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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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CONCLUSION

In the closing chapters of his *Summary*, Gracián gives a brief account of his own devotion to St Joseph, whom he indicates he first came to know as a young boy. He writes that from Joseph, and from the Virgin Mary, he experienced many interior and exterior graces; many as a child and young man, some as a religious, as a superior, and as a fugitive, and particularly in his trials, exiles, journeys, shipwrecks, captivity, and finally in his freedom.¹ Consequently, the image of Joseph that arises in the *Summary* is not surprising and is tightly aligned to Gracián's own experience and relationship with the saint.

The *Summary*, through its consideration of Joseph's qualities, roles and responsibilities, presents Joseph as an inspiring saintly model of masculinity and a powerful intercessor for both laymen and the labourers. It successfully achieves this through its emblematic composition, which this thesis has shown to be a crucial factor when considering the *Summary's* message. Fr Chorpenning states that the engravings of the *Summary*, with their combination of picture and epigram, represent "the full potential of the printed image".² Following Chorpenning's pioneering study of the *Summary*, this thesis has demonstrated just how closely linked these three elements are, arguing that the engravings of the *Summary* would by no means achieve their true function without collaboration with the epigrams and text *de facto*; likewise, the text of the *Summary* cannot be fully understood without the engravings and epigrams. It is through their cooperation that the *Summary* presents a comprehensive and authentic typology of Joseph, representing the saint in turn as the husband of the Virgin, the foster father of Jesus and a parallel of God the Artisan, as a just man, an angel on earth, as perfectly balancing action and contemplation, and as patron of the dying – in total, the complete fulfilment of contemporary masculine ideals. This portrayal of Joseph in the *Summary* was successful in codifying his typology, in encouraging devotion to and emulation of Joseph and in shaping how the faithful interacted with him, from the members of the Archconfraternity, its immediate audience, to devotional circles beyond.

Throughout the *Summary*, Joseph is presented as a parallel or fulfilment of the Old Testament patriarchs, particularly Joseph of Egypt. This is seen in Book I, where similarities between the two figures serve to present the saint as the only man, out of all men ever created, who could truly fulfil the role of Mary's husband. The engraving preceding Book III, in its presentation

¹ Gracián, *Sommario*, 1597: 338.

² Chorpenning, "St Joseph as Guardian Angel, Artisan, and Contemplative", 2011: 124.

of Jesus resting his hands upon Mary and Joseph's shoulders, corresponds with Gracián's description of Joseph as the "last stone" above which the cornerstone, Jesus, is placed, and as the containing within himself all the virtues of the Old Testament fathers. Book V, in its representation of Joseph's dream, connects the saint again with his Old Testament namesake but also with other key dreamers, such as David and Solomon. These analogies work to bestow validity upon the saint, to emphasise his legitimacy as Mary's husband and his fundamental role as the fulfilment, even summit, of the Old Testament patriarchs, and to present him as a more powerful model for veneration and imitation.

The *Summary* also characterises Joseph as an intimate participator in the Divine Mystery. This theme is given strong expression in Blancus' engraving preceding Book II, where the depiction of Jesus, Mary and Joseph each using thread in their work indicates their collaboration with God in bringing about divine Redemption. The engraving preceding Book IV also explores this theme in its focus on the preparation of a fish for dinner. Here, Mary and Jesus prepare the food while Joseph, in a dream state, is inspired by an angel. The whole scene allegorically references the co-operation of the Holy Family in shielding the Mystery of the Incarnation and in allowing for Redemption to occur through the Passion of Jesus.

This collaboration ultimately reveals Joseph to be intimately connected and to collaborate with God the Father, and further parallels the Holy Family with the Holy Trinity. The pyramidal compositions of Blancus' engravings, some more explicit and others more creative, have been shown to illustrate this concept in an immediately tangible way by literally envisioning the Holy Family as the axis of the pyramid. The communion between the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity is given direct reference in the engraving preceding Book I. Its semi-anthropomorphic inclusion of God the Father, whose physical encircling of Mary and Joseph unifies them intimately, is accompanied by Gracián's parallel of each member of the Holy Family with a respective Person of the Trinity. This composition is paralleled in the engraving preceding Book III, in which Jesus at the apex encircles the shoulders of his seated parents. Joseph takes the hieratic position in the second and fifth engravings, with the engraving preceding Book II successfully collaborating with Morale's epigram and Gracián's description of Joseph's fulfilment of the offices of fatherhood to parallel him with God the Father. The engravings accompanying Books IV and VI still incorporate a pyramidal structure, but in a less overt way. The inclusion of this compositional element throughout the engravings of the *Summary* successfully unifies them and communicates in a deeper way the intimate and harmonious cooperation of the Holy Family and their connection with the Holy Trinity.

The *Summary* effectively presents Joseph as an imitable model of fatherhood, despite the fact he did not generate Jesus. Blancus' tender scene of familial intimacy preceding Book II depicts Joseph closely working with Jesus and alongside Mary, whose modest posture and gaze indicates her submission to him as her husband. Blancus' masterful composition of this scene works to communicate each of the offices of fatherhood identified by Gracián in the text of his chapter, thus successfully demonstrating that Joseph can rightfully be titled the "father of Jesus". Book IV also offers a representation of Joseph as father through the visual depiction of Joseph carrying Jesus on his shoulders, presenting for the viewer a scene of familial tenderness and fatherly care which is given additional emphasis in Gracián's description of Joseph's protection of Jesus and Mary in all their trials.

Joseph's masculinity is also depicted in the *Summary* as genuine and tangible. Although Book I adopts the view that Joseph and Mary shared a virginal marriage, it presents this marriage in a way which does not deny Joseph the rights and responsibilities of a husband. In this way, it reflects the works of Augustine and Aquinas, among others, the Counter-Reformational shift in approaching sacramental marriage, and the developing interest and growth in the recognition of saints who were virginal and married, especially St Elzear of Sabran and his wife, Blessed Delphine. Although Book II shows Joseph interacting with Mary and Jesus in an intimate family scene, it does not follow the tradition of the apocryphal narratives and Mystery plays in using domestic scenarios to downplay his masculine authority. Rather, the tender scene of the Holy Family in Joseph's workshop reflects the spread of the *devotio moderna*, encouraging a deeper consideration of the humanity of Jesus and of the Holy Family's everyday life and struggles. Joseph, at the apex of the composition, is clearly articulated as the family head and authority. In this way, the Holy Family reflected contemporary ideals, becoming relevant and easy to emulate. The "just man" presented in Book III is shown to contain within himself all theological and moral virtues, and thus Joseph is presented as a figure whom men could feel confident and comfortable in imitating. The balance of joy and sorrow and of action and contemplation that Joseph possesses in Books IV and V would have been relatable to the *Summary*'s contemporary audience as they navigated a society in the stages of redefinition after the turbulence of war, plague and religious upheaval. Finally, Book V's representation of Joseph dying in the arms of Jesus and Mary offers a reassuring picture for the *Summary*'s audience, presenting "a good death" as something which is both desirable and attainable.

Joseph is therefore powerfully presented in the *Summary* as an imitable model of sanctity. This is largely achieved by Blancus' depictions of simple scenes relevant to his contemporary

audience: a marriage, a family busy at work and sharing times of great joy and intimacy as well as experiences of suffering. The settings and scenes are not idealised, nor are the figures accompanied by supernatural beings, angels, or divine fanfare³. With the exception of the first engraving, in which Mary and Joseph are accompanied by the priest and the visual-textual representation of God the Father through the descending arms and the Tetragrammaton, and of the fifth which features the angel, Blancus depicts the Holy Family in isolation. This choice arguably works to communicate even more strongly the *Summary*'s representation of the Holy Family as a model worthy and capable of emulation. The simplicity of these scenes is both a reflection of and reflected by the text *de facto*. Although Gracián indicates that a key aim of his work is to achieve the glory of the saint, he does so in a way which makes Joseph relatable to the sixteenth-century layman: the primary audience of the book.

The *Summary*'s impact on Josephine devotion has been profound. Still, there are elements of the *Summary*'s influence which have not yet been explored in depth. This thesis' refined scope has highlighted several areas which could potentially form the basis of future works. The limited information available on the circumstances and process of the writing of the *Summary* has meant this study has not entered into a deep consideration of the work's patronage and commissioning, both of which would contribute further to the exploration of the *Summary*'s composition. Further, due to the inaccessibility of archival material regarding the Archconfraternity's links to the *Summary*, and regarding the Oratory of St Joseph's acquisition of the Italian translation of the text, this study has not explored the deeper history of the document. Future research may explore these areas, as well as the life and work of Christophorus Blancus, about whom little is known.

An overarching aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate the need for deeper scholarly attention to the field of Josephine research and for the advancement of Josephine theology. It is clear that the *Summary* itself, by presenting a comprehensive typology of the saint, sought to unite all elements of Josephine theology and thereby offer clear doctrinal and devotional instruction. In his book, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus: the complete life, theology and devotional history of St Joseph*, Fr Francis L. Filas raises pertinent questions regarding the reasons for researching and advancing Josephine theology. He writes:

What is the purpose of studying the theology of St Joseph? Should we not be content to accept the saint merely as the protector of Mary and Jesus, calling him

³ When God is depicted in the first engraving, it is a very simple illustration which emphasises His close intimacy with Mary and Joseph more than it asserts His power.

“foster father”? Why seek greater knowledge, through study of Scripture and Church history, when, as everyone knows, there is so little to be known about the saint? Why risk imposing upon the rights of the Father Almighty, or detracting from the dignity and rank of the Blessed Virgin?⁴

Filas indicates that the principal answer to such questions lies in the fact that “knowledge is the basis for action”, and that the more the faithful know about Joseph, the more they will love, imitate, and seek to learn all possible details of his dignity and holiness.⁵ In essence, Filas is suggesting that by understanding the life and actions of an ideal of masculine behaviour such as Joseph, the faithful will be inspired to live in the same way.

By interpreting representations of Joseph’s masculinity and fatherhood, such as those found in the *Summary*, in light of their particular social, religious, and cultural contexts, a clearer understanding of and appreciation for the history of devotion and society can be gained. Joseph is presented here as the definitive model of the ideal man. Examining the *Summary*’s construction of Joseph as a model of masculinity allows us to enter, to a degree, the sixteenth-century world of Blancus, Morale and Gracián. In its presentation of masculine ideals, the *Summary* emphasises that the seemingly one-dimensional concept of “masculinity” is much more complex and rich than originally thought. It encourages the emergence of a more realistic portrait of men and maleness. The ideal man is presented as successfully occupying authority and responsibility within the family unit, while also actively engaging in an intimate and harmonious relationship with his wife and children and cultivating authentic interaction with God. This presentation can help to break down the narrow ideas of past views of masculinity and femininity. Even if an ideal, and projected through the lens of a saintly life, the *Summary* clarifies the values, expectations and possibilities engendered in Early Modern male performance. Perhaps such an understanding can offer contemporary historians a new view of the past and new ways of interpreting the performance of masculinities today.

⁴ Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 339.

⁵ Filas, *Joseph, the man closest to Jesus*, 1962: 340.