EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

De Medio Aevo
ISSN-e 2255-5889

MISCELÁNEA

The Marketplace of the Heart: Penance and Redemption in the Wings of the Mérode Triptych

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https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.104568 Received: August 26, 2025. Accepted: October 2, 2025.

Abstract: Visual exegesis of the *Annunciation Triptych's* figurative wordplay calls for a reassessment of Robert Campin's fundamental importance to early Netherlandish Art. During the first quarter of the fifteenth century, when treatises on the art of memory began to proliferate in Southern and Central Europe, similar manuals were relatively rare in the Low Countries, where the locations (*loci*) and vivid images (*imagines agentes*) of mendicant rhetoric had become the memory prompts in devotional paintings that guided penitents on their journey to God. Following a spiritual guide through a door is an immersive sensory experience quite different from viewing the world through a picture window. The former is medieval, the latter, early modern. When Campin decided to replace the gold of eternity with blue sky and white clouds in Mary's bourgeoise living room, he sited the Virgin's solar at the top of the stairs, high above the courtyard of conscience and the workshop of redemption in the triptych's respective wings. These locations and images — which follow the rhetorical rules of similarity, dissimilarity and contiguity — prompted the male votary to remember, confess and expiate his sins as he moved through the classic stages of spiritual ascent — purification in the left wing, illumination in the right wing and union in the central panel.
Keywords: Christ Child Creator; Feast of the Annunciation; Medieval Marketplace; Demon Fowler; Romance of the Rose; Joseph the Carpenter; Scandal of the Cross; Synderesis.

EN El Mercado del Corazón: Penitencia y redención en las alas del Tríptico de Mérode

Resumen: La exégesis visual del juego de palabras figurativo del Tríptico de la Anunciación exige una reevaluación de la importancia fundamental de Robert Campin para el arte neerlandés temprano. Durante el primer cuarto del siglo XV, cuando los tratados sobre el arte de la memoria comenzaron a proliferar en el sur y centro de Europa, manuales similares eran relativamente escasos en los Países Bajos, donde las localizaciones (loci) y las vívidas imágenes (imagines agentes) de la retórica mendicante se habían convertido en los estímulos de la memoria en las pinturas devocionales que guiaban a los penitentes en su camino hacia Dios. Seguir a un guía espiritual a través de una puerta es una experiencia sensorial inmersiva muy diferente a contemplar el mundo a través de un ventanal. Lo primero es medieval, lo segundo, de principios de la Edad Moderna. Cuando Campin decidió sustituir el oro de la eternidad por cielo azul y nubes blancas en el salón burgués de María, ubicó el solar de la Virgen en lo alto de la escalera, muy por encima del patio de la conciencia y el taller de la redención en las respectivas alas del tríptico. Estas ubicaciones e imágenes, que siguen las reglas retóricas de similitud, disimilitud y contigüidad, motivaban al devoto masculino a recordar, confesar y expiar sus pecados mientras avanzaba por las etapas clásicas del ascenso espiritual: purificación en el ala izquierda, iluminación en el ala derecha y unión en el panel central.
Palabras clave: Cristo Niño Creador; Fiesta de la Anunciación; Mercado Medieval; Cazador Demonio; *Romance de la Rosa*; José el Carpintero; Escándalo de la Cruz; Sindéresis.

How to cite: Lea, P.P. (2026). "The Marketplace of the Heart: Penance and Redemption in the Wings of the Mérode Triptych." *De Medio Aevo* 15/1, 1-53. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.104568

1. Introduction: Setting the Scene

Art historians have largely ignored the two streetscapes in the votary and the carpenter wings of the *Annunciation Triptych* (Mérode Altarpiece) by the workshop of Robert Campin (c.1375-1444) (Fig. 1).[1] Charles de Tolnay observed that the green sward in the courtyard heralds spring, and the snow flurries in the marketplace signal winter, with the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ marking the turn of the New Year on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25.[2] The *Fasciculus Morum* — a fourteenth-century manual for mendicant preachers — captured the essence of Lady's Day in just three lines of verse:

> "Hail, festal day, comprising all our wounds.
> On it was Adam made, and on this day he fell.
> Sent was the angel then, and on his cross Christ died."[3]

Although the street scene in the votary wing might be anywhere in the Low Countries, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin identified the cityscape in the carpenter panel as Liége (Figs. 2 and 3).[4] The shops on either side of the cross street are probably more important than the geographical location of the marketplace. On the left corner of the street hangs the signboard of a white swan — a pretentious bird favored by inns and taverns, which catered to temptations of the flesh like gluttony, lust and avarice.[5] Across the street, copper bowls and a gold chalice announce the respective services of a barber-surgeon and apothecary.[6] An early sixteenth-century miniature from a French translation of a manual for the education of princes written by an Augustinian brother, Giles of Rome (1243-1316), illustrates a Paris market, where copper bowls and white majolica identify the stalls of a barber-surgeon and apothecary, respectively (Fig. 4).[7] Both shops sell remedies for too much wine, women and credit.

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1 According to dendrochronological analysis, the *Annunciation* panel of the Mérode triptych was painted around 1427. Several years later, the buyer of the central panel probably commissioned the votary and carpenter wings. Most experts agree that the left wing was painted by an artist other than Robert Campin. The female votary, messenger and the coats of arms were added sometime after the triptych's assembly. For a review of the painting's spatial disparities, phased construction and later alterations, see: Maryan Wynn Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of* Art (New York: *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1998), 92-96.

2 De Tolnay did not note that the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ took place on the same feast day: Charles De Tolnay, "L'autel Mérode du Maître de Flémalle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 53 (1959): 69-70. When the date of the Crucifixion was fixed in the third century, it was argued that the incarnation and death of Christ must have occurred on the same day as the Julian (Roman) vernal equinox or the anniversary of creation: Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Dating of Christmas: The Early Church,» in *The Oxford Handbook of Christmas*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 9. New Year's Day was sporadically celebrated on March 25 in Flanders, Picardy and Germany until the Catholic Church adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1582: Olivier Guyotjeannin and Benoît-Michel Tock, "Mos presentis patrie : Les styles de changement du millésime dans les acres français (XIe-XVIe siècle)," Bibliothèque *de l'École des Chartes* 157 (1999): 67-68; and Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar, Chronology and Worship: Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 95-97.

3 One of the handbooks written to guide mendicant friars preaching penitence after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 mandated annual confession, the *Fasciculus Morum* (Bundle of Bad Behavior) was organized according to the seven deadly sins by an English Franciscan. The quoted verse introduced the day, place and manner of Christ's Passion (Envy III.xi.10-12): *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 214-215.

4 The author identified the town by citing the relative position of two churches in a historical model: Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "On the Cityscape of the Mérode Altarpiece," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 11 (1976): 129-131. The animated cityscapes of the Campin circle are not specific to one location, but glimpses of the world: Felix Thürlemann, "Der Blick hinaus auf die Welt: Zum Raumkonzept des Mérode-Triptychons von Robert Campin," in *Espaces du texte: Recueil d'hommages pour Jacques Geninasca*, eds. Peter Fröhlicher et al. (Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1990): 392. For more on the temporal rhetoric of spiritual foreground and profane background, see: Alfred Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (1998): 425-429; and Jelle De Rock, *The Image of the City in Early Netherlandish Painting (1400-1550)* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2019), 74-83.

5 The pure white feathers of the elegant swan conceal skin black with concupiscence: Hugh of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloy's "De Avibus*, ed. and trans. Willene B. Clark (Warsaw: Andesite Press, 2017), 243 (Chapter 58); and Natalie Jayne Goodison, *Introducing the Medieval Swan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2022), 17-42. Inns and taverns were viewed as dens of iniquity, where merchants drank, ate and conducted business on credit: Andrew Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern: Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 2-10; Henry Lancaster, *The Book of Holy Medicines* (*Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*), trans. Catherine Batt (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 178; and Liad Rinot, "Sin City: Scenes of Daily Life in Paintings by Robert Campin and His Followers," in *The Sides of the North: An Anthology in Honor of Professor Yona Pinson*, eds. Tamar Cholcman et al. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 105-110.

6 The barber surgeon announced his services by suspending shaving or bleeding bowls from a long pole over the street: Michael Camille, "Signs of the City: Place, Power, and Public Fantasy in Medieval Paris," in *Medieval Practices of Space*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt et al. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 20; and De Rock, *The Image of the City*, 98-101. Barber and apothecary shops were often sited next to one another near central markets: Christopher Booth,"-Physician, Apothecary, or Surgeon? The Medieval Roots of Professional Boundaries in Later Medical Practice,» *Medieval Midlands 2018* (2018): 25-28. Majolica storage jars and other eye-catching vessels drew attention to apothecary shops: Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, *Dans l'atelier de l'apothicaire: Histoire et archéologie des pots de pharmacie XIIIe-XVIe siècle* (Paris: Picard, 2013), 78-81; and Violetta Barbashina, "'...In Charity, for the Sake of Charity, and with Charity': The Ointment Jar and the Virtue of *Caritas* in the Apothecary's Practice," *History of Pharmacy and Pharmaceuticals* 64, no. 1 (2022): 18-22.

7 *Le Livre du gouvernement des princes* (BNF Ms. 5062, 149v) was illuminated in 1515 for Robert Stuart, Field-Marshall of France and Knight of the Order of St. Michael. The four market stalls include a clothier, furrier, barber and apothecary (last accessed 3/22/24): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2b/Du_Gouvernement_des_princes_(BNF_Ms-5062)_-_149_v.jpg. The words on the placard next to the large white and blue vase translates as "good hypocras" — a sweet spiced wine with medicinal and aphrodisiac properties first distilled by the physician Hippocrates: Françoise Desportes, "Food Trades," in *Food: A Culinary History*, eds. Jean-Louis

Fig. 1. Workshop of Robert Campin, *Annunciation Triptych* (*Mérode Altarpiece*), Southern Netherlands, 1427-1432, oil on oak, 64.5 x 117.8 cm, Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 56.70a–c, New York.

Fig. 2. Streetscape in the background of the votary panel. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.
Fig. 3. Marketplace view in the carpenter panel with an enlargement of the swan signboard. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

Henry of Grosmont (ca.1310-1361), the first Duke of Lancaster, described city crossroads in his *Book of Holy Medicines*, the only first-person form of confession to survive the late Middle Ages.[8] Crossroads led merchants — who carried "wanton thoughts, wicked desires and vile pleasures" — through sensual gates to a central market, where the heart weighed sinful transactions.[9] This transactional metaphor of the confessing heart has important implications for the votary and carpenter wings of the Mérode triptych. Central to the identity of medieval towns in the Low Countries, trade was compared to the long chain of collective debt started when God the Creator became incarnate to purchase our freedom from sin on the cross.[10] Fifteenth century greeting cards of the

Flandrin et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 285; and Fabian Müllers, "Alimentation et médecine au Moyen Âge à travers le prisme des épices" (Masters Thesis, Université Paris Descartes, 2019), 43-52.

8 Modeled on the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Lancaster's form was written in Anglo-Norman, a French dialect spoken by English aristocrats. The first half of his confession covered the anatomy and wounds of sin and the second half, the therapeutic regimens delivered by Christ the Physician and his nurse, the Virgin Mary: Lancaster, *The Book*, 177-180. One of three metaphors of heartfelt confession, the marketplace focused on the transactional nature of sin: Gabriela Badea, "*Confessio Cordis* and Landscapes of the Heart in Henry of Lancaster's *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*," *Reading Medieval Studies* 43 (2017): 18-20.

9 Lancaster, *The Book*, 179. The five physical senses — seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch — were how sin entered the body and infected the soul. These sensual gateways aligned with the five wounds of Christ. Lancaster added a sixth gate by dividing touch into hands and feet. The six gates of the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet were then linked to the heart and the seven deadly sins that wound conscience. Lancaster's confession was the first spiritual self-portrait to associate the gateway metaphor to curing the wounds of sin with the medicine of Christ's blood: Robert W. Ackerman, "The Traditional Background of Henry of Lancaster's *Livre*," *L'Esprit créateur* 2, no. 3 (1962): 115-118.

10 The commercial language that described Christ as both merchant and merchandise developed during late Antiquity and the

Fig. 4. Paris market stalls in the *Livre du Gouvernement des Princes by* Giles of Rome, 1515, tempera, ink and gold on parchment, 408 x 280 mm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. 5062, fol. 149v, Paris. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

Fig. 5. Anonymous, *New Year's Card: Christ Child with the Cross*, South Germany, c. 1490, hand-colored woodcut with traces of gilt, 3.4 x 7.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 31.54.145, New York.

Christ Child bearing the instruments of his Passion linked the New Year and Incarnation to the Fall and Redemption (Fig. 5).[11] Trades were just when accounts balanced, and the devil's market tax was paid:

early Middle Ages: Franziska Quaas, "Towards a Different Type of Market Exchange in the Early Middle Ages: The *Sacrum Commercium* and Its Agents," in *Markets and their Actors in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Tanja Skambraks et al. (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020): 38-43. Augustine's description of Christ as a good merchant who offers life for death had a strong influence on thirteenth-century mendicant sermons: David L. d'Avray, "Sermons to the Upper Bourgeoisie by a Thirteenth Century Franciscan," *Studies in Church History* 16 (1979): 196-199; *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 204-239; and Frans N.M. Diekstra, "The Language of the Marketplace in the Sermons of Robert de Sorbon (1201-1274)," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 75, no. 2 (2008), 343-349. For divine auditing, see: Simon Kemp, "Quantification of Virtue in Late Medieval Europe," *History of Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2018): 35-37; and Nancy Haijing Jiang, "From Audits to Confessionals: The Influence of Accounting Technology on Medieval Penitential Pedagogy," in *Media Technologies and the Digital Humanities in Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, eds. Katharine D. Scherff et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2023): 20-25.

[11] The late fifteenth-century colored woodcut of the incarnate Christ Child bearing his cross and looking back to the future is accompanied by the following New Year's sentiment: *innien tagen / hat das swere Kreuz getragen* (*in those days, he carried a heavy Cross*). I would like to thank Dr. Joanna Sheers Seidenstein — Associate Curator of Northern European Drawings, Prints, and Illustrated Books at the Metropolitan Museum of Art — for translating the early high German greeting (last accessed 3/22/24): https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/360220. The green grass suggests that the card was sent to commemorate the New Year on March 25: Gregory C. Bryda, *The Trees of the Cross: Wood as Subject and Medium in the Art of Late Medieval Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 77-78. For more on the layering of timeframes that combine the New Year and Incarnation with the Fall and Redemption, see: David S. Areford, "Christ Child Creator," in *Quid est sacramentum?: Visual Representation of Sacred Mysteries in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1700*, eds. Walter S. Melion et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019): 480-483.

Fig. 6. Workshop of Robert Campin, Left wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*, Southern Netherlands, 1427-1432, oil on oak, 64.5 x 27.3 cm, Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 7. Closeup of the two votaries and messenger in the left wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

> "And if that thought is impure, it weighs heavily and attracts the host (the Devil) to itself, with all the sins, and then it weighs so on the wretched soul that everything goes and falls into the deepest pit of hell. But if it is weighed and counterweighted, as it should be, before agreement is reached, it would be wisely and fairly traded were the thought weighed up with sound examination and counterweighted with sufficient continence. And anyone who would do this and agreed thereby to weigh and sell his goods trustworthily would loose nothing, but would win more than the tax owed."[12]

The tax owed the Devil, the host of the market, was the precious blood of Christ, who paid in advance to buy contrite souls and redeem them from hell. The copper color of blood money links this payment for sin to the shaving or bleeding bowls that identify the corner barbershop in the carpenter wing.[13] Just as blood-letting cools enflamed bodies, Christ the Barber-Surgeon purges sin so that penitents can receive the Word of God with a pure heart.[14]

Reading the Word of God or *Lectio Divina* as outlined in the Annunciation panel sorely tested the time constraints of Christians living outside the cloister.[15]

[12] Lancaster, *The Book*, 180. The two commercial sins of greatest concern were avarice and usury or economic sins against one's neighbor. A just price was defined as labor plus costs or the common price set by bargaining in the marketplace: Odd Langholm, *The Merchant in the Confessional: Trade and Price in the Pre-Reformation Penitential Handbooks* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 244-255; Jennifer Hole, *Economic Ethics in Late Medieval England, 1300–1500* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 32-38; and Nancy Haijing Jiang, "The Trade of Penance: Commercial Practice and Penitential Piety in Late Medieval Literature" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2023), 23-74. For an excellent discussion of late medieval views of the Christian merchant entrepreneur and the importance of his generosity to Church and State, see: Hugo Soly, "Social Relations, Political Balances of Power, and Perceptions of Big Business: Contrasting Images of Merchants in Northern Italy, the Low Countries, and Southern Germany in the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries," *The Medieval Low Countries* 3 (2016): 192-215.

[13] Critical to the trading of necessities in growing city markets, small change made from bronze or other copper-alloys cost more to mint than the value of the base metal: Philipp Robinson Rössner, "From the Black Death to the New World (c.1350– 1500)," in *Money and Coinage in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rory Naismith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018): 164-167. Chronic bullion shortages led to the extensive credit networks characteristic of the late Middle Ages: Thomas J. Sargent and François R. Velde, *The Big Problem of Small Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 131-138; and Richard Goddard, *Credit and Trade in Later Medieval England, 1353-1532* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 138-146.

[14] Christ shed his blood to cure the sickness of guilt (Envy III.x.146-151): *Fasciculus Morum*, 206-207. He was both surgeon and patient: Virginia Langum, "'The Wounded Surgeon': Devotion, Compassion and Metaphor in Medieval England," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, eds. Larissa Tracy et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015): 280-290. Bloodletting was one of the purgative treatments used by barber-surgeons to restore the balance of humors and therefore easily linked to confession: Denise Despres, "Medicine and Sacramentals: Performative Material Culture in the York Pageants," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 15, no. 3 (2021): 320-324; and Patrick Outhwaite, *Christ the Physician in Late-Medieval Religious Controversy: England and Central Europe, 1350-1434* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2024), 145-147. For the association of barbershops with folly, see: Rinot, "Sin City," 110-118.

[15] According to the Carthusian, Prior Guigo II (died 1188/93) and the Chancellor, John Gerson (1363-1429), *Lectio Divina* was a metaphorical ladder to heaven with four steps — reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation: Patricia Padgett Lea, "Clean Hands Are Not Enough: *Lectio Divina* for Novices in the

Fig. 8. Anonymous, Dreamer and Idleness with self-castrating beaver in the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, France, c. 1325-1350, tempera, ink and gold on parchment, 30.0 x 21.0 cm, British Library, Stowe Ms. 947, fol. 1v.

Flemish burghers and their families built new spiritual sanctuaries to purge their hearts from constant contact with the world, the flesh and the Devil.[16] One of these havens was the courtyard of conscience, where penitents examined their hearts, confessed their sins and asked for pardon before entering Church for Easter Communion. Another was the workshop of redemption, where "the sorrow of contrition and the shame of confession" were healed by "the labor of satisfaction."[17] We will accompany a young patrician on his spiritual journey from a busy city street into the courtyard of conscience and then enter the interior door of Saint Joseph's workshop to view the marketplace during Lent from second-story windows.[18] Many of the memory prompts that define the votary's path are double coded to answer one question: How can rich men wearing wide brim beaver hats enter the narrow gate of heaven?[19]

Mérode *Annunciation*," *De Medio Aevo* 11/2, 2022: 227-233. Gerson believed that divine reading and affective prayer were not exclusive to the cloistered: Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, "Les passions, la mystique, la prière. Affectivité et dévotion dans la pensée de Jean Gerson," *Revue Mabillon* 24 (2013): 115-116. For the late medieval proliferation of vernacular devotional texts that valorized the active life of the layman, see: Margriet Hoogvliet, "'Pour faire laies personnes entendre les hystoires des escriptures anciennes': Theoretical Approaches to a Social History of Religious Reading in the French Vernaculars during the Late Middle Ages," in *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion*, eds. Sabrina Corbellini et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015): 120-127.

16 In the Low Countries of the late Middle Ages, Christian burghers or *poorters* who resided within city walls became a corporative community that regarded its leaders as limbs or members of Christ's body, the Church: Jan Dumolyn, "The Many Faces of the Medieval Burgher in the Southern Netherlands," in *Golden Times: Wealth and Status in the Middle Ages in the Southern Low Countries*, eds. Véronique Lambert et al. (Tielt: Lannoo, 2016): 148, 163-170.

17 The first two stages of Penance — contrition and confession — are important themes in the votary wing. Satisfaction — the doctrine of penitential labor and good works — is central to understanding the carpenter wing (Envy III.x.21-28): *Fasciculus Morum*, 200-202. The remedy for sloth, manual labor was both penitential and redemptive: Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 140-148.

18 Merchant elites with landed estates were called patricians, who often held prominent positions in local city governments: Jan Dumolyn, "Nobles, Patricians and Officers: The Making of a Regional Political Elite in Late Medieval Flanders," *Journal of Social History* 40, No. 2 (Winter 2006): 436-438. Proud patricians rode high horses like the equestrian in the background of the votary panel: Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, "'Let Each Man Carry on With his Trade and Remain Silent': Middle-Class Ideology in the Urban Literature of the Late Medieval Low Countries," *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 2 (2013): 169. Elite townhouses often included offices, shops or storage facilities like the counting room in the Dijon residence of a master of accounts in the Burgundian court: Katherine Anne Wilson, "The Household Inventory as Urban 'Theatre' in Late Medieval Burgundy,» *Social History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 341.

19 Fraudulent traders had little hope of heaven, but those who followed Christ the Good Trader (*Christus Mercator*) on the pilgrimage of life entered the narrow gate of salvation after death (Matthew 7:13-14): Jussi Hanska, *"And the Rich Man also died; and He was buried in Hell": The Social Ethos in Mendicant Sermons* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1997), 88-92; and Daniel Jütte, *The Strait Gate: Thresholds and Pow-*

The *bièvres* worn by the elegant rider and male penitent in the left panel are good examples of double coding to create moral ambivalence (Figs. 6 and 7).[20] Shorthand for female privities as well as felt hats, beavers are amphibious animals with fish-like tails and webbed hind feet.[21] Despite their erotic fur, beavers were widely associated with chastity in medieval Europe. The *Physiologus* — a Christian bestiary composed in Alexandria during the fourth century — explains why male beavers were chaste. They castrated themselves to avoid being killed by hunters of castoreum — a fabled perfume and anticonvulsant that was extracted from scent glands once thought to be testicles.[22] In the bas-de-page decoration of the folio introducing the Stowe *Romance of the Rose*, a self-castrating beaver represents chastity, because he values eternal life more than lust (Fig. 8).[23] The beaver opposes Lady Idleness, the gatekeeper of a fortress pleasure garden teeming with phallic birds.[24] Ironically, beavers were almost hunted to extinction in late medieval Europe for their waterproof pelts, not their scent glands. Their "soft gold" made the production of wide brim hats possible.[25] As costly as fine jewelry, luxurious *bièvres* quickly became status symbols among bourgeois elites.

2. Common as the Street

The narrow gatehouse wicket — graphic code for a wanton woman — frames one of the earliest street scenes to signify prostitution in early Netherlandish art.[26] The elegant rider with his tailored red coat, black leather boots and extravagant beaver hat is not a knight.[27] His bearing resembles that of the Merchant in *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

er in Western History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 27-30. Double coding or "both/and" is the interplay between sacred and profane to express the ambiguity of moral judgment: Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 7-25. For the difference between ambiguity and ambivalence, see: Ingrid Falque, "Early Netherlandish Paintings as Devotional Objects: State of Research ca. 1990-2020," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 16, no. 1 (2024): 12.

20 Philip the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy (1302-1404) bought his large collection of beaver hats in Paris, not Bruges Although felt hats disappeared from the account books after the Duke's death, *bièvres* remained popular among bourgeoise elites: Sophie Jolivet, "Chapeaux, chaperons et autres couvre-chefs: Une place de choix dans la garde-robe des ducs de Bourgogne," in *Le vêtement au Moyen Age, de l'atelier à la garde-robe*, eds. Nils Bock et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021): 169.

21 During the late Medieval and early Renaissance periods, wild animal fur was worn discreetly as linings or trimmings, because hairy bodies signaled man's bestial nature. Fashionable openings or slits to reveal hidden fur linings were called "windows of hell" by itinerant preachers: Patricia Lurati, "'To dust the pelisse': The Erotic Side of Fur in Italian Renaissance Art," *Renaissance Studies* 31, no. 2 (2017): 259. For the association of furry animals with pubic hair and the container imagery of beaver hats frequently felt, see: Peter G. Beidler, "Chaucer's French Accent: Gardens and Sex-Talk in the *Shipman's Tale,*" in *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, eds. Nicole Nolan Sidhu et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006): 156; and Keith Allan, "Pragmatics in Language Change and Lexical Creativity," *SpringerPlus* 5, no. 1 (2016): 15-16 of 23.

22 Castoreum is derived from *castor,* the Latin word for beaver: *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 52 (XXXVII). By the end of the fifteenth century, apothecaries understood that beaver musk came from scent glands, not testicles: Matthaeus Platearius, Ghislaine Malandin, François Avril and Pierre Lieutaghi, *Le livre des simple médicines: D'après le manuscrit français 12322 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris: Editions Ozalid et textes cardinaux, Bibliothèque nationale, 1986), 228-229, 322. For more on the backstory of the multivalent beaver and his pelt, which severed sex from gender, see: Ellen Lorraine Friedrich, "Insinuating Indeterminate Gender: A Castration Motif in Guillaume de Lorris's *Romans de la rose*," in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2013): 264-272; and Kenneth Gouwens, "Emasculation as Empowerment: Lessons of Beaver Lore for Two Italian Humanists,» *European Review of History*: *Revue européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 4 (2015): 540-543, 553-554.

23 The courageous lion and chaste beaver oppose the young man dreaming about the Garden of Pleasure guarded by Lady Idleness (last accessed 3/24/24): https://picryl.com/media/amant-from-bl-stowe-947-f-1-8b67b7. The lion and the beaver probably refer to the respective control of emotion and appetite by reason represented by the little bird in the right margin. These three animals reflect the Platonic division of the human soul: Manfred Svensson, "Augustine on Moral Conscience," *The Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 1 (2013): 3-4.

24 For birds as phallic symbols, see: Ellen Lorraine Friedrich, "Queer Names and Experiences in Old French and Romance Literatures," in *Queering the Medieval Mediterranean: Transcultural Sea of Sex, Gender, Identity, and Culture*, eds. Felipe Rojas et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021): 130-138; and Allen J. Grieco, „From Roosters to Cocks: Italian Renaissance Fowl and Sexuality,» in *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 89-99.

25 Russian fur traders called beaver pelts "brown or soft gold" because of their high value and portability: Frank Rosell and Róisín Campbell-Palmer, *Beavers: Ecology, Behaviour, Conservation, and Managemen*t (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 39. The underfur or wool of the beaver made a more durable and lustrous felt than substitute fibers: John F. Crean, "Hats and the Fur Trade," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne de economiques et science politique* 28, no. 3 (1962): 375-378; and Robert Delort, *Le commerce des fourrures en Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge (vers 1300-vers 1450)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1978), 105-114, 338-343, 1072-1087.

26 By the end of the fourteenth century, promiscuous men and women were called "common as the street" in John Gower's *Confessio amantis*: Sarah Rees Jones, "Public and Private Space and Gender in Medieval Europe,» in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds. Judith M. Bennett et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 258. The Carthaginian founder of Western theology, Tertullian (died after 220), famously called women "the devil's gateway" (*De cultu feminarum* I.1.2): Carly Daniel-Hughes, *The Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for the Resurrection* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 63. For the negative implications of women sitting near doorways or loitering in the street without a purpose or male escort, see: Rinot, "Sin City," 118-122. Chatting at a wicket gate was an euphemism for vaginal penetration: Noah D. Guynn, "Sodomy, Courtly Love, and The Birth of Romance: *Le Roman D'eneas,*" in *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages*, edited by Noah Guynn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 83-84; and Sarah Wilma Watson, "Grace Holds the 'Clicket' to the Heavenly 'Wiket': *Piers Plowman*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and the Poetics of Penetration," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 30 (2016): 214-220.

27 The rider's red and black attire might refer to the proud cock of the walk in medieval literature: Louise O. Vasvári, "Fowl Play in My Lady's Chamber: Textual Harassment of a Middle English Pornithological Riddle and Visual Pun," in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, eds. Louise O. Vasvári et al. (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 1998): 127-132. After the marriage of Philip the Good of Burgundy to Isabella of Portugal in 1430, black broadcloth became more fashionable than expensive scarlet: John H. Munro, "The Anti-Red Shift—To the Dark Side: Colour Changes in Flemish Luxury Woolens, 1300-1550," in *Medieval Cloth-*

(ca.1340-1400): "In parti-colored clothes he sat, Beneath a Flemish beaver hat, His boots were of the finest sort, His proclamations round and short" (lines 271-274).[28] During the late Middle Ages, Flanders became a major felt producer, where beaver wool from Russia was imported to make wide brim hats like that in the *Portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy* by Jan van Eyck (ca. 1385-1441) (Fig. 9).[29] On one hand, the rider's finery might simply stand for the vice of vainglory.[30] On the other, "poor shifting sisters" who plied their needle skills in city streets to lure rich clients into tailor shops often moonlighted as prostitutes to earn extra money.[31] This promiscuous street scene introduces the courtyard of conscience in the votary panel and opposes the birds-eye-view of the Lenten market in the carpenter wing.

Fig. 9. Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy*, Flanders, c. 1436, oil on oak, 26 x 20 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

3. Double Duty: The Small Gatehouse

Fig. 10. Anonymous, Swallows nesting under castle eaves in *L'Acerba etas* by Cecco d'Ascoli, Italy, Fourteenth Century, tempera and ink on parchment, 19.0 x 27.5 cm, Biblioteca Medicae Laurenziana, Plut.40.52, fol. 39r, Florence.

The openings of rundown buildings often stood for the physical senses, because sin was thought to enter the body and corrupt the soul through the eyes, ears, nose, mouth and fingertips.[32] The Mérode

ing and Textiles, eds. Robin Netherton et al., III (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2007): 87-91.

28 Geoffrey Chaucer and Joseph Glaser, *The Canterbury Tales in Modern Verse* (Indianapolis, ID: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 28. Chaucer thought Flemings to be peddlers of flesh as well as fine hats and spectacles: Michael Hanrahan, "Flemings." in *A New Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019): 154-157. Merchants often hid concupiscence behind virtuous facades: James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 83-95. For the links between Chaucer's merchant, the spendthrift knight and the late medieval credit economy, where everyone was always in debt, see: Anne Schuurman, *The Theology of Debt in Late Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 50-57.

29 Wearing the prestigious collar of the Golden Fleece, a chivalric order founded by Duke of Burgundy in 1430, Baudouin de Lannoy — a Flemish councilor and chamberlain of Philip the Good — was the ambassador to the English court of Henry V (last accessed 3/25/24): https://id.smb.museum/object/869991/baudouin-de-lannoy-1388-1474. Separating beaver underfur or wool from the guard hairs and abrading the smooth keratin fibers with a felting bow were closely guarded trade secrets of late medieval hat makers from the Low Countries: Shannon McSheffrey and Ad Putter, *The Dutch Hatmakers of Late Medieval and Tudor London: With an Edition of Their Bilingual Guild Ordinances* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer Limited, 2023), 5-13. Beaver felt was shaped on moulds with hot water and steam. By the fifteenth century, felt hats were made for stock and export. For the contents of sixteenth-century hatter and bonnet shops in Bruges post-mortem and confiscation inventories, see: Isis Sturtewagen, "All Together Respectably Dressed: Fashion and Clothing in Bruges During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2016): 79-82; and Julie De Groot, *At Home in Renaissance Bruges: Connecting Objects, People and Domestic Spaces in a Sixteenth-century City* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2022), 60-62.

30 Chaucer's description also resembles the proud merchant who travels through streets full of temptation to reach the sinful heart of the medieval town: Lancaster, *The Book*, 177.

31 Among the male clothing displayed on the windowsill is a white linen shift or undershirt, which was probably made by the seamstress sitting next to the tailor shop: Mario DiGangi, "Sexual Slander and Working Women in *The Roaring Girl*," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 159. Female textile workers in low-paying jobs were occasional prostitutes: Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 54; and Derrick Higginbotham, "Producing Women: Textile Manufacture and Economic Power on Late Medieval and Early Modern Stages," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 194, note 28. By the end of the fifteenth century, the white linen undershirt hanging on a sill or rod became a marker for illicit sex: Eric De Bruyn, "The Iconography of Hieronymus Bosch's *St. Christopher Carrying the Christ Child* (Rotterdam)," *Oud Holland–Journal for Art of the Low Countries* 118, no. 1-2 (2005): 33.

32 *Le Portkin* (The Small Gatehouse) was the name of a fifteenth-century brothel in Sluis: Erik Spindler, "Were Medieval Prostitutes Marginals? Evidence from Sluis, 1387-1440," *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 87, no. 2 (2009): 248. The Latin word for door or *ostium* comes from the word for mouth or *os*. Like the door of a house, the mouth provides access to the interior of the body: Jütte, *The Strait Gate*, 53-54. For the metaphor of the body as a building whose openings let

gatehouse with its open door and broken window-panes is also a snare — a death trap for plump fledglings ready to fly the nest. Barred from owning noble dovecotes, Flemish burghers tempted wild migratory birds called passerines to nest both inside and outside tall buildings so that their chicks could become fat, panfried and eaten like "small butter pancakes" (Fig. 10).[33] The robin, magpie, goldfinch and great tit perched on the gatehouse roof and wall-walk ledge belong to the same class of birds as the sparrow.[34] Since antiquity, eating too many songbirds has signaled gluttony and lust.[35] The weathered gatehouse also taps into the imagery of the demonic fowler, who traps the unwary with sins of the flesh.[36] This metaphor of carnal temptation pairs nicely with the snares in the right wing of the Mérode Triptych, where Saint Joseph as the Virgin's husband plays an important role in baiting the mousetrap of the cross by concealing the divinity of Christ from the Devil.[37]

Fig. 11. Jan van Eyck, Detail of interior with city view in the *Annunciation* of the closed *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, 1432, oil on oak, 90.2 X 34.10 cm, St. Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium. © Lukasweb.be-Art in Flanders vzw, photo Hugo Maertens, KIK-IRPA.

During the late Middle Ages, birds flying to heaven conveyed different meaning than birds held in captivity. The closer birds flew to earth, the more dangerous their lives became.[38] Birds living in cotes like the Mérode gatehouse were free to come and go as they pleased, but their young were dead meat. Cityscapes teeming with birds like the view from Gabriel's window in the *Ghent Altarpiece* by Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441) stood for the natural law of procreation (Fig. 11).[39] The bas-de-page decoration of the *Visitation* in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* — a manuscript illuminated in Utrecht around 1440 for the Duchess of Guelders — links pregnancy to birds caught in fowling traps, with the unborn Baptist holding the strings of two clap nets that flank either side of his haloed

sin corrupt the soul, see: David Cowling, *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 45-46; and Janice Pinder, *The Abbaye Du Saint Esprit: Spiritual Instruction for Laywomen, 1250-1500* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020), 28-29, 96-98.

33 According to a medieval encyclopedia of natural science entitled *L'Acerba etas* (*The Bitter Age*), swallows are chatty birds who migrate during the winter and nest under the eaves of tall buildings to protect their young from predators: https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beastgallery255.htm. Sparrow towers and starling pots provided artificial nests to raise the young of these small migratory birds called passerines, a class of wild birds whose name comes from the Latin word for sparrow or *passer*: Mauro Ferri, "Ancient Artificial Nests to Attract Swifts, Sparrows and Starlings to Exploit Them as Food," in *Birds as Food: Anthropological and Cross-disciplinary Perspectives, eds. Frédéric Duhart* et al. (ICAF: Alimenta Populorum, 2018): 231-232; "Le 'rondonare': come attrarre i rondoni negli edifici, dal Medioevo ai nostri giorni," *Atti Società dei Naturalisti e dei Matematici di Modena* 149 (2018): 185-192; and Clément Alix and Sébastien Jesset, "Panorama des céramiques insérées dans les constructions orléanaises," *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique et Historique de l'Orléanais* 25, no. 186 (2021): 9-20.

34 The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Associate Curator of Arms and Armor mistook the yellow-breasted tit for a sparrow: Helmut Nickel, "The Man Beside the Gate," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 24, no. 8 (1966): 243.

35 For *Luxuria* and the eating of songbirds by the profligate son of Aesopus, the Roman tragedian, see Book IX.1: Valerius Maximus, *Valerius Maximus: Memorable Doings and Sayings*, ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), II, 295. Although passerines — creatures of the hot and humid air — could be therapeutic when eaten in moderation, excess consumption led to gluttony and lust: Allen J. Grieco, "From Roosters to Cocks," 110-122.

36 The theme of the demonic bird-hunter was ubiquitous during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, see: Shannon Godlove, "In the Words of the Apostle: Pauline Apostolic Discourse in the Letters of Boniface and his Circle," *Early Medieval Europe* 25, no. 3 (2017): 320-322; Benjamin G. Koonce, "Satan the Fowler,» *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959): 176-184; Jeroen Stumpel, "The Foul Fowler Found Out: On a Key Motif in Dürer's *Four Witches*," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* (2003): 146-156; and David Scott-Macnab, "Innocuous Drollery or Demonic Menace? The Fowler in the Margin of the *Très Riches Heures*," *The Mediaeval Journal* 8, no. 2 (2018): 41-55.

37 Saint Joseph's marriage to the Virgin Mary established Christ's descent from King David (Matthew 1:1-17) and concealed his divine paternity. Thürlemann speculated that the unfinished mousetrap on the table in Joseph's workshop alludes to Joseph's role in deceiving the Devil about his stepson's dual nature: Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 2002), 66. God angling for the sea serpent Leviathan (Job 40:20-28) with Joseph's lineage was closely associated with Augustine's mousetrap for the Devil, who swallowed the bait of Christ's death on the cross and was caught by the divine fishhook: Meyer Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli,' the Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1945): 182-183; and "A Note on the Merode Altarpiece." *The Art Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (1959): 327-328. For an excellent review of the angling trope in sacred and profane literature from Plato's *Timaeus* to John Donne's *Baite*: see: Eugene R. Cunnar, "Donne's Witty Theory of Atonement in 'The Baite'," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 29, no. 1 (1989): 79-85.

38 When the bird/soul flies high in contemplation, it is safe from the devious fowler. When it flies low, it becomes entangled in worldly affairs (Envy III.xxi.34-48): *Fasciculus Morum*, 278-279.

39 In the Annunciation of the *Ghent Altarpiece* on Gabriel's right, a Romanesque bifora window overlooks crenelated buildings with rows of small holes just below the ramparts for nesting songbirds (last accessed 3/26/24): https://artinflanders.be/sites/default/files/artwork/f05cf5bae69142df905ee175335774f6f72a6372fc7143be8d9aab10f4187daee-8dec99efa134aeabf838f8d6bdb2b4f.jpg. Near the space between panels, isolated birds flock with pilgrims congregating outside a hospice dedicated to Saint Christopher, who prevented sudden death without confession: Mikhail A. Rogov, "The Ghent Altarpiece and the Legend of Saint Christopher," *Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art* 13 (2023): 461-462.

cousin (Fig. 12).[40] John himself is surrounded by an open wattle fence. The fence or hide was yet another sign of the pregnant womb. Christ became flesh to free sinners from the traps of the demonic fowler, represented here by an angry red dragon looming in the foliage above the unborn Baptist.[41] The fowler's tethers, nets and cages were broken when the Devil took the bait of Christ's blood on the cross and shriven souls could fly to heaven singing joyfully: "Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we are delivered (Psalm 123:7)."[42] Birdcages also stood for the discipline of Penance, the protection of Mother Church, the hope of Heaven and the study of Holy Scripture.[43] To explore the imagery of fowling properly, we will go beyond scriptural commentary, devotional literature and courtesy books to include romantic prose poems and hunting manuals.[44] We shall find that Penance replaced the discipline of birdcages in the Mérode triptych to remind carefree youth that winter is coming.

Fig. 12. Master of Catherine of Cleves, Detail of *Visitation* border in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Netherlands, Utrecht, c. 1440, tempera, ink and gold on vellum, 192 x 130 mm, Morgan Library, Ms M.917/945, fol. 32r, New York.

4. The Courtyard of Conscience

The gatehouse in the votary wing is just one location on the spiritual map that marks the transition from a busy city street to the courtyard of conscience.[45] Hugh of Fouilloy (died ca. 1172) — a twelfth-century prior who wrote a popular moral treatise on birds for his lay brothers — called the open space between gatehouse and cloister "the court of renunciation," where initiates put aside worldly goods before converting from sin to grace in the cloister:

> "The righteous man is planted, flowers and bears fruit. He is planted *in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God*

40 The Visitation of the pregnant Virgin Mary and her elderly cousin, Saint Elizabeth, from the Hours of the Virgin was celebrated during Lauds (last accessed 3/28/24): https://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/collection/download/045-M945_031v-032r.jpg. Containers such as nests, nets and cages stood for the womb. They were also closely associated with natural desire, procreation and brothels: Greico, "From Roosters to Cocks," 94, 108; and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco, "Satyrs and Sausages: Erotic Strategies and the Print market in Cinquecento Italy,» in *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 32-35. This imagery persisted well into the early modern period: Eddy De Jongh, "A Birds-Eye View of Erotica: Double Entendre in a Series of Seventeenth-Century Genre Scenes," in *Questions of Meaning: Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, eds. Eddy de Jongh et al. (Leiden: Primavera, 2000): 25, 43-46.

41 Birds caught in nets and cages often stood for the divine soul imprisoned in fallen flesh. For the imagery of spiritual entrapment in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, see: David Scott-Macnab, "Augustine's Trope of the Crucifixion as a Trap for the Devil and Its Survival in the English Middle Ages," *Viator* 46, no. 3 (2015): 17-18. Romans of the late Republic who kept birds as pets developed the caged-bird metaphor of body and soul as well as the notion that birdcages could protect, discipline and educate souls: Frederick Jones, *The Boundaries of Art and Social Space in Rome: The Caged Bird and Other Art Forms* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 103-111. For a helpful overview of birdcage metaphors and the cloister during Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see: Kristin B. Aavitsland, *Imagining the Human Condition in Medieval Rome: The Cistercian Fresco Cycle at Abbazia delle Tre Fontane* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 270-294.

42 Unless otherwise noted, all English biblical quotes come from the Douay Rheims translation of the Vulgate. In the Epistle 22:3 to Eustochium, Saint Jerome stresses the importance of disciplining bodies with penance and prayer, so that souls can be delivered from the snares of the demonic fowler and soar with flights of angels (last accessed 10/12/24): https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001022.htm. Wild birds such as sparrows stood for erratic men ready for conversion by the Benedictine rule. When carnal desire was overcome by abstinence and reading scripture, the soul could fly to heaven on wings of contemplation: Hugh of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds*, 119 (Prologue I), 165-167 (Chapter 35: The Sparrow Snare), 169 (Chapter 37: The Sacrifice of the Sparrow), 209-212 (Chapter 46: The Swallow). For more on the spiritual divide between free and captive birds, see: Penny Howell Jolly, "Antonello da Messina's Saint Jerome in His Study: An Iconographic Analysis," *The Art Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (1983): 248-249.

43 Memory prompts such as birdcages were deep wells of remembrance. The phallus/bird in the cage/womb is a time-honored euphemism for sexual intercourse and marriage: Culture Decanted, "Semiotics of the Birdcage," (last accessed on 9/26/24): https://culturedecanted.com/2014/08/27/semiotics-of-the-birdcage/.

44 During the late Middle Ages, municipal schools funded by urban elites focused on teaching basic skills in Latin and vernacular: Sheffler, David. "Late Medieval Education: Continuity and Change." *History Compass* 8, no. 9 (2010): 1068-1070. Vernacular libraries contained secular as well as devotional literature. The 1413 Aubert inventory in Dijon included the *Roman de la rose*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and a bestiary or hunting book: Wilson, "The Household Inventory," 355-358. For the ownership of religious books and miscellanies by artisans in late medieval Tournai, see: Sabrina Corbellini and Margriet Hoogvliet, "Artisans and Religious Reading in Late Medieval Italy and Northern France (ca. 1400-ca. 1520)," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43, no. 3 (2013): 529-530. French was not only the language of the Burgundian dukes of the Valois, it was also the language of trade: Margriet Hoogvliet, "Religious Reading in French and Middle Dutch in the Southern Low Countries and Northern France (c. 1400-c. 1520)," in *Francophone Literary Culture outside France: Studies in the Moving Word*, eds. Nicola Morato et al. (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018): 324-325.

45 Medieval canon law had two forums — the public court of ecclesiastical law and the private court of conscience, also known as confession and penance. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 mandated that all Christians must confess their sins to their parish priest at least once a year before participating in communion on Easter Sunday. The internal court of conscience was initiated voluntarily and focused on purification by purging vice and cultivating virtue: Joseph Goering, "The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession," *Traditio* 59 (2004): 175-177.

> (Psalm 91:14). The house of our God is the house of conversion. Moreover, the court precedes the house since the court of renunciation comes before the house of conversion. For he who renounces the world plants the palm of victory by which he conquers the world in the courts of the house of the Lord."[46]

During the late Middle Ages, the public court of renunciation became the private court of the heart, where vice was uprooted like grass so that virtue could blossom.[47] The last Schoolman, Denis the Carthusian (1402–1471), made no reference to the forecourt metaphor in his commentary on *Plantati*. His gloss describes an atrium of justified hearts filled with lilies and the roses reminiscent of the Virgin Mary's enclosed garden:

> "Planted, that is, the faithful are rooted through faith and obedience, in the house of the Lord, that is, in the Church of Christ, in the courts of the house of our God, that is, in their own hearts, which are the courts of the divine dwelling. As the Apostle says, when Christ dwells in hearts by our faith, they will flourish, prospering in the grace of God and the apostles filling them up. Show yourselves holy and spotless and blameless before God: and elsewhere Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Moreover, this comparison agrees with what the Lord says through the prophet Hosea (14:5): 'I will be as the dew, Israel shall spring as the lily, and his root shall shoot forth as that of Libanus.' It is also similar in Ecclesiasticus (39:17): 'Hear me, ye divine offspring, and bud forth as the rose planted by the brooks of waters.'"[48]

Fig. 13. Master of the View of Saint Gudula, Young Man Holding a Book, Netherlands, c. 1480, oil on wood, 20.6 x 12.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession Number: 50.145.27.

Although roses bloom in the courtyard of the votary panel, the walled sward is not an enclosed garden symbolic of the Virgin Mary.[49] It is the court of conscience, where penitents recall their sins from memory and then inscribe them on their hearts before confessing to a priest. The heart is the seat of the soul, where conscience and reason struggle to transform carnal desire into love of God and one's neighbor.[50] The split architectural background of a

46 Psalm 91:14 refers to an atrium, an open space in the middle of a building. Hugh of Fouilloy placed the court in front of the house of conversion to reflect the layout of medieval monasteries: Hugh of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds*, 151 (Chapter 26: The Palm 3). A vicar of the Carmelite order, Michael Ayguan of Bologna (died 1416), mistook Hugh of Fouilloy for the Augustinian director of the Victorine School, Hugh of Saint Victor (ca. 1096-1141), in his commentary on Psalm 91:14, which not only referenced the forecourt of renunciation, but also the house of conversion planted with justified souls: Michael Ayguani, *Commentaria in Psalmos Davidicos auctoris incogniti, nunc vero cogniti* II (Venetiis: Apud Ioannnes Guerilius, 1601): 400EF. For the function of the cloister gatehouse as a monastic boundary between renunciation and conversion, see: Maximilian Sternberg, *Cistercian Architecture and Medieval Society* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 135-147.

47 Humans are like grass; they wither and die (Isaiah 40:7-8). Green grass often stood for the saved and dry hay, for fallen sinners: Mirella Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Firenze: Olschki, 1977), 166-168, 170. For grass and hay as biblical metaphors of transience, see: Robert Costomiris, "'A Cart that Charged was with hey': The Symbolism of Hay in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*," *Neophilologus* 104, no. 4 (2020): 593-591.

48 "Plantati, id est fideles per fidem et obedientiam radicati, in domo Domini, id est in Ecclesia Christi Christi, in atriis domus Dei nostri, id est in propriis cordibus, quae sunt atria mansionis divinae, quemadmodum ait Apostolus, Christum per fidem habitare in cordibus nostris, florebunt, proficiendo in gratia Dei: implentes illud Apostoli. Exhibete vos sanctos et immaculatos et irreprehensibiles coram Deo: et alibi. Renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae. Porro huic concordat comparationi, quod Dominus per Osee prophetam dicit: Ero quasi ros, et Israel germinabit quasi lilium. Erumpet radix eius ut Libani: ibunt rami eius, et erit quasi oliva gloria eius, et odor eius ut Libani. Simile quoque est in Ecclesiastico: obaudite me, divini fructus, et quasi rosa plantata super rivos aquarum fructificate: florete flores quasi lilium, et date odorem, et frondete in gratiam" (Psalm XCI:13): Denis the Carthusian, *Opera omnia: In Psalmos (XLIV–CL)* (Monstrolii: Cartusiae Sanctae Mariae de Pratis, 1898): 371C.

49 The Mérode forecourt is a permeable space with more references to virginity breached than protected. For the interpretation of the courtyard as the Virgin Mary's rose garden, see: Reindert Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the Merode Triptych," in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: a Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan Wynn Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001): 8-11; and Ingrid Falque, "'Mise en mots' et 'mise en image' de la progression spirituelle: Vers une nouvelle approche du portrait dévotionnel dans la peinture flamande de la fin du Moyen Âge," in *Fiction sacrée: Spiritualité et esthétique durant le premier âge moderne*, eds. Ralph Dekoninck et al. (Leuven and Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013): 309-311.

50 Scholastics divided the soul's moral sense into synderesis and conscience. Synderesis is the virginal portion of the soul untainted by the Fall that desires good, hates evil and makes man aware of his sinfulness: Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 10-11; and Gustav Zamore, "The Term Synderesis and Its Tranformations: A Conceptual History of Synderesis, ca. 1150-1450" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2016), 23. The Chancellor Jean Gerson (1363-1429) wrote extensively on the soul's moral sense, including two humorous morality plays for adolescents — *The School of Conscience* (*L'école de la conscience*) and *The School of Reason* (*L'école de la raison*), also known as *The Dialogue of the Heart and Five*

portrait by the Master of the View of Saint Gudula (active ca. 1485) suggests that the young gentleman holding a heart-shaped book has overcome temptation and confessed his sins in a church courtyard before receiving Holy Communion (Fig. 13).[51] Crenelated courtyards looked like fortresses on the outside and sanctuaries on the inside.[52] They were transitional spaces that allowed buildings as well as penitents, such as the couple in the votary panel, to reinvent themselves.[53]

5. Focus on the Male Votary

Art historians have shown more interest in the identity of the man and woman praying in the foreground than the confessional background of the votary panel. The moral ambiguity and painterly style of the triptych's left wing suggest that the panel was produced by an associate younger than Robert Campin. Rogier van der Weyden (ca.1399-1464) would have been a sympathetic choice because he was nearly thirty or about the same age as the male votary, whose receding hairline signals the end of youth and the beginning of maturity.[54] A municipal archivist first identified the male votary as Peter Ingelbrecht, a Cologne patrician with property and mercantile interests, who moved to Mechlin in 1453.[55] Peter was portrayed without a partner when the wings were commissioned, possibly as a gift to commemorate his marriage to Margarethe Schrinmechers between 1425 and 1428.[56] The bride's family name, which translates as cabinetmaker, might account for the upgrade in Joseph's profession from carpenter to fine woodworker in the right wing of the Mérode triptych.[57] The female votary and Mechlin

Senses (*Moralité du coeur et des cinq sens*) — where the students' lewd antics sorely tested the patience of nagging Conscience. Reason mediated between Conscience and the five physical senses by reminding the Heart that youth must learn to resist temptation on earth to reach heaven after death: Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, "Humour as a Teaching Tool in Jean Gerson's (1363–1429) Morality Plays," *European Medieval Drama* 20 (2016): 12-13.

51 The portrait might have originally been part of a devotional diptych (last accessed 3/29/24): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5e/Young_Man_Holding_a_Book_MET_DP282434.jpg. The heart-shaped book in the Metropolitan Museum's portrait of a young man strongly resembles a painting in London's National Gallery. The London portrait displays writing instruments on the ledge of a window as well as a different church and cemetery in the background: Guy Bauman, "Early Flemish Portraits 1425-1525," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 43, no. 4 (Spring,1986): 40-41; and Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 178-181. Before the introduction of box confessionals in the sixteenth century, confession usually took place in church precincts, where sins could be aired and purged without polluting sacred interiors: Dominique Iogna-Prat, "Topographies of Penance in the Latin West (c. 800–c. 1200)," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008): 165. For self-examination, confession and the opening of heart-shaped books, see: Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 114-126; and Elizabeth Marie Sandoval, "A Material Sign of Self: The Book as Metaphor and Representation in Fifteenth-Century Northern European Art" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2018), 273-290.

52 In medieval Flanders, elite tower residences were initially surrounded by garden courtyards bordering several streets on the outside and comprising a tall rectangular house and its outbuildings on the inside. The garden area was gradually reduced by the subdivision and rental of smaller houses facing the street, with the primary residence retaining courtyard access via a side street. Although elite houses were not fortified, the blank walls, crenellated courtyard and gatehouse entrance conveyed the idea of passive defense: Paulo Charruadas and Stéphane Demeter, "Vivre au château dans et autour de Bruxelles: Résidence princière et maisons fortes aristocratiques," in *Vivre au Château* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020): 69-70; and Marie Christine Laleman and Patrick Raveschot, "Maisons patriciennes médiévales à Gand (Gent, Belgique)," *Actes des congrès de la Société d'Archéologie Médiévale* 4, no. 1 (1994): 204-205.

53 The courtyard in the votary panel is a heterotopia: Robert Nelson, "The Courtyard Inside and Out: A Brief History of an Architectural Ambiguity," *Enquiry: The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research* 11, no. 1 (2014): 9. For the original paper on heterotopias, see: Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 26.

54 Thirty to thirty-three, or roughly the age of Jesus Christ during his ministry, was considered to be the prime of life for medieval men: Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012), 20. Frinta first speculated that the left wing was not painted by Robert Campin: Mojmír S. Frinta, *The Genius of Robert Campin* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 22-28. Several experts have suggested that Rogier van der Weyden — an apprentice/journeyman in Campin's workshop between 1427 and 1432 — might be Frinta's Hand B: Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 95-96; Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 64-65; and Stephan Kemperdick and Jochen Sander, *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, DE: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 195-200.

55 The coat of arms that decorates the left pane of the casement window in the Annunciation panel eventually led to the identification of the male votary as Peter Ingelbrecht, a wealthy Mechlin entrepreneur exiled from Cologne in 1453 because of his participation in the murder of a Polish monk. Peter lived to be almost eighty, had three wives and thirteen children, four of whom were illegitimate: Henri Installé, "Le triptyque Merode: Évocation mnémonique d'une famille de marchands colonais réfugiée à Malines," *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, 96/1 (1992): 74-84; and Stephan Kemperdick, *Der Meister von Flémalle: Die Werkstatt Robert Campins und Rogier van der Weyden* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 85-87.

56 Peter Ingelbrecht had two brothers, Heinrich and Rembolt. Any one of the three brothers might have bought the Mérode Annunciation and commissioned the wings to commemorate Peter's marriage. For example, Rembolt was originally identified as the male votary, because his birth in 1394 and occupation as a Mechlin merchant were recorded in several Tournai documents: Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 58, 70-71. A different patrician altogether might have originally purchased the central panel and commissioned the two wings before Peter Ingelbrecht acquired the *Annunciation Triptych* after he moved to Mechlin in 1453, when his family arms and those of his second wife were added to the glass panes of the casement window behind the Virgin Mary: Elizabeth C. Parker, "The Annunciation Triptych: How the Engelbrechts Saw It," *Studies in Iconography* 46, no. 1 (2025): 112-114.

57 Canting or talking arms in heraldry represent the bearer's name as a visual pun. For a discussion of the newly married couple's canting names, *Der Engel Brachte* (*The Angel Having Brought*) and *Schrein Macher* (*Cabinet Maker*), see: Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin: Das Mérode-Triptychon: Ein Hochzeitsbild für Peter Engelbrecht und Gretchen Schrinemechers aus Köln* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1997), 17, 36-38; and *Robert Campin*, 70-71. The medieval guild system divided woodworkers into three groups — sawyers, carpenters and joiners. Joiners produced furniture, including the oak support system of the Mérode triptych: Hélène Verougstraete, *Frames and Supports in 15th and 16th Century South-*

Fig. 14. Detail of male votary, beaver hat and door keys in the left wing of the *Annunciation Triptych.*

messenger were added later — perhaps as late as 1456 after Peter Ingelbrecht's second marriage to Heylwich Bille of Breda.[58] However, if the female votary is Peter's new wife, her costume is twenty-five years out of date.[59] The cut of her clothes suggests that the sitter is Peter's first wife, Margarethe Schrinmechers, who might have been inserted in the votary panel a few years after the wings were initially completed, with the coats of arms being added to the casement window panes in the Annunciation panel after the votary's second marriage. The problem with this theory is that Peter did not move to Mechlin until he was exiled in 1453. Why would a Mechlin messenger be added to the votary panel at the same time as Peter's first wife, who lived and died in Cologne? To avoid confusion, we will proceed with our analysis of the panel's memory prompts as if the left wing were never reworked and assume that the votary is Peter Ingelbrecht. Excluding the wife and messenger will make our walk through the court of Peter's conscience more straightforward. Prompts like the courtyard were tailored to individuals so that they could remember their sins, prepare for confession and amend their behavior.[60]

6. The Half-Open Door

In the foreground of the votary panel, Peter Ingelbrecht kneels on a dirt path in front of three sandstone steps (Fig. 14). The steps lead to a wooden door that swings outward like the cover of a book or diptych.[61] Kneeling on the ground signals humility, the foundation of virtuous living.[62] The number and rise of the steps link the panels of the Mérode Triptych to the classic stages of spiritual ascent — purgation in the votary wing, illumination in the carpenter wing and union in the Annunciation panel.[63] Doors that swing out are less secure than doors that swing

ern Netherlandish Painting (Brussels, Belgium: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), 2015), 1-7.

58 The Mechlin messenger and coat of arms in the right pane of the casement window in the Annunciation panel argue that the female votary is Heylwich Bille of Breda, with whom Peter had been living before their marriage in 1456 after the death of his first wife in Cologne: Nickel, "The Man," 239-242; Installé, "Le triptych Merode," 78-84; and Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 72-73.

59 For the problem of the wife's anachronistic clothing, see: Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 95. The clothing of the pious woman in *The Moneychanger and his Wife* by Quentin Matsys (1466-1530) is intentionally old-fashioned to reference traditional religious values: Annette LeZotte, "Moralizing Dialogues on the Northern Economy: Women's Directives in Sixteenth-Century Genre Imagery of the Antwerp Marketplace," in *Genre Imagery in Early Modern Northern Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Arthur J. DiFuria (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 54-57. Scholars usually identify the female votary as Peter Ingelbrecht's first wife, Margarethe Schrinmechers. Although this identification eliminates the problem of anachronistic clothing, it suggests that the messenger standing beside the gate was added in 1456 after Peter married his second wife, Heylwich Bille of Breda, or around the same time as the couple's coats of arms were added to the two glass panes in the rear window of the Annunciation panel: Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture and Spiritual Experience in Early Netherlandish Painting: Catalogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), CCCLVII (Cat. 429).

60 While the Book of Hours was popular with women, men preferred devotional portrait diptychs to guide meditation: Andrea Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art*, 1350–1530: Experience, Authority, Resistance (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 3-8. Auricular confession was sealed and therefore difficult to document: Michael E. Cornett, "The Form of Confession: A Later Medieval Genre for Examining Conscience" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 18-22.

61 Diptychs and triptychs were articulated or hinged pieces of furniture with wings that pivot along an axis. They were accompanied by hierarchical instructions for opening and closing. Painted around 1432 shortly after the wings of the Mérode Triptych, the lower *Ghent Altarpiece* by Hubert van Eyck clearly defines the difference between the temporal space of the donors on the outside and the sacred space of the Mystic Lamb on the inside of doors that open and close: Verougstraete, *Frames and Support*, 157-186; and Lynn F. Jacobs, *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 42-43. For the metaphor of opening a book and the wounding of Christ's body on the cross, see: Alexa Sue Amore, "Open Book, Broken Flesh: The Victoria and Albert Museum's Gothic Ivory Devotional Booklet as Simulacral Wound," *Athanor* 37 (2019): 82-83.

62 In the late thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) recovered the derivation of humility from Latin word for dirt or *humus* by citing the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), II-II, q. 161 a. 1 ad 1. The Virgin of Humility seated on the ground made her appearance during the next century. For the journey of Humility from the Queen of virtue to a companion of chastity, see: María Elvira Mocholi Martínez and María Montesinos Castañeda, "Humility: Virgin or Virtue?," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021)1019: 6-13 of 19; https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12111019. For the Early Christian concept of humility as dying to self, see: Kent Dunnington, *Humility, Pride, and Christian Virtue Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3-8.

63 According to Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221-1274) in *The Triple Way* (De triplici via), virtue cleanses; truth enlightens, and love unites: Liam Andrew Farrer, "Enkindling the Seraphic Fire Within: A Lonerganian Analysis of the Franciscan Charism of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio" (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2015), 66-72. The early Church Fathers also divided souls on the journey to God into beginners, proficients and perfected. For more on the literature of fallen man's return to God and the visual vocabulary of ascent, see: Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture and Spiritual Experience in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 2019), 110-112, 167-175. The most influential theologian of the fifteenth century, Jean Gerson, referred to the Pseudo-Dionysian paths of purification, illumination and perfection as grades in the school of God: Casagrande and Vecchio, "Les passions," 107-108.

in, because their hinges are on the outside and are therefore more easily broken. Here the position of the door blocks physical access to the house of conversion, which belongs first to God, then to the Holy Family and finally to the soul. The half-open door, which stands for the hope of eternal life, might also show the early stage of the male votary's spiritual progress.[64]

Although dressed in black, the color of humility and contrition, Peter is wearing several expensive accessories.[65] They contradict the advice that Jesus Christ gave his disciples to earn their provisions on the road by good works: "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses. Nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff; for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matthew 10:9-10). In contrast to Peter's plain leather belt, his girdle purse and knife case are studded with silver mounts that signal wealth and privilege.[66] The rosebud pinned to the costly — albeit smaller — beaver hat, which Peter holds close to his heart, can refer both to praying the rosary and deflowering a virgin.[67] Stubborn sins of the flesh would explain the large scale of the votary relative to the doorway.[68] Like a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle, Peter Ingelbrecht will have to unload all his worldly possessions before entering the kingdom of heaven (Luke 18:25).

7. The Keys to the House of Conversion

The door to the house of conversion has been unlocked by one of two keys strung on a leather ring. The keys refer to the power of penance to bind and loose sinners — to close and open the doors of the earthly Church and the heavenly Kingdom:

> "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19).

The leather cord represents the mediation of Jesus Christ, whose skin was flayed and beaten like animal hide to redeem our sins.[69] The two keys also stand for the active life of good deeds and the contemplative life of sacred reading.[70] In addition to the

64 The wicket framing the street in the far background and half-open door in the foreground of the votary panel establish the early stage of the Peter Ingelbrecht's spiritual development compared to that of Ludovico Portinari who prays above a fortified courtyard in the 1479 Diptych by the Master of the Legend of St. Ursula: Falque, *Devotional Portraiture*, 200-203. The half-open door signaled the passage from life to death during antiquity: Britt Haarløv, *The Half-Open Door: A Common Symbolic Motif within Roman Sepulchral Sculpture* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 1977), 55-56. Christ's donation of the keys that open and close the gate of heaven to St. Peter replaced the half-open door in early Christian art: Roald Dijkstra, "Imagining the Entrance to the Afterlife: Peter as the Gatekeeper of Heaven in Early Christianity," in *Sacred Thresholds: The Door to the Sanctuary in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emilie M. van Opstall (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 197-204.

65 During the patristic period, the pagan custom of wearing black to funerals was viewed as incompatible with the Christian promise of eternal life. Liturgical black nevertheless survives in the Roman rite for Good Friday and funeral masses: Alfred C. Rush, "The Colors of Red and Black in the Liturgy of the Dead," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Ouasten*, eds. Patrick Granfield et al., II (Münster: Verlag Ascchendorff, 1970): 702-707. The meaning of black was expanded to include cloistral austerity and penitential sorrow in the Middle Ages. Black can also represent earth and signal humility, because *humus,* the Latin root of the virtue, is where dead bodies are buried: Jane Schneider, „Peacocks and Penguins: The Political Economy of European Cloth and Colors,» *American Ethnologist* 5, no. 3 (1978): 421-426; and Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 63-67.

66 For the theme of exchanging possessions for the gold of a clear conscience, see the prominent wallet of the kneeling magus and alms giving in Rogier van der Weyden's Columba Altarpiece: Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece," 439-443. In fifteenth-century Flanders, wealthy elites wore purses attached to leather belts decorated with bling: Annemarieke Willemsen, "'Man is a sack of muck girded with silver': Metal Decoration on Late-Medieval Leather Belts and Purses from the Netherlands," *Medieval Archaeology* 56, no. 1 (2012): 171-172. Painted shortly before the Mérode triptych, the Dance of Death in the Holy Innocents Cemetery of Paris associated the Burgher, Usurer and Merchant with fat purses and fur hats. Although the Paris *Danse Macabre* was destroyed in the seventeenth-century, both text and illustrations were published around 1475 in Guyot Marchant's woodblock prints: Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 6-8; and Clifford Davidson and Sophie Oosterwijk, *John Lydgate, the Dance of Death, and Its Model, the French Danse Macabre* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 206 (Master and Burgher: Woodcut 8, fol. 5v); 207 (Canon and Merchant: Woodcut 9, fol. 6r); and 209-210 (Monk, Usurer and Poor Man: Woodcut 11, fol. 7r).

67 According to Robert de Sorbon, founder of the college of Sorbonne in Paris, the quality of charity, which derives from the Latin genitive of *carus* or dear, depends upon the price of the object that one holds dearest: Diekstra, "The Language of the Marketplace," 350-353. For the earliest association of the Word *Ave* with María and a chaplet or little hat of roses in the thirteenth-century, see: Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 100-103. The rosary or little rose hat was the mystery gift in a clever sixteenth-century table play (*Een tafelspeilken op een Hoedeken van Marye*) written for the Bruges milliners guild by Cornelius Everaert (died 1556): Bart Ramakers, "Books, Beads and Bitterness: Making Sense of Gifts in Two Table Plays by Cornelis Everaert," in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Sabrina Corbellini et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015): 145-153. In medieval prose poems, plucking a rosebud covered everything from stealing a kiss to deflowering a virgin: Suzanne Lewis, "Images of Opening, Penetration and Closure in the *Roman de la Rose*,» *Word & Image* 8, no. 3 (1992): 239-241; and Karen Jean Bezella-Bond, "Florescence and Defloration: Maytime in Chaucer and Malory" (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 2003), 48-49, 141-143.

68 Such visual discrepancies were devotional tools or devices that encouraged viewers to seek spiritual meaning. For more on the tendency of some art historians to interpret compositional ambiguity in early Netherlandish painting as clumsy rather than intentional, see: Falque, *Devotional Portraiture*, 226-227.

69 Leather book covers and parchment pages were compared to the crucified body of Christ: Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "The Lacerated Body of the Book: Bloody Animation of the Passion in a 15th Century Devotional Book," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (2022): 13. For derma relics and redemption, see: Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen, "Skin Christ. On the Animation, Imitation, and Mediation of Living Skin and Touch in Late Medieval Contact Imagery," in *Touching, Devotional Practices, and Visionary Experience in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. David Carrillo-Rangel et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 188-197. Dead animal hides represented mortified flesh or penance (Chapter 22: The Hawk's Cord): Hugh of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds*, 147.

70 During the late Middle Ages, many sections of the Bible were translated into vernacular to help lay participation in the

Fig. 15. Detail of the Dreamer in the Stowe Roman de la Rose. Photo: PICRYL

front door, the active key unlocks the interior door to Joseph's workshop on the second floor of the house and the contemplative key, the Virgin's solar at the top of the stairs.[71] The active key — the key of David and good works — refers to the Law of Moses known also as the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. Born of King David's line, Christ opened the door of divine law when he died on the cross and rose from the dead so that the Old Testament could be read both literally and spiritually:

> "...These things saith the Holy One and the true one, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, shutteth and no man openeth: I know thy works. Behold, I have given before thee a door opened, which no man can shut: because thou hast a little strength and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name" (Apocalypse 3:7-8).[72]

The design of the contemplative key is also significant. The IHΣ bit, which slides into the keyway and unlocks the door, is a Greek monogram comprised of the first three letters in the name Jesus (IHΣOYΣ), which means salvation.[73] The heart-shaped bow that lets the bit be turned in the lock stands for the double law of charity — the love of God and one's neighbor — which opens the door of the New Testament in the Virgin Mary's solar.[74]

8. The Cultivated Rosebush

Because the love of God and the love of self intermingle in the human heart, evil cannot be eradicated in this world. It must be tolerated until Judgment Day (Matthew 13:36-43). The rosebush — an ancient symbol of sacred and profane love — was planted deep in the courtyard near the crenelated wall and is taller than the Mechlin messenger standing next to the gatehouse wicket.[75] Although not as pervasive as the pink roses that fill the mind of the dreaming lover in the Stowe *Romance of the Rose*, the bush is so large that it competes with the half-open door for Peter Ingelbrecht's attention (Fig. 15).[76] Like the rosebud pinned to the votary's beaver hat, which probably

spiritual life. According to the French *Somme le roi*, a manual of religious instruction written around 1279 by a Dominican friar for the children of the King Phillip III of France, testing virtue in the active life comes before advancing to the contemplative life: Sabrina Corbellini and Margriet Hoogvliet, "Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Late Medieval Europe: Translation and Participation," in *Texts, Transmissions, Receptions*, eds. A. P. M. H. Lardinois et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015): 273-274.

71 The front door in the votary panel is shorter than the adjacent door jamb in the Annunciation panel. This mismatch shows that one does not lead directly to the other. The door to the house is clearly on the ground floor. The view from Joseph's workshop indicates a position somewhere in between the entry level and Mary's solar. As the soul climbs the stairs, she approaches heaven: Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture*, 107-110, 182-190. For more on locational imagination and the upward thrust of spiritual ascent in early Netherlandish art, see: Thor-Oona Pignarre-Altermatt, "What Approach to Flemish Annunciations?" *Arts* 11(1), 33 (Special Issue 'Flemish Art: Past and Present', 2022): 14-16 of 20.

72 Christ is the Mediator between the Old and New Testaments, who unlocked the spiritual meaning of sacred scripture: Dorothy Haines, "Unlocking *Exodus* 11. 516-532,» *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 98, no. 4 (1999): 484-494. Although Carla Gottlieb discussed David's key (Isaiah 22:22 and Apocalypse 3:7-8), she did not explore the rich patristic commentary on Christ as the key to understanding both Testaments. However, she did note that Christ ceded the keys to heaven and hell (Matthew 16:19; Apocalypse 1:18) to both the Virgin Mary (the Door to Paradise) and St. Peter (the Gatekeeper of Heaven): Carla Gottlieb, "*Respiciens per Fenestras*: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," *Oud Holland–Journal for Art of the Low Countries* 85, no. 1 (1970): 68-73.

73 Carla Gottlieb noted that an IHS key opened the door to the courtyard, because the Greek letter Σ translates as the Latin letter S: Gottlieb, "*Respiciens per Fenestras*," 68-73.

74 For the imagery of the heart-shaped bow, see: Elliott Daniel Wise, "Painterly Vernacular and Pictorial Piety: Rogier van der Weyden, Robert Campin, and Jan van Ruusbroec" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2016), 306-309.

75 The rosebush is 2.0 to 2.5 meters tall. The shrub's magnification makes the species difficult to identify: Piotr Kulesza, *Plants in 15th-Century Netherlandish Painting: A Botanical Analysis of Selected Paintings* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2014), 32. For an overview of rose symbolism, see: Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden*," 330-355.

76 Detail Stowe 947, f.1r (last accessed 3/16/23): https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=5448.

signals contrition for sex outside marriage, the roses are double coded.[77] Red roses often stood for the wounds of Christ.[78] Meditation on Christ crucified comforted hearts like Peter Ingelbrecht's that were wounded by concupiscence.

9. Wayside Weeds

Fig. 16. Detail of sward in the left wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

The green sward at the bottom of the votary panel is a collection of transient couch grass (*Elymus repens*) and eight specimen weeds that provide food for nesting songbirds.[79] The contrast between two outsized plants — the field chickweed (*Cerastium arvense*) and sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) — might refer to the tolerance of evil in the parable of the cockle, where noxious weeds and desirable plants are grown together until Judgment Day, when angels will separate the good from the bad.[80] Called *mouron des oiseaux* (chickenfeed) and *oreille de souris des champs* (field mouse-ear) in French — the chickweed probably refers to the bird and/or mouse traps in the left and right wings of the Mérode triptych, respectively (Fig. 16).[81] Conversely, the violet next to the field mouse-ear often represents humility as well as confessors of the faith.[82] A late fifteenth-century illumination from *The Book of Simple Medicines* in the National Library of France shows the sweet violet underneath a plant labeled *janete sauvaige* (savage janet) that looks like field chickweed (Fig. 17).[83] The proximity of these two outsized plants in the sward suggest that the votary knew more savage Janets than sweet Violets as a bachelor. The relative size of the two plants mirrors the relationship between the large merchant and small door to the soul's house of conversion. This differential suggests that the penitent must labor in the workshop of redemption to offset his sins with good deeds. The other six weeds — red clover, silverweed, greater plantain, heath speedwell, wooly-leaved crowfoot and daisy — are all drawn to scale and have utility as both seed and medicine.[84]

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77 Notice that the clipped rose hedge in the Virgin's enclosed garden grows unchecked in the votary panel of Hans Memling's late fifteenth-century *Diptych with Virgin and Child with Four Angels* (left shutter) and *Donor with St. George* (right shutter) in Munich's Alte Pinakothek (last accessed 1/14/2025): https://www.kikirpa.be/en/friedlaender/1210.

78 For the imprinting on the heart of a red rose whose petals represent the five wounds of Christ, see: Johanna Pollick, "The Flowering Wound: Christ's Heart in Princeton University, MS Taylor 17," in "'Your Body Is Full of Wounds': References, Social Contexts and Uses of the Wounds of Christ in Late Medieval Europe," *Science Museum Group Journal* 15 (Spring 2021): https://doi.org/10.15180/211503. Henry of Lancaster compared the distillation of rosewater to compassionate meditation on the suffering Christ: Catherine Batt, "Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Book of Holy Medicines*: The Rhetoric of Knowledge and Devotion," *Leeds Studies in English* (2006): 410-411; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Holy Medicine and Diseases of the Soul: Henry of Lancaster and *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*," *Medical History* 53, no. 3 (2009): 406-407; and Outhwaite, *Christ the Physician*, 48-50.

79 Although the eight identified species usually do not grow together, they all colonize ruderal areas such as roadsides, where the previous biomass has been partially or entirely destroyed. Except for the sweet violet, which blooms in the early spring, most of these plants flower in May and June. Missing details hindered firm identification of two species — a forget-me-not and a wild strawberry: Kulesza, *Plants*, 26-35. Except for the marguerite or daisy, whose mature seeds feed sparrows during winter, similar weeds nourished doves and pigeons in a modern field study: R. K. Murton, N. J. Westwood, and A. J. Isaacson, "The Feeding Habits of the Woodpigeon *Columba Palumbus*, Stock Dove *C. Oenas* and Turtle Dove *Streptopelia Turtur*," *Ibis* 106, no. 2 (1964): 181-186.

80 Matthew 13:24-30. Medieval tolerance was both a moral virtue and a political practice that permitted lesser evils, such as prostitution, so that souls were not overwhelmed by greater evils, such as lust (Augustine, *De ordine*, 2.4.12). Among the Stoics and early Christians, tolerance was close to patience and endurance. Thomas Aquinas expanded the moral virtue of tolerance to include permission or forbearance: István Bejczy, "Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 3 (1997): 370-372; Manfred Svensson, "A Dirty Word? The Christian Development of the Traditional Conception of Toleration in Augustine, Aquinas, and John Owen," in *Secularization, Desecularization, and Toleration: Cross-Disciplinary Challenges to a Modern Myth*, eds. Vyacheslav Karpov et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 44-52.

81 The etymology of "mouron des oiseaux" is uncertain. The term can be used to describe a number of plants, including the starweed (*Stellaria media*), which lacks the telltale notch in the flower petals of the field chickweed, but has leaves shaped like mouse ears: Marcel Coquillat, "Sur quelques noms patois de plantes," *Publications de la Société Linnéenne de Lyon* 31, no. 3 (1962): 76. Herbalists use the edible starweed as an astringent to reduce skin irritation: Michael S. Defelice, "Common Chickweed, *Stellaria media* (L.) Vill.—'Mere Chicken Feed?'," *Weed Technology* 18, no. 1 (2004): 196-197.

82 According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the demure violet, which flowers in late March, represents humility because it is small, grows in low places, smells sweet and wears a dark color (*Vitis mystica*, XVII.53-54): *Patrologia Latina* (PL), ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 184.667C-668D (1879). Hrabanus Maurus compared purple violets to confessors (*De universo*, Book XIX, Chapter VIII): Migne, PL, 111.528BC (1864). For violets as symbols of the Virgin Mary as well as the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ, see: Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden*, 398-401. Violets have the virtue of moistening, softening, cooling and letting go. To put a patient suffering from acute fever to sleep, bathe the feet and forehead with a still warm decoction of violet leaves: Platearius, *Le livre*, 126-127, 351.

83 No text goes with the plant labeled as *janete sauvaige* (savage janet) in BnF Gallica Ms. 12322, fol. 165r (last accessed 3/30/24): https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52517049r/f315.item/f315.jpeg?download=1. The author of the facsimile edition noted a resemblance to *stellaire holostée*, the greater stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea* L., reclassified in 2019 as *Rabelera holostea* L.). The stitchwort has more deeply notched petals or mouse ears than those in the illumination: Platearius, *Le livre*, 126-127, 349.

84 The marguerite or daisy near the second limestone step might refer to Peter Ingelbrecht's first wife, Margarethe or Margaret, whose family name, Schrinmechers, means cabinetmaker. Daisies stand for the Blessed in Heaven, the innocence of the Christ Child and St. Peter's keys or penance: Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden*, 124-126.

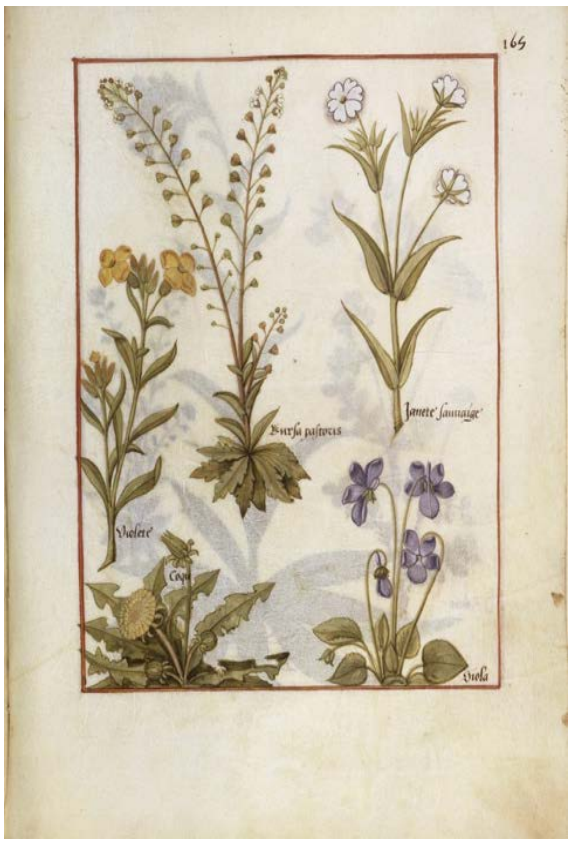

Fig. 17. Mattheus Plantearius, *Livre des Simples* Médicines, France, c. 1500, parchment, 340 x 258mm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, BnF Français 12322, fol. 165v, Paris.

10. The Romance of the Rose

The courtyard garden of the Mérode votary panel also draws inspiration from the *Romance of the Rose* — an allegory of courtship and seduction written in the thirteenth century by two French poets — Guillaume de Lorris, who composed the first verses around 1235, and Jean de Meun, who completed the poem forty years later. One of the foundational works of French literature, the *Romance of the Rose* tells the story of a noble youth who falls asleep reading *The Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* by the pagan philosopher Macrobius, a Roman provincial who flourished around the turn of the fifth century.[85] The young man dreams of rising early the next morning and taking the easy path to Pleasure. Surrounded by Maytime, the dreamer strolls through a greenwood and chances upon a crenelated garden, which he enters at the behest of Lady Idleness through a narrow wicket. Once inside the Garden of Pleasure, the dreamer dances a carol and meets Cupid, the god of irrational desire, whose green robe encodes the fertility of Nature.[86] After meeting Cupid, the youth sees a reflection in the Fountain of Narcissus — the rosebush from which he will pluck the most perfect bud at the end of his quest (Fig. 18).[87] Many of the poem's harbingers of spring — the blushing dawn, the singing birds, the green sward, the blooming rosebush and the pink souvenir attached to the brim of Peter Ingelbrecht's hat — define the season of the votary panel. The rosebud also suggests that only penitence and meditation on the Passion can save young sinners like Peter from the world, the flesh and the Devil.[88]

Fig. 18. Anonymous, Lover finding his rosebud in the *Roman de la Rose*, France, c. 1380, tempera, ink and gold on parchment, 27.0 x 18.0 cm, British Library, ADD Ms. 31840, fol. 14r, London.

When the dreamer falls in love with the perfect rosebud reflected in the Fountain of Narcissus, he becomes an irrational bird caught in a trap:

> "Cupid, the son of Venus, sowed the seed of love that has dyed the whole fountain, here that he stretched his nets and placed his snares to

[85] The Neoplatonist commentary of Macrobius on the *Somnium Scipionis* by Cicero (106-43 BCE) distinguished prophetic dreams from non-prophetic. In a vision set among the stars, the dead grandfather of Scipio the Younger predicts that his grandson will conquer Carthage and warns the youth that heavenly virtue lasts longer than earthly glory: Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio,* trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 87-92 (Macrobius III). Macrobius classified erotic dreams like the *Romance of the Rose* as non-prophetic nightmares not worthy of comment (Macrobius I, iii): Charles Dahlberg, "Macrobius and the Unity of the *Roman de la Rose,*" *Studies in Philology* 58, no. 4 (1961): 577. For more information on dating the two parts of the *Romance of the Rose*, see: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1-2.

[86] Cupid's green robe is covered with tiny flowers, lozenges, little shields, animals and birds (lines 865-906). The lozenge and other elements stand for generation, Mother Nature's drive to procreate. For the grid, lozenge and trellis as becoming, reproduction and the power of creation see: Barbara Baert, *About Sieves and Sieving: Motif, Symbol, Technique, Paradigm* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 63-70.

[87] A fourteenth-century French manuscript in the British Library contains a rare illumination (Additional 31840, f. 14r) of a rosebud reflected in the crystal Fountain of Narcissus (lines 1425-1680) (last accessed 4/1/24): https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2016/04/everythings-coming-up-roman-de-la-roses.html. Although the rosebush is reflected in the water, the Lover only sees one perfect bud: Lewis, "Images of Opening," 225-226.

[88] During the *Quarrel of the Rose*, John Gerson criticized the pilgrimage allegory of deflowering the rose as a perversion of commentary on sacred scripture: Gabriela Badea, "Allegories of Selfhood in Late Medieval Devotional Literature" (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 2018), 151-152.

trap young men and women; for Love wants no other birds."[89]

Fig. 19. Anonymous, Trapping birds with clap nets in the *Livre du Roy Modus et la Royne Ratio by Henri de Ferrières*, France, after 1354, tempera, ink and gold on parchment, 305 x 215 mm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, BnF Français 12399, fol. 89r, Paris.

The baiting of nets with grain is a fairly simple fowling technique as shown in the *Books of King Method and Queen Reason*, a late fourteenth-century hunting manual written in Old French by Henri de Ferrières (Fig. 19).[90] The treatise warns readers that the fowler who nets birds is like the devil who traps souls. Delights of the flesh are the decoys and whistles that lure the unwary. Flesh is the birdlime — the sticky substance smeared on clap nets and bare branches — that holds sinners fast. According to Queen Reason, only Penance can loosen the bond between fallen flesh and original sin:

"Birdlime is such that when it is softened it cannot stick to or capture anything. So it is with the flesh: when the flesh of Man is diluted with the tears of contrition and repentance it can capture nothing except that which is its own by right and reason, and so that the evil lust of the flesh, the great enemy of Man, is destroyed. And so, if you would defend yourself against these three enemies, the world, the flesh and the Devil, clothe yourself in these three things: Faith, Hope and Charity; and be armed likewise with three weapons: Confession, Repentance and Contentment. And thus your enemies will be powerless to do you harm or hurt."[91]

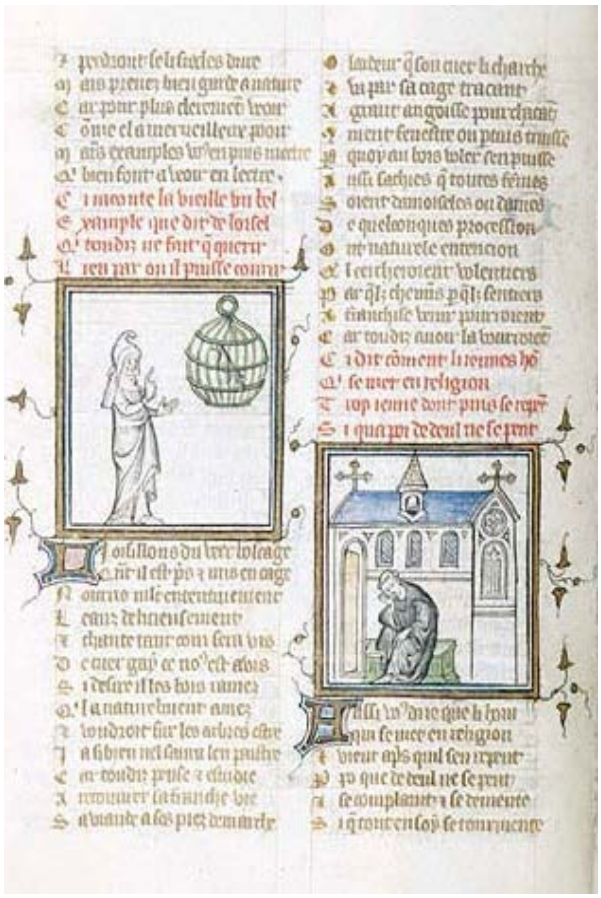

Fig. 20. Anonymous, Old Woman with a caged bird and a Young Monk repenting his vows in the *Roman de la Rose*, France, c. 1380, grisaille on parchment, 20.2 x 13.8 cm, Morgan Library, Ms. M. 132, fol. 102v, New York.

Other traps in the *Romance of the Rose* include the birdcage of the deceitful Old Woman, who strips away the genteel veil of courtly love to expose the foul underbelly of man's desire for wealth and pleasure. She also warns vigorous young men that they might regret entering the cloister (Fig. 20).[92] The birdcage

89 Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance*, 52 (lines 1586-92). The inability to see oneself clearly in the mirror of self-love — the trap of misrecognition — is critical to understanding the imagery of the carpentry panel, where the memory prompts on the worktable help the male votary to avoid the snares of the Devil: Jonathan Morton, *The Roman de la Rose in Its Philosophical Context: Art, Nature, and Ethics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 144-151.

90 The first book is a hunting manual; and the second, a battle between virtue and vice. Hunters used different lures, including tethered decoys of the opposite sex, to capture live birds in clap nets (BnF Français 12399 folio 89r) (last accessed 10/27/23): https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10515896h/f181.item/f181.jpeg?download=1. Biblical nets can be metaphors of divine justice and salvation as well as demonic snares: Jacqueline Stuhmiller, "Hunting, Hawking, Fowling, and Fishing," in *Handbook of Medieval Culture* II, ed. Albrecht Clausen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015): 713-714.

91 Birdlime was only one of the ingenious methods used by medieval fowlers to capture wild birds: John Cummins, *The Art of Medieval Hunting: The Hound and the Hawk* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2003), 247. When discussing original sin and the innocence of young boys during the *Debate of the Rose*, Jean Gerson compared Pierre Col and his fellow royal secretaries to birds caught in lime: Joseph L. Baird and John Robert Kane, *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978), 146.

92 Both the bird and the monk were enclosed to learn discipline (Morgan Library, Ms. M.132, fol. 102v) (last accessed 10/28/23): http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/39/77345. The

Fig. 21. Detail of the gatehouse and four songbirds in the left wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

is a container metaphor that can shape thinking for better or worse. In the *Romance of the Rose*, the cage stands for the constraints of society that curb the soul's natural desire to be free:

> "When the bird from the green wood is captured and put into a cage, very attentively and delicately cared for there within, you think that he sings with a gay heart as long as he lives; but he longs for the branching woods that he loved naturally, and he would want to be on the trees, no matter how well one could feed him. He always plans and studies how to regain his free life. He tramples his food under his feet with the ardor that his heart fills him with, and he goes trailing along his cage, searching in great anguish for a way to find a window or hole through which he might fly away to the woods. In the same way, you know, all women of every condition, whether girls or ladies, have a natural inclination to seek out voluntarily the roads and paths by which they might come to freedom, for they always want to gain it."[93]

In the *Book of the City of Ladies* and *Book of Three Virtues* by Christine de Pisan (1364-1430) — the first self-published woman of letters in medieval Europe — the birdcage is a city and the architect of the city, a wise bird-catcher.[94] Under the guise of the feminine fowler, Christine not only defends the reputation of ladies against the slander of the Old Woman in the *Romance of the Rose* but also builds a bridge between nature and civilization. The city is a place of learning — where women preaching the three virtues of Reason, Rectitude and Justice teach wild male birds how to become good citizens.

11. Educating Nature

Fowlers often encouraged male birds to roost near cotes to lure fertile females into empty nest boxes (Fig. 21). Each of the four birds in the votary panel stands for a man in the triptych.[95] The closer the bird is to the weathered gatehouse, the closer the individual, to sins of the flesh. The red breast of cock robin, for example, is the same color as the jacket worn by the merchant, who is also a harbinger of spring.[96] The white and black feathers of the magpie signal the vacillation of Peter Ingelbrecht between good and evil. His higher self seeks forgiveness in the house of conversion, while his lower half longs for sex in the

grisaille illuminations in this manuscript were created during the last decade of the fourteenth century, just before the great debate erupted between John Gerson, Christine de Pisan and the defenders of the *Roman de La Rose*: Melanie Garcia Sympson, "Experiment and Visual Transformation in Illuminated Manuscripts of the *Roman de la rose*, c. 1338–c. 1405" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 155-197.

93 Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance*, 239 (Lines 13,938–66). The example of a caged bird is taken from *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius (died 524), where the desire for freedom stands for the soul's natural inclination towards goodness: Morton, *The Roman*, 65-68.

94 Fabienne Pomel, "L'architecte et l'oiseleur. Usages genrés de la ville et métaphore de la cité chez Christine de Pizan," in *Littérature urbaine. Donnée culturelle médiévale ou concept de l'histoire littéraire?*, eds. Ludmilla Evdokimova et al. (Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2022), 317-324. For a comparison between Christine's wise fowler and John Gerson demonic bird catcher, see: Earl Jeffrey Richards, "Jean Gerson's Writings to His Sisters and Christine de Pizan's Livre des trois vertus: An Intellectual Dialogue Culminating in Friendship," in *Virtue Ethics for Women 1250-1500*, eds. Karen Green et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011): 89-93.

95 Nickel related the robin, magpie, goldfinch and great tit to the homunculus, Gabriel, Mary and Joseph, respectively: Nickel, "The Man," 243-244.

96 The sound of robins migrating announced the change of seasons: Helen F. Wilson, *Robin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), 73. Robin redbreast was the cock bird in an anonymous English poem written around 1400. The poem imitated Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, where the robin was dismissed as "the tame ruddock" (line 349): W. B. Lockwood, "The Marriage of the Robin and the Wren," *Folklore* 100, no. 2 (1989): 237-238. The robin occasionally replaced the goldfinch as the bird that removed spikes from Christ's bloody crown of thorns: Robert Fletcher, "Myths of the Robin Redbreast in Early English Poetry," *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 2 (1889): 112-113; and Herbert Friedmann, *A Bestiary for Saint Jerome: Animal Symbolism in European Religious Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), 288-289.

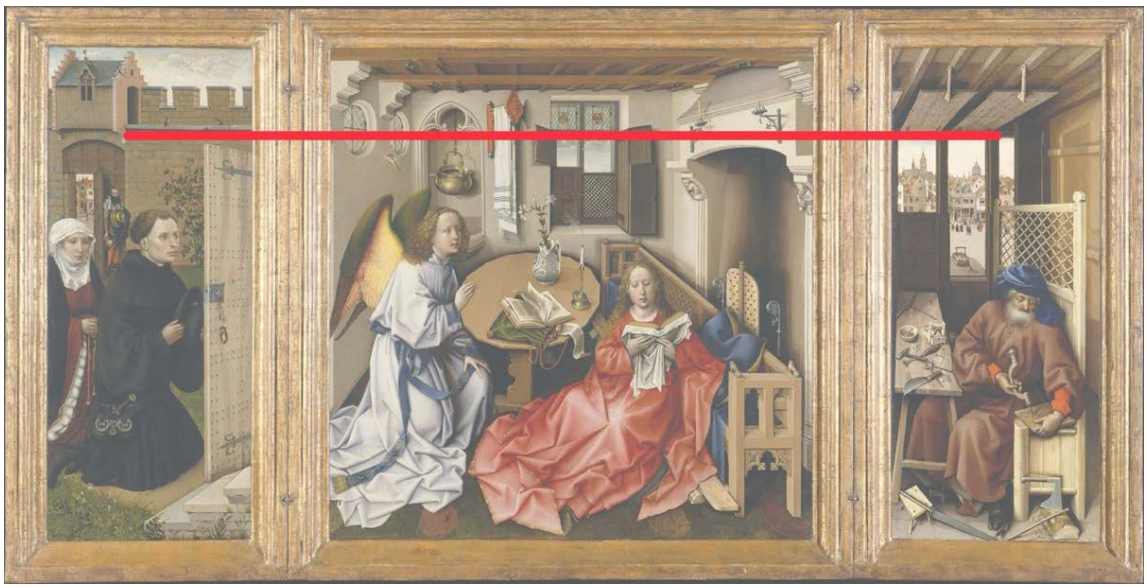

Fig. 22. Photoshop overlay showing the alignment of the gatehouse, mullion and louvers in the three panels of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

city.[97] The goldfinch roosting on the ramparts near the great tit signifies Christ the Redeemer, who bled to save mankind from original sin.[98] The yellow-breasted tit represents the credulity of Saint Joseph, the first Jew to confess the newborn Christ.[99] Although free of the Devil's snare, none of these birds have flown far from the weathered gatehouse. Only souls who meditate on the mystery of redemption like Saint Joseph can fly toward heaven singing joyfully (Psalm 123:7). The goldfinch and great tit perch on a ledge that links the votary and carpenter panels. A line of energy extends from the intersection of the gatehouse and ledge through the horizontal mullion of the Virgin's casement window to the space between the rust-stained louvers and fenestration in Joseph's workshop (Fig. 22). The louvered windows resemble the doors of a birdcage. Open windows and doors stood for the physical senses that permit both sin and light to enter the cage/body. The first corrupts, while the second purifies.

12. Just Joseph: The Keeper of David's Key

A just man lives by faith and does not mistake material for spiritual goods. Just men nonetheless see through a glass darkly.[100] Before an angel confirmed the virginal conception of Christ in a prophetic dream, Saint Joseph considered the messianic promises made to his ancestor King David (2 Samuel 7:14) and decided to break his engagement secretly to protect the pregnant Mary and her unborn child:

> "So the angel called him 'son of David,' that he might know what had been promised to the house of his father David. What was promised? Undoubtedly, that from his house would be born the Messiah promised in the Law. 'How would he be born?' Not by the assistance of a man, but of a virgin woman. 'Why did he believe that?' Because he believed in God to whom he could say with his ancestor David: 'I cling to your teachings, O Yahweh!' Indeed, he clung to the testimonies of the prophets, he clung to the prophet Isaiah and he believed in him; to put it more accurately, it was in God whom he believed, announcing through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (Isaiah 7:14), which means 'God with us,' that is to say, a God-man among men. Joseph therefore believed that Christ, both God and man, would be born of the family of

97 The Latin word *poetica* (poetic) comes from *pica* (magpie). Magpies were associated with poetry, because they can imitate the sound of a human voice (XII.vii.45): Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephan A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2010), 267. The talkative magpie was a clever thief caught between faith and disbelief: Friedmann, *A Bestiary*, 269-270. For more on vacillating magpies — one trapped in a cage next to the tavern and the other grounded behind a closed gate on the tondo's right — see: Przemysław Kisiel, "'The Wayfarer' ('The Pedlar') by Hieronymus Bosch as an Archetypal Image of an 'Other-Stranger,'" *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* 16, no. 2 (2020): 54, 58.

98 The European goldfinch with red feathers surrounding its beak loves to eat thistles and was therefore widely identified with the sacrificial blood of Christ and his crown of thorns first in medieval France and then throughout Europe: Herbert Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Decotional Art* (Washington, DC: Pantheon Books, 1946), 9-10; and Friedmann, *The Bestiary*, 220.

99 A divine cuckold, Joseph of Nazareth trusted prophetic dreams about Mary's miraculous pregnancy and accepted his supportive role in Christ's redemptive mission: Francesca Alberti, "'Divine cuckolds': Joseph and Vulcan in Renaissance Art and Literature," in *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe (15th–17th century)*, ed. Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (London and New York: Routledge, 2018): 157-162; and Anne L. Williams, *Satire, Veneration, and St. Joseph in Art, c. 1300-1550* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 225-229. The inverted tit hanging next to an owl in several Bosch paintings was probably an example of misplaced trust, see: Kisiel, "'The Wayfarer'," 57. For the negative symbolism of inversion in medieval art, see: Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5-7. Yellow is the color of aged parchment and often associated with the Old Testament and the Synagogue: Michel Pastoureau, *Yellow: The History of a Color* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 130-131.

100 In the eleventh glory of Saint Joseph, Pierre D'Ailly explained why angels spoke to Joseph in dreams. Joseph saw through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12) compared with the Virgin Mary, who communicated directly: Pierre d'Ailly, "Les Douze Gloires de Saint Joseph," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 1, no. 2, 1953: 325.

> David and of a virgin and was thus justified by his faith. It is for this reason that he was called righteous. It is also by the same faith that we are justified, believing as already accomplished what he believed ought to be afterwards."[101]

The noble Joseph did not simply believe in a dream or even an angel. He trusted in God, who banished doubt from his heart and replaced it with purpose. Just Joseph was a bridge — the last patriarch in the Old Testament and the first convert in the New. Like Saint Peter and the bishops who bind and loose sinners, Joseph protected the key of David that unlocked the Ten Commandments so that they could be read spiritually.[102] Joseph's wisdom and chastity made him a role model for young men like Peter Ingelbrecht who struggled to resist temptation and become justified.[103]

13. The Workshop of Redemption

Winter — the season of Lent and old age — has come to the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*, where a red-eyed Joseph bores a diamond pattern with a brace drill into a rectangular block of wood (Figs. 23).[104] Dressed like a prosperous tradesman in a brown houppelande, scarlet doublet, blue chaperone and metal pattens, the elderly Joseph is an artisan of souls.[105] His drilling portends the Crucifixion of Christ, who will be nailed to the cross by sinners such as himself. Sinners will bore pilot holes with an auger to make hammering nails through Christ's hands and feet easier. They will insert a gouge between flesh and wood so that pliers can extract nails from crucified limbs. The knife refers to the Old Testament rite of Circumcision, when the newborn Christ first shed blood and Joseph named his stepson Jesus so that he could "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).[106] The knife, pliers, gouge, hammer, nails and auger on Joseph's workbench surround the famous

101 For a French translation of the original Latin text concerning the seventh honor of justification from *De duodecim honoribus sancti Joseph* by Pierre d'Ailly, the mentor of Jean Gerson, see: Pierre d'Ailly, "Les douze gloires de saint Joseph," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 1, no. 1, 1953: 160. An English version of the *Twelve Honors* was condensed for use in the Carmelite Breviary: Pierre D'Ailly and Robert F. McNamara, "The Twelve Honors which God Bestowed on St. Joseph," St. *Joseph Lilies*, 34, no. 1 (1945): 22-25. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) praised Joseph's wise and noble heart — his faith, holiness and devotion — in a homily on Luke 1:26-27 (Homily II.16) in *De laudibus virginis Mariae*: Migne, PL, 183.69C-70C (1879).

102 St. Bernard hailed Joseph as "the son of David" — a key link between messianic promise and redemption in the same homily on Luke 1:26-27 (Homily II.16) where he praised his wisdom and nobility: Migne, PL 183.70A (1879). Joseph was the keeper of the key to the Old Testament, not the key itself as the Franciscan Peter John Olivi (1248-1298) speculated in his *Postilla* on Matthew: Francis L. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1962), 498. For St. Joseph as a type of St. Peter, see: Sheila Schwartz, "St. Joseph in Meister Bertram's Petri-Altar," *Gesta* 24, no. 2 (1985): 151-153; and Carol M. Richardson, "St Joseph, St Peter, Jean Gerson and the Guelphs," *Renaissance Studies* 26, no. 2 (2012): 243-249.

103 Joseph the Just is a delegate figure who helps the beholder to recognize himself in Christ and lead a virtuous life: Mitchell B. Merback, *Perfection's Therapy: An Essay on Albrecht Dürer's Melencolia I* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 110-113. The righteous Joseph was compared with a palm tree planted in the courts of the house of the Lord (Psalm 91:13-14). These verses were associated with Joseph as early as the thirteenth century in the third nocturne of an early Office and Mass for Joseph the Guardian written at the Saint-Laurent monastery in Liege: Maria Parousia Clemens, "Joseph Custos: The Role of Saint Joseph in a Thirteenth-Century Office and Mass for His Feast," *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 27, no. 1 (2023): 110. Three centuries later, the first verse of this pericope — "Istus ut palma florebit" (The just shall flourish like the palm tree) introduced the Mass for the Feast of Saint Joseph on March 19 in the Roman Missal of Pius V (1570): Joseph F. Chorpenning, "Ars laudandi, Francis de Sales's Picture of St. Joseph's Sanctification, and Its Emblematic Adaptation by Adrien Gambart," *Emblematica: Essays in Word and Image*, I (2017): 150-151.

104 The perforated block of wood has a checkered history of interpretation. Panofsky thought that Joseph was making the lid of a foot warmer: Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 164, note 12. Freeman, De Tolnay and Russell believed that the wood would become the spike-block that bloodied Christ's legs and feet as he carried his cross to Golgotha: Margaret B. Freeman, "The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, no. 4 (1957): 138; De Tolnay, "L'autel Mérode," 75; and Malcolm Russell, "The Woodworker and the Redemption: The Right Shutter of the 'Merode Triptych'," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 39, no. 4 (2017): 344-345. Schapiro noted that Joseph might be drilling holes in the cover of a fisherman's bait box: Schapiro, "A Note," 327. Zupnick thought that Joseph was making a maze mousetrap: Irving L. Zupnick, "The Mystery of the Mérode Mousetrap," *The Burlington Magazine* 108, no. 756 (March, 1966): 130. Minott drew attention to the receptacle for the suitors' rods in the Hoogestraten *Betrothal of the Virgin*: Charles Ilsley Minott, "The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 51, no. 3 (1969): 268, note 14. Heckscher first suggested that Joseph might be making a second fire screen: William S. Heckscher, "The Annunciation of the Mérode Altarpiece: An Iconographic Study," in *Miscellanea Jozef Duverger: bijdragen tot de kunstgeschiednis der Nederlanden* I (Ghent: Vereniging voor de geschiedenis der textielkunsten, 1968): 48; Daniel Arasse, "A propos de l'article de Meyer Schapiro, Muscipula Diaboli: Le 'réseau figuratif' du rétable de Mérode," in *Symboles de la Renaissance*, ed. Daniel Arasse (Open Edition Books, 2020): 105-109; and 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, no. 1 (1986): 60. Lavin interpreted the board as the strainer at the bottom of a winepress: Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "The Mystic Winepress in the Mérode Altarpiece," in Studies in Late Medieval and *Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, eds. Irving Lavin et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1977): 299-301.

105 In a commentary on Luke, the Bishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose (ca. 339-397), viewed Joseph the carpenter as a type of God the Creator — a Christian craftsman who trims vice and perfects virtue: Migne, PL 15.1589AC. For an English translation of the Latin text and Joseph as the earthly shadow of the divine craftsman, Creator of heaven and earth, who calls all Christians to repent, see: Cynthia Hahn, "Joseph as Ambrose's Artisan of the Soul in the Holy Family in Egypt by Albrecht Dürer," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte Berlin* 47, no. 4 (1984): 517; Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 55-61; Merback, *Perfection's Therapy*, 113-115; and Carolyn C. Wilson, "*Nunc faber alter adest*: Cristoforo Bianchi's Emblematic Engraving from 1597 and the Saint Joseph Altarpiece of 1603 by Giovanni Barbiani of Ravenna," *Artibus et Historiae* 40, no. 80 (2019): 253-263.

106 The Circumcision took place eight days after the Nativity on December 25. Gerson's mentor, Pierre d'Ailly, compared Joseph to an evangelist for publishing the name Jesus and heralding the good news of salvation on the first day of the Julian New Year, or January 1: Pierre D'Ailly, "Les douze glories," *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 1, no. 2, 1953: 319-321. The knife frequently seen among the *arma Christi* usually stood for the Circumcision — the first shedding of Christ's blood, which redeemed Adam's original sin and protected against lechery: Mary Agnes Edsall, "Arma Christi Rolls or Textual Amulets?: The Narrow Roll Format Manuscripts of 'O Vernicle'," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 9, no. 2 (2014): 192-193; and Ann W. Astell, "Retooling the Instruments of Christ's Passion: Memorial Titian, St Thomas the Twin, and British Library Additional MS 22029," in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle'*, eds. Andrea Denny-Brown et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016): 179.

mousetrap of the cross, where Christ paid the bloody price of redemption.[107]

Fig. 23. Robert Campin, Right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*, Southern Netherlands, 1427-1432, oil on oak, 64.5 x 27.3 cm, Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

14. The Scandal of the Cross

Joseph is making another trap to test the faith of sinners — the scandal of Christ crucified: "For both the Jews require signs: and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).[108] The English noun scandal derives from the Greek for offense (*skandalon*) and the Latin for trap, snare or obstacle (*scandalum*) that impedes conversion to Christianity.[109] False gods in the Old Testament became Jesus Christ in the Gospels — the scandal that challenges wealthy young men such as Peter Ingelbrecht to exchange all their gold and silver for eternal life (Mark 10:23-30).[110] Margaret Freeman first identified Joseph's plank of wood as the stumbling block that bloodied the footsteps of Christ on his way to Golgotha.[111] Trip-blocks hanging from ropes tied around Christ's neck and waist originally appeared in a group of Dutch manuscripts illuminated during the early fifteenth century.[112] As the motif spread across Northern Europe, so did the number

[107] The Mérode mousetraps sparked tremendous interest among art historians after Meyer Schapiro found the metaphor's source, the sermons of Saint Augustine of Hippo: Schapiro, "*Muscipula Diaboli*," 184-185; and "A Note," 327-328. The device on Joseph's worktable has a spring mechanism that is cross shaped. The trap on the window display looks like a gallows and/or door. Both mousetraps lack components of their set/release mechanism and therefore cannot function: David C. Drummond, "Unmasking Mascall's Mouse Traps," *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference* 15, no. 15, 1992: 233. An abridged version of Augustine's *muscipula diaboli* from Sermon 130 reached Joseph's workshop via a series of medieval texts, including Lombard's *Sentences* and Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The medieval mousetrap of the cross was baited with Christ's blood rather than his body: Russell, "The Woodworker," 348-350. For the bloody price of redemption, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 195-209.

[108] For commentary on the Pauline text and the curse of the cross, see: David McCracken, *The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story, and Offense* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28-31; and Robin M. Jensen, *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 1-24. Paul's stumbling block is prefigured in the Psalms. For the Lesson of the metaphorical stumbling block that is read during the Mass of the Pre-Sanctified on Good Friday (Psalm 139:6), see: Phillip Jeffrey Guilbeau, "*Iuxta Iter Scandalum*: The 'Wayside Stumbling-Block' in Late Medieval Passion Imagery," *Studies in Iconography* 27 (2006): 89-95. The table cursed by the Law (Galatians 3:13) was set with a snare, mousetrap and stumbling block (Psalm 68:23): Russell, "The Woodworker," 348-349.

[109] For the etymology of the scandalous stumbling block in the Old Testament, see: McCracken, *The Scandal*, viii-ix; and Guilbeau, "*Iuxta Iter Scandalum*," 90. An anchoress rule book written in the early thirteenth century called the *Ancrene Wisse* defined scandal as "anything done or said so as to incite others to sin" (Part VI.386-388). This failure to support the spiritual health of fellow Christians opposed the theological virtue of charity in the New Testament. The capital sin of scandal began to assume its modern meaning of slander or defamation during the late Middle Ages: Lindsay Bryan, "Scandle is heaued sunne," *Florilegium* 14, no. 1 (1996): 71-73.

[110] The warning that money is the root of all evil (1Timothy 6:10) pervades the New Testament. The remedy for avarice is the sacrament of Penance and almsgiving. The failure to give alms was a scandal. Following the advice of Jesus to the wealthy young man to increase his treasure in heaven, Peter Ingelbrecht, distributed all his possessions to the Church, his third wife and thirteen children before his death in 1476: Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 72-73.

[111] Freeman, "The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece," 138. Marrow disagreed with Freeman's suggestion, because instruments of torture associated with the Crucifixion were out of place in an Annunciation triptych: 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 Co., 1979), 175. Anne van Buren cited the tiny spirit of Christ bearing his cross in the central panel of the Mẹrode triptych and promptly added Joseph's device to Marrow's extensive list of spike-block art: Anne Hagopian van Buren, "Review of *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, by James H. Marrow," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no.3 (September, 1982): 511.

[112] The trip-block appeared in the northern Netherlands around 1410. It did not begin spreading throughout Western Europe until the second half of the fifteenth century: Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, 171-172; and Guilbeau, "*Iuxta Iter Scandalum*," 79-80.

Fig. 24. Master of Catherine of Cleves, *Christ Carrying the Cross* and the *Preparation of the Cross* in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Netherlands, Utrecht, c. 1440, tempera, ink and gold on vellum, 192 x 130 mm, Morgan Library, Ms M.917/945, fol. 63v and 64r, New York.

of blocks and nails. For example, *Christ Carrying the Cross* in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* has two spike-blocks (Fig. 24).[113] Early Netherlandish passion texts associated the stumbling blocks with the rectangular patches of embroidery called apparels attached to the front and back hems of a priest's alb.[114] It took nearly six centuries after the comparison of stumbling blocks to apparels in the late Middle Ages for a medieval art historian, Phillip Jeffery Guilbeau, to link spike-blocks with biblical scandals.[115]

15. The Sacred Language of Geometry

As Joseph drills holes to pilot the long nails in the wooden cup on his worktable into the stumbling block of Christ crucified, he is creating a diagonal grid to hide the divinity of his stepson, who will fall physically, but not morally, on his way to Golgotha. Variations of this apotropaic pattern repeat throughout the *Annunciation Triptych*.[116] Here the lozenge shape refers to the Incarnation — the manifestation of Christ within his creation.[117] Joseph is adding a fourth point to an equilateral triangle, a symbol of the Trinity.[118]

113 Christ carrying the cross and the seated Christ waiting for death present two of the three most important devotional moments in the Good Friday narrative — (last accessed 12/9/23): https://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/collection/download/081-M945_063v-064r.jpg. The third most important scene was Christ crucified on Mount Calvary: Joanka van der Laan, "Enacting Devotion: Performative Religious Reading in the Low Countries (ca. 1470-1550)" (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 2020), 222.

114 Introduced in the thirteenth century, apparels are also attached to the cuffs of the alb and the front edge of a priest's amice: Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, *Vestments for all Seasons* (New York and Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 30. Marrow rejected the apparel origin story in favor of an obscure commentary on the fringed phylacteries of Hebrew scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:4-5): Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, 181-189.

115 Although Minott linked the snare in Psalm 139:6 to Augustine's mousetrap metaphor, he did not associate Joseph's device with the wayside stumbling block: Minott, "The Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," 268. During the sixteenth century, the spike-block imagery was replaced by the the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15: Guilbeau, "*Iuxta Iter Scandalum*," 90-95.

116 Williamson also noticed the repetition of the diagonal grid in all three panels, including the broken panes of the cote and the ocular windows of the solar: Jack Hamilton Williamson, "The Meaning of the Merode Altarpiece" (Masters Thesis, Michigan State University, 1982), 129-131. The apotropaic lozenge protected openings such as windows, doors and hearths from misfortune. See the integrated AM symbol on chimney lintels in: Timothy Easton and Jeremy Hodgkinson, "Apotropaic Symbols on Cast-Iron Firebacks," *Journal of the Antique Metalware Society* 21 (2013): 29. The lozenge pattern was also woven into the fabric of the Temple curtain in the Holy of Holies that was torn at the moment of Christ's death. It refers to the starry firmament that connects heaven and earth (Hebrews: 9:8). The torn curtain of Christ's body allowed scripture to be read spiritually as well as literally: Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 56-63; and Lea, "Clean Hands," 242.

117 Joseph's genealogy prefaces Matthew and ends before the first mention of Christ's name in the New Testament: Benjamin C. Tilghman, "Ornament and Incarnation in Insular Art," *Gesta* 55, no. 2 (2016): 158-163. The lozenge might also refer to the Resurrection of Christ: Anna Gannon, "Lies, Damned Lies and Iconography," in *Making Histories: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Insular Art*, University of York, July 2011, ed. Alexandra Jane Hawkes (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013): 294-298.

118 The Greek letter delta or "D" is shaped like an equilateral triangle, which often represented *Deus* or the Trinity in Insular manuscripts: Benjamin C. Tilghman, "The Shape of the Word: Extralinguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering," *Word & Image* 27, no. 3 (2011): 292-293. Although triangular compositions did not become commonplace until the Renaissance, the geometry's interpretive potential was recognized and exploited during the early Middle Ages: Warren Sanderson, "Geometry on a Carolingian Wall," in *Ad Quadratum: The Practical Application of Geometry in Medieval Architecture*, ed. Nancy Y. Wu (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 17–18. For the sporadic history of the trinitarian triangle during the Middle

Fig. 25. *Chi Rho Iota* in the *Book of Kells*, Ireland, c. 800, colored ink and gold on vellum, 300 x 255 mm, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ms f5, fol. 34r. Dublin.

Fig. 26. *Omnes Ergo Generationes* in the *Book of Kells*, Ireland, c. 800, colored ink and gold on vellum, 300 x 255 mm, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ms f5, 31r, Dublin.

Two such triangles joined at their bases create a rhombus with four equal sides like those of a square. The upright triangle or blade signals male power and Fire; the inverted triangle or chalice, female receptivity and Water.[119] The rhombus or lozenge comes from the *Vesica Piscis* — the almond-shaped fish bladder formed when two circles of equal size share the same radius.[120] In the ninth-century *Book of Kells*, the crossing of the Greek *Chi or X* — the first letter of *Xpi* or Christ's genitive name— creates an animated rhombus (Fig. 25).[121] Several folios before the Christogram of Matthew 1:18, a more straightforward diamond doubles as the "O" of *Omnes ergo generationes* — a visual pun on "all the generations" of Christ from Abraham to Joseph of Nazareth (Fig. 26).[122] The yellow and purple lozenge outlined in red dots is the first letter of the last verse that ends the list of the Messiah's progenitors (Matthew 1:17).[123] Four open circles in the middle of the lozenge form a cross and represent the Word of God revealed in the Gospels.[124]

Ages, see: Rebecca Zorach, *The Passionate Triangle* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 51-67.

119 The relationship between the diagonals of the rhombus formed by the fused equilateral triangles has a square root of three. Here the rhombus refers to the Incarnation of Christ. Plato regarded the triangle as the basis of all matter, with each element having a triangular shape: Zorach, *The Passionate Triangle*, 13. The symbol for Air is an upright triangle with a line through its apex; the symbol for Earth, inverted Air: Farrin Chwalkowski, *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture: The Soul of Nature* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 99.

120 *Mandorla* — the halo of divine light that often surrounded holy figures in Early Christian and Medieval Art — means *almond* in Italian. For more on the symbolism of the rhombus derived from the *Vesica Piscis* or fish bladder as well as Pisces, the last sign of the Zodiac that marks the end of the seasonal year on the vernal equinox, see: Rachel Fletcher, "Musings on the Vesica Piscis," *Nexus Network Journal: Architecture & Mathematics* 6, no. 2 (2004): 95-99; and Todorova Georgieva Rostislava, "The Migrating Symbol: Vesica Pisces from the Pythagoreans to the Christianity," in *Harmony of Nature and Spirituality in Stone: Proceedings, 17-18 March 2011, Kragujevac, Serbia*, ed. Violeta Cvetkovska Ocokoljic (Belgrade: Stone Studio Association, 2011): 218-227.

121 *Xpi* (Chi rho iota) — the sacred name of Christ — starts the Gospel of Matthew 1:18 after the book of generations (last accessed 7/21/24): https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/iiif/2/nc-580n09f/files/d2b21a14-d9a5-40fd-8204-236ff2d30d76/fcr:versions/version1/full/2527,/0/default.jpg. The genitive name is often mistaken for the victorious Chi-rho monogram carried by the Emperor Constantine at the Milvian Bridge: Carol A. Farr, "The Sign at the Cross-Roads: The Matthean Nomen Sacrum in Anglo-Saxon Gospel Books before Alfred the Great," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 16, 2009: 77. The letter "X" was a common trope for Christ or cross as in Xmas: Tilghman, "Ornament," 295-296. For more on the lozenge as a symbol of the Logos in Carolingian Art, see: Ildar H. Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300-900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 256-257.

122 *Omnes ergo generationes* (Matthew 1: 17) initiates the last verse of Matthew's genealogy of Christ (last accessed 7/21/24): https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/iiif/2/5138jf30t/files/b5339dd1-e5eb-43a3-9d3f-0c09eccbbda5/fcr:versions/version1/full/2367,/0/default.jpg. There are two ancestries of Christ in the New Testament — the genealogy ending with Joseph of Nazareth in Matthew 1:1-17 and the genealogy of the Virgin Mary beginning with her husband Joseph in Luke 3:23-38. The two ancestries move in opposite directions. The Matthean descent stands for the Incarnation of Christ to bear our sins; the Lucan ascent, his Crucifixion to pay for them: Farr, "The Sign," 82-84; and Tilghman, "Ornament," 163-164.

123 The yellow gold and purple lozenge refers to Christ's divinity and humanity, respectively: Jennifer O'Reilly, "Signs of the Cross: Medieval Religious Images and the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Early Medieval Text and Image* II, eds. Jennifer O'Reilly et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019): 314. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, parchment stood for flesh and Incarnation; yellow gold, for the sun and royalty; and purple red, for blood and Crucifixion: Heather Pulliam, "Color," *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 5-6, 9-10.

124 The early Church Fathers used the square and rhombus to express the fourfold nature of the cosmos as well as the harmony of the Gospels. The equilateral cross could also represent the four directions, seasons, elements and properties of the macrocosm as well as the four humors and ages of the human microcosm: Anna C. Esmeijer, *Divina Quaternitas: A Preliminary Study in the Method and Application of Visual Exegesis* (Assen: Gorcum, 1978), 33; Rachel Fletcher, "The Geometry of the Zodiac," *Nexus Network Journal* 11, no. 1 (2009): 110-125; and Jennifer O'Reilly, "Patristic and Insular Tradition

Although five centuries and distance separates the art of early medieval Britain from that of late medieval Flanders, the sacred language of geometry persisted well into the early modern period, as can be seen by the graphic symbols of heaven and earth stamped on the respective blades of the axe and saw at Saint Joseph's feet (Figs. 27).[125] The three-point triangle and equal-armed cross are Christian craft marks. The triangle of circles was imprinted on the tools of artisans who had completed their journeyman training.[126] The cross was traditionally hammered on medieval money.[127] Throughout the Middle Ages, the equal-armed cross was the signature of a Christian as well as an invocation of divine authority.[128]

Fig. 27. Detail of the equal-armed cross on the saw blade and three-point triangle on the axe blade in the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

16. Woodworking Basics: How to Make a Useful Bench

The still-life in the foreground of the carpenter panel teaches contrite souls woodworking basics. The axe, saw and rod on the floor of the Mérode workshop refer to the wicked Assyrians, the tools of God's retribution against the Israelites who worshipped pagan idols: "Shall the axe boast itself against him that cutteth with it? or shall the saw exalt itself against him by whom it is drawn? as if a rod should lift itself up against him that lifteth it up, and a staff exalt itself, which is but wood" (Isaiah 10:15).[129] In a commentary on this passage, Saint Jerome explains why God punishes idolatry with diabolical tools. He fells trees, strips bark and divides wood to bring proud sinners to repentance:

> "But whatever is said to the Assyrian can be referred both to the arrogance of the heretics and to the devil, who is called an axe, a saw and a rod in the Scriptures. For through him fruitless trees are cut down and divided, and the hardness of unbelievers will be sawn through, and those who do not accept correction are struck with a rod."[130]

Stamped with the equal-armed cross and three-point triangle, the saw and axe in the Mérode still-life belong to Christians, not idolators.[131] Working with wood was a divine craft in the view of Saint Augustine's mentor — Bishop Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397) — who compared Joseph the artisan to God the Creator:

Fig. 28. Ravenna Workshop, *Nativity* from the *Diptych of the Five Parts*, Italy, late fifth century, ivory, gold and gemstones, 35.5 x 28.1 cm, Cathedral Treasury and Museum, Accession Number: 5Bg.005b–c, Milan.

of the Evangelists: Exegesis and Iconography," in *Early Medieval Text and Image* 1, eds. Jennifer O'Reilly et al. (London: Routledge, 2019): 110-118, 125-140.

125 The equilateral triangle connects heaven and earth. The apex of the triangle points toward heaven and the base shelters the fourfold world. The triangle on top of a square forms a polygon that looks like the facade of a house or church: Raymond Duval, "Geometrical Pictures: Kinds of Representation and Specific Processings," in *Exploiting Mental imagery with Computers in Mathematics Education*, eds. Rosamund Sutherland et al. (Berlin: Springer, 1995): 142.

126 The three-point triangle shows that the axe belonged to a Christian compagnon who had completed his technical education by working for different masters. Apprentices had to complete a period of travel called the Tour de France before becoming masters. Sometimes the three circles were aligned rather than triangulated: Jean-Claude Peretz and Jean-Charles Pillant, *L'Outil et le compagnon* (Paris: SELD-Jean-Cyrille Godefroy, 1994), 136-140; and Laurent Adamowitz, *Codes & Symbols of European Tools* (Publisher: Laurent Adamowitz, 2006), 56-59.

127 See the silver coin from Holland on the suffrage page of Saint Gregory the Great in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Pope Gregory was known for his careful administration of Church money (last accessed 1/15/24): https://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/collection/download/312-M917_240-241.jpg. For descriptions of various equilateral crosses, including the cross pattee stamped on the saw blade, see: Tim Healey, "The Symbolism of the Cross in Sacred and Secular Art." *Leonardo* Vol. 10, no. 4 (Autumn, 1977): 290-291.

128 The sign of the cross validated signatures on official documents and called for divine action like the invocation of a prayer: Michel Parisse, "Croix autographes de souscription dans l'Ouest de la France au XIe siècle," in *Graphische Symbole in mittelalterlichen Urkunden, Beiträge zur diplomatischen Semiotik*, ed. Peter Rück (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1996): 150-152; Ildar H. Garipzanov, "Metamorphoses of the Early Medieval *Signum* of a Ruler in the Carolingian World," *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 4 (2006): 421-431; and *Graphic Signs*, 286-311.

129 Minott was the first art historian to link the diabolical tools of retribution in Isaiah 10:15 to the axe, rod and saw in the foreground of Joseph's workshop: Minott, "The Theme," 267. The tools personified in Isaiah 10:15 appeared in vernacular texts such as the debate between Nature and Grace in the *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* by Guillaume de Deguileville, who died before 1358: Lisa H. Cooper, "'Markys...Off the Workman': Heresy, Hagiography, and the Heavens in The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man," in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Lisa Cooper et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008): 92.

130 Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah: Including St. Jerome's Translation of Origin's Homilies 1–9 on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2014), 205 (Book 4.7). St. Ambrose associated Joseph with the finishing axe because spiritual carpentry begins with trimming vice: Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 57-60.

131 Although Minott failed to notice that the blades of the axe and saw were stamped with a triangle and cross, respectively, Cynthia Hahn identified Joseph's tools as implements of salvation: Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 59. Malcolm Russell recognized the trade marks as Christian: Russell, "The Woodworker," 347.

> "Because if the human is not comparable to the divine, nonetheless the symbol is perfect, since the Father of Christ works by the fire and the spirit (Matthew 3:11) and like a good artisan of the soul trims off our vices all around, takes the ax to the unfruitful trees, cuts off that which is worthless, saving the well-shaped shoots, and softening the rigidity of souls in the fire of the spirit, and fashioning humankind by different sorts of ministries for various uses."[132]

Fig. 29. Anonymous, The Holy Family in the Stable with Angels, Netherlands, Utrecht c. 1400, oil on oak, 31.0 x 25.1 cm, Staatliche Museen, Accession Number: 2116, Berlin. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

This typology might account for the portrayal of Joseph with a framing saw in several fifth-century ivories from Milan (Figs. 28).[133] The saw divides like the double-edged sword of God's Word: "For the word of God is living and effectual and more piercing than any two edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow: and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). In the Mérode carpenter panel, the saw of God's Word — whose grip rests on the small footstool with splayed legs — probably refers to the martyrdom of the prophet Isaiah, who was tied to a tree and sawn in half. The prophet's death prefigured the crucifixion of Christ, who divided the Jews into believers and unbelievers.[134]

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, illustrations of Joseph working with wood began to appear in late Gothic art.[135] The *Holy Family in a Stable with Angels* painted by an anonymous artist from the Duchy of Guelders is an early example of Joseph's carpenter persona (Fig. 29).[136] Joseph is offering the fruit of his labor to his stepson, who has been freed from his swaddling clothes so that angels can bathe him.[137] On his workbench is a square block of wood with two peg legs. When completed, Joseph's handiwork might become the footrest for Christ's enemies that God the Father promised God the Son after his Ascension into heaven: "Sit thou at my right hand: Until I make thy enemies thy footstool" (Psalm 109:1).[138] Christ's enemies are unbelievers — the Jews and Gentiles who regard him as either a scandal or a fool. Several decades later, a miniature in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* shows just Joseph finishing a

[132] This English translation is from the commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel of Luke (Luke 4:22): Hahn, "Joseph Will Perfect," 58, note 18. For the Latin text, see: Migne, PL 15.1589AC.

[133] Instead of sleeping, Joseph sits on a rock with a framing saw in the Nativity of a fifth-century ivory diptych in the Treasury of Milan Cathedral (last accessed 7/24/24): https://www.duomomilano.it/en/restorartion-dittico-duomo-milan/. For the other two examples of Joseph with a saw in Early Christian art, see: Brigitte Heublein, *Der "verkannte" Joseph: zur mittelalterlichen Ikonographie des Heiligen im deutschen und niederländischen Kulturraum* (Weimar: VDG Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1998), 22-23 (2.1.2).

[134] Justin the Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 120) and Origen (*Letter to Africanus* 9) believed that the Jews deliberately erased the account of Isaiah's death from the Old Testament, because his martyrdom was a scandal that foretold the division of Israel. The saw is an attribute of the prophet Isaiah who was martyred on wood because his prophecies offended an idolatrous King: Richard Bernheimer, "The Martyrdom of Isaiah," *The Art Bulletin* 34, no. 1 (1952): 33.

[135] During the early Middle Ages, biblical scholars favored Joseph's smith persona until the middle of the thirteenth century, when the Scholastic theologian, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), explained why Jesus lacked spiritual authority among his skeptical neighbors in Nazareth. He was the son of a humble carpenter (Matthew 13:55), who worked during the day, not a blacksmith, who worked at night: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew Chapters 13-38*, trans. Jeremy Holmes (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2018), 58 and 659 (Chapter 13.4.1210). Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Nicholas of Lyra and Denis the Carthusian followed the lead of Saint Thomas Aquinas: E.F. Sutcliffe, "St. Joseph's Trade: An Enquiry into the Evidence," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 10 (1915): 188-189.

[136] Although the execution of the Berlin painting is not the work of a master, the panel's iconography is unique (last accessed 1/11/24): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/15th-century_unknown_painters_-_The_Holy_Family_with_Angels_-_WGA23769.jpg. The hammer and pegs or treenails on Joseph's workbench were instruments of the Passion: Heublein, *Der "verkannte" Joseph,* 94-95 (4.1).

[137] The various textiles associated with Christ throughout his life have their own story arcs. One of these was the Virgin Mary's white headscarf or veil, which was thought to have swaddled her son, covered his loins on the cross and shrouded his body after death. The veil that Christ wore like a shroud in his tomb was his skin or the fabric of human nature: Sarah Elliott Novacich, "Transparent Mary: Visible Interiors and the Maternal body in the Middle Ages,» *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116, no. 4 (2017): 475.

[138] In the Old Testament, earth is also God's footstool: "...Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool" (Isaiah 66:1). The word *humiliation* derives from *humus*, which means earth in Latin. Unbelievers who humiliated Christ on the cross would be humbled at the Last Judgment, when they became a footrest for the Lords enthroned in heaven. A thirteenth century illustration of Psalm 109:1 shows the right and left foot of God the Father and God the Son, respectively, firmly planted on a footstool with a curved base shaped like the earth, see the second medallion down from the top right of a thirteenth-century Latin Bible (Paris BN, ms. lat. 11560, folio 29v, last accessed 3/28/25): https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10538038j/f62.item/f62.jpeg?download=1. For an overview of the illustration of Psalm 109:1, see: Gamble Leigh Madsen, "Medieval Vision of the Godhead: Peter Lombard's Commentary on Psalm 109" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2004), 181-183.

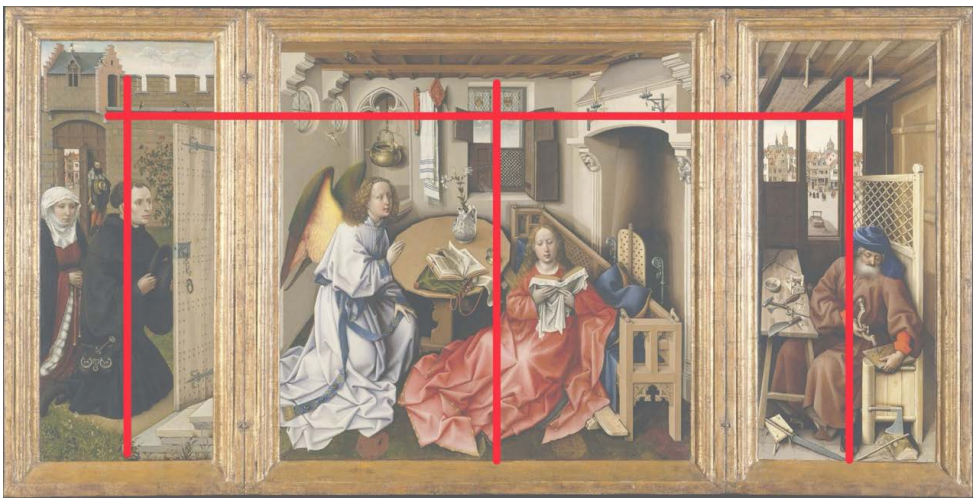

Fig. 31. Photoshop overlay showing the separation of virtue and vice in the left wing, the straight way to heaven in the right wing and the alignment of the cross and the candle of conscience in the central panel of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

plank of wood with his broad axe as the Virgin weaves and the Christ child learns to walk (Figs. 30).[139] The toddler — who is steering his walker toward a small bench with splayed front legs in the lower left corner — holds a banner proclaiming:" I am your solace."[140]

Fig. 30. Master of Catherine of Cleves, The Holy Family at Work in The Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Netherlands, Utrecht, c. 1440, tempera, ink and gold on vellum, 192 x 130 mm, Morgan Library, Ms M.917/945, page 149, New York.

Charitable deeds are the fruit of virtuous labor. In a commentary on one of Isaiah's idol parodies (Isaiah 44:9-22), Saint Jerome quotes the Augustan poet Horace (65-8 BCE) about a carpenter who decided to make a fertility God instead of a useful bench from the trunk of a fig tree:

> "Once I was the trunk of a fig tree, a useless lump of wood.
> Then the carpenter, wondering whether to make a bench or a Priapus,
> preferred me to be a god. So a god I am,
> the terror of thieves and birds..."[141]

Jerome then compares the pagan carpenter to deceptive orators, who compose their lies with the skill of a craftsman and cautioned that sinners who make false idols would be beaten with rods and go to hell.[142] Just Joseph has chosen to make useful benches instead of idols in the workshop of redemption. His footstool exalts the saw of God's Word that separates believers from unbelievers. The little bench has the same number of tenons as the four arms of the cross embossed on the saw blade. The round shape of the joints might also refer to the Cardinal virtues of fortitude, justice, temperance and prudence, which precede the triad of Theological virtues stamped on the axe.[143] Faith, hope and charity must

139 A framing saw hangs on the wall next to the chimney breast (last accessed 1/14/24): https://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/collection/download/225-M917_146-149.jpg. Saturday was traditionally dedicated to the Virgin Mary in liturgical hours arranged according to the days of the week. Meditation on the seven churches in Rome, the seven bloodlettings and the seven deadly sins according to the seven days of the week promoted moral and spiritual transformation: Laan," Enacting Devotion," 267-268.

140 The banner translation comes from the Morgan Library website (last accessed 1/11/24): https://www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-catherine-of-cleves/226.

141 The vegetation God, Priapus, was a scarecrow in the gardens of Maecenas, formerly a cemetery on Esquiline Hill (Satire 1.8.1-4): *Horace, Satires and Epistles. Persius Satires*, trans. Niall Rudd (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005), 31. The pagan who opted to make a fertility god instead of a bench is similar the biblical carpenter who made idols from a crooked branch of wood instead of useful vessels (Wisdom 13:11-19): Michael Camille, "The Iconoclast's Desire: Deguileville's Idolatry in France and England," in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image*, eds. Jeremy Dimmick et al. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 157-158.

142 The early Church Fathers, including St. Jerome, assumed that the tools in Isaiah 44:12-13 belonged to a carpenter: Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 581 (Book 12.18). Medieval exegetes assigned the hammer, chisel, chalk line, plane and compasses to two different craftsmen. The first verse referred to a smith, who forged gold and silver idols with his hammer and chisel; the next verse, to a carpenter, who made wooden pedestals for top-heavy idols with a chalk line, plane and compasses: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Louis St. Hilaire (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2021), 401.

143 The four cardinal virtues of classical Antiquity are the basis of building a good character. For the building metaphor, see: Hole, *Economic Ethics*, 83.

be combined with the classical virtues for Christians to become justified.

17. The Missing Staff and Man's Moral Limp

Isaiah's wooden staff — which appears to be missing from the Mérode still-life beneath Joseph's feet — was often coupled with the rod of discipline.[144] The staff of support was a common attribute of the elderly Joseph, who nourished and protected Christ during his childhood. Carolyn Wilson suggested that the wood between Joseph's legs in Italian paintings of the Renaissance might reference his "messianic function in the scheme of redemption" and noted a few Northern examples, including the *Adoration of the Christ Child* in the *Miraflores Altarpiece* by Rogier van der Weyden.[145] Unfortunately, the table leg between Joseph's thighs in the Mérode panel is twisted and therefore more likely to signify lust than Joseph's chaste staff of support.[146] In a sermon given on 27 December 1402 at Saint-Jean-en-Greve, the Chancellor Jean Gerson specifically linked stumbling to lust — the sin responsible for mankind's moral limp:

> "Lust blinds, it makes one lame...it obstructs good teaching, leads to moral lapses contrary to Jesus Christ...Lust makes one limp and stumble on the path to virtues, for her left foot, which speaks to the carnal feelings, is too large, and her right foot too short.[147]

The full-frontal position of Joseph's left foot — which almost touches the tip of the saw — suggests that God's Word will keep Joseph on the straight way to heaven despite mankind's moral limp. There is only one direct path to salvation in Joseph's workshop — the line that runs from the point of Joseph's patten and ends at the left front corner of the right louver (Fig. 31). Separating spirit from flesh or the good from the vicious is also an important theme in the green sword at the bottom of the votary wing, where the wayside weeds and limestone steps mirror the V-shaped composition of the still-life bisected by Joseph's left foot.[148] In the Annunciation panel, the vertical mullion aligns with the divine spark in the smoking candle of conscience to mark the moment when Christ entered time and became incarnate.[149] These three grid intersections — where vertical heaven crosses horizontal earth — are charged with meaning.[150]

A broken line of white chalk that points toward the mousetrap highlights the skewed tenon joint of the twisted table leg (Fig. 32). The chalk line with a pigtail at one end and a half carat on the other also draws attention to the uneven edge of the workbench, which looks more like the crooked path to hell than the straight way to heaven (Matthew 7:13-14).[151] A small piece of chalk has been strategically placed on the left side of the chalk line.[152] Derived from the Latin verb *cerno* meaning to sift or discern, *creta* or chalk stands for the little stone of sifted earth that remained after God shook the sinful house of Israel in a sieve: "...I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as corn is sifted in a sleve: and there shall not a little stone fall to the ground" (Amos 9:9).[153] According to Saint Jerome's commentary on Amos, the little pebble of sifted earth is the remnant of men purified by penance and therefore worthy of redemption:

> "'So that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles on whom my name is called, May seek me,' we ought to take the 'remnant of men' as those of the Jewish people who came to faith, and like small stones did not fall from the sieve, nor were they cast out with the dust, chaff and filth. For a remnant will be saved in the beginning of faith and at the end of the world, so

144 Minott and Russell both thought the wooden dowel resting on the billet represented the rod of discipline as well as the flowering staff of Saint Joseph: Minott, "The Theme," 267; and Russell, "The Woodworker," 346.

145 Infrared reflectography and dendrochronological analysis indicate that the Berlin *Miraflores Altarpiece* is the original triptych painted by Rogier van der Weyden around 1440 (last accessed 11/24/23): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/38/Rogier_van_der_Weyden_-_The_Altar_of_Our_Lady_(Miraflores_Altar)_-_Google_Art_Project_(left_panel_without_frame).jpg. The efficacy of prayers to Saint Joseph, who was championed by John Gerson in his 1413 Letter to All Churches, may have inspired the imagery of Joseph's generative staff in the Nativity of the *Strozzi Altarpiece* by Gentile da Fabriano (circa 1370-1427): Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 2001), 32-33.

146 The elderly Joseph with his cane or staff has been compared to the lame blacksmith Vulcan — the god of fire whose wife Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, had an affair with Mars, the god of war. Blacksmiths became lame, because they inhaled arsenic fumes when forging metals: Vasvári, "Joseph on the Margin," 167-169; and Alberti, "'Divine cuckolds'," 160.

147 For the original French quote from Gerson's *Poenitemini* sermons on repentance and the seven deadly sins, which were delivered in late 1402 and early 1403, see (Glorieux, 7.2.824): Lori J. Walters, "'The Foot on Which He Limps': Jean Gerson and the Rehabilitation of Jean de Meun in Arsenal 3339," *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 1, no. 1 (2012): 120.

148 In the votary wing, a corresponding line divides the bad from the good on the Day of Judgment: Williamson, "The Meaning of the Merode Altarpiece," 103.

149 Lea, "Clean Hands," 242.

150 A point-based grid constructed with a straightedge and compass underpins the design of the Mérode triptych: Jack Hamilton Williamson, "The Grid: History, Use, and Meaning," *Design Issues* 3.2 (1986): 15-21.

151 In an engraving of fatherhood for the *Summary of the Excellencies of St. Joseph*, the workbench has a crochet or notch for securing blocks of wood in the exact spot where the Mérode table is damaged: Joseph F. Chorpenning, *Christophorus Blancus' Engravings for Jerónimo Gracián's Summary of the Excellencies of St. Joseph (1597)* (Philadelphia, PA: St. Joseph's University Press, 1996), 6-7, 10-12 (Plate 2: The Holy Family in St. Joseph's Workshop). This design would have been so prone to breakage that modern experts believe that the engraver mistook a detachable clamp for part of the workbench: Christopher Schwarz, *Ingenious Mechanicks: Early Workbenches & Workholding* (Covington, KY: Lost Art Press, 2018), 42.

152 Elliott Wise identified the white pebble as a "scrap of chalk" without comment: Wise, "Painterly Vernacular," 273. Chalk marks like the pigtail and half-carat are poorly understood, because they rarely survive: Duncan James, "Carpenters' Assembly Marks in Timber-Framed Buildings," *Vernacular Architecture* 49, no. 1 (2018): 15.

153 *Creta* is the feminine perfect passive participle of two Latin verbs — *cerno* (to sift or discern) and *cresco* (to grow or augment). See the WordSense Online Dictionary (last accessed on August 29, 2023) URL: https://www.wordsense.eu/cretus/. Isidore of Seville derived the word *creta* from Crete, which produced the best white potter's clay (Book XVI.i6): Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, 317.

that, when the fullness of Gentiles is entered in, then all Israel may be saved."[154]

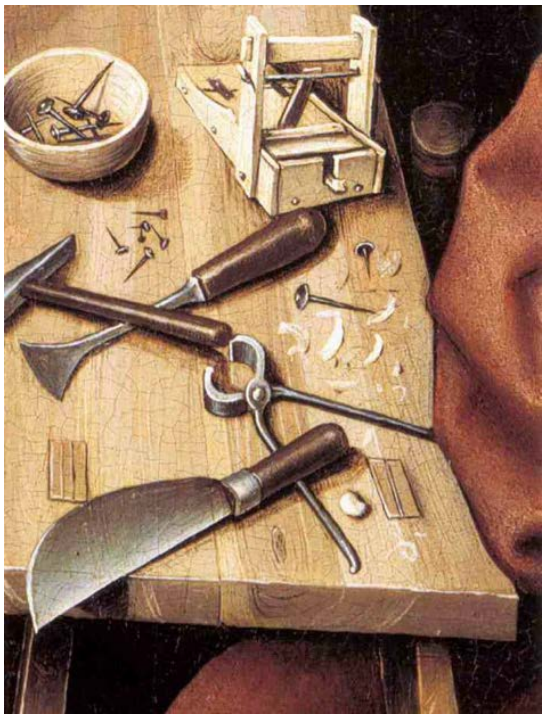

Fig. 32. Detail of the chalk mark on the carpenter's bench in the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

Paul the Apostle argued that the small stone (*lapillus*) referred not only to Jews, but to all the sons of Adam who die and turn to dust (Acts 15:16-17). The left handle of the pliers ties the tip of the chalk line to the uneven edge of the tabletop and segregates the chalk, tenon joint and reference line from the tangle of tools on the workbench. The knife of Circumcision — which aligns with the carat of the chalk line and overlaps the left handle of the pliers. The knife supersedes the pliers, which might otherwise signal the Sacrament of Penance.[155]

18. The Cursed Table

Fig. 33. Functional replica of the Mérode torsion trap. Photo: Public Domain.

"May their table become a mousetrap."[156] This curse comes from Augustine's commentary on Psalm 68:23-24 after King David, like the crucified Christ, was offered bitter gall to eat and sour wine to drink: "Let their table become as a snare before them, and a recompense, and a stumbling block. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not; and their back bend thou down always."[157] The cross mousetrap is inoperable, because it lacks two critical components of its torsion mechanism — the string and latch that provide tension for the striker (Fig. 33).[158] Once triggered,

[154] See Jerome's commentary on Amos 9:11-12: Jerome, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets* 2, ed. Tomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 395. The scrap of chalk in the Mérode carpenter panel has also been identified as the small pebble or calculus in Apocalypse 2:17: Minott, "The Theme," 268-269. According to Isidore of Seville, the tiny calcus or calculus was the smallest unit of Roman measure equal in weight to two lentils (*Etymologies* XVI.xxv.8): Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, 333. Russell misidentified the Mérode chalk as a faba bean, which belong to the same pulse family as the lentil: Russell, "The Woodworker," 348-349. Pulses have irregular shapes compared to the round, smooth and very light weight of Jesus Christ that became the fiery calculus of divinity in Ruusbroec's *The Sparkling Stone* (Vanden blinkenden Steen or De Calculo IV): John of Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage; The Sparkling Stone; The Book of Supreme Truth*, trans. C.A. Wynschenk (London: J.M. Dent, 1916), 187; Wolfgang Christian Schneider, "The Sparkling Stones in the Ghent Altarpiece and the Fountain of Life of Jan van Eyck, Reflecting Cusanus and Jan van Ruusbroec," *Studies in Spirituality* 24 (2014): 168-170; and Elliott D. Wise, "'Hidden Sons,' Baptism, and Vernacular Mysticism in Rogier van der Weyden's St. John Triptych," in *Rethinking the Dialogue between the Verbal and the Visual: Methodological Approaches to the Relationship between Religious Art and Literature (1400–1700)*, eds. Ingrid Falque et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022): 172, 190-191, 198.

[155] A Middle English *Arma Christi* manuscript in the Princeton University Library contains a prayer prompted by the pliers that loosened Christ from the cross: "The tongs that drew the nails out of feet and hands without doubt/And so loosened thy body from the tree/Of my sins lord loose thou me" (Taylor Ms. 17 fol. 7r). The prayer was written during the last quarter of the fifteenth century (last accessed 9/12/24): https://figgy.princeton.edu/downloads/ae1ea5f6-64e6-41d6-b20f-2737112238ad/file/ae02e632-f71d-44be-8933-b0a8e2497dff. For more on Taylor Ms. 17, see: Rebecca Zorach, "'Sweet in the Mouth, Bitter in the Belly': Seeing Double in an Eccentric French Renaissance Book of Hours," *Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians* 36, no. 5 (2013): 930; and Pollick, "The Flowering Wound," http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/211503).

[156] Augustine's *muscipula* (mousetrap) is often translated as *snare* or *trap* in English versions of the bishop's commentaries and sermons: Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions of the Psalms* Vol. 3, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2021), 390. Augustine routinely used the North African *muscipula* (mousetrap) instead of Jerome's *laqueus* to translate the Greek παγίς or trap: David Scott-Macnab, "Septuagint παγίς and the Language of the Hunt," in *Greece, Rome, Byzantium and Africa: Studies Presented to Benjamin Hendrickx on His Seventy-fifth Birthday*, eds. William J. Henderson et al. (Athens: Hērodotos, 2016): 632-635.

[157] Blind men signified pagan idolators, Jews and false Christians who have lost spiritual vision: Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 71-72. Men with disabilities such as blindness or lameness were thought to lack faith: Livio Pestilli, *Picturing the Lame in Italian Art from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 100-101.

[158] Leonard Mascall — Clerk of the Kitchen for the Archbishop of Canterbury — described the torsion or following trappe (81, Figure 2a) in his sixteenth-century *Booke of Engines*

the trap will hold backsliders face down so that they cannot pay their spiritual debts, much less see heaven. Without faith in the stumbling block of Christ crucified, the mousetrap becomes a snare for stubborn sinners who willfully step into their own traps:

> "*May their table become a (mouse)trap for them before their very eyes*...But why does it add, *Before their very eyes*? It would have sufficed to say, *May their table be a trap for them*. The addition suggests that some people are well aware of their iniquity, and continue in it with immovable obstinacy; for such sinners the trap is set before their very eyes. Those who go down alive to the underworld are particularly wicked...What does *alive* imply? That we are consenting to their will, and knew that we should not consent. The trap is set in front of them, where they can see it, but they are not corrected. (Or it could mean that since the trap is set in front of them they have no excuse for falling into it.) But clearly, they know the trap is there, yet step into it, and allow themselves to be caught by the neck."[159]

Saint Augustine then identified the unbelievers as skeptical Jews who were blind to Christ's fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy both before and after the Crucifixion (Psalm 68:24).[160]

Following the timeline of Christ's Passion from the knife of Circumcision to the stumbling block and then back to the tools of Crucifixion on the damaged workbench leads nowhere, because the table prompts cannot be read spiritually.[161] The traditional arms of Christ — the auger, nails, hammer, gouge, pliers and knife — are "tokens of doom" that threaten backsliders with eternal damnation.[162] After the Fourth Lateran Council required Christians to confess annually in the early thirteenth century, prayers said in front of contact relics like the carpenter tools that crucified Christ earned indulgences that reduced time spent in Purgatory as well as other forms of pardon in exchange for money, labor and/or prayers.[163] Cursed tools cannot support meditation or accumulate credit in heaven.[164] Only penitents who follow the instructions listed by Saint Augustine in his commentary on Psalm 68 can unwind the table's curse: "How much better it would have been to steer clear of the trap, recognize their sin, repudiate their error, shake off their bitterness, make their way over into the body of Christ, and seek the glory

and Traps: Drummond, "Unmasking," 233. Joachim Dagg observed that the famous Mérode mousetrap is missing the twisted cord that holds the following stick in place. The stick puts tension on the striker (last accessed 9/23/24): https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joachim-Dagg/publication/226186692/figure/fig3/AS:319966432776193@1453297350099/Renaissance-torsion-traps-a-Merode-or-Following-trap-recorded-by-Master-of-Flemalle.png. For a discussion of the replica in figure 4a, see: Joachim L. Dagg, "Exploring Mouse Trap History," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 4, no. 3 (2011): 404. Dagg's observations are based on a *Mousetrap Monday* video (last accessed 7/25/24): Shawn Woods, "600 Year Old Style Merode Mouse Trap in Action: Best Trigger System that I Have Tested," Nov. 6, 2017, YouTube Video, 4:39, https://youtu.be/c3t_Tapb93g?si=fX-AQbP7tJmRFuPZB.

159 "Open-eyed iniquity leads to merited blindness and bent backs" according to the heading of *Exposition 2* on Psalm 68:23-24: Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions of the Psalms* Vol.3, 390. For Bonaventure's division of sinners into three groups — blind heretics, slaves of sin and the damned, see: Douglas Langston, "The Spark of Conscience: Bonaventure's View of Conscience and Synderesis," *Franciscan Studies* 53, no. 1 (1993): 87-91.

160 Augustine referred to blind Jews and the mousetrap curse twice in the *City of God*: Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (London: Catholic Way Publishing, 2015), 560 (Book XVII.19) and 610 (Book XVIII.46). For the inability to read sacred scripture spiritually and the blindness of Jews trapped by the letter of the Law in the Prado's *Fountain of Life* by Jan van Eyck's workshop, see: Felipe Pereda, "Eyes That They Should Not See, and Ears That They Should Not Hear: Literal Sense and Spiritual Vision in the *Fountain of Life,"* in *Fiction sacrée: Spiritualité et esthétique durant le premier âge moderne*, eds. Ralph Dekoninck et al. (Leuven and Walpole: Peeters, 2013): 126, 135-145.

161 Russell observed that the layout of tools on Joseph's worktable was not professional and suggested that the Tau-shaped auger stood for the cross of the bad thief, whereas the pairing of hammer and chisel with knife and tongs represented the crosses of Christ and the good thief, respectively: Russell, "The Woodworker," 338-342. The auger on the damaged worktable might also refer to the crucifixion of Christ under the curse of the Old Law. See Deuteronomy 21:22-23 for the cursed man hanging on a tree: Jensen, *The Cross*, 17-20. The table cursed by King David was traditionally linked with the scandal of Christ crucified and the following Pauline verse: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written: Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). For the curse of Moses and the vicarious atonement of Christ in the writings of Justin Martyr, Augustine of Hippo and Theodore Abu Qurrah, see: Peter W. Martens, "'Anyone Hung on a Tress is Under God's Curse' (Deuteronomy 21: 23): Jesus' Crucifixion and Interreligious Exegetical Debate in Late Antiquity," *Ex Auditu: An International Journal for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* 26 (2011): 89-90.

162 In "*O Vernicle*" — a fourteenth-century Middle English pardon poem, whose twenty-four stanzas focus on the instruments of Christ's Passion — the hammer, pincers and knife are not only tools of affective prayer and meditation, but also weapons that shield penitents in their battle against evil: Edsall, "Arma Christi Rolls," 41, 192-196; and Ruth Mullett, "Putting on the Armor of God: Defensive Reading in England, c. 1250-1500" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2017), 12-16.The tools that crucified Christ punished as well as saved: Salvador Ryan, "The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland," in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle*,' ed. Andrea Denny-Brown et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016): 260.

163 Representations of the *arma Christi* indulgence remained popular in England and the Low Countries until the Reformation: Shannon Gayk, "Early Modern Afterlives of the *Arma Christi*," in *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle,'* eds. Andrea Denny-Brown et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016): 277; Kathryn M. Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 151; and "Arma Christi," in *Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts*, ed. Kathryn M. Rudy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017): 55-80.

164 The treasury of merit was a doctrine developed by the Church in the thirteenth century to exert authority over popular religious movements. Indulgences from the treasury were pardons for sin made to penitents from the inexhaustible merits gained for the Church through the suffering, death and virtuous deeds of Christ, the Virgin Mary and Church martyrs. Mendicant theologians followed a precedent set by the early Church Fathers when they used the commercial imagery of redemption to make doctrine more accessible to the laity: Robert W. Shaffern, "Images, Jurisdiction, and the Treasury of Merit," *Journal of Medieval History* 22, no. 3 (1996): 238-240; and *The Penitents' Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom, 1175–1375* (Scranton and London: University of Scranton Press, 2007), 84-94.

of the Lord."[165] In the carpenter panel, each of these prompts is made of new or green wood.[166] They include the Lord's footstool, Joseph's settle, the cross mousetrap, the cup of nails, the louver hooks and the small latchkey attached to the display snare by a length of flax string. According to a commentary on Ecclesiastes by the French theologian, Hugh of Saint Victor (ca. 1096-1141), green wood signifies hearts full of carnal desire:

> "...the carnal heart is like a green tree, and not yet dried up from the carnal humor of concupiscence, if it ever conceives any spark of divine fear or love, first of all the fumes of passions and disturbances rise up with the reluctance of evil desires; then strengthened in mind, with the flame of love, and begins to burn strong and shine brighter, soon all the fog of disturbances disappears: and thus purified, the mind spreads itself to the contemplation of truth."[167]

Fired by meditation on the scandal of Christ crucified, the split log or billet that supports the axe and rod in front of Joseph's settle must exhaust "wanton thoughts, wicked desires and vile pleasures" before becoming the pure flame of contemplation.[168] The wood chips on the floor next to the log suggest that the process of conversion has already begun. Trimming vice is the first step toward illumination.[169]

19. The Piecer: Softening the Rigidity of Souls

The instability of splayed benches like the footstool and worktable prompted Joseph to secure the stumbling block of Christ crucified on the arm of his rectilinear settle.[170] He presses the pad of the brace drill against his heart as he bores pilot holes for the long nails in the cup of new wood (Fig. 34). Also known as a piercer, the brace of the drill, which allows the continuous rotation of the spoon-bit, is made of bronze instead of old wood like the other grips in Joseph's workshop. Invented in Northern Europe around the turn of the fifteenth century, the piercer rapidly became an essential tool in carpentry scenes.[171] Much more than a small detail in Joseph's workshop, the piercer replaces the saw as the tool of God's Word — the divine spear of fear and love that forces hard hearts to soften and weep tears of compunction:

> "By the saving wounds which you suffered on the cross for our salvation and from which flowed the precious blood of our redemption, wound this sinful soul of mine for which you were willing even to die; wound it with the fiery and powerful dart of your charity that is beyond compare. You are the living Word of God, effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword. You are the choice arrow and sharpest of swords, so powerful that you can penetrate the tough shield of the human heart: pierce my heart then, with the dart of your love, so that my soul may say, 'I have been wounded by your love,' and abundant tears may flow day and night from this wound of your rich love. Strike, Lord, strike this hard heart of mine with the sharp spear of your love and by your power pierce deep into my inmost self."[172]

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165 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 390. Although the path to heaven is straight, most penitents meet obstacles and detours along the way. Self-reflexive turns allow penitents to amend their behavior: Martha Dana Rust, "Revertere! Penitence, Marginal Commentary, and the Recursive Path of Right Reading," in *Reading and Literacy: in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Ian Frederick Moulton (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2004), 1-4. Also see the theme of penitential conversion or turning around (Canticles 6:12) in the Prado's *Fountain of Life*: Pereda, "Eyes," 143.

166 The split log on the floor beneath Joseph's settle shows the contrast between the older, harder, darker core of the tree known as heartwood as opposed to the newer, softer, lighter sapwood close to the bark. Heartwood is much more stable than moist sapwood, which tends to curl: William E. Hillis, *Heartwood and Tree Exudates*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1987, 1-7. New or green heartwood is usually lighter in color and easier for carpenters using hand tools to cut, carve, nail, turn and join than seasoned lumber: Sturt W. Manning, "Dendrochronology and Archaeology," in *Handbook of Archaeological Sciences* I, eds. A. Mark Pollard et al. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2023): 37-38.

167 "...carnale cor quasi lignum viride, et necdum ab humore carnalis concupiscentiae exsiccatum, si quando aliquam divini timoris seu dilectionis scintillam conceperit, primum quidem pravis desideriis relunctantibus passionem et perturbationum fumus exoritur; deinde roborata mente cum flamma amoris, et validius ardere et clarius splendere coeperit, mox omnis perturbationum caligo evanescit: et jam pura mente animus ad contemplationem veritatis se diffundit." This Victorine commentary on vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:2) is the source of John Gerson's smoke and fire imagery in *The Mountain of Contemplation* and Robert Campin's smoldering candle in the Mérode *Annunciation*. According to Hugh of Saint Victor (*Ecclesiasten Homillae XIX*), the smoking green log stands for penitential meditation: Migne, PL 175.117D-118A (1879).

168 Lancaster, *The Book*, 179.

169 Wood bark, chips and shavings represented sins of the flesh that were separated from the spirit so that "you do not the things that you would" (Galatians 5:17). In The Sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt by Dürer, putti gathering wood waste pantomime their disgust with the vicious refuse: Hahn, " Joseph as Ambrose's 'Artisan of the Soul'," 518.

170 The splayed benches aligned with the swan tavern lack balance like the blindfolded rabbi holding a broken staff and illegible phylacteries in Jan van Eyck's *Fountain of Life:* Pereda, "Eyes," 124-130.

171 The earliest known illustration of the brace drill shows the tool hanging on Joseph's staff in the Flight into Egypt from the Lüneburg *Golden Panel* in the State Museum of Hannover. The brace drill, which permits continuous turning of the bit instead the the intermittent action of the auger, was initially used to bore pilot holes: Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (London, Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1962), 112-117; and William Louis Goodman, "The History of Woodworking Tools" (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1963), 175. For more background on the term *piercer*, see the *Debate of the Carpenters' Tools*: Roy Underhill, *The Woodwright's Companion: Exploring Traditional Woodcraft* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 10-11.

172 Based on Augustine's *Confessions*, this quote is an English translation of a devotional passage from the *Libellus de scripturis et verbis patrum collectus ad eorum presertim utilitaem qui contemplativa vita sunt amatores* (Little Book of Extracts from the Scriptures and Words of the Fathers, Especially Useful for Those Who Are Lovers of Contemplation) by the Norman abbot, John of Fécamp (died 1079): Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 62-63; and Lauren Mancia, *Emotional Monasticism: Affective Piety in the Eleventh-Century Monastery of John of Fécamp* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 30. For the violent piercing that leads to self-recognition and a change of heart, see: Mark Chambers, "'Wyth poynt of penaunce I schal hym prene': Weaponised Conversion in Medieval Allegorical Drama," *European Medieval Drama* 24 (2020): 186-192.

Fig. 34. Detail of Saint Joseph piercing the tough wood that covers the book of the heart in the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

As compunction pierces the scandal, penitents learn to recognize their sins and imitate just Joseph as he tattoos the living Word of God on the book of their hearts.[173] His eyes red from weeping, Joseph is a model of the compassionate soul who avoids evil and looks for good by transforming penitential labor into worship.[174]

Saint Joseph is a teacher who preaches compunction from his seat of wisdom.[175] The high back of the settle keeps the saint upright as he turns toward the future. The finials on top of the back posts are octagons — the geometry of rebirth and resurrection.[176] The new wood of the settle meets a dark mullion, where the Law and Grace end and the epoch of the Holy Spirit begins. According to the Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), this future time is the millennium between the Antichrist's destruction and the End of Time, when Jews and Muslims will be reconciled with Christians, and the Church hierarchy, replaced by a peaceful society intent on heavenly perfection.[177] In the upper right corner of the *Trinitarian Circles* from Joachim's *Liber Figurarum*, the first of three green circles, the status of the Father, is divided into two stages before and under the Law (Fig.

173 *Liber*, the Latin word for book, also means bark. The leaves of ancient scrolls came from the inside layer of bark or sapwood (VI.xiii.1-3; xiv.6): Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, 142. For the comparison of annual tree rings to the folios of a book and the medieval concept of layered time, see: Eric Palazzo, "Art, Liturgy, and the Five Senses in the Early Middle Ages," *Viator* 41, no. 1 (2010): 38. The anthropomorphized wood of the cross — often linked to the cover of the book of life, conscience, heart and experience — was made from the core or hardest part of the tree trunk, later known as heartwood or duramen in the early modern period: Jean Leclercq, "Aspects spirituels de la symbolique du livre au XIIe siècle," in *L'homme devant Dieu : Mélanges offerts au père Henri de Lubac*, ed. Henri de Lubac II (Paris: Aubier, 1964): 63-72; Michel Pastoureau, "La symbolique médiévale du livre," *Revue française d'histoire du livre* 86-87 (1995): 19-25; Jager, *The Book*, 103-113; and Bryda, *The Trees*, 15-19, 97-100.

174 For the red eye lids of Saint Joseph, see: De Tolnay, "L'autel Mérode," 75. The grace of God causes the spiritual pain of compunction that converts penitents from worldly desire to godly love. Heart-piercing is the first stage of religious awakening that begins with tears of sorrow for sin and ends with tears of joy for redemption: Jean Leclercq, The *Love of Learning and The Desire God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 29-32; and June-Ann Greeley, "The Medieval Spirituality of 'Purity of Heart' and 'Heart-piercing Goodness' in Selected Works of St. Anselm of Canterbury," in *The Feeling Heart in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Meaning, Embodiment, and Making*, ed. Katie Barclay et al. (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2019): 173-179. The trope of work as worship developed during the late Middle Ages: Jeffrey Morrow, "Work as Worship in the Garden and the Workshop: Genesis 1–3, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and Liturgical Hermeneutics," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 15, no. 4 (2012): 168.

175 "The throne of wisdom (is) the soul of a just man" (*Sedes sapientia, justi anima*) according to Augustine of Hippo (In Psalmum XCVIII Enarratio, v. 3): Migne, PL 37.1259 (1865). During the Middle Ages, the Patristic seat of divine wisdom that exists in the souls of just men was linked to Solomon's throne and the Virgin Mary: Anne Marie LaBonnardière, "Anima iusti sedes sapientiae dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin," in *Epektasis. Mélanges patristique offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, eds. Jacques Fontaine et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972): 119-120; and Allegra Iafrate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 234-236. The third letter of Joseph's initials JOS stood for sapientia or wisdom (Part I, Chapter 5): Carolyn C. Wilson, "St. Joseph as Custos in the Summa of Isidoro Isolano and in Italian Renaissance Art," in *St. Joseph Studies: Papers in English from the Seventh and Eighth International St. Joseph Symposia in Malta 1997 and El Salvador 2001*, ed. Larry M. Toschi (Santa Cruz, CA: Guardian of the Redeemer Books, 2002): 103-104.

176 The cube has eight corners and embodies space. Octagonal domes unite the circle of heaven with the cube of earth. The ground plans of many Early Christian baptisteries and tombs had eight sides, which represented the resurrection of Christ and the hope of eternal life as well as cosmic balance: Mark Reynolds, "The Octagon in Leonardo's Drawings," *Nexus Network Journal* 10, no. 1 (2008): 54-57. The number eight also stands for the first day of the new week or the eighth day when Christ rose from the dead: Robin M. Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 244-247.

177 Joachim of Fiore interpreted the millennium in Apocalypse 20:4-5 literally as opposed to the allegorical reading of Saint Augustine. The three overlapping stages of salvation history — the past status of the Father, the present status of the Son and the future status of the Holy Spirit — correspond to circumcision, crucifixion and peaceful rest, respectively, as well as knowledge, wisdom and perfect understanding of both Testaments: Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 38-51, 192-198; Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 13; and Matthias Riedl, "A Collective Messiah: Joachim of Fiore´ s Constitution of Future Society," *Mirabilia: Electronic Journal of Antiquity, Middle & Modern Ages* 14 (2012): 61-64. For more on the figure of the Trinitarian Circles, see: Jeremy Cohen, *The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 115-119. Williamson first suggested that the three windows overlooking the marketplace in the right wing of the carpenter panel articulate Joachim's Trinitarian view of history. The workshop stands for illumination or the status of the Son, not contemplation or the status of the Holy Spirit: Williamson, "The Meaning of the Merode Altarpiece," 218-223. For more on the eschatological conversion of Jews in the Prado *Fountain of Life*, see: Pereda, "Eyes," 150-153.

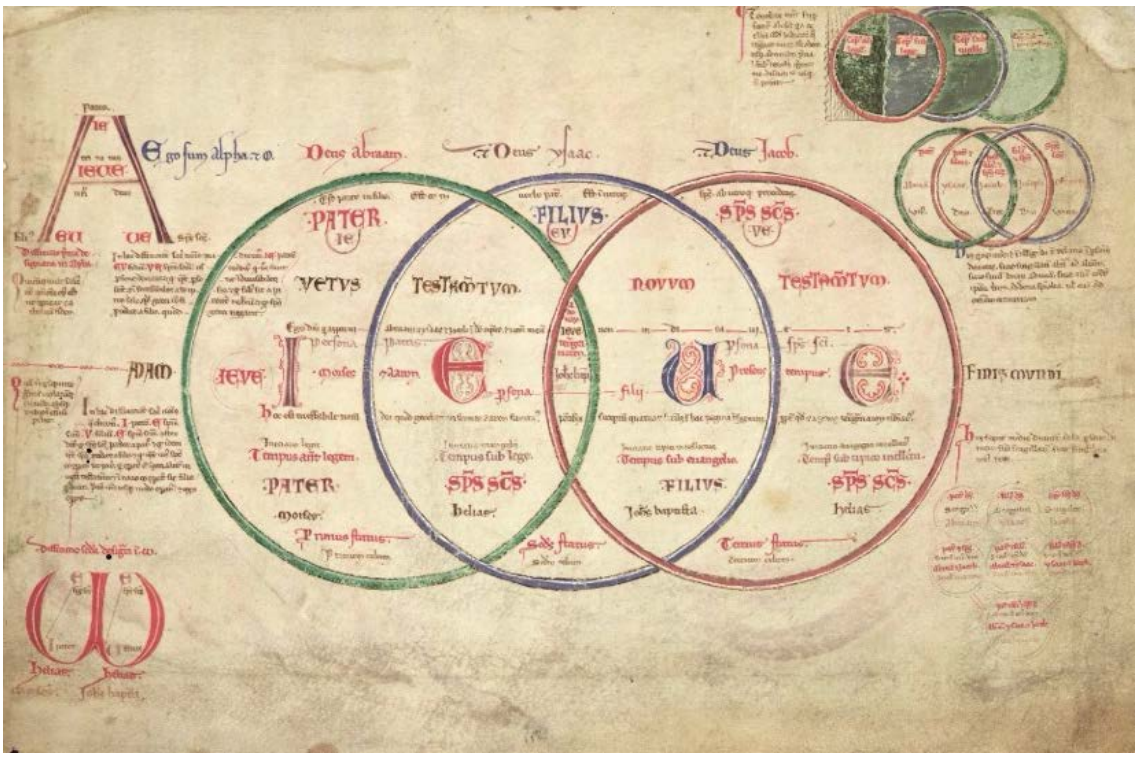

Fig. 35. Anonymous, *Trinitarian Circles* in the *Liber figurarum* of Joachim of Fiore, southern Italy, early thirteenth century, tempera and ink on vellum, 340 x 230 mm, Corpus Christi College, Ms 255A, fol. 7v, Oxford.

35).[178] In the Mérode carpenter panel, the stage before the Law corresponds to the far left louver and the stage under the Law, to the left window. The next two windows stand for the statuses of the Son and Holy Spirit, respectively. The lattice rail of the settle casts a shadow on the honey-colored door of heaven. The diamond pattern foretells the Second Coming of Christ.[179] The door has been removed from the hinge of salvation and moved toward the exterior wall to widen the interval between the return of Christ and Judgment Day.[180] The city view glimpsed through the half-shuttered window has no steeples, crosses or other signs of Church authority — only two friends talking with one another in a peaceful marketplace.[181]

Joachim of Fiore's stages of salvation history strongly resemble Augustine's four ages of man as outlined in the Saint's *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*.[182] These ages define the four steps of

178 Perhaps the progress of the three overlapping circles in the subsidiary figure (Corpus Christi College MS 255 f.7v) from dark to light green stand for increasing levels of enlightenment as time past becomes time future (last accessed 7/5/24): https://iiif.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/iiif/image/01605838-a275-4c1b-a98b-608567a7bb06/full/pct:40/0/default.jpg?-filename=Corpus-Christi-College-MS-255A_00020_fol-7v_reduced.jpg. For a discussion of the *Trinitarian Circles'* color symbolism generally and green as a symbol of life specifically, see: Reeves, *Figurae*, 194.

179 Matter casts shadows: Victor I. Stoichita, *Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 44-48. For example, the carpenter Joseph was the earthly shadow of God the Creator: Hahn, "Joseph as Ambrose's 'Artisan of the Soul'," 517. Just as Old Testament prophecy foreshadowed New Testament revelation, so the New Testament foreshadowed the second coming and final judgment at the end of time: Joseph F. Chorpenning, "The Enigma of St. Joseph in Poussin's Holy Family on the Steps," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 60, no. 1 (1997): 278-279.

180 The third circle of the Holy Spirit represented Joachim's thousand years of peaceful coexistence. Heretofore theologians had thought that peace would come after the end of time and that the interval between the second Advent and Last Judgment was limited to just a few days: Marjorie Reeves, "The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 269-287. For more on Tertullian's statement that flesh, or the incarnation of Christ, is the hinge of salvation (*De resurrectione mortuorum* 8. 2), see: Bernard McGinn, "Ordering the Times: The Theology of History in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* and Joachim of Fiore's *Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 35, no. 1 (2021): 11.

181 The folding shutters of the far right window are decorated with apotropaic X forms or saltire crosses separated by horizontal moldings that are stacked on top of one another. This vertical witch-post formation signified the connection between heaven and earth and guarded against evil: Bill Angus, "The Apotropaic 'Witch Posts' of Early Modern Yorkshire: A Contextualization," *Material Religion* 14, no. 1 (2018): 57-58, 66-69. The shutters and wainscoting beneath the two visible louvered windows have horizontal moldings that pass through the center of the Xs. These horizontal moldings might stand for human communication or even the soul's passage from the Old to the New Covenant in this life. See *The Sojourn of the Holy Family Egypt* by Albrecht Dűrer: Hahn, "Joseph as Ambrose's 'Artisan of the Soul'," 519. For more on the apotropaic X forms that protected the windows and doors of medieval churches and homes, see: Timothy Easton, "Apotropaic Symbols and Other Measures for Protecting Buildings Against Misfortune," in *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic*, ed. Ronald Hutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 54-55.

182 In addition to the four stages of human life, Augustine of Hippo also divided world history into a cosmic week, which included the six ages of man corresponding to the days of Creation plus the Sabbath or day of rest before the eighth day of eternal life. The sixth day when Adam was created and fell was the age of grace: Reeves, "The Originality," 272-273. Saint Augustine was the first writer to combine the ages of man and the world to signify the soul's spiritual progress: John Anthony Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 80-92; and Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpre-*

spiritual progress for individuals as they struggle to control concupiscence:

> "Therefore let us distinguish these four stages of man: prior to the Law (*ante legem*); under the Law (*sub lege*); under grace (*sub gratia*) and in peace (*sub pace*)...Prior to the Law, we do not struggle, because not only do we lust and sin, but we even assent to sin. Under the Law we struggle but we are overcome. We admit that we do evil, and by that admission that we really do not want to do it, but because we still lack grace we are overwhelmed...For then comes grace, which pardons earlier sins and aids the struggling one, adds charity to justice, and takes away fear. When this happens, even though certain fleshy desires fight against our spirit when we are in this life, to lead us into sin, nonetheless our spirit resists them and ceases to sin...these desires arise from the mortality of the flesh, which we bear from the first sin of the first man, whence we are born fleshly. Thus they will not cease save at the resurrection of the body, when we will have merited that transformation promised to us. Then there will be perfect peace, when we have been established in the fourth stage."[183]

Augustine's fourfold division helps us to understand not only the fenestration of Joseph's workshop, but also the relationship between the prompts before and behind the three windows. The cursed table and swan tavern are linked with Mosaic Law; the new settle and medicine shops, Christian Grace; and the golden door and friendly neighbors, Joachim's peaceful society. The upper right corner of the far left louver refers to the stage before the Law, when nature ruled and desire ran wild.

20. Return to the Straight Way of Penance

Two household objects on the damaged worktable warn penitents to turn back and look toward the future like Saint Joseph.[184] Both prompts are made of green wood. The mousetrap of the cross and the cup of long nails refer to the demonic snare and unpaid debts of Psalm 68:23, respectively.[185] The mousetrap is Saint Augustine's famous snare "for" and "of" the devil (*muscipula diaboli*) that will crush backsliders who do not repudiate their sins and keep vice hidden in their hearts. The face-turned cup also has a double meaning.[186] As the cup of wrath, it refers to the bitter drink given to the Psalmist in the verse before David's curse: "And they gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 68:22).[187]

Fig. 36. Master of the Karlsruhe Passion, *Disrobing*, Upper Rhine, Germany, c. 1450, oil on walnut, 46.0 x 67.0 cm, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Strasbourg. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

tations of the Life Cycle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 55-58. For the use of Augustine's topos to encourage laymen to repent their sins and prepare for final judgment during the late Middle Ages, see: Lidia Grzybowska, "The Topos of the Ages of the World and Man in the First Sermon on Dominica Septuagesimae of Mikołaj of Błonie," *PL. IT–rassegna italiana di argomenti polacchi* 14 (2023): 87-90.

183 For the four-fold framework of salvation history, see Augustine's exposition on Romans 3:20: "Because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before him. For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Propositions, 13–18.2–4, 7–8, 10): Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Paula Fredriksen Landes (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 4-7. See various Pauline references in: Auguste Luneau, *L'histoire du salut chez les Pères de l'Église: La doctrine des âges du monde* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1964), 47; and Paul Archambault, "The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World: A Study of Two Traditions," *Revue des études augustiniennes et patristiques* 12, no. 3-4 (1966): 201.

184 In the Middle English devotional poem, "Revetere!" written on the leaves of a thorny shrub urges a carefree young man to go back to the straight way of penance: Rust, "*Revertere*!," 1-9.

185 Recompense or *retributiones* in Latin not only meant God's just retribution, but also unpaid spiritual debts: Russell, "The Woodworker," 348. Man is duty-bound to obey the Ten Commandments, faithfully worship God and repay his moral debts: Agnès Blandeau, "Various Meanings of Debt and Indebtedness in *Dives and Pauper*," *Éditions du CRINI: La Revue Électronique du Centre de Recherche sur les Identités Nationales et l'Interculturalité* 9 (2017): 4-7. Unpaid debts could lead to excommunication or suspension of the sacraments because debtors who did not repay loans lacked charity: Tyler Lange, *Excommunication for Debt in Late Medieval France: The Business of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4-21.

186 Most medieval household dishes such as plates, bowls and cups were made of wood and turned on a pole-lathe. Wooden vessels like the Mérode cup of wrath, whose grain is perpendicular to the axis of rotation, are face-turned: Paola Pugsley, "The Origins of Medieval Vessel Turning," *The Antiquaries Journal* 85 (2005): 1-2.

187 During the French Middle Ages, the bivalent metaphor of drinking from the cup of God's judgement and Christ's mercy gave birth to the legend of the Holy Grail. The elusive Grail was a blood relic: Joanna Bellis, "The Dregs of Trembling, the Draught of Salvation: The Dual Symbolism of the Cup in Medieval Literature," *Journal of Medieval History* 37, no. 1 (2011): 53-60. For an overview of the biblical cup and its contents, see: Everett Ferguson, "The Cup of the Lord," in *Ethics in Contexts: Essays in Honor of Wendell Lee Willis*, eds. James W. Thompson et al. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019): 124-129; and Nerina Bosman, "The Cup as Metaphor and Symbol: A Cognitive Linguistics Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): http://hdl.handle.net/2263/76049.

Fig. 37. Master of the Karlsruhe Passion, *Nailing of Christ to the Cross*, Upper Rhine, Germany, c. 1450, oil on walnut, 46.0 x 67.0 cm, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Strasbourg. Photo: Wikipedia Commons.

Good Friday sermons linked these words to the last torture of Christ, when he was offered a sponge soaked in bitter poison to quench his thirst: "...And I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none: and for one that would comfort me, and I found none" (Psalm 68:21).[188] During the high Middle Ages, the sponge-bearer was often portrayed as an unrepentant Jew called Stephaton, who stood opposite the penitent lancer on the left side of the crucified Christ.[189] The vessel of gall and vinegar — represented here by the cup of nails — held all the world's iniquity.[190] Because Stephaton did not show compassion, he was damned forever in contrast to co-workers like the carpenter in the *Karlsruhe Passion*, who covered Christ's loins with the Virgin Mary's veil after drilling pilot holes for her son's crucifixion with the auger tucked under his right arm (Figs. 36 and 37).[191] Those who suffer with Christ learn how to repay their debts and taste sweet salvation. Even nails can be sweet if repentance drives out the bitter taste of sin.[192]

21. Joining Christian Community

Fig. 38. Fenestration detail in the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

Three of the four windows at the rear of the workshop have hinged louvers hooked to the ceiling with one of the two middle windows half-closed. The two visible hooks are made of new wood. The exterior of the three louvers has been stained by rusty nails like the

188 David's drink was linked with the bitter brew offered to Christ in Matthew (27:24), Mark (15:23) and John (19:30): Jensen, *The Cross*, 7. Psalm 68 introduced the psalms read during Matins on Thursday except for the last three days of Holy Week, when the service of Tenebrae replaced the first two hours of morning prayer. The popular late fourteenth-century Good Friday sermon — *Christus passus est pro nobis vobis relinquens exemplum ut sequamini* (Oxford, Balliol College, MS 149, fols 1r-15v) — contrasts Christ's suffering with the easy or prosperous life: Holly Johnson, *The Grammar of Good Friday: Macaronic Sermons of Late Medieval England* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 288-293.

189 The sponge stood for the Jews full of pride and the container, the world full of sin: William Chester Jordan, "The Last Tormentor of Christ: An Image of the Jew in Ancient and Medieval Exegesis, Art, and Drama," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 78, no. 1/2 (1987): 30-32. During the fifteenth century, Stephaton was transformed into a sympathetic soldier or Gentile who tried to end Christ's suffering: William Chester Jordan, "The Erosion of the Stereotype of the last Tormentor of Christ," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1/2 (1990): 17.

190 Jordan, "The Last Tormentor," 31. In "O Vernicle," the beholder asks the nails to help him out of sin and the harm that he has done in his life: Edsall, "*Arma Christi* Rolls," 192.

191 The young carpenter, who drilled pilot holes in the cross with the auger under his right arm in the Nailing, wears a red wool hat in the crowded background of the Disrobing (last accessed on 10/21/23): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/18/Master_of_the_Karlsruhe_Passion_-_Nailing_of_Christ_to_the_Cross.jpeg. The crucifixion of Christ naked was his final debasement. For the Virgin Mary's shame on seeing her son remove his clothes in the Revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden (died 1373) and the seven falls of Christ on the path to Golgotha, see: Corine Schleif, "Christ Bared: Problems of Viewing and Powers of Exposing," in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C.M. Lindquist (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012): 263-267.

192 Taste and touch are the two senses directly connected to the heart. Sweetness cannot be savored without bitterness. As one nail drives out another, the goodness of Christ replaces sweet temptation: Mary Carruthers, "Sweetness," *Speculum* 81, no. 4 (2006): 1011-1102, 1012-1013. Nails strengthen and fix. They were usually made of iron, an impure material that was cleansed when hammered into living wood: Stanisław Kobielus, "The *Concordia Novi et Veteris Testamenti* in its Juxtaposition of Illustrations: The Hitting of Hammers of Tubalcain and the Hammering of the Nails into the Hands and Feet of Christ during the Crucifixion," *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 61, no. 04 (2013): 49-50.

outside of the weathered gatehouse in the votary panel. The view from the far left window cannot be seen and refers to the status of the Father before the Law. The fenestration of the louvered windows resembles the central panel's casement configuration, which stands for the literal and allegorical senses of scripture; however, no mullions intersect to form a Latin cross (Fig. 38).[193] A sash board replaces the Annunciation panel's bolted shutter of the Law, which the son of David will unlock so that the Ten Commandments can be read spiritually.

Fig. 39. Jean Poyer, The Feast of Dives with Lazarus in the Bosom of Abraham and Dives in Hell in The Hours of Henry VIII, France, Tours, c. 1500, Tempera, ink and gold on vellum, 256 x 180 mm, Morgan Library, Ms H.8, fols. 134v-135r, New York.

The worktable aligns with the sash board and the sign of the swan in the Lenten marketplace. A popular attribute of inns and taverns, the proud swan hides her black skin — her propensity to sin — beneath virginal white feathers. Roadhouses host appetites of the flesh, corrupt public morals and pervert man's quest for salvation. The alignment of tavern and workbench imply that the damaged table might also be read as worldly possessions, which prevent rich men from reaching heaven: "To carnal folk, prosperity is the snare of sin, an occasion of retribution from God (who repays the good things of the world with the evils of hell), and a stumbling block for their neighbor."[194] Causing another to stumble because of one's own immoral behavior was a scandal known as the eighth deadly sin.[195] Here the needy neighbor is a beggar called Lazarus who waits for crumbs to fall from the rich man's table (Luke 16:19-31). In a Renaissance Book of Hours made for Henry VIII of England, the poor man enjoys eternal rest in heaven, while the rich man burns in hell (Fig. 39).[196] Prosperous elites like the Peter Ingelbrecht, who share their wealth with the Church and give alms to the poor, can access healing grace — the medicine offered by Christ the Good Physician and Trader — in the Christian marketplace.[197]

22. Seeking the Glory of God

Fig. 40. Master of the Legend of Saint Barbara, Saint Joseph's workshop in the Adoration of the Magi, Brussels, c.1480, oil on oak, 90.7 x 96.7 cm, Galleria Colonna Inventory Number 234, Rome.

193 The half-open window on the left has a sliding sash board and stands for the stage under Law, when Old Testament was understood literally. The open window on the right refers to the stage under grace, when scripture could be read spiritually. The casement window in the Annunciation panel has a diagonal lattice, which represents contemplation through a glass darkly: Lea, "Clean Hands," 241.

194 The mendicant Franciscan, St. Anthony of Padua, cited Psalm 68:23 in Sermon 9 for the First Sunday after Pentecost. The sermon focuses on the meaning of the pond Probatica with its five porches (John 5:2-3), and Lazarus begging for crumbs from the rich man's table (Luke 16:19-31): Anthony of Padua, *Sermons for Sundays and Festivals* II, trans. Paul Spilsbury (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2007), 17. For an illustration of the healing pond at Bethesda where the future wood of the cross from the tree of mercy was buried after being rejected by Solomon for his Temple, see *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (last accessed 1/16/24): https://www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-catherine-of-cleves/211.

195 Public sins corrupted the community's spiritual health: Lindsay Bryan, "*Vae mundo a scandalis*, the Sin of Scandal in Medieval England" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 7-8.

196 The miniature of Dives and Lazarus from Jean Poyer's *Hours of Henry VIII* shows how the love of money can rob the soul of eternal life (last accessed 11/23/23): https://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/images/collection/download/MSH0008_C_0134_verso-0135_recto.jpg. The parable of the rich man Dives and the beggar Lazarus was recently highlighted in an exhibition at the Morgan Library: Diane Wolfthal, *Medieval Money, Merchants and Morality* (New York: The Morgan Library and Museum and D. Giles Limited, 2023), 104-106. The moral bankruptcy of Dives led to hell, while the spiritual wealth of the beggar merited heaven: Karris, Robert J. "The Interpretations of the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) by Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher († 1263) and Cardinal Bonaventure of Bagnoregio († 1274)," *Franciscan Studies* 78 (2020): 91-92.

197 Augustine developed the metaphor of Christ as medicinal grace for the soul: Hugues Vermès, "*Gratia medicinalis*: La métaphore médicale dans le *De natura et gratia* d'Augustin," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques Revue d'Études* 65, no. 1 (2019): 43-47. For Christ the Good Trader who ransoms Adam and Eve with his blood on the cross, see Sermon 130.2 on the loaves and the fishes of Saint Augustine and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1096-1160): Augustine of Hippo, Sermons 94A-147A on the New Testament III/4, ed. John E. Rotelle (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 311; and Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 3 On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute Of Medieval Studies, 2010), 79-80. Greed was Eve's original sin: Joseph E. Marshall, "Redeeming the Medieval Spirit: Christus Mercator in the York Cycle," *Medieval Perspectives* 23 (2008): 57-61.

Fig. 41. Mérode display mousetrap in the right wing of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

Fig. 42. A vintage deadfall trap in the Mousetrap Collection of Shawn Woods, YouTube.

The careful placement of bivalent prompts to express likeness and opposition in the Mérode triptych raises the following question: Does the display mousetrap, which looks like some gallows, open the door to heaven or the mouth of hell? Russell argued that the second snare is a have-a-heart trap designed to capture bird/souls rather than kill rat/bodies.[198] Indeed, Saint Paul added a *captio* or compassionate trap to David's curse in Romans 11:9: "Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them" (*et David dicit fiat mensa eorum in laqueum et in captionem et in scandalum et in retributionem illis*). We do not believe that the display snare is a *captio*, because it has no air-holes like the have-a-heart trap in the Colonna Galleria's *Adoration of the Magi* by the Master of the Legend of St. Barbara (Fig. 40).[199]

Campin's display snare looks more like a vintage deadfall recently discovered in an auction box (Fig. Figs 41 and 42).[200] This medieval design killed countless vermin well into the nineteenth century. Deadfalls are set by attaching pieces of string to paddle triggers with latches. The drop is a solid block of wood that pancakes greedy rodents.[201] The placement of the snare on the left or sinister side of the straight way

198 Russell believed that the display snare was a live trap for birds: Russell, "The Woodworker," 345-346. The framework of the display snare is inside the box and therefore more likely to be a deadfall. The frame of a live trap is on the outside so that the drop can rest on top of rather than inside the box (last accessed 11/26/24): Shawn Woods, "The Old Style Korpilahti Mousetrap from Finland," January 27, 2018, YouTube Video, 0.01/2.16, https://youtu.be/y3LpfuySAv8.

199 The trap has been set to catch animals alive. The piercer, which replaced the auger in wood-working shops around the turn of the fifteenth century, simplified drilling holes for round wooden dowels (last accessed 10/25/24): https://jhna.org/articles/satirizing-sacred-humor-saint-josephs-veneration-early-modern-art/. Rather than looking at the Adoration like the ox who knows his owner, Joseph concentrates on his work like the ass who know his master's crib (Isaiah 1:3): Anne L. Williams, "Satirizing the Sacred: Humor in Saint Joseph's Veneration and Early Modern Art," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 10, no. 1 (2018): 9 (fig. 7). In the medieval encyclopedia, *On the Nature of Things* (*De natura rerum*, Quadrupeds 4.2) the Flemish Dominican, Thomas of Cantimprè (1201-1272), compared the faithful ass with humble men who do their good deeds secretly (last accessed 5/26/25): https://patrimoine-numerique.ville-valenciennes.fr/ark:/29755/B_596066101_MS_0320/v0001; and Kathryn L. Smithies, *Introducing the Medieval Ass* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020), 26. For the two wings of the *Annuncation*, *Abner's Messenger before David* and *The Queen of Sheba Bringing Gifts to Solomon* in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, see: Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 120-122 (No. 13).

200 The vintage deadfall was originally missing a peddle trigger and latch (last accessed 7/12/24): Shawn Woods, "An Amazing Gift from a YouTube Viewer: Antique Wood Block Deadfall Mouse Trap," April 29, 2024, YouTube Video, 2:22/2:55, https://youtu.be/v961vLTbp2Y?si=4JmqYCg4PBU4vcqQ. Leonard Mascall described the dead-drop or fall for rats and other vermin (78, Figure 1e) in his sixteenth-century *Booke of Engines and Traps*: Drummond, "Unmasking," 233. The display snare was first identified as a deadfall by an apprentice carpenter at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool: John Jacob, "The Mérode Mousetrap," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 108, No. 760 (Jul., 1966): 374.

201 The display snare is a shop sign advertising the sale of devices that control greed. "Mice represent greedy men who seek earthly goods, and make the goods of others their prey" according to a thirteenth-century English bestiary: Richard Barber, *Bestiary: Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Bodley 764: With All the*

to heaven also signals the death of a mouse, not the capture of a bird.[202] Black mice were traditional symbols of greed that must be controlled so that virtue could flourish.[203] Although the deadfall has the string and latch needed to activate the cross mousetrap, it also lacks a critical part — the iron hook that connects the drop to the trigger mechanism.[204] Grace cannot open Heaven's gate, because the deadfall has no hook and the latchkey is too green — too small and immature — to lever the heavy weight of sin.

The composition of the *Annunciation Triptych* tethers the outside of the votary gatehouse to the inside of Joseph's workshop. His crowded workroom is the Pauline *captio* or cage, where penitents learn to meditate on the scandal of Christ crucified, turn away from vice and embrace virtue. Like the open door of the live trap in the Colonna Galleria's *Adoration*, the latches that secure the louvers to the ceiling free shriven souls to seek the glory of God:

> "...the sweet songs of the birds which fly and sing. These are the pious souls, flying up high from below, climbing from the active life to the contemplative life by leaving behind lowly terrestrial things in order to attain the things of heaven. They are the little birds which fly from the earth to the sky, shedding the feathers of their cogitations of worldly preoccupation and moving the wings of their affection through divine meditation. Thus the pious souls fly deftly and ascend to great heights. And as they fly and climb, they sing very sweetly, and lovingly recite spiritual songs...This song is very melodious, for it is sung very sweetly, more by means of grace than by nature. There is neither discord nor false or affected rhythm or music, but the heart and mouth are in full harmony and there is perfect concordance between voice and thought."[205]

23. The Undying Spark in the Smoldering Candle of Conscience

Synderesis — Saint Jerome's scintilla of conscience to do good and avoid evil — links penitential prayer in the votary wing with the active life of virtuous deeds in the carpenter wing, where backsliders are encouraged to imitate Saint Joseph as they meditate on the scandal of Christ crucified. Campin visualized the paradox of the spark metaphor — its undying strength and virtual extinction — in the smoking wick of the Annunciation candle (Fig. 43).[206] Saint Jerome's scintilla — a remnant of man's moral integrity before the Fall — cannot be extinguished even in the heart of Cain. Although Jerome mentioned this spark elsewhere, he only used the Greek word *synteresin* once in his commentary on Ezekiel's vision of the Tetramorph that combined the attributes of the four Evangelists to support the throne of God (Ezekiel 1:4-14):

> "Most people interpret the man, the lion and the ox as the rational, emotional and appetitive parts of the soul, following Plato's division, who calls them the *logikon* and *thymikon* and *epithymetikon*, locating reason in the brain, emotion in the gall bladder and appetite in the liver. And they posit a fourth part which is above and beyond these three, and which the Greeks call *synteresin*: that spark of conscience which was not even extinguished in the breast of Cain, after he was turned out of Paradise and by which we discern that we sin, when we are overcome by pleasures or frenzy and meanwhile are misled by an imitation of reason. They reckon that this is, strictly speaking, the eagle, which is not mixed up with the other three, but corrects them when they go wrong, and of which we read in Scripture as the spirit which 'asketh for us with unspeakable groanings' (Romans 8:26)' 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?'" (1 Corinthians 2:11).[207]

During the high Middle Ages, Jerome's *synteresin* became *synderesis* in the influential *Sentences* of the early Scholastic theologian, Peter Lombard (ca. 1096-1160), whose discussion of "the spark of reason" guaranteed the survival of the metaphor in ensuing medieval theology.[208] Although Scholastics

Original Miniatures Reproduced in Facsimile (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 109.

202 If the bird/soul flies too close to earth it becomes a vicious rat caught in a trap: Jacques Berchtold, *Des rats et des ratières: Anamorphoses d'un champ métaphorique de saint Augustin à Jean Racine* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992), 53.

203 According to Isidore of Seville (*Etymologies*, XII.iii.1) and Bartholomaeus Angelicus (Liber de proprietatibus rerum, Book 18.72), moist earth or *humus* gave birth to the *mus* or mouse (last accessed 11/24/24): https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beastsource214.htm. Black mice represented sinful souls, whereas red mice stood for the virtuous: Christina Welch, "Late Medieval Carved Cadaver Memorials in England and Wales," in *Death in the Middles Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Cultures of Death*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016): 395. For the mouse as a symbol of the soul, see: John Anthony Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature 1100-1500* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112.

204 The trigger mechanisms of both mousetraps in the Mérode triptych are missing critical components. This lack implies that redemption is a cooperative effort between the penitent soul and the crucified Christ. The flax thread ties the components together like the lineage of Joseph and the iron hook that was baited with Christ's body on the cross. The thread or *fil* is a play on the French word for son or *fils*. For the Latin pun of *filium* (son) and *filum* (thread), see: Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 164, 220 n.88.

205 This English translation was excerpted from *Le jardin amoureux* by Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420), a Christian counter narrative written in 1401/02 during the famous Debate of the *Rose*: Christine McWebb, *Debating the Roman de la rose: A Critical Anthology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 270.

206 As heat and smoke dissipate, they leave the ashes of sin: Robert A. Greene, "Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 2 (1991): 198; and "Instinct of Nature: Natural Law, Synderesis, and the Moral Sense." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 2 (1997): 179. For an overview of synderesis, see the open HTML version of the following article (last accessed 3/31/25): Peter Eardley, "Medieval Theories of Conscience," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/conscience-medieval/.

207 Passages that Potts quoted from the King James Version of the Bible were replaced with Douay Rheims translations of the Vulgate: Potts, Conscience, 79-80. For Jerome's use of the spark metaphor in his letter to Algasias, which discusses differences between Matthew 12:20 and Isaiah 42:3, see: Minott, "The Theme of the Merode Altarpiece," 270, note 28.

208 Peter Lombard briefly mentioned "the spark of reason" that can never be lost in his discussion of moral weakness (Book 2

agreed that conscience resided in practical reason, there were different schools of thought about the home of synderesis.[209] These schools split between the old way (*via antiqua*) of emotion and the modern way (*via moderna*) of intellect. Saint Bonaventure placed our desire for good with our desire for union with God, while Saint Thomas Aquinas housed it with reason.[210] This divine law written in our hearts that incites good and murmurs against evil helps penitents to feel remorse for their sins.[211] Saint Jerome's "unspeakable groaning" is everyman's Guardian Angel:

Fig. 43. The undying spark in the smoking candle of conscience at the center of the *Annunciation Triptych*.

> "... (The voice) accuses and blames, reprehends and protests, condemns and disturbs, oppresses and torments, gnaws and pricks. It teaches and warns, it counsels and exhorts...It discerns good from evil and shows what is or is not to be done. It also gives joy, encourages, enlightens and heals."[212]

Jean Gerson believed that a scintilla of the Christian soul remains virginal to spark the mystical conception of Christ (Fig. 44).[213] Near the end of *Jacob autem* — his famous sermon advocating a feast in honor of the Marriage of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph — Jean Gerson described this pure part of the soul as synderesis:

> "But what purpose does this talk of synderesis serve? Clearly, so that we may show that it always remains a virgin, which remains sterile in the absence of the Spirit that would otherwise overshadow it and make it bear fruit. But when the Spirit is present, (the spark) becomes the conceiver of the Word, that is to say it gives birth to the Word and does so without corruption, because what is born here is not born of the blood of bodily phantasms, nor from the will of the flesh striving for its sensual desires, nor from the will of the man, that is to say from the power of the free will, but from God. And synderesis and the consent of reason is not shut out, but when the grace of the Annunciation with its secret and intimate breath over the soul, when the doors have been shut, brings to mind the news of the advent of the Word, synderesis humbly genuflects and responds: 'see I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word'."[214]

In the *Mountain of Contemplation*, Gerson tells us that the spark in the melting candle of conscience becomes flame without smoke, when penitents conceive Christ in their hearts like the Virgin Mary:

> "Similarly, the person who wants to live in the contemplative life does not have perfection at the start. She must first get rid of the smoke, which is frustration with one's life, a smoke that makes her weep and troubles her, providing hardly any consolation. Then the flame of love will appear together with the smoke, and finally the fire will be pure and devoid of smoke."[215]

on Creation, dist. 39 c3): Lombard, *Sentences* 2, 197-198. For the origin of this imagery as the spark of life among the writings of the second-century gnostic Christian, Saturninus of Antioch, see: Michel Tardieu, "Histoire d'une métaphore dans la tradition platonicienne jusqu'à Eckhart," *Revue d'Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 21, no. 3-4 (1975): 227-230. For a discussion of *synteresin* as a scribal error in the *Glossa ordinaria* that should read *syneidesis*, see: Zamora, "The Term Synderesis," 43-46.

209 Bonaventure discussed moral philosophy and the stimulus imagery in his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard: Langston, "The Spark," 85-86. In *The Journey of the Mind to God* (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*), Bonaventure moved toward a more mystical interpretation of the spark as synderesis or the desire for union with God: Zamora, "The Term Synderesis," 129-144.

210 Mika Ojakangas, *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013), 41-43; and Langston, "The Spark," 91-95.

211 See Jeremiah 31:33 and and other Old Testament references to the law of God written in our hearts that must be obeyed. For the universal law of nature inscribed on every heart through baptism and faith, see Paul (Romans 2:15): Greene, "Synderesis," 198; Langston, "The Spark," 86-87; and Ojakangas, *The Voice*, 35. For the nagging worm of conscience that never dies (Isaiah 66:24) even in the damned, see: Zamora, "The Term Synderesis," 122-127, 169-300.

212 Ojakangas, *The Voice*, 31.

213 Sacred reading that leads to the spiritual conception of Christ is a central theme of the Mérode Annunciation: Lea, "Clean Hands," 227-235. For the Virgin Mary's heart-womb and contemplation, see: Friedrich Ohly, "*Cor amantis non angustum*: Vom Wohnen im Herzen," in *Schriften zur Mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung*, eds. Friedrich Ohly et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977): 135-141; Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul," 7-8; and Wise, "Painterly Vernacular," 258-262.

214 *Jacob autem* was delivered to honor the feast of the Virgin Mary's Nativity at the Council of Constance on 8 September 1416. For the Latin text of the sermon, see: Gerson, *Oeuvres Complètes* V, 359-360. The translation into English comes from: Zamore, "The Term Synderesis," 261-262.

215 Jean Gerson wrote his treatise on contemplation in 1400. He returned to the imagery of smoke and fire several times to describe the soul's threefold ascent to God — meditation, illumination and contemplation. His second step of illumina-

Gerson's imagery comes from the same twelfth-century commentary on Ecclesiastes by Hugh of Saint Victor that compared penitential prayer to green wood full of moist concupiscence:

> "In meditation it is like a kind of light of ignorance with knowledge, and the light of truth shines in a certain way in the midst of the darkness of error, as if the fire in green wood was at first difficult to grasp, but when it was excited by a more violent blast, and began to burn more avidly into the underlying matter, then some great balls of smoky fog rise up, and we see the flame itself, which is still of a slight scintillation, enveloping itself more and more rarely, until at last, with the gradually increasing conflagration of the vapor, all exhaustion, and dispelled by the mist, a serene splendor appears."[216]

Fig. 44. Robert Campin, Central panel of the *Annunciation Triptych*, Southern Netherlands, 1427-1432, oil on oak, 64.5 x 63.2 cm, Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Jean Gerson wrote the *Mountain of Contemplation* for his sisters — who wished to cloister at home. He believed that spiritual union with God was not exclusive to monks, nuns and priests, but possible among the laity as well.[217] He even cautioned prelates who despised the active lives of laymen to confess their pride least they be cursed thirteen times:

> "...It is evident that the active (laity) have various distractions and no spiritual softness or sweet melting feelings in their hearts; indeed, the majority of Christians hardly serve God in any other way; to judge those who are damned or lack spiritual sentiments is the most perverse form of cowardice and intolerable arrogance among those who often enjoy melting sensations and place their whole salvation and glory in them. How often they are mocked by the devil in hell, because pride deserves to be mocked; in short, he deserves, even while receiving the Eucharist, that which is said by the psalmist: 'Let their table become a snare before them.' Let him and those who follow his example be cursed thirteen times."[218]

Contemplation is not a prize for good behavior, but a divine gift rarely given in this life and only sometimes in the next. Conversely, the Sacrament of Penance, which prepares sinners for death and the End of Time, is not only available, but mandatory for every true Christian.

24. Campin's *Annunciation Triptych*: A Guide to Daily Prayer

The tiny spirit of Christ bearing his cross links the New Year and Incarnation to the Fall and Redemption. The Christ Child enters his mother's solar on seven rays of gold leaf that stand for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Behind the seven spiritual gifts, a bright red finial decorated with the bearded face of Janus marks the end of the Roman solar year on January 1, almost three months before the conception of Christ on Lady's Day.[219] The eternal timeline of the present runs from

tion corresponds to the third stage of *lectio divina*, where the flame of the Holy Spirit or Divine Love begins to turn the sins of the contrite soul into ashes: Gerson, Jean. "The Mountain of Contemplation," in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 102; and Lea, "Clean Hands," 230-231.

216 "In meditatione quasi quaedam lucya est ignorantiae cum scientia, et lumen veritatis quodammodo in media caligine erroris emicat, velut ignisin ligno viridi primo quidem difficile apprehendit, sed cum flatu vehementiori excitatus fuerit, et acrius in subjectam materiam exardescere coeperit, tunc magnos quosdam fumosae calignis globos exsurgere, et ipsam adhuc modicae scintillationis flammam rarius interlucentem obvolvere videmus, donec tandem paulatim crescente incendio vapore omni exhaustio, et caligine disjecta, splendor serenus appareat." For the Latin text, see: Migne PL 175:117CD (1879).

217 Although Jean Gerson agreed with the fourteenth-century Augustinian canon, John of Ruusbroec (died 1381), about lay participation in contemplative prayer, he did not agree with the controversial mystic about the nature of the soul's union with God in this life. Gerson believed that perfect union with God only occurred after death. For an overview of the influence of John of Ruusbroec and the Brothers of the Common Life on Jean Gerson, see: Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, *Le siècle d'or de la mystique française: étude de la littérature spirituelle de Jean Gerson (1363-1429) à Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples (1450-1537)* (Milan: Archè, 2004), 129-144.

218 "[7a veritas]...Patet in activis per varia distractis, nullam in corde suo sentimentorum spiritualism mollitiem aut liquefactionis suavitatem habentibus; immo maxima christianorum pars vix alias servit Deo; quos judicare damnandos vel extra statum salutis ob hoc esse, perversissimae est termeritatis et intolerabilis arrogantiae apud illos qui sentimentis hujusmodi crebro gaudent, qui suam in iltis salutem totam ponunt et gloriam.Sed heu saepe quam profunde fallit eos stulta praesumptio cordis sui; quam frequenter illuduntur a demonio meridiano, quia superbia meretur illudi; denique meretur etiam dum Eucharistiam suscipit, illud imprecatum per psalmistam : fiat mensa eorum coram ipsis in laquem , cum ceteris quae sequuntur sub trinodecim numero maledictis." Translated into English by the author with the input of Google Translator, this text was excerpted from a letter written in Latin by Jean Gerson to Bassardi in 1426: Gerson, *Oeuvres Complétes* II, 271.

219 The bearded face on the end piece of the towel rack has been identified as Father Sol, the Roman god of the sun: De Tolnay, "L'autel Mérode," 72; and Lea, "Clean Hands," 238-239. Another possibility is that the red terminal refers to the end of the past Roman year. During Classical Antiquity, *Janus Bi-*

the mullion of the casement window through the smoking candle to the floor beneath the red skirts of the Virgin Mary.[220] The white star shining on her lap signals that the incarnation took place when she read Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth.[221] The Feast of the Annunciation not only coincides with the turn of the new year but also separates the seasons of death and rebirth.[222] As time cycles from the spring of youth in the left wing to the winter of old age in the right wing, pious souls move from purgation and illumination to spiritual union with God in the central panel. Like a book of hours that guides daily prayer, the Campin workshop's *Annunciation Triptych* fosters devotion throughout the Church year so that penitents can avoid vice, seek virtue and, God Willing, conceive the spirit of the Christ Child Creator in their hearts.[223]

25. Methodology: Memory Holds the Treasure

During the first quarter of the fifteenth century, when treatises on the art of memory began to proliferate in Southern and Central Europe, similar manuals were relatively rare in the Low Countries, where the locations (*loci*) and vivid images (*imagines agentes*) of mendicant rhetoric had become the memory prompts in devotional paintings that guided penitents on their journey to God.[224] Following a spiritual guide through a door is an immersive sensory experience quite different from viewing the world through a picture window. The former is medieval, the latter, early modern.[225] Conversion reconfigures sensory perception like the twist of a kaleidoscope.[226] When Robert Campin decided to break with tradition and replace the gold of eternity with the blue sky and white clouds in Mary's bourgeoise living room, he sited the Virgin's solar at the top of the stairs, high above the courtyard of conscience and the workshop of redemption in the respective wings of the *Annunciation Triptych*.[227] Below Mary's solar, the contrast between the common street scene and Lenten marketplace illustrates the shift that occurs when a soul turns toward God and views the world from a Christian perspective. Each location and image — which follow the rhetorical rules of similarity, dissimilarity and contiguity — prompted the male votary to remember, confess and expiate his sins as he moved through the classic stages of spiritual ascent.

Visual exegesis of the *Annunciation Triptych's* figurative wordplay calls for a reassessment of Robert Campin's contribution to the development of early Netherlandish Art. All too often, recent scholarship has downplayed the triptych's importance because its iconography resisted conventional analysis. The recurring notion that a learned patron or theological advisor told the artist what to paint has been one of the greatest obstacles to understanding his innovative composition, because the assumption either quashed further research or inspired quixotic

frons, the god of transitions, marked the turn of the new solar year at the beginning of January. The face looking back was old and bearded; and the one looking forward, often young and clean shaven. According to Saint Augustine, Janus represented both the world and its terminus at the end of time: Gordana Kostich-Lefebvre, "Facing It All: Mighty Faces and the Western Facade," *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* (2000): 46-47.

220 Based on Aristotle (384-322 BC), Saint Augustine divided time into past, present and future with the eternal present constantly becoming memory (Confessions 11,14): Augustine of Hippo, The Confessions I, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 295-296.

221 Lea, "Clean Hands," 241-243.

222 Lady's Day approximates the beginning of the astrological year with the sign of Aries on the vernal equinox: Fletcher, "Musings," 97. Some scholars have speculated that the snow flakes in the cityscape of the carpenter panel reference the Nativity on Christmas Day instead of the interval between the winter solstice and spring equinox: De Tolnay, "L'autel Mérode," 75; and Wise, "Painterly Vernacular," 275. For the layering of time in images of the Christ Child with the arms of his crucifixion, see: Areford, "Christ Child Creator," 469-480.

223 Around 1400, double-folio illuminations of votaries praying to the Virgin and Child in French books of hours, which were primarily owned by women, inspired the production of devotional diptychs and triptychs in the Low Countries: Laura Deborah Gelfand, "Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Devotional Portrait Diptychs: Origins and Function" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1994), 30-37. These domestic shrines were often commissioned by male patricians and clerics as public displays of personal piety: Pearson, Envisioning Gender, 3-20. During the thirteenth century, affluent laymen preferred cumbersome Psalter-Hours, where the calendar of core liturgical psalms was more important than the Little Office of the Virgin. Even in portable books of hours, the devotional portraits of male owners focused more on praying for strength to resist temptation than emulation of the Virgin. For a different perspective on figuring gender and devotion than Pearson's, see: Maeve K. Doyle, "Picturing Men at Prayer: Gender in Manuscript Owner Portraits around 1300," *Getty Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (2021): 51-55.

224 The fourteen mnemonic treatises composed before 1400 were followed by fifty during the first seven decades of the fifteenth century: Gábor Kiss Farkas, "Performing from Memory and Experiencing the Senses in Late Medieval Meditative Practice: The Treatises *Memoria fecunda*, *Nota hanc figuram* and *Alphabetum Trinitatis*," *Daphnis-Zeitschrift Für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur* 41, no. 2 (2012): 419-420. In a rare Flemish treatise, the *Tractatus artis memorative* (1424), Goswin de Ryt used the four descending scales within a city rather than the rooms of a house to store memories: Kimberley Skelton, "The Physicality of Early Modern Memory Spaces. Imagining Movement, Communicating Knowledge and Shaping Attitudes," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 87, no. 1 (2024): 68; and Sabine Heimann-Seelbach, "Mnemonics in the Vernacular. More than a Linguistic Paradigm Shift?" in *Medieval Memory. Image and Text*, eds. Frank Willaert et al. (Turnhout: Brepols Publisher, 2004): 43-45.

225 "Ductus is the way by which a work leads someone through itself...an experience more like traveling through stages along a route than like perceiving a whole object." After this definition of *ductus*, Carruthers describes paths similar to those in the Mérode carpenter panel that converge and diverge: Mary Carruthers, "The Concept of Ductus, or Journeying Through a Work of Art," in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 190. Ductus influenced many Annunciations designed for private meditation in early Netherlandish Art: John R. Decker, "Guides Who Know the Way," in *Audience and Reception in the Early Modern Period*, eds. John R. Decker et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2022): 324-328. In Carruthers's most recent book, her description of the Mandorla or Almond, where God sits and creates, throws new light on the figure of Saint Joseph in the carpenter panel who tattoos the lozenge of incarnation on the scandal of Christ crucified: Mary Carruthers, *Meditation, Invention and Designing Thought in the Augustinian Middle Ages* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Ltd and Durham University IMEMS Press, 2025), 151-153.

226 For this metaphor's source, see: Ingrid Nelson, "Ambient Media and Chaucer's House of Fame," ELH 88, no. 3 (2021): 551.

227 Campin replaced the original background of silver leaf glazed with yellow pigment with blue sky and clouds when the two wings were added to the Annunciation panel to create a triptych: William Suhr, "The Restoration of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, no. 4 (1957): 144.

quests for an elusive script.[228] That is not to say Campin's client had no input. In retrospect, the triptych's ductus strongly suggests that the male votary was not Peter Ingelbrecht, who bought the triptych after moving to Mechlin in 1453, but a wealthy Jewish convert who hoped to marry a Christian.[229] Other important roadblocks include a parochial focus on late medieval Dutch rather than French textual sources and a decided preference for contemplative over penitential literature. The new discipline of visual exegesis not only lets Campin speak for himself, but also allows penitents to follow the artist's lead as he brings out the spiritual treasure contained in Holy Scripture: "...Therefore every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old" (Matthew 13:52). Memory is the householder's treasury.

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[228] Ridderbos mentions a learned client fourteen times and outside theological advisor once in his dismissal of the Mérode Triptych as a workshop piece: Bernhard Ridderbos, "Choices and Intentions in the Mérode Altarpiece," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 14:1 (Winter 2022): 8-20. Although the apprentice-priest, Jacques Daret (1404-1470), might have initially taught his associates the art of memory, Campin would not have concealed his name in the anagram — DVPAYMKN ("Deo Volente KAMPYN") —- in the decoration of the Annunciation panel's majolica vase unless he was the designer of the triptych's ductus: Lea, "Clean Hands," 233-235.

[229] For recent doubts about the identity of the male votary, see: Parker, "The Annunciation Triptych," 112-114.

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