

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF REMBRANDT'S DEPICTIONS OF THE HOLY FAMILY

(in a domestic setting)

by

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## Abstract

The main topic of discussion in this thesis is the iconography of two etchings and five paintings of the Holy Family in a domestic or domestic/workshop setting. All of these works were, at one time, attributed to Rembrandt van Rijn. Although doubt now has been expressed by experts as to the authenticity of at least two of the paintings, namely, the *Holy Family at Night* (c. 1638/40, Amsterdam) and the *Holy Family with St. Anne* (1640, Paris), these disputed works are included because of a similarity to the way in which Rembrandt depicted the Holy Family in a non-Biblical context. If these are not works by Rembrandt's own hand, they are certainly variants of his ideas, painted by artists in his circle. The remaining paintings consist of the *Holy Family* (1634, Munich), the *Holy Family with Angels* (1645, St. Petersburg), and the *Holy Family with the Curtain* (1646, Kassel). The etchings described are the 1632 *Holy Family* and the 1654 *Virgin with the Cat and the Snake*.

Prior to a consideration of the aforementioned works of art, both individually and as a group, and in order to ascertain whether or not Rembrandt was influenced by earlier artists, a brief overview of depictions of the Holy Family in imaginary settings is provided, covering a period from the time of the Renaissance to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Mention also is made of the influence of restrictions on religious art that followed in the wake of the Reformation, particularly with respect to the art of the north Netherlands.

Lastly, a look at a few depictions of the Holy Family by Rembrandt's students and followers gives some indication of the extent to which they emulated his work. A comparison of the treatment of the same subject by Peter Paul Rubens and Jacob Jordaens, both of whom worked in the Catholic environment of the south Netherlands helps to demonstrate Rembrandt's ability to meet the requirements of a largely Protestant society through the manner in which he chose to present the Holy Family.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the manner in which Rembrandt van Rijn portrayed the Holy Family in a non-Biblical setting so as to be able to satisfy the criteria for religious art imposed in a largely Protestant society. The two etchings and five paintings to be discussed were, at one time, all attributed to Rembrandt. Doubt has been expressed as to the authenticity of at least two of the paintings, the *Holy Family at Night* (c.1638/40, Amsterdam) and the *Holy Family with St. Anne* (1640, Paris), and some experts are of the opinion that they may be the work of an artist close to Rembrandt, or in his studio. All of the works of art depict the Holy Family in a domestic setting, at times combined with a carpenter's workshop. In view of the fact that even the disputed works share some similarity to the way in which Rembrandt worked or the manner in which he chose to present the Holy Family, the paintings in question will be considered as part of the whole group with respect to iconography. The other paintings in the group are the *Holy Family* (1634, Munich), the *Holy Family with Angels* (1645, St. Petersburg), and the *Holy Family with the Curtain* (1646, Kassel). The etchings to be considered are the 1632 *Holy Family* and the 1654 *Virgin with the Cat and the Snake*.

A brief overview of the pictorial tradition associated with the Holy Family when depicted in non-Biblical events will be provided in Chapter 3. This will cover a period roughly from the time of the Renaissance to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Mention will be made of works of art produced by artists in both the north and south of Europe, that is, in Italy and the Netherlands. Although Rembrandt himself chose not to study in Italy, there was a great deal of interaction between the north and the south as many artists availed themselves of the opportunity of studying works by masters of the Renaissance, particularly in Rome. By the time of Rembrandt's generation, through the medium of prints especially, it had become possible to be acquainted with the works of renowned artists, as well as having the opportunity of seeing original works of art that passed through the markets of a flourishing city such as Amsterdam. It has been noted by art historians that Rembrandt occasionally was inspired by motifs in the works of other artists. However, as will be shown in the case of depictions of the Holy Family, Rembrandt interpreted any such 'borrowings' in his own singular manner. Religious differences

arising in the sixteenth century also will be touched upon to determine the extent of any influence that dissent may have had in the realm of art.

In Chapter 4, the above-mentioned etchings and paintings will be described in detail in order to ascertain if they differ in any significant way iconographically from earlier works on the same subject, that is, the Holy Family in an imaginary setting. Their relevance to contemporary society also will be explored. Of particular interest, in view of the fact that Rembrandt used a domestic and sometimes domestic/workplace setting, is whether or not these depictions reflect contemporary expectations as to family life within the framework of the culture of the time. For both Protestant and Catholic authorities, the family unit was an essential component of their respective communities, and the Holy Family could be seen as providing the model of a caring and committed family. For members of the Reformed faith, for whom Scripture was the sole authority, the responsibility of upholding moral behavior both at home and in the workplace devolved mainly to the father as head of the household. At the same time, a wife had a share in this responsibility by providing a role model in her capacity as a mother. By fulfilling these roles conscientiously, people could be viewed as serving God in the practice of their daily lives.

Rembrandt worked in a primarily Protestant environment, although his clients and admirers came from a spectrum of religious faiths. In contrast, the other very famous Netherlandish painter of the day, Peter Paul Rubens, worked in a Catholic environment. In view of Calvinist restrictions on religious art in the Dutch Republic as compared to Flanders, it is understandable that Rubens would have had the opportunity of painting not only ecclesiastical art, but also depictions of the Holy Family for private use to a greater extent than was the case for Rembrandt. Chapter 5 will not only consider the work of Rubens and his contemporary, Jacob Jordaens, but also the work of some of Rembrandt's students and admirers with respect to their depictions of the Holy Family. By looking at a few works painted by Rubens and Jordaens, it may be possible to determine if they differ in any marked degree from those of Rembrandt and his followers. If so, this may be attributable to the differences in attitude and expectations of Protestant and Catholic authorities as regards religious art.

A discussion of the earlier mentioned etchings and paintings within the framework of traditional practices and contemporary values in the Northern Provinces, together with a

comparison to works produced in the Southern Provinces, will demonstrate that Rembrandt depicted the Holy Family in a manner that was suitable and relevant to the society in which he lived.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

There is a vast amount of literature pertaining to Rembrandt. Virtually every known aspect of his life and career as an artist has been studied. The year 2006, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, resulted in even more books and articles. For the purposes of this thesis, numerous and varied publications were perused in search of illustrations and information. The most in-depth analysis of individual paintings by the master, or those attributed to him, appears to be the study that was carried out by the Rembrandt Research Project for the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*. Two of the paintings discussed in Chapter 4 are mentioned in the *Corpus*, namely the 1634 *Holy Family* (Munich) and the 1640 *Holy Family* (Paris). The publications listed in the attached bibliography have all been of help in one way or another, but space allows for the mention of only a representative few. In some texts, a single reference could prove to be of importance, or perhaps several, as in the case of James Snyder's *Northern Renaissance Art*. With respect to Rembrandt, the literature encompasses many works that refer to his life and art, including specific references to his paintings, as in Christian Tumpel's *Rembrandt*, and to his prints, as in Christopher White's *Rembrandt as an Etcher*. Otto Benesch's *The Drawings of Rembrandt* and Werner Sumowski's compilation of drawings and paintings by Rembrandt's students provided a fund of information. Also included in the bibliography are exhibition catalogues, articles from journals, and monographs of other artists, both in the north and south of Europe. Works that refer to the religious and social issues of the day are listed as well, insofar as they contributed to an understanding of the influence of these issues on works of art. Simon Schama's *Rembrandt's Eyes* provided insight into the lives of both Rubens and Rembrandt. In regard to depictions of the Holy Family, Max J. Friedlander's *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, Hildegard Erlemann's *Die Heilige Familie: ein Tugendverbild der Gegenreformation im Wandel der Zeit: Kult und Ideologie* and Carolyn C. Wilson's *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art* were invaluable sources of material.

Art historians have written about the two etchings and five paintings discussed in Chapter 4 either as individual works of art or in various combinations or, as in the case of E. H. Begemann's

*Rembrandt, the Holy Family in St. Petersburg*, in a more focused manner. In the thesis now being presented, these works of art are brought together as a group because of their underlying theme of domesticity. In *Paragons of Virtue*, Wayne Franits discusses the expectations of seventeenth-century Dutch society as to the virtuous behavior of women, especially in the domestic sphere. These expectations are expressed in contemporary literature and illustrated, in the eyes of the viewer, in appropriate genre scenes. With respect to depictions of the Holy Family in a domestic setting, the exemplary behavior of Mary may be taken for granted. As regards the influence of religious beliefs on any artistic interpretation of this latter subject, an opinion occasionally has been voiced to the effect that Protestantism played a part in the manner in which Rembrandt chose to present his religious subjects. Rather than assuming this opinion to be correct, it is intended that this thesis should demonstrate the way in which Rembrandt's interpretations of the Holy Family reflect the religious and social mores of his milieu, also keeping in mind the visual traditions that surround this particular subject.

## Chapter 3 Past and Contemporary Influences

It becomes evident, from looking at his works of art, that Rembrandt had a predilection for interpreting Biblical events. These works include depictions of the Holy Family as described in the New Testament. However, he also appears to have had an interest in portraying the Holy Family in a domestic setting. Depicting the Holy Family in settings or circumstances other than those described in the Bible was not a new concept. Such depictions usually were intended for private use and might even have a devotional aspect, depending upon the composition. It is possible that the attitude of the Dutch Reformed Church towards religious images in general, and especially imagery that might in any way become an object of devotion, may have been a factor in Rembrandt's decision to depict the Holy Family in a more secular manner in those portrayals not based on events found in the Bible. The figures of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are fixed historically in time, and are known to us from the New Testament. However, circumstances coincidental with an individual artist's career might well determine the manner of interpretation of such a subject, and this possibility will be examined. Apart from other factors that might be expected to influence an artist, such as a client's wishes, or admiration of another artist's work, any pictorial tradition known to the artist and associated with the Holy Family should also be considered, that is, with respect to the depiction of non-Biblical events. In particular, are Rembrandt's compositions reflective of any iconography found in such earlier works?

Virtually nothing is known from the New Testament about the day-to-day activities of the Holy Family. There are accounts in the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke of significant occurrences, such as the circumstances surrounding Christ's birth, beginning with the Annunciation and Visitation and encompassing the Nativity and other directly related events. Mention also is made of the flight into Egypt and the return of the Holy Family to take up residence in Nazareth, with a final reference to the twelve year old Jesus being found by his parents in the temple, conversing with the teachers. The recounting of Christ's public ministry then follows. In the recording of that public ministry, however, there is a mention of Joseph's occupation when the question is asked, pertaining to the adult Jesus: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13:55). While the above-mentioned events provided ample material for artists,

they also found inspiration in the apocryphal writings on the life of the Virgin and the childhood of Jesus in Egypt. For instance, the legend of the palm tree that bent down its branches at the command of Jesus, so that Mary could partake of its fruit when the Holy Family sought shelter in its shade, is related in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.<sup>1</sup> The Rest on the Flight into Egypt became a popular subject in art, and the Holy Family frequently was depicted as sitting beneath the branches of a tree, although not necessarily a palm tree. Artists had ample opportunity of displaying their skills when interpreting this incident, particularly with respect to the landscape that often reflected the natural surroundings familiar to the artist.

The domestic activities of the Holy Family also caught the imagination of artists, and this theme of domesticity is relevant to the works by Rembrandt to be discussed in chapter 2. For instance, a fourteenth century manuscript, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, describes in words and delicate illustrations the supposed activities of the Holy Family at a period in their lives when they were living in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> An unknown artist in the North Netherlands, the Master of Catherine of Cleves, depicted the *Holy Family at Supper* and the *Holy Family at Work* in *The Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, c. 1440.<sup>3</sup> In each of these illustrations, the Holy Family is pictured in a comfortable room that has a fireplace, as well as simple furnishings and utensils, although the rooms depicted are different in appearance. In the *Holy Family at Supper*, the Virgin is seated on a mat on the floor and is breastfeeding Jesus, while Joseph is sitting in a barrel chair near the fireplace, using a spoon to eat from the contents of a bowl. In the *Holy Family at Work*, Mary is shown seated at her loom, while Joseph planes a board and the Child stands in His walker (fig. 1). A carpenter's bench and tools are located next to a window.

It is not likely that a personally owned Book of Hours would have been available to a wide audience. However, prints depicting the everyday activities of the Holy Family could be enjoyed by many. An illustration from an incunabulum, c.1489 (Lienhart Ysenhut, d. 1507, printer)

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. ed., English trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co., Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 463.

<sup>2</sup> Ira Ragusa, ed. and trans., and Rosalie B. Green, ed., *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (pseudo-Bonaventure), (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> Bodo Brinkman, "Master of Catherine of Cleves," *Grove Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, vol. 20 (London: Macmillan Reference 2000), illus. *Holy Family at Work*, fig. 1, p. 643. Also see John Plummer,

entitled *The Holy Family at Work*, from *Itinerarius sive peregrinarius Beatissime Virginis Marie* (Kunsthalle, Bremen), shows Mary seated indoors at her spindle, while Joseph and a young Jesus, who are both out-of-doors, hold on to the small beam between them that Joseph appears to be measuring (fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> These motifs of Mary's ability to spin and the legend of the beam harken back to apocryphal literature.<sup>5</sup> A depiction of *The Holy Family at Table* is found in the aforementioned series by Ysenhut as well.<sup>6</sup> Jan Mostaert's painting, *The Holy Family at a Meal*, (c. 1495-1500, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne), also shows the Holy Family seated around a table.<sup>7</sup> Albrecht Dürer, whose prints were widely circulated in Europe, depicted an exterior scene, *The Sojourn of Mary and Joseph in Egypt*, in his 1501-02 woodcut *Life of the Virgin Series* (fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> In this case, a vigorous Joseph is using an adze to hollow out a beam of wood, assisted by cherubs who are storing bits and pieces of wood in a basket. Two or three of these little angels appear to be forming crosses from the sticks they are gathering. The Virgin sits quietly nearby, "in the company of angels," working with her spindle and distaff.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, she is using her foot to rock the cradle in which the Child is placed. In the heavens above, the figures of God the Father and the Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove), together with the Infant Jesus, signify the Holy Trinity. Rembrandt would have been familiar with the *Life of the Virgin Series* from a purchase he made of Dürer's prints at auction rooms in Amsterdam in mid-February, 1638.<sup>10</sup>

In a variation on this theme, Marten de Vos (1532-1603), in an engraving entitled *The Holy Family in Egypt Served by Angels*, 1581, from the *New Testament Series*, depicts Mary in an interior setting and spoon-feeding the Infant Jesus, while angels attend to the housework (fig. 4)<sup>11</sup> Through a wide opening in the side of the house, Joseph may be seen employing his skills as a carpenter. Hieronymus Wierix (1553-1619) repeats this subject matter in a somewhat similar

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*The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (New York: George Braziller, 2002) for illus. *The Holy Family at Work*, p. 92 and illus. *The Holy Family at Supper*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Hildegard Erlemann, *Die Heilige Familie: ein Tugenvorbild der Gegenreformation im Wandel der Zeit: Kult und Ideologie* (Münster: Ardey-Verlag, 1993), illus. 26, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Schneemelcher (note 1), p. 447 for the legend of the beam (*The Infancy Story of Thomas*), and p. 430 for the legend pertaining to Mary (*Protoevangelium of James*).

<sup>6</sup> Erlemann (note 4), illus. 20, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, illus. 19, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 2005), illus. 13.36, p. 324.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 42.

manner in an engraving of the early seventeenth century, *The Holy Family at Work in the House*, from the series *Jesu Christi Dei Domini Salvatoris Nostri Infantia* (Frankfurt-on-Main, Stadelsches Kunstinstitut).<sup>12</sup> In looking at Netherlandish art of the sixteenth century, it would appear that this particular theme, that is, Mary and Joseph attending to their respective tasks, was more popular in print than in painting. The fact that the various series on the life of the Holy Family could be distributed more easily in graphic form and would be less costly than a painted version may have been the reason. The subject is also found in Italian art.<sup>13</sup> As will be seen later, Rembrandt took note of Joseph's trade. However, he presents this topic in a different manner.

It is during the Renaissance, around the beginning of the sixteenth century, that depictions of the Holy Family in settings not related to specific events either in the Bible or apocryphal writings would seem to have increased in popularity, possibly as an aid to private contemplation or as a reminder of the exemplary role provided by the Holy Family. Some paintings may have been enjoyed simply for the visual pleasure they provided an appreciative owner. Many beautiful religious works of art were produced during the Renaissance, not only at the request of the Church hierarchy and other institutions, such as religious orders, societies and guilds, but also for the nobility and wealthy merchants who acquired art for their private chapels and personal collections. Although the prints and paintings under discussion in this essay may not qualify as ecclesiastical art, they nevertheless are religious in substance. They appear to have been intended primarily for personal use. The figures in these depictions of the Holy Family usually wore clothing indicative of an earlier age, and often were idealized, particularly in works reflecting the influence of the Italian Renaissance. The inclusion of angels in some compositions acted as a visible reminder of heaven and the special nature of the persons depicted, and served to enhance the spiritual dimension of the particular work of art.

The more frequent depiction of all three members of the Holy Family together in a non-Biblical setting may reflect the growing importance of the married state in Christian ideology

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<sup>11</sup> F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700* (Amsterdam: Hertzberger, 1949-), vol. XLV. Plates, Pt.1, p. 109, illus. 265.

<sup>12</sup> Erlemann (note 4), p. 81, illus. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Jill Dunkerton, et al, *Dürer to Veronese* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), illus 109, p. 95; text p. 96. The Italian artist Correggio (1494-1534) painted his *Madonna of the Basket*, c. 1524, in which Mary and Joseph are depicted out-of-doors, Mary attending to Jesus and Joseph busy at his carpentry work.

since the late Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> The Holy Family could be seen as representing Christian values in family life. The cult of St. Joseph may also have been a factor in the development of these new representations of the Holy Family, and likely played a part as well in determining the manner in which Joseph would be portrayed. Devotion to St. Joseph had been growing in popularity even prior to the Renaissance.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Jean Gerson (1362-1428), Chancellor of the University of Paris, promoted the cause of Joseph. He is said to have described the saint in terms of being the “efficacious, hardworking, and affectionate protector of Mary and Jesus.”<sup>16</sup> The stereotyping of an elderly Joseph, often depicted as a peripheral figure, gave way to a figure more actively involved and capable of providing for those in his care. Previously mentioned depictions of the sojourn in Egypt confirm this impression of Joseph as a capable provider for his family, and he even came to be portrayed, at times, as being more youthful in appearance. This is in contrast to fifteenth century depictions of a visibly old and weary Joseph, such as the figure dozing in a chair in a scene with the Virgin and Infant from *The Miraflores Altarpiece* (c. 1440-44, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) by Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400-1464).<sup>17</sup> Petrus Christus (d. 1472/73) portrayed a younger looking Joseph in his c. 1450-1455 *Virgin and Child in a Chamber* (Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City).<sup>18</sup> In this instance, however, the emphasis is on the Virgin who is seated near the window of a well-appointed room, the Infant standing upright on her lap. Joseph is seen only as a distant figure entering into the house through a doorway. By the sixteenth century, the Holy Family was being portrayed as a close knit and caring family unit.

The recognition of the Holy Family as providing a role model for the Christian family was not limited to those of the Catholic faith. The illustration on the title page of a Protestant house-father book, 1528, suggests that early Reformers also appreciated the example set by the Holy Family.<sup>19</sup> House-father literature appears to have been designed to encourage a father’s responsibility and authority in maintaining order and morality in the home and in the prevention

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<sup>14</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, (Ithaca Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, illus. p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Snyder (note 8), illus. 6.12, p.122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, illus. 7.6, p.142.

<sup>19</sup> Albrecht Koschorke, *The Holy Family and Its Legacy*, trans. Thomas Dunlop (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) illus. p. 121. Koschorke further explains that “Patriarchal (familial), paternalistic (secular), and ecclesiastical supervision were to go hand in hand, corresponding to the three orders of the Christian society as Luther defined them: *ecclesia, politica, and oeconomia*.”

of disorder and immorality “in all spheres of daily life,” thus demonstrating “his obedience toward the secular lordship as well as toward God.”<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the house father’s authority was seen as coming from God, the “highest house father.”<sup>21</sup> With respect to the above-mentioned illustration, the wording below indicates that the depiction of the Holy Family at the bottom of the page is connected by a vertical line to the three persons of the Trinity pictured at the top of the page. A nimbus surrounds the Virgin’s head, and one completely surrounds the body of the Infant. The half figures of Mary and Joseph are portrayed as gazing down at their Son and represent, according to the wording below, “the model for the Christian marriage.”<sup>22</sup>

As will be seen, artists in both the north and south of Europe sometimes portrayed the Holy Family simply as a trio, and at other times accompanied by a saintly relative or relatives. The backgrounds could vary, and either an exterior or interior setting might be used. In his rather whimsical *Holy Family in a Garden* (c. 1500, Drypoint, 5 1/8 x 4 1/2”), the artist known as the Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet (Housebook Master) depicts Mary sitting on a stone ledge and supporting Jesus as he reaches down for an apple on the ground (fig. 5)<sup>23</sup> Joseph, partly hidden by the ledge, appears to be playing a game by rolling apples towards the Child. In contrast, in his painting, *The Holy Family* (c.1500-1506, Kress Collection, National Gallery, Washington), Giorgione (Giorgio da Castelfranco, 1478/9-1510) depicts Mary and Joseph sitting quietly side by side on a bench in the plain interior of a building (fig. 6).<sup>24</sup> They are wearing traditional robes, and both parents are admiring the Infant held in the Virgin’s arms. An arched opening in the back wall of the structure provides a view of a landscape. Raphael (Raffaello Santi, 1483-1520), on the other hand, in *The Holy Family of Francis I* (1518, Louvre, Paris), included St. Elizabeth and the infant John the Baptist as part of the family group (fig. 7).<sup>25</sup> There are haloes around the heads of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. An angel kneels behind Mary, while another hovers, with arms outstretched, preparing to crown the Virgin with a garland of flowers. Joseph stands by, in close proximity, looking on with benign attention. The setting for this idyllic group is an elegant room,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 122

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Snyder (note 8), illus.12.28, p. 259.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson (note15), illus. pl. 64.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pl. 20.

in contrast to the landscape background used by Raphael on other occasions, such as for the *Canigiani Holy Family* (1505/06, Alte Pinakotech, Munich), in which the same family group is gracefully clustered together in a pyramidal configuration, with cherubs visible in the heavens above.<sup>26</sup> The figures are posed against a landscape of undulating fields with a view of a city on the horizon. All of the figures have lightly inscribed haloes above their heads.

Many idyllic scenes of the Holy Family appear to be simply happy scenes that frequently included saintly relatives. There is no Biblical reference to the presence of figures such as St. Elizabeth and a young John the Baptist with the Holy Family, but artists may have used incidents from apocryphal sources as a reason for their inclusion. Other saintly figures, such as a patron saint, might also be included, possibly at the request of a client. Any accompanying saints, where appropriate, were clothed in robes representative of relevant religious orders. For instance, in a painting in the Mannerist style by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) entitled *Holy Family with Saint Francis in a Landscape* (1542, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles), the Virgin has a stylish dress and coiffure, and even Joseph has a clamp securing his cloak, but St. Francis wears the simple robe with cowl of a monk (fig. 8).<sup>27</sup> Although St. Joseph usually was attired in a traditional robe, Mary's apparel could vary. In his c. 1520 painting, *The Holy Family* (National Gallery, London), Joos van Cleve (c. 1485-1540) presents Mary and Joseph in more contemporary type clothing, but also makes use of traditional symbols (fig. 9).<sup>28</sup> The Virgin is shown in half-length, standing behind a ledge on which the Infant Jesus stands, supported by His mother's right arm. The Infant reaches up to clasp His mother's breast, so that He can be nursed. A dignified and learned looking Joseph, wearing a straw hat and spectacles and standing to the left and slightly behind Mary, is reading from a book placed on the lectern in front of him. Mary, whose traditional veil has been replaced by a multi-pleated and flowing white linen head covering, reaches with her left hand to touch a small cluster of cherries. The symbolism associated with the lily, the open pomegranate, and the cherries, all placed on the ledge, confirm that this trio represents the Holy Family and not an ordinary family.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Louisa Becherucci, "Raphael and Painting," *The Complete Work of Raphael* (New York: Reynal & Co. in association with William Morrow & Co. 1969), illus. 71, p.71.

<sup>27</sup> Laura Corti, *Vasari (Catalogo completo)*, (Firenze & Contini, 1989), illus. p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson (note 15), illus. pl 32.

<sup>29</sup> George W. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 17 – the lily is a symbol of purity associated with the Virgin, and it is also an attribute of St.

Van Cleve spent a few years in the early 1530s at the French court, but whether or not he actually visited Italy is not known.<sup>30</sup> Jan Gossaert (1478-1532), however, another painter who worked in the Netherlands at approximately the same time as Van Cleve, was in Rome 1508-09 as part of Philip of Burgundy's entourage, and drew ancient statuary for his patron.<sup>31</sup> His experience in Italy appears to be reflected in *The Holy Family* (Museos de Bellas Artes y de Arte Moderno, Bilbao), (fig. 10).<sup>32</sup> Gossaert has portrayed an intimate and happy family scene. The large urn on the shelf of the stand behind the Holy Family suggests an elegant interior, as well as Gossaert's familiarity with classical antiquities. The Virgin and Joseph are seated, and their attention is directed towards the Baby Jesus who reclines on Mary's lap. The Infant reaches out to touch the flower that His gently smiling and gracefully depicted mother holds in front of Him. Joseph wears a cowl similar to that worn by a monk, whereas Mary is fashionably attired. Her hair is carefully arranged in ringlets, and a pleated silk cap covers the top of her head, very unlike the simple robe and veil associated with the Virgin. In other works, however, Gossaert uses more traditional robes for the Madonna, as he does in an early Holy Family depiction on the centerpiece of a triptych. This altarpiece, *The Holy Family with Saints Catherine and Barbara* (about 1505, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon), would appear to be one of the relatively few examples of a portrayal of the Holy Family in a non-Biblical context for an altarpiece.<sup>33</sup>

Jan Gossaert was just one of the many artists whose work was influenced to some degree by Italian models, either directly as a result of traveling to Italy, or indirectly by studying with an artist who had been there, or even through the medium of prints. As far as representations of the Holy Family are concerned, the essence of the subject matter, the figures of Jesus, Mary and Joseph remained the same, but the artistic style might differ. Willem Key (c 1515/16-1568), who settled in Antwerp, studied at one time with Lambert Lombard (1505-1566) of Liege, who had

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Joseph as a symbol of chastity. P. 19 – the pomegranate usually is an allusion to the Christian Church “because of the inner unity of countless seeds in one and the same fruit.” and can also symbolize hope in immortality and resurrection. P. 14 – the red, sweet fruit of the cherry symbolizes the sweetness of character deriving from good works – often called the Fruit of Paradise.

<sup>30</sup> Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, trans. Heinz Norden (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff), vol. IX, pt. 1, p.26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, illus. pl. 139, Add. 163.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, pl. 1.

not only been in Rome, but also in Germany and France.<sup>34</sup> In his painting entitled *Holy Family* (Pommersfelden, Gemäldegalerie), Key chose to depict the figures of the Holy Family in the graceful manner of the Italian Renaissance (fig. 11).<sup>35</sup> In this close-knit family group, the Infant is the focus of Mary and Joseph's attention. Kneeling, Mary gently clasps her Son who stands on the pillow of the His wooden cot in order to reach up and touch her face. The sheen on the fine materials of the Child's bedding and on His parents' robes, with their many folds, helps to convey a sense of softness and richness to the scene.

Frans Floris (1520-1570) of Antwerp, on the other hand, who also visited Rome and other Italian cities between 1540 and 1545, presents a more down-to-earth picture in his 1552 *Holy Family* (Obrazarna Zarnek, Kromeriz), (fig. 12).<sup>36</sup> In this instance, the Holy Family is shown in the upstairs room of a house. The Virgin, who is seated in a wicker chair, is supporting Jesus on her lap while she feeds Him with a spoon, at the same time holding on to a plate that the Child also is grasping. Joseph, who is standing close by and holding on to what is, presumably, a porridge pot with his right hand, while his other hand holds a long-handled utensil, appears ready to replenish the empty plate. The theme of providing sustenance for the Christ Child seems to be a recurring one in art. Rather than depicting Mary as breastfeeding Jesus, Gerard David (d. 1523) portrayed Mary as spoon-feeding the Infant some food from a bowl in his painting c. 1510-1515 entitled *Madonna and Child with a Bowl of Porridge* (Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van Belgie, Brussels).<sup>37</sup> In *The Holy Family* (present location unknown) by Jan van Hemessan (1500-1565/75), it is Joseph who is holding both the spoon and bowl.<sup>38</sup> However, in an early etching of *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1626, 21.7 x 16.5 cm), Rembrandt depicts Mary as spoon-feeding the Infant, while Joseph participates by holding out a shallow bowl in which, presumably, there is food taken from the pot sitting above a small fire (fig. 13).<sup>39</sup> Rembrandt also includes a bowl and spoon as part of the iconography in other works that will be discussed later.

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<sup>34</sup> Snyder (note 8), p. 499.

<sup>35</sup> Friedländer (note 30), illus. 273, pl. 133, vol. XIII.

<sup>36</sup> Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris (1519/20-1570) Leven en Werken* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1975), illus. no. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Snyder (note 8), illus. 10.23, p.210.

<sup>38</sup> Friedländer (note 30), illus. pl. 112, fig.207. vol. XII.

<sup>39</sup> White (note 10), illus. 17, p. 20. B 59.

In a slightly later painting entitled *Holy Family* (1553, Musée Royaux des Beaux-Art Belgique, Brussels), Floris depicts the interior of a modest, but comfortable home (fig. 14). Apart from the depiction of the trio of a father, mother and child, there is no particular symbolic marker to indicate that this is intended to be a representation of the Holy Family.<sup>40</sup> The Virgin and a white-bearded, but alert looking, Joseph are dressed in clothing more contemporary than antique. The Infant, lying in a substantial wicker cradle, gently touches His mother's lips as she leans over the cradle to kiss the Child's fingers. Joseph stands by, a pleasant look of authority about his stance, and rests his left forearm on the hood of the cradle. A small dog turns its head to look out at the viewer. Both Rembrandt and Rubens used a similar type of cradle at one time in their respective paintings on the same subject.<sup>41</sup> In the painting by Rubens, however, it is Mary who has her forearm draped gracefully across the hood, whereas in Rembrandt's work, it is Joseph's forearm that is shown as being placed on the cradle's hood.

Bartholomeus Spranger (1546-1611), an artist who was originally trained in Haarlem, did not return to the Netherlands to live, but went to Italy in 1565 via Paris and eventually settled in Prague. Like many other artists, his works became known through the medium of print. Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1611) produced some of Spranger's work as engravings, including *The Holy Family* (1589, 28.2 x 21cm), a sophisticated depiction of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the Mannerist style (fig. 15).<sup>42</sup> The figures are bust length, save for that of the Child, and are positioned in close proximity to one another. Mary, her right arm resting on a ledge, holds the naked Infant in her arms. Goltzius's own engraving of the same subject shows a much gentler approach, reminiscent of the Renaissance. In his oval, miniature-like depiction (c. 1583, 6.7 x 5.2 cm), Mary and Joseph gaze fondly down at the Infant, who is partially covered with drapery (fig. 16).<sup>43</sup> The figures in the representation by Goltzius are more natural than those depicted in Spranger's work.

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<sup>40</sup> Friedländer (note 30), vol. XIII, illus. pl. 70, fig. 133. With reference to the identification of the Holy Family in another Holy Family depiction by Floris, E. H. Begemann (*Rembrandt, the Holy Family in St., Petersburg*, Groningen: The Gerson Lecture Foundation, 1995), notes that the scene could be recognized "as representing the Holy Family rather than an everyday family primarily and immediately because domestic scenes as such were not included in the repertoire of subjects in the visual arts," p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> See Rubens's *The Holy Family* (c/ 1615, Pitti Gallery, Florence), and Rembrandt's *The Holy Family* (1634, Alte Pinakothek, Munich).

<sup>42</sup> Walter L. Strauss, *Hendrik Goltzius, 1558-1617; The complete engravings and woodcuts*, ed. W. L. Strauss (New York: Abaris Books, c1977), vol. 2, illus. p. 495, text 494.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, illus. p. 281, text p. 280.

Prints were easy to transport, and could be widely distributed. The work of artists in both the north and south of Europe provided material for engravers. Cornelis Cort, for example, produced engravings of the work of Frans Floris, and also an engraving in 1577 of a painting by Federico Barocci (c. 1526-1612) of Urbino, the *Madonna del Gatto*, c. 1575 (National Gallery, London).<sup>44</sup> The idyllic nature of this composition reflects the Italian tradition when portraying scenes of the Holy Family in a non-Biblical setting. In his charming depiction of the Holy Family (fig. 17), Barocci catches a moment of domestic happiness to which the viewer can respond. There is a glimpse of an interior and a view through a window of the blue sky. The Virgin, modestly attired and not wearing a head covering save for a narrow hair band, supports the Infant Jesus on her lap with her left arm, as she has been nursing Him. Her right arm partly encircles a young John the Baptist, whose identity is confirmed by the reed cross resting against the Infant's cradle. With her right hand, Mary draws the attention of Jesus to the little cat being teased by the Baptist, who gleefully holds a goldfinch well out of the reach of the cat. Joseph, his arm resting on an adjacent table, leans forward to enjoy this happy moment. While the inclusion of a goldfinch might suggest a foreshadowing of Christ's Passion; it is difficult to fully appreciate that significance in view of the playful interaction of the Baptist with the cat. The presence of a house cat adds a decided note of domesticity to the scene. Rembrandt includes a cat on more than one occasion in his works that portray the Holy Family in a domestic setting.

Barocci's paintings were mostly of religious subjects, and he has been described as "the interpreter of a humanization of the Divine and a spiritualization of the Human."<sup>45</sup> Apparently, he did not follow the dictates of Italian Mannerism. The exaggerated elegance and artificiality of the Mannerist style, a style that became popular in the era between the Renaissance and the Baroque, did not reflect the values of the Counter Reformation, whose authorities sought a style of art that would evoke a response of a spiritual nature through appropriate religious images. The "verisimilitude and emotional persuasiveness" that an artist such as Annibale Carracci (1550-1609), for example, strove for in his religious images was more in keeping with their aims.<sup>46</sup> Although it is a depiction intended for private use, rather than ecclesiastical purposes, Carracci's

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<sup>44</sup> Dunkerton (note 13), illus. of engraving, no. 226, p.180; illus. of painting, p.219.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Olsen, *Federico Barocci* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, vol. 1 (Phaidon, 1971), p. 39.

etching and engraving *The Holy Family with St. John* (1590, Pinacoteca, Bologna) illustrates the emotional appeal of his work, although in this instance it is probably more sentimental than spiritually uplifting (fig. 18).<sup>47</sup> This print also is relevant to a 1632 etching of the same subject by Rembrandt, and will be discussed later. In Carracci's work, the full-length figures are portrayed as being 'close by', that is, close to the viewer, and they are naturally posed. Their simple but voluminous robes lend a grace to the figures. There is a lightly inscribed halo above the Virgin's head, a helpful indication that it is the Holy Family being represented. Joseph, seen in profile, is sitting on the ledge of what appears to be a loggia, and leaning back comfortably against a pillar. He is engrossed in reading a book, presumably Scripture. Mary, sitting a little distance to the left, but facing the viewer, is holding on to Jesus who is by her side with John the Baptist. She leans slightly towards Joseph, either deep in her own thoughts or listening to what Joseph may be saying. The artist has captured this scene in all its peaceful domestic simplicity.

In the Netherlands, a painting by Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651), *The Holy Family* (collection James D. Belden, U.S.A.) with a suggested date of 1590-95, and said to be Bloemaert's "only early painting of the Holy Family," is depicted in the Mannerist style used by the artist in his early works (fig. 19).<sup>48</sup> Portrayed against a massive tree trunk, the figures of the Infant, Mary and Joseph form a cohesive family unit. Joseph appears to be offering an apple to Jesus. There is a sense of the artificial, however, in the way in which they are posed, and the beautiful Madonna has been given an elegant coiffure. Bloemaert settled in Utrecht, and became exposed to the new concepts in art to be found in Italy by those artists who traveled to that country in the early seventeenth century and returned to Utrecht. In particular, members of the Utrecht school made the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio (1571-1610) familiar in the north. Rembrandt may well have been influenced by the work of Caravaggio and/or his Utrecht followers in his use of the same technique.

Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1650), a member of the Utrecht "Caravaggisti" who studied with Bloemaert both before and after his return from a trip to Italy, was known for his dramatic contrast of light and shadow achieved through the use of candlelight in his paintings. However,

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<sup>47</sup> A.W.A. Boschloo *Annibale Carracci in Bologna* (The Hague: Government Publishing Office, 1974), fig. 104.

in his very appealing and graceful *Holy Family with Joseph* (1632, Stedelijk Museum, Alkmaar), he relies on a heavenly light that streams down diagonally from the upper left of the painting to achieve a chiaroscuro effect (figure 20).<sup>49</sup> The figure of Joseph, seated and shown in profile, is partly in shadow, while the Virgin and the Infant are bathed in light. Joseph has reached out to touch the Child's hand. A joyful Mary, her right hand raised as though to draw attention to her Son, and a smiling Jesus who is reclining in her lap, both look out at the viewer. While in Italy, Honthorst's paintings consisted mainly of religious themes, but in the years following his return north to Utrecht in 1620, there was a marked decrease in his works of a religious nature.<sup>50</sup> This has been attributed to the "religious climate" at that time.<sup>51</sup> Due to the influence of the Reformation in the United Provinces, it was a climate not conducive to the type of commissions that Honthorst had received in Italy. It was very different for Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) when he returned from Rome to Antwerp in 1608, as there was opportunity in the south for religious commissions in view of the ecclesiastical building and rebuilding following the Twelve Year Truce signed in 1609 between Spain and the north Netherlands.<sup>52</sup> The wishes of proponents of the Counter Reformation that ecclesiastical art should be truthful to church doctrine, but also inspire emotions of spirituality on the part of the faithful, found expression in Rubens's Baroque art. At the same time, his idyllic portrayals of the Holy Family found a receptive audience in the public sector, and this will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The works of art described thus far are intended as a brief overview, or sampling, of the various ways in which the Holy Family was depicted in non-Biblical settings over a period of a hundred years or more. The artists mentioned lived and worked primarily in the Netherlands or Italy. For artists in the Netherlands, especially, some mention should be made of circumstances other than custom that may have directly, or indirectly, influenced their work, namely the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. The influences on religious art in general of these two sixteenth century events carried over into the seventeenth century and the era of Rembrandt.

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<sup>48</sup> Marcel G. Roethlisberger and Marten Jan Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons* (Davaco, 1993, vol. 1, documentation p. 85; vol. 2, illus. cat. 36, fig. 71).

<sup>49</sup> J. Richard Judson, *Gerrit van Honthorst 1592-1656/J. Richardson Judson & Rudolf E.O. Ekkart*, rev. ed. of *Gerrit van Honthorst/J. Richard Judson*, 1959, Ser. *Aetas aurea*: 014 (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1999), illus. pl. 12, cat. 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

With respect to the Counter Reformation, the Council of Trent was convened by the Catholic Church in 1545, in order to address certain religious matters. In December of 1563, during the closing days of the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of this Council, a Decree on the Cult of Saints and Religious Imagery was issued. Through this Decree, the Council sought to correct abuses that had crept into ecclesiastical imagery with respect to accuracy and decorum, and to ensure that the prototype received the honor and veneration and not the image itself.<sup>53</sup> While affirming the placing and retention of images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other saints “especially in churches”, it laid down rules and regulations for religious art and the manner of ensuring compliance in this regard.<sup>54</sup> In countries or areas where allegiance to the Church of Rome was retained, it is to be assumed that artists, in the ensuing years, adapted their religious art to the spirit of the Counter Reformation. Concern on the part of church authorities for a closer empathy between the faithful and a religious work of art contributed to the vogue for naturalism.

The situation for artists residing in areas influenced by the Protestant Reformation, however, could be disheartening. They faced not only the destruction of their ecclesiastical art from acts of iconoclasm, but also their own financial hardship due to the loss of church commissions. In the belief that religious images were a source of idolatry and superstition, innumerable works of religious art – paintings, statues, and stained glass windows – were destroyed or, where cooler heads prevailed, quietly removed. Iconoclastic outbreaks in the Netherlands in 1566, when that country was in revolt against Spain, had the added incentive of the association of the enemy, Catholic Spain, with the Church of Rome.<sup>55</sup> Neither the Reform leader Martin Luther (1483-1546) nor his follower John Calvin (1509-1604) shared the views of the Catholic Church with regard to the place for religious images in churches. With respect to the role of the Virgin Mary and other saints as intercessors, Luther pointed out, in 1523, that there was no mention of such a role in Scripture.<sup>56</sup> In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin makes clear his opposition to any attempt “to make a visible representation of God, because he hath himself forbidden it,”

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<sup>52</sup> David Freedberg, “Painting and the Counter Reformation in the Age of Rubens,” *The Age of Rubens*, Peter C. Sutton, et al (Boston/Ghent: Museum of Fine Arts/Ludion Press, 1993), p. 133.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth G. Holt, trans., and ed., “The Council of Trent and Religious Art,” *Literary Sources of Art History* (Princeton, 1947), pp. 242-44 for the text of the Decree.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Bob Haak, *The Golden Age*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Willems-Treeman (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1966), p. 21.

and further states that only objects that are visible to the eye should be painted and engraved.<sup>57</sup> Calvin also questions the need for any images in “Christian temples.”<sup>58</sup> Pieter Saenredam’s 1628 painting of the interior of the St. Bavo Church in Haarlem, with its white washed walls and lack of sacred imagery, illustrates the change brought about by strict observance of Calvinist teaching.<sup>59</sup> In the years following the split between the northern and southern provinces of the Netherlands in 1579, the majority of reformed church groups in the north had joined together, embracing Calvinist teaching and discipline. The Dutch Reformed Church was accorded a special position and had the sole use of all church buildings. However, religious works could be commissioned privately for Lutheran chapels or clandestine Catholic places of worship.<sup>60</sup>

With the loss of church commissions in the north that followed in the wake of a shift in religious control from Catholic to the Reformed faith, artists had to find new subjects to paint, as well as new patrons. The influx of Protestants from the south following the retaking of Antwerp by the Spanish in 1585, as well as immigration from other parts of Europe, and the Republic’s increasing importance as a sea power with extensive trade interests, all contributed to a growing prosperity. An interest in works of art was a part of the new prosperity. By the time of Rembrandt’s generation, artists were finding success in subjects such as history paintings, portraits, sea and landscapes, and scenes from everyday life. Commissions came from both private and official sources for the decorating of homes and public buildings. As mentioned previously, many artists from the Netherlands had traveled to Italy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to observe and/or study, and some traveled to the courts of other countries. Some remained abroad, but those who returned to the Netherlands brought with them their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Pieter Lastman (1583-1633), for instance, the man with whom Rembrandt apprenticed for six months in 1624, returned to Amsterdam in 1607 and specialized in history paintings, both Biblical and mythological.

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<sup>56</sup> Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), Bk. 1, Ch. XI, pp. 126,127.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Haak (note 55), p. 21.

Even before he apprenticed with Lastman, Rembrandt would have acquired some knowledge of Biblical events. At the age of seven, he was sent to the Latin school in Leiden.<sup>61</sup> The school was built as a Calvinist educational institution, and students attending the school had the opportunity of becoming familiar with the Bible and Calvinist doctrine, as well as languages and the liberal arts. There also is a record of Rembrandt's entrance form dated 1620 to the renowned University of Leiden, although there is no record as to how long he may have attended that university.<sup>62</sup> It is known that Rembrandt was apprenticed to the Leiden history painter Jacob van Swanenburgh (1571-1631) from 1621-1623, and subsequently studied with Lastman. Unlike so many previous artists from the Netherlands, Rembrandt did not go abroad to study. However, this did not prevent him from gaining knowledge of the work of past and present artists. Apart from any opportunity he may have had of seeing art in private collections, including his own, or as it passed through the hands of Amsterdam dealers, the inventory of Rembrandt's possessions made in 1656 for bankruptcy purposes indicates that he owned an extensive collection of prints. Item number 200 in the Inventory, "The precious book of Andrea Mantegna," is of particular interest.<sup>63</sup> It appears to have provided the source for the figure of Mary in Rembrandt's etching of *The Virgin and Child with the Cat and the Snake*, 1654.<sup>64</sup> This etching will be discussed later, along with the previously mentioned etching of 1632, entitled *The Holy Family*. The figure of Joseph in the latter work is adapted loosely from Carracci's 1590 print of the same subject.<sup>65</sup> The 1656 Inventory of Rembrandt's possessions indicates that he owned prints by Annibale Carracci.<sup>66</sup>

The above-mentioned etchings represent the first and the last of Rembrandt's formal depictions of the Holy Family in a domestic setting. The paintings on this theme of domesticity span the years between the etchings. The original provenance for every painting is not known, but it does seem certain that two newlyweds who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church were the first to own the 1634 Munich *Holy Family*, a painting that will be discussed in Chapter

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<sup>60</sup> Christian Tumpel, "Religious History Painting," *Gods, Saints & Heroes*, Dewey F. Mosby, et al (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1980), p. 46. Tumpel notes that Lutherans were "allowed to build their churches with communal approval," and that Catholic churches "were hidden in private homes."

<sup>61</sup> Christian Tumpel, *Rembrandt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1993), p.12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, et al, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York: Abaris Books, Inc.1979), p.369.

<sup>64</sup> White (note 10), p. 89.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Strauss and Van der Meulen, et al (note 63), Inventory items 81 and 83, p. 357 and item 209, p. 209.

4. Protestants and Catholics alike respected the Holy Family, but there was a difference in attitudes as regards the Virgin Mary. Although the major Reform leaders, Luther, Huldrick Zwengli and Calvin accorded due honor and respect to Mary as the Mother of God, they did not approve of the practice of venerating her or promoting devotion to her.<sup>67</sup> In view of his familiarity with the tenets of Calvinism with respect to devotional images or a singling out of the Virgin for special attention, it is understandable that Rembrandt might choose to present the Holy Family in a way that would be acceptable in a predominately Protestant society. However, the religious affiliation of buyers of his Holy Family paintings remains unknown. Rembrandt numbered people of various faiths amongst his clientele, but the religion of a painter or a client does not appear to have been a problem for either party.<sup>68</sup> As regards Rembrandt's etchings, Christians in general could appreciate the Holy Family. For those not particularly religious, or of other faiths, prints were a collector's item, and a collector might be more interested in the expertise and quality of the work, rather than in the subject matter itself.

In general, depictions of the Holy Family for private spiritual edification or as a pleasant and appealing visual reminder of the virtues of Christian marriage appear to have been numerous from the time of the Renaissance. The extent of their popularity may have varied at times depending upon place and religious circumstances. With respect to pictorial tradition, these depictions of the Holy Family project a sense of family unity. An air of quiet contentment and/or loving care may be apparent and, depending upon the setting, an aura of domestic happiness. Scenes may reflect episodes taken from apocryphal writings, or simply be a creation of the artist's imagination. As there was no necessity of conforming to Biblical events as related in the New Testament, artists were free to choose settings, costumes, and choice of stylistic trends in art. At the same time, these choices were made within the parameters of pictorial types that are evident from the time of the Renaissance. Preferences voiced by patrons may also have been a consideration. The use of haloes decreased. However, in most cases, some iconographic reference helps the viewer to confirm that it is the Holy Family being represented. In place of Mannerism, the style that succeeded the graceful idealization of the Renaissance, a more natural approach to depicting the Holy Family developed in the late sixteenth century in Italy and spread

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<sup>67</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *The Virgin in Evangelical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, pp. 22-24.

<sup>68</sup> Tumpel (note 61). Tumpel remarks that Rembrandt "painted portraits and histories for Calvinists, Catholics, Remonstrants, free-thinkers, Jews, Mennonites, and Lutherans," p. 91.

to the north, but the spiritual significance of the figures remained. While the religious controversies of an earlier generation did not affect Rembrandt's work directly, in the sense that the growing popularity of other genres had replaced the need for church commissions, his work, nevertheless, could not help but be indirectly influenced. It also appears that his compositions may have been influenced in some respects by earlier motifs. The manner in which Rembrandt adapted his depictions of the Holy Family to encompass both iconographic elements from the past and the beliefs of a largely Calvinist community forms the subject matter of the next chapter.

Plate 1, Figures 1-6



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Plate 2, Figures 7-11



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Plate 3, Figures 12-17



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Plate 4, Figures 18-20



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## Chapter 4

### Two Etchings and Five Paintings

The works of art to be discussed in this chapter encompass a period of twenty-two years, that is, from 1632 to 1654. They are depictions by Rembrandt of the Holy Family in a domestic and/or workshop setting. The authenticity of two of the paintings that were once attributed to him is now questioned, but these works appear to be representative of his school. Apart from the two etchings and five paintings produced during the above-mentioned period, Rembrandt drew many scenes that are identified as being of the Holy Family in an interior setting. There are also sketches of women with toddlers. These informal works show a continuity of interest in both the secular and the religious, and may reflect as well his personal interest in family life. Certainly, roughly within the time frame previously mentioned, Rembrandt experienced both the joys and sorrows that are synonymous with family life. In a drawing entitled *The Holy Family Seated by a Window* (c.1635, 14.0 x 16.3 cm, Pen and bistre, washes in bistre and India ink, formerly London, O. Gutekinst), Joseph is portrayed as happily contemplating Mary embracing the Child in her arms (fig. 21).<sup>1</sup> It is thought that Rembrandt's wife Saskia may have been the model for the Virgin, and that she is holding Rombertus, their first born, but that Joseph was drawn from imagination.<sup>2</sup> Rembrandt and Saskia Uylenburgh, whom he met when he moved to Amsterdam to live with her cousin, the art dealer Hendrik Uylenburg, were married in 1634. It may be that Rembrandt's feelings for his own family are reflected in his warm and sympathetic interpretation of the Holy Family in the works that are the subject of this essay. It would appear that these more detailed and public depictions of the Holy Family, particularly his paintings, also reflect the ethos of his time and place.

In Rembrandt's etching of 1632, *The Holy Family* (9.6 x 7 cm.), the interior setting and the fairly close placement of the figures create the impression of an intimate family scene (fig. 22).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, enlarged and ed. by Eva Benesch (London: Phaidon Press, 1973), vol. I, Ben. 114, fig. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33..

<sup>3</sup> Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), illus. p. 31. B 62.

At the same time, Mary and Joseph appear to be engrossed in their own thoughts and activities. In this depiction, the baby Jesus is not the focus of attention of both parents. The figure of Joseph reading is believed to be “adapted loosely” from Annibale Carracci’s 1590 print of the same subject (fig. 18), and, as in Carracci’s print, is shown in profile, but sitting on a low chair and leaning against a wall.<sup>4</sup> While Joseph reads, Mary cradles her drowsy infant as she breast-feeds Him. Her partially downward gaze is meditative. A *bakermat*, a legless basketry couch used by nursing mothers in seventeenth century Holland, is set up on end with a shawl or blanket tossed on top. This familiar item, together with the open workbasket beside Mary and the sandal that she has, perhaps, casually kicked off, imparts a sense of homely domesticity to the scene. Joseph’s cap, somewhat similar in shape to those worn by members of the Jewish community as portrayed by Rembrandt, and Mary’s rather elaborate headdress suggestive of an earlier age, together with the fact that it is a trio being represented, lend a biblical connotation to this otherwise seemingly contemporary scene. Although St. Joseph often was portrayed as reading a book, presumably Scripture, the fact that he is doing so in this etching might strike a chord with Protestant viewers who were encouraged to read the Bible.

The next work of art to be considered is *The Holy Family* (1634, Alte Pinakothek, Munich), believed to have been Rembrandt’s largest history painting up to that time (fig. 23).<sup>5</sup> The figures are almost life-size. This work reflects Rembrandt’s interest in the Baroque at this period in his artistic career, as evidenced by other large paintings of the 1630s.<sup>6</sup> Painted in oil on canvas, it measures 183.5 x 123.5 cm. The original format was altered, most likely to accommodate an eighteenth-century chimneybreast, but the canvas subsequently was restored to a rectangular shape, although a piece appears still to be missing on the left hand side.<sup>7</sup> It has been suggested that a wood fire was depicted on this missing part, in which case Mary, who is holding the Infant’s toes in her right hand, might be seen as warming her baby’s toes from the heat of the flames.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of a fire, together with the large stick and the earthenware cooking pot on

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bruyn, et al, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, trans. D. Cook-Radmore, vol. 2 (1631-1634) Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague/Boston/London, 1986), p. 456; cat. A88, p. 450.

<sup>6</sup> For example: *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1635 (193 x 133 cm, Hermitage St. Petersburg) and *The Blinding of Samson*, 1636 (236 x 302 cm, Stadelches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt).

<sup>7</sup> *Corpus* (note 5), p. 452.

<sup>8</sup> Pieter van Thiel, “The Holy Family,” *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop*, ed. Sally Salvesen, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p.162.

the floor to the left of Mary, would enhance the domestic ambience of the scene. The painting was signed and dated. However, with respect to the dating, confusion surrounding the final digit, a fragment of which was completed as a 1 on an added strip of canvas, has been resolved in favor of a dating of 1634.<sup>9</sup>

Rembrandt painted a joyful and intimate family scene. The figures are bathed in a light falling from the left, creating a chiaroscuro effect, and, in keeping with the Baroque, there is a sense of heightened emotion in the vibrancy of the figures of Mary and Joseph. The young couple is obviously delighted with their infant Son. This can be appreciated even more when one considers the sorrow often faced by parents in the seventeenth century because of the high mortality rate of children.<sup>10</sup> Mary appears to be sitting on a low bench. The position of her right leg, stretched forward, allows for a glimpse of her shoe, more modern footwear than that usually associated with the Virgin. Her other foot is covered by her gown. She is wearing a contemporary type gown of a purple-red color. A diaphanous veil, seemingly transparent where it covers her forehead but otherwise patterned, softly falls over her right shoulder, and adds a touch of elegance to her simple costume. Her head covering seems appropriate when considered in the light of representations of the Virgin in more biblical attire. Partly wrapped in a green cloth and lying on a fur pelt, the Child is held on Mary's lap. Her left arm encircles Jesus, while her right hand holds His feet. In drawing on the past when using this Byzantine iconographic motif, Rembrandt may have been influenced by the use of the same motif in the works of sixteenth-century Venetian and Northern Italian artists.<sup>11</sup> Mary's bare breast, with a drop of milk on the nipple, rests against the head of the contented Infant and creates an impression of reality.

This lifelike portrayal of Mary as a nursing mother alludes to the traditional theme *Maria lactans*, and also is symbolic of the virtue of charity. Seventeenth-century mothers could have identified with Mary and her example of a mother's love in nursing her baby. Breast-feeding by a

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<sup>9</sup> *Corpus* (note 5), p. 456.

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldeck (New York: Random House, 1962). See pages 38 and 39 for remarks made by people in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that reflect high infant and child mortality. Also, Erwin H. Ackerknacht, M.D., *A Short History of Medicine*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) – with respect to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ackerknacht comments on a decrease in “the appalling death rate of infants and children” as a result of a rising interest in public health.

mother, rather than by a wet nurse, was encouraged by Dutch authorities, not only for the physical and moral well being of the child, but also as a sign of true mother love.<sup>12</sup> Jacob Cats (1557-1660), statesman, moralist and writer, expresses the latter sentiment in *Houwelyck*, his treatise on marriage and family life: “One who bears her children is a mother in part/But she who suckles her child is a mother in full.”<sup>13</sup> Seventeenth-century artists also portrayed nursing mothers in genre paintings.<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with the trend of depicting Joseph as a more youthful man, rather than a fairly old and somewhat peripheral figure, the Joseph of Rembrandt’s painting is very much a part of the scene. His right hand, apparently resting on a piece of furniture as he bends forward to gaze at the Child, seems to almost touch the fur pelt, while his left arm rests on the hooded wickerwork cradle with its fine white pillow and sheet. Behind Joseph, a dark curtain partly obscures the back wall, although a masonry arch is visible on the wall behind Mary. The tools hanging from a horizontal strap attached to the top of this wall, together with the hammer on the table to the left of Mary, are indicative of Joseph, the carpenter. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the cradle is similar to the one used in Rubens’s *Holy Family* in the Pitti Gallery, Florence (fig. 53), and there does seem to be a similarity of spirit between the two paintings. However, Rembrandt brings his own singular interpretation to his work on the same subject.

The religious content of this painting might presuppose a Catholic client, although both Catholics and Protestants recognized the exemplary role of the Holy Family as regards the virtues of family life. It was, however, purchased by a wealthy young couple who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, Oopjen Coppet and Martin Soolmans, whose portraits Rembrandt had

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<sup>11</sup> *Corpus* (note 5), p. 456. Also, in discussing this gesture on p. 36 in “Rembrandt and the Italian Baroque,” *Simiolus* 4, 1970, Bruyn identifies it thus: “a motif from Byzantine icons of the *Hypsilotera* type in that she holds the Christ child’s feet.”

<sup>12</sup> Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1987), p. 539. The opinion was that only when absolutely necessary should a wet nurse be called upon. Apart from the importance of the compatibility of a mother and child, it was believed that an infant was at risk if the wet nurse had less than desirable habits, and that even the child’s personality might be affected.

<sup>13</sup> E. de Jongh, “The model woman and women of flesh and blood,” *Rembrandt’s Women*, ed. Julia Lloyd Williams (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 2001), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne E. Franits, *Paragons of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) – in discussing this subject in his chapter “Moeder,” Franits refers to the works of artists such as Slingelandt, De Hooch, and Maes.

painted in 1634.<sup>15</sup> This appears to bear out Volker Manuth's observation "that for the majority of the different faiths religious paintings were viewed as unproblematic, at least in the private sphere."<sup>16</sup> *The Holy Family* is not a religious painting in the sense that it represents a particular event from the Old or New Testament, but it does portray Biblical figures. In Amsterdam, apparently, the more liberal-minded Calvinists (known as Remonstrants) were not as rigid in their interpretation of the appropriateness of a work of art as were the strictest Calvinists (Counter Remonstrants).<sup>17</sup> A dispute between these two groups that began in the early seventeenth century as a theological debate regarding predestination became political.<sup>18</sup> Although the Counter Remonstrants gained the upper hand after the Dordrecht synod (1618 to 1619), by 1622 the liberal patricians, under whom the arts flourished, had regained power.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the aesthetic pleasure that such a work of art as *The Holy Family* could provide for an owner, regardless of religious persuasion, the painting has a general appeal because of the warm, familiar human values and emotion that Rembrandt manages to impart through his skill as an artist.

*The Holy Family at Night* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), c. 1638/40 (fig. 24), exhibits a very different style from Rembrandt's 1634 depiction of the Holy Family (Munich) during his Baroque period. The painting, oil on panel, measures 66.5 x 78 cm, and its format is horizontal rather than vertical.<sup>20</sup> In the early eighteenth century, while on a holiday in France, Jonathan Richardson, Jr. wrote about a Rembrandt in the Cabinet of the Yellow Bed of the Regent, the Duke of Orleans, possibly this work:

A woman reading to her Mother, while the Old Woman nods in rocking the Cradle where her Grandchild sleeps. The same Size as the finish'd Drawing my Father had, and exactly the same, as far as a Drawing and Picture can be. All the good properties of a Picture (of this subject) are here in a very high Degree, and

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<sup>15</sup> *Corpus* (note 5), Excerpt from the *Corpus* re Provenance: "described in the settlement of probate dated 24 June 1660 on the estate of Maerten Daey (d. 1659), the second husband of Oopjen Coppit, and allocated to her son Jan Soolmans from her first marriage with Marten Soolmans," p. 458.

<sup>16</sup> Volker Manuth, "Denomination and iconography: the choice of subject matter in the biblical painting of the Rembrandt circle," *Simiolus* 22.4 (1993/94), p. 240.

<sup>17</sup> Christian Tumpel, *Rembrandt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1993), p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.125.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* pp.125, 126.

<sup>20</sup> Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde de Rembrandt-Schüler* (Landu/Pfatz, West Germany: Editions PVA, 1983), vol. IV, illus. p. 2968.

some as high as one can conceive 'tis possible to raise them. They are plain People, and in a cottage; and Nature, and Humour must be instead of Grace, and Greatness; the Expression is exquisite, the Colouring warm, and transparent; a vast number of Parts put together with the utmost Harmony; and for the Clair- Obscure it may stand in Competition with the *Notte* of Corregio, or any other picture.<sup>21</sup>

Seymour Slive identifies this painting as the *Holy Family at Night*, although it was not always known by that title. The 1721 catalogues of the Duke of Orleans's collection do not mention a figure under the stairs, and St. Anne is mistaken for a man.<sup>22</sup> John Smith, in his *Catalogue Raisonné* (v. 7, 1836), simply describes it as *A Woman reading by Candlelight*, with no reference to the Holy Family.<sup>23</sup> In his 1854 listing of pictures brought to England in 1792 from the Orleans Gallery, Gustav F. Waagen mentions a painting, "*The Birth of Christ, seen.*" that was "Afterwards sold to Payne Knight for 1000 gn."<sup>24</sup> The grandson of the Duke had sold his inherited collection in 1791 to three Englishmen who, in turn had a sales exhibition at the Royal Academy.<sup>25</sup> The aforementioned painting would appear to be the one listed as *The Cradle* in their sales catalogue, and purchased by Richard Payne Knight for 1000 guineas.<sup>26</sup> In their description of *The Cradle* (*The Complete Works of Rembrandt*, 1900), W. Bode and C. Hofstede de Groot describe the figures of Mary and the "aged Anne" in what they refer to as a Biblical incident, rather than a genre picture as formerly classified.<sup>27</sup> C. Stryienski, in his 1912 publication on the gallery of the Duke of Orleans, refers to this painting as *La Veillée hollandaise* or *le Berceau*

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<sup>21</sup> Seymour Slive, *Rembrandt and His Critics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> Tacco Dibbits, "The Reception History of the *Holy Family at Night*," *Rembrandt and Dutch History Painting in the 17th Century* (Tokyo: The National Museum of Western Art, 2004), p.43.

<sup>23</sup> John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters* (1829-42), London, vol. 7, 1836, pp. 63-64, item 145. Smith suggests that the man dimly perceived under the archway of the stairs is drawing liquor.

<sup>24</sup> G.F. Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* (London: John Murray, 1854), vol. 2, p.501, item 4. The reference to the 'Birth of Christ' implies a depiction of the Holy Family.

<sup>25</sup> Dibbits (note 22), p.43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> W. Bode and C. Hofstede de Groot, *The Complete Works of Rembrandt*, vol. 4, trans. Florence Simonds (Paris: Charles Sedelmeier, 1900), p.15.

(cradle), and comments on the figures of the Holy Family.<sup>28</sup> The actual cradle in the composition is almost centrally placed, and the Infant and His coverings are bathed in light.

When looking at the painting, the illumination that highlights the pages of the book being held by the woman, and that also falls on the child, suggests Mary and the Infant Jesus rather than an ordinary mother and child. On more than one occasion the Virgin has been shown with a book in Annunciation scenes when her devotional reading is interrupted by the arrival of the Angel Gabriel. The elderly woman sitting against the wall, who may have fallen asleep while rocking the Child's cradle by means of a rope, is identified as St. Anne. She wears a cap and cloak, possibly for warmth, and she appears to be wearing a linen shoulder mantel over her dress.<sup>29</sup> The red of her dress is particularly noticeable in the midst of colors that consist mainly of soft yellow and brown tones. Mary also appears to be wearing a shoulder mantel, but it is difficult to determine the texture. Her hair is caught up in a bun. The Child, asleep in a low wickerwork cradle, is carefully covered and appears to be wearing a little cap.

The light is coming from an unknown source, close to the floor and between the figure of Mary and the window, and it produces the dramatic shadow that is cast by the figure of St. Anne. It is unlikely that a single candle or a small oil lamp would be strong enough to project the rays of light of the strength needed to traverse the distance described in the painting. It may be that the artist wanted to create the effect of a mysterious light in keeping with the subject matter. Another figure, barely discernible, is under the archway of the stairs. Presumably, it is meant to be St. Joseph. Why he is in that location is open to question; perhaps he is retrieving kindling for the nearby fireplace.

In the eighteenth century, Richardson referred to a cottage, but the well-described interior suggests more than a humble cottage. It is snug and comfortably appointed. A flight of stairs can be seen on the left. Curved beams support the roof, and the casement windows are secured with shutters against the night. The upper half-round of the window has a panel that can be opened or

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<sup>28</sup> C. Stryienski, *La Galerie du régent, Philippe, duc d'Orléans* (Paris: Goupil & Cie, 1913), p.108. Stryienski mentions *Le Berceau* as being listed in a catalogue made by Dubois of Sain-Gelais.

<sup>29</sup> See Marieke de Winkel, "Fashion or Fancy? Some interpretations of the dress of Rembrandt's women reevaluated," *Rembrandt's Women*, ed. Julia Lloyd Williams (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 2001), p. 56 for reference to this style.

shut by ropes positioned on the inside and attached to the ceiling. Settings may not always be authentic, but by means of such homey details, a sense of reality is, nevertheless, imparted to the viewer. There is a cloth on the table behind Mary and utensils that catch a gleam of light, as does the pot on the shelf in a nearby open cupboard. The utensils are a fitting motif in this domestic theme, but the pair of shoes shown on the table would seem to be a most unlikely occurrence in such a well-kept cottage. The shoes may, perhaps, have a virtuous connotation when considered in light of the suggestion that shoes, when removed, “were invoked as reminders to women that they belong in the home.”<sup>30</sup> The depiction of the shoes on the table, with the possible inference that Mary is barefoot, may also allude to the symbolism of standing or walking unshod on ground made hallow, in this case by the presence of the Christ Child.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that the figure of Mary is shown reading a book, most likely a Bible, would be commended by Dutch seventeenth-century moralists who placed great emphasis on the role of mothers in the moral and physical well being of those entrusted to their care. A virtuous household was also a clean and well-ordered one, such as that portrayed in the painting. In this cozy and intimate scene, Mary is depicted in her sphere of influence, the home. Joseph’s workshop must be in another part of the cottage. There is a religious aspect to the scene, but it is not stressed as in many other Holy Family scenes, save for the significant and rather mysterious illumination. Mary is being depicted primarily as a mother in a domestic setting. It is a depiction unlikely to offend anyone’s religious sensibilities.

This painting is charming. Unfortunately, there is some question as to its authenticity, and differing opinions have been expressed. If not a Rembrandt, the iconography suggests that it is the work of someone either close to Rembrandt or in his studio.<sup>32</sup> It has been noted that the figure of Mary was derived from the *repoussoir* figure in an etching by Rembrandt (fig. 25), Joseph *Telling his Dreams* (1638, 11.1 x 8.4 cm).<sup>33</sup> Regardless of the identity of the artist, this painting would seem to have the same appeal today as it did for Jonathan Richardson, Jr. An apt

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<sup>30</sup> Franits (note 14), p.77. Franits is referring to Plutarch’s *Conjugalia praecepta*, “a collection of ‘laws,’” i.e. observations and advice about marriage as proposed by Plutarch. Franits suggests that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Plutarch’s book was well known in the Netherlands.

<sup>31</sup> James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc. 1985). See p. 112 for reference to this symbolism in connection with the *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*, 1534, and p. 108 for illus.

<sup>32</sup> Dibbits (note 22), p.50.

description of this work, perhaps, is that expressed by an agent who unsuccessfully attempted to purchase *The Cradle* from the Boughton-Knight collection in the early 1900s for the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>34</sup> The agent, Douglas, is as enthusiastic as Richardson, Jr. on the merits of the painting that he describes as having “all the popular virtues – beautiful sentiment, fine colour, and a general effectiveness and charm.”<sup>35</sup>

The suggestion of a genre scene is repeated in the next painting to be described, a work that was attributed to Rembrandt, but a question of authenticity has arisen. It currently is surmised that it may be the work of someone close to Rembrandt, that is, from his “immediate circle.”<sup>36</sup> However, it is not the purpose of this essay to determine authenticity, but to comment on the iconography. *The Holy Family with St. Anne* (Louvre, Paris) is signed and dated 1640 (fig. 26), but the signature is said to be “unconvincing” as regards authenticity.<sup>37</sup> It is painted in oil on oak panel and measures only 40.6 x 34 cm. The identity of the original owner is not known, but it is recorded as being sold in 1711 at the Isaac van Thye sale in Amsterdam for 900 guilders.<sup>38</sup> Since the eighteenth century, the painting was known as *Le Ménagement du menuisier* because of the domesticity of the scene.<sup>39</sup> The original panel had a half-round edge at the top, but another panel now encases the original, probably added in the eighteenth century, thus making up a rectangle.<sup>40</sup> The iconography of the painting clearly indicates the Holy Family. Included in this domestic-cum-workshop scene are Mary, Joseph, the Infant Jesus, and St. Anne who is bending forward and lifting back the blanket in which the Child is being held so as to see Him a little better. It is suggested that she has been reading the Bible – her glasses are hooked over her left index finger and the book put aside – and has read some words about the Saviour that have illuminated her mind with regard to the Child.<sup>41</sup> Mary cradles and suckles her naked Son. She is sitting in a *bakermat*, a nursing chair that would have been recognized by contemporary viewers. Frans

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., illus. fig. 11 (B. 37, II) and comments on this etching.

<sup>34</sup> Denys Sutton, “Agent for The Metropolitan Museum,” *Apollo*, June 1979, vol. 104, pp. 412-415.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>36</sup> J. Bruyn, et al, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, trans. D. Cook-Radmore, vol. 3 (1635-1642), Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague/Boston/London, 1989), p. 561; cat. C87, p. 558 for illus.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bode and De Groot (note 27), vol. 4, p. 74.

<sup>39</sup> *Corpus* (note 36), p. 566.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 561.

<sup>41</sup> Tumpel (note 17), p. 97.

Floris also portrayed Mary as sitting in a *bakermat* in his sixteenth-century painting (fig. 27) entitled *Holy Family* (c. 1547, Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai).<sup>42</sup> Depicting Mary as sitting at a lower level, or close to the floor, is familiar from both fourteenth-century Sieneese art and fifteenth-century Flemish art, and is most likely a reference to Mary as the Virgin of Humility.

In view of the tradition surrounding St. Anne, it would not have been unusual to include her in a depiction with the Infant Jesus and Mary. The parents of the Blessed Virgin are not mentioned in the Bible, but they are referred to as Anna and Joachim in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>43</sup> St. Anne, the mother of Mary, appears to have been very respected by the Church for her pious care of her daughter; for those in the married state and charged with the education of children, she could be seen as a model of virtue.<sup>44</sup> She also became popular with the laity, as evidenced by the flourishing cult of St. Anne that developed in the fifteenth century.<sup>45</sup> St. Anne was portrayed so frequently with the Virgin and Child, particularly in Germany and the northern Netherlands, that the titles of ‘Die Heilige Anna Selbdritt’ and ‘St. Anna te Drieën’ were, respectively, assigned to this subject matter.<sup>46</sup> In commenting on this classification, E. Haverkamp-Begemann further suggests that the previously mentioned painting, *The Holy Family at Night*, would fall into the category of a ‘St. Anna te Drieën’.<sup>47</sup>

In the Louvre painting, Joseph is standing by an open window, the upper portion of which is composed of square leaded panes of glass, a type of window used by Rembrandt in other compositions.<sup>48</sup> Distant houses and some trees are visible. The room is mostly in semi-darkness. Various shades of brown are used, with a few bright colors in the group composed of Mary, Jesus and St. Anne. Small dabbing strokes are used for the light blue of the sky. Pictured with the sunlight falling on his white shirt, Joseph is busy spoke-shaving a piece of wood that he holds

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<sup>42</sup> Carl van de Velde, *Frans Floris (1519/20-1570) Leven en Werken* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1975), illus. 18, text p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. *New Testament Apocrypha*, English trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co. 1991), pp. 426-428.

<sup>44</sup> Rev. Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. V11 (New York: D & J Sadlier, 1885), p. 212.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *Lives of the Saints*, ed. and rev. and supp. by Herbert J. Thurston, S.J. and Donald Atwater, vol. III, (Tumbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1986), p. 189.

<sup>46</sup> Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt, The Holy Family, St. Petersburg* (Groningen: The Gerson Lecture Foundation, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Corpus* (note 36) – the ensuing description of the room and its contents is taken from the *Corpus*, p. 557.

jammed between his chest and the workbench. A tool holster hangs at his left hip, and the tools on the wall include a small axe and a brace-and-bit. Above the tools, a canteen hangs against a post. Other objects that might be found in a genre painting include a closet bed, with a curtain and bedding, a string of garlic on the wall, a kettle hanging on a chain in the fireplace, a cat sitting on a child's chair, and a cabbage. A tall fireplace rounds off the edge of the room that has an open truss roof. The planks of the floor run at right angles to the plank running parallel to the picture plane, thus seeming to set the scene apart from the viewer.

As in *The Holy Family at Night*, light is used for a special effect. The sunlight, coming through the window on the left, falls on the Infant and in a distinct patch on the broad planks of the floor.<sup>49</sup> Reflected light illuminates the faces of the two women and other items around the central group, such as the hooded wickerwork cradle and its covering, the white cloth and red blanket on which the Child is lying, and, farther to the right, objects in the room. The pieces of wood on the floor, partially in the sunlight that highlights the Infant and seems to travel in a direct ray to these pieces of wood, form a rough cross, an indication, perhaps, of Christ's death and resurrection. Haverkamp-Begemann notes the same motif in Dürer's *Sojourn in Egypt* woodcut, and suggests that it also is an allusion to the cross on which Christ will be crucified.<sup>50</sup> The sunlight also plays through the partly filled glass of water that is prominently placed on the windowsill. This could be a reference to Mary's purity. The frame surrounding Jan van Eyck's painting of the *Madonna in the Church*, c. 1437-38, in Berlin, was inscribed with the words of a popular Nativity hymn which ended with the lines: "as the sunbeam through the glass passes but not stains, so the Virgin, as she was, a virgin still remains."<sup>51</sup> An early painting by Van Eyck, the *Ince Hall Madonna* (*Madonna with the Child Reading*, 1433, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), includes a carafe "through which the sunbeams pass."<sup>52</sup> Also, the climbing plants seen along the right jamb of the window, if they are vines, are significant. Vines express the new relationship between God and His people through Christ: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Haverkamp-Begemann (note 46), p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, rev. ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2005), p. 97.

<sup>52</sup> Snyder (note 31), text p. 102, illus. 100, p. 103.

husbandman...I am the vine, ye are the branches..." John 15: 1,5,8.<sup>53</sup> It is quite possible that not all seventeenth-century viewers would be familiar with, or read into the painting, late medieval symbolism relating to the Virgin Mary. They would, however, recognize a scenario in which the father, in the person of Joseph, is working to support his family, while Mary lovingly cares for their Infant, and Anne leans forward with grandmotherly concern.

Rembrandt's beautiful and unusual painting, *The Holy Family with Angels*, (Hermitage, St. Petersburg), is signed and dated Rembrandt f. 1645 (fig. 28).<sup>54</sup> It is painted in oil on canvas, has a vertical format, and measures 117 x 91 cm. The original provenance remains to be determined, but it has been suggested that at one time the painting may have belonged to Roger de Piles (1635-1709), passed then to Pierre Crozat (1690-1740), and then on to a great nephew, Louis Antoine Crozart, Baron de Thieur (1690-1770), and was acquired by Catherine the II of Russia in 1770 in Paris.<sup>55</sup> The setting is that of a domestic interior. The celestial light, in which descending cherubs may be seen, enters the room from the upper left hand corner of the painting, encompassing the young woman and the sleeping infant and leaving no doubt that the viewer is looking at a depiction of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. The focus is on the Child who sleeps peacefully in His cradle. In fact, the whole painting reflects an atmosphere of quiet domesticity in harmony with heaven. In the words of Otto Benesch: "The idea of religious faith sanctifying our daily life in a workaday world is expressed to perfection in this painting."<sup>56</sup>

The shape of the room cannot be determined, but Joseph is working at his carpentry bench against the back wall, using the faint light of the fire burning in the hearth to the right. His closely cropped hair makes him appear to be younger than the figure of Joseph in the Munich Holy Family. His figure is seen in profile, and he is very intent on making a yoke for an ox. A yoke can be associated with an Old Testament prophecy foretelling that the Saviour will break the yoke of Israel's burden.<sup>57</sup> To quote Isaias 9:2-4, in part: "The people that walked in darkness,

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<sup>53</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 39-40.

<sup>54</sup> Tumpel (note 17), illus. p. 245.

<sup>55</sup> Michiel Roscam Abbing, "Roger de Piles' Holy Family by Rembrandt," *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis*, 1993, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Otto Benesch, *Rembrandt: biographical and critical study*, trans. James Emmons, The Taste of our Time, v. 022, (New York: Skira, 1957), p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> Tumpel (note 17), p.245.

have seen a great light. To them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen...For the yoke of their burden, and the rod of their shoulder, and the scepter of their oppressor thou hast overcome, as in the day of Madian.”

Neither Mary nor Joseph seems to be aware of the silently descending putti. Mary turns for a moment from reading a book, presumably a Bible, to lift back the coverlet on the hood of the wickerwork cradle to check on her Infant, as any Dutch mother might. There is an expression of tenderness that emanates from her look and gesture. There may also be a religious connotation that simultaneously relates the Bible, illuminated by the heavenly light, and Mary’s action. It has been suggested, in essence, that the Bible being held by Mary reveals the life of Christ, the Saviour; Mary, by glancing at the Infant, reveals the Saviour to the viewer.<sup>58</sup> The religious symbolism in this scene is enhanced by the leading angel who is positioned above the Child and cradle. His outspread arms might be seen as bestowing a blessing, but his body posture may also serve as a reminder of the crucified Christ.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the two foremost sticks by the foot warmer, one thicker than the other, form the shape of a Cross. These symbolic references to the Passion are in keeping with the implicit reference to this event as represented in the person of the Infant Jesus. The motif of cherubs descending from Heaven may be seen in the work of an earlier artist, Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610). A descending cherub, one of many in his painting entitled *The Holy Family with the Boy John* (c. 1599, oil on copper, State Museum, Berlin), although not as rigid in appearance as Rembrandt’s angel, is positioned high above the Christ Child (fig. 29).<sup>60</sup>

Mary, who is pictured as being very young, is dressed in contemporary Dutch attire, and a pearl necklace is partially visible at the neckline of her gown. It seems unlikely that a carpenter’s wife would be wearing a pearl necklace, but Mary, as Christ’s mother, may be thought of as being elevated figuratively above her depicted role in this domestic setting. Broad brushstrokes define her shoulder shawl, through which the rich copper-pink of the top portion of her dress may be seen. Mary’s dress, the red of the cradle’s coverlet and the yellow of the fox fur lining, as well as the white of the pillow and sheet reflect the light and contribute to the illumination of the

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<sup>58</sup> Haverkamp-Begemann (note 46), p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Tumpel (note 17), p. 245.

<sup>60</sup> Caroline H. Ebertshauser, et al, *Mary: Art, Culture and Religion through the Ages*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company 1998), illus. p. 255.

scene.<sup>61</sup> The details of the necklace and the fox fur provide a luxurious note in contrast to the simple robes and modest circumstances usually associated with Biblical presentations of the Holy Family. Rembrandt may be portraying the Virgin and Child in a manner that he feels befits them. A bowl and spoon are placed on the floor next to the foot warmer.

What was once believed to have been a preliminary drawing by Rembrandt for the Hermitage painting, *The Holy Family in the Carpenter's Workshop* (16.1 x 15.8 cm, pen and bistre, Bonnat Museum, Bayonne), is now thought to be a sketch after the painting by a pupil.<sup>62</sup> With reference to another drawing by Rembrandt, however, *Baby Sleeping in a Cradle* (c. 1645, 7.5 x 11.3 cm, black chalk, in a private collection), Otto Benesch suggests that it is a "Life-Study, probably connected with the painting of 1645..." in the Hermitage (fig. 30).<sup>63</sup> Although it does not appear to be directly related to *The Holy Family with Angels*, Benesch also feels that the idea of Rembrandt's drawing, *The Holy Family Asleep, with Angels* (c. 1645, 17.5 x 31.3 cm, pen and bistre, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), is "apparently connected" with the aforementioned painting (fig. 31).<sup>64</sup> There does seem to be a similarity between the 'Life Study' infant in its cradle and those depicted in the Hermitage painting and the Cambridge drawing. Also of significance for the Hermitage painting, perhaps, is the lightly sketched figure of a cherub in the Cambridge drawing, standing upright and poised behind the head of the cradle, with head bent down and seemingly looking at the Christ Child.

The 1640s was a time when Rembrandt experienced both joy and sorrow – sorrow at the death of his wife Saskia in 1642, and joy in the experience of having a young son, Titus. Three previous children had died in infancy. It is not possible to read Rembrandt's thoughts, and whether or not his interest in depicting the Holy Family was influenced by personal events can only be a matter of speculation. However, Benesch describes the drawing, *The Holy Family Asleep, with Angels*, as "one of the most charming idylls of family life ever executed by Rembrandt, characteristic of the spirit of the 1640s."<sup>65</sup> With respect to the painting, *The Holy Family with Angels*, the simplicity and warmth of this family scene must have had a wide appeal

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<sup>61</sup> Benesch (note 56), p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Dibbits (note 22), p. 49 for comments and fig. 8. Ben. 567.

<sup>63</sup> Benesch (note 1), vol. 3, Ben. 570, p.155.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, Ben. 569, p. 155.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

for contemporary viewers. In particular, while the young Virgin Mary is still the mother of Christ, and the visible religious content reinforces this interpretation, she is believable also as a young Dutch mother caring for her infant while her husband works at his nearby carpenter's bench. The celestial element with angels is unusual when considered in relation to Rembrandt's other depictions of the Holy Family, although the ethereal aspect of the putti is somewhat mitigated by the sturdy figure of the lead cherub. Unfortunately, it is not known for whom the painting was intended.

The final painting to be considered, *The Holy Family with the Curtain* (Gemäldegalerie, Kassel), is signed and dated *Rembrandt ft.* 1646 (fig. 32).<sup>66</sup> An oil painting on an oak panel, it measures 45 x 67 cm, and has a horizontal format. The earliest provenance is a manuscript note in a catalogue of 1752 recording that the painting was sold by Willem Lormier from his collection to the Electoral Gallery in Kassel.<sup>67</sup> It is presented in a most unusual way. Painted into the picture are a gold, carved frame in the shape of a proscenium arch and a brass rod extending across the width of the frame, with a curtain hanging from the rod on the right hand side.<sup>68</sup> This gives the effect of a stage, or an area removed from the viewer. A stair or stairs leading down to an outside area on the right and towards the back of the room reinforces this image. Rembrandt's use of a *trompe-l'oeil* effect with the curtain also creates a painting within a painting. Besides providing a motif by which artists could demonstrate their skill at illusion, or imitating reality, curtains were used to cover paintings in the seventeenth century. This not only protected valuable paintings from dust and dirt, but also allowed an owner to reveal a painting as a pleasant surprise for a visitor by drawing back the curtain. In this *Holy Family* painting, the curtain looks as though it is being drawn back, thus revealing an intimate domestic scene in the life of the Holy Family.

The setting is the interior of a building that has partly fallen into ruin. A pillar and a large window with a Gothic arch and grating, positioned on the back, outside wall, are suggestive of a

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<sup>66</sup> Tumpel (note 17), illus. p. 243.

<sup>67</sup> Bode and De Groot (note 27), vol. 4, no. 252. Vosmaer's Catalogue of the Willem Lormier Collection, 1752, notes that it was sold by Lormier to the Electoral Gallery, "now the Royal Gallery, Kassel."

<sup>68</sup> B. Haak, *Rembrandt. His life, His work, His time*, trans. Elizabeth Willems-Treeman, (New York: Harry N. Abram, Inc., 1969), p. 117. Rembrandt's study for the frame of his grisaille, *The Preaching of John the*

church. It is dusk, although a segment of landscape is visible. Joseph is outside, and can be seen working with his axe. Mary sits with the Child on her lap, a curtained bed behind her. Although there is some light from the fire burning in the middle of the room, a soft light comes from high up on the left and falls gently on the Virgin and Child. This illumination from an unknown source helps to confirm that the three people depicted represent the Holy Family. Mary, who is barefoot, appears to be warming her feet by the fire. The sense of domesticity is enhanced by the tabby cat crouched by the fire, and the presence of a dish and spoon on the floor, motifs that are familiar from other scenes of domestic interiors. Mary is leaning forward to protectively clasp the Infant in her arms as He turns to His mother, unsteadily standing on her lap. Is He alarmed at the intent glare in the blue eyes of the cat as it looks towards what may be a porridge bowl? If so, it is a small note of everyday domestic drama in an otherwise very tranquil scene. Jesus, who appears to be slightly older than in previous Holy Family depictions, is dressed in a little red suit.

Mary is well dressed in a gown of dark colored material, and she wears a finely worked shawl around her shoulders. Over the crown of her pretty cap are two separate woven bands of deep blue and red. In painting the Virgin and Child, Rembrandt uses broad, but sure brushstrokes to create his impressions, including the delicacy of some of the fabrics. The rather vigilant-looking cat seems to be made up of a combination of short brushstrokes and dabs of paint. The bowl and the fire are rendered very realistically. The polished wooden armchair in which Mary sits is of the type used by Rembrandt in other paintings. There is a patterned rug on the chair, and the wicker cradle, placed to the left of Mary's figure, is plain, but sturdily built with handles to facilitate carrying. In comparison to Mary's attire and the chair, the fire in the middle of the floor is anachronistic in an age of fireplaces. In addition, it appears to be set directly on the wood plank floor. This may be a further indication that the building is abandoned as far as its original purpose was concerned, and was not intended as a dwelling.

It has been proposed that the red curtain being pulled back is not simply revealing a domestic scene, but has a more symbolic meaning.<sup>69</sup> In his *Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1480, Staatliche Museen, Berlin), Hugo van der Goes uses the motif of parted veils being held by two

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*Baptist* (about 1655), is shaped like a proscenium arch, and he sketched a similar frame for the *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Joan Deyman*, 1656.

Old Testament figures who are unveiling the meaning of their prophecies, as was their role in medieval mystery plays.<sup>70</sup> The curtain in Rembrandt's painting may be a metaphor for the veil that must be pushed aside from the Old Testament in order to reveal the meaning of Christ.<sup>71</sup> This is explained in St. Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians 3:13-16: "We do not act as Moses did, who used to put a veil over his face that the Israelites might not observe the glory of his countenance, which was to pass away. But their minds were darkened; for to this day, when the Old Testament is read to them, the selfsame veil remains, not being lifted to disclose the Christ in whom it is made void. Yes, down to this very day, when Moses is read, the veil covers their hearts; but when they turn in repentance to God, the veil shall be taken away." John F. Moffitt sees a connection between Rembrandt's iconography of *The Holy Family with the Curtain* and remarks by John Calvin in his *Commentaries* in which he explains the meaning of Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>72</sup> Moffitt also comments on a work by Calvin entitled *Harmony*, in which the Reformer refers to Christ's paternity, relative to the Holy Family itself, that he views as "being set within a stage-like and veiled setting."<sup>73</sup> It is reasonable to assume that not only was Rembrandt familiar with the Bible, but that he also had a schooled knowledge of Calvin's ideas.

It is not possible to know how many seventeenth-century viewers would have appreciated this painting in terms of St. Paul's words or Calvin's writings. Presumably, they would have appreciated the intimate and tender ambience of the composition. Rembrandt reveals the identity of the Holy Family to viewers, but, at the same time, gently blends this religious connotation with the domestic. Bob Haak sees in Rembrandt's sketch of a smiling woman, about 1646, in which she is helping a child learn to walk, an indication of the artist's interest in household activities and

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<sup>69</sup> John F. Moffitt, "Rembrandt, Revelation and Calvin's Curtain," *Gazete des Beau/Arts*, Series 6, vol. 113/114, April, 1989, p. 178.

<sup>70</sup> Snyder (note 51), illus. 8:13, text p. 170.

<sup>71</sup> Moffitt (note 69), p. 178.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

children at that time.<sup>74</sup> It is just one of the many that Rembrandt sketched of the life of women with children in the later 1630s and early 1640s.<sup>75</sup>

In his final etching of the Holy Family in a domestic setting, *The Virgin and Child with the Cat and the Snake* (1654, 9.5 x 14.5 cm), Rembrandt again locates the figures of Mary and the Infant in an interior, while Joseph is seen outside looking in through the window at the scene within, (fig. 33).<sup>76</sup> The Virgin, who is warmly cuddling her Child, is directly modeled on Andrea Mantegna's sculpturesque *Virgin and Child* (fig. 34) in his engraving c. 1480-85 (39 x 29.2 cm).<sup>77</sup> However, while Mantegna's Madonna wears traditional robes and is placed against a plain background, Rembrandt's Madonna is dressed in softly draped contemporary clothing, and is placed in a simple domestic setting. The cat, which appears to be reaching out to play with the hem of the Virgin's dress, the open workbasket placed on the floor, and the fire in the hearth add to the sense of domesticity. At the same time, Rembrandt includes elements of traditional religious symbolism in this etching. For instance, Mary is seated close to the floor, on a slightly elevated dais. This is suggestive of her title as the Virgin of Humility. The armchair and the parted curtain above it, on the other hand, are suggestive of a throne and canopy, somewhat out of keeping, perhaps, in an otherwise simple interior, but serving to emphasize Mary's position of humility. For a Catholic viewer, the throne-like chair might give rise to thoughts of Mary's role as Queen of Heaven.<sup>78</sup> The round pane of glass in the leaded window behind the Virgin simulates a halo, enhanced by the drawn lines that radiate from around her head. This use of a natural object for a spiritual purpose is reminiscent of the use of the fire screen to suggest a halo for the Virgin in the Master of Flémalle's *Salting Madonna* (c. 1430, National Gallery, London).<sup>79</sup> These symbols of holiness are augmented by the placing of the Virgin's foot on the snake, a motif that symbolizes the enmity between the new Eve (Mary) and the serpent, and the victory of her

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<sup>74</sup>Haak (note 68), p. 195. Haak is referring to a *Sheet of Studies* (pen and bistre 6 ¼ x 6 ½", Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), Ben. 706, fig. 895, vol. IV.

<sup>75</sup> As noted by Clifford S. Ackley, et al, *Rembrandt's Journey* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2003), p. 169, Jan van de Capelle (about 1624-1679) owned 135 drawings by Rembrandt listed in his inventory under the "broad title" of "the life of women with children."

<sup>76</sup> White (note 3), illus. 111, p. 88. B. 63/1.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., illus. 112, p. 89. B. 63 I.

<sup>78</sup> Holm Bevers in *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop*, ed. Sally Salvesen, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: National Gallery Publications, c. 1991), no. 36. Also Eberthausen (note 60): Although Mary was not formally declared "Queen of Heaven" until 1954 by Pius XII, her praises were sung in this regard as early as the eleventh century in the *Salve Regina*, p. 167.

Child, Christ, over Satan (Genesis 3:14-16). Some viewers might relate the action of the Virgin placing her foot on the snake to her blameless nature and Immaculate Conception.<sup>80</sup>

In a drawing about 1648-49 by Rembrandt, *The Holy Family in the Carpenter's Workshop* (about 1648-9, 18.2 x 23.4 cm, collection Count Antoine Seilern, London), the face of a woman, possibly meant to be St. Anne, can be seen looking in through a window at the cozy scene within.<sup>81</sup> While Joseph works with his axe, Mary is nursing Jesus. A cat sleeps nearby. In *The Virgin and Child with the Cat and the Snake*, Joseph is portrayed in a similar manner, that is, as being part of the scene, but not fully participating in the tender moment of human bonding between the Virgin and Child. Perhaps Rembrandt himself witnessed such a scene in his own household. On a spiritual level, the Gospel of Matthew 1:18-25 relates how Joseph co-operated in God's plan by accepting his role as the foster father of Jesus. Joseph's appearance at the window might be interpreted as the care and concern of this saintly man for Mary and Jesus who have been placed in his care. Rembrandt is able to balance the secular with the spiritual in such a way that neither seems out of place in this religious subject that is presented in a manner open to interpretation on more than one level.

Albert Koschorke is of the opinion that "Rembrandt drew the visual consequences from Luther's dialectic of secularization and spiritualization."<sup>82</sup> This combination of the secular and spiritual in Rembrandt's paintings of the Holy Family could well have struck a responsive chord with Dutch seventeenth century viewers. Prior to the Reformation, the Catholic clergy had acquired an authoritative position pertaining to the sacrament of marriage that even extended into the realm of family morals. Although marriage was deemed to be a desirable and necessary state, and the conjugal family unit an essential component of the Church community, celibacy was viewed as a preferred option, and was mandatory for clerics. With the abolishment of clerical celibacy by the Reformists and the resultant emphasis on the married state, together with the

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<sup>79</sup> Snyder (note 51), illus. 6.6, p. 117.

<sup>80</sup> Apart from the fact that she was chosen to become Christ's Mother and might be assumed to be without blemish, Mary, in her obedience to God's Will cancels out the disobedience of Eve, and overcomes sin. Taken in part from Aelred R. Rosser, *Workbook for lectors and gospel readers* (Ottawa: CCCB Publications, Year C 2004), reading for December 8, 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Benesch (note 1), vol. 3, Ben. 620A, fig. 795.

<sup>82</sup> Albecht Koschorke, *The Holy Family and Its Legacy*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 127.

belief in a more direct spiritual relationship to God on the part of the individual, the responsibility for the morals of a household devolved to the parents, particularly to the father as head of the family. It would not have been unusual for family members and any servants or apprentices to gather together, under the direction of the head of the household, for a daily reading from the Bible. In Korschke's words, "the reduction in ecclesiastical authority accrued to the benefit of the family father's position of authority."<sup>83</sup>

It would seem, however, that the concept of religion in daily life was not confined to a reading of the Bible. The closing of monasteries and nunneries and the subsequent releasing of religious from their vows of chastity was visible evidence that Reformists did not consider "monastic withdrawal" as the only way of pleasing God.<sup>84</sup> In keeping with Luther's thoughts, the conscientious carrying out of "daily tasks and duties" took on a religious significance of its own, thus enabling the individual to live a religious life through the performance of secular work.<sup>85</sup> The humble carpenter pursuing his craft could be seen as fulfilling his obligation to his family and society at large in a manner pleasing to God.

Women also had an important role to play as wives and mothers. Although St. Paul spoke of a wife as being subject to her husband as head of the family, his further injunction that a husband should love his wife as himself would seem to be a prescription for marital harmony. (Ephesians, 2:21-29). Popular housebooks of the seventeenth century described the role of the husband as that of a "god-fearing, wise, understanding man" who is "able to maintain the love, friendship and good will of all around him."<sup>86</sup> In neither Protestant nor Catholic beliefs was the "father of the House" to be a tyrant.<sup>87</sup> As the mother of the house, a wife was to be accorded "a position of high authority and equal respect."<sup>88</sup> The first priority for a woman was her household. That this was an accepted norm is evidenced by the immense popularity of Jacob Cats's *Houwelyck*, a comprehensive treatise on marriage and family life, setting out the "specific virtues and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> Erik Larsen, *Calvinistic Economy and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Art* (Lawrence University of Kansas Publications, 1979), p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Steven Ozmont, *When Fathers Ruled* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 50.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

obligations” during the various stages of a woman’s life.<sup>89</sup> Wayne E. Franits comments on the many “images of domestic virtues” that is, visual works of art that depict women in domestic situations of a “wholesome” kind.<sup>90</sup> Most relevant, perhaps, to Rembrandt’s depictions of the Holy Family is a secular painting (fig. 35) by Pieter van Slingelandt (1640-1691) entitled *The Carpenter’s Family* (London, Collection of Her Majesty the Queen).<sup>91</sup> In this ideal of virtuous family life, the mother, seated at home beside the hearth and nursing her infant while her little girl stands close by, personifies the loving and devoted mother. Her husband works at his carpentry in an adjacent area, thus demonstrating for the viewer his ability and willingness to support his family. Both husband and wife are fulfilling the roles expected of them by contemporary society. This concept of family commitment is reflected in Rembrandt’s depictions of the Holy Family, the difference being that although Rembrandt humanizes his figures, he also conveys the spiritual significance.

A common denominator in the various scenes of the Holy Family under discussion is the theme of domesticity, although these settings sometimes indicate Joseph’s calling as a carpenter as well. An element that does not change, regardless of year of execution, is the loving care and/or concern that Mary shows for her Child. This attentiveness to Jesus is repeated in countless depictions of the Virgin and Child that have survived down through the ages. During the sixteenth century, Joseph came to share more visibly in this caring attention when the Holy Family was depicted as a trio. In reference to the above-mentioned works, Joseph’s attention, with the exception of the Munich *Holy Family* and the 1654 etching, is directed elsewhere, reading a Bible in the etching of 1632 and otherwise absorbed in his labors. This scenario may have been recognizable by a seventeenth-century viewer as an everyday reality. St. Anne is shown as taking a participatory role, as far as the Infant is concerned, albeit she appears to have fallen asleep while rocking His cradle in the Amsterdam work of 1638/40. In the 1640 Louvre painting, she transfers her attention from her Bible to the Christ Child as she lifts back a portion of the blanket in which He is being held. This deviation from a format of the static scene where the Child is the focus of attention on the part of His parents and possibly another relative, such as St. Anne, adds a realistic note in the form of a plausible domestic occurrence. In contrast, the

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<sup>89</sup> Wayne E. Franits (note 14), p.6.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, illus. p. 116.

delightful descending cherubs in the 1645 St. Petersburg painting are a distinct reminder of the spiritual status of the family being portrayed in which could otherwise be equated with a glimpse into the life of an artisan's family.

The two etchings and five paintings are alike in that the settings are more contemporary than antique. While the setting may not reproduce an actual interior, the impression of an appropriate background is conveyed to the viewer. Mary's apparel approximates contemporary dress, particularly in *The Holy Family with the Curtain* (Kassel) and *The Holy Family with Angels* (St. Petersburg). Joseph's enveloping robe in the 1632 etching and in the Munich *Holy Family* is replaced by recognizable workman's clothing. When depicting the Holy Family in an every day setting where Joseph is recognized as a carpenter, earlier artists, such as Dürer, portrayed him as working out-of-doors. The depiction by the fifteenth century Master of Catherine of Cleves was an exception, but it seems unlikely that Rembrandt would have seen this particular work. In reference to the paintings of the Holy Family under discussion, with the exception of the Kassel *Holy Family*, where Joseph can be seen working outside chopping wood, and the Amsterdam *Holy Family* where his activity is uncertain, Rembrandt indicates or describes the workshop as sharing the domestic quarters. This would not have been viewed as being out of place in the artist's time when a craftsman might be working on his own. Even larger enterprises employing apprentices could occupy part of a residence.

In each work, Rembrandt includes both subtle and more obvious iconographical references as to the spiritual identity of the figures portrayed. The depiction of a family comprised of a mother, infant, and carpenter father is, in itself, highly suggestive of the Holy Family. There are exceptions to this format, as in the case of *The Holy Family at Night* where Joseph is barely visible, the 1632 etching in which he is depicted as reading, and the 1654 etching where he is looking through a window at the Virgin and Child. Apart from the 1634 *Holy Family* (Munich) and its association with the Soolmans family, there appears to be a lack of information as to the initial provenance for Rembrandt's other works of art in this category. Whether or not any were intended specifically for a Catholic client is not known. However, neither the subject matter nor the religious persuasion of the artist or client would necessarily have been of concern to a discerning collector. Some viewers might enjoy more visible spiritual reminders such as the halo

and serpent in the 1654 etching, or the cherubs in the *Holy Family* painting in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

Other symbolic references are less obvious and may, to some extent, depend upon the viewer's perception. The glass of water and the shaft of sunlight that falls upon the crossed sticks in *The Holy Family with St. Anne*, and the unusual illumination in the Amsterdam *Holy Family* are elements in these respective compositions that enhance the spiritual connotation associated with the Holy Family, and illustrate how natural objects are used by the artist to impart a spiritual significance to the scene. The motif of sticks in the shape of a cross and the illumination of a significant item, in this case a Bible, may also be seen in *The Holy Family with Angels*. Apart from being reminiscent of sixteenth century prints that depict Joseph working outside while Mary attends to Jesus inside their dwelling, the 1645 *Holy Family* painting in Kassel also has suggestive references incorporated into the composition as a whole. For instance, the Gothic window so often associated with a church, the anachronistic fire and bare feet of the Virgin indicative of an earlier time (in contrast to the Virgin's more modern attire), and the soft illumination falling upon Mary and the Child may be interpreted as indicative of the special status of this family. In the etching of 1632, the reading of a Bible by Joseph, his robe and cap, and the Virgin's headdress blend in with the overall composition to reinforce the title. Traditional motifs, such as the bowl, spoon, and cat continue to reinforce the domestic ambience of the various compositions in which they are used.

The political and religious strife that began in the sixteenth century and led to the establishment and, finally, recognition of the Dutch Republic during Rembrandt's lifetime is reflected in the above-mentioned etchings and paintings only insofar as religion is concerned. Religious influences arising from the Reformation, especially as regards sacred images and the changing role of the clergy, appear to have played a part in Rembrandt's decision to interpret the daily life of the Holy Family in circumstances that could be recognized by seventeenth-century viewers. In particular, the Virgin Mary, although portrayed as the Mother of God, may be seen as an example of the cultural expectations for contemporary mothers. Joseph, especially when represented as providing for his family, is seen as fulfilling the role expected of him by society in his enhanced role as head of the family with all its attendant responsibilities. Through his settings

and his compositions as a whole, Rembrandt is able to evoke an empathetic response from the contemporary viewer. A part of his success may have been his own observations of family life.

Plate 5, Figures 21-25



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Plate 6, Figures 26-31



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29 (detail)

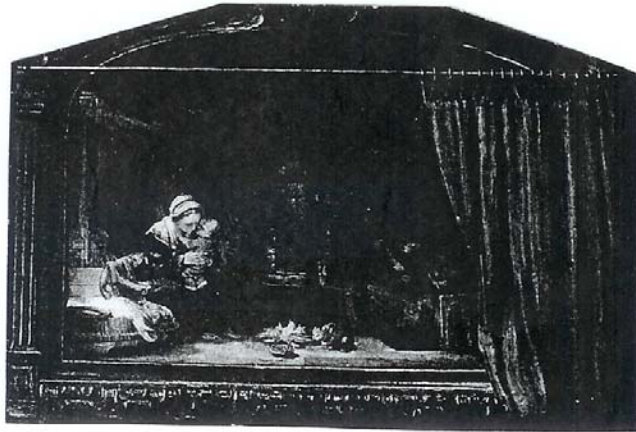


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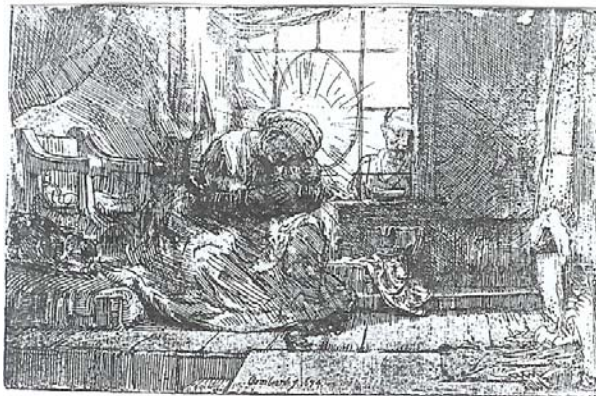


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Plate 7, Figures 32-35



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## Chapter 5

### A Comparison of Depictions of the Holy Family in the north and south Netherlands

In depicting the Holy Family in an imaginary setting, Rembrandt was following a long established custom. He seems to depart from earlier artists, however, in his addition of a carpenter's working area to the domestic scene. Did this become a popular theme for others, particularly his pupils who might be apt to emulate his works of art, and to what extent, if any, did they borrow motifs from Rembrandt? A brief look at their work relative to the Holy Family in a domestic setting may reveal some similarities. It is to be expected that works of art pertaining to this particular subject may have been fewer in number in Holland as opposed to Flanders, for instance, because of Calvinist restrictions on religious images, especially those that did not reflect an actual Biblical event. Artists in the Dutch Republic could satisfy public demand for art, however, with a wide array of subjects, such as history paintings (Biblical and mythological), portraits, the increasingly popular landscapes, and genre scenes. Although variety in art also existed in the southern Netherlands, there was an impetus on the part of Catholic Church authorities to promote religious art. Peter Paul Rubens can be considered to be an exponent of the latter type of art and had receptive audiences both in Flanders and abroad. A look at how he portrayed the Holy Family in an imaginary setting in comparison to Rembrandt's interpretations may be helpful in determining whether or not a difference exists that may be attributed to circumstances of time and place.

During the course of Rembrandt's career, many pupils came to his studio for instruction, including some with exceptional talent, such as Gerrit Dou (1613-1675) who achieved international success through his *fijnschilderij*. Other successful students, such as Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680) and Govert Flinck (1615-1660), received initial training elsewhere, but obviously wished to acquire knowledge of Rembrandt's manner of painting. It is believed that Rembrandt instructed students in Hendrik Uylenburg's establishment when he was living and working in the

art dealer's home after moving to Amsterdam from Leiden in the latter part of 1631.<sup>1</sup> However, following his marriage to Saskia, he appears to have moved into rented premises, most likely having a studio of his own. By 1639, in a letter written to Constantijn Huygens and dated February, 1639, Rembrandt indicates that he is residing beside the sugar bakery on the Binnen Amstel but, in that same year, he left these premises and purchased a large house on the Sint Anthonisbreestraat.<sup>2</sup> The influence of Rembrandt has been noted in the works of his former students, in some cases to the extent that the authenticity of an attribution has been questioned.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, this did not prevent talented students from developing a personal style of their own, or being influenced to some extent by another artist or artists later on in their careers. Albert Blankert remarks, for instance, that even in his "most Rembrandtesque" works, Govaert Flinck displayed a personal style in his "decorative calligraphic outline," an elegance not seen in Rembrandt's works, but one that is seen in Flinck's later works as well.<sup>4</sup> The earlier religious works of Nicolaes Maes are said to have exhibited "a strong Rembrandtesque style."<sup>5</sup> Maes later became known for his genre paintings, but after 1659, he painted "elegant portraits" reflecting the influence of Flemish art, particularly that of Anthony van Dyck.<sup>6</sup>

It is to be expected that a pupil in Rembrandt's studio would emulate his works, but former students might also refer back to motifs used by the master. A painting mentioned in the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* as being "a workshop piece" (1633/34), painted by an apparent "beginner" and entitled *The rest on the flight into Egypt*, is a compilation of motifs from Rembrandt's works, although the main prototype is the 1634 Munich *Holy Family*.<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand Bol, in his 1644 *Rest on the flight into Egypt* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden) also refers back to the Munich *Holy Family*, although by this time he was an independent painter in

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Blankert, et al, *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria; Sydney: Art Exhibition, Australia; Zwolle (Netherlands): Waanders, c. 1997), p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Michiel Roscam Abbing, *The Treasures of Rembrandt* (London: André Dutsch, 2006), letter, p. 19. The house on the Sint Anthonisbreestraat is now the Rembrandt House Museum, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Blankert, et al (note 1), p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 203, 204.

<sup>5</sup> Peter C. Sutton, *Northern European Paintings in the Philadelphia Museum of Art; from the Sixteenth through the Nineteenth Century*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art; distributed by Gary Schwarz/SDU; The Hague, c1990), p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> J. Bruyn, et al *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, trans. D. Cook-Radmore, vol. III 1635-1642, (Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague/Boston/London, 1989), illus. fig. 16, p. 28, text pp. 28-29.

Amsterdam. (fig.36).<sup>8</sup> The *Corpus* notes that this work is painted “in a new style,” and is “less rembrandtesque” than earlier works, that is, with respect to Rembrandt’s manner of painting.<sup>9</sup> Albert Blankert mentions that Bol began to use brighter colors around 1650, and that his figures were portrayed in “more elegant attitudes” and “more ‘correct’ antique costumes.”<sup>10</sup> Although Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck may have influenced Bol on occasion with respect to the figures, he apparently continued to work in a “more or less” Rembrandtesque style.<sup>11</sup>

Another painting entitled *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1653, collection Dr. Alfred Bader, Milwaukee), and very reminiscent of Rembrandt’s 1634 Munich *Holy Family*, was painted by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (fig. 37).<sup>12</sup> Eeckhout (1621-74), who was in Rembrandt’s studio possibly in the latter part of the 1630s, showed “a strong dependence” on Rembrandt as regards his own religious works.<sup>13</sup> In keeping with tradition and Rembrandt’s aforementioned *Holy Family*, the Baby Jesus is the focus of attention on the part of His parents. There is a similarity in appearance between the Infant in Eeckhout’s work and that of the same figure in Rembrandt’s painting. Both are partially wrapped in cloths, more confiningly so in Eeckhout’s depiction; both also are further partially enveloped, one in a fur pelt as in the Munich *Holy Family*, and the other in a soft woolen blanket in Eeckhout’s *Rest on the Flight*. The action of the Virgin in lifting back the cloth, so that Joseph (and the viewer) may see the Infant’s face, echoes that of Mary in Rembrandt’s 1645 etching (13 x 11.5 cm) *Rest on the Flight* (fig. 38).<sup>14</sup>

In Werner Sumowski’s survey, *The Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, there are various examples pertaining to the Holy Family. The iconography of a few of these drawings is consistent with Rembrandt’s compositions of the Holy Family in a domestic setting. One or two are simply copies. For instance, *Virgin with the Infant Christ next to a Cradle* (10.4 x 8.7 cm,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. fig. 17 and text p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Blankert, et al (note 1), p. 243.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler* (London/Pfatz, West Germany: Editions PVA1983, vol. II, cat. 415. See also David de Witt, *The Bader Collection: Dutch and Flemish paintings* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Guido Jansen, “Biographies,” *Rembrandt, The Impact of a Genius*, Albert Blankert, et al, trans. Ina Rike, (Amsterdam: K & V. Waterman B.V., 1983), p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> Sumowski (note 12), vol. II, cat.415, p. 730; for illus. of etching see Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), fig. 59, p. 50. B. 58.

pen and brown ink, Frankfurt A.M., private collection) by Philips Koninck (1619-1688) is a replica of the Virgin and Child from Rembrandt's 1646 *Holy Family with the Curtain* (Kassel).<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, however, later drawings by Koninck of the Holy Family simply as a trio are not reflective of Rembrandt's style.<sup>16</sup> After his move to Amsterdam in 1641, Koninck became a member of Rembrandt's circle of friends, rather than a pupil, but the master's influence extended beyond the studio. Koninck's landscapes, so admired today, are said to have originated from Rembrandt's works, although he subsequently developed his own style.<sup>17</sup>

A partial copy of the above-mentioned Kassel painting by Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693), *The Holy Family* (19.2 x 28.7, black and red chalk; pen and black ink with brown and gray washes), is in the British Museum, London, and it probably dates from the beginning of Maes's apprenticeship with Rembrandt c. 1648.<sup>18</sup> A further drawing by Maes after the Kassel painting is a complete copy of the composition (c. 1648/50, black and red chalk with brown wash, possibly with an oil base, on vellum, Eastbourne, Sir Karl T. Parker).<sup>19</sup> It is suggested by Sumowski that this small copy may have been commissioned. In one of Maes's earliest paintings (fig. 39), *Young Mother at a Cradle* (c. 1655, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), the pose of the young mother, who is holding a book in her lap and leaning towards the baby in the cradle, is similar to that of the Virgin Mary in Rembrandt's 1645 *Holy Family with Angels* (St. Petersburg).<sup>20</sup> In Rembrandt's composition, Mary also holds a book in her lap and leans towards the Infant in the cradle. However, there is no spiritual connotation apparent in the painting by Maes beyond the fact that it is a portrayal of a concerned and caring Dutch mother. The *trompe-l'oeil* curtain on the right hand side of the painting repeats, in part, an iconographic item from Rembrandt's *Holy Family with the Curtain*. Maes's adaptation of the motif from the Hermitage painting for his genre scene confirms the significance of the Holy Family as a paradigm of domestic life to be emulated by Dutch families.

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<sup>15</sup> Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, ed. and trans. Walter L. Strauss, (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), vol. VI, no. 1411x, p. 3142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1455x, p. 3232; no. 1456x, p. 3234.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 2945.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 4026, no. 1790x.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4028, no 1791x.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Liedtke, et al, *Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt*, vol.2 (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), illus. 42, p. 30.

In his *Gemälde der Rembrandt Schüler*, Sumowski refers to a painting by the artist Adriaen van Gaesbeeck (1621-1650), *Rest on the Flight* (1667, State Museum of Lakenhal, Leiden) that also reflects iconographic motifs from Rembrandt's *Holy Family* in Kassel, particularly with respect to the *trompe-l'oeil* curtain (fig. 40).<sup>21</sup> The setting, however, is out-of-doors, but it does include a fire and the figure of Joseph in the background. Mary, clothed in a softly draped robe and wearing a wide-brimmed hat, is sitting in a low chair while she nurses her Infant. Her arm is extended towards the fire, no doubt in order to warm the swaddling cloth draped around this arm. Mary's pose is reminiscent of that of the Virgin in Rembrandt's 1632 etching of the Holy Family, although in this case she is wearing both of her sandals. A wicker basket containing cloths is nearby on the ground. Van Gaesbeeck, apparently, studied with Gerrit Dou.<sup>22</sup>

Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), who was both an artist and a writer, originally studied with his father until the latter's death in 1640, at which time he became one of Rembrandt's pupils. It is said that his early style was based on that of Rembrandt's of the 1640s.<sup>23</sup> What is believed to be a copy of an original work by Hoogstraten, *The Holy Family* (15 x 23.2 cm, pen and brown ink and brown wash on a sketch in black chalk, formerly Kunsthalle, Bremen, 1882; was lost) has a signature in ink, "S. van Hoogstraeten" in a late hand, at the bottom right (fig. 41).<sup>24</sup> In this interior domestic scene, Mary is seated with her back to the viewer, while the Child sleeps in His cradle close by. To the left, and near a window, Joseph stands working at his craft and facing the viewer.<sup>25</sup> No details are borrowed, apparently, but the composition "presupposes Rembrandt's representations of the Holy Family of the 1640s."<sup>26</sup>

Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680) studied with Rembrandt in the latter half of the 1630s before setting himself up as an independent master around 1641.<sup>27</sup> In a drawing dating from the early 1640s, and once thought to be by Rembrandt, *The Holy Family in a Room* (18 x 27.2 cm, pen and brown ink and brown washes, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt), Bol has borrowed from

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<sup>21</sup> Sumowski (note 12), vol. VI, p. 3653.

<sup>22</sup> Serguisz Michaelski, "Rembrandt and the Church Interiors of the Delft School," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 23, no.46, 2002, p. 187.

<sup>23</sup> Sumowski (note 15), vol. V, p. 2451.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2636.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1189x, p. 2636.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Rembrandt's compositions (fig. 42).<sup>28</sup> Mary and the Infant and the nearby basket holding cloths correspond, in reverse, to the same motifs in Rembrandt's 1632 *Holy Family* etching, while the "carpenter tools on the wall, the window on the left, the fireplace with the hanging kettle, and the pet on the right" repeat items in the Louvre painting, *The Holy Family with St. Anne*, 1640.<sup>29</sup> A further drawing, *The Holy Family in a Room* (early 1640s, black and red chalk; pen and brown ink, brown and grey washes; white tempera, 18 x 20.7, British Museum, London), also suggests knowledge on the part of Bol of Rembrandt's 1640 Louvre painting (fig. 43). Sumowski refers to the drawing as being accepted "in the literature" as "a preparatory work in reverse" for Bol's 1643 etching.<sup>30</sup> In this etching *Holy Family in an Interior* (1645, 18.2 x 21.6 cm, etching, drypoint and engraving), Mary is seated beside a cradle and is nursing her Infant who appears to be bound in swaddling cloths (fig. 44).<sup>31</sup> Joseph is visible, standing behind her. A curtained bed, a *bakermat* upright against a cupboard, the cat beside the fireplace, and domestic items hanging on the wall contribute to the domesticity of this scene. The light pouring in from the window to the left of the fireplace illuminates the figures of Mary and Jesus, as well as a large book, presumably Scripture, placed on the table in front of the window. Like Rembrandt, Bol uses illumination to highlight an object of religious significance, thus adding credibility to the interpretation of the subject.

In *The Holy Family with St. Anne and Young John the Baptist* (Amstelkring Museum, Amsterdam), Barend Fabritius (1624-1673) also depicted the Holy Family in a domestic/workshop setting with iconography that implies some knowledge of Rembrandt's work, specifically his painting in the Louvre (fig. 45).<sup>32</sup> While St. Anne, with a partially closed book on her lap, looks intently at the Christ Child being held upright by Mary, who is traditionally garbed, Joseph works at his bench adjacent to a window.<sup>33</sup> The inclusion of John the Baptist with his cross and a lamb, plus the halo around the Infant's head and the fruit held in Mary's hand are

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<sup>27</sup> Blankert, et al (note 1), p. 243.

<sup>28</sup> Sumowski (note 15), vol. I, no. 195x, p. 414.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 95, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> Liedtke (note 20), illus. 4, p. 238.

<sup>32</sup> Sumowski (note 12), vol. II, p. 941, illus. 561.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 918. With respect to the figure of Joseph, Sumowski refers to a drawing by Rembrandt, around 1640-42, found in Benesch III, cat. 516, fig. 677.

motifs from an earlier era, and may, perhaps, be intended to appeal to a Catholic client.<sup>34</sup> There appears to be some uncertainty as to whether or not Barend actually studied with Rembrandt, but his famous brother, Carel Fabritius, did so in the early 1640s.<sup>35</sup>

One of Rembrandt's last students was Arent de Gelder (1645-1727), who studied with the master for about two years in the mid-1660s, and who is said to have continued to paint in Rembrandt's manner of that period.<sup>36</sup> His painting, *The Holy Family* (1680-1685, State Museum, Berlin) is a joyful portrait of Mary and Joseph with the Infant Jesus, and it captures the warmth of human emotions (fig. 46). In 1872, it was sold as a Rembrandt.<sup>37</sup> Were it not for the Oriental costumes, this might be taken for a "profane domestic scene."<sup>38</sup> A later painting by De Gelder, *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (around 1700, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), again illustrates how motifs were borrowed from Rembrandt's scenes of the Holy Family in a domestic setting and incorporated into different scenarios (fig. 47).<sup>39</sup> For instance, the manner in which Mary is nursing Jesus is familiar from Rembrandt's 1632 etching of the Holy Family, although in this case Mary is wearing a broad-brimmed hat, similar to the straw hat worn by the shepherdess (fig. 48) in a Rembrandt etching of 1642, *The Flute Player* (etching and drypoint, 11.8 x 13.5).<sup>40</sup> As in Rembrandt's aforementioned 1632 etching, Joseph is reading a Bible, but De Gelder depicts him as pointing his finger to a certain passage while he looks intently at the Child in what is, perhaps, intended to be a "recognition" motif. Joseph's position and his hat, on the other hand, are reminiscent of the figure of Joseph in Rembrandt's 1645 etching, *Rest on the Flight* (fig. 38). The bright illumination of only certain areas, such as the faces of the Virgin and Child and Joseph, as well the pages of the book, creates a strong chiaroscuro effect.

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<sup>34</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 13. If the fruit being held in Mary's hand is an apple, it is considered to be "an allusion to salvation," as Mary is thought of traditionally as the new Eve.

<sup>35</sup> Jansen (note 13), p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Guido Jansen, "Catalogue" (texts), *Rembrandt, The Impact of a Genius*, Albert Blankert, et al, trans. Ina Rike (Amsterdam: K 7 V Waterman B.V., 1983), Cat. 36, p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Udo Brunsion, et al, *Arent de Gelder (1645-1727) Rembrandts Meisterschüler und Nachfolger* (Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Köln; Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht (Gent:Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1998), illus. 38, p. 209.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, illus. 2, p. 210. B. 188, II.

Salomon Koninck (1600-1650), on the other hand, portrayed the Holy Family (fig.49) more in the manner of an informal family portrait in his painting, “*The Holy Family with John the Baptist, Elizabeth and Zaccariah* (probably 1646, Museum Nardowe, Poznan).<sup>41</sup> Although Koninck does not use contextual details familiar from Rembrandt’s depictions of the Holy Family, he does portray this group in terms of a caring and decorous Dutch family. The costumes and the chair in which the Virgin is sitting, with Jesus on her lap, appear to be more modern than antique. The figure of Mary conveys the impression of a young matron. Zaccariah, standing on the left behind Mary, his cloak trimmed with ermine, and Joseph, standing to the right, look on as a kneeling Elizabeth supports a young John the Baptist who is cupping his hands around the face of Jesus. A small nimbus around the head of Christ indicates that this is not a portrait of an ordinary family. A light from an unseen source illuminates the faces of the individuals portrayed. Koninck is said to have been a follower of Rembrandt’s style of the 1630s, including the use of chiaroscuro.<sup>42</sup>

Abraham van Dijck (1635-1672) also portrayed the Holy Family in a domestic setting (fig. 50), but used a theme different from those mentioned above. From the style of his paintings, it is believed that Van Dijck may have been a pupil of Rembrandt around 1650.<sup>43</sup> The theme of his painting, *The Holy Family at Table* (c. 1650/52, Pushkin M:useum, Moscow), is one that was used by earlier artists.<sup>44</sup> In this instance, Mary and Joseph are shown seated at either end of a table that is partially covered by a cloth. A soft light, presumably from an unseen window, illuminates the scene. While Joseph reverently says grace, Mary, with the Child on her lap, holds His hands in a clasped, prayerful position. Mary’s veil and the reverent ambience of the scene complement the title. Rembrandt did not include this “table theme” in his Holy Family depictions, although he did paint the *Supper at Emmaus* (Louvre, Paris), dated 1648 (fig. 51). Sumowski suggests that Van Dijck was influenced by Rembrandt’s painting.<sup>45</sup>

It seems unlikely that depictions of the Holy Family in a non-Biblical setting would have formed a significant part of the artistic output of Rembrandt’s students or that of his admirers. In view of the examples of motifs taken from Rembrandt’s Holy Family depictions and transferred

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<sup>41</sup> Sumowski (note 12), vol. III, p. 1674, illus 1100, and cat. entry 1100, p. 1645 for reference to date.

<sup>42</sup> Jansen (note 13), p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> Sumowski (note 12), vol. I, p. 675, illus. 354.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., vol. I, p. 660.

to Rest on the Flight compositions, it may even be that the latter were more popular than the domestic scenes because of the opportunity of providing a landscape setting. A study carried out by John Michael Montias gives some statistical indication of the degree of popularity of works of art pertaining to the Holy Family. Based on notarized inventories, Montias has provided data with respect to religious subjects (consisting of all art objects) recorded as being in the homes of Amsterdam residents covering a period from 1620 to 1679. This data is compiled from 362 inventories collected in Amsterdam, four of the inventories being those of art dealers.<sup>46</sup> From this data base, Montias has been able to identify 199 Reformed, 43 Roman Catholic, 9 Lutheran and 3 Mennonite households as being represented in these inventories.<sup>47</sup> In Tables 6a and 6b, the owners are identified as being either Roman Catholic or Reformed (Calvinist).<sup>48</sup> Table 6a shows that out of a total of 269 subjects from the New Testament owned by Roman Catholics (representing 71% of all their religious subjects owned), 8, or 2.1% were of the Holy Family; only 1 of the Holy Family, or 0.3% out of a total of 115 New Testament religious subjects (representing 42% of all their religious subjects) is listed under the Reformed faith.<sup>49</sup> For the years 1650-1679, Table 6b indicates that Catholics owned 66 New Testament subjects (representing 67.3% of all their religious subjects owned) and 2, or 2% were of the Holy Family; for Reformed church members, out of 122 New Testament subjects (representing 37.9% of all their religious subjects) 5, or 1.6% were of the Holy Family.<sup>50</sup> Whether or not the depictions of the Holy Family were non-Biblical in type is not stated. However, there are separate listings for the "Nativity" (including Adoration of the Magi) and "Other incidents in the life of Christ." As well as demonstrating that New Testament subjects were more numerous in Catholic households in comparison to those of the Reformed faith, Montias was able to show that the reverse held true for Old Testament subjects, that is, with more of the latter found in the collections of Reformed households than in those of the Catholic faith.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Michael Montias, "Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," *Art in history History in art*, eds. David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991), p. 338.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

The data compiled by Montias reveals that depictions of the Holy Family in comparison to other religious subjects were relatively few in number in Amsterdam. This is not too surprising, perhaps, in view of the esteem in which historical paintings, in this case Biblical histories, were held, as compared to a more personal and possibly idyllic representation of the Holy Family. The emphasis on the sole authority of the Bible, particularly in the case of Protestants, and the de-emphasizing of any special role for the Virgin Mary, apart from her role as Christ's mother, may not have encouraged the production of depictions of the Holy Family per se for the open market. Although Christians of differing religious affiliations had knowledge of Jesus, Mary and Joseph from the Bible, it is understandable, given the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, that representations of the Holy Family not related to Biblical events may have been more popular in Catholic countries than those with a predominantly Protestant population. However, although the Reformed faith may have been dominant in the Northern Provinces, there were also people of other religious affiliations living in the Republic, including a sizeable Catholic population. For those who might prefer more traditional and idealistic imagery of the Holy Family, prints of works by Abraham Bloemaert, for instance, were available.

Bloemaert (1566-1651) was one of the principal painters in Utrecht during the first half of the seventeenth century. A devout Catholic, he was esteemed for his "religious and mythological subjects and for his numerous drawings."<sup>52</sup> In the early years of the seventeenth century, he received commissions from the Catholic Church and also made altarpieces for clandestine Catholic churches, places of worship that usually were constructed in private homes. While Bloemaert depicted the Holy Family on more than one occasion as a trio in an imaginary outdoor setting, with Mary and Joseph in historical clothing and Jesus as the focus of attention, his use of an interior setting appears to have been limited to one or two compositions. His painting, *The Holy Family in an Interior* (1632, canvas, 85 x 109.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), is described as his "only elaborate interior scene" (fig. 52).<sup>53</sup> Mary, wearing a simple gown and short veil and holding the Child on her lap, is seated on the stone floor of a large room in a structure that shows signs of deterioration. She is leaning against a cabinet and reaching out with her right hand to spoon food from a bowl on the floor beside her. A workbasket containing

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<sup>52</sup> Wansink, C.J.A., "Bloemaert," *Grove Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan Reference 2000), vol. 4, p.150.

<sup>53</sup> Marcel G. Roethlisberger, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons*, vol. II, p. illus. fig. 675, cat. 493.

cloths, and similar in type to that same item in Rembrandt's 1632 etching of the Holy Family, is to her left. An alert looking dog lies beside the basket. The figure of an elderly man, attired in robes and a tam-like head covering, leans against the cabinet, while a younger man, wearing working clothes and a hat, is attending to a cauldron above the fire in the hearth. There is a luminosity to the room provided by natural light, and the figures of Mary and Jesus are particularly defined. This composition does not convey the sense of a domestic permanency, as do Rembrandt's depictions of the Holy Family.

Prints of idyllic scenes of the Holy Family painted by Peter Paul Rubens (1572-1640) also were available in the northern Netherlands, and possibly found a market not only with the Catholic population, but with discerning art connoisseurs as well. As early as 1612, Rubens traveled north with a view to finding a Dutch engraver.<sup>54</sup> He later sought copyright privileges within the Republic, and was successful in obtaining these privileges from The Hague in May of 1620.<sup>55</sup> Engravers such as Lucas Vosterman, Paulus Pontius and the Bolswerts reproduced Rubens's many depictions of the Holy Family.<sup>56</sup> In 1608, Rubens had returned from Italy to Flanders in time to benefit artistically from the peace that ensued between Spain and the United Provinces as a result of the Twelve Year Truce. Following the regaining of the Southern Provinces for Spain in the early 1580s, and under the orders of Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma, Catholic services were restored and instructions given that churches damaged as a result of the militia-inspired Spanish Fury in 1576 and the Iconoclasms of 1566 and 1581 should be restored or rebuilt.<sup>57</sup> In 1577, William of Orange had taken possession of Antwerp. The "quiet" iconoclasm of 1581 was carried out in an orderly and efficient manner by the Protestant Antwerp council upon learning that the gates of Breda had been opened to the Spanish by the Catholics.<sup>58</sup>

There was a great need for religious paintings and the Truce facilitated the already slowly growing prosperity in Flanders. It has been estimated that between the years 1609-1620, Rubens painted no fewer than sixty-three altarpieces, "twenty-two for churches and chapels in Antwerp

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<sup>54</sup> Simon Schama, *Rembrandt's Eyes* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, Ltd., 1999), p. 185.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>57</sup> David Freedberg, "Painting and the Counter Reformation in the Age of Rubens," *The Age of Rubens*, Peter C. Sutton, et al (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, p. 133.

<sup>58</sup> Schama (note 54), p. 74.

alone; ten for Brussels; three for Lille, Meckelen and Tournai, and many others for churches in France and Germany.”<sup>59</sup> The Baroque style used by Rubens seemed to satisfy the criteria for inspirational religious imagery set by the arbiters of Counter Reformation art. At the same time, this art was supposed to have a realism that provided the particular event with “an immediate tangible presence” for the spectator, as opposed to being in a distant time or place.<sup>60</sup>

Knowledgeable churchmen who wrote extensively on what was or was not permissible in sacred art viewed these images as having the potential of being not only a source of spiritual edification, but also as a visible *Biblia Pauperum* for those who were poor and illiterate.<sup>61</sup> Presumably then, religious events were to be presented as clearly and accurately as possible, and in such a way that the viewer could be brought into a state of “exalted communion with Christ and his Church.”<sup>62</sup>

Along with his more prestigious commissions, Rubens painted many depictions of the Holy Family, often with saintly relatives. Although these depictions do not promote the emotional intensity that might be possible in sacred art, they nevertheless are emotionally appealing in the obvious happiness shared by the figures represented. Rubens does not depict the Holy Family in a clearly defined domestic setting, nor are the figures shown as being surrounded by the accessories of everyday living. An interior setting might be implied, but otherwise the scene is one that is set out-of-doors, usually with foliage and some masonry. They are idyllic scenes in that they portray people who seem removed from the cares of the secular world. At the same time, they impart a sense of reality because of the figures and the settings. For instance, in the very tender portrayal entitled *The Holy Family* (c. 1615, Pitti Gallery, Florence), there is a limited view of what appears to be an interior setting (53).<sup>63</sup> The eyes of Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth are directed towards the Christ Child and the little St. John. Jesus, sitting in His cradle, reaches out to caress the cheek of John the Baptist. The clasped hands of Elizabeth and the crossed hands of the Baptist indicate their reverence. Mary’s left arm is draped comfortably over the large hood of the cradle. This is reminiscent of the depiction by Frans Floris where Joseph’s forearm is casually placed across the hood of a similar cradle (fig. 14). Rembrandt also used this motif for St. Joseph

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Adolph Rosenberg, *P.P. Rubens* (Stuttgart und Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1906), illus. 166.

in his Munich depiction of the Holy Family. The afore-mentioned painting by Rubens was engraved by Vorsterman in 1620.<sup>64</sup>

In a painting c. 1615-1616, *The Holy Family (The Virgin with a parrot*, Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), the Holy Family is shown out-of-doors, with the Virgin and Child sitting on a stone bench (fig. 54). Joseph, in the familiar pose of leaning forward with his chin in his hand, contemplates Mary and Jesus. Jesus leans against Mary, and both are looking outwards, thus directly engaging the viewer. The parrot is perched on a nearby pedestal. There is a view of a landscape receding into the horizon.<sup>65</sup> In Rubens's beautiful *The Holy Family under the Apple Tree*, on the other hand, the viewer contemplates a more traditional scene (fig. 55).<sup>66</sup> The Infant Jesus is the center of attention. He is supported by Mary, who is seated, and His face is turned towards St. John the Baptist who approaches with outstretched arms and hands clasped together. Both infants are naked, despite the injunction by the Council of Trent against nudity. The Baptist's parents also appear to be paying homage to Jesus. Joseph stands behind Mary, looking on attentively. A swath of red material secured through the branch of the apple tree forms a canopy of sorts. A lamb stands close to Elizabeth, and two cherubs can be seen in the branches of the tree. The inclusion of an apple tree may be significant, in that an apple may be associated with Eve's sin of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, a transgression that was overcome by Mary through her obedience to the Will of God. For those familiar with Catholic doctrine, this iconography might also bring to mind the belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception. This depiction of the Holy Family was painted on the exterior sides of the wings of the Ildefonso Altarpiece (1630/32, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), an altarpiece originally ordered by the Infanta Isabella in 1629 for the Brotherhood of St. Ildefonso.<sup>67</sup> In the eighteenth century, the outer sides of the wings were separated and put together as a single painting, *The Holy Family under the Apple Tree*, now at the Vienna museum.<sup>68</sup>

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) did not achieve the fame enjoyed by Rubens but he nevertheless was recognized both in Flanders and internationally. He also portrayed the Holy Family in an

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<sup>64</sup> Max Rooses, *L'Oeuvre de P.P. Rubens*, vol. I, "Saintes Familles," engraving, pl. 75, text p. 300.

<sup>65</sup> Rosenberg (note 63), illus. p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., illus. p. 328.

<sup>67</sup> Erik Larsen, *Seventeenth Century Flemish Painting* (Luca Verlag Freren 1985), p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

exterior setting. In his painting entitled *The Holy Family with Elizabeth and the little St. John* (c. 1615, Royal Museum, Brussels), he depicted the three-quarter length adult figures against a backdrop of sky and foliage (fig. 56)<sup>69</sup> An older looking Joseph leans over Mary's shoulder to look at the Infant Jesus and his cousin, who are in a close embrace and supported by their respective mothers. What appears to be a sun hat serves to suggest a halo around the Virgin's head, while a small nimbus surrounds the head of Christ. Jordaens was influenced by different artists, including Rubens and the man who became his father-in-law, Adam van Noort, under whom Rubens studied for a time.<sup>70</sup> There is a similarity in the pose of the Virgin and her downcast eyes when compared to that of Mary in Rubens's *Holy Family* in Florence, and some similarity in the physiogomy of the two Elizabeths.<sup>71</sup> The grapes on the pedestal in the lower right hand corner of the picture may be a reference to the wine of the Eucharist. The cat, jumping up to snatch at the bird cage and, presumably, at the bird within, as a cat may well do, may be intended to reflect the natural world.

Jordaens did portray members of the Holy Family in what appears to be an interior setting, albeit a limited one. In *The Madonna and Child Visited by the Child St. John and his Parents* (c. 1615-17, oil on canvas, 16.8 x 144.5 cm, North Carolina Museum of Art) Elizabeth, Zacharias and St. John, whose right arm encircles a bird cage that rests on the back of a lamb, crowd around the Virgin and Infant in order to present their gift (fig. 57).<sup>72</sup> The goldfinch, seen flying from its cage, symbolizes Christ's passion. In reference to this painting, Michael Jaffé mentions that the goldfinch also is symbolic of the "longing of the soul for God."<sup>73</sup> Jesus wears a crown of flowers in lieu of a nimbus, and the braid around Mary's head simulates a halo. The high-backed wicker chair in which the Virgin sits might be interpreted as representing a throne, in keeping with Mary's title as Queen of Heaven. The partial red drapery in the left hand corner of the composition adds a touch of elegance in keeping with an iconographic reference to the Queen of Heaven. There is a latent vitality to Jordaens's rather robust figures that gives them a "down to earth" quality in contrast to the more graceful figures described by Rubens.

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<sup>69</sup> R.A. d'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens*, trans. P.S. Falla (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), illus. p. 50.

<sup>70</sup> Larsen (note 67), p.210.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Jaffé, *Jacob Jordaens, 1593-1678*, Ex. Cat. (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1968), illus. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

In a painting by Jordaens completed in probably 1620-25 (fig. 58) and entitled *The Holy Family and Saint John the Baptist* (National Gallery, London), Joseph is shown as a much younger man in contrast to the figure of Joseph depicted in Jordaens's previously mentioned 1615 painting of the Holy Family.<sup>74</sup> Joseph, Mary and Jesus, who is standing on Mary's knee, and a young John the Baptist, seen at the lower left of the painting, are all looking out at the viewer. Jesus holds a rosary, while John holds a cross. The way in which Mary is supporting Jesus may have been borrowed as a motif from Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary* (1606/1607, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a painting in the Dominican Church in Antwerp at that time.<sup>75</sup> In view of the prominence given to the Rosary as a form of devotion to the Blessed Mother, Jordaens's work reflects the interest in devotional art aroused by the Counter Reformation.

The revival of the Catholic faith following the Reformation, and the founding of new religious orders that sometimes encouraged a special devotion, led to the production of popular prints of imagery related to a particular devotion.<sup>76</sup> David Freedberg mentions the emphasis placed on older devotions, such as the Rosary, and newer devotions such as "the Sweet Name of Jesus, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Holy Infant and the Holy Family."<sup>77</sup> Cult images of Mary and the saints also became popular in the early seventeenth century.<sup>78</sup> It is in relation to cults of the Virgin Mary that two of Rembrandt's etchings might be briefly described, that is: *The Madonna in the Clouds* (1641, etching and drypoint, 16.8 x 10.6 cm ) and *The Virgin with the Instruments of the Passion* (c. 1652, etching and drypoint, 11 x 9 cm)<sup>79</sup> It is not intended to discuss these etchings by Rembrandt in great detail, nor are they necessarily related to any particular cult, but is it possible that they were intended for a primarily Catholic clientele?

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<sup>74</sup> For illus. see Web site for National Gallery, London.

<sup>75</sup> d'Hulst (note 69) mentions this motif in connection with another painting by Jordaens, *The Holy Family with a maidservant* (circa 1625-1630, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm) in which Jesus is being supported in a similar manner.

<sup>76</sup> Freedberg (note 57), p. 136.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>79</sup> F.W.H. Holstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings Engravings and Woodcuts*, vol. IX, illus. B. 61, *Virgin and Child in the Clouds*, and illus. B. 85, *The Virgin with the Instruments of the Passion*.

In the latter etching (fig. 59), Mary is depicted in half figure and wearing a long veil, and her right hand is raised as though in horror or disbelief as she looks at the instruments on the table before her. Although Rembrandt pays singular attention to Mary, he presents the subject in such a way that the figure could represent any grieving mother, except that the instruments are included. The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin (which would include the Crucifixion) was a popular subject for a time. Rembrandt's *Madonna in the Clouds* (fig. 60) reflects, in reverse, an etching (fig. 61) by Federico Barocci, *Madonna and child* (c. 1570-80, etching, 15.3 x 30.5 cm), but these two etchings differ greatly in emotional impact.<sup>80</sup> Item 195 in the 1656 Inventory of Rembrandt's possessions refers to "One ditto (book) with copper plate engravings by Vanni and others including Barocci," so it is possible that Rembrandt was familiar with Barocci's etching.<sup>81</sup> In both instances, the Virgins, their hands clasped, enfold the Infants within their respective arms. Barocci's Virgin is an idealized figure with a sweetly smiling face as she gazes down at her sturdy Son. He is facing the viewer, with His right hand raised as though in a blessing. Rembrandt's Madonna, on the other hand, has her head tilted as she gazes slightly upwards as though in silent supplication to the Almighty. The Infant reclining in her arms appears to be slightly younger and more delicate in comparison to Barocci's figure of the Child. Rembrandt's etching is signed "Rembrandt f. 1641," the year in which Titus was born. It is tempting to speculate that Rembrandt's composition may reflect the hopes that he and Saskia must have had that their child might survive infancy.

Both Rubens and Jordaens depicted the Holy Family on many occasions, but not in a domestic setting as envisioned by Rembrandt. Unlike the situation in the Republic, there was ample opportunity in Flanders not only for private devotional pictures, but also for church commissions. Commissions similar to that received by Jan Lievens (1607-1674) when he lived in Antwerp would have been virtually non-existent in the north. For instance, Lievens, who had worked alongside Rembrandt in the Leiden years, painted *The Holy Family with St. Anne and young John the Baptist* (1641) for the Church of St. Charles Borromeo in Antwerp (fig. 62).<sup>82</sup> This painting is an idyllic and uplifting portrayal, complete with cherubs, of the Virgin, Jesus and John the Baptist as the central figures, and Joseph and St. Anne to either side. It reflects the Counter Reformation

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<sup>80</sup> Erik Hinterding, et al, *Rembrandt the Printmaker* (London: British Museum Press), illus. fig a and text on p. 193.

<sup>81</sup> Walter L. Strauss, et al, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1979), p.369.

art prevalent under a Catholic regime. Lievens returned to the north – he is listed as being in Amsterdam in 1644 – but his subsequent commissions appear to have been of a secular nature.<sup>83</sup>

Rubens and Jordaens also painted secular subjects, including histories, mythologies, portraits and landscapes. These genres appear to have thrived alongside religious art, the latter being in high demand and richly rewarded by patrons.<sup>84</sup> This is not to say that there were no religious paintings in the northern Netherlands, as evidenced by the Biblical histories painted by Rembrandt, as well as his depictions of the Holy Family. However, these representations were intended for a secular market, as opposed to an ecclesiastical setting, and were depicted in a manner that would be acceptable to a largely Protestant community. Various writers have commented on the emotional aspect of Catholic ecclesiastical art in contrast to the more didactic nature of Protestant religious art. Counter Reformation art may have been designed to elicit a response on the part of the viewer that would bring him, or her, spiritually closer to Christ, especially in depictions of an event such as the Crucifixion. It would seem that Protestant art, on the other hand, was intended to reflect the word of God as revealed in the Bible. At the same time, there are instances in Rembrandt's Biblical presentations where he seems able to bring the beholder to an understanding of the emotions being experienced by the person or persons portrayed. In the case of his depictions of the Holy Family in a domestic setting, however, it is more likely that there was recognition on the part of the viewer of the ideal of family life as advocated by Calvinist beliefs.

While John Calvin objected to any attempt at a corporeal representation of God, he was not averse to painting and sculpture per se, provided these arts were put to a "pure and legitimate use."<sup>85</sup> Objects to be depicted should be visible to the eye, and, in his criticism of certain religious art, he does admit to seeing some merit in histories as a source of "information and recollection."<sup>86</sup> Whether or not artists were encouraged by Calvin's remarks with respect to the depiction of visible objects, secular subjects flourished in the Northern and well as in the

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<sup>82</sup>Sumowski (note 12), illus.1204, p. 1843.

<sup>83</sup> Bob Haak, *The Golden Age*, trans. E. Willems-Treeman (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1984), p.370.

<sup>84</sup> Larsen (note 67), p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), Bk. I, Ch. XI, p. 126

Southern Provinces. The growing affluence of a city such as Amsterdam may also have stimulated the desire for portraits and genre scenes reflecting the material achievements of the citizens of the Dutch Republic, as well as for landscapes that reflected their love of and pride in their country. Ironically, the benefit that accrued to artists as regards religious art when the Spanish Crown reclaimed Antwerp, also benefited the Northern Provinces. Artists of the reformed faith who emigrated brought their talents with them.

There obviously was a much larger market in the Southern Provinces for the type of privately owned religious depictions of the Holy Family. Rubens and Jordaens produced many such pictures, but not in the detailed domestic setting as envisioned by Rembrandt, nor do they make any reference to Joseph's work as a carpenter. They appear to have chosen a more traditional composition as seen in sixteenth century depictions of the Holy Family, either as a trio or occasionally with a relative or relatives. The figures depicted by Jordaens are not as graceful as those portrayed by Rubens, but an aura of happiness pervades their compositions and the Christ Child is a focus of attention, thus creating a sentimental appeal to the viewer. The Holy Family seems removed from the everyday cares of the world. Rembrandt's depictions of the same subject with his less idealistically portrayed figures in a contemporary setting impart a more realistic and secular ambience to his compositions. Although Rembrandt's students and admirers quoted from his works of the Holy Family mentioned in Chapter 4, and even undertook to copy or approximate his compositions, this particular subject does not seem to have been especially popular or to have endured over any length of time in the Netherlands. It does seem apparent that even in the case of a religious painting intended for personal use, that is, a depiction of the Holy Family, whether or not an artist lived in Flanders or Holland would seem to have been a factor in determining the content of the composition. This is a reflection of the earlier-mentioned differences between Catholic and Protestant religious art.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Plate 8, Figures 36-40



36



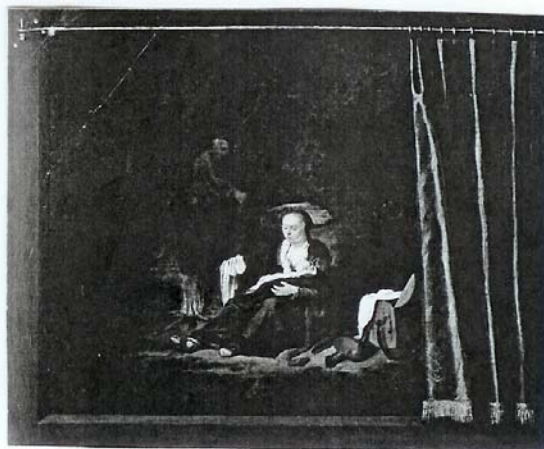
37



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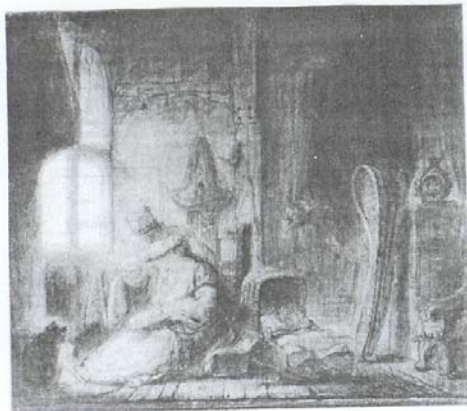
Plate 9, Figures 41-46



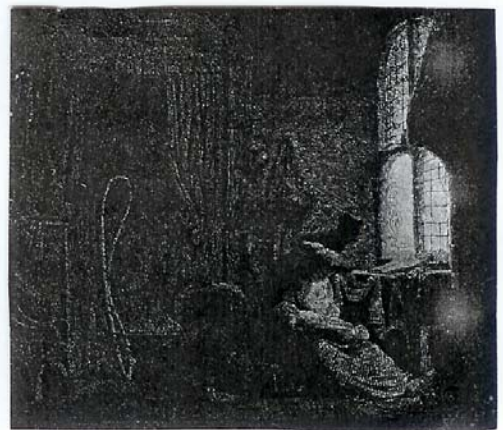
41



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43



44



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46

Plate 10, Figures 47-52



47



48 (detail)



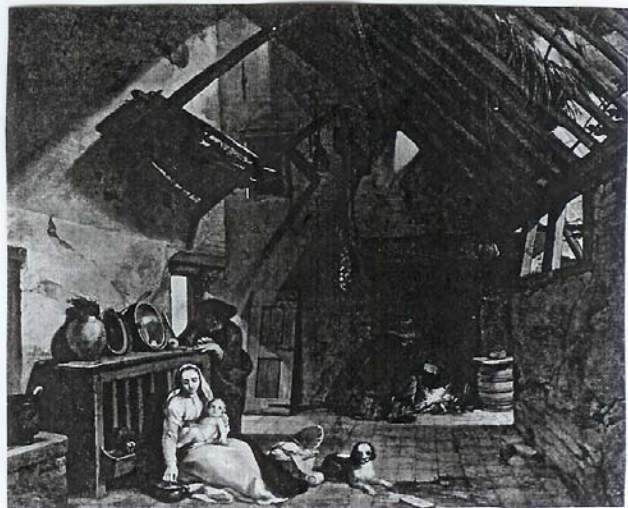
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Plate 11, Figures 53-57



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Plate 12, Figures 58-62



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## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The two etchings and five paintings that are the focus of this essay repeat the theme of domesticity. The inclusion of a reference to St. Joseph's work as a carpenter reinforces the concept of the family unit in which the mother as the nurturer and the father as the provider fulfil their expected roles in contemporary society. Since the theme of the Holy Family at home was not linked to a specific Biblical passage, Rembrandt was free to create a setting to which viewers of his time and place could relate. Other artists had and did create settings for the Holy Family when depicting them outside of Biblical events, but Rembrandt imbued his compositions with a more secular ambience. Although he was familiar with the restrictions on religious art imposed by Calvinist authorities, particularly with respect to any suggestion of a devotional representation, he nevertheless was able to portray the Holy Family in a manner that recognized not only their humanity, but also their spiritual status.

Artists often used traditional motifs to indicate the spiritual nature of their subject matter when portraying the Holy Family, and these might include flowers or fruit of a symbolic nature, haloes, or the attributes of a saint, such as the reed cross or lamb. For the most part, Rembrandt's iconographic symbolism becomes a natural part of the surroundings. His lighting is particularly effective in conveying a spiritual importance to a figure or an iconographic item. His descending angels in the Hermitage painting are not a natural part of the surroundings, but they do create a special effect and emphasize the spiritual aspect of the scene. It could be speculated that the painting was intended for someone who would appreciate the inclusion of the putti. While the snake in the 1654 etching also might be seen as an unusual addition, there is no doubt that it is a reference to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, and the authority of the Bible was a fundamental aspect of Calvinist belief.

From his adaptation of certain figures and motifs, it is apparent that Rembrandt was familiar with earlier depictions of the Holy Family. It is not possible to know if the inclusion of St. Anne in the Louvre painting was in the interests of tradition or for a client. Saints were not considered to be of special status by the Reformed church. However, St. Anne's portrayal as an older

woman in the role of an interested grandmother may not have seemed out of place in the setting devised by Rembrandt or a follower. The same might apply to the figure of St. Anne in the Rijksmuseum painting. True to tradition, Mary remains the loving and conscientious mother. The recurring motif of the bowl and spoon may have a tradition of its own in Netherlandish art, or it may simply be a token of domestic reality.

Rembrandt's pupils and followers were influenced by his work in various ways and to varying degrees. The concept of a domestic/workshop setting for the Holy Family, however, appears to have had a limited appeal, although it is possible that some works of this type may have been lost over time for one reason or another. With respect to depictions of the Holy Family in the Dutch Republic, data compiled for Amsterdam suggests that Biblical events, particularly from the Old Testament in the case of members of the Reformed faith, seem to have been preferred. Depictions of the Holy Family for personal use were more likely to be popular in a predominantly Catholic country, and tended to be idealistic in composition.

The difference in interpretation of the Holy Family for a Protestant society, as opposed to a Catholic one, is to be expected due to the differing points of view as regards religious art that can be traced back to the sixteenth century Reformation and Counter Reformation. Rembrandt's depictions of the Holy Family in a domestic and/or workshop setting presented the Holy Family in terms that could be appreciated by viewers living in a largely Protestant society where marriage and the family were deemed to be an essential component of that society from both a cultural and religious point of view.

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