

# *A Complex Delight*

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The Secularization of the Breast

1350-1750

MARGARET R. MILES

*For Jane,*

*beloved friend and mentor,*

*Margaret*

*January 2008*



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## CONTENTS

PREFACE *ix*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *xiii*

I / The Secularization of the Breast I

### PART ONE

THE RELIGIOUS BREAST 27

2 / The Virgin's One Bare Breast 33

3 / Mary Magdalen's Penitent Breast 54

### PART TWO

THE SECULAR BREAST 77

4 / The Anatomical Breast 87

5 / The Pornographic Breast III

Afterword: A Complex Delight 131

NOTES 141

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 165

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS 171

INDEX 173

## *The Religious Breast*

There is something profoundly alien to modern sensibilities about the role of the body in medieval piety. . . . [For medieval Christians,] bodiliness provide[d] access to the sacred.

CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM

*"The Female Body and Religious Practice  
in the Later Middle Ages"*

LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PAINTINGS and sculptures of the Virgin Mary with one breast exposed existed alongside questions concerning the appropriateness of nakedness in religious painting. In the mid-fourteenth century, frequent depictions of the lactating Virgin suggest that this image was compellingly attractive to viewers. But in the sixteenth century, the debate over nakedness in religious painting intensified in Italy. Controversy was not focused on images of the Virgin, however, but on depictions of human figures in paintings of the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Flesh (plate 6 and figure 7).

Toward the end of the fifteenth century, the Dominican preacher Savonarola (d. 1498), a harsh critic of Florentine morals and doctrine, fulminated against nakedness in artistic representations of all kinds.<sup>1</sup> His sermons, with their vivid and violent imagery of destruction and devastation, evoked terror. Indeed, his threats that God would punish the sins of Florentine society were substantially supported by the plague epidemics, famines, and war suffered by the city. Savonarola's sermons typically ended with bonfires of "vanities," including such items as cosmetics, playing cards, dice, games, wigs, jewelry, perfumes, mirrors, and dolls. So-called lewd books—volumes of Petrarch and Boccaccio—and paintings of nudes also made their way to the fires.<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth-century art historian Giorgio Vasari reported that these were some of the most beautiful paintings of Renaissance Florence. Savonarola's preaching was so persuasive that several painters, such as Fra Bartolommeo and Lorenzo di Credi, brought their own paintings to the bonfires.

Savonarola preached distrust and fear of the sexual seductiveness of naked bodies. Luca Signorelli (1441–1523) argued—in paint—against this position two years after Savonarola's execution for challenging the ruling





Figure 7. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), *Last Judgment*, 1540. Sistine Chapel, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City (photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).

families of Florence. His *Resurrection of the Flesh* (c. 1500) in the San Brizio Chapel of the Orvieto Cathedral endeavored to show that nakedness need not convey the reductively sexual meaning applied to it by Savonarola, but that naked human bodies, the culmination of creation, were the perfect form for the communication of religious meaning (Plate 6).

Signorelli's painted bodies in *Resurrection of the Flesh* exhibit the characteristics of resurrected bodies described by Augustine in Book XXII of



*City of God*. The painting depicts the moment just after the trumpeting angels have called the blessed to resurrection. Bodies in various stages of enfleshment appear, climbing out of their graves, drawn by their eyes, which, according to Augustine, are now capable of a corporeal vision of God. The women and men have fully fleshed and muscled bodies—*real* bodies, as Augustine had insisted—even though they are also spiritual bodies and thus, like the angels, weightless. Several of the figures explore their new weightlessness, stretching out their arms to test the lightness of the air, or gently hugging each other. Here are bodies “risen and glorious,” in Augustine’s phrase.

The female nudes in this scene do not represent the erotic Renaissance female body. They have neither the small, high breasts nor the exaggerated belly that counted as erotic at that time. Moreover, the men and women touch each other with infinite tenderness but without urgency or passion. They “enjoy one another’s beauty for its own sake,” as Augustine had described. These bodies are sexed male and female, but Signorelli eliminated the visual signs of gender socialization that mark real bodies: he created “bones, muscles, sense organs, nerves, brain, lungs, and circulation” that are distinctively masculine or feminine,<sup>3</sup> but removed differences of posture, gesture, stance, and musculature so that female and male bodies appear equally strong, flexible, and expressive. Signorelli’s strategies for depicting religious bodies were apparently convincing to his contemporaries, for there is no evidence of controversy and his naked bodies were not subsequently overpainted.

Approximately forty years later, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) filled the apse wall of the Sistine Chapel with hundreds of naked bodies in his *Last Judgment*. Knowledgeable contemporaries such as Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi recognized Michelangelo as a consummate master in the representation of human bodies and considered his *Last Judgment* the apex of his talent as an artist. But critics like Pietro Aretino (discussed in chapter 5) and the papal master of ceremonies Biagio da Cesena claimed that the *Last Judgment* turned the holiest chapel in Rome into a “*stufa d’ignudi*” (public bath). Michelangelo responded: “No other kind of figuration is possible in a representation of resurrected creatures.” Beauty of body signaled the higher condition of humanity, he asserted: “No other proof, no other fruits of heaven on earth do we have.”<sup>4</sup> But the climate of opinion had shifted since Signorelli’s time, and religious nakedness was no longer credible. Within five years of its completion, Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* was overpainted to clothe the naked figures, and more clothing was added repeatedly in the following two hundred years.

In locations other than the highly scrutinized Vatican, painters continued to paint religious nakedness throughout the seventeenth century. The breast continued to focus the religious values of nourishment and penitence. But other associations, increasingly accessible in public images and printed texts, were gaining strength. In part 2, I discuss social and cultural changes that contributed to altered perceptions of naked bodies. But that is ahead of our story. In chapters 2 and 3, I focus on the religious breast.



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## *The Virgin's One Bare Breast*

· A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.

AUGUSTINE

*De doctrina Christiana*

IN PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Virgin/Mother Mary is repeatedly shown with one exposed breast. Fourteenth-century people apparently found these images attractive and persuasive in the immediate circumstances of their lives. The harsh challenges of malnutrition and epidemic disease led them to value an image that most Western Europeans had not previously seen. The *Virgo lactans* image (figure 8) probably originated in Byzantium and came to Western Europe through Sicily and Venice in the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The icon changed dramatically over time, becoming increasingly naturalistic. It is not difficult to see why symbolic reassurances of provision and nourishment became attractive to people who lived in the midst of the personal and communal instability and suffering caused by food scarcity and plague.

### EARLY MODERN ITALY

From the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, Italy was divided into warring states that were repeatedly invaded by France and Germany. At the same time, the Renaissance gave Italy intellectual and artistic leadership in





Figure 8. Anonymous, *The Divine Mother (Galaktotrophousa)*, c. 1600. Collection of Dr. Amberg-Herzog, Kölliken, Switzerland (photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY).

Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> In this time of dramatic contradictions, Italy, along with the rest of Western Europe, was also the site of diseases—pandemic plague and an epidemic of syphilis—for which the only known treatments were palliative. Contemporary authors claimed that plague prompted sexual promiscuity, a higher crime rate, and an increase of lesser vices.<sup>3</sup> Yet the same authors also claimed that God sent plague as punishment for the wickedness people were already committing.



Even before the onset of pandemic plague in the mid-fourteenth century, severe crises of food supply were frequent. From the tenth century to the last decades of the thirteenth century, a food surplus had increased the European population by thirty percent, but as fertility rates continued to increase, the area of arable land did not. By 1309, crop failures caused food shortages and brought about a continent-wide famine, the first in 250 years.<sup>4</sup> Although Italian cities were usually able to acquire provisions by seizing the harvest from surrounding villages, even the wealthy and competently administered city of Florence could not avoid the terror and social chaos caused by hunger. In 1347, bread was issued daily to 94,000 people in Florence, but contemporary sources say that 4,000 Florentines died that year "either of malnutrition or from diseases which, if malnutrition had not first existed, would never have proved fatal."<sup>5</sup> The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani wrote: "The famine was felt not only in Florence but throughout Tuscany and Italy. And so terrible was it that the Perugians, the Sieneese, and the Pistoiese and many other townsmen drove from their territory all their beggars because they could not support them. . . . The agitation of the people at the market of San Michele was so great that it was necessary to protect officials by means of guards fitted out with an axe and block to punish rioters on the spot with the loss of their hands and their feet."<sup>6</sup>

By mid-century, recurring waves of plague swept across Western Europe, devastating populations. Outbreaks of plague occurred approximately once in every generation from 1347 to 1721. With mortality rates approximating ninety percent, one-third to one-half of the European population died during this period—between two and three million people.<sup>7</sup> In Florence between 1340 and 1427, eight plague epidemics shrank the Florentine population by three-fourths; the average life span decreased almost by half, from over thirty to under twenty years.<sup>8</sup> Contemporaries suggested several reasons for the outbreaks; God's judgment on sinners was the favored explanation of clergy, but Jews and women were also blamed.<sup>9</sup> Attempting to control abuses, in October 1349 Pope Clement VI condemned flagellant processions, saying that "many [flagellants] . . . cruelly extending their hands to works of impiety under the color of piety, seem not in the least afraid to shed the blood of Jews, whom Christian piety accepts and sustains."<sup>10</sup> In England, 158 Jewish pogroms occurred between 1348 and 1351. In Western Europe during outbreaks of plague, hundreds of Jewish communities were burned to the ground "from Catalonia to Germany, often with their residents trapped inside."<sup>11</sup>



In short, early modern Italy and Western Europe were besieged by myriad catastrophic troubles: "There were many years in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century when large parts of Italy were afflicted by diseases, serious food shortages and war damage; often all three went together. Armies destroyed or seized food stocks, or prevented sowing; they spread plague, syphilis, and other diseases; panics over plague, flight from the area, the death of farmers meant less farming the following season. . . . Italy was a major war theatre from the 1490s until 1559, with the inflow of French, German, Spanish and Swiss troops."<sup>12</sup>

Clerics and women—those who were expected to care for sufferers—were often accused of neglecting their responsibilities. Plague created a crisis in church personnel caused both by the death of many clergymen and by the fact that, as numerous contemporary sources complain, many clergy made themselves scarce during plague crises. The English bishop Ralph Shrewsbury, in a 1349 letter to the clergy of his diocese, wrote: "The contagious pestilence, which is now spreading everywhere, has left many parish churches and other benefices in our diocese without an incumbent, so that their inhabitants are bereft of a priest. And because priests cannot be found for love or money to take on the responsibility for those places and visit the sick and administer the sacraments of the Church to them—perhaps because they fear that they will catch the disease themselves—we understand that many people are dying without the sacrament of penance."<sup>13</sup>

Women, the perennial caregivers, were also accused of "unnaturally" neglecting familial duties. Chronicler Gabriele de Muisis imagined the last words of a dying child: "Mother, where have you gone? Why are you now so cruel to me when only yesterday you were so kind? You fed me at your breast and carried me within your womb for nine months."<sup>14</sup> Contemporary sources reflect anger and desolation when spiritual and maternal care was not provided. The fact that priests and women were as susceptible to plague as anyone else did not alleviate the hostility directed toward them.

#### NURSING OR WET NURSING?

A third feature of Italian social life bears a special relevance to the paintings under consideration, namely, breast-feeding practices. James Ross describes the first experiences of a middle-class child in Renaissance Tuscany:



"Birth in the parental bed, bath in the same room, and baptism in the parish church were followed almost at once by delivery into the hands of a *balia* or wet nurse, generally a peasant woman, living at a distance, with whom the infant would presumably remain for about two years or until weaning was completed."<sup>15</sup>

Research in family history provides an important piece in our understanding of the social setting of images of the nursing Virgin. As Mary Martin McLaughlin states: "The infant's survival depended on one thing above all else: its access to breast milk of good quality."<sup>16</sup> In societies without refrigeration, the consistent availability of milk was a life-or-death matter for infants. In addition to the practical problems of preservation and transportation, animal milk was considered harmful, since infants were thought to acquire the physical appearance, intelligence, and personality of their milk source. A fourteenth-century Tuscan child-care manual states: "Be sure that the wet nurse has plenty of milk because if she lacks it she may give the baby the milk of a goat or sheep or ass or some other animal because the child, boy or girl, nourished on animal milk doesn't have perfect wits like one fed on women's milk, but always looks stupid and vacant and not right in the head."<sup>17</sup> The most popular Italian preacher of the first half of the fifteenth century, Bernardino of Siena, added his admonitions in favor of maternal feeding: "Even if you are prudent and of good customs and habits, and discreet . . . you often give your child to a dirty drab, and from her, perforce, the child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him. If the one who cares for him has evil customs or is of base condition, he will receive the impress of these customs because of having suckled her polluted blood."<sup>18</sup>

Infant nourishment was also the focus of social conflicts. Although wet nursing had existed since antiquity, it was practiced with more frequency in fourteenth-century Italy than it had been previously. A literature of advice, admonitions, and warnings reveals contradictory, or at least ambivalent, attitudes toward mothers nursing their infants themselves. On the one hand, mothers were frequently instructed to nurse their own infants due to the danger of employing an unsuitable wet nurse. On the other hand, employing a wet nurse was a mark of upward mobility for middle-class families. Social meanings were apparently in direct conflict with advice from preachers and child-rearing manuals.

For many Italian families, an additional factor came into play: wet nurses were often slave women brought to Italy in increasing numbers by traders in the fourteenth century. Petrarch called this slave population





Figure 9. Lorenzo di Credi (1459–1537), *Madonna Nursing the Christ Child*, before 1537. Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, Vatican City (photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).



*domestici hostes* (domestic enemies). The employment of women regarded as hostile and untrustworthy contributed substantially to the anxiety surrounding a couple's decision about infant nourishment.<sup>19</sup> Further exacerbating this anxiety was the not-infrequent fate of infants in the care of a wet nurse: "smothering," a generic name for death from poor care as well as from inadvertent or deliberate suffocation.

Images of the nursing Virgin must have evoked in contemporary viewers the ambivalence surrounding wet nursing. For parents, this may have included guilt over exposing their infants to spiritual pollution and physical peril. Indeed, it is likely that the same clergymen who advocated maternal nursing in sermons also commissioned paintings to be placed in the public space of churches. Depictions of the nursing Virgin conveyed the same message carried in sermons, namely, that women should emulate the mother of Christ (figure 9).

### THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

From the third century forward, the Virgin's primary theological meaning was that she guaranteed Christ's humanity. Tertullian wrote: "Christ received his flesh from the Virgin . . . certain proof that his flesh was human."<sup>20</sup> At the Council of Ephesus (431 C.E.), Mary was called *theotokos* (God-bearer), affirming that Christ, born from her, was true God and true human. Mary's humanity provided her son's humanity.<sup>21</sup>

At no time was Marian popular devotion more prominent in Western European culture than in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Dominicans and Franciscans debated heatedly the Virgin's attributes and powers; councils invoked Mary's presence and wisdom; academic theologians like Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, attested her presence and participation at the Last Supper and Pentecost. Affirming her appointment to the priesthood, Gerson called her "the Mother of the Eucharist," the one who provided Christ's human flesh, which was offered to believers in the sacrament.<sup>22</sup> Excitement over the Virgin and her power was not, however, confined to the theological elite. Bernardino of Siena praised Mary in extravagant terms in his popular and passionate sermons, waxing eloquent over "the unthinkable power of the Virgin Mother." The charismatic evangelical preacher stated:

Only the blessed Virgin Mary has done more for God, or just as much, as God has done for all humankind. . . . God fashioned us from the soil, but



Mary formed him from her pure blood; God impressed on us his image, but Mary impressed hers on God; . . . God taught us wisdom, but Mary taught Christ to flee from the hurtful and follow her; God nourished us with the fruits of paradise, but she nourished him with her most holy milk, so that I may say this for the blessed Virgin, whom, however, God made himself, God is in some way under a greater obligation to us through her, than we to God.<sup>23</sup>

Although some theologians protested such exuberant statements of Mary's significance, Bernardino's estimation of her power could have been a gloss on popular images. The Florentine fresco discussed in chapter 1 (plate 2) is, in effect, a visualization of Bernardino's sermon.

Theologians understood not only Mary's centrality to the redemption of humanity, but also her importance for the devotional needs of Christian communities. Posing the question "whether the matter of Christ's body should have been taken from a woman," Thomas Aquinas responded: "Because the male sex exceeds the female sex, Christ assumed a man's nature. So that people should not think little of the female sex, it was fitting that he should take flesh from a woman. Hence Augustine says, 'Despise not yourselves, men, the son of God became a man; despise not yourselves, women, the son of God was born of a woman.'"<sup>24</sup>

Despite the evident androcentrism of this statement, it raises a theme that was fundamental to incarnational doctrine from the earliest theological considerations of the Virgin's role, namely, women's and men's devotional need for gender parallelism in Christian symbols. In images, as in theological texts, the development of Marian theology took the form of an increasing parallelism between the character and life of Christ and those of the Virgin. Christ's conception was matched by Mary's immaculate conception, an unscriptural doctrine that was rejected by Thomas Aquinas and heavily contested from the fourth century until it became official dogma in 1854. Christ's birth and Mary's birth both received their full share of Apocryphal legends. Christ's circumcision found its parallel in Mary's purification. Christ's presentation in the temple is matched by the Apocryphal account, often depicted in paintings, of the Virgin's presentation in the temple at the age of three years.<sup>25</sup>

The ministry years of Christ's life did not always find a parallel in the Virgin's life, but in popular devotional works, like the mid-fourteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, narratives from Christ's ministry were interspersed with accounts of the Virgin's presence, activities, and emotions. In fact, Christ's power and the Virgin's power might easily be seen as competitive rather than complementary, a possibility that Thomas



Aquinas tried to dismiss in his description of Mary's talents: "She possessed extraordinary gifts but could not use them publicly since it would detract from Christ's teaching."<sup>26</sup>

Marian theology also presented the Virgin as an indispensable spectator/participant in Christ's crucifixion. According to medieval tradition, her suffering paralleled Christ's: she suffered mentally what Christ suffered physically. She and her more flamboyant counterpart, Mary Magdalen, provided those listening to devotional stories or viewing religious paintings with models of the emotions they were instructed to experience. Because Christ's bodily ascension was clearly taught in scripture, the bodily assumption of Mary, although unscriptural and tortuously argued until its acceptance as doctrine in 1950, was a devotional requirement as a parallel to Christ's ascension.

Incidents from Christ's and the Virgin's lives were presented visually as well as verbally. Paintings in churches served as a focus for contemplation and provided access to worship for people for whom worship was primarily a visual activity. Images did not merely instruct and delight predominantly illiterate congregations; they directed religious affections in fundamental ways understood as essential for salvation. Accessible to all members of Christian communities on a daily basis, religious paintings were the equivalent of today's media images, strongly informing the self-images of medieval people and their ideas of relationships, God, and the world. The power of paintings to direct religious and social attitudes and behavior in late medieval and early modern Western Europe cannot be overestimated.

### THE NURSING VIRGIN

How did images of the nursing Virgin differ from what people were accustomed to seeing in their local churches? How were these images related to other themes and subjects that began to emerge in religious painting in approximately the same time and place? Most early modern people saw no other images than those displayed in local churches, so we can expect that unfamiliar styles and subjects were noticed and puzzled over by their first viewers.

Images of Mary with one exposed breast were part of an artistic trend that arose at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in which the Virgin was depicted as a humble peasant woman, sometimes barefoot and seated on the ground. Painted in a naturalistic style, Madonnas of Humility





Figure 10. Anonymous, *Madonna and Child with Stories of Christ and Saints* (detail), 14th century. Museo Correr, Venice (photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice/Art Resource, NY).

(figure 10) were striking in contrast with earlier depictions of the Virgin. Throughout the thirteenth century, the Virgin had been pictured as a Byzantine empress, luxuriously robed, heavily jeweled, and seated on a throne surrounded by angels and worshippers. The new Madonnas suggested instead the Virgin's accessibility, sympathy, and emotional richness.<sup>27</sup> Depictions of the nursing Virgin and Child in which the infant



Christ twists around to engage the viewer's eye employed an established device for inviting the viewer to participate in the pictured scene (plate 1).<sup>28</sup> In the context of the artistic trend toward portraying scriptural figures as humble people with strong feelings, the Virgin with an uncovered breast represents comfortable simplicity and unpretentious accessibility.

## VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRIST'S HUMANITY

The Virgin was not the only sacred figure whose partially naked body was displayed in early modern religious paintings. In *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Painting and in Modern Oblivion*, Leo Steinberg calls attention to a number of Renaissance paintings that feature Christ's exposed or scantily veiled genitals. Steinberg argues that these paintings presented, for the first time, the full humanity of Christ; he cites sermons preached in the papal court between 1450 and 1521 to document a contemporary theological emphasis on Christ's full humanity. Supported by dozens of illustrations, Steinberg shows that Renaissance depictions of Christ—in infancy, crucifixion, deposition, and resurrection—focus insistently on his penis.

Most strikingly, in some images of the resurrected Christ, Christ is shown with an artfully draped but unmistakable erection. "If the truth of the incarnation was proved in the mortification of the penis," Steinberg writes, "would not the truth of the Anastasis, the resuscitation, be proved by its erection?" Steinberg calls the erect phallus "the body's best show of power," an appropriate symbol of Christ's vivified flesh.<sup>29</sup> "The supreme power," he writes, "is the power that prevails over mortality," a power "reasonably equated with the phallus."<sup>30</sup>

Yet dozens of late medieval and early modern paintings of the Virgin Mary with one bare breast suggest that unless "the body" is assumed to be a male body, erection is demonstrably *not* "the body's best show of power." In fact, a human body's best show of power, and the evidence of Christ's fully human incarnation, was the Virgin's presentation of Christ *from her own body* (figure II). It was she who provided both the flesh and the nourishment on which his humanity depended. *This*, the capability to give birth and to nourish and sustain life is "the body's best show of power."





Figure 11. Sebastiano Mainardi (1460–1513), *Madonna with Child Nursing and Angels*, before 1513. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY).



Nakedness or partial nakedness in religious paintings created two kinds of tension. First, there was a tension between cultural and natural meanings. For example, in societies in which almost all infants were nursed at a woman's breast, the bare-breasted Virgin evoked visual associations that inevitably emphasized her similarity with other women; yet devotional texts and images contradicted these associations by insisting on her difference. *Meditations on the Life of Christ* comments on an illustration of the nursing Virgin: "How readily she nursed him, feeling a great and unknown sweetness in nursing this child, such as could never be felt by other women."<sup>31</sup>

Second, nakedness in religious painting created a tension between erotic attraction and religious meaning. In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander argues that nakedness in art always carries a sexual message; images of a naked body are never so thoroughly devoid of sexual associations as to become unambiguous vehicles for theological messages. At the same time, however, nakedness intensifies a painting's narrative, doctrinal, or devotional message by enhancing the viewer's attraction. In paintings intended to stimulate religious feeling, nakedness must be depicted naturalistically enough to engage a viewer's erotic interest, but it must be carefully balanced with other visual content so that the erotic response does not dominate.

Were images of the Virgin with an exposed breast successful in maintaining a balance of erotic and religious meanings? Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century painters employed two strategies to ensure that the religious message—the viewer's participation in an intimate scene in which humanity and divinity are closely woven—was strengthened rather than subverted by its erotic content. First, they depicted a large breast, visually at odds with the small, high breasts considered erotic by contemporaries (plate 1 and figure 10). Second, Mary's dress does not show the provocative disarrangement that characterizes erotic exposure (figure 9). Moreover, the covered breast is perfectly flat, while the exposed breast is round and ample: the viewer's impression was not that of an illicit glimpse of a normally concealed breast, but rather one of a purposefully revealed symbol of specific religious meaning (plate 7). Until the later half of the fifteenth century, the cone-shaped breast from which the Child is nourished seems even more explicitly not to be part of Mary's body, but an appendage (figure 8). Paintings of the nursing Virgin illustrate Jacobus de Voragine's statement in *The Golden Legend* (1255–66): "Such indeed was Mary's innocence that it shone forth even outside



of her, and quelled any urgency in the flesh of others. . . . Although Mary was surpassing fair, no man could look upon her with desire."<sup>32</sup>

There is little evidence that women identified with the Virgin's power. A delicate message was communicated, apparently effectively, by the dissonance between verbal and visual messages. While the latter emphasized the similarity of the Virgin and actual women, it was the contrast between actual women and the Virgin that dominated early modern sermons, theological writings, devotional manuals, and child-rearing manuals. In verbal texts, attachment to the Virgin was presented as an alternative to appreciation of and attachment to one's actual mother. This theme appeared as early as the twelfth century. Aelred of Rievaulx wrote of the Virgin: "It is she . . . who has given us life, who nourishes and raises us. . . . She is our mother much more than our mother according to the flesh."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the lives of monks, mothering was associated not only with the Virgin; Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential late medieval author, assigned the role of mothering to the male Jesus, just as contemporary abbots described their role within monastic communities as one of providing spiritual care and nourishment.<sup>34</sup> Lady Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century English recluse, contrasted Jesus as Mother with earthly mothers in her *Showings*: "We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death. O, what is that? But our true Mother, Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life. . . . This fair, lovely word "mother" is so sweet and so kind in itself that it cannot truly be said of anyone or to anyone except of him and to him who is the true mother of life and of all things. To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom, and knowledge, and this is God."<sup>35</sup>

Theological descriptions of Mary or Jesus as ideal Mother use maternal images as a vehicle for drawing strong contrasts between ideal and real women. In fourteenth-century devotional texts, no comparable effort was made to curtail men's identification with the male Christ. The appearance of God in the male sex was understood as privileging that sex, making men less vulnerable to evil than women. The 1484 *Malleus Maleficarum* states that men are much less likely than women to associate with the devil because they belong to Christ's sex: "And blessed be the Highest who has so far preserved the male sex from so great a crime: For since he was willing to be born and suffer for us, therefore he has granted to men this privilege."<sup>36</sup> While men were encouraged to identify with Christ's maleness, women's identification with the Virgin's power was blocked by emphasis on the unbridgeable chasm between the ideal Virgin and actual women.



What messages were likely to have been given and received from images of the Virgin with one bare breast? Jane Gallop's suggestion that "the visual mode produces representations as a way of mastering what is otherwise too intense" offers a useful interpretive clue.<sup>37</sup> These images address a cultural situation in which, as we have seen, human life was extraordinarily precarious and vulnerable. Images of the nursing Virgin are *men's* images; as far as can be determined, not a single image of this type was commissioned or painted by a woman until the seventeenth century. Far from presenting a simple message encouraging viewers to greater affective piety, these paintings must have carried highly complex communications to people in stressful and anxious societies.

The nourishing breast may have simultaneously focused a pervasive, chronic anxiety over nourishment and assured the viewer of the divine provision of spiritual and physical needs. In a society in which a woman's milk was a practical, emotional, social, and religious issue, the nursing Virgin was likely to have evoked an intimate and volatile mixture of danger and delight. As sermons and child-rearing manuals demonstrate, the "extremely bad" breast—that of either the natural mother choosing not to nurse her infant or the irresponsible or incapable wet nurse—was an immediate personal and social threat.

Unlike actual women, who might or might not be acceptable mothers, the Virgin represented the fantasy of the "extremely perfect" breast. Called *mater omnium* and *nutrix omnium*, she could be counted on to nurse not only her son, but through him all Christians.<sup>38</sup> Depictions of physical nourishment at a woman's breast, the earliest delight of virtually all fourteenth-century people, evoked both sensual pleasure and spiritual nourishment. Mary's humility, obedience, and submissiveness in unquestioningly offering her body as shelter and nourishment for the infant Christ was part of the message intended by male commissioners, clergy, and painters. The Virgin was presented as a model—however unattainable—to actual women.

Images of the nursing Virgin also reminded viewers of women's terrifying power to give or to withhold nourishment. If the Virgin gained tremendous power by nursing her son, what was to prevent actual women from recognizing their own power, derived from the same source and irresistible to their adult sons? Images of the nursing Virgin signified the power to conceive, nourish, shelter, and sustain human life—a power that may well have been clearly understood as "the body's best show of power" by



fourteenth-century people threatened by plague, famine, and social chaos. As such, in a society designed and administered by men, it was a power that had to be firmly directed to socially desirable ends. The cultural work of the image was thus complex: women had to be guided to accept the model of the nursing Virgin without identifying with her power—a potential social and physical power derived from her body.

Did men have reason to be uneasy about women's social power? In late medieval towns, some women achieved economic independence, owned and managed businesses, and disposed of their own property without their husband's consent.<sup>39</sup> The cost of dowries had never been higher, indicating the importance of advantageous marriages for men's sisters and daughters—advantageous to the men, that is, whose wealth, power, and influence often depended on such marriages. Moreover, according to a 1427 Florentine census, women lived longer than men.<sup>40</sup> But these favorable conditions for women were soon to change, as women simultaneously lost legal rights and access to production in early capitalism.

#### PRODUCTION VERSUS REPRODUCTION: EARLY MODERN CAPITALISM

Historian Martha Howell, who has studied production in northern Europe as early modern societies replaced late medieval social arrangements, writes:

In northern Europe during the late Middle Ages, the household was the most important center of economic production. Work both for the market and for subsistence often took place in the household itself, but even when it did not, as for some artisans and many merchants, the members of the household formed an economic unit by working to sustain themselves as a group. Often they performed closely related tasks, as when household members together raised crops or produced textiles for the market; at other times they performed distinct tasks, as when one person in a household made cabinets, another distributed goods imported from abroad, and a third helped to make clothing.<sup>41</sup>

A commonplace theory among Marxist and feminist historians pictures early modern capitalism as diminishing "women's roles in economic production by diminishing the family's role in market production."<sup>42</sup> This picture, however, reduces the complexity of late medieval production, which regularly combined market and subsistence production, moving easily back and forth between the household and the public sphere. Howell



has refined this interpretation: "While it is apparent that women did not lose access to market production because the 'family economy' was destroyed by 'capitalism,' it is possible that women lost access to *high status positions* in market production because the *family production unit* was destroyed by capitalism."<sup>43</sup>

In the market economy, rather than moving freely between household and public arenas, women increasingly came to perform their trades in the home: "Women were concentrated in food and clothing preparation and sale and they seldom undertook tasks which led them away from the home."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, "patriarchy in capitalist societies is achieved partly by excluding women from high-status positions in market production."<sup>45</sup> Along with economic agency, women also surrendered authority to men. Moreover, "as women lost labor status, they also lost legal status."<sup>46</sup> In short, Howell finds that in early modern Europe "the roles of women and the definitions of womanhood were changing . . . and women's lives were increasingly centered in a newly constructed patriarchal household . . . because the patriarchal order required it."<sup>47</sup> "The late medieval and early modern period . . . was an age of great uncertainty, even disagreement, about appropriate gender roles. By its end, the division between public and private had been newly and clearly drawn, and women . . . were firmly located in the private realm centered on the patriarchal nuclear family."<sup>48</sup>

Giovanna Casagrande describes a "circle of exclusions" experienced by women in early modern Western Europe: "Women could not gain access to any priestly office; a military career was precluded to them; they were excluded from civil, political, and administrative power, not to mention from university, and therefore, from intellectual work. What was left was family life and its limitations and conditions. When they could work outside the home they were often not given their full due; women did not or could not gain access to every sphere of artisanal or professional work."<sup>49</sup>

By the fifteenth century, Western European societies were in transition from traditional forms of trade to capitalism. Measured by "changes in economic activity, distribution of wealth, social mobility, political crisis, and constitutional reorganization," early capitalism also affected social values.<sup>50</sup> As women of all but the poorest classes were increasingly confined to their homes, it became rare for women and men to work together on common economic and religious projects, removing the daily interaction by which men could come to recognize women's skills and capabilities.

It is not sufficient, however, to detect changed roles for women. It is simultaneously more important and more difficult to examine *how these*



*changes worked* in concrete and practical ways. How were people's relationships adjusted and codified in social and religious institutions? Guilds and confraternities were two important organizations that formed and coordinated people's religious and economic energies in the public sphere. Both excluded women from any but ancillary roles.

## GUILDS

While confraternities organized religious devotion, guilds monitored commerce and social life in the public sphere, though these were not, of course, separate or sometimes even distinguishable realms. Confraternities were often affiliated with a guild, with the same members participating in both. Late medieval and early modern guilds wielded considerable social control through training and regulating members. They provided the possibility of upward mobility for young men, who could be sent to apprentice with a master craftsman between the ages of ten and eighteen, for two or three years. In late medieval guilds, "the master had not only to teach the trainee the rules and skills of his craft but also to bring him up to be 'an honorable member of the craftsmen's guild.'"<sup>51</sup> In short, the master was responsible for his apprentice "body and soul," protecting him from exploitation and other dangers.

Early modern capitalism developed within guilds, transforming them into "hierarchical organizations, stratified along economic, social, and political lines."<sup>52</sup> The relationship of master and apprentice also changed; it became one of "capitalist entrepreneurs on the one hand and skilled wage workers on the other."<sup>53</sup> Girls and women, previously accepted as apprentices, began to be excluded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as guilds focused on competitiveness and profit. With guilds providing training exclusively to young men, girls learned only in the home and thus were excluded from practicing most of the independent trades.<sup>54</sup> The result was often economic impoverishment: "In every case where it can be measured, women—usually single but very often widowed—made up a disproportionate share of the economic underclass of late medieval cities."<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, early capitalism, in which household production became market production, created a disadvantage for women. "Many of the positions men acquired, in brewing, weaving, and inn-keeping . . . once had been women's."<sup>56</sup> For example, women steadily lost high-status positions in the textile industry almost everywhere in northern Europe in the sixteenth century, even though women outnumbered men in most cities and textile production increased during that period.<sup>57</sup>





Plate 1. Ambrogio Lorenzetti (fl. c. 1311–48), *Madonna del latte*, before 1348. Palazzo Arcivescovile, Siena (photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).





Plate 2. Attributed to Lorenzo Monaco (active 1390–1423/24), *The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin*, early 15th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 1953 (53.57) (photo © 1996 The Metropolitan Museum of Art).



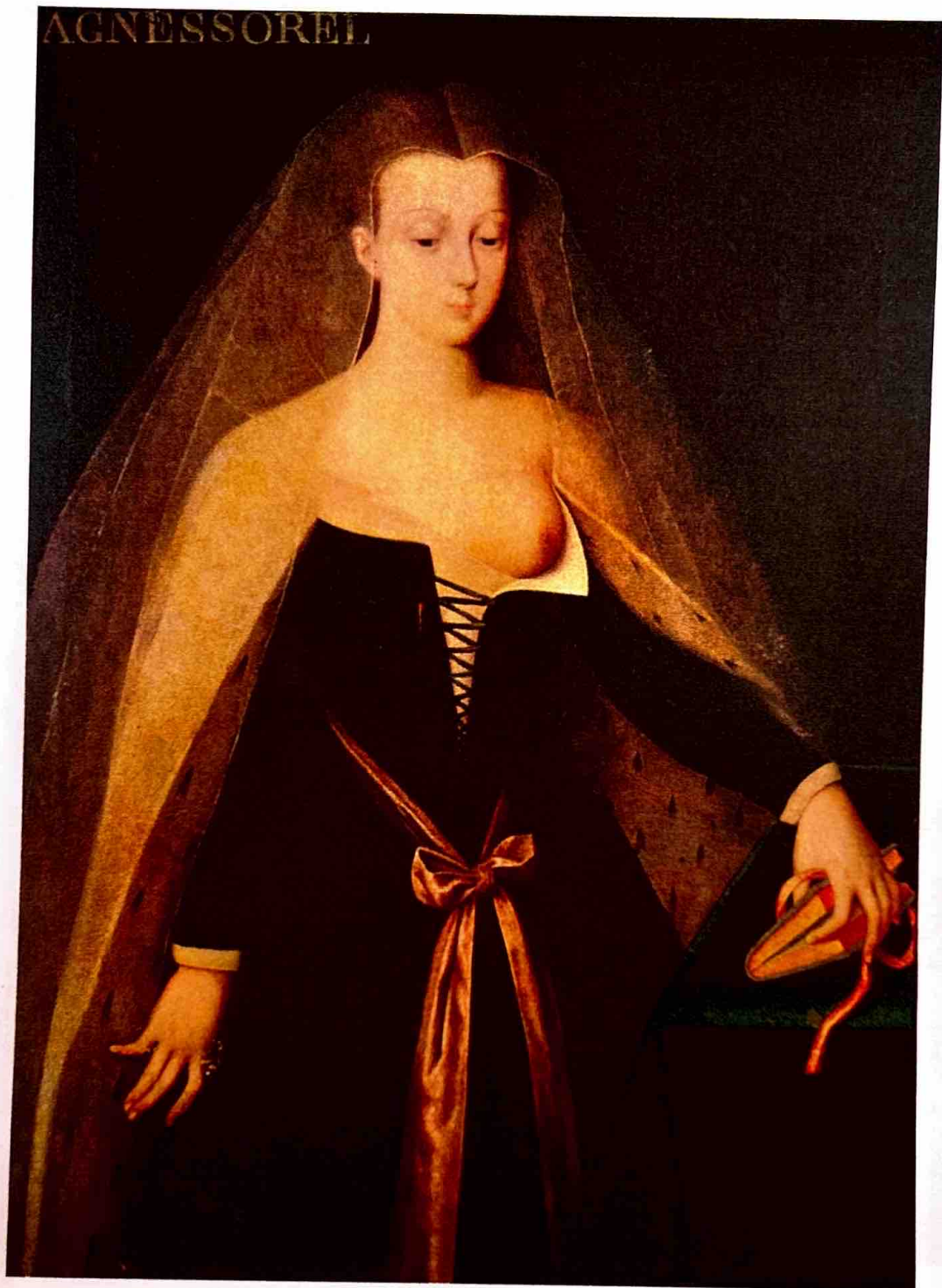


Plate 3. Anonymous, *Agnès Sorel, Mistress of King Charles VII of France*, 15th century. Private collection, Paris (photo: Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY).



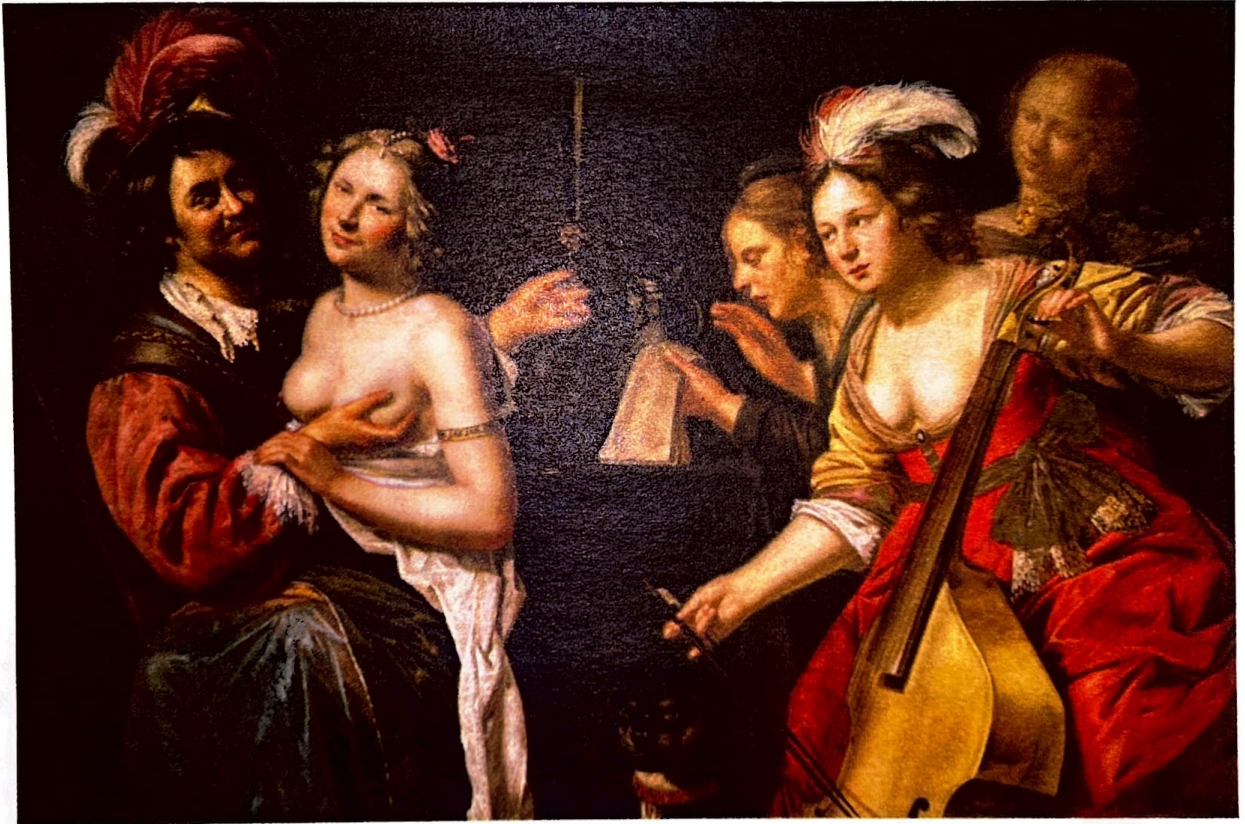


Plate 4. Johannes Baeck (d. 1655), *The Prodigal Son*, 1637. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY).



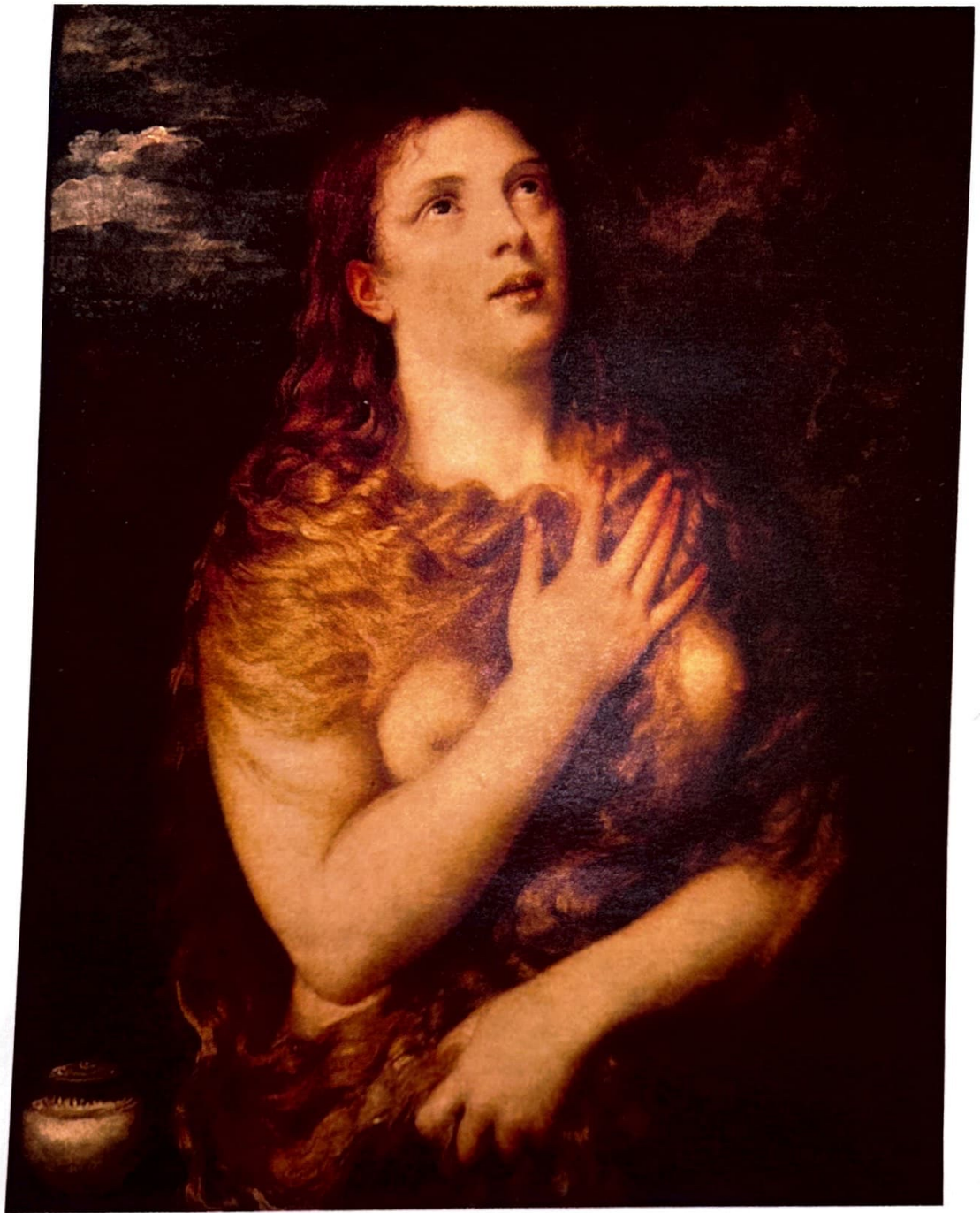


Plate 5. Titian (1488–1576), *Mary Magdalen*, c. 1535. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence (photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).



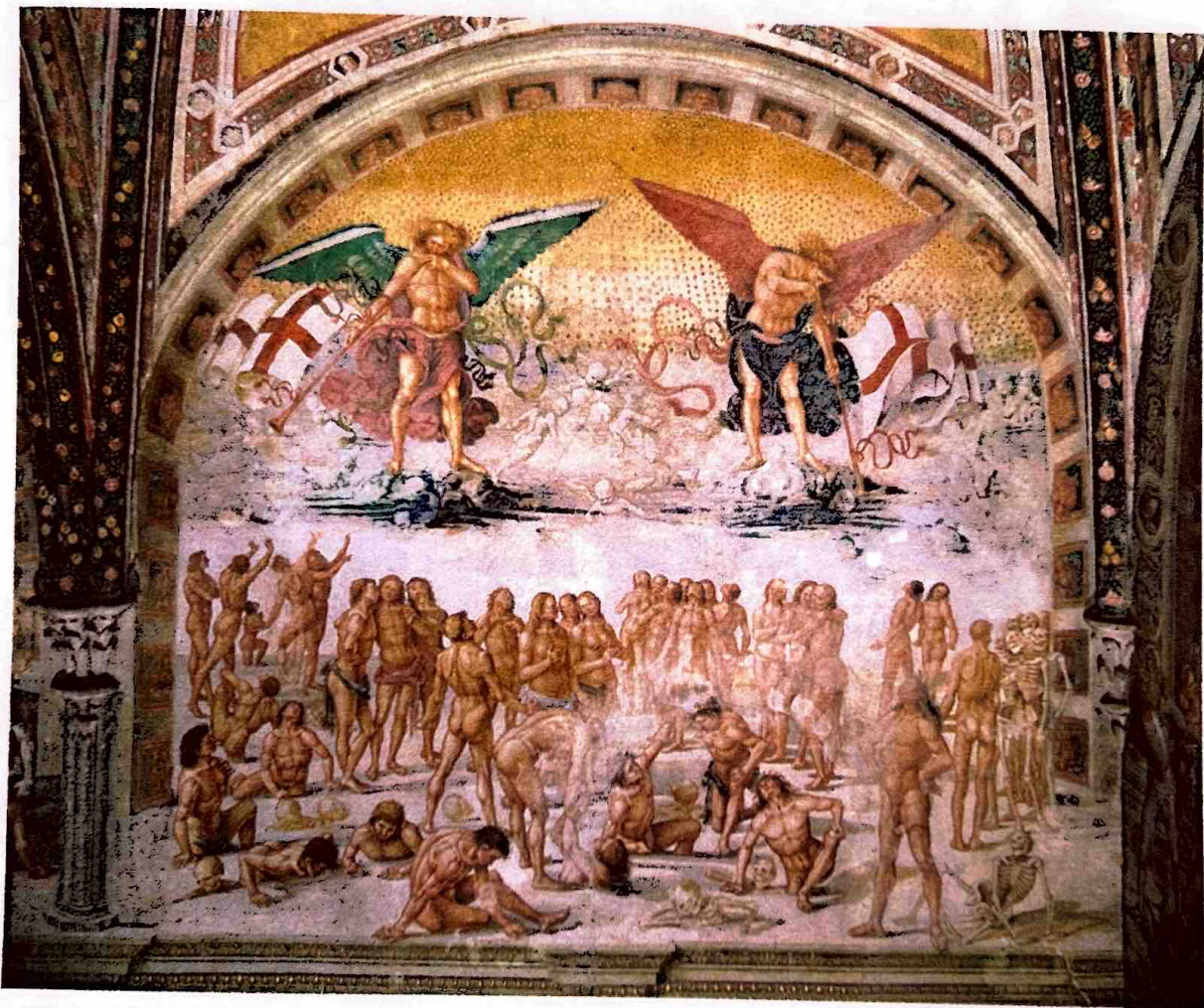


Plate 6. Luca Signorelli (1441–1523), *Resurrection of the Flesh*, c. 1500–1503. San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto Cathedral, Orvieto (photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).





Plate 7. Francesco dei Franceschi, *Nursing Virgin*, 15th century. Ca' d'Oro, Venice (photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice/Art Resource, NY).





Plate 8. Master of the Magdalen, *St. Mary Magdalen and Stories of Her Life*, 1250–70. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence (photo: Scala/Art Resource. NY).





Plate 9. Carlo da Camerino (active 1396–c. 1425), *The Madonna of Humility with the Temptation of Eve*, before 1420. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Holden Collection 1916.795 (© The Cleveland Museum of Art).





Plate 10. Henri Beaubrun the Younger (1603–1677) and Charles Beaubrun (1604–1692), *Infant Louis XIV and His Wet Nurse, M. de la Giraudière*, before 1677. Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY).





Plate II. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1651), *Madonna and Child*, c. 1609. Galleria Spada, Rome.



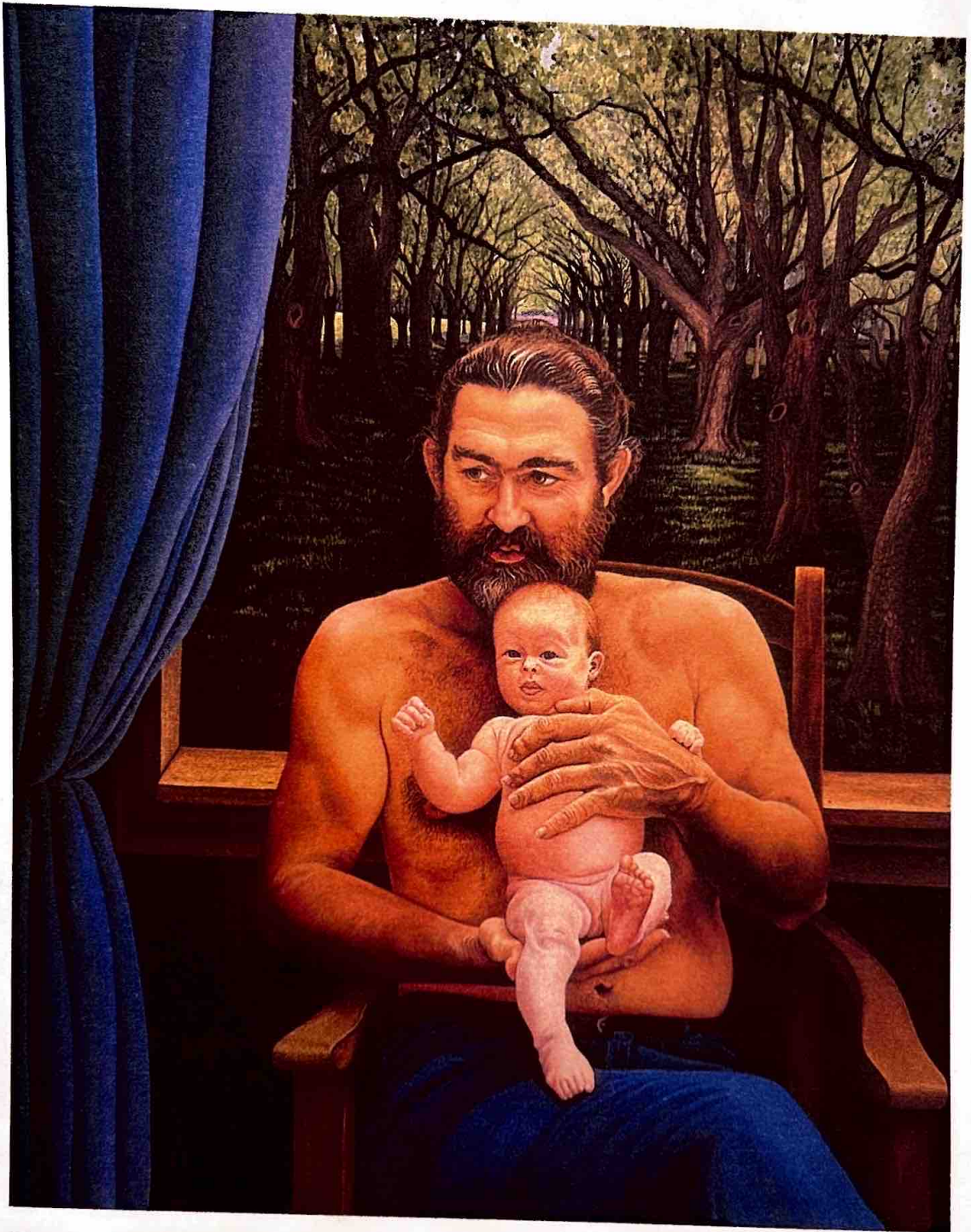


Plate 12. Lynn Randolph, *Father and Child*, 1984. Private collection, Houston (by permission of the artist).



Scholars have frequently interpreted the popular religious energy that was marshaled in lay confraternities as evidence that the church was losing its attraction for early modern people. Recently, however, Nicholas Terpstra has advocated a broader understanding of religion that puts into question this interpretation. Religion, he writes, “has such a complex range of dimensions and forms that focus on the formal hierarchy of the Catholic Church seems almost quaint, if not peripheral to an understanding of how faith animated local communities.”<sup>58</sup> As late medieval Western Europe (roughly thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) became early modern Western Europe (approximately fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), religion was not only promoted by an institutional church and a professional clergy, but also by laymen who took leading roles in confraternities. Richard Trexler describes the shift in religious foci as a transition “from the stable to the mobile (i.e., from monks to friars), from the sacerdotal to the charismatic (from clergy to the unordained holy man), and from the ecclesiastical to the lay (from church to confraternity).”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, religious vitality was not incompatible with rapid secularization.

Confraternities were popular in the extreme conditions of plague, starvation, and war. In Bologna, for example, plague devastated the population in 1527–28; famines in 1558 and 1561 caused ten thousand people in the city and thirty thousand in its environs to perish; another cycle of famines arrived in 1588–89, 1590, and 1593–94; and catastrophic plague recurred in 1630. In these conditions, “smaller, closely-knit confraternities devoted to penitential flagellation” were broadly popular.<sup>60</sup> But confraternities also maintained their attraction to members through changing circumstances. Although these circumstances prompted changes within the confraternities themselves, Christopher Black notes that the organizations “remained a major part of Italian society until the eighteenth century.”<sup>61</sup> The role of confraternities varied over time and from confraternity to confraternity, depending on external and internal pressures, but praying for souls was their most common and persistent work. They also cared for the poor, administered hospitals, and provided dowries for impoverished girls.<sup>62</sup> Educating members in “Christian doctrine and . . . the rituals that animated the doctrine and structured the community’s life”—especially liturgy and the sacraments of confession and communion—was also a high priority of confraternities.<sup>63</sup>



Because of variations across geographical locations and time, it is difficult to generalize about women's participation in lay religious movements. From the thirteenth century forward, women participated in the *laudesi* (praise) confraternities whose mission was to provide mutual assistance to their members in life and death. In early confraternities, women were "recognized as indispensable members of the local neighborhood with a role to play in the neighborhood's public worship and charitable service."<sup>64</sup> But as praise confraternities waned during the late medieval period and flagellant (*battuti* or *disciplinati*) confraternities increased, women were excluded or relegated to minor roles. They were not permitted to participate in the administration of confraternities, or in the primary devotional practice, flagellation (though they undoubtedly flagellated in private).<sup>65</sup> Women members contributed to the fund of merit gathered by the members' prayers, penitence, and charitable service, but only those who were active members at the time of their death could draw on this fund (by being buried in the confraternity's robes or being prayed through purgatory).<sup>66</sup> Giovanna Casagrande concludes her survey of lay female religiosity in late medieval and Renaissance Umbria: "Women were not excluded from all forms of confraternal sociability, but extant documents do not put much significance on their roles and duties."<sup>67</sup>

Flagellation was a devotion initiated by mendicant—especially Capuchin—piety. It was practiced either in public processions or, more commonly, within a confraternal liturgy in which flagellation began after prayers and hymns in a darkened sanctuary. Barbed cords or leather strips were used by the most dedicated flagellants; others used silken flails to symbolize, rather than fully enact, the practice. Processions might include as many as seven hundred people walking barefoot, flagellating themselves. But flagellation was practiced most frequently within a confraternity rather than in public. Christopher Black comments: "The physical and emotional commitment of such rituals, the attempt to distance oneself from the secular world and status, confession in front of relatives, neighbors, and those of different social backgrounds within the brotherhood could lead to intense fraternity"—a fraternity from which women were excluded.<sup>68</sup>

In attempting to understand flagellation, we might imagine that its primary purpose was to dramatize repentance in case the troubles experienced by societies afflicted by natural disaster and war were sent by an angry God, as many priests preached. But scholars who have studied the phenomenon find much more emphasis on "imitative piety," a "demonstration of love



and solidarity with Christ,” rather than “an act of individual purification or expiation.”<sup>69</sup>

The practice may appear to us only to have increased the misery of suffering societies—and thus it may not seem a disadvantage for women to have been denied the privilege of public and/or liturgical flagellation. But to think like this is to think within twenty-first-century Western cultural values. Until nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical discoveries, it was not possible to alleviate or control pain, and historical people thought very differently about pain. Ariel Glucklich, in *Sacred Pain*, discusses historical and contemporary uses of pain for religious purposes.<sup>70</sup> It has been used as an instrument of passage and purification, a community builder, and a stimulant of ecstatic states, to name only a few of the uses Glucklich identifies. If we take seriously early modern women’s religious commitments, we must acknowledge that they were likely to have experienced their exclusion from the most intense religious expression of their time as frustrating and constraining.

It is striking that images of the nursing Virgin were frequently painted in a time of great social, political, and religious change, when women were rapidly being marginalized from public life (figure 11). The image carried multiple communications, constituting a remarkably explicit objectification of one of the most pressing personal and collective anxieties of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century people—the uncertainty of food supply—while also specifying with precision women’s primary role in society, that of caregiver and sustainer of life.

No direct evidence remains of how women understood and reacted to these images. And no simple resolution of conflicting messages can do justice to the complexity of the communities in which the images appeared. Rather, both visual messages that acknowledge women’s power over life and death and verbal messages that deny the identity of actual women with the powerful Virgin must be considered if we are to represent accurately men’s ambivalence toward women. The promise of the “extremely perfect” breast and the threat of the “extremely bad” breast both played powerful roles in Western societies. In the context of the cataclysmic events, changing social arrangements, and religious rhetoric of the societies in which they appeared, images of the Virgin with one bare breast both formulated and attempted to control the awesome power of women to bear and sustain new life.



intercourse with demons or the devil, and flying on broomsticks to witches' sabbaths were frequent.

57. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, II.6; quoted in Carole Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila: Author of a Heroic Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 27.

58. This assumption may not, in fact, be accurate even for modern Western societies, but that possibility must be explored elsewhere.

59. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vols. I and II (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

60. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 24–25; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

61. I use the term “queer eye” to refer to the practice of setting aside conventional interpretations in order to approach the evidence with critical questions about how a particular phenomenon “worked” in a society, whom it served—politically and socially—and its effects, rather than the explicit or inferred intentions of its designers. See Rosemary Hennessy’s discussion of queer theory in *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 52–55.

62. Plato, *Symposium*, 210a–212b; *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Michael Joyce (Princeton: Princeton University, 1961), 561–63.

63. “By use of the bodily eyes everyone possesses all that he delights to see”; Augustine, *De trinitate*, 14.19 (my translation); *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: Opera Omnia* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1841).

64. “Grace is a glow of soul, a real quality, like beauty of body”; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I ae. Q. 110, Art. 2; *Aquinas on Nature and Grace*, trans. A. M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 159.

65. For the role of bodies in the theory and practice of Christianity, see my *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

## PART ONE: The Religious Breast

The epigraph is from Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Fragments for a History of the Body*, ed. Michael Feher (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 2: 161, 164.

1. Stanley Meltzoff, *Botticelli, Signorelli, and Savonarola: Theologia poetica and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziana* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1987), 294.

2. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, ed E. W. Blashfield and A. A. Hopkins (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897), 2: 351–52.

3. Ruth Hubbard, “Constructing Sex Difference,” *New Literary History* 19 (autumn 1987), 131.



4. Quoted in Pierluigi De Vecchi, "The Syntax of Form and Posture from the Ceiling to the *Last Judgment*." In *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration*, ed. Pierluigi De Vecchi (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 230.

## CHAPTER 2: The Virgin's One Bare Breast

The epigraph is from Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 1.2.2; *Saint Augustine: On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958). Deborah Haynes noticed that Augustine's definition of "sign" approximates Paul Tillich's definition of "symbol" (discussed in the preface of this book).

1. Victor Lasareff, "Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin," *Art Bulletin* 20, no. 1 (March 1938), 26–65. However, Millard Meiss suggests a Tuscan origin for paintings of the nursing Virgin, based on many examples painted by Simon Marmion, Lippo Memmi, Sandro Botticelli, Taddeo Gaddi, Andrea di Bartolo, and others; Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (New York: Harper, 1964), 133ff.

2. William L. Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 454.

3. John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 154.

4. Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1983), 15, 27.

5. Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York: Harper, 1969), 44. For an argument against a connection between hunger and disease, see Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 16.

6. Quoted in Ferdinand Schevill, *History of Florence* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), 237.

7. Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 127–28.

8. Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62.

9. The profound effects of plague on Western European societies and culture have been studied in detail. See Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*; Allen, *Wages of Sin*; and George Huppert, *After the Black Death; A Social History of Early Modern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986).

10. Quoted in Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 155–56.

11. Allen, *Wages of Sin*, 64.

12. Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 151–52.

13. Quoted in Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 160–61.

14. Quoted in *ibid.*, 154.



15. James Bruce Ross, "The Middle Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York: Harper, 1974), 184.

16. Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries," in *History of Childhood*, 115.

17. Paolo da Certaldo, *Libro di buoni costumi*, quoted in Ross, "Middle Class Child," in *History of Childhood*, 187.

18. Quoted in Ross, "Middle Class Child," 186.

19. Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30, no. 3 (1955), 321ff. Wet-nursing practices are discussed further in chapter 4.

20. Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 17; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, trans. D. Holmes (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1853).

21. From the Council of Ephesus comes the only generic use of "woman" of which I am aware in the history of Christianity. The all-male Council declared: "The blessed Virgin was woman as we are." *The Anathematisms of St. Cyril against Nestorius*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 14: *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 206.

22. Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) states: "To carry out the mystery of unity we ourselves receive from him the body that he himself receives from us."

23. Translated in Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, vol. 1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 316–17.

24. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a, q. 31, art. 4; *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 2 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948).

25. These and other parallel events in the lives of Christ and the Virgin appear in Giotto's 1304 paintings in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy.

26. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a, qs. 27–30.

27. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, 132ff.

28. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 72ff.

29. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Painting and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 91. Indisputably, the phenomenon Steinberg observed in Renaissance painting and preaching existed. It was not, however, as Steinberg writes, the first time that Christ's "full humanity" had been displayed: Christ's full humanity was demonstrated in his presentation by the Blessed Virgin Mary (from her flesh). The Christ Child's bare feet also signaled his human vulnerability.

30. *Ibid.*, 90.

31. Bonaventure [pseudo], *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. and trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 55.

32. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 150.



15. James Bruce Ross, "The Middle Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York: Harper, 1974), 184.

16. Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries," in *History of Childhood*, 115.

17. Paolo da Certaldo, *Libro di buoni costumi*, quoted in Ross, "Middle Class Child," in *History of Childhood*, 187.

18. Quoted in Ross, "Middle Class Child," 186.

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32. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 150.



60. Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 171.
61. Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 21.
62. In the seventeenth century, however, due to an ever-increasing social and economic crisis, Bolognese confraternities defined the poor as nobles who had fallen into poverty; Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 149.
63. Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 54.
64. *Ibid.*, 84.
65. *Ibid.*, 118.
66. *Ibid.*, 119.
67. Casagrande, "Confraternities and Lay Female Religiosity," 66.
68. Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 103.
69. Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities*, 123.
70. Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). By contrast, modern people, some of whom still suffer unmanageable pain, "waste" that pain.

### CHAPTER 3: Mary Magdalen's Penitent Breast

The epigraph is from Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 115.

1. Bonaventure [pseudo], *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. and trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 172.

2. *Meditations*, 343.

3. Quoted in Katherine Ludwig Jansen, "Mary Magdalena: Apostolorum Apostola," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 60.

4. A fifth-century Palestinian monk, Zosimus, first circulated the legend of Mary of Egypt, and it was subsequently embellished in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (1255–66).

5. See my *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 66. The composite Mary Magdalen was not agreed upon by all medieval authors, and discussion of her identity continued throughout the Middle Ages; see Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6–7. The Eastern Orthodox churches did not accept the conflation of several women found in the gospels into the composite figure of the Magdalen.

6. Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 133.

7. Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 214.