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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 FIVE: PATRON OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

Book V of the *Summary* discusses Joseph's attainment of contemplation, as well as his death and privileges. The engraving preceding this Book (Plate 5) presents a representation of the Holy House of Nazareth, an artistic genre which rose to prominence during the post-Tridentine period and in conjunction with developments in the cult of the Holy House of Loreto.¹ Father Chorpenning notes that this cult is intertwined with the history of the Carmelite order. He writes that the Carmelites fled the Saracen-invaded Palestine in 1291, the same year in which, according to tradition, the Holy House was miraculously transported to Italy; that one of the first chronicles published on the Holy House (1480) was written by Battista Spagnoli, vicar general of the Mantuan Congregation of the Carmelites; and that in 1489, the Carmelites became the first religious order to be granted complete custody of the Holy House of Loreto.² The Holy House of Loreto clearly had deep importance for the Carmelite order. Such importance is openly reflected in Gracián's *Summary*, particularly in the emphasis placed on the Holy Family's domestic life, and indeed in Blancus' engraving, which sets the Holy Family in a private and homely interior space. The warmth and intimacy conveyed through Blancus' detailed description indicates the scene had a particular importance to the text. Through his choice to depict the Holy Family at home, Blancus conveys a palpable familial intimacy and tenderness which is, as has been emphasised so far, a consistent theme throughout the *Summary*. This chapter will explore this theme of familial affection, and will also discuss Book V's emblematic representation of Joseph as exercising within himself a perfect balance of action and contemplation.

In the foreground of the scene, the curly-haired boy Jesus, dressed in a simple tunic and sandals, helps Mary prepare to cook a fish, while a pet dog is begging at Jesus' feet. In accordance with Blancus' previous depictions and with traditional iconography, Mary is veiled and wears a long dress and mantle. Joseph, who is bearded and wears a tunic and cloak, sleeps in the background while an angel speaks into his ear. This gesture of Joseph resting his left elbow on the table,

¹ Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 118. The Holy House of Loreto is, according to tradition, the site where Mary lived, where the Annunciation occurred, and the house in which the Holy Family dwelt after their return from Egypt to Nazareth. Chorpenning provides a brief account of the history of the Holy House, including its miraculous transportations in order to protect it from invasion and profanation.

² Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 118. The Society of Jesus also fostered a devotion to the Holy House of Loreto, with many early saints of the Society, including Francis Xavier, Aloysius Gonzaga, and Peter Canisius, making pilgrimages there.

with his hand supporting his head, conforms to the established pose of meditation or contemplation in which the saint is often depicted.³ The angel's raised wings and flowing drapery indicates that it has only just alighted. Its raised right arm and the upward gesture of its left hand direct the eye to the upper left corner of the composition, where Blancus has depicted, through strong parallel lines, a radiating sphere surrounded by cloud. The figures are bordered by objects which strongly enforce their domestic existence: earthenware vessels, a burning fireplace, carpenter's tools, and planks of wood, one of which bears the engraver's signature.⁴ Blancus' act of signing his work is significant; it clearly designates personal ownership, and it distinguishes this particular engraving from the other images. It may well be an indication that this image held a particularly deep importance or meaning for him.

Once again the pyramidal structure is used to arrange the figures, with Joseph and the angel occupying the apex. As with the second engraving depicting the Holy Family at work, Blancus' depiction of the Holy Family in a domestic interior and with Joseph at the head of the compositional pyramid serves to emphasise his roles as earthly father of Jesus and as head of the family unit. Morale's accompanying epigram reads, *Terque quaterque Ioseph felix, cui corporis escas atque animi, coelom Virgo, puerque parat* ("Both thrice and four-times blessed is Joseph for whom the heavenly Virgin and Child prepare bodily and spiritual food)."

Depicting the tenderness of the Holy Family seems to have been a growing preoccupation among artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, seemingly as a reflection of the *devotio moderna*. For example, in Jan Mostaert's scene of familial affection (Plate 5.1.), entitled *The Holy Family's supper* and now housed in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Joseph is seated next to the Madonna and Child, who watch him as he solemnly slices dark bread.⁵ In Lucio Massari's charming *Holy Family* (Plate 5.2.), painted around 1620 and now held in the Uffizi Gallery collection, Joseph hangs out linen which has just been washed by the Virgin; further, Jacques Callot, in his 1628 etching of the Holy Family held in a private collection in Rome (Plate 5.3.), Joseph attentively waits upon Mary and Jesus who are seated at table.⁶ These artworks mark a distinct movement away from previous representations of the

³ Wilson, "St Joseph and the Process of Decoding Vincenzo Catena's *Warrior Adoring the Infant Christ and the Virgin*", 2013: 126.

⁴ Although Blancus initials two other engravings in the *Summary*, this is the only image he signs fully. The signature reads "Christophorus Blancus facit".

⁵ Patricia Elaine Phagan, *Images of Women in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Domesticity and the Representation of the Peasant* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1996): 56.

⁶ For Massari's artwork, see Barbagallo, *St Joseph in Art*, 2014: pl. 30. For Callot's etching, see Helen Diane Russell and Jeffrey Blanchard, *Jacques Callot: Prints and Related Drawings, Issue 21* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1975): 194.

Holy Family which are often not only set in idyllic landscape scenes, but which also tend to present Joseph as an isolated figure who is often represented as disinterested and distinctly removed from Mary and Jesus. The presentation of the saint in these works as an attentive, tender “family man” clearly held importance and relevance for Blancus’ contemporaries and is perhaps reflective of a deeper valuing of familial relationships, particularly those between fathers and sons.

Through Gracián’s writing, Blancus’ engraving, and Morale’s epigram, Book V of the *Summary* illustrates the ideal balance between action and contemplation. Such an ideal was regarded by St Teresa of Avila as the goal of the spiritual life. Significantly, it was also characteristic of the House of Nazareth, upon which Teresa modelled her monasteries.⁷

This dualism of action and contemplation has its basis in ancient philosophy. It appears to have flourished from a desire for authenticity, closely linked to the philosopher’s experience of the ‘eternal’ which was, according to Hannah Arendt, developed by Plato around the same time as the discovery of the *bios theōrētikos*, or life of contemplation.⁸ This operated alongside what Aristotle termed the *bios politikos*, which focused on the attainment of immortality by the production of lasting artefacts, specifically referred to human affairs and was placed alongside aesthetics and philosophy.⁹

While Aristotle’s *bios politikos* focused on an authentically human way of living, medieval philosophers used the term, translated as *vita activa*, to denote active human engagement in the world and particularly those methods of engagement which were concerned with perpetuation of life, such as slave labour, artisanship, and trade.¹⁰ Additionally, Arendt notes that the *vita activa* held the glorification of labour as the source of all values.¹¹ This description created a more distinct separation between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, with the latter seen as a rejection of all forms of activity and as a prominent element of the “interior life” accessible only to a small group.¹² Christianity itself sanctioned and elevated contemplation, whose delights reveal the joys of the hereafter, namely communion with the divine, while at the same

⁷ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 119-120.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 18-19. As noted in Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1997): 60.

⁹ Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 1997: 61.

¹⁰ Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 1997: 61.

¹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1998: 85.

¹² Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 1993: 19.

time debasing the *vita activa* as a lower form of life.¹³ In *De civitate Dei* (Book XIX, Chapter 19) Augustine indicates there are three kinds of life: active, contemplative, and the mean between them. He argues for balance, writing that “One may not be so given to contemplation, that he neglect the good of his neighbour: nor so far in love with action that he forget Divine speculation.”¹⁴

Through contemplation, Augustine stresses, a person is led to the truth, and he indicates that the “holy search after truth”, “our first resolution”, must be the purpose of one’s life unless “the necessity of charity” is imposed upon them.¹⁵ Augustine heavily inspired Boethius, whose *Consolation of Philosophy* (524 CE) offers a consideration of what it means to live a good life. The imprisoned, downcast Boethius is visited by Philosophy, who reveals to him that the reason for his “sickness” is that he has forgotten who he is and has fallen into sorrow and exile. Boethius has neglected to understand the aim and end of all things, and he has forgotten the methods by which the universe is led and controlled.¹⁶ Contemplation and reasoning are therefore identified here as essential. Additionally, in his *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas notes that while the contemplative life is lived by that “most proper” to man, his mind, the active life involves “the lower powers also, common to us and brutes”.¹⁷ Aquinas is thus emphasising that while in contemplation a person engages with something greater than themselves, in the active life they perform activities common to other animals. The *vita contemplativa* is therefore presented as “other worldly”, gazing “longingly towards an imaginary *hors-texte*, the eternal, a realm of pure stillness, of human inactivity – of human absence, indeed.”¹⁸

Contradicting this view was Florentine Coluccio Salutati, who sought to restore the philosophy of the *vita activa politica*, or active political life. His personal letters contain references to the significance of the *vita activa*¹⁹, and in 1372 Salutati began work on a treatise, *De Vita Associabili et Operativa*, either opposed to or seeking to expand upon Petrarch’s *De Vita*

¹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1998: 16; Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 1997: 61.

¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, vol. 2, trans. John Healey (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909): 234.

¹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, 1909: 234.

¹⁶ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008): 6,7.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1947: IIa-IIæ, Q.182, art. 1.

¹⁸ Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, 1997: 61.

¹⁹ In one such letter, he writes, “the active life is inferior, but many times is to be preferred”, and stresses that such a life “produces and begets” contemplation.

Solitaria.²⁰ Petrarch's work emphasises three kinds of solitude, solitude of place (*solitudo loci*), solitude of time (*solitudo temporis*, which he writes is experienced by all people in sleep), and solitude of mind (*solitudo animi*). His argument essentially distinguishes only between the *solitudo loci* and the *solitudo animi*. Petrarch writes that, in order to achieve *solitudo loci*, a person must rid themselves of their concerns.

Of what value to me is the entrance to places alone, what of the fact [that] winding streams carry me along, what help are the lustrous woods, what use are the fixed mountains, if wherever I go my mind follows, to the same extent in the woods as in the towns? It is that [i.e. the mind] which before all else must be put aside; that, I say, that must be left behind at home, and it must be humbly begged of the Lord that he make a pure heart within me, and to renew an upright spirit in this heart. Only then will I penetrate the hidden life of solitude.²¹

In his work, *Salutati* raises this key argument which presents a challenge to Petrarch: "Since according to the Christian faith man was meant to gain eternal beatitude, why would nature have created him a social and political animal if life in the company of his fellows were incapable of providing another path to salvation?"²² In his writings to his friend Zambecari, who was deliberating entering the contemplative life and becoming a monk, *Salutati* urges him to consider serving his family, relatives, friends and state in an active life devoted to God, which requires the person to be perfectly motivated by God and to love God.²³ This necessity obliged *Salutati* to state that the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* must be united to a certain extent, though the active life must still be valued more greatly than the contemplative life as the former uses the love of God in the service of others, while the second is centred on the self.²⁴

²⁰ *Salutati* never finished his book and instead, in 1381, produced a completely different work entitled *De Saeculo et Religione* (On the Secular Life and the Religious Life), which functioned as a spiritual guide for a friend of his who was entering a monastery. Hans Baron speculates that *Salutati* never finished his work on the active political life because the religious preference for contemplation and the link between religious contemplation and medieval Stoic philosophy still carried much weight. See Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 134, 135.

²¹ Petrarch, *De vita solitaria*, I, iv. 6. English translation taken from Alexander Lee, *Petrarch and St Augustine: classical scholarship, Christian theology, and the origins of the Renaissance in Italy* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012): 188.

²² Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 1988: 136.

²³ Coluccio *Salutati*, "Letter to Pellegrino Zambecari", trans. Ronald G. Witt, in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978): 110.

²⁴ Lee, *Petrarch and St Augustine*, 2012: 15.

Devotional developments during the medieval period saw the *vita contemplativa* becoming more accessible for the laity. There was a spread in production of Books of Hours and of the Gospels for private meditational use, a rise in Eucharistic adoration in churches, a growth in processions for the feast of Corpus Christi, and a spread in private revelations and visions.²⁵

Blancus clearly emphasises the *vita activa* by showing Mary and Jesus busy preparing the fish, the “earthly food” described by the epigram, in the foreground. The inclusion of a fish in a scene of the Holy Family is an uncommon occurrence, but the fish itself was in fact a prominent symbol in Carmelite iconography of the seventeenth century.²⁶ It particularly found visualisation in the allegorical subject of the Mystical Trout, in which Joseph catches trout from a stream and gives them to the Christ Child who, using his finger, marks each fish with a cross.²⁷ The story goes on to state that the Virgin Mary presents these fish to St Teresa, while at the same time pressing her Son’s breast from which a spring flows, eventually becoming a river; in this river Teresa replaces these fish, symbolic of the vocations provided her by the Holy Family, and they then swim to Carmel where the river empties.²⁸ Chorpenning notes this allegory is inspired by the following passage in Teresa’s *Book of Foundations* (1582).

Only those who have experienced it will believe what pleasure we get from these foundations when we find ourselves at last in a cloister which can be entered by no one from the world. For, however much we may love those in the world, our love is not enough to deprive us of our great happiness when we find ourselves alone. It is as when a great many fish are taken from the river in a net: they cannot live unless they are put back in the river. Even so it is with souls accustomed to live in the streams of the water of their Spouse: if they are drawn out of them by nets, which are the things of the world, they can have no true life until they find themselves back again.²⁹

Thus, Blancus’ depiction of the fish, which Jesus and Mary prepare together, prompts the viewer to recall to mind this allegory and also places the image within a distinct Carmelite framework.

Notwithstanding the Carmelite references, the fish was already a prominent symbol in early Christianity which evoked the divinity of Christ. The fish itself came to represent the Greek

²⁵ Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 1993: 24.

²⁶ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 128, n. 84.

²⁷ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 128-129, n. 84.

²⁸ Chorpenning, “St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative”, 2011: 129, n. 84.

²⁹ Teresa of Avila, *The Complete Works of St Teresa of Avila, volume 3*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns & Oates, 2002): 203.

phrase “Iesous Christos THEou Uios Soter”³⁰, which forms the acronym “ichthus”, the word for “fish”.³¹ The fact that Blancus depicts Jesus holding the fish gives additional emphasis to this symbolic relationship. Mary’s preparing to cut the fish and thus shed its blood no doubt foreshadows Christ’s impending sacrifice, with the assistance of the boy Jesus suggesting their co-operation in the divine plan for the redemption of mankind. The overcharged prominence of the fish in this engraving also calls to mind biblical accounts of miraculous events involving fish. Jesus’ holding of the fish, and its size, convey a visual link with the accounts of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Additionally, the engraving’s visual conjunction of child and fish call to mind the numerous Renaissance representations of Tobias and the angel, who use a fish to cure Tobias’ father of his blindness; see, for example, Benozzo Gozzoli’s fresco in the church of Sant’ Agostino in San Gimignano (Plate 5.4.), completed in 1465, in which the child Tobias, who carries a large fish, is led by the hand by Raphael.³²

Further activity is present in the engraving in the dog begging at Jesus’ feet and the fire burning beside Mary and Jesus, its smoke rising high. In Christian iconography, the dog can be interpreted as a symbol of the faithful believer, of the Good Shepherd, and of the clergy, particularly the Dominican order;³³ Blancus’ depiction of the dog’s close interaction with the boy Jesus may be interpreted as an allegory of the desire of the faithful, such as the members of the Archconfraternity, to know Jesus.³⁴ The burning fire may communicate sacrifice, thus once again reflecting the sacrifice of Christ; it may also bear a relationship with the presence of God the Father, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and God the Holy Spirit, who was made manifest to the apostles as tongues of fire on Pentecost.³⁵ The inclusion of earthenware pots act as a reference to domestic work and productivity with the lumber planks and hammers in the background, further referencing Joseph’s trade. Further, as has been mentioned, the angel’s spread wings seem to indicate it has just entered the scene, and its

³⁰ Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour.

³¹ Micah Lee Issitt and Carlyn Main, *Hidden Religion: The Greatest Mysteries and Symbols of the World’s Religious Beliefs* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LCC, 2014): 50. The authors indicate it is unclear whether the symbol of the fish as representative of Christ preceded the co-opting of “ichthus”.

³² Diane Cole Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli: Tradition and Innovation in Renaissance Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996):125.

³³ The name “Dominican” literally means “dogs of God”, with their emblem of a black-and-white dog with a burning torch in its mouth signifying the order’s “watchdog function” and their readiness to refute and dispel heresy. Hope B. Werness, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2006): 139

³⁴ Werness, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art*, 2006: 139.

³⁵ Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, 1961: 42; Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography*, 2013: 668.

gestures and body language direct us to the heavenly sphere, shown radiating as the clouds part.

In the midst of all this action, however, Blancus places the sleeping Joseph who, judging by the presence of the angel, may be dreaming. The scene of Joseph's dream, in which the divine will is revealed to him through the message of an angel, has featured as an artistic subject in its own right.³⁶ The dream itself has been historically regarded as a means by which an individual can establish an effective and real communication with the supernatural, and in the Old Testament it is cast as "a privileged instrument of divine revelation which helps individuals to rise with respect to the contingency of the present moment."³⁷ Therefore, the dreams of Joseph of Nazareth act as an effective link with patriarchal figures of the Old Testament, a comparison which, as has been demonstrated, Gracián seeks to emphasise throughout his *Summary*.

Scripture records four dreams of Joseph, all of which occur within the Gospel of Matthew: the annunciation to Joseph (1:20-21), the warning to flee to Egypt (2:13), the instruction to return to Israel (2:19-20), and the warning not to enter Judaea (2:22). Matthew's description of the annunciation to Joseph follows the pattern laid out in the Old Testament for the typical annunciation of birth. In his study of the three Christmas stories contained within the Gospels, Fr Raymond E. Brown, S.S. notes that the annunciation pattern, which is also presented in Luke's Gospel, albeit in a different way, bears particular relationship with those concerning the births of Isaac (Gen 17: 15-21) and of Samson (Jdg 13).³⁸ Therefore, the very manner of the angel's revelation to Joseph of the Mystery of the Incarnation finds a parallel with similar instances in the Old Testament Scriptures. This parallel gives the New Testament narrative

³⁶ The dream of Joseph flourished as an iconographic subject during the seventeenth century. Among many examples Georges de la Tour's 1640 picture, and Francisco de Moncada's 1760 painting. For de la Tour, see Jacques Thullier, *Georges de la Tour* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993): 290. For de Moncada, see Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: Figure 18.

³⁷ Manes, *The Melody of Silence*, 2014: 167. Manes makes particular reference to dreams which contain commands from God (Jacob in Genesis 31:11-18,24; Solomon in 1 Kings 3:5-15), and dreams in which God communicates through images (Joseph in Genesis 37:5-11, 40:9ff; Gideon in Judges 7:13ff; Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:4).

³⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *An Adult Christ at Christmas: Essays on the Three Biblical Christmas Stories, Matthew 2 and Luke 2* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1978): 10. In the annunciation of the birth of Isaac, the angel tells Abraham, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac" (Gen 17:19), an address which bears likeness to that conveyed in Matthew's account of the annunciation to Joseph. Furthermore, in the Book of Judges the angel of the Lord addresses the wife of Manoah in a similar way, saying that she will "conceive and bear a son" who will be "a nazirite (that is, consecrated) to God from birth" and who will "begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Jdg 13:2, 5). This bears comparison to the angel's message to Joseph that Mary will conceive and bear a son who will "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

greater legitimacy and encourages it to be more easily read as an encounter between the human and the divine.

Joseph's dreaming may establish a further connection between him and Joseph of Egypt, who is titled as the "man of dreams" (Gen 37:5, 9, 19). His dreams differ from the dreams of Daniel, which are apocalyptic, and they do not need an interpreter or carry revelation.³⁹ Their primary function is to emphasise and clarify Joseph's legal paternity and familial authority, primarily expressed in the angel's commands that Joseph take Mary as his wife, name the child and thus confer ancestry upon him, take Mary and Jesus into Egypt, and return and settle in Nazareth.⁴⁰

These angelic visitations to Joseph in sleep in a sense emphasise his "aleness". Unlike Mary who questions the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation (Luke 1:34), there is no one with whom Joseph can speak or from whom he can receive explanations and reassurance. Joseph is alone and makes his decisions in solitude and silence, and when the angel does guide him along the right path, it is in a dream, with no opportunity for Joseph to discuss or question.⁴¹ In each instance, once Joseph awakens from sleep he seems to waste no time in acting, which once more indicates his obedience and remarkable trust in God, qualities which are especially emphasised in the fact that the revelations he received were limited to dreams.⁴² As already discussed, the obedience and trust Joseph shows in his response to these dreams, along with his practice of contemplation, are given emphasis by Gracián in the *Summary*.

Although Blancus' Joseph rests his head on his hand with his eyes closed, he is not shown lying prostrate in bed. This representation contrasts with the established visual depiction of dreams. In his fresco cycle at Assisi, Giotto includes the scene of Pope Innocent's prophetic dream of St Francis, depicting the robed pontiff sleeping on a bed (Plate 5.5.).⁴³ Piero della Francesca's fresco scene of the dream of Constantine (Plate 5.6.), completed between 1452 and 1466 for the church of San Francesco in Arezzo, places the emperor in bed and surrounded by guards

³⁹ These dreams simply provide the context for the angel's message. See Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 1997: 129.

⁴⁰ Brown notes (*The Birth of the Messiah*, 1997: 129) that while in patriarchal times the naming of the child could be performed by either the father or the mother (Gen 4:25; 5:3), bestowing this role upon Joseph gives him fatherly authority over the child. This role is further explored by Griffin ("Saint Joseph", 1972: 224), who states that naming Jesus, Joseph makes him a member of the chosen people and bestows upon him his legal ancestry as a son of David.

⁴¹ Zuffetti, *L'uomo dei sette silenzi*, 2012: 8.

⁴² Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009): 94.

⁴³ Joachim Poeschke, *Italian Frescoes, the Age of Giotto: 1280-1400* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2005): 42.

and a servant.⁴⁴ In contrast, Blancus' Joseph is fully dressed and sitting upright on a bench. His attire and posture thus make him a figure combining sleep and wakefulness or alertness. In this context, his resting of his head on his hand and his closed eyes could be seen as gestures of contemplation or visionary experience, rather than sleep. Blancus' depiction of Joseph here seems thus to be an elaboration of earlier representations of Joseph as the sleeper-visionary, particularly in scenes of the Nativity, with prominent examples found in Giotto's fresco in the Scrovegni Chapel (Plate 5.7.), and in Filippo Lippi's *Adoration of the Child*, held in the Uffizi (Plate 5.8.).⁴⁵ His head-on-hand pose also calls to mind Michelangelo's Sistine frescoes of the prophets, in particular Isaiah (Plate 5.9.), who has perhaps just been awoken from the same posture.⁴⁶

The subject of Joseph's contemplation and prayer is discussed by Gracián in the opening chapters of Book V of the *Summary*. Gracián writes that Joseph practices all the virtues of good mental prayer: meditating upon his family, fostering conversation with Christ, forgetting the world and its created things, freeing himself from passions, and cultivating patience and perseverance which he demonstrated not only in his trials and in his work, but also in company with Christ, with whom he walked in contemplation.⁴⁷ Further, Gracián considers Joseph's interior silence, which he identifies as an entire peace of soul, a tranquillity of conscience, and a stillness of all power which is born of the secrets spoken by God in the depths of the human heart.⁴⁸ This interior silence, he writes, was achieved by Joseph through his conversation with Jesus and Mary, a point established already in Blancus' engraving discussed in the previous chapter.⁴⁹

In Book V, Gracián offers a description of the daily life of the Holy Family, writing that when Joseph returned home, exhausted after his work, he would take Jesus into his arms so that Mary could more freely perform her household tasks:

...e riposandosi il fanciulino nelle sue braccia, esso Giosef ancora si riposava nelle braccia d'Iddio, dimeticandosi di tutti i suoi travagli, e cessando ogni angoscia, e partendosi finalmente da lui qual si voglia afflitione, perche (riponeva tutti i suoi

⁴⁴ Judith Veronica Field, *Piero della Francesca: A Mathematician's Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 199.

⁴⁵ For Giotto's fresco, see Alessandro Tomei, *Giotto* (Florence: Giunti, 1998): 21.

⁴⁶ Eugène Müntz, *Michelangelo* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2017): 82-83.

⁴⁷ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 298.

⁴⁸ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 313.

⁴⁹ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 314.

pensieri in Dio, e da esso era nutrito come fanciullo) in premio di esser esso Iddio bambino nutrito e allevato da esso Giosef.

[...with Jesus resting in the arms of Joseph, I know Joseph also rested in the arms of God, forgetting all his trials, and ceasing every agony, and finally parting with his afflictions, because he surrendered all his thoughts to God, who nurtured Joseph as a child as reward for Joseph's nurturing of Jesus as a child.]⁵⁰

This description of Joseph "resting in the arms of God" perhaps again calls to mind the engraving of Book I, in which Joseph and Mary are shown literally held "in God's arms" as they solemnise their marriage, and also that of Book III which shows Jesus resting his hands on the shoulders of Joseph and Mary. In this passage, Gracián strongly emphasises the nurturing role of God, who takes on the trials, afflictions and thoughts of Joseph almost in a paternal way.

Gracián notes that the rest and sleep of Joseph is extraordinary. He writes that while in ordinary sleep the soul is at rest, in Joseph's sleep his soul is "watchful, and more awake and alert than ever", before continuing:

Como si el Rey mandasse cerrar las puertas, y reposar los porteros, por que esta occupado en algun negocio de importancia, y no quiere que nadie le distraja: assi haze el libre aluedrio, quando se recoge en su retrete de la porcion superior para recibir altissimos secretos del Cielo, que manda dormir a todos los porteros de los sentidos, para que no le distrayan con otros pensamientos. Desta manera era el sueño de Ioseph, quando vino el Angel: porque aunque dormia, su coraçon velava, y no era sueño ordinario, que se llama ymagen de muerte, que mientras dura no ay diferencia del hombre a la bestia.

[Just as the king orders that the doors be closed and that guards be posted because he is occupied with some matter of great importance, and he does not want anyone to interrupt him, the will, when it retires into the secret dwelling place of the superior part of the soul to receive the most sublime heavenly secrets, commands all the sentinels that keep watch over the senses to let them sleep so that they do not distract it with other thoughts. This is what St Joseph's sleep was like when the angel spoke to him. Although he was sleeping, his heart was vigilant; it was not ordinary sleep, which is called an image of death, and in which man does not differ from beast.]⁵¹

Blancus offers a powerful communication of the depth of Joseph's sleep in his engraving. Joseph is not simply dozing, wearied by the cares of duty and responsibility; rather, in his sleep he engages in active communication with the divine through the presence of the angel. Further,

⁵⁰ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 315.

⁵¹ Gracián, *Sumario*, 1597: 128-129. English translation taken from Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 120.

the accompanying epigram's description of the saint being "thrice blessed" is, according to Chorpenning, a clear allusion to the three angelic visitations experienced by Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew.⁵² The epigram, however, extends beyond this in its reference to Joseph as also "four times blessed". This perhaps indicates the communication between the saint and the divine which occurs outside of sleep, and of the continued contemplation he experiences, even in his home at Nazareth. The epigram indicates that these blessings instil in Joseph a great gift of peace, expressed in the provision of bodily and spiritual food by Mary and Jesus. Of such nourishment, Gracián writes,

Avevano sì gran vigore e forza le parole di Christo Gesù, e della Sacratissima Vergine Maria, per quietar e pacificare i cuori, di chi l'udiavano che quantunque quello di Giosef fosse stato il più unquieto, e perturbato d'ogni altro, il solo udir continuamente le parole della sua Sposa, e del suo bambino Christo Gesù, sarebbe stato bastante a farlo godere questo silenzio interiore, che è un ritratto vero della beatitudine.

[The words of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Virgin Mary, had such power and strength to calm and pacify the heart that, although Joseph's heart was more restless and perturbed than any other, he only had to hear the words of his Spouse and of the Child Jesus to dwell in that interior silence which is a true image of heavenly blessing.]⁵³

These words may also find a presence in Blancus' engraving. Jesus' mouth appears to be open, and he is almost smiling, while Mary seems to listen intently as she concentrates on her task. This visualisation directly communicates Gracián's text, which emphasises that it is the conversation of Jesus and Mary which places Joseph in the sphere of peace and contemplation.

In exploring the distinctions and balance between action and contemplation, Gracián's *Summary* connects with the writings of St Teresa of Ávila, who shared a close relationship with the author.⁵⁴ Teresa identifies the balance between action and contemplation as the goal of the spiritual life, and the concluding chapter of her *Interior Castle* incorporates this message to her sisters:

⁵² Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 120.

⁵³ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 214.

⁵⁴ Gracián shared a close relationship with Teresa of Ávila, who was an essential proponent in the advancement of the cult of Joseph across Western Europe. Attributing her healing from a serious illness to Joseph's intercession, Teresa encouraged others to develop their own devotion to the saint. Teresa began to see Joseph as her spiritual father and as the father of the reformed Carmel, which came to regard the saint as its founder. It can be argued that given Teresa's close relationship with Gracián, and Gracián's fidelity to her foundations and spirituality, Teresa's devotion to Joseph strongly influenced Gracián's own dedication to the saint.

I insist again: your foundation must not consist of prayer and contemplation alone: unless you acquire the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs... believe me, both Martha and Mary must entertain Our Lord and keep Him as their Guest, nor must they be so inhospitable as to offer Him no food. How can Mary do this while she sits at His feet, if her sister does not help her?⁵⁵

In these words, which are reflective of the writings of Salutati and Augustine, Teresa stresses that possessing and practicing the virtues are essential for spiritual growth, and that, as she emphasises in the case of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), there must be a cooperation between action and contemplation in order to achieve spiritual fulfilment. This theme of cooperation is one that is adopted in the *Summary*, through Blancus' engraving, Gracián's text, and Morale's epigram.

The dichotomy of action and contemplation is a proven feature in scenes of the Holy Family in which Joseph is sleeping. Notably, when artists choose to depict Joseph in sleep they often place him in a corner and removed from the main focus or movement of the piece. In Sebastiano del Piombo's *The Madonna and Child with Saint Joseph, Saint John the Baptist and a Donor* (Plate 5.10.), the Madonna and Child are observed by an adult John the Baptist, and adored by the donor who kneels below, his hands crossed over his chest in blessing and the Madonna's hand resting on his shoulder. The Child Jesus, clutching at his mother's veil, seems as if he is stepping off her lap and onto the arm of the chair, the line of his extended leg drawing the viewer's gaze down the work. Behind these figures, a grey-haired, bearded Joseph sleeps beside an open curtain,⁵⁶ turned away from the centre of the work and resting his head on his hands.

Such depictions have formed the view that artists sought to present Joseph as an ineffectual, elderly and weary figure, exhausted by the demands of marital and familial life. This view neglects to consider that in Scripture, Joseph slept, and while he slept he received instruction regarding his paternal and authoritative role.⁵⁷ The depiction of Joseph sleeping should thus be read as an expression not merely of weariness, incapacity, or an inability to cope with the demands of family life, but a sign of his openness to the will and instruction of God. Further, it reinforces the established typological connections between Joseph the Patriarch and Joseph

⁵⁵ Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle, or The Mansions, translated from the Autograph of St Teresa of Jesus by the Benedictines of Stanbrook*, 3rd ed. (London: Thomas Baker, 1921): 292, 293, 294.

⁵⁶ The inclusion of the curtain in this depiction, and the placement of Joseph beside it, can be seen as a further representation of his role in the Mystery of Redemption.

⁵⁷ Sheingorn, "Joseph's Failure at Familial Discipline", 2002: 157.

of Egypt. Just as Joseph of the Old Testament, the interpreter of dreams and the victim of his brothers' jealousy, is led as a slave into Egypt, thereby saving Israel, so too does Joseph of Nazareth receive revelation in his dreams, and as a result of the envy of Herod is forced to flee into Egypt in order to save the infant Christ, and ultimately all of humanity.⁵⁸

Joseph's openness to divine instruction is also expressed in Battista and Dosso Dossi's *Nativity with Annunciation to the Shepherds* (Plate 2.7). As previously discussed, the similarities depicted in this work between God the Father and Joseph reflect Joseph's acceptance of and openness to the divine will; however, this work also demonstrates a clear balance between action and contemplation. While Joseph kneels before the Child in reverent adoration, and perhaps contemplation, the fact that he is dressed in traveller's clothing indicates action, readiness, and that he is prepared to move at any moment whenever the need may arise.⁵⁹ Within Joseph, therefore, the balance of the "interior life" – of action and contemplation – is powerfully demonstrated, and this balance is also communicated by Blancus in his engraving.

Gracián's emphasis on the need for balance between action and contemplation would have held importance for the Archconfraternity which, as has been indicated, was comprised predominately of men involved in the wood-working crafts. The combination and harmony between action and contemplation expressed in Blancus' engravings provided clear instruction on the proper focus of work: it was not solely a person's primary objective, but was intrinsically connected with prayer and devotion to God.

Gracián concludes with instruction to the Archconfraternity which is centred on achieving this balance between action and contemplation. He first encourages the brethren to cultivate and nurture their prayer life through recitation of the Our Father, and through spending a small time, either in the evening or before work, in meditation on the life and passion of Christ, on the favours, graces, and blessings which they have received from Christ, and on their many grave sins, on death, judgement, hell, and glory.⁶⁰ It is important to note that Gracián stresses this meditation should be placed either at the end of the day, which may thus enable it to function as a sort of examination of conscience and of the day's activities, or before work has commenced, and thus a way to guide and direct labour. In this way, Gracián represents once more the importance of balancing action and contemplation. He then stresses the importance

⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Life and Glories of St Joseph*, 2013: 17.

⁵⁹ Wilson, *St Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 2011: 45.

⁶⁰ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 255.

of daily Mass attendance not only for the brethren, but also for any Christian, indicating that without this custom it is impossible to recognise the spiritual and temporal goods of this life and to avoid and flee dangers.⁶¹ Extending his instruction here beyond the brethren fulfils the original stated intention of Fr Zaragoza, Master of St Peter's, to produce this book for the goodness of all souls and thus spread it beyond the Archconfraternity.

Gracián further urges the brethren to remember Jesus, Mary, and Joseph while at work: to recall whenever taking into their hands the saw, the plane, the axe, or any other instrument that Jesus and Joseph worked in the same way, and that both Mary and Joseph remained with Christ to hear his words and to contemplate the highest mysteries.⁶² In this way, Gracián successfully combines elements of action and contemplation, stressing that the brethren pursue contemplation and union with God even when engaging in labour. Finally, the author urges the brethren to fulfil, with sincerity of heart, all commands and statutes surrounding the celebration of feasts, the liturgy of Mass and Vespers, and the observation of solemnities, in order that they will not only perform “exterior ceremonies”, but also “a real and true devotion”.⁶³ This also communicates an appropriate balance between action and contemplation, with Gracián's words encouraging the brethren to celebrate the customs and rituals of faith with true devotion, rather than simply performing the actions.

Like the engraving preceding Book II, Blancus' engraving accompanying Book V of the *Summary* can be considered as part of the “Holy House of Nazareth” iconographic genre in that it presents the Holy Family within a domestic interior and occupied with domestic tasks. In this engraving, the action and work of Mary and Jesus, who prepare the fish in the foreground, is effectively balanced against the contemplative Joseph, shown receiving divine instruction in sleep. In this way, Blancus visualises the emphasis Gracián places in seeking harmony between action and contemplation, a subject which, as has been demonstrated, was particularly important for St Teresa. The image reinforces that both the active and the contemplative life are essential to family harmony. Furthermore, at its heart the engraving expresses the epigram's description of Joseph being blessed with both “bodily and spiritual food” prepared by the Virgin and Child. The emblematic cooperation of text, epigram and image ultimately work to present Joseph, while working hard to provide for his family, as

⁶¹ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 256.

⁶² Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 257.

⁶³ ...*non solo fieno cerimonie esteriori, ma anche reale e vera devozione*. Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 257.

receiving the benefits of their love for him and as enjoying the blessings that come through true contemplation of the divine presence.