Proximity to saints and their relics was a popular goal in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and this desire was catered to in a number of ways. However, Christian theology constantly emphasized that proximity to Christ was the clearest way to salvation. Even the popularity of the Virgin Mary was largely based on a fundamental consanguinity with her son, and in the yearning toward salvation there was an even closer connection than the mother—Christ himself as celebrated in the bread and wine of the Mass. (fig. 13.1) The devout could interact with God in the form most available to humanity—the Eucharistic Christ.

As theologians and preachers asserted, the laity had access to the Divine whenever they entered a church due to the presence of the reserved Sacrament. The Franciscan preacher San Bernardino of Siena, for example, in a sermon delivered in 1424 at Santa Croce, Florence, in listing the reasons to be reverent in church states first that it is the "place of God and the dwelling of God, ... and second, that the True Presence of the body of Jesus Christ, is always in the church and consecrated at the high altar." He asserts that "When entering a church, the devout should first make the proper reverence to the Body of Jesus Christ." Bernardino of Siena, Le Prediche Volgari, ed. C. Cannarozzi, Florentine Sermons, 4 vols., (Pistoia: Pacinotti 1934), I, Sermon 14, pp. 211–214. Bernardino’s statement echoes the words of St. Francis regarding the presence of the Body of Christ in the church. For Francis’s Testament see Marion A. Habig, ed. St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies, English
Fig. 13.1 Cathedral Workshop, *Priest Elevating the Host (Sacrament of the Eucharist)*, 1350s, marble and glazed terracotta relief, 87 × 63.5 cm, from the Campanile, Florence, now in the Museo del'Opera del Duomo, Florence. Photo: author.