.

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[167] For a discussion of late medieval amber mining, the oldest surviving amber objects, and these three Holy Face images in particular, see Rachel King, "Rethinking 'the oldest surviving amber in the West'." *Burlington Magazine* 155 (November 2013): 756–762. On the identification of the *Mandylion* iconography, see ibid., 759.
[168] Ibid., 759.
[169] King notes that indents in the halo of the New York example could have been concealed by a mount. Ibid., 759–760.
[170] Ibid., 762.

The large eyes, outlined in paint, and staring solemnly out from the New York Holy Face, invite viewers to look back, to meet Christ's gaze, and to plumb the glowing depths of his bleeding countenance for a devotional experience similar to Ruusbroec's "sons of sight," who strain to see God through the intermediary of his son. Although the backings on the Munich and London ambers inhibit the votary from literally gazing through the stone, the compositions are not without figurative references to light and translucence, which remind the viewer of the luminosity latent in the material.[171] The London carving, probably used as a pax and framed in a broad setting ornamented with enamel angels, flowers, and a bird, carries an inscription alluding to the light of Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. He who follows me walks not in darkness [and he will have] eternal peace."[172]

The mount for the Munich Holy Face also makes use of enamel, and on its reverse it depicts the Trinity at the Mercy Seat in silver gilt, set against a glowing blue background (Fig. 1.30).[173] As in the stained glass roundel from Saint-Denis, the crucified Christ is held up by God the Father as the great, priestly mediator at the Ark of the Covenant, while the dove of the Holy Spirit hovers above the cross (Fig. 1.17). Essentially, the two sides of this amber image work together to assert that the tortured humanity of Christ's Incarnation provides both visionary and salvific access to the Father.

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[171] On the Munich amber's translucence and devotional reference to "see[ing] through a glass darkly" (1 *Corinthians* 13:12), see Barbara Drake Boehm and Jiří Fajt, eds., *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia, 1347–1437* (New York City: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 200, cat. no. 64. King contends, however, that the presence of silver mounts in the Munich and London examples indicates that neither work made use of the translucent quality of the amber. A similar ambivalence to the effects of light seems to characterize the New York Holy Face, which still bears paint on its surface. King, 759.

[172] Ibid., 760: "Ego sum via veritas et vita quia sequitar / me non ambulant in / tenebris et pacem eternal[m]." For the suggestion that the carving functioned as a pax, see ibid. The inscription is an amalgamation of scripture taken from *John* 8:12 and 14:6, the former explicitly developing the reference to light: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

[173] With the amber rendered opaque from its silver backing, King points to the enamel as the only material demonstrating light reflection and luminosity. Ibid., 759.

On the obverse, the blood-red Holy Face, carved in luminous—if no longer translucent—amber, is the plastic, three-dimensional front for the flattened, shining image of the Trinity on its reverse, in precisely the way that the mortal Christ gives shape and substance to the ineffable Godhead. The enamel and silver-gilt tabernacle-throne on the reverse, then, is concealed and revealed both by the curtain of Christ's broken body on the cross before it and also by his amber face, which seems to have taken shape from his own blood.

The vermilion veil in the Escorial *Crucifixion*—fashioned from crystalline cinnabar that, like Ruusbroec's humble carnelian stone, is also "blood-red, like red earth"—serves a similar, mediating function. In its color and material, the cloth facilitates contemplation of the sacrificial body of the Lord, and it prompts exegetical meditation on the nature of the Trinity, perceived through the bleeding curtain of Christ's flesh. Furthermore, this swath of vermilion pigment animates and amplifies the converting vision of St. Longinus, who opened his formerly sightless eyes and, in a red haze of healing, baptizing blood, affirmed the divinity of the son of God. It also frames St. John's invitation to believe in the Lord, whom he witnessed wounded and red in the blood of his pierced heart. In all these instances, the scarlet field of Christ's blood marks the threshold between the limitations of corporeal sight and the depth of revelatory vision, in much the way that a partially transparent gem or a silk veil can both conceal and reveal heavenly realities so incomprehensible that, for Ruusbroec, they can only be articulated in terms of darkness and emptiness.

Not surprisingly, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* casts St. John's contribution to the Creed in ruby-red tones as the beloved disciple describes Christ's suffering under Pontius

Pilate. Interestingly, the rhetorical image that accompanies this article of the Faith resembles Rogier's painterly juxtaposition of radiant scarlet with deep shadows in the Escorial panel: "Thus was Christ, our ruby stone, fiery as a burning coal […] and particularly in His passion and when He was crucified. And in His death, He became so brightly flashing that all the darkness of sins cannot overcome the splendor."[174] Both text and painting recall the prologue to the *Gospel of St. John* when the evangelist describes the light of Christ, which "shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not."[175] For viewers who imitated St. John's intent gaze as they contemplated Rogier's painting, the "twice-dyed" red of the curtain would have filled their vision. Like the jasper-green that was seared into the minds of the apostles who witnessed Christ's Ascension, the pool of vermilion may have lingered with the Scheut Carthusians as an after-image, encasing their memory in the saturated hue of Christ's mediating blood, even after they had looked away from the painting.

Ruusbroec's text helps readers understand part of what St. John may have perceived when he witnessed the piercing of Christ's side and gazed through the Lord's ruby veil of blood into the burning red of his Sacred Heart. The *Spiritual Tabernacle* explains that Christ's physical suffering on Calvary was only an outward manifestation of his "inward activity," the agonizing torment that played out with greatest intensity within his soul.[176] Ruusbroec uses markedly liturgical imagery to expound this solitary Passion of the heart and relates it to the annual ritual performed by the Old Testament high priest,

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[174] D5:1241/1245, E5:1177/1180, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D717, E716: "Aldus was Cristus onse carbonkel steen, vierech alse een berrende cole … ende sunderlinghe in sire passien ende doe hi ghecruset wart. Ende in sire dooet es hi soe clare blickende worden dat alle donkerheit der sunden die claerheit niet verwinnen en mach."
[175] *John* 1:5.
[176] D5:4588, E5:4321, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1049, E1048: "inwendeghe werc."

who likewise officiated before the Mercy Seat alone and hidden, deep within the tabernacle. "Clad in virtues as a deacon or a minor priest," Christ swings "a censer full of burning coals, namely, His heart full of burning love," and rends the curtain of the Holy of Holies, cleansing the sanctuary in his blood.[177] Rogier's fictive woolen veil, which calls to mind the rites and sacred accoutrements of the Jewish tabernacle, prompts viewers to look "internally" with St John and imagine the hidden, priestly Passion that "was the (very) inspiration of His outward suffering."[178]

In fact, Rogier has stripped away much of the "exterior view" of the Lord's execution as it appears in his Berlin, Abegg, and Vienna *Crucifixions* (Figs. 1.31 and 1.32). In the Scheut painting there are no anguished angels or groups of mourning women. A stone wall blocks any glimpse of Jerusalem on the horizon, and the sky has been drained of color. A profound silence and stillness permeates the composition. Even the breeze that routinely twists the long ends of Christ's loincloth into calligraphic lines has stopped blowing.[179] Rogier has telescoped the viewers' attention inward toward the quiet, tear-streaked face of Christ. St. John's preoccupied trance heightens the numbing effect of the painting, while the Virgin's downward, soul-searching glance takes the inward trajectory even deeper as she ponders another "hidden passion," the inner *Compassio* that wracked her own heart with acute pain.

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[177] D5:4602, E5:4334/4335, in ibid., D1051, E1050: "met doechden ghecleedt alse .i. dyaken ochte .i. clein priester"; D5:4564/4565, E5:4299, in ibid., D1047, E1046: "i. wieroec vat vol berrender colen, dat was sijn herte vol berrender minnen"; D5:4560/4586, E5:4295/4319, in ibid., D1047, 1049; E1046, 1048.
[178] D5:4590, E5:4323/4324, in ibid., D1049, E1048: "het was die forme des doeghens van buten."
[179] Acres, "Rogier van der Weyden's Painted Texts" 98. Acres contrasts the movement, blowing loincloth, and narrative detail in the Vienna *Crucifixion* with the timeless mood of the Philadelphia and Escorial *Crucifixions.* See also Shirley Blum's comments on the floating cloth in the "windless" Philadelphia *Crucifixion.* Guy C. Bauman and Walter A. Liedtke, eds., *Flemish Paintings in America: A Survey of Early Netherlandish and Flemish Paintings in the Public Collections of North America* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1992), 51.

This palpable sense of introspection invites the votary to focus on the center and "inner heart" of the composition—the wound in Christ's side. As mentioned earlier, the red of the curtain frames and reiterates the red of the wound so that the bloody veil elides with the torn curtain of Christ's flesh, granting access to a Holy of Holies in the Sacred Heart. To perceive the hidden depths of Christ's suffering, obscured in the blood of his silent liturgy, viewers of Rogier's painting may have imaginatively approached the heart of Jesus. In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* Ruusbroec describes such a pilgrimage: "For He shall unfurl His glorious loving heart for you, and the innermost of His soul, all full of glory, grace, joy, and fidelity […] [t]he open wound in His side shall be your gate to eternal life."[180]

St. John evinces the revelatory effects of this enlightened view into the interior suffering of Christ's heart not only by his astonished expression but also by the position of his upturned head and outstretched hands. This same posture occurs elsewhere in Rogier's oeuvre and consistently accompanies divine vision. In the *Bladelin Triptych,* the balding magus in the foreground adopts a similar position as he beholds the Star of Bethlehem reconfigured into a heavenly image of the Christ Child (Fig. 1.33). In the Beaune *Last Judgment,* several of the apostles lift their hands in adoration as they watch the celestial judge consign the dead to paradise and hell (Fig. 1.34). But St. John's gesture most closely mirrors the stance of the Virgin Mary in the *Miraflores Triptych,*[181]

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[180] D54/58, E52/55, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D197, E196: "Want hi sal u openen sine gloriose, minnende herte ende die binnenste sijnre zielen, al vol glorien, gratien ende vrouden ende trouwen … [d]ie opene wonde sijnre ziden sal sijn uwe pooerte in dat eeweghe leven."

[181] Lorne Campbell also has observed this similarity, although he makes no comment on its significance. See Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 51. For general comments on this gesture's association with sanctity, see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 66. For other citations on the gesture's significance, see Jules Destrée, *Roger de la Pasture van der Weyden,* 2 vols (Paris, Brussels: Les Éditions G. Van Oest, 1930), 97; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 263; Larry Silver, "Old-Time

where the Mother of God lifts her arms and face in wonder to see her dead son triumphantly resurrected from the grave (Fig. 1.35).

Theologically, the beloved disciple's divine vision secured him a special identification with Christ, even casting him as an *alter Christus*.[182] This transformation into a type of Christ is explicated in St. John's own Gospel, when the dying Lord entrusts his mother to the evangelist's care: "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"[183] Devotees of St. John understood these words to have carried the same transformative power as Christ's declaration at the Last Supper: "Take, eat; this is my body" and "this is my blood of the new testament."[184] The Lord's pronouncement on Calvary became a kind of Consecration, "transubstantiating" St. John into another son of the Virgin Mary.[185] Ruusbroec's *The Twelve Beguines* (*Vanden XII beghinen*) further emphasizes this point, declaring that St. John "received the noble virgin into his care, just as if she had been his own mother by grace and by nature."[186] Significantly, the evangelist was likewise understood to participate in Christ's priesthood, assisting at the first sacrifice of the mass on Calvary.[187] The position of St. John's hands in the Escorial *Crucifixion* even resembles the gesture of

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Religion: Bernart van Orley and the Devotional Tradition," *Pantheon* 56 (1998): 75; James D. Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit': The Iconography of the Appearance of Christ to His Mother," *The Art Bulletin* 39 (March 1957): 23.

[182] *John* 1:1. See Hamburger, *St. John the Divine,* 4–5, 17; Deshman, "Another Look at the Disappearing Christ," 538, 541–542.

[183] *John* 18:26–27.

[184] *Matthew* 26:26, 28.

[185] Hamburger, *St. John the Divine,* 165–166, 175–176.

[186] D2c1362/1364, E2c1261/1262, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* ed. Mikel M. Kors, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vols. 7–7A, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), D529, 531; E528, 530: "Ende hy ontfinc die edel maghet in sijnder hoeden, rechte als ochte si hadde gheweest zyn eyghen moeder van ghenaden ende van natueren."

[187] Hamburger, *St. John the Divine,* 165–166, 170.

a priest presiding at the Eucharist.[188] Having looked into the hidden tabernacle of Christ's heart and witnessed his wrenching, "inward passion," the eagle-eyed apostle humbly lifts his own hands to emulate the great high "priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec"[189] who, with outstretched arms pinned in place on the cross, eternally consecrates the oblation of his own body and blood.

The priestly evangelist, vested in his white, Carthusian-like robes, makes an ideal exemplar for those monks at the Our Lady of Grace Charterhouse who were also ordained priests. His stance and gaze would have inspired them to identify with Christ so closely that, like St. John, they could share in his Passion and glimpse his divine nature as they ministered at the altar. In alluding to a priest's mystical crucifixion with Christ, Rogier was tapping into a devotional trope deeply cherished by the Carthusians. In fact, for masses celebrated within the walls of their charterhouses, the priests of St. Bruno's Order were permitted to depart from the standard gesture of prayer used during the Consecration and instead arrange their arms in the shape of a cross, liturgically "crucifying" themselves as the elements before them transformed into Christ's body and blood.[190] For Ruusbroec, the relationship between the Eucharistic Christ and his people was so close that he describes priests and communicants being offered, consecrated, elevated, and even eaten, as if they had become hosts themselves. For instance, just as a priest offers bread to God, so Christ "offer[s] Himself and us, with His humble death, to the graciousness of His Father."[191] In *The Spiritual Tabernacle* the devout priest is

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[188] Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 196.
[189] D322, E279/280, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D191, E190: "inwendighe doghen"; *Hebrews* 5:6; 7:3.
[190] Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 196.
[191] D861/862, E811/812, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D279, E278: "Hi offerde hem ende ons, met sijnre ooedmoedegher dooet, der ghenadegheit sijns vader."

"consecrated to God," and "Christ gives him His power so that with Him he can bear the sins of the world, and pray for them."[192] Moreover, whereas the Lamb of God is elevated above the altar in a mystical reenactment of the raising of the cross, the priest "elevates himself […] and gives himself a second time into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ."[193] Finally, in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* the incarnate God's unity with his people is styled as a mutual sacramental banquet in which the faithful 'shall always eat and be eaten."[194]

These cooperative oblations, in which Christ, the priest, and the communicants are each sacrificed liturgically, correlate with another meditative argument in *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* that of holocaustic sacrifice. Throughout the treatise, the "twice-dyed" scarlet hue that occupies such an important place in Ruusbroec's exegesis is consistently associated with burning. Up to this point, this chapter has focused primarily on the color's allusion to blood, both the selfless blood of Christ, poured out as he "d[ied] of love for the sins of the world," and also the charitable blood of his imitators spent in honor of God and neighbor.[195] The sacrificial blood of loving hearts, however, is also inextricably connected to the brilliant red flames of the burnt offerings at the Mosaic tabernacle. The mystic from Groenendaal speaks of Christ as the paschal lamb, "roasted for us on the cross, in the fire of love and of martyrdom," and in the section of his treatise

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[192] D5:3474, E5:3271/3272, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D939, E938: "hi es gode gheheilecht"; D5:3478/3479, E5:3275/327, in ibid.: "Ende Cristus die gheeft heme sine macht op dat hi met heme draghen ende verbidden moghe die sonden der werelt."
[193] D5:3482/3484, E5:3279/3281, in ibid., D939, E938: "so verheft hi hem selven … ende gheeft heme anderwerf in die hande ons heren Jhesu Cristi."
[194] D777, E732, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D271, E270: "aldus selen wi altoes eten ende werden gheten."
[195] D5:3816/3817, E5:3590/3591, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D973, E972: "van minnen stervende vore die sonden der werelt."

exhorting readers to weave spiritual veils in honor of the Lord's blood-red charity, Ruusbroec expounds on the relationship between fire and cloth dyed in worms' blood:

> And it is twice-dyed red, and like a fire, for it unites us with God and with our fellow-Christian … [a]nd thus he has the fiery color called flaming-red, for it burns up all shortcomings and it perfects all virtues. Therefore, he wears the wedding garment, the noble scarlet mantle which Christ, the noble humble lover, wore on the day of love when He spent His blood in love and brought to perfection the works of highest charity in honor of His Father and in service of all people.[196]

Enriched by Ruusbroec's writings, the red curtain in the Escorial *Crucifixion* can be seen not only as the veil of Christ's blood but also the scorching fire beneath the altar of his cross and the inspiration for the votary's fervent self-sacrifice. This inventive merging of fire and blood suggests an exegetical reading of a passage from *The Acts of the Apostles,* repurposed in Ruusbroec's mystical theology and in Rogier's distillation of the Passion: "And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke."[197] Fire imagery figures frequently in Ruusbroec's *oeuvre* as a rhetorical device illustrating an exalted level of unity with God, when the contemplative is "burned up" in divine light.[198]

Interestingly, in *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* the believers who labor on their mental tabernacles encounter this fire of heavenly light through a 'shadow" cast by the person of Christ, a concept which Ruusbroec unfolds in typological and etymological arguments.

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[196] D5:4235/4236, E5:3988/3989, in ibid., D1015, E1014: "dat ons ghebraden es ane den cruce in dat vier der minnen ende der maertilien"; D4:566/579, E4:543/556, in ibid., D385, 387; E384, 386: "Ende si es dobbel roet ende gelijc den viere, want si enecht ons met gode ende met onsen evenkersten … [e]nde alsoe hevet hi die virege varuwe diemen vlammech noemt, want si verberrent alle gebreke ende si volmaect alle dogede. Ende hier omme hevet hi dat brulocht cleet, dien edelen coccinen mantel, omme dien Cristus, die hoge oetmoedege minnere, droech in den dage der minnen, doen hi sijn bloet in minnen verteerde ende die werke der hoechster karitaten volbrachte in die ere sijns vaders ende in orbore alre minscen."

[197] *Acts* 2:19. I am indebted to Walter S. Melion for this insight.

[198] For an excellent analysis of this theme, see Paul Mommaers, introduction to *Vanden blinkenden steen,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. H. Noë, trans. André Lefevere, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 10, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 15–16.

As his readers rebuild the holy tent and re-fashion the Ark of the Covenant within their hearts, the mystic enjoins them to become Beseleel and Oliab, the Old Testament craftsmen who oversaw the construction of the tabernacle. Beseleel, whose name means "the shadow of God, or a divine overshadowing," is especially pertinent to Ruusbroec's discussion.[199] He exhorts the faithful to consider carefully the names of Beseleel's ancestors. Ur, the architect's grandfather, means "light, or fire, or burning up, or a window," and Uri, son of Ur, means "my light, or my fire, or my burning-up, or my opening."[200] These names become the basis for an elaborate discourse on the glowing attributes of God, particularly his love, and the mystic advises his readers to replicate this shining genealogy in their hearts, so that Beseleel, his father, and grandfather can be "born in us."[201]

Appropriately, Beseleel, the "shadow of God," stands at the end of a genealogical line of effulgent family members, as if he were silhouetted against their light. His name teaches Ruusbroec's spiritual architects how to imitate Christ so closely that they become shadows of God themselves. Specifically, the mystic explains that Christ's humanity intercepts the light of his divinity, creating a shadow that can be impressed on the will of

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[199] D4:372, E4:356/357, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel*, D365, E364: "ene scaduwe goeds, ocht een godlec omme scaduwen"; see also D4:129/130, E4:124/125, in ibid., D341, E340. Ruusbroec reiterates this injunction at the end of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* during his discussion of the Ark of the Covenant. See D6:29/30, E6:28/29, in ibid., D1265, E1264.

[200] D4:165/166, E4:157, in ibid., D343, E342: "licht, och vier, ochte verberren, ochte ene venstere"; D4:236/237, E4:226, in ibid., D351, E350: "mijn licht, ochte mijn vier, ochte mijn verberren, ochte mine oepeninge."

[201] D4:234, E4:224, in ibid., D351, E350: "geboren in ons"; see also D4:303/309, E4:294/297, in ibid., D357, 359; E356. 358. For Ruusbroec's lengthy etymological discourse, see D4:137/316, E4:131/303, in ibid., D341, 343, 345, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357, 359; E340, 342, 344, 346, 348, 350, 352, 354, 356, 358.

humble, obedient souls.[202] This shadow-image of Christ guides the votary's movements, both internally and externally:

> You know well that a shadow always moves in conformity with every movement of that from which it arises and follows it in all its ways. If then we are the shadow of God through obedience of will, we must follow the Spirit of God and Its motion within, and we must follow the humanity of our Lord and His teaching without, both in counsel and in the commandments.[203]

In a larger sense, it is significant that the creator of the Mosaic tabernacle and all its vessels, vestments, and furniture, is epitomized, not by light or fire, but by a shadow, which is an image—albeit an ephemeral one—with shape and contour.

Beseleel's artifice in creating the sacred objects of Israel's worship typifies the divine artifice that created Christ, the "image of God," who is the center of worship under the New Law. In fact, the use of the term "shadow," and especially "overshadowing" (*scaduwe* and *scaduwen*), echoes the scriptural account of Christ's Incarnation, when the "image of God" was "constructed" in the womb of the Virgin Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall *overshadow* thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."[204] Ruusbroec writes that through the "divine overshadowing" of Beseleel's name, the votary "becomes God's overshadowing and God his overshadowing, for God rests and dwells in him, and he in God."[205] It is fitting that Ruusbroec brings together themes of Incarnation, artifice, light, and shadow in this way, for the spiritual tabernacle is itself a kind of shadow—an

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[202] D4:373/397, E4:358/381, in ibid., D365, 367; E364, 366.
[203] D4:398/403, E4:382/387, in ibid., D367, E366: "Ghi wet wel dat hare die scadue altoes beweget na alle die maniere des geens daer si ave comt ende volget hem na in allen sinen wegen. Sijn wi dan die scadue goeds overmids gehoersamheit van wille, soe moten wi volgen den geeste goeds ende sire bewegingen van binnen ende wi moten volgen der menscheit ons heren ende sire leren van buten, beide in rade ende in geboden."
[204] *Luke* 1:35, italics added for emphasis.
[205] D4:408/409, E4:392/393, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D367, E366: "Daer inne wert hi goeds ommescaduinge ende god sine ommescaduinge, want god rust ende woent in heme ende hi in gode."

intangible work of meditative craftsmanship to help votaries visualize their "mutual indwelling" with God made flesh.

Ruusbroec's finely nuanced exegesis coalesces with special power in Rogier's "fiery-red" curtain, which, burning with divine love in the furnace of Christ's martyrdom, gives glowing contours to the lifeless shell of the Lord's body hanging from the cross. The image may have invited the Scheut Carthusians to consider the shadow imprinted on the vermilion material of their own hearts by the suffering, human Christ as he intercepts the radiant fire of his divine nature. Indeed, the painted shadows, which accentuate the three-dimensional illusion of this statuesque Calvary group, invite such contemplation.[206] Furthermore, the grieving Virgin and St. John provide ideal patterns for votaries attempting to replicate each movement and attribute of Christ in their souls. Literally standing in the shadow of their dead God, the *Mater dolorosa* and her adopted son have conformed themselves to Christ's image, to the point that they even share the fiery backdrop of his twice-dyed curtain of blood. Their colorless garments drain them of much of their individuality and draw attention instead to their postures and gazes as they are subsumed into the persona of Christ.

With his hands raised like a priest reciting the Canon of the Mass, St. John "shadows" the "high priest of good things to come" and stands against a portion of Christ's scarlet cloth, which glows like the "fire of love" in the holocaustic Eucharist, "so simple and so great that nothing escapes it, but it swallows and consumes everything into

[206] On the shadows' contribution to the painting's sculptural quality, see García-Frías Checa, "The Recovery of a Masterpiece," 68.

oneness."[207] For her part, the Virgin Mary "shadows" the blood-red burnt offering of her son not only as she suffers beside him on Calvary but throughout her life. Ruusbroec presents her as an example for "all believing people … [who] humble their soul[s] and offer [them] to God, pouring out blood through penitence."[208] He writes that even before Christ's birth, the Virgin exercised such humility that God accepted her canticle of praise at the Visitation as "a blessed offering wholly to be burned in love."[209]

Beneath the shadow of the cross, however, the Mother of God participates most profoundly in Christ's fiery oblation. If St. John beholds the dying Lord's divinity and assists in his priesthood, the Virgin Mary creates an important foil by imitating the human Christ, the victim who suffered in the flesh he received from her. The Virgin's *Compassio* is a familiar theme in Rogier's oeuvre, as well as in Carthusian spirituality, and it re-occurs with characteristic poignancy in the Escorial *Crucifixion,*[210] where the grieving mother bows her head and closes her eyes, as if she, too, has died. With her knees about to buckle,[211] she adopts a position similar to her son, whose knees also bend under the weight of his body. Like the folds of her cloak—gathered in and bunched up around her hands and face—the Virgin's grief has twisted her attention inward toward her

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[207] D5:3824/3826, E5:3598/3600, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D973, E972: "Want dat vier der minnen es so eenvoldich ende so groet dat hem niet en ontblijft, maer al verslent ende verteert in enicheit."
[208] D5:3940/3941, E5:3704/3705, in ibid., D985, E984: "siet, aldus moeten alle gheloeveghe menscen hare sielen gode oetmoedeghen ende offeren, bloetstortende overmids penitencie."
[209] D5:3949/3950, E5:3713/3714, in ibid.: "i. weerdich opganc ende .i. salich offer al te verberne in minnen."
[210] Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 193–196; Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language" 52.
[211] Hedeman, "Roger van der Weyden's Escorial *Crucifixion,*" 195; Lorne Campbell, *Van der Weyden* (London: Chaucer Press, 2004), 11. Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 50–51, has noted that Rogier departs from convention in choosing to angle Christ's legs toward the right rather than toward the left. By doing so, Rogier aligns the body of the nearly-swooning mother with the body of her dead son, further linking their joint suffering.

heart, which burns on its own cruciform altar, pierced by the invisible sword of her Compassion.

Together, Rogier's Virgin and St. John evoke one of the most central and complicated dualities in Ruusbroec's writing—"turning inward" and "turning outward." An aspiring mystic should continually fluctuate between these extremes, turning inward to contemplate the imageless unity of the Trinity and then turning outward in penance and compassionate service to God and neighbor. This binary also juxtaposes corporeal with spiritual sight, "sensible images" with "intellectual images," the human with the divine nature of Christ, his public suffering with his hidden Passion, and the active life with the contemplative vocation.[212] That the mystic should simultaneously embrace aspects of both inward and outward turning is eloquently evoked in the Escorial panel. St. John's open eyes and outstretched arms identify him with outward turning, but his revelatory vision is more a function of inward, "unimaged" perception. On the other hand, the Virgin's affective meditation on the suffering Christ tends toward the outward, even while her downcast eyes and hunched form gravitate inward.

The vermilion curtain in Rogier's painting also participates in a configuration of inward and outward turnings, but in a manner that improvises imaginatively on the principles in Ruusbroec's text. In an emphatically "outward" manner, the veil is a mimetic representation of scarlet wool, imaginatively figured with embroidered images and typifying the blood that still drips from the cold corpse of the dead Christ. At the same time, though, it is also the abstract vehicle of internal vision. As will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter, the lens-like curtain leads the votary *within* the ocular

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[212] For "sensible" versus "intellectual" images, see D5:360/382, E5:343/365, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D603, 605; E602, 604: "verstendeghen beelden," 'sinleke beelden."

wound in Christ's side and *within* the temple veil of the Holy of Holies. Through its reverse typology, in which the antitype also typifies the type, the curtain prompts a meditative exegesis that illuminates the inner eyes of the soul in a field of color, ultimately transcending all types. In essence, Rogier's curtain re-reads Ruusbroec's verbal distillation of mystical turnings and translates them into an emphatically pictorial trope.

Moreover, the Escorial *Crucifixion* was an important source for a sculpted Calvary group created for the choir screen of the Church of Saint-Pierre in Louvain around 1490,[213] which, to a certain extent, emulates his visual representation of inward and outward turnings (Fig. 1.36). The evangelist cranes his neck to look up and outward at the crucified Lord, while the *Mater dolorosa* shifts her body away from the cross, twisting her head and eyes inward and even lifting her right hand to block the tortuous scene.[214] Furthermore, Jean de Beaumetz's two surviving *Crucifixion* panels, painted for solitary devotion in the cells of the monks at the Chartreuse de Champmol, demonstrate that Carthusians were already accustomed to artistic interpretations of the "turnings" of the worshiper's soul (Figs. 1.37 and 1.38). Both paintings depict the dead Christ surrounded by anguished mourners, among whom is a Carthusian monk kneeling at the base of the cross, rapt in intense prayer. In the panel conserved at the Louvre, the monastic gazes intently up at the Lord, hands clasped. The Carthusian in the Cleveland panel, by contrast, has twisted himself into a contorted posture, bowing forward from his

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[213] Borchgrave d'Altena, "Roger de le Pasture – Rogier van der Weyden et les scultures," 23; The Detroit Institute of Arts, *Flanders in the Fifteenth Century: Art and Civilization: Catalogue of the Exhibition, Masterpieces of Flemish Art: Van Eyck to Bosch* (Detroit; Brussels: The Detroit Institute of Arts; Centre National de Recherches Primitifs Flamands, 1960), 244–246, cat. nos. 78–79.

[214] Stephan Kemperdick has also commented on the inward and outward suffering demonstrated by St. John and the Virgin. See Stephan Kemperdick, *Rogier van der Weyden 1399/1400–1464,* trans. Anthea Bell (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 121.

waist, low to the ground, and then bending his head and shoulders upward toward the Lord's pierced feet. Even his arms are folded across each other to mark his heart with the pain of Christ's cross. The daunting gymnastics of his worship can be read as an outward manifestation of a soul straining inward and outward in a penitential search for God.

Ruusbroec condemns any who suppose that they can turn inward without turning outward,[215] and the Escorial Virgin and St. John, in their embodiment of facets from both sides of this binary, recall an important exegetical argument drawn from Ruusbroec's Eucharistic reading of the account of Zacchaeus the publican. The mystic re-tells this scriptural narrative in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* to illustrate how exemplary communicants should understand both the human and divine natures of Christ before receiving the Sacrament: "In their turning inward with an unimaged spirit, they are elevated through bare love before the nature of the Divinity; in their turning outward, they are imaged, through heartfelt affection, unto our Lord's humanity."[216] In the story, Zacchaeus, unable to see Christ because of his small stature, climbs a tree to call out to the Lord, only to promptly return to the ground at Christ's command. The mystic comments that for the faithful, who climb with the publican "into the highest of their mind, where the spirit stands unassailed by images and unimpeded in its freedom," "there is Jesus seen, recognized and loved in His Divinity."[217] As if imitating St. John, they stare eagle-like into the sunburst of God's glory from a privileged vantage point high in a tree. These same devotees, however, must also attend to Christ's exhortation:

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[215] See D1429/1432, E1337/1340, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D333, 335; E332, 334.

[216] D1263/1266, E1179/1182, in ibid., D317, 319; E316, 318: "si met onghebeelden gheeste in haren inkeere, met blooeter minnen verhaven vore die natuere der godheit, ende in haren uutkeere met herteleker liefden ghebeeldt toe der menscheit ons heeren."

[217] D1292/1294, E1206/1208, in ibid., D321, E320: "in dat hooeghste haerre ghedachten, daer de gheest onverbeeldt ende onghehendert in sijnre vriheit steet. Daer wert Jhesus ghesien, bekint ende ghemint in sijnre godheit."

> "Go down quickly, for high freedom of spirit cannot keep on standing except in lowly obedience of mind. For you must know Me and love Me, as God and man: highness above all, and brought low below all … then I must come into your house and keep dwelling with you and in you, and you with Me and in Me."[218]

Having thus lowered their heavenward gaze to the dust, like Rogier's grief-stricken Virgin, the votaries are prepared to receive Communion, repeating the liturgical response first spoken by Zacchaeus as he welcomed the Eucharistic Christ into his home, "'Lord, I am not worthy, but I am unworthy that I should receive Your glorious body in the holy Sacrament in the sinful house of my body and my soul. But, Lord, have mercy on me and take pity on my poor life and all my failings'."[219]

In the turnings inward and outward of their postures, gazes, and souls, Rogier's St. John and the Virgin stand watch within Christ's shadow, guarding his cross, and enclosing him in a living tabernacle constructed from the "house of [their] bod[ies] and [their] soul[s]." On another level, though, the figure of the Lord himself, lifted up and suspended for adoration at the culmination of his sacrifice, spurs a penultimate meditation on inward and outward devotion. It is significant that in Ruusbroec's writings both directions of the soul's turning are fueled by love, as the votary looks outward to others in charity and inward to the loving unity of the Trinity. Not surprisingly, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* tends to associate the blood pouring out of Christ's wounds with the outward-moving trajectory of his love. Yet the text's constant insistence on "double charity" and "twice-dyed" cloth suggests that this out-flowing of love may be "doubled"

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[218] D1297/1304, E1210/1217, in ibid., D321, E320: "'Gaet haestelec neder. Want hooeghe vriheit van gheeste en mach niet staende bliven dan in nedere ghehooersamheit van moede. Want ghi moetd mi bekinnen ende minnen god ende mensche, hooecheit boven al ende ghenedert onder al … dan moete ic in uwe huus comen ende wooenende bliven met u ende in u, ende ghi met mi ende in mi'."

[219] D1307/1311, E1219/1222, in ibid., D321, 323; E320, 322: "'Heere, ic en ben niet weerdegh maer ic ben onweerdegh, dat ic uwen gloriosen lichame in den heileghen sacramente ontfaen soude in dat sondeghe huus mijns lichamen ende mijnre zielen. Maer, heere, sijt mijns ghenadegh ende ontfarme u mijns arms levens ende alle mijnre ghebreke'."

by an inward-flowing aspect of Christ's charitable blood. Indeed, both sides of the binary are suffused with love in the mystic's explanation of the properties of God in the heart of the believer:

> The first two properties are, by nature, flowing out, and the other two are drawing inward. God is by nature flowing out with truth and with love, and He is drawing inward with unity and with essence. The eternal truth is born of the Father. And the eternal love flows from both of them, namely from the Father and from the Son. These are the outflowing properties in God. The unity of divine nature is drawing the three Persons inward in the bond of love, and the divine essence contains the unity in emptiness, with an enjoyable embrace in essential love. These are the two inward-drawing properties in God.[220]

In the Escorial *Crucifixion,* the "inmost blood" originating in Christ's pierced heart flows *out* from his side, hands, feet, and head, coloring the woolen cloth with the dye of his battered, worm-like body. At the same time, though, the painting also invites its viewers to move *inward*, to follow that vermilion river upstream, through the wound in the Lord's side and into his Sacred Heart. Like grisaille shutters concealing the brilliant interior of a triptych, the pale, statuesque forms of St. John, the *Virgo doloris,* and even the emaciated body of Christ itself, demarcate an outer threshold guarding the rectangle of red cloth behind them. So concentrated is its vibrant color, in fact, that it seems as if it has absorbed all the blood from their three pallid bodies, monopolizing all the color in the composition and garnering it together into one rectangular, panel-like center. The grisaille "doors" of this mystical "triptych" invite the viewer inward and outward through the broken, tabernacle-body of Christ to the pool of Precious Blood that

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[220] D4:1940/1948, E4:1849/1857, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D535, E534: "Die ierste .ii. eigenscape sijn van naturen uutvloeiende ende die andere .ii. sijn intreckende. God es van naturen uutvloeiende met waerheiden ende met minnen, ende hi es intreckende met enecheiden ende met wesene. Die ewege waerheit wert gheboren ute den vader. Ende die ewege minne vliet ute hen beiden, dat es ute den vader ende ute den sone. Dit sijn die uutvloeiende eigenscape in gode. Die enecheit godleker naturen es intreckende die .iii. persone in bande van minnen ende dat godleke wesen beveet die enecheit in ledecheiden met enen gebrukeleken ommevange in weseleker minnen. Dit sjn twe intreckende eigenscape in gode."

stains its inner sanctuary.[221] That meditative Holy of Holies, where Christ and man meet at the Mercy Seat, is the innermost space of Ruusbroec's mystical tabernacle, the culmination of his treatise's inward-moving narrative,[222] and the vehicle by which an inward-turning mystic can share in Christ's Trinitarian unity. It is fitting that in the final pages of *The Spiritual Tabernacle*, Ruusbroec writes that the golden cherubim protecting the Ark of the Covenant embody "the loving spirit in its highest nobility, where it belongs entirely and totally to the love of God, in an emptiness of itself."[223]

To conclude this chapter, I would like to return to the devotional exercise of gazing, as prompted by both Rogier and Ruusbroec. Each day, the Carthusian monks of Our Lady of Grace would have focused intently on the Host and chalice, straining their spiritual vision to look past the accidentals of bread and wine in order to perceive the Real Presence of God, in much the way that St. John looks beyond and to the side of the broken body of Christ to behold his divinity. This is also St. Longinus's line of vision, who, newly healed from blindness, suddenly recognizes the Son of God in the crucified man before him. In a similar manner, Ruusbroec's exegetical texts would have aided the Carthusians to perceive profound meanings in the subtle gestures of Rogier's mourners, the somber foregrounding of the Lord's side wound, and the shimmering, jewel-like pool

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[221] My analysis is informed by Lynn Jacobs' scholarship on the Netherlandish triptych as a highly nuanced threshold accessed through the "doors" of its shutters. Jacobs discusses, among other things, the traditional progression from grisaille to color, as well as Rogier's innovative use of fictive doors, subtle thresholds, and grisaille elements within a single panel. See Lynn F. Jacobs, *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 2–7, 37–40, 87–118.

[222] In contrast to the description of the tabernacle in *Exodus,* Ruusbroec details the spaces and materials of the holy tent beginning with the exterior and moving to the interior, and from the bottom to the top. See Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* I 24, 34–35; D2:13/18, E2:13/17, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D279, E278; D2:51/52, E2:50/51, in ibid., D283, E282; Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 207.

[223] D6:314/316, E6:298/300, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1293, E1292: "den minnenden gheeste eyghen sijn in sijnre hoechster edelheit, daer hi der ewegher minnen gods gheheel es ende al in eenre ledicheit sijns selfs."

of "twice-dyed" vermilion. The "demi-grisaille" figures may have resolved more readily from fictive sculpture into living flesh when the monks recalled Ruusbroec's litany of other metamorphosing elements as types for transubstantiation: the Nile turning to blood, Lot's wife changing into a pillar of salt, and the stream pouring forth from the rock in the Exodus.[224] On the other side of the wall separating the monks' choir from the pilgrimage church, the faithful looked imploringly at the inanimate statue of Our Lady of Grace, which had once undergone a metamorphosis itself when it shown with heavenly light on the eve of Pentecost, 1449. Gazing at Rogier's panel, the Carthusians may have pondered Christ's Eucharistic entrance into the Old Testament Holy of Holies to celebrate the Christian mass with his own blood, and in a complementary way, they may have reflected on his sacramental presence in the spiritual tabernacle of their own hearts.

[224] See D682/689, E641/648, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D261, E260.

Chapter 2

Mysticism and Marian Mediation in the *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin*

Rogier van der Weyden's *oeuvre* bears witness to a profoundly Marian sensibility that manages to be as poignant and imaginative as it is consistent in various permutations of the Incarnation and Passion. In accordance with fervent, fifteenth-century veneration for the interceding Queen of Heaven, Rogier's compositions generally style the Virgin as *Mediatrix.* The central panel of the *Columba Triptych of the Adoration of the Magi,* for instance, repeats a common Eyckian trope of conflating Mary's lap with an altar, from which she offers her child for adoration (Fig. 2.1). As the Eucharistic victim, he sits on a corporal-like cloth, a crucifix suspended from the stone pier behind him.[1] In the triptych's left-hand panel, the liturgical timbre of the Virgin's mediation becomes even more pronounced as she lifts her son over the temple altar like a priest elevating the Host.[2] On a smaller and more intimate scale, Mary facilitates the Christ Child's interaction with donors in the tender, half-length diptychs popularized by Rogier.[3] The *Diptych of Jean de Gros* embodies this quiet, personalized strain of devotion as *Maria lactans* suckles her infant, promising the nourishment of her maternal intercession for the Burgundian court official praying before her (Fig. 2.2).

Chapter one discussed Rogier's frequent treatment of the *Compassio* of the Virgin, and his Vienna *Triptych of the Crucifixion* offers a deeply innovative and wrenching variation on this theme (Fig. 1.25).[4] Like the priestly Mother of God in the *Columba Triptych,* the Vienna *Virgo doloris* kneels before the cross, wrapping her arms

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[1] Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 64–65.
[2] Ibid., 68–71.
[3] Kemperdick, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 105; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 25–26.
[4] Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece,* 85–86.

cruciformly around its base as she offers her son for the sins of humanity. Just as the Canon of the mass recalls Christ's humanity by mixing water into the wine of the chalice, so the profuse tears of the Lord's mortal mother mingle with the blood from his feet. These bloody tears epitomize the joint oblation of the Virgin and her son, here represented as the Church and her Bridegroom.[5] Nowhere, however, does Rogier express Mary's agonizing mediation with more cathartic poetics than in his Escorial *Deposition* (Fig. 2.3).[6] In this altarpiece the inner torment of her soul has conformed the color of her countenance to the morbid pallor of her son's face and matched her limbs to the position of his corpse. The scarf twisted around her head mimics the cruel thorns crushed into his brow, and the long folds of blue wool cascading down from her chest emulate the river of blood still streaming from his pierced heart. In her deathly swoon, Rogier's *Mater dolorosa* supremely mediates empathetic devotion to her son.

The faithful, who cannot literally suffer the pains of crucifixion, look to the example of this co-Redemptrix, whose compassionate fervor was such that her hands, feet, and side were pierced spiritually. Significantly, Nicodemus draws attention to Mary's model of meditative compunction by prayerfully pondering Christ's wounded hand. In emulation of the bloodstained nails held by the attendant at the top of the painting, Nicodemus's gaze "pierces," first through the Lord's left hand and then through his right. The line of his vision continues in a diagonal that then passes through the Virgin's hands—and also St. John's foot—in acknowledgment of the corresponding, albeit invisible, wounds inflicted in them. Significantly, the trajectory of this piercing

[5] Ibid., 86.
[6] See Simson, "Compassio and Co-Redemptio."

stare ends at the moldering skull of Adam.[7] Nicodemus's bounteous tears, combined with the fierce, cruciform gesture of the Magdalene's arms, put into practice the example of the New Eve, who co-redeems the hopelessly skull-like remains of fallen men and women with spiritual *stigmata,* indelibly impressed on the heart.

The next two chapters will provide an innovative mode for understanding Rogier's Mariology by examining it through the lens of Ruusbroec's texts. I argue that the resulting collaboration of pictorial and literary tropes indicates that Rogier often re-interpreted, altered, and re-applied Ruusbroec's theology and imagery in inventive ways. This chapter will focus on the *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin,* perhaps the most overtly Marian of Rogier's works. Chapter three will then address the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels. Although the placement, function, and provenance of the Philadelphia paintings has prompted much speculation in the past, new scholarship has now securely identified them as the exterior shutters in a monumental altarpiece dedicated to the Virgin Mary.[8] Now that their fundamentally Marian theme has been substantiated, it is an auspicious time to reassess their devotional argument. To this end, my dissertation will offer one of the first attempts to study the *Miraflores* and Philadelphia compositions as complementary Mariological works, deeply informed by Ruusbroec. The *Miraflores Triptych* sets the foundation for the pictorial and mystical idioms I will discuss, and therefore this chapter will be much longer than chapter three. It is significant that the *Miraflores* and Philadelphia panels each have a probable Carthusian context, and both

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[7] On the line of vision joining Christ, the Virgin, and Adam's skull, see Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 222, 224.

[8] Véronique Bücken and Griet Steyaert, eds., *L'Héritage de Rogier van der Weyden. La peinture à Bruxelles 1450–1520* (Tielt, Brussels: Lannoo, Musées royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique, 2013), 157–159.

ensembles situate Marian interventions across a troping apparatus of mystical doorways and carefully placed colors.

In 1445, Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin* was presented by King Juan II of Castile and León to the Charterhouse of Miraflores near Burgos in northern Spain. It has been conserved in the Staatliche Museen of Berlin since 1850. Often referred to as a "Mary Altar," the triptych presents three distillations of the Virgin's maternal mediation framed by fictive portals (Fig. 2.4). In the first panel she solemnly adores the newborn Christ Child beside a sleeping St. Joseph in a small chapel furnished with a luxurious hanging of gold brocade and green silk (Fig. 2.5). In the central scene St. John and Joseph of Arimathaea tearfully minister to the Virgin as she presses the bleeding face of her son to her own, his body lying rigid across her lap (Fig. 2.6). Mary's grief turns to joy in the final panel as she beholds the resurrected Christ, who has risen triumphantly from his sepulcher with its futile contingent of Roman guards, while the three holy women in the distant background wind their way through the countryside carrying unguents (Fig. 1.35). The changing colors of the Virgin's garments in each scene, along with the blue and violet angels at the top announcing her victories with banderoles and crowns, transform each panel into an iconic mystery for meditation.

Of particular relevance to the *Miraflores's* Marian mysteries is Ruusbroec's most well-known treatise, *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*), as well as *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*). It is important to note, however, that although Ruusbroec treats the Virgin Mary with distinct reverence throughout his work and affords her special prominence in his *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* (*Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*), his description of the mystical life is, for the most part,

overwhelmingly Christological.[9] Significantly, chapters two and three argue that the *Miraflores* and *Crucifixion* panels not only track a devotional engagement with Ruusbroec but also evince an active dialog of creative interpretation and application on the part of both the artist and the viewers. I argue that these panel paintings read and re-contextualize Ruusbroec, translating his visual prose into literary images and his Christological idioms into Marian icons.

Incidentally, *The Spiritual Espousals* speaks frequently of "mediation" in recounting the soul's union with the Trinity. Ruusbroec distinguishes between unification "with intermediary," in which the votary meets God by means of virtues, divine gifts, and conformity to the image of Christ, and unification "without intermediary." In the latter instance, "the loving spirit … die[s] to itself," "in a darkness in which all contemplatives wander," wherein "is born an incomprehensible light which is the Son of God, in whom one contemplates eternal life," the spirit "receiv[ing] the brightness of God without intermediary … [and] becom[ing] the very brightness which it receives."[10] Rogier's paintings apprehend Ruusbroec's mystical theology—both with intermediary and without intermediary—through the medium of the Virgin Mary, who, in the *Spiritual Espousals* mediates the vivifying light of the Christological sun as the maternal "dawn and … beginning of the day of all grace."[11] Excerpts from the text of the *Magnificat,* embroidered in gold along the hem of her cloak in all three *Miraflores* panels, remind

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[9] Mommaers, introduction to *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* 48–49.
[10] Dc65/77, Ec53/64, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D581, E580: "in een duysternisse daer alle scouwende menschen ghebrukelijcke in verdoelt sijn … Inden afgront deser duysternissen, daer de minnende gheest sijns selfs in ghestorven es … werdet gheboren een ombegripelijc licht, dat es de sone gods, daermen in scouwet eewich leven … ende ontfeet die claerheit gods sonder[e] middel. Ende hi wert die claerheit selve sonder onderlaet die hi ontfeet."
[11] Db895/896, Eb770/771, in ibid., D389, E388: "eene dagheraet ende een beghin … des daechs alre gracien."

viewers that as her luminous soul "magnifies the Lord," she reflects and focuses his light like a mirror.

Portals, Mysteries, and the Charterhouse of Santa María de Miraflores

The "Mary Altar" of Miraflores, along with the Escorial *Crucifixion* and *Deposition,* is part of a triad of rarified paintings with contemporary or near contemporary documentation linking it to Rogier. In 1783, King Carlos II's secretary, Antonio Ponz, printed an account of his visit to the Charterhouse of Santa María de Miraflores in a multi-volume survey of the kingdom of Spain, entitled *Viaje de España.* He records his impressions on seeing Rogier's painting and fortuitously quotes from a now-lost sixteenth-century chronicle of the Charterhouse. Bound in calf's skin, this cartulary was known as the *Libro becerro,* and its record of the bequest of the triptych presumably comes from an archival note dating to around 1445. Ponz's description reads as follows:

> I cannot stop speaking of a very particular jewel, and it is a little altar with its doors (?), that served as an oratory to King don Juan II, and was a gift that Pope Martin V gave to him, according to what is said. The execution, beauty and minuteness of each thing would charm those who have distinguished themselves most in painting, even after the aggrandizement (?) and restoration. In the middle, the dead Jesus Christ is represented; on the left the apparition to our Lady of the same Lord resurrected; and on the right the Birth. At first sight this work could be taken to be something by Hieronymus Bosch but it is prior to the time of this craftsman and very superior to anything he did. In the Monastery's Register book there is this article: *In the year 1445, the King (don Juan) gave an oratory, most precious and holy, depicting three stories; namely, the Nativity of Jesus, His Descent from the Cross, which is elsewhere called the Fifth Sorrow, and His Appearance to His Mother after the Resurrection. This oratory was painted by the great famous Master Rogel of Flanders.* The above-mentioned paintings are enclosed in very fancy borders, feigned to be of stone, with many statuettes and other things arranged on them.[12]

[12] Vol. 12, 3.1–17, in Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España: Seguido de los dos tomos del Viaje fuera de España* (Madrid: M. Aguilar, 1947), 57–58, quoted and cited in Anne Simonson Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces in Context," *Studies in Iconography* 6 (1980): 65–66: "No puedo dejar de hablar de una alhaja muy particular, y es un altarito con sus puertas, que servía de oratorio al rey don

This transcription allows a reconstruction of a critical portion of the triptych's provenance. Like the dukes and duchesses of Burgundy, King Juan II of Castile and León and his wife, María of Aragon, were important patrons of the Carthusian Order.[13] Juan's financial assistance enabled the completion of the monastery church at the Cartuja del Paular, established in 1390 outside Madrid, and he also provided a high altarpiece in alabaster for the monks. In 1441 Queen María built the Aniago Charterhouse of Santa María de la Piedad near Valladolid, and during a planning meeting for her new foundation, Juan presented an assembly of Carthusian priors with a proposal to transform his hunting palace in the Valley of Miraflores into yet another charterhouse. The palace was located about an hour's walk from the city center of Burgos and had been constructed by the king's father, Enrique III, who had died as a young man in 1406. Enrique had cherished a special devotion for the Franciscans, and his will indicated his wish to provide an abbey for them. In deference to his father, Juan stipulated that the Charterhouse at Miraflores be dedicated to St. Francis, and in February of 1442 the monastery was established. The monks arranged for a temporary chapel in the palace,

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Juan II, y fué regalo que le hizo el Papa Martino V, según se cuenta. La ejecución, hermosura y menudencia de cada cosa encantaría a los que más se han señalado en la pintura, aun después de su engrandecimiento y restauración. En el medio se representa a Jesucristo difunto; a mano izquierda, la Aparación del mismo Señor resucitado a Nuestra Señora, y a la derecha, el Nacimiento. A primera vista tendría alguno esta obra por de Jerónimo Bosco, pero es anterior al tiempo de este artífice y muy superior a todo lo que él hizo. En el libro del Becerro del monasterio hay este artículo: *Anno 1445, donavit praedictus Rex (don Juan) pretiosissimum, & devotum oratorium, tres historias habens; Nativitatem, scilicet, Jesu-Christi, Descensionem ipsius de cruce, quae alias Quinta Angustia nuncupatur, & Apparitionem ejusdem ad Matrem post Resurrectionem. Hoc oratorium à Magistro Rogel, magno & famoso Flandresco fuit depictum.* Dichas pinturas están incluidas dentro de orlas caprichosísimas fingidas de piedra, onc muchas figurillas, y otras cosas acomodadas en ellas."

[13] For the king and queen's favor toward the Carthusians, see Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 62, esp. note 20, which notes the sentiments expressed in Juan's letter of 1441 to the prior general of the Order, Francisco Maresme of Aragon, regarding the establishment of the Miraflores Charterhouse.

and during the office of Vespers on the Feast of Pentecost, 1443, they formally initiated their rigorous life of prayer and silence in the new location.

Lorne Campbell has recently called into question the assumption that Juan himself commissioned the *Triptych of the Virgin.* He cites a contemporary commentary on the king's "indolent" nature and notes his apparent lack of interest in collecting paintings. Artistic patronage, Campbell adds, likely would have been stifled during the years leading up to the king's supposed bequest by intense struggles again the Infantes of Aragon, a threatening coalition of María's relatives, which lead to Juan's own captivity.[14] Campbell finds a more likely candidate for Rogier's benefactor in María. The queen's familial ties exempted her from much of the fraught politics plaguing Juan, and both she and her brother, Alfonso V of Aragon, had a documented interest in Netherlandish painting.[15] Campbell suggests that María may have commissioned the *Triptych of the Virgin* as a gift for her own Charterhouse of Santa María de la Piedad, where the monks safeguarded one of her family treasures, a carved *Pietà* in painted and gilded alabaster (Fig. 2.7).[16] The central panel of Rogier's "Mary Altar," with its depiction of the anguished Virgin cradling her dead son, certainly would have resonated with this statue and with the foundation's dedication to the "Piedad."

While Campbell does not specifically cite this evidence, the corollary between painting and sculpture makes his argument particularly compelling. In tactile, three-

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[14] Lorne Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," in *Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula,* ed. Lorne Campbell (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2015), 34–35.

[15] In addition to several other paintings, the queen possessed "a Flemish retable of one panel" and "an altarpiece of several painted panels from Flanders" ("vn rretablo de Flandes," "vnas tablas de altar pintadas de las de Flandes"). Ibid., 35. Alfonso V, for his part, possessed a Passion cycle on cloth by Rogier. In fact, it may have been these very paintings that the king is said to have asked to gaze upon as he lay dying. See ibid., 35, 36–37.

[16] Ibid., 35–36.

dimensional alabaster, as in luminous oil glazes on wood, these two images body forth affective, corporeal manifestations of a sorrowful Marian mystery deeply esteemed by María and her family. Even so, the traditional account of the triptych's commission by Juan II should not be dismissed too hastily, particularly on the basis of the king's reported personality traits. As it turns out, when the permanent monastic structures at Miraflores were finally completed in 1488, the Burgos Carthusians also placed their devotions under the protection of the "Piedad" of the Virgin by situating a large, polychrome relief of the *Pietà* in the tympanum of their church's western portal (Fig. 2.8). Christ's right arm rests just above the lintel of the door, and his head has fallen onto his shoulder so that worshipers glancing up as they entered the sanctuary would have been confronted by his wounded hand and pitiable countenance. Traces of painted tears still streak the Virgin's face, and remnants of Christ's blood articulate his brow and wounds.

The door of the church elides easily with the Lord's prominent side wound directly above it, and visitors may have imagined themselves sprinkled with blood and tears as they passed through the portal. Appropriately, Eucharistic grape vines animate the framing archivolts, and verdant foliate motifs appear throughout the rest of the church, laden with fruit and populated with small creatures, as if watered by Christ's blood (Fig. 2.9). This sculpted *Pietà* may well have advertized Miraflores's connection to the other royal charterhouse at Aniago, especially considering the large escutcheon of Castile and León and the personal device of Juan II, which flank the entryway to the church (Fig. 2.10). Positioned between these coats of arms, the stone Virgin of Compassion may have also echoed Rogier's own *Pietà,* enshrined at the center of the

monastery's "most precious and holy" (*pretiosissimum, & devotum*) "oratory," purchased from the Low Countries and bestowed on the monks by their royal benefactors.

Whether it was Juan II or María who initially commissioned Rogier's painting, the king's concern for his new foundation at Miraflores should not be underestimated. The monks' choir was to be his final resting place, and when he died on July 21, 1454, his body was first interred in the Monastery of San Pablo at Valladolid, where he had grown up.[17] Nearly one year later, the king's remains were unearthed, according to prior command, and his funeral *cortège* embarked on a solemn, four-day march to Miraflores, stopping just shy of the charterhouse in Burgos for a preliminary mass offered in the Monastery of Las Huelgas and a final night of prayers with the Dominican friars of San Pablo. The palatine rooms occupied by the Miraflores monks had been severely damaged by a fire in October of 1452, and reconstruction had not begun until two months prior to the king's death, the charterhouse having received Juan's permission to dedicate the new structure to the Mother of God, rather than to St. Francis. Therefore, when the king's remains were at last transferred to the care of the brothers of Santa María de Miraflores on June 24, 1455—the Feast of the Nativity of Juan's patron, St. John the Baptist—they were placed in a temporary tomb.

It has been suggested that Rogier's triptych may have been displayed near the grave as part of an interim monument to Juan and a devotional prompt for the monks reciting the Offices of the Dead for his soul.[18] It was not until after Juan's daughter,

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[17] Juan's request to be buried in Miraflores is first noted in a document from 1453, just one year before his death. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that he had already selected the monastery as the site of his tomb several years earlier. See Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 65.

[18] Ibid., 71. Alternatively, Campbell suggests that the triptych could have been placed on the altar of the monks' temporary chapel in the Miraflores palace, which may have been small enough for the diminutive

Isabella the Catholic, had assumed the throne and pledged financial support for a mausoleum for her father and his second wife, Isabella of Portugal, that the rebuilding of Miraflores progressed in earnest.[19] Constructed from heavy, white stone, the finished church and cloister evoke in their very materials the austere, white-robed Order of St. Bruno. Also rendered in "Carthusian" white are Gil de Siloe's monumental tombs of Guadalajara alabaster for the Catholic Queen's parents and brother, their breathtaking ornamentation highlighted with subtle polychromy (Figs. 2.11 and 2.12).[20] Interestingly, the Virgin of the *Pietà* appears again beneath the head of Isabella of Portugal's effigy, paired with an image of *Maria lactans* under Juan's head. The white walls of the church and its luminous, nearly colorless tomb monuments are overshadowed by Siloe and Diego de la Cruz's massive, multi-registered wooden retable, completed in 1499 (Fig. 2.13). A geometric framework surrounds a profusely bleeding, crucified Christ with an explosion of brilliantly painted saints and angels, lavishly adorned with gold.

The figures in the retable have been keyed to the rich imagery adorning the tombs, so that Juan II's effigy lies with its feet pointing toward a vertical column in the altarpiece crowned with an image of St. John the Evangelist and the Magdalene immediately below. Isabella of Portugal faces a corollary arrangement of another "Mary" and "John": the Virgin grieving beside the crucifix and the Baptist in the tabernacle directly beneath. The lid of the alabaster sepulcher takes the shape of an elongated, eight-pointed star, with the evangelists occupying the primary four points. St. Mark sits on the

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"Mary Altar" to not seem out of place. Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," 35.

[19] See Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 65.

[20] It is likely that another prized alabaster located at the charterhouse—the image of the Virgin and Child affixed over the south portal in the choir—is also a late fifteenth-century work by Gil de Siloe. A closely related version of the sculpture is conserved in the Prado's collection. It is tempting to think of the image as a gift paralleling the alabaster *Pietà* offered to the Charterhouse of Santa Marí de la Piedad at Aniago from the collection of the Aragonese royal family.

corner closest to the altar and looks up at an image of himself in the retable, enclosed in a roundel and positioned to the left of the crucifix. Standing on top of this roundel, a tall statue of St. Peter holds the keys of the kingdom in his right hand and reads from a small book in his left. Likewise, the tomb includes a diminutive alabaster of St. Peter on the right of St. Mark, again engrossed in a book and with keys in hand. In short, with the high altar and the sepulcher locked together in such a carefully orchestrated assembly of iconography and materials, it seems logical that Rogier's triptych would have been released from its duties of adorning the king's burial site in the new church, if it ever even served that capacity.[21]

Perhaps the most compelling hypothesis for the "Mary Altar" is that the painting functioned as an epitaph not for Juan but for his first wife, María. The Aragonese queen died in February of the same year that her husband bequeathed the triptych to Miraflores, and an eighteenth-century transcription from the charterhouse archives indicates that his gift was accompanied by fine textiles, including a gold brocade with the king's heraldry, an altar frontal, and a "precious garment" to be refashioned into a chasuble.[22] Ronda Kasl has noted that aristocratic and royal families often donated articles of the deceased's clothing to a religious establishment to be remade into vestments or ecclesiastical cloths. It is likely that the rich garments offered by Juan in 1445 were precisely this type of gift, and María's clothing would have made a fitting accompaniment for panels depicting

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[21] Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 71. Campbell has suggested the sacristy or the church's altar dedicated to St. Bruno as possible locations. Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," 35.

[22] See Camilo María Abad Puente, "Documentos inéditos acerca de algunos cuadros flamencos de la Cartuja de Miraflores," *Razón y Fe: Revista mensual redactada por Padres de la Compañía de Jesús* 35 (January–April 1913): 488, cited and expanded upon with other sources in Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," 33: "Año 1445. dió el R.D. Juan el repostero, una vestidura preciosa, de que se hizo un frontal y casulla, y las tablas que eran su oratorio: El que las pinto fué un famoso flamenco llamado el M.º Rogel."

mysteries from the life of her holy namesake.[23] Since the queen was interred in the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe, it makes all the more sense for Juan to have ensured that his wife had an epitaph, in the absence of her physical body, in the church where he may have already planned to be buried. The central panel of the *Triptych of the Virgin* would have made the painting a particularly appropriate memorial for María, who had a special interest in the Charterhouse of Aniago and its alabaster *Pietà.* As the Miraflores priests celebrated mass vested in the queen's own attire, María and the needs of her soul would have been literally arraigned before the altar in a manner akin to the physical presence of Juan and Isabella of Portugal, whose bones and alabaster effigies lay perpetually in the retable's shadow. In a complementary way, Rogier's "Mary Altar," with its thrice-crowned Queen of Heaven, would have constantly reminded the monks to pray for the Queen of Castile and León by name.

Ponz's account of the *Triptych of the Virgin* reports that the panels were originally given to Juan II by Pope Martin V. Many scholars have treated this assertion as suspect since Rogier had only just begun his career when Martin died in 1431, having brought the Western Schism to a close with his fourteen-year pontificate. Even so, some have suggested that Rogier's "Mary Altar" could have been a special gift carried to Rome in 1425 by an entourage requesting the pope's endorsement for the University of Leuven or as part of the Cardinal of Beaufort's negotiations at the papal court in 1428.[24] In the most

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[23] These ideas derive from my conversation with Ronda Kasl on July 16, 2014 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Kasl's suggestion is also referred to in Maryan Wynn Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen, eds., *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 218–219. Fuchs expresses the possibility that the Miraflores "Mary Altar" may have been part of a pendant memorial, together with Rogier's *St. John Triptych,* to María and Juan, but she quickly refutes the idea given Juan's marriage to Isabella of Portugal two years later. Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 71.

[24] For the Leuven charter theory, see A. J. Wauters, "Roger van der Weyden–I," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 22 (October 1912–March 1913): 81–82; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Pictures Lent

recent catalog entry on the triptych, Stephan Kemperdick completely dismisses any connection to Rome, arguing that Rogier surely would not have been awarded such an important commission before 1432, when he became a master, and that the Italian historiography of painting always situated him in the shadow of Jan van Eyck, making it unlikely that the pope would even have been aware of Rogier at this early date.[25] Moreover, dendrochronological findings indicate that the panels were not painted until at least 1435–1437, several years after Martin's decease.[26]

There may, however, yet be a possibility for pontifical involvement in the *Triptych of the Virgin.* Martin V's successor, Eugenius IV, presided over a Church deeply fractured by the question of papal versus synodal primacy. Juan II threw his support behind the pope in 1436, and by 1439 tensions with the Council of Basel had escalated to the point that the assembly of clerics formally denounced Eugenius. The successor of St. Peter rewarded Juan for his persevering allegiance, and in 1438 he extended to the king the right to attend mass at a portable altar in the early hours of the day, before sunrise.[27] It could be that Eugenius gave Rogier's triptych to Juan to be used for precisely this purpose.[28] On this point, it is significant that in Ponz's transcription of the *Libro becerro,* as well as in the charterhouse inventory citing Juan's donation of textiles, the "Mary Altar" is characterized as an "oratory" (*oratorium*), which denotes a small-scale object

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for the Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition," *Bulletin of The Metropolitan Museum of Art* 15 (August 1920): 186. On the Cardinal of Beaufort, see Châtelet, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 89.

[25] Stephan Kemperdick, "Miraflores Triptych," in *Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula,* ed. Lorne Campbell (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2015), 96.

[26] Ibid.; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 231–232.

[27] See also the bull, *Laudibus et honore,* from July 24, 1436. Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 69.

[28] Ibid., 69–70; Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 218.

for use in prayer and meditation.[29] Furthermore, although most scholars assume that Rogier intended the wings of his triptych to be immovable, as they are in their current frame, Ponz describes it as "a little altar with its doors," which certainly could be taken to mean that it was hinged.[30] A foldable, portable "oratory" would have functioned ideally in Juan's liturgy before dawn.[31]

Moreover, Anne Simonson Fuchs argues that even the triptych's subject matter comments on political and theological issues at the heart of Eugenius and Juan's friendship. In particular, she discusses the Virgin as a figure for *Ecclesia,* a point made by earlier scholars, but in the context of the pope's tug-of-war with the Council of Basel for ecclesiastical primacy, the allusion takes on new depth. As the victorious, maternal protector of the *cathedra Petri,* the crowned *Virgo-Ecclesia* triumphs in purity in the first panel, suffers valiantly in the second, and overcomes "all things" (*vi*[*n*]*cens o*[*mn*]*ia*), as stated in the banderole of the third scene. Fuchs posits that the refrains from the *Magnificat* on the hem of Mary's mantle may refer specifically to the Feast of the Visitation, which had officially entered the universal liturgy in 1389 with the expectation that the "visit" of Christ and his mother would dissolve the deadlock in the schismatic Church.[32]

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[29] Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," 33; Kemperdick, "Miraflores Triptych," 96.

[30] Ibid., 95–96. On this point, Kemperdick also cites a report that in the mid nineteenth century the original frames were still in place, albeit with replaced hinges. Jean Chrétien Nieuwenhuys, *Description de la Galerie des tableaux de S. M. le Roi des Pays-Bas avec quelques remarques sur l'histoire des peintres et sur les progrès de l'art* (Brussels: [Imp. Delavingne et Callewaert], 1843), no. 15. For the identification of the hinged triptych with Charles V's portable altar, see ibid., 43–44. De Vos believes that Rogier intended the "Mary Altar" to be stationary and that the hinges were added later in order to make the triptych more marketable, an alteration which gave rise to the belief that Charles V had used it. Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 226.

[31] Kemperdick, "Miraflores Triptych," 96.

[32] Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 67–68, 70. For an earlier reference to the Miraflores Virgin as *Ecclesia*, see Christine Hasenmueller McCorkel, "The Role of the Suspended Crown in Jan van Eyck's Madonna and Chancellor Rolin," *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 518.

It has further been conjectured that the three "crowns of life" held above Mary's head by angels in each of the panels allude to levels of beatitude (*fructus* and *aureola*), which in scholastic philosophy are awarded in the form of heavenly crowns to righteous virgins, martyrs, and doctors (Fig. 2.4). Theologians argued that the Mother of God qualified for each of these beatific rankings, and the *Miraflores Triptych* supports this by memorializing first her virgin maternity with an immaculate white mantle, followed by her martyrdom-like *Compassio* with a cloak of blood red. Her true witness of the glorified Christ in the third panel is an important attribute of the *Virgo-Ecclesia,* and, significantly, it fashions her into a teacher to the apostolic doctors of the Church. To this end she carries a book in this scene, as she does in the diminutive representations of the Pentecost (Fig. 2.14) and the Annunciation of Her Death (Fig. 2.30) that appear in the surrounding archivolts.[33] These scholastic allusions may well have appealed to the refined tastes of the papal court, and the inclusion of Sts. Peter and Paul as "book ends" in the row of evangelists inhabiting the jambs of the fictive portals deepens the potential reference to Rome.[34] In short, the case for Eugenius IV as donor is plausible, but on the other hand, the papal provenance may equally well be a mythologized addition to the panels' history. In fact, Juan's staunch support of the pope, followed by his daughter's legacy of zealous orthodoxy and institution of the "Catholic Kings" (*Reyes Católicos*), may have been the catalyst for just these sorts of legendary embellishments.

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[33] Edwin Hall and Horst Uhr, "Aureola and Fructus: Distinctions of Beatitude in Scholastic Thought and the Meaning of Some Crowns in Early Flemish Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 60 (June 1978): 249–270.
[34] Karl Birkmeyer asserts that Sts. Peter and Paul are situated among the four writers of the Gospels as representatives for the *Book of Acts*. In a footnote, he hypothesizes that they may be the patron saints of the triptych's donor but stops short of suggesting the pope. Karl M. Birkmeyer, "The Arch Motif in Netherlandish Painting of the Fifteenth Century: Part One," *The Art Bulletin* 43 (March 1961): 5, note 13.

In fact, Maryan Ainsworth has suggested that the aura of the triptych's history, combined with the finesse of its execution, may have prompted Isabella the Catholic to have one of her court artists prepare an exact copy of the "Mary Altar" during the time she resided near Miraflores.[35] For many years, this copy, which is now divided between the Capilla Real in the Cathedral of Granada and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, was considered to be Rogier's original (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16).[36] In 1981, Rainhald Grosshans' meticulous analysis of the Berlin triptych—believed at the time to be derivative from the Granada–New York "original"—noted remarkably free and inventive underdrawings, quite unlike the work of a copyist.[37] Other differences in the Granada and New York paintings, such as adjustments in perspective and alternative articulation of the foliage, heightened suspicions, and dendrochronological tests finally confirmed that these panels could not have been painted until after Rogier's death.[38]

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[35] Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 26, 219.

[36] This view was almost universally upheld by scholarship prior to the 1980s. See, for instance, D. M. Gómez-Moreno, "Un trésor de peintures inédites du XV^{e} siècle," trans. E. Bertaux, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 40 (1908): 289–314, esp. 302; Wilhelm von Bode, "Roger van der Weydens sogen. Reisealtar Kaiser Karls V. im Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum und der Altar mit den gleichen Darstellungen in der Capilla Real des Doms zu Granada," *Amtliche Berichte aus den Königlichen Kunstsammlungen* 30 no. 2 (1908): col. 29–35; Valerian von Loga, "Zum Altar von Miraflores," *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 31 (1910): 47–56; Wauters, "Roger van der Weyden–I," esp. 81–82; Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Christ Appearing to His Mother by Rogier de la Pasture," *Art in America* 5 (1917): 143–149, esp. 148–149; Martin Conway, *The Van Eycks and Their Followers* (London: John Murray, 1921), 140; Emile Renders, *Solution du Problème Van der Weyden Flémalle Campin,* vol. 3 (Bruges: Firme Charles Beyaert, 1931), 31; Lorne Campbell, *Van der Weyden* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 8. The primary scholar to suggest that the Berlin triptych was Rogier's original was Leo van Puyvelde. See Leo van Puyvelde, "Les primitifs flamands à l'exposition de Bruxelles," *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art* 5 (1935): 311–317, esp. 312; Leo van Puyvelde, "La genèse de la forme artistique chez Rogier van der Weyden," in *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes: Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn 1964,* vol. 1 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1967), 55. J. Taubert believed that only the Berlin Christ Appearing to His Mother panel was by Rogier. J. Taubert, "Die beiden Marienaltäre des Rogier van der Weyden: Ein Beitrag zur Kopienkritik," *Pantheon* 18 (1960): 67–75; See also Vos's helpful summary of this scholarship in Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 233, note 8.

[37] See Rainald Grosshans, "Rogier van der Weyden: Der Marienaltar aus der Kartause Miraflores," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 23 (1981): 49–112.

[38] Maryan Wynn Ainsworth, "Implications of Revised Attributions in Netherlandish Painting," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 27 (1992): 59–76, esp. 59–62, 65; Peter Klein, "Dendrochronological Studies on Oak Panels of Rogier van der Weyden and His Circle," in *Le dessin sous-jacent dans la*

Interestingly, the new date for this separated triptych, revised to the late fifteenth-century, aligns with the death of Juan II's widow, Isabella of Portugal, in 1496. It is likely that the royal couple's daughter, Isabella the Catholic, commissioned the copy not only to honor her father and his first wife but also to repurpose an epitaph for María of Aragon into a memorial for her own mother.[39] Later the composition would memorialize the Catholic Queen herself when in 1504 Isabella had the Granada–New York composition installed in the Capilla Real of Granada, where she had arranged to be buried.[40]

There is also important evidence that the imagery in the "Mary Altar" was originally planned for a Carthusian audience, suggesting that Juan may have commissioned it with the intention of eventually donating it to his newly established charterhouse at Miraflores. The Virgin Mary is the protector of the Carthusian Order and most charterhouses bear her name. It goes almost without saying that Rogier's triptych—unequalled in the complexity of its Marian theology—would have had special appeal for the monks of St. Bruno's Order. Not surprisingly, medieval and early modern charterhouses were bastions of early rosary devotion,[41] and a key indicator of Carthusian spirituality in the painting is its rosary-like collection of mysteries.

In 1843, Jean Chrétien Nieuwenhuys characterized the panels of the "Mary Altar" as joyful and sorrowful distillations from the Virgin's life.[42] This art dealer had purchased Rogier's painting not long after it left the collection of General Jean

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peinture. Colloque VII 17–19 septembre 1987. Géographie et chronologie du dessin sous-jacent, ed. Roger van Schoute and Hélène Verougstraete-Marcq (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Collège Erasme, 1989), 28.

[39] Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 219.

[40] Ibid.

[41] For rosary devotion among the Spanish Carthusians in this period, see Santiago Cantera Montenegro, *Los cartujos en la religiosidad y la sociedad Españolas: 1390–1563,* 2 vols., in *Analecta Cartusiana,* vol. 166, ed. James Hogg, Alain Girard, and Daniel Le Blévec (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2000), 139–160.

[42] Nieuwenhuys, Description de la Galerie, 37.

d'Armagnac, who had taken it from Burgos Cathedral in 1809. Nieuwenhuys, in turn, sold it to King Willem II of the Netherlands in 1842. His description of the triptych's subject matter references the traditional cycles of joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries in the rosary, and many of the sculptures in the archivolts support those categories.[43] Although the subjects for meditation while praying the rosary were not standardized during the fifteenth century, the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Shepherds, and Adoration of the Magi all qualify for joyful mysteries, and appropriately, they appear draped over the portal framing the Holy Family in the first panel, like a large, stone strand of intricately historiated *Paternoster* beads.

Otto Pächt has designated the subject of the second panel as a *Pietà* rather than a Lamentation, since St. John and Joseph of Arimathaea primarily serve to support the Virgin and are psychologically removed from her strikingly private vigil over her son's body.[44] The surrounding half circle of archivolt sculptures contributes further sorrowful meditations with Christ's Farewell to His Mother, the Report to the Virgin of Christ's Arrest, the Way to Calvary, the Raising of the Cross, the Piercing of Christ's Side, and the Entombment. A rosary instructional text from 1422 known as the "Franciscan Crown" cites the Lord's Appearance to His Mother—the subject of Rogier's third panel—as a joyful mystery.[45] It could be categorized equally well, however, as a glorious mystery, especially with the carvings of the Ascension, Pentecost, and Assumption/Coronation of the Virgin, which hover over the countenance of the exultant Mary, much like the jeweled crown at the peak of the fictive doorway. In this way, the archivolt functions like a halo

[43] See Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 262.
[44] Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 35.
[45] Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 28.

or rosary *corona* for the Mother of God, a rich tiara with Gothic tracery holding the mysteries of her life in place like the ornamental settings for precious gemstones.

This dissection of Mary's life into sequences for categorization and reorganization is a hallmark of rosary devotion that resonates with the cartographic itinerary of Marian mysteries in Hans Memling *Seven Joys of the Virgin,* installed around 1480 on the altar of the tanners' guild in the Church of Our Lady at Bruges (Fig. 2.17).[46] Like the *Miraflores* panels, Memling's cycle of joyful events snakes around a central mystery, in this case an Adoration of the Magi, with the subsidiary scenes playing out across cut-away buildings, grassy hills, and winding roads.[47] It should be noted, however, that the rosary categories of "joyful," "sorrowful," and "glorious" break down upon closer investigation of Rogier's *Triptych of the Virgin.* For instance, the grief of the *Virgo doloris* in the central panel bleeds over into the two flanking scenes, where a somber foreboding pervades Mary's joyful worship of her newborn son, just as a lingering memory of the Passion colors her glory in his Resurrection.[48] This resistance to categorization and chronology cements these subjects' identity as mysteries, which are by definition timeless in their typological gaze into the future, in their ruminations on the past, and in their devotional application to the present.[49]

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Barbara G. Lane, *Hans Memling: Master Painter in Fifteenth-Century Bruges* (London: Harvey Miller, 2009), 159–160. Lane compares the composition to a triptych, with the Adoration of the Magi in the "central panel," pre-Resurrection scenes in the "left wing," and the Resurrection and events transpiring thereafter in the right.
[48] Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 35–36.
[49] Closely related to the construction of mysteries in the visual arts is the medieval and early modern notion of time as a function of memory and devotion. See Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," 422–451. Much of the literature on the *Miraflores Triptych* characterizes the central subjects of its panels as symbolic, rather than narrative. See in particular Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 261; Birkmeyer, "The Arch Motif in Netherlandish Painting," 3; Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 32; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 226; Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 109.

In the first panel, the jamb figures of St. Peter and St. Luke emulate the Virgin's solemn, downcast eyes, and St. Joseph's slumber—far from the distracted dozing of an old man—anticipates the sleep of death that, in the central panel, renders Christ's body motionless in *rigor mortis.* The capital to the left of the rich brocade, combined with the one partially obscured beneath it on the right, typify the coming Passion with depictions of Absalom's Death (Fig. 2.18) and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Fig. 2.19), while the Christ Child's position on his mother's knees moves seamlessly to the *Pietà* in the second panel, where the Virgin's fervent embrace of her son betrays her longing for the living baby she once held on her lap.[50] Moreover, this central scene substitutes the grandfatherly St. Joseph sitting at the head of the infant Christ with another elderly Joseph—this time Joseph of Arimathaea—who supports the Lord's head with a white cloth reminiscent of the fabric laid beneath the body of the child in the first panel.

At his appearance to his mother in the final scene, Christ's glowing, red wounds and the Virgin's tear-stained face once again echo the *Pietà.*[51] The position of their bodies, however, reenacts an even earlier event in Christ's life as mother and son imitate the choreography of an Annunciation, with Christ standing and leaning forward, like the Angel Gabriel, and Mary sitting meekly on a low stool and turning from her devotional reading at his arrival.[52] Furthermore, Alfred Acres has cogently noted that the panel collapses time, as the risen Christ stepping from his tomb in the distance becomes the past of the foreground scene and the future of the background narrative, since the holy women's journey to the empty sepulcher will make them witnesses to the empty tomb

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[50] See Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 261; Lane, "Rogier's Saint John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 667; Pächt, 35; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 230; Kemperdick, "Miraflores Triptych," 89.
[51] Pächt, 35–36.
[52] Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 26–28; Silver, "Old Time Religion," 75; Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 216.

and the evidence of the Lord's triumphant Resurrection, an event which viewers of the panel have already apprehended.[53] In a similar displacement of time, the composition brings the Annunciation of Christ's Incarnation into the drama of Easter morning, uniting in one, heavily theological moment the announcement of his human nature with the proclamation of his divine nature.[54]

Memling's *Seven Joys of the Virgin* employs a comparable pairing of the Annunciation and Appearance, borrowing both composition and theology from Rogier. Memling's Annunciation unfolds behind twin arches at the upper left edge of the panel, while the resurrected Christ appears to the Virgin on the opposite side of the painting, again in a stone house with a double arch.[55] The Annunciation, in fact, initiates a falling vertical that mimics God's humble descent to earth, with an angel appearing to an unassuming group of shepherds in the hills beneath, followed by the newborn Christ lying in a ruinous stable directly below. Memling's Appearance, by contrast, forms part of an *upward*-moving meditation on Christ's divinity, as the Resurrection at the lower right begins a rising arc that passes the Virgin's house, where the triumphant Lord visits her and where she eventually dies, and culminates in Christ's ascent into the clouds and Mary's Assumption into heaven.[56] In the *Miraflores Triptych* a diagonal line links the stone Annunciation scene (Fig. 2.20) in the upper left of the Holy Family panel with the

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[53] Alfred Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," *The Art Bulletin* 80 (September 1998): 437. For an early commentary on notions of time in this panel, see K. Smits, *De Iconografie van de Nederlandsche Primitieven* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversbedrijf "De Spieghel," 1933), 122–124.

[54] The scholarly literature characterizes the parallelism as Gabriel's annunciation of the Incarnation versus Christ's annunciation of its glorious completion. Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 26–27. The latter has also been styled as an "annunciation of eternal life." Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 216.

[55] Dirk de Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* (Ghent: Ludion, 1994), 176; Lane, *Hans Memling,* 157–158.

[56] Barbara Lane has noted that the Magi, whose exodus from Bethlehem follows a similar, upward moving course to the sea at the upper right, are pursuing a "journey toward eternal life." Ibid., 160. Moreover, Dirk de Vos's characterization of the painting's subject matter as the "Advent and Glorification" of Christ relates to these trajectories of movement through Incarnation and exaltation. See Vos, *Hans Memling,* cat. no. 38.

similarly-composed Announcement of Mary's Death (Fig. 2.30) in the lower right of the third panel.[57]

The literature on Rogier's "Mary Altar" frequently pits these grisaille archivolt carvings against the three main scenes rendered in color below them as a juxtaposition between narrative and *Andachtsbild.*[58] As has been demonstrated, however, the sculpted images function equally well as constellations of mysteries that supplement the central subjects and have the potential to be amplified into rosary meditations themselves.[59] They progress chronologically, albeit in a rather eccentric way, with the narrative beginning just to the left of each arch's center and then moving counterclockwise back to the archivolt's apex on the other side. Hypotheses for the rationale behind this arrangement vary. The Annunciation and Assumption scenes both appear near the peak of their respective archivolts, the Annunciation beginning the "joyful" mysteries in the first panel and the Assumption concluding the "glorious" cycle in the final panel. It has been argued that the counterclockwise progression of scenes ensures that, as in Memling's panel, the storyline moves from heavenly intervention at the Annunciation to the earthly Holy Family beneath the archivolt and then from Christ's earthly Appearance to the Virgin back up to heaven with the Assumption.[60] An alternative explanation posits that Rogier positioned particularly noteworthy sculptures at points where viewers would

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[57] See Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 216. Larry Silver suggests that the reverberation of Annunciation iconography in the third panel looks ahead to the Annunciation of the Death of the Virgin. Silver, "Old Time Religion," 75.

[58] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 261; Birkmeyer, "The Arch Motif," 4; Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 35; Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 108. Jacobs, however, notes the meditative potential in the narrative archivolts.

[59] In the *Miraflores Triptych's* arrangement of simplified scenes surrounded by scriptural narrative in the archivolts and Old Testament typology in the capitals, Felix Thürlemann sees a parallel to the meditative structure in books like the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and the *Biblia pauperum*. Felix Thürlemann, *Rogier van der Weyden: Leben und Werk* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2006), 88.

[60] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 261.

most naturally look, due to alignments with V- and X-shaped diagrams organizing the composition.[61]

In contrast, I suggest that the atypical flow of scenes intentionally discourages a solely chronological, narrative reading. Rather, it allows for devotional engagement outside of time and space, as with the three central mysteries of the triptych, which, in a deeply Augustinian manner, simultaneously look forward, gaze backward, and hover perpetually in the present. In this way, the archivolts mirror the landscape of mysteries in the *Seven Joys of the Virgin.* Memling's topography of Christian history can certainly be transversed chronologically by virtual pilgrims, but the narrative is constantly interrupted by competing itineraries, including the delineated route of the magi, the soul's imaginative ascent to heaven, and the circuit of indulgenced Holy Land sites.[62] In its most ahistorical mode, Memling's painting invites viewers to join the donors, Pieter Bultynck, and Katelijne van Rijebeke, in kneeling before the Nativity and the Pentecost and pausing for introspective meditation on mysteries that are beyond the confines of space and time.[63]

The Order of St. Bruno is inextricably connected to the origins and practice of the rosary. In fact, most scholars believe that the common legend attributing the institution of "Our Lady's Psalter" to St. Dominic may have arisen from confusion with another Dominic—Dominic the Carthusian of Prussia, who contributed significantly to

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[61] Charles D. Cuttler, *Northern Painting: From Pucelle to Bruegel / Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), 115. See also Birkmeyer's comments on the inconsistency of medieval sculptural programs. Birkmeyer, "The Arch Motif," 4.
[62] See Lane's summary of the scholarship on virtual indulgences in this painting. Lane, *Hans Memling,* 158–159.
[63] On the donors' distracted, devotional gaze, see ibid.

early fifteenth-century rosary devotion at the Charterhouse of St. Alban near Trier.[64] With the support of a fellow monk, Adolph of Essen, Dominic composed *clausulae,* or meditative verses on Christological mysteries to be recited at the conclusion of *Ave Maria* prayers. Fifty in total, these *clausulae* follow a narrative organization,[65] much like the *Miraflores* archivolts, as they lead the worshiper through a timeline of sacred events even more comprehensive than the eighteen sculptures in Rogier's triptych.

As with the three timeless mysteries at the heart of the "Mary Altar"—each tinged with lingering sorrow, anticipated glory, and the constant refrain of the *Magnificat* embroidered on the Virgin's mantle—Dominic's *clausulae* embed both joy and suffering into a framework of glad tidings from the Angel Gabriel: "Hail Mary, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus Christ, who, at the Last Supper, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and of his Blood."[66] Another *clausula,* particularly pertinent to the central panel of Rogier's painting, reads, "… blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus Christ, whose sacred side, opened by the lance of the soldier, let flow water and blood for the remission of our sins."[67] It is especially interesting, in this regard, that the rather unusual episode of Christ's Appearance to His Mother figured among the mysteries in these elaborated Carthusian rosary cycles.[68]

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[64] Thomas Esser was the first to publish the case for Dominic the Carthusian. See Thomas Esser, "Beitrag zur Geschichte des Rosenkranzes: Die ersten Spuren von Betrachtungen beim Rosenkranz," *Der Katholik* 77 (1897): 346–360, 409–422, 515–528, cited and discussed in Ann Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 16–17. See also Yves Gourdel, "Le Culte de la trés sainte Vièrge dans l'Ordre des Chartreux," *Maria: études sur la Sainte Vièrge* 2 (1949): 657–675.

[65] Due to its narrative organization, the Carthusian method of praying the rosary has been referred to as the *vita Christi* method. Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose,* 68, 72–73.

[66] Gourdel, "Le Culte de la trés sainte Vièrge," 662: "Je vous salue, Marie, le Seigneur est avec vous. Vous êtes bénie entre toutes les femmes, et béni est le fruit de votre sein, Jésus-Christ, qui, à la dernière cène, a institué le sacrament de son Corps et de son Sang."

[67] Ibid: "... béni est le fruit de votre sein, Jésus-Christ, dont le côté sacré, ouvert par la lance du soldat, laissa échapper eau et sang pour la rémission de nos péchés."

[68] Montenegro, *Los cartujos en la religiosidad,* 154.

The subject of Rogier's third panel has prompted much discussion. An addendum to the Easter story, it does not appear in the Gospels, although its validity has been acknowledged since patristic times when St. Ambrose asserted that the Virgin had been the first witness to Christ's Resurrection.[69] In Western Europe, the first detailed narrative of the event occurs in the widely-circulated *Meditationes vitae Christi* from the late thirteenth century. This Franciscan text was followed by several other accounts in the fourteenth century, including the famous *Vita Christi,* penned by the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony; Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de Jésus-Christ;* and the *Revelationes* of St. Brigit of Sweden.[70] Scholars have assumed that Rogier's depiction of the joyful meeting between mother and son depends on the Franciscan *Meditationes,* but it is likely that he also referred to the Carthusian version of the story, which, incidentally, was more commonly read in Spain than the *Meditationes.*[71] The two texts are quite similar. In the *Meditationes,* the narrative begins with the Virgin giving the three Maries leave to take their ointments to Christ's tomb. There follows a lengthy prayer, in which the Mother of God reviews her son's death and then pleads movingly for his return, using language drawn—somewhat surprisingly—from *Judges* 5:28, in which the mother of Sisera laments over her dead son, a formidable enemy of the Israelites, killed by Jael: "'O my sweetest Son, how are you? What are you doing? What causes your delay? … Come

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[69] See Book 1, 3.14, in Ambrose of Milan, *Liber de virginitate,* in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina. Supplementum,* ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1958), cited and discussed in Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 15.

[70] Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 17–18.

[71] On the diffusion of the *Vita Christi* in Spain, see ibid., 22. On the library at the Charterhouse of Santa María de Miraflores, see Tarín y Juaneda, *La real Cartuja de Miraflores,* 231–234. Two copies of the *Vita Christi,* one from 1530–1531 and an incomplete copy from 1503, are known to have been in the library, albeit after Rogier's painting had already been acquired. On a related note, the presence of Christ's garden tomb outside the window of the Virgin's house does not accord with either the *Meditationes* or the *Vita Christi* but does reflect a fairly distinctly Spanish iconographical solution. Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 21–22.

back then, my Beloved; come, Lord Jesus; come, my only hope; come to me, my Son'."[72]

Christ arrives and tenderly greets his mother:

> While she was praying thus, and gently shedding tears, behold suddenly the Lord Jesus came, in the whitest garments, with serene face, beautiful, glorious, and rejoicing, and said to her, as if beside her, "Hail, saintly parent." She immediately turned around. "Are you," she said, "my Son Jesus?" And she knelt, adoring Him. Her Son said, "My sweetest mother, it is I. I have risen and am with you." Then, rising, she embraced Him with tears of joy … Afterwards, when they were sitting down together, she looked intently and earnestly at His face and at the scars on His hands and asked whether all the pain had gone. He said, "Reverend mother, all pain has gone from me, and I have overcome death, and sorrow, and all hardships, nor could I feel anything of that kind now" … And the Lord Jesus told her how He had liberated His people from Hell and all that He had done in those three days.[73]

Rogier incorporates several details from this narrative, most of which he could also have gleaned from the Carthusian *Vita Christi.* Of particular note are the Virgin's luminously rendered "tears of joy" and her reverent gaze toward "the scars on His hands."[74] Both texts also report that Christ told his mother of the Harrowing of Hell.[75] Scholarship on the *Miraflores Triptych* has not adequately identified Rogier's important elaborations on this reference to the redemption of Hell's captives. The carved capitals in the panel feature scenes of David slaying Goliath (Fig. 2.21), Sampson carrying off the gates of Gaza, and Sampson rending the lion's jaws (Fig. 2.22), but these depictions are

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[72] Chapter 86, in Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. ITAL. 115,* ed. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, trans. Isa Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 359. Note the correspondence with *Judges* 5:28: "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of this chariots?" The window with a lattice also recalls the *Song of Songs,* the imagery of which was routinely applied to the Virgin Mary and Christ. For another correspondence, see *Revelation* 22:20: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

[73] Chapter 86, in Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* 359–360.

[74] On Mary's tears and prayers, as recorded in the *Meditationes,* see Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 263. For corresponding passages in the *Vita Christi,* see part 2, chapter 70, in Ludolphus of Saxony, *Vita Christi Domini Salvatoris nostri* (Venice: [Valerium Bonellum], 1587), 1061: "Domina igitur orante, & lachrymas dulciter emittente"; "curiose intuebatur eunde[m] in vultu et cicatricibus per totu[m]: dilige[n]ter quaerens si omnis pena transisset, et omnis dolor ab eo discessisset."

[75] Ibid.: "Et narrat ei D[omi]n[u]s Iesus qualiter populum suum liberavit de inferno, et quae fecit in illo triduo."

more than just generic types for Christ's victory over the devil. They are specific allusions to his liberation of the faithful dead when he descended into Hell during "those three days" and literally rent asunder the gates of the infernal kingdom.[76] Moreover, it is significant that the framework connecting Christ's Appearance to His Mother with an Annunciation scene is already encoded in the language of the *Meditationes* text. Christ's greeting, "'Hail, saintly parent … I have risen and am with you'," recalls Gabriel's words to the Virgin Annunciate: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee."[77] Furthermore, the open tomb in the background of the *Miraflores* panel appeals to St. Ambrose's analogy linking the sepulcher of Christ, "wherein was never man yet laid" to the Virgin's chaste womb, both of which brought forth the Lord.[78]

Although Ludolph does not make this correlation as explicit in the *Vita Christi* narrative, he does direct the reader to the writings of St. Ambrose and Sedulius, the latter having cogently developed the Marian associations of the Lord's tomb.[79] Moreover, in contrast to the *Meditationes,* the *Vita Christi* gives a lengthy etymology for the names of the three Maries journeying to the sepulcher, along with an explanation of their virtues

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[76] For the more generic interpretation of the capitals' significance, see Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 263. Interestingly, the account of Christ's descent into Hell in the *Vita Christi* gave rise to several Spanish depictions of Christ bringing the liberated souls with him when he appeared to his mother on Easter morning. See Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 28–31; Silver, "Old-Time Religion"; James Snyder, "'The Joyous Appearance of Christ with a Multitude of Angels and Holy Fathers to His Dearest Mother': A Mystical Devotional Diptych by Jan Mostaert," in *Tribute to Lotte Brand Philip: Art Historian and Detective,* ed. William W. Clark, Colin Eisler, William S. Heckscher, and Barbara Lane (New York: Abaris Books, 1985), 175–184. As a side note, Frank Mather cites a miniature from a moralized Bible in which a scene of *Synagoga* petitioning Christ to free the Old Testament captives in Limbo has been rendered similarly to depictions of Christ Appearing to His Mother. Mather, "Christ Appearing to His Mother," 144.
[77] *Luke* 1:28. James Breckenridge has also noticed this. Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 17.
[78] *John* 19:41. See Book 1, 3.14, in Ambrose of Milan, *Liber de virginitate.* See also Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit',"17; Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 216.
[79] See Sedulius, *Carmen paschale,* 5, in *Sedulii opera omnia,* ed. Johann Hümer (Vienna: C. Geroldi filium, 1885), beginning 140; Sedulius, *Opera paschale,* 5, in ibid., beginning 297, both cited in Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit'," 15. For the *Vita Christi* references to St. Ambrose and Sedulius, see part 2, chapter 70, in Ludolphus of Saxony, *Vita Christi,* 1062: "Hoc etiam testatur Ambros. dicens: Vidit Maria resurrectione[m] Domini: prima vidit, & credidit" [citation to book 3 of *Liber de virginibus*]; "Unde etiam Sedulius: Semper virgo manens, huius se visibus astans Luce palam dominus prius obtulit."

and the metaphorical significance of the spices and ointments they prepared to anoint Christ's body.[80] Ludolph's ponderous digression may have prompted Rogier not only to include an image in the archivolts of the Virgin sending the holy women to the tomb with their unguents (Fig. 2.23) but also to depict them in the center of the composition, striding through the countryside (Fig. 2.24). Their neatly categorized appearance—all in a line, costly perfumes in hand, one in blue, the next in red, and the last in green, each with a white veil on her head—carries the same sense of strictly-ordered, exegetical scrutiny that characterizes the *Vita Christi* commentary.

Finally, Ruusbroec's relevance to the devotional argument of the "Mary Altar" provides some of the best evidence that the triptych may have been planned with a Carthusian audience in mind. As mentioned earlier, *The Spiritual Espousals* offers an especially compelling context for understanding the painting's mystical dimension. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate that in addition to its extrapolation of Marian mysteries and rosary spirituality, Rogier's triptych also engages with the distinctly mystical endeavor of apprehending God through ascending levels of active and contemplative images and experience. This mysticism is by no means inconsonant with the more canonical forms of Marian piety present in the painting, and in fact the *Miraflores* panels construe unification with the divine as a function of precisely this kind of devotion to the Virgin.

Ruusbroec composed *The Spiritual Espousals* in the early 1330s during his chaplaincy at St. Gudula's.[81] Widely regarded as one of his richest works, the text focuses on God's salvific betrothal to humankind. It divides the mystical life into active,

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[80] Ibid., 1058–1061.
[81] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 35; Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* 13.

inner, and contemplative sequences reminiscent of St. Bonaventure's three-part ladder to perfection and St. Augustine's three levels of sight.[82] Ruusbroec describes each of these sequences within an overarching, exegetical commentary on a single line from Christ's parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, with which he opens the treatise: "See, the bridegroom cometh; go out to meet Him."[83] The mystic from Groenendaal then recounts the Fall from Eden that necessitated the coming of Christ the Bridegroom and explains how the injunction to "see" the Lord's "coming," to "go out" and to "meet Him" must be ascertained in active, inner, and contemplative iterations. Christ comes to meet the Bride actively in his Incarnation and appearance in the heart, "innerly" in his rising and setting like the sun in the interior landscape of the soul, and contemplatively in his ceaseless, Trinitarian birth from the Father. Against the backdrop of these comings and goings, the Bride is repeatedly commanded to "see": to peer into the "simple sight where hearing and seeing are one," to emulate the "intent seeing and … unscreened, penetrating vision" of Christ, and to "becom[e] seeing" with spiritual eyes "so widely dilated that they will never again be closed," "[f]or the heavenly Father wishes us to be seeing … [and] He speaks eternally in the hiddenness of our spirit a single fathomless word and nothing more. And in this word, He utters Himself and all things. And this word is nothing other than 'See'."[84]

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[82] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 100; Bret Rothstein, "Vision, Cognition, and Self-Reflection in Rogier van der Weyden's Bladelin Triptych," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 64 (2001): 37.

[83] D1, E1, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D151, E150: "Siet, de brudegom comt; gaet ute hem to ontmoete." See also *Matthew* 25:6.

[84] Db562/563, Eb482, in ibid., D349, E348: "want horen ende sien es een … in dien eenvuldigen ghesichte"; Db1051/1052, Eb906, in ibid., D409, E408: "een aenstaren ende een dore sien alle dinc sonder bedectheit"; Db1604, Eb1380, in ibid., D469, E468: "siende werdet"; Dc104/105, Ec89/90, in ibid., D585, E584: "soe wide ontploken datse nummermeer en werden gheloken"; Dc46/51, Ec38/42, in ibid., D579, E578: "Want die hemelsche vader wilt dat wij siende sijn … Ende hier omme spreect hi eewelijcke … in die verborghenheit ons gheests een eenich grondeloes woort ende niet meer. Ende in desen worde spreect hi hem selven ende alle dinc. Ende dit woort en ludet anders niet dan: 'Siet'."

The *Miraflores Triptych* demonstrates a strikingly similar focus on the themes of looking, coming, going, and meeting. Regardless of whether the side panels of this "little altar with its doors" were originally hinged or, on the other hand, fixed in place to form an immobile, Trinitarian ensemble of three paintings in one, the composition's organization around portals insistently foregrounds spaces of comings, goings, and meetings through doorways.[85] Lynn Jacobs' argument for the stationary theory of the "Mary Altar" not only cites Spanish precedent but also demonstrates that the unmoving structure of Rogier's *Miraflores, St. John* (Fig. 2.25) and *Seven Sacraments* (Fig. 2.26) triptychs cleverly manipulates the role of altarpiece wings, which were routinely referred to as "doors" during the Renaissance.[86] In typical folding Netherlandish triptychs, the "doors" often employ grisaille modeling, shallow depth perception, and the presence of donors to create a "miraculous threshold," across which lies the otherworldly interior of the altarpiece, filled with sacred figures, brilliant polychromy, and distant vistas. The *Miraflores Triptych,* by contrast, demonstrates a "rotated threshold," in which the primary "doorway" does not "miraculously" mediate between the exterior and interior of the folding altarpiece, nor between the wings and the central panel, but rather stands between the viewer and the stationary, painted object. In this new system, the formal indicators of the "miraculous threshold" are either set aside or relocated, as in the "Mary Altar," where the structure of the fictive portal contains grisaille archivolt sculpture and stands both over and behind the shallow, frieze-like arrangement of figures below. At their essence,

[85] On the stationary triptych's Trinitarian allusion, see Châtelet, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 89.
[86] Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 90–92, 102–103.

Rogier's "rotated thresholds" function as meditative passageways and, in the context of Ruusbroec, entrances to the mystical life.[87]

The Virgin Mary, who mediates at these thresholds, embodies many aspects of the Bride in *The Spiritual Espousals.* Viewers familiar with this text likely would have recognized in Rogier's triptych a somewhat altered, Marian reading of Ruusbroec, for the treatise labels the Bride as "human nature" and also identifies her with the wise virgins in Christ's parable.[88] Of course Mary as *sponsa* was a theological commonplace, and readers of *The Spiritual Espousals* likely would have seen the *Virgo virginis,* who is both mother and archetypal Bride of God, as an implied exemplar for the betrothed souls discussed in the text. In fact, Ruusbroec implies such an interpretation by invoking the Virgin at several points in his argument. For instance, Christ's espousal to human nature, fallen from Edenic grace, occurs at the Annunciation: "There He espoused this bride, our nature, and united it to His person out of the most pure blood of the noble Virgin. The priest who married the bride was the Holy Spirit. The Angel Gabriel announced the banns. The glorious Virgin gave (her) consent."[89] Since Christ's human nature, "united to His person," was made from the flesh and blood of the Mother of God, she literally shares the same substance as the Bride, and appropriately it is the Virgin who speaks in her behalf as the Holy Spirit solemnizes the nuptial vows.

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[87] See ibid., 87–111, esp. 87–92, 101–105, 109–111. The disjunctive positioning of the figures both in front of and under the *Miraflores* arches has been noted many times. See Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 260; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 17; Birkmeyer, "The Arch Motif," 3; Lane, "Rogier's Saint John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 670; Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 53, 56; Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 18; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 226.

[88] D5, E4, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D151, E150: "menschelijcke natuere [dat] es de bruyt."

[89] D23/26, E19/22, in ibid., D153, E152: "Daer trouwede hi dese bruyt, onse natuere, ende vereenichde met sinen persone vanden puersten bloede[n] der edelre maghet. Die priester die de bruyt trouwede, dat was die heylighe gheest. Die inghel Gabriel dede de ghebode. Die gloriose maghet gaf dat consent."

Moreover, Ruusbroec's description of human nature's original home in the Garden of Eden and his characterization of the heaven that the Bride hopes to regain echo the syntax he employs for the Virgin herself. The earthly paradise is "the most exalted, the loveliest, the richest and most blissful place on earth," while the celestial home of God is a "heavenly hall full of glory and joy, and his Beloved crowned there, flowing out with rich bliss into His saints."[90] In like manner, Ruusbroec speaks of the "rich hall and glorious temple, which was the body of the Virgin Mary."[91] Indeed, in the *Miraflores Triptych,* the rich ecclesiastical architecture, embellished with sculpted mysteries from the Virgin's life, as well as the Edenic vistas extending out behind two of the portals, seem to be attributes of the woman who, as *sponsa,* is both God's "glorious temple" and the portal to a new, Edenic paradise.[92]

It is important to emphasize that Ruusbroec's treatises do not purport to be step-by-step manuals for mysticism.[93] They admonish and instruct but in the end only offer vivid descriptions of transcendent experiences to guide and inspire the reader in a process that cannot fully be taught.[94] *The Spiritual Espousals,* then, gives personal testimony to the active, inner, and contemplative stages of human nature's mystical journey. Employing metaphors, word pictures, and colorful language, the text describes the attributes and virtues of God's Bride. The *Miraflores Triptych* operates in a profoundly

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[90] D7/8, E6, in ibid., D151, E150: "die hoochste stat, ende in die scoonste ende in die rijcste ende in die weldichste van eertrijcke"; Db538/540, Eb461/462, in ibid., D347, E346: "hemelsche sale vol glorien ende vrouden ende sijn <lief> ghecroont daer binnen, uutvloeyende in sine heilighen in rijcker welden."
[91] D21/22, E18/19, in ibid., D153, E152: "in eene rijckelijcke sale ende in eenen gloriosen temple."
[92] On Mary as *Ecclesia* and *Porta paradisi,* see Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 108. For comments on the portals' resemblance to Campin's *Marriage of the Virgin,* Cologne Cathedral, and the architecture and stone carvings of Tournai, see Paul Rolland, *Les primitifs Tournaisiens. Peintres & sculpteurs* (Brussels; Paris: Librairie Nationale d'Art et d'Histoire, 1932), 96–97; Alan Burroughs, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), 225.
[93] Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* 15.
[94] Ibid., 16.

similar way, as Rogier likewise "describes the Bride" through assemblies of colors, subtle gestures, typological references, and echoes from scripture, devotional texts, and Ruusbroec's own writings. The Marian Bride that takes shape in his three panels exemplifies an ideal that, like many of Ruusbroec's lofty accounts of mystical ascent, may seem unattainable, for the Virgin's immaculate soul and singular mission in the economy of salvation are profoundly unique. Still the visual description Rogier provides of *Maria sponsa* establishes a radiant model for those seeking the mystical espousal of their own souls.

On this note, the "crowns of life" (*corona vite* [sic]) suspended over Mary in each of the panels not only allude to bridal insignia but also resonate with passages from Ruusbroec that use the crown to emblematize triumph in the mystical life: "This contemplation establishes us in purity and in limpidity above all our understanding, for it is a special enrichment and a heavenly crown," "[a]nd the gazing in the divine light holds him above all inner practice and above all virtues and above all merits, for it is the crown and the reward after which we strive."[95] The persevering Christian journeys inward as a pilgrim, "struggl[ing] in love for victory, for he sees his crown" because "[g]ood will, in its turning inward to God, is a spirit crowned with eternal love."[96] Consonant with Ruusbroec's language, the paraphrases of scripture on the banderoles in each of Rogier's panels ascribe a laborious, war-like struggle to the Virgin's merits, recounting her "faithful[ness] in the Passion of Christ" (*fuit fidelissima in xpi dolore*) and her

[95] Dc8/10, Ec6/8, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D575, E574: "Dit scouwen sedt ons in puerheit ende in luterheit boven alle onse verstaen, want het es eene sonderlinghe chierheit ende eene hemelsche crone"; Dc190/192, Ec165/167, in ibid., D593, E592: "Ende dat staren inden godlijcken lichte hout hem boven alle innicheit ende boven alle duechde ende boven alle verdienen, want het es die croene ende die loen daer wij na haken."

[96] Db2266/2267, Eb1951/1952, in ibid., D535, E534: "hi stridet in minnen om victorie, want hi siet sine crone"; D1692/1693, E1583/1584, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D361, E360: "De goede wille in sinen inkeere te gode es .i. gheest ghecrooent met eewegher minnen."

"persever[ance], conquering everything" (*p*[*er*]*severavit vi*[*n*]*cens o*[*mn*]*ia*). In fact, Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* might as well be justifying the coronation of this *Miraflores* Virgin with its pronouncement that "nobody shall be crowned except he who has lawfully struggled. And for this it is better to be with Christ in tribulations and in suffering, than to be without Him in joy and in bliss."[97] The final paragraphs of this same treatise contain a beautiful summary of the most exalted state in the mystical life, again employing crowns: "There is neither demanding nor desiring, neither giving nor taking, but a blessed being empty, crown and essential reward of all holiness and all virtue."[98]

The mystical significance of crowns, as elucidated in Ruusbroec's Middle Dutch prose, adds a vernacular inflection to the scholastic interpretation of the *Miraflores* crowns mentioned earlier, with its precise Latin terminology. In particular, the scholastic *aureola* crown of beatitude derives from an exegetical amplification of *Exodus* 25:24–25 and its discussion of the Mosaic table of shewbread, which was rimmed with a small crown (*aureola*) superimposed on a larger one.[99] These two interpretations of the Virgin's coronation —Ruusbroec's vernacular reading and the Latin, scholastic point of view—are not mutually exclusive. As it turns out, Ruusbroec devotes several pages of *The Spiritual Tabernacle* to an explanation of the "little crown of fine gold" surrounding the table of shewbread.[100] He refers to this "little crown" in both Middle Dutch (*cleine croenen*) and Latin (*aureola*) in the same sentence, acknowledging the theological weight

[97] D481/484, E452/455, in ibid., D241; E238, 240: "nieman en sal ghecrooent werden dan die wettelec ghestreden heeft. Ende hier omme eest beter met Cristo in tribulatien ende in dooeghene te sine, dan sonder hem te sine in blisscapen ende in weelden."
[98] D2112/2114, E1969/1971, in ibid., D403, E402: "Daer en es eisschen noch begheeren, gheven noch nemen, maer een salegh ledegh wesen, crooene ende weseleec looen alre heilecheit ende alre dooghde."
[99] See Hall and Uhr, "Aureola and Fructus," 252–253.
[100] D5:5022, E5:4731, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D1091, E1090: "een clein croenken van finen goude."

encoded in the latter term.[101] Predictably, though, he layers a mystical meaning onto the preexisting scholastic one, associating the diminutive crown with those "who confess and glorify the greatness of God's love, in an annihilation of themselves and all their works. And that is in the contemplation of the eternal love, which is God," "for our passivity and God's activity are the little crown with which we confess and feel the greatness of God's love, which teaches us all truth."[102]

In *The Spiritual Espousals,* the Bride embarks on the mystical life with the command to "see": "Since the time of Adam, Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, says and has said to all inwardly according to his divinity: 'See'," and "He shows us what we should see, namely, the coming of the Bridegroom."[103] Ruusbroec explains that in order to see corporally, an individual requires light, a "ready willingness to let the things he is to see be reflected in his eyes," and "sound and flawless" eyes in which objects can be "subtly reflected."[104] Spiritual vision, on the other hand, modifies these three necessities into "the light of God's grace, a will freely turned (to Him), and a conscience unstained by mortal sin."[105] In the "Mary Altar," the Virgin reflects the Bridegroom in the eyes of her soul as she gazes upon her son three times: at his *coming* into the world in the left-hand panel, at his *coming* down from the cross in the middle, and at his *coming* forth

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[101] See D5:5057, E5:4761, in ibid., D1093, E1092.

[102] D5:5092/5094, E5:4793/4795, in ibid., D1097, E1096: "die belien ende glorificeren die groetheit der minnen gods in een vernieuten haers selfs ende al haerre werke. Ende dat es in den aensiene die eweghe minne, die god es"; D5:5125/5128, E5:4823/4825, in D1101, E1100: "Want onse ghedoeghen ende gods werken dat es die cleine croene daer wi groetheit der minnen gods mede belien ende ghevoelen, die ons alle waerheit leert."

[103] D56/58, E48/49, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D157, E156: "Cristus, die wijsheyt dies vaders, spreect ende hevet ghesproken inwendichlijcke na sire godheyt, van Adaems tijde, allen menschen toe: 'Siet'"; D41/42, E34/35, in ibid., D155, E154: "toent hi ons wat wij sien selen, dat es: die toecomst dies brudegoms."

[104] D64/67, E54/57, in ibid., D157, E156: "eene vrije willicheyt dat hi late die dinghen herbeelden in sine oghen, die hi sien sal … die oghen, ghesont sijn ende sonder vlecke, alsoe dat die grove lijflijcke dinghe subtijlijcke daer in herbeelden moghen."

[105] D72/73, D60/62, in ibid., D159, E158: "licht der gracien gods, ende een vrije toeghekeert wille, ende een ombesmette consiencie van dootzonden."

from the grave in the right-hand panel. In the first of these three encounters with Christ, the trajectory of Mary's praying hands and the foil of St. Joseph's closed eyes draw special attention to her downcast, adoring gaze. The Virgin's snow-white mantle and humble position on the stone floor "reflect" the pale flesh of her newborn child and the abject poverty and exposure of his first days in mortality.

In the second panel, the *Virgo doloris* pulls her son's wounded head close to her tearful eyes, filling her field of vision with his bleeding face, while St. John and Joseph of Arimathaea look on her looking with empathy. The blood-red of her clothing makes vibrantly visible the hidden suffering she endured alongside the dying Lord. Finally, in the right-hand painting, the locked gaze between mother and son evinces the joy of their reunion, as the Virgin lifts her hands to imitate Christ's posture in revealing his wounds. So intent is the Virgin's exemplary seeing of the Bridegroom in each panel that viewers of the triptych look upon Christ through his mother's eyes, eliding their vision with hers.[106] In fact, the panels create a narrative of sight that culminates with the completely reciprocal vision achieved in the third scene, as Christ returns the gaze of *Maria sponsa.*

"Looking with Mary" engages repeated references to doors, using Rogier's fictive, tripartite entryway as a trope for the Lord's "comings." The first panel comments on the mystery of Christ's quiet *adventus* by means of a virgin mother, paradoxically invoked as the *Porta clausa.*[107] Appropriately, Rogier's "Incarnation portal" leads into a Gothic sanctuary as enclosed, in its gray walls and canopy of golden brocade, as the chaste womb that bore the tiny Christ Child. Furthermore, although the members of the

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[106] On this point's relevance to the Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* see Koldeweij, "Representatie en devotie," 168.

[107] Jacobs, "Opening Doors," 111. Jacobs sees the space in each of the three panels as a "gloss" on the theology depicted in them. She associates the removed feel of the first panel with a *hortus conclusus.*

Holy Family sit fairly close to the wooden rim of the portal, they occupy a deeper, more protected region of the composition than the figures in either of the other two panels.[108] In the middle scene, a watered landscape, like a redeemed Eden, trails out to hazy mountains.[109] Significantly, this open space is accessible only for those votaries who imaginatively progress past the *Pietà* and through a "portal within the portal," passing beneath the great "door frame" of the empty cross. Similarly, in the third panel the lid of Christ's sepulcher, the unlatched doors of the stone porch, and the unhinged gates of Gaza in the upper right capital have all been swung open to the salvation assured by the empty tomb.

Mary's eyewitness of the Bridegroom and his reflection in her posture, attributes, and compassionate soul invites viewers of the triptych to mimic the *Mediatrix* in "going out" to meet Christ. In doing so, Rogier embellishes Ruusbroec's injunction with an invitation to reverse the "going out" of mankind's first parents from Eden, as depicted on the capital in the central panel, where the stone figures of Adam and Eve turn in exile from the sunlit landscape, the cross, and the shelter of the Marian portal (Fig. 2.27). Following the account given in *Genesis,* an angel vigorously swings a "flaming sword" over his head to drive them from the gate of paradise, rendered in miniature like a microcosmic version of the larger portal framing the panel.[110] For the foolish virgins in Christ's parable, who slumbered through the hour when the Bridegroom came, the entrance to the wedding feast was likewise closed.[111] The wise virgins, however, found the door thrown open and like "the just" in Ruusbroec's *The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rijcke*

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] *Genesis* 3:24.
[111] See *Matthew* 25:5–6, 10–12.

der ghelieven), they are "led back" to salvation from the "dungeon," "prison," "impasse," and "disorientation" inherited by the "children of disobedience."[112]

The Bride seeking to regain paradise, however, must suffer, and her vision depends on "perfect contrition and purification of conscience … when a person looks down on his evil deeds and on the blemishes of his soul."[113] Similarly, in "going out" to meet Christ in the active life, the faithful must experience deep "compassion and a common shared suffering with all mankind."[114] This not only includes sorrow for personal "failings and… lack of virtues" but also "pity for the bodily or spiritual needs of all."[115] In particular, the compassionate suffer for Christ, offered for their empathetic gaze on the lap of Rogier's grieving Virgin in the *Miraflores* central panel. To this intent, Ruusbroec invites his readers to consider objects, attributes, and emotions from the Passion, organized in rhythmic, rosary-like clusters: "the reason for his torments, the mode, and His foresakenness; the love, the wounds, His tenderness; the sorrow, the shame, His nobility; the misery, the disgrace, His humiliation; the crown, the nails, His mercifulness; (His) perishing and dying in patience."[116] Ultimately, "compassion is a laceration of the heart which renders love common to all, and it cannot be healed as long

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[112] *The Realm of Lovers* is organized around the scripture, "'The Lord led the just back along the right ways and showed him the realm of God'." D1:1/2, E1:1/2, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D151, E152: "'Die heere hevet weder leidet den gherechten die gherechte weeghe, ende hevet hem ghetoent dat rike gods'." D2:61/66, E2:54/58, in ibid., D159, E158: "'hi hevet weder leidet' ... ende de natuere die vri was, es worden een kerker ende een ghevankenisse ende ene ellende ende een awech ende een verdoelen hen allen diere in gheboeren werden, want si sijn kindere der onghehoersamheit."

[113] D165/167, E139/141, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D171, E170: "volcomen rouwe ende suveringhe der consiencien; ende dat ghesciet inden neder siene op die mesdaet ende op de vlecken der zielen."

[114] D613/614, E521/522, in ibid., D229, E228: "compassie ende een ghemeyne mede doghen met allen menscen."

[115] D626, E531, in ibid.: "ghebreeke ende … ontbliven in doechden"; D616/617, E523/524, in ibid.: "ontfermicheiden tot alre menschen noot, lijfelijcke ochte gheestelijcke."

[116] D618/622, E525/528, in ibid.: "die waromme sijnder pinen, die wise, ende sine ghelatentheit; die minne, die wonden, sine teederheyt; die smerte, die scaemte, sine edelheit; die alinde, die scande, sine versmaetheit; die croone, die naghelen, sine goedertierenheit; verderven ende sterven in verduldicheit."

as any virtue lives in a person, for God has commanded compassion alone, above all (other) virtues, to have sorrow and grief."[117] Ruusbroec's explication of this great virtue concludes with a hope-filled promise for the wise virgins and redeemed children of Adam: "And therefore Christ says: 'Blessed are the sorrowful, for they shall be consoled'."[118]

In Rogier's triptych, the model of suffering pity is, of course, the New Eve and wisest of virgins (*Virgo prudentissima*), who, rather than fleeing the flaming weapon of the angel in the capital, instead suffers the sword of *Compassio* to pierce her soul. Taken in Marian terminology, this "laceration of the heart" truly "renders love common to all," for it assists in Christ's merciful redemption, purchased by the blood of his own pierced heart. Indeed, the grief-stricken mother holds her son close to her bosom, so that his stilled heart aligns with her own. It is significant, in this regard, that the sword held aloft by the angel expelling Adam and Eve also points back to the center of the portal and to the *Pietà* enshrined within it. In this way, the weapon swivels back and forth between two poles in the history of salvation. On the one hand, it directs viewers to meditate on the Fall from Grace, inspiring compunction with the violent intensity of the angel's swing toward the cowering parents of humankind. At the same time, though, the trajectory of the sword can be reoriented to delineate a razor-sharp path back to a new Eden. Equally violent, this alternative, meditative itinerary repeats the double laceration of Christ and Mary's layered hearts by inviting viewers to "go out" to meet the Lord at the two new portals to paradise, pierced into the bodies of mother and son. The "doorframe" of the

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[117] D650/653, E552/555, in ibid., D233, E232: "compassie es eene quetsure der herten die minne maect ghemeyne tot allen menschen, ende niet ghenesen en mach also langhe alse enighe doghet inden mensce levet; want god hevet hare alleene rouwe ende seer bevolen vore alle dogheden."
[118] D653/655, E555/556, in ibid.: "Ende daer omme spreect Cristus: 'Salich sijn die bedroeft sijn, want si zullen ghetroost werden'."

cross behind them, with its double entryway, reiterates this joint passage to salvation. In fact, Rogier's puzzling decision to set the stone archivolts of his portals in a fictive armature of wood can be viewed as an extrapolation of the redemptive doorways fashioned from the cross in the central panel. The three holes bored into the beams of the holy wood by the nails are plainly visible, and the thoughtful viewer could have associated them with the three portals depicted in the painting. Rimmed in stone and wood, these Marian thresholds become magnifications of the "scars" left in the cross, so that the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries occupy the very sites where the Lord's pierced hands and feet were once pinned.

In fact, "lacerations of the heart," along with the other wounds of Christ, are foregrounded in all three panels as the ultimate doorways to the mystical life. It was previously mentioned that the capitals in the Holy Family scene depict the slaying of King David's son, Absalom (Fig. 2.18), and a sliver from the narrative of Abraham sacrificing Isaac (Fig. 2.19). In the former image, Joab puts a dart through Absalom's heart as he hangs from the boughs of an oak. Below, the Mother of God moves these stone prophecies to their fulfillment in living flesh as she gestures to the heart of her baby, positioned precisely on the median axis of the painting, her sharply pointed fingers anticipating the spear that will one day pierce him when he, like Absalom, hangs from a tree. Interestingly, the Carthusian *Vita Christi* also draws special attention to the Sacred Heart of the Infant Jesus, and Ruusbroec repeats the common analogy between the Lord's wounded side and a doorway to grace: "For He shall unfurl His glorious loving heart for you, and the innermost of His soul, all full of glory, grace, joy, and fidelity. And therein shall you rejoice and wax and grow in heartfelt love. The open wound in His side shall

be your gate to eternal life, and your entrance into the living paradise that He Himself is."[119] Incidentally, Mary's spear-like hands instigate another shadow of prophetic violence as the gilded edge of her mantle highlights a sharp line that descends threateningly from her fingers to the Christ Child's neck.

In the middle panel of the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Lord's bleeding side again falls along the central axis, further delineated this time by the vertical beam of the cross. The viewer's entrance to the portal is now literally framed by gaping wounds, which likewise document another entrance—the cruel passage of nails into Christ's feet and hands. His pierced feet extend to the lower corner of the fictive wooden frame, and on the right his arm hangs awkwardly from his shoulder, continuing the falling line of the Virgin's tears in a sheer drop down to the pooling folds of her red mantle. The excerpt from the *Magnificat* recorded along her cloak—"He hath shewed strength with his arm"—adds a gloss on the rigid limb and impaled hand that strained under the weight of the world's sins.[120] Finally, at his Appearance to His Mother, Christ again manifests the *stigmata,* his right foot angled forward and the wounds glistening with light, like jewels. As already noted, the Virgin lifts her own hands in imitation of her son's pierced ones, and the sepulcher in the distance makes further reference to her empathetic wounds by recalling

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[119] For the heart of the Christ Child in the *Vita Christi,* see Mary Immaculate Bodenstedt, "The Vita Christi of Ludolphus the Carthusian," in *The Catholic University of America Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin Language and Literature*, vol. 16 (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1944), 138. D54/58, E52/56, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D197, E196: "Want hi sal u openen sine gloriose, minnende herte ende die binnenste sijnre zielen, al vol glorien, gratien ende vrouden ende trouwen. Ende daer in seldi verbliden ende wassen ende toenemen in herteleker liefden. Die opene wonde sijnre ziden sal sijn uwe pooerte in dat eeweghe leven ende uwe ingang in dat levende paradijs dat hi selve es."

[120] *Luke* 1:51, inscribed in Rogier's painting as "[fecit potentia]m in brachio [suo]."

the *Vita Christi's* assertion that Mary did not visit the Lord's tomb with the other holy women on Easter morning because the very sight of it would pierce her heart anew.[121]

Placed near the middle of the composition and close to the *open* wound in the side of the resurrected Christ, the *open* sepulcher repeats the allusion to "lacerated hearts" that occupies the center of all three panels. The trumeau of the porch portal, which falls along the axis of this panel, has three empty latches, the locks having been unbolted to open the doors to the spring landscape. It has been suggested that these latches refer to the three nails of the Passion, which harmonizes well with the panel's focus on the *stigmata* as marks of victory.[122] *The Spiritual Espousals* movingly recounts the votary's Eucharistic worship before and within these wounds, characterizing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a "jewel which Christ has left in the holy Church as common to all good people," not unlike the glinting, gem-like death scars in Rogier's Appearance panel, through which "common" humanity can return to paradise:

> And he presses himself into the wounds and into the open heart of Christ his Savior … This felt affection along with compassion and the intense imagination, together with inner consideration of the wounds of Christ may be so great that a person might think that he felt the wounds and the lacerations of Christ in his heart and in all his members. And if any person could, in any way, really receive the signs of our Lord's wounds, it would be this person.[123]

The "Mary Altar" and Ruusbroec's Three Lives

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[121] Ludolphus of Saxony, *Vita Christi,* 1061: "Si enim sepulchrum filii vidisset, quasi doloris gladius animam eius perforasset."

[122] Fuchs, "Rogier van der Weyden's St. John and Miraflores Altarpieces," 56, note 6.

[123] Db1324/1325, Eb1141/1142, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D439, E438: "cleynode dat Cristus inder heiligher kercken ghemeyne ghelaten hevet allen goeden menschen"; Db1381/1389, Eb1188/1195, in ibid., D445, E444: "Ende hi druct hem in die wonden ende in die openne herte Cristi sijns behouders … Dese ghevoelijcke liefde met compassien, ende die sterke ymaginacie met innighen ghemercke in die wonden Cristi, die mochte soe groot sijn, dat den mensche soude duncken dat hi ghevoelde der wonden ende der quetsueren Cristi in sine herte ende in alle sine lede. Ende soude eenich mensche ghewaerlijcke de teekene der wonden ons heeren ontfaen in eenigher wijs, dat soude dese mensche sijn." On the salvific connotation of the landscape in the second and third panels of the *Miraflores Triptych,* see Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 111. For Christ as the emblematic door in the triptych, see ibid., 109.

The remainder of this chapter will carefully discuss the circuitous ladder of mystical ascent and track the way that Rogier translates Ruusbroec's imagery into a Marian idiom suited for Carthusian devotion. The Mariology of St. Bruno's Order has a distinctive flavor. The Carthusians cherished a fervent filial loyalty to the Mother of God, and, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, nearly all charterhouses bore her name. Indeed, the emphatically "interior" nature of the Carthusian vocation was modeled on the woman who was both virgin and mother, for the monks construed their fidelity to God's love as a "spiritual virginity" that could engender "spiritual fecundity" of the soul.[124] Their long hours of isolated meditation in the seclusion of their cells often involved Marian prayers and concerted effort to imitate Christ through the medium of the Virgin.[125]

The most famous of the order's Marian theologians was Dionysius van Rijkel, also known as Denis the Carthusian. Denis's elaboration on the Compassion of the Virgin had a pronounced impact on the moving Crucifixion scenes of Rogier and other Netherlandish painters, but this erudite monk also treated other aspects of the Virgin's character with equal zeal. He was an ardent defender of the Immaculate Conception and Mary's co-redemptive role as the New Eve, and he wrote movingly of her mediating queenship.[126] In fact, Denis ascribes such power to the Virgin's intercession that in his commentary on the great Marian hymn, *Ave maris stella,* he declared that "God wants for us to receive nothing that does not pass through the hands of Mary."[127] The Carthusians who safeguarded Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych* would have cherished his references to

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[124] Gourdel, "Le Culte de la trés sainte Vièrge," 637–638.
[125] Ibid., 640–642.
[126] Ibid., 643–645.
[127] This quote is translated into French and cited in ibid., 644: "Dieu veut que nous n'ayons rien qui ne passe par les mains de Marie."

virgin maternity, *Compassio,* co-redemption, and especially Marian intercession. Given Denis's utter dependence on Mary as a conduit for divine favors, it is not surprising that the city painter of Brussels chose to construe Ruusbroec's Christological mysticism as an act of *imitatio Mariae.*

In the *Miraflores Triptych,* Rogier's reduced palette of white, red, blue, and a small swath of violet, sweeps across the three portals in precisely the same four colors ornamenting Ruusbroec's curtains in *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* The changing hues of clothing track different states of the soul as it encounters and imitates the Bridegroom. Rogier's sensitive use of color in constructing the spiritual arguments of his compositions has already been discussed at length in this dissertation. In particular, the vibrant vermillion of the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixion* paintings has been correlated to the holocaustic love and compassionate charity associated with Ruusbroec's cloth of "twice-dyed red." Ruusbroec assigns additional virtues to the other three colors woven into the veils of the Mosaic sanctuary, which harmonize well with the devotional and chromatic schema at work in the "Mary Altar" mysteries. Not surprisingly, *The Spiritual Espousals* also uses color to explicate abstract ideas. Paralleling the *Miraflores* Virgin with her crowns and mantles of allegorized hues, Ruusbroec speaks of the votary "enrich[ing], possess[ing], and govern[ing] his soul like a kingdom," where Free Will reigns under God's direction as a tributary monarch, "crowned with a crown called charity" and "adorned and clad in a bi-colored garment: the right side, with a divine gift called fortitude, … [t]he left side of the garment … [with] the cardinal virtue called moral fortitude."[128]

[128] D840/856, E713/726, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D257, 259; E256, 258: "sine ziele chieren ende besitten ende ordineren ghelijc eenen conincrijcke … Die sal ghecroont sijn met eenre cronen die heet

Later, in the text's discussion of the soul's meeting with the Bridegroom in the inner life, the "spirit of understanding" is bestowed "like the shining of the sun: for by its shining, the sun fills the air with simple brightness, and it enlightens all forms and shows the distinction of all colors."[129] Ruusbroec explains that "the grace of God is to God as the sunshine (is) to the sun, and it is the means and path which leads us to (Him); and therefore, it shines simply in us, and makes us God-colored, that is, God-like."[130] In this remarkable passage, the faithful meet Christ "with intermediary" as the Lord's intervening, "polychromatic" grace enables them to don his likeness, in the same way that sunlight blushes color into a dark world.[131] The quality of the air and the changing intensity of divine rays of light poetically account for a range of hues moving from the Philadelphia panels' pale intimations of blue and rose, to be discussed in chapter three, to the bloody red of Mary's veil in the *Miraflores Triptych.* "God-colored" and tinted with Christ's virtues, the Virgin, St. John, and the enlightened mystics who emulate them could use this same "light of understanding" to perceive a kaleidoscope of attributes in the Trinity itself, which, paradoxically, is by nature colorless, formless, and inconceivable:

> When the air is penetrated by the sun's brightness, then the beauty and richness of the whole world are shown forth, and a person's eyes are enlightened, and he rejoices in the manifold differentiation of colors. So likewise, when we are one-fold in ourselves, and our potential understanding is illuminated and penetrated by

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karitate … gheciert ende ghecleedt sijn met eenen ondersneden cleede: die rechter side met eenre godlijcker gaven die heetet stercheit … [d]ie slincke side des cleeds sal sijn eene cardinale doghet die heetet sedelijcke stercheit."

[129] Db1951/1957, Eb1680/1685: "gheest der verstendicheit … ghelijc den schine der zonnen; want die zonne met haren schine vervult de locht met eenvoldigher claerheit, ende si verclaert alle ghedaente ende toent onderscheet van allen varwen."

[130] Db1974/1977, Eb1699/1702, in ibid., D507, E506: "de gracie gods houdet hare te gode alse de schijn ter zonnen, ende si es middel ende wech die ons toe leydet; ende hier omme schijnt si eenvoldelijcke in ons, ende maket ons godvaer, dat es gode ghelijc."

[131] Db1624, Eb1397/1398, in ibid., D471, E470: "met middel."

> the shining of the spirit of understanding, then we are able to know the lofty attributes which exist in God.[132]

Against this background of mystical color theory, this chapter will now track the way in which the four hues of Ruusbroec's tabernacle veils are configured in Rogier's "Mary Altar." At the same time, I will demonstrate that the chromatic nature of the three *Miraflores* portals relates to Ruusbroec's tripartite organization of "mystical lives" in *The Spiritual Espousals*. Each of these lives—active, inner, and contemplative—requires the votary to "see" the "coming" of the Bridegroom and to "go out" and "meet him." It may at first seem artificial and overly simplistic to align Ruusbroec's three stages of mystical ascent with the three *Miraflores* panels, but there are important correspondences worth discussing. Moreover, the active, inner, and contemplative lives are by no means unique to *The Spiritual Espousals*. They occur in various iterations throughout most of Ruusbroec's work, and, as mentioned earlier, they resemble the mystical itinerary outlined by St. Bonaventure and codified in St. Augustine's three levels of spiritual sight. In short, it is not farfetched to imagine Rogier organizing his painting around this three-part pattern of apprehending God, particularly as it appears in one of Ruusbroec's most esteemed treatises.

The white-clad Virgin in the first panel of the *Miraflores Triptych* accords with the white segment of the sanctuary curtain in *The Spiritual Tabernacle*. Ruusbroec's text associates this portion of the veil with purity, innocence, and self-effacing simplicity, attributes that not only harmonize with Rogier's composition but also complement many

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[132] For Ruusbroec's description of the heavenly Bridegroom's fathomless incomprehensibility, see Db2025/2029, Eb1743/1747, in ibid., D511, 513; E510, 512. For the quoted text, see Db2008/2015, Eb1728/1734, in ibid., D511, E510: "Alse de locht wert dore schenen met claerheiden der zonnen, soe wert vertoent schoonheit ende rijcheit van alder werelt ende des menschen oghen werden verclaert, ende hi wert verblidet in menichfuldich ondersceet van varwen. Alsoe ghelijckerwijs alse wij eenvuldich sijn in ons selven, ende onse moghelijcke verstaen wert verclaert ende dore schenen metten gheeste der verstendicheit, soe moghen wij bekinnen die hoghe eyghenscape die in gode sijn."

of the characteristics of the active mode of life in *The Spiritual Espousals,* particularly its requirement to see with a "pure conscience" and practice humility.[133] As a peerless model of humility and purity, Rogier's Virgin kneels abjectly on the ground, greeting the newly incarnate Christ, whose historical coming into the world "for the sake of mankind" is the first in a subset of three comings that the Bride must behold as part of Ruusbroec's active life.[134] In discussing the attributes of the Lord's humanity, the mystic from Groenendaal treats his humility, in that "He chose a poor maiden, and not a king's daughter, for a mother, so that the poor maiden should be the Mother of God who is Lord of heaven and earth and of all creatures."[135] In Rogier's painting, this "poor maiden" already possesses the jeweled circlet of heaven's favor, held by angelic hands above her, all the while meekly inclining her head and hands to the ground and sitting even lower than her husband.

The Christ Child is himself an example of self-abasing condescension, tiny, vulnerable, and complementing Ruusbroec's insight that "he began to suffer early, as soon as He was born: that (suffering) consisted of poverty and cold."[136] Paler even than her baby's skin, the Virgin's immaculate mantle veils the threshold of the portal, like a fabric supplement to the brocade canopy suspended behind her. In function and color, it is reminiscent of the "fine linen twined, bright white, of soft flax" woven into a segment

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[133] For the color's association with purity, simplicity, and innocence, see D2:251/254, E2:237/239, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,*D303, E302; D4:522/524, E4:503/505, in ibid., D381, E380. For seeing with a "pure conscience," see D468, E402, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D209, E208: "suvere conziencie."

[134] D184/185, E157, in ibid., D173, E172: "om des menschen wille."

[135] D231/233, E199/201, in ibid., D179, E178: "hi een arme joncfrouwe coes te eender moeder, niet eens conincs dochtere; alsoe dat die arme joncfrouwe gods moeder sijn soude, die een heere es hemelrijcs ende eertrijcs ende alre creatueren."

[136] D278/279, E240/241, in ibid., D183, 185; E182, 184: "hi began vroech te doghene doen hi gheboren was: dat was armoede ende coude."

of the curtain at the entrance to the Holy of Holies in *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*[137] The words of the *Magnificat* on the hem of Mary's cloak—"For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden"— appropriately sweep over the very tiles of the floor, as mother and son contemplate one another, the infant Christ "regard[ing] the low estate" of his mother, and the Virgin looking reverently on her equally lowly baby.[138]

The Bridegroom's second coming in the active life "is daily, frequent, and often, in each loving heart."[139] As already discussed, the first *Miraflores* panel focuses intently on hearts, both the pierced heart of Absalom in stone and the prophetically pierced heart of the infant Jesus. Furthermore, the enclosed, cell-like setting for the composition evokes the inner cloister of the votary's heart where Christ mystically enters, according to *The Spiritual Espousals.* In fact, Mary's solemnly pointed hands, which anticipate the lance wound in her son's side, also create a line linking her heart to his, as if she were already consecrating the inner chamber of her soul to the Lord, long before it would be rent by the sword of her Compassion on Calvary. Above, Simeon's forbidding prophecy of this very event plays out in the archivolt sculpture just to the right of the portal's center, where the Virgin listens to the holy man, her fingers held together in another sharply-pointed gesture of prayerful grief (Fig. 2.28).

After this arrival in the heart, Ruusbroec discusses Christ's third "active" coming in judgment and then admonishes the Bride to "go out" and prepare to "meet" the Bridegroom by building an "edifice of all virtue and of all nobility" " in the kingdom of

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[137] D4:522/523, E4:503, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D381, E380: "dobbel byssinen, blickende wit, van sachten vlasse."
[138] *Luke* 1:48, inscribed in Rogier's painting as "[quia resp]exit humilitatem ancille sue."
[139] D185/186, E158, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D173, E172: "es daghelijcs dicke ende menichwerven in elcke minnende herte."

the soul in which God will dwell."[140] The first and foundational virtue in this structure is, once again, humility, defined by Ruusbroec in language that accords with Rogier's demure, white-robed Virgin, inclining her body and eyes to the ground: "Humility is lowliness or abasement; it is an inward bending over or bowing down of the heart and of the mind before the sublime dignity of God."[141] There follows over three hundred lines of commentary on other righteous attributes to be incorporated into this kingdom of the soul. One of the last of these is "purity of soul and of body," nowhere expressed better than in the humble mother who, with her son steadily reflected in the eyes of her soul, "magnif[ies] the Lord" and merits the words inscribed above her in the *Miraflores* Holy Family panel: "This woman was found most worthy and free from all blemish; therefore she shall receive the crown of life."[142] In this context, the slumbering St. Joseph, who was earlier interpreted as a type for Christ's "sleep" of death at the *Pietà,* takes on another meaning. His sleep recalls the revelatory dream in which another angel affirmed the effulgently white purity of Mary's soul, dispelling the carpenter's fearful doubts: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."[143]

In *The Realm of Lovers,* Ruusbroec characterizes baptism as a "re-clothing in Christian (comm)union of a new life," a "garment of innocence" given to the souls of the

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[140] D483/486, E415/418, in ibid., D211, E210: "Dese twee, dat es karitate ende gherechticheit, legghen een fondament inden rijcke der zielen, daer god in woenen sal, ende dit fundament es oetmoedicheit. Dese .iij. doechde dragen al den last ende dat ghestichte alder duechde ende alre edelheit."
[141] D498/501, E428/430, in ibid., D213, E212: "Oetmoedicheit, dat es nedermoedicheit ochte diepmoedicheit; dats een inwendich neder nighen ochte neder buyghen des herten ende des ghemoeds vore die hoghe weerdicheit gods."
[142] D762, E647, in ibid., D247, E246: "reynicheit van ziele ende van live." The opening text of the *Magnificat* in this panel reads as follows: "[Magnificat anima mea] Dominum et exaltavit spiritus meus in Deo salvatr[i meo]." The banderole reads, "Mulier h[e]c fuit pr[o]batissi[m]a mu[n]da ab o[mn]i labe ideo accipiet corona[m] vite ex Iac Iº."
[143] *Matthew* 1:20.

catechumens as they are "clothed with the death and merits of Christ."[144] Although no color is mentioned in the text, the association with purity and baptism conjures up a carefully bleached robe, "washed … and made … white in the blood of the Lamb."[145] In the central panel of the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Virgin is literally "clothed with the death and merits of Christ," but here her vesture has been baptized and drenched in the full, concentrated red of his saving blood. Even her hands and face are flushed pink with grief, as if stained by excess color leeching from her enveloping mantle. As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* this cloth—most likely fine, Burgundian scarlet wool—seems woven from the sheered fleece of the Lamb of God on her lap and "twice-dyed" in his blood. In fact, the *Miraflores* Virgin is, in a sense, "thrice-dyed" in blood since the sleeves of her dress, her gold-edged robe, and her voluminous mantle are all the same vibrant color.

Moreover, this vermillion segment of "tabernacle curtain" hung across the *Miraflores* portals is also "twice-repeated" in the panels flanking the blood-red *Pietà.* To the left, St. Joseph's scarlet robes accentuate the Passion typology of his deathly slumber, and to the right, the luminous red cape of the resurrected Christ highlights his glowing wounds and recalls the profuse blood that "cloaked" his body on the cross. It is notable that these two additional passages of red cloth appear along the borders with the middle panel, so that they seem to have "spilled" over from the wellspring of scarlet pouring from the Virgin's Compassion in the center. Located at the "heart" of the triptych, Rogier's *Pietà* is the pivotal mystery in the work's larger argument. The red cloth that

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[144] D2:77/81, E2:67/70, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D159, 161; E158, 160: "hercleeden in kersteliker eninghen een nuwes levens .... Ende hem werdet ghegheven dat cleet der onnoeselheit, dat es: sine siele wert ghecleedt met der doot ende met der verdienten Cristi."
[145] *Revelation* 7:14.

streams forward from it to the Resurrection and simultaneously backward to the Adoration of the Holy Family underscores the timeless quality of this triad of scenes, as if fed by a circulatory system of blood draining and pumping from the pierced hearts of Christ and his mother. The angel at the peak of the central portal, itself tinted from blue to violet by the same bloody dye, reinforces the middle panel's thesis of compassionate charity: "This woman was most faithful in the Passion of Christ, therefore there is given to her the crown of life."[146]

The second of the three "mystical lives" in *The Spiritual Espousals*—the "inner life"—resonates with elements from this "innermost" scene at the center of the "Mary Altar," and Ruusbroec gives it by far the longest treatment in his text. From the very beginning of its explication, this "second life" looks inward, eliding the lamps of the wise virgins in Christ's parable with the heart and mind of the bride: "The prudent maiden, that is a pure soul who has given up earthly things and who lives for God in virtues, has taken in the vessel of her heart the oil of charity and virtuous works, with the lamp of an unblemished conscience."[147] The components needed to "see" spiritually are then redefined as, first, an "interior illumination of God's grace … like a candle in a lantern or in a glass vessel"; second, "a stripping away of alien images and of busyness of heart" to allow "a gathering of all the faculties within and without in unity of spirit, in the bond of love"; and third, "a free conversion of the will."[148]

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[146] "Mulier hec fuit fidelissima in xpi dolore ideo datur ei corona vite Ex apoc IIºcº."
[147] Db1/4, Eb1/3, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D281, 283; E280, 282: "<D>ie vroede joncfrouwe, dat es eene reyne ziele die eertsche dinghe hevet begheven ende [met] gode levet in duechden, si hevet ghenomen inden vate[n] harer herten olye der karitaten ende doechdelijcker wercken, metter lampten der ombesmetter conziencien."
[148] Db140/142, Eb121/123, in ibid., D297, 299; E296, 298: "inlichten der gracien gods … ghelijc der keersen inder lanternen ochte in eenen glasenen vate"; Db28/29, Eb24/ 25, in ibid., D285, E284: "een ontblotinghe vremder beelden ende onledicheden van herten"; Db149/151, Eb129/130, in ibid., D299,

In this way, the inner mystic "become[s] seeing" through Christ, who "is the light of the Father."[149] The object of sight—the coming of the Bridegroom—together with the command to go out and meet him, takes the form of an elaborate series of metaphors, corresponding to three levels of unity within the votary. The lowest level of inner unity is associated with the soul, heart, and senses and can be magnified through diligent imitation of Christ and the saints.[150] The Bridegroom's coming in this realm plays out through the blessings and trials of four spiritual seasons announced by astrological signs and characterized by the waxing and waning of the sun, the burgeoning of flowers, and the desolation of heat and hoarfrost. True to the spirit of devout *imitatio Christi*, Ruusbroec models each of these seasons with examples from the life of Christ.

The second level of inner unity adheres to the "higher faculties" and gives definition to the spirit and mind, "above sensory perception, and from it come memory and intellect and will and every faculty of spiritual activity," as the votary emulates the Lord through "faith, hope, and love, and by influx of grace and the gifts of God."[151] Ruusbroec compares this coming of the Bridegroom to "a living fountain with three streams," which flow, firstly, in "pure simplicity" and "requir[e] a going-out" in "supernatural unity"; secondly, in "spiritual clarity," which prompts a "going-out" by comparing the likeness of the soul to the majestic, yet "common," attributes of God; and

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E298: "eene vergaderinghe alle der crachte van binnen ende van buyten, in eenicheit des gheests, in bande van minnen"; Db30/31, Eb27, in ibid., D285, E284: "eene vrie keer des willen."

[149] Db112, Eb97, in ibid., D295, E294: "werden wij siende, want hi is dat licht des vaders."

[150] On the lowest level of unity, see Db58/64, Eb50/56, in ibid., D289, E288; Db73/78, Eb62/67, in ibid., D291, E290.

[151] Db51/57, Eb43/49, in ibid., D289, E288: "overster crachten … boven senlijcheit; ende hier ute comt memorie ende verstannisse ende wille, ende alle die macht gheestelijcker werke"; Db80/81, Eb69/70, in ibid., D291, E290: "ghelove, hope ende minne; ende met invlote der gracien ende der gaven gods."

finally in "inspired fervor," demanding "spiritual love without labor" in return.[152] Ruusbroec identifies four more ways that a person "goes out" toward God, self, and suffering souls before treating the Bridegroom's coming in the highest level of inner unity. This is a godly, natural, "essential" state, which, when enriched by virtues and "praise of God," becomes a haven to "rest in Him above intention, and above ourselves, and above all things," for it is "the unity out of which we have flowed in creaturely wise, and in which we have remained essentially, and back to which, by means of charity, we are lovingly returning."[153] This ultimate level is likened to the vein of a "living fountain with three streams," which is "an inward stirring, or touch, of Christ by His divine brightness in the innermost (depths) of our spirit."[154]

The inner life of *The Spiritual Espousals* is also called the "yearning life," for although the essential unity within the votary prompts "an incomprehensible brightness, and that is the supreme Trinity," yet because a "created vessel cannot contain an uncreated good," there ensues "an eternal hunger which will never be filled."[155] This yearning causes the spirit to be "wounded … by love," an image which occurs earlier in Ruusbroec's explication of the inner life when he discourses on the mystic "wounded

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[152] Db975/976, Eb839, in ibid., D399, E398: "eenre levender fonteynen met drie rivieren." Db984, Eb846/847, in ibid., D401, E400: "puere eenvoldicheit"; Db992/1000, Eb854/860, in ibid., D401, 403; E400, 402: "eyschet … een ute gaen ...overnaturlijcke eenicheit." Db1010, Eb869, in ibid., D403, E402: "gheestelijcke claerheit." On the "common" ("ghemeyne") attributes of God, see Db1083/1110, Eb932/955, in ibid., D411, 413, 415; E410, 412, 414. Db1125, Eb967, in ibid., D415, E414: "inghegheeste hitte"; Db1117, Eb960, in ibid.: "gheestelijcke minne zonder aerbeit."

[153] Db46, Eb39, in ibid., D287, E286: "Dese eenicheit es weselijc in ons van natueren"; Db85/89, Eb73/77, in ibid., D291, 293; E290, 292: "gods lof … in hem rusten boen meyninghe ende boven ons selven ende boven alle dinc. Dit es die eenicheit daer wij creatuerlijcker wijs ute ghevloten sijn, ende weselijc in bleven sijn, ende overmids karitate minlijcke weder toekeerende sijn."

[154] Db1465/1469, Eb1260/1261, in ibid., D453, E452: "een inwindich rueren ochte gherinen Cristi in sire godlijcker claerheit, in dat innichste ons gheests."

[155] D51, E44, in ibid., D155, E154: "begheerlijcken leven"; Db1488/1489, Eb1279/1280, in ibid., D457, E456: "eene ombegripelijcke claerheit ende dat es die hoghe drivoldicheit"; Db1536/1537, Eb1321, in ibid., D461, E460: "een ghescapen vat en can gheen onghescapen goet ghevaten"; Db1528, Eb1314, in ibid.: "een eewich hongher, die nummermeer vervult en wert."

within, [who] in his heart … feels lacerations of love … To be wounded by love is a sure sign that one shall be healed. The spiritual wound simultaneously produces weal and woe."[156] As already discussed, the "lacerations" of the heart have special implications for Rogier's triptych, concentrated with greatest poignancy in the two pierced hearts of the central panel. The *Miraflores* Virgin of the *Pietà* embodies Ruusbroec's wounded, longing soul as she yearns for her dead son. Unlike Christ's bleeding side, her wound is not a literal laceration but an internal, unseen, and empathetic lesion of the spirit, which accords well with this second, inner stage of the mystical life. Moreover, just as the red of Mary's cloak spills forward and backward into the flanking panels, so, too, the vestiges of Simeon's prophecy that "a sword shall pierce through thy own soul" haunt the left- and right-hand scenes, voicing the cyclical nature of mysticism, in which progression "up" the spiritual ladder is actually a cycle that endlessly echoes, balances, and fluctuates back and forth between the different rungs.[157]

The heart appears in several other places in Ruusbroec's inner life, its role as a surrogate vessel for the oil of the wise virgins' lamps having already been mentioned. In particular, the heart figures prominently in the comings of Christ and goings-out of the Bride in the lowest level of "inner unity": "In the open heart where Christ, the eternal sun, shines, He makes that heart and all the inward faculties grow and blossom and flow with joy and with sweetness."[158] The faithful practice "singleness of heart" and engage in "inner practice," which prompts a person to "tur[n] inwards, within, towards his own

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[156] Db1564, Eb1345, in ibid., D465, E464: "van minnen … ghewont"; Db494/498, Eb424/428, in ibid., D341, E340: "van binnen int herte ghewont ende ghevoelt quetsueren van minnen … Ghewont te sine van minnen, dat es een seker teeken datmen ghenesen sal. Die gheestelijcke wonde die maect wel ende wee in eenen tijde."

[157] *Luke* 2:35.

[158] Db447/450, Eb384/386, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D335, E334: "Dat ontplokene herte daer Cristus die eewighe zonne in schijnt, daer doet hi groeyen ende bloeyen ende vloeyen dat herte ende alle die inwindighe crachte met vrouden ende met soeticheiden."

heart," for Christ's own "loving, oblative heart burned with desire before His Father for the needs of all mankind … And therefore Christ's heart and His manner and His converse and His service flowed (out) in mercifulness and in meekness and in humility and in generosity."[159]

Ruusbroec's discourse on the life of yearning comes to a conclusion with an explanation of the Bride's meeting with Christ in three manners. In the first, "essential" mode, they meet without intermediary, by means of the soul's natural likeness to its Creator, "just like an untarnished mirror in which the image is constantly dwelling": "For wherever He comes, there He is; and wherever He is, there He comes; and where He never was, He never comes."[160] The second mode, by contrast, depends on the mediation of virtues and a detailed list of gifts from the Holy Spirit. In the final mode, the meetings with intermediary and without are perfectly balanced in "an inward life according to justice," which epitomizes the "common-life" equilibrium of active and contemplative worship favored by Ruusbroec.[161]

The pathos of Rogier's Virgin holding her dead son to her bosom—his heart silent, hers pieced in empathy—beautifully amplifies a particular segment of Ruusbroec's explanation of the inner life. In the final stage of Christ's coming according to the lower unity of heart and soul, the mystic from Groenendaal describes weeks of progressively shorter and colder days, moving toward an Autumn Equinox in the soul. In terms of the

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[159] Db255/260, Eb218/223, in ibid., D311, E310: "Eenicheit des herten … inwindich van binnen ghekeert si te si[e]ne eyghender herten"; Db906/914, Eb779/786, in ibid., D391, E390: "minnende opdragende herte begheerde ende berrende vore sinen vadere omme alre menschen noot … Ende hier omme vloeyde Cristus herte ende sine maniere ende sine wandelinghe ende sinen dienst in goedertierenheiden, ende in saechtmoedicheiden, ende in oetmoedicheiden, ende in meldicheiden."
[160] Db1652/1653, Eb1424, in ibid., D475, E474: "rechte als die ombesmette spiegel, dae<r> alle weghe dat beelde inblivet"; Db1637/1638, Eb1409/1411, in ibid., D473, E472: "Want daer hi comt, daer es hi; ende daer hi es, <daer comt hi; ende daer hi noeyt en was,> daer en comt hi nummermer."
[161] Db1931/1932, Eb2243/2244, in ibid., D533, E532: "een inwindich leven nader gherechticheit."

text's relevance to the "Mary Altar" *Pietà,* it is significant that this "internal weather" begins to change under the *Virgo* zodiac sign, at a time for harvesting "durable fruits which one can use and consume for a long time."[162] Ruusbroec specifically mentions "grain and grapes" in this harvest, the Eucharistic associations of which are hardly meant to be coincidental.[163]

As the weeks rotate into the *Libra* astrological sign, the climate gets more severe, prompting dropsy, fevers, and chills. Applied to the heart, the darkness, cold, and illness stem from spiritual seasons when "the glorious sun Christ … begins to sink and to hide the interior shining of His divine rays and to leave that person."[164] Times like these are hazardous for the soul, and "the person goes out and finds himself poor, miserable, forsaken," "robbed of earthly goods, of friends, and of family, and … forsaken by all creatures," for "[t]his is the farthest point where a person can remain standing without despair."[165] It is during these dark times, however, that the soul which endures valiantly "will make an inward joy of all suffering and of all forsakenness, and offer himself into the hands of God, and be glad that he may suffer for the honor of God," for "[i]f he conducts himself rightly in this mode, he will never have tasted joy so deep."[166] Ruusbroec promises such individuals a precious harvest, which essentially amounts to a Eucharistic feast:

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[162] Db678/679, Eb581/582, in ibid., D363, E362: "gheduerighe vrucht, diemen in langen tijden orboren ende verteren mach."
[163] Db679, Eb582, in ibid.: "coren ende wijn."
[164] Db684/688, Eb586/589, in ibid., D365, E364: "die gloriose zonne Cristus … beghint te dalene ende dat inschinen sire godlijcker rayen te berghene, ende den mensche te latene."
[165] Db692/693, Eb593/594, in ibid.: "gheet die mensche ute, ende vendet hem arm, ellendich, ghelaten"; Db703/704, Eb601/602, in ibid., D367, E366: "berovet van eertschen goede, van vrienden ende <van> maghen; en<de> ghelaten van allen creatueren"; Db711/712, Eb609/610, in ibid.: "Dit es dat leste poent daermen staende in mach bliven sonder onthopen."
[166] Db725/729, Eb622/625, in ibid., D369, E368: "Van allen doghene ende van alre ghelatentheit sal de mensche een inwindighe vroude maken, ende offeren hem inde handen gods, ende verbliden hem dat hi doghen mach in die eere gods. Es hem recht in deser wise, soe en smaect<e> hi noeyt soe innighe vroude."

> When these resigned people are thus deprived of all consolation and are—in their opinion—quit of all virtues and forsaken by God and by all creatures, then, if they are able to gather (them), all sorts of fruit, grain, and grape are now perfected, mature, and ripe … Thus the virtues are fulfilled, and desolation becomes eternal wine.[167]

These dark, autumnal months of the heart have a significant Christological precedent:

> When the suitable time came when Christ was to bring and gather into the eternal kingdom all the fruits of virtues that had ever been practiced or ever would be practiced, then the eternal Sun began to sink. For Christ abased Himself, and gave His bodily life into the hands of His enemies, and, in such need, He was disavowed and forsaken by His friends. And His nature was deprived of all consolation within and without, and upon it were heaped misery, torment, scorn, bother and burden, and the (charge of) paying the ransom of all sins, according to justice; and He bore it in humble patience. And He wrought the preeminent works of love in this forsakenness.[168]

In the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Virgin holds Christ in the grim aftermath of Ruusbroec's autumnal narrative. The scene is set in the late afternoon or early evening, the "autumn" of the day, and the hour of Vespers. In his meditation on the liturgical hours in *The Twelve Beguines,* Ruusbroec writes that "when evening approached, at the eleventh hour of the day which still pertains to Vespers," Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus "took the body from the cross, and had prepared two white linen sheets, in which they wound the body, and a napkin on which they laid His blessed head."[169] The

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[167] Db743/757, Eb636/649, in ibid., D371, 373; E370, 372: "Alse dese ghesaette menschen aldus alles troosts berovet sijn, ende rechte na haren dunckene alre doghede quite sijn, ende van gode ende van allen creatueren ghelaten sijn: eest dat si wel gaderen connen, alrehande vruchte, coren ende wijn es nu volbracht, rijp ende tijdich … Aldus werden die duechde volbracht, ende mestroost wert eewich wijn."

[168] Db933/943, Eb803/811, in ibid., D395, E394: "Doe die bequamighe tijt quam dat Cristus alle de vruchte der duechde die ye ghewracht worden ende emmermeer ghewracht souden werden, doe hi die voeren ende vergaderen woude inden eewighen rijcke, doe begonste die eewighe zonne te dalene. Want Cristus nederde hem, ende gaf sijn lijflijcke leven inden handen sire vianden, ende hi wert ombekint ende ghelaten van sinen vrienden in selcker noodt. Ende der natueren wert ontrocken allen troost van buyten ende van binnen, ende op hare wert gheladen ellende ende pine ende versmaetheit, ende last ende bordene, ende coop alre zonden te betalenne na gherechticheit; ende hi droecht in oetmoedigher verduldicheit. Ende hi wrochte die stercke werke van minnen in deser ghelatentheit."

[169] D2c1415/1416, E2c1310/1311, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* D535, E534: "doent den evende naecte, in die elfste ure vanden daghe, die noch vesperen toehoort"; D2c1425/1428, E2c1320/1322, in ibid., D535, 537; E536: "den lichame vanden cruce ende hadden bereet .ij. witte linen lakene, daer si den lichame in wonden, ende eenen sweet doeck, daer si dat ghebenedide hoot in leiden."

words of the *Magnificat* embroidered on Mary's mantle are particularly appropriate for this "Vesperbild" since they are always intoned during the evening office, and as the shadows lengthen, the Virgin presides like the astrological sign of *Virgo* over the chill of death, the flush of fevered grief, and crippling, soul-crushing despair. Moreover, Ruusbroec's repeated use of the word, "forsaken," in his description of this dark, cold season of the soul cues the reader to Christ's anguished cry to his Father on Calvary: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[170] First voiced by the psalmist, these words were among Christ's last as "the eternal Sun began to sink" and "He wrought the preeminent works of love in … forsakenness."[171]

It is deeply significant that the refrain of the *Magnificat,* employed in each panel of the *Miraflores Triptych,* is interrupted here at the *Pietà* by snatches from a different text. Running across the Virgin's brow in gold letters are the words, "My God, [my] God," which Mary re-voices in a plea of isolation and bereavement addressed to her son, implicitly followed by the question "why hast thou forsaken me?"[172] The text curls around her face, following the folds of her mantle, some of the letters glinting as they catch the light. The effect is similar to the lines of scripture twisting through the air around the heads of Christ, the Virgin, and the two St. Johns in Rogier's *Triptych of Jean Braque,* where the flowing succession of words is meant to mimic speech traveling through the air (Fig. 2.29).[173] In the "Mary Altar," during the autumnal Vespers of the Virgin's heart, she whispers her prayer to the bleeding face of the God who has forsaken her and who, just hours before, uttered the same cry.

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[170] *Matthew* 27:46.
[171] See *Psalm* 22:1.
[172] "Deus meus deu[s]." On the combination of this text with the *Magnificat,* see Thürlemann, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 90–91.
[173] Acres, "Rogier van der Weyden's Painted Texts," 88.

In the beginning of his exposition on the "second life" of mysticism, Ruusbroec builds on an earlier analogy between the "heart full of mercy" and "a lamp full of precious oil" as he compares a well-prepared soul to a vessel of wine: "Thus one creates a readiness and a disposition for receiving the inward, yearning life. When the vessel is ready, noble liquor is poured into it. There is no vessel more noble than the loving soul, nor drink more beneficial than the grace of God."[174] This "noble liquor" reappears as the prize for those who suffer through the dark days of forsakenness and reap the rewards of their Eucharistic harvest of grapes and wheat as "desolation becomes eternal wine."

The central *Miraflores* panel takes this vivid "word picture" of Ruusbroec one step further as "noble liquor" and eternal, sacramental wine flow from the pierced vessel of Christ's very body, clothing his bereft mother in the likeness of his agony. Mysteriously, the crimson cloth doubles as both the emblem of Mary's forsaken, compassionate heart and also a glorious vesture of victory for the woman who, the banderole assures, was "so faithful in the Passion of Christ," that "there is given to her the crown of life." The mingling of suffering blood and triumphant wine in her attire parrots a similar dualism in a well-known, Messianic passage from *Isaiah*:

> Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.[175]

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[174] D606/607, E515/516, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D227, E226: "herte dat vol es goedertierenheiden, es ghelijc der lampten vol edelre olien"; Db99/102, Eb86/89, in ibid., D293, E292: "Aldus maectmen eene bereetscap ende eene bevallijcheit een inwindich begheerlijc leven te ontfane. Alse dat vadt bereet es, stortmen daer in edele licore. Hen is gheen edelre vat dan die minnende ziele, noch orborlijcker dranc dan die gracie gods."

[175] *Isaiah* 63:2–3.

Like the cloth in this Old Testament prophecy, the Virgin's cloak, "twice-dyed" in red, seems to have been double-dipped, first in blood and then in wine. As the folds of her apparel—stained in winefat—overflow the borders of the panel to vest her resurrected son in crimson, the color's associations prompt viewers to consider the miraculous transformation of the Virgin's grief in forsakenness into joy in reunion. The blood of her crushed heart becomes the juice of crushed grapes, like transubstantiation in reverse, shifting from blood to the "noble liquor" that is the Eucharistic gift of the altar and precious reward for victorious mystics.

To the left of the *Pietà,* St. John leans forward, his face speckled with tears and his eyes squinted with pain, as he reaches out his arms to comfort the Virgin. His depiction in solid purple is unusual, although in the *Braque Triptych* he also wears a violet cloak, edged with gold and over a green tunic. In the "Mary Altar," however, the hue of his garb contributes meaningfully to the portals' living "veil" of "God-colored," virtuous souls, for purple cloth, "tinted with the blood of fish," forms one of the segments in the allegorical curtain of *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*[176] Ruusbroec's poetic connection to fish blood likely stems from the pigment's ancient derivation from the secretions of sea mollusks.[177] *The Spiritual Tabernacle* associates the violet portion of the veil with fortitude and compassionate generosity.[178] In a particularly pertinent passage, Ruusbroec revisits the aquatic origins of the color by describing embroidered water lilies against the purple ground of the curtain:

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[176] D2:234, E2:220, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D301, E300: "gheverwet es met bloede van visschen."
[177] See Daniel Varney Thompson, *The Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 155–159.
[178] See D2:234/235, E2:220/221, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D301, E300; D4:1968/1969, E4:1875/1876, in ibid., D637, E536; D5:464/469, E5:443/447, in ibid., D615, E614.

> And so are we fixed in the ground of all gifts, that is, in the Holy Spirit, just as the water lily is fixed in the ground of the water … And thus are we medicine for all the world. For the generous heart which possesses God's richness must give, console and quench and cool all who are afflicted and hereby is the purple color adorned. [179]

St. John's empathetic gesture toward the suffering Mother of God precisely echoes this description of soothing, medicinal consolation. In fact, the cool hue of the evangelist's clothing and the tentative touch of his hands, combined with Joseph of Arimathaea's gentle support for the Virgin's bowed head, contrast markedly with the ferocity of Mary's grief, as she bends toward her son in fiery red, embracing him tightly. Her quiet attendants, although reverently imitating her anguish with their tears, attempt to quench her feverish pain by administering generous, reserved comfort. *The Spiritual Espousals* seconds the commentary on purple generosity in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* by describing this virtue as "a liberal outpouring of the heart that is moved by charity and with pity," directed both to the "suffering and torments of Christ" as well as to "the bodily needs of all: ['the generous person'] gives, he lends, he consoles each person according to his needs."[180]

As the Virgin's mournful weeping turns to tears of joy in the final panel of the triptych, her mantle shifts to vibrant ultramarine, like the "sky-blue" segment of curtain in *The Spiritual Tabernacle.*[181] Ruusbroec writes that this "heaven-colored" cloth, "which is like the clarified air," signifies "the virtue of discretion, or discernment, for it

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[179] D4:639/645, E4:613/618, in ibid., D393, E392: "Soe werden wi gestadecht in den gronde alre gaven, dat es in den heilegen geeste, alsoe als die aplompe gestadecht es in den gronde der watere … Ende Aldus sijn wi medicine alle der werelt. Want die melde herte die goeds rijcheit besit, die moet geven, troesten ende laven ende vercoelen alle die bedroeft sijn ende hier mede es die purper varuwe geciert."
[180] D661/663, E561/563, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D235, E234: "een melde ute vlieten des herten dat beweeghet is in karitaten ende met ontfermicheiden. Alse die mensche met compassien merket dat dogen ende die pine Cristi"; D675/677, E573/575, in ibid., D237, E236: "De[se] melde mensche merket oic met compassien lijflijcke[r] noot alre menschen: hi dient, hi ghevet, hi leent, hi troost yeghelijcken na sijn behoeven."
[181] D2:227, E2:215, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D301, E300: "jacinctinen."

adorns the faculty of reason and gives discretion in all things, as to how they ought to be done or not done."[182] The chromatic qualities of this hue are as complex as the cognitive and revelatory virtues associated with it:

> This color shows itself as dark or light, according to the way that the air is enlightened, more or less, by the shining of the sun. In this we note just discernment within, which we shall maintain in all our works. And this is always enlightened by heavenly light, that is by God's grace, more or less, according to how each one is enlightened by God.[183]

Ruusbroec comments further that "this discretion is rightly heaven-colored, for it flows to us without labor from God's truth. And therefore, it may not be deceived, and we receive it from grace, not from nature."[184]

Heavenly discernment and discretion are appropriate attributes for this first witness of the resurrected Christ, who, according to Rogier's banderole, "persevered, conquering everything, therefore there has been given to her a crown."[185] In the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Virgin's culminating recognition of salvation through Christ's victory over death has relevance to the "life of contemplation," the most exalted and abstract of the three mystical states in *The Spiritual Espousals*. Appropriately, Ruusbroec's "heaven-colored" blue, which shifts in hue as the sunlight of grace illuminates "the clarified air," is likewise more immaterial and ethereal in its pigmentation than the other, more earthy colors in the tabernacle curtains—the purple dye

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[182] D4:548, E4:526, in ibid., D383, E382: "hemel varuwech"; D2:230/233, E2:217/219, in ibid., D301, E300: "die gelijc es dire vercleerder locht, versteet men die doghet der discrecien ochte der bescedenheit, want si ciert die redeleke cracht ende ghevet ondersceet in allen dingen, hoe mense doen ende laten sal."
[183] D4:548/553, E4:527/531, in ibid., D383, E382: "Dese varuwe vertoent hare donkerlec ochte claerlec na die maniere dat die locht verclaert es men ende meer van den scine der sonnen. Hier inne merken wi gherechte bescedenheit van binnen, die wi behouden selen in al onsen werken. Ende die wert altoes verclaert met hemelschen lichte, dat es metter gracien goeds, men ende meer na dat iegewelc verlicht es van gode."
[184] D4:1956/1959, E4:1864/1867, in ibid., D537, E536: "dese bescedenheit es wel te rechte hemelvaruwech, want si vloeit ons sonder arbeit ute der waerheit goods. Ende hier omme en machse niet bedrogen werden ende wi ontfaense van genaden, niet van naturen."
[185] "Mulier hec p[er]severavit vi[n]cens o[mn]ia ideo data e[st] ei corona ex apoc VIº cº."

being extracted from fish blood; the scarlet cloth double-dipped in the "blood of tiny little worms"; and the white compared to the color of "fine goat-hair."[186]

The mystic from Groenendaal himself acknowledges that the "third life" of contemplation is difficult to describe: "And therefore, no one will really thoroughly understand these remarks by means of any study or subtle consideration on one's own. For all the words and everything that one can learn and understand in a creaturely fashion is alien to, and far beneath, the truth that I have in mind."[187] In this exalted state, however, God the Father once again "says in the hiddenness of the spirit immersed (in God): 'See, the bridegroom cometh; go out to meet Him'."[188] The votary responds by looking with an empty soul, devoid of any work or active virtue; with an inner, "devoted intention"; and, most paradoxically, with a "modelessness" and "darkness, in which all contemplatives wander … and can no longer find themselves in a creaturely mode."[189]

This darkness has relevance to the Virgin's deathly swoon in the Philadelphia panels, to be addressed in chapter three, for the "superessential" life of contemplation can only be comprehended by God himself, for whom it is a natural state of being.[190] Therefore, the mystic "must be dead to himself and live in God," so that "united with God and enlightened in this truth [he] can understand the truth by (the truth) itself. For to

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[186] D2:240/241, E2:226/227, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D303, E302: "bloede van cleinen woermkenen"; D4:519, E4:499, in ibid., D379, E378: "gelijc bocrane."
[187] Dc28/32, Ec23/27, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D577, E576: "Ende hier omme en sal desen sen niemen eyghenlijcke te gronde verstaen overmids eenighe leringhe oft subtijl ghemerc sijns selfs. Want alle waerde ende al datmen creatuerlijckerwijs leren ende verstaen mach, dat es vremde ende verre beneden der waerheit die ic meyne."
[188] Dc22/23, Ec18/19, in ibid., D575, 577; E574, 576: "Ende hi spreect in die ontsoncken verborghenheit des gheests: 'Siet, die brudegom comt; gaet ute hem jegen'."
[189] For the first requirement of contemplative vision, see Dc53/59, Ec44/49, in ibid., D579, 581; E578, 580. Dc60/61, Ec50, in ibid., Dc581, Ec580: "Ten anderen male, hi moet van binnen gode aenhanghen met toevoeghender meyninghen ende minnen"; Dc64/67, Ec53/55, in ibid.: "een onwise ende in een duysternisse daer alle scouwende menschen … in verdoelt sijn, ende hem selven nemmermeer creatuerlijcker wijs en connen vinden."
[190] Dc7, Ec5/6, in ibid., D575, E574: "overweselijcken scouwene." On "God's mode" of contemplation, see Dc112/116, Ec96/99, in ibid., D585, 587; E584, 586.

comprehend and to understand God, above all similitudes, as He is in Himself means to be God with God, without intermediary or any otherness which can create a hindrance or a mediation."[191]

In many ways, the "third life" is a "superessential" (*overweselijcken*) apotheosis of the Bride's "essential" (*weselijcken*) meeting with Christ "without intermediary," spoken of in the "second life" of mysticism.[192] Both this meeting, as well as its active counterpart "with mediary," depends on the ceaseless birth of the Son of God into the soul of the believer: "For in each new now, God is born in us," "with new comings and with new inshining of the new brightness of His eternal birth."[193] In the "third life" of contemplative mysticism, the command to see the Bridegroom is likewise "a new birth and a new enlightenment without cease":

> "For in this darkness there shines and is born an incomprehensible light which is the Son of God, in whom one contemplates eternal life. And in this light one becomes seeing … And without cease, [the spirit] becomes the very brightness which it receives … And according to the simple bareness which encompasses all things, he finds and feels himself to be that very light by which he sees, and nothing else."[194]

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[191] Dc43/44, Ec35/36, in ibid., D579, E578: "moet sijns selfs ghestorven sijn ende in gode leven"; Dc32/37, Ec27/31, in ibid., D577, E576: "Maer die vereenicht es met gode ende verclaert in deser waerheit, hi mach die waerheit met haer selven verstaen. Want god begripen ende verstaen boven alle ghelijckenissen alsoe alse hi es in hem selven, dat es god sijn met gode sonder middel oft eenighe anderheit die hinder ochte middel maken mach."

[192] In the "second life," Ruusbroec describes the two manners of meeting Christ as "essential" (without intermediary) and "active" (with intermediary). See Db1626/1627, Eb1399/1400, in ibid., D471, E470: "Die eenicheit ons gheests houdet hare in tween manieren, dat es: weselijc ende werkelijc."

[193] Db1774, Eb1528, in ibid., D487, E486: "Want in elcken nuwen nu wert god in ons gheboren"; Db1536/1537, Eb1408/1409, in ibid., D473, E472: "met nuwer toecomst ende met nuwen inschine nuwer claerheit sire eewigher gheboert."

[194] Dc88, Ec74/75, in D583, E582: "die nuwe ghebort ende een nuwe verclaren sonder onderlaet"; Dc69/82, Ec56/69, in ibid., D581, 583; E580, 582: "Want in dier duysternissen schijnt ende werdet gheboren een ombegripelijc licht, dat es de sone gods, daermen in scouwet eewich leven. Ende in desen lichte wertmen siende … Ende hi wert die claerheit selve sonder onderlaet die hi ontfeet … Ende nader eenvuldigher bloetheit die alle dinc beveet, soe vint hi hem ende ghevoelt dat selve licht daer hi met siet, ende niet anders."

Ruusbroec explains that this soul, which has become the Christological brightness it ponders, both mimics and participates in the unity of the Trinity. A portion of the human spirit "has an eternal indwelling without distinction" in "the bosom of the Father," while at the same time, "it has an eternal out-flowing, through the birth of the Son, into an otherness, with distinction."[195] Mystics who attain the heights of the contemplative life "go out" to meet the Bridegroom by accessing their own spiritual likeness to the Trinity.[196] In a sense, they "tak[e] possession of the bosom of the Father," so that like God they behold all of creation through the person of the son, who "shines forth without measure" in his endless cycle of births, and they join themselves to the Godhead in the unity of the Holy Spirit, which is "their mutual love."[197]

The Virgin's exemplary seeing in each of the *Miraflores* panels has already been discussed, but the sense of discerning, revelatory comprehension that accompanies her upraised head, slightly opened mouth, and peering gaze toward Christ's wounds in the third scene is unique. It recalls Ruusbroec's description of the faithful in *The Realm of Lovers,* who are "directed upwards with intention, desire, soul, body, eyes, hands, and everything [they are] capable of, to offer God praise and honor in time and in eternity."[198] Chapter one mentioned the connotations of joyful wonder, divine vision, and even liturgical celebration implicit in the position of Mary's hands, but it is significant that the gesture also communicates openness. Like the open tomb, the open jaws of the lion in

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[195] Dc140/143, Ec120/122, in ibid., D589, E588: "hevet een eewich inbliven sonder onderscheet … het hevet een [een] eewich uutvlieten, overmids die ghebort des soens, in eere anderheit, met ondersceede"; Dc159, Ec136, in ibid., D591, E590: "die scoot des vaders."
[196] See Dc155/158, Ec133/136, in ibid., D591, E590.
[197] Dc206/207, Ec179/180, in ibid., D595, E594: "beseten hevet den scoot des vader"; Dc176, Ec151/152, in ibid., D593, E592: "sonder mate ute scijnt"; Dc217, Ec189, in ibid., D597, E596: "harer beider minne." On God's vision of creation through his son, see Dc126/135, Ec108/116, in ibid., D587, 589; E586, 588.
[198] D4:1115/1118, E4:1052/1054, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D259, 261; E260: "op gherecht met meininghen, met begheerten, met siele, met live, met oeghen, met handen ende met al dat men gheleisten mach, om gode lof ende eere te biedene in tijt ende in ewicheit."

the capital, the porch doors, Sampson's gates of Gaza (Fig. 2.22), and even Christ's open wounds, Mary's wide eyes and open hands correlate with Ruusbroec's beloved maxim of the open, "onefold eye" of the mystic:

> And therefore, the eyes with which the spirit contemplates and gazes upon its Bridegroom are so widely dilated that they will never again be closed. For the gazing and contemplation of the spirit remain eternally (fixed) on the hidden revelation of God, and the comprehension of the spirit is so widely dilated for the coming of the Bridegroom that the spirit itself has become the wideness which it apprehends.[199]

Positioned near her heart, the Virgin's hands body forth the openness of her soul, already wounded with a sword, and now open, like the sepulcher behind her, to receive the coming of Christ, who, in the active life of mysticism, "shines" as an "eternal sun" "[i]n the open heart."[200] The "gazing and contemplation of [her] spirit remain eternally fixed" on the *stigmata* of her son, including the scar of his own pierced and open heart, while Mary's hands, lifted in conformity to the Lord's, transform her into the very object of her vision. Taken in Ruusbroec's mystical idiom, the Virgin's witness of the Resurrection and its glowing scars of redemption have so transfigured her cognitive and spiritual understanding that she now sees and discerns by means of her unity with her son. Indeed, the open eyes, open heart, and open, scarless palms of this preeminent Bride of God elide with the open wounds of the Bridegroom and bespeak a discerning, dilated comprehension of the Lord.

Beginning upside down at the crown of her head, the glittering letters of the *Magnificat* amplify the Christological metamorphosis of the Virgin's open, magnified

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[199] Dc103/108, Ec88/93, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D585, E584: "Ende hier omme sijn die oghen des gheests, daer hi met scouwet ende aenstaert sinen brudegom, soe wide ontploken datse nummermeer en werden gheloken. Want staren ende scouwen des gheests blivet eewich in die verborghene oppenbaringhe gods, ende dat begrijp des gheests es soe wide ontploken jeghen die toecomst des brudegoms, dat die gheest selve die wijtheit worden es die hi begrijpt."

[200] Db447/448, Eb384/385, in ibid., D335, E334: "Dat ontplokene herte daer Cristus die eewighe zonne in schijnt."

soul as her right hand literally skirts the text aside to draw her mantle open near her heart: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced."[201] In many ways, the dilated, "onefold eye" of the mystic is closely related to the magnified soul in Mary's canticle of praise. Situated beneath Christ's uplifted, blessing hands, the excerpts from the *Magnificat* continue, embroidered into the ultramarine fabric of the Virgin's mantle with gilt thread: "[H]e hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things."[202] Pondered alongside *The Spiritual Espousals,* the words accord with the blessed state of the contemplative life, to which "no one can arrive … by means of science or subtlety, nor by any practice, but he whom God wishes to unite with His Spirit and to illumine with Himself."[203] The "crown and the reward" of this "heavenly life," is available not only for God's "handmaiden" of "low estate" for whom "he hath done … great things," but also for the Virgin's humble imitators, for Ruusbroec concludes his treatise by assuring his readers that "divine love … rebuffs no beggar" and can "grant us that we might possess the essential unity in enjoyment, and clearly contemplate oneness in threeness."[204]

The mystic from Groenendaal also comments, however, that true contemplation would be more easily achieved "were we released from this exile."[205] To this end, the

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[201] "Magnificat an[ima mea] Dominu[m] et exaltavit [spiritus m]eus."
[202] "[Qui]a respexit humilitatem ancille sue. Ecce en[im ex hoc] beatam me dicen[t omnes] genera[tiones q]uia fecit mihi [magna qui] potens est."
[203] Dc11/13,Ec9/11, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D575, E574: Ende hier toe en mach niemen comen overmids const ochte subtijlheit, noch met gheenre oefeninghen; maer die god in sinen gheeste vereenighen wilt ende met hem selve verclaren."
[204] Dc192, Ec166, in ibid., D593, E592: "croene ende die loen"; Dc193/194, Ec167/168, in ibid., D593, 595; E592, 594: "want scouwende leven dat es een hemels leven"; Dc256/258, Ec224/226, in ibid., D601, E600: "Dat wij ghebrukelijcke besitten moeten die weselijcke eenicheit, ende eenheit claerlijcke bescouwen in drieheit: dat gheve ons die godlijcke minne, die en ghene bedelere en ontseit."
[205] Dc194, Ec168, in ibid., D595, E594: "waren wij verledicht ute deser ellenden."

Carthusians meditating before Rogier's triptych could address the beloved *Salve Regina* prayer to the mediating New Eve who, reversing their exile from Eden, changes tears of grief to tears of joy as she gazes with wide eyes and open heart at the resurrected Christ: "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy … To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send forth our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."[206]

The *Miraflores* Christ Appearing to His Mother memorializes the "blessed fruit of [the Virgin's] womb" by echoing the Annunciation and including a distant scene of the Lord rising from a womb-like tomb. This unique composition takes on an intriguing new significance in light of Ruusbroec's notion of mystical death and the "eternal births" of the son of God. As already mentioned, the painting also cues the viewer to the Annunciation of the Virgin's Death, which appears in the lowest segment of archivolt above Mary's head and, in its form, loosely resembles the resurrected Christ's visit to his mother (Fig. 2.30). A depiction of the Dormition, followed by the Assumption and Coronation, continues the grisaille storyline of the Virgin's last days (Fig. 2.30). At the same time, the main scene within the portal provides its own intimations of Mary's death by demonstrating how the Mother of God was conformed to the likeness of her son not only in life but also in afterlife. Christ's sepulcher, attended by distant holy women with spices, anticipates the Virgin's tomb, which attendant apostles found similarly empty three days after her death. A carpet of roses had taken the place of her uncorrupted body

[206] "Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae … Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae, ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle. Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte; Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende."

as she was assumed into heaven to join Christ, who had ascended to his celestial throne earlier.

By thus encoding the announcement of Mary's death into an image of Christ announcing new life to his mother, Rogier invites viewers to meditate on Christian death as the entrance to eternal life. At the same time, though, he also prompts them to consider an endless cycle of mystical livings and dyings that volley back and forth between the pictorial elements of the composition, simultaneously alluding to the triumph of the Resurrection and the solemn foretelling of Mary's demise. In this way, the very structure of the painting mimics Ruusbroec's circle of mystical death and life, in which contemplatives repeatedly die to themselves in order to live through Christ, following him—as Mary did—from the tomb to the Trinitarian unity of his throne.

The *Miraflores* panel's "recollection" of the Annunciation, combined with St. Ambrose's analogy between womb and tomb, recalls Ruusbroec's timeless notion of "the going-out and the birth of the Son of eternal Light."[207] In contrast to the Lord's historic Nativity, these mystical births are so ceaseless and "so rapid that He is always having come … and (that He) is coming anew personally, without cease, with such new brightness just as though He had never come before. For His coming consists in an eternal now, without time."[208] Interestingly, the enigmatic position of the resurrected Christ's right hand, in which the fingers approximate a circular shape, as if he were about to offer his blessing, has special relevance to these "eternal birth[s]." The gesture is markedly similar to the right hand of St. John the Baptist in Campin's Werl panels (Fig.

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[207] Dc51/52, Ec42, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D579, E578: "die uutganc ende die gheboert des soens des eewichs lichts."

[208] Dc96/100, Ec82/85, in ibid., D585, E584: "also snel dat hi altoes comen es ende in blivende met grondeloser rijcheit; ende persoenlijc, sonder onderlaet, nuwe met alsulcker nuwer claerheit comende es, rechte ochte hi vore nie comen en ware. Want sijn comen besteet, sonder tijt, in eenen eewighen nu."

4.11). Some scholars have used the date of 1438—inscribed on Campin's composition—as a *terminus ante quem* for the *Miraflores Triptych,* assuming that Rogier borrowed the motif from the older master, while others have argued a reverse scenario with Campin emulating the invention of his former journeyman.[209]

Underdrawings, however, reveal St. John and Christ's hands to be less analogous in their preparatory executions.[210] In any case, Rogier's gesture most likely draws attention to the wound in Christ's palm.[211] I would further suggest that the position of his fingers may be intended to cause the wound to open, in much the way that the dead Lord in images of the *Genadestoel* presents the viewer with a portal to his pierced heart by using his hand to open the wound in his side (Fig. 1.19). In the *Miraflores* panel, Mary looks into this open wound in the hand of her son, underscoring the implication that her own dilated eyes, open hands, and open heart trope the Lord's *stigmata.*

This gesture in Christ's right hand, however, also mimics the position of his left hand in the first panel of the "Mary Altar," in which he lies as a tiny infant on his mother's lap. Here again, his hand, particularly the thumb and middle finger, bends to make a circular shape. At the same time, the child's right hand mirrors the position of the resurrected Christ's left hand in reverse, so that the baby's palm is turned over and facing the white cloth of Mary's robe. The adult Christ, by contrast, extends his palm to his

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[209] See Édouard Michel, "Rogier van der Weyden et le Maitre de Flémalle," *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 57 (January–May 1930): 275; Alan Burroughs, "Campin and Van der Weyden Again," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 4 (1932-1933): 132; Burroughs, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory,* 213–214; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 264; Mojmír S. Frinta, *The Genius of Robert Campin* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 72; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 36–37; J. R. J.van Asperen de Boer, J. Dijkstra, and R. van Schoute, *Underdrawing in Paintings of the Rogier van der Weyden and Master of Flémalle Groups,* in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1992), 119–122.
[210] See Asperen de Boer, Dijkstra, and Schoute, *Underdrawing in Paintings,* 121–122; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 233, note 14; Kemperdick, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 38.
[211] Burroughs, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory,* 213–214; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 264; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 36.

mother's face, now wrapped in a white wimple. These gestural similarities add another layer of timeless interchange between the triad of mysteries in the *Miraflores Triptych* so that the child on his mother's lap not only looks ahead to the wrenching *Pietà,* but also to his own "rebirth" from the tomb. Like a visual extrapolation of "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last," the beginning and concluding scenes in the "Mary Altar" constantly anticipate and recollect each other, creating an important archetype for the Lord's mystical cycle of "eternal birth[s]" into the soul.[212]

For the contemplative who receives Christ's "eternal birth," there is no better exemplar than the Virgin Mary. Not only did she literally receive the son of God into her womb when he flowed forth from the Trinity and was "made flesh," but the tomb's analogy to her chaste body enables her to mystically participate in his "rebirth," when he vivified his lifeless corpse and glorified the same flesh he had received "out of the most pure blood of the noble Virgin."[213] Mary's mediation, then, at the Lord's "coming" into the world and at his "going out" from it, makes her a fitting gate keeper for the "new comings and … new inshining of the new brightness of His eternal birth." She is "one with this divine brightness" and has become "the brightness itself," for, as mentioned earlier, Ruusbroec honors this Bride and mother of Christ as "a dawn and … beginning of the day of all grace in which we shall eternally rejoice."[214] In her "heaven-colored" mantle of discerning "sky-blue" that shifts in hue "like the clarified air," Mary is transfigured and transformed by the Christological sun rising at Easter dawn to "fil[l] the

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[212] *Matthew* 20:16.
[213] D24, E20/21, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D153, E152: "vanden puersten bloede[n] der edelre maghet."
[214] Dc172/173, Ec148/149, in ibid., D591, E590: "een met deser godlijcker claerheit ende si sijn die claerheit selve"; Db895/896, Eb770/771, in ibid., D389, E388: "eene dagheraet ende een beghin … des daechs alre gracien daer wij eewelijc in verbliden selen."

air with simple brightness, … show[ing] the distinction of all colors," and making her "God-colored, that is, God-like."

In conclusion, Rogier articulates the intense, Marian piety of the *Miraflores Triptych* through a battery of subtly construed tropes, including rosary allusions, portals and wounds, careful chromatic arrangements, innovative typologies, and a timeless interface of mysteries. Many of these vivid pictorial inventions receive new significance and devotional depth when read in conjunction with Ruusbroec's literary tropes. Of particular relevance to the "Mary Altar" is *The Spiritual Espousals,* with its three-part system of comings, goings, and seeings of the Christological Bridegroom. *The Spiritual Tabernacle* is equally illuminating, given the triptych's references to emblematic curtains. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Ruusbroec's monumental treatise on the Old Testament tent sanctuary was well suited to the careful, exegetical pondering of cloistered monastics, while *The Spiritual Espousals* calls forth a broader base of readers. The demographics of the latter text's audience are best summarized in Ruusbroec's *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden blinkenden steen*), which is markedly similar in its argument and structure to *The Spiritual Espousals:* "Understand this, you who want to live in the spirit, for I am not speaking to anyone else."[215] I argue that this base of readers "who want[ed] to live in the spirit" often engaged creatively and interpretatively with Ruusbroec's theology and visual analogies. The *Miraflores Triptych* evinces that in many cases both Rogier and the viewers of his work translated Ruusbroec's Christ-centric mysticism into distinctive Marian idioms.

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[215] D73/75, E62/63, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D109, E108: "Nu verstaet, ghi die inden gheeste leven wilt, want niemen anders en sprekic toe." The relationship between *The Sparkling Stone* and *The Spiritual Espousals,* as well as this quote's relevance to the audience of the latter text, is discussed in Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 136.

Chapter 3

The Philadelphia *Crucifixion* Panels: Spiritual Death and Compassionate Intervention

The analysis of the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels (Fig. 1.8) in this chapter builds on the Ruusbroec-inflected Mariology previously discussed in the *Miraflores Triptych* (Fig. 2.4). I will also make recourse to arguments set forth in chapter one, since the stark, stage-like setting and blood-red veils in the Philadelphia paintings closely resemble the Escorial *Crucifixion* (Fig. 1.1). In fact, this striking similarity has prompted many scholars to suggest that the Philadelphia panels may also have a Carthusian provenance. The original format of this *Crucifixion* has been the topic of much debate. It has been variously identified as a large diptych, the exterior of an organ case, or part of a triptych.[1] The near grisaille tonality of Christ, the Virgin, and St. John contributed to Max Friedländer's assertion that the paintings formed the exterior shutters of a triptych, while Erwin Panofsky countered that a composition of this finesse could only occupy the privileged, interior space of such an ensemble.[2]

As mentioned earlier, recent scholarship has revealed that the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* did, in fact, adorn the exterior of a great Marian altarpiece. Through

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[1] The appellation of "diptych" has a long history in the literature and has been used in prominent publications, such as Dirk de Vos's monograph. See Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 335–338. For the organ case suggestion, see J. Kirby Grant, "Mr. John J. Johnson's Collection of Pictures in Philadelphia," *The Connoisseur* 21 (September 1908): 4. For early arguments favoring the panels' function as part of a triptych, see Una McMahon, "Une exposition documentaire en Pennsylvanie," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 51 (1908): 132; Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "The John G. Johnson Collection," *The American Magazine of Art* 8 (July 1917): 344; Willy Burger, *Rogier van der Weyden* (Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1923), 31; Paul Rolland, "La Madone italo-byzantine de Frasnes-lez-Buissenal," *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art* 17 (1948): 104–105.

[2] Max J. Friedländer, "The Pictures of Rogier van der Weyden in America," *Art in America* 9 (1921): 65. For an interpretation of Friedländer's comments, see Tucker, "Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia 'Crucifixion'," 676; Zuidema, "Verbeelding en Ontbeelding," 191–192. On the significance of grisaille in the panels, see Pächt, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 32, 34. For Panofsky's opinion, see Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 285, note 2.

dendrochronological dating and careful examination of the wood, Véronique Bücken and Griet Steyaert have demonstrated that the panel depicting the Virgin and St. John once bore an *Annunciation* (Fig. 3.1) from the Dijon Musée des Beaux-Arts on its reverse, while the scene of the crucified Christ was backed with a *Christ Appearing to His Mother* (Fig. 3.2), today in the Washington National Gallery of Art.[3] Mark Tucker's discovery of dowel holes, which once supported an armature of tracery on the back of the Philadelphia panels, accounts for the difference in size between the *Crucifixion* and the paintings that were once behind them.[4] Significantly, the Washington panel derives directly from the *Miraflores Christ Appearing to His Mother* (Fig. 1.35). Generally dated to the later fifteenth century, the Washington and Dijon images have long been acknowledged as pendant works and have been attributed either to the Master of the Prado *Redemption* or to Vrancke van der Stockt, who followed Rogier as city painter of Brussels.

This newly discovered clue to the Philadelphia panels' original context has exciting and far-reaching implications for the study of Rogier's *oeuvre* and early Netherlandish painting in general. For one thing, the subject of the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* can now be identified unambiguously as a Marian mystery.[5] In this guise, it sets the stage for the *Annunciation*, *Christ Appearing to His Mother,* and any other panels depicting mysteries from the Virgin's life that may also have been folded behind the shutters of what must have been one of the most monumental altarpieces in the fifteenth-century Low Countries.[6]

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[3] Bücken and Steyaert, *L'Héritage de Rogier van der Weyden,* 157–159.
[4] See Mark Tucker, "New Findings on the Original Function of Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia *Crucifixion*" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Historians of Netherlandish Art, Baltimore, Maryland/Washington, D.C., November 8–12, 2006).
[5] Conversation with Mark Tucker and Christopher Atkins at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 22, 2014.
[6] Ibid.; Tucker, "New Findings."

Although the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* renders the Virgin's compassionate faint into the arms of a tortured St. John with Rogier's characteristically heart-rending intensity, the panels have not garnered unanimous support as autograph works. In fact, dendrochronological reports estimate the earliest likely date of production to be during the final years of Rogier's life, which would indicate that they were either one of his last projects or else the work of one of his followers.[7] In any case, the sensitivity of the composition's Marian argument is on par with that of the *Miraflores Triptych.* In fact, the trailing folds of the Philadelphia Virgin's mantle, which extend beyond the edge of her panel and into the adjoining composition where the forsaken Christ hangs from his lonely cross, underscore Mary's mediation, in much the way that the *Miraflores Triptych* establishes her as the *Porta coeli,* sitting beneath each of the three portals, her white, scarlet, and ultramarine clothing spilling over the thresholds and breeching the space between the viewer and Christ.[8] This chapter will argue that, like the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* employs the mediation of the Virgin in pointing viewers to spiritual portals veiled in cloth and the saving wounds of Christ. Also consonant with Rogier's "Mary Altar" is the Philadelphia panels' suggestion of creative agency in the readership of Ruusbroec's texts. Through the intervention of both artist and viewers, the imagery in *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*) and *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*) has evolved into pictorial translations that style the Virgin Mary as the *exemplum* of mystical experience.

Given the Marian program that once linked the Philadelphia, Dijon, and Washington panels together, this large ensemble could aptly be called a "Mary Altar" in

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[7] Klein, "Dendrochronological Studies," 29, 32. See also correspondence from Carl Strehlke to Peter Klein, January 31, 1984, in The Philadelphia Museum of Art archival file.
[8] On Mary as *Porta paradisi,* see Grosshans, "Rogier van der Weyden," 66–67.

its own right. As in the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Mother of God mediates in transitional spaces. In fact, as she swoons at the hinged "shutter-doors" of the altarpiece, the Philadelphia Virgin occupies a literal threshold. The faint, frigid blue of her mantle, combined with the pale, violet-gray of St. John's clothing, recalls the venerable Netherlandish tradition of rendering the exterior of shutters in grisaille. The vermillion curtains behind Christ and his mourners anticipate the celebratory polychromy on the other side of the panels, which would have been swung open on holy days. As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* however, the dramatic contrast between the blood-red pigment of the cloth and the faded colors clothing the three figures connotes more than just a juxtaposition between ferial and festal liturgies. The sharply creased hangings function primarily as devotional aids that both rivet the votary's attention on Christ, the Virgin, and St. John and, at the same time, obscure part of the scene behind their copious red cloth. Indeed, they seem like curtained passageways, fictive extensions to the "doors" of the altarpiece that lead to the kind of unfathomable knowledge and hidden, spiritual experience described by Ruusbroec. In essence, the curtains prompt viewers to open the "doors" of their hearts and minds to a mystical interaction with Christ through the mediation of his mother.

Provenance and Patronage

Historically, two main theories have been proposed for the provenance of the Philadelphia panels. The first derives from a detailed, fifteenth-century transaction recorded in the *Mémoriaux de Jean Le Robert et de Philippe Bloquet, abbés de S. Aubert de Cambray,* discovered in 1844 by an archivist in Lille.[9] According to the *Mémoriaux,*

[9] Jean Le Robert and Philippe Bloquet, *Mémoriaux de Jean Le Robert et de Philippe Bloquet, abbés de S. Aubert de Cambray* (Lille, Archives Départementals du Nord, 36 H 431), cited and quoted in Dhanens,

on June 16, 1455, Jean Le Robert, Augustinian abbot of Saint-Aubert in Cambrai and member of the ducal court, commissioned Rogier to create an altarpiece for his monastic church. It was to be five feet square and conform to a format enigmatically described as "I tableau … à II huysseoires." This phrase has been variously interpreted to mean "one panel with eleven scenes" (*histoires*), "two scenes on a single panel," or "one painting in two parts."[10] The most accurate reading renders it as "one panel with two doors" (*huis* or *huysseries*): in other words, a triptych.[11] The *Mémoriaux* continues to recount that on June 8, 1459, four years after the initial commission, Rogier and his wife accompanied the finished panels to Cambrai. During the ensuing weeks, the abbot ensured that Rogier's altarpiece would be generously illuminated, fitted with copper clamps, and its frame painted by an artist named Hayne, most likely the same Hayne of Brussels who completed twelve images of the Virgin for the Cathedral of Cambrai between 1454 and

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"Rogier van der Weyden," 130: [1455–1459] "Le XVI^{e} de juing l'an LV, je Jehan abbé marchanday à maistre Rogier de le Pasture, maistre ouvrier de paincture de Bruxelles, de faire 1 tableau de V piez en quarrure à 11 huysseoires, de telle devise que l'ouvrage le monstre. Se furent les devises faittes à plusieurs fois et ossi il fist ledit tabliau de VI piez et demi de hault et de V piez de large pour le bien de loevre, lequel tabliau fut parfait à le Trinité l'an LIX, se cousta en principal IIII^{xx} ridders d'or de XLIII S. IIII d. la pièce, monnoye de Cambray, dont il fu tous payez du nostre à plusieurs fois. Se fu donné à se femme et à se ouvriers quant on l'amena 11 escus d'or de IIII liivres xx d. t. Se fu admenez cheens par le kar Gillot de Gongnelieu du Ronqer le première sepmaine de juing l'an LIX, se cousta en voitues (sic) à III chevaux, à fardeler, à Bruxelles en winages, cauchies, en despens dudit carton et de Jennin de Montegni, clerc de cheens, que y furent, IX lb. XV s. X d. t. et 11 menc. d'avoine de XXII g. et fu cheens admenez le VIIJ^{e} de juing LIX. Item donné à Pierart Rencon, questier, Jehan Senvin, entailleur, et Martin le voirier, pour avoir assis ledit tannelet en cuer sur hestaux les XIX^{e} et XX^{e} de juing pour avoir ses vewes et pour scavoir où on le porroit assir plus plaisemment, IIIJ par. pour aller dejjeuner. Item pour audit P. Remon (sic) le VI^{e} d'aoust LIX pour une repase et une liste de bos mis et assis desoubz et deseure ledit tableau, 1 lyon d'or de LI s. t. Item marchandé à Jehan Cachet, fondeur, de faire et assis 1 candeler de kevre à V candeleiz devant ledict tableau par le manière qu'il est à veyr s'en heult par marquiet fait en tasque, X escus de XX lb. t. payez le XVIIJ d'aoust LIX. Il fu depuis payet à Hayne jone pointre pour poindre autour dudit tableau le liste et le deseure et jusques as cayères du cuer, LX sous du nostre."

[10] For a summary of these interpretations, see Francis Cambier, "À propos du triptyque de l'abbaye de Saint-Aubert à Cambrai et du peintre Hayne de Bruxelles: Relecture des sources d'archives," in *Rogier van der Weyden in Context: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting Held in Leuven, 22–24 October 2009,* ed. Lorne Campbell, Jan van der Stock, Catherine Reynolds, and Lieve Watteuw (Paris; Leuven; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012), 109.

[11] See Rolland, "La Madone italo-byzantine," 97–106. See also Julius Held, "Periodical Literature on Flemish and Dutch Painting of the 15th and 16th Centuries, 1939–41," *The Art Bulletin* 24 (1942): 391; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 285, note 3.

1455.[12] Rogier's paintings were put in place in the choir on August 14, 1459, the Vigil of the Feast of the Assumption.

Taken together, the Philadelphia panels measure quite close to five feet square, corresponding with Jean Le Robert's commission. This, along with the fact that the *Crucifixion* scene appears in "two parts" ("II huysseoires"), convinced E. P. Richardson that the panels must be identified with the Cambrai altarpiece. Richardson notes, however, that according to the archives, the dimensions of Rogier's Saint-Aubert ensemble were eventually increased to six and a half feet tall by five feet wide, which would have required the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* to be equipped with a now-lost predella or hefty frame in order to still qualify as the altarpiece.[13] Moreover, Mark Tucker has suggested that the Dijon *Annunciation* and Washington *Christ Appearing to His Mother* could have bracketed a larger cycle of scenes from the Virgin's life unfolding in several additional panels. If this were the case, the altarpiece would not have been a triptych but rather one of the largest polyptychs in the fifteenth-century Low Countries, perhaps with a polychrome sculptural group at its center. This scenario would, of course, increase the composition's size to well beyond the measurements given in the *Mémoriaux.*[14]

It is equally possible, however, that the Dijon and Washington paintings presented a more compact distillation of Marian mysteries in a tripartite format comparable to the *Miraflores* panels, with a missing panel or sculpture at the center. As demonstrated earlier, Rogier's "Mary Altar" for King Juan II promulgates an ingenious visual exegesis of Christ's Appearance to His Mother by reading the mystery through the lens of the

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[12] Cambier, "À propos du triptyque," 110.
[13] E. P. Richardson, "Rogier van der Weyden's Cambrai Altar," *Art Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1939): 57–66, esp. 64–66.
[14] Conversation with Mark Tucker and Christopher Atkins at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 22, 2014.

Annunciation. It is significant that the Washington *Appearance* closely follows the *Miraflores* composition in its arrangement of figures, portal frame, color palette, and open door in the background. In particular, the Washington Virgin, who is in the process of rising from her knees to greet her son, holds her hands in precisely the same position as the *Miraflores* Madonna, and the two figures' ample blue cloaks skirt the threshold in both paintings.

Furthermore, the creator of the Dijon and Washington panels seems to have applied Rogier's learned reference to the theological intimations of St. Ambrose and Sedulius that link the *Annunciation* and the *Appearance.* To this effect, the compositions mirror each other. Dressed in a red dalmatic embroidered with gold thread, the Angel Gabriel steps forward to announce the Incarnation, his right hand lifted in greeting and his left hand holding a scepter, while a banderole recording his words wraps around the column. Christ takes a similar stance in the Dijon panel with one foot extended forward. Also dressed in red, he makes a gesture of blessing with his right hand, while in his left the angel's scepter has been exchanged for a cruciform staff, its fluttering green flag echoing the effect of Gabriel's twining banderole. In both paintings the Virgin begins to rise from a wooden *prie-dieu.* In the Dijon *Annunciation* she turns from the left edge of the panel and inclines her head toward the right, while in the Washington painting she makes the same motion in reverse: twisting away from the right to angle her body toward the left. The two images of the Virgin become "parentheses" for the altarpiece's interior, containing the two announcements of the Bridegroom's "comings" in much the way that her womb and the womb-like tomb frame Christ's sojourn on the earth.

Interestingly, the Cambrai *Mémoriaux* reveals the Saint-Aubert retable to have depicted a Marian subject, for it documents a yearly allowance for a candle to illuminate Rogier's "image of Our Lady" during certain offices and masses.[15] It is not difficult to imagine the Philadelphia panels filling this roll with a taper burning before the swooning Virgin on the left door of the closed altarpiece. On important feast days, there would have been several "image[s] of Our Lady" visible on the altarpiece's interior, any of which could have fulfilled the abbot's stipulation for a candle offering. The biggest impediment to the Saint-Aubert theory for the Philadelphia, Dijon, and Washington ensemble is dating. The dendrochronological report for the *Crucifixion* panels estimates 1463 or 1464 as the likely year of execution, although they could have been painted as early as 1458. The oak tree from which the panels were made was cut down in 1448 with a minimum of ten years average curing time.[16] It is tempting to shave three years off the earliest likely date of production so that the panels could still fit within the chronology of Jean Le Robert's commission in 1455.[17]

Even with adjustments to the dendrochronology, however, the question of authorship remains a thorny issue. As alluded to earlier, several scholars, including Lorne Campbell and Stephan Kemperdick, have contested Rogier as the painter of the Philadelphia panels.[18] On the other hand, most of the literature attributes the works to him, and after an intensive examination of the pigment, brushstrokes, and underdrawings

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[15] Jean Le Robert and Philippe Bloquet, *Mémoriaux,* fol. 225r, cited and quoted in Cambier, "À propos du triptyque," 109: "aud[it] office de la t[re] sourie pour allumer deva[n]t lymage de n[ost]re Dame seant eu cuer ent[re] le cloquier z le capelle n[ost]re Dame q[ue] a fait faire a bruxelles par maist[re] Rogier de le pasture le d[it] abbe e sans liij z lv as sollempnite .j. chiron a vespres matines z messe."
[16] Klein, "Dendrochronological Studies," 29.
[17] See unpublished notes from the Philadelphia Museum of Art curatorial file.
[18] For the panels' attribution to a follower of Rogier, see Burroughs, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory,* 266; Kemperdick, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 125; Campbell, *Van der Weyden* (2004), 127; Campbell, "The New Pictorial Language," 127; García-Frías Checa, "The Recovery of a Masterpiece," 67.

of the *Crucifixion* paintings, J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer emphatically proclaimed, "If that's not a Van der Weyden painting in quality then very few other paintings are."[19] Kemperdick has rightly cautioned against artistic hierarchies that depend on subjective judgments of "quality," but at the same time it is difficult not to notice a disparity in execution between the Philadelphia panels and the Dijon and Washington paintings.[20] The latter two were once frequently assigned to Rogier, but it is telling that while the *Crucifixion* panels occupy a prime place in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, presiding over the Medieval and Renaissance galleries as the "crown jewels" of the collection, the Washington *Christ Appearing to His Mother* was consigned to storage at the National Gallery years ago.[21]

There remains another, as-yet overlooked corollary between the Phildaelphia *Crucifixion* and artistic patronage in the city of Cambrai. Chapter one discussed Bishop Jean VI de Bourgogne's failed attempt to bring the miracle-working statue of Our Lady of Grace at Scheut under the control of his Cambrai diocese. I argued that Cambrai's nearly contemporary inauguration of a cult to a Roman icon of the Virgin and Child

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[19] The quote comes from the transcription of an interview from 1999 between Molly Faries and J. R. J. Van Asperen de Boer, portions of which are available for review in the curatorial files of The Philadelphia Museum of Art. Moreover, Friedrich Winkler cited the originality and dynamism of the *Virgin and St. John* panel to support his amended attribution to Rogier himself. Noting St. John's resemblance to the evangelist in the Vienna *Crucifixion,* he dated the painting to the late 1440s. He was not as assured of Rogier's authorship in the Philadelphia panel of the *Crucifixion.* Friedrich Winkler, *Der Meister von Flémalle und Rogier van der Weyden: Studien zu ihren Werken und zur Kunst ihrer Zeit mit mehreren Katalogen zu Rogier* (Strasbourg: Heitz & Mündel, 1913), 51. Max Friedländer unambiguously places the panels in Rogier's *oeuvre,* declaring the invention and style to be "entirely of Rogier's genius." Friedländer, "The Pictures of Rogier van der Weyden in America," 65.

[20] See Kemperdick, "Miraflores Triptych," 97.

[21] On the attribution of the Dijon *Annunciation,* see Andrée Brunard, "Vrancke Van der Stockt (Successeur de Roger Van der Weyden, en qualité de peintre official de la Ville de Bruxelles)," in *Bruxelles au XV^{me} siècle* (Brussels: Editions de la Librairie Encyclopédique: 1953), 83–84; Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* vol. 2, *Rogier van der Weyden and the Master of Flémalle,* trans. Heinz Norden (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff; Brussels: Éditions de la Conniassance, 1967), 57, 93. For the Washington *Christ Appearing to His Mother,* see Royal Cortissoz, *An Introduction to the Mellon Collection* (Boston: The Merrymount Press, 1937), 34; Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 215; John Oliver Hand and Martha Wolff, *Early Netherlandish Painting: The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 254–256.

known as "Notre-Dame saint Luc" may have been, in part, an effort to compete with Scheut and its zealous masses of pilgrims (Fig. 3.3). One of an illustrious group of images attributed to the hand of the evangelist St. Luke, the Cambrai icon depicts a half-length, Italo-Byzantine Virgin and Child of the "Loving Kindness" type with the Christ Child nestled against his mother's face, affectionately cradling her chin in his right hand.[22] Although the earliest documents refer to the icon by the name of St. Luke, there is evidence that it was already known by its more familiar appellation of "Notre-Dame de Grâce" during the fifteenth century, perhaps intentionally coopting the same title used to invoke the miracle-working image at Scheut.[23] Canon Fursy de Bruille is credited with bringing Cambrai's icon to France in 1440 after inheriting it from the prestigious prelate, Jean Allarmet, Cardinal of Brogny and Bishop of Ostia. In 1452 the icon was placed in the Cathedral of Cambrai on the Vigil of the Assumption, just two years after Charles the Bold set the first foundation stone in place for the shrine of Our Lady of Grace at Scheut. Incidentally, it was also on the Vigil of the Assumption that Rogier's Saint-Aubert altar was installed with aid from Hayne of Brussels, the same craftsman who had been employed in the service of the Marian cult at Cambrai Cathedral just four years earlier.

Given the pronounced similarities between the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions,* it may be that the abbot of Saint-Aubert stipulated that his altarpiece was to emulate Rogier's monumental painting at Scheut, in much the way that the neighboring Cathedral of Cambrai had sought to co-opt some of the grace emanating from that

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[22] See Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York; New Haven, CT: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2004), cat. 349, 582–584.

[23] A woodcut of the Cambrai icon, dated to the fifteenth century and conserved in Lille, includes the following inscription in the vernacular: "Je te salue Notre-Dame de Grace, / de Cambrai la cité / mais belle en coeur et face / ici en ta suavité. / Amen." See Jules Houdoy, *Histoire artistique de la Cathédrale de Cambrai, ancienne église métropolitaine Notre-Dame. Comptes, inventaires et documents inédits, Avec une vue et un plan de l'ancienne cathédrale* (Paris: Damascene Morgand et Charles Fatout, 1880), 73-74.

charterhouse's miraculous statue. Interestingly, the Saint-Aubert archives reveal that the Augustinian monastery maintained close affiliations with Flemish Carthusians. The Charterhouse of Our Lady of the Chapel at Herne is mentioned numerous times in the records, often in connection to tithes, benefits, and assets.[24] As discussed in chapter one, Herne also had important economic and historic ties to Ruusbroec's foundation at Groenendaal. Since Saint-Aubert and Groenendaal were both houses of Augustinian canons, it is all the more likely that the mystical intimations of Ruusbroec's theology in the Scheut *Crucifixion* would have also held a special appeal for the Cambrai monks.

Incidentally, the alternative theory for the provenance of the Philadelphia panels places them in the custody of the Herne Carthusians. The Herne necrology notes that in honor of his son Cornelis's entrance into the Order of St. Bruno, Rogier painted a panel for the monastery's chapel of St. Catherine and polychromed a statue of this beloved martyr of Alexandria.[25] Cornelis made his profession in 1450, several years before the earliest dendrochronological estimate for the panels' age, but it could be that Rogier made his donation a number of years after the fact since the necrology entry does not cite the precise date of the gift. The greatest obstacle to this hypothesis is that the charterhouse archives indicate a single panel (*tabulam*), and an altarpiece large enough to include the

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[24] See, for instance, Ordre de Saint Augustin, Abbaye Saint-Aubuert de Cambrai (Lille, Archives Départementals du Nord), 36 H 3, 278, 385.

[25] Arnold Beeltsens and Jean Ammonius, *Chronique de la Chartreuse de la Chapelle à Hérinnes-lez-Enghien,* ed. Edmond Lamalle (Louvain: Bureaux de la *Revue d'hisoire ecclésiastique,* 1932), 228 (Necr. A fol. 33): "Beneficia Rogerii de Pascua. Magister Rogerius de Pascua post professionem Cornelii fratris nostri filii sui dedit domui centum petros. Item ad constructionem novi braxatorii lx libras. Et in testamento suo reliquit in promptis pecuniis centum coronas. Insuper contulit tabulam positam in capella beatae Katarinae. Et fecit depingi ymaginem eius."

Philadelphia, Dijon, and Washington paintings would certainly seem at odds with a small side chapel.[26]

Penny Howell Jolly, however, argues that the *Crucifixion* paintings' muted colors and compositional elements argue strongly for a provenance among the austere, white-robed monks at Herne. She suggests that Rogier visited the Dominican Monastery of San Marco in Florence during his pilgrimage to Rome in 1450 and drew inspiration for the Philadelphia panels from three minimalistic Passion and Marian frescoes by Fra Angelico and his workshop, two of which contain a similarly placed curtain (Figs. 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6). A common monastic severity unites these five images, but Jolly claims that Rogier's paintings make a pointedly Carthusian reference. The swoon of the Virgin resonates with the Marian Compassion articulated so eloquently by Denis the Carthusian, but it further recalls the distinctive rite of profession among St. Bruno's monks, in which they "die" with Christ and remain silent and hooded for three days in memory of his Entombment. Jolly conjectures that since the Scheut Charterhouse imported its first prior and monks from Herne, the close correlation between the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions* may bespeak nostalgia among Scheut's founding religious for the altarpiece of their mother monastery.[27] Subsequent, dendrochronological reports on the compositions, of course, imply the opposite trajectory of influence: namely, the Herne panels emulating the earlier Scheut painting.

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[26] See unpublished notes from The Philadelphia Museum of Art archival file. For an alternative identification of Rogier's lost gift to the St. Catherine chapel, see P. Landelin-Hoffmans, *Un Rogier van der Weyden inconnu? Tableau commémoratif offert par Rogier van der Weyden à la Chartreuse d'Hérinnes-lez-Enghien en souvenir de la profession de son fils Corneille* (Enghien: P. Landelin-Hoffmans, 1948).

[27] Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions*." See also Koldeweij, "Representatie en devotie," 167–168, in which the Philadephia panels are assigned to either the Herne or Scheut Charterhouses.

One of Herne's great benefactors was Margaret of York, wife of Charles the Bold. Chapter four will discuss the allegiance of the Valois noble women to the Order of St. Bruno in more detail, but it is significant that this patroness of Herne possessed a personalized devotional text, inspired by Denis the Carthusian, which contained a miniature of herself kneeling before the resurrected Christ (Fig. 4.33).[28] The composition bears a number of similarities to the Washington *Christ Appearing to His Mother,* with the Burgundian duchess taking the place of the Virgin as she, too, raises her hands in awe and reverently beholds a triumphant Christ clothed in a red cloak fastened with a broach. Both images take place in a barrel-vaulted chamber with an open door on the left, a tiled floor, and a siding of wooden planks on the lower portion of the stone walls. Furthermore, in each depiction Christ carries a cruciform staff surmounted by a billowing flag. It is conceivable that the similarities between the miniature and the Washington panel could indicate a specific request from Margaret for her devotional book to allude to her patronage and loyalty to the Herne Charterhouse.

This evidence, however, is far from conclusive, as is Jolly's suggestion that the Philadelphia *Mater dolorosa* typifies Carthusians at the cusp of their final vows. In any case, the Spartan setting of the *Crucifixion* panels and their extreme color palette do suggest a Carthusian aesthetic reminiscent of the Scheut Calvary, and Edward Bekaert has noted that the Virgin clasps her hands in a distinctly Carthusian gesture of worship known as *manus insertae*.[29] Furthermore, the Philadelphia Christ closely resembles the

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[28] Nicholas Finet, *Le Dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Christ* (London, The British Library, Add. MS 7970).

[29] For the muted colors' allusion to Carthusian habits, see Koldeweij, "Representatie en devotie," 167–168. Koldeweij brings the *Miraflores Triptych* into conversation with the Philadelphia panels as another example of a Carthusian commission with subtly colored robes. He reads the white clothing of the Virgin in the *Miraflores* Adoration of the Holy Family panel as an extremely pale blue—nearly white—and reminiscent of the light, blue-gray vesture worn by the Philadelphia Virgin.

dead Lord in a small Carthusian *Crucifixion* by Bartel Bruyn the Elder (Fig. 3.7). Probably originating in the Cologne Charterhouse, ca. 1515–1520, this diminutive panel not only emulates the position of Christ's skeletal limbs and slumped head in the Philadelphia image but also borrows from the pattern of folds in the trailing end of the loincloth.

Recently, Lorne Campbell has drawn attention to the nineteenth-century Spanish provenance of the Philadelphia, Dijon, and Washington panels, suggesting that the paintings may have been in the Iberian peninsula as early as the fifteenth century due to a copy of the Washington *Christ Appearing to His Mother* by the Luna Master.[30] Based primarily in Guadalajara, this anonymous Spanish painter is so named for his altarpiece in Toledo created for the family of Álvaro de Luna, a key figure in the circle of Rogier's great Spanish patron, King Juan II of Castile and León. Significantly, there is also a wooden Calvary group with a pastiche of Rogierian motifs at the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe, which houses the sepulcher of Juan's first wife, María of Aragon (Fig. 3.8). The sculpture includes angels loosely based on Rogier's Vienna *Crucifixion* (Fig. 1.25) and a Magdalene evoking the *Deposition,* but its swooning Virgin and St. John closely adhere to the Philadelphia panels, even down to the position of Mary's clasped hands.[31] Hanequin of Brussels, the Flemish sculptor responsible for this Calvary, was an important architect at the Cathedral of Toledo and worked at the Guadalupe sanctuary between 1458 and 1478, presumably dying around 1479. He most

[30] Campbell, "Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of Iberia," 37–38; Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 350–351.
[31] Harold E. Wethey, "Anequín de Egas Cueman, A Fleming in Spain," *The Art Bulletin* 19 (September 1937): 381–401, esp. 381–382, 387–391.

likely carved the Calvary group between 1467 and 1468 or in 1478, which means he must have seen the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* prior to those years.[32]

The dating of Hanequin's sculpture provides a hesitant *terminus ante quem* for the Philadelphia paintings, and it implies that the *Annunciation* and *Christ Appearing to His Mother* on the reverse of the panels were executed a little earlier than is sometimes conjectured in the literature. It also bolsters the possibility that the ensemble may have been commissioned for a Spanish religious foundation.[33] The miracle-working Virgin of Guadalupe and her royal monastery were administered by the Hieronymites, and it is noteworthy that the Dijon and Washington paintings closely emulate the composition and exegetical argument of Rogier's triptych at Miraflores, probably donated as an epitaph for the very queen whose bones lay interred at the Guadalupe sanctuary. Perhaps this monumental altarpiece once graced the altar of another Spanish charterhouse as the devotional focal point for the silent monks of María of Aragon's beloved order.

Fractures and Mystical Death

Regardless of whether the ensemble was commissioned by Carthusians, Augustinians, or another religious institution, the Philadelphia panels exhibit the same, stirring connection to Ruusbroec's treatises as does the Scheut *Crucifixion*. *The Spiritual Espousals* contains a moving account of Christ's death that bears particular resonance with the bleak loneliness portrayed in the paintings, in which a rocky valley separates Christ from his mourners, cleaving Mount Golgotha into two pale green islands rising against a stone wall and an impenetrably dark sky:

> He bore His cross with great woe up to the highest place on earth … Never did man nor woman see such a fair body so disfigured. He endured shame, pain and

[32] Ibid.
[33] Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 338.

> cold before the whole world; for He was naked and it was cold, and the biting wind blew into His wounds. He was nailed to the wood of the cross with blunt nails, and racked so that His veins were rent. He was placed upright and thrust down so that His wounds bled. His head was crowned with thorns … His eyes saw the obstinacy and the wickedness of the Jews and the anguish of His Mother, and His sight failed on account of the bitterness of the torments and of death … Christ our Bridegroom wounded unto death, forsaken by God and by all creatures, dying hanging on the cross like a log no one heeded but Mary His Mother, who could not help Him. And Christ also suffered spiritually, in His soul … He suffered still more by reason of the grief and anguish of His Mother and of His disciples who were in great affliction … And His (human) nature and His lower reason suffered because God withdrew from them the influx of His gifts and of His consolation, and He left them to themselves in such need; and Christ bemoaned this and said: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"[34]

As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* the brilliant, orange-red cloth backing Christ, the Virgin, and St. John gains deeper significance within the context of Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* It echoes the "deep fiery-red" segment of curtain ornamenting the mystical tabernacle within the heart, dyed twice in the "blood of worms" to conform to the bleeding flesh of the crucified Christ. The paintings' wrenching depiction of a collapsed mother beside the slaughtered *Agnus Dei,* strung up, as it were, before his own blood-stained fleece, moves the viewer to apply Ruusbroec's visceral mode of compassionate *imitatio Christi:* "These unheard-of, manifold torments of Christ our Redeemer and our

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[34] D288/318, E249/276, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D185, 187, 189; E184, 186, 188: "Hi droech sijn cruyce met groten wee inde hoochste stat van eertrijcke … Soe sconen lijf en sach noyt man noch wijf soe mesmaect. Hi leet scaemte, smerte, coude vore alle de werelt, <want> hi was naect ende het was cout, ende de hare vloech hem in sine wonden. Hi wert ghenaghelt ane dat hout des cruycen met plompen naghelen, ende gherect dat hem sine aderen scoorden. Hi wert opgherecht ende neder ghestuket dat hem sine wonden bloedden. Hem was sijn hooft ghecroont met dornen … sine oghen saghen die eenwillicheit ende <die> quaetheyt der joden ende de alindicheit sire moeder, ende sine oghen verghinghen van bitterheyt der pinen ende der doot … Cristus onse brudegom ghewont tot der doot [toe], ghelaten van gode ende van allen creatueren, stervende aenden cruyce hanghende als een stoc dies nieman en achte, sonder Maria sijn moeder die hem niet <ghe> helpen en mochte. Noch doghede Cristus gheestelijc, aender zielen … Noch dooghede hi omme den jammer ende omme de alindicheit sire moeder ende sire discipulen die in groter droefheit waren … Ende sine natuere ende sine nederste redene doghede om dat hare god ontrac den invlote sire gaven ende sijns troostes, ende hise liet op hare selven staen in selcker noot. Ende des beclaghede hem Cristus ende sprac: 'Mijn god, mijn god, waer omme hebdi mij ghelaten?'

Bridegroom move the merciful person in compassion and in pity towards Christ."[35] Therefore, "[i]n this way we ought to rend our hearts with compassion and tint our life with our blood."[36]

Even seen from a great distance, the Philadelphia panels reinforce their deeply emotive subject matter with a masterful manipulation of formal elements. The cross fades into the deep, indigo-blue sky, dramatically silhoeutting the wounded hands of Christ against a dark abyss.[37] The jewel-like glow of the vermillion veils foregrounds the broken body of the Lord and his beloved disciple and mother. As discussed in chapter one, Ruusbroec's exegetical distillation on the etymology of red pigment gives shape to the devotional potential in these expanses of cloth. The mystic explains that the word "vermillion" derives from *vermiculus,* or "little worm." In the abject condescension of his Passion, Christ becomes "a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people."[38] Ruusbroec amplifies this passage from the Psalms by proclaiming that Christ "delivered the little worm, that is, His worthy body, unto death. And this is twice-dyed-red color, for He has washed us and honorably tinted us in His blood."[39] The humiliating allegory of the worm, however, also applies to all imitators of Christ's suffering, including the Virgin and St. John, who, in the Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* bend and crumple toward the dirt, worm-like in their grief:

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[35] D622/624, E528/530, in ibid., D229, E228: "Dese onghehoerde menichfoudighe pine Cristi ons verlossers ende ons brudegoms, die beweeghet den goedertieren mensce in compassien ende in ontfermicheiden met Cristo.

[36] D2:246/247, E2:232/233, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D303, E302: "Aldus soude wi onse herte scoren met compassion ende verwen onse leven met onsen bloede."

[37] Tucker, "Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia 'Crucifixion'," 681.

[38] *Psalm* 22:6.

[39] D2:269/272, E2:254/257, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D305, E304: "Ende hier omme hevet hi dat woermken gelevert ter doet, dats sinen werdegen lichame. Ende dit es dobbel roede varuwe, want hi hevet ons ghewasschen ende eerleke geverwet in sinen bloede ende hem selven gecledet met den eersamsten clede der minnen ende der martilien datmen gedinken mach."

> If we but want to be tiny humble little worms, and to shun what the world seeks […] thus can we make the noble red color which adorns all virtue. For whoever practices charity in virtues spends, by means of his affection and his devotion, his own blood in honor of God, and in service of his fellow Christian.[40]

The nearly black backdrop to the Philadelphia Calvary group refers to Christ's final hours, in which "the sun was darkened," and "there was a darkness over all the earth."[41] As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* the blood-red cloth alludes to the curtain before the Holy of Holies, which was torn asunder at the moment of the Lord's death. The Philadelphia panels, however, point to this devotional climax even more emphatically by depicting the scarlet wool in two pieces, as if ripped apart by the same force that split the slope of Calvary and separated Christ from his mother with a jagged fissure in the ground. The Gospels, in fact, report that when Christ "yielded up the ghost" there was both a tearing of Mosaic, temple cloth and also a "tearing" of the earth itself: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent."[42] In his *The Twelve Beguines* (*Vanden XII beghinen*), Ruusbroec correlates these two rendings with the breaking of the Lord's heart at his death:

> And He bowed His head upon His breast and said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And saying these word, His eyes failed, and His heart was rent, and He sent His spirit into the glory of His Father. And this was the ninth hour of the day, which we call Nones. The earth trembled and the stones split; the curtains which hung in the temple tore into two parts.[43]

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[40] D4:567/574, E4:545/551, in ibid., D385, E384: "Eerst alsoe dat wi cleine oetmoedege woermkene willen sijn ende scuwen dat de werelt soect […]. Alsoe moge wi die edele roede varuwe maken die alle dogede verciert. Want so wie karitate in dogeden ufent, overmids sine affectie ende sine devocie verteret hi sijn eigen bloet in der eren goeds ende in orbore sijns evenkerstens."
[41] *Luke* 23:44–45.
[42] *Matthew* 27:50–51.
[43] D2c1392/1398, E2c1290/1295, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* D533, E532: "Ende hy neychde sijn hoot op sine borst ende sprack: 'Vader, in dine handen bevelic mynen gheest.' Ende al segghende die woorde braken sine oghen ende syn herte scuerde, ende hi sant synen gheest in die glorie sijns vaders. Ende dit was in de neghende ure vanden daghe, die wy noenen heeten. Die eerde bevede ende die steene cloeven; die gardine die inden tempel hinc scoorde in .ij. partyen."

It is deeply significant that the seam joining the two panels begins in the cleft of the rent ground and continues up into the empty space between the two portions of the rent veil. Opening the altarpiece, then, repeats the cataclysmic splitting of the earth and dividing of the temple curtain. On a more mystical level, it also repeats the rending of Christ's side and the propitiatory entrance into the Holy of Holies by the "high priest of good things to come" "through the veil … [of] his flesh."[44] Like its Escorial prototype, the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* uses the glowing red curtain to spotlight the wound in Christ's side, where the soldier's spear "rent" the fabric of his body and opened a salvific portal to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Interestingly, Ruusbroec associates Christ's death with the loss of corporeal sight—"His eyes failed." It follows that the rent earth, curtain, and side of the Lord open the way to spiritual lines of vision that depend on a new kind of sight, one that is incorporeal, fine tuned, and mystical.

The *Virgo doloris* of the Philadelphia panels mediates at these "fissures" in the composition, both literally and devotionally. She swoons at the cleft-like doors of the altarpiece as St. John barely keeps her from sliding into the valley that indelibly fractures the barren peak of this, the "highest place on earth." In fact, the rocky gorge running along the base of the paintings and bifurcating the composition in half has been compared to the wood and stone portals that frame the *Miraflores Triptych* and provide shelter for its three main mysteries.[45] Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of the "Mary Altar" *Pietà,* the Philadelphia Virgin also stands guard at the "doors" of the Lord's "lacerated heart," as a gatekeeper to the Holy of Holies of his tabernacle-body (Fig. 2.5). Her face is lower than the other two figures in the panels so that viewers look up at the dead Christ from a

[44] *Hebrews* 9:11, 10:20.
[45] Blum, "Symbolic Invention," 118–119.

vantage point similar to hers, as if seeing him through her tearful vision.[46] She slips into unconsciousness as he slips into death, and appropriately, the slouched position of her body hovers between standing and falling, living and dying. Shirley Blum has commented on the Philadelphia Virgin's ability to "believably and at one time swoon, genuflect, and clasp her hands in prayer before her Son," while the steep incline on which she stands elevates her to a closer par with Christ.[47]

Mary's mediation depends on her interior conformity to the soul of Christ, so often implicated by physical imitation in the works of Rogier and his followers. In the Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* highlights on the knees and shins of the Virgin, along with the folds of blue-gray cloth around her legs, imply that her feet are crossed, as though nailed to the stony ground in emulation of the crossed and bleeding feet of Christ. The Lord's hair has all been swept to the right side of his face, where it falls in a solid mass over one shoulder, reiterating the line of his bowed head, now drooping in death. Interestingly, this creates the effect of a veil dropping from his brow, which resonates notably with the mantle of his mother that curtains her face in a similar manner, albeit in cloth. Moreover, the Virgin's right hand replicates the gesture of blessing still frozen in both of Christ's hands, with her index and middle finger extending over her left hand and the other two fingers bent at the knuckles (Fig. 3.9). Although less noticeable, the fingers of her left hand also echo the blessing gesture, with her fourth and fifth fingers positioned side-by-side and separated from the middle and index fingers.

The painting draws special attention to the Virgin's clasped hands, since she raises them to the same level as her face, even while she bows her head in grief. As her

[46] Koldeweij, "Representatie en devotie," 168.
[47] Blum, "Symbolic Invention," 119.

unflinching vigil at the cross finally gives way to unconsciousness, her folded fingers take the place of an upturned and wakeful gaze in communicating the perpetual attentiveness of her heart. Although, like her son, her "eyes [have] failed," the Virgin's corporeal watchfulness has been transferred to equally rigorous spiritual perception. Lifting *up* her hands as she sinks *down* to the ground, her gesture reinforces her ability to mediate dichotomies of swooning and standing, fainting and genuflecting, dying and living, in a liminal space that crosses rent ground and divided panels to access the fissured heart of the forsaken Christ. In the *Miraflores Triptych,* the Vespers canticle, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," provided a devotional rhythm for Rogier's Marian distillations. In the Philadelphia panels, another important liturgical sequence gives voice to the elevation of the Virgin's hands and heart in compassionate *conformitas* to her son: "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul."[48]

Ruusbroec's *The Twelve Beguines* contains a lengthy meditation on the Passion structured around the monastic offices of prayer. The beginning of the hour of None focuses on the interaction between the dying Christ and his mother, when the Lord's grace lifts the distressed soul of the *Mater dolorosa,* bestowing "joy within and great peace" and inspiring her to suffer redemptively alongside him:

> Then Mary, Jesus' Mother, was filled with sadness, and the sword of sorrow and of compassion transpierced soul and body, heart and senses, as though she would die. When Jesus saw that, He sent His Spirit and made her recall the words of the Angel Gabriel, that her Son should be called and be the Son of God Almighty … And she thought of the miracles and of the words which He had spoken from the beginning, and of the prophets and of holy Scripture: that Jesus, her Son, would have to suffer and die for the sins of all people and for their salvation. And the Spirit of God gave her such great charity that she would gladly have died the bitter death herself had it been possible, for the salvation and for the needs of all

[48] *Psalm* 25:1 (*Ad te levavi animam meam*).

> people. Had the nails sprung out of His hands and out of His feet, she would have pounded them in again, for the forgiveness of our sins.[49]

The Philadelphia panels voice a similarly emotive commentary on Mary's co-redemptive *conformitas* through the careful positioning of the Virgin's heavy, woolen mantle. This dissertation has already demonstrated some of the subtle and stirring ways that Rogier manipulates the devotional valence of cloth. In the *Bladelin Triptych of the Nativity,* for instance, he places the infant Jesus on a corner of the Virgin's soft, blue cloak, signifying that the garment of flesh clothing God at his Incarnation was fashioned from the same material as Mary's own body (Fig. 4.1).

The Philadelphia *Crucifixion* wrenchingly reiterates this trope as a corner of the Virgin's mantle bridges the divide between the two panels, like a futile attempt to administer relief and protection to the dead Christ. Aside from the stone wall uniting the paintings, this piece of steel-blue fabric is the only mediator across the chasm that splits Golgotha and the seam that divides the shutters. The cloth becomes a synecdoche for the Virgin herself, who once stood resolutely beneath the cross, her unflinching station at Christ's side memorialized in the words of the hallowed medieval hymn, *Stabat mater dolorosa juxta crucem lacrimosa.* Just as her raised hands now take the place of a mind once conscious and alert to the last moments of Christ's life, so, too, the corner of her mantle maintains her former sentry post at the cross, before the rending of the earth, the

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[49] D2c1378/1379, E2c1276/1277, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* D531, E530: "Si hadde bliscap van binnen ende groten vrede"; D2c1364/1378, E2c1263/1276, in ibid.: "Doen bedroefde haer Maria, Jhesus moeder, ende dat sweert van rouwen ende van compassien doerghinc ziele ende lijf, herte ende sen, als ochte sy sterven soude. Doen dat Jhesus sach, sant hy sinen gheest ende dede haer ghedincken die woorde des inghels Gabriels, dat haer sone soude heeten ende sijn des almachtichs gods sone … Ende sy ghedachte der miraculen ende der woorde die hi ghesproken hadde van beghinne, ende der propheten ende der heiligher screftueren, dat Jhesus, haer sone, moeste doghen ende sterven om alre menschen sonden ende salicheit. Ende de gheest gods gaf haer soe grote karitate, dat si gherne selve ghestorven hadde, hadt moghelijc gheweest, die bitter doot om alder menschen salicheit ende noot. Hadden de naghele uut sine hande ende uut syn voete ghespronghen, sy hadse weder in ghesleghen om verlatenisse van onsen sonden."

tearing of the temple veil, her backwards swoon, and ultimately death separated her from her son. The saturated vermilion veils, as if dyed in Christ's own blood, stand in stark contrast to Mary's mantle, which is pale as flesh—specifically the flesh of the Lord, made from the flesh of his mother. In this way, the paintings prompt meditation on the Eucharist "elevated" for adoration at the front of the picture plane. Although the Host and chalice each contain the full body, blood, and soul of Christ, these mysterious elements are here distinguished according to the sacramental species they most closely resemble: first as the pale flesh and faded fabric of mother and son, united across the two panels, and second as ruby-red blood, fractured into twin cloths like a broken Host.

On a more emotional level, the opening of the altarpiece "doors" not only repeats the rending of the vermilion temple veil, believed to have been woven by the Virgin herself, but it also literally tears Mary's mantle, ripping a grieving mother away from her dead child. This remarkable compositional device stays true to Rogier's tendency to inflect exegesis, liturgy, and Ruusbroec's Christ-centered mysticism with Marian overtones. Significantly, this length of blue, maternal wool has been positioned at the center of the composition, straddling both panels, and falling at the probable eye level of a fifteenth-century viewer. The seam dividing the *Crucifixion* into two shutters, itself seeming to have been created by an aftershock from the earthquake following Christ's death, locates literal and abstract acts of opening, rending, and splitting across the mantle of the Virgin. The tearing of the temple curtain destroys the handiwork of her loom, and the synchronized "rending" of Christ's side does violence against the fruit of her womb. As already mentioned, even the fractured Host mysteriously derives from the substance of her flesh.

Essentially, the Virgin mediates the suffering of the Lord in such a way that her Compassion provides a model for how a Christian can be crushed, torn, and broken *spiritually.* Using her example, the faithful suffer the Lord's torments one step removed—not in literal flesh and blood but instead intercepted by a "Marian cloth" of tears, swooning, and compunction of the heart. Devout viewers of the Philadelphia panels who aspired to construct Ruusbroec's spiritual tabernacle in their hearts could look to the *Virgo doloris* falling to the dust, her mantle endlessly torn with the openings of the altarpiece, as they considered their similarly humiliating vocation as "tiny humble little worms" who "rend [their] hearts with compassion and tint [their] li[v]e[s] with [their] blood." In fact, the curtains hanging in the sanctuary of the soul, as outlined in *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* not only contain fabric "twice-dyed red with the blood of tiny little worms," but also swaths of "sky-blue," purple, and white.[50] The "twice-repeated" lengths of blood-red cloth in the Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* combined with the ghostly, bluish-white clothing of the Virgin and the pale, dusky rose of St. John's drapery, may have inspired votaries to vest their inner selves in the color-coded virtues of Mary and her adopted son as they approached the vermilion Sacred Heart in the rent side of Christ.

Regarding the veil of the Old Testament Holy of Holies and Ruusbroec's spiritual tabernacle of the soul, chapter one discussed the body and blood of the Escorial Christ as a mystical curtain mediating the presence of God, in much the way that the Father holds the dead body of his son before him in images of the *Genadestoel.* The Philadelphia panels, for their part, implicate the mediating power of the Virgin Mary in a related allusion to the Mosaic "Mercy Seat." St. John holds the slumped body of the Virgin in

[50] D2:240/241, E2:226/227, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D303, E302: "dobbel roet ghemaect met bloede van cleinen woermkenen"; D2:230, E2:217, in ibid., D301, E300: "jacincten varuwen."

much the way that the *Genadestoel* God supports the lifeless body of Christ, an intriguing extrapolation of Marian Compassion that Felix Thürlemann has documented in the grisaille shutters of the *Edelheere Triptych* (Fig. 3.10).[51] This altarpiece—the earliest extant copy of Rogier's Escorial *Deposition*—eloquently analogizes the grief of a divine Father mourning his only-begotten son to St. John empathizing with the pain of his adopted mother. Ruusbroec writes that the son "d[ied] of love for the sins of the world," and it is loving *Compassio* that conforms the swooning Virgin to Christ's likeness, just as it is loving, empathetic grief that haunts the faces of those that hold them: the sharp frown of the Philadelphia St. John and the large, pained eyes of God in Campin's *Flémalle Lamentation of the Holy Trinity* (Fig. 3.11).[52]

As in most *Genadestoel images,* Campin's dead Christ points to his pierced side, and in like manner St. John gestures to the Virgin's side, as if directing attention to a phantom wound near her own heart. The evangelist's solemn gaze toward the adjoining panel accords with the confrontational, searching stare of God in many Lamentations at the Mercy Seat, and it invites viewers to use the posture of St. John and the Virgin as a directive to perceive the invisible presence of a bereft Father veiled in curtains of flesh and blood behind his crucified son. The ultimate portal of salvation and seat of grace, then, is made available through the dead weight of a torn Christ and the intervention of his collapsed and broken mother.

The Lord's twice-dyed veil of blood drops from the ledge behind him like a waterfall, or like the Christological dew in the liturgical sequence, "Drop down, ye

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[51] See Felix Thürlemann, "Die Madrider Kreuzabnahme und die Pariser Grabtragung: das malerische und das zeichnerische Hauptwerk Robert Campins," *Pantheon* 51 (1993): 18–45. See also Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs,* 56.

[52] D5:3816/3817, E5:3590/3591, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D973, E972: "van minnen stervende vore die sonden der werelt."

heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness."[53] Christ's wounds bleed fairly modestly in the painting, as though the copious flood of his redeeming blood had been relocated and translated into cloth. Significantly, this life-giving, bloody fabric courses down a stone wall, which, before an overzealous cleaning in 1941, was once articulated with water stains, moss, and lichens.[54] Instigated by David Rosen, this disastrous cleaning also included the removal of the Philadelphia panels' original azurite sky and its replacement with a gilded background. The rust-brown streaks along and just below the wall's ledge represent most of what remains of the water stains. In color like dried blood, they echo the vivid cloth and running blood in front of them like desiccated relics. Moreover, the blood that drips from the Lord's brow, arms, hands, and toes finds another reverberation in the strings of fringe at the curtain's edge, which noticeably mimic these glistening, ruby-like rivulets trickling from Christ's body.

The composition urges viewers to associate this textile of Eucharistic blood with the streaming waters that nurture moss and lichens along the rocky wall, an analogy deepened by Ruusbroec, who routinely compares divine love—and, by implication, Christ's blood—to bodies of water. His texts are replete with references to fountains and streams, which flow *out* from the generous wellspring of God and call for the faithful to flow *back* into his love. In *The Spiritual Espousals* he writes that "Christ our Lover has labored for our sake without and within in true fidelity: we are unable to fathom His charity, for it flowed out of the fathomless fountain of the Holy Spirit, above all creatures

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[53] *Isaiah* 45:8 (*Rorate coeli* from the Introit for the fourth Sunday in Advent).
[54] Mark Tucker, "Examination Report and Treatment Proposal" (August 18, 1992), 8, from the curatorial file in The Philadelphia Museum of Art; ibid., "Rogier van der Weyden's Philadelphia 'Crucifixion'," 681.

who ever received charity, for He was God and man in one Person."[55] Later in the text, Ruusbroec makes a memorable analogy between the outflowing of God's grace and the tides of the sea:

> [A]nd he will behold the rich, generous flowing-forth of God, with glory and with Himself, and with incomprehensible bliss into all the saints, according to the appetite of all spirits. And how they are flowing back with themselves and with all that they have received and can do, into the same rich unity from which all bliss comes forth. This flowing of God always demands a flowing-back, for God is a flowing, ebbing sea, which flows without cease into all His beloved, according to each one's needs and dignity. And He is ebbing back in again, drawing all those whom He has endowed on heaven and earth, together with all that they have and can do.[56]

Ruusbroec explains further that this sea of love is unfathomable in its ebb and flow:

> [I]n this manifestation, He demands love and honor in proportion to His dignity. For God wants to be loved by us according to His nobility; and in this all spirits fail … And for the enlightened reason, it is a great bliss and delight that its God and its Beloved is so sublime and so rich that He transcends all creature faculties and is loved by no one but Himself according to His dignity.[57]

Indeed, the faithful love God most fully when they "die" to themselves and become one with the divine tide that alone can replenish the source waters of grace: "And therefore, the spirit sinks away from itself in enjoyment and floats away into God as into its eternal rest … And likeness sinks away from itself every moment and dies in God, and becomes

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[55] D270/274, E233/236, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D183, E182: "Cristus onse minnere hevet omme ons ghearbeyt van buyten ende van binnen, in gherechter trouwen: sine karitate en moghen wij te gronde niet verstaen want si vloeyde uter grondeloser fonteynen des [des] heylichs gheestes, boven alle creatueren die ye karitate ontfinghen."

[56] Db1143/1151, Eb982/990, in ibid., D417, 419; D416, 418: "[E]nde hi sal aensien dat rijcke melde vloeyen gods, met glorien ende met hem selven ende met ombegripelijcker weelden, in alle heylighen, na alre gheeste ghelost. Ende hoe si wedervloeyende sijn met hem selven ende met al dat si ontfaen hebben ende gheleysten moghen, in die selve rijcke eenicheit daer alle weelde ute comt. Dit vloeyen gods eyschet altoes een wedervloeyen; want god es eene vloeyende ebbende zee die zonder onderlaet vloeyt in alle sine gheminde, na elcs behoeven ende weerde. Ende hi es weder <in> ebbende alle die ghegavet sijn in hemel ende in eerde, met al dat si hebben ende vermoghen.

[57] Db1153/1169, Eb992/1005, in ibid., D419, 421; E418, 420: "[I]n desen toene eyschet hi minne ende eere na sijn weerde. Want god wilt van ons ghemint sijn na sine edelheit, ende hier inne faelgeren alle gheeste … Ende dat es <der> verlichter redenen een grote walost ende ghenoechlijcheit, dat hare god ende hare lief soe hoghe ende soe rijcke es, dat hi allen ghescapenen crachten onthoghet ende van niemenne ghemint en es na sine weerde dan van hem selven."

one with God and remains one; for charity makes us become one with God and remain and dwell in one(-ness)."[58]

The Philadelphia Virgin embodies this very mode of mystical experience, defined at the beginning of chapter two as a death-like unity with God "without intermediary." The culmination of her *Compassio* on Calvary becomes not only an empathetic "death" but also a mystical "death" as she swoons into the arms of St. John.[59] It is somewhat ironic that in exemplifying this loftiest level of Ruusbroec's spiritual ascent, the collapsed Virgin mediates a fathomless mode of mysticism that is, by definition, *unmediated.* As the charity of Christ courses over the stone wall and drips from the fringe of the scarlet wool, the fainting Mother of God seems to flow backward into the glowing pool of cloth behind her, as if her billowing, steely blue garments were the foamy edge of a wave retreating with the tide. As she sinks into the fathomless love of her son, it is as if her own life and color drain away, until only the ghostly, pallid shapes of St. John and his adopted mother remain silhouetted against the vibrant red sea behind them. As the hues of life and individuality literally leech out from these most faithful mourners, they emulate Christ who, in the voice of the psalmist, was "poured out like water" and, in Ruusbroec's words, made "common" (*ghemeyne*):

> Christ had nothing proper to Himself, nothing of His own, but everything (was) common: body and soul, mother and disciples, cloak and tunic. He ate and drank for our sake; He lived and died for our sake. His torments and His sufferings and His misery were proper to Him and His own, but the profit and the usefulness

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[58] Db1972/1979, Eb1698/1704, in ibid., D507, E506: "Ende hier omme ontsincket de gheest hem selven ghebrukelijcke, ende vervlietet in gode alse in sine eewighe raste … Ende ghelijc ontsinct hem selven alle uren, ende stervet in gode, ende wert met gode een, ende blivet een; want karitate doet ons werden met gode een, ende bliven ende wonen in een."

[59] Edward Bekaert makes this argument in his discussion of Ruusbroec and Rogier, in particular with regard to the Virgin's swoon in Rogier's great *Deposition.* Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 378, 383.

> which issued from them are common, and the glory of His merits will be common for eternity.[60]

Those votaries who "die" in God are, like Christ, "poured out like water," and subsumed into a ceaseless rhythm of common love, as if caught in an ocean current:

> And then we shall be flowing out and flowing in again, in true charity, and … we stream away from ourselves into unity, and meet God with God, without intermediary, in enjoyable rest. And thus we shall be eternally indwelling and always flowing out and without cease returning in again. And herewith, we possess a genuine inner life in all (its) perfection.[61]

Like the *Miraflores* Christ Appearing to His Mother, the Philadelphia composition comments on the constant recapitulations of spiritual death and birth that characterize the cyclical ladder of mystical ascent (Fig. 1.35). The faithful flow away and die to themselves, only to be reborn in the unity of the living Trinity. In a related way, the swoon of the Virgin lingers between death and life, her head bowed and unconscious but her hands prayerfully vigilant. In the painting, the pallor of death and the hope of life extend even to the bleak landscape. Parts of the rocky slopes of Calvary are "pockmarked" with splits and gouges that closely resemble the empty and cracked eye sockets of Adam's skull and the stippled edges of his dry, marrow-less bone. On the one hand, the detailed texture of this topography reiterates the meaning of its Hebrew name: "Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull."[62] Yet the fractured hill also emblematizes the body of Christ, which has been rendered in the same yellowed, ivory

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[60] *Psalm* 22:14; Db1282/1288, Eb1104/1109, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D433, 435; E432, 434: "Cristus en hadde niet propers noch eyghens, maer alle ghemeyne: lijf ende ziele, moeder ende discipele mantel ende roc. Hi at ende dranc om onsen wille; hi leefde ende starf om onsen wille. Sijn pine ende sijn doghen ende sijn alinde was hem proper ende eyghen, maer die profijt ende die nutscap die daer ave comen es, die es ghemeyne, ende die glorie sijnre verdienten [die] sal eewelijc ghemeyne sijn."

[61] Db2575/2583, Eb2212/2219, in ibid., D569, 571; E568, 570: "Ende soe werde wij uutvloeyende ende weder invloeyende in gherechter karitaten, ende … soe ontvlieten wij ons selven in eenicheit ende ontmoeten gode met gode sonder middel in ghebrukelijcker rasten. Ende alsoe werde wij eewelijcke inblivende ende altoes uutvloeiende ende sonder onderlaet weder inkeerende. Ende hier met besitten wij een ghewarich innich leven in alre volcomenheit."

[62] *Mark* 15:22.

hue as the bones. The New Adam conforms to the morbid color and hopeless condition of the first Adam in order to restore life to humanity. At the same time, though, the light green vegetation that blushes over the pockmarked ground at "The place of a skull" anticipates the Resurrection of Christ, the redemption of fallen man, and the mystical life promised to those who join the *Virgo doloris* in compassionate death.

As in the Escorial *Crucifixion,* St. John's weary but intense gaze toward the wound in Christ's side, coupled with the Virgin's downcast eyes, repeats Ruusbroec's fundamental binary of inward and outward turnings of the spirit.[63] *The Spiritual Espousals* instructively discusses an "enlightened person" who assesses his conformity to both the divine and human natures of Christ through inward and outward looking.[64] Like the Philadelphia St. John, "he will lift up his enlightened eyes towards intelligible truth, with enlightened reason, and examine and behold, in creaturely fashion, the exalted nature of God and the fathomless attributes which are in God."[65] At the same time, though, this votary will turn inward and emulate the "fail[ing]" of corporeal vision and death-like stupor of the swooning *Mater dolorosa,* for "the fathomless sea of the Godhead … is nevertheless examined and beheld within, in truth, as a fathomless good without mode."[66] Moreover, the "enlightened person" beholds with awe the "inaccessible height, and unfathomable depth, incomprehensible breadth and eternal length" of Deity, as "a dark stillness and a wild desert."[67] The votary is "draw[n] … into (a state) of

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[63] Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 377–378.
[64] Db1026, Eb883, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D405, E404: "verclaerde mensche."
[65] Db1029/1032, Eb886/889, in ibid.: "Ende hi sal sine verclaerde oghen op heffen in verstandigher waerheit met verlichter redenen, ende merken ende aensien, creatuerlijcker wijs, die hoghe natuere gods ende die grondelose eyghenscape die in gode sijn."
[66] Db1039/1042, Eb894/898, in ibid., D407, E406: "inder grondeloser zee zee der godheit … dit wert doch inder waerheit van binnen ghemerket ende aen<ghe>sien een grondeloes goet zonder wise."
[67] Db1035/1037, Eb891/893, in ibid.: "ontoegancleke hoochde ende afgrondighe diepheit, ombegripelijcke breyde ende eewighe lancheit, eene duystere stille ende eene welde woestine."

astonishment," however, by one overarching realization from this inward and outward vision: the "commonness of God," "the divine persons as a common outflowing[,] … [t]hus God is … common to all creatures, for through Him, all things exist, and in Him and on Him hang heaven and earth and all natures."[68] This epiphany of "commonness" in the Godhead has relevance to the Philadelphia *Crucifixion.* The "astonishment" that renders the Virgin unconscious and rivets the evangelist's streaming eyes ultimately derives from an embodiment of strikingly abject, condescending "commonness"—namely, the lonely, incarnate God who waters creation with his self-sacrificing life and blood.

Not surprisingly, the ebb and flow of God's grace and love also adheres to Ruusbroec's binary of inward and outward modes. He writes that the "fullness of the grace of God in the unity of our spirit … behaves (both) essentially, with respect to (its) indwelling, like a brimful fountain; (and) actively, with respect to (its) outflowing with streams."[69] This "brimful" and "outflowing" river of grace has pertinence not only to the *Crucifixion* panels but also to a small devotional triptych that seems to derive from them. This little painting borrows key elements from the Philadelphia composition and rearranges them in a way that draws attention to latent arguments embedded in the larger *Crucifixion.* To illuminate these insights, the remainder of this chapter will explore the relevant tropes in this virtually unknown triptych.

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[68] Db1084/1102, Eb933/949, in ibid., D411, 413; E410, 412: "die trect den mensche in een verwonderen … ghemeinheit gods … godlijcke persone een ghemeyne uutvloeyen … [a]ldus es god … ghemeyne allen creatueren; want overmids hem sijn alle dinc, ende in hem ende aen hem hanghet hemel ende eerde ende alle natueren."

[69] Db976/979, Eb840/842, in ibid., D399, 401; E398, 400: "de volheit der gracien gods in eenicheit ons gheests … houdet hare … weselijcke, na den inblivene, alse eene volle fonteyne; werkelijcke, na den ute vloeyene met rivieren."

Inscribed with the date 1506 and likely originating in Bruges, the panels are now in a private collection (Fig. 3.12).[70] In the right wing, a cleric—and probable donor—kneels at a *prie-dieu,* while St. John occupies the left panel. The apostle blesses a golden chalice, while above, his vision of the Apocalyptic Virgin "clothed with the sun" unfolds in the sky.[71] On the left side of the central panel a priest elevates the Host during the Canon of the mass, assisted by an acolyte. The miniature crucifix embedded in the gilded altarpiece seems to have prompted a vision of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, with a bleeding, crucified Christ filling the center of the composition. The figure of the dead Lord is remarkably evocative of the Escorial and especially the Philadelphia *Crucifixions,* a connection that, to my knowledge, has not yet been published.[72] The body of Christ and the floating edges of his loincloth closely follow the Philadelphia composition, but the most obvious correlation is the heavily creased, vermillion curtain suspended by angels in the triptych. These similarities could pose a challenge to theories situating the Philadelphia panels in Spain not long after their production, since the triptych seems to have been executed in or around Bruges.

In any case, the central panel offers a remarkably unique reading of the Passion through the "double lens" of both the liturgy and St. John's revelatory vision. The *Apocalypse* prophesies Babylon's destruction, and in accordance, a golden idol to the right of the crucified Christ crashes from its pedestal. Pierced through the heart with an arrow, the statue's destruction relates directly to the piercing of Christ's heart with a spear. St. John's solemn witness to the resultant bleeding "door" in the side of Christ

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[70] See *Old Master Pictures, to be sold at Christie's Great Rooms on Friday 14 December 1990* (St. James, London: Christie, Manson, and Woods, 1990), 235.
[71] *Revelation* 12:1.
[72] This triptych was brought to my attention by a reproduction in The Philadelphia Museum of Art curatorial file, where its connection to the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* panels was clearly implicated.

merges with his "piercing" gaze into the apocalyptic future, for the golden doors floating in the sky directly above the wounded Lord recall the dramatic moment on the Isle of Patmos when he "looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven."[73] As in the Philadelphia panels, the Virgin mediates at this multivalent portal since she appears immediately to the left as another *Porta caeli,* radiant with golden light and "the moon under her feet."[74] Most significantly, the opening of the Lord's side and the opening of the heavenly doors have been coordinated with the opening of the altar curtains, which would have been drawn previously during the Consecration of the Host. These liturgical drapes are just visible on the right side of the altar, bunched together and elided with the scarlet hanging held by the angels. As if by heavenly choreography, the Real Presence of Christ appears against a field of cloth the color of Eucharistic blood at precisely the moment when the transubstantiated Sacrament is unveiled during the mass.

Both the acolyte at the altar and the clerical donor in the right panel take the place of the mournful St. John as they gaze adoringly at a Eucharistic vision akin to the divine manifestation at the legendary Mass of St. Gregory.[75] Essentially, the Bruges painting invites viewers to invest their perception of the sacramental Real Presence with the same miraculous wonder as St. John's apocalyptic vision on Patmos. The donor, in fact, appears to be the same individual as the celebrant at the altar, and in that case, the triptych instructs him in the revelation and grace made available through his own priestly sacrifice. At the base of the cross, a chasm in the earth has opened to reveal the suffering souls in Purgatory, whose torments are assuaged not only by the redeeming blood

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[73] *Revelation* 4:1.
[74] *Revelation* 12:1.
[75] In fact, the Christie's auction catalog identifies the scene—I believe mistakenly—as the Mass of St. Gregory.

contained inwardly and "brimful" in the altar chalice, but by the blood dripping down to them "outwardly" from Christ's body and imaginatively coursing over the scarlet curtain. The black material of the priest's chasuble indicates that the mass being offered is specifically for the relief of the suffering dead.

As in the Philadelphia panels, Ruusbroec's ebb and flow of divine love lends insight to the related argument presented in this diminutive triptych. In emulation of the "brimful" and "outflowing" fountain of Christ's grace, Ruusbroec enjoins the faithful to "go out … with abundant charity," imitating the streaming rivers of the Lord's common love.[76] One of the ways the votary can accomplish this is to "behold his friends in purgatory and consider their misery and their longing and their grievous torments. Then he will invoke and call on the graciousness and mercy and the generosity of God, and show (Him) their good will and their great misery and their longing for the rich bounty of God."[77] Such a person, who "goes out," as if in the very stream of Christ's flowing blood, becomes, like the Virgin herself, "a mediator between God and all people."[78] In the fifteenth century there were few greater acts of charitable mediation than mass for the dead, and mediation before the throne of God is precisely the function of the Old Testament tabernacle veil, echoed by the blood-red cloth in the Bruges and Philadelphia panels.

In short, the Philadelphia, Dijon, and Washington ensemble of shutters and interior panels parallels the *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin* in its assembly of Marian

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[76] Db1133/1134, Eb974/975, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D417, E416: "ute gaen … met overvloedigher karitaten."
[77] Db1193/1197, Eb1029/1032, in ibid., D423, 425; E422, 424: "anesien sine vriende inden vagheviere, ende merken hare ellende ende hare verlanghen ende hare sware pine. Dan sal hi anebeden ende aenroepen die ghenadicheit ende die ontfermherticheit ende de meltheit gods, ende tonen haren goeden wille ende hare grote ellinde ende hare verlanghen der rijcker goeden gods."
[78] Db1215/1216, Eb1047, in ibid., D427, E426: "een middelere tuschen gode ende allen menschen."

mysteries and its devotional manipulation of portals and colored cloth. Both works betray a Carthusian—or at least a monastic—sensibility manifested in provenance, rosary spirituality, or compositional precedent. For each of these "Mary Altars," however, some of the most important evidence for monastic intervention comes from their resonance with Ruusbroec's meditative treatises. *The Spiritual Espousals, The Spiritual Tabernacle,* and other texts by the mystic of Groenendaal help articulate commentaries in the paintings on mystical life and death; the seeing, coming, and "going out" to meet the Bridegroom; and the brilliantly dyed curtain of virtues mediating the Holy of Holies in the heart. Even so, the Philadelphia panels and *Miraflores Triptych* are certainly not illustrations or passive reflections of Ruusbroec's theology. On the contrary, they inflect his Trinitarian mysticism with Mariology and appoint the Bride and Mother of God to mediate even the highest rung of "unmediated" unity with the divine.

Chapter 4

"Living Mirrors," the Window of the Eye, and Figurations of the Soul in the *Mérode Triptych*

Up to this point, this dissertation has examined mystical inflections from Ruusbroec in paintings with either a documented connection to a religious house or else a probable monastic provenance. Special emphasis has been given to works possessed by the Carthusians, the order most closely associated with Ruusbroec. The mystic from Groenendaal, however, also enjoyed a burgeoning readership outside the cloister, and his popularity among the laity is an important point of departure for many studies.[1] For instance, in his analysis of Rogier van der Weyden's *Bladelin Triptych of the Nativity,* Bret Rothstein suggests that the altarpiece's lay patron, Pieter Bladelin, Lord of Middelburg, may have been conversant with *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*) (Fig. 4.1). Ruusbroec's text helps nuance Rothstein's argument for corporeal and spiritual seeing in the painting, and he even cites a section of Bladelin's will as evidence for the donor's personal interest in the theology of sight.[2] Rothstein does not reference Ruusbroec in his discussion of Rogier's *Vienna Triptych of the Crucifixion,* but he rightly notes that the dichotomy of gazing modeled by the middle class couple kneeling at the base of the cross and looking both at and away from Christ demonstrates an increasing familiarity with mystical tropes among the laity (Fig. 1.25).[3]

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[1] See Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality,* 13–18.
[2] Rothstein, "Vision, Cognition, and Self-Reflection," 37–55, esp. 44. For Bladelin's will and his citation of "fleshy eyes," see ibid., 53. Most of this material is repeated in chapter 1 of Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality,* 20–48.
[3] Ibid., 51. Rothstein's brief discussion of the *Vienna Crucifixion* is part of a chapter framing the author's theory that aniconic spirituality undergirds Netherlandish devotional painting to the point that even the careful naturalism of a Van Eyck painting should ultimately prompt viewers to contemplate the unseen, un-paintable divine.

This chapter will offer another study for Ruusbroec's relevance to bourgeois art and devotion by examining the *Mérode Triptych,* one of the most iconic Netherlandish paintings (Fig. 4.2). Generally attributed to Robert Campin, circa 1425, this painting has long been noted for innovatively staging the Annunciation in a homey, Netherlandish interior with St. Joseph working in his carpentry shop in the right-hand panel (Fig. 4.3).[4] The left-hand panel contains the painting's donor, convincingly identified as Peter Inghelbrechts, a wealthy merchant based in Mechelin, and accompanied by a woman who is probably his second wife, Helwich Bille of Breda (Fig. 4.4).[5] The triptych would likely have occupied a privileged place in their home, perhaps as part of a domestic altar.[6] The wealth of scholarship dedicated to this work has illuminated a web of visual references in its three panels ranging from vernacular religious practice to patristic theology to fifteenth-century bourgeois culture. The seemingly endless possibilities for fine-tuning the *Mérode's* meditative argument bear witness to the multi-faceted nature of early Renaissance devotion. Indeed, given the wide interpretive scope available for Netherlandish paintings, it may be helpful to think of artists, patrons, and viewers as sharing in "communities of understanding," founded upon commonly held knowledge, experience, images, texts, and spiritual practices.[7] Such a framework provides a rationale

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[4] As a side note to the Master of Flémalle/Robert Campin attribution battle that always hovers over scholarship on this artist, Lorne Campbell suggests that this painting be given to the "Master of Mérode" because of disjunctures in style, subject matter, and—most interestingly—the direction of the brush strokes. The direction of the brushstrokes in the *Mérode Triptych* align with those of the Werl panels and the London *Virgin and Child Before a Firescreen,* and, according to Campbell, indicates a right-handed artist, while brush strokes in other works in the Campin/Master of Flémalle oeuvre point to a left-handed master. Lorne Campbell, "Robert Campin, the Master of Flémalle and the Master of Mérode," *The Burlington Magazine* 116 (November 1974): 634–646.

[5] On Peter Inghelbrechts' wives and family, see Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 70–73.

[6] For more on the *Mérode Triptych's* function as a household altar, see Fritz Neugass, "Über die Geschichte des Merode-Altars," *Das Kunstwerk: Eine Zeitschrift über alle Gebiete der bildenden Kunst* 3 (September 1958): 4–12.

[7] I am indebted to C. Jean Campbell for the term, "communities of understanding."

for the way a picture's meanings shift, bleed into each other, and prompt new associations.

For instance, although many lay readers were exposed to Ruusbroec's writings in the century following his death, I propose that even without direct access to his work, the non-clerical populace could have encountered the mystic's tenets through these "communities of understanding" and recognized and applied the visual idioms of his mystical philosophy in their devotions. It is particularly significant that in the Low Countries, the Carthusians and their busy copy houses played a critical role in supplying lay men and women with religious texts and enriching their meditations with the affective piety and mystical leanings of charterhouse customs. In his early twelfth-century Carthusian customary, *Consuetudines cartusiae,* Guigo I, fifth prior of the Grande Chartreuse, expressed the monks' hope that the books they copied would edify those who read them by reproving error, illuminating truth, exhorting repentance, and inspiring devotion.[8] Indeed, this chapter will suggest that the *Mérode Triptych* not only makes recourse to Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* (*Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*)*, The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rijcke der ghelieven*), and *The Spiritual Espousals,* but does so with accompanying Carthusian ruminations on subjects like the monastic cell. Although it is the concluding chapter of this dissertation, the analysis offered on the *Mérode Triptych* will hopefully be a prelude to further investigation of Ruusbroec's reverberations in the works of other Netherlandish painters, including commissions outside the cloister.

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[8] 28, 4.31/36, in Guigo I the Carthusian, *Coutumes de Chartreuse,* ed. and trans. A Carthusian, 3rd ed., in *Sources chrétiennes,* vol. 313 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 224: "Quot enim libros scribimus, tot nobis veritatis praecones facere videmur, sperantes a domino mercedem, pro omnibus qui per eos vel ab errore correcti fuerint, vel in catholica veritate profecerint, pro cunctis etiam qui vel de suis peccatis et viciis compuncti, vel ad desiderium fuerint patriae caelestis accensi."

Ruusbroec and Lay "Communities of Understanding"

The variety of literary and devotional material circulating in these "communities of understanding" increased notably during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when, as John van Engen has written, lay men and women were presented with "multiple options" for the welfare of their souls.[9] Demand increased for moralizing texts and the works of great mystics and theologians like St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bonaventure, and William of St. Thierry, as well as the compositions of St. Brigit of Sweden and Ruusbroec.[10] Mendicant preachers, like St. Bernardino of Siena and Jan Brugman, both Observant Franciscans, canvassed the cities of western Europe, delivering stirring outdoor sermons and promoting a cult to the Holy Name of Jesus. Devotion to the Passion, the Sacred Heart, and the Five Wounds increasingly became vehicles for the laity to approach the Eucharistic Christ without actually receiving Communion or even kneeling before the reserved Host in a church.[11] Van Engen notes that this personalization of devotion complements the rise of the neighborhood parish as the center for worship.[12] The wealthy endowed altars for masses to be offered in perpetuity for themselves and their ancestors, and many participated in local confraternities: from prestigious organizations, like the Brussels Confraternity of the Holy Cross, to which Rogier and his wife belonged, to the all-inclusive rosary confraternities.[13]

Moreover, customs like the Liturgy of the Hours, which had once been the exclusive province of monastics, became widespread outside the cloister walls with

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[9] See John van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (June 2008): 257–284.
[10] Ibid., 275–276, 281–282.
[11] See ibid., 278–279.
[12] Ibid., 264–265.
[13] Ibid., 269–270, 274.

portable books of hours and rosary beads, the latter's cycle of Marian prayers evoking the 150 psalms of the Divine Office.[14] Lay men and women were supplied with vernacular editions of the breviary, and Ruusbroec's *The Twelve Beguines* (*Vanden XII beghinen*) seems to target just such a lay audience with its lengthy exposition on the suffering of Christ correlated to the canonical offices of prayer.[15] Perhaps most transgressive in their breach of the divide between religious and lay were the quasi-monastic movements such as the *Gottesfreunde,* or "Friends of God"; the beguines; and the *Devotio moderna,* the "Modern Devout," or "Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life." Like cloistered religious, these groups often lived together and shunned worldly distractions, but they did not adopt the official rules of life approved by the Church and thus were often distrusted and even vilified by certain ecclesiastical authorities, like Jean Gerson and Pierre d'Ailley. Mystical texts—many of them rendering complex theological terminology in the dangerously untried lexicon of the vernacular—were collected, studied, and discussed by these groups.[16] Gerson witheringly characterized such "conversations" among the laity as a "delirious wish to talk."[17]

The *Gottesfreunde,* the beguines, and the *Devotio moderna* played an important role in introducing Ruusbroec to circles of lay readership and establishing him in their "communities of understanding." Ruusbroec himself was part of the Brussels society of

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[14] See ibid., 269.
[15] Mikel M. Kors, introduction to *Vanden XII beghinen,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Mikel M. Kors, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 7–7A, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 19, 45. Geert Grote, for instance, prepared a translation of the breviary between 1383 and 1384. For Ruusbroec's text, see D2c:1/1440, E2c:1/1334, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* D403, E402–D537, E536.
[16] Niklaus Largier, "Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience," *Representations* 105 (Winter 2009): 41; Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 140.
[17] 9:184, in Jean Gerson, *De probatione spirituum,* in *Oeuvres complètes,* ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris, New York: Desclée, 1962–1963), cited in Largier, "Mysticism," 46: "Hoc praecipue considerare necesse est, si sit mulier, qualiter cum suis confessoribus conversatur et instructoribus, si collocutionibus intendit continuis, sub obtentu nunc crebrae confessionis, nunc prolixae narrationis visionum suarum, nunc alterius cujuslibet confabulationis."

the "Friends of God."[18] Made up of priests and pious laymen, the *Gottesfreunde* originated during the first half of the fourteenth century in German-speaking lands, developing particularly strong bases in Strasbourg and Cologne. Ruusbroec's texts found a welcome reception in this organization, which identified itself closely with Dominican mysticism, especially the writings of Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Henry Suso. In fact, it was at Tauler's request that the *Gottesfreunde* began acquiring Ruusbroec's work, and they seem to be responsible for taking his texts outside the Low Countries for the first time.[19] Not surprisingly, Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Espousals* enjoyed special esteem among this society, which envisioned its members as "brides of Christ."[20] Brother Gerard of Saintes noted that Ruusbroec's great treatise on mystical marriage had reached "even as far as the mountains."[21] Indeed the *Gottesfreund* Rulmann Merswin wrote a preface for a manuscript of the text in use at Strasbourg: "[T]he book of the Espousals, written by a dear, holy, forest priest in Brabant. His name is brother Jan van Ruusbroec, and he sent it to us, Friends of God, here in the highland, in the jubilee year, 1350."[22] Although the term, "friends of God" was certainly not unique to this lay organization, it is likely that Ruusbroec's personal association with the *Gottesfreunde* impacted the tripartite model for mystical ascent in his *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden*

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[18] See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 144.
[19] Ibid., 133, 137.
[20] Ibid., 140.
[21] Gerard of Saintes, *Dei prologe van her Gerardus,* cited in Wolfgang Eichler, *Jan van Ruusbroecs 'Brulocht' in oberdeutscher Überlieferung. Untersuchungen und kritische Textausgabe* (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969), 30: "dat hi dat (gemeint ist das Brulocht-Buch) hielde over seker ende goed, ende dattet ghemenichfuldicht waer toten voeten des berchs." See also Mommaers, introduction to *Die geestelike brulocht,* 13.
[22] For Rulmann Merswin's preface, see *Großes Memorial* (Strasbourg, Biliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, Cod. 739), fol. 122r, cited in Eichler, *Jan van Ruusbroecs 'Brulocht,'* 30: "Dis ist gar eine gewore fruhtbere nútze lere, genummen vsser dem anefange des brutlouf bůchelins, das ein lieber heiliger waltprister in Brobant schreib, heisset brůder Johans von Rúsebrůch vnd santé es her us in oberlant den gottes frúnden des jubel iores do men zalete von gottes gebúrte dritzehundert vnd fúnftzig ior vnd vohet alsus ane." Warnar notes that Merswin seems to have used the Groenendaal Priory as the model for a narrative he composed about priests and laymen. See Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 133.

blinkenden steen), in which he designates the middle group of contemplatives as "secret friends."[23]

Ruusbroec's relationship with the beguines is more fraught. These lay women were repeatedly denounced for heresy during the fourteenth century, notably in the papal dictums of Clement V, Urban V, and Gregory XI.[24] Harsh legislation condemned the French beguine Marguerite Porete to death by fire in 1310 for advocating unorthodox "Free Spirit" theology. As mentioned in chapter one, Ruusbroec himself was scrutinized for heretical leanings, particularly with regard to his claim that a mystic could be united to the Godhead "without difference," and many of his texts go to great pains to distinguish his mysticism from seditious tenets.[25] Even so, Ruusbroec's mother became a beguine, and his texts show influence from the well-known vernacular poet and beguine, Hadewijck.[26] At the same time, though, Ruusbroec's biography claims that he denounced the teachings of a woman that scholars often associate either with Hadewijck or another charismatic beguine, Heilwig Bloemaerts.[27]

Ruusbroec's popularity among pious women—both cloistered and lay—is well known. Although *The Twelve Beguines* seems not to have enjoyed the same breadth of readership as some of his other works, its lengthy opening poem implies that the treatise was composed with an audience of beguines in mind.[28] In it, Ruusbroec gives voice to twelve different beguines, some of whom speak with words drawn from the writings of

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[23] Ibid., 143–145.
[24] See in particular Urban V's bulls of 1365 and 1368.
[25] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 83, 147, 151, 171.
[26] Ibid., 83, 91; Kors, introduction to *Vanden XII beghinen,* 20, 44.
[27] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 83.
[28] Kors, introduction to *Vanden XII beghinen,* 44. Grote's harsh appraisal of the theology in much of *The Twelve Beguines* may explain why only a few manuscripts of the text are extant today. See also ibid., 8–9.

Hadewijck.[29] Furthermore, a letter to the canons of Groenendaal from Geert Grote (1340–1384), founder of the *Devotio moderna,* confirms that the text was presented to at least one beguine: Margriet van Mekeren, who resided in Nijmegen.[30] Ruusbroec articulates his position on the polemical question of beguine spirituality with a prudent conclusion to his introductory poem: "See, this is the state of good beguines / Who greatly strive for virtue, / Those who were here long before / And those who also live at this time. / But this state (of life) has greatly faded away. / Infidelity alone has brought this about."[31]

Among these quasi-religious organizations like the beguines and the *Gottesfreunde,* Geert Grote and the *Devotio moderna* had the most far-reaching impact on the dissemination of Ruusbroec's texts among the laity. Grote's interest in Ruusbroec grew out of his early exposure to the Carthusian Rule of life. Between 1374 and 1377 Grote retreated to the Charterhouse of Monnikshuizen, not far from the northern Netherlandish city of Arnhem, where he observed the Carthusian habits of private prayer and an interior life organized around the monastic cell. The monks of St. Bruno were an inspiration to many reformers like Grote, particularly since they actively facilitated lay access to spiritual texts. In addition to copying Ruusbroec's treatises during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Carthusians painstakingly reproduced works by writers such as St. Catherine of Siena, whose secretary had joined the Carthusians later in life, the Cistercian Guillaume de Deguileville, Nicholas Love, Thomas à Kempis, Julian

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[29] Ibid., 44.
[30] Ibid., 18–19, 44.
[31] D120/125, E120/125, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII beghinen,* D15, 17; E14, 16: Siet, dits den staet van goeden beghinen / die seere na die doghede pinen, / die langhe hier te voren waren / ende die oec leven in desen jaren. / Maer dese staet <es> seere vergaen; / dat hevet ontrouwe te male ghedaen."

of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Hugh of Balma, and Walter Hilton.[32] The monks translated Latin works into the vernacular for local audiences and vernacular texts into Latin for multi-lingual access across Europe.[33] Furthermore, charterhouse libraries, which sometimes made their holdings available to lay readers, amassed important collections of books, some of which were on loan from Carthusian monasteries in other lands.[34] Widely revered for their uncompromising adherence to the rigorous ideals of their founders, the Carthusians were called upon to aid other reforming orders within the Church.[35] On a more personal level, the Charterhouse of Our Lady of the Chapel at Herne was known for offering counsel and spiritual direction to lay men and women seeking to reform their own souls.[36]

Drawing from his training among the Monnikshuizen Carthusians, Grote committed himself and his pious followers to a simple life of "modern devotion." These "Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life" shared their property in the manner of the early Christian Church and dwelled as "family republics," the brothers gently supervised by a "father" priest and the sisters under the direction of a "mother" leader.[37] Grote was particularly interested in the Carthusian mode of prayer, and he modeled his personal

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[32] See Dennis D. Martin, "Behind the Scene: The Carthusian Presence in Late Medieval Spirituality," in *Nicholas of Cusa and His Age: Intellect and Spirituality. Essays Dedicated to the Memory of F. Edward Cranz, Thomas P.McTighe and Charles Trinkaus,* ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29; Jeremy Catto, "Statesmen and Contemplatives in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 110–113; Jessica Brantley, "The Pilgrim in the Cell: Carthusian Readers and Deguileville," in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), esp. 296–298.
[33] Catto, "Statesmen and Contemplatives," 112–113.
[34] Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 342.
[35] Martin, "Behind the Scene," 30.
[36] Ezekiel Lotz, "Secret Rooms: Private Spaces for Private Prayer in Late Medieval Burgundy and the Netherlands," in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 175.
[37] John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 172–173, 182, 198–199.

rooms in the city of Deventer after their meticulously organized cells.[38] Before long, Zwolle, Utrecht, and Kampen joined Deventer as important centers for the *Devotio moderna.* In the monastic tradition, the brothers and sisters worked incessantly, the sisters laboring over the loom and the brothers copying books, "preaching by the pen," in the manner of Carthusian charterhouses like Herne.[39] A few of the brothers became priests, but most of the Modern Devout were lay men and women who, Grote emphasized, adhered to poverty, chastity, and obedience not out of vowed necessity but out of humble love for God.[40]

Although sometimes critical of Ruusbroec's work, Grote was by and large an avid supporter of the mystic from Groenendaal.[41] He visited Ruusbroec at his priory and prepared Latin translations of the *Spiritual Espousals, A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* and *The Seven Enclosures* (*Vanden seven sloten*).[42] Reading held an important place in the daily routine of the *Devotio moderna,* and texts were expounded in brief, sermon-like collations, held once or twice per day, and sometimes drawing outside listeners.[43] Much like the Carthusians, in fact, the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life sometimes acted as confessor-type advisers for other lay men and women.[44] Moreover, the Devout did not shy away from complicated or mystical theology, believing that their righteousness and piety gave them special insight into the Bible, as well as into treatises by heavy weights such as St. Bonaventure, Henry Suso, St. Augustine, St. Anselm,

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[38] Lotz, "Secret Rooms," 163–165.
[39] Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life,* 190–192.
[40] Ibid., 178, 184–186.
[41] In addition to Grote's hesitancy about doctrinal issues in *The Twelve Beguines,* he felt that a work as theologically dense as *The Spiritual Espousals* should only be read in Latin. Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 235. On the other hand, Warnar notes the special esteem with which Grote held *The Spiritual Tabernacle.* Ibid., 197.
[42] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 197.
[43] Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life,* 281–288, esp. 286.
[44] Ibid., 292; Engen, "Multiple Options," 268.

Cassian, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux.[45] Their confidence in understanding scripture closely mirrors Ruusbroec's approach to Biblical exegesis in *The Realm of Lovers:*

> The learned, clever person, though he be without the grace of God, can elucidate the scriptures plainly, by means of an abundance of references and the cleverness of his understanding and long practice in the school, but the fruit and the sweetness hidden within it he cannot savor without divine love. This is why the realm of Scripture is shown to those who love, in order that they might live in likeness to Holy Scripture and savor its sweetness and fruit in time and in eternity; for virtue and interior consolation and hope of eternal life: (all) this is the realm of God that is hidden in Scripture, and that is shown to those who love, ([a] realm) that strangers cannot savor with any knowledge or cleverness without the grace of God.[46]

Among the brothers, collations were an important part of the educational program offered for local school boys, and those within the ambit of the Common Life Devotion were encouraged to keep commonplace notebooks, or *rapiaria,* that recorded edifying passages from texts, personal annotations, and spiritual agendas.[47] Devout sisters were advised to record *rapiaria* on their hearts so that they could reflect internally on their lifelong vocation in much the way that they would read a spiritual text.[48] Ruusbroec's writings feature prominently in the hefty number of volumes produced by the Common Life brothers, and the close connection between the mystic and the Modern Devout is underscored by the fact that in 1412 Groenendaal Priory adopted the Rule of the Windesheim Augustinians, the same lifestyle that had been embraced by those of Grote's

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[45] Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life,* 271–275.
[46] D5:2645/2656, E5:2530/2539, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D407, E406: "De gheleerde behendighe mach de scriftuere claerlijc ontbinden overmids volheit der scrift ende behendicheit sijns verstennissen ende langhe gheufentheit in der scolen, nochtan dat hi sonder de gracie gods es; maer de vrocht ende de soeticheit diere in verborghen es, die en mach hi niet ghesmaken sonder de godlike minne. Ende hier omme werdet dit rike der scriftueren den minnenden ghetoent, op dat si der heiligher scriftueren ghelijc leven ende der soeticheit ende der vrocht ghesmaken in tijt ende <in> ewicheit. Want doechde ende troest van binnen ende hope des ewichs levens, dat es dat rike gods dat verborghen es in der scrifturen, dat vertoent wert den minnenden, dies de vremde niet ghesmaken en moghen met gheenre const noch met behendicheiden sonder de gracie gods."
[47] Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life,* 278–279.
[48] Ibid.

followers who wished to become formal monastics.[49] Furthermore, just a few hours' walk from Groenendaal, another important Windesheim foundation—the Monastery of Rooklooster—boasted a large collection of Ruusbroec's texts, mostly copied by the Carthusians at Herne, and including the oldest surviving manuscript from his oeuvre.[50]

It is significant that the concept of a "common life"—so central in the teachings of the Modern Devout—is also an oft-repeated theme in Ruusbroec's writing. As articulated in *The Sparkling Stone,* the "common life" is an ultimate, enlightened state in which a mystic balances the active and contemplative modes in perfect, spiritual symbiosis: "And therefore he has a common life, for contemplation and action come just as readily to him and he is perfect in both."[51] Ruusbroec's ideal resonates noticeably with the aspirations of the *Devotio moderna,* the *Gottesfreunde,* and the beguines, each of which sought a form of life that bridged cloistered monasticism with the active, secular state. The idea of a "common life" acquires deeper valence in Ruusbroec's other texts, in which Christ, the "merits of His death," his love, compassion, and the assistance of his saints are all characterized as "common."[52] In *The Realm of Lovers,* Ruusbroec emphasizes that the Lord "was always satisfying all people outwardly and in works of

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[49] Kors, introduction to *Vanden XII beghinen,* 43–44.
[50] On the fascinating interface between Rooklooster and Herne, see Kwakkel, *Die dietsche boeke die ons toebehoeren.*
[51] D948/949, E790/792, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D183, E182: "Ende hier omme heeft hi een ghemeyn leven, want hem es scouwen ende werken even ghereet, ende in beyden es hi volcomen."
[52] D5:1441/1443, E5:1363/1366, in ibid., *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D737, E736: "hi ons hem selven gheven soude ghemeine ende overmids sine overvloedeghe ghemeine minne woude hi ons wasschen in sinen bloede"; D5:1445/1446, E5:1368/1369, in ibid., D739, E738: "Ende die verdiente siere doet hevet hi ghemeine ghegheven der heilegher kerken in verlatenessen der sonden"; D4:2399/2400, E4:2293, in ibid., *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D383, E382: "Want hi es ghemeine hen allen die sijns begheeren"; D4:2401/2404, E4:2296/2298, in ibid.: "Ende alle de hoechste heilighen die in des hemels trhone sijn, die waren ghemeine op eertrike, ende si sijn ghemeine in den ewighen rike ende bidden ende begheeren voer ons."

charity" and at the same time "was contemplating the face of His Father without cease": "acting and contemplating and remaining unhindered."[53]

Moreover, the instructions Ruusbroec gives in his treatises for individuals seeking the common life and ascending the mystical ladder are replete with examples of lay men and women. Far from narrowing his audience to the tight-knit community of hermit priests who prayed and worked beside him in the seclusion of the Soignes Forest, he repeatedly mentions good and bad examples drawn from both religious and lay spheres. *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* discusses the range of spiritual preparation among parishioners, priests, and nuns approaching Holy Communion, while *The Realm of Lovers* draws attention to ambitious hypocrites seeking secular power and beguines, aristocrats, and craftsmen trying in vain to balance the kingdom of God with mammon.[54] In a complementary way, close criticism of Ruusbroec's texts has revealed that the mystic not only draws from the Latin writings of the Church Fathers and other hegemonic texts, but that he also pulls equally from Middle Dutch literature.[55] It is interesting in this regard that even while Ruusbroec unfolds an elaborate exegesis on a vernacular rendering of *Matthew* 25:6 ("See, the bridegroom cometh; go out to meet Him") in *The Spiritual Espousals,* his discussion of the word "cometh" depends on concepts of time encoded in

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[53] D2160/2163, E2062/2065, ibid., D359, E358: "Nochtan was hi allen menschen altoes gnoech uutwendich ende in werken der caritaten, ende hi was sonder onderlaet scouwende dat aenschijn sijns vader … werken ende scouwen ende onghehindert bliven …"

[54] D1125/1126, E1051/1053, in ibid., *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D305, E304: "Hier na volght onderscheet der persone die dat heileghe sacrament ontfaen selen, beide in gheesteleken state ende oec in wereleken state"; D4:410/412, E4:376/379, in ibid., *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* E193, E192: "ochte werelijc heerscap, ende hem de mensche veinset ende smeeket ende toent oetmoedich, gherecht ende gheoerdent in allen doechden: dit doet al hoeveerde ochte ghiericheit"; D4:458/460, E4:423/426, in ibid., D199, E198: "De weerleec man, de ambachs man, de beghine, in wat state dat si sijn: die gode soeken ende eertsche dinghe soeken boeven noet, die sijn alle twevoldich ende onghelijc ende onwerdich der gracien gods." See also Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life,* 33.

[55] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 50.

the Latin Vulgate word, *venit.*[56] Like a Common Life brother, Ruusbroec toggles back and forth between the tried and tested lexicon of the ancient Church and the more unstable, unchartered waters of vernacular spirituality.

The *Mérode Triptych* and the "Household of the Soul"

In a similar way, the different levels of meaning in Campin's *Mérode Triptych* bear witness to a community of understanding that held canonical monasticism and Augustinian exegesis in tandem with the more fluctuating strains of pious domesticity, mysticism, and vernacular devotion. Few Netherlandish works, in fact, have inspired so diverse and formidable a mountain of scholarship as has the *Mérode Triptych.* Before examining the role of Ruusbroec's texts in shaping and augmenting the meditative argument in the painting, it will be helpful to review highlights in the historiography of the panels.

The first record of the triptych comes from 1820, when it was purchased in Bruges by the Prince of Arenberg. It later entered the private collection of the Comtesse de Mérode, where it remained until 1957 when The Cloisters Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art bought it with Rockefeller funds. Prior to its arrival in New York City, the *Mérode Triptych* only appeared twice in public—in Bruges, at the *Toison d'Or* exhibition of 1907, and in Paris, at an exhibition of Belgian art in 1923. The years leading up to and immediately following The Cloisters' acquisition of the painting were particularly productive for scholarship, especially in the United States. In 1945 Millard Meiss discussed the central place of light in the triptych, stressing the connection between the seven rays that carry the Christ Child through the glass of the window and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Fig. 4.5). The window references the Lord's miraculous

[56] See D179/184, E152/156, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D171, 173; E170, 172.

conception, in which the virginity of his mother remained as inviolate as the sunlit glass.[57]

Published the same year as Meiss's article, Meyer Schapiro's landmark essay on the *Mérode Triptych* famously identified the mousetrap on St. Joseph's workshop bench as a reference to St. Augustine's interpretation of Christ as the "bait" in a divine deception to trap the devil (Fig. 4.6). Tricked into believing that Jesus was the mortal son of St. Joseph, the devil plotted the Lord's death on Calvary, only to be outwitted by the Resurrection of the immortal Christ. Schapiro uses this patristic reading alongside the holy carpenter's prominent status in the painting to document the rise of St. Joseph's cult in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[58]

The year of the *Mérode's* installment at The Cloisters prompted three articles in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* including Margaret Freeman's exhaustive iconographical analysis, which resonates with Erwin Panofsky's discussion of the triptych using his theory of "disguised symbolism." For example, the brass candlestick holding the candle correlates with the Virgin who will hold Christ, the Lord's humanity evoked by the wax and his divinity by the flame. The open door of the *hortus conclusus* refers to the portal of heaven opened by the Mother of God, the bench carved with lions identifies her as the Solomonic *Sedes sapientiae,* and the laver of water, combined with the lilies, recalls her purity (Fig. 4.7).[59] William Suhr's conservation report in the *Bulletin* noted that the blue sky visible through the Virgin's window had once been gilded

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[57] Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (September 1945): 175–181.
[58] Meyer Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli,' The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (September 1945): 182–187.
[59] Margaret B. Freeman, "The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16 (December 1957): 130–139; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 127–129, 142–143, 164–166.

and that the donor's wife in the left-hand panel was a later addition.[60] Theodore Rousseau's article connected the steep perspective of the floor plane to contemporary bas-relief sculpture, suggesting that Campin may have intentionally stretched the limits of proper perspective in order to depict the maximum number of household objects.[61] Writing nine years after these initial responses to the *Mérode,* Helmut Nickel, a curator from The Metropolitan Museum's Arms and Armor Department, observed that the mysterious figure standing at the garden gate was wearing a small medal that identifies him as an official messenger from Mechelin, the city that was also home to the painter's donor, Peter Inghelbrechts (Fig. 4.8).[62]

Schapiro's analysis of St. Joseph's mousetrap elicited a flurry of responses during the 1960s and 70s and prompted other scholars to comb through the painting for equally obscure "disguised symbols," often bolstering Schapiro's argument for the Passion of Christ as a major organizing principle in the triptych's iconography.[63] For instance, Marilyn Aronberg Lavin contended that, in addition to mousetraps, St. Joseph's carpentry shop was also producing the perforated top of a wine press to typify the suffering Christ who "tro[d] the winepress alone."[64] Furthermore, Charles de Tolnay asserted that the strange contrast between the burgeoning flowers in the donors' panel and the snow-flecked cityscape in the St. Joseph panel established an appropriate pairing of the

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[60] William Suhr, "The Restoration of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16 (December 1957): 140–144.
[61] Theodore Rousseau, Jr, "The Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16 (December 1957): 117–129.
[62] Helmut Nickel, "The Man beside the Gate," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 24 (April 1966): 237–244.
[63] For responses to Schapiro's mousetrap analysis, see Irving L. Zupnick, "The Mystery of the Mérode Mousetrap," *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (March 1966): 126, 128–131, 133; John Jacob, "The Mérode Mousetrap," *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (July 1966): 372–374; Helmut Nickel, "The Mousetraps of the Mérode Altar-Piece Again," *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (November 1966): 577, 580.
[64] *Isaiah* 63:3; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "The Mystic Winepress in the Mérode Altarpiece," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss,* vol. 1, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University), 297–301.

springtime feast of the Annunciation on March 25th with the Solemnity of Christmas in the dead of winter (Fig. 4.9).[65] In a similar vein, Charles Ilsley Minnot read the work as an expression of liturgical and eschatological "advents," enlightened by the prophecies of Isaiah, and Carla Gottleib hypothesized that the lattice shutter in the central panel alludes to the appearance of the Bridegroom at a window in the *Song of Songs*.[66]

Scholarship since the 1980s has largely moved away from Panofskian iconography, allowing textual and social-historical studies to inspire a range of different significations for the *Mérode's* clutter of objects. Jozef de Coo attempted to recreate a "medieval look" at the triptych by acknowledging a mixture of secular and spiritual associations in the painting that were anything but "disguised." Rather than being a precursor to the Virgin's Solomonic throne in heaven, for example, he argued that the wooden bench in the central panel is an authentic, fifteenth-century, reversible-back piece of furniture. Similarly, the choice to set the Annunciation in the patrons' home may voice their desire to have their own child. In this regard, it is interesting that Gabriel's message to the Virgin Mary and the mystery of Christ's conception align fundamentally with the donor's surname, since "Inghelbrechts" means, "angel brought."[67]

On the other hand, Ellen Callmann opened a different avenue of study by tracing the blue and white maiolica ceramic in the central panel back to Florence and using it to discuss workshop practice and the *Mérode's* relationship to a close version of the

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[65] Charles de Tolnay, "L'Autel Mérode du Matire de Flémalle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 53 (1959): 65–78.
[66] Charles Ilsley Minott, "The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 51 (September 1969): 267–271; Carla Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," *Oud Holland* 85(1970): 65–84. For another important iconographical analysis, see William S. Heckscher, "The Annunciation of the Merode Altarpiece: An Iconographic Study," in *Miscellanea Jozef Duverger: Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 1 (Gent: Vereniging voor de Geschiedenis der Textielkunsten, 1968), 37–65.
[67] Jozef de Coo, "A Medieval Look at the Merode Annunciation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1981): 114–132.

composition conserved in Brussels (Fig. 4.10).[68] Barbara Lane, by contrast, fleshed out earlier arguments for important Eucharistic and liturgical references in the triptych.[69] Cynthia Hahn's important article from 1986 offered an emphatically devotional interpretation, in which the Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Christ Child become an "Earthly Trinity," modeling redemption from the Fall, industry, and the ideal marriage and family life. Hahn's correlation between St. Joseph and God the Creator, both of whom shape, refine, and carve souls like carpenters, is particularly compelling.[70]

Albert Châtelet's work on Campin, although dependent on the iconographical readings of Panofsky and De Tolnay, moves well beyond his predecessors in considering the *Devotio moderna,* the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas à Kempis, the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph of Saxony, and other dimensions of late medieval spirituality to account for "latent," rather than "disguised," symbols, which shift in meaning according to the range of viewers gazing at them.[71] Carol Purtle traced the *Mérode* Virgin's antecedents in Sienese Madonnas of Humility, and Felix Thürlemann's monograph analyzed the differences between the *Mérode* triptych and its Brussels variation to glean insights into the composition's symbolic program, as understood by Campin's students.[72] Thürlemann also discussed the semiotic parallel between "Schrinmechers," the surname of Peter

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[68] Ellen Callmann, "Campin's Maiolica Pitcher," *The Art Bulletin* 64 (December 1982): 629–631.
[69] Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece,* 41–50. For another study on the relationship between the *Mérode* and its Brussels version, see Jeltje Dijkstra, "The Brussels and the Merode *Annunciation* Reconsidered," in *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship,* ed. Susan Foister and Susie Nash (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 95–104.
[70] Cynthia Hahn, "'Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee': The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych," *The Art Bulletin* 68 (March 1986): 54–66.
[71] Albert Châtelet, *Robert Campin, Le Maître de Flémalle. La Fascination du Quotidien* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator Paribas, 1996), esp. 93–112, 237–251.
[72] Carol J. Purtle, "The Iconography of Campin's Madonnas in Interiors: A Search for Common Ground," in *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship,* ed. Susan Foister and Susie Nash (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 171–182.

Inghelbrechts' first wife, which means "cabinet maker," and the literal setting of the St. Joseph panel in a carpentry shop.[73]

Well known for her careful consideration of "technical art history," Maryan Ainsworth builds on Suhr's conservational work in her catalog of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's northern Renaissance collection and also draws from the rigorous formal observations made by Mojmír Frinta in 1966.[74] The dendrochronological report on the *Mérode Triptych* estimates that the central panel may be up to twenty-five years older than the side panels. This, combined with divergent underdrawings and evidence of another hand—quite possibly Rogier van der Weyden's—in the left panel, may indicate that the triptych was painted in stages and assembled in a composite manner, which could explain the breaches in perspective, the varying sizes of the figures, and the later additions of the donor's wife, the Inghelbrechts' heraldic devices, and the blue sky in the window of the central panel.[75] Although these arguments are well taken, Ainsworth herself acknowledges that they do not preclude the possibility that the panels were painted at the same time, using an older piece of wood for the center of the triptych and perhaps with collaboration from Rogier during his time as a journeyman in Campin's workshop.[76]

Even if the Annunciation panel were completed decades earlier, however, the remaining two panels seem to have been carefully executed to complement the devotional

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[73] Thürlemann, *Robert Campin,* 58–76. For more on the Inghelbrechts family and the relationship of the painting to the names of Peter and his wife, Gretgin Schrinmechers, see H.Installé, "Le triptyque Mérode. Evocation mnémonique d'une famille de marchands colonais, réfugiées à Malines," *Hanelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen* 1 (1992): 55–155.
[74] Frinta, *The Genius of Robert Campin,* 13–27.
[75] Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 89–96. For further discussion of the contrasts in perspective and scale as evidence for an assembly in different stages, see Campbell, "Robert Campin, the Master of Flémalle and the Master of Mérode," 643–645.
[76]Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 92.

argument of the central scene. It is surely not coincidental, for instance, that the cross-shaped bar of the mousetrap in the right-hand panel approximates the size and dimensions of the cross carried by the tiny Christ Child in the central scene, as if he were swooping toward the carpentry shop to offer himself as bait to catch the devil.[77] Alfred Acres eloquently characterizes the relationship between these two scenes as a dangerous "haunting" from the right answered by grace descending from the left.[78] Furthermore, the object on which St. Joseph labors in his workshop appears to be a firescreen, perhaps the very one that stands in the middle panel, epitomizing his role in guarding and "screening" the Virgin Mary from harm.[79] It is significant that when the triptych is closed, the depiction of St. Joseph—together with the screen-like back to his bench—folds over the Mother of God, protecting her image in a remarkably literal way. On another note, Nickel has even suggested that the robin, magpie, goldfinch, and sparrow sitting along the top of the garden wall in the left-hand wing echo the heights, placement, and spiritual significance of the four figures in the remaining two panels.[80]

Furthermore, the contrast in elevation, perspective, and scale in the triptych is not adequately explained by a delayed assembly. It would seem strange for an artist who had so carefully brought the *Mérode* panels into dialog with each other through bridging details and compositional echoes to then haphazardly permit an awkward transition at the foreshortened door joining the left and central panels, a jarring difference in elevation between the view of the city from the carpentry shop and the ground-floor *hortus conclusus,* a larger scale for the donors than for the Virgin and St. Joseph, and even an

[77] Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli'," 183.
[78] Acres, "Porous Subject Matter and Christ's Haunted Infancy," 247.
[79] Thürlemann, *Robert Campin,* 68; Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 60–61.
[80] Nickel, "The Man Beside the Gate," 243–244.

illogical confluence of spring and winter weather, unless these disjunctures were intentional. The *Mérode Triptych* inspired many later compositions, including Campin's Werl panels of 1438 (Figs. 4.11 and 4.12) and Rogier's Paris-Turin *Triptych of the Annunciation* from circa 1435 (Fig. 4.13). Significantly, both of these works not only quote from the myriad of objects depicted in the *Mérode* but also emulate portions of its disjointed scale and perspective, implying that there was enough significance in Campin's unusual spatial assembly to make it worth copying.

Unfortunately, the central panel of the Werl ensemble has been lost, but the donor in the left-hand wing, Heinrich von Werl, the Franciscan provincial from Cologne, kneels, like Peter Inghelbrechts, before a few steps ascending to a doorway. Although impossible to know for certain, it is likely that the central panel into which the Werl friar gazes would not have been spatially continuous with the St. Barbara panel on the right, where the young martyr sits in an apartment as isolated as St. Joseph's workshop. She is as engrossed in her prayer book as he is in his carpentry, while around her the reversible-back bench, mantle with candle bracket, shuttered window, and open-beam ceiling recall the accoutrements of the *Mérode* Madonna's *cubiculum.*[81] Moreover, Heinrich is significantly larger in scale than either St. John the Baptist, who introduces him, or St. Barbara, and the pitch of the floor plane in the right-hand panel is markedly steeper than in the donor panel, and the view from St. Barbara's window seems correspondingly higher.[82]

Rogier's Paris-Turin *Triptych of the Annunciation,* associated with the De Villa family from Piedmont in northern Italy, presents a dendrochronological puzzle similar to

[81] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 173.
[82] Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 56.

the *Mérode* dating dilemma. Here, the side panels—if they indeed are the side panels for this triptych—are up to forty years younger than the wood of the central portion depicting the Annunciation, again raising questions about the manner in which the triptych was painted and assembled. As in the *Mérode Triptych,* the donor kneels before an elevated entryway that only roughly aligns with the other side of the doorway in the middle panel. The gate to the secluded garden behind him is open, as in the Inghelbrechts' garden, and coincidentally, the donor's portrait also endured alterations at a later date, probably before the middle of the sixteenth century.[83] Furthermore, the elevation of the view overlooking the landscape, the scale of the figures, and the perspective of the floor all shift rather suddenly at the juncture between the donor's garden and the Virgin's room, where the fireplace, candle, maiolica vessel with lilies, and shutters all derive from Campin.[84] Paralleling the patron outside her home, the Virgin herself kneels at a threshold to an adjoining space—a window opening onto a Visitation scene.[85] The fluttering pages of her book parrot the "turning forward" of her vision as she perceives an event several months in the future, like the *Mérode* St. Joseph who works against a wintery cityscape, nine months after the springtime Annunciation.

As with Campin's triptych, however, the seemingly disjointed scenes of the Paris-Turin *Annunciation* maintain an internal logic. Notably, the Virgin does not actually look

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[83] Ibid., 95–97; Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 196–197. The face of the original donor was cut from the panel and replaced with a new section of wood. In fact, X-radiography reveals portions of this original donor's clothing, and De Vos has identified another De Villa Annunciation ensemble from the Petworth House in West Sussex, in which the donor not only corresponds closely with these remaining traces of clothing, but the stance of the Angel Gabriel in both works is nearly the same. He hypothesizes that the original donor of the Paris-Turn triptych is the same De Villa merchant who commissioned the Petworth House *Annunciation* and may even be the same donor who appears in Rogier's *Abegg Triptych of the Crucifixion.* The subsequent owner of the Paris-Turin triptych may have chosen to preserve the original donor's portrait because they were related in some way.
[84] Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 95–97.
[85] Vos, 195.

out her window but rather inclines her head away from the vista to hear the angel's message. The view of the Visitation may thus be intended as an internal musing in the Virgin's heart, so that Gabriel's words, "blessed art thou among women," prompt a prophetic visualization of her future journey to St. Elizabeth's home where her cousin would utter the same proclamation, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."[86] It is at the Annunciation that Mary first apprehends the presence of God incarnate, and the Visitation confirms that mystery as St. Elizabeth and the Virgin reverently touch each other's pregnant stomachs, while St. John the Baptist, recognizing Christ *in utero,* "leap[s] in [the] womb for joy."[87]

Interestingly, the contrast between Mary's crouched position on the floor at the Annunciation and her standing posture at the Visitation, the latter further elevated by the steeply winding road, corresponds nicely with a passage from Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*), which also uses different elevations to juxtapose the humility of the Virgin Annunciate with the exuberant praise she offers at the Visitation *Magnificat*:

> And this is what Mary, the mother of God, teaches us. For when she had said to the angel: 'Behold here the handmaid of God; let it be done unto me according to Thy word,' that was a humble descent. And immediately afterward, she said: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit doth rejoice in God my salvation.' That was a worthy ascent, and a blessed offering wholly to be burned in love.[88]

Despite lingering questions regarding the execution of the Paris-Turin *Annunciation,* the Werl panels, and the *Mérode Triptych,* their "disjunctures" in space, time, elevation, and

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[86] *Luke* 1:28, 42.
[87] Ibid. 1:41.
[88] D5:3945/3950, E5:3709/3714, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D985, E984: "Ende dit leert ons Maria, die moeder gods. Want doen si ghesproken hadde tote den inghel: 'Siet hier de dierne gods; mi ghescie na dinen worde,' dat was .i. oetmoedich nederganc. Ende altehans daer na sprac si: 'Mine siele maect groet den heere. Ende mijn gheest heeft heme verblijdt in gode, die es mijn heil.' Dat was .i. weerdich opganc ende .i. salich offer al te verberne in minnen."

scale should not be read as the awkward result of piecemeal assembly. Rather, they should be viewed according to Lynne Jacobs' notion of "miraculous thresholds," in which the "doors" of a folding triptych sometimes transgress narrative and spatial logic in order to engage meditation on abstract transitions of devotion and theology.[89]

Among the most incisive interpretations of the *Mérode Triptych* is Reindert Falkenburg's article from 2001.[90] He argues that the devotional argument of the painting depends on St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who interpreted the Annunciation as a spiritual betrothal between God and the soul of the Virgin Mary. This mystical marriage became a model for the unity with the divine that all Christians hoped to achieve. Meditative texts inspired lay men and women to imagine their souls' unification with God set in a house or garden furnished with emblematized virtues. In this context, the cluttered sitting room depicted in Campin's painting not only recalls a fifteenth-century middle class home but also prompts prayerful consideration of another intimate, interior space: the "household" of the Virgin's soul. Its carefully positioned candle, laver, towel, and maiolica vase of lilies body forth the virtues contained in the immaculate chamber of the Virgin's heart, as *exempla* for imitation.

In fact, much of Falkenburg's essay deals with the notion of *conformitas,* the votary's quest to align soul, body, and emotions with the examples provided by the saints, the Virgin Mary, and ultimately Christ. In mystical garden literature, roses often underscore the "consubstantiality" between the Lord, his mother, and the believer. The left panel of the *Mérode* follows suit with the donors kneeling in a rose garden, Inghelbrechts' face framed with the blossoms of a bush just behind him and with a rose

[89] See Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 40–57, 95–97.
[90] Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul," 2–17.

bud—like a votive offering—tucked into his hat (Fig. 4.14), while his wife holds a pink rosary in her hands (Fig. 4.15). Consistent with the protocol of courtly love, these rose allusions allegorize the couple's allegiance to the Virgin Mary, who, with her billowing red dress unfolding petal-like about her, literally embodies her title as *Rosa mystica.* The donors aspire to imitate the "Rose Without Thorns" so meticulously that they even claim her spiritual home as their own, having soldered their heraldic devices into its windowpanes (Fig. 4.16). Conforming their souls to hers, they seek to welcome the newborn Christ into the pious households of their hearts.[91]

The Mystic from Groenendaal, the Eucharist, and *Mérode* Craftsmanship

The striking imagery of Ruusbroec's texts and his instructions for the *conformitas* of the soul expand the significance of "devout domesticity" in the *Mérode Triptych* and offer new insights into the Eucharistic potential embedded in the mystery of the Annunciation. As mentioned earlier, my analysis will draw primarily from Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* which was previously introduced in chapter one of this dissertation as an epistle-like treatise deeply concerned with the Sacrament of the altar and originally written in 1359 for a Clarissan nun.[92] The text sets forth Christological and Marian mirrors for imitation and depends fundamentally on the mirror likeness of God reflected in the soul of every human at Creation and then supernaturally renewed by grace in the image of Christ. The votary's unification with the Trinity is mediated by the ceaseless births of the Son of God into the soul, a trope that reappears in Ruusbroec's *The*

[91] For a counter argument to Falkenburg's notion of *conformitas,* see Peter Parshall, "Commentary: Conformity of Contrast?," in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia, Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 18–25.
[92] Mommaers, introduction to *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* 15–16.

Realm of Lovers and his *Spiritual Espousals,* both of which will also receive attention in this chapter.

The Realm of Lovers did not enjoy nearly the same diffusion as *The Spiritual Espousals,* which was introduced in chapter two. It was the first composition Ruusbroec wrote, likely dating to about 1338, and from its inception, the mystic seems to have intended it to circulate primarily among his fellow priests in Brussels.[93] Today there are only five extant manuscripts with complete versions of the treatise or significant portions of it, most of them coming from houses of Canons and Canonesses Regular, which joined the Chapter of Windesheim in the early fifteenth century.[94] Like *The Spiritual Espousals, The Realm of Lovers* is an exegetical elaboration of a single line of scripture, this time originating from a slightly-altered verse in the *Book of Wisdom*: "The Lord led the just back along the right ways and showed him the realm of God."[95] Ruusbroec breaks this line into five parts and details three modes for accessing "the realm of God," including an "outward, sensible way" that mirrors the created world; the "way of natural light," marked by the soul's natural likeness to God; and the "supernatural, divine way," which is enabled by the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.[96] This third manner of "seeing the realm" takes the form of a complicated construction that correlates each of the seven gifts with one of the nine choirs of angels, one of Christ's Beatitudes, the divine and human

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[93] Joseph Alaerts, introduction to *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* by Jan van Ruusbroec, ed. Joseph Alaerts, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 4, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 14–15; Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 64.

[94] See chapter 1: "The Manuscripts," in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* 111–132. Manuscript Ltk. 343, from the Leiden Universiteitsbeibliotheek, is no longer extant.

[95] D1/2, E1/2, in ibid., D151, E150: "Die heere hevet weder leidet den gherechten die gherechte weeghe, ende hevet hem ghetoent dat rike gods." For the variations from the original citation in the *Book of Wisdom* 10:10, see Alaerts, introduction to *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* 15.

[96] D4:172, E4:152, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D171, E170: "uutwendich, senlijc wech"; D4:230, E4:206, in ibid., D175, E174: "wech des naturlijcs lichts"; D4:311, E4:283, in ibid., D183, E182: "overnatuerleec, godleec wech."

attributes of the Lord, and references to the seven days of Creation.[97] Grace from the Holy Spirit enables the votary's unification with God and recreates the soul into a renewed and supernatural version of the first Creation.

A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness, The Spiritual Espousals, and even the less commonly read *Realm of Lovers,* likely inflected the "communities of understanding" that permeated the learning and devotion of both Campin and the Inghelbrechts family. It is even possible that both the artist and the donor could have had direct access to Ruusbroec's writings. The introduction to this dissertation briefly discussed the potential for Campin and Rogier to have encountered Ruusbroec's texts in Tournai. There is also evidence that Campin had family ties to Brussels, which would only have increased the likelihood of an interface with the mystic of Groenendaal. In fact, it seems that Campin even modeled the Gothic portal in his *Marriage of the Virgin* after the Brussels church, Notre-Dame du Sablon, perhaps indicating that he had occasion to visit the city (Fig. 4.17).[98] Moreover, the Inghelbrechts family also had important connections to Ruusbroec's native Brabant. Peter Inghelbrechts' association with the city of Mechelin, in fact, would have situated him just twenty miles northeast of Ruusbroec's priory at Groenendaal. Furthermore, the Inghelbrechts originally hailed from Cologne, as did Peter's first wife, and Ruusbroec had a well-documented relationship with the Cologne

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[97] Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 57.

[98] For Campin's familial connections to Brussels, see Lorne Campbell, "Brussels and Tournai," in *Campin in Context: Peinture et Société dans la Vallé de l'Escaut à l'Époque de Robert Campin 1375–1445*, ed. Ludovic Nys and Jacques Debergh (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2007), 113–123. For the connection to the Church of Notre-Dame du Sablon, see Ludovic Nys, "Le Maître de Flémalle à Gand. À Propos du *Mariage de la Vierge* et de l'*Annonciation* du Museé du Prado," in *Campin in Context: Peinture et Société dans la Vallé de l'Escaut à l'Époque de Robert Campin 1375–1445*, ed. Ludovic Nys and Jacques Debergh (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2007), 240, note 6.

Carthusians.[99] Most important, of course, for a link to Ruusbroec is the visual evidence provided by the *Mérode Triptych* itself. The Virgin Annunciate figures prominently in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* and Ruusbroec's verbal imagery recalls many of the pictorial prompts in Campin's painting, illuminating a common directive to use the Annunciation to prepare the soul for Eucharistic communion with Christ and ultimate unification with the Trinity.

As with Campin's "household of the heart," Ruusbroec often visualizes the human soul as a structure. In addition to Noah's Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Mosaic tabernacle, all of which are analogized to the soul in *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* Ruusbroec speaks elsewhere of the "kingdom of the soul" as an "edifice of all virtue and of all nobility," the "dwelling of the Father" and "His temple."[100] He also describes it as a verdant microcosm of Creation with "seven streams … flowing through the realm of the soul, and making it fruitful in many ways," crowned above by "[t]he firmament of heaven … adorned with seven planets and with the stars," while higher still a crystalline heaven extends up to the final stratosphere of "pure, simple resplendence."[101] In *The Spiritual Espousals,* the garden-like realm of the soul cycles through the seasons, at times appearing like the *Mérode's* flowering *hortus conclusus,* populated by spiritual bees

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[99] On Ruusbroec and the Cologne Charterhouse, see Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 283; Faesen, "Ruusbroec at the Charterhouse of Herne," 117–118; Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 339.

[100] For Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant, described as types for the structures of the Church and the soul, see D0:5/12, E0:5/12, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D261, E260. See also D484, E416, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D211, E210: "rijcke der zielen"; D486, E417/418, in ibid.: "ghestichte alder duechde ende alre edelheit"; D1915, E1786, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D383, E382: "wooeninghe des vader, sijn tempel."

[101] D4:316/318, E4:288/289, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D183, E182: ".vij. rivieren … doer vlietende dat conincrike der sielen, vrochtbaer makende in menigher manieren"; D4:1749/1750, E4:1658/1659, in ibid., D319, 321; E318, 320: "Dat firmament des hemels es oec gheciert met .vij. planeten ende met den steren"; D4:212, E4:189/190, in ibid., D175, E174: "puere semple claerheit." On the three levels of heaven, to which the soul conforms itself, see also D4:2002/2009, E4:1904/1911, in ibid., D345, 343; E342, 344; D4:2170/2174, E4:2071/2075, in ibid., D359, 361; E358, 360; D4:2416/2419, E4:2310/2312, in ibid., D383, 385; E382. For a diagram of these and other analogies to the soul in *The Realm of Lovers,* see Alaerts, introduction to *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* 20–31.

"travel[ing] forth" "[i]n the open heart where Christ, the eternal sun, shines, [who] makes that heart and all the inward faculties grow and blossom and flow with joy and with sweetness."[102] The soul weathers "sweet rain of new inward consolation and heavenly dew of divine sweetness," as well as blistering summer heat that causes "herbs and trees [to] wither and dry up, and in certain waters, some fish [to] parch and die."[103] At the other climatic extreme, the soul can also suffer "hoarfrost and haze."[104]

As God dwells in the highest heaven and looks down on his creation, so his image also abides as a reflection in the microcosmic soul. In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* Ruusbroec explains that when God "created man in his own image," he left in the "noblest part of our soul, that is the ground of our higher faculties," "a living eternal mirror of God, whereupon God has impressed His eternal image."[105] This natural resemblance to the Creator harbored in the heart is Christological, for "God has eternally known all things" through the likeness of his son:

> God recognizes Himself and reflects Himself without cease in this likeness with respect to being and to persons … Thus He beholds Himself as well as all creatures in a one-fold seeing; and this is God's image and God's likeness, and our image and our likeness, for God reflects Himself and all things in it.[106]

At the same time, though, the Creator's reflection is also Trinitarian, deriving from the writings of St. Augustine, in which man maintains "vestiges of the Trinity" in the

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[102] Db442, Eb379, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D335, E334: "vaert ute"; Db447/450, Eb384/386, in ibid.: "Dat ontplokene herte daer Cristus die eewighe zonne in schijnt, daer doet hi groeyen ende bloeyen ende vloeyen dat herte ende alle die inwindighe crachte met vrouden ende met soeticheiden."
[103] Db377/379, Eb324/325, in ibid., D327, E326: "soete reghen nuwes inwindichs troosts ende hemelschen dau godlijcker soeticheit"; Db597/598, Eb511/512, in ibid., D353, E352: "verdorren ende verdroghen crude ende bome, ende in selcke watere versmachten <ende sterven> somighe viesche."
[104] Db428, Eb367, in ibid., D333, E332: "[r]ijm ende nevel."
[105] *Genesis* 1:27; D905/908, E851/853, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D283, E282: "Want na den edelsten deele onser zielen, dat es eighendoem onser overster crachte, daer sijn wi ghemaect alse .i. levende eewegh spieghel gods, daer god sijn eeweghe beelde in ghedruct heeft."
[106] Dc144/152, Ec123/131, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D589, E588: "hi hem sonder onderlaet bekint ende herbeelt in deser ghelijcheit na wesene ende na personen … Met eenen eenvuldighen siene soe siet hi hem selven ane alse alle dinc: ende dit es gods beelde ende gods ghelijckenisse, ende onse beelde ende onse ghelijckenisse, want hier in herbeelt hem god ende alle dinc."

intellect, will, and memory.[107] For Ruusbroec, the persons of the Godhead correspond to a triad of properties in the human soul that "are one in nature":

> The first attribute of the soul is unimaged essential bareness. Therewith we are like, and also united with the Father and His divine nature. The second attribute may be called the higher reason of the soul, that is: a mirror-like clarity. Therein we receive the Son of God, the eternal truth. In that clarity we are like Him, but in the receiving we are one with Him. The third attribute we call the spark of the soul, that is: the natural inward inclination of the soul toward its origin. Therein we receive the Holy Spirit, the Love of God.[108]

At the Fall, the divine image housed in the soul was marred: "But when Adam, the first man, was disobedient, in such a way that he broke the commandment of our Lord, then he became unlike because of the sin and forfeited paradise and the entry into the realm of God, and all of us with him."[109]

Man's *natural* resemblance to Deity having been hopelessly scarred, God offered redemption through another mirror-likeness, his image made flesh in his Son and *super-naturally* renewed in the reflective eyes of the faithful.[110] This renewal occurs in a flood of light as the Father "gives birth to His Son, that is: His resplendence, in the open, gazing eye" of those who "go out of [them]selves in this divine light and supernaturally pursue this image—which is [their] own life—and possess it actively and enjoyably with

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[107] See Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 180.

[108] D939/947, E883/890, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D287, E286: "een sijn in der natueren. Die ierste eighenscap der zielen es onghebeelde, weseleke blooetheit. Daer mede sijn wi ghelijc ende oec gheeenecht den vader ende sijnre godleker natueren. Die andere eighenscap mach heeten de overste redene der zielen, dat es eene spiegheleke claerheit. Daer in ontfaen wi den sone gods, die eeweghe waerheit. In der claerheit sijn wi heme ghelijc, maer in den ontfane sijn wi een met heme. Die derde eighenscap noemen wi de vonke der zielen, dat es natuerleke ingheneichtheit der zielen in haren orsprong. Daer in ontfaen wi den heileghen gheest, de minne gods."

[109] D970/973, E911/914, in ibid., D289, E288: "Maer doe Adam, die ierste mensche, onghehooersam was, alsoe dat hi brac dat ghebod ons heeren, doe wart hi onghelijc overmids de sonde ende verboorde dat paradijs ende den ingang in dat rike gods, ende wi alle met heme."

[110] For an analysis of Ruusbroec's complex mirror analogy, the "renewal" of the primordial image in Christ, and divine vision in the resplendent light, see Mommaers, introduction to *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* 19–32.

Him in eternal blessedness."[111] Ruusbroec makes a distinction here between the "eternal birth of the Son" in the "living mirror" of the "highest (part) of our soul" and the supernatural, "resplendent" renewal of Christ's image in the light-filled eye.[112] The former is innately, "essentially and personally in all people," "for all persons, good and evil, have this within themselves."[113] The latter, by contrast, is available only through human agency combined with the operation of God's "grace and His gifts," in "love and in virtues," and "wrought by His Spirit" until they are "above likeness, the sons of God by grace."[114] Then with Christ's features and attributes renewed in the heart and emblazoned, as if on the retinas of their spiritual eyes, the faithful exchange mere likeness to God for unity with him, as they become "one with that same light by which they see and which they see."[115] They "gaz[e] with bare sight on the light with the same light. There is eye to eye, mirror to mirror, image to image. With these three we are like to God and united with Him."[116]

The Eucharist, which Ruusbroec discusses at length in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, facilitates this mystical unification, for worshipers aspiring to receive

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[111] D1915/1916, E1787/1788, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D383, E382: "Ende hi ghebaert sinen sone, dat es sine claerheit, in die opene, starende ooeghe"; Dc156/158, Ec134/136, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D591, E590: "dat wij ons selfs uutgaen in desen godlijcken lichte, ende dit beelde—dat onse eyghen leven es—overnaturlijcke vervolghen ende met hem bistten, werkelijc ende ghebrukelijc in eewigher zalicheit."

[112] D929/933, E874/877, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D285, E284: "Dat overste onser zielen es altoes bereed … Ende daer omme eest een eewegh levende spieghel gods, altoes sonder onderlaet ontfaende die eeweghe gheboort des soons."

[113] D912, E857, in ibid., D283, E282: "weselec ende persoonlec in alle menschen"; Db1666/1667, Eb1435/1436, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D475, E474: "want dit hebben alle menschen in hem, goede ende quade."

[114] D961/963, E903/905, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D289, E288: "sine gratie ende sine gaven … in minnen ende in dooghden"; D1921, E1792/1793, in ibid., D383, E382: "ghewracht van sinen gheeste"; D1922/23, E1794, in ibid., D383, E382: "Daer sijn wi boven ghelijc de sonen gods van ghenaden."

[115] Dc181/182, Ec158/158, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D593, E592: "een met dien selven lichte daer si met sien ende dat si sien."

[116] D1839/1842, E1718/1720, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D375, E374: "staert met blooeten ghesichte dat licht met den selven lichte. Daer es ooeghe jeghen ooeghe, spieghel jeghen spieghel, beelde jeghen beelde. Met desen .iij. sijn wi gode ghelijc ende heme gheeeneght."

Christ's birth in their eyes should first receive in their mouths the consecrated bread that contains both his crucified body and his godly soul. To foreground the connection between the Eucharist and mystical vision, Ruusbroec punctuates his discussion with sacramental syntax. He asserts that "the glorious body of our Lord lives in the entire Sacrament throughout all the earth, undivided and without place," "[a]nd therefore, (in) whatever drop of the cup, or whatever little particle of the consecrated host, no matter how small it is, where there is appearance of bread, there is Christ wholly and entirely, complete, as in heaven."[117] He then uses the same terminology to describe the reflection of God in the soul, "whole and entire, undivided; and all people have of it among them all no more than one person has."[118] The lexicon applies equally to Christ's resplendent birth in the mystical eye: "Each sight receives the entire image of God, undivided and whole; and it is also entire to any one, and stays in itself an undivided one."[119] Furthermore, Ruusbroec frequently exhorts his readers to "lift up [their] eyes," echoing the familiar "lift up your hearts" (*sursum corda*) from the Eucharistic liturgy, and he repeatedly speaks of "impressions"—God's nature "impressed" in the soul's "living mirror," Christ "assum[ing] human nature out of love and impress[ing] upon it His Personality," and the "image … [of] His divine resplendence" "impressed" in the

[117] D814/816, E768/769, in ibid., D275, E274: "alsoe leeft de gloriose lichame ons heeren in al dat sacrament al erterike dore, onghedeilt ende sonder stad"; D807/810, E760/763, in ibid., D273, E272: "Ende hier omme, ieghewelc dropel van den kelke ochte ieghewelc brocsken van der gheconsacreerder hostien, hoe cleine dadt es, daer schijn van brooede es, daer es Cristus al te male gheheel al se in den hemel."
[118] D913/914, E858/859, in ibid., D283, E282: "gheheel, onghedeilt, ende alle menschen en hebbens onder hen allen niet meer dan .i. mensche."
[119] D2041/2043, E1904/1905, in ibid., D395, E394: "Dat beelde gods ontfeet ieghewelc ghesichte al, onghedeilt ende gheheel, ende het es oec ieghewelken al ende blijft in hem selven een onghedeilt een."

mystic's eye.[120] The language recalls the wafers of the Eucharist, which were literally impressed with depictions of the Lord or the monogram of the Holy Name of Jesus.[121]

The likeness of God—as reflected in his son—dwells primordially in the soul, but the incarnate Christ, which "impressed" human nature with the attributes and personality of God, is also offered to the votary as a more immediately accessible mirror upon which to ponder and meditate: "For He lives in you and He has given and left to you His mirror and His image, that is His Son Jesus Christ, your Bridegroom; Him shall you bear in your hands, before your eyes and in your heart."[122] To facilitate devout reception of the Eucharist—and also mystical reception of Christ born into the eye—Ruusbroec offers yet another exemplary mirror, the spotless image of the Virgin Annunciate. He invites the devout communicant to become Mary's "'discipula' and her lady-in-waiting and sit at her feet that she may teach you through her example how you shall live; for she is the highest mistress of all virtues and all holiness."[123] His fourfold description of the virtues she "had in her and practiced when she conceived our Lord" aligns with the accoutrements of Mary's soul, as set forth in the *Mérode Triptych.*[124] Ruusbroec first points to the "purity,

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[120] D160/161, E151/152, in ibid., D209; E206, 208: "verheffen uwe ooeghe ende uwe herte in den hemel"; D1730, E1617, in ibid., D365, E364: "Nu heft dan op uwe ooeghen"; D2019/2020, E1883, in ibid., D393, E392: "Nu verheft alle uwe ghemuede ende uwe blooete ghesichte boven alle hemele"; D2055/2056, E1916/1917, in ibid., D397, E396: "verheft uwe inneghe ooeghen in uwe hooeghste"; D1790/1792, E1671/1673, in ibid., D371, E370: "Ende hi heeft ieghewelcs menschen ziele ghescapen alse eenen levenden spieghel daer hi dat beelde sijnre natueren in ghedruct heeft"; D885/886, E834/835, in ibid.,D281, E280: "van minnen ane ghenomen heeft menscheleke natuere ende heeft die ghebeelt met sijnre persoonlecheit"; D1843/1844, E1722, in ibid., D375, E374: "daer hi sijn beelde in ghedruct heeft. Sijn beelde dat es sine godleke claerheit."

[121] For a study on the ritualized production and impressing of hosts, see Aden Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species: Eucharistic Morphology in the Middle Ages," *Res* 59/60 (Spring/Autumn 2011): 179–191, esp. 184–186.

[122] D320/323, E304/307, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D223, 225; E222, 224: "Want hi leeft in u ende hi heeft u ghegheven ende ghelaten sinen spieghel ende sijn beelde, dat es sijn sone Jhesus Cristus, uwe brudegooem. Dien seldi draghen in uwe hande, vore uwe oeeghen ende in uwe herte."

[123] D507/509, E477/479, in ibid., D243, E242: "discipula ende hare cameriere, ende sitten te haren voeten, op dat si u leeren moghe met haren exemplen hoe ghi leven selt, want si es overmeesterse alre dooghde ende alre heilecheit."

[124] D506, E476, in ibid., D243, E242: "in hare hadde ende ufende doe si onsen heere ontfing."

in your mirror Mary," inviting his readers to "be pure and stay with Mary in her room," a chamber that might appropriately be furnished with Campin's clean towel, laver of pure water, and white lilies.[125]

The second attribute of Ruusbroec's Virgin is the "true knowledge of God," which "Mary had above all people who have ever been, next to her Son who is Himself the wisdom of God."[126] The mystic further adds that upon hearing Gabriel's announcement, "she was taught by the angel and much more still by the Holy Spirit."[127] In the painting, the carved lions on the Virgin's bench identify her as the very Throne of Wisdom, and the composition draws special attention to three texts: a book reverently held in white cloth by the Mother of God; a partially unrolled scroll; and an additional volume, bookmarked and resting on a green bag on the table. The gilded pages of this third book are fluttering, as if the "rushing mighty wind" of the Pentecostal Holy Spirit itself were turning the leaves for Mary's edification.[128] The Virgin is so engrossed in her reading that she hardly looks at Gabriel. Her eyes move slightly to the left, but it is ambiguous whether she is acknowledging the heavenly messenger in her room or whether she is simply cross referencing her study with a glance at the text on the scroll.

Her absorption in divinely inspired words accords with Ruusbroec's assertion that the Virgin Annunciate learned first and foremost from the Holy Spirit, and in Campin's painting the significance of Mary's mission seems to distill upon her mind as much through revelatory Biblical exegesis as through the angel's announcement. An intently

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[125] D513/514, E482, in ibid., D243, E242: "reinecheit, in uwen spieghel Marien"; D546/547, E513/514, in ibid., D247, E246: "reine sijn ende met Marien bliven in hare camere."
[126] D549/551, E516/518, in ibid., D247, E246: "ghewaregh kinnesse gods. Dat hadde Maria boven alle menschen die ye gheworden, naest haren sone, die selve de wijsheit gods es."
[127] D566/567, E532/533, in ibid., D249, E248: "doe was si gheleert van den inghel ende noch vele meer van den heileghen gheest."
[128] *Acts* 2:2.

reading Madonna certainly resonates with the *Devotio moderna* and other currents in lay spirituality that promoted careful study of scripture and other texts. As mentioned earlier, Ruusbroec joined with Geert Grote in recommending "the realm of Scripture … [that] has flowed out of the Holy Spirit" as a treasure for those who, like the Virgin Mary, can surpass scholarly erudition by means of their virtues, grace, and divine love.[129] In fact, the painting's prominent inclusion of texts invites viewers to imitate the Mother of God by using scripture and other writings, such as Ruusbroec's own treatises, to unfold the mystery of the Annunciation.

Ruusbroec's third Marian point in preparing for Communion is humility, for "she was humble down to the ground (of her being)" when she said, "'Here is the handmaid of our Lord'."[130] "When God lifted her up in the highest, then she put herself lowest … [for] what is higher than the mother of God, and what is lower than the handmaid of God and of all the world that was Mary?"[131] Much has been said of the *Mérode* Virgin's dependence on the Sienese Madonna of Humility type, in which the Virgin abases herself by sitting on the ground, sometimes accompanied by spools of thread or other mundane sewing accouterments, to emphasize God's condescension in being born to a humble mother in simplicity and poverty (Fig. 4.18).[132] In the triptych, however, Mary is not the only figure positioned on the ground. Campin has reconfigured her example of humility into a means of paying her homage so that the genuflection of the angel and the kneeling posture of the donors in the garden dirt—*humus* in Latin—become devout acts of

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[129] D5:2642/2644, E5:2527/2528, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D407, E406: "dat rike der scriftueren … want het es ghevloeten uut den heilighen gheest."
[130] D1383/1385, E1292/1294, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D329, E328: "Si was grondooetmoedegh … 'Hier es de dierne ons heeren'."
[131] D568/574, E534/540, in ibid., D249, E248: "Doese god verhief ten hooeghsten, doe sette si hare ten nedersten … wat es hooeghere dan de moeder gods ende wat es nederre dan de deerne gods ende alle der werelt, dat was Maria?"
[132] See Purtle, "The Iconography of Campin's Madonnas in Interiors," 171–182.

conformitas. In a similar manner, Ruusbroec's advice to "sit at [Mary's] feet" as her *discipula* and lady-in-waiting is an invitation to honor her in precisely the way that she honors God, as a "handmaid" crouching on the floor.

Lastly, Ruusbroec cites the Mother of God's "voluntary desire" in agreeing to God's will with her response to Gabriel, "Be it done unto me according to Thy word" (*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*).[133] Agency plays an important role in Ruusbroec's conception of mystical ascent, and in *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* he associates the human will with the "fiery spark" of "the soul's very life," which is the "will in the ground of … good-willingness."[134] *The Realm of Lovers* likewise connects "freedom of will" to the element of fire.[135] As mentioned earlier, this "spark of the soul" is also the site in every human heart where the Holy Spirit leaves its impression as part of the ceaseless reflection of the triune God. It is notable, in this regard, that the *Mérode Triptych* depicts a tiny, smoldering spark at the wick of the candle, moments away from being extinguished in the smoke (Fig. 4.19). The same disturbance in the air that flutters the pages of the open book seems to have also blown out the candle. Although often explained by the angel's sudden arrival, this gust of air more likely embodies the Spirit as the Pentecostal wind and *flatus Domini,* or "breath of the Lord."[136] It puts out the flame of the Old Law in deference to the effulgent light of the New. Read alongside Ruusbroec, it confirms the Virgin's *conformitas* to God, so much so that his divine will becomes her

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[133] D511/512, E481, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D243, E242: "vriwilleghe begheerlecheit"; D576, E542, in ibid., D249, E248: "'Mi gheschie na dinen waerde'."
[134] D1878/1879, E1754, in ibid., D379, E378: "den gronde onser goetwillecheit, dat es de viereghe vonke, der zielen levendegheit";
[135] D4:1156, E4:1089, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D263, E262: "dat vier, dat es vriheit des willen."
[136] Thürlemann, *Robert Campin,*70; Châtelet, *Robert Campin,* 99.

own "voluntary desire" as the "fiery spark" of her will is "extinguished" in the wind of the Spirit.[137]

Fittingly, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* describes souls who emulate the Virgin in "voluntary desire" as having "died to all ownness, that is ownness of will, in the free will of God."[138] In Campin's painting, however, the sputtering, "dying" flame of Mary's will is *supernaturally* renewed as it enables the greater light of her son's coming. To this effect, Ruusbroec writes that "[w]hen the Holy Spirit heard [the Virgin's acceptance], that pleased the love of God so well that it sent Christ into Mary's chamber, who redeemed us of all affliction."[139] The triptych evokes this moment in a similar manner, as the soul of the tiny Christ Child—shining with the light of the New Covenant—descends through the windowpane, the cross of redemption over his shoulder.

For the Virgin's imitators, who receive the Holy Child in the Sacrament, the transubstantiation of bread into the body of Christ repeats the miracle of the Annunciation, when God took "substance" from the flesh of his mother.[140] During the Consecration of the Host, the theatrical practice of lowering a vessel shaped like a dove down to the altar made a visual link between the Canon of the mass and the Incarnation *de Spiritu Sancto.*[141] Furthermore, "sacrament houses" from northern Europe often

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[137] For the extinguished candle's reference to the end of the Mosaic era, see Minott, "The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," 270. For the suggestion that Mary herself blows out the candle to confirm her acceptance of God's will, see Heckscher, "The Annunciation of the Merode Altarpiece," 56–57. On the trope of a secular candle being put out in favor of the coming of divine light, see Freeman, "The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece," 134; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 143; Purtle, "The Iconography of Campin's Madonnas in Interiors," 177.

[138] D1376/1377, E1285/1286, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D329, E328: "ghestorven te sine alre eighenheit dat es eighenheit des willen in den vrien wille gods."

[139] D577/579, E543/544, in ibid., E251, E250: "Doe de heileghe gheest dat verhooerde, dat bequam der minnen gods soe wale, dat si Cristum zand in Marien zale, die ons verlooest heeft van alre quale."

[140] On the Virgin Mary's relationship to the Eucharist, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142–147.

[141] Timmermann, *Real Presence,* 27; Yrjō Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine: A Study of the Poetry and Art of the Catholic Church* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 114–115.

include depictions of Gabriel and the Virgin Annunciate, transforming these tabernacles for the Lord's Eucharistic body into types for the "timeless womb" of his mother.[142] In a late fourteenth-century German example from Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a carving of the Christ Child's soul, markedly similar to Campin's representation, has been affixed over the doors of the sacrament house, as if it were flying from the Angel Gabriel, who stands to the left of the doors, toward the Virgin who appears on the right (Fig. 4.20).[143] The *Mérode Triptych,* for its part, transforms Mary's table into a kind of altar, with Gabriel vested in the alb and stole of a deacon and a *piscina,* or liturgical washing basin, embedded in the back wall for ritual cleansing before mass.[144]

In this context, the ghostly form of the pre-incarnate Christ enters the window to vest himself in a chasuble of flesh within the sacristy of his mother's womb, before offering himself as priest and victim on the cross slung over his shoulder.[145] Referred to variously as a homunculus or the *parvulus puer formatus,* this figure calls to mind the so-called "Child in the Host," a common literary, visionary, and devotional trope, in which the infant Jesus takes shape from Communion wafers. The "Proleptic Passion," which reads the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ in the mysteries of his birth and childhood, was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by Abraham offering his child on an altar and then appears in the Gospels as St. Luke draws a semantic parallel between "the babe wrapped

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[142] See Timmermann, *Real Presence,* 249–253, esp. 250. On the application of this theme to the *Mérode Triptych,* see Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece,* 41–50.
[143] Timmermann, *Real Presence,* 250. For the *Mérode* child as the Host, see Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 75.
[144] See ibid., 65–67, 73–75; M. B. McNamee, "Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 45 (June 1963): 143. McNamee specifies that Gabriel is vested for a solemn high mass.
[145] On the analogy between the sacristy and the Virgin's womb where Christ dons his sacrificial vestments, see Guilielmus Durandus, *The Rationale divinorum officiorum: The Foundational Symbolism of the Early Church, its Structure, Decoration, Sacraments and Vestments, Books I, III and IV by Gulielmus Durandus (1230–1296CE); Including Selections from the Mystical Mirror of the Church by Hugo de Sancto Victore (1096–1141CE)* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), 20.

in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger," and the Lord's corpse "wrapped … in linen, and laid … in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone."[146]

The Fathers of the Church elaborated on these allusions, with St. Gregory the Great identifying the manger—a feeding trough for animals—as a figure for the altar where the "bread which cometh down from heaven" is reborn each day as food for the faithful, hidden under the accidentals of bread and wine, whereas it was once hidden in swaddling clothes.[147] As it turns out, appearances of the "Immolated Innocent" in the Host were corroborated by enough witnesses among both the devout and the doubters, the religious and the lay, that St. Thomas Aquinas famously included an article in his *Summa theologica* on the relationship between the Eucharistic infant and the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament.[148]

A classic hagiographical example concerns a clerk, who in 1196 witnessed a miraculous transformation during a mass celebrated by St. Hugh of Lincoln:

> God in His mercy deigned to open the eyes of a certain clerk and showed him Christ in the likeness of a small child in the chaste hands of the venerable and holy bishop. Although very tiny, the child was very lovely and of a supernatural brilliance and whiteness beyond man's imagination. The clerk … saw it elevated once more to be broken into three portions and partaken of. In the second

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[146] Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 136; Theresa Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar in the Middle English Nativity Lyric," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!,* ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 57; *Luke* 2:12, 23:53.

[147] Leah S. Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the English Cycle Plays," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!,* ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 6–7; *John* 6:50. For the patristic foundation of the Christ Child in the Host, see Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar," 29–65.

[148] Part 3, Question 76, Article 8, in Thomas Aquinas, *The "Summa Theologica" of Thomas Aquinas,* vol. 17, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1923), 301–304: *Utrum, quando in hoc sacramento apparet miraculose caro vel puer, sit ibi vere corpus Christi.* On visions, as well as on St. Thomas Aquinas' discussion of the Child in the Eucharist, see Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice," 3, 5; Elina Gertsman, "Signs of Death: The Sacrificial Christ Child in Late-Medieval Art," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!,* ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 73–75; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 113, 116–119, 124, 135–139, 143, specifically 135 for "Immolated Innocent."

> elevation he saw the Son of the Most High, born of a virgin, in the same form as before, offer himself for the redemption of mankind.[149]

In this account, the Virgin Mary is so closely tied to the presence of her Child in the Sacrament that the description of St. Hugh's "chaste hands" seems to have intentional Marian overtones, as if the bishop were taking her place as he elevates the infant. The clerk's vision is prefaced, in fact, by a description of St. Hugh's devotion to the "day and night offices of Mary, the blessed mother of God."[150]

With regard to the *Mérode Triptych,* this account of the child—"very tiny … and of a supernatural brilliance and whiteness beyond man's imagination"—accords closely with Campin's small homunculus, so white that he seems fashioned from light itself. The diminutive size of this *parvulus puer formatus* has been explained away as an effort on the part of the artist to hide an iconographical motif that had fallen under critical scrutiny from the Church since images of the disembodied soul of the Christ Child smacked of heresy.[151] A better explanation for the size of the *Mérode* child is its correlation with the similarly tiny, white Host, which, as Ruusbroec asserts, contains "Christ wholly and entirely" in every "little particle" of the bread. In fact, the infantine size of both homunculus and wafer heightens the mystique of their adoration—the painted child

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[149] Book 5, chapter 3, in Adam of Eynsham, *Magna vita sancti hugonis,* vol. 2, ed. Decima L. Douie and David Hugh Farmer, in *Oxford Medieval Texts,* ed. C. N. L. Brooke, D. E. Greenway, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 86: "cuisdam clerici oculos superna clementia dignata est aperire; eique sub specie infantis paruuli Christum suum demonstrauit mundissimis digitis sacri presulis reuerentissime contrectari. Erat uero idem puer forma quidem permodicus set diuino quodam nitore atque candore super estimationem hominis nimium decorus. Clericus …eam leuari cerneret, frangendam iam et sumendam sub trina sui partitione. In qua rursum eleuatione sub eadem qua prius ymagine natum intuetur de uirgine Filium Altissimi, seipsum offerentem pro humana salute." This account is cited and discussed in Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice," 4.

[150] Book 5, chapter 3, in Adam of Eynsham, *Magna vita sancti hugonis,* 85–86: "de beata Dei genetrice Maria tam diurrnum quam nocturnum officium."

[151] Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* trans. Janet Seligman, vol. 1 (Greenwich, CN: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 45–46. On heretical concerns with the iconography, see also Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli'," 183; J. Squilbeck, "Un aspect peu connu de la personnalité du Maître de Flémalle," *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art* 35 (1966): 3–4.

nearly lost among the detailed assortment of household objects in the panel, and the disk of consecrated bread overwhelmed by its habitual framework of precious metals, jewels, canopies, and sumptuous retables.

Depictions of the "Child in the Host" include metamorphoses at the Elevation (Fig. 4.21), as well as more mysterious images, like a German altar panel from the mid fourteenth century with St. Clare of Assisi praying before a Host animated by a miniature baby Jesus (Fig. 4.22). In a related manner, the careful assembly of Eucharistic vessels and pictorial artifice in the German tabernacle from Rothenburg ob der Tauber, cited above, pays homage to visions of the Holy Child. When the doors of this shrine were opened to reveal the reserved Sacrament, the wooden depiction of the infant Christ's soul would have been positioned directly over the ciborium holding the consecrated bread.[152] This would not only have foregrounded the tabernacle's role as the "timeless womb" of the Virgin but would also have imitated a Eucharistic miracle, as if the Host had transformed into a tiny child.[153] The statue of the Man of Sorrows, directly above the tabernacle's *parvulus puer formatus,* heightens the visionary aspect of the ensemble by referencing St. Gregory the Great's archetypal encounter with the Eucharistic Christ.

Building on this tradition of Eucharistic vision and devotion, Ruusbroec's *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* together with the *Mérode Triptych,* takes the Annunciation in an unusual direction, using this Marian mystery to teach proper reception of Communion and to anticipate mystical reception of Christ, born into the eye. Regarding this "birth in the eye," it is not hard to imagine a household "altarpiece" like the *Mérode Triptych* functioning as a backdrop for just this kind of transcendental musing as lay men

[152] Timmermann, *Real Presence,* 250.
[153] Ibid.

and women read mystical texts in the seclusion of their homes. The painting's relevance to Communion, however, may at first seem strained, given its domestic location. Falkenburg has convincingly argued, however, that household paintings, like the *Mérode,* frequently prepared votaries for liturgical experience, even in spaces far removed from the altar and the tabernacle.[154]

In representing Christ's descending soul, the *Mérode Triptych* taps into a fourteenth-century tradition originating in Italy. Pacino di Bonaguida's *Arbor Vitae,* circa 1320, is the first uncontested example of this iconographical device (Fig. 4.23). In the painting, God the Father sits enthroned in a roundel with Christ on his lap, as the Holy Spirit proceeds forth *ex Patre Filioque* in a column of golden rays, carrying the homunculus that represents the soul of the Christ Child to the Virgin Annunciate in a roundel below.[155] The pictorial conception is rooted in Franciscan theology emphasizing the entire Trinity's participation at the Annunciation, a point that Pacino emphasizes with his tripartite heavenly throne.[156] The *Meditationes vitae Christi,* written by a Franciscan posing as St. Bonaventure, eloquently reiterates this Trinitarian preface to the Annunciation as God sends Gabriel to Nazareth:

> Thus here you may imagine God and regard Him as best you can, although He has no body, beholding Him as a great God seated on a raised chair, with benign face, compassionate and paternal almost as though wishing to be or already reconciled

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[154] Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Hans Memling's Van Nieuwenhove Diptych: The Place of Prayer in Early Netherlandish Devotional Painting," in *Essays in Context: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych,* ed. John Oliver Hand and Ron Spronk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2006), 97.

[155] Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* 44–46. David Robb cites several images that come close to the iconography of the Christ Child's descending soul at the Annunciation, including three thirteenth-century *Bibles moralisées.* These miniatures, however, are more theological explications of the Incarnation than they are Annunciation scenes. A German ivory, circa 1100, is often mentioned as a remarkably early example of the descending Christ, but Robb notes that the image is ambiguous, and the figure of the Christ Child is probably no more than an architectural ornament on the building depicted in the scene. David. M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *The Art Bulletin* 18 (December 1936): 523.

[156] Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* 45–46.

> as He speaks these words … But [Gabriel's] flight was not so swift that God did not enter before him, and thus the Holy Trinity was present, entering before His messenger … What a small house it was in which these Persons entered, and what events They caused! Although the Holy Trinity is everywhere, consider that at this time and place It was here in a singular way for a singular purpose.[157]

The homunculus motif, as an aspect of the Trinity, spread from Italy to the Germanic lands in the later portion of the fourteenth century, and Campin's painting is a fairly early instance of its appearance in Netherlandish and French circles.[158]

Interestingly, this iconographical device had a strong base in the Cologne schools, and, as already mentioned, the Inghelbrechts family originally came from Cologne, Peter's first wife, Gretgin Schrinmechers, being a native of that city.[159] In this way, Campin's *parvulus puer formatus* may have been meant as homage to the genealogy of these wealthy merchants. In a more literal manner, though, the triptych likely evokes the donors' desire to extend that genealogical tree in the opposite direction by having a child. Appropriately, they address their prayers to the Mother of God as she is about to receive her own son on rays of light, Peter with a votive "baby rose" tucked in his hat and his second wife with a St. Christopher medal attached to her rosary, inspiring *conformitas* to the holy giant who, like the Virgin Mary, was himself the "bearer" of a child (Fig. 4.15).[160] As indicated previously, however, the Church began to look askance at portrayals of the homunculus since they resonated with the Incarnation heresy of Valentine, suggesting that Christ's dual nature was separable into a mortal *corpus* and a

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[157] Chapter 4, in Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* 15–16.
[158] Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* 46; Squilbeck, "Un aspect peu connu," 6–7.
[159] Ibid., 10.
[160] Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul," 14; Thürlemann, *Robert Campin,* 72

divine *anima.*[161] The iconography was not formally suppressed, however, until the eighteenth century.

In art, the descending Christ Child is almost always represented as part of a Trinitarian trajectory that begins with the Father in the heavens, moves diagonally to the infant Son, and then ends with the dove of the Holy Spirit, as in an Annunciation scene from the *Grabow Altar* of 1379 by Master Bertram (Fig. 4.24). The *Mérode Triptych* presents an unusual deviation from this tradition by neglecting the figures of God the Father and the dove of the Holy Ghost.[162] On the one hand, the isolation of the Christ Child from the standard Trinitarian diagonal may have functioned to recondition viewers' perception of the trope, prompting a more insistently Eucharistic focus on the Host-like infant. An *Annunciation* given to the Master of the Garden of Paradise (Fig. 4.25) closely copies the *Mérode Triptych* but adds the dove of the Holy Spirit, as does a fifteenth-century panel by the Master of Liesborn (Fig. 4.26). By contrast, the Aix-en-Provence *Annunciation,* attributed to Barthélemy d'Eyck, from 1443–1445 (Fig. 4.27), depicts God the Father and the *parvulus puer formatus* but leaves out the final person in the Trinity. Incidentally, the Aix panel, which sets the Annunciation in a Gothic church, draws a similar parallel between the Incarnation and the Eucharist by balancing the Virgin's reception of the tiny Christ Child with a crowd gathered for mass at the far right edge of the composition.

I argue, however, that in the *Mérode Triptych* the other members of the Godhead are present, albeit in an innovative, less traditional way, much in keeping with Campin's novel setting of the Annunciation in a domestic space. The trail of smoke wafting up

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[161] Squilbeck, "Un aspect peu connu," 3–4.
[162] Charles de Tolnay, *Le Maître de Flémalle et les frères Van Eyck* (Bruxelles: Éditions de la Connaissance, 1939), 15; Squilbeck, "Un aspect peu connu," 7.

from the candle near Mary's ear tracks the presence of the Holy Spirit, which, as the Pentecostal wind, has been "breathe[d] forth" from the Father and the Son, bringing the word of God to Mary's hearing and acceptance, leafing through prophecies in the open book on the table, and extinguishing the candle as it rushes through the room.[163] It has further been suggested that the bearded face carved in relief on the side of the red towel rack stands in for God the Father,[164] who would then form the apex of a Trinitarian triangle linking the miniature Christ Child on the left with the smoky "breath of the Lord" on the right and, appropriately, enclosing three lilies on one stem in between (Fig. 4.28). Echoes of this construction appear in Rogier's Paris-Turin *Triptych of the Annunciation,* in which another disturbance in the air—either from the angel or from the Holy Spirit—has knocked two petals from the vase of lilies to the floor,[165] while an image of Deity—this time a pearl-studded gold relief of Christ enthroned—hangs over the Virgin's bed (Fig. 4.29). Furthermore, although the Werl *St. Barbara* panel does not depict a carved face on the towel rack that it borrows from the *Mérode* composition, it does feature a stone sculpture of the Trinity over the mantle, at the same elevation as the towel rack.

In the *Mérode Triptych* the Godhead appears in three different media, the cold, rigid wood of the Father yielding to the supple, luminous form of Christ and the phantasmal smoke of the Spirit, just as the austere Law of Moses yields to the era of Grace characterized by the Lord's tender body and effulgent soul impressed in the wheat of the Host. This particular "imaging" of the Trinity is as cogently theological as it is pictorially inventive. Campin's painted representation of the carved face of the Father is an image of an image, two steps removed from its prototype. In that sense, it evokes the

[163] D213/214, E183, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D175, E174: "si gheesten eenen geest."
[164] Tolnay, "L'Autel Mérode," 72; Châtelet, *Robert Campin,* 99.
[165] De Vos attributes the fallen petals to the angel's brisk arrival. Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden,* 95.

exegetical notion that the ineffable God must be apprehended through indices, like the burning bush or "cloudy pillar" that mediated his presence in *Exodus*.[166] The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is depicted as an image of an effect, since the current of air extinguishing the candle and rustling the pages of the book remains invisible. Although artists most commonly represent the third member of the Trinity under the *figura* of a dove, Campin's more ephemeral evocation is equally scriptural since the *Old* and *New Testaments* frequently associate the Spirit with intangible elements like wind and fire. Campin's mode of depicting Christ bridges the pictorial poles he uses for the Father and the Spirit. As the sole incarnate person of the Trinity, Christ alone has been rendered as a fully discernible figure, unmediated by effect or extra indices of images. In fact, his corporeal nature is emphasized to such a degree that he seems to be already "in the flesh," even though it is technically just his soul that is present at this point in the narrative. Appropriately, he shares in the phantasmal attributes of the Holy Spirit as he passes, like light, through a pane of glass, but at the same time his observable features derive from the carved visage of God. In short, the divergent representations of the Father and the Spirit converge in witnessing that Christ is the living image of the Father, made visible in his flesh "by the Holy Spirit" (*de Spiritu Sancto*).

Read alongside *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* the finely-tooled head of the Father correlates well with Ruusbroec's description of the image of God impressed in "the noblest part of [the] soul." The face has been telescoped by the ornamental lobes of its frame into a close-up encounter with God, looking out from the chamber of Mary's heart and even painted in the same fiery, seraphic red as her dress, like an impression in red sealing wax. Indeed, this evocation of a stamped image is particularly pertinent, for

[166] *Nehemiah* 9:12.

Ruusbroec's analogy of mirrors and reflections in the soul closely relates to a metaphor of seals, commonly employed by mystics and theologians like St. Bonaventure, who exerted a marked impact on Ruusbroec.[167] Abelard of Laon associated the bronze of the seal with God the Father, while the incised image in the seal was God the Son, the latter exemplifying the Augustinian *imago genita,* or "begotten image" that is one in substance with its prototype. This Trinitarian seal then impresses a Christological likeness of itself in the wax of the human soul, producing an *imago facta,* a "created image," which, although unlike in substance, replicates the visage of its maker as a sign of his ownership.[168]

In Campin's painting, the pseudo-Hebrew painted on the maiolica vase, positioned just beneath the seal-like face, deepens the allusion to a primordial moment in Jewish history when God made men and women "from the dust of the earth"[169] and impressed his divine countenance into the households of their hearts. Isaiah relates God's creative manipulation of raw materials in *Genesis* to the skillful artifice of a craftsman working in clay: "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."[170] Indeed, the formation of Adam and Eve, as if they were vessels of earth requiring shaping, sculpting, and stamping, finds a visual corollary in the notable elements of craftsmanship in the carved head and maiolica vase. There is a rustic quality to the curvature of the ceramic vessel's rim that tracks the folding

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[167] St. Bonaventure discusses creation in terms of three different "impressions." Ruth Wolff, "The Sealed Saint: Representations of Saint Francis of Assisi on Medieval Italian Seals," in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals,* ed. Noël Adams, John Cherry, and James Robinson (London: The British Museum, 2008), 95. On the trope of mirrors in medieval treatises, including the "mirrors" of Christ, the Virgin, the eye, and the heart, see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance,* trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 68–88.
[168] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago,* 147–150, 178–179, 187–189.
[169] *Genesis* 3:19: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."
[170] *Isaiah* 64:8.

and molding of the clay, while the reflective planes of smooth wood and glossy paint on the sculpted face contrast with the fussy ridges of its hair.

Intriguingly, the angle and features of this carved head resemble St. Joseph, with its slight frown, creased brow, downcast eyes, and prominent nose. The two faces are both rimmed with a beard and wavy hair, although St. Joseph's head is mostly covered in a blue turban, and the beard and hair of the wooden face extend decoratively to fill the two elongated lobes of the framing quatrefoil. It is as if St. Joseph, in imitation of the Creator, had whittled his own portrait into a project from his workshop, strewn, not with the "dust of the earth," but with wood shavings, a scrap of chalk, and nails. This association between St. Joseph and God the Father appears in the writings of the Church Fathers, with St. Ambrose styling the holy carpenter as a type for the divine craftsman of human souls.[171]

There is evidence for a growing cult to the step-father of Christ in the fourteenth and possibly even the thirteenth century among the Franciscans, but devotion to St. Joseph became particularly fervent in the early fifteenth century under the influence of preachers like St. Bernardino of Siena, and the powerful Franco-Flemish clerics, Jean Gerson and Pierre d'Ailley.[172] The chancellor of the University of Paris and the Bishop of Cambrai lobbied with special zeal for the spouse of the Virgin Mary at the Council of Constance (1414–1418), D'Ailley writing his influential *Tractatus de duodecim honoribus sancti Joseph* and Gerson composing vernacular treatises, such as the

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[171] See Book 1, in Ambrose of Milan, *Traité sur l'évangile de S. Luc* (*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*), vol. 1, ed. Gabriel Tissot, in *Sources chrétiennes*, vol. 45 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1956–1958), 119–120, cited and discussed in Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 58.

[172] B. Burkey, "The Feast of St. Joseph: A Franciscan Bequest," in *Premier Symposium International: Saint Joseph durant les quinze premiers siècles de l'église* (Montreal: Centre de Recherche et de Documentation Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 1971), 647–680; Max Lieberman, *Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson et le culte de saint Joseph* (Montreal: Centre de Recherche et de Documentation Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 1967), 2–4.

Considérations sur saint Joseph, various sermons, and nearly three thousand verses of poetry.[173] Several decades later, the Franciscan Philippe van Meron of Gouda reiterated the Ambrosian analogy between the heavenly Father and the step-father of Christ, proclaiming that both men and angels venerated this humble carpenter, to whom even the young Christ had been subject.[174]

The *Mérode Triptych* is not the only painting associated with Campin to partake of this enthusiasm for St. Joseph. His *Marriage of the Virgin* gives equal emphasis to the narrative of St. Joseph's blossoming staff as it does to the Virgin's wedding, where the carpenter's shaved head and plain clothing make him a model of humble austerity compared with the exotic costumes of the leering suitors surrounding him. In fact, some scholars believe that this panel may have once been part of a larger series, emulated later in the century by the Hoogstraten *Life of St. Joseph,* which nearly duplicates the composition of the *Marriage of the Virgin* as one of six detailed vignettes from the carpenter's *vita* clustered around a central image of the Nativity (Fig. 4.30).[175] Finally, a *Holy Family,* circa 1500, from the Convent of Poor Clares at Puy de Dôme is believed to

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[173] Pal. Glorieux, "Saint Joseph dans l'Oeuvre de Gerson," in *Premier symposium international: Saint Joseph durant les quinze premiers siècles de l'église* (Montreal: Centre de Recherche et de Documentation Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 1971), esp. 419, 426–427.

[174] Chapter 10, in Philip van Meron, *Die historie van den heiligen patriarch Joseph: brudegom der maget Maria onde opvoeder ons heren ihesu cristi* (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB 150 E 33), fols. 37r–38r, cited in French in Télesphore Bosquet, "Philippe van Meron, O.F.M., et «L'Histoire» de Saint Joseph," in *Premier symposium international: Saint Joseph durant les quinze premiers siècles de l'église* (Montreal: Centre de Recherche et de Documentation Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 1967), 506 : "Le Père éternel et Joseph, sont nommés père de l'Enfant béni"; chapter 8, in ibid., fols. 31r–31v, in Bosquet, "Philippe van Meron," 525: "Il avait sous son domaine celui auquel toutes les créatures sont soumises, celui que non seulement les hommes, mais également la multitude des anges honore, adore et frémit devant lui! C'était vraiment le plus grand honneur, que le Dieu tout-puissant lui était soumis et lui obéissait, et que lui, Joseph, pouvait donner des orders à Dieu."

[175] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 161; Thürlemann, *Robert Campin,* 261–262. Thürlemann claims that the *Marriage of the Virgin* is also a copy. He argues that both it and the *Life of St. Joseph* are copies after a lost work by Campin.

be a copy after Campin and places St. Joseph on par with the Virgin in a triad of domestic sanctity (Fig. 4.31).[176]

Pushed behind the heavy, scorched hearth in the central scene of the *Mérode Triptych,* St. Joseph's workshop at first appears dark, cramped, and unceremoniously sidelined to the narrow right-hand panel. Yet Campin endows the "fruits" of this small room with a theological weight that complements the sacred handiwork of the adjoining chamber, where the Virgin herself becomes a craftswoman, making vestments of flesh for God as the artistry of her "workshop," the fruit of her womb. The carved head that recalls the Creator's mirror-like impression in the heart joins the prophetic mousetrap and the protective firescreen as emblematic objects whittled by this earthly "God the Father." Furthermore, the tools on his workbench—particularly the nails, pincers, and hammer—resemble the instruments of the Passion, as if St. Joseph, with his red eyes and grim countenance,[177] were reverently anticipating the destruction of the very body under construction in the Virgin's womb (Fig. 4.6). By contrast, Hahn reads the saw on the floor and the short, trimming axe in the block of wood as gentle instruments for the saintly artisan to employ in trimming faults, chipping away vice, and remaking the souls of those who seek his intercession.[178] The benign axe and saw have even been *impressed* with sacred signs, the saw incised with a cross and the axe bearing a triangular configuration of three circles, most likely referring to the Holy Trinity (Fig. 4.32).[179]

Indeed, the *supernatural* reception of God's image, born with the resplendent Christ into the mystical eye, demands just the sort of discipline and spiritual remaking

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[176] Vitale Bloch, "An Unknown Composition by the Master of Flémalle," The *Burlington Magazine* 105 (February 1963): 72.
[177] Tolnay, "L'Autel Mérode," 75.
[178] Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 58–59.
[179] Lavin, "The Mystic Wine Press," 298.

accomplished by St. Joseph's carpentry tools. *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* calls on the votary to be actively "in control of yourself and have your soul in your hands" and to "bear in your hands" the mirror and image of Christ.[180] Mystical ascent starts to resemble a workshop with hands-on shaping, carving, and impressing of the soul through sacraments, penance, and the repeated prayers evoked by the coral rosary beads folded in the donoress's fingers. The active, tactile quality of this spiritual preparation is entirely consonant with Ruusbroec's brand of mysticism, which requires as much active practice as it does contemplative in order to achieve the coveted "common life." Unification with God depends on divine grace, but it also calls on votaries to manufacture devout visualizations and engage with finely articulated metaphors in a manner quite similar to Campin's painting, which prompts Eucharistic and mystical insight through a cooperation of worldly and divine artifice.

Artisanship and the crafting of the soul, as reverberations of God's creation of men and women in his likeness, are important and repeated themes in the *Mérode Triptych*. In addition to St. Joseph's God-like woodworking and the mystical creation of the Eucharistic infant in the Virgin's womb, the donors pray to become creators of a child as they kneel in a fruitful, Edenic garden. The triptych—itself a carefully-crafted object for looking—draws viewers' corporeal vision with its colors, textures, and virtuosic details as a prelude to its deeper function of "re-crafting" spiritual eyes and training them to receive the mystical birth of Christ, when the souls of the faithful will be re-impressed and recreated supernaturally. In this context, the glowing, transcendent soul of Christ fulfills and even supersedes the fabricated carving of God the Father, in much the way

[180] D159, E150/151, in Ruusbroec, *Een Spieghel der Eeuwigher Salicheit,* D207, E206: "uws selfs gheweldegh, ende hebt uwe ziele in uwe hande."

that Ruusbroec's *super-natural* manifestation of Christ renews and transfigures the *natural* impression of the Christological Creator in every soul. As already discussed, this climax of mystical experience requires sensitivity to the primordial reflection of God in the soul, coupled with righteous agency, grace, and gifts from the Holy Spirit:

> And therefore, if we want to feel and experience the realm of God that is hidden in us, then we must have a virtuous life inside and (a) well-ordered (life) outside in true charity, following Christ in every way, so that grace, love and virtue may elevate us into the highest (part) of our self where in God lives and rules … And for this God has created the higher faculties of our soul to receive His likeness, that is: His grace and His gifts. Therein we are renewed and elevated above nature, and like Him in love and in virtues.[181]

In *The Realm of Lovers,* unification "above nature" unfolds in a similar manner, as the soul is enriched by each of the seven gifts of the Spirit and conforms itself to the attributes of the nine angelic choirs.

Resplendence, Mystical Birth, and the Apex of the Soul

Having thus prepared themselves in an active manner, Ruusbroec's readers are then invited to look "above reason and above all practice of virtues, and behold with loving spirit, with gazing eyes, the living life that is origin and cause of all life and all holiness."[182] This "living life" (*levende leven*) denotes unification with the Trinity through Christ, and it "flows and is born with the Son from the Father; and that life the

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[181] D953/963, E896/905, in ibid., D287, 289; E286, 288: "Ende hier omme, willen wi ghevoelen ende bevenden dat rike gods dat in ons verborghen es, soe moeten wi hebben .i. dooghtsam leven van binnen ende wel gheordent van buten in rechter caritaten, Cristum navolghende in alre wijs, alsoe dat ons gratie, minne ende dooghde verheffen moghen in dat overste ons selfs, daer god in leeft ende regneert …Ende hier omme heeft god de overste crachte onser zielen ghscapen sijn ghelijc te ontfane, dat es sine gratie ende sine gaven. Daer in werden wi vernuwet ende verhaven boven natuere, ende heme ghelijc in minnen ende in dooghden."

[182] D1730/1732, E1617/1619, in ibid., D365, E364: "boven redene ende boven alle ufeninghe van dooghden, ende siet ane met minnenden gheeste, met starenden ooeghen dat levende leven, dat orsprong ende sake es alles levens ende alre heilecheit."

Father with the Son has eternally known and loved in the Holy Spirit."[183] Unification with God occurs in the "apex" and "highest (part) of [the soul]," a location akin to the branches of the tree which Zacchaeus climbed in the New Testament in order to see Christ as he passed by and which Ruusbroec compares to the "highest of the mind," where the Lord can be "seen, recognized and loved in His Divinity."[184] In that towering, reflective space into which God gazes eternally to see His own countenance, "our heavenly Father shall show to us … His divine resplendence … And in the same way that the sun of heaven with its rays shines through and illuminates and makes fruitful all the world, so also does the resplendence of God that reigns in the highest (part) of our mind. It gives out in all our faculties clear flashing rays, namely divine gifts."[185]

Ruusbroec routinely describes the pinnacle of the soul as "empty" and "unimaged," and although his metaphors for the heights of the mind range from the top of a tree to an expansive kingdom, "higher than the uppermost heaven and deeper than the bottom of the sea," his language accords well with the lofty chamber of the *Mérode Triptych,* with its steeply tilted floor and soaring, aerial view of unbroken sky and clouds.[186] Essentially, Ruusbroec's visual analogies prepare his readers to encounter the

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[183] D1753/1755, E1637/1639, in ibid., D367, E366: "vloeyt ende wert gheboren met den sone ute den vader, ende dat leven heeft de vader met den sone eewelec bekint ende ghemindt in den heileghen gheeste." See also Mommaers, introduction to *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* 25–32.

[184] D4:2322, E4:2218, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D375, E374: "overstheit"; D930, E874, in Ruusbroec, *Een Spieghel der Eeuwigher Salicheit*, D285, E284: "overste onser zielen"; D1292/1294, E1206/1208, in ibid., D321, E320: "dat hooeghste haerre ghedachten … Daer wert Jhesus ghesien, bekint ende ghemint in sijnre godheit."

[185] D1803/1811, E1685/1690, in ibid., D371, 373; E370, 372: "onse hemelsche vader sal ons vertooenen … sine godleke claerheit … Ende gheliker wijs dat de sonne des hemels met haren raeyen dorschijnt ende verlicht ende vrochtbaer maect al de werelt, alsoe doet oec de claerheit gods die regneert in dat overste onser ghedachten. Si gheeft uut in alle onse crachte clare, blickende raeyen, dat sijn godleke gaven."

[186] D1914, E1786, in ibid., D383, E382: "ledegh, onghebeeldt"; D4:299/301, E4:271/273, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D183, E182: "Dat overste des natuerlijcs weechs es dat wesen der sielen … hogher dan de overste hemel ende diepere dan de gront des meers." For a discussion of space and perspective in the *Mérode* panels, see Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 51. On the differing elevation among the panels and its significance, see Suzanne Delehanty, *The Window in Twentieth-Century Art* (Purchase, NY:

"unimaged" and "empty" stratosphere of mystical experience in the same way that Campin's pictorial inventions prepare the viewer for lofty spiritual insight. Both artist and mystic employ representations to access the unrepresentable. As it turns out, the precise location of the Virgin's elevated chamber in the *Mérode Triptych* is as difficult to plot as the coordinates for Ruusbroec's "apex" of the soul. The three short steps leading from the garden to the threshold of the holy house marshal their own kind of poetic analogy as they lead the viewer quite suddenly from ground level to an impossibly tall room where mysticism highjacks the logics of elevation and space, transforming Mary's *cubiculum* into a figure for the soul's dizzying ascent up the "ladder of love … [to] the realm of God."[187]

Interestingly, Campin's chamber of the heart, furnished to receive the birth of Christ, bears a noteworthy resemblance to a Carthusian cell. The unusual, two-storied living spaces used by the monks of the Order of St. Bruno were meant to replicate the desert seclusion of the ancient prophets, the hermit saints, and Christ himself during his fasting and prayer in the wilderness.[188] Guigo I famously wrote that the cell was just as "necessary to [a monk's] salvation and to his life as water for fish and the sheepfold for sheep."[189] Because the brothers confined themselves to their cells for most of the day,

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Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase, 1986), 11; Cuttler, *Northern Painting,* 76; Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 10.

[187] D0:3/5, E0:3/4, in Jan van Ruusbroec, *Van seven trappen,* ed. Rob Faesen, trans. Helen Rolfson, in *Jan van Ruusbroec Opera Omnia,* vol. 9, ed. Guido de Baere, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), D103, E102: "minnen graed … daer wi mede opklemmen in dat rike gods."

[188] On the cell's Biblical allusions, see 80, 1–12 (*De commendatione solitariae vitae*), in Guigo I the Carthusian, *Coutumes de Chartreuse,* 286, 288, 290, 292, 294; Daniel Le Blévec, "Les chartreux et l'art," in *Les chartreux et l'art. XIV^e^–XVIII^e^ siècle. Actes du X^e^ colloque international d'histoire et de spiritualité cartusiennes (Villeneuves-lès-Avignon, 15–18 septembre 1988),* ed. Alain Girard and Daniel Le Blévec (Latour-Maubourg: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 16.

[189] 31, 1.5/7, in Guigo I the Carthusian, *Coutumes de Chartreuse,* 232: "sed potius sicut aquas piscibus, et caulas ovibus, ita suae saluti et vitae cellam deputet necessariam."

these structures were designed like small homes, with a private garden for meditation on the ground level and spaces on the upper floor for work, prayer, preparing food, and eating.

The Virgin's home in the *Mérode Triptych,* although doubtlessly more comfortable than most charterhouse cells with their "poor and miserable" furnishings,[190] is arranged similarly, with a private garden and an upper level accessed by stairs. St. Joseph works silently at his desk, like an exemplary Carthusian, while the Virgin, possibly positioned on a floor level even higher than her spouse, devotes herself to meditative reading. Guigo I's customary itemizes the furniture and objects that should be found in a proper cell, and while he mentions a towel and a receptacle for water, both of which appear in Campin's painting, his discussion of books is most applicable to the *Mérode Triptych.*[191] So important is deep, purposeful reading to the Carthusian vocation, that this prior of the Grande Chartreuse lists "two books … from the library" among the default "furnishings" of each cell.[192] He exhorts the brothers to treat these volumes with the utmost care, reverencing them as "food for the soul" and protecting them from smoke or dust.[193]

The *Mérode* Madonna follows these prescriptions precisely. Her *cubiculum* contains exactly two books, one of which lies on the table, inviting an analogy to physical nourishment in food and drink. The towel on the red rack behind her is slightly rumpled, as if she had just washed and dried her hands at the laver before beginning her reading, holding the book in a white cloth to keep its pages and binding clean. As for the other

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[190] 28, 1.13, in ibid., 222: "paupertatem et abiectionem."
[191] 28, 5.41/42, in ibid., 224: "vas aquarium," "manutergium."
[192] 28, 3.25/26, in ibid., 222, 224: "libros ad legendum de armario accipit duos."
[193] See 28, 3, and for the quotation 28, 3.28, in ibid., 224: "animarum nostrarum cibum."

book, Campin foregrounds its protective green and red bag, which serves as a makeshift book rest and preserves it from contact with the wooden table. On a final note, Guigo I outlines strict rules for visitors to the brothers' cells, all of whom need permission before entering the cloister. The monastic cook fills this function, attending to visitors as he "presides at the gate,"[194] in a manner vaguely echoing Campin's messenger figure who has admitted Peter Inghelbrechts and Helwich Bille to the Marian *hortus conclusus*.

The *Mérode Triptych's* allusion to the idiosyncratic floor plan of a Carthusian cell bears witness to the pronounced impact the Order of St. Bruno exerted on lay men and women's "communities of understanding." This chapter has already discussed Geert Grote's enthusiastic reconditioning of his own home in Deventer to approximate a Carthusian cell. Prominent members of the Valois family followed suit. Duke Philip the Good and his wife, Isabella of Portugal, used a two-storied, cell-like oratory attached to the chapel of the Chartreuse de Champmol in Dijon, and the duchess, well known for zealously living a lay form of Carthusian spirituality, cherished a tradition of borrowing a monastic cell on Ember Thursday in Lent to prepare bread and fish *pâté* for the monks.[195] Among the books that structured Isabella's personal devotion was a work composed for her by Denis the Carthusian of Roermond, entitled, *De vita et regimine principissae.* The text invites the duchess of Burgundy to imitate certain charterhouse customs in her prayers, which include retiring to a solitary, cell-like room for meditation, as well as cultivating a spiritual oratory in her heart where Christ could visit her.[196] Isabella

[194] 46, 3.18/19, in ibid., 256: "portae preest, advenientibus respondet."
[195] See Lotz, "Secret Rooms," 166–170.
[196] Ibid., 171–173.

incorporated these ideas into her villa of La Motte-au-Bois, where she built several second-story oratories over the Chapel of St. Thomas Becket.[197]

As mentioned in chapter two, Isabella's daughter-in-law, Margaret of York, was deeply vested in the Charterhouse of Our Lady of the Chapel at Herne and requested that her confessor, Nicholas Finet, prepare a personalized version of Isabella's manual on Carthusian prayer for herself: *Le Dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Christ.*[198] A miniature from the manuscript depicts Margaret on her knees in her bedroom, which has become the oratory of her heart, as the resurrected Christ reveals the wound in his left hand to her in a mystical reenactment of his appearance to his mother in her house and the Magdalene at the garden tomb (Fig. 4.33).[199] Not surprisingly, Carthusians and other spiritual writers compared the heart of the Virgin Mary, as well as the heart of every votary, to a cloister, walled away in pious isolation, albeit with windows and gateway opened to the Lord's presence, much like the house and enclosed garden in Campin's painting.[200] In essence, the *Mérode Triptych* provides powerful visual evidence not only for Ruusbroec's migration outside the charterhouse but also for the melding of monastic and domestic spaces, as practiced by Geert Grote and the Valois family. By specifically addressing bourgeois patrons, however, the painting extends the invitation to construct a

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[197] Ibid., 170–171.
[198] Ibid., "Secret Rooms," 174–176. On Margaret of York's collection of spiritual texts, see Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick, *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: The Paul J. Getty Museum, 2003), 217; Hanno Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1550)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 92.
[199] Lotz, "Secret Rooms," 176; Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert, and Gabriele Keck, eds., *Splendour of the Burgundian Court: Charles the Bold (1433–1477)* (Berne, Brussels, and Bruges: Mercatorfonds, 2009), 258–259.
[200] See the thirteenth-century *Vita beatae virginis Mariae et salvatoris rhythmica* and Philip of Seitz's *Marienleben,* discussed in Martin, "Behind the Scene," 41. See also Mary as a model of prayer in Guigo II's *Scala claustralium,* in ibid., 47–48. On the heart of the votary as a cell with open windows, see Henry Luttikhuizen, "Monastic Hospitality: The Cloister as Heart in Early Netherlandish Painting," in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* ed. Reindert Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 348.

Carthusian cell in the heart not just to aristocratic rulers and the quasi-monastic Devout. Rather, it suggests that even a middle-class home, like the one in which Peter and his wife probably viewed their triptych, can provide an adequate setting to ponder the resplendent rays of spiritual sunlight transfiguring the "highest (part)" of the soul's internal cloister.

In the triptych, Campin's Christ Child enters this lofty household of his mother's soul on seven "flashing rays," as if descending from Ruusbroec's "burning, resplendent, divine sun that has enriched the realm of the soul with seven principal supernatural rays, namely the seven great gifts" (Fig. 4.5).[201] Christ's arrival in the eye of the mystic—like his arrival through the *Mérode* window—is radiant with light, repeatedly referred to by Ruusbroec as a "resplendence." Moreover, although the Lord's appearance in the eye is a divine, Trinitarian birth from the Father, distinct from his historical birth to the Virgin, still the mystic from Groenendaal embeds Christ's birth in Bethlehem beneath the prose, for the very word "resplendence" evokes the liturgy for the Christmas season. The masses for the Nativity and the Epiphany treat Christ's birth into the night as the breaking forth of effulgent splendor: "O God, who didst make this most sacred night to shine forth with the glory of him who is the true light of the world … [and] has made resplendent our paths on earth"; "In the brightness of the saints (*in splendoribus sanctorum*), from the womb before the day-star, I begot thee"; "Bathed in the new light brought upon earth by thine Incarnate Word, … which ever illumines our minds"; and "Arise, shine; for thy

[201] D4:2336/2338, E4:2233/2235, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D375, 377; E374, 376: "de berrende, claere, godlike sonne die met .vij. principalen overnaturliken raeyen, dat sijn de .vij. hoeghe gaven, dat rike der sielen gheciert hevet."

light is come … And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising (*in splendore ortus tui*)."[202]

Ruusbroec's rationale for recalling the Nativity alongside his description of Christ's mystical birth in the eye likely stems from the pivotal role of the Incarnation in his theology of unification with the divine. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the soul's "mutual indwelling" with Christ depends on the human nature he received from the Virgin. Because Christ became "common" with his people and feeds them with his mortal body and blood, "common" men and women can likewise share in his divine unity. In this regard, it is not surprising that *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* construes the Annunciation as a Eucharistic *exemplum* leading to mystical experience. The *Mérode Triptych* operates with a similar analogical structure, only in reverse. It unambiguously puts the historical Incarnation and mystery of the Annunciation in central place, shifting the ceaseless, Trinitarian births of Christ to the subtext of its argument.

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[202] The liturgical quotations come from *The Roman Missal in Latin and English, Arranged for the Use of the Laity, to Which is Added a Collection of Usual Public Prayers,* 3rd edition (Paris: Society of St. John the Evangelist, [1925]). For an edition of the Latin liturgy closer to Ruusbroec and Campin's time, see *Missale Romanum: Mediolani, 1474,* vol. 1, *Text,* ed. Robert Lippe, in *Henry Bradshaw Society Series,* vol. 17 (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press for the Henry Bradshaw Society, [2009]). The text in the fifteenth-century missal is essentially identical to the Latin original for the cited quotations. Prayer from the First Christmas Mass at Midnight: "Deus, qui hanc sacratissimam noctem veri luminis fecisti illustratione clarescere; da quesumus; ut cuius lucis mysteria in terra cognovimus: ejus quoque gaudiis in coelo perfruamur"; Communion from Christmas Mass at Midnight: "In splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te"; Prayer from the Second Christmas Mass at Dawn: "Da nobis quaesumus omnipotens Deus: ut qui nova incarnati Verbi tui luce perfundimur; hoc in nostro resplendeat opere, quod per fidem fulget in mente"; Epistle from Epiphany Mass (*Isaiah* 60:1–6), esp. 1, 3: "Surge illuminare Jerusalem: quia venit lumen tuum, et gloria Domini super te orta est … Et ambulabunt gentes in lumine tuo, et reges in splendore ortus tui." See also the Gradual from the First Christmas Mass, at Midnight: "Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum: ex utero ante luciferum genui te. Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis: donec ponam inimicos tuos, scabellum pedum tuorum"; Epistle from the Third Christmas Mass, During the Day (Hebrews 1:1–12), esp. 3: "qui cum sit splendor gloriae, et figura substantiae ejus."

Ruusbroec's vision of the resplendent Christ is a mediated one, beheld by means of the primordial mirror in the apex of the mind and by the light that God himself administers to the soul:

> This great resplendence is the simple contemplation of the Father, and of all those who enjoyably contemplate and gaze into oneness and with an incomprehensible light, each in the measure that he is enlightened. For this bottomless light shines without cease in all minds; but the person who lives here in time is frequently encumbered with images, so that he does not always actively contemplate or gaze with this light into the superessence, but he who has received this gift has possessed it (the light) essentially, and thus he can use it if he wants.[203]

A particularly poetic passage from *The Spiritual Espousals* explains more explicitly how the resplendence of Christ becomes the "eye" by which the votary sees, fusing together the instrument and object of vision:

> For in this darkness there shines and is born an incomprehensible light which is the Son of God, in whom one contemplates eternal life. And in this light one becomes seeing … And without cease, it becomes the very brightness which it receives. See, this hidden brightness in which one contemplates everything that one desires according to the mode of emptiness of spirit, the brightness is so great that the loving contemplative neither sees nor feels anything in his ground in which he rests except an incomprehensible light. And according to the simple bareness which encompasses all things, he finds and feels himself to be that very light by which he sees, and nothing else.[204]

Therefore, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* explains, "the Son visits our unimaged sight with the fathomless resplendence that He Himself is, and requires us and teaches us to

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[203]D4:2138/2145, E4:2040/2048, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D357, E356: Dese hoeghe claerheit, dat es dat eenvuldighe scouwen des vader ende alle der gheenre die ghebrukeleec scouwen ende staren in eenen ende met enen onbegripelijcken lichte, ende ieghelijc na dat hi verclaert es. Want dit grondeloese licht scijnt sonder op houden in alle ghedachten, maer de mensche die hier levet in der tijt werdet dicke verbeelt, dat hi niet altoes werkelike en scout noch en staert met desen lichte in dat overwesen; maer weseleec hevet hijt beseten die dese gave ontfaen hevet, ende alse hi wilt mach hijs pleghen."

[204] Dc69/82, Ec56/69, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D581, 583; E580, 582: "Want in dier duysternissen schijnt ende werdet gheboren een ombegripelijc licht, dat es de sone gods, daermen in scouwet eewich leven. Ende in desen lichte wertmen siende … Ende hi wert die claerheit selve sonder onderlaet die hi ontfeet. Siet, dese verborghene claerheit daermen al in scouwet diesmen beghert na wise des gheests ledicheit, dese claerheit es alsoe groot dat de minnende scouwere in sinen gronde, daer hi in rast, niet en siet noch en ghevoelt dan een ombegripelijc licht. Ende nader eenvuldigher bloetheit die alle dinc beveet, soe vint hi hem ende ghevoelt dat selve licht daer hi met siet, ende niet anders."

gaze and contemplate that resplendence with itself" so that the mystic looks upon God "eye to eye, mirror to mirror, image to image."[205]

Campin also alludes to a register of rarified vision in which the distinction between seeing and the object of sight fade away into common light, but he does so through emphatically representational means. For lay votaries, like the Inghelbrechts, such representations were the most critical vehicle for transformative spiritual experience. Appropriately, the interior of the *Mérode* chamber is suffused with light, so bright that the objects cast double shadows.[206] The brass *piscina* catches the reflection of two, sun-filled windows, which then appear again, shimmering on the surface of the metal candlestick. Moreover, the brilliant highlights on Mary's dress bleach out the coral-colored hue of the cloth, as if she herself had become a reflective, "living mirror," assisting in the mystical apparatus of reflections and radiant grace that allows the votary to glimpse God. Enriching this depiction of the sun-soaked realm of the heart, Ruusbroec emphasizes that although the "bottomless resplendence" of mystical sunlight "is given as common to all," the material of the soul determines the degree to which it can be illuminated by light:

> Nevertheless, those who receive it are not equally enlightened. The sun shines more resplendently through glass than through stone, and through crystal than through glass; and in the resplendence of the sun, each precious stone shines and shows its nobility, its virtue, and its color. So, too, each is enlightened according to the nobility of his receptivity, both in grace and in glory.[207]

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[205] D2066/2069, E1926/1929, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D397, E396: "de sone visiteert onse onghebeelde ghesichte met der grondelooeser claerheit die hi selve es, ende eischt ons ende leert ons dat wi staren ende scouwen die claerheit met haerselven"; D1840/1841, E1719, in ibid., D375, E374: "ooeghe jeghen ooeghe, spieghel jeghen spieghel, beelde jeghen beelde."

[206] Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 51. Jacobs points out that the central panel is the brightest among the three.

[207] D4:2127/2134, E4:2029/2037, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D355, 357; E354, 356: "Nu werdet dese grondeloese claerheit ghemeine ghegheven allen ghebrukende ghedachten in gracien ende in glorien … Nochtan en werdense niet ghelijc verclaert diese ontfaen. De sonne doerschijnt claerre dat ghelas dan den steen, ende dat cristal dan dat ghelas; ende elc precioes steen blict ende toent sine edelheit ende

The language brings new depth to the effects of light on the materials in the *Mérode Triptych,* with shadows cast against stone walls, gold threads sparkling along the hem of the Virgin's gown, light refracting in the gems of Gabriel's stole, and brilliant reflections glowing in the brass candlestick, and *piscina.* Most significantly, the Christ Child on his seven, trailing rays of light illuminates the soul's *cubiculum* through a pane of translucent glass, just as Ruusbroec describes, as clear and unflawed as the Immaculate Mother of God herself, who in a medieval hymn is invoked as the "glass window radiant with the sun."[208]

On a related note, *The Realm of Lovers* sets forth a memorable analogy for the soul's unification with God, which calls to mind a notably Marian theological conception. Ruusbroec asserts that those who "are sunken away from themselves into the abyss … have become throne and rest for the exalted Trinity" and that "all who possess God in this stage whether in grace or in glory are thrones and the tabernacles of God."[209] Ruusbroec's analogy derives from his comments on the spiritual gift of "counsel" and its association with the seventh angelic choir, denoted as "Thrones." The regal chair of God, however, and the tabernacle for his Eucharistic body are reifications that refer most readily to the Virgin Mary. As the mystic moves on to discourse on the gift of "understanding," he exhorts his readers to rise above the choir of Thrones and to imitate

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sine viertuut ende sine varuwe in der claerheit der sonnen. Alsoe werdet ieghelijc verclaert na edelheit siere ontfanckeleecheit beide in gracien ende in glorien."

[208] Franz Joseph Mone, ed., *Lateinische Hymnen des Mittelalters,* vol. 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1853–1855), nr. 600, cited in Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol," 179 and Jan Bialostocki, "The Eye and the Window: Realism and Symbolism of Light Reflections in the Art of Albrecht Dürer and His Predecessors," in *Festschrift für Gert von der Osten,* ed. Horst Keller (Cologne: Du Mont Schauberg, 1970), 169: "Fenestra vitrea sole radiata."

[209] D4:1983/1984, E4:1886/1888, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D343, E342: "sijn hem selven ontsonken in die afgrondicheit ende sijn woerden trhoen ende raste der hoegher triniteit"; D4:2114/2115, E4:2016/2017, in ibid., D355, E354: "alle die in desen grade gode besitten in gracien ende in glorien, dat sijn trhoene ende <die> tabernakele gods."

the Trinity's own mode of self-contemplation by means of Wisdom personified in Christ.[210] By so doing, Ruusbroec's contemplatives align themselves with the choir of Cherubim, becoming "like crystal," and as "transparent" as the "crystalline" heaven.[211] Campin seems to tap into Ruusbroec's memorable imagery as it coalesces around the person of the Virgin. In his painting, faithful *discipulae* of the *Mérode* Madonna could imaginatively sit "at the feet" of her bench, carved with the lions of "Solomon the Wise," and conform the material of their souls to the immaculate glass of the maternal *Sedes sapientiae* and, like her, hold Wisdom incarnate on the throne of their laps.

In the heart's effulgent chamber, Ruusbroec enjoins his readers to gaze with "onefold sight so wide that our eye must stay open eternally; we cannot close it."[212] The eye becomes a glassy, mirror-like extension of the soul, "looking inward and … looking outward" in contemplative and active devotion, "for where the Beloved (is) there (are their) eyes," and "blessed are [those] seeing eyes to whom God shows … Himself," for in the "open, gazing eye" "He gives birth to His Son."[213] The *Mérode Triptych* sets the stage for precisely this kind of mystical and sacramental gazing. The shutters of the Virgin's room, the door to her home, the garden gate, the windows of St. Joseph's carpentry shop, the mousetrap poised to catch Schapiro's diabolical rat, and even the pages of Mary's books have all been thrown open, parroting the act of opening the "doors" of the triptych itself and inviting viewers to join Peter Inghelbrechts in opening

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[210] See D4:2117/2164, E4:2019/2065, in ibid., D355, 357, 359; E354, 356, 358.
[211] D4:2170/2171, E4:2071/2071, in ibid., D359, 361; E358, 360: "Dese menschen sijn wel ghelijc den middelsten hemele die cristalen heetet. Want si sijn ghelijc den cristale doerscinich van den oversten hemele."
[212] D2050/2052, E1912/1913, in Ruubcroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D395, 397; E394, 396: "ende onse eenvuldeghe ghesichte soe wide ontdaen, onse ooeghe moet eewelec open staen, wi en connense niet gheluken."
[213] D1373/1374, E1282/1283, in ibid., D329, E328: "in insiene ende in uutsiene, dat es in scouwene ende in werkene"; D167, E158, in ibid., D209, E208: "Want daer lief, daer ooeghe"; D1873/1874, E1748/1749, in ibid., D379, E378: "Salegh sijn de siende ooeghen dien god vertooent … hi selve."

their eyes to adore the Host-like child and his mother, as if enshrined in a tabernacle.[214] The donor leans forward and opens his eyes wide enough to wrinkle his brow as he stares into the Marian mirror to replicate her room in his heart and receive the Eucharistic child through the window of his eye, rather than through the pair of ocular windows that stare back at him from the wall of the Virgin's house (Fig. 4.34).

In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* Ruusbroec loosely quotes a portion of Christ's Sermon on the Mount and alters it slightly to privilege the sense of sight, as quoted in the paragraph above: "Where the Beloved (is), there (are their) eyes and where a person's treasure is, there is his heart, says our Lord Himself."[215] Immediately following Christ's explanation of the "treasure of the heart," St. Matthew records another verse dealing with vision: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."[216] St. Luke adds that "[i]f thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."[217] Peter Inghelbrechts' mystical stare epitomizes these statements, for the "singular" gaze of his eye seems to impress the domestic setting of the Annunciation into his memory so that the Virgin's effulgent *cubiculum* is relocated to the "the highest (part) of [his] mind," lit by the "bright shining" of Christ rather than the earthly light of the smoldering candle. In accordance with Ruusbroec's morphology, the

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[214] Jacobs, *Opening Doors,* 2–4, 10–11. Jacobs explains that altarpiece side wings were historically known as "doors" and in some cases "leaves," like the pages of a book. For the Virgin's room as a tabernacle with the Christ Child as Host, see Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 74–75. De Tolnay suggests that the viewers are invited to wrinkle their brows in concentration, like the donor, as they stare at the painting. Tolnay, "L'Autel Mérode," 65.

[215] D167/168, E158/159, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D209, E208: "Want daer lief, daer ooeghe, ende 'daer des menschen scat es, daer es sijn herte,' sprect onse here selve."

[216] *Matthew* 6:22. See also 6:21. Bialostocki briefly mentions this verse in relation to sitters in Dürer's portraits with window reflections in their eyes but does not elaborate on its significance. Bialostocki, "The Eye and the Window," 174.

[217] *Luke* 11:36.

donor, in a sense, becomes the very object he contemplates, a home already marked with his own heraldic device in stained glass. His eyes acquire the same function as the two windows before which he kneels, admitting the Christ Child through the wall of his brow and into the apex of his mind. The brightness of the *Mérode* chamber, with its double shadows, radiantly illuminated cloth, and brass objects bearing the reflection of windows, fills his own body with light, emblematized by the glinting highlights in his eyes.[218]

Peter Inghelbrechts' reception of Christ in the window of his eye follows naturally on the heels of the *exempla* provided by the Virgin Mary. She first receives the announcement of the angel in her ear, before receiving the Christ Child into the sacristy of her womb, and in her practice of purity, knowledge, wisdom, and voluntary desire, she instructs Peter Inghelbrechts and his wife in receiving the Holy Infant into their mouths under the guise of consecrated bread. Indeed, as Peter now receives the Host-like child through his eye into the domestic sanctuary in the apex of his mind, he can, in Ruusbroec's words, join Zacchaeus in "climb[ing] into the highest of [his] mind," only to descend back to earth and humbly invite the Eucharistic Christ into the household of his soul: "'Lord, I am not worthy, but I am unworthy that I should receive Your glorious body in the holy Sacrament in the sinful house of my body and my soul. But Lord, have mercy on me and take pity on my poor life and all my failings'."[219]

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[218] On both practical and religious implications of window reflections in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painting, see Bialostocki, "The Eye and the Window," 159–176. The main argument of Bialostocki's article deals with window reflections in the eyes, particularly in portraits by Dürer. Although window reflections occur routinely in the crystal orb of the *Salvator mundi* and other glass objects in fifteenth-century paintings, the reflection does not seem to appear in the eye until the following century. The window certainly has mystical connotations in some cases, but Bialostocki suggests that often its reflections are simply a means for suggesting light. See ibid., 164, 168–170.

[219] D1292/1293, E1206, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D321, E320: "clemmen si in dat hooeghste haerre ghedachten"; D1307/1311, E1219/1222, in ibid., D321, 323; E320, 322: "'Heere, ic en ben niet weerdegh maer ic ben onweerdegh, dat ic uwen gloriosen lichame in den heileghen sacramente

In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* Mary also models Ruusbroec's great binary of inward and outward turnings, a theme that runs consistently through the mystic's work. In characterizing the group of communicants who most closely resemble the Virgin at her Eucharistic Annunciation, he writes that they practice Marian wisdom in "looking inward and in looking outward, that is: in contemplating and in acting."[220] As it turns out, the *Mérode* Madonna adopts an appropriately serpentine position of inward and outward twistings on the floor of her chamber. Her knees turn outward in the direction of the Angel Gabriel, but she has angled her torso away from her visitor and toward the hearth of her home. Her eyes, however, strike an interesting balance between the two poles. She looks down into the pages of text cradled close to her heart and tilted inward toward her body, but her eyes also pause at the right edge of the book, as if on the brink of arresting her pensive reading and looking up and outward at the angel. In imitation of this "mirror Mary," the donor in the painting "looks outward" with wide eyes and wrinkled brow, while his wife exemplifies the other side of Ruusbroec's binary of vision by "looking inward" with downcast eyes and an introspective self-absorption that pulls her body backward slightly, counterbalancing her husband's forward movement.

As previously suggested in this chapter, the spiritual construction of the donors' hearts likewise requires both outward and inward labor. Ruusbroec's ideal of the "common life"—balancing the outward and the active with the inward and the contemplative—garnishes the lives of the Virgin and Christ: "Even though Mary had been chosen above all creatures to be the mother of God, queen of heaven and earth, yet

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ontfaen soude in dat sondeghe huus mijns lichamen ende mijnre zielen. Maer, heere, sijt mijns ghenadegh ende ontfarme u mijns arms levens ende alle mijnre ghebreke'."

[220] D1373/1374, E1282/1283, in ibid., D329, E328: "in insiene ende in uutsiene, dat es in scouwene ende in werkene."

for herself she chose to be the handmaid of God and of the whole world."[221] He goes on to explain that she did not remain in isolated contemplation at the mystery of her conception of Christ, but immediately following the Annunciation she visited St. Elizabeth to wait upon her cousin like a servant.[222] In the same manner, Christ humbly washed the feet of his disciples as soon as he finished the sacred rite of blessing and administering the Eucharistic oblation at the Last Supper.[223]

In both these examples from the Christological and Marian mirrors of Ruusbroec's text, the miraculous configurement of God in flesh—firstly in the Incarnation and secondly in the Sacrament—is associated with the contemplative and inward-turning side of the "common life." Yet *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* insists that those who would "always approach the Sacrament when they wish" must remember that "whoever wants to practice only beholding and turning inward and abandons his neighbor in need, he never had turning inward or the contemplative life, but he is deceived in all his being."[224] For their part, the *Mérode* donors strike a balance between active and contemplative devotion, with Peter actively opening his eyes and leaning forward to behold the Annunciation but at the same time receiving the contemplative birth of Christ in his inner, onefold vision. His wife, on the other hand, seems much more self absorbed as she averts her gaze to look blankly off to one side, even while she grasps the rosary in her hands, a tool that makes her contemplative stare and inner prayers

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[221] D1388/1391, E1298/1300, in ibid., D329, 331; E330: "al was Maria uutvercoren boven alle creatueren de moeder gods te sine, coninghinne hemelrijcs ende erterijcs, nochtan vercooes si hare selven de dierne gods te sine ende alle der werelt."
[222] See D1391/1394, E1300/1303, in ibid., D331, E330.
[223] See D1394/1400, E1303/1309, in ibid.
[224] D1419, E1326/1327, in ibid., D333, E332: "altoes ten sacramente gaen, alse si willen"; D1429/1432, E1337/1339, in ibid., D333, 335; E332, 334: "die insiens ende inkeers alleene wilt pleghen ende sinen naesten in nooede begheven, hi en hadde nooeyt inkeer noch scouwende leven, maer hi es bedroghen in al sijn wesen."

tangible and active (Fig. 4.15). Moreover, Peter actively chaperones his wife, and his monetary success in the active, mercantile world—denoted by the prominent purse on his belt—enables the couple to claim prolonged periods of silent retirement and contemplation.

As discussed earlier, St. Joseph's carpentry shop suggests many of the active qualities of an outward-turned life. Unlike Mary, who tilts her contemplative reading away from the viewer and holds the book near her heart, the holy craftsman tilts the plank on which he is working forward, openly demonstrating his method in drilling for the viewer. The saw propped at the very edge of the panel, the trimming axe momentarily wedged into a log with fresh wood chips beside it, the knife balanced precariously on the work bench, the scattering of shavings and nails, the haphazard jumble of tools, and even the bustle of activity outside the window all bear witness to busy, outward-oriented, "hands on" craftsmanship. Yet the soul's unification with the Trinity also requires divine artisanship made "without hands," and dispensed more passively to the open, contemplative eye. Thus the meditative Virgin stands in contrast to her spouse as she reads quietly in a cell-like *cubiculum* situated in the clouds, a blackened but empty fireplace and a snuffed-out candle beside her. Fittingly, this silent, immaculate "workshop" of the Annunciation produces an *acheiropoietic* craft, dispensing the resplendent image of God above human logic and nature as Christ passes imperceptibly through solid glass to be "baked" as the "living bread which came down from heaven" in the womb of a virgin mother.[225]

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[225] *John* 6:51; For more on the notion of the Christ Child "baked" in the womb of his mother, see Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar," 54; Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ,* 21; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 145–147.

In *The Spiritual Tabernacle* Ruusbroec improvises on a venerable theological analogy as he likens the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Redemption on the cross to the production of three different loaves of Mosaic offering bread. The first loaf, "kneaded with oil, (then) baked in an oven," corresponds to the "noble wheat flour" of the Virgin, kneaded with the "oil of [God's] mercy" and "baked in the oven, that is, in the body of the pure maid Mary, who was well set aflame with the fire of charity" to make "the sweetest loaf of bread that ever was, which is the food for angels and for human beings."[226] A thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* illustrates this typological construction by pairing a depiction of the Israelites putting sacrificial loaves of bread into an altar-oven with an image of the Virgin Annunciate receiving the Christ Child from Gabriel to be "baked" in her "virginal womb, an unusual pictorial conception that resonates intriguingly with the trope of the descending homunculus (Fig. 4.35).[227]

Ruusbroec's loaf for the Eucharist is boiled in Christ's love, while the loaf of Redemption is roasted until it is "dried like a crust, or like a potsherd" "upon the grill of the cross."[228] The *Mérode Triptych* prompts a similar image by drawing special attention to the fireplace in the Virgin's room, a device Campin repeats in other works, such as his

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[226] D5:3220, E5:3034, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D915, E914: "met olien ghecneden, inden oven ghebacken"; D5:3419, E5:3222, in ibid., D933, E932: "olie sijnre ontfaermherticheit"; D5:3421/3426, E5:3223/3228, in ibid., D935, E934: "Ende Maria die gaf die edele tarwene bloeme. Ende die heileghe gheest heeft olie ende bloeme te gadere ghecneden ende heeft ons ghemaect ende ghebacken dat suetste broet dat ye ghewart, dat ene spise es der inghele ende der menscen. Ende dit broet es ghebacken in den oven, dat es in den lichame der reynre maghet Marien, die wel doerheidt was met den viere der karitaten." The most important art historical study on the theological tropes linking the domestic hearth, the Old Testament altar of sacrifice, the womb of the Virgin Mary, and the cross of Christ is Carra Ferguson O'Meara, "'In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb': The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art," *The Art Bulletin* 63 (March 1981): 79–88.

[227] *Bible Moralisée* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 270b), fol. 59r, cited and discussed in O'Meara, "'In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb'," 79. "Filii (Israel) feceru(n)t panem azimum, posuerunt eum i(n) clibano succendo coxerunt. Judei qui panem miserunt in ignem fig(u)ra(n)t q(uod) deus pat(er) filiu(m) suum misut (sic) in uteru(m) virginalis."

[228] D5:3442/3443, E5:3243, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D937, E936: "verdroecht alse eene corste ochte alse een scerf"; D5:3446/3447, E5:3246, in ibid.: "op den roestere des crucen." See also D5:3427/3452, E5:3229/3251, in ibid., D935, 937; E934, 936.

London *Salting Madonna* (Fig. 4.36).[229] The extinguished candle reiterates an analogous lack of flames in the fireplace, and the hearth's normal role in heating and lighting has been further suppressed by the firescreen, the reversible-back bench, the heavy blue cushion, and a cascading length of the Virgin's mantle, all of which smother and blockade it into the corner of the *cubiculum.* The hearth's dramatic scorch marks further underscore that although this is a functioning fireplace, its use has been suspended in deference to a supernatural baking. Indeed, the Virgin's glowing red dress identifies her as the substitute blaze, the oven for the heavenly loaf descending on radiant light through the window, a "fire of charity," kindled by the flames of the Holy Spirit and fanned by the Pentecostal wind.

In this guise, the smoke floating up from the candle could just as well be an attribute of the Virgin, a byproduct of the spiritual conflagration articulated by the swirling, flame-like folds of her rose-colored robes and mirroring the smoke that rises from Campin's virtuosic rendering of sparks, red-hot wood, and ash blazing in the fireplace of his Werl *St. Barbara* panel. Dieric Bouts' great *Last Supper Triptych,* from 1464, points to the spiritual flames that roast and boil Christ's redemptive and Eucharistic loaves in a similar way (Fig. 4.37). Like the *Mérode* Virgin, Bouts's Christ is aligned with a hearth that has been rendered inoperable, this time by a monumental wooden screen, against which the Lord himself becomes the new fire, as if burning on the wood of the cross.[230] In contrast to the typological scene in the left panel of the altarpiece, in which the Israelites consume their paschal lamb near a household hearth, Christ's final meal with his apostles institutes an unbloody sacrifice of bread, unscathed by earthly

[229] See O'Meara, "'In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb'," 82–83, 85–86.
[230] Ibid., 84–85.

flames, and offered in a domestic chamber that, like the *Mérode cubiculum,* has been sanctified by a liturgical *piscina* near its garden entrance.[231]

Campin's painting, with its studious, Carthusian ambience, its heavenly loaf of bread coming down through the window, and its spiritual oven, recalls the spotless monastic chambers in which medieval hosts were silently stamped and baked. This process of preparing bread for the altar was not only endowed with scriptural implications to elevate it above mundane kitchen work, but fastidious proscriptions attempted to efface all evidence of human hands or even human breath from the labor.[232] The method of production mixes active work with contemplative overtones in a manner reminiscent of Ruusbroec's "common life" mysticism. Such was the reverence of the process that it acquired a miraculous sensibility reminiscent of the supernatural "baking" of the incarnate Word and the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic victim. To this end, the monks effected a liturgical mood in the work room, vesting in amice and alb and chanting psalms or litanies while they labored.[233] The only ingredients in the recipe were water and pure wheat flour, the former being poured from "no other vessel than the one in which it is wont to be brought to Mass," recalling the *piscinae* of water in the *Mérode* and Bouts triptychs and the Angel Gabriel ministering in his alb and stole.[234] The wheat, like the *Immaculata* herself, was to be without blemish, "picked out grain by grain with great care," carried to the mill by a "servant of good character," and only processed after

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[231] Ibid., 85. On the liturgical reconstruction of the space, see Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs,* 66; Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece,* 113.
[232] Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," 186–187.
[233] Lanfranc, *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc,* ed. and trans. David Knowles, in *Medieval Classics,* ed. V. H. Galbraith and R. A. B. Mynors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 84; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine,* 112.
[234] *Vetus disciplina monastica; seu, Collectio auctorum Ordinis S. Benedicti maximam partem ineditorum,* ed. M. Hergott (Paris: Typis C. Osmont, 1726), 249, cited in Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," 86: "aqua vero non in alio vase defertur, quam in quo solet ad Missas deferri."

catching stray gravel and dirt in a preliminary grinding of inferior wheat with freshly-washed mill stones.[235]

These scrupulous requirements for cleanliness included an "immaculate table" for kneading the flour and water—a far cry from St. Joseph's messy carpentry bench—and carefully washed and groomed workers who wore shoes to keep the dust from their feet and watched that "none of their saliva, nor even their breath, in any fashion [would be] able to reach the hosts."[236] The firewood was to be fine and dry to stave off unnecessary mess and minimize sounds coming from the hearth.[237] The flour was surrounded by a curtain,[238] presumably to protect it from dust, but simultaneously evoking the sanctuary curtains drawn about the altar at the moment of Consecration. An eleventh-century customary from Cluny specifies that the workers "should sprinkle [the flour] with cold water,"[239] as if blessing with an aspergillum. This frigid water contributes to the lifelessly hygienic ingredients and space that yet give rise to "living bread" as vital and miraculous as the image of the Virgin and Child sprouting from the sterile, thorny branches of Petrus Christus's *Madonna of the Dry Tree* (Fig. 4.38). Furthermore, the Cluny instructions describe a wooden armature made from "two stakes upon which is held a transverse piece of wood."[240] A worker balances the Host press on this markedly cruciform structure and, with gloved hands, like a cleric holding a monstrance in a

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[235] Lanfranc, *The Monastic Constitutions,* 83: "frumentum cum magno studio granatim eligatur," "famulo boni studii"; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 39; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine,* 112.
[236] *Vetus disciplina monastica,* 249, cited in Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," 86: "tabulam nitidissimam," "summopere cavent ut nonmodo saliva, sed nec flatus eorum aliquo modo ad hostias pertingere possit"; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine,* 112.
[237] Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 42; Lanfranc, *The Monastic Constitutions,* 84; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine,* 112–113.
[238] Lanfranc, *The Monastic Constitutions,* 84.
[239] *Vetus disciplina monastica,* 249, cited in Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," 86: "conspergunt cum aqua frigida."
[240] Ibid.: "super hanc duo sunt pali infixi, super quos lignum habetur transversum."

liturgical cloth, flattens, incises, and bakes the hosts, removing uncooked bread with a knife. These relatively violent kitchen procedures reenact the torments of the Lamb of God who was himself pierced, cut, "roasted" on the "grill of the cross," and, in some Passion literature, even pressed.[241]

Thus, although the highest levels of mystical ascent hinge on a passive, contemplative reception of grace, Ruusbroec often frames this unity with the resplendent light of Christ's ceaseless birth in language reticent of craft and workshop process. Like the antiseptic production of Hosts or the spiritual baking of the incarnate God, who, in the *Mérode Triptych,* chooses to float miraculously through solid glass even though there are open and unimpeded windows in the room, Ruusbroec styles unification with the Trinity as a form of artistry that depends on supernatural production made "without hands." Chapter one discussed a version of this trope in *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* in which readers imitate the Old Testament craftsmen, Beseleel and Oliab, in constructing inner tabernacles in which they can meet God. Ruusbroec describes the labors of his spiritual architects—both inward and outward, active and contemplative—as imaginative craftwork, woven, dyed, embroidered, and gilded invisibly and "handlessly" in the heart. In all his treatises, however, the divine love that transcends activity and reason to admit the mystic into the unity of the Trinity is compared to fire. Likened by literary scholars to burning logs in a hearth, Ruusbroec's flames of the Holy Spirit first "bur[n] in love," with the votary and God as separate and distinct from one another as the substance of wood is

[241] On the pressing of the suffering Lord, see James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmert Publishing Company, 1979), 83–94.

from fire, and then "bur[n] up," like kindling totally consumed and believers so transformed into the Trinity that they are "onefold and there is no distinction left."[242]

Incidentally, the blaze on the hearth of Campin's *St. Barbara* panel seems to engage Ruusbroec's theme of the divine furnace quite overtly. The painted fire itself details various stages of "burning" and "burnt up" wood, with charred planks, glowing embers, logs wreathed in flame, and un-singed pieces of kindling. Appropriately, an image of the Trinity presides over this "burnt offering" from a small podium on the mantle, and the firelight casts a warm glow on the interior of the far arm of St. Barbara's reversible-back bench. Combined with the bench's bright red coverlet and cushions, as well as the flickering quality of rose cloth and gold thread in the saint's dress, it seems that the wooden bench and St. Barbara herself have themselves caught flame in a spiritual conflagration of unity with the triune God above her.

This accords well with the legendary account of the saint's banishment to a tower, in which she arranged for three windows to be constructed in order to transform her site of imprisonment into a cloistered monument to the Trinity. Depicted under construction outside St. Barbara's chamber, this tower parallels St. Joseph's carpentry shop in the *Mérode Triptych,* in that it foregrounds the active, artisanal labor of preparing the soul to be united to God. Like the chamber of the Virgin Annunciate, St. Barbara's *cubiculum* becomes the setting for a more passive, contemplative transformation prompted by silent, solitary reading. Incidentally, this is precisely the argument of Van Eyck's St. Barbara panel, in which the saint's quiet reading contrasts markedly with the intensive

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[242] D115, E98, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden blinkenden steen,* D111, E110: "berrent in minnen"; D117/118, E99/100, in ibid., D113, E112: "Maer daer hi verberent, daer es hi eenvoldich ende en heeft gheen ondersceet." For the stages of burning wood as an analogy for Ruusbroec's understanding of unification with the divine, see Mommaers, introduction to *Vanden blinkenden steen,* 15–16.

construction behind her (Fig. 4.39). Campin's painting, however, implies that God, having accepted St. Barbara's sacrifice to wall herself away in a tower, now initiates a supernatural sacrifice, a burnt offering of divine love in the "towering" apex of the saint's mind. This fire, made "without hands," reconstructs her soul into the likeness of the God she emulated in a Trinitarian edifice built with manual labor.

As mentioned earlier, *The Realm of Lovers* compares votaries to stone, glass, and crystal, the varying degrees of translucence corresponding to their range of spiritual preparation as the Christological sun illuminates the realm of their souls. In a similar passage later in the text, Ruusbroec again describes luminous souls, but this time as different metals in the blistering heat of a smelting furnace. The firescreen in the *Mérode* chamber futilely belies a similar wave of transformative, un-barricaded heat kindled by the resplendence of Christ's mystical birth:

> The Holy Spirit is an infinite fire that has transformed and shone through all inward turned spirits in grace and glory; and they have melted like gold in the furnace of divine unity. Each one enjoys and savors according to his state and worthiness. Nevertheless, this divine fire burns without distinction; but here copper, lead, iron, tin, silver, gold, and many sorts of metal are melted together in an incomprehensible fire.[243]

Ruusbroec associates these melting, metallic souls with the ninth choir of angels, the Seraphim, the "highest spirits of the eternal realm, for they are burning and melting before the face of enjoyment."[244] They are drawn toward the "resplendent sun that shines

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[243] D4:2338/2345, E4:2235/2241, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D377, E376: "De heilighe gheest es .i. onghemeten vier dat overformt ende doerclaert hevet alle inghekeerde gheeste in gracie ende in glorien, ende si sijn versmolten ghelijc den goude in de forneise godliker enicheit. Ende ieghelijc ghebruket ende smaect na staet ende na weerdicheit. Nochtan brandet dit godlike vier sonder onderscheit. Maer hier es coper ende loet ende yser ende ten ende silver ende gout ende menegherande motael te gadere ghesmolten in enen onbegripeliken viere."

[244] D4:2369/2370, E4:2265/2266, in ibid., D379, E378: "die overste gheeste dies ewighen rijkes. Want si berrende ende smeltende sijn voer dat aenschijn der ghebrukeleecheit."

and burns in the apex of the soul … and causes gazing without failing, for eternity."[245] Staring into the blinding visage of God, it is as if their own faces have melted, to be reformed and re-impressed in the contemplative furnace. Transfixed "in grace and in glory," these seraphic individuals have received a renewed and "super-natural" image of God in their souls: "By means of this image, God made this creature like to Himself by nature. He made those (who) turned toward (Him) even more like (Him) above nature whether in the light of grace or (in the light) of glory, each according to his receptivity, in accordance with (his) state and worthiness"[246]

Impressions and Salvific Seals

Ruusbroec's treatises describe unity with the Trinity in terms of "melting" as frequently as they describe it in terms of "burning," but in the context of *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* the mystic's language calls to mind the melted wax of official, notarial seals. Although not specifically mentioning notaries, charters, or authoritative signet rings, the beginning passages of the text employ notably legalistic language:

> But if the Son has offered you to His Father with Him and with His death, then you are embraced in love; and love is given you as a pledge with which you have been ransomed to serve God and as a security with which you have been made an heir in the kingdom of God; and God cannot redeem His pledge, for that pledge is all that God Himself is and can do. Look upon this pledge and this security that is the Holy Spirit: that is your bride-treasure and your dowry with which Jesus, your Bridegroom, has made you an heir in His Father's kingdom.[247]

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[245] D4:2359/2361, E4:2254/2257, in ibid., D379; E376, 378: "clare sonne die scinet ende brandet in dat overste der sielen … ende doet staren sonder falieren in ewicheiden."
[246] D4:2099/2103, E4:2001/2005, in ibid., D353, E352: "Overmids dit beelde hevet god de creature hem ghelijc ghemaect van naturen. Ende hi hevet de toeghekeerde noch gheliker ghemaect boven naturen, in lichte der gracien ochte der glorien, elcke na dien datse ontfanckeleec sijn na staet ende na weerdicheit."
[247] D86/93, E81/89, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D201, E200: "Maer heeft u de sone met hem ende met sijnre dooed gheoffert sinen vader, soe sidi behelst in minnen. Ende minne es u ghegheven alse een pand daer ghi mede ghecocht sijd gode te dienenne, ende alse .i. weerdere daer ghi mede gheerft sijt in dat rike goods. Ende god en can sinen pand niet ghequiten, want die pand es al dat god selve es ende vermach. Siet, dese pand ende dese weerdere dat es de heileghe gheest: die es uwe bruudscat ende uwe duwarie daer u Jhesus, uwe brudegooem, mede gheerft heeft in sijns vader rike."

Ruusbroec makes the theme of salvific seals and notaries explicit in *The Twelve Beguines* when he describes Christ's redemptive death on the cross and the official witnesses to it:

> This is Jesus' testament, that He has left as common to the whole world. On the day in which Jesus accomplished, ordained, confirmed, and sealed His testament by His death, there were exceedingly many notaries from all lands of all tongues; for it was the greatest feast of the whole year. They noted and wrote down the passion of our Lord, and the great marvel that they saw, and how it happened on that day.[248]

In *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* Ruusbroec associates the pledge of God's love with another binding covenant—the monastic profession made by the Clarissan nuns addressed in the treatise—and he characterizes the legal earnest of their salvation as the Eucharist: "And so that you believe Him in this and trust well in Him, He has given you and left you His flesh and His blood in food and in drink."[249] The first portion of Ruusbroec's five-point discourse on the Blessed Sacrament, which, in its entirety, extends beyond a thousand lines of prose, revisits this notion of the Eucharist as a notarizing pledge. It is as if the impressed Host had become the waxy ground for Christ's seal, his Last Will and Testament left in the apostles' keeping at the Last Supper:

> And because He was to die the next day, and part from them, He wanted to make His testament; and He wanted to leave it to His apostles and, through them, to all believers until the last day. This testament He has firmly sealed with His death, as did all the apostles after Him. This testament that He left to us is He Himself in the Sacrament and all that He can accomplish, God and man.[250]

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[248] D2c:458/463, E2c:423/428, in Ruusbroec, *Vanden XII Beghinen,* D443, E442: "Dit es Jhesus testament, dat hy ghemeyne ghelaten heeft in alle de werelt. In dien daghe doe Jhesus [Cristus] sijn testament volmaecte, oordineerde, confirmeerde ende seghelde met sijnre doot, daer waren over veel notarise uut allen landen, van allen tonghen, want het was de grootste feeste van alden jare. Die mercten ende screven die passie ons heeren ende dat grote wonder dat sy saghen, ende hoe dat daer ghesciede in dien daghe."
[249] D37/38, E35/37, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D195, E194: "Ende op dat ghi hem des ghelooeft ende wale betrout, soe heeft hi u ghegheven ende ghelaten sijn vleesch ende sijn bloed in spisen ende in dranke." For Ruusbroec's comments on the nuns' profession, see D19/29, E19/28, in ibid.
[250] D635/641, E598/603, in ibid., D257, E256: "Ende want hi des anders daeghs sterven soude ende van hen scheeden, soe woude hi maken sijn testament ende dat woude hi laten sinen apostelen ende, overmids hen, allen ghelooeveghen tote in den lesten dagh. Dit testament heeft hi vaste bezeghelt met sijnre dooet, ende alle de apostelen na heme. Dit testament dat hi ons ghelaten heeft, dat es hi selve in den sacramente ende al dat hi gheleisten magh, god ende mensche."

It is not surprising that small, round hosts impressed with a monogram or image of Christ were linked to the contractual seals of dukes, magistrates, monasteries, and cities stamped into similarly small, round pools of wax. Semiotically, the seal and the Host were not far removed from each other since both operated as signifiers for an absent, authoritative signified.[251] Although produced in rapid, almost "mechanical" succession, each seal and each Host carried full, binding potential for privileges and grace.[252] Additionally, the impressions born by both objects allowed them to make their signifieds present in an imaged, three-dimensional way, though in the unique case of the Eucharist, the signifier and the signified were the same substance.[253] Scholars have further noted that the expansion of personal seals in the Middle Ages corresponds intriguingly with important developments in Eucharistic theology.[254] Finally, Ruusbroec's chain of legalizing evidence for salvation includes the monastic vows of nuns, and interestingly, the liturgical Consecration rites for religious women also refer to seals: "Wherefore, receive the ring of faith, the seal of the Holy Spirit, that you may be called the spouse of God" and "He has placed a seal upon my forehead, in order that I may admit no other lover besides Him."[255]

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[251] On the semiotics of seals, see Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago,* 60–65.
[252] In addition to discussing the similarities between the Host and seals, Kumler unfolds the visual and semiotic relationship between coins and mass-produced, Eucharistic wafers. Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," 187–191.
[253] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago,* 152, 225–226. Bedos-Rezak makes the interesting point that a seal's impression is a "double" of the individual who owns the seal, since all people are themselves impressions of the Trinity, made in flesh rather than wax. On the unique semiotics of the Host, see ibid., 106–107, 175–177, 194–195.
[254] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago,* 30, 102–107. Bedos-Rezak discusses Paschasius Radbert's ninth-century treatise on the Real Presence, *De corpore et sanguine Domini* and notes a correlation between supporters of Paschasius's Eucharistic theology and users of personal seals.
[255] René Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église romaine. Étude d'histoire de la liturgie,* vol. 4, *Bibliothèque de L'Institut de Droit Canonique de L'Université de Strasbourg* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 440, trans. in *The Consecration of Virgins According to the Roman Pontifical* (Clyde, MO: Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, 1952), 16: "Accipe ergo annulum fidei, signaculum

Regarding the *Mérode Triptych,* it is important to note that the Annunciation was also imbued with legal implications, like a pact for mankind's redemption. In fact, *The Spiritual Espousals* treats Gabriel's announcement as a statutory preamble to the covenant of the Incarnation: "There [Christ] espoused this bride, our nature, and united it to His person out of the most pure blood of the noble Virgin. The priest who married the bride was the Holy Spirit. The Angel Gabriel announced the banns. The glorious Virgin gave (her) consent."[256] Mary's acceptance of the angel's words (*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*) carried great theological weight in executing the conditions of salvation in the living contract of her son's body, stamped with the image of God like a confirming, notarial seal. Some artistic renditions of the Annunciation, particularly ones from southern Germany, make the legal ramifications of the mystery explicit, as in a tiny panel conserved in New York, circa 1440–1450 (Fig. 4.40). Indebted to the *Mérode* composition in many ways, this Bavarian painting also includes an official letter in Gabriel's hands, authenticated by the three red seals of the Godhead.[257] An Italian *Annunciation* by Carlo Crivelli from 1486 provides a fascinating gloss on the "contract of salvation" by including a notary perched above an arched passageway in the upper left of the painting, an assistant at his side (Fig. 4.41). In this guise, he functions as a secular foil for Gabriel, the heavenly

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Spiritus sancti, ut sponsa Dei voceris"; Metz, *La consécration des vierges,* 438, trans. in *The Consecration of Virgins,* 15: "Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut nullum praeter eum amatorem admittam."

[256] D23/26, E19/22, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D153, E152: "Daer trouwede hi dese bruyt, onse natuere, ende vereenichde met sinen persone vanden puersten bloede[n] der edelre maghet. Die priester die de bruyt trouwede, dat was die heylighe gheest. Die inghel Gabriel dede de ghebode. Die gloriose maghet gaf dat consent."

[257] See Maryan Ainsworth, "Recent Acquisitions, A Selection: 2004–2005," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 63 (Fall 2005): 15.

notary from the celestial city.[258] The angel appears directly below the civic witness, and the attendant bishop saint adopts a similar posture to the assistant above.

Divine appropriation of legal offices and procedures is a familiar trope in medieval devotion, famously demonstrated by the account of St. Francis of Assisi securing an indulgence from Pope Honorius III for the Church of Santa Maria della Porziuncola. At the conclusion of his audience with the founder of the Friars Minor, the pontiff watched in amusement as the unassuming St. Francis prepared to leave without any official document verifying the transaction. Mimicking the words spoken by St. Peter to Christ shortly before his Passion, Honorius asked the *Poverello*, "Where are you going?"[259] St. Francis replied to St. Peter's successor, "Your word is good enough for me … Wherefore I want no other instrument [*nolo aliud instrumentum*], only that the blessed Virgin Mary is the charter [*carta*], Christ the notary, and the angels the witnesses."[260] The legend is particularly significant since the *stigmata* born in the hands, feet, and side of St. Francis were routinely compared to seals authenticating the Order of Friars Minor and were simultaneously understood as confirming evidence for the redemption of fallen man through a new image of the wounded Lord impressed on the body of the "Little Poor Man from Assisi."[261]

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[258] See Ronald Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), 333–344, esp. 342.
[259] Roberto Abbondanza, ed., *Il notariato a Perugia: Mostra documentaria e iconográfica per il XVI Congresso nazionale del notariato, Perugia, maggio–luglio 1967* (Rome: Consiglio nazionale del notariato, 1973), cat. no. 221, fig. 42, cited in C. Jean Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 89. See also *John* 13:36 for St. Peter's question, "Lord whither goest thou?" Bishop Theobald of Assisi, who narrates the account, uses this Biblical allusion to style St. Francis as a Christ figure who patiently hears the pope's question and humbly tutors him in the same way that Christ gently instructed St. Peter in his upcoming Passion and the chief apostle's own martyrdom: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards."
[260] Ibid.
[261] See Wolff, "The Sealed Saint," 91–99.

The red face on the side of the towel rack in the *Mérode Triptych* has already been cited for its resemblance to a seal stamped in red wax, and it could be that the narrow scroll partially unrolled from beneath the book on the Virgin's table may have been intended to evoke a charter or other legal document. Certainly the heraldic devices in the windows of the *cubiculum* (Fig. 4.16) and the Trinitarian and cruciform marks on St. Joseph's tools (Fig. 4.32) exert legalizing claims on the setting and objects of the Annunciation. It has further been suggested that the second key suspended from the lock on the door of the Virgin's house contains a monogram for the name of Jesus (*IHC*) in its bit (Fig. 4.42).[262] This is quite plausible, given the esteemed devotion to the Holy Name and its special association with the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel first proclaimed, "[thou] shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest."[263]

Fifteenth-century Observant preachers like Jan Brugman and especially St. Bernardino of Siena brought the Holy Name of Jesus to the center stage of public life and lay "communities of understanding," with the monogram emblazoned on town halls, city squares, and private homes.[264] In an *Annunciation* fresco from 1451 at the Dominican Monastery of Santa Maria di Castello in Genova by the German artist, Justus von Ravensburg, the monogram of the name of Jesus has been embroidered on the bedspread of the Mother of God and then appears again on the ceiling, explicitly following the iconography of St. Bernardino's devotional *tavolette,* with the letters written in gold,

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[262] Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 68,
[263] *Luke* 1:31–32. On devotion to the Holy Name, see Peter R. Biasotto, "History of the Development of Devotion to the Holy Name" (PhD diss., St. Bonaventure College and Seminary, 1943); André Cabassut, "La Dévotion au Nom de Jésus dans l'Église d'occident," *La Vie spirituelle* 86 (1952): 46–69.
[264] For the public display of the Holy Name in the Low Countries, see Dirk J. de Vries, "Boetepredikers en de IHS-rage op gebouwen," *Bulletin van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Oudheidkundige Bond* 103 (2004): 91–105.

Gothic script (*YHS*), wreathed in rays of light, and set against a deep blue ground (Fig. 4.43). Justus's composition borrows from the *Mérode Triptych* with its lily in a maiolica vase and liturgical towel and laver.[265] Significantly, these objects are sequestered to a triangular quadrant of the composition, just as they are in the *Mérode,* only this time the carved face of God on the towel rack has been exchanged for an actual vision of the Deity, who hovers within a band of red seraphim, precisely above the Holy Name monogram and the triangle of emblematic objects.

The *Mérode Triptych* is probably a little early to bear witness to the Holy Name cult as promoted by St. Bernardino and Brugman, but contemporaries of Ruusbroec from the previous century, like Henry Suso, were already endorsing a special veneration for the name of Jesus.[266] It is not surprising, then, that *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* includes a tribute to the Holy Name, particularly in light of the text's focus on the Annunciation. Ruusbroec extolls the humility of Christ's Incarnation and death in a kind of paraphrase of *Philippians* 2:6–11, a passage that includes two of the most important scriptural verses for devotion to the Holy Name: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."[267] Ruusbroec's words draw in particular from those two verses:

> His blessed name, Jesus, was eternally foreseen, called and chosen, and announced by the angel to the Virgin Mary, His mother: That He would be God's Son and her Son, God and man in one person … And He has ascended above all heavens and above all choirs of angels, and sits crowned at the right hand of His

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[265] See Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 66.
[266] Biasotto, "History and Development of Devotion to the Holy Name," 63–65; Cabassut, "La Dévotion au Nom de Jésus ," 57–61. In addition to Henry Suso, Cabassut cites the role of theHoly Name in the *Vita Christi* of Ludolphus the Carthusian.
[267] *Philippians* 2:9–10. See D1954/1983, E1822/1849, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D387, 389; E386, 388.

> Father, equal to Him in honor and in power. And before Him all knees bend, for He is Lord of all lords and King of kings, and His kingdom has no end nor beginning.[268]

In the *Mérode Triptych,* Peter Inghelbrechts and Helwich Bille themselves kneel before the tiny monogram of the Holy Name, the full-length shadow of the key drawing extra attention to it. The two keys' emblematic significance is underscored by their placement directly beside the votive rosebud in the donor's hat, and their heart-shaped handles even give them a similar shape to the Marian flower. Moreover, the key with the Lord's monogram is suspended from the lock by a short length of rose-colored cord, creating a visual corollary with the pink rosary dangling from Helwich Bille's hands, which bears not a monogram but a miniscule medal of St. Christopher.

As the third in a line-up of diminutive objects signifying Peter and Helwich's *conformitas* with Mary as *Rosa mystica,* the heart-shaped keys mark the domestic threshold with the name of Jesus and identify the *cubiculum* as both the abode of Christ and the meditative household of the donors' hearts.[269] In this way, the pair of keys combines with the two heraldic devices in the windows to bear legal testimony to a kind of joint ownership for the holy house, the key marked with Lord's name presumably belonging to him, while the key in the lock would be the property of the Inghelbrechts. Needless to say, a long exegetical history associates Christ with unlocked doors, deriving from the New Testament, in which the Lord declares himself to be "the door of the sheep

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[268] D1974/1983, E1840/1849, in ibid., D389, E388: "Sijn ghebenedide name, Jhesus, was eewelec voorsien, gheroepen ende vercoren, ende van den inghel gheboodscaept der maeght Marien, sijnre moeder, dat hi soude sijn gods sone ende hare sone, god ende mensche in eenen persooen … Ende hi es op ghevaren boven alle hemele ende boven alle chooere der inghele ende sitd ghecrooent ter rechter hand sijns vader, ghelijc heme in eeren ende in machte. Ende vore heme booeghen alle knien, want hi es alre heeren heere ende coning alre coninghe, ende sijn rike en heeft inde noch beghin."

[269] On the keys and Christ's ownership of the house, see Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 68.

[fold]," and the giver of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."[270] *The Realm of Lovers* uses the door analogy to emphasize Christ's crucial mediation in both salvation and mystical vision: "He is the door through whom we must pass with respect to human nature and also with respect to divine nature, for no one comes into the hall of eternal enjoyment if he neither lives like Christ's humanity nor contemplates nor flows back in by means of His infinite splendor."[271] In a similar way, *The Spiritual Espousals* speaks of Christ "unlock[ing] for us the … unity in which we can possess eternal blessedness" by means of his Incarnation and Passion.[272]

It may be that the awkwardly foreshortened door to the Virgin's house in Campin's painting could function as a ploy to draw the viewer's attention and highlight its devotional significance. Moreover, the presence of keys, a monogram, and other official devices of ownership correlate well with Ruusbroec's characterization of the promise of salvation as a legally-protected "pledge" and "security," a "dowry" and "bride-treasure," safeguarded, as it were, by seals and locks. For the *Mérode* donors, the ultimate pledge and security, cloistered behind door and garden gate, is another miniscule object—the tiny white infant, whose coming into the "window of the eye" supersedes the Inghelbrechts' coat of arms in glass with a living, heraldic seal, like the Holy Name monogram impressed in a tiny, white Host. The Lord descends in resplendence, the warm, white wax of the still-smoking candle troping his incarnate impression in the flesh

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[270] *John* 10:7; *Matthew* 16:19. See also Gottlieb, "Respiciens per Fenestras," 68, 73. Gottlieb makes the interesting observation that the *Mérode* key resembles the sort of elaborate key that would be used for a reliquary.

[271] D4:1912/1916, E4:1860/1820, in Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven,* D335, E334: Ende hi es de dore daer men doer liden moet na menscheliker natueren ende oec na godliker natueren. Want niemen en comt in de sale des ewighen ghebrukens, hi en leve ghelijc Cristus menscheit, ende hi en scouwe ende vloeie weder in overmids sine onghemetene claerheit.

[272] Db39/40, Eb33/34, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D287, E286: "hevet ons ontsloten die … enicheit daer wij inne moghen besitten die eewighe zalicheit."

of his mother, like a salvific, Eucharistic stamp on the Marian charter of redemption, a notarizing "testament … firmly sealed with His death … [and] left to us … in the Sacrament."[273]

In keeping with the tradition of heavenly notaries, living charters, and miraculous seals, Gabriel serves as an important player in this divine contract. As in the Crivelli painting, the *Mérode Triptych* provides a secular corollary for the angel's role in witnessing the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.[274] As discussed earlier, the finely-dressed official standing just inside the garden has been convincingly identified as an official messenger, due to his clothing and miniature badge, which link him to the city of Mechelin (Fig. 4.8). Gabriel, the heavenly messenger "sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth" pauses just inside the open door of the Virgin's house, whereas the secular messenger presides at the gate to the Marian *hortus conclusus.*[275] The genuflecting angel mediates between the Mother of God and the donors, who follow his lead in falling to their knees. The emissary from Mechelin likewise has a mediating role in the composition. In fact, the effects of perspective create the illusion that he is standing between the husband and wife and introducing Peter Inghelbrechts to the Virgin, in much the way that a patron saint routinely lays his hand on the shoulder of a donor to usher him into the Lord's presence. It is significant that a professional messenger's work likely overlapped with the duties of a notary or witness, and some messengers may have functioned in both capacities. Incidentally, the notary in Crivelli's painting also appears in the upper left of the composition, standing over the arched entryway to a garden

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[273] For notarial and even monetary connotations to the Eucharist, see Kumler, "The Multiplication of the Species," esp. 187–191

[274] On the Angel Gabriel as a messenger, see Nickel, "The Man beside the Gate," esp. 242–243.

[275] *Luke* 1:26.

courtyard, and occupying a "mediating stretch" of architecture that literally bridges two buildings.

The configurement of donors, messengers, and saints in the *Mérode Triptych* suggests another, more abstract reference to seals. As already discussed, the seal operated by making present an absent person and certifying his or her individualized endorsement of a cause or pronouncement. Ironically, however, the iconography of these personalized impressions was usually quite generic, subsuming specific monarchs, bishops, and aristocrats into a repertoire of standardized figures with easily recognizable attributes of political or ecclesiastical office.[276] This characteristic has been associated with a larger tendency toward conformity in certain aspects of medieval society, including the promotion of sanctioned categories and states of life.[277] Conformity in seal imagery, however, offers a helpful model for understanding the devotional *conformitas* of the *Mérode* donors. The compositions of the central and right-hand panels, toward which the donors face from their adoring station in the *hortus conclusus,* are "canting" devices, or pictorial "spellings" of the surnames of Peter and his dead wife, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. This is a surprisingly early use of canting names in panel painting, but canting was already a standard practice in seals, particularly civic ones.[278] For instance, the French city of Mantes incorporated a branch of mint (*mantes*) into its seal, and Conques used a basin (*conca*).[279]

Like these civic seals, the *Mérode Triptych* gives form to Peter Inghelbrechts' family name with a depiction of the "the angel bringing" news to the Virgin Mary, while

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[276] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago,* 29.
[277] Ibid., 154–158, 235.
[278] Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel,* 95.
[279] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago,* 247–252.

St. Joseph's "cabinet making" workshop memorializes the donor's first wife, Gretgin Schrinmechers of Cologne. At the same time, though, the canting devices subsume Peter and Gretgin's pedigrees into the general personae of two of the most universal saints in the Church. Certainly many elements of setting and composition in the *Mérode* panels are unique and unprecedented, but there are also few scenes as oft repeated, generic, and immediately recognizable as the Annunciation. In short, Peter asserts his identity and the identity of his dead wife through a relatively predictable arrangement of figures and attributes, in much the way that medieval seals bundled magistrates, lords, and bishops into the standard iconographical types for rulers and prelates. The *Mérode* canting names have even more in common with monastic and civic seals that used the image of a patron saint as a mascot under which all the identities in a community could be visualized.[280]

In a way, Campin's painting presents the Annunciation and St. Joseph's workshop as both the objects of meditative gazing and also the mystical identities of the gazers, as if the donors had become the Virgin and St. Joseph, exemplifying Ruusbroec's injunction to "receiv[e] the brightness—which is God Himself— …[and] becom[e] the very brightness which [one] receives."[281] Gretgin Schrinmechers, of course, is not present in the painting, and the triptych's fascinating confluence of spiritual sight, *conformitas,* and seals depends, to a certain extent, on the assumption that Helwich Bille stands in for her in the devotional scheme of the triptych. However, in much the way that Peter Inghelbrechts marks the windows of the *cubiculum* with his coats of arms, he and his family use the Virgin Annunciate and her spouse as living seals to pledge their wills and hearts to the saints and receive salvation through the window of the eye. Their pious

[280] Ibid., 246.
[281] Dc72/77, Ec60/64, in Ruusbroec, *Die geestelike brulocht,* D581, E580: "daer de gheest die claerheit – die god selve es—ontfeet … Ende hi wert die claerheit selve sonder onderlaet die hi ontfeet."

transaction—brokered by the notary-like messenger in the garden—is itself an imitation of the Virgin who, upon receiving the "contract" of salvation from the Angel Gabriel, sealed her own will to God's plan of redemption with the words, "Be it unto me according to thy word."

The attention to seals and impressions in both Ruusbroec's text and Campin's image calls attention to one final meditative prompt embedded in the painting. The distinctive towel, with its two bands of three blue stripes and edging of fringe, appears many times in later imitations of the *Mérode* Annunciation. Although its sharp creases indicate that it has been neatly folded in the past, it appears distinctly rumpled in the composition, as if it had just been used by the Virgin to dry her hands. It thus bears the impression of Mary's hands, much like the white cloth employed by the Mother of God to cradle the text she is reading. Her fingers indent the cloth wrapped around the book, and the folds drip down from her hands like the wax of the candle just beside her. At this moment, when the soul of the Christ Child is about to be made flesh from the "cloth" of the Virgin's body, the trope of impressed material evokes one of the most precious testaments to the Incarnation in Christendom, the *sudarium* of St. Veronica. As Christ trudged along his way to Calvary with face and hands wet, not with water from the *Mérode piscina* but with blood and sweat, he paused to wipe his face on St. Veronica's towel, leaving his countenance indelibly impressed in the cloth, like a seal of his Passion.

Campin seems to have intended sacred associations for the towel in his triptych. Not only does it occupy the same quadrant as the liturgical laver, the lilies, candle, and carved face, but its blue stripes on white correspond with other holy cloths in contemporary images. Jacques Daret, who apprenticed with Campin in his Tournai

workshop, painted a *Presentation in the Temple,* in which the Virgin offers the Christ Child to Simeon on an altar covered in a white cloth decorated primarily with bands of blue pseudo-Hebrew and bordered with a triad of more blue stripes (Fig. 4.44). The Campinesque *Trinity as Genadestoel* from Leuven again associates the body of Christ with a white cloth printed with sections of pseudo-Hebrew and edged with three blue stripes (Fig. 1.20). This time the material has become a burial shroud, deferentially used by angels to lift the Lord's Eucharistic corpse. It is also notable that the white cloth in Justus von Ravensburg's *Annunciation* employs a series of fine, calligraphic bands of ornamentation in blue, which approximate the decorative quality of Hebraic letters.

Moreover, the *Mérode* towel, especially with its fringe, bears a certain resemblance to a Jewish prayer shawl (*tallith*), an observation that has not gone unnoticed, although it is seldom discussed in the literature.[282] There is, however, an early fourteenth-century precedent for depicting prayer shawls in a similar manner, albeit one that Campin would almost assuredly not have known. A fresco of the Last Supper from the Passion cycle of Pietro Lorenzetti adorns the walls of the Lower Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, including an unusual view of the kitchen alongside the room where Christ eats his final meal with his apostles (Fig. 4.45). Probably part of a typological commentary on the institution of the Eucharist, two Jewish cooks labor over an open fire, one wearing a striped prayer shawl and the other using a prayer shawl to clean a platter.[283]

Lorenzetti's use of the *tallith* as a towel is particularly pertinent for the *Mérode* panel, where the blue and white cloth, slung over the red rack, inspires viewers

[282] I am grateful to Maryan Ainsworth for allowing me to review her unpublished correspondence on this subject.
[283] O'Meara, "'In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb'," 80–81.

imaginatively to receive the visage of the Lord imprinted on the fabric of their hearts. Such a devotional impression follows easily from the context of creative, Eucharistic, visionary, and legal impressions discussed thus far. In fact, the carved, red face standing in for God the Father on the side of the towel rack plays an important role in prompting the meditative metamorphosis that would transform the towel into a *sudarium* for the soul (Fig. 4.28). The hard wood contrasts with the soft cloth and the Biblical "fleshy tables of the heart," and the intensity of the red hue draws attention to the stark whiteness of the towel, anticipating the bloody "ink" that would transfer Christ's features to the material.[284]

Indeed, the frontal view of the sculpted head closely resembles the amber Holy Face carvings discussed in chapter one, their close-up depictions of the Lord in petrified, blood-colored tree sap paying homage to St. Veronica's relic-portrait (Figs. 1.27, 1.28, and 1.29). It would even be easy to imagine the sculpted head as the vehicle for impressing the blue-striped towel, as if it were renewing its image in flesh-like cloth, as a memento of Christ's Incarnation. This fits well with Ruusbroec's idea of the natural image of the Creator—reflected within the household of the soul—facilitating a new birth and re-imaging of Christ. In this way, the supple, white towel parallels the effulgent, white child, the two bodying forth the Lord's presence in cloth and light in the apex of the soul's *cubiculum.* The cross already weighs down upon the tiny body of the infant, like a white Host imprinted with an image of the Crucifixion. For those seeking salvation by conforming themselves to the Virgin and St. Joseph, there is no more trustworthy seal of acceptance than the Eucharist, the ceaseless imprints of Christ's birth into the eye, or the impression of his countenance on the soul's *sudarium.*

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[284] 2 *Corinthians* 3:3.

Finally, with the *Mérode* chambers and their emblematic objects emblazoned on their hearts, Peter Inghelbrechts and his wife can emulate the Virgin Annunciate's "voluntary desire" and achieve a penultimate spiritual recreation in the "fiery spark" of "the soul's very life," which is their "will in the ground of [their] good-willingness": "Where [they] are wrought and breathed over (into God) by the Spirit of our Lord, there [they] are sons of God, by grace, not by nature. There [they] are onefolded. For all [their] faculties fail in their own works, and melt and flow away in the countenance of the eternal love of God."[285] These words from *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* build on the scriptural account of Creation "in the beginning" when the vivifying "Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" and "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."[286] Recreation in the "breath of the Lord" also recalls another "in the beginning" when the Word, which "was with God" and which "was God," was "made flesh" as the same Spirit "overshadow[ed]" the Virgin Annunciate.[287]

In the *Mérode Triptych* the Mother of God has herself been "breathed over" by the Spirit in the trailing smoke of the candle, the "fiery spark" of her soul's will still glowing at its wick, as the melting candle wax seals and notarizes her agreement to receive Christ into her womb for the world's salvation. In like manner, those who receive the body of the perfect man in the white Host and renew the divine image of the perfect God in the

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[285] D1878/1880, E1753/1755, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D379, E378: "Onse wille in den gronde onser goetwillecheit, dat es de viereghe vonke, der zielen levendegheit. Daer ghebaert de vader sinen sone"; D1883/1887, E1758/1762, in ibid.: "Daer wi ghewracht werden ende overgheest met den gheeste ons heeren, daer sijn wi sonen gods van ghenaden, niet van natueren. Daer werden wi gheeenvuldeght. Want alle onse crachte ghebreken in hare eighen werken, ende smelten ende vervlieten in dat anschijn der eewegher minnen gods."
[286] D1786, E1667, in ibid., D371, E370: "In beghinne der werelt"; *Genesis* 1:2, 2:7.
[287] *John* 1:1–2, 14; *Luke* 1:35.

window of their eye will "feel no difference between [themselves] and God, for [they] are above [them]selves and above all order breathed out (of [them]selves) into His love":

> [F]or [Christ] is one with His Father in nature, for He is God. And He is also one with us in our nature, for He is man … And thus He is united with us, and we with Him … And in love and in practice we are united with our heavenly Father, but not one … But where we are embraced and encompassed by the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit above all practice of love, there we are all one, in the same way that Christ, God and man, is one with His Father in the fathomless love of them both.[288]

Ruusbroec sums up his carefully articulated description of unification to the Trinity "without difference" with a poem that concludes the treatise of *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness.* Appropriately, the final verses, which mix together Latin and the vernacular, gently call to mind the Eucharistic Annunciation by referring eating, along with an allusion to the "fiat" from the Virgin's acceptance of God's will (*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*): "Utinam adveniat [May it come to pass], / That we love so much, That we may recognize ourselves, (though) hungry, satiated, / And always find (ourselves) in enjoyment, / Say 'amen, fiat, fiat' [let it be, let it be]. / Amen."[289] In a related way, Campin's painting encourages viewers to widen their eyes and wrinkle their brows as they follow Ruusbroec's injunction to "look outward" and "feast" their eyes on a virtuosic array of minutely detailed objects, fastidiously rendered textures, and

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[288] D2110/2112, E1967/1969, in Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit,* D403, E402: "ghevoelen wi gheen onderscheet tusschen ons ende gode, want wi sijn boven ons selven ende boven alle ordene ontgheest in sijnre minnen"; D2116/2128, E1973/1984, in ibid., D403, E402: "want hi es .i. met sinen vader in der natueren, want hi es god. Ende hi es oec een met ons in onser natueren, want hi es mensche … Ende aldus es hi met ons vereeneght ende wi met heme … Ende in minnen ende in ufeninghen sijn wi eenegh met onsen hemelschen vader, maer niet een … Maer daer wi boven alle ufeninghe van minnen behelst ende bevaen sijn met den vader ende met den sone in eenegheit des heileghs gheests, daer sijn wi alle een, gheliker wijs dat Cristus, god ende mensche, met sinen vader een es in haerre beider grondelooese minne."

[289] D2213/2218, E2069/2074, in ibid., D413, E412: "Utinam adveniat, / dat wi alsoe seere minnen, / dat wi ons hongheregh sat bekinnen / ende altoes in ghebrukene vinden. / Sprect 'amen, fiat, fiat.' / Amen."

luminous colors.[290] Ultimately, though, the artist's skill in painting "outward things" prompts the viewers to turn their gaze back inward, toward the resplendence transfusing the apex of their souls, in an equally rigorous examination of the "household of their hearts."

[290] Tolnay, "L'Autel Mérode," 65.

Conclusion

This dissertation advances an important methodology for interpreting the devotional art of the fifteenth-century Low Countries, and paintings by Rogier van der Weyden and Robert Campin in particular. As explained in the introductory chapter, much of the literature on Rogier has been stalled for many decades on a theoretical plateau of formalism. For good reason, scholars have long been entranced with the elegance of his compositions, his expert orchestration of color and line, and the dramatic emotion of his subjects. Too often, though, criticism of Rogier's work does not move beyond aesthetic considerations, bolstered by biographical information combed from archives. Campin's work has benefited from a much broader spectrum of investigation, but the interpretation of many of his paintings still suffers to a degree from endless battles of connoisseurship and outdated methodologies like Panofsky's "disguised symbolism."[1]

In contrast, I have demonstrated a new and fruitful system of inquiry that has potential to plumb the devotional, theological, and exegetical depths of early northern Renaissance painting. This system operates by reading the pictorial tropes of artists like Rogier and Campin in tandem with vernacular devotional texts, especially the mystical treatises of Jan van Ruusbroec. In advancing this theory, I am building on the work of a number of scholars who have made important inroads into the relationship between vernacular literature and fifteenth-century painting, such as Reindert Falkenburg and Bret Rothstein. Edward Bekaert published a study specifically on Rogier and Ruusbroec during the early stages of my research, and I have cited many of his observations in

[1] For studies addressing connoisseurship, see Frinta, *The Genius of Robert Campin;* Campbell, "Robert Campin," 634–646; Thürlemann, *Robert Campin;* Stephan Kemperdick and Jochen Sander, eds., *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden: An Exhibition Organized by the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, and the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

previous chapters. My work on Ruusbroec and the visual arts, however, deals specifically with the interface between pictorial and literary tropes. Although Ruusbroec assembles his complex theological analogies from words while Rogier distills mysteries through paint, there are nonetheless illuminating similarities in the construction and operation of their tropes.

Scholars of devotional art often refer to the meditative images of artists like Rogier and Campin as *machinae,* "machines" that prompt, inspire, and guide the viewer in spiritual experiences. The mental pictures and interpretive embellishments produced by these *machinae* often elaborate well beyond the "rudiments" of subject matter, color, and composition physically present in an image.[2] There is a similar *modus operandi* at work in Ruusbroec's writings, which offer exegesis, extended metaphors, and poetic language as "machinery" to be used by devout readers seeking transcendent mystical experiences. The ultimate goal of the mystical text—like the goal of a devout picture—is a level of perception and insight that cannot be *literally* articulated in either words or paint. Since texts and pictorial images functioned side by side in the rich spirituality of the late medieval and early modern Low Countries, examining them in tandem helps reassemble the critical but frustratingly ephemeral musings of the devout soul.

Ruusbroec's esteemed place in Carthusian spirituality and book production has been discussed at length in this dissertation. In fact, the Order of St. Bruno's predilection for Ruusbroec and other vernacular authors forges the critical juncture between Rogier—

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[2] See, for instance, Walter S. Melion, "Prayerful Artifice: The Fine Style as Marian Devotion in Hieronymus Wierix's *Maria* of ca. 1611," in *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700,* ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl A. E. Enenkel, and Walter S. Melion (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 628. Falkenburg has also spoken and written on this subject several times. See Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Hieronymus Bosch's Mass of Saint Gregory and 'Sacramental Vision'," in *Das Bild der Erscheinung: die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter,* ed. Andreas Gormans and Thomas Lentes (Berlin: Reimer, 2007), 178–206.

a life-long Carthusian enthusiast—and the mystic of Groenendaal. Ruusbroec's potential to illuminate specific tropes in devotional paintings and to give definition to the intangible meditation they prompted, however, is not limited to art produced for the charterhouse cloister. The Order of St. Bruno played a profound role in mentoring and instructing a variety of reform-minded groups within the Church, as well as lay men and women. Carthusian scriptoria, particularly the copyists from Herne, are largely responsible for the fact that so many extant manuscripts of Ruusbroec's work come from institutions specially fostered by the monks, including *Devotio moderna* houses and priories of the Windesheim Congregation.[3]

For monastics, the lay, and the quasi-lay, the treatises of Brabant's most celebrated mystic provided an important vocabulary for the potential associations sacred works of art may have prompted. These could have included distinct pairings of mental images, scriptural passages, liturgical refrains, and exegetical distillations. Attempts to reconstruct such meditative experiences are not only informative but also crucial to understanding the core of Renaissance devotion. The final purpose for spiritual images and texts was to transform the soul of the votary, and that profoundly metaphysical endeavor played out primarily in the unseen arena of the heart. There, the "machinery" of text- and image-making was repurposed in a devotional workshop of sculpting, painting, sanding, trimming, puncturing, and inscribing in order to refashion the soul into an image of Christ, who, through his Incarnation, was himself "imaged" in flesh.[4]

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[3] For the vast manuscript output at Herne, see Kwakkel, *Die dietsche boeke.*

[4] For a cogent case study in the process of image-making as a trope for soul formation, see Walter S. Melion, "Convent and cubiculum cordis: The Incarnational Thematic of Materiality in the Cistercian Prayerbook of Martin Boschman (1610)," in *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image, 1400-1700,* ed. Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 413–458. On the Incarnation as a license for pictorial image making, see Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer

There is another important reason that the pictorial tropes of two of the most innovative artists of the Renaissance accord in productive ways with the literary tropes of Ruusbroec. "Vernacular theology" was a challenging, not to mention risky, endeavor during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Ruusbroec abandoned the established terminology and structures of ecclesiastical Latin for the unchartered lexicon of Middle Dutch. This facilitated the novel inventions and slippage of meaning that often structure his vivid descriptions of mystical ascent. In terms of early Renaissance painting, it is easy to use a loose notion of "vernacular" *Zeitgeist* to explain the virtuosic naturalism, fastidious textures, and microscopic details that characterize works by Campin, Rogier, and other artists of the so-called *Ars nova.* Rogier and Campin's working method, however, parallels aspects of vernacular theology in other, much more intriguing ways. Like Ruusbroec, both of these painters break rules, create unprecedented compositions, and approach established devotional themes from unconventional angles and by means of highly inventive tropes. In that sense, their mode of painting could be described as having a "vernacular" quality.

In fact, Rogier and Campin's unstable imagery and "unchartered" analogies are every bit as noteworthy as their brilliant formalism or arcane iconography. For example, this dissertation has frequently noted Rogier's fascination with one material imitating or morphing into another. Indeed, these clever manipulations of paint parroting stone or wooden sculptures, which in turn seem to be transforming into flesh and blood, are not far removed from the issues of translation, imprecision, and slippage so germane to Ruusbroec and other vernacular mystics. I have argued that the instability and

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Wandel, introduction to *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image, 1400-1700*, ed. Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 1-14.

inventiveness in Ruusbroec's texts are not the bumbling outcome of a theologian's experimentation in Middle Dutch literature. Nor are they merely stylistic curiosities that contribute charm to his prose. Rather, his colorful and unusual analogies, multivalent metaphors, and lexicon constitute a spiritual mechanism to help readers approximate the shifting vagaries of experiential mysticism.

This understanding of vernacular devotional texts contains an important application for early northern Renaissance art. As with Ruusbroec's literary inventions, Rogier's depictions of transforming materials go well beyond formalist appeal. They are not just a clever *trompe l'oeil* or a skillful handling of paint. In the Escorial *Crucifixion,* discussed in chapter one, the strange, demi-grisaille Virgin and St. John certainly contribute to the frozen austerity of the painting and its minimalist palette (Fig. 1.1). More importantly, though, as they hover between the appearance of flesh and the appearance of stone they trope the unfathomable mystery of transubstantiation, in which inanimate bread and wine become flesh and blood on the altar. In the *Deposition,* Rogier masterfully creates the illusion that a narrow frieze of wooden sculptures packed into a gilded retable has sprung to life with blood-shot eyes and translucent tears running down their faces (Fig. 2.3). Here again, the viewer's perception of unstable, metamorphosing materials becomes a *machina* for spiritual transformation. Like the Scheut *Crucifixion,* the painting actively trains worshipers to ascertain the Real Presence of Christ living in the Eucharist, but it also invites them to consider the visionary and vivifying effects of intense, meditative prayer before an image. Ultimately, the visceral emotion of these animated "sculptures" prompts viewers to bring the Passion to life in meditative artifice, cathartically recreated in the heart.

These painted "translations" of one material into another likely evolved from an older Netherlandish tradition, in which triptychs and polyptychs frequently included an evolution from grisaille to polychromed figures. Chapters two and four discussed the "miraculous" transitions from fictive stone sculptures on the exterior shutters of an altarpiece to brilliantly colored interiors with lifelike texture and detail. Significantly, Campin's *Marriage of the Virgin* may be the earliest instance of this trope, with grisaille depictions of St. Clare of Assisi and St. James the Great presented on the reverse of the panel (Figs. 4.46 and 4.17).[5] Campin, however, also engaged with the representation of materials in more complex ways. Chapter four noted his strikingly unusual representation of the Trinity in the *Mérode Triptych,* in which the rigid carving of God the Father's face, the luminous form of the homunculus Christ Child, and the ephemeral "trace" of the Holy Spirit use substances to comment on the roles and interrelationships of the divine persons. Moreover, in thinking about *machinae* for personalized meditative experience, it is important that Campin's analogy takes place in the "household" of the votary's heart, rendered in a vocabulary of quotidian domesticity that resonates closely with literature in the Mother Tongue.

Having drawn attention to general premises and themes that operate similarly in the works of Ruusbroec, Rogier, and Campin, I will conclude by reviewing specific instances when these two artists appropriate particular language and imagery from the mystic of Groenendaal. Chapter one compared the Escorial *Crucifixion* to Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Tabernacle* (*Van den geesteliken tabernakel*) and *A Mirror of Eternal*

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[5] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 161. For more on the implications of grisaille in northern Renaissance panel painting, see Denis Coekelberghs, "Les grisailles et le trompe-l'oeil dans l'oeuvre de Van Eyck et de Van der Weyden," in *Mélanges d'archaéologie et d'histoire de l'art offerts au professeur Jacques Lavelleye* (Louvain: Université de Louvain, 1970), 21–34.

Blessedness (*Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*), a juxtaposition that foregrounded both distinctions and similarities in pictorial and literary troping mechanisms. Rogier's monumental painting is stark, confrontational in its devotional immediacy, and also quietly introspective in its pathos. *The Spiritual Tabernacle* is anything but stark or spare in its dense maze of exegetical categorizing, and yet both it and *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness* demand similarly introspective pondering. To this end, *The Spiritual Tabernacle* inverts the order of the Bible's account of Israel's tent sanctuary, so that Ruusbroec can guide his readers from the exterior of the structure to the interior, and likewise from outer courtyards of the heart to the innermost "mutual indwelling" of God in the soul.[6]

The manifold instances of inward and outward turning in Ruusbroec's work bring new significance to the bowed head and downcast eyes of Rogier's *Virgo doloris*, as contrasted with the open hands, mouth, and eyes of St. John. The "inward" and "outward" positioning of these two mourners brings unforeseen import to the *outflowing* of blood from the Lord's broken body and the figurative "Holy of Holies" *within* the blood-red veil and rent "curtain" of Christ's side. The significance of this vermilion veil—present in both the Escorial and Philadelphia *Crucifixions*—comes to the fore when read alongside *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* with its account of red cloth "twice-dyed" in the blood of worms (Fig. 1.8). In this light, Rogier's saturated, vermilion veils are not just an aesthetic reprieve from the surrounding whites, grays, and ghostly halftones. Rather, they typify the Lord's blood through a mimetic representation of sacred cloth, an allusion to

[6] On the differing order of description in the Bible and in Ruusbroec's text, see Mertens, introduction to *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* 24, 34–35; D2:13/18, E2:13/17, in Ruusbroec, *Van den geesteliken tabernakel,* D279, E278; D2:51/52, E2:50/51, in ibid., D283, E282; Warnar, *Ruusbroec,* 207.

the abased, Christological worm of *Psalm* 22, and a remarkable commentary on the worm-based etymology of vermilion pigment.

Chapters two and three addressed Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych of the Virgin* and the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* in conjunction with Ruusbroec's *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*) (Fig. 2.4). Most well known among the mystic's works, this treatise seems to have appealed to a more diverse audience than *The Spiritual Tabernacle,* which is also discussed in these two chapters. *The Spiritual Espousals* is exegetical at its core, but it makes use of a more varied array of imagery and metaphors. Its bridal theme and codification of the three levels of mystical ascent fit particularly well with the "seeings" "comings," and "meetings" of the Bridegroom that are latent in the three *Miraflores* panels. Of special note for Rogier's painting is Ruusbroec's treatment of abandonment during the second stage of the mystical life, associated with Christ's utter forsakenness on the cross. Significantly, the second panel of the *Miraflores Triptych* repeats the dying Lord's anguished cry of utter loneliness—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—in gold letters stitched onto the mantle of the grieving Virgin.[7] His words become hers as she re-voices them in a despondent prayer to her dead son lying on her lap.

Rogier's intentional repurposing of Ruusbroec's language and imagery in the Miraflores *Pietà* scene is typical of the way the mystic's Christological theology is often translated into Marian "lexicon" in both the *Miraflores* and Philadelphia panels. As the Virgin swoons in the Philadelphia *Crucifixion,* she not only adds a Mariological corollary to the meanings embedded in images of the *Genadestoel* (Fig. 3.11), but she models

[7] *Matthew* 27:46.

mystical death, like a *Mediatrix* for Ruusbroec's ascent to unification with God.[8] Indeed, chapters two and three demonstrate that Rogier was as creative and inventive in his reading and application of Ruusbroec as he was in his alterations and transformations of standard Christian iconography.

Chapter four introduced a different artist and audience than the first three chapters. Campin's *Mérode Triptych* was made for wealthy, lay patrons, and its setting for the Annunciation is, at first glance, emphatically secular (Fig. 4.2). Among the myriad allusions, theologies, and analogies at play in this complicated painting, I argued that Ruusbroec's learned treatise, *A Mirror of Eternal Blessedness,* plays a critical and overlooked role. The text extolls the Virgin Annunciate as the perfect model for a devout communicant at mass, and her virtues accord closely with the emblematic attributes depicted in the *Mérode.* Like Rogier, Campin seems to have engaged creatively with Ruusbroec, for he translates the mystic's account of Christ's resplendent birth in the eye of the votary into a luminous homunculus, which descends through one of two ocular windows that are echoed in the wide, staring eyes of the donor who kneels close by.

Rogier and Campin certainly do not have a monopoly on the application and interpretation of Ruusbroec's literary tropes. Ruusbroec's promotion at the hands of the Carthusians guaranteed a wide diffusion of his texts among monastic, ecclesiastical, lay, and quasi-lay communities. Artists with a predilection for the mystical—like Claus Sluter, Jan van Eyck, Geertgen tot Sint Jans, and Hugo van der Goes—offer especially promising avenues for further study. Sluter and Hugo's connection to the Augustinian Order and the *Devotio moderna,* respectively, makes them ideal candidates for inquiry

[8] Bekaert makes the argument that the Virgin's swoon exemplifies mystical death in both the Philadelphia *Crucifixion* and the *Deposition.* Bekaert, "The Mystical Dimension in Flemish Primitive Painting," 378, 383.

grounded in the same kind of historical overlap characterizing Rogier's interface with Ruusbroec.[9] The colorful language of this venerable mystic from the Brabantine woods brings new brilliance to Netherlandish painting, while devotional panels highlight the pictorial potential in his vernacular spirituality.

[9] Morand, *Claus Sluter,* 19–21.

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