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Joseph of Nazareth as Man and Father in Jerónimo Gracián's Summary of the
Excellencies of St Joseph (1597)

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CHAPTER ONE: HUSBAND OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Gracián dedicates Book I of his *Summary* to an exploration of Joseph’s title as “husband of Mary”. Joseph’s role as spouse has been given much attention in biblical commentary, in apocryphal literature, and in the writings of Church Fathers and theologians. The *Summary*’s emblematic approach to the marriage of Joseph and Mary bears connection with each of these genres as well as with fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian artistic representations of the scene. Although the *Summary*’s depiction of the marriage, in particular Blancus’ engraving (Plate 1), conforms to the accounts given in Scriptural and apocryphal narratives, it presents striking divergences when compared to the existing artistic tradition. While artistic depictions of the Marriage of the Virgin traditionally present the event as a publicly celebrated union observed by onlookers, most notably the disappointed unsuccessful suitors competing for Mary’s hand, Blancus “privatises” the union, thus emphasising it and ultimately marriage as a whole as sacred, dignified and divinely ordained. The engraving, along with the accompanying epigram and text *de facto*, successfully present to the audience a visualisation of the nature of Mary and Joseph’s marriage and of Joseph’s role as spouse.

The relationship between Joseph and Mary has attracted significant theological and devotional interest throughout history and into the contemporary period. The period from the third to the fifth century witnessed the development of a Marian theology which stressed Mary’s perpetual virginity and chaste marriage to Joseph.¹ The first independent liturgical commemoration of Joseph, which is found in a martyrology from Rheinau dating from the eighth century, lists Joseph as the “spouse of Mary.”² A concern over the validity of the marriage of Joseph and Mary, and particularly the question of Joseph’s virginity, has peppered the historiography of Joseph’s cult since the very early days of the Church Fathers. At the Council of Constance (1414-1418), Jean Gerson, who believed from personal experience that Joseph was a valuable intercessor meriting a feast, argued for the installation of a universal memorial honouring the union of Mary and Joseph, perhaps in order to allay the above-mentioned concerns.³ In more

¹ Francis L. Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus: the complete life, theology and devotional history of St Joseph* (Boston: The Daughters of St Paul, 1962): 475-93; Sara Nair James, “The Exceptional Role of St Joseph in Ugolino de Prete Ilario’s Life of the Virgin at Orvieto”, *Gesta*, vol. 55 (1), Spring 2016: 87.

² Francis L Filas, “Joseph, St., Devotion To”, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, vol. 7 (Detroit: Gale, 2003): 1038.

³ Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005): 262.

recent times, Pope St John Paul II wrote in his apostolic exhortation, *Redemptoris Custos*, that Joseph, by virtue of his relationship with Mary, shares with her in the mystery of the Incarnation and thus becomes “the first guardian of this divine mystery”.⁴ This view is one foreshadowed in Gracián’s *Summary*, which identifies Joseph as “the first Christian of the world” in that the saint was the first to know, believe in, serve, and glorify Christ after he entered the world.⁵

Given the historical significance of the theme, it is not surprising that a prominent feature of Book I of the *Summary* is Gracián’s presentation of nine reasons why Christ was born to an espoused virgin.⁶ He states that the marriage of Mary and Joseph primarily ensured the concealing of the Divine Mystery of the Incarnation, enabled Jesus’ genealogy, which was carried through the male line, to be written according to the law and thus affirm Jesus’ legitimacy as a son of David. It further ensured that Mary, the “Mother of God” and mother of the three states of marriage, widowhood and virginity, could be protected from suspicion of adultery and thus from stoning.⁷ Additionally, the marriage allowed Mary and Jesus to live under the faithful guardianship of Joseph in a union representative of that between Christ and His Church.⁸ Gracián makes it clear, therefore, that the particular union of Mary with Joseph was no mere coincidence; rather, it was a vital element of God’s plan for human salvation.⁹ This approach works to present the marriage as divinely-ordained, a depiction which is conveyed not solely in the text, but in Blancus’ engraving and in Morale’s epigram.

Following Gracián, Blancus underscores the participation of the divine in this union in his engraving of the Marriage of the Virgin, which is placed before the text of Book I. In accordance with typical iconography, Blancus presents Joseph, Mary, and the priest grouped together in the centre of the image field.¹⁰ The priest gently guides Joseph’s hand, holding the nuptial ring, to Mary’s, and this gesture forms the focal point of the composition. Above the figures is depicted a radiating sphere within which the Tetragrammaton is contained.¹¹ The orb

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, Apostolic Exhortation, Vatican Website, August 15, 1989, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_15081989_redemptoris-custos.html, section II, paragraph 5.

⁵ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 344.

⁶ Gracián based his explanation on the writings of specific Church Fathers including St Ambrose and St Thomas Aquinas.

⁷ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597, 5-6.

⁸ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597, 6.

⁹ St Bernard of Clairvaux (*Hom. 2, super missus est*). As cited in Gracián, *Sumario*, 1597: 13.

¹⁰ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 110.

¹¹ The four letters communicating the proper name for God, *yod, he, vau, he* (YHWH). Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 111.

itself is encircled by clouds from which two arms descend, with the hands protectively enfolding the shoulders of Mary and Joseph, in a visible sign that their union is “eternal and indeed fore-ordained.”¹² The arms of God can be seen to form a shape reminiscent of a mandorla, a symbol used to define a sacred space surrounding Christ, the Virgin, or a saint, or as symbolising the realm of heaven and the union of opposites, including the union of heaven and earth.¹³ Above Joseph a dove hovers, with the tip of Joseph’s flowering staff highlighting its appearance. The dove can be viewed as a literal transcription of the hagiographic tradition, especially as shown in Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend* which indicates the miraculous eruption of a dove from Joseph’s staff indicating his selection by divine providence.¹⁴ The inclusion of the dove proves the divine participation in the event. It stands not only as the representation of the Holy Spirit, but its placement above Joseph and facing the Virgin perhaps also alludes to the Annunciation, as a foreshadowing of the descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, or even as a visualisation of the Messianic title of “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) bestowed upon Jesus. Beneath the engraving sits the epigram: *Patris nata, parens nati, qua et pneumatis almi Sponsa, pio nubit Virgo Maria Ioseph* (“The Virgin Mary, who was born of the Father and is bearing the Son, she, who is also the Spouse of the nourishing Spirit, weds holy Joseph”).¹⁵ Joseph’s link to the “nourishing Spirit” to whom Mary is wed is emphasised further by the dove’s placement and the visual line of the staff.

Blancus’ engraving communicates several points conveyed in the *Summary* which form the basis of this chapter’s discussion. It presents the marriage of Joseph and Mary as ordained by God the Father, who is also shown here to participate directly in the union. Following from this, Joseph is cast as the only possible spouse for Mary. He successfully fulfils his role as her husband, both co-operating with and sharing in her perpetual virginity. As Chorpenning writes, the *Summary* establishes a typological link between the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity, with Joseph cast as a representation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Joseph is therefore characterised as successfully fulfilling his masculine and marital roles and responsibilities, and is presented to

¹² Wilson, “Some Further Evidence”, 2006: 908.

¹³ Andreas Andreopolous, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press: New York, 2005): 83-84.

¹⁴ The presence of the dove may also reflect the Scriptural narrative of the Baptism of Jesus, at which the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; Zaira Zuffetti, *L’uomo dei sette silenzi, San Giuseppe nell’arte* (Milan: Ancora Editrice, 2012): 15.

¹⁵ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 111.

¹⁶ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 110.

the brethren of the Archconfraternity as a relatable and accessible model they could emulate in their own relationships.

Book I of the *Summary* presents the marriage of Mary and Joseph as something in which God participates intimately. The basis for this representation is Scriptural, with the Gospel of Matthew stating that, as Joseph considered separating himself from Mary,

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, *do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emman‘u-el”,¹⁷

(which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; *he took his wife*, but knew her not until she had borne a son,¹⁸ and he called his name Jesus. (Matt 1:18-25, emphasis mine).¹⁹

Joseph therefore, with awareness of Mary’s pregnancy and of its divine origin, consents to formalising the marriage. Blancus communicates a presence of the divine through his depiction of the radiating Tetragrammaton. Additionally, the mandorla shape created by his placement of Joseph and Mary literally “in the arms” of God aids in drawing the eye to the focal point of the piece.

Blancus’ engraving of the Marriage of the Virgin does not depict God performing an action or a miracle. It simply denotes God’s presence through the inclusion of the Tetragrammaton, the name of God. Blancus’ inclusion of the title “I am who I am” (Gen 3:14) designates the

¹⁷ Isaiah 7:14. The scholar Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) notes that in marrying Mary to save her reputation, Joseph fulfilled this prophecy. See Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods, vol. 1: Doctrine and Devotion* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012): 70.

¹⁸ Although, as will be seen, several works of apocryphal literature purport that Joseph fathered children or was previously married, there is nothing in Scripture to substantiate this claim. These words from Matthew’s Gospel, “he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son”, do not automatically indicate any existence of sexual relations. They merely show that Joseph was not the natural father of Jesus. Similarly, according to Scriptural usage, the use of the term “firstborn” refers to the first male child, and does not necessarily indicate the existence of other children. See also Luke 2:7. For other Scriptural uses of the term “firstborn”, see Exodus 13:2 and Numbers 3:12.

¹⁹ All Scriptural references used in this thesis are sourced from the *Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition* (Oxford: New York, 2004).

presence of the divine in the scene, emphasising that the marriage of Mary and Joseph is witnessed and participated in by God.

Blancus' composition further communicates the interaction between God, Mary and Joseph through its incorporation of a mandorla. The mandorla is created through the lines of God's descending arms, which carry downwards and continue through Mary and Joseph's arms, hands and the folds in their garments, passing through their respective bent knees to meet at a central point below. The draperies carry downwards to return focus to the centre of the composition then are strategically redirected up towards the centre of the image, leading the viewer's eye to the central gesture of the hands and to the focal point of the ring. The mandorla powerfully unifies all figures within the composition, defines a sacred space, and further conveys an intimate union between God and Mary and Joseph. It communicates not only the fulfilment of God's will in the union of Joseph and Mary, but also the sacred union of heaven and earth which takes place at the Incarnation, an event which is referenced by Blancus in his rendering of a pregnant Mary.

Blancus' depiction of God's embrace calls to mind the ancient visual expression of nuptial union, in which two figures are joined through the embrace of a third, central figure. This formula consistently featured in the visual narratives of Roman sarcophagi. A second-century sarcophagus fragment, likely of Proconnesian origin and held in the British Museum collection (Plate 1.1.) shows the marriage ceremony solemnised with the couple clasping right hands (*dextrarum iunctio*), both the bride and groom embraced by a central figure who gazes outwards.²⁰ Renaissance art ascribed to the gesture a more general or additional meaning of commendation or reconciliation. Key examples include the exterior wing of Taddeo Gaddi's triptych, completed in 1333 and held in the Gemäldegalerie (Plate 1.2.), which shows Christ commending the Virgin to the Beloved Disciple as her son, and Barna da Siena's panel depiction of the Mystic Marriage of St Catherine (Plate 1.3.), in which an angel embraces and reconciles two enemies who exchange the kiss of peace.²¹ Such connotations apply closely to Mary and Joseph at the moment of their marriage.

The focus given to the solemnisation of the union of Mary and Joseph, primarily through the carrying of the viewer's focus downwards through God's arms to the extended hands of Mary

²⁰Karen K. Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 345.

²¹ For Gaddi's work, see Andrew Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi: A Critical Reappraisal and a Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982): 127. For Barna da Siena's panel, see Theodore E. Stebbins and Peter C. Sutton, *Masterpieces from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986): 18.

and Joseph, further conveys the subject of divine ordination. In his discussion of Joseph's divine selection as husband of Mary, Gracián draws parallels between the saint and his Old Testament precedent, Joseph of Egypt.²² He quotes the following passage from the Book of Genesis:

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenathpaneah, and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt (Gen 41:41-45).

Gracián indicates that just as Joseph of Egypt was set apart by Pharaoh and had bestowed upon him privileges and authority, so too was Joseph set apart by God for an even greater honour.²³ Interpreting the ring as an allegorical symbol of Christ, Gracián stresses that just as this ring was given by Pharaoh to Joseph of Egypt, so Christ was bestowed into the care of Joseph of Nazareth by God and by virtue of his marriage to Mary.²⁴ His words are given even stronger emphasis when read in conjunction with the engraving's visualisation of Joseph's hand, which holds the ring, being guided towards Mary's by the hand of the priest and by extension the arm of God descending from the clouds. The connections made by both Gracián and Blancus work not only to establish a genealogy for Joseph, but also to give him legitimacy by paralleling him against an Old Testament precedent.

Blancus' depiction of God in a semi-anthropomorphic way that combines text and image is reflective of "a major *caesura*" in sixteenth-century Western art and of the gradual, deepening sensitivity to pictorial depictions of God.²⁵ Artists working during the first half of the sixteenth

²² Here, Gracián closely follows the writing of Bernard of Clairvaux, *Hom. 2, super missus est*. Cited in Sumario, 1597: 13.

²³ In his *Summary*, Gracián identifies further parallels between Joseph of Egypt and Joseph of Nazareth. The gold chain Pharaoh places around the neck of Joseph in Genesis 41, argues Gracián, finds its parallel in the arms of Christ, which hung "a thousand times" around the neck of Joseph. Further, he indicates, the white garments worn by Joseph of Egypt reflects the justice of Joseph of Nazareth. Gracián also stresses that just as all of Egypt was obedient to Joseph, so Joseph of Nazareth is head and lord of the house of God and the patron of Mary who, along with Jesus, was obedient to him. *Sommario*, 1597: 13.

²⁴ Gracián writes that the roundness of the ring symbolises eternity, and the stone in the centre references divinity and the godhead, which seals the writings of divine grace. *Sommario*, 1597: 13.

²⁵ Robert J. Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton: Western Christians and the Hebrew Name of God* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015): 367.

century generally represented God the Father anthropomorphically, as seen in the image of the Betrothal of Joseph and Mary found on the title and dedication page of the *mariegola*, or book of rules, produced in 1499 for the Confraternity of St Joseph the Protector in San Silvestro and currently held in the Biblioteca Correr in Venice (Plate 1.4.).²⁶ This image presents Joseph and Mary surrounded by onlookers, with a dove hovering above them, but it is particularly significant to see that the priest has been replaced by an image of God the Father who presides over the ceremony.

In his visual-textual representation of God, Blancus adopts a different approach to the way in which God is depicted visually. In the years following the Council of Trent, Catholic iconographers including Johannus Molanus and Gabriele Paleotti sought to classify the repertoire of sacred images available to artists, regarding the image of the Holy Trinity as particularly complex.²⁷ Molanus described the Trinity as “the holiest and most difficult of *figurae*” in that it incorporated not only Jesus, who is representable through the fact he is incarnate, and the Holy Spirit, manifested as a dove at the baptism of Jesus (John 1:32), but also God the Father, whom the Prophet Isaiah stresses is indescribable in appearance: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him?” (Isaiah 40:18).²⁸ In his *Treatise on Sacred Images* (1570), Molanus uses the Tridentine Catechism to argue that symbolic images can be used to depict God as long as their precise value and function is explained by persons of knowledge, and they are rooted in Scripture.²⁹ Blancus’ representation seems to follow these criteria. God’s countenance is not featured in the engraving; what makes it clear that God is present is the incorporation of the Tetragrammaton, which is deeply grounded in Scripture, and perhaps the inclusion of the arms extending from the circle of cloud at the top of the image field, whose placement communicates a tender celestial or supernatural element. Blancus therefore successfully depicts this marriage as being initiated, orchestrated, and perhaps even witnessed by God, whom he represents in a way reflective of developing cultural sensitivities and changes in iconographic symbolism.

²⁶ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Society and Art*, 2001, pl. 8. Wilson’s discussion of the *mariegola* in this book (pp. 24-25) is foundational and extensive. She also includes a more recent bibliography on the confraternity in her 2013 work. For foundational and extensive discussion of the *mariegola* image, see Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, pp. 24-25. Wilson (2013) also includes a more recent bibliography on the confraternity for whom the *mariegola* was produced.

²⁷ Walter S. Melion, “‘Nor My Praise to Graven Images’: Divine Artifice and the Heart’s Idols in Georg Mack the Elder’s Painted Print of *The Trinity*”, in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions, and the Early Modern World*, Michael W. Cole and Rebecca Zorach (eds.). (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009): 221.

²⁸ Melion, “‘Nor My Praise to Graven Images’”, 2009: 221.

²⁹ Melion, “‘Nor My Praise to Graven Images’”, 2009: 221

Blancus depicts Joseph and Mary in isolation, with no witnesses, onlookers or extraneous participants beyond the priest and God the Father. While it may be that the confines of the *Summary*'s small pages meant restrictions on how detailed the scenes could be, it seems more likely that Blancus willingly sought to omit extraneous figures in order to give the scene a more devotional focus and to explicate the *Summary*'s message.

Such a representation communicates Gracián's argument that Joseph alone could be chosen as Mary's husband:

Che il Padre eterno predestino il Suo Figliuolo al morte per la redenzione di noi altri: che per ciò dice (Agnello morto fin dal principio del mondo) e parimente ordinó ad eterno per sua madre una Vergine sposata. E così nella stessa eternità elesse e predestino Giosef per sposo di questa Vergine...onde lo creo in tempo tale, e in tal luogo, e con tali occasioni che, ponendosi in ezzecuzione di questo spozalizio, dessero i sacerdoti di mano sopra Giosef come ministri di Dio, e perche, come uomini, potevano ingannarsi, dichiaro loro la sua volontà co'l mezzo de' fiori miraculosi.

[From the beginning of the world, the eternal Father predestined that the Son of God die for us as the lamb of sacrifice, and in this same eternity He ordained that an espoused virgin be His mother. Then in the same eternity He chose and predestined Joseph to be the husband of this virgin. Thus He created him in time and endowed him with grace, so that at the place and time when the priests, as God's ministers, were proceeding with the Virgin's espousal, they would select Joseph. And because men might be able to be deceived, God made known His will to them with the miraculous flowers that blossomed from Joseph's staff.]³⁰

By omitting the presence of other figures, such as the spurned suitors, Blancus directly visualises Gracián's statement that out of all men, none but Joseph could be chosen as husband of the Virgin. This is a direct employment of the succinct, limited and mnemonic "format" of the emblem; the cooperation of Blancus's engraving and Gracián's text works to show that there are no other men present in the scene because no other man could be selected as Mary's spouse.

Blancus' representation diverges from the established devotional tradition surrounding the marriage of Mary and Joseph, which developed rapidly with the spread of apocryphal

³⁰ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 9-10. English translation taken from Chorpenning, *Just Man*, 1993: 95.

narratives.³¹ It also, as will be seen, communicates social views of sacramental marriage, particularly those which emerged following the Council of Trent.

In order to fill the void of Scriptural information regarding the marriage of Joseph and Mary and of the life of the Holy Family, a number of apocryphal narratives were composed which take the relationship of Mary and Joseph, and the daily life of the Holy Family, as a significant focus.³² Such tales may have emerged in the midst of anxiety surrounding the legitimacy of Christ's line or the Holy Family's suitability as a model for families. They may certainly have held a devotional function, or served as a means for inspiring husbands, wives and families in their relationships with one another. Without a doubt, they have greatly informed the ways in which the marriage of Mary and Joseph have been depicted visually.

These texts often give significant detail to the betrothal and marriage of Mary and Joseph. The *Protoevangelium of James*, which dates from sometime after 130 CE and is purported to be written by the apostle St James the Less, makes distinct reference to Joseph's divine selection as Mary's spouse.³³ It notes that widowers are specifically sought as potential spouses for the Virgin who, at the age of three, was consecrated to the temple, something that was historically only permissible for boys.³⁴ One widower is chosen from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and they are called to enter the temple carrying staffs; the man from whose staff a dove erupts is to be the husband of Mary.³⁵ This sign also features in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (c. 600) which, based heavily on the second-century *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, sought as its main

³¹ The term "apocryphal" is used to refer to texts which focus on Scriptural themes, and particularly on the life of Christ, but which are not regarded as divinely inspired and are therefore not part of the Biblical canon. Most of the apocryphal texts referenced here have been sourced from J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: a collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For an introduction and full text of the *Protoevangelium of James*, see pp. 48-67. For introduction and full text of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, see 68-83. For introduction and some of the text of *Pseudo-Matthew*, see 84-99.

³² The historical and informational gap between the account of the finding of the Child Jesus in the temple and the commencement of Jesus' public ministry has been termed "the hidden life". Perhaps in an effort to make Christ and the Holy Family more relevant for everyday families, apocryphal literature notably focuses on this period in the life of Christ.

³³ The *Protoevangelium* is one of the earliest non-canonical writings. Despite the fact that it is an apocryphon, it may contain genuine details that may lead to an understanding of how Christians of the period understood the Holy Family. This text has notably influenced Church liturgy, leading to the institution of the Roman memorial of Sts Joachim and Anne, parents of Mary (July 26), and the memorial of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple (November 21). See Joseph T. Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity: Devotion and Theology", *Joseph of Nazareth Through the Centuries*, ed. Joseph F. Chorprenning, O.S. F. S. (Philadelphia: St Joseph's University Press, 2011): 18-19; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "St Joseph in Matthew's Gospel", *Joseph of Nazareth through the Centuries*, ed. Joseph F. Chorprenning, O.S. F. S. (Philadelphia: St Joseph's University Press, 2011): 6.

³⁴ Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 32

³⁵ Zuffetti, *L'uomo dei sette silenzi*, 2012: 15.

objectives to substantiate the virgin birth and to give evidence of Christ's divinity.³⁶ The author explains that in order to find a suitable spouse for Mary the priest calls all unmarried men to bring their staffs to the temple, saying:

“...the man from the point of whose staff a dove shall come forth and fly toward heaven and in whose hand the staff, when given back, shall exhibit this sign, to him let Mary be delivered to be kept”.³⁷

The *Golden Legend*, which was written by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century and which combines narratives of the lives of the saints with liturgical and religious instruction, describes Mary as having been raised and instructed by the temple elders.³⁸ In anticipation of her marriage, the temple elders receive divine instruction to summon all the unmarried but marriageable men of the house of David, from whom the spouse of Mary will be selected when his staff bursts into flower.³⁹

Blancus' presentation of Joseph and Mary in isolation diverges from many visual depictions of the Marriage of the Virgin, which tend to feature within visual narratives and life cycles of Jesus and Mary. Such works generally follow the established pattern of presenting Mary supported by female attendants and Joseph often flanked by men, who frequently bear staffs and sometimes clap Joseph on the back at the moment the union is solemnised. Giotto's fresco of the scene (Plate 1.5.), completed around 1305, is a pertinent example of this.⁴⁰ The fresco, which is situated in Padua's Scrovegni chapel and is closely based on the *Golden Legend*, includes eight men, who watch and comment excitedly on the scene. Seven of them hold their useless staffs, one breaking his over his knee in a graceful gesture. None of the men appears frustrated or angry. Whilst the man directly behind Joseph raises his hand, Klapisch-Zuber stresses that this is in fact the depiction of the *compater anuli*, a popular Italian custom which

³⁶ *Pseudo-Matthew*, 8. As cited by Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993: 89. See also Marjory Bolger Foster, *The Iconography of St Joseph in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1500* (The University of Kansas, 1978):10. Bolger Foster argues the writer achieves these aims by including witnesses to the events other than Mary and Joseph, and by extolling the great sanctity and insight of Mary.

³⁷ *Pseudo-Matthew*, 8. As cited by Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 78.

³⁸ From “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012: 539. It is useful to note that in his 1475 publication of the *Golden Legend* in Venice, Nicolas Jensen included a “Life of St Joseph”. See Carolyn C. Wilson, “St Joseph and the Process of Decoding Vincenzo Catena's *Warrior Adoring the Infant Christ and the Virgin*”, *Artibus et Historiae*, 67 (34), 2013: 123.

³⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2012: 539.

⁴⁰ Bruce Cole, *Giotto: The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua* (New York: George Braziller, 1993): 63.

involves landing a heavy clap on the bridegroom's back at the moment of consent.⁴¹ This gesture is echoed in Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco scene of the Marriage of the Virgin (Plate 1.6.), completed between 1486 and 1490 for the Tornabuoni chapel of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.⁴² The fresco presents the ceremony taking place against an ornate backdrop with the use of arches, columns, and linear perspective drawing the viewer's eye to the figures of Mary, Joseph, and the priest who are placed slightly off-centre. These central figures are surrounded by a crowd of onlookers: men and women survey the scene, children feature in the foreground and a small group of musicians play in the background.

Ghirlandaio's pupil, Bartolomeo di Giovanni, also incorporates the gesture of the *compater anuli* in his painting of the predella for Ghirlandaio's altarpiece, completed between 1486 and 1489 for the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence (Plate 1.7.).⁴³ While the women standing behind Mary are completely composed, the male observers are depicted in a frenzy: one of the men breaks his staff while others raise their fists, one man dropping his staff as he does so. A group of observers is also included in Pietro Perugino's scene of the Marriage of the Virgin (Plate 1.8.).⁴⁴ This altarpiece was completed in 1504 for the chapel of St Joseph in Perugia's Cathedral of San Lorenzo, and its patron was the confraternity of St Joseph, which had been established in 1487 by Bernardino da Feltre, a Franciscan Observantist well-known for his devotion to Joseph.⁴⁵ The work distinctly parallels in its organisation and proportionality the similar, well-known composition produced by Raphael during the same year.⁴⁶ The priest, Mary and Joseph stand in the temple foreground surrounded by onlookers on either side. Women stand behind Mary, talking among themselves, while the men behind Joseph are similarly animated with the young man in the centre of the group breaking a staff over his knee in a conceivable, though graceful, act of frustration. Their elaborate hats, brightly coloured clothing and hose contrast against Joseph's simpler, voluminous robes and his bare feet, perhaps as an indication of his virtue.

⁴¹ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, translated by Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985): 201.

⁴² Jean K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 135.

⁴³ Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, 2000: 259.

⁴⁴ Joseph Antenucci Becherer and Katherine Renell Smith Abbott, *Pietro Perugino: master of the Italian Renaissance* (Milan: Rizzoli International, 1997): 287.

⁴⁵ The ring was acquired by Perugia in 1486; perhaps the city's acquisition of the ring was the stimulus for the creation of the confraternity. See Wisch, "Re-Viewing the Image of Confraternities in Renaissance Italy", 2003: 17; Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 26; Wilson, "Some Further Evidence", 2006: 908.

⁴⁶ Paul Crenshaw, Rebecca Tucker, and Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, *Simboli e segreti: i significati nascosti nei grandi dipinti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2009): 80.

Perugino depicts the exact moment of nuptial union in which Joseph places the ring on Mary's finger; this is described by Charlene Villaseñor Black as an "unusual detail".⁴⁷ This detail would have been of particular relevance to the confraternity in Perugia and communicates the significance of Josephine devotion there. The chapel for which this artwork was commissioned was the location of the ring of the Betrothal, one of the few known relics of St Joseph.⁴⁸ The ring itself was venerated in Tuscany as early as 1000, and was only acquired by Perugia through *furta sacra*, or "holy theft".⁴⁹ Historical study indicates, however, that such rings were not used during the time of Mary and Joseph.⁵⁰ Images such as Perugino's which were created specifically for confraternal chapels embody a particular function: they not only make the devotional cult more concrete, but also indicate that liturgy and ritual are a prominent preoccupation for the laity.

This particular detail also appears in Girolamo Marchesi's *The Marriage of St Joseph and the Virgin Mary* (Plate 1.9.), completed in 1523 for the high altar of the church of San Giuseppe di Via Galliera in Bologna.⁵¹ The marriage is here performed within an ornate interior, with the vertical lines of the columns and arches drawing the viewer's focus to the couple and the large group of spectators. Six *putti* are grouped above them, four standing upon cloud and holding a dove, and two descending upon Mary and Joseph, holding wreaths in their outstretched hands.

⁴⁷ Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of St Joseph: art and gender in the Spanish empire* (Princeton University Press: 2006): 164, n. 22; Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan and Contemplative", 2011: 110.

⁴⁸ Black, *Creating the Cult of St Joseph*, 2006: 164, n. 22.

⁴⁹ In his study on *furta sacra*, Patrick Geary writes that such thefts were alleged or perpetrated by members of religious or secular communities as a means of alleviating a particular crisis. The ring, which was the subject of strong conflict between the cities of Chiusi and Perugia, was stolen from Chiusi only thirty years before Raphael's painting of the Betrothal was commissioned; the inclusion of the ring in Raphael's and Perugino's artworks can be interpreted as an overt affirmation of Perugia's authority to claim ownership of the ring. Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 525; Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978): xiii; Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *The Art of Surrender: Decomposing Sovereignty at Conflict's End* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005): 54.

⁵⁰ The ring featured among multiple staffs claimed to be borne by Joseph during the flight into Egypt, swaddling clothes thought to be foot-coverings, a grey hemp girdle accompanied by a Latin inscription reading, "This is the girdle that girded Joseph, spouse of Mary", and even fragments of his body. Particular information is known about the girdle: it was brought to France from the East in the thirteenth century by a Crusader, Sire de Joinville, and a chapel was built in order to house it. The girdle was destroyed in 1688, and the only guarantee of its authenticity is the "noble character" of its original owner. Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 525-527; Wisch, "Re-Viewing the Image of Confraternities in Renaissance Italy", 2003: 17.

⁵¹ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: pl. 11. Wilson is the only author to have discussed this work as a St Joseph altarpiece and to observe the inclusion of the sibyl and prophet, the crowns, which she describes in reference to Sixtus IV's promulgation of the Josephine cult, and the prophet's gesture. She is also the first to draw correlation between these motifs and Joseph's cult, particularly in relation to Joseph's invocation as spouse of Mary. See Wilson, "Francesco Vecellio's *Presepio* for San Giuseppe, Belluno: Aspects and Overview of the Cult and Iconography of St Joseph in Pre-Tridentine Art", *Venezia Cinquecento*, VI:1, Jan-June, 1996, pp. 39-74; Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 25-27.

In this scene, Mary and Joseph are again surrounded by many figures, some of them definitively anachronistic. A sibyl-like woman is seated in the foreground, looking beyond the composition and equipped with a writing tablet, a *putto* accompanying her at her right shoulder. A blind, praying man, reminiscent of a prophet, mirrors her at the right edge of the image field. Behind this man, another man gestures towards the sibyl and to the *putti* above, his extended arms directing focus to the centre of the work.

The incorporation of elements of popular custom and cultural allegory into illustrations of the Marriage of the Virgin emphasises not only a freedom of interpretation, but also places the marriage scene within a distinctly Italian context. Representing the scene in such a way would have rendered the Marriage more relatable to the works' original audiences. Seeing Mary, Joseph and the surrounding figure dressed in identifiable garb and making gestures or performing rituals that were culturally relevant would have encouraged the audiences to identify more closely with Mary and Joseph and with Blancus's overt depiction of their marriage as solemn and sacramental.

Renaissance marriages were essentially an interplay of Roman law and custom, Jewish and Christian practices, and contemporary power politics.⁵² Although the Council of Florence had defined marriage as the seventh sacrament of the Church in 1439, there was little unity regarding its celebration.⁵³ Many Italian laypeople interpreted marriage as a social rather than as a religious affair, and as a public rather than private matter, thus leading to the celebration of extravagant wedding ceremonies.⁵⁴ Social status, accumulation of wealth and inheritance were prioritised, and the only requisite for a valid marriage was mutual consent.⁵⁵ Marriage was primarily a legal institution, with financial and social importance, and so it was not unusual for couples to exchange vows, documents, and money without even entering a church.⁵⁶

⁵² Helene E. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art* (London: Routledge, 2013): 558.

⁵³ Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 69.

⁵⁴ Trevor Dean & K. J. P. Lowe (eds.) *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 2. The authors emphasise that marriages were seen as an opportunity for entertainment and a vital means of gaining publicity, displaying familial hospitality, and repaying debts and obligations. At the 1513 union of the patrician Foscari and Venier families, for example, more than 500 guests were in attendance and the banquet was followed by music, dancing and theatrical entertainment lasting into the early morning. M. Sanudo, *I diarii*, ed. R. Fulin *et al.*, vol. XVI, cols. 206-7, 2 May 1513. As cited in

⁵⁵ Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 4.

⁵⁶ Crenshaw, Tucker, and Bonfante-Warren, *Simboli e segreti*, 2009: 80.

The Protestant and Catholic reformations of the sixteenth century promoted marriage as a significant issue. The Council of Trent sought to emphasise the sacramental nature of marriage, its indissolubility, its subjection to ecclesiastical authority, and the norms for its celebration; most notably, it insisted upon the presence of a parish priest at the ceremony, whereas previously a marriage was publicised by banns,⁵⁷ witnesses, and registration.⁵⁸ At the twenty-fourth session of the Council, held on November 11, 1563, it was stipulated that a marriage could only be celebrated after it had been publicly announced by the parish priest, and that it was essential the marriage be performed before the parish priest and before two or three witnesses.⁵⁹

Blancus' presentation of Joseph, Mary, and the priest as completely alone distinctly departs from the established iconographic representation of this scene and at the same time strives to align itself with Tridentine reforms. Blancus' highly intimate, simple scene, devoid of extraneous figures and allegorical motifs, portrays the marriage of Mary and Joseph as sacramental in that it is conducted by a priest and mutually agreed upon by both parties, elements which were prescribed clearly by the Council of Trent.

Blancus' choice to not depict witnesses in the scene may seem contradictory to social custom and to the newly-emerged requirements of sacramental marriages. I would argue instead that the openness of the scene invites and allows room for the participation of the viewer, who thereby becomes a privileged witness to the marriage. Not only does this artistic choice effectively communicate Gracián's portrayal of Joseph as the only possible spouse for Mary, but it also further encourages audience participation. While the abovementioned works are placed within ornate interiors or in temple forecourts, presenting Mary and Joseph surrounded by often lavishly-dressed onlookers, Blancus depicts the marriage performed in isolation and in an unidentifiable setting, with God as both witness and celebrant. This instils in his engraving a visionary quality, presenting it to the viewer for contemplation; additionally, it conveys a sort of universality which would have made his work symbolic for a wider audience and would have reflected Zaragoza's statement that the *Summary* should be written not solely for the benefit of the brethren, but for the good of souls and for the honour of the saint.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ A notice read during Mass on three successive Sundays by the priest announcing the marriage and providing an opportunity for the people to raise objections. See *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1978: 183.

⁵⁸ Dean and Lowe, *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650*, 1998: 6.

⁵⁹ The Council reinforced that the ministers of the sacrament were the marrying couple; the priest presided over the ceremony. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1978: 184.

⁶⁰ Gracián, *Obras*, 1616: 37.

Blancus further invites audience participation through the depiction of Mary's foot breaking the image frame and thus entering the temporal space of the viewer, which does not occur in any of the other engravings within the book. As the *Summary* is itself intimate, by virtue of its size, it seems that Blancus sought to encourage a close connection between the audience and the image and a direct participation of the members of the confraternity. The audience is thereby not only viewing the image, but also becomes a witness to the event taking place in the scene.

Although the *Summary* portrays Joseph as exceptional, it also strives to humanise him and portray him as a model for everyday men in relationships with their wives. In this text, Joseph is not the reluctant, insecure man of apocryphal legend, nor the grandfatherly figure who sometimes features in artistic representations of the Holy Family. Andrea del Sarto's *Holy Family*, completed around 1527 and held in the collection of the Galleria Palatina in Florence (Plate 1.10.), and Perino del Vaga's 1540 *Holy Family* held in Vienna's Liechtenstein Museum (Plate 1.11.), both relegate the sleeping, grey-haired Joseph to the shadowy edge of the frame.⁶¹ These works respectively show him resting upon a pillar and holding his staff, which seems necessary to support his old, weak body.⁶² In contrast, Blancus portrays him as straight-backed and muscular, gripping his staff firmly and looking directly at Mary, albeit somewhat nervously. The directness of his gaze, his strong posture and his clearly muscular legs, well-defined by his long boots and revealed by the short length of his tunic, lend him a quality of power and virility.⁶³ This is a man undoubtedly in the prime of his life. Such a depiction presents for the brethren of the Archconfraternity a tangible model of masculinity and a relatable guide for the relationship husbands should hold with their wives.

Blancus' depiction of Joseph as strong and virile runs in accordance with Gracián's description of the saint's youth and upbringing. Gracián writes that Joseph, although being born of a noble line, was born in poverty, and so "it eventually became necessary for him to leave his small

⁶¹ As will be discussed in chapter 5, the sleeping or meditative pose denotes Joseph's receptivity to the word of God communicated in dreams. Julian Brooks, Denise Allen and Xavier F. Solomon, *Andrea del Sarto: the Renaissance workshop in action* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2015): 125; Johann Kréaftner, *Liechtenstein Museum: the princely collections* (Munich: Prestel, 2004): 32. See Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 43, 80, for discussions of other representations of Joseph by these two artists, both probably occurring within a cult context.

⁶² Zuffetti, *L'uomo dei sette silenzi*, 2012: 16.

⁶³ A precedent can be found in Correggio's altarpiece for the St Joseph confraternity in Parma; in her discussion of this artwork, Carolyn Wilson states that the upward movement of drapery reveals Joseph's powerful legs and unites, in an extraordinary way, "the angelic Joseph and his celestial guide". See Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 74.

patrimony, go to Jerusalem, and learn the art of carpentry in order to support himself and to participate in the sacrifices of the temple.”⁶⁴ This description readily conveys to the reader particular qualities they can associate with the saint and perhaps even identify within their own selves: a knowledge of poverty and struggle, hard work and self-sufficiency, piety and a commitment to devotional and religious practices. Further, Joseph is described in the *Summary* as young and vigorous, qualities which Gracián implies by paralleling him with Joseph of Egypt and casting him as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.⁶⁵ These qualities also communicate the ideal of manly strength, or *virtus*, which was depicted throughout literature as the goal of both male and female saints; the *Summary*, in its visual-textual representation of Joseph’s physical power, indicates that he has fulfilled this ideal.⁶⁶

In addition to operating in accordance with Scriptural narrative, the portrayal of a young and masculine Joseph taps into social custom at the time of Mary and Joseph, and into the Renaissance understanding of the meaning of aesthetics and beauty. As Larry M. Toschi writes, Scripture’s use of the word “betrothed” naturally promotes the image of Mary and Joseph as “two youths of ordinary marriageable age.”⁶⁷ In the time of Mary and Joseph, betrothals, which designated a formal exchange of consent and money between the young man and the father of the bride, were usually entered into when the bride was between the ages of twelve and thirteen

⁶⁴ *E su neccessitato vendere quel poco patrimonio, che aveva in Bethlehem, e imparare l’arte de legnaiuolo, con la quale si pose ad abitare in Gerusalemme per sostentarsi, e per partecipare de i sacrifici del santo Tempio.* Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 6.

⁶⁵ These typological connections find their genesis in the Matthean genealogy, which titles Joseph as the son of Jacob (Matt 1:16). The name “Joseph”, which can be translated as “Yahweh increases” or “let him increase” (Gen 30:24), is a conceivable allegorical reference to the humble submission of the two Josephs to God’s will. Throughout all of Scripture, the title “son of Jacob” is used only to describe these two figures. Joseph of Nazareth is identified by Bernard of Clairvaux as the “true son of David”, with this sonship leading to his divine selection as recipient of the Word and forming a patriarchal link between the Old and New Testaments. Bernard also parallels the two figures in their purity and obedience, and in the divine intelligence bestowed upon them. The Franciscan Ubertine of Casale (d. c. 1329) presents Joseph as “the key to the Old Testament, in whom the patriarchal and prophetic dignity attained to its promised fruit.” Chorpensing, *Just Man*, 1993: 105, 111; Larry M. Toschi, *Joseph in the New Testament: with Redemptoris Custos, the apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Saint Joseph* (Santa Cruz: Guardian of the Redeemer Books, 1991): 334; Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 4; Bolger Foster, *The Iconography of St Joseph*, 1978: 22; Edward Healy Thompson, *The Life and Glories of St Joseph* (North Carolina: TAN Books, 2013): 15; Chester N. Scoville, *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Biblical Drama* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 57-8.

⁶⁶ Alison More, “Convergence, Conversion, and Transformation: Gender and Sanctity in Thirteenth-Century Liège”, *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe*, ed. Dr Elizabeth L’Estrange and Dr Alison More (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011): 33.

⁶⁷ Toschi, *Joseph in the New Testament*, 1991: 394. The Navarre commentary on Matthew’s Gospel notes that as it was quite usual for people to marry within their clan, it can be concluded that Mary belonged to the house of David; however, Jesus’ ancestral and legal rights would have come from his father’s line and so he was recognised and titled “son of David” because Joseph was also “son of David”. See *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew’s Gospel, in the Revised Standard Version and New Vulgate with a commentary by the Faculty of Theology, University of Navarre* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1988): 29.

and the bridegroom between fourteen and twenty-one years old.⁶⁸ During the betrothal period, which generally lasted around a year, Mary and Joseph were already titled “husband” and “wife”,⁶⁹ but could not live together or have sexual relations; this was especially true in Galilee, where the wife had to be taken as a virgin into her husband’s home.⁷⁰ Aside from this, they would have held all rights pertaining to married couples. If Joseph died, Mary would be considered his widow and thus entitled to his inheritance, and if Mary was unfaithful she would be punished as an adulteress and could not remarry unless she obtained a bill of divorce.⁷¹ At the conclusion of this period the bride was taken to the husband’s family home in the second and definitive moment of the marriage rite.⁷² Matthew’s referring to Mary and Joseph as a betrothed couple, along with Luke’s statement that they are “espoused”, indicates that at the time of the Annunciation Mary and Joseph were not living together as man and wife but, as they had already exchanged consent, were married in the eyes of God and of the people.⁷³

This portrayal of Joseph as a young man is strongly contrasted in apocryphal literature, where he is typically represented as elderly, at least sixty years’ Mary’s senior. The *Protoevangelium of James* describes Joseph as still practicing as a carpenter yet well advanced in years.⁷⁴ After

⁶⁸ David W. Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism”, in Ken M. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003): 186, 189. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: a commentary on the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke* (London: Cassell and Collier Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1997): 123; Giuseppe Danieli, *Incontri con San Giuseppe nella Parola di Dio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Murialdo, 2009): 10.

⁶⁹ Note the use of the term *gynē*, “wife”, in Matt 1:20-24. See Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 1997: 123.

⁷⁰ Toschi, *Joseph in the New Testament*, 1991: 394; Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 1997: 124, 207. Brown indicates the difficulty in applying the distinction in Galilean custom to Mary and Joseph. He notes first that it is commonly believed this distinction arose out of fear that occupying Roman troops might rape or seduce a betrothed virgin, and so this indicates the custom may well have come about from the post-70 A.D. period. Second, he draws attention to Matthew’s indication that Mary and Joseph live and have their home in Bethlehem in Judaea (2:11), and that Joseph, when returning with his family to Israel after the death of Herod, initially thinks of resettling in Judaea (2:22). Therefore, if there were a regional difference in custom, Mary and Joseph would likely have adhered to Judaeian practice which allowed them to spend time alone together as a betrothed couple. Brown notes, however, that Matthew’s implicit tone of scandal suggests a connection with the Galilean practice.

⁷¹ Michael D. Griffin (O.C.D.), *Saint Joseph: a theological introduction* (Montreal: Oratoire Saint-Joseph, 1996): 6. This is quite possibly what is conveyed in Joseph’s consideration of divorce. As Mary has, by all manner of appearances, been unfaithful, Joseph as her husband has the right to have her condemned. He instead begins to set about to divorce her “quietly”. This action on his part seems designed to protect Mary from shame while at the same time operating as a fulfilment of his rights as her husband.

⁷² Toschi, *Joseph in the New Testament*, 1991: 394; Danieli, *Incontri con San Giuseppe*, 2009: 10. Examples of the marriage celebration are found in Scripture, such as the feast of the ten maidens (Matt 25:1-13), or the account of the marriage at Cana (Matt 2:1-11).

⁷³ Griffin, *Saint Joseph: a theological introduction*, 1996: 6.

⁷⁴ The consistent representation of Joseph as an elderly man in apocryphal literature seems to be focused on allaying any speculation that he could be considered the natural father of Christ. In truth, if he had been this old, he would not have appeared to be Jesus’ natural father in the public eye, something which Scripture makes clear was assumed. Furthermore, if Joseph were an older man, this would have defied his evident call to protect the reputation of Mary and Jesus, and ultimately, to shield the mystery of the Incarnation.

his selection to take Mary into his home as his “ward”, Joseph protests, his words emphasising the age disparity between him and Mary and also revealing something of social expectation and convention: “I have sons, and am old; she is but a girl. I object lest I should become a laughing-stock to the sons of Israel.”⁷⁵ Joseph’s words indicate that a union between a young woman and an old man was perceived as unnatural and a subject of ridicule and it is only at the high priest’s threatening of divine vengeance that he submits.⁷⁶

Joseph’s old age is also described in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, whose account of the Marriage of the Virgin emphasises Joseph’s humanness and depicts him as an incompetent husband in a portrayal which directly contrasts Mary’s virtue.⁷⁷ He is described here as an old man⁷⁸ who has been cast off, and when he is chosen he expresses no willingness to wed Mary and instead is instructed by the priests to take her.⁷⁹ The age disparity between the couple again motivates Joseph’s reluctance to wed Mary, and his dismay at the miraculous conception of Christ indicates that he also seems to lack the courage and wisdom necessary to fulfil his role as husband.⁸⁰

Gracián departs from such representations in the *Summary*, attributing to Mary and Joseph the words of Isaiah: “For as a young man marries a young woman” (62:5). Further, he is explicit in regarding artistic representations of an elderly Joseph as merely expressions of allegory rather than of fact.⁸¹ These works, he states, illustrate Joseph’s wisdom and prudence, and were designed to prevent people from thinking that two people of such beauty and youth could not possibly live together in complete purity.⁸²

⁷⁵ *Protoevangelium of James*, 1993: 9:2. As cited by Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993: 61. Joseph’s reaction, though designed to convey fear and insecurity, also presents a desire to live in obscurity and an unwillingness to offend the Law. His representation in this text, while quite possibly intended to demean him, also emphasises a clear human nature and distinct, real emotions of doubt, insecurity, and a desire for self-preservation and the protection of reputation.

⁷⁶ *Protoevangelium of James*, 1993: 9:2. As cited by Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993: 61.

⁷⁷ Bolger Foster, *The Iconography of St Joseph*, 1978: 10.

⁷⁸ It is indicated in the text that Joseph is a grandfather, and that his grandchildren are already older than the fourteen-year-old Mary. Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 32.

⁷⁹ *Pseudo-Matthew*, 8. As cited by Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 79.

⁸⁰ Mary Dzon, “Joseph and the Amazing Christ-Child of Late Medieval Legend”, *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: the results of a paradigm shift in the history of mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2006): 145.

⁸¹ Wellela Muller writes that until the Renaissance, representations of Joseph were stable: he was an old man remaining behind the Virgin and Child. This follows Payan, who states that the presence of an elderly man beside the Virgin was enough to indicate Joseph. See Wellela Muller, *The Representations of Elderly People in the Scenes of Jesus’ Childhood in Tuscan Paintings, 14th – 16th Centuries: Images of Intergeneration Relationships* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016: 48, and Paul Payan, *Joseph: une image de la paternité dans l’Occident médiéval* (Aubier: Collection historique, 2006): 124.

⁸² Chorpenning, *Just Man*, 1993: 112.

The perception of a young and handsome Joseph stands as a reflection of the Renaissance, Neo-Platonic belief that inner goodness and external beauty existed in harmony, which thus leads to an integration and unity of the inner and outer selves of man. Sixteenth-century Italian plays, such as Giovanni Maria Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo* (1549) or Girolamo Bargagli's *La Pellegrina* (c. 1564-8), portrayed old husbands who were ridiculed while their young wives enjoyed the company of young lovers.⁸³ This age gap likely strengthened the patriarchal mentality, but it also emphasises the perceived integral connection of beauty and goodness; the elderly husband, unable to satisfy his young wife, is “unmanned”, lacking in virtue, and presented as a sort of comic relief. In a similar vein, portrayals of the elderly Joseph as a subject of ridicule work to convey him as lacking in masculine virtue or goodness.

This belief in the interconnectedness between beauty and goodness is clearly expressed in Baldesare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528), in which he writes that “the good and the beautiful are somehow one and the same thing”.⁸⁴ By this token, the *Summary*'s emblematic representation of Joseph as young and handsome is a direct indication of his goodness and virtue. By presenting Joseph as physically attractive, perhaps Gracián wanted to ensure there would be no means by which Joseph's virtue and holiness could be denied.

The subject of Joseph's masculinity was approached by Rosso Fiorentino in his *Marriage of the Virgin* (Plate 1.12.), painted in 1523 for the family altar of banker Carlo Ginori in San Lorenzo.⁸⁵ Rosso's composition bears similarity to Girolamo Marchesi's as Mary and Joseph are placed in the midst of a somewhat anachronistic crowd of spectators, including sibyl-like women, one of whom holds a book as a conceivable reference to prophetic announcement and of the coming of the Messiah, and the Dominican saint Vincent Ferrer who gestures towards the couple with his right arm.⁸⁶ Zaira Zuffetti notes that the representation of Joseph in the work of Rosso Fiorentino was viewed as scandalous, as it departed completely from the established iconography of Joseph as an elderly man.⁸⁷ Rosso, who has been described as the “eccentric standard-bearer for the most fearless and experimental Mannerism”, departs from convention in presenting to the viewer a handsome, blonde, athletic, and even heroic Joseph,

⁸³ Christopher F. Black, *Early Modern Europe: a social history* (London: Routledge, 2001): 115.

⁸⁴ Baldesare Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Anchor: Garden City, 1959): 344.

⁸⁵ David Franklin, *The Art of Parmigianino*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 140; Claire Van Cleave, *Master Drawings of the Italian Renaissance* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 2007): 172.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 196 n17.

⁸⁷ Zuffetti, *L'uomo dei sette silenzi*, 2012: 18.

who is paralleled by the very young, very contemporary Mary.⁸⁸ Rosso's challenge to the iconography of Joseph as elderly and even frail casts the saint in a new light: not only is he youthful and virile, but by his youthfulness and virility Joseph is clearly capable to fill the roles of husband of Mary and father of Jesus. Further, Rosso's incorporation of the anachronistic sibyls and saint places the union of Mary and Joseph beyond the temporal, establishing it as an "eternal and indeed fore-ordained union."⁸⁹ This quality is established even more significantly in Rosso's inscription of the tetragrammaton on the priest's headdress, which, as David Franklin argues, emphasises that the union of Mary and Joseph is willed by God.⁹⁰ These qualities are paralleled by Blancus. The attention Blancus gives to Joseph's physical strength, primarily through the straightness of his back and staff, portrays him as fully capable to assume the responsibilities of the roles bestowed on him by God. As in the case of Rosso's artwork, the gesturing of Blancus's figures and the inclusion of the tetragrammaton communicates the union of Mary and Joseph as pre-ordained and even witnessed by the Father.

The *Summary* indicates that Joseph, by virtue of his marriage with Mary, shared with her in her virginity.⁹¹ While the chaste marriage of Mary and Joseph has attracted very little attention in terms of its role as a marriage model, in the twelfth century it was employed as the foundation of the development of an ecclesiastical model of marital union.⁹² It was, however, on some level non-imitable. In the words of Dyan Elliott:

The union of Mary and Joseph was undoubtedly the most celebrated of virginal marriages: however, all of the circumstances around their union, particularly their divinely inspired fulfilment of the Augustinian goods, were beyond imitation. And yet...their marriage was the touchstone for determining the norms of Christian marriages.⁹³

Blancus's engraving conforms to the traditional iconographic depiction of Joseph's virginity. Joseph carries a blossoming staff, Mary and Joseph do not make physical contact, and their

⁸⁸ Sandro Barbagallo, *St Joseph in Art: Iconology and Iconography of the Redeemer's silent Guardian* (Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2014): 7.

⁸⁹ Wilson, "Some Further Evidence", 2006: 908.

⁹⁰ David Franklin, *Rosso in Italy: The Italian Career of Rosso Fiorentino* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 100.

⁹¹ Scripture does not make any reference to Mary's taking of a vow of virginity.

⁹² Pat Cullum, "'Give Me Chastity': Masculinity and Attitudes to Chastity and Celibacy in the Middle Ages", in *Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History*, ed. Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014): 226.

⁹³ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 177.

postures are mirrored. The iconography of the flowering staff finds its basis in the Book of Numbers, with Aaron's selection as high priest from among all the tribes of Israel indicated by his rod bursting into flower (Num 17:16-20).⁹⁴ The iconographic subject of Joseph bearing a blooming staff emerged during the medieval period, with the staff later being replaced by a lily, the symbol of purity and chastity.⁹⁵

The blossoming staff became a feature in apocryphal narratives of the Marriage of the Virgin, particularly within the *Golden Legend*, and Gracián adopts this symbol in his own writing where he states that when all men of marriageable age from Mary's tribe came together in the temple "Joseph's staff flowered and a white dove appeared over him".⁹⁶ Following from this, "they espoused to Joseph she who is the rod of Jesse's stem, from which blossomed the flower, Jesus of Nazareth (Isaiah 1:11), and she who was sanctified by the white dove of the Holy Spirit."⁹⁷ Further, he presents Joseph as having been a virgin at the time of his marriage to Mary and contradicts any supposition of a previous marriage, writing that on the night of their wedding Joseph and Mary "opened their hearts to one another, and with their mutual consent they made a vow of absolute chastity and remained virgins."⁹⁸

The flowering staff thus became an identifying feature of Mary's spouse and was frequently incorporated in visual scenes of the Marriage of the Virgin, with Giotto's fresco standing as a prominent example. It is unclear whether Blancus was influenced by Voragine directly, or by Voragine through Giotto, but what is evident is that Giotto's portrayal of the marriage stood as a model for Blancus' own representation. Blancus' illustration of Joseph holding a flowering staff directly communicates Gracián's words, draws a connection with the preceding literary and artistic tradition, and further identifies Joseph's selection as Mary's spouse and his participation in her virginity.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ The divine selection of Aaron in this way, and from among all the tribes of Israel, can be viewed as a typology of Joseph's selection as Mary's spouse. Stefania Colafranceschi, "'a Te, o beato Giuseppe': il culto di san Giuseppe nei santini", in Vincenza Musardo Talò, *dalla Sicilia alla Puglia: La festa di San Giuseppe* (Manduria: Talmus-Art Editore, 2012): 194; Bolger Foster, *The Iconography of St Joseph*, 1978: 75; Zuffetti, *L'uomo dei sette silenzi*, 2012: 15.

⁹⁵ Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 80.

⁹⁶ *Venuti li giovani fiori il bastone di Giosef, e sopra di esso si vide una colomba bianca*. Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 7; De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2012: 539.

⁹⁷ Onde diedero per sposa a Giosef quella, la quale (é la vengha delle radice di Jesse, onde nacque il fiore Gesú Nazareno) e su santificata per la colomba candida dello Spirito Santo. Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 7.

⁹⁸ Chorpenning, *Just Man*, 1993: 93; Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, 1649: 497.

⁹⁹ The presence of the dove, and the fact that it faces Mary, can also reasonably be interpreted as a sign of Mary's sanctification by the Holy Spirit, to which Gracián gives description.

Blancus further emphasises the virginal and chaste marriage of Joseph and Mary through his depiction of Joseph extending his hand towards Mary's but not touching her. In this way, he maintains a deference which Sara Nair James argues is implied in the language of the local Italian *sacra rappresentazione*, and which signifies the chastity of their marriage and addresses the history of debate among churchmen as to whether a marriage could be both valid and celibate.¹⁰⁰

Discussion and questioning of Joseph's virginity seems to go hand-in-hand with considerations of his masculinity and of the validity of his marriage with Mary. In the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the fact that Mary makes a vow of perpetual virginity, thus becoming, in Lienhard's words, "a Christian nun long before nuns existed", was seen to deny the existence of a "true marriage" with Joseph.¹⁰¹ Mary's choice of a chaste marriage operates in clear contradiction to the fundamental role of sexual intercourse within marriage and to the primal importance of generating children and thereby preserving the family name. In presenting Mary and Joseph's union as more of a guardianship than a marriage, *Pseudo-Matthew* contradicts the canonical gospel narrative that, through its references to Joseph and Mary as husband and wife and as Jesus' parents, presents their marital union as valid even if it was unconsummated.¹⁰²

Blancus draws further reference to the virginity of Joseph and Mary, and thus by extension to the validity of their virginal marriage, through their mirrored gestures. The similarities in their stance and gestures emphasise mutual consent, and perhaps reflects the use of Mary and Joseph's virginal marriage to justify the argument for consent as the essence of a valid marriage.¹⁰³ Further, it reflects Gracián's description of the virginal and chaste union Joseph entered into with Mary when he consented to take her as his wife.¹⁰⁴

Such compositional symmetry is prefigured in earlier depictions of the Marriage of the Virgin. Fra Angelico emphasises symmetry and mirroring in the Marriage scene depicted on the predella of his *Coronation of the Virgin* (Plate 1.13.), completed around 1432 and held in the Uffizi Gallery.¹⁰⁵ In this scene, the similarities in Mary and Joseph's gestures, with one hand extended and the other folded over the stomach, draws emphasis upon their mutuality and union. Further, the use of repeated colours, particularly blue, gold, and pink, successfully works

¹⁰⁰ James, "The Exceptional Role of St Joseph", 2016: 90.

¹⁰¹ Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 19.

¹⁰² Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 34.

¹⁰³ Cullum, "'Give Me Chastity'", 2014: 229.

¹⁰⁴ Chorpensing, *Just Man*, 1993: 93.

¹⁰⁵ Silvia Malaguzzi, *Fra Angelico* (Florence: Giunti, 2003): 23.

to create harmony within the composition and to create parallels between the men and women standing either side of the couple. The use of stylistic elements, particularly body language and gesture, to convey harmony is something that Blancus clearly employs in his emphasis of Mary and Joseph's consensual marital union and shared virginity.

By the twelfth century belief in Joseph's virginity was already widespread, through the efforts of the Church Fathers and theologians. One of the earliest discussions of Joseph's virginity is found in the writings of Origen (d. 294) who, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, stresses that Joseph could not have been a perpetual virgin, as Jesus and Mary had to be the "first fruits" of virginity. Additionally, he ascribes children to Joseph, indicating that that the "brothers of the Lord" are Joseph's sons by his first marriage.¹⁰⁶ Saint Ambrose (d. 397), the bishop of Milan, emphasised that the validity of the marriage between Mary and Joseph is grounded in Roman law which stresses the constitution of marriage by consent rather than by consummation.¹⁰⁷ In his *Commentary on Luke*, Ambrose argues that marriage itself is not constituted by the loss of virginity, but by its solemnisation and celebration, and therefore Joseph and Mary could have enjoyed a true marriage without their virginity being compromised.¹⁰⁸

Saint Jerome's (d. 420) discussion in support of Joseph's virginity is also significant, particularly in his refutation of previous writers. Jerome notably challenges Helvidius (4th century), who claimed that Joseph and Mary had normal marital relations after Jesus was born, and Saints Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis (d. 403), and Hilary of Poitiers (c. 367), who argue that Jesus' "brothers" are children of Joseph from a previous marriage.¹⁰⁹ Jerome presents Joseph's virginity as dependent on that of Mary, arguing that this voluntary surrender of his marriage rights made him a true co-operator in preparing, along with Mary, to welcome Christ into the world.¹¹⁰ This is paralleled in Gracián's description of the "mutual consent" entered into by Mary and Joseph on their wedding night; therefore, Joseph's virginity is entered into as a free choice and not settled on reluctantly.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 22; Tarcisio Stramare, *San Giuseppe dai Padri della Chiesa agli Scrittori Ecclesiastici fino a San Bernardo* (Napoli: Editrice Domenicana Italiana, 2009): 34. 21.

¹⁰⁷ Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 23.

¹⁰⁸ Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 23.

¹⁰⁹ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Evangelium Mathei libri quatuor*, trans. Thomas P. Sheck (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008): 61.

¹¹⁰ Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 23.

¹¹¹ Chorpenning, *Just Man*, 1993: 93.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) also asserted the validity of Joseph and Mary's marriage and stressed Joseph's perpetual virginity.¹¹² Like Ambrose he uses terminology from Roman law, and stresses in his Sermon I that "Joseph then was not the less his [Jesus'] father, because he knew not the mother of our Lord, as though concupiscence and not conjugal love constitutes the marriage bond."¹¹³ Thus, for Augustine, it was matrimonial love and not intercourse that validated such a union, and this view is emphasised by Gracián in his discussion of the true union of Mary and Joseph. Although their union was not consummated, the abstinence from intercourse does not invalidate their marital relationship. Rather, their union is upheld and strengthened through their mutual consent and their expression of love for one another, qualities which are depicted visually by Blancus in his engraving.

In his work *De Bono Coniugali* (The Goods of Marriage), composed in 401, Augustine delineates three particular "goods" existing within Christian marriages:

Bonum igitur nuptiarum per omnes gentes atque omnes homines in causa generandi est et in fide castitatis; quod autem ad populum Dei pertinet, etiam in sanctitate sacrament...

[The value of marriage, therefore, for all races and all people, lies in the objective of procreation and the faithful observance of chastity. For the people of God, however, it lies also in the sanctity of the sacrament....]¹¹⁴

And in *De Nuptis et Concupiscentia*, he writes:

Omne itaque nuptiarum bonum impletum est in illis parentibus Christi, proles, fides, sacramentum. Prolem cognoscimus ipsum Dominum Iesum, fidem, quia nullum adulterium, sacramentum, quia nullum divortium. Solus ibi nuptialis concubitus non fuit...

[Every good of marriage was fulfilled in the parents of Christ: offspring, loyalty, and the sacrament. We recognise the offspring in our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the loyalty in that no adultery occurred, and the sacrament (that is, the

¹¹² Rosemary Drage Hale, "Joseph as Mother: Adaptation and Appropriation of the Construction of Male Virtue", *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996): 103.

¹¹³ Augustine of Hippo, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Volume VI: St Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, and Homilies on the Gospels, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Cosimo, 2007): 252. See also Lienhard, "St Joseph in Early Christianity", 2011: 24. Lienhard references Augustine's discussion of the First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, in which it is written: "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none" (1 Cor 7:29). Using this verse, Augustine claims that if a couple does surrender intercourse, they do not automatically cease to be husband and wife, as they by mutual agreement relinquish the satisfaction of the flesh but not their love for one another.

¹¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *De Bono Coniugali*, 24, paragraph 32. English translation taken from *The Works of Saint Augustine: Marriage and Virginity*, trans. Ray Kearney (New York: New City Press, 1999).

indissolubility), because of no divorce. Only conjugal intercourse did not take place...]¹¹⁵

These three goods of marriage, faith, children, and the sacrament (or irrevocability), stood as the basis for the ecclesial doctrine of marriage, and for centuries were regarded as necessary in all Christian marriages.¹¹⁶ Additionally, regarding the marriage of Joseph and Mary, Augustine states:

At ubi natus est ipse Rex omnium gentium, coepit dignitas virginalis a Matre Domini, quae et filium habere meruit, et corrumpi non meruit. Sic ergo erat illud coniugium, et sine nulla corruptione coniugium: sic quod caste uxor peperit, cur non caste maritus acciperet? Sicut enim caste coniux illa, sic ille caste maritus: et sicut illa caste mater, sic ille caste pater.

[But when the King of all nations Himself was born, then began the honour of virginity with the mother of the Lord, who had the privilege of bearing a Son without any loss of her virgin purity. As that then was a true marriage, and a marriage free from all corruption, so why should not the husband chastely receive what his wife had chastely brought forth? For as she was a wife in chastity, so was he in chastity a husband; and as she was in chastity a mother, so was he in chastity a father.]¹¹⁷

Joseph's virginity, he claims, influenced the coming of Christ into the world. His free consent was essential in order for the virginal marriage to exist, as Mary could not possibly have been "ever-virgin" if Joseph had not freely agreed the same; additionally, Augustine stresses that Mary and Joseph were truly a married couple even though they did not have sexual relations.¹¹⁸ Thus, he argues the marriage of Joseph and Mary is both virginal and valid.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) expressed that through Mary's marriage to Joseph, "both virginity and wedlock are honoured in her person, in contradiction to those heretics who disparaged one or the other".¹¹⁹ He also stressed Joseph's perpetual virginity, indicating that

¹¹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia, libro duo*, 11, paragraph 13; 12, paragraph 13. English translation taken from Francis L. Filas, S.J. *Joseph and Jesus: a theological study of their relationship* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1952) 37.

¹¹⁶ Mia Korpiola, *Between Betrothal and Bedding: Marriage Formation in Spain 1200-1600* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2009): 93.

¹¹⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo 51: De Consonantia Evangelistarum Matthaei et Lucae in Generationibus Domini*, 16, paragraph 26. English translation taken from Augustine of Hippo, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2007: 255.

¹¹⁸ Filas, *Joseph and Jesus*, 1952: 37; Augustine of Hippo, *St Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Ann Clark (CUA Press, 1996):7.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), IIIa, Q.29, art. 1. See also Michael J. Dodds, "The Teaching of Thomas Aquinas on the Mysteries of the Life of Christ", *Aquinas on*

although Mary desired to take a vow of virginity before her marriage to Joseph, in her society the begetting of children was seen as a worship of God and so, having taken a husband in accordance with social custom she, “together with him”, took a vow of virginity.¹²⁰ Gracián himself adopts this view in his discussion of the union of Mary and Joseph as true, perfect, and virginal.

The *Summary*'s presentation of a virginal Joseph and of a virginal marriage operates in direct contrast to prevailing social views of sexuality and masculinity. St Augustine's famous plea for God to “give me chastity and continence, but not yet” resonates among modern audiences as the “natural” reaction of men to the Christian requirement to restrict and even forgo sexual activity.¹²¹ Vern Bullough states that as sexual performance typically embodied what it meant to be male in the medieval period, any failure to perform was not only a threat to a man's masculinity but also to society.¹²²

This approach, however, has not always been the case. Cassandra Rhodes indicates that the majority of Anglo-Saxon hagiographic texts, regardless of context or date, depict male saints or spiritual models as chaste or virginal.¹²³ Saints such as Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford (d. 1282) and the unofficial saints Richard Scrope of York (d. 1405) and John Dalderby of Lincoln (d. 1320) stand as evidence for this deepening interest in male chastity.¹²⁴ Additionally, the development of stories featuring identifiable and imitable male figures who were also virgins, such as the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, indicates that there was an interest among laymen in masculine virginity and virtue.¹²⁵

Rhodes continues her argument with the statement:

Doctrine: a critical introduction, ed. Thomas Gerard Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (London: T & T Clark, Ltd., 2004): 96.

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1947: IIIa, Q.28, art. 4.

¹²¹ Cullum, “Give Me Chastity”, 2014: 225.

¹²² Vern L. Bullough, “On Being a Male in the Middle Ages”, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 41.

¹²³ Cassandra Rhodes, “What, after all, is a male virgin?” Multiple Performances of Male Virginity in Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives”, *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe*, ed. Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011): 15.

¹²⁴ Cullum, “Give Me Chastity”, 2014: 226.

¹²⁵ Gawain, who is in the beginning of the poem described as an exemplary and virtuous character (lines 636-39), later succumbs to spiritual and moral error in going against his word after being led by the weakness of his flesh. This weakness is, however, presented by Clare Kinney as “the inescapable condition of all *men* faced with female beguilements.” Gawain has unmanned himself, but at the same time has acted in accordance with what it means to be a man. Cullum, “Give Me Chastity”, 2014: 226; Clare R. Kinney, “The (Dis) Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 50, 55.

Scholars of later medieval masculine virginity have identified male saints who were tested with carnal temptations, who used virginity to legitimise a break in royal succession, or who became virgins through a semantic association with tropes familiar from female virgin *passiones*.¹²⁶

Rhodes's work suggests that, in some instances, saints were seen as the most perfect humans because of their virginity and thus became the ultimate models of human behaviour. More often than not, however, it appears that the tendency to feminise virginity meant that the issue of a male virgin was not clear-cut. Masculine virginity was so undefined in its own right that it could only be understood in reference to female virginity, and particularly in the case of Joseph it was difficult to see him as both a virgin and masculine.

Virgin saints were particularly glorified through the devotional importance given to mystical marriages. Commonplace in literature, these marriages tended to unite a female virginal saint with Christ, with Catherine of Alexandria and Catherine of Siena frequently chosen as subjects.¹²⁷ A pertinent example is seen in Paris Bordone's 1524 depiction of the mystical marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria (Plate 1.14.), currently held in private collection.¹²⁸ Here the infant Christ, held in the arm of his mother, offers a ring to Catherine, while the infant John the Baptist surveys the scene from the left corner of the frame. Joseph is seated in the centre. In contrast with the delicate features and radiant complexions of the surrounding figures, Joseph's face is brown and bearded and his exposed right foreleg is powerful and muscular.¹²⁹ He guides the bride's hand to receive the ring, and thus is presented as an

¹²⁶ Rhodes, "'What, after all, is a male virgin?'" 2011: 15.

¹²⁷ A particularly revealing image of a mystical marriage is found in the writing of St Hermann of Steinfeld (d. 1240) who experienced a vision in which he was married to the Virgin Mary. In his vision Mary, who is a young girl of unsurpassed beauty, is brought to the saint by two angels, one of whom tells him "It is fitting that this brilliant virgin be married to you." The angel then joins the two in marriage, saying to St Hermann: "I give you as wife this virgin, even as she had been married to Joseph. And you shall take the name of the husband even as you take the bride." With this, Hermann takes both Joseph's name and his spouse, and from this marriage he gains "encouragement, advice, consolation, instruction, and dearest friendship". Not only does this vision seem to indicate Joseph as an unworthy, ill-fitting spouse of Mary, but it also strips the saint of all that identifies him: his marriage, his connection with Christ, even his name. See David Herlihy, "The Family and Religious Ideologies in Medieval Europe", *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe, Historical Essays 1978-1991* ed. David Herlihy (Rhode Island: Berghahn Books, 1995): 168-169.

¹²⁸ David Alan Brown and Sylvia Ferino Pagden, *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 96-97.

¹²⁹ Significantly, Bordone's depiction of Joseph's muscular, exposed, bare foreleg connects him with other male saints, such as St Mark. For example, Tintoretto's *The Evangelists Mark and John* (1557), at Santa Maria del Giglio in Venice, depicts Mark, who holds the Bible open with one hand and paints with the other, with an exposed, bare muscular leg and turning torso which distinctly contrasts the demure, boyish John writing calmly beside him. Robert Kiely, *Blessed and Beautiful: Picturing the Saints* (London: Yale University Press, 2010): 117.

intermediary reminiscent of a priest with the ring arguably symbolising the consensual union of Catherine with Christ.

Prior to the twelfth century, lay Christians were almost completely excluded from the realm of sanctity, particularly that communicated through literature and art. The thirteenth century saw a new approach to the relationship between marriage and sanctity, with married saints from earlier periods, such as Osith and Eustace, being adopted as imitable figures.¹³⁰ Such an approach ultimately led to the view that a non-virgin could become a saint or beatus. This was achieved in part with the development of a marriage model based on consent, which marked a shift away from marriage as a social obligation to which women in particular had to conform in order to avoid the disappointment or anger of their family.¹³¹ In the case of non-virgin female saints, what appears to be consistently emphasised is that the marriage was consummated some time after the ceremony; for example, St Bridget of Sweden remained a virgin for two years after her marriage and Dorothy of Montau (d. 1394) for a fortnight.¹³² Vauchez notes that as the sexual act was frequently regarded as “fundamentally sinful” in that it might cause pleasure, married female saints practiced periodic continence and encouraged their husbands to practice sexual abstinence after the birth of a number of children.¹³³

In such scenarios, virginity is accepted and idealised as a mark of sainthood even in marriage. These “spiritual marriages” grew in number during the thirteenth century, perhaps as a result of the blossoming cult of the Virgin Mary.¹³⁴ Generally, the wife is seen on some level as the “saviour” of her husband, tempering his carnal desires and motivating him towards a life of spiritual purity. An example of this is found in the life of Umilitá of Faenza (1226 – 1310). Born into a privileged family as Rosanna de Negustani, she is described in her *Vitae* as, from childhood, being “intent on divine obedience, occupying her time in constant prayer, and

¹³⁰ Emma Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives: The Gift, Kinship and Community in Old French Hagiography* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008): 97.

¹³¹ Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, 2008: 97; André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 382.

¹³² Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 2005: 382, fn. 499.

¹³³ Several texts point to the three goods or triple purpose of Christian marriage (faith, children, and the sacrament), noting in passing that such marriages fulfil these aims. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 2005: 382-3.

¹³⁴ The depiction of Mary's obedience to God became a means by which socially prescribed female roles could be reinforced. This obedience was outlined in the thirteenth-century wives' manual, *The Goodman of Paris*, as prescriptive for a wife's behaviour with her husband. With Mary portrayed in such a way, Joseph began to be presented as the head of the household to whom she submitted. The two devotional cults go hand-in-hand: as the cult of Joseph gained ground, it initiated the development of a humbler, more submissive Mary. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 1998: 177-79.

generous alms giving” and as wanting to pursue a celibate life.¹³⁵ Following the death of her father, she married a gentleman of Faenza, Ugoletto Caccianemici, and had several children, all of whom died at a young age.¹³⁶ Her husband became seriously ill and Rosanna persuaded him to enter with her into a celibate life as a religious; they both joined the double monastery of St Perpetua, he as a lay brother and she as a choir nun taking the name Umilitá.¹³⁷ Rosanna’s convincing her husband to follow a life of chastity, and their subsequent clothing as a monk and nun, are depicted in poignant scenes within Pietro Lorenzetti’s polyptych of the life of Beata Umilitá (Plates 1.15. and 1.16.), completed around 1340 and held in the collection of the Uffizi Gallery.¹³⁸

Perhaps the most pertinent example of a wife guiding her husband towards spiritual purity and virginity is found in the marriage of St Elzear of Sabran and his wife, Blessed Delphina. When she was around twelve years old Delphina, who strongly desired to remain a virgin at all costs, was betrothed to Elzear.¹³⁹ At first, Delphina withheld her consent, only agreeing to the marriage when she experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary who assured her that her virginity would be protected.¹⁴⁰ Delphina and Elzear were married two years later, in 1300, and Elzear, although apparently initially hesitant, chose to follow her in her commitment.¹⁴¹ Together they vowed to live a virginal marriage and committed to lives of prayer, austerity, and charity, which included an imposition of chastity on the entire household, although the couple themselves did not make formal public vows of chastity until 1316.¹⁴² Elzear was canonised in 1369 and is the only layman to have been made a saint during the fourteenth century, while Delphina’s cause for canonisation, opened three years after her death, was not successful.¹⁴³ Interestingly, Vauchez writes that Elzear is presented by his biographers as a “new Joseph.”¹⁴⁴ Perhaps Elzear channels Joseph in his initial hesitation to maintain a virginal marriage with his wife, a

¹³⁵ Steven Chase, *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels*, translated and introduced by Steven Chase (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002): 148.

¹³⁶ Chase, *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels*, 2002: 148.

¹³⁷ Chase, *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels*, 2002: 148.

¹³⁸ Gloria Fossi, *Galleria degli Uffizi: arte, storia, collezioni*, vol. 2 (Florence: Giunti, 2001): 60.

¹³⁹ Delphina’s hagiographer stresses that her intention to remain a virgin was simply that, an intention, rather than a formal act or vow. Ferdinand Holböck, *Married Saints and Blesseds: Through the Centuries*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002): 237; Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 1998: 220.

¹⁴⁰ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 1998: 284.

¹⁴¹ Holböck, *Married Saints and Blesseds: Through the Centuries*, 2002: 237.

¹⁴² Holböck, *Married Saints and Blesseds: Through the Centuries*, 2002: 237; Cullum, ““Give Me Chastity””, 2014: 232.

¹⁴³ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why* (New York: Touchstone, 1996): 72.

¹⁴⁴ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 2005: 383, fn. 503.

hesitation which is eventually allayed and replaced by a dedication to virginity and acts of charity. Even though Elzear's cult was more successful than that of his wife, it is Delphina's practice of virginity which has drawn greater discussion, perhaps further emphasising the general assumption that virginal marriages exist at the wife's instigation.¹⁴⁵

This deepening interest in virginal marriages encouraged a deeper focus on Mary and Joseph's perpetual virginity. The beginning of the fifteenth century saw growing interest in the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph, particularly as a result of the efforts of Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris and representative of the University and of the King of France at the Council of Constance, which had been established to resolve the problem of false popes.¹⁴⁶ Of Gerson's presentation to the Council, Andrew Doze writes that it was essentially "an excuse used basically to speak about Joseph for whom he had a great love, a deep veneration."¹⁴⁷ On August 17, 1413, Gerson issued a letter addressed to "all churches" in which he pleaded his case for a "day in honour of the same Virgin and of her husband the just Joseph, her witness and guardian".¹⁴⁸ On September 8, 1416, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, he spoke at the Council, arguing for the installation of a universal feast honouring Joseph, whom he claimed had possessed a holiness "concomitant with that of Mary" and had, like her, been assumed into heaven.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, and very strikingly, Gerson purports that Christ was born of Mary "with the true or interpretative consent" of St Joseph, a just man who "wished that the will of God should be accomplished in all things."¹⁵⁰

Further, Gerson questioned the typical artistic depiction of Joseph as an old man, stating that such a practice was used to make his chastity more credible; however, Gerson himself was of the view that Joseph was a young man, and argued this alternative artistic and conceptual vision

¹⁴⁵ Cullum, "Give Me Chastity", 2014: 239.

¹⁴⁶ The Council sought to formally depose or accept the resignation of three claimants to the papacy, the antipopes Benedict XIII and John XXIII, and the Roman claimant Gregory XII. When Gerson delivered his sermon in 1416, only Benedict XIII remained as pope. Progress towards a unified papacy was slow, as a single, new pope (Martin V) could only be elected once all the false claimants had been removed. On the deposition of Benedict XIII on the 26th July, 1417, Gerson rejoiced: "One legitimate man [Joseph] remains. Let him be made the betrothed and shepherd to the Church and let the whole world obey him." Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 6; Carol M. Richardson, "St Joseph, St Peter, Jean Gerson and the Guelphs", *Renaissance Studies*, 26 (2), 2012: 262.

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Doze, *St Joseph: Shadow of the Father* (New York: Alba House, 1992): 15; Filas, *Joseph and Jesus*, 1952: 76.

¹⁴⁸ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 6. Gerson also stressed that Joseph and Mary had shared everything as a married couple, except intercourse.

¹⁴⁹ The assumption of Joseph is not official dogma of the Church though it has attracted devotional interest. Doze, *St Joseph: Shadow of the Father*, 1992: 15; Villasenor Black, *Creating the Cult of St Joseph*, 2006: 24.

¹⁵⁰ Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 221.

of the saint.¹⁵¹ It is perhaps a result of such arguments that depictions of a youthful Joseph began to grow in number. By presenting Joseph as, like Mary, both young and virginal, Gerson works to make Joseph's virginity all the more laudable and to communicate particular qualities of restraint and self-control. These traits are closely aligned with "clerical" or "spiritual" masculinity, a term which was used to denote a form of manliness centred on self-mastery. The example of saints such as Hugh of Lincoln (d. 1200), who bravely and successfully battled to achieve chastity, offered a comforting model for men embarking on the monastic life and the reassurance that, by doing so, their masculinity was not being compromised.¹⁵² The monk was portrayed as still possessing his sexual virility, the indicator of his manhood, but in surpassing lust his masculinity is transformed and heightened.¹⁵³

Blancus' depiction of the mutuality of Mary and Joseph also works to convey Gracián's representation of them, along with Jesus, as a typology of the Holy Trinity. Gracián casts the Holy Family as the representatives of the Trinity on earth, indicating that each member of the Holy Family, through their particular attributes, parallels a Person of the Holy Trinity. Gracián identifies Mary as a parallel of God the Father, as she cooperates with Him in bearing His only Son, Jesus.¹⁵⁴ Jesus, he continues, is the Divine Word, both man born of Mary and God begotten of the eternal Father, while Joseph reflects the Holy Spirit in that, like the Spirit, he is called to comfort, animate, accompany, and console Mary and Jesus.¹⁵⁵

In his comparison of Joseph and the Holy Spirit, Gracián gives reference to Isidoro Isolano, whose *Summa de Donis Sancti Ioseph* (Summa of the Gifts of St Joseph, 1522) is recognised as "the first scholastically argued Josephine theological text".¹⁵⁶ Gracián writes:

Dice un'auttore, che, se fossero insieme tutti gli uomini del mondo da Adamo, che su il primo, infino all'ultimo, che nascerà nel tempo di Antichristo, e che lo Spirito Santo, il quale é di Sapienza infinita, e investigatore de'cuori, avesse di loro ad

¹⁵¹ McGuire, *Jean Gerson*, 2005: 262.

¹⁵² Jacqueline Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity", *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 37.

¹⁵³ Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life", 2005: 37.

¹⁵⁴ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 2.

¹⁵⁵ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 2.

¹⁵⁶ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 9; Thompson, *The Life and Glories of Saint Joseph*, 2013: 438; Carolyn C. Wilson, "St Joseph as *Custos* in the *Summa* of Isidoro Isolano and in Italian Renaissance Art", in *Saint Joseph Studies: Papers in English from the Seventh and Eighth International St Joseph Symposia: Malta 1997 and El Salvador 2001*, Larry M. Toschi (ed.) (California: Guardian of the Redeemer Press, 2002): 89.

eleggerne uno, non porrebe mani sopra di altro, che di Giosef per sposo della sua Sposa Maria, madre del Verbo divino, e figliuola dell'eterno padre.

[One author [Isidoro Isolano] states that if all the men from Adam, the first man, until the last man, who will be born in the time of the Antichrist, were gathered together in one place, and if the Holy Spirit, who is infinite Wisdom and who scrutinises hearts, would choose from among them all, He would choose none but Joseph to be the spouse of His spouse, the mother of the Divine Word and the daughter of the eternal Father.]¹⁵⁷

This quotation of Isolano is distinctly referenced in Morale's epigram, which describes Mary as "born of the Father", "bearing the Son", and "Spouse of the nourishing Spirit".¹⁵⁸ While these words reflect the previous discussion of Joseph as the only possible spouse for Mary, they also point to a parallel between the saint and the Spirit in that Joseph is selected by the Holy Spirit, "who is infinite Wisdom and who scrutinises hearts", to be "the spouse of His spouse."

Blancus communicates the presence of the Trinity in his engraving, and in an incredibly striking way. As has been explicated, the two arms descending from the heavens and enfolding Mary and Joseph in their embrace clearly indicate God's presence and participation in the nuptial union. Viewed in relation to the Trinity, however, these two arms can be individually interpreted as visualising God the Father and Christ the Son, with the dove of the Holy Spirit shared between them. This interpretation presents the implied figure as three separate persons or fragments, yet connected as a single, unified whole. Such a visualisation is not far removed from earlier artworks which, under the theme of the "Throne of Grace", link the Trinity to the Crucifixion, or involve the Father and Spirit in the deposition of Christ from the cross.¹⁵⁹ Images such as an Austrian altarpiece of the *Trinity with Christ Crucified*, dating from 1410 and held in the collection of the National Gallery in Britain (Plate 1.17.), or Domenica Beccafumi's 1513 triptych of the Trinity, held at Siena's Pinacoteca Nazionale (Plate 1.18), show the seated Father supporting the arm of the Cross, bearing the body of Christ, while the dove of the Spirit appears between them.¹⁶⁰ Bœspflug writes that Jean Malouel's *Pitié-de-Notre-Seigneur* (Plate 1.19.), completed around 1400 and held in the Louvre, presents God the

¹⁵⁷ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 8. English translation taken from Chorpenning, *Just Man*, 1993: 23.

¹⁵⁸ Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 111.

¹⁵⁹ Francois Bœspflug, "The Compassion of God the Father in Western Art", *Cross Currents* 42 (1992): 491.

¹⁶⁰ For Austrian altarpiece, see Jill Dunkerton, *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991): 31. For Beccafumi's painting, see Pascale Dubus, *Domenico Beccafumi* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1999): 51.

Father taking the place of Joseph of Arimathea.¹⁶¹ Assisted by angels, the Father supports the body of the Son, perhaps even presenting the dead Christ to the sorrowful Virgin and John the Evangelist. Between the heads of the Father and the Son, the dove of the Spirit hovers, making this a Trinitarian piece. Each of these artworks, particularly through their positioning of the figures, conveys the Trinity as three individual and distinct persons which, together, compose a single, indivisible whole. Blancus echoes this artistic style in his own pertinent and distinct portrayal of the two arms and the dove conveying the Trinity.

The placement of the dove directly above Joseph's head is of particular significance here. This positioning may first call to mind the apocryphal accounts of the Marriage of the Virgin, and previous artistic representations such as Giotto's, in which the manifestation of the dove above Joseph operates as a sign of his divine selection. Additionally, the depiction of the dove in this way emphasises Gracián's description of the cooperation of Joseph and the Spirit, who are both espoused to Mary, in the Divine Mystery. This cooperation is also expressed in the epigram's description of Mary as "also the spouse of the nourishing Spirit". This communion, Gracián writes, was fostered during the raising of Mary in the temple from the age of three until eleven, during which time she practiced "the highest prayer, contemplation, virtues, and work for the worship of God, enjoying the extraordinary consolation of the Holy Spirit, visions, revelations, and conversation with the angels, who brought her heavenly food for her sustenance."¹⁶² Joseph is identified here as being called to offer to Mary consolation and nourishment as her spouse, and therefore is presented in the *Summary* as a typological representation of the Spirit.

If the image is read in this way it, in conjunction with the parallels Gracián draws between the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity, can be classified as an iconographic type of the "Earthly Trinity".¹⁶³ According to this typology the Holy Family, with its three persons of Mary, the devoted mother and handmaid of the Lord, Joseph, her humble and self-denying husband, and Jesus, the holy and perfect son obeying his earthly parents and the Heavenly Father, is distinctly cast as a reflection of God the Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁶⁴ Jean Gerson references this typology

¹⁶¹ Bœspflug, "The Compassion of God the Father in Western Art", 1992: 493. For Malouel's panel, see Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016): 267.

¹⁶² Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 4.

¹⁶³ The type of the "Earthly Trinity" is also referenced in Blancus' engraving of Joseph, the just man.

¹⁶⁴ Susan Mosher Stuard, "Burdens of Matrimony", *Husbanding and Gender in Medieval Italy*, in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, edited by Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 61; Stephen M. Taylor, "Heavenly Humility: The Holy Family as a Role Model for Parents and Children in Medieval French Literature", *Cahiers Joséphologie* vol. XXVIII (1), 1980: 45.

in his poetry where he writes: “Oh, venerable trinity Jesus, Joseph and Mary, which divinity has joined, the concord of love!”¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, here Gerson names Joseph before Mary, and in the view of Herlihy Gerson’s use of the words “concord of love” references the “cultural and emotional ideal to which medieval families were invited to aspire.”¹⁶⁶

By establishing such distinct parallels between the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity, Gracián’s text, Blancus’ engravings and Morale’s epigrams collaborate in order to present to the viewer a specific characterisation of Mary and Joseph. Book I of the *Summary*, in its combination of text, image and epigram, emphasises the dignity of Mary and Joseph, their close relationship to God, their cooperation with divine providence, and their role in the fulfilment of eternal destiny as conveyed in Scripture.

In his conclusion to Book I, Gracián indicates to the brethren five doctrines through which they may be “espoused to grace”: first, to perform a full and true confession of sins; second, to receive the Sacraments frequently; third, to conduct a brief daily examination of conscience before sleep; fourth, to perform three acts of contrition each day, one before sleeping, one when rising or going to Mass, and one at midday; and fifth, which Gracián advises as obligatory for the Confraternity, to be particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary, the spouse of the brethren’s patron and father, Joseph.¹⁶⁷ The provision of such doctrine not only offers to the reader clear practical instruction for practicing religious devotion in their daily life, but also, by describing them as being “espoused to grace”, offers them a connection with Joseph, “Spouse of the Virgin.” This actively fulfils the commission bestowed upon Gracián to achieve, through his writing, the goodness of souls and the promotion of Joseph’s honour. Gracián offers for the brethren, and indeed for his wider audience, practical instruction as to how they can cultivate grace in their daily lives and, by doing so, attain closeness to God and ultimately benefit the soul. By describing Joseph as “Spouse of the Virgin”, who is herself honoured in this doctrine and conveyed almost as a personification of grace, Gracián bestows upon the saint a distinct honour and dignity.

The treatment of St Joseph and his marriage to Mary within Book I of the *Summary* is a reflection not only of the established Scriptural, literary and artistic tradition, but also of the contemporary changes and challenges particularly relevant to marriage. Gracián presents

¹⁶⁵ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2001: 6; David Herlihy, “The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, Sentiment”, in Herlihy’s *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe, Historical Essays 1978-1991* (Rhode Island: Berghahn Books, 1995): 152.

¹⁶⁶ Herlihy, “The Making of the Medieval Family”, 1995: 152.

¹⁶⁷ Gracián, *Sumario*, 1597: 37-39.

Joseph as a young man whose willing acceptance of God's will for his life calls to mind Old Testament figures, particularly Joseph of Egypt. The saint is also cast as the only suitable spouse for Mary and, by virtue of their mutual and consensual union, as sharing in Mary's virginity. As has been seen, this portrayal reflects changing attitudes to the plausibility of their virginal marriage, which are rooted in sixteenth-century depictions of a youthful Joseph. Gracián also indicates that by Joseph's marriage to Mary, whom the epigram titles "the spouse of the nourishing Spirit", a typological connection is also established between the saint and the Holy Spirit. The visual representation of these ideas in Blancus' engraving and their communication with the accompanying epigram emphasises an emblematic function. By accepting traditional norms, Blancus situates his image in a beloved narrative. The differences in his work, primarily the semi-anthropomorphic God the Father, the youthful Joseph, and the lack of observers or witnesses in the scene, reflect contemporary concerns, particularly those regarding sacramental marriage as a private affair which has God and mutual consent at its heart.