

THE LOWER SENSES  
IN EARLY NETHERLANDISH  
EPIPHANY ALTARPIECES

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

THE LOWER SENSES  
IN EARLY NETHERLANDISH  
EPIPHANY ALTARPIECES

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THE LOWER SENSES  
IN EARLY NETHERLANDISH EPIPHANY ALTARPIECES

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ABSTRACT

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were a time of growing affective piety and engagement with the material culture of Christian devotion in Northern Europe. The three so-called lower senses of smell, touch, and taste were very much a part of this devotional context, formed over centuries to be associated with particular fragrances, embraces, and savors. This work argues that artists and patrons exploited a play on these lower senses as integral parts of the composition, utilizing objects, actions, and even persons to trigger sense memory, ideas, and appropriate practice in viewers.

The Epiphany, or the biblical event when magi from the east brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn Jesus, was a popular subject for altarpiece paintings. It was one of three most popular altarpiece subjects in the late medieval Low Countries. Its association with the Eucharist and the phenomenon of infrequent communion for the laity at the time helps to explain why the lower senses became important in these works.

Smell is highly associated with memory and was stimulated in these altarpieces to reinforce positive life events with the Church's worship. Touch and taste are braided senses that imply contact with Christ through the Eucharist, if only visually. Marginal persons also appear in these paintings becoming living symbols of the senses that help to correct over-enthusiasm for miraculous and direct contact with the holy.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

One of the earliest depictions of the Feast of the Epiphany in Netherlandish panel painting of the fifteenth century is the *Columba Triptych* (Figure 1) by Rogier van der Weyden and his workshop.<sup>1</sup> This monumental work created late in his career is also unique among this artist's folding triptychs in that it has three separate narratives from the infancy accounts of Christ, including the Annunciation and the Presentation in the Temple.<sup>2</sup> The *Columba Triptych* has been associated with Cologne and the church from which it takes its name; however, patronage and the original context in the building are both matters of speculation.<sup>3</sup>

Rogier sets the Savior's birthing stable into a characteristic fifteenth-century ruin that, in the classic Panofskyan interpretation, represents the end of a Jewish or pagan world and the advent of the newborn church.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the vaulting above the thatched roof of the stable appears to be a Gothic arch, lining up directly with the Virgin and Child, and hinting at the newness to arise from Christ's birth. The main figures of Mary and Jesus are left of center, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix: Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop), *Columba Triptych* (c. 1450-1456) oil on panels (Munich: Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische). Cf. Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 115.

Alfred Acres, "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World," *The Art Bulletin* 80:3 (1998): 422–51; Lorne Campbell, *Van der Weyden* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) 36-47; Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 90-94, 105-107, 115-118, 206; Ursula Nilgen and Renate Franciscano "Epiphany and the Eucharist: On the Interpretation of Eucharistic Motifs in Mediaeval Epiphany Scenes" *The Art Bulletin* 49:4 (1967): 316; Beth Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion," *Speculum* 79:2 (2004): 351.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Jacobs, *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania, 2011) 107: It is "one of the first examples, in surviving early Netherlandish triptych production, of a triptych in which each panel of the interior depicts a separate narrative event."

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 115-116. Infrared reflectography uncovered that the donor portrait just behind the wall to the left of St. Joseph was not in the underdrawing and his identity remains unknown.

<sup>4</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting, Its Origin and Character* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953) 135.

figures are lively in their gestures, pressed up directly to the picture plane like a sculptural tableau.<sup>5</sup> Joseph emerges from a spiral staircase leading up from a grotto. The solid colors of the Holy Family contrast with the multicolored, gold-fringed, and brocaded clothing of the Three Kings or *Magi*. The Magi remove their hats, begin to bow and kneel. The tenderness that is frequently associated with Rogier's painting is on full display as the eldest magus gently cradles the Christ Child's feet in one hand and raises the newborn king's hands to his lips for a reverent kiss.<sup>6</sup>

While scholars are unsure of the original location of the *Columba Triptych* in the church, we can speculate from other altarpieces that remain in situ and from how the artwork is fabricated to reconstruct the setting.<sup>7</sup> Measuring 137 cm high and 296 cm wide, the painting could have been set on an altar in a side chapel altar financed by its patron or was large enough to be set on the main altar in the church. The painting comprises three separate panels, the two side paintings being attached on moveable doors. There does not appear to be paintings on the reverse of the panels, but contemporary documentation explains how these doors were opened and closed for liturgy, devotion, or for different liturgical festivals.<sup>8</sup> The outside of the doors may have once been placed in a more opulent gilt wood frame and probably had other sculptural components that towered over the central

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<sup>5</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* 249. "An obviously important commission, it gives us Rogier's mature expression for some problems of painting, including the representation of figures in action proper to the scene, and the coherent management of many figures," Martin Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden: an essay, with a critical catalogue of paintings assigned to him and to Robert Campin* (London: Phaidon, 1972) 22.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden: an essay, with a critical catalogue of paintings assigned to him and to Robert Campin* (London: Phaidon, 1972) 22.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 115-116: It was sold in 1801 according to the inventory of St. Columba in Cologne.

<sup>8</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 1.

panel; this could have included a crucifix and perhaps niches with sculptures of saints.<sup>9</sup>

Being an altarpiece, the painting was an integral part of the liturgy. On the altar *mensa* just below this work the priest consecrated bread and wine to confect what believers say is the body and blood of Christ, after which he would raise each above his head accompanied by the ringing of bells to show the congregation. The open or even closed triptych would have helped to make the elevated communion host and chalice visible in a large church. Thus, the *Columba Triptych* would have been surrounded by a daily round of solemn ritual that set it amid fine textiles, gold utensils, and on high feast days, the skein of incense smoke wafting.

Furthermore, most of the viewers would ordinarily be set at a distance from this altar, and it could even have been obscured by a chancel screen making it quite hard to see. Allowing that one had a better view of the triptych, the light in the large church would have changed throughout the day, making viewings inconsistent. Candlelight and perhaps oil lamps contributed to illuminating the space, which create flickering light. Yet conceivably, outside of the celebration of the Mass and on a bright day, the devotee could spend time before the opened altarpiece with a better vantage. It is, however, perhaps more precise to say that the average Christian – cleric or lay – would have viewed and experienced the *Columba Triptych* in different ways depending on the time of day or even season,

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<sup>9</sup> See Rogier van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* depicting a priest celebrating Mass on the altar on the nave side of the chancel screen that shows an inverted, T-shaped altarpiece with a tabernacle above opened to display a sculpted statue of the Virgin and Christ child.

dependent on the celebration, but all in the larger context of a particular church space. The devotee moved around this altarpiece, but in a sense, the altarpiece was a moveable set piece within a larger drama that took place in a built world.

The *Columba Triptych* is in a very different context today, seen in the picture masthead from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (Figure 2).<sup>10</sup> The museum has mounted the moveable altarpiece flush to the wall for maximal viewing. In fact, the photograph shows two individuals standing a mere eight or ten feet away, their heads line up with the middle of the panels. Although spectators can get quite close, a chain cordons off the space so that visitors do not dare touch, let alone try to move the wings that are affixed to the wall. The artificial and perhaps diffused natural light in the exhibition space is evenly distributed. The wall is painted an aqua-gray hue that does not draw attention to itself. One can also see that Rogier's altarpiece is set in a large, open room only perhaps two and a half feet away from two other large paintings. The other artworks appear to be early Netherlandish religious paintings that place the *Columba Altarpiece* as one among other examples – if the rest not quite so exceptional – of the culture and time. Housed in a room with other paintings much like it, however, it would encourage close inspection, and just as surely, scant inspection by myriads of people who may or may not be familiar with the narrative and symbolism. The experience now is primarily aesthetic and visual.

It is taken for granted that painting is a visual medium. Art history tends toward the image, studying in books, slides, and screens that reproduce visual and

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix: Masthead screenshot from the Alte Pinakothek website homepage, <[https://www. pinakothek.de/besuch/alte-pinakothek](https://www.pinakothek.de/besuch/alte-pinakothek)>

architectural works for our detailed study in various scales. Likewise, the museum as vessel for these artworks generally speaking tends to create a spartan space that speaks to modern aesthetic sensibilities and even expensive tastes; in such settings the image takes on an academic and indexical character. And what is considered art in the West falls into a triad: painting, sculpture, and architecture. The *what* of art and art history are images, and its purview is sight.

Nevertheless, these premises and practices are deceiving. First of all, until the invention of digital media, all images were singular and produced on an object with a discreet size and medium, even if it were a page in a book – to say nothing of sculpture.<sup>11</sup> Works of art like the *Columba Triptych* are *objects*, not merely images, and inhabited their contexts in a material way.<sup>12</sup> Frequently enough the context for the objects changed over time. In spite of this, most often before the eighteenth century and the emergence of collection rooms and museums, objects were created for particular places and had distinct functions. These settings for functional art objects also involved any number of behaviors and associations other than only aesthetic (and perhaps monetary) appreciation. Recurrently these functional art objects lack classification as painting, sculpture, and architecture, and time and again in pre-modern Western Europe could incorporate all three. All of these factors add up to the fact that art and art history are not simply best understood as only visual in character.

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<sup>11</sup> Printed images are discreet objects and scales. Additionally, early printed images of saints were not considered second rate because they were reproduced. On the contrary, they were often deemed scientifically exact and miraculous. Cf. David S. Areford, “Pringing the Side Wound of Christ,” *The viewer and the printed image in late medieval Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) 228-267.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18:2 (2011): 240.

Once one opens to the suggestion that art history involves more than merely the visual, then study gives way from the *what* of an art object to what Lynn Jacobs describes as the *how* of an object.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the *how* of art historical method involves the understanding that comes through function and interaction rather than mere visual iconography. This hermeneutic expands the investigation thematically of a particular work beyond the main subject matter in order to consider how other details of scale and setting may have affected those who gazed upon and manipulated an object.

In this dissertation I will investigate how the senses of smell, taste, and touch were depicted, evoked, and perhaps deliberately exploited in order to cue experiences and associations in the viewer of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish altarpieces. These works are paintings and some are in fact not explicitly altarpieces per se, but devotional paintings connected to Eucharistic piety. These art objects had a clear function, as they were directly connected to the altars upon which they were stood and, hence, to the action of the Eucharist, as well as other sacraments and devotional acts. Altarpieces were sometimes set into a larger piece of sculpted furniture or architecture which presented itself in different views of open and closed parts, and thus even more iteration of image-combinations. The scenes depicted in the altarpieces of this study are painted rather than sculpted, although examples of altarpieces constructed of partial or entire three-dimensional forms were also made in this period in the Netherlands and especially in German-speaking territories.

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<sup>13</sup> Jacobs, *Opening* xvi; Yonan, "Toward a Fusion" 238.

The primary subjects of this study will be altarpieces presenting the Epiphany or Adoration of the Magi as subject matter, of which the *Columba Triptych* is an important example. The Epiphany, a popular choice for altarpieces, is ripe for study as it is an excellent subject for the stimulation of the senses. The gifts of the Magi included aromatic and palpable substances, and the scene is set in the humble context of a barn providing ample examples of smell, taste, and touch. The complexity of these multi-paneled compositions and their construction give place and function to all details. Even those marginal aspects, such as the lower senses, should not be ignored in these paintings of the Adoration of the Magi.

In this study I will argue that the senses of smell, taste, and touch were deliberately evoked in the compositions of Epiphany altarpieces. Artists and patrons drew on associations taken from devotional literature, visual analogies that played on sense experience, and even tried to stimulate these three lower senses by sight. I will argue that the different senses were exploited in order to accomplish particular things in the devotee, and those sensations may be germane to each. Nonetheless, I will demonstrate both that early modern Christian spirituality was a multi-sensory experience and that constructed objects before the age of art were more than visual in nature.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) xxi, 9.

## *The Epiphany and the Eucharist*

In the present day, one might guess that when commissioning a painting to be set above an altar one would choose as its subject the Last Supper, that is, the Passover meal in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist that would become the central action of the Catholic Mass.<sup>15</sup> However, because the Mass was already the re-presentation of the Last Supper, in the early modern period it may have been considered too redundant or simplistic to depict that; instead, this theme was preferred in monastic refectories, where monks' communal meals imitated that gathering of the disciples of Christ for the Passover Seder.<sup>16</sup> Rather at this time, altarpieces that could offer different themes for reflection were preferred; the subjects most typically depicted include the Crucifixion, the Nativity of Christ, and the Adoration of the Magi (Epiphany).<sup>17</sup> The Crucifixion was chosen because the Last Supper is only one half of the sacrifice that the Eucharist memorializes. The latter two events were popular because they depicted the Incarnation, the Son

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

<sup>16</sup> Dieric Bouts, *Holy Sacrament Altarpiece* (1464-68) oil on panels (Leuven: St. Peter's Church). This is a unique work for the commission document survives, detailing that the artist would consult with two masters in theology at the local university, especially regarding the four Old Testament typological scenes on the triptych wings; see Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 134. The Leuven Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament are evidence of a positive feedback loop of a growing Eucharistic devotion in the late medieval period and also the desire for a more literal depiction of the institution of the sacrament at the Last Supper.

Leonardo da Vinci's famous *Last Supper* is in a Dominican monastery's refectory.

Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 69; Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 15, 124-25, 131-33, 134-40, 138, 142, 143, 177, 178, 185, 263. Wolfgang Schöne, *Dieric Bouts und seine Schule. Mit 90 Bildtafeln* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1938) 240, 55, 241.

Cf. Tilman Riemenschneider, *Holy Blood Altarpiece* (c. 1500-1505) limewood (Rothenburg ob der Tauber: St. James Church).

Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 18-19, 172-90, 259-65; Vincent Mayr, "Riemenschneider, Tilman," Grove Art Online last modified September 22, 2014, Oxford Art Online <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T072085>>

<sup>17</sup> Larry Silver, Hieronymus Bosch 161; Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy and Devotion" 348, 351.

of God taking human flesh, which was the same flesh that became food in the sacrament. Thus, the Nativity and Epiphany underscored the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the sacrament.

The direct Eucharistic connotations explain why the Adoration of the Magi was so common in altarpieces. As noted above, the wealthy kings bringing gifts to Christ seemed especially appropriate to patrons – all the more so if they were concerned about their rich lifestyles being an obstacle to gospel simplicity. Still, depictions of the Adoration itself began to reflect liturgical practices and theological ideas not expressly written in the evangelist Matthew’s account of the event.<sup>18</sup>

This event, the Epiphany – or manifestation of God to all nations – is described tersely only in the gospel of Matthew chapter 2.<sup>19</sup> The three foreign gift-bearers are “magi from the east,” probably meant to be Persian Zoroastrian clerics or dream interpreters, called *magos* in the Hellenistic world.<sup>20</sup> There is, in fact, no designation of there being three, the number only deduced by the individual gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as is seen in the *Columba Triptych* for example. Over time in Western Europe magi became “wise men,” as a fair translation, or the Three Kings. The latter based on typological reflection

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<sup>18</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono 311-313.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18.

<sup>20</sup> The Douay-Reims English translation calls them, “wise men from the east” (Matthew 2:1). Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990) 635; Kristen Collins and Bryan C. Keene, “A New Exhibition Explores Balthazar, a Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance European Art,” *The Getty Iris* 19 November 2019 <<https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/exhibition-to-examine-balthazar-a-black-african-king-in-medieval-and-renaissance-european-art/>>.

from Psalm 72:10 [71:10], “The kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents: the kings of the Arabians [Shebans] and of Saba shall bring gifts,” sung in the liturgy for Epiphany. These respective Gentile peoples coming to worship the God of Israel were from Spain (Tarshish), Ethiopia (Sheba), and Arabia (Seba).<sup>21</sup> These prophecies help to explain the common notion for Western Christians of the Three Kings as European, African, and Asian – coming from the three known continents to worship Jesus.

The notion of the Magi coming from the three races of humanity was specifically furthered by a medieval author known to us as Pseudo-Bede.<sup>22</sup> This same author also proposed the Magi representing the Three Ages of Man, with the European magus representing old age, the Asian middle age, and the African youth. The ages of the representative continents are in what he anachronistically considered the most ancient to the newest conversion to Christianity. The purported relics of the Three Kings, said to be martyrs for the faith, were taken from Constantinople to Milan in 344, and then Emperor Fredrick Barbarossa transferred them again in 1164 to Cologne Cathedral.<sup>23</sup> Names have been attributed to the Magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar), although ethnic

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<sup>21</sup> *Reges Tharsis et insulae munera offerent; reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent.* Note that St. Jerome attributed Sheba with Arabia, but often enough India was associated with one of the places. These prophecies contribute to the common custom of depicting the Three Kings as European, African, and Asian – coming from the three known continents to worship Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> (Pseudo-)Bede, *Expositio in Matthaei Evangelium*, Patrologia Latina vol. 92, 13, Ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862); Collins and Keene, “Exhibition Explores Balthazar.”

<sup>23</sup> Yona Pinson, “Connotations of Sin and Heresy in the Figure of the Black King in Some Northern Renaissance Adorations,” *Artibus et Historiae* 17:34 (1994) 160.

designation varies as to which is which, as does the gift borne by each, and just as often all three are regarded as all being from different East Asian nations.<sup>24</sup>

Other details that were not described in Matthew's account of the Epiphany were steeped in biblical reflection. For example, the customary crèche figurines of the ox and donkey were derived from the prophecy of Isaiah: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood."<sup>25</sup> Again, this underscores how Jesus' own nation, Israel, did not recognize him, but Gentile peoples did as a king, divine, and one who would die for the people.

Another extra-biblical trope seen in early Netherlandish paintings of the Adoration is the stable in which Christ was born. This is often set into the ruins of a once grand structure. This is to denote King David's palace in Bethlehem, for Jesus is born in the line of David of Judah, to fulfill the covenant God made to the king that his dynasty would be eternal (2 Samuel 7:16). This also explains the frequent typological linkage between the Adoration of the Magi and the Three Brave Men, who bring the fugitive King David a cup of well water from his hometown (2 Samuel 23:16) – three being a magic number of prophecy fulfilled for the gift-bearing Gentile kings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 1, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1<sup>st</sup> American edition 1971) 91.

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 1:3.

<sup>26</sup> Appendix: In Bosch's *Adoration of the Magi* triptych in the Prado Museum (Figure 24), the third magus, Balthasar, offers a silver orb with a typological scene. Larry Silver has suggested that it is Three Brave Men of 2 Samuel (Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York City: Abbeville Press, 2006) 172.). The catalog entry from the museum says it is King David's general Abner instructing the northern tribes of Israel to unite with the southern kingdom of Judah in 2 Samuel 3:10. Cf. Pilar Silva, "El Bosco. Tríptico de la Adoración de los Magos," *El Bosco. La exposición del V Centenario* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 2016)

There is one more attribute common to Epiphany altarpieces. In Rogier's *Columba Triptych*, for example, amid the figures, setting, and main action, a conspicuous detail emerges: a small table. All three Magi bear tall, gold, cylindrical vessels for their gifts; the eldest king has already presented his gift, which sits upon a triangular table between the Virgin and St. Joseph. While there is little mention of the stable's furnishings outside of the manger-cum-cradle in Luke's account (cf. Luke 2:12), this table would not be so important until compared to Epiphany altarpieces influenced by Rogier in the subsequent generations of Netherlandish masters. As Nilgen and Franciscono point out, the table becomes a regular feature of Adorations, growing in prominence and size, until a square, four-legged table dominates the scene in a panel from the workshop of Hieronymus Bosch painted around the end of the fifteenth century (Figure 3).<sup>27</sup>

In both Eastern and Western Christianity, sermons and scriptural commentaries make frequent connections between the Epiphany specifically and the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>28</sup> Such luminaries as Ambrose, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, along with a certain Theodatus of Ancyra – who preached at the Council of Ephesus which proclaimed Mary not simply mother of Christ's human nature but *Theotokos* ("Godbearer") – all make deliberate

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<<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/triptych-of-the-adoration-of-the-magi>>.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix: Workshop of Hieronymus Bosch, *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1499) oil on panel (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Koerner, *Bosch & Bruegel* 239; Nilgen and Franciscono, "The Epiphany and the Eucharist," 311; Silver, *Bosch* 155, 300.

<sup>28</sup> Ursula Nilgen and Renate Franciscono. "The Epiphany and the Eucharist: On the Interpretation of Eucharistic Motifs in Mediaeval Epiphany Scenes." *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 4 (1967): 313.

connections with the worship of the nations and bringing gifts to the God who becomes flesh and food.<sup>29</sup> Medieval magi plays arose first in France in the eleventh century and became popular throughout Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, becoming even more elaborate performances in the following two centuries.<sup>30</sup> “It is important to keep in mind that in the Latin Magi plays the Three Kings always offered their gifts at the altar, since, as we know from the written sources, it symbolized the manger.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, these plays took place at the time of the offertory on the Solemnity of the Epiphany with clerics donning royal robes of the Three Kings and presenting the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Thus, we can see that annually something that was on view year round in the *Columba Triptych*, uniting this subject to the action that occurred on the altar. To state the point once again: Rogier van der Weyden painted an object with a setting and function and not merely an image.

The phenomenon of paraliturgical reenactments of the Epiphany at the Eucharist had a direct impact on Netherlandish painting of the period. Taking the place of honor in the *Columba Triptych* the growing importance of the Adoration of the Magi in devotional and liturgical contexts is evident. However, the most notable aspect of this trend is how Eucharistic allusions emerge in the narrative scene. The small, triangular table does not quite look like an altar, but it does

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<sup>29</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono, “Epiphany and the Eucharist”: Cf. Ambrose, *De Iacob et vita beata* 2. 7 (PL, xIv, 657); John Chrysostom, *In Mattheum Homilia* 7. 5 (PG, LVII, 78), *De beato Philogonio Homilia* 6 (PG, xLvIII, 753) and *In Epistolam I ad Corinthios Homilia* 24. 5 (PG, LXI, 204); Gregory the Great, *Homilia 8 In die Natalis Domini* (PL, LXXVI, 1104); Augustine, *Sermo* 190 *In Natali Domini* 3. 3, and *Sermo* 194 *In Natali Domini* 2. 2 (PL, xxxvIII, 1008, 1016); Theodotus of Ancyra, *Homilia 1 In die Nativitatis Domini* 11 (PG, LxxvII, 1366) (cf. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* vol. 1-3 (Spectrum, 1950), vol. 4 (Christian Classics, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono, “Epiphany and the Eucharist,” 312.

<sup>31</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono, “Epiphany and the Eucharist,” 312.

allude to altars since it holds a vessel similar to the ciborium that would house the consecrated hosts in a church. The table could just as easily be what is called a ‘credence table,’ auxiliary furniture meant to hold various vessels for the Mass that were not set on the altar for consecration of the Eucharist. The credence table was a place one put the collection plate and incense boat, as well as the cruets for water and wine, and the *lavabo* vessels for when the priest ritually washed his hands. This association is emphasized in its placement by the manger which resembles a Roman stone sarcophagus repurposed for livestock troughs, and which also takes the place of an altar – a connection made in Ghirlandaio’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Figure 4) and by the gift of myrrh for burial.<sup>32</sup> But more importantly table and tomb are beside the Madonna, who holds the Christ Child on her lap. Since the body of Christ is the focus of the Eucharistic celebration and in typology Mary is frequently connected to the Ark of the Covenant, her lap becomes a sort of altar.<sup>33</sup> The Ark was God’s footstool and before which the show bread was placed. It seems that all three symbols of tomb, feeding trough, and ark work together in Rogier’s construction. In fact, the

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1483-1485) tempera and oil on panel, 167 x 167cm (Florence:Santa Trinità). The influence of Hugo van der Goes’ Portinari Altarpiece is widely acknowledged, but Ghirlandaio also incorporates a legend of a Roman Emperor Fulvius written in Latin on the sarcophagus-cum-manger: “The urn that conceals me will bring forth a God,” cf. “Adoration of the Shepherds by Ghirlandaio,” Web Gallery of Art, <[http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/g/ghirland/domenico/5sassett/shepherd/shepher.html](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/g/ghirland/domenico/5sassett/shepherd/shepher.html)>.

Jean K. Cadogan and Andrea Muzzi, “Ghirlandaio Family,” Grove Art Online last modified September 16, 2010, Oxford Art Online <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T031960>>

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Exodus 25:23-30; “For the holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without, that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary,” Gregory Thaumaturgus, “Homily on the Annunciation,” *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, S.D.F. Salmond, trans., Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886).

merging of the stable and the church is made explicit by the presence of a small crucifix above the archways of the ruin reminiscent of what surmounted altars.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, scholarly consensus is that the Epiphany was already associated with the Eucharist from the Patristic period. Then, in the time after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) when the doctrine of the real presence was defined, larger structures to frame and draw attention to the consecration and elevation of the Eucharist were strongly suggested; hence, paintings above the altars in the Low Countries became more and more plentiful.<sup>35</sup> Based on paraliturgical celebrations and the existing theological reflection on the Epiphany with this sacrament, it is no surprise it became one of the three preferred subjects for altarpieces. At the same time, because the Epiphany became a didactic work for transubstantiation, extra-biblical details were added into the scene by artists in order to strengthen the idea even more.

### *The Lower Senses*

The traditional Western categorization of the five senses since Aristotle are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The final three on the list are the so-called ‘lower senses,’ or the more animalistic and less intellectual ones. There should be a word of caution to anyone placing values on the ancient and medieval views of the senses and sensation, however. The Platonic and Neo-Platonist views

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<sup>34</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono, “Epiphany and the Eucharist” 316.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs notes that while there are many examples of mixed media both painted panel and sculpted altars, the two media industries worked independently (cf. *Opening Doors* 15).

of the senses were certainly influential for many church fathers.<sup>36</sup> In spite of this, Platonic dualism was more akin to Cartesian dualism of the Enlightenment period than to most of what became the serious reflection on senses in the medieval period. The hierarchies often shift depending on the criteria by which the thinker is categorizing them. Although, surely no one would accuse a Scholastic like Thomas Aquinas of being unsystematic! Nonetheless, sight and hearing were generally considered rational and therefore of greater importance than smell, taste, and touch, which were foundational but required less cognition.<sup>37</sup>

For the most part, all senses were appreciated. Plato believed that the senses simply gathered data into the mind, which then processed it rationally.<sup>38</sup> Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas were more empirical and accorded the senses different values. Aquinas says that cognitive faculties were both sensory and mental, even if sense data had to be interpreted through the rational mind.<sup>39</sup> Aristotle codifies the senses as five, based on the phenotypical organs for

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<sup>36</sup> Beata Hoffmann, "Scent in Science and Culture," *History of the Human Sciences* 26:5 (December 1, 2013): 32.

<sup>37</sup> Neil Campbell, "Aquinas' Reasons for the Aesthetic Irrelevance of Tastes and Smells," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36:2 (April 1, 1996): 170; Hoffman, "Scent in Science and Culture" 32.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Henrik Lohfert Jorgensen "Touch," *The Saturated Sensorium Principles of Perception and Mediation in the Middle Ages*, Lohfert Jorgensen, Hans Henrik, Laugerud, Henning, and Laura Kristine Skinnebach, eds. (Aarhus University Press, 2015) 39-40. Modern science tends to believe that the traditional Aristotelian breakdown of senses is simplistic, and that the brain can interpret the senses in different ways. This has led to technology that allows the physically impaired to navigate the world. For example, the blind being able to 'see' through a device that stimulates taste buds on the tongue. Cf. Nicola Twilley, "Sight Unseen: Seeing with Your Tongue, Sensory-substitution devices help blind and deaf people, but that's just the beginning," *The New Yorker* (15 May 2017) accessed 5 March 2020 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/05/15/seeing-with-your-tongue>>. There were plenty of medieval schemata that intuitively saw the brain as the processor of sense data.

<sup>39</sup> Hoffman, "Scent in Science and Culture" 32.

collecting sense data: eyes to see, ears to hear, noses to smell, tongues to taste, and hands to feel.<sup>40</sup>

With that said, touch in particular as a discreet sense was questionable to both Aristotle and Aquinas, as the entirety of skin has the sense of feeling. Touch had a greater investigative power than most senses, carrying with it the ability to describe “weight, texture, surface, solidity, sharpness, humidity, temperature.”<sup>41</sup> Yet for that reason perhaps there were different senses of touch, and Aquinas opined that perhaps there could be multiple touches to categorize so as to expand the classical Aristotelian number of senses.<sup>42</sup>

Thomas Aquinas’ most straightforward – if one can call it that – distillation of the senses comes through his explanation of what he calls *immutatio*. In this Latin term we hear the English word ‘mutation,’ meaning in its most basic sense a change. He describes this in his commentary on Aristotle’s senses, *Sententia libri De anima*.

The human senses are, according to his [Aquinas’] view, immutated by what they sense, so that they somehow become *like* the objects: “[...] it follows that, whilst at the start of the process of being acted upon the faculty is not like its object, at the term of the process it has its likeness.”<sup>43</sup>

There are two kinds of immutation: natural and spiritual, or alternately one could say external and rational. Sight, therefore, is the highest and most rational because

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<sup>40</sup> Twilley, “Sight Unseen: Seeing with Your Tongue.”

<sup>41</sup> Lohfert Jorgensen, “Touch” 39.

<sup>42</sup> Lohfert Jorgensen, “Touch” 39.

<sup>43</sup> Laura Kristine Skinnebach, “Devotion,” *The Saturated Sensorium Principles of Perception and Mediation in the Middle Ages*, Lohfert Jorgensen, Hans Henrik, Laugerud, Henning, and Laura Kristine Skinnebach, eds. (Aarhus University Press, 2015) 162.

it requires less direct immutation and abstracts sense information without being changed by the object it perceives. “The sense of sight, Aquinas claims, involves no natural immutation since the eye itself is not coloured when it perceives a coloured object and the air through which the light reflecting the object moves is also unchanged, since it is transparent.”<sup>44</sup> Hearing is perhaps second but closely aligned to smell, “the ear and the nose are not themselves physically changed as the tongue and skin are but require a medium between the object and the organ which itself changes.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, because of the transplantation of the matter of object sensed into the rational soul or mind, touch and taste are the most tainted because they change with the object perceived. “A hand that senses heat not only receives the form spiritually but also naturally since the hand itself is warmed when it touches a warm object. Similarly, the tongue which senses sweetness or bitterness is itself changed since it is 'moistened by the humidity of flavors.’”<sup>46</sup> And yet, in the same work Aquinas actually places the sense of touch above hearing for the fact that one obtains more information from touch than hearing in his reasoning.<sup>47</sup>

However, when treating aesthetics within the context of the three transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas ranks the senses in the traditional hierarchy. This must have either been heavily

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima* 1.78.3 as quoted in Campbell, “Aquinas’ Aesthetic Irrelevance” 170.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, “Aquinas’ Aesthetic Irrelevance” 170; Simon Kemp, “A Medieval Controversy about Odor,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 1997), 214.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima* 1.78.3 as quoted in Campbell, “Aquinas’ Aesthetic Irrelevance” 170.

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, “Aquinas’ Aesthetic Irrelevance” 172. Again, while the lower senses are always considered basic, pre-rational because infants learn about the world from them, and feminine – which was usually inferior and irrational in connotation – there is a certain ambivalence or appreciation for them in differing contexts in the tradition.

influential for Western thought on art or at least representative of the culture. A considerable amount of Thomas' ranking of the senses is linguistic or philological. This is a different mindset from current academic thinking about language, after semiotics and post-structuralist critiques of realism. However, for Aquinas the words used to describe sense experience is a part of the reason why visual and auditory objects are rational and higher because they are closer to the transcendental because they are called, "beautiful," while smells and tastes are not described this way.<sup>48</sup> It is understandable that moving from such a cerebral origin would have an abstract end. Yet most importantly for the third chapter in this thesis, both Aristotle and Aquinas linked touch with taste, as eating was a kind of touch.<sup>49</sup>

Outside of academic thought, ancient Mediterranean peoples had cultural practices that would later influence Christian religious thought and practice. For example, spectators entering stadia for sporting events were anointed with perfumed oil.<sup>50</sup> This practice no doubt fulfilled a couple of functions: first, it deodorized the crowd packed in tightly together, and second, it united the audience in the event through smell and touch, similar to how in our own day sports fans might wear team colors to a game. Romans were keenly aware of how the manipulation of smellscape distinguished spaces that were public from

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<sup>48</sup> From the biblical perspective, words not only describe truth but are the actions of the creator-God: "And God said: Be light made. And light was made. And God saw the light that it was good" (Genesis 1:3-4) and "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made." (John 1:1, 3).

<sup>49</sup> Lohfert Jorgensen, "Touch" 40.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past* 60.

private, but could also unite the cultic to the domestic through burning incense.<sup>51</sup> Of particular interest is how the Greeks' view of cultic meals demonstrates a stratification of senses: humans eat the meat, but the gods consume the smell of the roasting flesh.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, religiously speaking, smell was higher than taste. While perhaps not expressed in the same terms, the ancient Jews thought of sacrifices in the same way.<sup>53</sup> And, as will be explained in the next chapter, things that were good or holy smelled good. St. Paul said that baptized Christians were the "good odour of Christ unto God" (2 Corinthians 2:15), and not surprisingly, a post baptismal anointing with perfumed oil became normative rather quickly in the Patristic period. Correspondingly, good tastes and pleasant touch (so long as it was chaste touch!) were also holy.<sup>54</sup>

It should be said that the medieval period is quite long and not hegemonic in its thought, particularly regarding the senses. I will show in the following chapters that in the late medieval period in particular, affective piety was promoted, suggesting increasing engagement of the senses. Indeed, what was

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past* 61.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past* 77.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Genesis 8:21; Leviticus 1:9, 13; 2:2. St. Paul drawing on Jewish worship and notions, compares Christ's sacrifice on the cross to a votive aroma in Ephesians 5:2: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness." There was also some later Old Testament period pushback on the true spiritual intent of sacrifices as being from the value and contrition of the devotees instead of the matter for immolation: "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices: and thy burnt offerings are always in my sight... If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of praise: and pay thy vows to the most High" (Psalm 50[49]:8, 12-14); "o what purpose do you offer me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord? I am full, I desire not holocausts of rams, and fat of fatlings, and blood of calves, and lambs, and buck goats... Offer sacrifice no more in vain: incense is an abomination to me... Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes: cease to do perversely, Learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow." (Isaiah 1:11, 13, 16-17).

<sup>54</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:12: "Salute one another with a holy kiss."

probably symbolic to a great degree in the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux were more literal for slightly later women mystics and subsequently for leaders of the *Devotio Moderna* several centuries later. Regardless, this notion that sight and hearing were beautiful, pure, and rational, and the lower senses were base (as matter of fact or pejoratively), tainted by what they perceive, and unsophisticated cast a long shadow in Western thought.

Nevertheless, from this time period we can glean certain canons of associated sense ideas when speaking of the lower senses. The medieval European Christian imagination was ripe with symbolism culled from the quotidian. For example, in the case of flowers, certain forms of dianthus were associated with Christ. In English these flowers are often called pinks or carnations, both referring to the color of flesh and the punning on the word *incarnation*.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, many early Netherlandish Madonna and Christ child paintings show the babe being offered a pink. However, still another variety of dianthus called clove pinks were thought to resemble nails (in German *negelblum*, literally “nail flower”) and thus the Passion of Christ.<sup>56</sup> Thus the very smell of these plants associated with aspects of the Christian mystery were then further associated with the fragrance of the flower itself. Therefore, while there may be some ambiguity to lower sense symbolism, there are also clear examples that can be found in the culture.

In art history the state of the discipline is more often than not steeped in the sight over the other senses, and authors in Anglo-American schools tend to

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<sup>55</sup> Celia Fisher, “Flowers and Plants, the Living Iconography,” Hourihane, Colum, and Denis L. Drysdall, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, Routledge Companions (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017) 459.

<sup>56</sup> Fisher, “Flowers and Plants” 459.

focus on so-called *visual culture*. Visual culture is perhaps more helpful in the time since mass media from the printing press through digital media. The author most at the forefront of this, especially regarding how religion in the modern period uses images, is David Morgan.<sup>57</sup> Morgan argues that genres of images have a profoundly bodily and affective response in religious adherents. However, his emphasis is the image that can be reproduced or shown often without reference to its objecthood.

Others have promoted material culture as process and sensual experience in art historical study.<sup>58</sup> Thinking of art as objects, interacting with them, and considering the process of making art, as well as examining what was traditionally excluded as art for discussion, *material culture* encourages engagement with the objects themselves so that new insights can be gleaned. Indeed, while ideas and even sense associations are culturally and sometimes temporally bound, the human body's senses are absolutely bound by time. In other words, we know what something smells like, we only do not know what that kind of smell meant to someone in another time. We can, however, infer that from what we know explicitly or implicitly, and theorize based upon these sensations. A seminal work in material culture methodology is Jules David Prown's "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" (1982). He proposes a three-part methodology for researchers. The first is *description*, a

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<sup>57</sup> See especially David Morgan, *The sacred gaze: Religious visual culture in theory and practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (University of California Press, 2012); *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity*. (University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Michael Yonan, "The Suppression of Materiality in Anglo-American Art-Historical Writing," 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA) (Nurnberg, 2012) 31-34; —, "Toward a Fusion" 232-248.

formal analysis that is the baseline for any research. The second stage, *deduction*, is made up of a meditative chewing on the object through sensory engagement, intellectual engagement making connections between what is already known, and the subject's own emotional response to the artifact. The last stage is *speculation* which requires "as much creative imagining as possible" in order to formulate hypotheses.<sup>59</sup> While I have not always had the opportunity to interact with these altarpieces in the same way as Prown describes, by repeated encounters with these paintings, I hope that I have employed his methodology in this work. To consider the lower senses and how they were engaged by these artworks is a way of embracing the multivalent aspect of art as material artifact.

Regarding the state of the discipline and the lower senses, it is an emerging aspect of art history. Smell is perhaps the most surprising area of study in art history, unless one is talking about the smell of an art object's media. If one considers that the persons, plants, animals, and objects produce odors, then the arena of study is nearly endless. In the late medieval period alone, one can categorize on the one hand sweet scents such as flowers or burning incense, and on the other hand, crude odors like decaying bodies and sooty hearths. For this reason, as mentioned above, smell has a lot of important cultural associations even though the art historical research is still rather scant.<sup>60</sup>

Early Netherlandish painting scholars have focused great attention on the many symbolic details represented in hardline drawn clarity in religious paintings.

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<sup>59</sup> Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17:1 (1982): 7-10.

<sup>60</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008): 59-60.

Ward argues that for Panofsky, Friedlander, and Huizinga, the meaning of these objects were drawn only from the visual cue to the literary allusion.<sup>61</sup> While these authors conceived access to symbolic content of these details as restricted to the educated elites of society, researchers in the last quarter of the twentieth century persuasively demonstrated that many classes of persons understood a fair amount of these associations through sermons, church decoration like stained glass, inexpensive block prints, and vernacular devotional literature.<sup>62</sup> What is also coming to light in art history is how early modern Christians engaged the senses in liturgy and prayer practices.<sup>63</sup>

The ‘smoking gun,’ as it were, for the interaction between art object, olfactory symbolism, and actual devotional engagement with the sense of smell is a small private devotional diptych produced by Hans Memling’s workshop (Figure 5).<sup>64</sup> Commonly called Memling’s *Munich Diptych*, it depicts the Madonna and Child Jesus on the left panel (*dexter*, heraldic right) seated in front of a flowerbed of blue irises and red and white roses. The flowers are all Marian symbols. Four angels surround her playing musical instruments. The Christ Child reaches for an apple offered by the angel. On the right panel (*sinister*, heraldic left), a wealthy patron in black brocaded, fur-lined clothes kneels in prayer toward

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<sup>61</sup> John L. Ward, “Disguised Symbolism as Enactive Symbolism in Van Eyck’s Paintings,” *Artibus et Historiae* 15:29 (January 1, 1994): 11.

<sup>62</sup> John L. Ward, “Disguised Symbolism as Enactive Symbolism” 32.

<sup>63</sup> Kathryn M. Rudy, “Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges and Carrying Talismans: Considering Some Harley Manuscripts through the Physical Rituals they Reveal,” *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011): 1.

<sup>64</sup> Appendix: Workshop of Hans Memling, *Munich Diptych* (The Madonna in the Garden with a Donor and St. George) (c. 1480) oil on panel, 40 x 29cm (Munich: Alte Pinakothek).

Reindert Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness : notes on the interpretation of botanical symbolism in paintings by Hans Memling,” *Memling Studies: Proceedings of the International Colloquium* (1997): 149-160.

the Virgin and Child, clutching his rosary. His patron saint, George, coaxes the man to turn to Mary as he holds a spear impaled through a pathetic dragon at his feet. Typical of Flemish painting of the day, the scene is set within a vast landscape that depicts a castle and fortifications behind the Blessed Virgin and recedes into blue atmospheric perspective mountain ranges on the donor wing.

The flowers and perhaps the fruit are obvious smell cues. However, the painting is an otherwise unexceptional example of stereotypical donor devotional panels of fifteenth-century Flanders. And yet it is remarkable for one particular detail: its depiction of the rosary. At its base is a perforated metal ball. This is a *pomander* or scent ball. These were common enough among people who had the means to afford gold and silver perfume receptacles sometimes shaped like hearts or pomegranates.

The precious pomander was at one level certainly prestige object. It deodorized the donor's space and perhaps even had an apotropaic or prophylactic purpose.<sup>65</sup> Reindert Falkenburg does not rule out medicinal and evil-averting functions for rosary pomanders, as plague was associated with sinfulness and God's wrath. Still, he presumes that the primary function of this potpourri is parallel to the Marian devotion of the sacramental to which it is attached:

[T]o my mind its function of 'perfuming' prayer and meditation must have been equally prominent. The real smells of pomanders and rosery [*sic.*]

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<sup>65</sup> Eithne Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game: The Symbolic Background to European Prayer-Beads* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969) 60.

beads must have underscored - and maybe even facilitated - the experience in the believer of a spiritual scent during devotional exercise.<sup>66</sup>

Katelynn Robinson also mentions that medieval women mystics described the Madonna and Christ Child as emitting intense, floral smells themselves – implying that pleasant, terrestrial odors find their true origin in heaven.<sup>67</sup> Again, the rosary with pomander used in this devotional diptych tells us more simply its basic meaning. While this may be documentation of a treasured sacramental or even a sign of wealth, it is a conspicuous display of the patron’s piety. It does, then, show a direct connection between Netherlandish panel painting and the sense of smell. The Virgin is surrounded by flowers that are of sensory as well as symbolic value, while the devotee on the opposite panel evokes her presence – not just through the tactile practice of praying the Rosary, but – through the scent of the pomander.

Smells paired with visual aids were part of religious experience. In the case of the *Munich Diptych*, the devotional painting crystallizes the Proust phenomenon. The Proust phenomenon refers to an anecdotal situation in the French writer Marcel Proust’s book *Swann’s Way* (1919), in which he recounts how the smell of madeleine pastries dipped in tea whisked him back to his

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<sup>66</sup> Falkenburg, “The Scent of Holyness,” 160. The author gives a fuller list of scents, including musk, sweet and yellow flag, cinnamon, lemon skin, saffron, laudanum, lavender, aloe, nutmeg, incense, rose leaves, sandal-wood, spikenard, violets, tragacant, and benzoion. There was also a recipe for “pulverized sandelwood, mixed with black earth soaked in rose water, styrax and other resins and gums.” Robinson mentions the multisensory use of amber: “Amber beads, a common and desirable material for paternosters, provided other sensory experiences in addition to scent, with its tactile smoothness and natural warmth compared to precious stones and metals. Amber prayer beads could provide a nearly complete sensory experience in prayer: the beauty of the warm, smooth beads, the sound of a Latin or vernacular prayer, and perhaps the scent of a pomander filled with musk,” “The Heart’s Nose,” 61.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, “The Heart’s Nose,” 49-50.

grandmother's kitchen as a child. Social scientists and psychologists have set about testing if there is any validity to this experience.<sup>68</sup> There is ample evidence from contemporary experiments that memory is indeed cued by odor-associations and that even certain behaviors can be stimulated merely by the visual or verbal suggestion of smells.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, we can speculate that even in the absence of conscious odorants, the pomander cued a sense of memory for the patron, and indeed, any contemporary viewer. Or more rightly said, this diptych depicts the Proust *meta*-phenomenon. For on the one hand, this painting reminds the donor (and others with similar associations) of the joys of prayer, and on the other hand, it is not memory but a kind of prospective reminiscence. The latter point is to say that both image and odor transport the viewer to the imagined memory of a state of being, a future, or over a “miraculous threshold” – to use Lynn Jacobs’s term – into the presence of the Virgin and Christ Child.<sup>70</sup> For this reason, investigating the depiction of smell

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<sup>68</sup> “The fundamental principle underlying the Proust phenomenon is that odors can become affective markers for places where meaningful social interaction took place because they fit into the overall experience,” Gerald C. Cupchik, Michelle C. Hilscher, and Dina Buttu, “Recognizing Odors Associated with Meaningful Places,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 123, no. 3 (2010): 290.

<sup>69</sup> My masters thesis dealt with the contemporary evidence of smell upon memory and behavior, “The Depiction of Smell in Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Painting as Cultural Sense Memory and Odor-Cued Behavior,” University of Missouri, 2016: 15-24; Cf. Wen Li, Isabel Moallem, Ken A. Paller, and Jay A. Gottfried. “Subliminal Smells Can Guide Social Preferences.” *Psychological Science* 18:12 (December 1, 2007): 1044–49; Lorenzo D. Stafford, Sarah Salehi, and Bridget M. Waller, “Odors Cue Memory,” *Chemosensory Perception* 2: 2 (April 16, 2009): 59-69; Cupchik, et al., “Recognizing Odors,” 281-293; Rachel S. Herz, and Gerald C. Cupchik, “The Emotional Distinctiveness of Odor-Evoked Memories,” *Chemical Senses* 20:5 (January 1, 1995): 517–28; Rob W. Holland, Merel Hendriks, and Henk Aarts, “Smells like Clean Spirit: Nonconscious Effects of Scent on Cognition and Behavior,” *Psychological Science* 16:9 (September 1, 2005): 689–693.

<sup>70</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 106; “Visions of Paradise were similarly populated by sweet smells and a multitude of flowers. In the closing years of the twelfth century, Roger, a Cistercian lay brother at Stratford Langthorne, recounted an extensive dialogue he had in a vision of his friend, Alexander, a monk who had died about a year earlier. Alexander told how he was in Paradise and that there they lived off smell, which at the start of the day descended from Heaven,

in early Netherlandish painting, its potential designed use, and its effect in the experience of viewers has many insights for the history of devotion and artists' repertoires.

Taste has a slightly longer historiography in art history. However, any history of the sense of taste is indebted to a still more extensive study from anthropology, culinary history, and medical research, with the bulk of it focusing on the history of particular foods.<sup>71</sup> Certainly shared meals are aspects of cultures throughout the time and place. More importantly, sacrifice almost always includes ritual meals and eating.<sup>72</sup>

Landmark works in medieval history and art history have made the subject of food, if not necessarily the sense of taste, an important aspect of study. Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987) investigates how and why medieval women thought about food, manipulated their circumstances and those of others with food, and deprived themselves of it to extreme extents and why they did so.<sup>73</sup> One theme of Bynum's book investigates how women's relationship to food objectified their bodies, which as mystics were paired with Eucharistic themes.<sup>74</sup> Bynum also makes use of Northern European art to show how these ideas were both enshrined and influential.

A second important work in art history is Reindert Falkenburg's *The Fruit*

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satisfying and refreshing each according to his merits by a differential sweetness," Woolgar, *The Senses*, 119.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, "Sensing the Past" 75.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, "Sensing the Past" 76.

<sup>73</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>74</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* 277-287.

*of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (1994).<sup>75</sup> Falkenburg makes the simple, yet apparently unnoticed, connection between Netherlandish late medieval devotional works that speak of tastes (and scents, to some degree) and contemporary religious paintings that depict those things. His thesis is that tracts from the High Middle Ages that evoked the physical senses as routes to the spiritual senses, originally geared to an elite audience (i.e., monks and nuns), were re-presented to a broader audience in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in a time when sensation became the experience of the sacred.<sup>76</sup> In a period of growing affective piety, the sweetness and savor of food created a greater devotion by means of art. While the author suggests the importance of the senses in affective piety as seen in visual sources, he cautions scholars who consider the symbolic qualities to not take too far what is evoked in sensation as opposed to the imagination.<sup>77</sup>

Food moves to a fore (quite literally) in the sixteenth century. Even before the Protestant Reformation, late medieval piety was becoming more individualized and domestic in character. Unlike Protestant spirituality, however, it was still quite sensual and typically drew on Eucharistic associations. Maryan Ainsworth demonstrates this phenomenon of how very ordinary tastes can stimulate Eucharistic devotion discussing a series of small panels created in Gerard David's workshop for the burgeoning art market in the Low Countries.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994).

<sup>76</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion* 5-6.

<sup>77</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion* 78, 84-85.

<sup>78</sup> Maryan W. Ainsworth, *Gerard David : purity of vision in an age of transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 277-278.

The surviving artworks are variations on a near-identical theme, but the panel now in the Aurora Trust (Figure 6) suffices for discussion.<sup>79</sup> The small dimensions of the *Madonna and Child of the Milk Soup* (33 x 28 cm) underscore its private domestic use, and the setting is itself domestic. Mary is dressed as a young mother in a blue dress and veil, feeding a fully nude Christ Child on her lap. The figures are pressed right up to the picture plane. The interior is a domestic space, not a loggia or church, with a window looking into serene landscape.

Still, for all the domesticity and seeming simplicity, the symbolism in David's painting is as dense as any largescale altarpiece. Behind Mary is a cabinet with a carved figure of Adam on its door and three pears on top. Jesus holds a branch of cherries as Mary spoons porridge next to a knife, apple, and crusty bread bun on the table closest to the viewer. On a table beneath the window is a vase of flowers associated with Mary (e.g., iris, columbine, pink pansy, dame's rocket, and stock) in a majolica vase, a basket with white cloth, and a prayer book removed from its velvet pouch.<sup>80</sup> The meaning of the symbolism is clear: Christ's Incarnation and humanity's redemption. Mary, the New Eve, has turned her back

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<sup>79</sup> Gerard David and workshop, *Madonna & Child of the Milk Soup* (c. 1510-1512) oil on panel, 33 x 28cm (New York: Aurora Trust).

Maryan W. Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998); Maryan W. Ainsworth, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*. Exhibition catalogue (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998); Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* 117, 270–71; Max J. Friedländer et al. *Early Netherlandish Painting*. Vol. 6, *Hans Memlinc and Gerard David*. New York, 1971, part 2, p. 107, no. 212a, pl. 215; James Mundy, "Gerard David's 'Rest on the Flight into Egypt': Further Additions to Grape Symbolism," *Simiolus* 12:4 (1981–82) 219.

<sup>80</sup> Ainsworth, *Gerard David* 306.

on the fallen Adam, and offers pure food to the New Adam, Christ.<sup>81</sup> His very nakedness shows a return to original innocence.<sup>82</sup> The cherries are the fruit of paradise. The clothes are the linens that bound Christ's body for the tomb. The prayer book reminds the person of daily growth in holiness and preparing for the gift of salvation.

Already, the ordinary and sensual aspects of the composition are apparent. However, it is the food in the foreground and the feeding that are paramount. Mary supplies Christ with food, and her Son bestows on humanity his body and blood as nourishment. Devotional literature and the writings of medieval women mystics from the Low Countries used scriptural imagery "to provide the imagery of food and eating that expressed the soul's desire for God; bread, apples, milk - prominently placed in the *Virgin and Child of the Milk Soup* paintings - were symbolic of the Eucharist."<sup>83</sup> The play between breastmilk and blood will receive much greater treatment later in this paper. However, it should be noted again that these were not only symbols, but because these were common foods and the

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<sup>81</sup> Romans 5:12-18: "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned. For until the law sin was in the world: but sin was not imputed, when the law was not. But death reigned for Adam unto Moses, even over them also who have not sinned, after the similitude of the transgression of Adam, who is a figure of him who was to come. But not as the offence, so also the gift. For if by the offence of one, many died: much more the grace of God and the gift, by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

And not as it was by one sin, so also the gift. For judgment indeed was by one unto condemnation: but grace is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift and of justice shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one, unto all men to condemnation: so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life."

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Genesis 9:20-23: Noah's post-diluvian drunken siesta in the nude that was the cause of shame and curse for his sons may have also been seen as a return to the innocence before the Fall.

<sup>83</sup> Ainsworth, *Gerard David* 306-307.

Eucharist was often ritually consumed by the laity infrequently, certain food associations could be used to evoke devotional thought in the quotidian.

Hapticity is becoming more important as art history's methodology broadens its sense of what art is outside of the traditional Western culture triad. As the scope of accepted media expands and the notion of material culture gains ground in the discipline, touch in art is relevant. With that said, of the three lower senses this remains the least researched. To find historical writing on the topic can only be gleaned in the discipline of medicine.<sup>84</sup>

Medieval art historians have led the way led the way in pointing out fundamental ritual and devotional actions that involve bodily contact with art objects. For example, while an older generation of art historians was typically only interested in the image of illuminated manuscripts, within the last thirty years or so, scholars have started to pay attention to the prayerbook as a physical thing. The object of scholarship itself – the book – has been universally ignored in its haptic modality.<sup>85</sup> Yet once one considers that the prayerbook was meant to fit in the palms of the hands, the devotee caressed the velvety pages, and signs of dirt and wear evidence engagement of hands and even lips, one sees great possibilities for study.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, such signs of physical wear suggest what parts of the book, and thus which prayers, were most used. Furthermore, in the era before paper became the norm (and to some degree still afterward), it was not lost on early

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past* 94.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past* 93.

<sup>86</sup> Rudy, "Kissing Images" 4.

modern Christians that the written and painted page was skin.<sup>87</sup> This skin bearing the word of God could approximate or even accurately reproduce the presence of Jesus Christ himself. Thus, touching and kissing were a form of communion.

Regarding altarpieces, it can seem that touch is quite remote. However, like smell and taste, touch can be stimulated or sublimated by sight. The semi-grisaille exterior panels of Hieronymus Bosch's *Mass of Saint Gregory* (Figure 7) on his *Epiphany* altarpiece now in the Prado evokes the concept of touch quite clearly.<sup>88</sup> The scene is a Eucharistic miracle by which the sixth-century pope proved the real presence of the body of Christ in the presence. To confound the disbelief in the doctrine of transubstantiation by the woman who baked the communion hosts, as Gregory said the words of the institution, the sculpted corpus came to life and moved off of the cross.<sup>89</sup>

Bosch shows the corpus appear to come to life as the Man of Sorrows, half-length in front of an arched reredos over the altar. St. Gregory kneels below the chalice on the altar looking up in reverence. All around the altar reredos is there are lively painted and perhaps 'real' scenes of the Passion. Below, this even

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<sup>87</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012) 28-29; Rudy, *Kissing Images* 15.

<sup>88</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Mass of Saint Gregory* (exterior panels *Adoration of the Magi*) (c. 1494) oil on panels, 147.4cm h. (Museo del Prado).

Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 17; Reindert Falkenburg, "Super-Entanglement: Unfolding Evidence in Hieronymus Bosch's Mass of St. Gregory," *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image*, eds. Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden & Boston: Brill 2015) 371-396; Jutta Sperling, "Squeezing, Squirting, Spilling Milk: The Lactation of Saint Bernard and the Flemish Madonna Lactans (ca. 1430-1530)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 71:3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nilgen and Francescano, "Epiphany and the Eucharist" 313-314; Lotte Brand Philip, "The Prado Epiphany by Jerome Bosch," *The Art Bulletin* 35:4 (1953): 286-292; Yona Pinson, "Bruegel's 1564 Adoration: Hidden Meanings of Evil in the Figure of the Old King," *Artibus et Historiae* 15:30 (1994): 109, 124.

<sup>89</sup> The earliest versions of the story had the host St. Gregory held turn into a finger, cf. Andrea Maraschi, "Sympathy for the Lord: The Host and Elements of Sympathetic Magic in Late Medieval Exempla," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 43:2 (2017): 215.

the miraculous animation of Jesus is sober by comparison. However, there is no sign of the Eucharistic sacrament itself. The altar is stark with only two (three?) candles, the water and wine cruets, and the missal. There is one last tiny item on the altar on the right panel left of the candlestick: a pax board. The pax was a sculpted board with an image of Christ on it that fit into the palm of the hand – the board could be made of precious metals or molded in clay.<sup>90</sup> At the kiss of peace intended to quell animosity before approaching the altar (cf. Matthew 5:23-24), the priest ritually kissed this object with the body of Christ represented on it and then passed it through the congregation to kiss. The importance of this liturgical gesture was explained by the father of the Devotia Moderna, Geert Groote:

Take up the Pax reverently and devoutly because you are in contact with the body of the Lord through the mouth of the priest. Did Veronica not venerate it? Is not an image of Christ, even an unconsecrated host of Christ, also venerated? For all the faithful used to communicate in the early Church, and now the Pax is given in its place as a kind of communication with the body of Christ. The reason the body is not given commonly to all, I judge, is that they were better in the early Church, warmed still by the blood of Christ, and religion which has now grown decrepit was then in its vigor and at its peak. Christ therefore withdrew himself bodily, as he has spiritually. When the Pax comes, be prepared to receive it as the body of Christ, and then lift up your desire and prepare

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<sup>90</sup> Rudy, *Kissing Images* 1-2.

yourself so that even though you are not up to eating the sacrament carnally you may eat it spiritually.<sup>91</sup>

In the experience of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Christians, as Groote mentions, true eating of the Eucharist was rare and the kissing of the pax board was transmitted through the kiss of the priest who consecrated and consumed the sacrament himself communicating contact with the body of Christ. In fact, some priests seemed to have only shown the pax to the congregants instead of passing it around to be kissed.<sup>92</sup> In similar ways, the power of divine contact was as strongly associated with looking as with touching, or perhaps touching or kissing another material object was approximate.

The lower senses have a long history of under-appreciation in Western academe. However, paying attention to how artists, authors, and ordinary Christians engaged in a multisensory way with these art objects offers new insights for scholars. What is more, they make contemporary viewers more sensitive to the context, scale, and given objecthood of particular artworks. While sense associations are culturally based, and at times our own ability to experience what it was like is historically outside of our experience, these marginal details in the paintings help us reconstruct the values of early modern persons in the Low Countries and their orbit.

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72. <sup>91</sup> John Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988)

<sup>92</sup> Rudy, *Kissing Images 2*.

*The Lower Senses in Early Netherlandish Epiphany Altarpieces*

The late medieval period is a prime epoch to study the realities of the lower senses in altarpieces, given the large play of sense experience piety. This paper will utilize the subject of the Adoration of the Magi in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century altarpieces as a lens through which to see how the lower senses played a larger role of meaning and experience in the culture. Though they could be small details these objects carried potent meanings and affects. For example, the gifts of the three kings are central to the event represented. Each of them in their material makeup and containers are also items that have particular odors, tactile qualities, and even tastes. By breaking down the senses individually and evaluating them, they can then be synthesized with their larger subject matter for a greater appreciation of medieval spirituality. This is worthwhile because, as Peter Burke states, “Eye, brain and culture work together.”<sup>93</sup>

Chapter Two will deal with the sense of smell. As far as subject matter goes in early Netherlandish painting, the Adoration of the Magi is the smellscape *par excellence*. Few other scenes could offer such olfactive potential to Netherlandish artists, set as it was in a stable-grotto-ruin characteristic of the period’s paintings of Christ’s birth at Bethlehem. It was a perfect nexus for good, bad, and neutral odors. The convergence of many kinds of odors stemming from several contexts makes Epiphany altarpieces particularly suitable for study. I will argue that smell associations in these scenes collapsed the space between ecclesial/heavenly/communal associations and more domestic/earthly/personal

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2009) 16.

associations. These associations were based on the sacramental experience in the life of ordinary Christians who were reminded of them when they came into contact with these altarpieces, cuing memories through implied smell sensations triggered by sight. This chapter will re-present many of the ideas I argued in my Masters thesis, although adhering more closely to art historical research and omitting much of the social and behavioral science work I utilized in that previous project.

The third chapter concerns the integrated quality that exists between touch and taste in the medieval worldview. Looking specifically at a genre motif in which the Christ Child reaches into the gift of gold from the oldest magus, I argue that the touch bypassed taste, and sight both substituted and sublimated both for devotees. By contemplating this work in and out of Mass, a spiritual communion as ordinary ideal was reinforced for the average Christian. While at the same time for churchmen and patrons, the desire to touch, taste, and to believe wholeheartedly in the doctrine of the real presence in the sacrament were heightened by playing on these sense associations.

Chapter Four will depart somewhat from the study of the lower senses themselves. As Michael Camille pointed out in his seminal work, *Image on the Edge*, the highly stratified and hierarchal society of the medieval and early Renaissance periods created a space for everything. Just as some senses were marginal, animalistic, and inferior compared to the more intellectual and pure senses of sight and hearing, so were certain people. The Adoration of the Magi scenes also brought in these peripheral persons to reinforce beliefs about the

Eucharist and orthodoxy and orthopraxis – even if it did sometimes play upon and strengthen existing stereotypes of the lower classes and marginalized. In this chapter I will highlight the representation of Jewish persons and black Africans who were closely associated with the both positive and negative connotations the lower senses carried.

Chapter Five will continue to investigate the connection between persons and the lower senses in Epiphany altarpieces. Yet while those who were considered outside the homogenous white European Christian culture of the early modern period could be morally good or evil, this chapter will focus on those who are clearly evil. This chapter will argue that a figure who come to represent the Antichrist was replete with disease boding disgusting smells and dangerous physical touch in order to form devotion in a negative movement. For just as the lower senses could be exploited through positive associations, so could they be utilized in order to play on repulsion.

## Chapter 2 – Smell

### *Smell, Memory, and the Spiritual Life*

Europe in the early modern period was an intrinsically foul place to live. The inhabitant of fifteenth-century Flanders would have traversed a smellscape in which there was no sewer system, infrequent bathing, and unmediated exposure to all forms of farm and pre-industrial manufacturing that was pervasive and ubiquitous.<sup>94</sup> With that said, certain *good smells* would have been conspicuous and acute, just as the sound of church bells would have been particularly loud in a relatively silent world.<sup>95</sup> The depiction of good, neutral, and bad smells in the ever more naturalistic Flemish paintings of the fifteenth century gave viewers an ideal and symbolic experience similar to quotidian life, but also provided a way of lifting persons into contact with divine life.<sup>96</sup>

Odorants may or may not change in time, but most certainly their contexts do change.<sup>97</sup> Smell associations are also culturally bound, and there are clear indications of odor associations for the time period. Much of this can be taken from popular sermons, hymns, and early vernacular books of the late medieval period, themselves drawing on the reflection of Scripture commentators stretching back as far as the Patristic period. What is described in these prayer texts is

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<sup>94</sup> Mark S.R. Jenner, "Follow Your Nose?" *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 338.

<sup>95</sup> Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 2; Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense," 851.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Bynum, *Christian materiality*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Roses were bred for their aesthetic look and the scent was mellowed through selective breeding, so that we do not necessarily understand how roses smelled in the medieval period (cf. Mark M. Smith, "Sensing the Past" 63); Likewise, Civil War reenactments can have the same clothing and gun powder smoke blowing around, but it is now mixed in with mass produced aftershave and the sound of highway traffic in the distance (cf. Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense" 846).

exactly what is seen in the paintings.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, when one sees a flower it has obvious symbolic meanings (e.g., the purity of the Virgin), but the scent itself was an integral and essential part of the experience. As Caroline Walker Bynum has said in regard to materiality in the late medieval Low Countries, religious experience was marked by paradox: “Miraculous matter was simultaneously – hence paradoxically – the changeable stuff of not-God and the locus of a God revealed.”<sup>99</sup> For the believer at this time, smells – implied or actual – were the means to prayer but also not transcended and forgotten. On the contrary rather than a dichotomy, outer and ‘inner’ senses were interlaced.<sup>100</sup> This textual testimony, taken with what appears in the paintings themselves, helps to make fresh what odors were meant to be in fifteenth-century Flanders.

Most important for late medieval spirituality was twelfth-century monastic reflection on the sensuous imagery of the Song of Songs – the courtly, erotic poem of the Hebrew Scriptures – which linked smell and taste symbolism as *unio mystica* of Christ the Bridegroom with the soul of the believer.<sup>101</sup> The mystical writings of big names like St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Richard of St. Victor, anonymous works by Carthusian monks, and the documented mystical experiences of cloistered nuns were all distilled to the laity by the mendicant

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 158.

<sup>99</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 34-35.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 153; Henning Laugerud, “Memory: The Sensory Materiality of Belief and Understanding in Late Medieval Europe,” *The Saturated Sensorium* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2016) 264.

<sup>101</sup> Reindert L. Falkenburg, “The Scent of Holyness,” 153.

orders in the High Middle Ages.<sup>102</sup> An important work was St. Bonaventure's *Vitis Mystica* ("The Mystical Vine"), which took the longstanding *unio mystica*, love spirituality, and made explicit the beginning of spiritual experience in the natural world through all the senses:

Let us now smell these flowers in our vineyard praying to sweet Jesus that He deign to endow our hearts with the scent of His sweetest smells so that we may feel His sweetness. "O soul, father only the petals of the flowers of the blossoming Jesus, the drops of red blood and enclose these in the bed chamber of your heart. This taste and smell be in your heart as a holy medicine to drive away your illnesses and protect from the future evils."<sup>103</sup>

Sight, smell, taste, and touch are all mentioned in this exhortation. Bonaventure's instruction grounds prayer in an experience everyone can have and then invites the devotee to utilize memory and imagination. In its various forms, Bonaventure's work was popular and translated into vernacular languages, for example, in Middle Dutch as *Een Boecxken van den hemelschen Wijngaert*.<sup>104</sup>

A second and perhaps more important primer by Bonaventure is the *Lignum Vitae* ("Tree of Life") which uses the schematic image of a tree and, moving from base to top, charts a progression from human senses to the spiritual pinnacle. However, it should be noted again that in Bonaventure's time, and in the later medieval period especially, that senses did not pass away into a wordless, imageless experience of the holy. Henning Laugerud calls the engagement of

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<sup>102</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: the visual culture of a medieval convent*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 109.

<sup>103</sup> Bonaventure, *Vitas Mystica* §108, as quoted in Falkenburg, "The Scent of Holyness," 156.

<sup>104</sup> Falkenburg, "Scent of Holyness," 156.

senses of primary importance to creating so-called hooks of memory, which initiate a process of internalization of the mysteries through which one can be transformed – just as St. Francis of Assisi’s intense reflection on the crucified Christ produced the wounds of the Passion in his own body through stigmatization.<sup>105</sup> All the associations of smells, as well as ingesting or imagining the odors themselves, produce multiple effects: “this act of meditation comprises, therefore, not only the consumptive ‘internalizing’ and ‘incorporation’ by the soul of the Heavenly Bridegroom but also of (the virtuousness of) [the person contemplated] - and is an act of self-reflection by the soul as well.”<sup>106</sup> Many strata of society in the Low Countries knew of the Modern Devotion in the fifteenth century. Therefore, I assert that the presence of smell was a deliberate motif used by artists in this time and played into the multi-sensory piety of the era.

### *The Stable and the Church*

As stated in the first chapter, the Adoration of the Magi is the smellscape par excellence. The convergence of many kinds of smells stemming from several contexts makes these Epiphany altarpieces particularly suitable for study. I will argue that smell associations in these scenes collapsed the space between spaces marked out as ecclesial or heavenly and communal with those designated as domestic and terrestrial.

In the first place, it is important to understand how these smells interacted at the time. The practice of traveling to church, receiving sacraments and their

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<sup>105</sup> Laugerud, “Sensory Materiality,” 252, 266.

<sup>106</sup> Falkenburg, “Scent of Holyness,” 156.

secondary phenomena, and then bringing it back to the home marked important moments of initiation into the Christian life. These collapsing associations involve olfaction and can be linked to images of the Epiphany. Frankincense and myrrh both derive from balsam tree resin, and their aromatic qualities were burned in the former and crushed into olive oil for the latter, the fruit of trade with the East and the exotic.<sup>107</sup> Myrrh was an expensive ointment used to anoint a body for burial, and generally a costly perfume.<sup>108</sup>

Spices and aromatic resin were used in oils for perfume throughout the ancient world.<sup>109</sup> As sensual practices of the Mediterranean were applied to sacramental rites in order to bring out secondary meanings, not surprisingly perfumed oil became common. The early third-century theologian, Origen of Alexandria – in a trope that will be repeated in Christian preaching into the late medieval period –, uses the qualities of incense and myrrh as metaphors about striving for Christian perfection:

We must seek “frankincense” and not just any kind of frankincense but [that which is] clear. The high priest does not want to take something dark and sordid; he seeks something clear. But he also demands from you “galbanum” whose nature is to chase away harmful serpents by the

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<sup>107</sup> Le Guérier, *Scent*, 134-135.

<sup>108</sup> This gives insight into the men, and in particular the women such as Mary of Magdala, who subsidized Jesus’ public ministry and appeared at the tomb on Easter morning to anoint his body after the Passover (cf. Luke 23:56, 24:1, etc.).

<sup>109</sup> Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 2.

strength of its odor. He also seeks “myrrh”; for he wants both our words and our deeds to be purified and cleansed.<sup>110</sup>

This sermon clearly links liturgical use of perfumed substances to spiritual work and apotropaic function (i.e., the odor of sanctity). In Roman Catholic sacraments, there are three oils: the Oil of Catechumens, Oil of the Infirm, and Sacred Chrism. Of the three, only chrism is scented with spices and balsam.

A normative portrayal of sacramental experience is seen in Rogier van der Weyden’s fixed triptych *The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (Figure 8).<sup>111</sup> At 220 cm in height, this is the largest work Rogier ever produced. It depicts a large Gothic church with six side chapels. In the foreground center is a Crucifixion scene with gospel characters at the foot of the cross. The elevation of the host after its consecration at an altar is depicted just inside the rood screen of the church, representing the sacrament of the Eucharist as the most important of the seven. On the left and right panels are the other six sacraments in their respective chapels; moving from left to right, or clockwise in the space around the central panel, they are baptism, confirmation, confession, holy orders (here, priesthood), matrimony, and extreme unction (Last Rites).<sup>112</sup>

Most germane for this study are the representations of baptism and confirmation. At this time the norm was infant baptism, as soon as possible after birth, if not on the same day, due to high infant mortality and the influence of St.

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<sup>110</sup> *Homily on Leviticus 9.8.3* as quoted in Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 198-199. Galbanum is a kind of gum resin used for incense and myrrh.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix: Rogier van der Weyden, *The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*, (c. 1440-1445) oil on panel (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten).

<sup>112</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 282.

Augustine's soteriology.<sup>113</sup> In the Latin church the three sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) were separated when infant baptism became the norm, with the bishop being the reserved minister for performing confirmation – as high priest of a locality, he confirmed the baptism of the faithful.<sup>114</sup>

Rogier's painting gives us insight into the sacramental practice of the day (Figure 9).<sup>115</sup> The priest holds a metal box with two compartments for the two types of sacred oils. The baby has already been anointed on the breastbone and between the shoulders on the back with the unscented oil of catechumens prior to the water baptism in the font.<sup>116</sup> The viewer presently witnesses the post-baptismal explanatory rite of anointing with the scented chrism. Apparently contemporary application of the oils was done with a stylus rather than with the cleric's fingers, in this case, in the form of a cross on the crown of the skull. Durandus, thirteenth-century bishop of Mende in France, gives us the praxis and theological reflection on the use of the oils:

According to St. Augustine, the unction with oil shows us that we are fully prepared to hear the faith, and that we are called to the good odor of Christ, and that we are reminded to renounce the Devil. The second

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<sup>113</sup> Augustine, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine: Writings in connection with the Donatist controversy*, "On Baptism" Book IV (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872) 112-114 (§ 31-33); Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 232; Everett Ferguson, "Inscriptions and the Origins of Infant Baptism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30:1 (1979): 37-46: the author says that second-century North African bishops promoted the practice earliest, but that the practice was generally only for infants on their deathbeds and was not the norm; Augustine was a bishop in North Africa.

<sup>114</sup> "The sacrament of dignity and necessity is Confirmation; it is a sacrament of dignity since it can only be conferred by a bishop, and it is a sacrament of necessity, since he who renounces it out of contempt, will not be saved," Guillaume Durand, *The Rationale divinorum*, 100-101.

<sup>115</sup> Appendix: Rogier van der Weyden, *Seven Sacraments* (detail of sacraments of baptism and confirmation).

<sup>116</sup> Durand, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, VIII §6, p. 91.

unction, on the breast and between the shoulders is done, according to Rhabanus, so that we will be fortified through the faith in all our members to perform good works, strengthened through the grace of God... This [last] unction is done on the crown, that is, at the top of the head, on the cerebrum, according to the same author, so that the one anointed may be joined to those who share in the kingdom of heaven, and because the soul of the one who is baptized is betrothed to its head, that is Christ; moreover, it is done with chrism made from oil and balsam so that we might know that the Holy Spirit, which works invisibly, is given to him. For oil warms weary members and provides light, as was noted above, balsam gives off a sweet scent. Seeing the soul's members are weary...the Spirit gives him good works which provide a good odor for others, which is designated by the fragrant balsam. This anointing is also done on the crown of the head, where the seat of pride [*superbia*] is seen, which always seeks after higher things [*superiora*], so therefore, it is done in the form of the cross and in the name of humility.<sup>117</sup>

Nearly the same practice is occurring at confirmation in the side chapel just above the baptism scene. This time a bishop traces a cross of chrism on the forehead of the *confirmandus*. In the early modern period an attendant priest tied a white cloth around the head to seal the anointing, in order to absorb the oil the bishop crossed on the forehead and keep it from running into the eyes and off of the head. We see this process in Rogier's painting, as well as three children

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<sup>117</sup> Durande, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, VIII §8-9.

scampering off after their crismation, bandaged all.<sup>118</sup> These sacramental initiations are important for the bridging of sacred and profane because of the family or parish celebrations that occurred afterward. English families in the late medieval period were known to spend a great deal to provide a feast for family and neighbors after a child's baptism.<sup>119</sup> More to the point however, the aromatic chrism would remain on the head of a baby for at least the rest of that day. What is seen in *The Seven Sacraments Triptych* is not the full story of the confirmation rite, as Bishop Durandus gives dramatic witness to the claims that I have been making in regard to collapsing the aroma of Christ from the liturgy into the domestic space.

The bishop announces to the confirmed or crismated that in honor of the Holy Trinity they should bear the chrism cloths on their foreheads for the space of three days; and on the third day the priest shall wash their foreheads, and the chrism cloths upon their foreheads he will burn; or candles should be made from the chrism cloths for the use of the altar.<sup>120</sup>

How amazing! Not only would the smell of perfume permeate the home, but it would linger for three days. What is more, those cloths that conferred the sacramental graces upon the children were brought back to the parish church, and in some cases, used in altar candles for the celebration of the Mass! Again, the

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<sup>118</sup> Confirmation is a sacrament associated with the bestowal of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:1-2; Galatians 5:22-23).

<sup>119</sup> Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death*, Middle Ages Series, (Philadelphia : Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press ; University Presses Marketing [distributor], 2007) 60.

<sup>120</sup> Durandus as quoted in James Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012, 133.

church with its pleasant smells was a sharp contrast to the urban, rural, and domestic smells of the fifteenth century, but the space between it and the home collapsed as the aroma of Christ returned to it from the town. Indeed, how special would a young person feel attending Mass knowing that the wicks for the altar candles came from the cloth used at his confirmation.

Rogier's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* witnesses to the rich significance sacramental rituals marked the life of families. However, it also tells us that there was a slippage, so to speak, in how the good – that is also, holy or heavenly – smells linked church and home. These associations of the church's liturgical smells in the life of a family are the context into which Epiphany altarpieces had the potential to engage and stimulate devotees in a time when lay participation in the liturgy was mostly passive.

In the introduction, Rogier's *Columba Triptych* (Figure 1) was cited as an early example of the Adoration of the Magi as the central subject matter of a monumental altarpiece, and the ways in which the subject was bound to the Eucharist in a deliberate fashion were explored (pp. 11-14). In this chapter, I wish to show how the memory of sacramental initiations such as those seen in the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* could be stimulated in viewers. Thus, a routine evocation of collapsing the space between church and home occurred through meditation upon this Adoration of the Magi scene.

Following the narrative scenes from left to right the *Columba Triptych* displays the Annunciation, the Adoration of Magi, and the Presentation in the Temple (the Circumcision). Although the three scenes are distinct temporally, the

center and right panels share an overlapping wall which merges space from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. The heavy use of the red creates a banner of continuous color horizontally throughout the entire composition, while the vertical figure of the Virgin in her lapis lazuli blue robes (the one figure to appear in all three narrative scenes) breaks up the space in a rhythmic way.

The interplay between the three panels in their distinctness and juxtaposition tell us much about fifteenth-century spiritual experience. At the poles of the work we have a domestic and an ecclesial setting. The Annunciation on the left wing of the triptych places Mary in her bedchamber, kneeling at a prie-dieu to pray from her book of hours as the Angel Gabriel descends the stairs from a closed portal. Golden light rays draw diagonal lines toward her as a miniature Holy Spirit in the form a dove symbolizes the virginal conception. The scene resembles many other Annunciations of the period, but perhaps most notably Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation* in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. which, due to its tall, narrow shape, is thought to have been part of a triptych originally as well. While the formal composition of the *Columba Triptych* Annunciation and the van Eyck in Washington are similar, their setting is not; the latter is set within a church.<sup>121</sup> There could be a trace connection to this in the rose window in Roger's room, although stained glass in domestic interiors is seen in other Annunciation paintings.<sup>122</sup> This perhaps already shows the slippage of church into home, and the collapsing of space that happens through sacramental congress.

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<sup>121</sup> Placing the Annunciation in a church was an innovation, cf. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 137.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Robert Campin, *Méode Altarpiece*. Although x-ray research shows these windows were painted with stained glass after the first complete painting of the scene, cf. Ainsworth and Christiansen, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel*, 92.

In contrast to the Annunciation setting, the Presentation in the Temple is very much a church interior. From inside and out it resembles a Romanesque church.<sup>123</sup> The placement of the altar in which Mary and Simeon rise seems to be the chancel of the church or perhaps meant to represent a side chapel for the church for which it was commissioned.<sup>124</sup> One part of the temple structure overlaps panels into the scene abutting the stable in the center, a significant detail explained further below.

The distinctiveness of the altarpiece wings is important because Rogier's *Columba Triptych* takes the polar settings of left and right panels and merges them in its central scene. Said a different way, the domestic and the ecclesial realms collapse in the Epiphany, as the baptism and confirmation scenes in the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* were meant to do. The central scene is the site of the Adoration of the Magi. The stable is both showing a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), in a newborn king in David's line in the ruins of his palace, connected with the concept of the old giving way to the new by the hint of a Gothic arch in the stone construction representing the age of the church.<sup>125</sup> The main figures of Mary and Jesus are central are pressed up directly to the picture plane.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Panofsky says that fifteenth-century Flemish painters thought of Gothic architecture as distinctly Christian, and the older Romanesque style as closer to Eastern styles. "It was quite justifiable to substitute 'Romanesque' for 'Oriental' buildings wherever the contrast between Christianity and Judaism was intended," *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 135.

<sup>124</sup> "The Columba Triptych...develops thresholds both laterally, to structure relations between the scenes, and frontally, to structure relations between the viewer and the image," Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 116 (cf. 116-118).

<sup>125</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 135.

<sup>126</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 249. "An obviously important commission, it gives us Rogier's mature expression for some problems of painting, including the representation of figures in action proper to the scene, and

For a seemingly ignominious event, there are many witnesses, and the context of a stable and various people create an olfactory cornucopia. Along with the there is a small, white greyhound in the front right corner and, of course, a donkey and ox behind the arches in middle distance. They stick their head through an archway above the left shoulder of the Virgin and connect to the scene by means of a stone manger. Again, this densely populated scene is the place where many odorants come together, mixing worlds and theological realities.

It might be assumed that all domestic smells are bad and ecclesial ones are good, but again, it is not necessarily so. The domestic and ecclesial are two spheres of experience for all strata of churchgoer. The process by which these two spheres collapse, overlap, blend, and interact includes the sense of smell. There are the mundane odors of the barn: ox, ass, fresh hay and old fodder, with moldering thatch on the roof.<sup>127</sup> Yet there are also very noticeable scents associated with liturgical spaces: incense and aromatically infused oil. Regarding the quotidian smells, there are good, bad, and neutral smells, and some remain ambiguous. Lenten sermons made an analogy between spring cleaning in which old straw shut up in homes throughout winter are replaced with fresh hay for floors.

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the coherent management of many figures,” Martin Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden: an essay, with a critical catalogue of paintings assigned to him and to Robert Campin* (London: Phaidon, 1972) 22.

<sup>127</sup> Technically speaking straw and hay are not interchangeable terms in modern, agricultural parlance. The former is the byproduct or remnant plant matter of seed crops (e.g., wheat), while the latter is grown as a seed crop in itself, harvested before the nutrients go to the flower. Both are used as animal fodder, though it more likely that straw was used for non-edible functions (e.g., floor covering and bed stuffing), it cannot always be certain which is depicted in paintings. Thus, I use the terms interchangeably for the sake of lexical variance.

[Just as men and women] clean the house, taking out the fire and straw and flowers, just so they should clean the house of their soul, doing away with the fire of lechery and of deadly wrath and of envy, and add straw there, sweat [sic.] herbs, and flowers.<sup>128</sup>

In that sense one could bring different interpretations to the work based on one's own association. Does the donkey turn to the old, corrupt fodder and the ox turn toward the Christ Child – placed in the manger, but now seated on Mary's lap – as new food for the life of the world?<sup>129</sup> The irreverent jackass continues to eat the stinky feed, even though a new covenant in Christ's blood has come.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, “and that which is decayeth and groweth old, is near its end.”<sup>131</sup> At the same time, popular sermons for the Epiphany often made plain that “the purpose of incense as on the offerings of three kings was to put away the stench of the stable, to employ a good smell to counter an offensive one.”<sup>132</sup> This deodorizing and fumigating idea was employed in the subsequent outbreaks of bubonic plague after the Black Death (1348-1350), and to some degree seems to have worked.<sup>133</sup>

Smell associations within the Epiphany panel appear to be more nuanced and rich in possibilities than simple good and bad labels allow. This collapsing of everyday smells with scents that connoted heaven is not merely symbolic, but

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<sup>128</sup> Easter sermon by John Mirk, quoted in French, *The Good Women*, 22.

<sup>129</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 187.

<sup>130</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors*, 116.

<sup>131</sup> Hebrews 8:13.

<sup>132</sup> Woolgar, “The Senses,” 119.

<sup>133</sup> Anne G. Carmichael, “Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance,” *Bulletin for the History of Medicine*, 57 no. 4 (1984): 510-511.

rather reflects the lived experience of the pious for whom altar and hearth were braided at important moments during their lives. Some of these associated odors were linked to memories of liturgical seasons and others evoked more regular sacramental smells. The former instances are forms of paraliturgical rites and popular devotions that are proximate to public worship, while the latter mark particular initiation rites of the Church. One has to be careful in any time period to limit the continuum of ritual in the lived experience of spirituality.<sup>134</sup>

The blur between terrestrial, domestic smells and transcendent, ecclesial ones is seen in the tradition of the *crèche* or nativity scene. The custom of making a tableau of the Bethlehem stable for Christmas originated with St. Francis of Assisi.<sup>135</sup> Two weeks before the commemoration of Christ's birth in 1223, the saint commissioned a layman acquaintance to construct a grotto with ox, ass, manger, and a statue of the Christ Child in the church at Greccio. Importantly, for the present discussion, the scene was filled with straw and situated in the choir screen, near the high altar.<sup>136</sup> Just prior to Midnight Mass, townsfolk came to adore the display by torchlight. At the service where Francis assisted as deacon, he preached using the parts of the *crèche* as props. After the Mass, the faithful took pieces of straw from the *crèche* home as relics, with accounts of the

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<sup>134</sup> Rudy, "Kissing Images" 1.

<sup>135</sup> Augustine Thompson, OP, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012)

108. Drawing on one of the later biographies written by St. Bonaventure, the first *crèche* was said to be a living nativity with human and animals occupying a cave. However, earlier eyewitness accounts speak already of statues and a church locus.

<sup>136</sup> Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 108.

sacramentalized straw curing sick livestock who ingested it, as well as easing difficult labors for pregnant women who clutched it.<sup>137</sup>

Augustine Thompson in his recent, critical biography of St. Francis believes that the Greccio nativity seems to be a true story, although the immediate annual creation of the crèche is probably projected on the past from slightly later practice.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, the importance of the Incarnation in Francis' spirituality (and its influence on the medieval imagination) was illustrated in the crib: "The humiliation of the Son of God who became a child in the stable amid squalor and domestic animals, was for Francis a model of spiritual perfection."<sup>139</sup> The popularity of crèche sets in parish churches spread throughout Europe within the next several centuries, and they are still in contemporary use wherever Christians are. Most significant for smell study is the proximity of the Bethlehem stable to the altar by which the scents of the farm mix with the incense of the solemn high Mass. Likewise, the story of the Greccio original describes how the transfigured matter of Christ's manger is taken from the church back to the home. Of course, straw itself would be connoted with coming from a domestic setting to the church in order to imbue the matter with spiritual power. By the fifteenth century, when paintings like our example may well have been based on set-piece presentation of crèches, – something as ordinary as hay was mystically potent. As Bynum argues, at the same time as the *Devotio Moderna* proposed greater personal, interior piety, there was a strong turn to materiality. Matter comments on its own materiality by

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<sup>137</sup> Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 109.

<sup>138</sup> Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 260.

<sup>139</sup> Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 109.

not being God, yet it is created by God, and it is that through which he acts.<sup>140</sup>

The above references from popular sermons about fresh and rotten straw, the smell of the barnyard animals versus sweet incense, is proof enough of the strong visceral reactions due to suggestion of odors as apparently unexceptional as straw.<sup>141</sup>

Given that the *Columba Triptych* is an altarpiece, given that it represents an ordinary barn, and given the presence of liturgical scents at work in the Eucharist, it is hard not to conceive of the slippage that would happen in the memory and cued experience of churchgoers. Smell comes into play specifically here by the suggestion of incense. Whether every rural parish could afford incense for every Sunday is hard to determine. Certainly in a well-endowed, urban parish or monastic chapel the use of incense would have been ubiquitous. Even with the subtle objects that represent Eucharistic themes, the presence of the Magi – and what we know about the reenactments of the clerics bringing in these gifts on that feast – with their gifts in themselves would likely have evoked incense smells. Incense tends to linger in spaces even long after diffusing from sight of smoke clouds, even sinking into the linen and wool textiles worn and hung in the church, but moreover the sense memory of the liturgy should have made an immediate connection to the Mass. The limited participation of laity in the Eucharist liturgically, even in an auditory sense, would make the odor of incense filling the sacred space and representing the prayers of the faithful that much more

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<sup>140</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 35.

<sup>141</sup> Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval*, 124.

powerful.<sup>142</sup> Considering that even though the species of the sacramental body is made prominent through food analogies, it is important to realize that most probably did not receive communion that frequently. Seeing the Eucharist was a pious act of spiritual communion – hence *adoration* –, but even how well one could view it from the nave is questionable.<sup>143</sup> Conversely, the scent of incense reached even those who could not see beyond the screen, providing a direct experience associated with the Mass that may well have been further evoked by smell imagery in paintings of the Epiphany. And its juxtaposition to the barn odors could have been a deliberate way that the artist – similar to the admonitions of primers and popular sermons – took the devotion to the Eucharist back to the ordinary smells of the home, just as the people of Greccio took with them miraculous straw from the crèche.

In conclusion, comparing *The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* to the *Columba Triptych*, I think there is a sacramental trigger aside from the Eucharist. The portrayal of Christ as a baby is a staple of affective piety in the medieval period; however, it is emotional for the very reason that people identify with their

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. Jacqueline E. Jung, “Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches,” *The Art Bulletin*, 80:4 (2000): 622-657. Jung points out that often enough an altar in front of the choir screen was used for Masses with laity, and that lay persons actually came past into the choir often enough for liturgies (627). “Nevertheless, [the choir screen] reveals a conception of the central vessel of the church – however rigidly compartmentalized its sides may be – as remarkably fluid, a space in which vision and reality elide and the realms of sacred and profane, public-liturgical and private-devotional, blend seamlessly together,” 630.

<sup>143</sup> Joos van Ghent, *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1465) distemper on canvas (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art). This painting, only slightly older than van der Weyden’s, makes a more explicit connection between the Epiphany and the Eucharist with a more prominent table in relative isolation of extraneous objects and living things (ox and ass are barely legible in the background, at least in the painting’s present condition) but is close to the Virgin and Child. Rather than setting a ciborium on the altar it has loaves of bread (one on a round dish) and a glass of wine, making a direct Eucharistic allusion. There is also a bowl of porridge with a spoon beside it and a knife (no doubt linking the Last Supper to the sacrifice on Calvary). Again, growing Eucharistic piety was based on sight more than touch and taste, and yet one wonders how much sight played in the actual Mass itself?

love for infants. Yes, this is the Lord Jesus who grew up to die and Rise in order to save humanity from sin and death, but it is also a sweet mother and a cute baby. The presence of a work of art showing a nude baby in church with all eyes on him had to have had a strong association with baptism. This, placed alongside the gifts of the Magi, which included perfumed oil, seems to drive the behavioral cue home. When one saw an Epiphany scene like the *Columba Triptych*, then, he was reminded of baptism by the suggestion of smells it depicted; he was reminded of feasting and happy coming of age rituals in the family and community. Further, if he were a pious and semi-literate person, he likely drew various connections to the odor imagery of popular devotionals. As the English author, John Mirk, writes in a Nativity sermon: “And that same nyght of Cristes blessyd incarnation herbis began to blosom and floure, the trees ripe frute, vines ripe grapes, and many oþir marvelles were shewd.”<sup>144</sup> The imagined fragrance of these realistically depicted gifts of perfumed oil immediately brings back memories from sacramental initiation and family celebration. Thus, the conscious or nonconscious odor-cued behavior recreates an experience for believers. Psychologist Avery Gilbert posits that “scents exist entirely in our heads. Many particles are floating in the air but not all of them are recognized as scents. Therefore, scents are images rather than objectively existing entities.”<sup>145</sup> To see was to smell and to be reminded of smells was to lift one out of the earthly world into pleasanter times and spaces, and

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<sup>144</sup> John Mirk, Nativity Sermon 1, 238-239. *The Advent and Nativity sermons from a fifteenth-century revision of John Mirk's Festial: ed. from B.L. MSS Harley 2247, Royal 18 B XXV, and Gloucester Cathedral Library 22*, ed. Susan Powell, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag, 1981).

<sup>145</sup> Hoffmann, “Scents in Science and Culture,” 33.

perhaps even to mystical experiences – the enclosed garden and delights of heaven.

### Chapter 3 – Touch and Taste

Christian ritual and devotional practice became more tactile in the late medieval period, as documented by the rich material culture of Northern Europe after 1400.<sup>146</sup> For example, there were articulated statues of Christ that could be moved off a cross into a tomb during Holy Week liturgies, with a hinged chest cavity that doubled as a reserve ciborium for communion hosts. These statues exhibit paint missing on the feet where devotees apparently kissed and touched them. Eucharistic devotion in particular as well as sensuous pageantry grew significantly with the feasts of Corpus Christi and Epiphany in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; both entailed dramatic, paraliturgical activities. Along with the growth in sensuous affective devotion arose a heightened interest in Eucharistic miracles, such as the three bleeding hosts at the northern German village of Wilsnack which rivaled Santiago de Compostela as a late medieval pilgrimage destination. All of these trends are linked to scriptural passages about touching the body of Jesus, as well as interacting with and incorporating it into the body of the devotee. For laity, however, this devotion was vicarious not tangible, with infrequent communion and the proscription of touching the sacramental species itself.

Panel paintings evidenced this tension between sensuous prayer experience and sacramental remoteness, simultaneously drawing in viewers and keeping them at bay. The Adoration of the Magi became a frequent subject of fifteenth-century Netherlandish altarpieces due in part to its implied association to the Eucharist, linking the ideas of both adoring God made flesh at Bethlehem and

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<sup>146</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 43; Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 16.

in the sacrament of the altar. As Ursula Nilgen and Renate Franciscano argued long ago, the non-canonical addition of tables with bread, wine, and knives in the crèche witness to the yearly reenactment of clerics dressed as the Three Kings, bringing their gifts to the altar in a local church, starting in the eleventh century.<sup>147</sup>

In this chapter I will argue that the desire to touch the Eucharist was both stimulated and sublimated by depictions of the Adoration of the Magi through references to the medieval association between touch and taste. I will present later fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century altarpieces in which Jesus places his hand into the bowl, touching the coins that look similar to communion wafers in altar vessels. I assert that this visually excited the sacred desire in the devotee to touch Christ through tasting the sacrament, through which Christ touched the devotee in return. First, however, I will survey the prevailing sacramental discipline and piety for receiving the Eucharist at the time: visual communion.

#### Manducatio per Visum: *Visual Communion*

While the senses of sight, hearing, and smell can be misconstrued because one might not know with certainty what one sees, hears, or smells, a person can at the very least physically encounter what he touches and tastes. Tasting by its very nature implies touch, as “we cannot taste without taking something of their substance into our mouth and absorbing it through the membranes of the epithelial cells in our tongues.”<sup>148</sup> Medieval men and women were keenly aware of the

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<sup>147</sup> Nilgen and Franciscano, “The Epiphany and the” 312.

<sup>148</sup> Rachel Fulton, “that the Lord is sweet” (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” *The Journal of Religion* 86:2 (2006): 170.

intimate connection between touch and taste. Touch is also both active and passive, as one can be the object of touch by another subject. When taste was associated with touch in devotional experience it created a space into which the divine could reciprocate contact. The extent to which touch was metaphorical or solely mystically experienced in the soul is difficult to determine from the writings of early modern theologians and spiritual authors. In the medieval worldview, external senses had their own corresponding internal senses in what was known as the *mystical sensorium*.<sup>149</sup>

The braided unity of *touch* and *taste* and *sight* make sense in terms of the interior spirituality of the Christian mystics. In the physical world, tactile touching occurs outside the body; taste, like the sense of smell, must occur within the body.<sup>150</sup>

Physical taste in one manner, then, was to the sense of touch what all physical sensation was to spiritual sense comprehension.

Just as the body is the genus of the soul, so the physical senses have spiritual counterparts. The locus of this sense data teaching a devotee about spiritual things is what Lohfert Jorgensen calls the *hagiosensorium*:

The senses, I claim, operated within a *hagiosensorial matrix* of experience, a perceptual organisation aimed at sensing the holy and at authenticating and sanctifying holy sense experiences thus obtained. For the sacred to become an authentic experience it needed sensory

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<sup>149</sup> Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and See, for God is Sweet': Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience," *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, Valerie Marie Lagorio and Anne Clark Bartlett, eds. (Cambridge ; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1995) 3.

<sup>150</sup> Hale, "Taste and See" 6.

mediation... In order to be recognised and enter the sphere of human perception, holiness depended on mediation *for* the senses, mediation *by* the senses, and - ultimately - mediation *of* the senses.<sup>151</sup>

Theologians such as Gregory of Tours promoted the idea of contact relics. These are objects touched to first class relics of saints and become relics themselves, taking on qualities of holiness. If the miraculous passed in this way between material objects, then there surely was a correlative process from body to soul, mediated through a spiritual sensorium.<sup>152</sup>

Medieval authors and mystics were much less concerned with teasing out the degree to which these experiences were physical or spiritual than are modern scholars. Deciphering the divide is further complicated by the way they describe what one was to do in prayer or what an experience was like. The fourteenth-century Dominican nun Margaretha Ebner describes how she beheld a wooden statue of the infant Christ come alive from a carved altarpiece. Jesus told her to put his mouth to her naked, virginal breast and let him nurse. She states: “My longing and desire was in nursing Him, so that through His pure humanity I might be purified and set afire by Him with His burning love, and His divine essence together with all loving souls who lived in truth.”<sup>153</sup> From that point forward, whether at prayer, looking upon the sculpture she nursed, and most especially

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<sup>151</sup> Hans Henri Lohfert Jorgensen, “Sensorium: a Model for Medieval Perception,” *The Saturated Sensorium Principles of Perception and Mediation in the Middle Ages*, Eds. Hans Henri Lohfert Jorgensen, Henning Laugerud, Laura Kristine Skinnebach (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2014) 25-26.

<sup>152</sup> Lohfert Jorgensen, “Sensorium” 34.

<sup>153</sup> Margaretha Ebner as quoted in Hale, “Taste and See” 4.

when she anticipated reception of the Eucharist, she recalled both the intense experience of Christ's touch and a kind of spiritual co-mingling.

Central to Margaretha's first person account is the description of the interior nature of the grace she *feels*, a grace which is grounded in the exterior touch of the human mouth of the child on her breast. It would be a mistake to call her narration a visionary experience. She does *see* the effigy; she also *hears* it become the Holy Child, but, most importantly, it is the sensation of the human *touch* which carries for her the primary essence of her personal knowledge of the Incarnation.<sup>154</sup>

The importance of gaining knowledge by touch will be discussed in greater length later in this chapter. But it is important to note that touch in Margaretha's case is connected to her experience of Eucharist where she sees the statue daily, and the touch is reciprocal because it gives her knowledge of God through a spiritual-somatic encounter. Breastfeeding, touch, and vision come together in another legend about the famously anti-sensuous doctor, Bernard of Clairvaux. St. Bernard was renowned for his Marian piety, and in an apocryphal story, the Blessed Virgin bestowed breastmilk upon him while he prayed before a statue of the Madonna and Child that came to life.<sup>155</sup> The depiction of the event, the Lactation of St. Bernard (*Bernardi Lactans*), spikes in the Low Countries in

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<sup>154</sup> Hale, "Taste and See" 5.

<sup>155</sup> James France, *Medieval Images of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* *Cistercian Studies* vol. 210 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2007) 207-216: The seventeenth-century Benedictine scholar Jean Mabillon states emphatically the story of Bernard's lactation is completely fabricated, existing in none of the early vitae. The first literary source is found in a collection of Cistercian models for piety or *exemplum*, written in vernacular French in the second half of the fourteenth-century, entitled *Ci nous dit*. However, it is a slightly later tradition that places it in Speyer cathedral. There, considering the verses from the hymn, *Ave Maria Stella Maris*, he paused on the words, "Show us that you are our mother." At this point statue miraculously came alive and Mary bestowed three drops of breastmilk on Bernard's lips.

prayerbook illuminations, prints, and even monumental painting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>156</sup> It is an example of adoration, satiation of intimate contact from a distance, and the connection between sight and taste, which in this case comes through drinking. The written account of the dominant tradition of the *Bernardi Lactans* states that Mary placed three drops of milk on the abbot's lips, granting a request to make known that he – and indeed all Christians – had her for a mother too. Breastfeeding is perhaps the most intimate interpersonal embrace, aside from sexual intercourse, which also includes an exchange of bodily fluid.<sup>157</sup> But nursing equals nourishment, and it has a long and even biblical understanding as a particular type of food.<sup>158</sup>

When the story was translated into painting, however, artists took great liberties with its depiction. As the iconography developed, the three drops turned into a high velocity, long-distance spray or a lazy arc of milk directly into the saint's mouth. The reason for the heightened drama in *Bernardi Lactans* images could be as simple as a change of medium, necessitating a more dramatic interchange so that the untutored or unfamiliar would understand what was transpiring. However, it may also be a way of distancing St. Bernard from direct, physical contact with the Virgin.

Pertinent for this study, therefore, is that touch and taste must occur at some distance

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<sup>156</sup> France, *Images of St. Bernard* 205, 209: France says the *Bernardi Lactans* is the most popular legendary image depicted in the medieval period with almost one hundred nineteen in different media. Of that, one hundred two are post-1475, and furthermore, seventy of the one hundred nineteen are from the Low Countries, making up one third of the corpus.

<sup>157</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge* 111: Early modern European was less squeamish about bodily functions and effluvia. Camille points out this fact citing manuscript marginalia that proffers so much excrement as the matter-of-fact makeup of daily life.

<sup>158</sup> France, *Images of St. Bernard* 206: Nursing equals nourishment, and it has a long and even biblical understanding as a particular type of food. Over and again, the Promised Land of Canaan is referred to as a land “flowing with milk and honey” (cf. Exodus 3:7; Deut. 31:20). They represent, “perfect food which requires no preparation; pristine and pure in that they are untouched by man, they are rich in symbolising the transmission of life and wisdom.”

even for saints. Thus the action in the artworks takes the form either of a more naturalistic, focused spray of three drops (Figure 10) or a straight line drawn from nipple to monk's lips (Figure 11), as if Mary's breast and Bernard's mouth were tied together by a string.<sup>159</sup> And as one scholar has noted on this latter instance,

Some depictions of Saint Bernard's lactation transform the Madonna's jets of milk into rays of light aiming for his eyes, stressing the interchangeability of materiality and visuality as modes that were expected to facilitate and/or authenticate miraculous appearances of the Madonna.<sup>160</sup>

Once again, the braided quality of touch, taste, and sight are at work between Mary and Bernard, but also in sense for the devotee looking at the painting. The fact that later depictions transfigure the bodily effluvia into light rays perhaps speaks to a concern that the faithful would be tempted to expect contact in an all too physical way. Better to watch and pray instead of expecting something astounding. The goal of such a vision would be a greater relational embrace with Mary and being a child of God. Thus, a communion that played on intimate senses of direct intercourse were nonetheless experienced from a physical distance, and yet attainable through the gaze.

It is convenient for scholars to give the evocative examples of mystics, but proving their actual influence in the culture at large is less successful. The *Bernardi Lactans* image, while not based in historical account, testifies to a

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<sup>159</sup> Appendix: Anonymous Flemish artist, *The Lactation of Saint Bernard* (c. 1480) oil on panel (Liège: Great Curtius Museum).

Anonymous French illuminator, *The Lactation of Saint Bernard*, MS Douce 264, f. 38v (sixteenth-century) tempera and gold leaf on vellum (Oxford: Bodleian Library).

<sup>160</sup> Jutta Sperling, "Squeezing, Squirting, Spilling Milk: The Lactation of Saint Bernard and the Flemish Madonna Lactans (ca. 1430-1530)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 71:3 (2018): 868-918.

development in the mystical to the affective and sensual over the course of the medieval period. As much as authors appear to spiritualize these mystical experiences, it is not hard to see how many would regard the sense experience and the metaphorical vision as one in the same. The mystic Jan Ruusbroec (c. 1294-1381), the forebear for the more ascetical Gerte Groote, writes this:

And therefore, when we feel that he [Christ] with all these riches would be ours and dwell with us forever, then all the powers of the soul open themselves, especially the power of desire and all the rivers of the grace of God flow forth. The more we taste of them, and the more we long to taste, the more deeply we are in contact with his touch; the more deeply we are open to his touch, the more deeply his sweetness flows in and around us; the more it flows in and around us, then we feel that we know that God's sweetness is incomprehensible and bottomless. And hence the Prophet says: "Taste and see, for God is sweet" (Ps. 34.9)... Thus God's bride in the Song of Songs also says, "I sat under the shadow of him whom I desired, and his fruit is sweet to my taste."<sup>161</sup>

Touch and taste are clearly associated in Ruusbroec's exposition, and its result he claims gives the devotee knowledge of God. Tactile touch happens outside of the body but touching by taste happens within the body – or to be technical, it provides a liminal space between inside and outside of it. It seems that the

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<sup>161</sup> Jan Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone* as quoted in Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and See, for God is Sweet': Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience," *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, Valerie Marie Lagorio and Anne Clark Bartlett, eds. (Cambridge ; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1995) 6.

emphasis on personal engagement in prayer that the Modern Devotion promoted included the ideas of stimulating the senses within devotion.

For Christian mystics there is an element of inverted mimesis present in the process. In John the Evangelist's sense of the *Logos*, or eternal Word of God, was made flesh. In the post-Resurrection age, this Word made flesh can be eaten through reception of the Eucharist. The mystical experience reflects a theological inversion – tastes and sweetness of the divine flesh within, converts to Word through written recollection the experience of divine union.<sup>162</sup> In other words, divine knowledge is preceded by divine union. Earlier theologians like St. Anselm of Canterbury described the Christian intellectual project as *fides querens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”), a kind of reverent study before the great mystery of God. From the mouth of the St. Bernard of Clairvaux himself, he states, “taste is the ‘highest most immediate channel to God in this life’ and is given unusual emphasis compared with the other spiritual senses: only by tasting the Lord can we discover how *suavis* (sweet) He is.”<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Ruusbroec's description of mystically active and passive touch through taste sensation teaches the Christian to understand God first through prayer and then through the rational mind. These mystical works provide a backdrop for the paintings in which we begin to see the infant Christ reaching out to touch the gift from the Magi that looks like communion wafers.

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<sup>162</sup> Hale, “Taste and See” 6-7.

<sup>163</sup> Andrea Maraschi, “Sympathy for the Lord: The Host and Elements of Sympathetic Magic in Late Medieval Exempla,” *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* (43:2): 211. It is important to point out that St. Bernard was referring to the corresponding spiritual senses, and likely he meant that the sensations progressed from physical to spiritual quickly and necessarily.

Once again, it is tricky to estimate how these mystical documents may have trickled down in the following centuries to the popular primers. A concept that we know to be promoted in particular was *Manducatio per Visum* – literally “eating by vision.” The term referred to what pious laity and women religious were encouraged to do when reception of the Eucharist itself was discouraged. One made a *spiritual* or *visual communion*, focusing intimate contact with Christ present in the sacrament at the time of the elevation at Mass, wherein the priest raised the newly consecrated host and then chalice over his head at the ringing of bells.<sup>164</sup> This is what modern social psychologists would call *Pavlovian* or classical conditioning, where two stimuli are paired repeatedly until the first stimulus can be elicited by the performance of the second alone.<sup>165</sup> Reinert Falkenberg describes how this process worked in the Eucharist:

to have the viewer participate [in] Christ's real presence on the altar, through a transformation of physical into imaginary vision, and thereby to 'train' the viewer's inner eye, preparing it to 'see' the true presence of Christ's sacrificial body in the host, once it has been transformed in the *mysterium* of the Eucharistic rite.<sup>166</sup>

The climax was considered so powerful even in this remote experience that some devotees were known to trek from church to church to witness the elevation at

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<sup>164</sup> At the elevation sight and hearing are employed in order to substitute for touch and taste. For discussion on the liturgical use of bells see Wendy Wauters, “The Stirring of the Religious Soundscape. The Auditory Experience in the Antwerp Church of Our Lady (c. 1450-1566) and an Iconological Analysis of the Altar Bell,” *Christian Discourses of the Holy and the Sacred from the 15th to the 17th Century*, Eds. Teresa Heirgeist and Ismael del Olmo (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2020): 231-233.

<sup>165</sup> “Classical conditioning,” *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Ed. Andrew M. Colman (Oxford: Oxford UP: 2014).

<sup>166</sup> Falkenberg, ““Super-entanglement” 380.

different Masses on a Sunday, thereby receiving the grace and power of the event.<sup>167</sup>

### *The Eucharistic Gesture in Epiphany Altarpieces*

In the present day, one might guess that when commissioning a painting to be set above an altar one would choose the Last Supper, that is, the Passover meal in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist that would become the central action of the Catholic Mass.<sup>168</sup> However, because the Mass was already the representation of the Last Supper, in the early modern period it was considered redundant or simplistic to depict that.<sup>169</sup> Rather at this time, altarpieces that could offer different themes for reflection were preferred; most typically the Crucifixion, the Nativity of Christ, and the Adoration of the Magi (Epiphany).<sup>170</sup> The Crucifixion was chosen because the Last Supper is only one half of the sacrifice that the Eucharist memorializes. The latter two events were popular because they depicted the Incarnation, the Son of God taking human flesh, which was the same flesh that

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<sup>167</sup> Thomas M. Izbicki, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 105: Elevations began in northern Europe in the early thirteenth century and were only adopted by Rome in the fourteenth. The practice of itinerant viewing of the consecrated host may have been part of the reason that benediction and Corpus Christi processions came to be normal: rather than making the laity run around from church to church, the one cleric would do the movement and keep them local.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

<sup>169</sup> Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion," 348, 351. Notable exceptions include Dieric Bouts, *Holy Sacrament Altarpiece* (1464-1468) oil on panel (Leuven: St. Peter's Church). This is a unique work for the commission document survives, detailing that the artist would consult with two masters in theology at the local university, especially regarding the four Old Testament typological scenes on the triptych wings (Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 134). The Leuven Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament are evidence of a positive feedback loop of a growing Eucharistic devotion in the late medieval period and also the desire for a more literal depiction of the institution of the sacrament at the Last Supper.

<sup>170</sup> Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* 161; Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy and Devotion" *Speculum* 79:2 (2004): 348, 351.

became food in the sacrament. Thus, the Nativity and Epiphany underscored the doctrine of the real presence (*transubstantiation*).

The direct Eucharistic connotations explain why the Adoration of the Magi was a common subject in altarpieces. As noted above, the wealthy kings bringing gifts to Christ seemed especially appropriate to patrons – all the more so if they were concerned about their rich lifestyles being an obstacle to gospel simplicity. Still, scholarly consensus is that the depiction of Adoration itself began to reflect liturgical practices and theological ideas not expressly written in the evangelist Matthew’s account of the event.<sup>171</sup>

In Chapter One, I discussed the emergence of the Adoration of the Magi as the central, monumental painting over altars (pp. 7-14). One of the first was the *Columba Triptych* by Rogier van der Weyden and his workshop. The *Monforte Altarpiece* by Hugo van der Goes (Figure 12) is another early example.<sup>172</sup> It depicts the usual tableau: the stable of Christ’s birth made from the ruins of King David’s grand palace in the great king’s hometown of Bethlehem. The Virgin Mary is the throne for the newborn king in swaddling clothes; Joseph is depicted to their right as old and aloof. One thing that distinguishes this painting from Rogier’s is the vibrant blues and purples that glow in contrast to the warm earth tones of the *Columba Triptych*. The walls of the ramshackle stable in the *Monforte Adoration* create a strict, rectilinear grid of orthogonals moving to a

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<sup>171</sup> Nilgen and Franciscono 311-313.

<sup>172</sup> Appendix: Hugo van der Goes, *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1470) oil on panel, (Berlin: Gemäldegalerie).

Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish* vol. 4, 28; Lynn Jacobs, “The Inverted ‘T’-Shape in Early Netherlandish Altarpieces: Studies in the Relation between Painting and Sculpture,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54:1 (1991) 68; Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 143; Silver, *Bosch* 168; James Snyder, “Geertgen tot Sint Jans,” *Grove Art Online* Oxford Art Online <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T031157>>.

vanishing point just right of center in the background. Like many monumental Renaissance Adorations, it depicts a continuous narrative in the background: on the left we see more royal attendants of the Three Kings with horses, while in the middle distance behind a wall, dignitaries (the altarpiece donors perhaps?) adore from a discreet perch.<sup>173</sup> Directly through the center shepherds point at the pilgrim gift bearers. The shepherds were the first to see and adore the newborn Christ and thus would help the kings find him.<sup>174</sup> Other royal attendants squeeze in from the right side doorway, one looking out to the viewers. Meanwhile another servant kneels between the kings passing off incense to the Asian magus Melchior with a thick beard and wearing a heavy brown fur coat, and shiny red hat. The Kings represent both the Three Ages of Man and three known continents quite clearly. Various flowers on the periphery of the *Monforte Altarpiece* like the violets and gladiola, are Marian symbols signifying of her suffering, purity, and heavenly queenship.<sup>175</sup>

The *Monforte Altarpiece* is a tighter pictorial space with larger-scaled figures than the *Columba Altarpiece*, similar in its construction of figures right up against the picture plane to Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* now in the Prado.<sup>176</sup> Here, the clear

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<sup>173</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 143: The *Monforte Altarpiece* does not exist in its original multi-panel format and the central panel of the Adoration of the Magi appears to be cut down. Jacobs conceives of the original configuration of it as being a so-called Divided Threshold, in which the wings of the altarpiece had typological scenes or donor portraits with patron saints in different rooms.

<sup>174</sup> An unusual detail is a woman seated on the ground with a small child at her side between the flock and the two standing shepherds. It is unclear if this has an particular significance or is merely a genre device.

<sup>175</sup> Falkenburg, *The Scent of Holiness* 149, 151.

<sup>176</sup> Jacobs, "The Inverted 'T'-Shape" 45, 61: Jacobs argues that the elongated middle section of these altarpieces may have been a consequence of the Fourth Lateran Council's decree for the priest to elevate host and chalice after the consecration, creating a backdrop to see the white communion host. The gold and purple draperies in the little square bump above the Virgin was surely an angel hovering above.

one-point perspective thrusts the main figures close to the viewer's space. There is no table in Hugo's Adoration. Yet if contrasted with another infancy narrative, the *Portinari Altarpiece* or *Adoration of the Shepherds*, a slightly later but more famous triptych by Hugo, we see that a physical table might not be important for explicating Eucharistic imagery.<sup>177</sup> The weight of scholarly writ identifies the symbolism in Hugo's monumental triptych: wheat stalks strewn on the floor of the stable, a garb of wheat mirroring the body of the Christ Child, angels dressed in clerical vesture, and the parallel between animal manger and Christ on either side of the Virgin. All around him are stray stalks, though it is unclear if he is lying on wheat or it is simply a star-shaped nimbus that surrounds his body. In any case, he is encircled in a sunburst, much like the gold work on monstrances that held the consecrated host for veneration during Corpus Christi processions. Laterally, Christ lines up with his mother kneeling to adore, as well as with the stone manger. The structure in which the scene occurs is both solid, Romanesque ruin and rickety stable housing the Holy Family who are slightly larger in hieratic scale outsizing the many angels flying around and kneeling. From the dark left ox and ass feed from the manger. Just noticeable above the farm animals is a black demon, stemming from the ever-popular medieval book *The Golden Legend*, "in which the birth of Christ is said to have come

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Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* (1435) is considered to reflect shallow carved altarpieces, explaining the densely packed grouping of figures in a claustrophobic space.

<sup>177</sup> Hugo van der Goes, *The Adoration of the Shepherds (Portinari Altarpiece)* (c. 1477-1478) oil on panel (Florence: Uffizi).

Friedlander, *Early Netherlandish Painting* 16-19; Susanne Franke, "Between Status and Spiritual Salvation: The Portinari Triptych and Tommaso Portinari's Concern for His Memoria," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 33:3 (2007): 123-44; Robert A. Koch, "Flower Symbolism in the Portinari Altar," *The Art Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (1964): 70-77; Julia I. Miller, "Miraculous Childbirth and the Portinari Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 77:2 (1995): 249-61; M. B. McNamee, "Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 45:2 (1963): 142-43; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* 499, no. 1; *The Uffizi. General catalogue* (Florence: Center of the Uffizi Gallery, 1980) 560.

about ‘for the confusion of demons.’”<sup>178</sup> All of this reiterates the association between body of Christ born at Bethlehem and body of Christ present under the sacramental sign of bread.<sup>179</sup>

Notable visual cues in the *Monforte Adoration* are similar to those in the *Portinari Altarpiece*. The wheat stalks littering the stable floor are significant. Nonetheless, more direct visual association of Eucharistic imagery is at work as in the *Monforte Altarpiece*.<sup>180</sup> Christ is held directly above a gold, quatrefoil vessel which is placed on a flat-topped, rough-hewn stone – both vessel and stone are spatially closer to the viewer. Old Testament texts describe the construction of altars in places where God revealed himself were to be made out of uncut stones, as seen in Deuteronomy’s directive for the Temple in Jerusalem:

...you shall set up these stones concerning which I command you today, and coat them with plaster, and you shall build there an altar to the Lord, your God, an altar made of stones that no iron tool has touched. You shall build this altar of the Lord, your God, with unhewn stones.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Julia I. Miller, “Miraculous Childbirth and the *Portinari Altarpiece*,” *The Art Bulletin*: 77:2 (1995): 258.

<sup>179</sup> Ward, “Disguised Symbolism as Enactive Symbolism” 33-34: “us. The idea that the Virgin/Church holds up the Christ child as the substitute for the blood sacrifice of the Mosaic Law and the Synagogue is confirmed by the typological prefiguring in the scene of Abraham and Melchizedek above them that fades into shadows as its prophecy is fulfilled. But it is also indicated by the word fragment ‘LEVATA,’ excerpted from the text ‘Quoniam elevata est magnificentia tua, super coelos,’ and placed so that it curves into the infant’s back. The idea suggested is that the holding up of the child is a visualization of the underlying significance of the Elevation of the Host, the moment when, according to the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the Communion wafer mystically becomes the body of Christ. Since in that moment Christ appears to the congregation in the flesh (although marked by no outward change of appearance.”

<sup>180</sup> Easter sermon by John Mirk, quoted in French, *The Good Women*, 22: compares spring cleaning to repentance, illustrated by sweeping out the moldering straw on the floor to place down a fresh bed of hay.

<sup>181</sup> Deuteronomy 27: 4-6.

A more mystical citation is the account of Jacob's Ladder in the book of Genesis, in which the patriarch dreams of angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth. Awaking the next morning, Jacob anoints the stone he used as a pillow to make an altar at the site.<sup>182</sup> It is worth considering that altar marks the point of contact where a material object – a staircase or ladder – united the divine and the human, in the same way that Christ did in his person; now through the altar and Eucharist he will do the same for the contemporary devotee in holy matter.

It is hard to judge how well known the unhewn stone symbolism would have been to both the educated and the wider array of Christian faithful at the time, depending on popular sermons, mystery plays, and popular print formation of this notion. In a *Biblia Pauparum* blockbook from a fifteenth-century German or Netherlandish print shop, Jacob's Ladder is juxtaposed typologically with Job feasting with his children after his testing and the central image of the glorified Christ gathering the souls of the just (Figure 13), referring to redemption rather than sacrifice.<sup>183</sup> However, the presence of an altar stone with a relic was

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<sup>182</sup> Genesis 28:16-19.

<sup>183</sup> Appendix: "Christ gathering souls to himself, Job feasting with his children, and Jacob's dream of the ladder to heaven," *Biblia Pauparum* (1845,0809.40 sheet 39) (c. 1460-1470) block print ink on paper (London: British Museum).

A Middle English text-only version of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* from the fourteenth century compares Jacob's Ladder to the Ascension of Christ body and soul into heaven. *The mirour of mans saluacioune: a Middle English translation of Speculum humanae salvationis: a critical edition of the fifteenth-century manuscript illustrated from Der Spiegel der Menschen Behaltnis, Speyer, Drach, c.1475*, Avril Henry, ed., *The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987): 171.

necessary for celebration of the Eucharist at this time, up until the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.<sup>184</sup>

Nevertheless, the precious vessel on the stone looks similar to a *ciborium*, which is a container for storing the consecrated hosts not consumed at Mass. Likewise, the gold coin discs call to mind the small, round unleavened wafers used as communion hosts.<sup>185</sup> Next, as the fictive space moves from the Christ Child down and out to the gold container on the stone, it moves into the devotee's space of the altar below the panel on which the vessels and matter of the Mass would be. Artists making a parallel between the historical and sacramental body of Christ is familiar topos in altarpieces. What is conspicuous in Hugo's *Monforte Altarpiece* is this: the spatial movement of the body of Christ in its tangible form toward the viewer, and this despite the fact that communion was rare and touch proscribed. Nevertheless, could the image itself sublimate the desire to touch the flesh of the Lord?<sup>186</sup>

Clearly, Epiphany altarpieces utilized allegorical, narrative, and visual parallels and analogies to draw attention to the body of Christ present in the

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<sup>184</sup> Canon 9, Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787); *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*, Fourth ed. (1975) § 260, 262, 266, *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, Mary Ann Simcoe, ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1981) 97.

<sup>185</sup> The coins have designs on them. As is the custom still, the hosts were sometimes embossed with dies to imprint designs upon them, cf. appendix: School of the Master of the Burgundian Prelates, *The Hours of Ogier Benigne* W.291, f. 17v (c. 1480) ink and tempera on parchment, 23.3 x 15.7cm.

Denise L. Depres, "Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the Jews," *Jewish History* 12:1 (1998) 62; *The Eucharistic Miracles of the World*, Eds. Raymond Burke, Raffaello Martinelli, and John A. Hardon (Bardstow, KY: Eternal Life, 2009) 57; "The Hours of Ogier Bénigne," last modified 19 December, 2019 Walters Art Museum <<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/215/the-hours-of-ogier-bcnigne/>>.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Falkenburg, "Mass of St. Gregory," 181: *Schaufrömmigkeit* or "show piety," not referring to the imperative of believers to demonstrate piety. Instead the gaze becomes and sight becomes the major form of Eucharistic devotion.

Mass.<sup>187</sup> The explicit link between gifts for the altar and the Adoration of the Magi, as reenacted yearly in the performance of the liturgy, reinforced how one was to act before the sacrament himself. Even the addition of larger and larger tables in many of these panel paintings strenuously emphasized this symbolism to worshipers. Yet these symbolic sight-cues were not the only elements at work in the paintings, and perhaps not even the strongest for cuing devotional experience.

Touch was considered one of the three so-called lower senses from Aristotle up to Aquinas. Yet, Aquinas equally saw a holy inversion through which touch and taste returned a devotee to an innocent state of knowledge.<sup>188</sup> Barbara Baert states that this restriction of experience to the gaze did not diminish but rather stimulated the other senses. Investigating the subject of *Noli me tangere*, the post-Resurrection encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in which she was told by the Lord, “Do not touch me,” Baert argues that while this statement represents a negative principle it opens up knowledge of God to the other parts of the sensorium.<sup>189</sup> Lieven van Lathem’s illumination *Noli me tangere* in the *Prayer*

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<sup>187</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge* 157.

<sup>188</sup> Barbara Baert, “An Odour. A Taste. A Touch. Impossible to Describe: *Noli me tangere* and the Senses,” *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe. Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture*, v. 26. Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler, eds. (Leiden : Boston: Brill, 2013), 140: “Taste (*gustus, tactus* with the tongue) is in fact related to tactility with the mouth; it is the primary element of the sensorium of a child, as it discovers the world by tasting and eating food. Both scent and savour here seem to intensify the impact of the knowledge-generating senses on the area of lost secrets (intuition, the archetype of the lost paradise, the unconscious, etc.), an intensification that is even translated cosmologically (initiated *gnosis*, meeting and uniting with God himself). Of course, in Christianity the mother of all tastes, the food of all foods is the host. The cult of the holy host found avid promoters among the beguines; and one of them, the thirteenth-century Flemish beguine Hadewych, commented as follows: ‘I was chosen to receive revelations in order that I might taste man and God in one knowledge’ (‘dat ic mensche ende god in eenre const smake soude’).”

<sup>189</sup> Baert, “An Odour. A Taste,” 112; cf. Jn. 20:17 (20:11-18).

*Book of Charles the Bold* (Figure 14) expresses what she means.<sup>190</sup> Christ stands wrapped in an ample red cloak, displaying his wounds on his hands, feet, and side. Mary kneels opposite him.<sup>191</sup> Jesus rests his left hand on a shovel because the Magdalene first mistook him for the gardener before Christ called her by name and she recognized him. His right hand is raised in a gesture of imperative prohibition to touch. Indeed, the fact that Jesus and Mary Magdalene are in a garden and that he refers to her as ‘woman’ in the story is meant to evoke Adam and Eve in the garden. In this picture, Lieven has even added a tree between the two, recalling the proscription God gave the first humans to not taste of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge nor to even touch it (Gen. 2:17, 3:3)!<sup>192</sup> Yet her ability to control herself is a way of reversing Eve’s sin.<sup>193</sup> And knowledge is not cut off from her, for where touch is banned sight, hearing, and smell are stimulated. We see that in Lathem’s painting Mary has removed the lid from her myrrh jar. In fact in lieu of touching his hand, she places the opened jar in a place to contact his body through the sweet odor. “The visual medium, in which the prohibition of touch necessarily has to be made visible in the gesture of an almost touch, elliptically recuperates the motif of touch.”<sup>194</sup> Smell takes the place of

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<sup>190</sup> Appendix: Lieven van Lathem, *Noli Me Tangere* (MS 37 f. 46) *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold* (c. 1469) tempera on vellum (New York: Getty Collections).

Barbara Baert, “‘An Odour. A Taste,’” 111-151.

<sup>191</sup> Mary Magdalene is to Christ’s left, or on his *sinister* side. To be on the right (*dexter*) is the place of honor, and men got that in portraiture of in the case of a married couples family shields impaled together in a marshaled coat of arms.

<sup>192</sup> Baert, “‘An Odour. A Taste,’” 114.

<sup>193</sup> Hippolytus of Rome as quoted in Baert 114.

<sup>194</sup> Baert, “‘An Odour. A Taste,’” 125.

touch, then, and even the mere sight of this picture reminds a viewer of incense at Mass: the most basic and widely experienced form of spiritual communion.<sup>195</sup>

Applying the principles of the *Noli me tangere* to the motif of Christ touching what looks like the Eucharist in the Magi paintings, we can see that here touch and taste return in an appropriate form – even if for the average churchgoer this was infrequent or made only by means of sight for communion. Baert explains that the principle of *Noli me tangere* fostered the heightening of all the senses through sight alone.

This union [was] reflected in participation of the whole sensorium. On a deeper level the the *Noli me tangere* also thematizes the *ostensio* of Christ as host, the host that only a priest could touch with his hands, but the faithful touched with their mouth... The idea of *unio*, communion and host, just like the *Noli me tangere* itself, connects sight with taste in its most intimate way. But on the other hand, *Noli me tangere* excludes tactility... The prohibition of...touch intensified sight but also displaced touch toward *tactus* by fragrance and taste.<sup>196</sup>

In other words, a substitution heightened other senses. However, substitution had to work in place of what replaced it.

As stated in the first section of this chapter, because access to communion was limited, visual devotion to Eucharist, especially in the elevation, was emphasized. While the visual experience was celebrated in church and art,

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<sup>195</sup> Rudy, “Kissing Images” 5. One has to admit that perhaps the owner of the prayerbook got around this haptic prohibition, in that being a handheld object, the devotee actually could touch Christ in the picture. Similarly, the vellum was flesh, and the tangible quality of the book could have sublimated the sense of divine touch along with the holy writ on the page.

<sup>196</sup> Baert, “An Odour, a Taste” 147.

evocation of consumption of the host played a role too. As stated above, touch and taste were intermingled, due to the mechanics of eating; one *touched* food with tongue and teeth.<sup>197</sup> Also, and most importantly for the Eucharist, touch can be active *or passive*. Thus it is through consuming communion that Christ touches the believer. Around the last quarter of the fifteenth century, Adoration of the Magi scenes started to show a curious detail: the Christ Child places his hand into the vessel of gold coins and touches them. The gold coins resemble communion wafers. It seems probable, then, that seeing a painting in which Christ touches what the faithful receive and which is believed to be his body and blood, could induce sense-cued memories and associations. Once stimulated, the memories and the anticipation of the senses played on the emotions and piety, causing someone to grow in understanding of who Christ is because of the touch toward and from him.

A prime example is in a panel by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (Figure 15).<sup>198</sup> It is a standard version of the *Adoration of the Magi* by one of the third generation of early Netherlandish masters.<sup>199</sup> In fact, it is likely influenced by the *Monforte Altarpiece*, and in this case the mirror opposite of Hugo's painting.<sup>200</sup> The main

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<sup>197</sup> Baert, "An Odour. A Taste" 147; Hale, "Taste and See" 7.

<sup>198</sup> Appendix: Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1480-1485) oil on panel, (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum).

Friedländer vol. V, 1927, 32-35, 131, no. 2; Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 143; Micha Leeflang, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans, *The Adoration of the Magi*, Haarlem, c. 1480 – c. 1485," *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, J.P. Filedt Kok, Ed., 24 November 2015 Rijksmuseum online collection catalogue 2010 <<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2150/catalogue-entry>>; Panofsky 1953, vol. I, 329; James Snyder, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans," *Grove Art Online* Oxford Art Online <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T031157>>.

<sup>199</sup> M. J. Friedländer: *Early Netherlandish*, 5 (1969), pp. 11–30; E. Panofsky: *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), pp. 324–30; J. Snyder: 'The Early Haarlem School of Painting, II: Geertgen tot Sint Jans', *Art Bulletin*, 42 (1960): 113–32.

<sup>200</sup> Leeflang, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans"; James Snyder, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans."

characters are large and placed right up to the picture plain, with the three Magi on the left and the Holy Family on the right. The scene happens outside of the stable itself in the open air, the ruins of David's palace with its two Roman arches and marble column set above a timber-frame stable inside of which a red ox and gray ass are nibbling at the manger with their backs to the viewer. A stone bridge connects to the crumbling stable with a little brook leading the eye to the middle-distance where the Magi's entourage converges from both sides of the painting. On the left two bulbous rock outcrops rise, and on the left a series of manicured trees recede to the background. The Bethlehem cityscape, in more or less contemporary buildings, perches on the edge of a bay that dissolves into blue atmospheric perspective rendering of mountains at the horizon.

The main figures are all undeniably the work of Geertgen and his workshop (though it is not a signed work).<sup>201</sup> Their bodies are slight and somewhat short compared to their largish, egg-shaped heads and dark, beady eyes. The Magi form a triangular shape from right to left with the black magus standing, the Asian above beginning to kneel as he takes his gift from an almost completely concealed attendant, and then the European magus kneeling in the front of the group offering his gift. The African king, Balthasar, is still wearing his crown, the Asian, Melchior, has lowered his crown to his back, and the elder European king, Caspar, has placed his on a stone on the ground. Mary is seated, dressed in a blue mantle with a white veil that exposes a shaved high hairline

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<sup>201</sup> Leeftang, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans." To my knowledge, none of his works were signed. Connoisseurial consensus judges particular works as characteristic of a unique style: "Much controversy obscures the attribution of his paintings (see especially Châtelet), but the qualities that distinguish a painting by Geertgen are easy to perceive" (Snyder, "Geertgen tot Sint Jans").

according to the fashion of the time. Joseph stands behind her, looking younger than the iconographic traditions in this era portray him, with a scraggly goatee and pink cloak.<sup>202</sup> Additionally, Joseph wears a brown tunic, black cowl, and skull cap, which suggest this might be a crypto-portrait of a local Franciscan.<sup>203</sup> The baby Jesus is completely nude and displays his sex, as he sits on a white cloth atop his mother's lap. The construction of the foreground figures places the heads of the African and Asian magi congruently to Mary and Joseph on the opposite side, thus framing the action between the eldest king and Christ.

Once again as in the *Monforte Altarpiece*, the container in Geertgen's Adoration looks like a ciborium and the coins like communion wafers. The gold and baby Jesus are on the same level. Caspar does not touch Christ but instead allows the newborn king to reach for the gift. Jesus seems to actually have picked up a coin from the container. Unlike the *Columba Altarpiece* the king does not embrace the feet or hand of Christ, instead, the magus offering the gift is satisfied with gazing.<sup>204</sup> The interplay between touch and taste in both active and passive ways are brought to bear, when Christ touches and at the same time is the Eucharist evoked in the coins. He touches what the faithful consume, and because it is also his body, he touches them. It is worth mentioning that Catholic theology

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<sup>202</sup> Panofsky suggests this St. Joseph may have been taken from a different now-lost Hugo painting, cf. *Early Netherlandish Painting* vol. IV, 1969, no. 21, pl. 34.

<sup>203</sup> Compare this to Robert Campin, *Werl Triptych* (1438) oil on panels (Madrid: Prado). Indeed, the outdoor clogs that St. Joseph has slipped on over his slippers may give credence to the crypto-portrait conjecture, since it would be a conspicuous feature of contemporary Netherlandish living.

<sup>204</sup> The most famous artistic representation of divine-to-human touch is the outstretched fingers of God the Father to Adam on Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. It is the purview of the Creator to touch us but not us to touch Him. The Incarnation provides a new conduit of contact, but even then, Christ is aware that we should only approach by faith, as in the story of the woman afflicted with hemorrhages who touches the hem of Jesus' tunic and He recognizes that power flows out of Him (cf. Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48).

states that priests are an *alter Christus* at Mass, turning bread and wine into the body of Christ through the God-man's own priestly power at work in them granted by the sacrament of holy orders.<sup>205</sup> The painting reminds viewers – including the priest – that it is Christ who consecrates sacramental matter. Through reception of Eucharist, the communicants touch the body of Christ with their tongues. The parallel senses are stimulated in the mystical sensorium.

Nonetheless, despite such potent sense-cued symbols in this object, actual consumption of the host was generally infrequent at the time. Is this painting, then, a sign that the devotee, looking upon this altarpiece at Mass and the Eucharist raised above the priest's head, can contemplate how Christ touches him when he does receive communion and touches Christ in the only way He can? And by this painting inducing these associations and memories, stimulate the same sense cues merely by sight? The principle of *mandicatio per visum* was normative, but the actual desire for communion perhaps needed greater stimulation as much as reinforcement as a practice.

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<sup>205</sup> Columba Marmion, OSB, *Christ the Ideal of the Priest* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2006) 56: "The principal effect of this sacrament [of holy orders] is its character. Just as, in Jesus, the hypostatic union is the reason for His fullness of grace so, in the priest, the sacerdotal character is the source of all those gifts which raise him above the simple Christian.

"You have been endowed with a supernatural power, a power which enables you, as ministers of Christ, to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice and to pardon sins. This character is also a focus from which springs abundant grace which is the force and the light of your whole life. Moreover, it marks your soul with an imprint which cannot be effaced: it will remain in you for all eternity, as a cause of immense glory in heaven or of unspeakable shame in hell.

"You understand, therefore, how close is the union between Christ and His priest. In the eyes of early Christendom the priest was simply one with Jesus Christ. He is the living image, the accredited representative of the supreme Pontiff: *Sacerdos Christi figura expressaque forma* [cf. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), *De ordinatione in Spiritu Sancto*]. The familiar saying *Sacerdos alter Christus* expresses perfectly the belief of the Church...

"Remember what happens on the day of ordination... At the moment the Holy Spirit descends upon him and the Father is able to contemplate with ineffable complacency this new priest, a living reproduction of His beloved Son: *Hic filius meus dilectus.*"

The strength of this impulse in Adoration paintings continues into the sixteenth century. Jan Mostaert's *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 16), also in the Rijksmuseum, shows a proactive Christ reaching out for the gifts.<sup>206</sup> This much later painting has many of the hallmarks of sixteenth-century Netherlandish painting: a strong Italian influence that inspired soft *sfumato* paint blending over hatching for contours and shadow, zoomed in close-up on the central action, and architecture that begins to suggest not Romanesque but Greco-Roman styles.<sup>207</sup> Despite Leonardoesque overtones, Mostaert is indebted to the artistic heritage of his countrymen. Van Mander says he apprenticed under Geertgen tot Sint Jans, whose style is spied in the doll-like head and idealized face of the Virgin.<sup>208</sup> Likewise, the general composition is taken from what is said to be a now lost painting by Hugo van der Goes which survives in workshop copies in Copenhagen and New York (Figures 17 & 18).<sup>209</sup> However, the individualized characterization of the Magi are taken from Hugo's *Monforte Altarpeice*.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Appendix: Jan Jansz Mostaert, *Adoration of the Magi* (1520-1525) oil on panel (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum).

J.P. Filedt Kok, "Jan Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*, Haarlem, c. 1520 – c. 1525," *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Ed., J.P. Filedt Kok (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1980) online catalogue < <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-671/catalogue-entry>>; Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. X (1932) 120, no. 8.

<sup>207</sup> Maryan W. Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 307-308.

<sup>208</sup> Filedt Kok.

<sup>209</sup> Appendix: Southern Netherlandish painter, *The Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1500. oil on panel (74 x 65.1 cm), (The Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York).

Appendix: Southern Netherlandish painter, *Adoration of the Magi*, ca. 1500, oil on panel (73.5 x 72.5 cm) (Statens Museum for Kunst: Copenhagen) (inv. 235).

Max J. Friedländer, *Die altniederländische Malerei*, Vol. 4, *Hugo van der Goes*. (Berlin, 1926) 63, 65–66, 130; "Examining the *Adoration of the Magi*," Ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth, Laura Hartman, and Christine Seidel, accessed October 24, 2019 Metropolitan Museum of Art <<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/projects/adoration-of-the-magi>>; Sixten Ringbom. *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting*. (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco) 1984: 90–91, 101–4, 167, 200; Harry B. Wehle, "Seventy-Five Years Ago," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 4 (April 1946): 201–2.

Mostaert's painting has the best of all worlds: a tender scene in the foreground, typological scenes in the middle distance, and a deep landscape with lively action in the far background. It appears to be a commission primarily because of the novel depiction of the Asiatic magus (discussed below), not something with the broad appeal and rather rapid painting application seen in the Antwerp workshop panels mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The background includes the retinue of the three Magi with the respective clothes of each

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It seems just as plausible to me that later artists adapted Hugo's larger altarpiece designs to smaller, more intimate and therefore, more marketable, compositions than presuming Hugo came up with this idea and the workshop artists copied an original Hugo in its entirety.

Lorne Campbell, *The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century*, Burlington Magazine 118:877 (1976): 188-198; Falkenburg, "Mass of St. Gregory," 196: the panels are of such small size suggest that they were likely for domestic Eucharistic piety.

These two small panels are considered similar copies of a Hugo original, like that of Mostaert's. They were likely made for the open market in an Antwerp workshop around the turn of the sixteenth century. Scholars speculate that either the composition came from a now-lost Hugo in which the artist shifted in his later oeuvre to iconic, close-ups, or a free adaption of the *Monforte Altarpiece* as found in pattern books. This painting is an example of a transition from the large-scale altarpieces such as the *Monforte* and the later works sold to a wider clientele that were likely produced for domestic Eucharistic devotion instead of liturgical placement. While the Christ Child's gesture found in Geertgen's painting is not found in these two, we see how the theological concept of Body of Christ born in Bethlehem and Body of Christ in the Sacrament are collapsed in space. True to growth in a personal, affective encounter in religious devotion transitioning into the sixteenth-century, the proximity of the viewer to the main figures is equal to proximity between the baby held directly over the container of gold coins. The marble baluster can also function as an altar *mensa*, and the painting itself becomes a kind of an open window across a miraculous threshold into the sacred event. Here, we see how the gesture that evokes touch through taste will be heightened in other works in this related genre of Adorations of the Magi.

Dendrochronology determined they were not only of the same type of wood and same region, but of the same tree, thus verifying they were made in the same workshop. There is reason to believe that they were made by two different artists, however, based on certain painterly styles, even though X-radiograph research reveals they used the same underdrawing pattern. Variances are most notable in the expression of Balthasar, the African magus, and the finial on his gift (neither of which of the latter is an obvious typological symbol, yet both look similar to incidents from Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*). However, the most striking difference is the balustrade upon which the gold gift is placed: the Metropolitan Museum's panel shows a blue marble stone and the Copenhagen panel is dark brown stone. X-ray investigation discovered two coats of arms painted after the work was originally completed, and then subsequently covered up with the current dark coloring. Therefore, when these two panels went to market they were even more identical. (Cf. Laura Hartman and Christine Seidel, *Examination of the Adoration of the Magi*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 24 July 2019 <<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/projects/adoration-of-the-magi>> 2014).

<sup>210</sup> J.P. Filedt Kok, "Jan Janz Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*, Haarlem, c. 1520 – c. 1525," *Early Netherlandish Painting*, J.P. Filedt Kok, ed. Rijksmuseum online catalog 10 March 2016 <<hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.4657>>

continent: the straw pilgrim's hat and sumptuous red befitting a retainer of a king, two men in turbans with long beards for Asia, and the African servant identified as much by his skin color as (or more likely than) his garments. Even the ox and ass just barely make the cut on the left. The rest of the scene winds through a village with large ruins of King David's palace and terminating in bluish atmospheric perspective toward the vanishing point.<sup>211</sup>

On the architectural ruins just behind the main figures in the foreground are typological scenes done in grisaille painting as if carved into the pillar and architrave taken from the popular spiritual primer *Speculum humanae salvationis*.<sup>212</sup> Three scenes are incorporated in the exact center of the composition, above the Virgin Mary and Christ: the dream of Pharaoh's butler interpreted by Joseph (Genesis 40:9-20), the prophecy of the Tiburtine Sybil to Augustus, and David refusing to drink Bethlehem well water brought by the Three Mighty Men (2 Samuel 23:15-18) all of which prefigure the birth and adoration of Christ.<sup>213</sup> The architrave adds a red background to the grisaille and is a Jesse Tree, showing the father of David with a trunk sprouting from his loins and creating a lineage with the ancestors of Christ (Isaiah 11:1ff). To put it another way: the vertical axis represents earthly kingship before Christ the true king, and the horizontal axis points to Christ being the definitive successor to David's eternal dynasty.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Filedt Kok, "Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*."

<sup>212</sup> Carl van de Velde and James Snyder, "Mostaert," 5 May 2011 *Grove Art Online*, Ed. Jane Turner (Oxford: Oxford Art Online, 2011).

<sup>213</sup> Filedt Kok, "Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*."

<sup>214</sup> The Joseph and David stories warrant a bit more explanation as they are less familiar. Cf. Genesis 40:19, "Catholic Bible: Douay-Rheims Bible Online, Verses Search," Accessed April

The foreground is most important for the present study. The figures in front befit the turn in Netherlandish painting toward an ever more tender, immediate, and personal devotion suited to the affective piety of the time and the influence of Italian Madonna and Child paintings circulating in the North through the emerging art market.<sup>215</sup> Geertgen's painting put the main action in large close-up; Mostaert makes the painting's figures more proportionate to us by putting them at half-length as if on the other side of a window from the viewers.<sup>216</sup> Mary, a nude baby Jesus, and the three kings are pressed right up to the picture plane with only a small stone shelf with moss grown over it between the viewer and the

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9, 2017. <<http://www.drbo.org/>>. The Genesis story is about Joseph, sold by his brothers and taken to Egypt, and then thrown in prison by the jealous merchant Potiphar. In prison he interprets dreams for Pharaoh's butler and baker who have both offended the king. The cup-bearer's dream was that he saw a vine before him that immediately put forth grapes, and as he was already holding Pharaoh's cup, he squeezed juice into it. Joseph says this means that in three days the Pharaoh will reinstate him. However, the baker's similar dream forecasts his execution by the king. The grisaille niche sculpture shows a man with his legs in stocks, wearing a crown and flowing cape, and holding a cup. Behind him grape vines grow up, as if growing out of him. This narrative prefigured Christ's redemptive action on the cross and his Resurrection after three days. Joseph is a type for Christ, in prison with Pharaoh's servants, one saved and one condemned. Therefore it is like Christ crucified between the good and bad thieves. In fact, the Vulgate translation makes the link explicit: "After which Pharaoh will take thy head from thee, and hang thee on a cross, and the birds shall tear thy flesh." The artistic license at work connects the gesture of holding a cup to a kingly figure, and at the same time creates Eucharistic overtones with the chalice and grapes. (Cf. Numbers 13:23 in which the Hebrew spies bringing back a titanic cluster of grapes from the Promised Land which functioned as a type for Christ on the Cross with clear Eucharistic overtones.)

Cf. 2 Samuel 23, "Catholic Bible: Douay-Rheims Bible Online, Verses Search," Accessed April 9, 2017. <<http://www.drbo.org/>>. This story is from a low ebb in David's late reign in which he is on the run and hiding with his closest retainers in a cave. There he reminisces about the well near the gate of his hometown of Bethlehem in which he recalled watering his flocks and parching his thirst from this cool spring. Unfortunately, Bethlehem was under a Philistine garrison. As an act of devotion to their king, three courageous soldiers break through the enemy lines to bring the king a cup of the water. However, David receives it as a symbol of the blood of his men he has been forced to shed. So he pours it out as a libation to God. The self-sacrifice, offering of gifts from three devotees to the king, and the chalice of blood offered to God alone as a memorial of human violence and sin all prefigure Christ, the Magi, and the Eucharist.

<sup>215</sup> Maryann Ainsworth, *Gerard David: purity of vision in an age of transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 277-278, 295.

<sup>216</sup> This sense of looking through a window comes from Italian painting conventions, but is also influenced by a turn to the iconic through close-up works in early modern Netherlandish painting (cf. Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting*, 2nd ed. (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984).

holy persons. The kings represent the Three Ages of Man and the three continents. At least they almost do this, and that is what likely means this painting was a commission. The one holding the gift Christ also clutches in this panel would ordinarily represent Asia, denoted by his exotic fur coat and middle age appearance. Here, however, he is clean shaven and of quite obvious Northern European fair complexion, unlike the long-bearded Arab/Mongol/Muscovite king normally portrayed in Adoration scenes. For this reason and because his features seem particularly individualized in comparison to the other figures in the painting, it is thought to be a portrait of the donor.<sup>217</sup>

I disagree with the Rijksmuseum's interpretation of the action of the Magi with Christ. According to the museum catalog:

It was customary to depict the moment when Caspar, the eldest of the three kings, who also represented Europe, gave the Christ Child a goblet filled with gold coins, but here it is the slightly younger King Melchior, who symbolises Asia, who is lifting the lid of his gift of a goblet of incense, a reference to Christ's divinity.<sup>218</sup>

I would agree that a different magus is presenting a gift to Jesus, yet the gift is still gold. There are several reasons for saying this. First of all, the container placed on the *mensa* before Christ looks like the alabaster jar for myrrh that is an attribute for Mary Magdalene (cf. Figure 14). The receptacle the middle aged magus is holding looks more like the gold gift containers in comparanda and even

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<sup>217</sup> Filedt Kok, "Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*": "The simple cloak, admittedly, has a timeless look, but the hood, which is typical of Spanish cloaks, was certainly fashionable at the time." ; Wood, "Embedded Portraits."

<sup>218</sup> Filedt Kok, "Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*."

upon magnified inspection there is no sign of incense beads but just *craquelure* on a darker gold color for the inside of the vessel. Lastly, all of the typological images have to do with kingship and food miracles – thus, gold which is the symbol of royalty and the visual cue for communion hosts, would make more sense here. If I am right then none of the kings have their traditional gifts.<sup>219</sup>

However, why the gifts are where they are and presented by which makes sense. First of all, the alabaster jar of myrrh has already had its lid removed. In John's gospel Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany, anointed Jesus' feet with genuine aromatic nard so strong and plentiful that it filled the whole house – a glorious waste meant to prepare Christ's body for burial.<sup>220</sup> This story was also an intimate image in which Mary touched Christ's feet, weeping and drying them with her hair. This fragrance that was made of the same substance as incense is set on the slab that evokes an altar where the action of the Mass happens. Here the touch that Mary could experience was prohibited to lay people, and so touch is displaced into the experience of smell that reminds the devotee of anointing the Body of Christ.<sup>221</sup>

Second, it makes sense that the donor would offer gold to Christ.

Commissioning a painting in which a portrait appears denotes wealth, and hence

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<sup>219</sup> The gifts born by particular kings are not rigidly fixed. Typically the eldest European king Caspar offers gold, Melchior from Asia offers incense, and the youngest king from Africa, Balthasar, gives Christ myrrh. The gifts change hands quite a bit throughout this time period, however. In a large canvas painting of the Adoration by Pieter Bruegel in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, the African magus is offering incense, even burning it in billows of smoke in the stable: appendix (cf. 19): Bruegel, *Adoration of the Magi* (detail) (c. 1556-1560) tempera on canvas (Brussels: Musée Royale des Beaux-Arts). Notice that Caspar is relatively young, offering the quatrefoil container to the child Jesus as he reaches out a tentative hand to the coins. The presence of the host symbol with incense seems to heighten the parallel between the Adoration of the Magi and the sacrifice of the Mass.

<sup>220</sup> John 12:3ff.

<sup>221</sup> Baert, "An Odour. A Taste" 147.

coinage. Also, Christ does not just reach toward the vessel, but he takes hold of the lid and puts his hand inside it. So there is also the honor of letting the patron hold the gift that the Christ Child reaches into. This panel is different from the others because it was likely for private, domestic devotion not for an altarpiece, given its small yet high, narrow format.<sup>222</sup> While Christ does not place put his fingers on the contents of the ciborium as he did in the tot Sint Jans' painting, the other symbols of the small altar top with the myrrh on it with this evinces the Eucharist. It seems clear that the gift exchange happening between the traditional roles of the Magi is so that the donor may have the place of prominence yet matching his age at the time. In the end, the painting was meant to collapse the space between his experience of the Eucharist in church to the home. In both cases – liturgy and art – his experience was focused on the gaze and secondarily through olfaction. Communion was infrequent, so a spiritual communion was meant to recall memories of taste and the touch that accompanied it. Looking upon his Lord touching the vessel for the sacrament, but not touching him directly, Mostaert re-presented the donor's experience of the Mass at home and reinforced liturgical practice when at church. The patron's contact with Christ present in the Eucharist and in his everyday prayer was therefore implied in taste and touch through sight.

The genre motif of the baby Jesus reaching in to the container to touch the gold reaches a kind of climax in an altarpiece by Jan Gossaert completed around

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<sup>222</sup> Felidt Kok, "Mostaert, *The Adoration of the Magi*": "The modest size of the painting, the use of half-length figures to enhance the intimacy of the scene, the individualised features of Melchior and Caspar all indicate that the painting was not made for public display but was intended for private devotion."

the early second decade of the sixteenth century (Figure 20).<sup>223</sup> The composition would appear to have been an altarpiece, so the intimate close-up of Mostaert's and the Antwerp panels' *Adoration* are replaced by the deep space and opulence of the Epiphany. What makes this image particularly intriguing is that some twenty years after the appearance of the gesture, as witnessed in Geertgen's painting in the Rijksmuseum, here the Christ Child actually picks up a coin! This may seem straightforward, but in a liturgical context the priest holds the host over a chalice like this before distributing communion. A contemporary image of just such a situation can be seen in a woodcut from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (Fig. 21).<sup>224</sup> The woodcut depicts what looks to be a fixed triptych altarpiece upon which sits a gold ciborium with a cone-shaped lid hinged to its cup, terminating in a quatrefoil base. An enthroned pope holds up a round host with a cross on it to place on the tongue of a kneeling antipope. The host here is left white like the paper, but the hosts in the ciborium on the altar are painted gold like the vessel itself.

When this gesture is extrapolated into the context of Gossaert's *Adoration* the similarity is obvious. The main action of a highly detailed and busy composition occurs on the lap of Mary framed within the central, squared off arch of the painting underneath the star that led the Magi to Bethlehem, seen through the pitched roof. The Virgin is seated wearing ample blue robes, a small white

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<sup>223</sup> Appendix: Jan Gossaert, *Adoration of the Magi* (1510-1515) oil on panel (London: National Gallery).

"Jan Gossaert, *Adoration of the Magi*," London National Gallery <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-gossaert-jean-gossart-the-adoration-of-the-kings>>; Koerner, *Bosch & Bruegel* 119-120.

<sup>224</sup> Appendix: "Antipope Gregory VIII surrenders to Pope Calixtus II," *Liber Chronicorum* (1493) Handpainted woodblock print.

bonnet and long auburn hair flowing down onto her shoulders. Her features are idealized and her head is almost a perfect oval shape. A nude Christ Child is on her right knee; Mary's lap is the throne for Christ the high priest. In her left hand the Virgin holds the gold container, in a sense, making in her own body the New Ark and altar upon which sets the Show Bread.<sup>225</sup> To the right of Mary and Jesus is the European king kneeling with hands folded in prayer. I see a direct connection in the gesture of Christ and Caspar and that of the priest to the lay devotee at Mass at work in Gossaert's painting. What is more, the fact that both Balthasar and Melchior are left standing with their tall and narrow gifts and attendants on each side of this panel, and because the space is so deep and high that the three figures of Jesus, Mary, and Caspar are brought into focus due to their different postures.

Indeed, the relationship between coins and Eucharist became more explicit in this painting to heighten the sense of touch found in transubstantiated hosts. Therefore, it is apparent that this genre gesture became not only a suggestion of what real presence is but was intended to quite literally make clear that the Mass re-presented the same body of Christ born at Bethlehem. In the case of Gossaert's altarpiece, it could even be inferred that even the Three Kings were satisfied with a visual communion as the climax of the Eucharistic rite, just like how the baby Jesus elevates the coin before Caspar. Memory of taste and touch were exploited in a vicarious visuality reaffirming spiritual communion, or as Baert suggested in

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. Exodus 25:30: The *Show Bread* or *Presence Bread* was always to be kept on a specially dedicated table before the presence of God in the Temple (or tabernacle). This could be seen as a clear precursor to the Eucharist which unites both bread and God's presence. A reference to this in Matthew 12:4 links the Show Bread to King David, also an interesting connection to the Adoration of the Magi.

the *Noli me tangere* genre, that, “The prohibition of...touch intensified sight but also displaced touch toward *tactus* by fragrance and taste.”<sup>226</sup>

### *Conclusion*

I argued in this chapter that artists working from the late fifteenth into the sixteenth century played on the desire to touch the Body of Christ, stimulated and sublimated by depictions of the Adoration of the Magi through references to the medieval association between touch and taste. Through conditioned correlation, the parallel between communion hosts and gold coins touched by Christ in Adoration of the Magi altarpieces exploited how a believer had contact with the Incarnate Lord. The prospect of intimate touch could be substituted by making a spiritual (that is, *visual*) communion at Mass or before the altarpiece. While the direct contact experienced through touching and tasting was able to satiate and excite the faithful, vision itself had to be rationalized as a form of touch. Artists were clearly aware of the power they had over viewers and built on generations of theological reflection to include symbols for meditation on ideas of real presence. For that very reason, however, the greatest tool an artist could use was to stimulate the imagination and sense memory of devotees to be drawn into a multi-sensorial, and thus, more intense experience of contact within and without the Mass. Perhaps for this reason the absence of taste and touch or the transference of the senses to other objects in these tangible senses through the painted depiction made the longing for actual contact with Christ greater in the mind of spectator.

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<sup>226</sup> Baert, “On Odour, a Taste” 147.

Memory of reception of the Eucharist and also the longing for it in omission were perhaps as powerful as the very notion of visual communion.

## Chapter 4 – Marginal Senses, Marginal People

The very classification of certain senses as ‘lower’ implies a highly stratified conception of life. Marginal senses as depicted in Epiphany altarpieces parallel depictions of marginal peoples in the same objects. As Michael Camille has so effectively argued, marginalization does not mean insignificance; rather, a hierarchical structure orders and accounts for all classes, types, and even counterpoints which represent abhorrent examples.<sup>227</sup> Touch, taste, and smell were infantile and animalistic senses, unlike the sterile and rational senses of sight and hearing. Yet, developmentally the lower senses were necessary for coming to empirical knowledge while at the same time could, by a holy inversion, return a devotee to a reclaimed innocence.<sup>228</sup> Likewise, Jews, Africans, foreigners and non-believers, Muslims, Gypsies, women, homosexuals, beggars and lepers, and all manner of sinners, sorcerers, charlatans either had a place due to the ordering of early modern society, or did at least by dint of (perceived) reality. In this chapter I will argue that the implied senses evoked in Adoration of the Magi altarpieces parallel and amplify prevailing views and symbolic qualities of peripheral persons in them.

The notoriously vivid analogy Thomas Aquinas gives for tolerating unpleasant aspects of the mortal world is instructive for the purposes of this chapter. Aquinas faces the reality of the brothel in the medieval city. Several

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<sup>227</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge* 16; Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: a study of the forms of life, thought and art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth centuries* (London: E. Arnold & Co., 1924) 1-2.

<sup>228</sup> Barbara Baert, 'An Odour. A Taste. A Touch. Impossible to Describe': *Noli me tangere* and the Senses," *Religion and the senses in early modern Europe*, Wieste de Boer and Christine Göttler, Ed., *Intersections : interdisciplinary studies in early modern culture*, V. 26 (Boston: Brill): 138-140.

centuries later in Northern Europe, Protestant reformers would attempt to excise prostitution in society, promoting marriage for all and – at least officially – closing down the institution.<sup>229</sup> However, St. Thomas took a more pragmatic tack: society cannot legislate against every vice. In fact, brothels form a kind of necessary evil. They are, he wrote, “a cesspool in the palace; take away the cesspool and the palace becomes an unclean evil-smelling place.”<sup>230</sup> This is once again, another association between sanctity and sweetness, physical corruption and sin.<sup>231</sup> Aquinas is not advocating fornication and adultery, but he reasons that if surfeits of lust cannot be quenched by prostitution, then rape and infidelity with so-called respectable women would be rife and the eruption of pent up passions disastrous for society.<sup>232</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is interesting that his metaphor associates the sins of lust and prostitution with foul-smelling human waste, since decent people, it can be assumed, do not want to see their own raw

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<sup>229</sup> Lyndal Roper, “Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg,” *History Workshop* 19 (1985): 3-28.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The ‘Summa Theologica’ of Thomas Aquinas* (T. Baker, 1917) 2-2.153. 2.

<sup>231</sup> Denise L. Depres, “Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the Jews,” *Jewish History* 12:1 (1998): 58; Classen, *The Odor of the Other*, 134: “In the anti-Semitic Europe of the Middle Ages, for example, it was believed by many that Jews emitted a reek so horrible that they could only rid themselves of it by Christian baptism or by drinking the blood of a Christian child.”

<sup>232</sup> Prostitutes were necessary but outside the Church as public sinners. But the necessary toleration of evil went so far that in London bishops owned brothels in the fifteenth and sixteenth century (*Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work*, Vol. 1, Melissa Hope Ditmore, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006). The Church always held out for conversion. In some European cities, at least in the time of the Counter-Reformation’s zeal for conversion, all prostitutes were rounded up on the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, called to repent and reform their lives (Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Culture and Control in Counter-reformation Spain* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1992) 132-133).

Sometimes there is a sense that medieval Catholicism was preoccupied with sexuality. In fact, Aquinas’ reasoning on brothels is similar to his views on the sword of the king (Romans 13:4) and capital punishment, or just war theory.

sewage, and very less want to smell it.<sup>233</sup> Nevertheless, we all have to live with this unpleasant part of bodily life and thus brothels and sewers and bad smells exist on the margins of functional society – peripheral yet indispensable.

Marginal people were given their place in the central panels of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century altarpieces in the Low Countries. Jews with their legislated dress and stereotyped features appear near the stubborn, brute animals in the stable. Even when many European lands had expelled their Jewish populations, this ethnic group remained the foil for the unbeliever in various subjects.<sup>234</sup> Likewise, although black Africans were present in early modern Europe, and often introduced anew through interactions with the West Indies, one could be tempted from artistic documentation to believe in a monolithic, white European demography.<sup>235</sup> In time, the black Magus appears to take on the characteristics of a heretic in *Adoration* scenes. The placement of these non-Christian, non-European peoples mirrors the medieval conception of the world and its populations; the schematization of the world in the *mappa mundi* (or world map) shows the different humanoid races that become more deformed the farther they are situated from the world's center, Jerusalem.<sup>236</sup> Deformity, foul smell, complexion, physiognomy, and posture all become symbols for the disbelief and sin of these pseudo-human and even monstrous beings. This chapter will explore

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<sup>233</sup> Woolgar *The Senses in Late Medieval England* 132. “The Spanish term for a whore, *puta*, in fact, is based on the Latin word for putrid, as are similar terms in other modern Latin languages,” (Classen, “Odor of the Other” 142).

<sup>234</sup> Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 242; Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 69.

<sup>235</sup> *Revealing the African presence in Renaissance Europe*, Joaneath Spicer, ed. (Baltimore, MD: Walters Art Museum, 2012) 10, 82.

<sup>236</sup> John Block Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse University Press, 1981); *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

several paintings in which the analogy between the lower senses and those deemed 'other' in Western Christendom find their marginal spot.

*The Sense of the Other: The Black African*

The presence of black Africans is the most obvious fissure to white European dominance in Adoration of the Magi altarpieces. The African king, Balthasar, represents an overall ambivalence to non-Europeans or non-whites in Christendom and their standing as persons.<sup>237</sup> Even when at its most generous, European views of Africans were paternalistic or more interested in them for the sake of the exotic, or allowed for exceptional cases amid general inferiority. At its worst, European conceptions of Africans, as seen in these paintings, saw them – like Jews in many of the same images – as stand-ins for heretics and blasphemers. Older traditions of schematic *mappa mundi* – which themselves perhaps hung above altars in some instances – placed human races on the margins of the world and far from Jerusalem, making them fantastic and deformed.<sup>238</sup> Like the lower senses that tend to connote ideas of animalistic smells and mechanical eating, infantile touch or untouchable lower castes, even an African king has a marginal quality in the overall scene of Christ's nativity.

Paternalism and proximity to the Christian mysteries can be seen in Adoration altarpieces by interpreting where Africans are positioned and by how

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<sup>237</sup> Pinson, "Connotations of Sin" 163.

<sup>238</sup> We perhaps have to consider in this period "not only the relationship between monstrosity and race, but also monstrosity and religion as a surrogate for race," Debra Higgs Strickland, "Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Age," *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012) 375.

they are depicted.<sup>239</sup> Balthasar, the African, was depicted as the youngest of the three, corresponding to both the three ages of man and to accepted notion of Christian pedigree – anachronistic as it was – of Europe, followed by Asia, and then only in the early modern period, Africa (excepting Ethiopia in European understanding perhaps) (Figure 21).<sup>240</sup> Thus, Balthasar’s look corresponded to a general sense of sub-Saharan African peoples as children as a whole: in both their ability to care for themselves and the need to have the gospel given to them by fatherly European countries.<sup>241</sup>

Worldviews could quite literally manifest themselves for Europeans in the visual representation of the earth and its inhabitants. Long medieval traditions of the world’s history and geography were expounded in schematic world maps or *mappa mundi*, which look very little like the atlases of our modern perspective. These maps, most popular from twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, were not laid out to accurately represent topography and actual distance, but were conceptual aids to spiritual pilgrimage and themselves the fruit of theological

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<sup>239</sup> Perhaps we should also say, when the African magus is *not* depicted. In the first monumental Adoration of the Magi altarpiece in the Low Countries (that is extant, at least), Rogier van der Weyden depicts Balthasar as a young Caucasian. Some scholars believe this to be a crypto-portrait of Charles the Bold, and may explain that this dandy fit the duke because of his age the best of the three (Alfred Acres, “The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World,” *The Art Bulletin* 80:3 (1998): 430).

<sup>240</sup> Appendix: Hans Memling, *Jan Floreins Triptych (Adoration of the Magi)* (c.1479-80) oil on panels (Prado: Madrid).

Silver, *Bosch* 168.

To consider Europe older Christians than Asia and Africa may simply have been a description of that contemporary time period in which Europe was predominantly Christian and the closest parts of the Near East and Northern Africa were majority Muslim. “The teacher of the West,” St. Augustine, while from a Roman Patrician family, was of course, from the latter.

<sup>241</sup> Dienke Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe : racial patterns of paternalism and exclusion* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014) 19.

reflection on God's plan for creation.<sup>242</sup> The most basic form of these maps was what is often called today T-O maps, for their most stripped-down form they divide the circle representing the earth with a superimposed 'T' to dissect the shape into thirds.<sup>243</sup> The three segments represented Asia (largest, taking up two fourths of the circle, on top), Europe (bottom left segment of the circle, encompassing one fourth), and Africa (bottom right, equivalent space to Europe). Unlike Ptolemaic maps that placed north at the top of the page, these maps were oriented at the top to the east – the location of the rising sun and where Christ will appear at the Last Judgment and resurrection – and with Jerusalem, “the navel of the world,” at the center.<sup>244</sup>

An example of a medieval world map is the *Hereford Map* created circa 1280 (Figure 22).<sup>245</sup> Made of a single calfskin of almost 1.5m in circumference stretched across an oak panel, it may have even been placed above an altar. Along with the typical T-O map schema, it shows Christ in judgment at the top (East), biblical and Greek mythological stories, and bestiary of thirty-three animals.<sup>246</sup> Of

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<sup>242</sup> Peter Barber, “The Evesham World Map: a Late Medieval English View of God and the World,” *Imago Mundi* 47 (1997): 13, 15.

<sup>243</sup> John F. Moffat, “Medieval Mappa mundi and Ptolemy's Chorographia,” *Gesta* 32:1 (1993): 59; Karl Whittington, “The Psalter Map: A Case Study in Forming a Cartographic Canon for Art History,” *Kunstlicht* 34:4 (2014): 22.

<sup>244</sup> That is, *umbilicus mundi* (or *omphalos*). It is an over-simplification to say that Jerusalem is in the center, as Karl Whittington pointed out about making the *Psalter Map* canonical exemplum that there were many variants on shape and placement of the holy city (“Psalter Map” 23).

<sup>245</sup> Appendix: Richard of Haldingham and Lafford, *Hereford Mappa mundi* (c. 1280) ink on vellum (Hereford Cathedral).

To be technical, some point out that the *Hereford Map* fits into a particularly British tradition, especially among monastic communities in either books or wall maps, to display the world in an oval rather than a circle (Barber, “Evesham World Map” 19).

<sup>246</sup> Moffat, “Medieval Mappa mundi” 65: “Medieval *mappaemundi* are equally narrative and encyclopedic; accordingly, the real value of the profuse pictorial details is broadly connotative rather than narrowly factual. These *cartes moralisées* demonstrate an obsession with the integration of geographical knowledge to spiritual ends; their major concern was evangelical. Instructing the faithful about the significant events in Christian history, rather than recording their

particular interest, however, is its inclusion of the so-called monstrous races at the margins of the known world. These peoples who are ferocious, uncivilized, and cannibalistic – and certainly deformed – come from ancient Hellenistic authorities like Herodotus, Strabo, and Pliny; still as mentioned above, they derive their mutated form through later reflection based on their distance from Jerusalem.<sup>247</sup> Thirty-two races are shown at the margins, mostly around Africa; thirty-two is one year minus the earthly life of Christ, and may explain their incomplete formation as humans. These races include the Troglodytes, cave dwellers who eat snakes and ride wild animals (Figure 23).<sup>248</sup> According to ancient historians, they lived near the Red Sea coast of Africa and went about mostly naked. Others include the *Sciapod* or *Monoculi*, a people with one enormous foot with which they both swiftly run and hold aloft over their heads to shield their faces from the intense sun.

Notably for this study on sense history and its social meaning, it is interesting that most of the monstrous races have exaggerated features that relate to touch and taste: enlarged feet or gigantic faces with wide mouths on their torsos. As sight and hearing were the rational senses of the mature person, one wonders if the augmentation of the infantile and animal phenotypical sense organs was a sign of savagery.<sup>249</sup> And if this was the case – consciously or unconsciously

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exact terrestrial locations, *mappaemundi* emphasized the transitory nature of earthly life. The *orbis depictus* was itself a *simulacrum* of the divine wisdom of God, the body of Christ, or even God himself.”

<sup>247</sup> Whittington, “Psalter Map,” 24: the author critiques this as an overall medieval worldview according to contemporary scholarly consensus of center and periphery.

<sup>248</sup> Appendix: *Hereford Mappa mundi* (detail), Africa with Troglodytes.

<sup>249</sup> “Smelling and sniffing are associated with animal behavior. If olfaction were his most important sense, man's linguistic incapacity to describe olfactory sensations would turn him into a creature tied to his environment... Thus the development of the sense of smell seems to be

– if European stereotypical fixation on particular features of black Africans, such as broad noses and full lips, in painted representation reinforced these negative sense associations.<sup>250</sup> In any case, Africa is the location of the majority of the bestial races.<sup>251</sup>

Such conceptions of what kinds of races are found in Africa – bestial, deformed, uncivilized – are one thing, but a more pertinent association with the Adoration of the Magi subject, might seem far-fetched. Yet, an illumination from a book of hours brings these two together (Figure 24).<sup>252</sup> On the incipit page for the canonical hour of Terce, a noble lady kneels to the right side of the letter ‘D’ for *Deus* (God). Inside the letter under a Gothic tracery canopy the three Magi bring gifts to the Child Jesus and Mary. The Magi are depicted as kings wearing crowns, who appear to be different ages as the eldest king kneeling has a long white beard and the other two are clean shaven, and they are clearly all

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inversely related to the development of intelligence... Unlike the senses of hearing and sight, valued on the basis of perpetually repeated Platonic prejudice, olfaction is also relatively useless in civilized society... The best proof of this claim is that the sense of smell is more highly developed among savages than among civilized men” (Corbin *The Foul and the Fragrant* 6).

<sup>250</sup> “Variety in skin color was not entirely unknown, but for most people, it came as a surprise, something really new and different. Explanations for diversity were suggested, not only as evidence of God’s unlimited power to create, but also a mystery, feeding fantasies about the bestiality, inhumanity, or monstrosity of ‘others’” (Hondius, *Blackness* 121).

<sup>251</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge* 14: “People’s fears were exorcised by dumping them on those who inhabited the edges of the known world, who were lesser in some sense; whether troglodytes or pygmies. . . the outskirts felt to be infected zones, where all kinds of monstrosities are possible, and where a different man is born, an aberrant from the prototype who inhabits the center of things’... During the Middle Ages the edges of the known world were at the same time the limits of representation. On the World Map...the further one moves away from the centre-point of Jerusalem, the more deformed and alien things become... Skirting Africa in the lower-right quadrant of this tiny one-and-half-inch cosmos, the artist has managed to depict fourteen of the monstrous races whose types derive from Pliny and who were thought to exist ‘at the round earth’s imagined corners’... In this sense, illuminators were often not inventing monsters but depicting creatures they might have well assumed existed at the limits of God’s creation.”

<sup>252</sup> Appendix: “Adoration of the Magi,” MS 36684 (fol. 46v) (second quarter of the thirteenth century) tempera and gold leaf on vellum (London: British Library).

Caucasian.<sup>253</sup> What is more interesting, however, is what happens on the *bas-de-page* as three apes travel in a line parodying the Wise Men.<sup>254</sup> And on the other side of the illuminated letter opposite the donor is a Sciapod bearing a crown for the Newborn King.

The play on the margins of the British Library's book of hours (MS 36684) can be innocently taken to be primarily a sardonic take on the very serious business of the incarnation and prayer. There are numerous medieval examples in prayerbooks and even church spaces of what, to a post-Enlightenment sensibility, seem contradictory. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the central illumination within the sacred name of God, proximate to Christ and the Blessed Virgin, are three white kings. Set outside the holy figures in the letter is the kneeling patroness. Surprisingly opposite her on the other side of the letter is a monstrous Sciapod humanoid. Lastly, there are the subhuman primates monkeying around at the bottom of the page, furthest south of the central composition.<sup>255</sup> While play is certainly intended, there is a worldview about the place of respectable people and races being articulated. Africa is the dark continent of apes and deformed races according to world maps, and cannot even get a token witness to the incarnation of the Son of God. In other words, the fodder for the humor complemented an

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<sup>253</sup> "Early medieval written legends report that one of the three kings who paid homage to the Christ Child in Bethlehem was from Africa. But it would take nearly 1,000 years for European artists to begin representing Balthazar, the youngest of the three kings, as a black man. Why? The explanation can be found through a closer look at the history of this period—specifically, in the rise of the African slave trade in mid-1400s," Kristin Collins and Bryan C. Keene, "A New Exhibition Explores Balthazar, a Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance European Art," 9 May 2019 *The Getty Iris* 3 March 2020 < <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/>>.

<sup>254</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge* 11.

<sup>255</sup> "The monkey aroused various associations in Northern Europe of that period. It symbolized sin, folly, but also the demonic. It is not rare to find monkeys accompanying the Kings' retinues Adorations, probably in order to emphasize the exotic aspects of event, but also sometimes suggesting sin" (Pinson, *Connotations of Sin* 168).

overall worldview that would allow for the proper place of certain peoples in a highly stratified society. Likewise, notions of naïveté as well as ferocity, domestication and dominance, and even the idea of being ‘unclean’ and stench come to mind when referring to non-European races.

What happens then, when the Adoration of the Magi are taken from small-scale prayerbooks and made the subject of monumental altarpieces, when these notions are put in the context of high stakes public art? To take a representative example, Hugo’s *Monforte Altarpiece* (Figure 12) shows the standard composition: the Three Kings enter (usually from the *sinister* side of the panel) to greet the Madonna and Child seated; they present gifts in descending age order; Caspar kneels, Melchior is beginning the act of kneeling, and Balthasar is standing. Age and proximity of the representative continents to Christ determine their pecking order in the composition. The black magus is farthest from the central action and sacred figures of Christ and Mary than is St. Joseph, and even the Caucasian footman of Melchior noses just ahead of Balthasar. Despite his finery, Balthasar is not much more distinguishable from the onlookers at the picture and stable’s edge.

In Jan Gossaert’s *Adoration* panel from the London National Gallery (Figure 20), Balthasar is actually closer to Christ than is Melchior, who is also standing. However, we see that there are two white dogs just in front of the African and European kings in this painting. The white Italian Greyhound before Caspar mirrors his kneeling posture, with head erect and alert. The other dog in front of Balthasar is blemished with orange spots and appears to be sniffing and

chewing at the ruined floor tiles, uninterested in the theophany transpiring before it. These two canines may contrast differing notions of fidelity and instinct, or perhaps even opportunism. Consonant with many aspects of countless early modern altarpieces from the Low Countries, there is an element of ambiguity: not everyone truly recognizes the significance of the events unfolding, or at the very least has come for various reasons that could be mere curiosity or disdain instead of devotion.<sup>256</sup>

In other Adoration of the Magi altarpieces, the bestial associations are connected to the ox and ass in the back of the stable. Hans Memling's *Jan Floreins Altarpiece* shows Caspar kneeling, Melchior genuflecting, and Balthasar the most distant and standing. As stated above, the ox represents thoughtful recognition of the scene unfolding before him, while the ass continues to gorge himself on silage; the former represents the humble believer and the latter the defiant or dull doubter. Here, Caspar has begun to kiss the feet of Christ, almost as if he is slurping up the true Body of Christ. Caspar is like the ox now with access to heavenly food. Balthasar, however, is the stubborn and dumb ass. Furthermore, treatment of animal stink, otherness of foreigners, and peripheral status is connected here in the smellscape of the stable.

The stench ascribed to the other is far less a response to an actual perception of the odor of the other than a potent metaphor for the social decay it is feared the other, often simply by virtue of being 'other,' will cause in the established order... Therefore, while we may feel an antipathy toward something or someone because its odor offends us, we may equally

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<sup>256</sup> Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 243.

ascribe an offensive odor to something because we feel an antipathy for it (or indeed the two elements may operate simultaneously so as to reinforce each other).<sup>257</sup>

Therefore, even while the European king is associated with an animal, it is a noble beast and – if I may say so – merely a symbol, whereas the African king might be instead the symbol of the ass!

Yona Pinson argues that the very posture of the African king shows that he is a heretic:

The image of black or swarthy [person] is thus seen to contain a doubly negative meaning in medieval and Renaissance culture; on the one hand, the black dark skin symbolized evil, sin and the devilish in both high and popular culture and, on the other, being associated with the figure of Moor, or Saracen, it was also related to heresy.<sup>258</sup>

The three kings representing the three known continents also flow from medieval exegesis on the three sons of Noah. The youngest, Ham, had skin that turned black when he looked on his father's nakedness bringing shame and curse upon all of his descendants.<sup>259</sup> Ham was the father of Canaan and Cush-Eithiopia, and contemporary to the production of the altarpieces of this period, was associated with Saracens.<sup>260</sup> The fact that black Balthasar remains standing, although patiently waiting perhaps, could be a snide sign that he does not truly believe.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Classen, "Odor of the Other" 135.

<sup>258</sup> Yona Pinson, "Connotations of Sin and Heresy in the Figure of the Black King in Some Northern Renaissance Adorations," *Artibus et Historiae* 17:34 (1988): 160.

<sup>259</sup> Hondius, *Blackness in Europe* 125.

<sup>260</sup> Pinson, "Connotations of Sin," 161.

<sup>261</sup> Pinson, "Connotations of Sin" 169.

Thus, despite having the cult of a saint, he has an ambiguous pose that could indicate his identification as a heretic.

While Balthasar is almost always a marginal figure, he is nonetheless ambiguous. As noted in chapter two, this was in part due to consistent distrust for smell in particular, because one was never quite sure the source of an odor.<sup>262</sup> There was room for exceptions to negative attitudes, and a particularly saintly African could exist. As Europeans began trans-oceanic travel in the early modern period in the succeeding century, coinciding with a shift from Slavic to African slave trade to the New World and to Europe, the Catholic Church would forward particular individuals for sanctity: St. Benedict the Moor, St. Martin de Porres, and others.<sup>263</sup> Even older traditions existed of the legendary Prester John, the priest-king of a distant Christian nation on the other side of the Muslim threat in the Levant.

The origin of Prester John is found in a letter written to Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus in 1165.<sup>264</sup> Although the author claims to be in ‘India,’ this as a geographical concept for many Europeans that could be located in Eastern Africa as much as it was the land beyond the Indis River.<sup>265</sup> Prester John was conflated with both the Mongol conqueror of Seljuk Turks in 1141, and plausibly a Nestorian Christian known to Europeans through Eurasian trade, or an

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<sup>262</sup> Barbara Baert, “Pentecost and the Senses: A Hermeneutical Contribution to the Visual Medium and the *Sensorium* in Early Medieval Manuscript Tradition,” *Interruptions and Transitions: Essays on the Senses in Medieval and early Modern Visual Culture*, Art and Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, Vol. 14, Eds. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019) 32; Baert, “An Odour. A Taste,” 140.

<sup>263</sup> Erin Kathleen Rowe, “After Death, Her Face Turned White: Blackness, Whiteness, and Sanctity in the Early Modern Hispanic World,” *The American Historical Review* 121:3 (2016): 732; Hondius, *Blackness* 124.

<sup>264</sup> Charles E. Nowell, “The Historical Prester John,” *Speculum* 28:3 (1953): 435.

<sup>265</sup> Nowell, “Prester John” 438.

Ethiopian king, also known to crusaders in the Holy Land, both of whom were considered descendants of the Three Kings.<sup>266</sup> *Prester* meant he was a priest (presbyter) and *John* being both his personal name and perhaps an allusion to the Ethiopian peoples the Zān.<sup>267</sup> Scholarly consensus is now that the author is neither, and some speculate that the writer's intent was not to forge an actual king at all. Rather, it may have been a Western ecclesiastic describing a utopian Christian kingdom in contrast to the ills of Europe having gone through the Great Schism, tension between the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope, and moral turpitude.<sup>268</sup> According to this theory, the point of the letter, then, was moralistic; but literal-minded persons preferred to imagine an actual historical figure and powerful Christian ally who could help them flank the Muslim threat than as a moral allegory. In any case, by the seventeenth century when trade with the Christian kingdom of the Kongo was at its height, the Kongolesse ambassador, Antonio Manuel ne Vunda, did not hesitate to ask for monies from the pope to begin constructing a road into the African interior that would finally connect Christian Europe to the lost kingdom of Prester John.<sup>269</sup>

African exceptionalism, however, was always swathed in paternalism and exoticism, and even at its best appears to have been suspect. Hieronymus Bosch's *Adoration of the Magi* triptych in the Prado is a unique depiction of the African

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<sup>266</sup> Nowell, "Prester John" 436-437, 439. "In the early thirteenth century, the Christian rulers of Europe had repeatedly attempted to ally with the Mongols of Iran against the Muslim Turks who were occupying the Holy Land" (Barber, "Evesham Map" 23).

<sup>267</sup> Nowell, "Prester John" 438.

<sup>268</sup> Nowell, "Prester John" 437.

<sup>269</sup> Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of the Kongo* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2017): 156-157.

magus (Figure 25).<sup>270</sup> Most Netherlandish Adorations simply put Balthasar in fancy European clothing, whereas Bosch creates fantastic clothing that evokes a different culture altogether.<sup>271</sup> The sensitive rendering of the features of the king and his maidservant suggest it was painted from life, perhaps from a West Indian visiting in the court of the Burgundian duke. Still, some point out that not only is the black magus standing in this work, but he is spatially removed within the scene, in spite of the two other kings being in the exact center of the main panel, and further divided from them by the doorway into the stable with the sinister figures gawking there (discussion of these individuals below).

The marginalization of Balthasar does not stop in his racial, geographic, and even chronological acceptance of Christ, but in those exotic clothes Bosch placed on him. While it is true that the two other kings have gifts and headgear that are morphing into sinister things like toads and apes, it is the white garments of the African that are most disconcerting.<sup>272</sup> Balthasar's collar and shoulder decorations are stylized thistles and thorns – medieval symbols of earthly temptation.

Thorns also refer to heretics, those who are “outside the Church,” as we can see from a page the *Bible Moralisee of the Grandes Heures de Rohan*, ca. 1417, where the Commentary on the Creation of the Trees on the Third Day says: “The good trees signify good deeds and are crowned with flowers in Paradise; the thorns signify bad men living in bad works who

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<sup>270</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Adoration of the Magi* (1494) oil on panel (Madrid: Museo del Prado).

<sup>271</sup> Bosch's innovation for Balthasar's clothes will be copied by his followers and by Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

<sup>272</sup> Silver, *Bosch* 168.

are crowned with thorns in this world.” The men crowned with thorns are depicted “outside the Church,” as rejected unbelievers and heretics, in contrast to the congregation of the blessed, crowned with paradisiacal flowers, “inside the Church.”<sup>273</sup>

Furthermore, the birds pecking at seeds, berries, berries-cum-pearls, on Balthasar’s robes are human male- and female-headed bird hybrid creatures, reminiscent of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.<sup>274</sup>

The decoration reveals the true nature of this black Magus to be sinfully indulgent, guilty of the lust and gluttony seen in the opulence of the *Garden*. Moreover, the hem of the red robe of his attendant behind him displays fish- or toadlike demons that devour one another, just as in the disturbing corners of Eden in the wing panel of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych. Further fruit metaphors abound in the ornaments of these two figures. The black Magus holds in his hand the gift of a silver sphere that is topped by a golden bird devouring a small, round, red fruit...another echo of the fruits of corruption in the *Garden*.<sup>275</sup>

All of these factors, again, at best make the African magus an ambiguous figure, and certainly marginal.

The black African Magus is marginal figure, then, because he only deserves to adore Christ when he is at his most outstanding for his race. Everything about him is suspect: his physical appearance, his smell, his posture, and his position in the Adoration. He has a place in early modern European

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<sup>273</sup> Pinson, “Connotations of Sin,” 166.

<sup>274</sup> Silver, *Bosch* 172.

<sup>275</sup> Silver, *Bosch* 172.

culture, but like the lower senses, they are less dignified and inhabit a lower place of priority in the composition of the artwork.

*The Sense of the Other: The Jew*

The black Magus has a role that can be justified in Adoration scenes, whereas the stereotype of the Jew in medieval art in general and in these altarpieces specifically occurs over and over again with less concern about the land and people of Jesus' birth than for contemporary symbolism. A central characteristic of Epiphany altarpieces was the reinforcement of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Throughout medieval and early modern Europe, there were two main opponents to belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist: the Jewish people and heretics. Even in countries that had expelled Jews for some time, they remained symbols of the latter that were actually in their midst, or at least in intellectual memory.<sup>276</sup> This would include the Lollards, or followers of the English priest John Wycliffe, who denied the real presence and ate consecrated Eucharist with onions to prove their disbelief.<sup>277</sup> The other would be the Cathars of southern France who prompted the founding of the Mendicant religious orders and a whole body of apologetics for the Eucharist in popular religion. From early manuscripts the most notable feature for the Jew is a horned cap (Figure 26), often identifying Jewish ancestors of Jesus or contemporary

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<sup>276</sup> Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 242.

<sup>277</sup> Depres, *Immaculate Flesh* 48; French, *The Good Women of the Parish* 21.

Jewish individuals in Europe.<sup>278</sup> By the time of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Netherlandish masters, identifiable Jewish tropes made them out to be symbols of obstinate unbelief. This is particularly consistent in Epiphany altarpieces where their presence reinforced several aspects of disbelief: of the Messiah, of transubstantiation, and of true religion itself. In short, Jews were the symbol for heretics and doubters.

The origins of European ambivalence to the Hebrew race can be found in the New Testament itself.<sup>279</sup> There were undoubtedly forced baptisms, although often enough individual bishops and Jewish communities sought to live together.<sup>280</sup> Pogroms and mass expulsions were nevertheless common in many Western European regions.<sup>281</sup>

European Jews were religiously and often socio-economically suspect by the Christian majority. Some of this was distinguished by their dress. First, the *pileus cornutus* (pointed Jewish hat) was simply the headgear worn by pious Jewish men. In time, however, Christian rulers and ecclesiastics required Jews to wear distinctive dress, by the turn of the second millennium. This was codified at the Fourth Lateran Council in canon 68 that decreed that Jews (and Muslims) should wear identifiable clothing so that there would not be untoward mingling of

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<sup>278</sup> Appendix: Frater Rufillus(?), *Inuentio sanctae Crucis (St. Helena Finding the True Cross)*, from the *Passionary of Weissenau (Weißenuer Passionale)* Cod. Bodmer 127, f. 53v (c. 1170-1200) ink and tempera on parchment (Coligny, Switzerland: Foundation Bodmer).

<sup>279</sup> Diarmaid McCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (London: Penguin, 2010) 92-93. This obviously had disastrous effects. The Jews had the autonomy to stone to death, only the Romans crucified. This implies that Jesus was seen as a threat to stability in Palestine.

<sup>280</sup> Norman Roth, "Bishops and Jews in the Middle Ages," *The Catholic Historical Review* 80:1 (1994): 2.

<sup>281</sup> This is the ostensible reason, although there is speculation about what several causes could have been. It was the first in a series of expulsions of Jews, the last of which occurred in 1394. (Simon R. Scharzfuchs, "The Expulsion of Jews from France," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 (1967): 482).

peoples.<sup>282</sup> The pointed hat was the most noticeable identifier and from 1215 on was more or less established.

Ideas of smell and taste in the guise of food and food ways also set Jews a part from the Christian European majority. It is anecdotal, but it is a common experience when cultures and nationalities converge that strange body odor, due in part to diet, is noticeable, and is noticed most often negatively. The anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter, was working among the Inuit of the Arctic in the late twentieth century, and an old woman asked if he thought she smelled bad, to which he responds in the affirmative. After pausing and returning to her sewing she told him she asked because alternately, they think he smelled bad and that it is offensive to them.<sup>283</sup> Not surprisingly, then, in “the anti-Semitic Europe of the Middle Ages, for example, it was believed by many that Jews emitted a reek so horrible that they could only rid themselves of it by Christian baptism or by drinking the blood of a Christian child.”<sup>284</sup> Thus, Jews were not merely foreign and marginal, but their very foul existence polluted the environment and could only be mastered by indulging diabolical impulse or exorcised by Christianization. Pointing to the foods and food ways in even more benign ways, such as kosher dietary laws, could even be a way of inferring meaning against Jewish Europeans as the distinctly ‘other’ and weak.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Canons 68 and 69 from Lateran Council IV (1215), Henri Leclercq, “Fourth Lateran Council (1215),” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 24 Oct. 2019 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09018a.htm>>.

<sup>283</sup> Constance Classen, “‘Odor of the Other,’ Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories.” *Ethos* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 1992): 134.

<sup>284</sup> Classen, “Odor of the Other” 134.

<sup>285</sup> Olivia Remie Constable, “Food and meaning: Christian understandings of Muslim food and food ways in Spain, 1250-1550,” *Viator* 44:3 (2013): 199-235. In this article Constable demonstrates how fifteenth-century Spanish Christians implied that older Christian kings like

Contemporary European Jews find their way into the periphery of early Netherlandish Epiphany altarpieces. This can be seen for example in the *Columba Altarpiece*. Most of the figures are dressed in contemporary garb – from the Holy Family to the finely dressed kings, to the donor kneeling with his Rosary tucked in the left corner of the central panel. However, just behind the principal players in the foreground is a group crowding through one of the arches in the crumbling stable's side.

We see that this group pushing through the portal are actually a part of a tremendous procession of exotically dressed figures with turbans and other orientalized dress. There is even an African in their number in the stream of people – even though all of the kings are depicted as European – presumably the entourage of the pilgrim kings.<sup>286</sup> Whereas the Magi, Joseph and Mary, and the donor all look at the Christ Child, this group looks elsewhere. The man in blue places a hand on the bearded man in yellow and looks directly out of the picture, and the other three whose faces are visible look to a small crucifix situated on the pillar between the two archways that flank the Madonna and Child seated below it. This would seem to indicate that these people can see the fullness of the Paschal Mystery begun at the Bethlehem stable: that the wood of the crib becomes the wood of the Cross.

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Enrique IV ate like Muslims in both types of food and in posture (on the floor). In an attempt to create meaning for a monolithic Christian culture on the Iberian peninsula it was necessary to differentiate even common foods between Christians and Muslims, attributing to the latter effeminate and weak qualities.

<sup>286</sup> Alfred Acres says that the youngest king might be a portrait of Charles the Bold: "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World, *The Art Bulletin* 80:3 (1998): 430.

Indeed, the *Columba Triptych* was an altarpiece, and scholars generally agree that the tableau is designed to resemble an early modern retable at an altar, with the Crucifix surmounted on it a clue that this is its enacted symbolism.<sup>287</sup> Mary herself becomes the altar on which the Christ Child's body is presented for adoration.<sup>288</sup> Panofsky also posits that the Roman arches alluding to the ruins of King David's palace give way above to what (would be if it were not broken) a pointed Gothic arch.<sup>289</sup> This, he argues, connotes the old form of religion giving way to the new, as the Gothic style succeeded Romanesque architecture.

Yet, these architectural shifts might frame other details in this scene. The most prominent figures in the group peering through the archway have long, scraggly beards: one white with age and the other still brown in middle age. Perhaps this is simply to show their Asiatic origins, so much less clean-shaven and 'civilized' compared to European inheritors of Roman grooming. However, even though St. Joseph is depicted as an elderly balding man, these figures seem particularly out of place in this party. The younger figure wears a turban, maybe an earring, and also what appears to be some kind of prayer shawl over his

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<sup>287</sup> John L. Ward, "Disguised Symbolism as Enactive Symbolism in Van Eyck's Paintings," *Artibus et Historiae* 15:29 (9-53): The author argues that the so-called hidden symbolism, coined by Erwin Panofsky, in early Netherlandish panel painting was obscure and only known by the most literate members of medieval society was really meant to be the means of prolonged viewing and associations that broke open meaning, *enacted* through contemplation of an art object.

<sup>288</sup> Appendix (Figure 9): Rogier van der Weyden, *Seven Sacraments Altar* (detail). The priest saying Mass in the middle distance directly in line with the celebration of the Eucharist, that above the high altar is a carved statue of the Madonna and Child from a winged tabernacle above it (Silver, *Bosch* 168).

<sup>289</sup> Panofsky says that fifteenth-century Flemish painters thought of Gothic architecture as distinctly Christian, and the older Romanesque style as closer to Eastern styles. "It was quite justifiable to substitute 'Romanesque' for 'Oriental' buildings wherever the contrast between Christianity and Judaism was intended," *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 135.

shoulders. He seems to have removed a black hat and is holding it to his chest in deference like the second king, Balthasar, is doing.

Nevertheless, the long beards and – especially the yellow clothing – could be meant to mark these two figures as Jews.<sup>290</sup> And the fact that they do not look with devotion upon the Christ Child, but instead eye the Cross of shame, could be proof of this. As stated above, they might represent the remnant of the old covenant that perdures in the presence of the new – even as Gothic superseded Romanesque. What is more, this group of men parallels the farm animals opposite them in the stable. As stated above, the ox and the ass corresponded to two notions of belief.<sup>291</sup> The former animal represents the thoughtful meditation on the Word of God brought forth from the manger, and naturally turns to face his Creator; the latter, continues to grouse on fodder in Christ’s bed, signaling obstinate unbelief. Perhaps the two Jewish men depicted parallel directly these two, with the white bearded one trying to point out the Christ to the other, who witnesses to disbelief.<sup>292</sup> In any case, it seems clear that the architecture motif, the ox and ass symbolism, taken with these Jewish figures are meant to show how someone can easily miss the newborn king which the Magi adore.

A small panel by Gerard David throws this association between Jews, donkeys, and the Eucharist implicitly connoted in Epiphany altarpieces into a

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<sup>290</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors*: distinctive clothing was already the norm for more than two hundred years by this time, but yellow had not yet been codified, 116; Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 248.

<sup>291</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 116: “Even the ass of the Nativity scene may form a negative model: for the ass thrusts his head through the arch that encloses the space of the Virgin, violating this inner sanctum in order to eat from his trough. The ass’s disrespectful behavior - especially in contrast to that of the ox, who directs his attention not to food but toward Christ while staying out of the inner stable - accords with associations sometimes made between the ass and unbelieving Jews.”

<sup>292</sup> Acres, *Columba Altarpiece* 434.

clear light, albeit, disturbing for contemporary viewers: *The Mule Kneeling before the Host* (c. 1500-1510) (Figure 27).<sup>293</sup> This work comes in a series of three identically shaped paintings that formed one side of the predella a large altarpiece of *The Holy Kinship* intended for a Spanish patron.<sup>294</sup>

The content of *The Mule Kneeling before the Host* is a proof of transubstantiation and the undeniable belief in it. The story goes that a certain Jewish merchant, Guillard, in the Italian town of Rimini, refused to believe that the Eucharist was anything more than bread.<sup>295</sup> Guillard makes a wager with the popular preacher, the Franciscan friar Anthony of Padua: he would starve a mule for three days, and then they would present the mule with both a pile of fodder and a paten with the consecrated Eucharist to see which one he chooses. At the

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<sup>293</sup> Appendix: Gerard David, *The Mule Kneeling before the Host* (c. 1500-1510) oil on panel (Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art).

“St. Anthony of Padua: Anthony and the Miracle of the Kneeling Horse in the Hours of Henry VIII,” The Morgan Library & Museum, Accessed March 14, 2019 <<https://www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-henry-viii/192>>; Maryan Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 176-177.

See also: Gerard Horenbout, *St. Anthony and the Miracle of the Mule* (c. 1500) *Breviary of Eleanor of Portugal* MS M.52, f. 411v (New York: Morgan Library & Museum).

<sup>294</sup> The National Gallery in Washington, D.C., that houses the main triptych panels, records the Spanish cardinal Antonio Despuig y Domingo, as the earliest known owner of the work. The southern European commission might explain the predella. Gerard David and workshop, *St. Anne Altarpiece* (center panel), *St. Nicholas* (left panel), and *St. Anthony of Padua* (right panel) (c.1500/1520) oil on panel (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art); Gerard David, *Three Legends of Saint Nicholas* (c. 1500-1510) oil on panels (Chicago Institute of Art).

This Holy Kinship was a late medieval family tree and way of shoring up loose ends in the biblical narrative with the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity. According to this tradition, St. Anne, the Blessed Virgin’s mother, had three successive marriages to Joachim, Cleopas, and Salome was known as the *trinubium* or *Holy Kinship* which produced three daughters all named Mary. The Mary Cleopas and Mary Salome provide cousins for those referred to in the gospels as the brothers of Jesus (Ashley and Sheingorn, *Saint Anne* 11-12).

Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990); Pamela Sheingorn, “Appropriating the Holy Kinship,” *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990): 173;

<sup>295</sup> “St. Anthony of Padua: Anthony and the Miracle of the Kneeling Horse in the Hours of Henry VIII,” The Morgan Library & Museum, Accessed March 14, 2019 <<https://www.themorgan.org/collection/hours-of-henry-viii/192>>

end of the three-day fast, the mule is untethered and heads directly for the oats or hay. Guillard is gleeful that his gamble paid off. However, at that very moment St. Anthony cries out, “Beast, behold your creator!” at which the animal kneels down on its front legs and bows its head to the ground in adoration to the host.<sup>296</sup> Dumbfounded, the Jewish merchant believes in the veracity of the Real Presence and converts on the spot.

The very premise of this miracle story strikes a modern reader as odd: a hungry animal might very well eat the hosts instead of hay, but what would that prove about belief that the Eucharist is the Body of Christ? That aspect is apparently irrelevant. What matters is the climax of the story: the most stubborn of animals can recognize the real presence! But the association of the mule or ass with an obstinate Jew is deliberate and, again to modern readers, problematic. Here we have testimony from the larger tradition of, at the very least, an indirectly anti-Semitic correlation between the Jewish people and their failure to believe in Christ – if not also being responsible for His death – and a dumb ass.<sup>297</sup> But this painting is not just didactic, not merely Anti-Semitic, but it is miraculous.

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<sup>296</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 218-219: The gesture along with the animal is important in certain stories similar to this animal recognition of the real presence corpus. “In an early fifteenth-century exemplum extracted from the Festial of John Mirk, prior of the Augustinian abbey of Lilleshall in Shropshire, we see an English priest drop the Host in a meadow while he is on his way to give Communion to a dying woman. When he returns to search for it, he finds beasts adoring it, but he notices a horse kneeling on one knee only. He questions the animal, who says that he is actually a devil in disguise. Not surprisingly, in the *Speculum laicorum* we have another priest go to visit a sick man carrying the Eucharist; he passes by a devil, who humbly bows down. When the priest returns without the Host, the devil bows on one knee only.”

<sup>297</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 218: “Animals were perfectly able to sense when they were in the presence of the eucharistic bread—even though, clearly, they could not understand the doctrinal implications of transubstantiation. They knew that they should not eat it, for example. Another Jew offered the Host to his dog, who bowed down and adored it, instead of consuming it; in the *Speculum laicorum*, the Jew becomes a generic heretic, and the dog, an ass, but the result is the same. We also know of cats, swine, and all sorts of other beasts kneeling before the wafer.”

Therefore, it reinforces the power of the Eucharist as it castigates the Jewish people in the minds of faithful Christians.

A panel such as this on an altarpiece in the early sixteenth century rules out any ambiguity about what the figures in the periphery of the stable opposite of ox and donkey in the *Adoration of the Magi* are supposed to be in the *Columba Triptych* (Figure 1). When we consider the Epiphany and its own implicit connection to the Eucharist and the many associations between Jewish disbelief, desecration of hosts, and a lingering Western European tendency to cast Jews as the unbelieving other – even long after their expulsion from many lands – it makes this St. Anthony legend uncomfortable to consider. Yet there is a certain ambivalence for the early modern Christian, for he could acknowledge this as a good Jew, who, even despite his ethnicity, was a witness to truth.<sup>298</sup>

David's panel crams this story into a tight space. Without knowledge of the story it would be a rather undramatic scene. Set into a deep town square with a group of citywalls and buildings blocking the sky in the distance, the figures are pushed up close to the picture plane. In the very front an ashen mule cropped just behind its neck kneels on its forelegs, creased at the back showing weight placed toward the front of the body, and head held erect at a ninety degree angle, head in profile. On the other side is St. Anthony in his gray friar's robe, knotted cord cinching his waste, kneeling in a three quarter pose, hands folded, clean-shaven, tonsured with a somber expression. Right behind him and just emerging from the picture border is an acolyte dressed in white surplice, black hair tonsured, also kneeling and holding a gold ciborium. Marking the focal point of the scene in

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<sup>298</sup> Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 245.

front is the Eucharistic miracle with a simple wooden table, askew diagonally between the mule and the saint, tall and narrow with a gothic arch notch cut at the legs and braced along the lateral open sides. The paten is large, gold or brass, shallow depth. It is full of white communion hosts.

Three figures stand behind the mule and the table. The figure on the left appears to be the wealthy merchant Guillard, as he is dressed in the sumptuous clothing of the middling classes: reddish, fur-lined robe and the black floppy hat fashionable throughout the period, and wooden clogs for outdoor conveyance in filthy streets. In his hand he holds either a scroll of accounts or perhaps a money purse. He points to the miracle with his right hand and his face reads as stunned. Two figures stand beside him: one clean-shaven man in a blue cap, only seen from the neck up, and another bearded man who grasps Guillard's left arm at the sight of the miracle.<sup>299</sup> This second figure may be there to reiterate that Guillard – who otherwise is cast as a merchant – is also Jewish. The figure standing to the right has a long beard, a hooked nose, and wears yellow; all of these are stereotypical ways for representing European Jews at this time. Like in the Epiphany scenes, these Jewish doubters stand just outside the scene. They are separated from the saintly Christians on the right side of the panel and connected to the side with the converted mule. Finally, one may note that although they

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<sup>299</sup> Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, 248-249: Lipton describes the growth of mixed spectators in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Netherlandish paintings with, "A similar mixture of apparently Jewish, presumably non-Jewish, quite ambiguous, and evidently distracted characters likewise characterizes the figures." Thus, while Guillard is clean-shaven, the bearded hook-nosed one is clearly intended to be Jewish, and the other one is ambiguous. Why? They show the various persons and reactions that persons can have to holy scene.

recognize the miracle they remain defiantly standing (as Balthasar does in Adoration scenes).

What is perhaps most surprising about David's *The Mule Kneeling before the Host* is that its mood is considerably placid. Maybe this is too subjective to assert, as even one of David's most dramatic works, *The Judgment of Cambyses* is understated as it is graphic.<sup>300</sup> Nonetheless, Guillard's pointing gesture and the bowing beast are restrained. Instead all the drama is given to the Eucharistic miracle: a host levitates above the dish and radiates a golden halo almost twice its diameter, with a smaller white shimmer on the outside of the areole. This is most interesting because this depiction is what derives from the written account the most. But it appears that the artist has taken some license to explain to viewers that, one, this is the real presence and it is miraculous in every occasion, and two, that the demure behavior is appropriate for venerating the Blessed Sacrament.

Disbelief was one thing, but in the popular lore of Christian Europe, the Jews were suspect not only for disbelieving the real presence in the Eucharist, but also accused of sacrilege of it. In May 1370, six Jews burned at the stake in Brussels charged with desecrating a host.<sup>301</sup> The late medieval period was a time of growing Eucharistic devotion and fascination with Eucharistic miracles. Interestingly, this growing devotion sometimes included and perpetuated stories of Jewish host desecration.

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<sup>300</sup> Cf. Maryan Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 57, 60-63, 66-68, 70, 73.

Regarding Gerard David's subdued drama: Maryan Ainsworth, *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) 275-281.

<sup>301</sup> Strickland, *Imagining Antichrist* 134.

A bifolio insert into a Burgundian book of hours brings together miraculous confirmation in transubstantiation, Eucharistic miracles, and Jewish sacrilege (Figure 28).<sup>302</sup> A modern account summarizes this particular relic's origin in Monaco, wherein a woman purchased an apparently stolen monstrance that still housed a large Eucharistic host for adoration.<sup>303</sup> The woman being ignorant of the real presence tried to dislodge the wafer with a knife, at which point the host began to bleed. As the blood dried on the host it created an image of the Lord Jesus enthroned on a semi-circular throne with attributes of the Passion. However, many other souvenir images from other manuscripts specifically link the agent of sacrilege as a Jew who repeatedly abused the Eucharistic host.<sup>304</sup>

The relic of the Host of Dijon in the *Hours of Ogier Bénigne* W.291, f. 17v, takes up a full page illumination and the opposite facing page (f. 18r) displays both a traditional elevation prayer and the provenance of the relic. This miraculous host was said to have been desecrated by a Jew and began to bleed. Pope Eugene IV bestowed it upon Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy in 1433. The duke's wife, Isabelle of Portugal, had the monstrance created to house it. Isabelle then presented the relic in the Carthusian charterhouse of Champmol in

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<sup>302</sup> Appendix: School of the Master of the Burgundian Prelates, *The Hours of Ogier Bénigne* W.291, f. 17v (c. 1480) ink and tempera on parchment, 23.3 x 15.7cm (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum).

"The Hours of Ogier Bénigne," The Walters Art Museum, June 6, 2019 <<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/215>>.

<sup>303</sup> *Eucharistic Miracles of the World*, Catalog of the Vatican International Exhibition, Eds. Raymond Burke, Raffaello Martinelli, John A. Harden (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life Press, 2016) 57.

<sup>304</sup> Roger Wieck, "Illuminating Faith: The Sacred Bleeding Host of Dijon," The Morgan Library 16 May 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbNhK6fYzbE>>; Despres, *Immaculate Flesh* 62.

Dijon in 1454.<sup>305</sup> The image depicts a large, white host with the image of Christ embossed on it. It is Christ in Judgment with Jesus nimbed and seated upon an arced lattice like a rainbow with hands upraised flanked by the *Arma Christi*.<sup>306</sup> Spots of blood appear over Christ's body, in his halo and over the image at various diameters. The host is held inside Isabelle's silver-gilt monstrance. The miraculous nature of the host is reiterated by two angels holding up the monstrance on a grassy mound.

The depiction of a miraculous host witnesses both to Eucharistic devotion, but also to the miraculous power accessible to devotees who had an accurate reproduction of it for their own possession. Access on parchment granted an intimacy of touch that could not be granted in the presence of the actual relic for most people, not to mention the matter the velvety feel of the skin page.<sup>307</sup> Nevertheless, for the present study the facing page of text is as interesting as the image. The center text is a traditional laic prayer to be recited during the elevation of the host at Mass – not only handy for devotion here, but reinforcing regular devotion as opposed to Eucharistic miracles. This prayer, however, is enclosed within quatrains of the provenance of the relic. Once again, its very origin was that a Jew tried to desecrate it. By reinforcing Christian doctrine and piety it was occasioned by a necessary exclusion that, in this case, excluded with the likely unintended but nonetheless Anti-Semitic feelings.

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<sup>305</sup> Depres, *Immaculate Flesh* 62.

<sup>306</sup> Depres, *Immaculate Flesh* 62. This image is unique as it seems to combine the Last Judgment with the Man of Sorrows.

<sup>307</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 28-29.

Returning to the *Columba Triptych* and the depiction of Jewish persons, we must conclude that placement of these foreigners is not necessarily a sign of depravity. After all, the donor is on the periphery, in a sense. The donor has to approach from behind a wall, kneeling, and mediated by St. Joseph. He is, therefore, as marginal in one sense as the Jewish men in the rear of the stable. Deference and disbelief are not easily distinguished, but associations in the culture lend weight to what has negative or positive meaning, just as certain odors were culturally conditioned with meaning. There is a long tradition of medieval art that is made deliberately hard to decode in order to promote contemplation and fruit for meditation when one is about his or her own day away from the object itself.<sup>308</sup> It is not that Jews and heretics do not have a place, but that location is marginal – a matter of fact, like the sewer in the castle – that must be tolerated as always present among the City of Man. Those who appear as stereotyped Jewish figures in Adoration of the Magi paintings more often than not present a threat of disbelief, desecration, and pollution. However, their mortal danger on the margins of late medieval European society could be masking something even more wicked.

### *Conclusion*

Foreigners and those who stayed on the margins of European Christian culture were categorized as ‘other.’ They ate different food, wore different clothing, and could even give off a foul smell in the presence of holy Christians.

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<sup>308</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. Second Ed.*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature: 70 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008) 222.

However, they had their place in macro- and microcosms of world and society for the early modern person, even representing certain kinds of Christians themselves – albeit sinners, heretics, or at the very least exceptional people within an untouchable group. Early Netherlandish altarpieces were created for a wide audience, all of which could find their place individually, or compare themselves to those who did not fit into the holy scenes depicted. Just as certain associations were useful for bringing out meaning or inspiring sentiment in devotees through play on the senses, like the smell of roses associated with the Virgin, so certain types of persons depicted on the literal or figurative edge of paintings could inspire similar ideas and reactions. If the whole world was ordered according to proximity to the Body of Christ, so were those of equal or lesser proximity in their recognition and devotion to it by whom they were. Black Africans, Jews, and heretics were nevertheless present and had their place in this world as well as in the virtual world reflected in early Netherlandish altarpieces. Johan Huizinga famously said that there was very little we could learn about late medieval society from religious painting, as it presented an ideal image without the violence and the vestigial and moribund feudal system.<sup>309</sup> What one sees even despite the beautiful surfaces and pure saints, is a very real presence of the actual world that peeks around the margins of both paintings and the culture of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Low Countries.

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<sup>309</sup> Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* 223.

## Chapter 5 – Sinister Outliers and the Lower Senses

The previous chapter discussed *mappa mundi* that show the different humanoid races of the world that become more deformed the more they depart from the world's center, Jerusalem.<sup>310</sup> Deformity, foul smell, complexion, physiognomy, and posture all become symbols for disbelief and sin. Furthermore, in figural paintings these marginal people had their place with the holy figures at the center. Black Africans and Jewish persons represent 'the other'; as such, they exist as morally ambiguous and not necessarily evil. There are, however, persons that present only evil, mockery, and disease. Surely, while being present in the real world and in the content of art, they are unambiguous. These are the sinister outliers. In this chapter, I will argue that connotations of unpleasant touch, taste, and smell coupled with sinister persons were utilized in order to temper devotional overreactions in the faithful.

There are many examples from the lower senses in which binary examples of good and evil exist; if there is an odor of sanctity it is contrasted with the odor of corruption. The hagiographical work throughout the medieval period testifies to this. An example of the odor of corruption is related in the transfer of some of St. Ursula's eleven thousand virgins' relics to a Cistercian monastery in the thirteenth century.

Laid out in the choir, the sacred bones began to give off an unbearable stench.

Suspecting some Satanic hanky-panky, the abbot summoned the abominable spirit to show itself. "[All o]f a sudden the huge jawbone of a horse was glimpsed

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<sup>310</sup> John Block Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse University Press, 1981); *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

beneath the heap of relics; it was cast out forthwith, and the horrible stench that had filled the place gave way to the sweetest of smells: whereupon the monks praised God.” The corpse of a saint cannot emit an unpleasant smell unless the Devil himself interferes.<sup>311</sup>

The odor of sanctity was a sign of a saint’s holiness and a reminder of holy things. These smells are, of course, are unexpected, and contrast with the fear and repulsion of death and decay. This was expressed in New Testament allegory and taken to a quite literal degree by medieval Christians:

Concerning the odor of a good reputation, the same Apostle says: *We are the odor of Christ*, that is, the example and imitation of Christ, *in all places*, and *we are for others an odor of life that leads to life* [2 Cor 1:15-16].., while others are an odor of death that leads to death [cf. 2 Cor 2:16], that is, the odor of envy and evil thoughts that lead to eternal death.<sup>312</sup>

Thus, the alternative to good smells would be the bad smells, in a delectable as well as a moral sense.

Taste and smell are related senses because of experience of eating. However, as Chapter Three pointed out, taste in particular is related to touch. I argued in this dissertation that Epiphany altarpieces had the ability to entice viewers through cuing positive memories surrounding church life and by sublimating desire for receiving the Eucharist. However, because the lower senses had a pejorative connotation for late medieval Christians, their power could be

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<sup>311</sup> Annick Le Guérer, *Scent: the mysterious and essential powers of smell* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994) 121.

<sup>312</sup> Guillaume Durand, *The Rationale divinorum officiorum of William Durand of Mende: (a new translation of the Prologue and Book one)*, T. M. Thibodeau, Trans., IX §4, (cf. VIII §10) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 94.

exploited in an equal and opposite direction. Rather than piquing desire for contact they could instead repulse.

The very notion that pious churchmen, patrons, and artists would try to cool devotion in viewers seems strange. However, it is the scholarly consensus that the work of Hieronymus Bosch in particular, while being *sui generis* in style surely, represents a turn from the mystical to the moral in his religious paintings.<sup>313</sup> For this reason, Bosch routinely warns and critiques the lasciviousness of courtly life in paintings such as *The Garden of Earthly Delights* – a work produced for the Duke of Burgundy’s palace, in the form of an altarpiece but was never intended for a church.<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, from the testimony of the Apostles up to the eve of the Reformation, there was no little concern and criticism by clergy and theologians on abuses or the potential for misunderstanding by simple folk.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Pinson, “Connotations of Sin and Heresy,” 167: “In this Bosch painting the African Magus no longer seems to belong to the Divine Personages in spite of his apparently glorious appearance. In this, as Brand Philip justly remarks, the altarpiece departs from its original purpose of assuring the faithful spectator of redemption. In Bosch the original purpose of the altarpiece is denied and it has lost its traditional sacramental character. The devotional meaning of the altarpiece is modified, and it has moved into the moralizing sphere. This tendency in a way foretells Bruegel, who, two generations later, transformed his Adoration of the Kings into a secular moralistic lesson.”

<sup>314</sup> Falkenburg, “El Jardín de las Delicias y la conversación galante”: He argues that the circus game of men riding on fantastic beasts around a pool of women in the central panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* mirrors similar courtly games. The chosen winner got his pick of the women. So it was a critique of accepted noblemen dalliances. Again, reiterating that this triptych was in a palace and not in a church; the subject matter meaning was about moral living and not about devotion.

<sup>315</sup> “That henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

“Now the Spirit manifestly saith, that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error, and doctrines of devils, Speaking lies in hypocrisy, and having their conscience seared, Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful, and by them that have known the truth. These things proposing to the brethren, thou shalt be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished up in the words

There are first, those churchmen like Nicholas of Cusa, papal legate sent to the little backwater in Northern Germany, Wilsnack, to investigate a longstanding Eucharistic miracle that gave both Rome and Santiago de Compostela a run for their money. In a decree issued at Halberstadt in 1451, he wrote:

We have heard from many reliable men and also have ourselves seen how the faithful stream to many places in the area of our legation to adore the precious blood of Christ our God that they believe is present in several transformed red hosts [*quem in nonnullis transformatis hostijs speciem rubedinis habere arbitrantur*]. And it is clearly attested by their words, with which they name this colored thing [*talem rubedinem*] the blood of Christ [*Christi cruorem*], that they thus believe and adore it, and the clergy in their greed for money not only permit this but even encourage it through the publicizing of miracles. . . . [But] it is pernicious . . . and we cannot permit it without damage to God, for our catholic faith teaches us the glorified veins [*sanguinem glorificatum in venis glorificatis penitus inuisibilem*]. In order to remove every opportunity for the deception of simple folk, we therefore order that . . . the clergy . . . should no longer

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of faith, and of the good doctrine which thou hast attained unto. But avoid foolish and old wives' fables: and exercise thyself unto godliness" (1 Timothy 4:1-3, 4-7).

Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton University Press, 2000) 135: "From the perspective of the ecclesiastical authorities, the marginal character of the Christian paraphernalia employed in the household would have been accentuated by its tendency to ambiguity and obscurity. It has been seen that in many cases, such as the unidentified riders, it is not clear whether the images on amulets and textiles are Christian or profane. The church fathers saw such ambiguity as an especially insidious feature of magic. For example, John Chrysostom, in his attacks on amulets and other apotropaic devices, repeatedly stressed that only the cross is acceptable as an explicitly Christian protection. Only the sign of the cross, he said, can be put on a child's forehead, not some other sign made in mud by its nurses and maids. The child should not be guarded by amulets tied to it, nor by bells hung from its hand, nor by scarlet thread, but only by the sign of the cross."

display or promulgate such miracles or allow pilgrim badges [*signa plumbea*] to be made of them, but these same transformed hosts should be consumed by the celebrating priest in communion rather than that the sacred eucharist given us as a divine gift for spiritual refection should be permitted to disintegrate through the corruption of the species [*per specierum corruptionem desinere*].<sup>316</sup>

Another example of criticism comes from the Netherlandish Humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. He was certainly an opponent of what he saw as superstition and exploitation of the poor laity at the corrupt gain of clergy.<sup>317</sup> In very straightforward fashion Erasmus states that the common practice of praying to saints for specific intentions for which they had been dubbed patrons was nothing more than polytheism by another name.

Some men worship certain saints with certain rites. One fellow pays his respects to Christopher every day, but in the presence of the saint's statue. What is he eyeing? Obviously this: he has persuaded himself that for that day he will be safe from the death he dreads. Another prays to a certain Roch, but why? Because he thinks that saint protects his body from the plague. Still another mumbles certain prayers to Barbara or to George lest he fall into the hands of his enemies... And these saints themselves vary with different nations. Paul, for example, is a favorite with the French for

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<sup>316</sup> Reissue by bishop of Magdeburg: *Codex diplomaticus Brandenburgensis: Sammlung der Urkunden, Chroniken und sonstigen Quellenschriften für die Geschichte der Mark Brandenburg und ihrer Regenten*, 41 vols. in 32 (Berlin: Morin, 1838-1869) 2, translated by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Christian Materiality* 15.

<sup>317</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, "*Enchiridion Militis Christiani*," *The Essential Erasmus*, ed. John Dolan (New York: Continuum, 1990), 60.

the same purposes that Jerome is among our own countrymen... Now, unless this kind of worship is restored to Christ and detached from any consideration of creature comforts or inconveniences, it is actually not Christian at all. It is not much different from the superstition of those who in earlier times used to promise Hercules a tenth of their goods in the hope that they might get rich, or offer a cock to Aesculapius that they might recover from an illness... You pray to God that you may not die too soon, not that He may bountifully give you sounder judgment and that wherever death takes you it may not catch you unprepared. You are not considering how you may change your life, and yet you are considering how you may change your life.<sup>318</sup>

The medieval period, issuing from the feudal system, posited a chain of being through which lower castes related to the next class upward without going straight to the top. The structure of secular society applied to the spiritual realm, so that saints were more approachable to common folk as well as pious clerics. Taken aback by superstition and the decay of the feudal system for increasingly centralized governance, Erasmus tries to correct and form appropriate piety.

Citing just these two figures, I think that it can be plausibly stated that if part of the goal of lower sense stimulation in altarpieces was to reinforce belief and practice surrounding the doctrine of transubstantiation, we can also say that the ‘correct’ formation – or the sober formation – of that was also important. The

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<sup>318</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Enchiridion of Erasmus*, Raymond Himelick, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 99.

official religion and folk religion, veering on the magical were always at work.<sup>319</sup> Some scholars have seen the growth of Eucharistic relics in the late medieval period as a desire for the laity to lay more claim over the spiritual world.<sup>320</sup> However, it was as advantageous for churchmen to promote pilgrimages and devotion in the real presence of the Eucharist. The tension that resulted in the realm of forming religious belief, not surprisingly, would have to touch the realm of the senses because sacraments and sacramentals were inherently sensuous. And just as an odor of sanctity, sweetness of taste, and gentle caresses could be connected to Jesus, Mary, and the saints, then the opposite – stench, rot, and contagious sores – could find its personification in representative art too.

Just as otherness could denote peoples who were outside hegemonic European society and needed to be held in place although separate, there was also an otherness that was suspect for sin and led to far more sinister topos. There was the openly demonic in these paintings. While temptations of saints like St. Anthony Abbot and others are the most obvious example, there is the *sui generis* Adoration by Hieronymus Bosch from 1495, now in the Prado Museum that may represent the presence of the Antichrist at the Epiphany. Here again, sickness, putrid odors, and marginalization reiterate a sense of the evil lurking on the margins of this world. This chapter will explore several paintings in which the analogy between the lower senses and the sinister were meant to elicit disgust and, rather than irresistibly drawing a viewer in to the scene, would help to keep the person at bay and right belief in check.

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<sup>319</sup> Valerie I. J. Flint, “The Magic That Persisted: Condemned Magical Agencies,” *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1991) 87-126.

<sup>320</sup> Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 5, 34-36.

### *Sinister Outliers*

The presence of marginal persons and marginal senses near the holy scene of the Epiphany show an inclusive microcosm of all strata of society having its place.<sup>321</sup> The incorporation of marginal persons – doubters, blasphemers, and heretics – along with marginal senses is more pointed in an Epiphany altarpiece by one of the most singular artists in the fifteenth-century Low Countries: Hieronymus Bosch. Most scholars would agree that Bosch is a bit like the best authors of literature who do not reduce their symbols to a one-to-one meaning; that it is to say that often his images have multivalent meanings and associations.<sup>322</sup> However, drawing out associations does not mean there are endless possibilities. In this section I will argue that while many artists used

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<sup>321</sup> Keith D. Lilley, *City and cosmos: the medieval world in urban form* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009) 10: “Alan [of Lille]’s ‘city’ is thus both cosmos and body, each formed and functioning according to divine plan. His city has the same *moral topography* as the universe, with its highest orders at the centre and lowest at the edge, and as the human body.”

<sup>322</sup> For differing views on the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, see: Otto Benesch, *Hieronymus Bosch and the Thinking of the Late Middle Ages*, (Vienna: Sartryck Ur Konsthistorisk Tidskrif, 1957) 116-117; Hans Lennerberg, *Bosch’s garden*, *Gazette des beaux-arts* (58) 1961: 135-144; Anna Spychalska-Boczkowska, *Material for the iconography of Hieronymus Bosch’s triptych the Garden of Delights* (Studia muzealne, 1966) 49-86; Max J. Friedländer, *Early netherlandish painting* (Leyden-Bruselas: A.W.Sijthoff, 1969); Elena Calas, *The wicked walk in a circle in Bosch’s garden*, *Coloquio artes* (20) 1978: 32-40; Dirk Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch. His Picture-Writing Deciphered* (Rotterdam: A.A.Balkema, 1979) 311; Albert Cook, *Change of signification in Bosch’s garden of earthly delight*, (Oud Holland, 1984) 76-97; Virginia Tuttle, *Lilith in Bosch’s Garden of earthly delights*, *Simiolus* (1985): 119-129; Reindert L. Falkenburg, *Joachim Patinir. Landscape As An Image of the Pilgrimage of* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988) 43; Larry Silver, *God in detail: Bosch and judgment(s)* *The Art Bulletin* 83:4 (2001): 641; Lary Silver, *Bosch* (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 2006) 21; W.S. Gibson, *Invented in Hell. Bosch’s Tree-man*, *Invention: northern renaissance studies in honor of Molly Faries* (2008) 162-173; Reindert L. Falkenburg, *The land of unlikeness: Hieronymus Bosch, “The Garden of Earthly Delights”*, (W Books, 2011); Reindert L. Falkenburg, *The Garden of Earthly Delights- viewership, patrons, public’ En.*, *Jheronimus Bosch, his patrons and his public. International Jheronimus Bosch Conference. 16-18 september 2012.* ‘s-Hertogenbosch, (2014): 118-131; Margaret A. Sullivan, *The timely art of Hieronymus Bosch. The left panel of the Garden of Earthly Delights* (Oud Holland, 2014) 165-194.

touch, taste, and smell to stimulate deeper engagement with the object in prayer, Bosch sought to exploit these senses in the opposite way.

This *Adoration of the Magi* in the Prado (Figure 26) is an uncharacteristically conservative subject for Bosch.<sup>323</sup> One of the few works by Bosch with donors depicted on the triptych, it follows that this traditional subject matter was according to the donors' wishes.<sup>324</sup> With that said, this is still Hieronymus Bosch and invention and subversion abound. Bosch's invention regards such things as the African king's clothing, which instead of being very fine European clothing is fantastic and exotic. There are the many strange allegorical statuettes, some of which seem to come to life, like the phoenix on the African magus' gift. There is, nonetheless, still plenty of subversion: instead of David's palace there is simply a ramshackle stable, an ape riding horseback to a brothel in the distance, and then, of course, the looming figures of shepherds and shadowy onlookers.

Unlike most monumental Bosch panels, this was an altarpiece, or more likely constructed like one for domestic Eucharistic piety.<sup>325</sup> The grisaille outer panels depicting the *Mass of St. Gregory* (Figure 7) make clear that in the tradition of altarpieces, the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament

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<sup>323</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Adoration of the Magi* (1495) oil on panel (Madrid: Museo del Prado).

<sup>324</sup> Donors are Peter Scheyfve and Agneese de Gramme.

<sup>325</sup> "The subtleties and complexity of the painting furthermore lead one to suspect that the piece was not primarily meant as a visual support for the celebration of the mass... It seems more reasonable, therefore, to assume that Bosch has created the Mass of St. Gregory as an *Andachtsbild* serving personal meditation and contemplation," Falkenburg, "Mass of St. Gregory," 196.

is the focus.<sup>326</sup> Therefore, if there were any doubt that Bosch's depiction of the Epiphany was not about the Eucharist, the combination of exterior and interior panels manifest it. *The Mass of St. Gregory* recounts a Eucharistic miracle attributed to the great pope who reigned from 590-604 CE.<sup>327</sup> According to legend, the woman who baked the communion hosts doubted the real presence of Christ in the sacrament at the pontiff's Mass. Just then, Christ appeared in bodily form on the altar before all. Like the *Miracle of St. Anthony and the Mule*, validating the ordinary miracle of transubstantiation with an astounding miracle that was frequently the topoi of altarpieces.

In the Prado *Adoration* we see Bosch using a conservative format in even the media to manage to place his unique twist on it. The *Gregorymas* is in grisaille – an unusual choice of exterior wings from what is extant – but nothing seems statuesque in these panels.<sup>328</sup> Bosch instead uses the grisaille as a threshold into what lies inside.<sup>329</sup> In fact, Bosch uses a very warm ochre-brown monochrome, as opposed to the more statue-like gray, as well as many aspects of events happening on the retable of the high altar that look less like sculpture and more like a different schematic way of painting for ordinary days when the doors of the triptych would be closed. Again, unusual is the presence of polychrome donors amid the grisaille.<sup>330</sup> But throughout the work there is a sense of objects

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<sup>326</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Mass of St. Gregory* (exterior panels on *Adoration of the Magi* triptych) (1495) oil on panel (Madrid: Museo del Prado).

<sup>327</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy for the Lord* 215-216.

<sup>328</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 208.

<sup>329</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 208.

<sup>330</sup> X-radiograph photography reveal these figures were not in the underdrawing but were added later. They are consistent with Bosch's style, so it is unclear why he or his followers were okay with the full color donors. Perhaps it was a way of showing difference between the historical and miraculous and those who are within the viewer's own time separated from that specific

not being as they first appear – a statue of Christ coming to life and the top portions of the retable appearing more like visions hidden to the casual observer too coming to life. While St. Gregory is a direct witness of the miracle with his attendant deacon and kneeling and the two donors, there are groups on either side of the altar kept from the action by two curtains. Falkenburg sees these crowds as representing the ordinary way that a devotee sees the miracle of transubstantiation normally: hidden but seen by faith.

The artist depicts Christ's appearance in the *Gregorymas* in what was commonplace: *The Man of Sorrows*, the Jesus of the Passion in half-length.<sup>331</sup> But what is unusual is that he paints right over the molding and places Christ's body directly on the panels' divide. He does this with the crucifix atop the passion scene-retable, with the body of Christ disappearing into the crack (more on that particular issue below).<sup>332</sup> All of these ideas of seeing properly, approaching the Eucharist properly, believing in what is hidden, are at work on this exterior grisaille scene.

The *Prado Epiphany*'s inner paintings are in full color. As already stated, their subject and its composition are some of the most conservative in Bosch's oeuvre. Like many monumental works of this artist, the three panels present a continuous narrative. In the background the yellow star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi to the stable is seen in the top of the central panel. There is a large city

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miracle. "The young man is the patrons' son Jan Scheyfve and the old man is probably Peeter's father Claus Scheyfve, who died before 1495, members of Antwerp's wealthy burgher class," P. Silva, "The Adoration of the Magi Triptych - The Collection," *The 5th Centenary Exhibition*, Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2016: 195-207, Accessed November 6, 2018 <<https://www.museodelprado.es>>.

<sup>331</sup> Falkenburg, "Super-Entanglement," 380.

<sup>332</sup> Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 208.

with exotic architecture in the background. Whether this is Jerusalem or Bethlehem is unclear, but we can tell that the stable is meant to inhabit a place outside of the city walls in the ruins of David's palace.

Between the foreground action of the Epiphany and the background cityscape are miniature scenes that cast a ghoulish cloud over the Infancy event. Much of the pastoral, genre scenes reference Christ's birth announced first to poor shepherds, as well as the parable of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Larry Silver and others have identified this as the Apocalyptic battle from the Book of Revelation of Gog and Magog roused by Satan to engage in Armageddon against Christ and the saints.<sup>333</sup> Just as the Magi are dressed in contemporary dress, these battling hordes represent contemporary threats, clothed as Muslim Turks with turbans and sabers. There is also statue of a pagan idol on a pillar surmounted by a crescent moon. The statue could symbolize several different things: 1) the turn of the pagan Magi from their gods to the true God, 2) the beast of Revelation 13:15 and its image that people were made to worship, or 3) the Egyptian idol of Thoth the baboon god of knowledge that toppled at the passing of the Christ Child during the Flight into Egypt.<sup>334</sup> A detail that seems out of place from these biblical allusions is an ape riding a donkey to a house of ill repute. Apes are associated with the most animal appetites of man. This might be a Boschian innovation for the longer iconographic traditions of figures making Joseph doubt the virginity of Mary.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Rev. 19-21; see also origins in Genesis 10 and Ezekiel 38.

<sup>334</sup> Pinson, *Connotations of Sin* 167.

<sup>335</sup> Fernando Lanzi and Gioia Lanzi, *Saints and Their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004) 40: "In icons and in many

The central panel, of course, contains the most important image: the *Adoration of the Magi*. While an Ashlar masonry wall is behind the stable, it does not appear to be made from the ruins of the Bethlehem royal palace. In fact, the stable is very flat, as if it were simply a stage set piece. The entire structure before which and through which a large meeting of figures takes place is grossly dilapidated: it is warped and rotted. In fact, the hay loft that is barely held together as it deteriorates, not only has the usual suggestion of wheat stalks, but also mice, amphibians, and a sinister owl peeking out of the darkness – all suggesting that evil is very close to the holy one of God. The shepherds cannot see directly on to the Epiphany occurring below and around the corner, but they like the congregants behind the curtains in the *Gregorymas* on the triptych exterior are able to see by *not* seeing.<sup>336</sup> Meanwhile, the three Kings present gifts and adore the Child, while a shadowy group of onlookers from inside the stable peer and leer through doorways and holes in the walls.<sup>337</sup>

The triptych's central panel must have a connection to the Eucharist because of its function and the themes on its exterior. Yet, what viewers find is that the adoration of the body of Christ is not so straightforward. Whereas the

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Western images representing the manger he appears seated and absorbed, according to the tradition that doubts were raised in him by the devil, who appeared to him in the guise of the shepherd Thyrsus; Thyrsus the name of the staff of Dionysus, which was used by satyrs and bacchants. These were said to have provoked Joseph by saying, in order to make him doubt the divine maternity of his wife. 'As this staff can not produce leaves, so an old man like you cannot beget and, on the other hand, a virgin cannot give birth.'

<sup>336</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, "Presencias Reales en el Altar de 'La Adoración de Los Magos,'" Museo del Prado (video, 2016).

Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 76-77: "for all the discussion of spiritual communion (reception by meditation before the host), those who theorized both host miracles and the 'ordinary' eucharist increasingly stressed seeing *through* or looking *beyond* at least as much as contact *with* the visible. The 'seeing' stressed in the fifteenth century was, in many ways, a not-seeing, just as the touching was a *noli me tangere*."

<sup>337</sup> Much has been written about the typological scenes of Old Testament events prefiguring the Epiphany on the clothing and gifts of the Magi (Silver, *Bosch* 168-175).

oldest magus, who in many Epiphany paintings would touch or kiss Jesus' foot or present a gift, here is separated by a bowed wooden post. Furthermore, this dividing line between Madonna and Child from the gift-bearers echoes the snout of the stable's ass, which as established above, was often a symbol of obtuse doubters. Likewise, the Magi are divided from the Virgin and Child in the same way that a semi-nude but regally adorned figure behind them is. Other Netherlandish painters had shown shepherds and, presumably, Jewish onlookers in contemporary garb on the periphery of the scene. But this Boschian interloper divided from Mary and Jesus is odd.

Art historians speculate who the pale figure in the exotic crown is. King Herod, who asked the Magi to find the newborn king of the Jews for him, massacred male children in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16), and later died of a terrible skin disease, is one possibility.<sup>338</sup> It could also be the Moabite prophet, Balaam (Numbers 22-24), commissioned to prophesy doom on the Israelites encamped outside the Promised Land, but accidentally blesses them. Balaam was also stopped

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<sup>338</sup> As far as I can tell this is my own conjecture based on Josephus *Antiquities* 17.6.5: "But now Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon him for his sins; for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly, as it augmented his pains inwardly; for it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also ex-ulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also had settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, further, his privy-member was putrefied, and produced worms; and when he sat upright, he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree. It was said by those who pretended to divine, and who were endued with wisdom to foretell such things, that God inflicted this punishment on the king on account of his great impiety; yet was he still in hopes of recovering, though his afflictions seemed greater than any one could bear."

Some scholars posit that the description of the blight on his sex organ was a disease that caused the skin to slough off. If this were the case the testes and sundry organs would look much like worms. This association may have found its way into Bosch's figure, as some consider him not a leper but a syphilitic – then a new and virulent disease spreading in Europe around 1492.

by an angel that only the donkey he rode saw; given the opportunity to speak the beast of burden chides the prophet. Indeed, I would allow for many of these associated figures for this person as they all provide a sense of malice, unbelief, or inability to see the Lord of glory hidden in the manger. At the same time, any of these persons also represent impotence of evil before God.

However, in line with Lotte Brand Philip and others since her 1953 study, I argue this is the Antichrist.<sup>339</sup> Several reasons for this would include his general depiction that looks like many Western painting portrayals of Jesus. Furthermore, when Christ was mocked by Roman soldiers he dressed in a crimson robe and a crown of thorns. This man wears ironically ornamental versions of those insufferable accessories.<sup>340</sup> This character's entire presentation appears to be a deliberate way to mock Jesus Christ.

Regarding the desire to touch the Eucharist, Bosch might have included this figure in particular to warn against too much fascination with the sacrament itself and the interest in Eucharistic miracles. On the Antichrist's leg is a crystal tube. Closer inspection shows a bleeding sore under glass (Figure 30).<sup>341</sup> Some scholars believe the pale complexion and the sore mean that he is a leper. In the ancient world until the twentieth century, leprosy was considered highly contagious; lepers lived on the margins of medieval towns and had to identify themselves as lepers.<sup>342</sup> What is more, European anti-Semitic polemic often

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<sup>339</sup> Lotte Brand Philip, "The Prado Epiphany by Jerome Bosch," *The Art Bulletin* (35:4) 271.

<sup>340</sup> Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* 172.

<sup>341</sup> Appendix: Bosch, *Epiphany* (detail). Silver, *Bosch* 172.

<sup>342</sup> Woolgar, *The senses in late medieval England* 127: "To control infection, the malodorous were set apart. Lepers were isolated, outcast by the Third Lateran Council of 1179 and

accused Jews of poisoning wells to unleash pestilence of this and other varieties in Christian populations.<sup>343</sup>

### *Touch, Sexual Disease, and the Eucharist*

While there were existing connotations of leprosy connected to desecration of the Eucharist and, by the same token, touching eating something infected with disease. The sore on this figure's leg, however, may be another disease, and one that is associated with carnal sin and sacrilege. This is a key feature to understanding the presence of this figure on the margins in the Prado *Epiphany*. In order to understand the symbolic meanings he evokes, it is necessary to look at similar topoi in Bosch's oeuvre. Thus, one of the most prominent figures on the *Hell* wing of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych is the hybrid Tree-man that looks out of the picture to the spectator (Figure 31).<sup>344</sup> In the black nightmare world of eternal punishment this pale white figure with his eye contact catches the viewer's attention.<sup>345</sup> He is a giant compared to most of the figures. Yet he is pathetic with nothing more than a torso, and at that, hollowed out. His arms or legs are positioned like a toad, and he is truly amphibious with

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stripped of their property, their dreadful stench marking them as spiritually deficient as well as physically afflicted. Many of the leper hospitals adopted strict regimes of mortification of the flesh, prayer and abstinence to treat the spiritual causes of the disease. The foods that were suitable for them also had a stench: when butchers in York were convicted of selling rotten, or measled, meat, that meat was then to be given to the lepers."

<sup>343</sup> Koerner, *Bosch and Bruegel*, 114 and Strickland, *Imagining Antichrist*, 122: 1321, Common conspiracy theory that lepers and Jews plotted to poison wells that caused Black Death of 1348.

<sup>344</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail) (1490-1510) oil on panel (Madrid: Museo del Prado).

<sup>345</sup> Silver *Bosch* 58: "We recall again the significance of eye contact as the conduit of love; therefore, the solicitations of the viewer's attention and thus of engaged affection begin with Christ himself in the Paradise wing, only to end unfulfilled in the averted gaze of the damned tree-figure, rooted in hell."

the base of these appendages resting in two boats. These arms or legs, however, are also like tree trunks with thorny branches growing up and piercing through his open chest cavity.

Closer examination of the Tree-man's body reveals that he suffers even greater than this, with a half-bandaged sore just below the joint on his right appendage. A white cloth is stretched tightly around the leg and tied with a bow on to the right. It is less than functional, as three fourths of a sore peaks out from underneath it. The sore is circular and translucent white, with a brighter halo of white around its edge and a black abscess at its center under the scab; the shape and anatomy of this wound looks something like an eyeball! The wound oozes red blood dribblets just from the underside of the sore. This is perhaps a deliberate association, as Bosch used it in *The Conjurer*, in which a ball used in a slight of hand trick is actually an eye. Is Bosch saying that by the wrong kind of gaze, we can come into contact with disease? The thought is repulsive and makes a viewer recoil.

At least one scholar has posited that this sore is a sign of syphilis.<sup>346</sup> This new venereal disease emerged at the end of the fifteenth century, commonly called at the time 'The French Pox.'<sup>347</sup> Syphilis has several stages of physical manifestation. Primary syphilis creates *chancres*, which are non-itchy pustules.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland, *The Epiphany of Hieronymus Bosch: Imagining Antichrist and Others from the Middle Ages to the Reformation* (London: Brepols, 2016) ?; Walter S. Gibson and Julien Chapuis, "Invented in Hell: Bosch's Tree-Man," *Invention: Northern Renaissance Studies in Honor of Molly Faries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

<sup>347</sup> Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Springer, 2001) 124: In truth, many different nationalities were blamed for its origin.

<sup>348</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Infectious Diseases*, Carol Turkington and Bonnie Ashby (New York: Infobase, 2007) 298.

Secondary syphilis creates flat, broad sores with hard edges, as well as red rashes throughout the body. While primary and secondary syphilitic sores are generally located on genitalia, we know that sometimes early modern artists moved such ailments down the leg for the sake of decorum – as seen for example in paintings and statues of St. Roch’s plague bubo that would have rather been in his groin (Figure 32).<sup>349</sup> Modesty seems absurd when discussing *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, but it may have also been a convention to place such a sore on the leg suggesting an origin near sexual organs.

Certainly sexual vice is all around the Tree-man. Inside his hollow torso is a tavern or brothel populated by nude cavorters and demons disguised as fancy-dressed women. Balancing on the Tree-man’s head is a white tabletop. Bosch used a similar circular construction to set *The Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* (Figure 33) on a panel that is a *momento mori* with the *Four Last Things* at the rectangular panel’s corners; *Luxuria* that stands in for the sin of lust occupies a wedge on the right side of the circle, as sensual indulgence may lead to sin.<sup>350</sup> On the Tree-Man’s table top, nude damned men are marched around by hybrid demons, all underneath an enormous pink bagpipe. The bagpipe’s color and shape, with a sack cleaved in the middle, and drooping down a long shaft with a cup at the end, bears a resemblance to male genitalia – and perhaps the drooping as well as erect pipes on the bag give the viewers a sort of continuous narrative as

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<sup>349</sup> Appendix *Saint Roch* (c. 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century) polychrome statue (Cambados, Pontevedra: San Francisco Church).

<sup>350</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Seven Deadly Sins & the Four Last Things* (c. 1500) oil on panel (Madrid: Prado). The fanlike formation of the seven sins rotate from a dark circle with Christ rising from the tomb; this creates an eye of God in which all is seen while humans freely choose good or evil (Psalm 50[49]:21), and the Latin inscription warns: *Cave, cave d[omin]us videt* (“Beware, beware, the Lord is watching”).

it were. In order to make the association more obvious, just below this bagpipe is a flag flowing from a branch poking through the back of the Tree-man with a similar pink bagpipe over the licentious tavern below. It is conceivable that drinking can lead into fornication or adultery, and delving into the desires of the flesh lead to damnation in the same way that *Luxuria* makes the connection in *The Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* does.

The connection between sexual sin and the Eucharist might appear to be a stretch, but gazing and touching can spur temptation as well as adoration – depending on the object of desire.<sup>351</sup> Sinful touch and touching equivalent to seeing can damn a person. This is clearly meant to create a negative reaction based in the lower senses for devotees. Reindert Falkenburg argues that *The Garden of Earthly Delights* as a whole concerns the *Devotio Moderna* concept of forming a process of perceptive vision.<sup>352</sup> Thus on the left wing Bosch changed the depiction of God as Creator from the old man seen on the exterior panels of the triptych to resemble the face of the young Christ.<sup>353</sup> The artist not only changed the divine Person, but also the position of the Creator’s gaze from looking down at Adam to frontal regard out toward the spectator. Thus, Falkenburg says that God engages us to learn how to look as Adam does, which is to see at the creation of first man and his inevitable fall from grace – a common

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<sup>351</sup> The moral maximalism of Jesus interiorizes the sin: “You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

<sup>352</sup> Reindert Falkenburg, *El Jardín de las Delicias y la conversación galante*, (filmed lecture, Madrid: Prado, 2016) <<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/triptych-of-the-adoration-of-the-magi/666788cc-c522-421b-83f0-5ad84b9377f7>>.

<sup>353</sup> Appendix: Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail of left wing). X-radiograph photography shows that the underdrawing was originally for a God the Father head rather than that of the young Christ.

notion in spiritual writing at the time –, to see the redemption in the Second Adam already.<sup>354</sup> From the start, the viewer is meant, therefore, to engage his sight to see how sin lurks at the door of all human delight; yet by the same token, one who is perceptive may learn to turn from carnal pleasure and look for the Savior.<sup>355</sup>

Above the central figures on *The Garden of Earthly Delight's* left panel is an elaborate, pink fountain of life in the middle distance. It is organic (the color of pink flesh?) and has anthropomorphic features at the base, making something that looks like a face.<sup>356</sup> But most importantly, the fountain has a large sphere that rests submerged in the water, with a round cavity in its middle. This object looks, once again, like an eyeball with its black pupil. Closer examination shows that an owl – yet another sinister beast – lurks inside. Here in paradise, the eye is subject to concupiscence: “The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil thy whole body shall be darksome. If then the light that is in thee, be darkness: the darkness itself how great shall it be!”<sup>357</sup> Moving from the left to the center panel, there is a similar fountain in the background between four towers, representing the different cities of man at the four corners of the earth.<sup>358</sup> Here is a metallic orb in the water, with a similar round portal in the middle. Inside this oculus, now looking down into the water, there is a nude man grasping a nude woman on her genitals as she extends her arm out to reach for another’s presented backside. Apparently, these are the

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<sup>354</sup> Falkenburg, *El Jardin de las Delicias*: He also points out that Adam’s elongated and closed legs touching the feet of God link him to the crucifixion pose; Rom. 5:12-21.

<sup>355</sup> Genesis 4:7.

<sup>356</sup> Falkenburg, *El Jardin de las Delicias*.

<sup>357</sup> Matthew 6:22-23.

<sup>358</sup> Falkenburg, *El Jardin de las Delicias*.

ones who have cast their gaze not on what is above but what is below, and to put it rather matter of fact, for a person to look down at his own groin.

This, however, inevitably leads back to the hell panel on the right with the Tree-man construction. Here we have pink, fleshy bagpipes like the large fountain of life that has been reduced to the entertainment of sensual pleasure. Instead of the gaze of Adam to Christ and God the Creator looking at the spectator, it is the wistful look of the Tree-man who has been hollowed out and consumed by feeding sensual appetites. And, half submerged, is a sore that looks out to those observing the triptych like an eyeball that has been consumed by disease that is the result of promiscuity.

Considering all this, the viewer understands the activities of the Tree-man intersect the sexual sin, punishment, and Eucharistic piety which involve purity of body, soul, and sight.<sup>359</sup> Directly below the Tree-man, two nude men are perched on a hurdy-gurdy. One lying on his stomach cranking the instrument with either another crank between his legs or – in line with medieval prayerbook marginalia – inserted in his anus.<sup>360</sup> The other with a pallid complexion, is squatting with his head bowed; on his back he balances a large egg. Silver notes that the overall shape of the Tree-man is egg-like, and the same foreshortened circle is echoed in the tabletop on his head. To the right of the Tree-man on another circular tabletop, a knight in armor is splayed on his back as six gray and green crocodiles tear out

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<sup>359</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 213: “In an early fourteenth-century collection of religious tales, a woman who spit out the Host into her hand was afflicted with leprosy, a disease that was commonly associated with sin during the Middle Ages.”

<sup>360</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 106: “The 'arrow in the hindquarters' motif is common in thirteenth-century manuscripts. In most cases the arrows might be seen as metaphors for God's punishment of sinners, where the victims are monsters or monkeys. The Psalmist tells us that God smites his enemies 'in the hindquarters' (Psalm 78: 66).”

his intestines, or perhaps, his groin. The knight's arms are raised above his head, forcing him to drop a gold chalice that sends a white communion host tumbling out onto the table. Instead of a heroic standard, he falls with a banner displaying the charge of a brown toad: a sign of evil in Bosch's work.<sup>361</sup>

So what do an egg on a nude man, the sexual sin punished by disease on the Tree-man, and a knight spilling the Eucharist have in common? They have to do with temptation and parody of the Eucharist. The knight calls to mind the Arthurian legends and other Romances that include the quest to discover the Holy Grail, which was the chalice with which Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The only knight thought capable of handling it was a knight who was sexually pure. Last Judgment paintings were common altarpieces, but scholarly consensus is that *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, while a triptych in the format of an altarpiece, was likely a moralistic painting made for a noble's palace. Given what we know of courtly debauchery and games – even alluded to in scenes from the painting – it is not surprising that the warning of the wages of sexual sin are shown here, along with the sacrilege a person commits in receiving communion in the state of mortal sin (1 Cor. 11:29).<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Frogs and toads were thought of as slimy creatures that eat decaying flesh. They show up in insidious ways, like the pedestals of a Magus' gift at the Prado's *Epiphany* or on the pubic area of a woman lying on the ground next to a man as a demon holds up a mirror before them in the hell scene – being punished for *Superbia* (Pride) – from the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins & Four Last Things*.

<sup>362</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 215: "According to Caesarius of Heisterbach, a *sacerdos luxuriosus* was trying to convince a woman he desired to give herself to him, but to no avail. He then decided to retain the sacramental wafer in his mouth after Mass, hoping that *si sic illam deoscularetur*, the power of the body of Christ would force her to change her mind. But as he made to exit the church, his size seemed to increase so much that he nearly hit the chapel ceiling and could not manage to leave the building. Terrified and shaken, he promptly took the Host out of his mouth and buried it inside the church. Later, after confessing his sacrilege, he and his familiars tried to disinter the wafer, but instead they found a small simulacrum of a crucified man made of living (and bleeding) human flesh."

Medieval exempla have scores of stories and sermon anecdotes that illustrate the fear and danger of receiving communion in a state of mortal sin. Nevertheless, the “problem is that there cannot be any sort of control by the Church over such an intimate condition: it is up to the faithful to make sure that their souls are pure while eating the body of Christ.”<sup>363</sup> A story about greed, not lust, goes like this:

In the very popular collection of edifying tales put together by Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1180–ca. 1240), the *Dialogus miraculorum*, we learn of a monk from the Cistercian community of Fumoringens, in Pictavia (Poitou), who fell gravely ill. The abbot went to visit him on his sickbed to hear his confession, but when he gave him the Host, placing it on his tongue, the monk was simply unable to close his mouth and chew. The abbot immediately took the wafer out of the monk’s mouth and gave it to another sick brother, who could easily swallow it. After his death, the monk was found guilty of concealing a huge sum of money (five *solidi aerei*, or shillings), which he was obviously not allowed to own. The abbot then said: “And so that you know that the reason why he could not receive the Lord’s body was not due to his sickness, on that same day he ate a whole chicken.” So, even in cases where the receivers were ready to take the Host regardless of their sinful condition, God was not necessarily willing to redeem their souls and let Himself become part of an unclean body.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 213.

<sup>364</sup> Maraschi, *Sympathy* 213-214.

The gaze, sexual purity, and the Eucharist converge from this hell scene and make the most sense when compared to Temptation of St. Anthony paintings. Vision is a higher sense, but the way in which the temptations come to Anthony are oozing bodies with hideous sense experience of smell, touch, and – here again, with the Eucharist – taste. St. Anthony the abbot was a popular subject in artwork providing the kind of artistic fantasies that Bosch is known for, mined from the Egyptian hermit's *vita* by St. Athanasius, describing his many battles with demons that took various forms.<sup>365</sup> Common temptations for a monk would be bodily: hunger and the sex drive. Unlike in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* where the action moves from left to right with sin being an insidious temptation, followed by giving in to licentiousness, and leading to eternal damnation, in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* from Lisbon, (Figure 34) evil is in open warfare with a saint remaining steadfast in a hellish nightmare throughout the triptych.<sup>366</sup> In an uninterrupted landscape across the three panels of the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, Bosch depicts a continuous narrative with the monk in each panel. He is dragged across a wooden bridge on the left wing, apparently by disciples, ends up kneeling in prayer in the midst of great temptation in a ruined building at the painting's center, and then sits placidly reading the Scriptures with a back-cast glance on the right wing.

Of particular importance is the activity that occurs around the saint in the central panel. Anthony kneels at a round semi-wall and looks back and out of the picture toward the spectator as he raises his hand in blessing. Recumbent just

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<sup>365</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony* (New York: Paulist Press) 1980.

<sup>366</sup> Appendix: Hieronymus Bosch, *Temptation of St. Anthony* (c. 1501) oil on panels (Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga).

alongside him is an attractive young woman in a pink gown holding up a dish of burgundy liquid; the saint looks away from both the girl and food, blessing the bowl should it be poisoned by earthly or spiritual toxins.<sup>367</sup> The belly and loins are tempted in this very spot. However, that is not all that is at work. Just behind him is a round table upon which drinking and instruments for tavern revelry (including a hurdy-gurdy) are being indulged by different classes of people and hybrid demons. And just above him inside the a darkened niche of what's left of the structure Anthony inhabits, is an altar bearing a large, bloody crucifix and Christ Himself shown with nimbed halo and dressed in a dark tunic. Christ's hand is raised in benediction, echoing Anthony's gesture. The saint is thus at the apex of temptation.

The kind of temptation is not, then, simply between bodily temptation to gormandize or fornicate, but involves also seeing aright. Ahead of Anthony is the celebration of the Mass, making the strong case that when a priest offers the Eucharist it is Jesus making the sign of the cross over the matter transformed. At the table to his back, a figure dressed in a red, short-sleeved tunic (looking conspicuously like a chasuble) and standing in a similar archway to where the

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<sup>367</sup> *Acts of John*, John Hall, "John the Evangelist," *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols of Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). *The Life of St. Benedict* by St. Gregory describes how the monks of Vicovare tried to poison Benedict, but he made the sign of the cross over the wine and the chalice broke saving him. "However, Laurinda Dison has linked Bosch's depiction to the healing process of the Antonite Order in its hospital. She considers the role of the alchemical knowledge as part of contemporary medicine and claims that what is presented to Anthony is actually a healing elixir. Offered on the feast of the Ascension..., this wine-based medication was, crucially, filtered through the bone relics of St. Anthony, and it was administered in a communion-like ceremony with a prayer to the saint to intercede to God for healing. However, the positive view of the ceremony in Bosch's triptych fully ignores the demonic figures who administer the potion," Silver 226, 229.

action of the altar is taking place, the man holds up a plate.<sup>368</sup> Within the place a small fat man, or a toad perhaps, holding up an egg.<sup>369</sup> This is a parody of the Eucharist, specifically the elevation at Mass. Consider that because of the piety of *masticatio per visum*, it was considered the holiest moment at the Mass, wherein the devotee made a communion with the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament as the sacrificial offering was lifted over the priest's head and came into view. Thus, it can be deduced that indulgence in food and alcohol can lead to sexual impropriety, and this leads both to the inability to see the Eucharistic species for what it truly is and it damns one by partaking of the sacrament in mortal sin. To eat correctly or incorrectly is eternally relevant; thus being able to rise to the higher, pure vision through restraint of touch and taste, is thoroughly important.

To make the case for the link in the late medieval mind between sexual temptation and Eucharistic abuse witnessed in Bosch, I offer a painting by a later

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<sup>368</sup> The man has a veil over his head and appears to be black (although, in a copy in the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia, a sixteenth-century copy, presents him as a Caucasian). There are perhaps a couple reasons for that. One being that black boys were described as showing up to tempt Anthony; a trope for pederasty: "Towards the end 'of the Middle Ages, especially in the Netherlands and Germany, blackness or swarthinness were perceived as symbols of evil, sin and the demonic, mainly in popular imagery. These complexions were especially associated with the sin of Luxuria. Brother Hendrik van Keulen declares that people guilty of Luxuria turn black as pitch in Hell. In the Dutch version of the life of Saint Anthony the spirit of lechery that appears to the saint is described as an ugly Moorish child who is the fruit of Satan's fornications. Similar figures appear in scientific writings. A fourteenth century treatise on physiognomy contains the following definition: 'Who is dark black or earth-like, means inclining towards moral defects and lusts in particular'" (Pinson, "Connotations of Sin," 159-160). His African descent and costly garb could also connect him to King Balthasar, and after all, he is presenting a gift to the saint.

<sup>369</sup> Lipton, *Dark Mirror* 244-245: "The toad or frog used in thirteenth-century art to symbolize the rapaciousness of Jewish usurers, for example, appears in a fifteenth-century painting on the shield of a turbaned figure leading Christ toward Calvary."

Maraschi, *Sympathy* 216: The toad was associated with Eucharistic profanation in at least one exempla story from the period: "In a manuscript [English c. 14th century], in 1343 a woman from Holland (Lincolnshire), angry with God for her bad luck at market, decides not to swallow the Host and to take it home, where she locks it in a box together with a toad. But she soon hears a cry come from the box, and she finds a child—quite a disturbing scene, which anyway does not exhaust the moralizing rhetoric of the tale: after confessing her sin, the woman receives Communion again, but this time, instead of the Host, a toad slips into her mouth and kills her."

Netherlandish artist. *The Temptation of St. Anthony* in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels by Cornelius Massys is dated somewhere just before the middle of the sixteenth century (Figure 35).<sup>370</sup> The painting is more indebted to the imaginary landscapes of Joachim Patinir than to Bosch.<sup>371</sup> The wizened and bearded hermit is seated by a fallen tree stump that has become his table, just outside the lean-to hermitage thatched between two trees in a heavily forested landscape leading down a road to a stone church. The saint is not alone, however, as an old crone in a harlot's red dress is perched on the fallen log has unlaced her bodice to expose shriveled breasts, and right before Anthony with his open Bible two young fully nude women present him with a dish. The frenetic crowd of demons so common in the hellish landscapes of Bosch are absent, nevertheless at the bottom of the picture plane a parade of diminutive hybrid demons lurk. It is if out of the muck and miasma come monsters – sin and senses are mirrored.

The temptation in Massys' painting is quite obviously sexual with the demons in the form of two fair skinned ladies with fancily made up hair. That is, however, not the only temptation. Both women urge St. Anthony to look upon and take what one of them presents on a dish held over the table top. On the dish is what appears to be a man bent over on all fours, legs spread apart pointing his backside to the monk. Balancing straight up on the arched back of this tiny man is an egg. Lastly, this small man has bent over and actually stuck his head in some sort of jug (perhaps meaning wine?) or something like the brass caldron which the

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<sup>370</sup> Appendix: Cornelius Massys, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (sixteenth-century) oil on canvas (Brussels: Royal Museum of Fine Arts).

<sup>371</sup> Jan van der Stock, "Matsys Family," *Grove Art Online* 15 August 2019 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T057484>> 26 November 2003.

bird-headed demon in the *Garden of Earthly Delights* wears while devouring damned souls and defecating them out below his throne (thus, perhaps a chamber pot?). Once again, this little man on the dish with the egg is meant to be a parody of the Eucharist and is an example that demonstrates it as a trope outside of Bosch's oeuvre. Unlike Bosch's *Temptation of St. Anthony* in which the little man on the dish is like a priest, this person is meant to both ridicule the idea that the bread becomes the Son of Man's flesh and temptation to sexual impurity in both heteronormative and same sex varieties. The parallel temptations of lustful gaze and disbelieving gaze draw a contrast not only between true devotion and sin, but also what would have been thought of as natural and what is unnatural, thereby implicating the supernatural reality of transubstantiation as natural to the eye of a believer.

Given all of this treatment of Eucharist with sexual sin and parodies of the doctrine of Real Presence, I believe this idea of skin disease and the threat of Jewish plague is deliberate in Bosch's *Adoration of the Magi* with the figure of the Antichrist. But there is a second feature to this image. In similar pogroms accusing Jews of infecting Christians was that they stole and desecrated hosts.<sup>372</sup> If the Eucharist was believed to be the true Body of Christ, then the Antichrist would have a corresponding 'sacrament' to offer for consumption: namely, a festering host.

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<sup>372</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 80-81.

*The Antichrist at the Epiphany: the Sense of Disgust*

The definition of the doctrine of the real presence at Lateran Council IV was accompanied by dictates for the protection and prominence of the Eucharist. Not only did elevation of the host and chalice over the priest's head at Mass after consecration become mandatory, but church furnishings became important. Now the leftover consecrated hosts needed to be securely stored and protected. In time, the furniture for repose, tabernacles, became more prominent and beautiful. Thus there was a natural correlative between importance and fine decoration, between protection of precious matter and yet having you access to it nonetheless. Therefore, just as something is removed from senses, the senses are stimulated. The tension between touching and not touching, tasting and not tasting was only heightened by art objects. In order to help keep the desire for physical contact at bay for relics and consecrated Eucharistic hosts, artists and patrons could attempt condition devotees to keep distance through negative associations with persons and unpleasant and diseased members which threatened dangerous contact through the senses.

*Monstrances* are liturgical vessels designed to display the Eucharistic host for adoration. Monstrances at the time were typically cylindrical glass tubes, set on elaborate, gold stands. Again, the statutes of Lateran IV, defining the doctrine of the real presence, called for physical ways to both display and protect the Blessed Sacrament that was reserved after consecration.<sup>373</sup> Initially, rood screens, tabernacles, and other liturgical furnishings in the chancel resulted from this

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<sup>373</sup> Canon 90, requiring both the Eucharist and holy oils for sacraments to be kept under lock and key (*Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV (1215)* Fordum University Medieval Sourcebooks, accessed October 31, 2019 <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>>.

decree. However, Eucharistic piety also grew, culminating in the universal celebration of Corpus Christi in 1317.<sup>374</sup> As stated in Chapter Three, visual consumption of the host was as important as physical communion. Thus the importance of displaying the host in glass in a way once reserved for relics grew in importance and popularity.

A good example of a monstrance and how it was used is seen in an illumination from a fifteenth-century prayerbook, the *Missal of Jan de Boedere of St. Adrian's Abbey, Geraardsbergen* (Figure 36).<sup>375</sup> In an illumination that takes up three fourths of a page, the scene is set in front of the altar in a large abbey church. A group of finely dressed lay people kneel to the left while a priest turns from a draped tabernacle atop an altar holding a large host inside of a crystal cylinder bound by gold filigree. Below the priest in his gold cope are three clerics kneeling on three sides of the steps of the altar: acolyte, subdeacon, and deacon. Around this central image of Eucharistic adoration are Old Testament types: the Last Supper, Elijah being fed by the angel, manna in the desert, Melchizedech offering bread and wine after Abraham's military success, and an unidentified scene. The presentation of the Eucharist and all of its Scriptural underpinnings are representative of practice and belief of the time.

Aside from the run-of-the-mill consecrated host, many miraculous hosts – typically hosts that bled or were reputed to have spots of real blood on them – were housed in similar cylindrical reliquaries (e.g., the Dijon Host, Figure 29).

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<sup>374</sup> Francis Merishman, "Feast of Corpus Christi," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908) 23 Nov. 2018 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04390b.htm>>.

<sup>375</sup> Appendix: *Missal of Jan de Boedere of St. Adrian's Abbey, Geraardsbergen* (first quarter of the sixteenth century) tempera and gold leaf on parchment, private collection.

Many cities in the Low Countries and German lands boasted such Eucharistic miracles. Perhaps the most popular were the three bleeding hosts in the small German town of Wilsnack (Bad Wilsnack) in Mark Brandenburg, which on the dawn of the Reformation rivaled Santiago de Compostela for most popular pilgrimage in Europe.<sup>376</sup>

The miracle occurred in 1383 when the local parish priest found three consecrated hosts survived both a village-wide fire and being soaked with rain, to be found in pristine condition yet stained with blood.<sup>377</sup> Wilsnack is a very small town even by medieval standards, but the rate of pilgrimage made it possible to construct the imposing St. Nicholas church, also called Church of the Holy Blood. The miraculous hosts endured great skepticism, and in the fifteenth century, Pope Eugene IV required newly consecrated hosts to be placed alongside the relics to reiterate ordinary devotion.<sup>378</sup> What survives of the shrine is a niche with a cabinets that opened with painted wings like a triptych (Figure 37).<sup>379</sup> On the right is a depiction of Christ as the Man of Sorrows mocked by soldiers in semi-nude shame, draped in crimson and crowned with thorns, and a bearded Pontius Pilate presents him to the crowds at the Passion. The opposite panel is the *Throne of Grace*, or a depiction of the Holy Trinity in the work of salvation history. Here, a gray-bearded God the Father holds up God the Son crucified on the cross, with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove between the head of the Father and top of the

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<sup>376</sup> Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 43: “Although there is no way of confirming the estimates of some historians that as many as 100,000 people a year journeyed to Wilsnack, evidence attests that the pilgrims were a truly international lot.”

<sup>377</sup> Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 25.

<sup>378</sup> Bynum *The Wonderful Blood* 131.

<sup>379</sup> Appendix: *Holy Blood Shrine* (c. late fifteenth-century) oil on panels (Wilsnack, Mark Brandenburg: St. Nicholas Church).

cross. Angels attend the Trinity dressed in liturgical vesture while smaller angels at the bottom hold up the cross' base. Each wing is missing most of what appear to be molded bosses. Interestingly, a painted panel above the doors in a tympanum show two angels holding the reliquary of the bleeding hosts in a tubular, crystal monstrance like that of the one in the miniature from the *Missal of Jan de Boedere* and in the way angels bear the Dijon Host from the *Ogier Hours*.

Wilsnack, like most shrines, had pilgrimage badges that could be affixed to clothing – typically hats – and touched, even if the reliquary was only encountered by gaze.<sup>380</sup> The badge from Wilsnack (Figure 38) shows what appears to be a semi-nude Christ in scenes of the Passion on circles representing the three miraculous communion wafers.<sup>381</sup> The badge has two circles at the top and one below and between the two at the bottom, all of equal diameter, and connected to each by triangle that binds them all together.<sup>382</sup> The figural molding is crude, made cheaply by pouring molten lead into dies. The first circle displays Christ on the Cross, and the other two are less identifiable. The second shows Christ clothed in a loincloth with halo and arms upraised, as he stands in front of or sits on some latticework that looks something like a gate or a tomb. For this reason it is unclear as to what is depicted; it is perhaps either the Man of Sorrows, the Resurrection, or the Last Judgement. The third shows the Christ again with hands on his hips and what appears to be a staff that is slipped through his elbow

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<sup>380</sup> Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 26: Initially, the bishop of Havelberg conceived of them in 1396 as a way to raise money to rebuild the church, but only grossing a third of the funds; the other two thirds went to episcopal buildings and the cathedral chapter.

<sup>381</sup> Appendix: Wilsnack pilgrimage badge (c. fourteenth- to sixteenth-century) lead.

<sup>382</sup> The one in the photograph provided appears to be broken. Other examples of the Wilsnack pilgrimage badge show a cross surmounting the disc on top of the triad.

on his left arm – what this is hard to say, unless perhaps it is the mocking with the reed scepter (Matthew 27:29).

Pilgrimages badges like these from Wilsnack, were not only a souvenir, but also provided a tangible object for devotees. The badge makes the direct connection between the body of Christ and the circular communion hosts (another correlation to the Pax board from Chapter Three). And while the climax of both the Mass and the pilgrimage is the scopic event, the badge sublimates the sense of connection. More than this, there is an implication that a devotee has a lasting miraculous touch from the relic host in the form of this token.

Corpus Christi ceremonials, miraculous Eucharistic host shrines, and the pilgrimage badges underscore the fascination with the Eucharistic species itself. The ability to see, touch or not touch, and apply the spiritual power of the material sacrament to the person in whichever form of participation the individual is able to make with it. Thus, just as there is great power in making a spiritual communion with the Eucharist, and even being touched through the sacrament when one consumes it, there is also a danger of receiving in a state of sin or perhaps focusing too much on the material sacrament of the host itself. Over and again, top ecclesiastics were wary of charlatanism and forged miracles. Recall in regarding Wilsnack itself, Nicholas of Cusa, theologian bishop and papal legate, himself determined that he did not believe the hosts at Wilsnack to be miraculous. Yet, Nicholas and others had to walk a fine line so as not to undermine the very idea of the miraculous that validates the doctrine of transubstantiation itself.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 15.

The medieval principle of similitude – that is, things that look like something else can stand in for that thing – are at work in both the gold coins and the bleeding sore in these two different Epiphany paintings resembling the Eucharistic wafer.<sup>384</sup> As stated in Chapter 3, artists like Geertgen and Jan Gossaert played on the association between the coins and the communion host, between touching the Body of Christ through receiving the sacrament, culminating in a desire whetted by the gaze for sacred touch. Hieronymus Bosch, instead, pairs leprous sores and bleeding hosts on the body of the Antichrist to warn of too much fascination with the so-called miraculous by conjuring a sense of sinister touch. Both impulses were in the popular and educated culture of the time. Church officials and Humanist writers had to promote the doctrine of the Real Presence and encourage devotion, while at the same time were often at pains to curb abuse and charlatanism.<sup>385</sup> Sacred and sinister touch had their place:

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<sup>384</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 200; Katheryn M. Rudy describes talismanic prayer rolls that display accurate reproductions of the *Arma Christi*, “Both the wound and the nails belong to a class of imagery known as metric relics, images that in their very dimensions correspond to a prototype and thereby summon the power of their referents” (“Kissing Images” 45).

<sup>385</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality* 15-17. Nicholas of Cusa’s determination on Wilsnack that it was not miraculous but due to the greed of local clergy, and the pilgrimages should cease. He did not believe the miracle could happen because Christ has been glorified, yet Cusa did not want to limit the knowability of God. Likewise, Nicholas advocated for a (papal approved!) Eucharistic miracle attributed to St. Gregory the Great at Andechs. His reasoning for the latter was its immutability, whereas, Wilsnack’s hosts appeared to be moldering.

Bynum, *The Wonderful Blood* 27-28: “We have heard from many reliable men and also have ourselves seen how the faithful stream to many places in the area of our legation to adore the precious blood of Christ our God that they believe is present in several transformed red hosts [*quem in nonnullis transformatis hostijs speciem rubedinis habere arbitrantur*]. And it is clearly attested by their words, with which they name this colored thing [*talem rubedinem*] the blood of Christ [*Christi cruorem*], that they thus believe and adore it, and the clergy in their greed for money not only permit this but even encourage it through the publicizing of miracles. . . . [But] it is pernicious . . . and we cannot permit it without damage to God, for our catholic faith teaches us the glorified veins [*sanguinem glorificatum in venis glorificatis penitus inuisibilem*]. In order to remove every opportunity for the deception of simple folk, we therefore order that . . . the clergy . . . should no longer display or promulgate such miracles or allow pilgrim badges [*signa plumbea*] to be made of them, but these same transformed hosts should be consumed by the celebrating

marginal, present to be a warning, and in attendance even at the most sacred events.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude this in a different way: whereas the association between sexual vice and Eucharistic piety were at odds, so was a quest for the miraculous and sensational instead of the mystical – that is, hidden – reality of transubstantiation with which the truly devout would be satisfied. The moral warnings against lust were obvious, but more to the point in the Prado *Adoration of the Magi* is Bosch's admonition to both see and not see, touch and not touch, appropriately. Christ's body on the crucifix atop the Calvary retable on the *Gregorymas* shows how difficult it is to see the Body of Christ – it disappears just as the sacrifice is made present again in the liturgy. And as the triptych opens and one sees clearly the babe atop Mary's lap, we notice that these shepherds peeking without a clear vantage see Jesus for who He is, while those like the Antichrist cannot. Indeed, the decorative elements in this doppelganger for the true Messiah might entrap our gaze, might excite our devotion to come forward and touch the miraculous. Yet if one did, he would be kissing and touching the tainted sores of disease. Bosch's more sophisticated moral in this devotional altarpiece was meant to train a viewer about the doctrine of the real presence, but also to encourage the appropriate form of communion: visual and in the ordinary celebration of the Eucharist. In a sense, the artist uses the lower senses to repudiate the passions of

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priest in communion rather than that the sacred eucharist given us as a divine gift for spiritual refectio should be permitted to disintegrate through the corruption of the species [*per specierum corruptionem desinere*].”

the lower senses, reorienting proper prayer to the highest sense, that of sight. Thus, even the most sinister touch was an integral part of the composition, working against an overemphasis on the miraculous and spectacular, instead of the ordinary devotion due to the sacrament and a morally upright life.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Before closing the doors on this dissertation, let us return to the *Columba Triptych*. Past the main characters and the sacred action unfolding before us in the scene are all kinds of details that cue the lower senses. There are the many luxurious textiles, like the Virgin's red-draped bedchamber on the *Annunciation* wing, with its velvety texture. Tiny flowers sprout around the dirt and craggy stone-ruin stable of the Christ's birth. The reason for including these plants is no doubt for medicinal and Marian symbolism as much as the Netherlandish penchant for naturalism. Such flowers could have had their own fragrance perhaps, as well as their own tactile stickiness or thorniness. Finally, in the *Presentation of the Lord* panel, the attendant girl in her green dress and fabulous spooled gold hat holds a metal goblet with the two young pigeons for the sacrifice offered for a firstborn son (cf. Exodus 13:2; Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:22-24). The meat sacrificed, that of squab, would be consumed by the Holy Family after the ritual. And just behind the main action leaning on a marble pillar and two crutches, a cripple with a withered, bandaged leg holds his hat out for alms. Both his destitute living condition and possible disease that caused him to wrap his leg imply a foul odor.

When we approach the object we recognize also the material makeup of the *Columba Triptych* itself. What has nearly six hundred years done to the texture of the wood of the altarpiece as well as its smell? With close inspection will the build-up of paint that created higher plains on the artwork's surface catch light and stand out in an ever so slight three-dimensional quality for visual

impact? We cannot know much about Rogier van der Weyden outside of what later authors wrote about him or from the radiograph investigations that offer contemporary scholars a window into his technique and working methods. However, the object is a primary source by Rogier, and we can have similar sensuous experiences with it to him. Closing the doors on this triptych and returning home, will we recall these features and chew on them in our mind's eye?

I argued in this dissertation that the lower senses were deliberately utilized by artists and patrons to cue memories, associations, and even implied sensations to heighten devotional experience. Smell was a regular aspect of piety and liturgy for late medieval Christians. The gifts of the Magi in paintings had the power to evoke positive memories of the life cycle and to collapse the space between the home and the church. Touch and taste were braided senses in the early modern imagination. Playing on this association, artists appear to have heightened and satisfied reception of the Eucharistic sacrament through a genre motif occurring between the Christ Child and King Caspar. The very real conscious and subconscious placement of the lower senses parallel the associations and placement of certain marginal persons like black Africans, Jews, and the diseased or heretics. These peripheral persons like touch, taste, and smell have their place as a fact of life or even to repel the devotee from certain affections. Thus, the lower senses work in different ways, but they were parts of the composition, as strategic as any color or gesture in the artwork. Thus, they were not simply

aesthetic but had functional import, placed in the larger religious context of the early modern Christian.

In the emerging sense history of art history, I believe that my work suggests there is more to these paintings than symbolism. Experience with these artworks not only stimulated intellectual meaning, but also played on affective sensations. The study of the affective piety of this period skews to emotional reactions. Smell, touch, and taste, however, exist below the emotion and through conditioned ideas manipulated and augmented feelings and ideas. Without already having a devotion to the Eucharist and having the memory of receiving a sacrament as food, would the genre gesture of a baby touching gold coins have any kind of a correlation to that ritual? And yet, because the senses, memory, and emotion are more fluid than didactic concepts, such associations are reasonably made. The insights of my research, therefore, are about these slippages that were perhaps taken for granted for the artists, patrons, and public of the time, but take a bit more work for scholars today.

I think that I sufficiently argued for the plausibility of these different sense meanings and reactions. The next step in the research springing from this work should focus on concentrated case studies. My own tendency is to follow the *big idea*. The big idea is a particular gesture, object, or theory and then to bring in every instance of it that can be found to build the weight of proofs. This method lacks the strength of recreating and discovering the original context, documentation, and quantitative data for one particular object. Case studies of a focused nature are easier to follow for readers and can also confirm or deny the

assertions made in this dissertation based on a variety of source materials for one object.

Consider, for example, placing Jan Gossaert's *Adoration of the Magi* altarpiece back in the Lady Chapel in St. Adrian's Abbey in Geraardsbergen, Flanders. That abbey church is destroyed, but if documentation still exists – certainly illuminated liturgical books still do (cf. Figure 35) – one can get a sense of how this chapel was used by the Benedictine monks. The community likely processed to this chapel at the end of the last canonical hour of the day, Compline, and sang a Marian hymn in the presence of a statue or even with this painting itself. And given the lived rituals and associations this community had in that space, what does a priestly gesture connected to the gold gift tap into for a devotee based on these findings?

I would also say that there are rich opportunities to contextualize the insights of my dissertation through correlation and reconstruction of other objects to the paintings. How do touch, taste, and sight outside of these works exist in a continuous built world, the sort of which I alluded to in the introductory chapter? Thus, are there textiles that have survived that help contemporary persons understand the liturgical life associated with what is depicted in the paintings? A significant amount of scholarship dwelt on the Flemish economic trade and production of fine cloth, and how that was shown off with textural accuracy in early Netherlandish painting.<sup>386</sup> A particular kind of patterned oriental rug has

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<sup>386</sup> Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting* vol. 6, 19, 109; Jacobs, *Opening Doors* 157-158; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* 19, 184, 307; Peter Stabel, "A Taste for the Orient?: Cosmopolitan Demand for 'Exotic' Durable Consumables in Late Medieval Bruges," *In London and Beyond*, edited by Matthew Davies and James A. Galloway, 87–102. Essays in

been dubbed a Memling carpet for its namesake artist's penchant for using them. Therefore, are there extant liturgical vestments that use similar images that evoke smell and taste in their symbolism? What do these textiles feel like? Are there objects that were perhaps the very model for those in paintings that survive? Could they be worn by researchers and curators around the very object to see how they would move in context? And what would these insights bring about for scholarship?

I believe that the research and ideas begun in this dissertation could inspire study in other disciplines, not only for art history. There are liturgical historians who might want to investigate the context for these altarpieces. Students of religious studies would be interested in this research, especially if they are interested in the neurological effects of the lower senses on the prayer experience. Anthropologists might investigate the foodways and ritual gestures depicted in these paintings, seeing how they both reflected contemporary mores and also the ways in which they were more symbolic. Yet, most especially for those who work in history, I hope my research encourages them to look at art objects as primary sources, and to utilize them in concert with an intellectual history methodology. At the very least, I hope that my research can help to inspire others to investigate how these seemingly insignificant senses could explain a range of cultural experiences in the early modern period and beyond.

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Honour of Derek Keene. University of London Press, 2012; David G. Stork, "Did Hans Memling Employ Optical Projections When Painting 'Flower Still-Life?'" *Leonardo* 38, no. 2 (2005): 155–60.

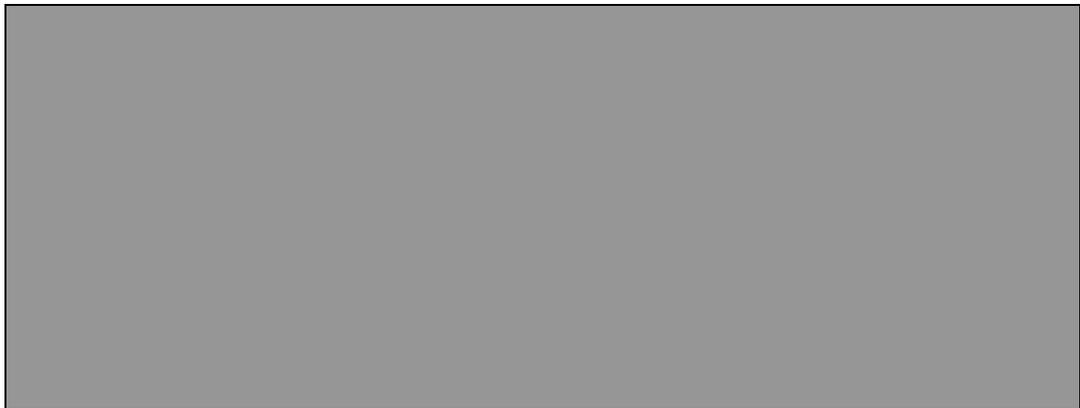
**Figure 1**



Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop)  
*Columba Triptych* (c. 1450-1456)  
oil on panels, 138 x 153 cm.  
Munich: Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tr%C3%ADptico\\_de\\_Santa\\_Columba,\\_Rogier\\_van\\_der\\_Weyden.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tr%C3%ADptico_de_Santa_Columba,_Rogier_van_der_Weyden.jpg)

**Figure 2**



Masthead screenshot from the Alte Pinakothek website homepage  
Alte Pinakothek (17 March 2020)

<https://www.pinakothek.de/besuch>

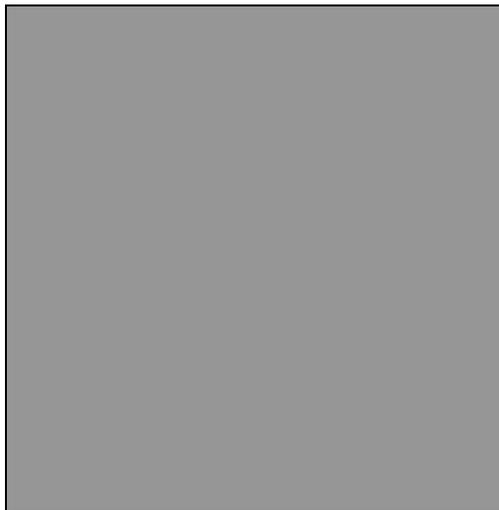
**Figure 3**



Workshop of Hieronymus Bosch  
*Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1499)  
oil on panel, 77.5 x 55.9 cm.  
Philadelphia Museum of Art

<https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/103592.html>

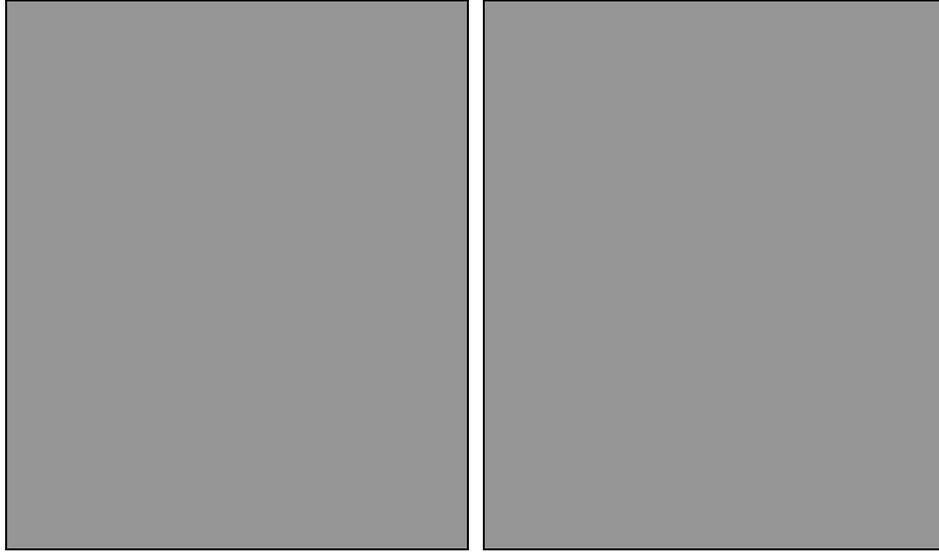
**Figure 4**



Domenico Ghirlandaio  
*Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1483-1485)  
tempera and oil on panel, 167 x 167cm. Florence:Santa Trinità.

<https://www.wga.hu/frames.html?/html/g/ghirland/domenico/5sasset/shepherd/shepher.html>

**Figure 5**



Workshop of Hans Memling  
*Munich Diptych* (The Madonna in the Garden with a Donor and St. George) (c. 1480)  
oil on panel, 40 x 29cm.  
Munich: Alte Pinakothek

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Diptych\\_of\\_Munich\\_by\\_Hans\\_Memling](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Diptych_of_Munich_by_Hans_Memling)

**Figure 6**



Gerard David  
*The Virgin and Child of the Milk Soup* (c. 1510-1512)  
oil on panel, 33 x 28 cm.  
New York: Aurora Trust

[https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/d/david/2/milksoux.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/david/2/milksoux.html)

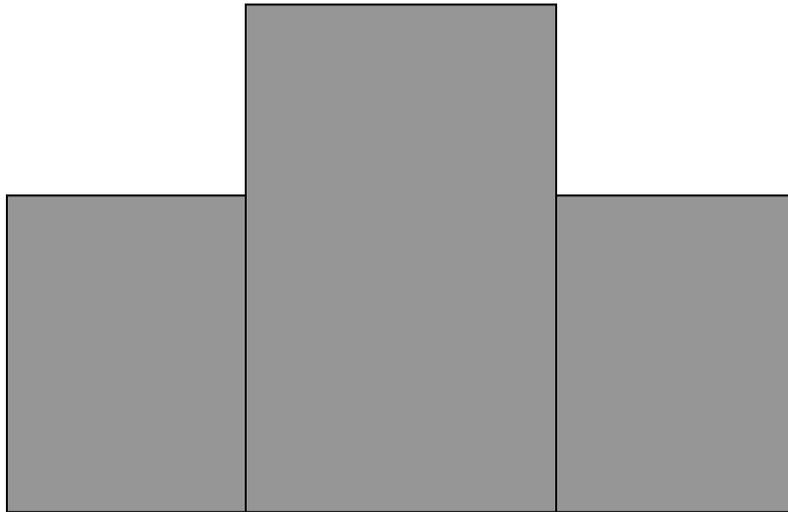
**Figure 7**



Hieronymus Bosch  
*Mass of Saint Gregory* (exterior panels *Adoration of the Magi*) (c. 1494)  
oil on panels, 147.4 cm h. Museo del Prado

[www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/  
triptych-of-the-adoration-of-the-magi](http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/triptych-of-the-adoration-of-the-magi)

**Figure 8**



Rogier van der Weyden  
*The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (c. 1440-1445)  
oil on panel, 119 x 63 cm.  
Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seven\\_Sacraments\\_Rogier.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seven_Sacraments_Rogier.jpg)

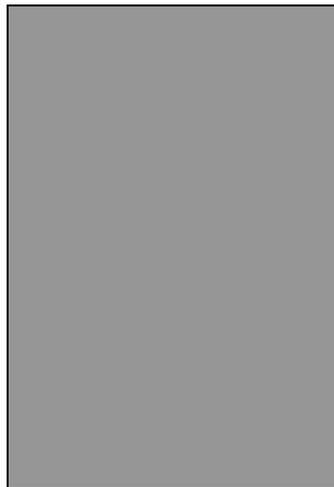
**Figure 9**



Rogier van der Weyden

*Seven Sacraments* (detail of sacraments of baptism and confirmation)

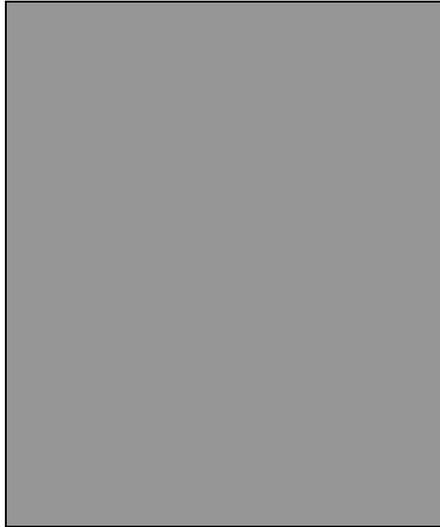
**Figure 10**



Anonymous Flemish artist  
*The Lactation of Saint Bernard* (c. 1480)  
oil on panel, 39 x 26 cm.  
Liège: Great Curtius Museum

<https://www.grandcurtius.be/index.php/en/museums-collections/religious-art-and-mosan-art/lactation-saint-bernard>

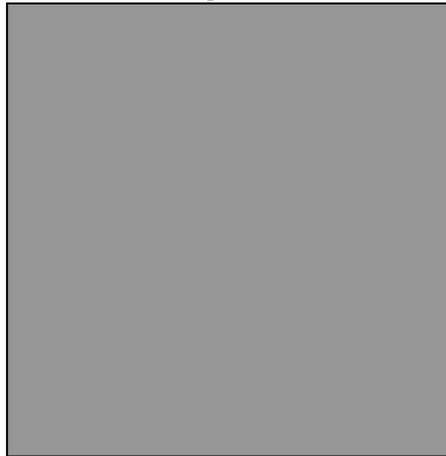
**Figure 11**



Anonymous French illuminator  
*The Lactation of Saint Bernard*. MS Douce 264, f. 38v. (sixteenth-century)  
tempera and gold leaf on vellum  
Oxford: Bodleian Library

[http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/jappersandjangers/files/2017/02/BernhardClairvaux\\_Lactatio\\_SourceUnknown.jpg](http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/jappersandjangers/files/2017/02/BernhardClairvaux_Lactatio_SourceUnknown.jpg)

**Figure 12**



Hugo van der Goes  
*Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1470)  
oil on panel, 147 x 242 cm.  
Berlin: Gemäldegalerie

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hugo\\_van\\_der\\_Goes\\_-\\_The\\_Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Kings\\_\(Monforte\\_Altar\)\\_-Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hugo_van_der_Goes_-_The_Adoration_of_the_Kings_(Monforte_Altar)_-Google_Art_Project.jpg)

**Figure 13**



“Christ gathering souls to himself, Job feasting with his children,  
and Jacob’s dream of the ladder to heaven”

*Biblia Pauperum* (1845,0809.40 sheet 39) (c. 1460-1470)

block print ink on paper, 26.2 x 19.2 cm.

London: British Museum

[https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=1354224&page=2&partId=1&people=25245-1-7&people=25245](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1354224&page=2&partId=1&people=25245-1-7&people=25245)

**Figure 14**



Lieven van Lathen

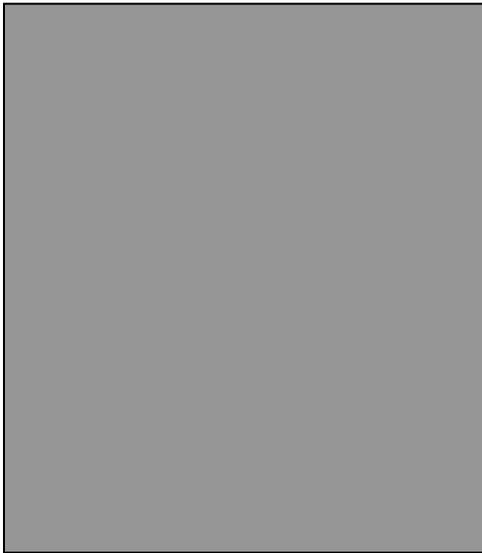
*Noli Me Tangere* (MS 37 f. 46), *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold* (c. 1469)

tempera on vellum, 12.4 x 9.2 cm.

New York: Getty Collections

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/1661/lieven-van-lathem-noli-me-tangere-flemish-1469/>

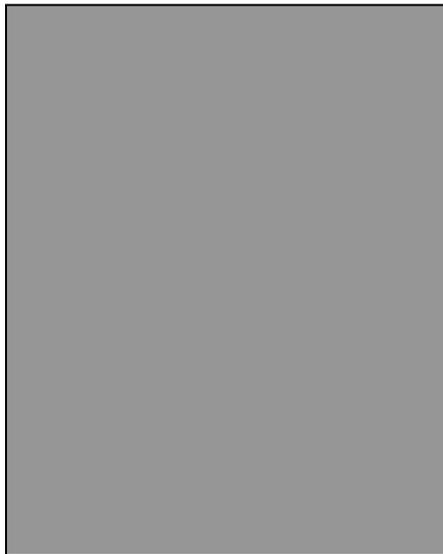
**Figure 15**



Geertgen tot Sint Jans  
*Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1480-1485)  
oil on panel, cm.  
Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2150>

**Figure 16**



Jan Jansz Mostaert  
*Adoration of the Magi* (1520-1525)  
oil on panel, 51 x 36.5 cm.  
Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/subjects/adoration/objects#/SK-A-671,0>

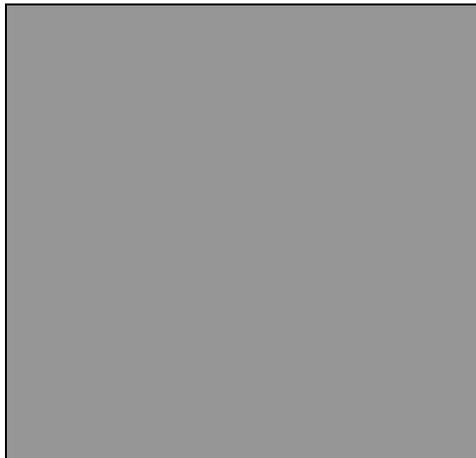
**Figure 17**



Southern Netherlandish painter  
*The Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1500)  
oil on panel, 74 x 65.1 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436523>

**Figure 18**



Southern Netherlandish painter  
*Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1500)  
oil on panel, 73.5 x 72.5 cm.  
Statens Museum for Kunst: Copenhagen (inv. 235)

<https://open.smk.dk/en/artwork/image/KMSSp336?q=Adoration%20of%20Magi&page=0>

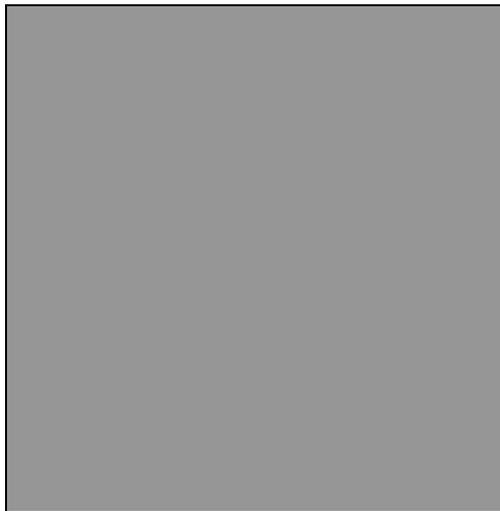
**Figure 19**



Peter Bruegel  
*Adoration of the Magi* (detail) (c. 1556-1560)  
tempera on canvas, 122 x 168 cm.  
Brussels: Musée Royale des Beaux-Arts

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_the\\_Elder\\_-\\_The\\_Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Kings\\_-\\_WGA03460.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Adoration_of_the_Kings_-_WGA03460.jpg)

**Figure 20**



Jan Gossaert  
*Adoration of the Magi* (1510-1515)  
oil on panel, 179.8 x 163.2 cm. London: National Gallery

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-gossaert-jean-gossart-the-adoration-of-the-kings>

**Figure 21**



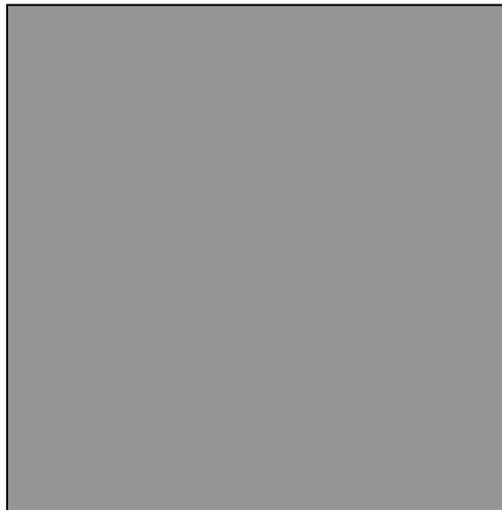
“Antipope Gregory VIII surrenders to Pope Calixtus II”

*Liber Chronicorum* (1493)

Handpainted woodblock print

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nuremberg\\_chronicles -  
\\_Burdinus, Antipope under Pope Calixtus II \(CXCVIIv\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nuremberg_chronicles_-_Burdinus,_Antipope_under_Pope_Calixtus_II_(CXCVIIv).jpg)

**Figure 22**



Hans Memling

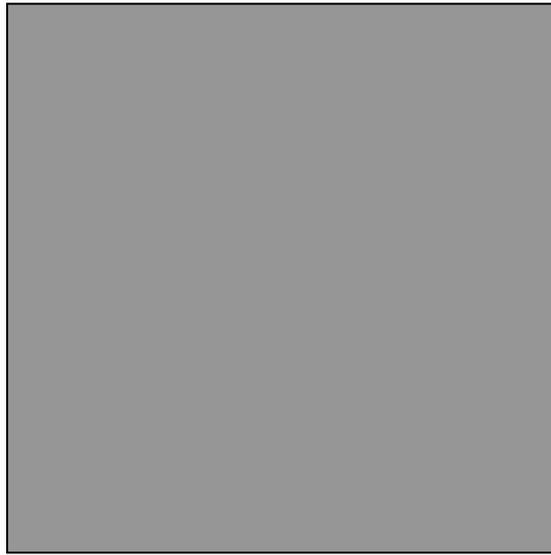
*Jan Floreins Triptych (Adoration of the Magi)* (c.1479-80)

oil on panel, 46.3 x 107.4 cm.

Prado: Madrid

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triptych\\_of\\_Jan\\_Floreins\\_1479.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triptych_of_Jan_Floreins_1479.jpg)

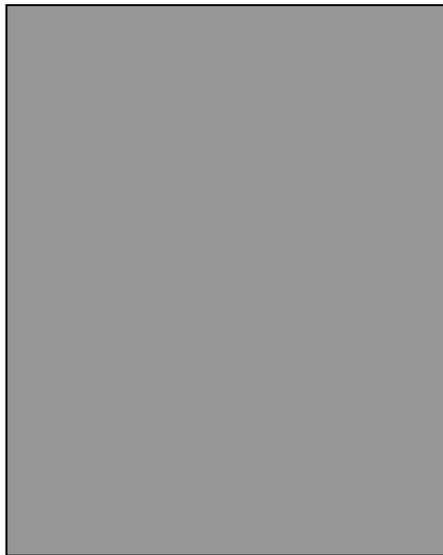
**Figure 23**



Richard of Haldingham and Lafford  
*Hereford Mappa mundi* (c. 1280)  
ink on vellum, 158 x 133 cm.  
Hereford Cathedral

<https://www.themappa mundi.co.uk/mappa-mundi/>

**Figure 24**



*Hereford Mappa mundi (detail)*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Hereford\\_Mappa\\_Mundi,\\_c.1300#/media/File:Hereford\\_Mappa\\_Mundi\\_Detail\\_Africa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Hereford_Mappa_Mundi,_c.1300#/media/File:Hereford_Mappa_Mundi_Detail_Africa.jpg)

**Figure 25**



“Adoration of the Magi” MS 36684 (f. 46v)  
(second quarter of the thirteenth century)  
tempera and gold leaf on vellum, 15.5 x 10.5 cm.  
London: British Library

[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_36684\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_36684_fs001r)

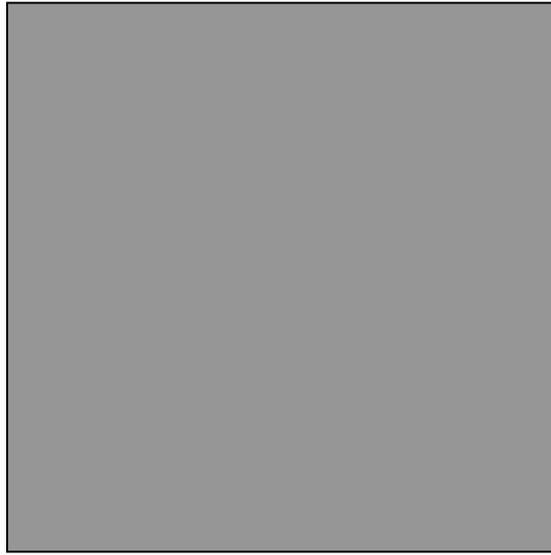
**Figure 26**



“Adoration of the Magi” MS 36684 (f. 46v)  
(second quarter of the thirteenth century)  
tempera and gold leaf on vellum, 15.5 x 10.5 cm.  
London: British Library

[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add\\_ms\\_36684\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_36684_fs001r)

**Figure 27**

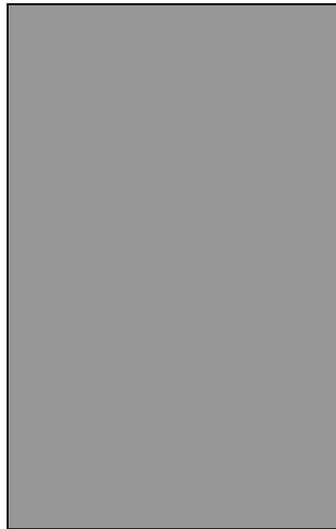


Frater Rufillus(?)

*Inuentio sanctae Crucis (St. Helena Finding the True Cross). Passionary of Weissenau (Weißenauer Passionale) Cod. Bodmer 127, f. 53v. (c. 1170-1200)*  
ink and tempera on parchment, 44.8 x 30.5 cm. Coligny, Switzerland: Foundation Bodmer

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex\\_Bodmer\\_127\\_053v\\_Detail.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Bodmer_127_053v_Detail.jpg)

**Figure 28**

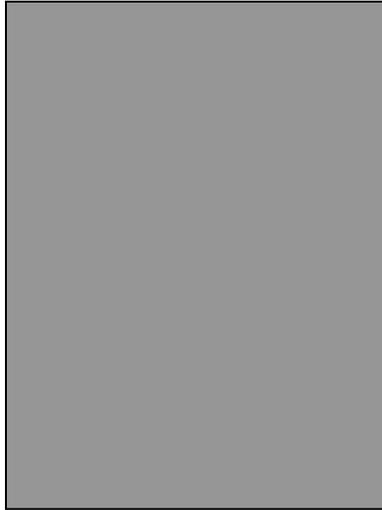


Gerard David

*The Mule Kneeling before the Host* (c. 1500-1510)  
oil on panel, 57.3 x 34 cm. Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art

<http://emuseum.toledomuseum.org/objects/67099/the-mule-kneeling-before-the-host;jsessionid=EC27D496B3CB6CE01373491D7B00AD29>

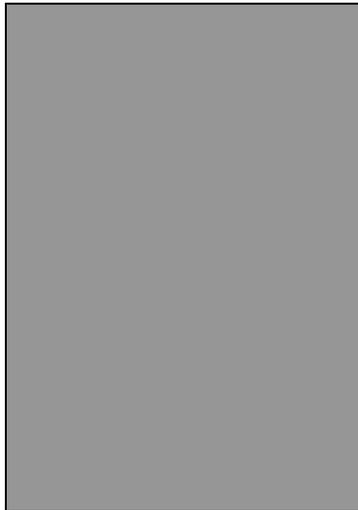
**Figure 29**



School of the Master of the Burgundian Prelates  
*The Hours of Ogier Benigne* W.291, f. 17v. (c. 1480)  
ink and tempera on parchment, 23.3 x 15.7cm.  
Baltimore: Waters Art Museum

<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/215/the-hours-of-ogier-bcnigne/>

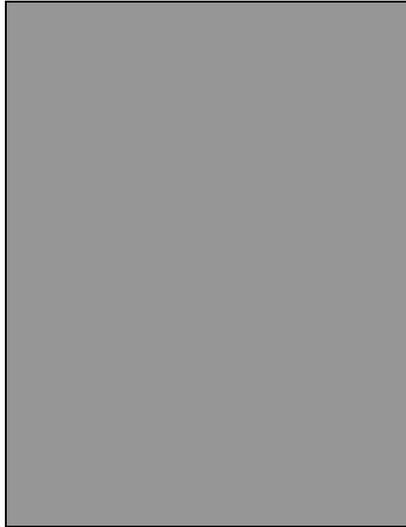
**Figure 30**



Hieronymus Bosch. *Adoration of the Magi* (detail)

[https://www.amazon.com/Epiphany-Hieronymus-Bosch-Reformation-Renaissance/dp/1909400556/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=Strickland+epiphany+bosch+antichrist&qid=1586897105&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Epiphany-Hieronymus-Bosch-Reformation-Renaissance/dp/1909400556/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Strickland+epiphany+bosch+antichrist&qid=1586897105&sr=8-1)

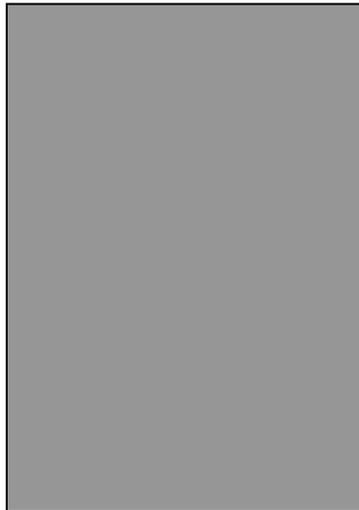
**Figure 31**



Hieronymus Bosch  
*Hell (sinister wing) The Garden of Earthly Delights (detail)* (1490-1510)  
oil on panel, 205.5 x 384.9 cm.  
Madrid: Museo del Prado

<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-garden-of-earthly-delights-triptych/02388242-6d6a-4e9e-a992-e1311eab3609>

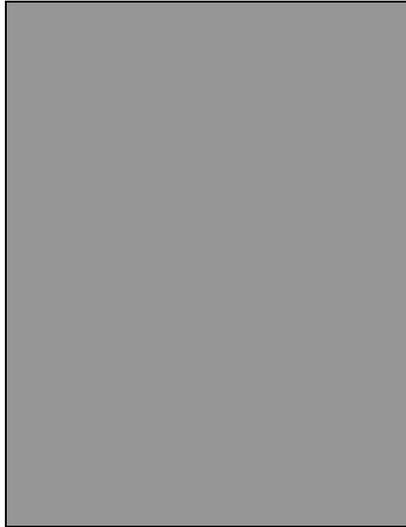
**Figure 32**



*Saint Roch* (c. 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century)  
polychrome statue  
Cambados, Pontevedra: San Francisco Church

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambados,\\_igreja\\_de\\_San\\_Francisco\\_03-09.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cambados,_igreja_de_San_Francisco_03-09.JPG)

**Figure 33**



Hieronymus Bosch  
*Seven Deadly Sins & the Four Last Things* (c. 1500)  
oil on panel, 119.5 x 139.5 cm.  
Madrid: Museo del Prado

<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/table-of-the-seven-deadly-sins/3fc0a84e-d77d-4217-b960-8a34b8873b70>

**Figure 34**



Hieronymus Bosch  
*Temptation of St. Anthony* (c. 1501)  
oil on panels, 131.5 x 172 cm.  
Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeroen\\_Bosch\\_\(ca.\\_1450-1516\)\\_-\\_De\\_verzoeking\\_van\\_de\\_heilige\\_Antonius\\_\(ca.1500\)\\_-\\_Lissabon\\_Museu\\_Nacional\\_de\\_Arte\\_Antiga\\_19-10-2010\\_16-21-31.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeroen_Bosch_(ca._1450-1516)_-_De_verzoeking_van_de_heilige_Antonius_(ca.1500)_-_Lissabon_Museu_Nacional_de_Arte_Antiga_19-10-2010_16-21-31.jpg)

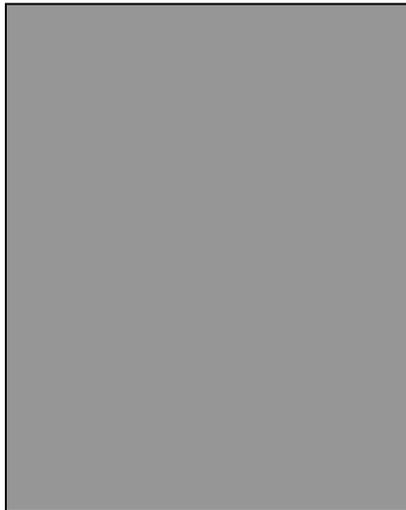
**Figure 35**



Cornelius Massys  
*The Temptation of St. Anthony* (sixteenth-century)  
oil on canvas, cm.  
Brussels: Royal Museum of Fine Arts

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cornelis\\_Massijs -  
De bekoring van de heilige Antonius - MSK Brussel 25-02-2011 12-07-12.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cornelis_Massijs_-_De_bekoring_van_de_heilige_Antonius_-_MSK_Brussel_25-02-2011_12-07-12.jpg)

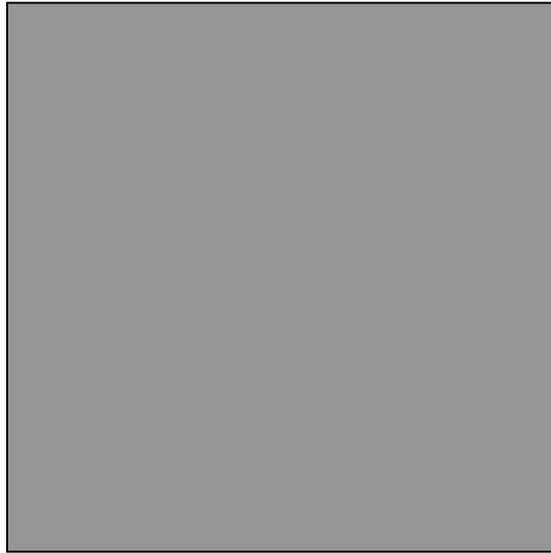
**Figure 36**



*Missal of Jan de Boedere of St. Adrian's Abbey, Geraardsbergen*  
(first quarter of the sixteenth century)  
tempera and gold leaf on parchment, 33.7 x 23 cm., private collection

[https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/missal-in-latin-illuminated-manuscript-on-  
vellum-3934549-details.aspx](https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/missal-in-latin-illuminated-manuscript-on-vellum-3934549-details.aspx)

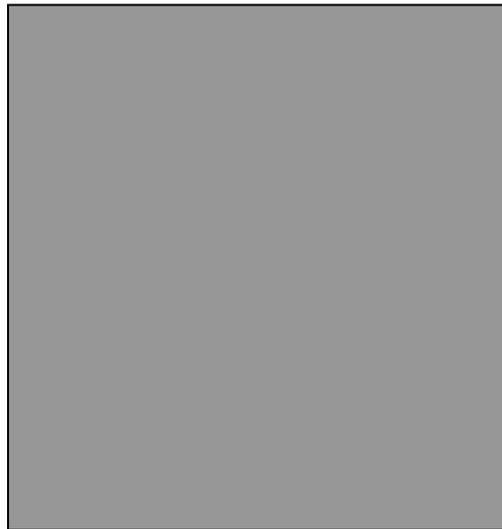
**Figure 37**



*Holy Blood Shrine* (c. late fifteenth-century)  
oil on panel  
Wilsnack, Mark Brandenburg: St. Nicholas Church

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wilsnack\\_Wunderblutschrein\\_offen.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wilsnack_Wunderblutschrein_offen.jpg)

**Figure 38**



Wilsnack pilgrimage badge (c. fourteenth- to sixteenth-century)  
lead, 3.3 x 3.3 cm.

<https://www.catawiki.com/1/20026285-medieval-renaissance-pewter-pilgrim-badge-wilsnack-the-3-hosts-the-holy-blood-3-3cm-x-3-3cm-1>

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<http://proxy.mul.missouri.edu/login?url=http://link.springer.com/openurl?genre=book&isbn=978-3-662-44192-3>.
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## VITA

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