Resurrecting the ‘Spiritual Daughters’: the Houtappel Chapel and Women’s Patronage of Jesuit Building Programs in the Spanish Netherlands

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On July 21 of 1640, the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the Jesuit order, a short but grand procession took place inside the Antwerp Jesuit church (Figs. 8.1, 8.2).¹ Members of the community’s Marian sodality, a confraternity dedicated to the promotion of the cult of the Virgin, carried a statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel (Fig. 8.3) from the church’s northern lateral chapel, where it had been kept temporarily, back to the southern chapel. The latter had been erected in c. 1620/21–1622 specifically to house this statue, and its walls had just recently been covered with panels of intricately carved, multicolored Italian marble.²

This stonework formed part of an integrated decorative scheme in which every surface was adorned with expensive materials and masterfully executed paintings and sculptures. By the middle of the seventeenth century it was arguably the finest space within an astonishingly richly appointed church,

1 This research was conducted with the support of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study.

2 The event is described in a history of the city of Antwerp written by the Jesuit Daniel van Papenbroeck around 1700: ‘Apud Patres Societatis interea fiebat ingens apparatus, pro celebrando primo a sua institutione Iubilaeo, collaborantibus imprimis piis illis virginibus, quae sub illorum directione devotam Dea castitatem vitamque profitebantur. Praecelluerunt autem hoc in genere sorores Houtappeliae, quae providi a multis retro mensibus constituerant, fundatum a se piisque parentibus suis sacellum, communemque omnibus sub illius altari sepulturam quam speciosissime exornare marmoribus, qualibus iam ipsum altare circumcirca fulgebat, complexum eximiam penicelli Rubenii tabulam assumptae in coelum Virginis. Quae sub hac populo colenda hactenus steterat Deiparae ex miraculoso Aspricollensi lingo statua, sub titulo REFUGII PECCATORUM; dum novo in opere laboraretur, tantisper delata fuerat ad sacellum Ignatianum. Stetit autem ibi usque ad XXI Julii, quando visum est priori loco restituendam processionaliter circumducere. Ad hanc pompam cohonestandam omnes senae Sodalitates cum facibus praeluxerunt.’ In Daniel van Papenbroeck, Joseph Ernest Buschmann, and Frans Hendrik Mertens, *Annales antverpienses ab urbe condita: ad annum MDCC collecti ex ipsius civitatis monementis publicis privatisque latinae ac patriae linguae iisque fere manu exaratis* (Antwerp: J. E. Buschmann, 1845–1848), 406–07.

FIGURE 8.1 Façade of the Jesuit church, Antwerp, constructed 1615–1621. Marble and gilding
PHOTO: AUTHOR

whose original splendor (diminished by a fire in the nave in 1718 that destroyed the famous ceiling paintings by Rubens) can be glimpsed by the modern viewer in paintings of its interior like that by Sebastiaan Vrancx of c. 1630 (Fig. 8.4).³ The chapel survives largely intact today (Figs. 8.5, 8.6), and both its

³ For visitors' reactions to the richness of the Jesuit church, some of which single out the chapel of the Virgin for the exceptional costliness and beauty of its decoration, see J. A. Goris, *Lof van Antwerpen. Hoe reizigers Antwerpen zagen van de Xve tot de Xxe eeuw* (Brussels: Standaard, 1940), 79–81; Piet Lombaerde, "Introduction," in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 24–25.

FIGURE 8.2 Jacob Neefs, *Templum et domus professa societatis Iesu*, mid-seventeenth century. Engraving depicting the Antwerp Jesuits' complex built c. 1607–1625. To the left is the church, and on its north side (not visible here) is the chapel of the Virgin, built 1620/21–1625.

sumptuous decoration and innovative, Italianate architecture make it arguably the most important example of the Flemish baroque.

It furthermore represents a remarkably comprehensive defense of Catholic tenets that were denied by Protestants and that lay at the very heart of the religious warfare that defined Low Countries history: the power of the saints and the Virgin Mary to intercede on the part of sinners, the existence of purgatory, the spiritual value of virginity and celibacy, and the validity of religious art itself, including miraculous images like the Scherpenheuvel Virgin. Yet despite its potential to offer insights for historians both of art and architecture and of religion, the chapel has remained understudied by scholars.⁴

4 This is largely a function of two factors: first, that art historians who have worked on the church have been primarily occupied with the role of Rubens in designing its decoration, and the extent of his involvement in the chapel is unclear, and second because a comprehensive, archivally-based study of the church has yet to be undertaken. Various aspects of the chapel are addressed in Rudi Mannaerts, "De artistieke expressie van de mariale devotie der Jezuïeten te Antwerpen (1562–1773). Een iconografisch onderzoek" (KUL, 1983); *Sint-Carolus Borromeus: de Antwerpse jezuïetenkerk, een openbaring* (Antwerp: Toerismepastoraal Antwerpen, 2011), 89–101; Bert Timmermans, *Patronen van patronage in het zeventiende-eeuwse Antwerpen: Een*

FIGURE 8.3 Attributed to Barbara van Ursel, Statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, c. 1605, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
 PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.4 Sebastiaan Vrancx, *Interior of the Antwerp Jesuit Church*, c. 1630, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna

FIGURE 8.5 View of the chapel of the Virgin towards the altar
PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.6 View of the chapel of the Virgin towards the west and north walls

PHOTO: AUTHOR

The present text redresses that lacuna. In contrast to most studies of Jesuit church decoration, which take their material subject matter as an example of or tool to elucidate a broadly Jesuit approach to the visual arts, I seek explanations within the specific local conditions under which the chapel of the Virgin was built. In particular I examine the relationship between the Antwerp Jesuits and the chapel's patrons, the extraordinarily wealthy sisters Maria (1575–1649), Anna (1581–1674), and Christina Houtappel (1585–1657), and their maternal

elite als actor binnen een kunstwereld, Studies stadsgeschiedenis (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008); Leon Lock, "Rubens and the Sculpture and Marble Decoration," in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008); Bert Timmermans, "The Chapel of the Houtappel Family and the Privatisation of the Church in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp," *ibid.*; Ria Fabri, "Light and Measurement. A Theoretical Approach of the Interior of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp" *ibid.*; David Freedberg, *Rubens: The Life of Christ after the Passion*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (New York; London: H. Miller; Oxford University Press, 1984), 149–53; Gertrude Wilmers, *Cornelis Schut (1597–1655): A Flemish Painter of the High Baroque* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 43. Ramash Ramsahoye's Master's thesis of 1993 represents the only previous real effort to investigate the Houtappel sisters' and Anna Sgrevens' identity as patrons based on archival documents (Ramesh Ramsahoye, "The Chapel of our Lady of Scherpenheuvel in the Church of St. Charles Borromeo, Antwerp" (University of London (Courtauld Institute of Art), 1993). I am grateful to Mr. Ramsahoye for sharing his work with me.

cousin Anna's Grevens or Sgrevens (1579/80–1638). All four women were 'spiritual daughters': single women who made 'simple' (i.e. not permanently binding) vows of chastity and pursued lives of piety under the direction of male clerics, a lifestyle choice that was especially promoted in the Low Countries by the Jesuits throughout the seventeenth century. This patronage perspective allows us to situate the chapel and its decoration at the interface between the large-scale forces of the Tridentine reforms and the gender dynamics that shaped social behavior, and the small-scale needs of and relationships between individuals. The text further demonstrates the imperative for scholars of the early modern Southern Low Countries to understand its legal system in regards to gender and property in order to avoid the fallacy that only men were positioned to act as important patrons. Women in the region in fact owned and controlled a large proportion of Low Countries wealth, and as the story of the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens shows, the wealthy among them could and did make a major impact on early modern Flemish artistic and religious culture.⁵

In the following pages I thus tell the story of the chapel of the Virgin as embedded within the social, economic, religious, and gendered environment of Antwerp in the seventeenth century. I first give a sketch of the linked histories of the Houtappel and Sgrevens families and the Jesuits of Antwerp from the mid-sixteenth century through their relocation during the Calvinist takeover of the city in 1577–1585, and into the first two decades of the seventeenth century as both groups reestablished themselves. Using archival evidence I then zoom in on the construction and decoration of the chapel of the Virgin, tracing the various stages of its progression over time, and then giving a brief art historical analysis of the chapel as a whole and the ways in which it broadcast fundamental Counter-Reformation messages in the service of societal reform. Finally, I look at the iconography of the chapel and the patronage acts of the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens from a gendered historical perspective, considering the extent to which we can perceive their own choices within the

5 See Sarah Joan Moran, "Inventory of the Marital Property of Emmanuel Ximenez and Isabel da Vega: Notes for Interpretation," in *The Worlds and Possessions of the Portuguese Merchant-Banker Emmanuel Ximenez (1564–1632)*, eds. Christine Göttler and Sven Dupré (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) (in press), Philippe Godding, "Le droit privé dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux du 12e au 18e siècle," in: *Mémoires de la Classe des lettres* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 1987), 271; Laura Van Aert, "Tussen norm en praktijk. Een terreinverkenning over het juridische statuut van vrouwen in het 16de-eeuwse Antwerpen," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 2, no. 3 (2005): 22–42; "The Legal Possibilities of Antwerp Widows in the Late Sixteenth Century," *History of the Family* 12 (2007): 282–295.

decorative program, and what it would have meant to these women to build, adorn, and ultimately be buried in such an extraordinary space.

1 Family and Historical Background

The Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens (see family tree, Figure 8.7) belonged to the wealthy merchant class that had profited during Antwerp's economic heyday in the early and mid-sixteenth century.⁶ Kinship and professional ties in this group were tightly intertwined, and among the Houtappels' relatives and business contacts the names Boot, della Faille, de Decker(e), and de Smidt appear particularly often.⁷

The sisters' father, Godfried Houtappel (1543–13/01/1626), partnered with the brothers Simon and Pascal de Decker in the early modern equivalent of an import/export firm with branches in Antwerp, Venice, and Naples, and by the 1570s they had also established a branch in Cologne.⁸ In 1571 Godfried

6 The family tree is constructed using information from the epitaphs that were originally installed in the crypt chapel beneath the chapel of the Virgin (removed during the French occupation) as reproduced in Papenbroeck, Buschmann, and Mertens, *Annales antverpienses ab urbe condita: ad annum MDCC collecti ex ipsius civitatis monementis publicis privatisque latinae ac patriae linguae iisque fere manu exaratis*, 411–13.; from Antonio (Antonius) Houtappel's will of December 23, 1617 (State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185); from Francis de Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," *L'intermédiaire des généalogistes* 12 (1957): 338–345; and from Félix-Victor Goethals, *Dictionnaire généalogique et héraldique des familles nobles du royaume de Belgique*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Polack-Duvivier, 1849), 404–06. As Antonio's will lists only Francisco, Maria, Anna, Christina, and Lucretia as his siblings, one can reasonably infer that the others were deceased by the time of its writing.

7 Roland Baetens, *De nazomer van Antwerpens welvaart: de diaspora en het handelshuis De Groote tijdens de eerste helft der 17de eeuw*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1976), 146–148; Gertrud Susanna Gramulla, *Handelsbeziehungen Kölner Kaufleute zwischen 1500 und 1650*, *Forschungen zur internationalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1972), 212–219, 234; W. Brulez, "De diaspora der Antwerpse kooplui op het einde van de 16e eeuw," *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 15 (1960): 279–306, 219.

8 Gustaaf Asaert, 1585: *De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004), 109. Somewhat later Godfried would also partner with his wife's half-nephew, Michel Boot, who would be his most important business associate during the later years in Antwerp and who was also a major supporter of the Antwerp and Brussels Jesuits. See Gertrud Susanna Gramulla, *Handelsbeziehungen Kölner Kaufleute zwischen 1500 und 1650*, *Forschungen zur internationalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1972), 217–18. Félix-Victor Goethals, *Dictionnaire généalogique et héraldique des familles nobles du royaume de Belgique*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Brussels: Polack-Duvivier, 1849), 405.

FIGURE 8.7 Houtappel and Sgrevens family tree

married Cornelia Boot (c. 1553–17/09/1620), with whom he would have at least ten children, five sons and five daughters.⁹ As Protestant sentiments rose in

9 Godfried's and Cornelia's dates of death are known from their epitaphs, as reproduced by Papenbroeck:

(1) 'H. S. E. Dominus Godefridus Houtappel, Dominus in Ranst, filius Iacobi, iurisconsulti, urbis huius, ob sua in eam merita adversus Martinum Rossemium, decimum septimum senatoris quod munus ipse suspicere quam suscipere maluit, sua se virtute negotiisque involvens; vir antiquae sinceritatis et fidei, qua pupillorum domus mortuales septenas religiosissime administravit; pietatis affectu sacellum hoc Deiparae, cum filiabus virginibus et nepte Anna Sgrevens, iacto primo lapide, aedificavit; quod hae dein, omni sacra supellectile instructum, marmoreum fecere. Obiit anno Salutis M.DC.XXVI, aetatis suae LXXXIII, die XIII Ianuarii. Parenti optimo filiae hoc honoris monumentum posuere. Vixit sine lite. Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo, Domine. PS. C.XLII.'

(2) 'H. S. E. Dom. Cornelia Boot, coniux lectissima D. Godefridi Houtappel, cui undecim liberos dedit, qua Antverpiae in patria, qua Venetiis, qua Coloniae prognatos; filios quinque, quos omnes sibi ac terris eripi aequanimis tulit; filias sex, quarum quaternas Mariam, Annam, Christinam, Lucretiam, virgines castas, mundo mortuas, laeta Deo obtulit; quibus ipsa fuit quod Paula Eustochio, quod Iuliana Demetriadi; matrona pientissima, in Societatem Iesu iuxta ac pauperes matris benefica; migravit anno Domini M.DC.XX, matrimonii XLIX, aetatis LXVII, die XVII Septembris. Parenti, optime de se merita, filiae virgines hoc amoris monumentum posuere. Matri filiarum laetanti aeterna gaudia tu comprecare.'

the Low Countries, spilling over into a wave of iconoclasm during the 'miracle year' of 1566–67 and the start, in 1568, of armed insurrections against Spain led by William of Orange, the Houtappels and their circle remained staunchly Catholic, supporting the fledgling Jesuit community that had arrived in Antwerp in 1562 to combat the spreading 'heresy.' The order's mission was to defend the Catholic tenets that Protestants denied – the doctrine of the Trinity, spiritual merit accrued through good works, the existence of purgatory, the power of the saints and the Virgin Mary to intercede on the part of sinners, the existence of miraculous images and the validity of religious art in general, and the spiritual value of virginity and celibacy – and to increase the laity's engagement with orthodox piety.¹⁰ Among the Jesuits' strategies was the establishment of colleges in which both the liberal arts and Catholic theology were taught, and Godfried Houtappel was one of the donors towards the founding, in 1574, of the Jesuit college in Antwerp.¹¹

That institution was, however, short-lived. Protestants gained control of the city and declared it a Calvinist Republic in 1577, expelling the Jesuits in 1578 and the other religious orders in 1579, and banning Catholic worship altogether in 1581.¹² Many of the Antwerp Jesuits took refuge in Cologne, whose community was one of the order's most vibrant.¹³ Cologne was also the destination for many of the wealthy Catholic families who left for more

10 On the Antwerp community's history and its profound impact on religious reform in the Spanish Netherlands see Marie Juliette Marinus, *De contrareformatie te Antwerpen (1585–1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad* (Brussels: Paleis der Academië, 1995); Alfred Poncelet, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les anciens Pays-Bas: établissement de la Compagnie de Jésus en Belgique et ses développements jusqu'à la fin du règne d'Albert et d'Isabelle*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Lamertin, 1928); Ludovicus Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani, S.J., 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden* (Antwerp: Ruusbroec-Genootschap, 1961). On the Jesuits more broadly, John W. O'Malley, ed., *The Jesuits I: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, and *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999 and 2006); Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

11 Marinus, "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773," in *Antwerpen en de jezuïeten, 1562–2002*, ed. Herman Van Goethem (Antwerp: UFSIA, 2002), 14. Shortly after its founding the college had around 300 male students drawn largely from wealthy mercantile families. On the Jesuit colleges generally, see Aldo Scaglione, *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1986).

12 See Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); "From Prosecuted Minority to Dominance: The Changing Face of the Calvinist Church in the Cities of Flanders and Brabant (1577–1585)," in *Reformed Majorities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay and H. J. Selderhuis (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co, 2015).

13 Marinus, "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773," 16.

religiously hospitable environments during these tumultuous years,¹⁴ though the Houtappel-Boots-Sgrevens group seem first to have gone to Italy. By 1579 or 1580 Anna Sgrevens's parents, Anna Boot and Adam Sgrevens, were in Naples, where their daughter was born.¹⁵ Godfried and Cornelia probably left Antwerp in or just before 1581, as their own daughter Anna – their seventh or eighth child – was born that year but is not recorded in the Antwerp parish records.¹⁶ The couple were in Venice in 1584, when Cornelia gave birth to Christina Houtappel, and Gottfried is recorded there in 1586–1587.¹⁷ By 1590, however, they had joined other Antwerp exiles in Cologne, where their last child, Lucretia Susanna, was born. In 1597 they had their portraits painted by the émigré Flemish artist Geldop Gortzius (Figs. 8.8 and 8.9).

They were likely still residing in Cologne in 1601/02 when Anna Muns (later called Moens), then fifteen years old and a native of the city, joined their household staff. She would remain with the family for the rest of her life and

14 On the flight of Antwerp merchant families in this period, see Gramulla, *Handelsbeziehungen Kölner Kaufleute zwischen 1500 und 1650*; Asaert, 1585; *De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders*.

15 We know that Anna Sgrevens was born in Naples from her epitaph: 'Domicella Anna Sgrevens, filia Adami, Hasseleto oriundi, et Annae Boot, Antverpianae, Neapoli nata, hic conditur; quae cognatae suae Mariae Houtappel, morum suorum a teneris magistrae, etiam defunctae subiacere voluit, cuius virtutes eximie expressit pietate, modestia, longanimitate et Crucis amore, vere virgo Deo devota, virginum sponso iuncta anno Christi M.DC.XXXVIII, aetatis LVIII, die XVIII Octobris. Cognatae et convictricis suavissimae Anna et Christina Houtappel hoc, velut sorori, monumentum posuerunt, anno M.DC.XLIX. Bene precatus, acclama, Lector: O quam pulchra est casta generatio! Sap. xv.' About Adam Sgrevens I have been able to find almost nothing, but a certain Gaspar Sgrevens (or Scrittoris), very likely a relative, is recorded as a silk merchant in the 1570s in Naples where he acted as an agent for the Antwerp della Faille family. The latter in turn had close ties to Houtappels and would later also be major patrons of the Antwerp Jesuits. See Wilfrid Brulez, *De firma della Faille en de internationale handel van Vlaamse firma's in de 16e eeuw* (Brussels: Palais der Academiën, 1959), 35, 68, 222, 84, 301.

16 Their first six children had all been baptized in the Antwerp cathedral, ending with Egidius on November 11, 1580. See De Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," 343.

17 See Christina's epitaph for her birthplace: 'Domicella Christina Iustina Houtappel, anno M.D.LXXXV, nata Venetiis, in omen futurae virtutis, primam appellationem traxit a Christo, Christi dein sponsa futura, Christinae Virginis Martyris imitata pietatem, relictum sibi a pientissimis parentibus aurum conflavit in alimenta pauperum, ornatum ecclesiae huius, et fundationem Collegii Antverpiensis, una cum tribus sororibus et cognata; mirabilis etiam cum Christina Belgica fortitudine animi in diuturna corporis infirmitate, Iustinae alterius, tutelariorum suarum, in consequenda virginitatis laurea constans aemulatrix; tandem die XVIII Ianuarii, anno M.DC.LVII, aetatis suae LXXII, placidissime, ut vixerat, decessit, iubilaee a dicata Deo virginitate proxima. Illud in coelis agenti perenne hoc soror superstes monumentum posuit.' On Godfried in Venice, see Gramulla, *Handelsbeziehungen Kölner Kaufleute zwischen 1500 und 1650*, 217, note 2.

FIGURE 8.8 Geldop Gortzius, *Portrait of Cornelia Boot*, 1597, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg

apparently developed a deep bond with the Houtappel sisters, who in 1646 granted her the remarkable (for a servant) honor of being buried in the family crypt beneath the chapel of the Virgin.¹⁸

¹⁸ Her epitaph was made of marble and installed in the floor; it is the only one still *in situ*: 'Hic iacet Anna Moens, Coloniensis: quae in domo Houtappel per annos XLV, tam

FIGURE 8.9 Geldop Gortzius, *Portrait of Godfried Houtappel*, 1597, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg

It was during their time in Cologne that the family became involved with the spiritual daughter movement. Much research remains to be done on that

singulari modestia reverentiaque ultimo die quam primo est famulata; obiit IV Ianuarii, M.DC.XLVI, ætatis LX.’

movement, whose origins have not been studied and which has not been looked at from a European perspective (what studies exist are highly localized).¹⁹ We can nevertheless characterize it as a Tridentine iteration of a long tradition of women rejecting marriage to embrace religious chastity without joining a convent, which went back at least to the *mulieres religiosae* of the High Middle Ages.²⁰ Individual women were drawn to such lifestyles both for religious reasons and because they offered a degree of independence that they would not have had had they married or professed as nuns (which along with other restrictions entailed, respectively, reduced control over or renunciation of their personal property). In the context of confessional warfare religious celibacy took on a new political weight, and the Roman Church vehemently defended the value of female virginity in particular. The subsequent tightening of enclosure restrictions on contemplative nuns, whose potential for sexual incontinence

19 On the French context, see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). Mexican and Spanish examples are discussed in J. Michelle Molina, "Technologies of the Self: The Letters of Eighteenth-Century Mexican Jesuit Spiritual Daughters," *History of Religions* 47, no. 4 (2008): 282–303; Isabelle Poutrin, "Una lección de teología moderna: la 'Vida Maravillosa de doña Marina de Escobar' (1665)," *Historia Social*, no. 57 (2007): 127–143. Perhaps the most attention has been given to the Low Countries, where in the South they were colloquially known as *kwezels*, while in the Protestant United Provinces they were more often called *klopjes* or *kloppen*. On the South, see Maurice de Vroede, *'Kwezels' en 'zusters': De geestelijke dochters in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden* (Brussel: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1994); Michel Nuytens, *Monasticon van devote gemeenschappen in de Provincie West-Vlaanderen tijdens het Ancien Régime* (Brussel: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2001); *Kwezeltjes danzen niet. Kwezels en devote gemeenschappen in Vlaanderen in de 17de–18de eeuw* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2013). M. Janssens, "Geestelijke dochters in het Waasland," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40, no. 306–342 (1966); Heidi Deneweth, "Spanningen tussen geestelijke dochters, families en geestelijke leiders te Brugge (17de en 18de eeuw)," *Handelingen van het genootschap voor geschiedenis* 141 (2004). On the North, see Marit Monteiro, *Geestelijke maagden: leven tussen klooster en wereld in Noord-Nederland gedurende de zeventiende eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1996); Charles H. Parker, *Faith on the Margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 43–44; Gerrit Vanden Bosch, "Pionnen op een schaakbord? De rol van klopjes in de belangenstrijd tussen jezuïeten en seculiere priesters in de Republiek omstreeks 1609–1610," *Trajecta* 9, no. 3 (2000): 252–283; Elizabeth Schulte van Kessel, *Geest en Vlees in godsdienst en wetenschap. Opstellen over gezagsconflicten in de zeventiende eeuw* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1980), 51–91; Peter van den Elsen, "Gemertse kwezels uit de hoek!," *Gemerts Heem* 4 (1987): 110–127. Eugenia Theissing, *Over klopjes en kwezels* (Utrecht: Dekker en Van de Vegt, 1935).

20 See Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier, eds., *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

was a danger to the Church's reputation, is well-known to scholars;²¹ however, new research is showing that in many places this coincided with increased support for un- or semi-enclosed female communities that combined a vow of chastity with direct engagement with the world; examples include the Low Countries the Beguines, Spanish *beatas*, teaching congregations, and variety of active tertiary convents.²² While Church officials remained anxious about the difficulty of regulating these movements, the concerns seem to have been outweighed by having such women visible in society as pious exemplars who were also often engaged as free labor in teaching children catechism. Women pursuing such a lifestyle outside of a community presented more of a regulatory challenge, and the advent of the spiritual daughter movement solved that problem by making a close, personal relationship with a professed male cleric as 'spiritual father' a defining aspect of these women's lives.

The Jesuits, whose mission was based in active engagement with the laity, may well have founded the movement; in later decades in the Low Countries they were clearly its strongest supporters. Spiritual daughters are recorded in Antwerp before the Dutch Revolt, and in the early seventeenth century there were an estimated 400 of these women living in Cologne, quite likely due to the Jesuits' strong presence there.²³ It was in this environment that Maria Houtappel made her vows as a spiritual daughter in 1596, when she was about twenty-one years old.²⁴ Her younger sisters Anna, Christina, and Lucretia

21 Ulrike Strasser, *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Mary Laven, "Sex and Celibacy in Early Modern Venice," *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 4 (2001): 865–888; *ibid.*; Sandra Weddle, "'Women in Wolves' Mouths': Nuns' Reputations, Enclosure and Architecture at the Convent of the Le Murate in Florence," in *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Helen Hills (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

22 See for example Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France*; Craig Harline, "Actives and Contemplatives: The Female Religious of the Low Countries Before and After Trent," *The Catholic Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (1995): 541–567; Sarah Joan Moran, "Bringing the Counter-Reformation Home: the Domestic Use of Artworks at the Antwerp Beguinage in the Seventeenth Century," *Simiolus* 38, no. 3 (2016): 144–158.

23 De Vroede, 'Kwezels' en 'zusters'. *De geestelijke dochters in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden*, 51.

24 This is known from Maria's epitaph: 'Domicella Maria Houtappel, virgo eximia, hic deposita, nata Antverpiae, abdicato Coloniae mundo muliebri, virginitatis vexillum redux in patriam intulit. Constanti vitae tenore quasi regulam professa, omnibus admirationi fuit; cilia, disciplinas, aliasque austeritates in extremum vitae annum protraxit; raro in publico aut orans aut laborans, domi prope latuit, corde humilis, verbis gravis, animo excelsa, sibi parca, aliis larga, in Dei cultum, in Deiparae honorem profusa; status sui virginis iubilaeum, anno Domini M.DC.XLVI, festo S. Ursulae, sacro Eucharistico, novem choris musicis exultabunda celebravit. Anno M.DC.XLIX, aetatis LXXIV, die XVIII Februarii, post probatam Deo gravibus morbis patientiam, ad iubilantium virginum

FIGURE 8.10 Franciscus Ehrlinger, *Castellum Sevenberghen*, in Jacob le Roy, *Notitia Marchionatus Sacri Romani Imperii hoc est urbis et agri Antverpiensis*, Antwerp, 1678

would all follow in her footsteps, as would Anna Sgrevens, whose epitaph states that from a young age she viewed Maria as a “pious example” and a teacher.

By 1607 Godfried Houtappel and Cornelia Boot had returned to Antwerp, where they bought a large house called “The Big Ruby” (*Den grooten Robyn*) and three adjacent houses on the Lange Nieuwestraat, a posh area situated between the cathedral and St. James’s church.²⁵ In 1609 they also purchased the castle Zevenbergen, a landed estate about ten kilometers away, which gained Godfried the title of Lord of Ranst and elevated the family to the ranks of the nobility. Over the following years the couple would spend over 30,000 guilders restoring the castle, which was pictured in Jacob le Roy’s 1678 illustrated volume on the castles, monasteries, and monuments around Antwerp (Fig. 8.10).²⁶

Cornelia’s cousin and Anna Sgrevens’s mother, Anna Boot, had returned to Antwerp by January of 1611 when she died a widow (the fate of her husband Adam Sgrevens is unknown). She would be buried in the yet-uncompleted choir of St. James’s.²⁷ In the same year Godfried also purchased burial rights

choros transiit, genuina S. P. Ignatii filia: sorores Anna et Christina, suae velut in Christo genitrici, hoc doloris sui monumentum posuere. Tu defunctam piis votis proseguere.’

25 De Decker, “La famille anversoise des Houtappel,” 342.

26 Ibid.

27 P. Génard, *Verzameling der graf- en gedenkschriften van de provincie Antwerpen*, vol. II.1 (Antwerp: Buschmann, 1863), 19, 37.

there for himself and his family, although as we shall see these would not be used.²⁸

With their four surviving daughters at home and pledged to remain unmarried, the perpetuation of Godfried and Cornelia's biological legacy was in the hands of two surviving sons, Antonius and Franciscus, who are recorded as living together in a house on the Piazza Monteoliveto in Naples in December of 1617.²⁹ These two young men would however die before their mother passed on 17 September 1620 (her epitaph stated that her sons had all been "snatched from her"), leaving only Maria, Anna, Christina, and Lucretia Susanna as the couple's heirs.³⁰ These four women then by law would have inherited their mother's half of the marital estate on her death, and Cornelia likely also left much of her personal property to her daughters (though without her will we cannot be sure). They must have used this money to build the chapel of the Virgin, which was begun around the same time. Lucretia then died on October 31 of 1622, and her epitaph states that she left her property to her sisters "to be given back to God, lest they build, donate, and adorn a temple of God without her." On January 13 of 1626 Godfried died, at which point the remaining half of the marital estate passed to Maria, Anna and Christina.

2 The Reestablishment of the Jesuits in Antwerp and Their Controversial New Church

The Jesuits had returned to Antwerp immediately upon the city's fall to Spanish forces in August of 1585, and they made the city their center of operations in the Low Countries.³¹ While the Houtappels were still in Cologne, probably

28 De Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," 343, note 35.

29 State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuieten te Antwerpen, Stukken betreffende de schenkingen door de zusters Anna, Christina, en Maria Houtappel en Anna's Grevens, T14/015.02–185: testament of Antonius or Antonio Houtappel, December 23 1617.

30 For Cornelia's exact death date, de Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," 342.

31 On the community's history and its profound impact on religious reform in the Spanish Netherlands, see Marinus, *De contrareformatie te Antwerpen (1585–1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad*; "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773"; Poncelet, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les anciens Pays-Bas: établissement de la Compagnie de Jésus en Belgique et ses développements jusqu'à la fin du règne d'Albert et d'Isabelle*; Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani, S.J., 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*; Alfons K. L. Thijs, *Van geuzenstad tot katholiek bolwerk: Antwerpen en de contrareformatie* (Antwerp: Brepols, 1990); Jeffrey M. Muller, "Jesuit Uses of Art in the Province of Flanders," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. J. W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

waiting to see if the financial situation in Antwerp would stabilize, the Jesuits set to work establishing their presence and re-Catholicizing the region.³² In September the college was reopened and Francis Coster founded a Marian sodality to promote devotion to the Virgin Mary, who was now a symbol of the Catholic Church and all of its tenets that Protestants had denied and who would be held up as Antwerp's patron and protector.³³ In this early period numerous Jesuit writers, including Coster, Jan David, Peter Canisi, and Carolus Scribani (1561–1629), whom the Houtappel family may have known in Cologne and who would act as their spiritual father in Antwerp, began publishing works on Catholic theology and devotion in order to spread their messages.³⁴ Jesuits were also instrumental in helping the archdukes Albert and Isabella create a new Marian pilgrimage site at Scherpenheuvel based around the miraculous healing powers of its resident cult image, and in or shortly before 1606 Albert gave the Antwerp Jesuits a 'copy' of that image, made of wood from the oak tree in which the original Scherpenheuvel Virgin had reportedly appeared.³⁵ It is that copy – believed to carry the miraculous essence of its original and thus quite a powerful object – for which the Houtappel chapel would later be built.

From their return to Antwerp in 1585 the Jesuits received crucial financial support from a number of local wealthy families who donated large sums of money and real estate. Many of their offspring became involved directly with the Jesuits by either professing at the community (whose numbers swelled from 25 in 1601 to 157 in 1619) or taking vows as spiritual daughters and using their fortunes to further the Jesuits' mission.³⁶ The first known indication of the Houtappel women's patronage relationship with the Jesuits is an act of

32 A useful timeline for the Antwerp Jesuits can be found in Mannaerts, *Sint-Carolus Borromeus: de Antwerpse jezuietenkerk, een openbaring*, 8–11.

33 See Muller, "Jesuit Uses of Art in the Province of Flanders," esp. 129.

34 Scribani attained his Master's degree in Cologne in 1582; see Abraham Jakob van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden: bevattende levensbeschrijvingen van zoodanige personen, die zich op eenigerlei wijze in ons vaderland hebben vermaard gemaakt*, vol. 17.1 (Haarlem: Brederode, 1874), 581–82. On publications by the Antwerp Jesuits in the early seventeenth century, see Paul Begheyn, *The Jesuits in the Low Countries 1540–1773: Apostles of the Printing Press* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Important information on the production of various editions is also found in Dirk Imhof, *Jan Moretus and the Continuation of the Plantin Press. A Bibliography of the Works Published and Printed by Jan Moretus I in Antwerp*, Bibliotheca Bibliographica Neerlandica Series Maior (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Fernand Donnet, *Les imprimeurs Trognaesius et leur famille* (Antwerp: E. Secelle, 1919).

35 For the gift of the statue see Luc Duerloo and Marc Wingens, *Scherpenheuvel: het Jeruzalem van de Lage Landen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), 55.

36 Marinus, "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773," 20. Among the top early financial contributors was Michael Boot, Cornelia Boot's nephew and Anna Sgrevens's uncle, who had four sons join the Jesuits.

June 24, 1609, in which the provincial superior Franciscus Florentius granted Maria Houtappel permission to participate in ‘all the merits, devotions, masses, penances, sermons, confessions, and all the other good works and religious offices that are performed and shall be performed henceforth by all the company and religious of this house [i.e., the Antwerp Jesuits] wherever in the world they may be.’³⁷ On November 27 of 1611 the superior general in Rome, Claudio Aquaviva, wrote a letter to Cornelia Boot, her four daughters, and Anna Sgrevens that recognized the society’s debt to these women and in turn granted them a list of spiritual benefits similar to those earlier accorded to Maria. A postscript on the letter, signed by Scribani, attests that they all now possessed the right to be buried in the (as yet only planned) church of the Jesuits in Antwerp.³⁸

In 1612 the Jesuit *Provincia Belgica* was split into the *Provincia Gallo-Belgica* (Walloon Province) and the *Provincia Flandro-Belgica* or *Diets-Nederlandse* (Flemish Province). The Antwerp Professed House (the Jesuits avoided the term ‘monastery’ to emphasize their non-enclosed, active missionary lifestyle) became head of the latter, making its prefect Scribani the new provincial superior, a position he retained until 1619. Under his purview plans were made for a new building complex in the heart of the city, which would include residential and administrative buildings and a modestly sized but architecturally grand public square, defined by a church, a library, and a sodality house, all built in a classicist Italian style (see Fig. 8.1). Francois d’Aguilon was appointed architect, and although initial plans sent to the superior general in Rome in 1613 were rejected, a new design was approved in 1615.³⁹

37 “... tous les mérites, prières, messes, pénitences, prédications, confessions et de toutes les autres bonnes oeuvres et offices religieuses qui se font et se feront désormais par toute la Compagnie et les religieux dicelle en quelque endroit du monde qu'ils soient.” State Archive Antwerp, Archief van de Nederduitse provincie der jezuieten en van het archief van het professenhuis te Antwerpen 1564–1773: 116–544, nr. 1.

38 State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, Stukken betreffende de schenkingen door de zusters Anna, Christina, en Maria Houtappel en Anna ‘s Grevens, T14/015.02–185: letter from Aquaviva to the Houtappel women, 27 November, 1611.

39 C. Van Herck and Ad Jansen, “Archief in beeld (2e deel): inventaris van de tekeningen bewaard op het archief van de Caroluskerk te Antwerpen,” *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis & folklore* 11 (1948): 45–91, 49; Bert Daelemans, “Pieter Huyssens S. J. (1577–1637), an Underestimated Architect and Engineer,” in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008). On the Low Countries Jesuits’ approach to architectural projects more broadly, see Bert Daelemans, “Het Promptuarium Pictorum als spiegel van de ontwerppraktijk der Vlaamse Jezuïetenarchitecten in de 17de eeuw,” in *Bellissimi ingegni, grandissimo splendore. Studies over de religieuze architectuur in de*

On April 15 of that year the first stone of the new church was laid. It was to be built on an open three-aisled plan that recalled early Christian basilicas, without side chapels or an architectural divider or roodscreen to block the laity's view of the masses performed at the its three altars.⁴⁰ At first glance this church plan might be seen to embrace and even exceed the emphasis on sobriety and restraint embodied in the Gèsu, the Jesuit mother church in Rome on which it was largely modelled (the rich decoration in the Gèsu today was added mainly in the later seventeenth century). But the Antwerp Jesuits in fact visualized a wholly different kind of space, one whose richness of decoration would outshine every other church in the region. The costs rose quickly, and despite embarking on a fundraising campaign beginning with parish collections in 1614, the Jesuits began borrowing large sums from local wealthy families.⁴¹ Jeffrey Muller has convincingly argued that this 'deficit spending' was a calculated strategy on the part of the community's leaders, who believed (correctly, it would turn out) that investing in grandeur and opulence would both draw the populace in to be educated in the tenets of faith and stimulate pious giving back to the community.⁴²

But the Jesuit leadership in Rome was not at all in favor of this approach. In 1617 the Antwerp house's deficit was 21,348 guilders, and the superior general, Muzio Vitelleschi, wrote to Jacobus Tirinus, who had headed the project since his appointment as provost of the new Professed House in 1616, instructing him to moderate his building activities to spend no more than the donations

Zuidelijke Nederlanden tijdens de 17de eeuw, ed. Krista de Jonge, Annemie De Vos, and Joris Snaet, *Symbola Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000).

40 These characteristics respond to the Council of Trent's (1545–1563) emphasis on lay understanding of and participation in church ritual; the implementation of the Tridentine reforms was in turn the goal of the Milan archbishop Carlo Borromeo book on church architecture and decoration, *Instructiones Fabricae Et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae* (1577) in which the author repeatedly looks to early Christian churches as authoritative examples. See Robert Sénécal, "Carlo Borromeo's *Instructiones Fabricae Et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae* and Its Origins in the Rome of His Time," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000): 241–267; Marcia B. Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce 1565–1577* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Evelyn Carole Voelker, "Charles Borromeo's *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, 1577, Book I, a translation with commentary" (Syracuse University, 1977); Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Preaching and Architecture in Tridentine Italy," *Erebea: Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales* 1 (2011): 231–252.

41 The fundraising campaign continued throughout the church's construction, with the largest donations coming from the city, which gave 20,000 guilders in 1616, the archdukes with 12,000 in 1619, and Philip IV with 10,000 in 1622. See Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani, S.J., 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 210.

42 See Muller, "Jesuit Uses of Art in the Province of Flanders," 132–133.

that had already been collected.⁴³ In 1619 the debts were 118,192 guilders and in 1620, 220,000 guilders, at which point the general ordered Tirinus to stop building. The latter ignored the order and not only continued with construction but also expanded the original plans to include two large lateral chapels, which appear on a new plan drawn up by Pieter Huyskens, who had taken over as architect when d'Aguilon died in 1617 (Fig. 8.11). That on the north side would be dedicated to St. Ignatius, that on the south to the Virgin.

In 1621 the Jesuits owed their creditors 460,286 guilders, and in a letter of June 12 Vitelleschi rebuked Tirinus for his disobedience and specifically for having already begun work on the chapel of the Virgin without permission.⁴⁴ The church was dedicated the same year with great celebration, and the grand two-story sodality house was constructed from 1622 to 1623.⁴⁵ In 1624 provincial superior Florentius de Montmorency reported to Vitelleschi on the progress of the church's decoration, emphasizing its grandeur and listing aspects of the decoration that had been paid for by wealthy benefactors (implicitly arguing against the accusation of irresponsible spending and for the idea that the project's opulence was attracting new donors).⁴⁶ He touched on the two lateral chapels and made a point of noting that that of the Virgin was funded by the generosity of the "three daughters of Godfried Houtappel, Maria, Anna, and Christina, along with his descendant Anna Sgrevens."⁴⁷ Income from such gifts had not yet caught up to the Jesuits' borrowing, however; the next year the debt peaked at 508,000 guilders and Vitelleschi ordered that both Tirinus and Huyskens be dismissed from the project. Tirinus was replaced as provost of the Professed House by Jan de Tollenare, whom the general superior instructed to repay the Jesuits' creditors as quickly as possible.⁴⁸

43 For the figures on the debts, Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani*, S. J., 1561–1629. *Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 210–212.

44 Alfred Poncelet, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les anciens Pays-Bas: établissement de la Compagnie de Jésus en Belgique et ses développements jusqu'à la fin du règne d'Albert et d'Isabelle*, vol. 2, 476.

45 Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani*, S. J., 1561–1629. *Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 210.

46 From the *Litterae annuae Domus Professum Soctis Jesu Antverpia Anni 1624*, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, as reproduced in Claire Baisier, "De documentaire waarde van de kerkinterieurs van de Antwerpse school in de Spaanse tijd (1585–1713)" (University of Leuven, 2008), 344.

47 *Ad dextrum templi latus excitatum sacellum dicandum magnae Matri longum pedes omnino quinquaginta duos, latum viginti septem (alteri quod ex adversa templi parte biennium B. Parenti nostro Ignatio exstructum fuit respondens) liberalitate trium filiarum D. Gotofredi Houtappelii Mariae, Annae, Christinae, eiusdemque neptis Anna Sgrevens*. Ibid.

48 Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani*, S. J., 1561–1629. *Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 211.

FIGURE 8.11 Pieter Huyssens, plan for the Jesuit complex, c. 1620–1622, Archive of the Carolus Borromeuskerk, Antwerp

3 The Construction and Decoration of the Chapel

It is the context of this conflict and its aftermath that the chapel of the Virgin was created, with construction beginning in 1620 or 1621 and the main phases of decoration stretching until about 1645, with at least one later addition in 1657. Here I will first sketch the chronology of this process and the expenses laid out for it as far as can be gleaned from the documentary evidence. I will then discuss the chapel as an integrated whole in which architecture, sculpture, and painting came together to communicate theological messages.

It is unclear whether the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens were involved in the chapel's initial conception; however, the correspondence of its foundation with the sisters' inheritance from their mother in the fall of 1620 strongly suggests that the latter was the catalyst. We are missing the documents (the parents' marriage contract, Cornelia Boot's will, probate inventories for her half of the marital property and for her personal property) that would tell us the exact size of this fortune, but considering the family's standing and the

daughters' subsequent patronage acts it was undoubtedly huge. On receiving their inheritance the sisters may have had the idea to build a monumental family chapel in the Jesuit church, or the Jesuits might have seen their faithful supporters' new wealth as an opportunity and brought a proposal for the chapel to them. It could also have been the case that the Jesuits were already planning the project when Cornelia Boot died, and the sisters, seeing the financial pressure under which the fathers were working, saw a chance to step in and make the chapel their own.

In any case, the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens were established as the chapel's patrons by November or December of 1622, when Tirinus wrote that he had allocated or dedicated (*ghegundt*) the space to these women and hung their arms there in recognition of the "many good deeds that they have done for our Society."⁴⁹ The fact that the escutcheons could be hung at all implies that the architecture of the chapel was complete at this time, and the 'allocation' also almost certainly corresponds with the establishment of the chapel as the Houtappel family's tomb; the body of Cornelia Boot, if not already in the subterranean crypt, must have been interred around this time as would have been that of her daughter Lucretia.

The architectural plan for the chapel of the Virgin has traditionally been ascribed to Rubens, though Leon Lock has recently argued for a collaborative approach between the painter and Huyssens.⁵⁰ Measuring seventeen meters long by seven-and-a-half wide, the chapel is architecturally separate from the rest of the church and accessible through a portal on its northeast corner. The east end is divided into a small rectangular apse just wide enough for the altar frame, which is flanked by two small triforia elevated to the height of the altarpiece. The spaces below these balconies are accessible by small doors, one giving access to the sacristy behind the altar, and the other to a stairway down to the church's crypt and the subterranean mortuary chapel beneath the altar of the chapel of the Virgin. The most striking architectural element

49 "... ick aende Eerbaere Joffrouwen Marie, Anna, Christina Houtappels ende Anna sGrevens, om de menichvuldige weldaden aen onse Societeit bewesen, ghegundt hebbe de nieuwe Capelle van onse lieve vrouwe van Scherpenheuvel in onse kerke, ende de selve met haere wapenen besedt hebbe." Original quoted in Ramsahoye, "The Chapel of our Lady of Scherpenheuvel in the Church of St. Charles Borromeo, Antwerp," 46. The date of November or December is based on the fact that Tirinus's letter is dated 1622 but he does not include Lucretia, who died on October 31.

50 See Lock, "Rubens and the Sculpture and Marble Decoration," in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008).

of the chapel is its use of a hidden light source in the form of a window set into the wall of a small barrel vault above the altar (Fig. 8.12), which together with the chapel's south-facing lateral windows illuminate the space, making it particularly bright in the afternoon. Paintings like that by Vrancx (see Fig. 8.4) that show the church's interior typically depict the entrance to the chapel of the Virgin as filled with a glowing, almost heavenly light.

Decorative efforts seem first to have been focused around the altar, which along with the altar of the St. Ignatius chapel was dedicated on Pentecost of 1625.⁵¹ The state of the apse was described by Florentius de Montmorency in a report to Vitelleschi of that year, which tells us that the statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel had been placed on the altar, as had Rubens's *Assumption* of c. 1611–1614 (Fig. 8.13) (the original was taken to Vienna by the Empress Marie Teresa at the end of the eighteenth century and is now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum; a nineteenth-century copy now appears in its place). This work had originally been executed for the high altar of Antwerp's cathedral but been rejected, and it is not clear exactly when or how it became destined for the chapel.⁵²

Also complete were the eight small scenes attributed to Hendrik van Balen that act as a kind of predella, painted directly onto the marble of the altar and the adjacent walls. Referred to by de Montmorency as "various painted emblems of the Nativity and the mysteries of the Word made Flesh," these were possibly executed in 1621, when two payments to the painter appear in

51 'Nobili tamen nostri, inquam, temporis Appellis Petri Pauli Rubbenii caelorum Regina in caelum assumpta altari in proprio sacello imposita, nobilissimam fortasse nobilissime pictoris opus: cui suppedanea eiusdem virginis satis procera statua e sacra Apriscollensi quercu excisa. Aram cingunt ab eodem artifice, eodemque modo quo in sacello B. Parentis nostri depicta varia, emblemata natalitia incarnati verbi mysteria referentia. Ceterum quamvis huic altari nondum suprema manus sit imposita, ex imperfecto tamen opere quale quantumque futurum sit facile colligi potest. Frontalia sane aliaque ornamenta venusta admodum, nec parii pretii mirantur omnes quibus liberalitate filiarum Dⁿⁱ Godefridi Houtappellii, Mariae, Annae, Christinae, eiusdemque neptis D. Annae Sgrevens magna sit quotidie accessio, quae ad ornandum D. virginis sacellum (quod suo iure sibi vindicant) omnem industriam et omnes curas diurnas nocturnasque conferunt, ut interim omitam quotidiana domui collata beneficia, multa et magna'. Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Provincia Flandro-Belgica 52. Hist. (1620–1629). Reproduced in Baisier, "De documentaire waarde van de kerkinterieurs van de Antwerpse school in de Spaanse tijd (1585–1713)," 345.

52 On the painting and related preparatory works, see Freedberg, *Rubens: The Life of Christ after the Passion*, 149–53; Anne-Marie S. Logan, ed. *Peter Paul Rubens: The Drawings* (New York; New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2005), 155–61.

FIGURE 8.12 Hans van Mildert (?), marble figure of God the Father at the top of the altar in the chapel of the Virgin, c. 1625, and the barrel vault above with a hidden window on the south wall, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp

PHOTO: AUTHOR

the Jesuit accounts.⁵³ They are arranged to be read in pairs; moving from the outermost scenes inward we see the Presentation of the Virgin on the left and on the right the Presentation of Christ, then the Virgin of the Annunciation and the Angel of the Annunciation, the Flight into Egypt and the Visitation, and finally the Adoration of the Shepherds and Adoration of the Magi, which flank the statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel.

Neither the designer nor the sculptor of the carved altar frame are recorded, but based on stylistic and circumstantial evidence they were probably Rubens and Hans van Mildert. Designs made by the former for other sculptural elements in the church share elements with the altar's florid dynamism, and the latter was responsible for the church's high altar (completed 1621) and later appears to have made a design for a marble altar for the Houtappel-Sgrevens

53 Anna C. Knaap, "Marvels and Marbles in the Antwerp Jesuit Church: Hendrick van Balen's Stone Paintings of the *Life of the Virgin* (1621)," in *Jesuit Image Theory*, ed. Wietse de Boer, Walter S. Melion, and Karl A. E. Enenkel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 364.

FIGURE 8.13 Peter Paul Rubens, *Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1611–1614, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

family crypt (Fig. 8.14).⁵⁴ According to de Montmorency the chapel altar was in 1625 as yet “imperfect,” but this, he assured Vitelleschi, would easily be rectified through the generosity of the community’s donors.⁵⁵ The Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens, he stated, had already made “many and great” gifts towards the chapel of the Virgin, and would continue to show all “industry and care,” working “day and night” to see to its ornamentation. As this work continued over the coming years, such ‘gifts’ would include rich liturgical vessels, vestments, and decorative elements for the altars, one of which is described in 1628 by de Montmorency’s successor Jacobus Stratus as an expensive altar frontal made of cloth of silver with *insigni acus artificio illuso*, “striking illusionistic needle work.”

That same letter refers to the chapel as that of the “queen of heaven,” *sacello praesertim coelorum reginae*, instead of *sacello magnae Matri* – chapel of the great Mother [of God] – as earlier documents term it. This we can link to the then near-complete altar space and its iconography: viewers saw in Rubens’s altarpiece the Virgin miraculously born up to heaven by a flock of angels three days after her death, while the apostles and bystanders marveled at her empty tomb below; the image was narratively expanded by the marble figure of God at the top of the altar (see Fig. 8.13) who reaches down to place a gilded crown (now removed) onto Mary’s head as she rises. De Montmorency’s reference to heaven also suggests that the stucco ceiling had already been completed or at least that its plans had been finalized. A design for the ceiling attributed to Rubens is preserved in the Albertina, while its execution has been attributed to Andries Colyns de Nole, who would a few years later be involved in other decorative work for the chapel (see below). The ceiling features symbols of the Virgin set into a heavenly space with angels, and it was on view by the Feast of the Nativity (September 8) of 1631 when the Archduchess Isabella and Marie

54 For Rubens, see Valerie Herremans, “Peter Paul Rubens and the Decoration of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp”; the drawing for the crypt chapel bears an eighteenth-century inscription giving the attribution to Van Mildert, the date, and a statement that the design was for the ‘improvement’ – presumably replacement – of an existing altar. See Marinus, “Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773,” 45.

55 Baisier, “De documentaire waarde van de kerkinterieurs van de Antwerpse school in de Spaanse tijd (1585–1713),” 345. The letter from de Montmorency provides the only solid evidence thus far for dating the altar. As it has only recently been published, several previous authors, including Bert Timmermans, Marguerite Casteels, and Valerie Herremans have presumed that the altar was completed later, after 1626 and as late as 1640, and some have claimed authorship for the Colyns de Nole workshop based on the 1635 contract for work on the chapel discussed below. Timmermans’s statement that the marble for the altar cost 3000 guilders (*Patronen van patronage* ..., 221) appears to be based on a misinterpretation of documents of 1640 cited by Casteels.

FIGURE 8.14 Hans van Mildert (attr.), design for the altar in the subterranean crypt of the chapel of the Virgin, 1635, Archive of the Carolus Borromeuskerk, Antwerp

de' Medici visited the church. In a description of their visit published the following year Jean Puget de La Serre noted that the ceiling was "carved in relief with figures, but so boldly that the work seems to detach from the [ceiling], deceiving the spirit with the eyes" – plastic illusionism in this case was clearly valued by the author and presumably by contemporaries. De La Serre however mistakenly stated that the carvings were done in "white stone," probably indicating that the stucco had not yet been gilded as we see it today (see Fig. 8.15).⁵⁶

On March 13 of 1635 the three Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens contracted with Robrecht Colyns de Nole and his nephew Andries to "clothe" (*becleeden*) the chapel in marble.⁵⁷ The cost for the project was to be 21,000 guilders paid in installments, with Anna Sgrevens covering one-half of the amount and the Houtappels the other half. While Rubens is presumed to have designed the installation, the contract makes reference only to a (now lost?) drawing "delivered and signed" by a certain Jesuit named Joannes Van Dam, which is described as marked with letters denoting where each different type of stone was to be used: marble of black, red, and white, as well as "variegated [i.e. polychrome] Italian marbles, whether black and yellow, or green-white, or whatever sorts are available." The women further ordered "six figures in white Carrara marble, each six feet high, being Our Lady with the Christ Child, St. Joseph, St. Joachim, St. Anna, St. Christina, [and] St. Lucretia or Susanna." The result, visible today, is a richly decorated interior whose aesthetic effects depend on not only the stones' natural colors but also deeply carved relief elements in the form of scrollwork, foliage, putti, and antique masks. The contract stipulated that the work was to be completed in three and a half years, but the death of Robrecht in 1636 and of Andries in 1638 must have contributed to

56 Jean Puget de La Serre, *Histoire curieuse de tout ce qui c'est (sic) passé à l'entrée de la Reyne Mere du Roy Treschrestien dans les villes des Pays Bas* (Antwerp: Balthasar Moretus, 1632), 57. "Sur le milieu de l'Eglise il y a aussi deux autres Chappelles, placees hors des espaces de son estentenduë; l'une consacrée à la Vierge, & l'autre à saint Ignace. Les voutes sont de pierre blanche, taillée en figures de relief; mais si hardiment, que l'ouvrage se destache en apparence de luy mesme, pour decevoir les esprits par les yeux. Les deux autels sont enrichis des despoüilles de quelque fameuse carriere de marbre, dont la politesse efclatante fait admirer par force les appas de sa beauté insensible & inanimée."

57 The document is reproduced in Pieter Jozef Visschers, *Iets over Jacob Jonghelinck, metaelgieter en penningsnyder, Octavio van Veen, schilder, in de XVI^e eeuw; en de gebroeders Collyns de Nole, beeldhouwers, in de XV^e, XVI^e en XVII^e eeuw* (Antwerp, 1853), 94–97. On the de Nole family of sculptors, see Marguerite Casteels, *De beeldhouwers de Nole te Kamerijk, te Utrecht en te Antwerpen*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor wetenschappen, letteren en schone kunsten van België. Klasse der schone kunsten (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1961); Jan Van der Stock and Hans Nieuwdorp, "Het Christusbeeld van de Meir te Antwerpen. Een meesterwerk van de gebroeders De Nole uit de vergeethoek," *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art* 55 (1986).

FIGURE 8.15 Ceiling with gilt stucco decoration, attributed to Andries de Nole, c. 1631, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
 PHOTO: AUTHOR

delays that stretched the installation of the marble until at least the middle of the following decade.⁵⁸

On May 12, 1638, Anna Sgrevens wrote her will, naming the Houtappel sisters as her executors and stating that “in the case that I should owe any debts for the affixing of the marble in Our Dear Lady chapel in the Professed House, and also for the gilding of the chapel, and the paintings that should be there, and any other work towards its completion” the sisters should pay the costs from her estate, most of which she left to the Jesuits.⁵⁹ Anna did die later that year, and over the next six years the Houtappel sisters made numerous payments, totaling 16,729 guilders, from her estate towards the chapel. These were tallied in an account drawn up by the procurator of the Jesuit College Gaspar de Haze on August 13 of 1644.⁶⁰ On September 12 of 1639 the commission was transferred to the sculptors Jacques Couplet and Sebastiaan de Neve, who had worked as journeymen under Andries Colyns de Nole.⁶¹ At that point the two artists still needed “three pieces of white marble” – suggesting that work on at least three of the statues had not yet been started. In 1640 the Couplet-de Neve workshop recorded a payment for renting the workshop where “three figures” had already been completed.⁶² Marguerite Casteels speculates that these were the statues of Joseph and the Virgin (Figs. 8.16 and 8.17), which she attributes to the Colyns de Noles, with possibly finishing touches by Couplet and de Neve) and St. Susanna (Fig. 8.18, which she attributes fully to de Neve) since no subsequent archival traces for those figures have been found.

In 1642 a payment was entered for the installation of the figure of St. Anne (Fig. 8.19), and a letter from the provincial superior to Vitelleschi in that year indeed states that that statue had been erected in the chapel.⁶³ The same let-

58 On the progress of the project see See Casteels, *De beeldhouwers de Nole te Kamerijk, te Utrecht en te Antwerpen*, 404–419.

59 State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185: Will of Anna Sgrevens, May 12, 1638; see also the probate inventory of Sgrevens's estate made on October 31, 1638.

60 State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185: Accounting of payments made by the Houtappel sisters from Anna Sgrevens's estate, made on August 13, 1644.

61 Delays may have also been caused by conflicts between the sculptors and Andries de Nole's widow, from whom Couplet and de Neve briefly rented their former employer's workshop. See Casteels, *De beeldhouwers de Nole te Kamerijk, te Utrecht en te Antwerpen*, 135–136.

62 Ibid., 417–419; Léon Lock (“Flemish Sculpture: Art and Manufacture 1600–1750,” University of London, 2008), has noted that a terracotta model for the figure of St. Joseph is held in the collection of the Royal Museum in Brussels.

63 State Archive Antwerpen, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185: Accounting of payments made by the Houtappel sisters from Anna Sgrevens's

ter reports that figures of Peter and Paul had already been installed in the balustraded triforia flanking the altar; these were not part of the 1635 contract with the Colyns de Noles and must have been ordered separately. Based on stylistic evidence Casteels attributed them to the Colyns de Noles for the design and primarily to Jacques Couplet for the execution; however the attribution is complicated by the fact that the figures now in place appear to be copies (they are not marble but painted wood, Figs. 8.20, 8.21). Because the statue of St. Peter, in the left-hand triforium as one faces the altar, is swathed in shadow no matter the time of day, one wonders if there may have originally been an opening in the wall beside him that would have allowed him to be illuminated with light from the nave.

Among the last entries in the account for Anna Sgrevens's estate are a payment of 500 guilders on June 2, 1644, to Sebastiaan de Neve for completing the statue of St. Catherine (Fig. 8.22; Catherine had replaced the statue of Joachim at some point after the original contract was drawn up), and finally a note stating that another 400 guilders, representing Sgrevens's half of the cost of the statue of St. Christina (Fig. 8.23), would be paid to the artist when it was finished.⁶⁴ When their installation was complete these eight sculpted figures would have made a striking impression on the viewer, both in a spiritual sense – the life-sized figures peering down from their elevated but still accessible register on the walls would have heightened the illusion of sharing their heavenly space – and a material one, since the Carrara marble from which they were made was very expensive in the seventeenth-century Low Countries and underlined the financial power of the patrons.⁶⁵

The "paintings" mentioned by Anna Sgrevens in her will of 1638 probably referred to the several works, all depicting Marian themes, that were custom-sized to fit between the marble elements on the walls. No other contemporary documents concerning these images have come to light, but Daniel Papebroeck's description of the chapel from around 1700 allows us to identify them for the most part.⁶⁶ Still in its original location at the back of the chapel, beneath the

estate, made on August 13, 1644; for the letter, Baisier, "De documentaire waarde van de kerkinterieurs van de Antwerpse school in de Spaanse tijd (1585–1713)," 347.

64 State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185: Accounting of payments made by the Houtappel sisters from Anna Sgrevens's estate, made on August 13, 1644.

65 On the cost of various types of marble see Lock, "Flemish Sculpture: Art and Manufacture 1600–1750," Chapter 4.

66 'Exhinc singulariter venerantium illam assiduitas crevit: multos etiam e longinquo attrahebat fama speciosioris quam alibi uspiam exstat capellae, quam novam videri faciebat marmoreal incrustatio parietis, inter positas recenter picturas praestantium artificum: quarum duae, sub gemina ad latus meridionale fenestra (nam sub media

FIGURE 8.16 Robrecht and Andries Colyns de Nole (attr.), *Virgin and Child*, c. 1638, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
 PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.17 Robrecht and Andries Colyns de Nole (attr.), *St. Joseph*, c. 1638, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp

PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.18 Sebastiaan de Neve (attr.), *St. Susanna*, c. 1638–1640, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
 PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.19 Jacques Couplet (attr.), *St. Anne*, 1640–1642, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
 PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.20 Anon., *St. Peter*, undated wooden copy after a marble original by Robrecht and Andries Colyns de Noles and Jacques Couplet (attr.) completed by 1642, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.21 Anon., *St. Paul*, undated wooden copy after a marble original by Robrecht and Andries Colyns de Noles and Jacques Couplet (attr.) completed by 1642, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.22 Sebastiaan de Neve, *St. Catharine*, 1644, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

FIGURE 8.23 Sebastiaan de Neve, *St. Christina*, c. 1644–45, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

Houtappel coat of arms and between decorative profile portraits of Christ and the Virgin in white marble, is Cornelis Schut's *Circumcision* (Fig. 8.24), an unusual composition that removes the scene from its typical temple setting to an ambiguous, perhaps heavenly or timeless, space. The Virgin holds her son in her lap, while the priest (whom Papenbroeck mistook for St. Joseph) kneels at her feet; two angels assist with the procedure while others floating above bear symbols of Christ's Passion, which is prefigured by the sacrifice of blood in the circumcision.

The two paintings originally on the south wall, hung on either side of the confessional, are works by Gerard Seghers now in the Antwerp Royal Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 8.25) and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Fig. 8.26), both of which display unusual iconography centered around the Virgin. The Antwerp picture presents the viewer with the biblical episode in which the resurrected Christ (recognizable as such by his palm frond and wounds) greets his mother. Mary is depicted as having just been interrupted in prayer, kneeling before a table-like altar with the signs of the Passion around her; above two putti hold a banner with the words *Regina coeli, laetare, alleluia*: "Queen of heaven, rejoice" – even though Mary was, of course, at this narrative moment still very much alive and on earth. Christ, on the other side, has just returned from hell/limbo and trails behind him Old Testament figures that he has released: King David, Moses, and Adam and Eve. Curiously, also in the group are

sedes stat confessionalis) Gerardi Zegerii sunt: una redivivum a mortuis Christum cum Patriarchis, limbo eductis, exhibens moestae, contemplandisque Passionis instrumentis intentae Matri; altera, eadem de manu Ioannis sacrificantis communicantem, in consortio Evangelicarum mulierum. E regione altaris, inter corniciam et confessionale, decurrit longior tabula Schutti, exprimens circumcisionis mysterium peractum reverenter a Iosepho genuflexo ante genua Virginis, tenentis in gremio filiolum, ad crucem desuper oblatam ab Angelis brachiola tendentem. Ex adverso autem fenestrae mediae, supra tertium confessionale, est duodennis Iesus a parentibus Hierosolymam ductus, Livinaei opus. Prae ceteris tamen admirationi est maior tabula, in qua depictam a Rubenio cum parvulo Matrem Chorus Angelorum, desuper ab eodem Rubenio expressus, ornate sertis et pancarpiis florum, a Daniele Zegers quam vivacissime expressorum. Ad pilas quatuor, sustinendo fornicis circumductas, totidem grandes ex candido marmore statuariae assurgunt, Sanctarum Annae, Christinae, Susannae et Catharinae. Denique supra portulam utramque ad sacrarium unam, alteram ad hypogeum sepulcrale ducentem, assistunt hinc Deipara, inde Iosephus, marmorei ambo; et post hos in lateralibus podiis altare stipant Apostolorum Principes Petrus ac Paulus. Altari vero ipsi superne incumbit, inter marmoreas Angelos, marmoreus ipse Deus Pater, quasi coronam aeris inaurati tendens ascendentem, in iam dicta tabula, e tumulo coelorum Reginae imponendam.' Papenbroeck, Buschmann, and Mertens, *Annales antverpienses ab urbe condita: ad annum MDCC collecti ex ipsius civitatis monementis publicis privatisque latinae ac patriae linguae usque fere manu exaratis*, 407–08.

FIGURE 8.24 Cornelis Schut, *Circumcision*, c. 1640s, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

St. Joseph and two anonymous souls, apparently signifying that Christ's sacrifice has made possible the salvation of all those who come after him. Seghers has thus created another hybrid heavenly/earthly space that glorifies Mary while underlining the crucifixion of her son as the foundation for mankind's salvation.

The Vienna painting depicts an apocryphal scene, that of St. John the Evangelist administering communion to Mary. The subject is unusual and has not, to my knowledge, been examined by art historians. It constitutes a curious kind of reintegration of the body of Christ into that of Mary, herself the site of his incarnation. It seems to have gained limited popularity after Trent, and the extant examples I have been able to trace suggest that it was a particularly Spanish iconography that was disseminated into its Low Countries territories in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.⁶⁷

67 On the iconography, see John B. Knipping, *De iconografie van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*. Vol. 2 (Hilversum: 1940), 17. Painted examples include one by Spanish court painter Juan Pantoja de la Cruz of c. 1600 which includes portraits of the family of Archduke Charles II in the Descalzas Reales monastery in Madrid, one by Alonzo Cano in the Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Mexico, another by Miguel Barroso dated 1585–89 in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, an anonymous Flemish seventeenth-century work in the collection of Fyvie castle, Scotland, one attributed to Frans Francken II in the former chapel of the Augustinian hospital sisters (now part of the Elzenveld) in Antwerp (KIK/IRPA nr. 109553), and an anonymous seventeenth-century painting in the Flemish abbey of Westmalle (KIK/IRPA nr. 87138).

FIGURE 8.25 Gerard Seghers, *Christ Returning from Purgatory to Greet his Mother*, c. 1640s, Royal Museum of Fine Art, Antwerp

FIGURE 8.26 Gerard Seghers, *John the Evangelist Administering Communion to the Virgin Mary Accompanied by Three Women*, c. 1640s, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Above the confessional on the north wall Papenbroeck noted a *Return from Egypt* by 'Livinius' (Jan Lievens, a Dutch painter active in Antwerp from 1635 to 1643). The work currently in place there is a *Holy Family with St. John, Joachim, and St. Anne*, more reasonably attributed to Schut (visible in Fig. 8.6). This would seem to indicate a replacement of the original painting; however, it may be that Papenbroeck simply misremembered either the work's subject or the actual location of a now-lost *Return from Egypt*. To the left of the north wall confessional is an anonymous painting of the Assumption not mentioned by Papenbroeck, and this may be where the painting he described as "by Rubens, with some ornate wreathes of fruit and flowers which Daniel Seghers painted from life" was originally installed.⁶⁸ Finally, at some point the sisters hung the portraits of their parents by Gortzius (8.8 & 8.9) in the chapel. Inscriptions were added naming Cornelia and Godfried as mother and father of Maria, Anna, and Christina, and calling both the parents and the daughters "co-founders" of the Jesuit College.⁶⁹ According to Visschers, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, these portraits were hung below the *Holy Family* mentioned above, which would resonate with its theme of parental and filial love.⁷⁰

For the making of the three confessionals we have no documentary evidence, but as the marble decorative panels seem designed to fit around them they must have been planned by the time the 1635 contract was drawn up. Made of oak, each consists of a central space with a bench for the priest to sit while hearing confessions, divided from two flanking spaces for penitents to kneel by intricately carved panels (Fig. 8.27).

68 Such pictures constituted an image-within-an-image with a central religious scene (often, but not always, of the Virgin), see David Freedberg, "Origins and rise of the Flemish Madonnas in flower garlands," *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 32 (1981): 115–150; Susan Merriam, *Seventeenth-century Flemish garland paintings: Still life, vision, and the devotional image* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

69 Although Katlijne van der Stighelen identified this reference with portraits of the parents by Cornelis Schut that were owned by Anna Houtappel at the time of her death, the inscriptions that were added to the Gortzius pieces indicate that it must have been these pictures in the chapel. It would also make sense that Anna would keep portraits of her parents both in the public chapel and in her private home. The inscriptions have been removed by restorers but were recorded by A. Somov: *Godefridus Havtappel toparcha in Ranst pater mariae Annae et Christinae Fundatricum hujus col. ob 13 jan aet 83 1686* and *Cornelia Boot mater Mariae Annae et Christinae Fundatricum hujus col. Ob 17 sept aet 67 1621*. *Ermitage Imperial: Catalogue de la Galerie Des Tableaux, Vol. 2: Écoles Néerlandaises Et École Allemande* (St. Petersburg, 1887), 133.

70 Visschers, *Iets over Jacob Jonghelinck, metaelgieter en penningsnyder, Octavio van Veen, schilder, in de XVI^e eeuw; en de gebroeders Collyns de Nole, beeldhouwers, in de XV^e, XVI^e en XVII^e eeuw*, 113.

FIGURE 8.27 Anon., confessional, c. 1635–44, chapel of the Virgin, Carolus Borromeuskerk (former Jesuit church), Antwerp
PHOTO: AUTHOR

In keeping with the original spirit of the development of confessionals by Tridentine reformers, who sought to bring the rite of confession out of closed rooms (with their potential for impropriety) and into public view, the chapel's examples have no doors or gates on the front.⁷¹ Although their details differ, the decorative schema of the confessionals all prominently feature angel-topped herms on their dividing panels with deeply carved scrollwork, floral patterns,

71 See Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001).

putti, and fruit garlands, echoing the same designs on the chapel's altar and throughout its marble decoration on the walls.

In 1657 Anna Houtappel, the last surviving sister (Maria Houtappel had died on February 18 of 1649 and Christina on January 1, 1657) added one final piece of furniture to the chapel's decoration: an ornate white marble communion rail erected before the altar (see Fig. 8.5). In its center is the monogram of the Virgin Mary and on either side are angels whose bodies trail away into cornucopia forms, sprouting leaves and roses. Moving outward these intertwine with Eucharistic symbols: oversized ears of wheat referring to the Host as the body of Christ, and grapes for the wine as his blood. This work formed a sacramental pendant to the chapel's confessionals, as penitents visiting the chapel would first confess and then kneel here to receive the host during the mass.

The chapel of the Virgin in the Jesuit church thus presented its viewers with a remarkably immersive space, one in which every surface was covered in precious materials wrought into visual forms that communicated religious messages. It was in a sense constructed almost like an enormous version of the ornate boxes and cabinets in which wealthy Antwerpers stored precious jewels, antique coins, or religious relics; in this case the "jewel" was the statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, and the decoration of the chapel aimed primarily at communicating the glory of the Virgin Mary herself. The imagery had a narrative aspect, beginning at the altar with the tiny 'predella' scenes from the Virgin's earthly life, each story or episode illustrating her personal virtues and her selection by God to be the bearer of Christ. The next vertical register presents us with the penultimate moments in her story, her Assumption and Coronation. Roses and fruit carved in relief on the altar further enhance our understanding of the scene, referring to the Virgin's virtue, to the sweet scent that emerged from her tomb when it was opened after her death, and to the heavenly 'fruits' of her pious life. The light that streams through the window concealed above God also seems to come from heaven itself, almost as though by a miracle – an idea that would in turn support Counter-Reformation church's claims for Mary's power as intercessor and the truth of miracles wrought through her compassion.⁷² This thematic integration of painting,

72 In fact, the author of the report on the visit of Marie d'Medici and the archduchess Isabella to the Jesuit church states that they listened to a sermon on just that subject by a certain Father Souffran, which brought the audience to tears: "Ce fut en ce saint lieu qu'il R. Pere Souffran preschant en presence de la Reyne & de l'Infante, & devant un monde de people, le jour de la Nativité de la Vierge, fit des miracles a son ordinaire. Le dy, des miracles, puis que par le seul effort de sa voix, animée de charité, il fit sourdre mille ruisseaux de larmes d'autant de coeurs de roche. Le ne vous en diray pas davantage, pour vous laisser la meditation de cette importante verité." Jean Puget de La Serre, *Histoire curieuse*

sculpture, and architecture would become a hallmark of baroque art and was employed most famously by Bernini in the 1640s, which makes its appearance here in the Antwerp Jesuit church by 1625 particularly notable.⁷³

The ceiling then represents, in symbolic form, Mary's eternal reign in heaven. At its center is her monogram MRA (Maria Regina Ave) inside a sunburst, which would have formally echoed the crown held by God the Father on the altar. A star and a moon appear on either side as references to the *Song of Solomon*. Above the windows on the south side of the chapel angels hold a vase, a typical symbol of Mary's virginity, and a 'spotless' mirror, symbol of the Immaculate Conception (Wisdom 7:26). The angels at the west end of the ceiling bear musical instruments, a sign of the heavenly music played on the occasion of the Assumption, and flowers. Those at the east hold laurel wreaths, symbol of valor and triumph, and martyrs' palm fronds. This latter element is curious, as it diverges from an iconographical program in the ceiling that is otherwise completely Marian (Mary was, of course, not executed as a martyr). The palm fronds do, however, resonate with the statues of the three early Christian virgin martyrs – Christina, Susanna, and Catherine of Alexandria – that our 'spiritual daughters' commissioned to adorn the walls below, integrating the primary Marian theme into a secondary theme, that of the spiritual virtue of (female) voluntary celibacy more broadly, discussed further below.

The imagery of the chapel thus surrounded viewers with a sense of Mary's virtue and heavenly presence, while the illusionism of many of its decorative elements would have made it seem as though one had stepped into another realm, a spiritual space removed from the ordinary world. Many visitors would have come specifically to pray before the statue of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, hoping for a miracle that would better their own lives or those of loved ones, and their physical surroundings would have shored up their faith in her virtue, benevolence, and power. Others came to participate in the sacraments of confession and communion, themes that were emphasized not only through the confessionals and the communion rail themselves, but also in both of Gerard Seghers's paintings and in Schut's *Circumcision*, with their direct and indirect references to Christ's sacrifice. One might even speculate that this chapel played an important part in the Jesuits' highly successful

de tout ce qui c'est (sic) passé à l'entrée de la Reyne Mere du Roy tres chrestien dans les villes des Pays Bas, 57.

73 On Bernini see Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, Franklin Jasper Walls lectures (New York Oxford University Press, 1980). While credit for the hidden light source has often been given to Rubens, Leon Lock has suggested that it was Pieter Huyssens who brought the idea back from Rome. Lock, "Rubens and the Sculpture and Marble Decoration," 166.

and fundamentally Tridentine push to involve the Antwerp laity in just these rituals; in 1649 alone, for example, they passed out around 300,000 consecrated hosts, well over 4 per resident of the city.⁷⁴ Finally, both the architecture and the decoration of the chapel made numerous references to Rome as the seat of Catholicism, and to the Catholic Church (rather than the Protestant sects) as the true heir of Christ's teaching: from the employment of the classical orders, barrel vaulting, and arched portico altar, to the use of multicolored marble that echoed contemporary baroque churches in the eternal city, to the figures of saints Peter and Paul as founders of the Church and symbols of the (Catholic) Church militant. The inclusion of these last figures must be rooted in the Jesuits' emphasis on these apostles as their own forbearers in spreading the true faith, and they mirrored very similar statues of Peter and Paul that appeared on the church's façade.⁷⁵ In the context of confessional warfare, the chapel of the Virgin thus both acted as a vehicle to increase Antwerp citizens' engagement with orthodox religious practice and grounded right belief within the Tridentine Roman Church.

4 Patronage, Gender, and Agency

The Houtappel sisters' and Anna Sgreven's support for the Antwerp Jesuits went far beyond patronizing the chapel of the Virgin to include periodic gifts of cash, real estate, and annuities. By the time Anna Houtappel died in 1674 the four women had donated well over 304,000 guilders, not including gifts in kind, as well as made over 66,000 guilders in loans to the community⁷⁶ – for perspective, a skilled laborer in Antwerp during this period could expect to make about 240–250 guilders per year.⁷⁷ This made them the biggest donors to the Antwerp Jesuits in the seventeenth century. But while the scale of

74 See Marinus, *De contrareformatie te Antwerpen (1585–1676): kerkelijk leven in een grootstad*, 208 (table 19); Muller, "Jesuit Uses of Art in the Province of Flanders," 139.

75 On the façade and its forcefully Tridentine iconography, see Barbara Haeger, "The Facade of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp: Representing the Church Militant and Triumphant," in *Innovation and Experience in the Early Baroque in the Southern Netherlands: The Case of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 97–124.

76 The figure of 304,000 guilders was calculated by Timmermans, *Patronen van patronage in het zeventiende-eeuwse Antwerpen: Een elite als actor binnen een kunstwereld*, 180. Documents in the State Archive Antwerp (T14/015.02–185) allow for the tallying of loans.

77 For wages, see Robert C. Allen, "The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War," *Explorations in Economic History* 38, no. 4 (2001): 411–447, 416.

these women's beneficence was exceptional, their profile as wealthy spiritual daughters among the community's patrons was not. The Ignatius chapel was built by the spiritual daughter Anna Mechelmens, and we find many more such women among their top donors, including the sisters Anna, Maria, and Barbara Goubau, Anna and Elizabeth Haecx, five daughters of the della Faille family, and Anna van Etten.⁷⁸ Single women and widows furthermore held over one third of the debts incurred by the Professed House in this period.⁷⁹

The Jesuits in fact seem to have systematically recruited wealthy Flemish women to become spiritual daughters and ultimately patrons. They were criticized for this practice by contemporaries, who not only accused the Jesuits of going after individual women's fortunes but also pointed out that when multiple members of the same family professed as spiritual daughters (thus remaining unmarried and childless) they tended to pass their inheritances down to each other until finally the family fortune landed in Jesuit hands.⁸⁰ This is, indeed, exactly what happened with the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens. Much research remains to be done, but there is reason to suspect that a significant portion of Jesuit art and architecture in the Low Countries was funded by spiritual daughters, and this would further resonate with recent scholarship on Italy and France that argues for the Jesuits intentionally targeting wealthy women as patrons.⁸¹ The more we know about these relationships,

78 Timmermans, *Patronen van patronage in het zeventiende-eeuwse Antwerpen: Een elite als actor binnen een kunstwereld*, 141.

79 Ibid., 136, 41–43.

80 Marinus, "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773," 44. Similar accusations were brought against the Jesuits broadly by their critics, in particular in the circulation from 1614 onward of the *Monita secreta*, a forged set of instructions supposedly by the superior general in Rome that outlined Jesuit recruiting tactics and financial strategy. See Pierre-Antoine Fabre et Catherine Maire, ed. *Les antijésuites. Discours, figures et lieux de l'antijésuitisme à l'époque moderne* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010). We can also detect an echo of this criticism in the 1663 report of the English Protestant Phillip Skippon, who wrote of visiting the church: "Here is a little chapel-vault where one Houtappel and others of his family are buried. This person left to this college 400,000 *l*. At this altar, two or three times in a year, masses are said for their souls. They were great benefactors, having built the chapel, &c. The jesuits expect much at the death of one of his daughters." See "A Journey through Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy and France. (1663)," in *A collection of voyages and travels, some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English. To which is prefixed, an introductory discourse (supposed to be written by the celebrated Mr. Locke) intitled, The whole history of navigation from its original to this time*, ed. Awnsham Churchill (London: H. Lintot 1745), 380.

81 M. A. Conelli, "A Typical Patron of Extraordinary Means: Isabella Feltria della Rovere and the Society of Jesus," *Renaissance Studies* 18 (2004): 412–436; Olwen Hufton, "Altruism and Reciprocity: The Early Jesuits and their Female Patrons," *ibid.* 15, no. 3 (2001):

the better we can understand how the Jesuits operated on a global scale, and perhaps even how the Tridentine Church itself understood the challenges to and solutions for its religious missions.

But at the same time the archival documents related to the chapel of the Virgin in the Antwerp Jesuit church show that the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens were not just passive carriers of wealth, obediently providing funds for the Jesuits' projects. The sisters' surviving wills make clear that they aimed to provide for each other first and the Jesuits second, and in some cases they were careful to outline restrictions on the purposes to which the Jesuits could use their donations.⁸² That the simple fact of their affluence gave these women a significant degree of agency in their relationship with the Jesuit fathers is further demonstrated by events surrounding the 1629 death of Scribani.⁸³ The Houtappels and Anna Sgrevens successfully requested that Scribani be buried in their family crypt despite the fact that the Jesuit statutes prohibited such burials for their members. The women interred their spiritual father next to their parents and had a very lengthy, and very laudatory, epitaph inscribed in bronze and installed over his grave.⁸⁴ On June 8 of 1630 Vitelleschi wrote to Stratius, then serving as provincial, expressing his shock that such a thing had been allowed to happen and ordering Stratius to implore the Houtappel sisters to remove the epitaph, as it represented an affront to the Jesuit ideal of humility. The inscription was not removed, which may have suited the Antwerp Jesuits just fine, but what is most significant for our purposes is that

328–353; Susan Broomhall, "Devoted Politics: Jesuits and Elite Catholic Women at the Later Sixteenth-Century Valois Court," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015): 586–605.

82 See for example State Archive Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185; Maria Houtappel's will of 12 May, 1638, in which she wills much of her property to the Jesuits but ensures that her sisters first have use of it (i.e. receive its investment income) until their deaths, and the *Fundatium Houtappel-Sgrevens*, est. 1651.

83 For the following, see Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani, S. J., 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 510–15, with the epitaph reproduced on 13.

84 It read: 'D.O.M Aeternae memoriae incomparabilis viri R. P. Caroli Scribani S. I. quem Bruxella mundo, Antverpia caelo dedit; postquam pontifici max. caesari, regibus, principibus plurimis domi forisque carus. Hereticis stylo terribilis, bonis omnibus amabilis, animi magnitudine, constantia, iudicio, consilio, linguarum peritia, rerum usu; nulli secundus, Europam totam fama sui nominis luculenter impleisset: dissidia nobilium familiarum mille controversiarum arbiter, privatae pacis vindex, publicae studiosus feliciter composuisset: Societatem Iesu in Belgio per annos XXVIII qua provincialis, qua rector mire promovisset, prudentia, morum gravitate, vitae integritate, religione in deum, pietate in patriam conspicuus laudabiliter vixit annos LXIX ex merito amoris, quod licuit optimo patri spirituali lacrymabile mortis et resurrectionis monumentum Domus et Familia Houtappelliorum praeter votum posuit anno reparatae salutis M.DC.XXIX Iunii die XXIV. Bene precarre mortuo lector brevi moriture.'

Vitelleschi assumed that the Houtappel sisters were in charge of the space and that no changes could be made without their permission.

Around the same time we find another indication of the position of our female patrons vis-à-vis the Jesuit fathers, in the 1631 second edition of the Dutch translation of the writings of the Milanese spiritual daughter Isabella Christina Bellinzaga (1551–1624).⁸⁵ Its rather lengthy dedication to the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens by the Antwerp Jesuit father Gregorius Fabri is adulatory almost to the point of being obsequious: the priest states that he offers this “simple” gift to the “most honorable and pious Ladies” not because they need to learn from it, but as a “means of support or maintenance” of the virtues that they have already acquired.⁸⁶ This suggests that as our four female patrons were in the process of completing the chapel of the Virgin, the Antwerp Jesuits had come to position themselves less as their directors and more as the grateful recipients of their largesse.

While the exact dynamics of the relationship between the Jesuits and the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens will remain unknown, it is clear that these women were actively engaged in the process of building the chapel, and that they were in a position to have a significant impact on its appearance. Whereas the overall decorative scheme of the chapel, with its complex expression of Marian and sacramental themes, is certainly rooted in Jesuit teachings, these themes would also have been very well-known to the female patrons who may well have been quite engaged with the design process. At the very least, the life-sized marble statues commissioned to adorn the walls must be the result of input from the Houtappels and Sgrevens. Three of these figures were, of course, of their own patron saints: the Virgin Mary for Maria Houtappel,

85 Isabella Cristina Bellinzaga, trans. H. G. Santfort, *Den kortsten wech tot de hoochste volmaecktheyt met alderley schoone, hooghe ende gheestelijcke leeringhen beset, om naer de selve godtvruchtichlyck te trachten* (Antwerp: Gregorius Fabri, 1631). On Bellinzaga's influence on the Italian Jesuits, see Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe not every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

86 “... heuet my oock goedt ghedocht Eerbaere ende Godtvruchtighe Iouffrauwen uwe eerbare ende Godtvruchtighe maeghdlijckheden dit simpel (nochtans lof ende prijsweerdich werck, arbeydt ende schrijvens, eender teere Italiaensche maghet, toe te voeghen, offeren ende presenteren; niet dat ick achte dat uwe Eerbaerheden, dit als exeplaer oft voorsteelt sel om naer te volghen van doen zijn hebbende: maer stelle die uwe EE. voor, alleen als tot een steunsel oft onderhoudinghe van't ghene uwe eerbare redelijckheden alreede (soo het schijnt) soo seer hebben aengenomen, als oft de redelijckheydt, eerbaerheyte ende Godtvruchticheydt, haer lieder naturelijck waer inghebornen.” Bellinzaga, *Den kortsten wech tot de hoochste volmaecktheyt met alderley schoone, hooghe ende gheestelijcke leeringhen beset, om naer de selve godtvruchtichlyck te trachten*, 4–5.

St. Anne for Anna Sgrevens and Anna Houtappel, St. Christina for Christina Houtappel, and St. Susanna for the deceased Lucretia Susana Houtappel. Both of the latter saints were fairly minor early Christian virgin martyrs, not a topic of particular interest to the early modern Jesuits but one which would have resonated very strongly with our patrons whose voluntary religious chastity was at the very core of their identity. The replacement of St. Joachim in the earlier plan, where he would have stood as a patriarchal pendant to St. Anne, with St. Catherine of Alexandria surely must also be understood in this vein, but why Catherine in particular was chosen has puzzled scholars.

A clue is in fact found in Antonius Houtappel's will of 1617. He mentions 'mia heredita, Catherina seu Cornelia Autappel, figlia de Igidio Autappel,' or 'my heir, Catherina a.k.a. Cornelia Houtappel, daughter of Egidius Houtappel.' This Egidius (or Gillis) was Godfried's younger brother, who lived in Antwerp and was married to Digna de Smit; their only surviving child was named Cornelia Maria.⁸⁷ If the family saw the names Cornelia and Catherine as interchangeable, then they must have understood St. Catherine of Alexandria to be the patron saint of their mother Cornelia Boot (there is a fourth-century Roman saint named Cornelia, but she rarely if ever appeared in Flemish church monuments in this period). By erecting a statue of St. Catherine, therefore, the Houtappel sisters were able to include their mother's patron in the church decoration, and together these life-sized marble statues stood as proxies for all the female family members who would eventually be buried together beneath the altar. Their father, Godfried, would be indirectly represented not by his own patron saint but by St. Joseph, patriarch of the holy family. The visual theme of patron saints also explains, I think, the unusual composition of Gerard Seghers's *John the Evangelist Administering Communion to the Virgin Mary*. Typically early modern versions of this subject include only the Virgin, the Evangelist, and an angel or altar boy as an assistant to the mass, as we see in a print by Antony Wierix (Fig. 8.28). Segher's inclusion of three female observers therefore must indicate that it has additional layers of meaning.⁸⁸

The middle woman, who leans in closest to the Virgin and holds out her arms, is older and fully veiled to show that she is married, while the other two are young and wear both their hair and a modest décolletage uncovered, indicating that they are virgins. The most likely explanation for the inclusion of

87 Gillis Houtappel's and Digna de Smit's epitaph is reproduced in Visschers, *Verzameling van grafschriften, in St. Andries kerk, te Antwerpen*, 24.

88 A lost (?) painting made by Erasmus Quellinus II, known by an engraving by Schelte à Bolswert (Biblioteca Nacional de España, item 2585A), was closely related to and possibly based on the Seghers piece. This is the only other image of the scene I have found that includes the female observers, which suggests that they were an invention by Seghers.

these figures is that they are the patron saints of our chapel's benefactors: the older woman is St. Anne, the young virgins are Saints Christina and Lucretia or Susanna, and the Virgin Mary fills out the group as the patron of Maria Houtappel.

The Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens thus had a significant impact on the decorative plan of the chapel, making the theme of glorified voluntary chastity a major part of its religious messages. Their commissions on this count also show a need on their part to inscribe the chapel with their own identity, here by proxy in the sculpted and painted bodies of their patron saints. The same need can be perceived in the altar plaque that they had inscribed with their names and those of their parents, as well as in actions taken by Anna Houtappel to ensure that her family's coat of arms would remain displayed in the chapel. The rights to those arms were tied to the seignury of Ranst, and since Godfried Houtappel had no surviving sons when he died, the seignury had passed to his eldest daughter Maria Houtappel. Ordinarily such a title and its fiefdoms, which as an exception to Antwerp property and inheritance law were governed by primogeniture, would have been transferred from Maria to her husband, or if she died unmarried (as she indeed planned to) to a surviving male relative. But in 1638 she successfully petitioned the Spanish crown for permission to sell the seignury. In the same year she wrote a will stating that the proceeds from the sale should be divided between her sisters Anna and Christina when she died, and only after their deaths be passed to the Jesuits.⁸⁹ In 1642 Maria sold the castle and its lands to her cousin Cornelia Maria Houtappel, mentioned above, making Cornelia and her husband Peter Pascal de Decker the new lady and lord of Ranst.⁹⁰ While this was clearly financially beneficial to the Houtappel sisters it also meant that they no longer had the right to use the coat of arms, so in 1669, at the age of 89, Anna Houtappel requested and received permission from the Spanish king Charles II to keep the escutcheon in the chapel of the Virgin on the grounds that her father had still held the lordship when he died.⁹¹

Making their identity known to the chapel's visitors would have had both social and religious functions for the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens.

89 State Archive, Antwerp, College en convict van de Jezuïeten te Antwerpen, T14/015.02–185: edict from Philip IV granting Maria Houtappel permission to sell the seignury and fiefdoms, 12 April 1638, and will of Maria Houtappel, 12 May 1638.

90 On the sale see de Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," 344.

91 The act was signed in Madrid on February 26, 1669, and applied specifically to the marble coat of arms hung in the chapel. See de Decker, "La famille anversoise des Houtappel," 344; Anonymous (M. D. and S. D. H.), *Nobiliaire des Pays-Bas et du comté de Bourgogne* (Leuven: Jean Jacobs, 1760), 449.

FIGURE 8.28 Antony Wierix, *John the Evangelist Administering Communion to the Virgin Mary*, late sixteenth/early seventeenth century. British Museum, London

While we know nearly nothing about their daily lives, gendered behavioral codes that valued feminine silence and modesty must have girded their public behavior. Through conspicuous consumption within religious patronage, however, they could assert their position at the apex of Antwerp's social elite, and it seems that they did not shy away from displays that some might have found ostentatious – for example, in 1645 Maria Houtappel's 'jubilee' (marking fifty years) as a spiritual daughter was celebrated in the Jesuit church with grand festivities, at which no less than nine separate choirs sang.⁹² Keeping

92 Marinus states that ten choirs were present, though Marie Houtappel's epitaph counts nine. Marinus, "Kampionen van de contrareformatie, 1562–1773," 48.

themselves visible through artistic patronage also offered them crucial spiritual benefits. It would have been the hope and, I think, the expectation of Lucretia Susanna, Christina, Anna, and Maria Houtappel, and Anna Sgrevens, that the magnificence of the chapel of the Virgin and its trumpeting of Catholic doctrine would have made clear their roles as vital contributors to the social and religious fabric of their city, and that this, in turn, would move visitors to pray for their souls in purgatory.

5 Conclusions

The chapel of the Virgin in the Antwerp Jesuit church should be seen as a joint effort between the Jesuits, with their zeal for furthering the cause of reform through dazzling visual displays, and the Houtappel sisters and Anna Sgrevens, without whose enormous wealth and enthusiasm for the project the chapel likely would not have been created. In this sense the findings here build on those put forward in Judith Pollmann's recent (2011) *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635*, in which she argues that the restoration of Catholic culture in the Southern Low Countries was a collaborative process between ecclesiastical reformers and members of the local populace. They also complement other studies of women taking on active roles in the Tridentine reform process across Europe by showing that they could do so outside of both convents and the grass-roots, often service-oriented movements with which we often associate them, by instead using their wealth to create monumental spaces that facilitated the conversion of souls. Considering the amount of property under women's control as well as the popularity of the spiritual daughter movement in the early modern Catholic Low Countries, it is likely that many more such examples will emerge if we simply start to look for them. This could both fundamentally shift our picture of how, and by whom, the region's religious culture was brought to flourish in the seventeenth century, while at the same time pushing us to revisit difficult questions around power, wealth, and gender, especially in terms of what the Counter-Reformation meant for women.

The case of the Houtappels and Anna Sgrevens furthermore asks art and architectural historians to more carefully consider how gendered norms have shaped not only our own historiography but also our primary sources and the very artworks and spaces that we study. As we have seen in the preceding pages, every single known archival and early reference to the construction of the chapel of the Virgin, from account books to letters between the Jesuits

to the description by Papenbroeck, names only the Houtappel and Sgrevens women as its patrons. Yet numerous authors have credited Godfried Houtappel with its foundation and construction.⁹³ Their doing so certainly (though not necessarily consciously) arose from, and has perpetuated, a sexist ontological framework in which men are public actors and women are not, but it has also been anchored to two very important and prominent material sources: the subterranean crypt chapel inscription that named Godfried as founder (note 9), and a marble plaque installed before the altar whose Latin inscription translates to 'The monument of Godfried Houtappel, Lord of Ranst, founder of this chapel, and of his most pious wife, Cornelia Boot, and of his virgin daughters, Maria, Anna, Christina, and Lucretia, and his descendant Anna Sgrevens, by whose benefices this chapel to the Mother of God was donated and ornamented, and the College of the Society of Jesus was founded in this city.'⁹⁴ Undoubtedly composed by the female patrons, these texts themselves seem to situate Godfried Houtappel as the chapel's main patron.

So does this mean that he actually did found the chapel, donating funds and giving instructions for its building before he died, and that all references to these acts have simply been lost to time? This seems to me all but impossible, as such a gift would not simply go unmentioned in the many documents that

93 It is important to note that Jesuit historians like Poncelet and Brouwers have given the female patrons their due, at least in terms of being the source of funds for the project. It is modern art historians who tend to give all or most of the credit Godfried, which has led to some false conclusions. For example, David Freedberg misquotes Papenbroeck's line *Praecelluerunt autem hoc in genere sorores Houtappelliae, quae providi a multis retro mensibus constituerant, fundatum a se piisque parentibus suis sacellum* to omit the word *parentibus* (obfuscating the original meaning, that the sisters founded the chapel to their parents) and then reads the word *confundatum*, co-founded, in the inscription before the altar to refer only to Anna Sgrevens and not to the Houtappel sisters. See Freedberg, *Rubens: The Life of Christ after the Passion*, 151. Following Freedberg's lead Gertrude Wilmers also credited Godfried alone with "donating" the chapel, and Van der Stighelen further attributed the Houtappel sisters' 1618 gift of a villa called 't Roy outside of Antwerp (see Brouwers, *Carolus Scribani, S. J., 1561–1629. Een groot man van de Contra-Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 213) to their father. Wilmers, *Cornelis Schut (1597–1655): A Flemish Painter of the High Baroque*, 43; Van der Stighelen, *De portretten van Cornelis de Vos (1584/5–1651): een kritische catalogus*, vol. 51, *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Schone Kunsten* (Brussels: AWLSK, 1990), 242. According to patronage to Godfried led both Freedberg and Wilmers to date the chapel to after his death in 1626.

94 'Monumentum Godefridii Houtappel Domini in Ranst fundatoris huius sacelli et piissimae coniugis Corneliae Boot filiarumque virgininum Mariae Annae Christinae Lucretiae et cognatae Annae Sgrevens a quibus confundatum et ornatum hoc Deiparae sacellum et fundatum in hac urbe collegium Societatis Iesu. Retribuere dignare Domine.'

do survive.⁹⁵ Instead we surely have here a case of daughters both honoring their father and using his name, his patriarchal authority, to navigate around gendered expectations. As women and especially as spiritual daughters, the Houtappels and Anna Sgrevens were expected to embody feminine humility, passivity, and obedience, to shield their gazes and to hold their tongues, to hide themselves behind walls or at least beneath the long black *huycken* (a kind of mantle) that proper Southern Low Countries women wore in public. Inscribing Godfried Houtappel's name before their chapel's altar, with his coat of arms hung on the opposite wall, allowed his daughters and niece to erect a public monument of incredible grandeur without directly claiming all the credit for themselves. Nor is it a coincidence, I think, that the Houtappels and Anna Sgrevens used their fortunes to glorify the very spiritual virtue – that of voluntary religious chastity, communicated in the forms of their patron saints and of the symbols of the Virgin and virginity on all the chapel's surfaces – that had justified their choice to remain unmarried and thus in control of their property, and thereby made their patronage possible in the first place. Keeping themselves one step removed, putting forth a patriarch as patron and having images of their patron saints stand in for themselves, these four women were able to create one of the most artistically remarkable sacramental spaces in the Spanish Low Countries, ensuring their own souls' salvation while furthering the glorious cause of the Counter-Reformation Church.

95 The sole contemporaneous reference to a donation by Godfried in association with the chapel that I have found is Skippon's 1663 statement that the former gave "400,000 *l*" to the Jesuits (see note 79). But here I have to conclude that the author was confused: first, 400,000 pounds is an unthinkable large sum, and second, if the amount was actually meant to be in guilders, it is so close to the total of the known donations and loans made by our women that it seems likely Skippon simply heard this number and assumed the money was given by their father.