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THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF REMBRANDT'S "RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON": AN EXAMINATION OF THE PICTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VISUAL AND ICONOGRAPHIC TRADITION

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THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF REMBRANDT'S RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON: AN EXAMINATION OF THE PICTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VISUAL AND ICONOGRAPHIC TRADITION

by

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To Kelly

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PREFACE

Recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are the three parables that Christ told in response to the unfavourable reaction of the Pharisees and scribes to His reception of the sinners and publicans who gathered to hear Him. The last of the three is the parable of the prodigal son:

A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son,

thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

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REMBRANDT'S RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON: A VISUAL ANALYSIS

During the last years of his life, Rembrandt painted the magnificent picture, the Return of the Prodigal Son, now in the Hermitage at Leningrad (Plate 1).[1] Acknowledged to be not only one of Rembrandt's most splendid paintings but one of the masterpieces of western art, it figures prominently in studies of both the artist's work and the history of art. Despite the consideration it has received, the full significance of the painting has remained elusive, because insufficient attention has been paid to the four observers and the sculptural relief that adorns the monumental arch. In the literature, as in the picture, these features are overshadowed by the dominant and deeply affecting image of the aged father tenderly embracing and sheltering his repentant son. Nevertheless, as shall be demonstrated, they form an integral part of the composition and contribute to the meaning of the work.

Those who have attempted to explain the roles played by the four observers and the role of the sculptural relief have failed to arrive at a satisfactory solution, because they have neglected to examine the painting in light of the visual and iconographic tradition. Instead they have considered it almost solely in relation to the biblical text, which reveals only that the man embracing the kneeling figure represents the father receiving the repentant prodigal. According to the parable, the father saw his son from afar and ran to meet him, which implies that no one witnessed the event. There is nothing in the text that accounts for a monumental arch bearing a sculptural relief or the presence of four witnesses. The subsequent portion of the parable mentions that servants brought

the robe, ring, and shoes for the prodigal and slaughtered a calf in preparation for the banquet, and that the elder son returned from the fields while this celebration was in progress. As Rembrandt depicts the father receiving his son close by the house rather than far from it and shows the father placing his hands on his son's back rather than falling on his neck, it is clear that he diverged from the biblical account. Thus one might argue that the witnesses represent those referred to in the subsequent passages. Some who have commented upon the picture have identified one or the other of the male witnesses as the prodigal's elder brother but have failed to identify the rest, who clearly cannot be the servants, as none leads the calf to slaughter or bears the robe, ring, or shoes. Their presence cannot be accounted for on the basis of the parable. Such piecemeal solutions result not only from an incomplete understanding of the visual and iconographic tradition but from a failure to see the painting as a whole, to subject it to a penetrating analysis. While in the following chapters the Return of the Prodigal Son will be examined in light of the visual and iconographic tradition, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the parts of the composition relate to one another and create an integrated totality.

The six figures in the painting are arranged in pairs established by placement in space, degree of visibility, and the architectural structure. This arrangement clearly emphasizes the varying degrees of importance of each. Enframed by the arch behind them and raised on an elevated platform, the prodigal son and his father are placed close to the picture plane. They are distinguished further by the pool of light in which they appear and by their poses. The prodigal son with his back to the viewer kneels before his father, and the position of his body, turned slightly to the right and bending forward, leads the viewer into the space and to the father, the only fully frontal figure in the composition. The father's frontal pose emphasizes his importance and underscores the stability of his form. The broad expanse of his body and voluminous robes creates a solid

pyramidal structure that supports and encompasses the prodigal son and serves to unify the two figures.

Within this group attention is focused specifically upon the upper portions of the bodies. Here the light is brightest; it illuminates the father's face, shines on the back of the prodigal's head, and glows warmly where the father's right hand rests on his son's back. The protective quality of the father's embrace is further strengthened by the diamond shape, created by the father's head, hands, and elbows, that enframes the prodigal's head. In addition, the bright red patches of the father's cloak that falls over his shoulders are separated by the golden column of his undergarment which links the heads of the father and son. Thus the two figures are effectively bound to one another in an immutable compositional unit.

While the left half of the picture is dominated by the father and the prodigal son, the right is the domain of the two male witnesses who are placed in front of the pier of the arch. Though they are paired by their placement, they are distinguished from one another. The more prominent one emerges from the shadows as the light falls on his face and hands, picks up the color of his deep red robes, and reflects off the gold trim of his attire. He is the third most significant figure in the work and is connected with the main group by his gaze and by his superficial resemblance to the father. Both are bearded and wear deep red cloaks over their gold garments. Unlike the father, however, he is shown in profile, standing upright with his shoulders squared and his arms drawn up tightly against his body as he clasps his hands in front of him. Thus, he forms a tall, vertical column in contrast to the broad pyramidal expanse of the father. Turned at a ninety degree angle to the main group and with his back against the picture's edge, he effectively closes off the composition at the right and, by his gaze and the slight inclination of his head, directs attention back to the father and the prodigal son.

Like the standing male witness, the seated man attentively observes the father's reception of his son. While the former is

linked with the father, the latter is linked with the son. Both are placed at an angle and in a position subordinate to those with whom they are paired. They appear diagonally opposite one another, one leading inward, the other outward; the slight movement generated by the prodigal's pose is counteracted by the seated man's body, which also closes off most of the space behind and between the main group and the standing witness. While the primary effect of this man's position is to return the viewer's attention to the father and son, his pose also serves to link the male observers with the female. He is shown with his left hand placed on the ankle of his right leg as it rests on his left knee. His right leg and his right arm, which is raised as he presses his fist against his chest, lead from the woman by the arch toward his companion in the right foreground, and at the same time, form a wedge which leads from his companion to the woman, thus linking the two pairs.

The architectural structure reinforces both the primary and secondary functions of the seated witness's pose. It blocks off any movement into the right middle ground, and the jutting corner of the pier points back to the main group. However, the curve of the arch and the sculptural relief that adorns the pier lead to the pair of female observers. The relief shows a seated man with one leg crossed over the other. The one leg leads to the woman shown leaning against the arch, as does the inclination of his head and his body as he bends over the horn that he plays.

The women are linked, in a number of ways, with the more prominent male witnesses. Though their heads are turned toward the father and son, their bodies are placed at an angle pointing to the right. Moreover, the woman and man who flank the pier of the arch are associated with one another by the angles of their bodies and because, along with the corner of the pier, they fill the space behind and between the main group and the standing male observer. The latter and the woman standing on the stairway are related as they fulfill similar functions; he closes off the composition at the right and she closes it off at the upper left. In addition, she stands on

the stairway so that her head almost touches the top of the picture. Placed in this elevated position her form serves to balance the standing male's great height. Finally, these four figures are arranged on a diagonal leading from the left background to the right foreground, each figure placed progressively farther to the right and closer to the viewer.

Rembrandt positioned all of the figures as he did in order to create a stable composition. The father and son, placed at the left, are balanced by the two male witnesses, who are set slightly back and to the right. The relationship between the two pairs is underscored by the disparity in height between the figures in each. However, unlike the father and son, the witnesses do not form a self-contained compositional unit. The position of the standing observer, who appears at the right edge of the work to close off the picture, requires that the seated one be set farther back in space and to the left, which generates movement in this direction. Therefore the female witnesses are included to lead the viewer's eye back out of the distant space. As has been mentioned, their bodies point to the right foreground, while their heads are turned to direct attention to the father and son.

In fact, all the observers turn their heads toward the father and his son, and the pier that projects between the male and female witnesses also points in this direction. The projecting corner establishes a link between the father and son and the pier, a diagonal connection that is intersected by the loose chain made up of the observers. The short diagonal, linking the solid unit created by the protagonists with the massive pier, that moves from the left foreground to the right middleground, is effectively balanced by the longer and looser one that extends from the right edge to the left distance. Thus it is clear that the architectural structures and the four witnesses form an integral part of the work and serve to create a stable composition.

The compositional equilibrium is essential to Rembrandt's conception of the subject. It is crucial to the sense of stillness which pervades the work and which is undisturbed by any action or dramatic

display of emotion. The reactions of the three witnesses whose expressions can be discerned are restrained. Only a dawning smile reveals the joy and pleasure felt by the woman who leans against the pier, and the evidence that the seated man is deeply moved is limited to his intent facial expression and the way he presses his fist to his heart. The response of the standing man is enigmatic, as well as subdued. As the lower part of this face is obscured by his beard and his hands are clasped in front of him, the only clue to his feelings is provided by his peaked eyebrow, indicative of a furrowed brow. His expression might be interpreted as one of either mingled anger and sorrow or intense concentration. Whatever their reaction, all of the observers are quietly attentive and stand immobile as they witness the father's reception of his son.

The father gently places his hands on the prodigal's back with a gesture that at once conveys his love and forgiveness and is suggestive of blessing. The exhausted and repentant prodigal rests his head against his father's chest, as he kneels before him and commends himself to his father's care and protection. His vulnerability is emphasized by his shorn head and pathetic appearance, while his father's strength is evident in his solid form and stable stance. The warm glow of light that envelops them, like the father's embrace, is expressive of the bond of love that unites them.

Placed in the foreground on an elevated platform and bathed in light, the two figures are distinguished from the others, who gradually merge with the shadows as the light dissipates. They appear as if in another realm, beyond time and space, and the golden aura radiating from them endows the work with a spiritual quality. In this manner, Rembrandt transforms the father and his son into a timeless image of God's love and mercy. The atmosphere of divine mystery is enhanced by the indistinct setting and the presence of the rapt witnesses. Thus the painting conveys the primary meaning of the parable, the message that God is merciful and willing to forgive repentant sinners, and evokes a reverential response from the viewer, a response warranted by the sublime expression of one of the fundamental tenets of Christian theology.

As has been demonstrated, the witnesses and setting form an integral part of the composition and contribute to the mood of the picture. However, while the carefully achieved equilibrium would be disturbed by the elimination of any one of these features, the omission of the sculptural relief would have little or no effect. Though the figure of the horn-playing musician directs attention to the head of the woman who leans against the pier, this compositional function is a minor if not insignificant one. Moreover, the relief is so indistinct that it has been overlooked by all but Carl Neumann, and were it not for his precise description one might doubt that it represents a man with his legs crossed and his head bowed as he plays his horn.[2] As it does not contribute to the visual impact of the picture, one must assume that Rembrandt included it to convey a particular meaning, an assumption that is supported by its placement. It appears at the point where the short diagonal created by the compact forms of the protagonists and the pier, linked by the projecting corner, intersects the long diagonal formed by the loosely arranged chain of the observers. Within this loosely arranged diagonal there is a relatively consistent line that starts with the dark fringe on the standing man's cloak and continues across the seated man's beret to the face of the woman, crossing the pier at the edge of the sculptural relief.

The presence of this relief, like that of the witnesses, cannot be explained by the biblical text. Obviously Rembrandt derived it from some other source or devised it in order to convey a particular meaning, a meaning that in all likelihood is connected with that communicated by the appearance of the woman to whom it points. This suggests that the witnesses, grouped in pairs yet presented as individuals, carefully arranged in varying degrees of visibility and consequently of importance, are also iconographically significant.

In the following chapters the Return of the Prodigal Son will be examined in light of the visual and iconographic tradition and in the contexts of Rembrandt's other representations of the subject

and of his late works. Thus it will be possible to determine how Rembrandt arrived at his final conception of the subject and to explain the significance of the sculptural relief and the four witnesses.

Footnotes to Chapter I

[1]The following factual information accompanies plates 148 and 149 in Irene Linnik's and Yury Kuznetsov's Dutch Paintings in Soviet Museums (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.; Leningrad, Aurora Art Publishers, 1982). The canvas measures 8'6 3/4" X 6' 8 3/4"; four inch strips of canvas have been added to the bottom and right edges and corners have been affixed at the top, so that the canvas is rectangular rather than rounded, as it once was. No indication is given concerning when the strips of canvas or the corners were added. The authenticity of the signature, at the left near the feet of the prodigal son, is doubtful. The provenance of the painting is as follows:

1742 Jan de Guis sale, Bonn.
1764 Archbishop Clemens Augustus of Bavaria sale (not sold due to high price).
Until 1776 Duke d' Amezune Collection, Paris.
1776 The Imperial Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

With the exception of C. Vosmaer, all Rembrandt scholars agree that the Return of the Prodigal Son is a late work. C. Vosmaer states that the picture was painted in 1636, at the same time that Rembrandt made an etching of the subject; Rembrandt: Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1877), p. 155. According to Emile Michel, who dates the picture 1668-69, Vosmaer never would have suggested an early date had he seen the painting, and he adds that it is unquestionably a work of Rembrandt's latest period; Rembrandt: His Life, his Work, and his Time (London: William Heinemann, 1894), 2:245 & 186. Though the dates suggested range from 1650 to 1669, most believe that the painting was one of Rembrandt's last works, as Werner Busch points out in "Zur Deutung von Rembrandts Verlorenem Sohn in Leningrad," Oud Holland 85 (1970): 180.

Alpatow, Bauch, Hofstede de Groot, Rosenberg, and Von Bode date the painting about 1669. Michael W. Alpatow, Studien zur Geschichte der westeuropaischen Kunst (Cologne: Verlag M. Du Mont Schauber, 1974), p. 29; Kurt Bauch, Rembrandt Gemalde (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1966), p. XV. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, A Catalogue Raisonne. . .; (London: Macmillan & Company, Limited, 1916), 6: 90. Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, and E.H. ter Kuile, Dutch Art and Architecture 1600-1800 (Harmondworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1977), p. 138. Wilhelm von Bode, The Complete Work of Rembrandt (Paris: Charles Sedalmeyer, 1902), 7:128.

Bob Haak believes that the picture was painted about 1668-69 and may have been finished by another artist; Rembrandt: His Life, His Work, His Time (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.), p. 328. Hamann and Munz also date the painting about 1668-69. Richard Hamann, Rembrandt (Berlin: Safari Verlag, 1948), p. 423; Ludwig Munz, Rembrandt (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1954), p. 28.

Veth states that it is perhaps one of Rembrandt's last paintings, and Van Gelder suggests that it may have been the last, while Eisler writes that it is the last uncommissioned work, painted perhaps

before the Brunswick Family Portrait, which Benesch dates about 1668 and to which he compares the style and technique of the Return of the Prodigal Son. Jan Veth, Rembrandts Leven en Kunst (Amsterdam: Scheltma & Holkemas Boekhandel, K. Groesbeek & Paul Nijhoff, 1906), p. 119; H. E. van Gelder, Rembrandt (Amsterdam: H. J. W. Becht, n.d.), p. 58 (Chapter IV); Max Eisler, Der alte Rembrandt (Vienna: Osterreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1927), p. 109; Otto Benesch, Rembrandt: Biographical and Critical Study (Lausanne: Skira, 1957), pp. 131-32.

Bialostocki, Bredius, Knuttel, Neumann, Tumpel, and Weisbach state simply that it is a late work. Jan Bialostocki, "Ikonographische Forschungen zur Rembrandts Werk," Munchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst 8 (1957):208; Abraham Bredius, The Paintings of Rembrandt (Vienna: The Phaidon Press & New York: Oxford University Press, n.d.), n.p.; G. Knuttel, Fakkeldragers van de nederlandsche Schilderkunst (Antwerp: De Sikkel & Utrecht: Mij. W. de Haan N.V., 1947), p. 129; Carl Neumann Rembrandt (Munich: Verlag von F. Bruckmann, 1924), 2:624; Christian Tumpel, Rembrandt: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag Gmbh., 1977), p. 124; Werner Weisbach, Rembrandt (Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1926), pp. 513-14.

In "Die Datierung von Rembrandts Verlorenen Sohn in Leningrad," Amici Amico: Festschrift fur Werner Gross zu seinem 65 Geburtstag (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1968), H. Th. Musper states that Rembrandt arrived at the conception for the picture prior to 1650 and that he worked on it for many years, completing it only at the end of the 1650's or at the beginning of the 1660's (p.238). He notes that only Horst Gerson and A. de Vries diverge from the traditional date of circa 1668-69. Their dating of the picture circa 1663 does not appear in the literature because the communication was made verbally (p. 232).

Horst Gerson does not date the picture in Rembrandt Paintings (Amsterdam: Reynal & Company, 1968); he states only that it is one of Rembrandt's last biblical paintings (p. 140). However, Linnik and Kuznetsov (Dutch Paintings in Soviet Museums, page facing plate 148) state that Gerson dates the painting to 1661. As they cite only Gerson's Rembrandt Paintings, one must assume that the communication was made verbally and that after 1968 Gerson changed his mind and dated the picture somewhat earlier than he had previously. Linnik and Kuznetsov believe that the picture was painted in the early 1660's (page facing plate 148).

[2]Neumann, Rembrandt, 2:620.

CHAPTER II

THE VISUAL TRADITION

The earliest representations of the return of the prodigal son appear within depictions of the parable, a subject that first attained some popularity in the art of northern Europe in the thirteenth century.[1] During the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the parable was depicted in manuscripts, stained glass windows, and tapestries in which features and events not mentioned in the biblical text were included. Most of this additional material was incorporated in order to convey the underlying meaning of the parable as well as the symbolic significance of the particular episodes. For the same reason, the parable was presented not as a dramatic narrative but as a series of distinct scenes, most of which display little action or descriptive detail.[2]

In medieval art, the return of the prodigal son usually was portrayed simply as one of a number of equally prominent scenes within the parable.[3] To varying degrees, the artists took liberties with the biblical description of the event. All rendered the episode not as a dramatic emotional event but as a rather staid one, and in many cases narrative and descriptive elements were subordinated to those that gave the return of the prodigal son a ceremonial quality and symbolic character.

One of the first northern European manuscripts to include a depiction of the parable is the Bible moralisée (Plate 2). In this mid-thirteenth-century work, the return of the prodigal son is represented as the fourth episode from the parable.[4] However, it appears in the seventh roundel because each episode is followed by an explanatory scene. Instead of following the biblical text in which the father is described as running to meet his son and falling on the latter's neck (Luke 15:20), the artist portrays

the two standing and facing one another while the prodigal clasps one of his father's hands. All dramatic action is stilled in order to bring the representation into correspondence with the symbolic scene that follows. However, a narrative link to the subsequent episodes from the parable is provided by the presence of the servants, one of whom beckons to the other, indicating that they are called to fulfill the father's commands.

Unlike the Bible moralisée, the Velislav Bible, produced at the Cistercian cloister of Mariensaal near Altbrünn in about 1340, presents the events of the parable in an uninterrupted sequence (Plate 4).[5] Instead of including explanatory scenes, the episodes themselves are endowed with a distinctly ritualistic character that bespeaks their symbolic meanings. This is particularly evident in the depictions of the prodigal son receiving the ring, robe, and shoes and of the banquet celebration, both of which are rendered as religious ceremonies. The return of the prodigal son here, as in the Bible moralisée, is portrayed as a static scene. The father and the son are shown standing in an embrace, and there is no descriptive detail and no setting. The figures are placed against the blank page and between depictions of the repentant prodigal and the father giving the servants his orders.

In the thirteenth century, the parable of the prodigal son was represented in stained glass windows in a number of French cathedrals, including those at Bourges and Chartres.[6] While the windows at both Bourges and Chartres convey the underlying symbolic meaning of the parable, they contain more scenes of a purely narrative nature, as well as more descriptive elements than either of the manuscripts mentioned above.[7] Moreover, the representations of the return of the prodigal reveal that to varying degrees the designers of these two windows paid closer attention to the description of the event given in the Bible than did the illuminators of the Bible moralisée and the Velislav Bible.

The return scene in the window at Chartres (in the center, the fourth scene from the top of the window) and that at Bourges

(in the center, the third scene from the top of the window), both include trees to indicate that the reunion took place out of doors (Plates 5 & 6). As no architectural structures are visible, it is clear that the father greeted his son outside and far from home in keeping with the account provided in the biblical text. Though the designer of the window at Chartres, like the illuminators, portrays the father and son standing still, the designer of the window at Bourges introduces action, thereby giving the event both a momentary narrative quality and a more dramatic character. While the father and son are shown embracing, the placement of their legs suggests movement, as does the father's cloak which floats out behind him. It would appear that the artist wished to show that the father hastened to meet his son in accordance with the biblical account. At variance with the scriptural description of the prodigal's return, however, is the presence of the servant. Though there is no indication that others were present when the father received his son, a servant frequently appears in depictions of this episode and soon became part of the visual tradition.

Thus a servant is included along with the principals in the tapestry from the Church of St. Elizabeth at Marburg, a fifteenth-century work (Plates 7 & 8).[8] Unlike the scene at Bourges, however, this representation is virtually devoid of action, and the only indications that the father greeted his son out of doors are a stylized plant in the lower left hand corner and an equally stylized vine. As a whole, the Marburg rendition of the parable does share with the stained glass window an interest in narrative continuity, and here the depiction of the events is enlivened by an attempt, albeit a crude one, to convey human emotion. This communication of the narrative in a somewhat more dramatic manner is effected only at the expense of the symbolic character of the scenes. As this means of presenting the religious content of the parable had to be sacrificed, the designer of the Marburg tapestry, like his predecessors at Chartres and Bourges, employed an alternative solution: the symbolic meaning of each episode and of the parable as a whole is provided by the images in the elaborate border.[9]

The interest in narrative continuity, descriptive detail, and dramatic action, the first faint glimmerings of which emerge in differing degrees in the windows at Bourges and Chartres and in the Marburg tapestry, would appear greatly strengthened in the sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the parable of the prodigal son. The appearance of these characteristics prior to the sixteenth century is weak and sporadic and does not form part of a consistent development. This is evident when one views the works discussed thus far in chronological order and when one examines two tapestries woven in Brussels about 1485 (Plates 9 & 10).[10]

The mode of representation employed in the Brussels tapestries attests to the continued desire to present the significance of both the individual episodes and the parable as a whole, often at the expense of narrative continuity. Many of the events possess a symbolic character that is enhanced by the inclusion of a plethora of allegorical figures and that is elucidated by the explanatory scenes interspersed among them. In addition, the representation of the parable fills the first of the tapestries (Louisville, J. B. Speed Museum) but covers only half of the second tapestry (Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery), the last portion of which contains scenes from the life of Adam and Eve and their descendents, scenes that are incorporated to clarify the parable's symbolic content.[11]

While the emphasis placed upon communicating the interpretation of the parable through symbolic features and explanatory scenes is in keeping with the established tradition, many elements of both the depiction of the prodigal's return and the overall formal conception are not. Earlier representations of the parable present the various episodes as more or less equally prominent scenes. By contrast, in the Brussels tapestries some events are given greater emphasis than others, and among these is the return of the prodigal son (Plate 11). It is the dominant scene, the only one in either tapestry to extend from the lower to the upper border. That this

is not merely a compositional device employed to separate the two subjects depicted in the second tapestry is evident. Not only do the sizes of the scenes vary in accordance with their importance in the first as well as in the second tapestry, but the episode selected for this distinction is not one that normally concludes representations of the parable. Indeed, all previous portrayals include at least one of the events that follow the prodigal's return. Clearly, the designer wished to emphasize this scene.

This portrayal of the return of the prodigal son differs from earlier depictions in its particulars as well as in the stress placed upon it. The only truly traditional feature is the pose of the father, who faces the prodigal and clasps one of his hands. However, there are other elements that though they cannot be considered part of the visual tradition do appear in some earlier works. These include the servant and the setting. The house, directly behind the father, is found in both the Bible moralisée and another thirteenth-century manuscript, the Goslar Gospels. The latter is unusual in that the return of the prodigal son appears not within the context of the parable but paired with only one other episode; both adorn the title page of the Gospel of St. Luke (Plate 12).[12] Specifically, the episode of the prodigal's return is combined with the subsequent event, the bestowal of the ring, robe, and shoes. Whereas the servant included in other representations of the return holds the required items in readiness, here several servants place the items on the prodigal.

In the Brussels tapestry, not only are these two events combined but there are other features that reveal that the scene is intended as a synthesis of the final portion of the parable. In front of the house stand two musicians who blow their trumpets. Trumpet players appear in depictions of the banquet celebration that follows the bestowal of the ring, robe, and shoes in both the Velislav Bible and the Goslar Gospels (Plates 4 & 12). Their presence in the Brussels tapestry surely constitutes an allusion to this event. Another inclusion that prefigures a subsequent episode is that

of the prodigal's elder brother, who can be identified because he holds a pitchfork indicating that he has returned from his labors in the fields.[13] His father clasps his garment, a motif that must be the result of the weavers' misinterpretation of the designer's intention. As one of the elder brother's hands is not visible, it is safe to assume that the designer intended to show the father clasping it rather than the garment. The depiction of the father holding on to his elder son refers to the last part of the parable in which the father entreats his elder son to join in the celebration. The presence here of figures and motifs taken from the events that follow the return of the prodigal son reveals that this scene is intended as a summary of the final portion of the parable and explains its prominence.

Though the final scene from the parable displayed in the tapestry is a summary of a number of events, it is worth noting that the return of the prodigal son is the major episode and that this is the first example of what would become common practice in the sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the parable--the portrayal of the prodigal's return as the last major episode. Other features that would become traditional in later depictions of this episode include the host of onlookers, many of whom cannot be identified as allegorical figures or biblical characters. Though few subsequent artists showed so many witnesses, a great many represented a number of observers whose presence cannot be explained on the basis of the biblical text. Another innovation, one of the utmost importance as it became a standard feature in every sixteenth-century example is the prodigal's pose: he is shown kneeling, not standing as in all previous representations.

While the Brussels tapestries introduce some elements that became part of the traditional depiction of the parable in sixteenth-century Netherlandish works, they are medieval in character, as is evinced by the allegorical figures and explanatory scenes. The conception they present is radically different from that employed by the artists of the following century. With one exception, sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the parable of

the prodigal son include neither allegorical figures nor obtrusive symbols. Moreover, explanatory scenes are eliminated and the emphasis is on narrative action. Most of these artists adhere more closely to the biblical text than did their predecessors, though they too add scenes and features not mentioned in the parable. However, for the most part, they employ these non-biblical elements to enliven the drama of the narrative and to convey a moralizing rather than purely religious meaning. In these works the settings for the events are neither bare nor artificial but naturalistic, and in many cases resemble the Netherlandish countryside. The narrative continuity, dramatic action, and naturalistic settings presented in many of these works combine to give the parable a new immediacy and enable the viewer to identify more easily with the events portrayed.

Sixteenth-century Netherlandish artists illustrated the parable, more or less completely, either in sets of prints or paintings or within a single work in which one event appears as the main scene. They also rendered certain episodes as semi-independent subjects. In such works, one episode is given overwhelming prominence, while the additional scenes depict only a portion of the parable and are visually insignificant, hence the designation "semi-independent subject." Whatever format was selected, the dramatic and pivotal events were emphasized at the expense of others. Among these were the prodigal son carousing and the return of the prodigal son which were also the only two to appear as semi-independent subjects and as the focus of those prints and paintings which present the whole parable within a single work.

Two sixteenth-century Netherlandish depictions of the parable within a single work that show the return of the prodigal son as the dominant episode are a triptych attributed to Gosewijn van der Weyden (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan: Museum of the Cranbrook Academy of the Arts) from 1526 and an anonymous mid-sixteenth-century woodcut (Plates 13 & 14).[14] In Van der Weyden's triptych, the return of the prodigal son appears as the major episode in the foreground of the central panel. The preceding events occupy the

wings, while the subsequent events are shown as subsidiary scenes in the central panel. The latter illustrate the father's words: "And bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry:" (Luke 15:23). Van der Weyden depicts horn playing musicians on the balcony above the banquet scene in order to express the joyful nature of the occasion. The presence of the musicians is also in keeping with the biblical text in which it is stated that there was music (Luke 15:25).

The return of the prodigal son appears in the foreground of the central panel, set apart from the distant subordinate scenes by a low wall. Here the prodigal son, hands clasped in prayer, kneels before his father who tenderly embraces him. Thus the artist conveys both the prodigal's repentance and the father's compassion. In accordance with the biblical description, the father receives his son far from the house and bends over to embrace him. At variance with the account, however, is the presence of the three men engaged in conversation. Though the parable implies that the father was unaccompanied when he received his son, previous artists had included a servant in their interpretations of this scene (Plates 6 & 8). However, none of these men can be identified as servants; none carries the items called for by the father, and their garments do not suggest that they are servants. Like many of the witnesses portrayed in the Brussels tapestry, they remain unidentifiable (Plate 10).

The unidentifiable observers also stand by the father as he tenderly embraces his repentant son who kneels before him in the mid-sixteenth-century woodcut (Plate 13). Here, however, the additional figures observe what is taking place rather than converse with each other, and their number is greatly increased. Moreover, two of these witnesses can be identified as the servants by virtue of the items they carry. The one farthest to the left holds the ring and shoes, and the man shown in profile, who closes off the central group at the right, holds the robe over his arm.

As in the Cranbrook triptych, the preceding and subsequent episodes are rendered as subsidiary scenes. The former appear

to the left of the dominant event, while the latter are shown in the background to the right. Here we see the slaughtering of the fatted calf, the dance, and the father addressing his elder son (seen through a small arch to the right). According to the biblical text, the elder son heard music and dancing when he returned from the fields, and he asked a servant what these things meant. Angered by the reply, he refused to go inside, prompting his father to go out and entreat him to join the celebration. He remained angry and claimed that the festivities were not justified. To this his father replied that it was indeed appropriate to rejoice (Luke 15:25-32). Therefore, one can assume that because he included the elder son who heard dancing when he returned from the fields, this artist decided to employ the dance rather than the banquet scene as the means of expressing the merrymaking that followed the prodigal's return.

Like the Cranbrook triptych and the woodcut, the depictions of the return of the prodigal son as a semi-independent subject portray the prodigal son kneeling before his father, and all but a painting by Maarten van Heemskerck depict unidentifiable observers. These works include fewer and smaller scale subsidiary scenes than do the triptych or the woodcut, and this gives the return of the prodigal son even greater prominence and justifies the designation "semi-independent."

The earliest of the semi-independent depictions of the return of the prodigal son is Lucas van Leyden's engraving of about 1510 (Plate 15).[15] The subordinate episodes are insignificant. Indeed, it is easy to overlook the minute representation of the prodigal son among the swine that appears in the vast, panoramic landscape. The tiny scene of the killing of the calf is more visible, as it is placed in a more noticeable position--between the prodigal's father and the group at the left. Neither distracts attention from the main episode.

Like the anonymous woodcut, the engraving shows the prodigal son being received by his father amidst a crowd of onlookers. Here, however, the observers are set at a greater distance from the father

and son and are divided into two groups, neither of which contains the servants who appear, instead, beneath the doorway of the house. The prodigal son and his father are placed at a sufficient distance from the house to indicate that the father went out to meet his son. Though he does not embrace him, the father bends over and reaches out solicitously to the prodigal. This is a subdued account of the subject; there is no action and the gestures are restrained. The mood is one of solemnity undisturbed by any reference to the subsequent merrymaking normally included in representations of this subject.

Cornelis Massys, unlike Lucas van Leyden, depicts the banquet celebration as an auxiliary scene in his painting (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) executed in 1538 (Plate 16).[16] It appears in the distance to the left along with the fatted calf being led to slaughter and the elder son asking a servant the cause for the merrymaking.[17] Though the painting differs from Van Leyden's engraving in these respects and in the way in which the return scene is represented, there are similarities that suggest that Massys was familiar with the engraving. Like Van Leyden, Massys places the prodigal son and his father in the center of the work in front of a tree, the crown of which is cut off by the upper edge of the picture. Moreover, Massys also sets the major scene on a hill overlooking a vast landscape that contains distant mountains and a minute scene of the prodigal son among the swine. Unlike the engraving, however, the painting shows the father compassionately embracing his son while only two men witness the event. These men appear to be expressing to one another their disbelief or their inability to understand what is taking place. While their gestures and their costumes are more extravagant, they recall the observers, also engaged in conversation, in Gosewijn van der Weyden's triptych (Plate 13).

Similar figures appear in Hans Bol's undated engraving of the return of the prodigal son, a work that like Massys's and Van der Weyden's includes auxiliary scenes showing the banquet and the fatted calf (Plate 17).[18] As in the Cranbrook triptych,

horn-playing musicians expressing the joyful nature of the occasion can be seen on the balcony above the banquet celebration. Yet unlike his predecessors, Bol locates the major episode quite close to the house and adds a servant who stands behind the prodigal son ready to place the robe on his shoulders.

At first glance, it appears that Maarten van Heemskerck also sets the reunion of father and son close by the house (Plate 18). However, closer examination of this picture (Angermund bei Düsseldorf, Collection Freiherr von Fürstenberg), painted in 1559, reveals that the father receives his son on an elevated patch of ground.[19] This device not only separates the father and the prodigal son from the approaching servants by implying physical distance but it also serves to focus attention on the main event. Van Heemskerck depicts the repentant prodigal son on his knees before his father who compassionately embraces him. With the exception of Lucas van Leyden, who portrays the father bending over his son rather than embracing him and who conveys neither the father's compassion nor the son's remorse in a particularly effective manner, all the sixteenth-century artists whose works are discussed above depict the father's reception of his son in a similar manner.

Like Bol and Massys, Van Heemskerck renders the subsidiary scenes of the fatted calf and the banquet. As in Massys's picture, a musician who blows his horn in a rather restrained manner stands by the table in this unusually prominent representation of the banquet celebration. The occasion appears to be a somber rather than a joyful one, and this is at variance with the merrymaking mentioned in the Bible.

Unlike the other artists who portrayed the prodigal's return as a semi-independent subject, Van Heemskerck does not include unidentifiable witnesses. Instead, he gives greater prominence to the servants, who display the same disgruntled reaction to the event as do the observers in the other works. Though the servants figure more prominently in this composition than they do in all but Bol's semi-independent representation of the subject, they are still set apart from the father and son in accordance with

the biblical text that implies that the father was unaccompanied when he received his son.

Like the semi-independent depictions of the subject, the representations of the return of the prodigal son that are included within series of prints or paintings illustrating the parable usually show the subsidiary scenes of the fatted calf and the banquet. Most also depict the father receiving his son at some distance from the house and include at least one servant and unidentifiable witnesses, features that are also commonplace in the sixteenth-century representations of the subject mentioned above. Finally, in keeping with the visual tradition, they portray the father embracing the prodigal who kneels before him.

In series of prints or paintings, unlike in the works discussed above, the return of the prodigal son is not the most prominent episode. Nonetheless, it is given a certain emphasis in all but two sets of images because it appears as the final major event. Only Philip Galle's six engravings after Maarten van Heemskerck and Cornelis Anthonisz.'s six woodcuts contain prints following the depiction of the prodigal's return. In Anthonisz.'s series printed in 1541, the return of the prodigal son is the fifth woodcut (Plate 23).[20] Like the rest of the series, the print is exceptional. Though it shows the father embracing his kneeling son amidst a host of onlookers, it differs from his contemporaries' depictions of the subject in the omission of subsidiary scenes and in the inclusion of allegorical figures. Anthonisz.'s series of woodcuts is the only post-medieval representation of the parable that presents the story not as a dramatic narrative but as a series of symbolic scenes filled with obtrusive symbols and allegorical figures. Many of the symbols and allegorical figures, like the major event in the print following the prodigal's return, are unique to this work. In addition to the main scene, this final woodcut contains a number of subordinate ones, only two of which are taken from the biblical text, and they are the only ones that appear in other depictions of the parable (Plate 24). Thus it is evident that Anthonisz.

employs this anachronistic mode of representation in order to convey a particular interpretation of the parable and one that is different from the interpretation presented in medieval works of art.

Unlike Anthonisz.'s work, Galle's engravings after Van Heemskerck, printed, in 1562 present the parable as a dramatic narrative (Plates 25-30).[21] Moreover, the two prints that follow the depiction of the prodigal's return represent the concluding episodes described in the biblical text. Along with the commonly depicted scenes of the fatted calf and the banquet, these prints show the prodigal son dancing with his companions (Plate 29) and three scenes that include his elder brother (Plate 30). These represent the elder brother: asking a servant the cause for the celebration, approaching the house, and speaking with his father. By portraying these less frequently depicted events, Van Heemskerck provides the most complete illustration of the parable. Thus it is evident that he added the last two prints in order to thoroughly depict the final portion of the biblical text.[22]

It would seem that Van Heemskerck was familiar with the anonymous mid-sixteenth-century woodcut (Plate 13). Not only does he include the rarely represented dance in the fifth print of the series but he employs a similar setting in his depiction of the prodigal's return. As in the woodcut, Galle's engraving after Van Heemskerck shows the father embracing the prodigal by a pier of a large arch that spans at least half the print. In both works, it appears as an independent architectural structure through which the father's house can be seen in the distance. In addition, to the left of the arch in each work is a tree with its roots exposed and a landscape containing ruined buildings. Finally, the engraving, like the woodcut, incorporates both preceding and subsequent episodes. In the engraving, there is a solitary figure in the landscape, and this must represent the prodigal son making his way home. As will be seen, the depiction of an event preceding the prodigal's return is an unusual element in representations of this scene that are included in series of prints or paintings.

The other features of Van Heemskerck's engraving are derived from his earlier painting of the subject (Plate 18). The poses of the father and son are nearly identical, and in both works the two figures are placed on an elevated area of ground that sets them apart from the servants, who appear behind and to the right of the father. In the engraving, however, this scene is set apart in time as well as space. The prodigal son appears again among the servants who now place the ring, robe, shoes, and hat on him. The hat is not mentioned in the biblical text and Van Heemskerck is the only artist to include it among the items held by one of the servants. He depicts it in both the engraving and the painting, but not in his earliest representation of the subject.

Van Heemskerk's earliest rendition of the return of the prodigal son appears in a series of four woodcuts executed about 1548.[22] The woodcuts present a less complete illustration of the parable than do the engravings. Not only does the woodcut series contain two fewer prints, but each of the prints depicts fewer episodes. The four major episodes represented are the prodigal son receiving his goods, carousing, repenting, and being received by his father.[23] These four events appear as the main scenes with slight variation in all sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish sets of prints or paintings that illustrate the parable. The variations, as stated, are minor. Some artists show the prodigal son departing in place of receiving his goods, and some show the prodigal son begging for food or eating pigs' draff rather than repenting. However, with the exception of the two sets discussed above, all show the return of the prodigal son as the last major episode.

Van Heemskerck's woodcut representation of the return of the prodigal son (Plate 31) differs from all other sixteenth-century Netherlandish renditions of the subject in one respect. It is the only such work that places the father's reception of his son on the threshold of the entrance to the house, and thus diverges not only from the visual tradition but also from the biblical text. However, this is the only unusual feature. The inclusion of the

subsidiary scene showing the fatted calf about to be slaughtered and the presence of the servants carrying the required items are commonplace. Moreover, the poses of the father and the prodigal son are in keeping with the visual tradition, as is the expression of the former's compassion and the latter's repentance.

Like Maarten van Heemskerck, Hans Bol depicted the return of the prodigal son both as a semi-independent subject and within a series of works illustrating the parable (Plates 17 & 32). The return of the prodigal son appears as the major episode in the fourth and final print in this series engraved by Julius Goltzius after Bol's drawings which were executed in 1588 (Vienna, Albertina).[24] This engraving differs from Bol's semi-independent depiction of the subject in a number of ways. While the father bends over his kneeling son and the unidentifiable witnesses are included, the scene is set far from the house and the servant is seen approaching in the distance rather than standing ready to place the robe on the prodigal's shoulders. The subordinate scenes of the slaughtering of the fatted calf and the banquet celebration are omitted and a preceding event, the prodigal son starting his journey home, is represented instead. As mentioned above in the discussion of Galle's engraving after Van Heemskerck, artists rarely included preceding episodes in those depictions of the return of the prodigal son that form part of a series of works. Unusual as well is the omission of the subsidiary scenes containing the fatted calf and the banquet.

Having discussed in some detail a few representations of the return of the prodigal son within sets of images, it is possible to summarize the major features that appear in the others. The fatted calf being led to slaughter, being slaughtered, or having been slaughtered appears along with the banquet celebration in the vast majority of Netherlandish renditions of the return of the prodigal son that conclude series of prints or paintings. These episodes are included in Crispijn van de Passe the Elder's engraving after Maarten de Vos (Plate 38), Assuerus van Londerseel's engraving

after Nicolas de Bruyn (Plate 39), Jacob Matham's 1592 engraving after Carel van Mander (Plate 40), Nicolas Jansz. Visscher's engraving after David Vinckboons's 1608 drawing (Plate 41), Adriaen Collaert's engraving included in Hieronymous Natali's Evangelicae Historiae Imagines printed in 1593 (Plate 42), Christoffel van Sichem's woodcut included in Ludovico de Ponte's Der Zielen Lust-hof printed in 1629 (Plate 43), an engraved illustration in Theatrum Biblicum printed by Nicolas Jansz. Visscher in 1643 (Plate 44), and an undated painting by Sebastian Vrancx (Plate 45).[25] Only Hieronymous Janssens's 1661 painting includes neither scene, while Cornelis de Wael's drawing shows only the calf being led to slaughter (Plates 46 & 47).[26]

With the exception of Crispijn van de Passe's engraving (Plate 37), all of the above mentioned works show a servant or servants standing in readiness to bestow the ring, robe, and shoes upon the prodigal son or approaching with those items. Several of them also show the elder son speaking with his father and/or speaking with a servant. He is shown conversing with a servant at the entrance to the garden in the background of Visscher's engraving after Vinckboons and in the background to the left in Matham's engraving (Plates 41 & 40). In the latter, he appears again in the center of the middleground speaking with his father, a scene that is represented in the background of Collaert's engraving, on the stairs leading to the banquet scene in Van Londerseel's engraving, and in Van Sichem's woodcut (Plates 42, 39 & 43). Though Van Sichem's woodcut is clearly based upon Visscher's engraving after Vinckboons, there are some differences, and among these is the substitution of the father and another figure for the servant in the scene containing the elder son.[27]

While the elder son appears in only five of these works, observers who cannot be identified on the basis of the biblical text witness the prodigal's return in all but Collaert's engraving and Van Heemskerck's prints (Plates 42, 28 & 31). In the painting by Janssens and the drawing by De Wael, a crowd of men and women attend the father's reception of the prodigal (Plates 46 & 47).

In Vrancx's painting, a number of people hurry to greet the prodigal, including a woman who pauses as she expresses her surprise at what she sees (Plate 45). She is a prominent figure, as are the women who appear in the following prints. A woman is shown hurrying after the father in Van de Passe's engraving, in Visscher's engraving after Vinckboons, and in Van Sichem's woodcut (Plates 38, 41 & 43), and one appears along with at least one maidservant in Van Londerseel's engraving and in the illustration in Theatrum Biblicum (Plates 39 & 44). The relatively prominent position of each of these women suggests that they are intended to represent the prodigal's mother. Though no such person is mentioned in the parable, the prodigal's mother is referred to in a number of sixteenth and seventeenth-century dramatizations of the story.[28] Moreover, her presence is natural, as it serves to create a more orthodox and complete family unit.

The woman who stands behind the father and stretches her hands out toward the prodigal in De Wael's drawing and the older woman seen hastening forward between the two younger women in Janssens's painting presumably represent the prodigal's mother (Plates 47 & 46). Moreover, it is possible that the woman who is present in the subsidiary scenes showing the father speaking with his elder son in Matham's and Van Londerseel's engravings and Van Sichem's woodcut is also to be seen as the prodigal's mother (Plates 40, 39 & 43). This is particularly likely in the last two works, because she also appears in the foreground. If this is the case, of the depictions of the return of the prodigal son included in sets of prints or paintings that contain witnesses who cannot be biblically identified, only Bol's engraving does not show the prodigal's mother (Plate 32).

Bol's engraving recalls the representations of the return of the prodigal son as the major scene in depictions of the parable within a single work and as a semi-independent subject in which the only witnesses not mentioned in the biblical text are male (Plates 13-17). In all of these works, there are either a large

number of observers (Plates 14 & 15) or only two or three who appear to be more significant due to the distinction given them (Plates 13, 16 & 17).

An examination of all the sixteenth-century representations of the return of the prodigal son and those seventeenth-century works that portray the subject within a series of prints and paintings discussed thus far reveals that there are a number of features and characteristics that can be considered traditional: the father embracing the prodigal who kneels before him; the placement of this scene at some distance from the house; the servants; the witnesses who cannot be identified on the basis of the biblical text; and the subsidiary scenes of the fatted calf and the banquet celebration. The presence of the woman who most likely represents the prodigal's mother is a traditional feature only in works executed after the middle of the sixteenth century, and because they are included in a large number of works but not the vast majority, the horn-playing musicians and the scenes containing the prodigal's elder brother can be considered commonplace rather than traditional. Finally, with the exception of Lucas van Leyden's engraving (Plate 15), all of these works show the prodigal's return as a rather dramatic scene in which the father expresses his concern for his son and his compassion while the prodigal repents and in most works gives vent to his grief.

During the seventeenth century, as we have seen, the return of the prodigal son continued to appear as the last major episode in series of prints or paintings that illustrate the parable. However, the other two formats employed by sixteenth-century artists all but disappeared. Most seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists depicted the return of the prodigal son as a fully independent subject. Of those who continued to include references to subsequent events, several incorporated them into the main episode, and none represented more than one subsidiary scene. While some Flemish artists represented the major episodes of the parable within a single work, they showed the prodigal son carousing, not the return

of the prodigal son, as the most prominent scene,[29] and with the exception of Barent Fabritius, who depicted the prodigal's return as a major episode in one such work, Dutch artists abandoned this mode of representation altogether.

Fabritius's picture of the parable of the prodigal son is one of three paintings of parables that the artist painted in 1661 for the Lutheran Church in Leiden (Plate 48).[30] Both the anachronistic format and the manner in which the events are portrayed are the result of the commission. As the parable of the prodigal son was the central picture, the composition had to be closed at both sides to separate the scenes depicted from those in the contiguous works.[31] Therefore, Fabritius represented not only the return of the prodigal son but the prodigal's departure at the edges of the picture. That he wished to emphasize the return of the prodigal within the compositional constraints, however, is evident. Though it is not the last event represented, it is shown at the far right, and it is the episode placed closest to the viewer.

In the background are depictions of the prodigal son carousing and the prodigal son among the swine, scenes that appear as major episodes in series of works that illustrate the parable. Here, however, they are given no more prominence than the representation of the fatted calf in the act of being slaughtered, a scene that is normally subordinated to one showing the prodigal's return. All three episodes appear here as subsidiary scenes and are rendered in a smaller scale than the foreground scenes that flank them and close off the composition at either side.

Fabritius's representation of the return of the prodigal son shows the servants standing behind the father who embraces his son and attempts to raise him up, while the kneeling prodigal covers his face in repentance and sorrow. This scene diverges from the tradition established in the sixteenth century only in the placement of the father and son so close to the house.

Like Fabritius, most seventeenth-century artists who depict the return of the prodigal son as an independent subject diverge from the sixteenth-century tradition and show the father receiving

his son directly in front of the house. However, in keeping with the traditional mode of representation, all but one of these artists depict the prodigal son kneeling before his father, and the majority portray the father either embracing his son or touching him in some way. As has been stated, some seventeenth-century artists include references to subsequent events which they attempt to incorporate into the depiction of the main episode; the only events referred to in this manner are the slaughtering of the fatted calf and the banquet celebration. Others show the events themselves as subsidiary scenes, but none includes more than one such scene, and therefore these works can be considered as independent representations of the subject. The only events depicted as subsidiary scenes are the elder brother speaking with a servant, which appears in only one work, and the fatted calf either being led to slaughter or about to be slaughtered. The calf appears either in a subordinate scene or as part of the main event in five seventeenth-century Netherlandish depictions of the return of the prodigal son as an independent subject.

The fatted calf can be seen in the background of a picture in the Detroit Institute of Arts attributed to Bartholomeus van Bassen (Plate 49).[32] Both the scene of the calf about to be slaughtered and that of the father receiving his son are visible through an archway at the left side of the picture. In this unusual work, the subsidiary scene is not much smaller than the main event, which also is shown in tiny scale. Though the particulars are difficult to distinguish, it appears that the prodigal is kneeling in front of his father who stands on the terrace and bends over his son, while another figure, perhaps a woman representing the prodigal's mother, looks on.

This is the only depiction of the return of the prodigal son in which the major portion of the composition is devoted to the interior of a room. Here we see the members of the household, some of whom react to the news conveyed by the boy shown hurrying across the room, while others continue to go about their business. None of the figures is given much more prominence than the prodigal

son and his father, and all are dwarfed by the palatial setting. Indeed, it is the room and its lavish ornamentation that attracts our attention. Among the decorations are several sculptures, two of which can be identified. The one in the center of the group over the fireplace represents King David holding his harp, and the one over the doorway in the middle of the rear wall represents Charity with her children. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, these sculptures are not merely decorative features but are employed to elucidate the meaning of the biblical event.[33] Their presence also reveals that the return of the prodigal son is the subject of the work despite its insignificance within the composition.

Not only the prodigal son and his father but the fatted calf are given much more prominence in Jan Steen's picture in the collection of Countess Brita Wachmeister (Kulla Gunnarstorp, Sweden) which was painted about 1668/69 (Plate 50).[34] Here the calf is shown peering out from behind the father as a servant tries to lead it off to slaughter. Like the calf, the man who blows his horn normally appears in a more subordinate position. As we have seen, horn-playing musicians frequently are portrayed in close proximity to the banquet celebration in those works that depict this event in the background (Plates 13, 16, 17, 18, 39 & 42). Clearly, Steen attempts to integrate these allusions to subsequent episodes into the main event in order to do away with the subsidiary scenes. Also included in the group that gathers around the prodigal and his father are two maidservants, one of whom stands with a basket of fruit on her head while the other holds the robe called for by the father. Behind the latter, beneath the doorway, is the prodigal's mother whose joy at the return of her son is evident. She is the only one of the participants who expresses her feelings without restraint.

Unlike the vast majority of post-medieval artists, Steen does not stress either the father's compassion or the son's remorse. The protagonists' rather subdued reactions may be the result of Steen's source of inspiration. The poses of father and son and

their costumes are derived from Lucas van Leyden's engraving (Plate 15), a work that also displays little emotional intensity.

A painting by an unknown Flemish artist presents the father and the prodigal in poses that resemble those employed by Steen (Plate 51).[35] Here, however, the father's compassion and the prodigal's repentance are more vividly expressed. In addition, the two are set apart from the observers and the fatted calf, here relegated to the background, and the vast majority of the witnesses direct attention to the protagonists as they attentively observe the father's reception of his son. Like the father, they regard the prodigal son with compassion, and thus the picture is unified by mood as well as composition.

In another painting by an anonymous Flemish artist, which is in the St. Waldetrudiskerk in Herenthals, only the servant who holds the required items observes the father's reception of the prodigal (Plate 52).[36] The other figures, some of whom are exotically attired, bustle about perhaps preparing for the approaching festivities, as do the servants who lead the calf off to slaughter. Though their attention is not focused upon the principals, the viewer's is. Along with the attentive servant, they are distinguished by the monumental barrel vault that appears behind them. This coffered vault forms part of an architectural structure, adorned with fluted columns and statuary, that resembles a section of a splendid Italianate palace and that like a stage set provides a backdrop for the action.

The Italianate quality of the work sets it apart from the more naturalistic, indigenous tradition and indicates foreign influence. Another feature that distinguishes the painting from the established tradition is the pose of the prodigal son. This is the only postmedieval depiction of the return of the prodigal son that portrays the youth on his feet rather than on his knees. That the prodigal's pose cannot be attributed to the influence of southern European works, however, can be demonstrated by an examination of other Netherlandish representations of the episode that bear the mark of such influence.

Abraham van Cuylenbergh's the Return of the Prodigal Son (Utrecht, Centraal Museum), painted in 1657, is a case in point (Plate 53).[37] Not only is the picture influenced by Italian art but it is based upon Guercino's painting of the same subject (Turin, Pinacoteca), executed six years earlier.[38] Like Guercino, Van Cuylenbergh includes the background scene of the elder brother addressing a servant, and though he eliminates the banquet celebration, he closely follows Guercino's picture in all other respects. In the foreground, a servant carrying the necessary items follows the father, who with out flung arms rushes to meet his son. The prodigal is portrayed not standing but kneeling in keeping with the established tradition. His face is turned from the viewer; nonetheless, his emotional state is revealed by the way he wrings his hands and by his pose. His distress justifies his father's compassionate response.

Though the Return of the Prodigal Son in the museum of the city of Kujbyschew, painted by Jan Buns in 1662, is not based upon a specific Italian picture, like Van Cuylenbergh's painting it displays evidence of southern influence (Plates 54).[39] The structures in the background are Italianate and attest to Buns's prediliction for the classicizing style noted by Fechner, who points out that both the low viewpoint and decorative quality of the work are characteristic features of the pictures painted by the Haarlem classicists.[40] The lack of dramatic action, the elegant costumes, and the graceful gestures are also in keeping with style of these artists and bear witness to the increasing influence of the classicizing manner in Dutch art after the middle of the century.

One more feature of this picture that is worthy of note is the prominent position of the servant who stands behind the prodigal. That he represents a servant is not open to question. He holds over his shoulder the robe intended for the prodigal, and though his sumptuous attire may seem inappropriate, it is not unique. The servant in Van Cuylenbergh's painting also wears costly garments and a plumed hat. His prominent position, however, is more unusual, and one might feel compelled to seek an explanation for it were

it not required by the composition. The strong diagonal movement from the lower right to the upper left necessitates the stabilizing vertical form of the servant. He serves to balance the composition and by inclining his head toward the prodigal directs attention to him, thereby strengthening the central focus of the work.

Another work that reflects the influence of Italian art is Leonard Bramer's painting in the collection of Siegfried Salz in Berlin (Plate 55). Here, however, it is the style of Caravaggio as interpreted by his Utrecht followers that affected the artist, as is evident in the inclusion of the cavalier. The Return of the Prodigal Son was probably painted during the 1640's when, as Nicolson points out, Bramer was influenced by the works of the Utrecht Caravaggisti.[41] Once again the prodigal son is portrayed on his knees, and thus it is clear that whatever inspired the painter of the picture in the St. Waldetrudiskerk in Herenthals to show the prodigal son standing up rather than kneeling, it was not Italian art.

With Rembrandt's 1636 etching, a work that appears to have had some influence on those of his followers, we return to the indigenous tradition (Plate 56). As has been noted frequently, the etching is based upon Maarten van Heemskerck's woodcut (Plate 31).[42] Though Rembrandt made some changes, the relationship between the two works is obvious. In both, the servants carrying the ring, robe, and shoes follow the father through the doorway as he steps forward to embrace his half-naked son who clasps his hands together as he kneels on one of the steps. Even less significant details reveal Rembrandt's debt to Van Heemskerck: the staff lying next to the prodigal, the foliage beneath the arch that enframes the landscape, and the buildings on the hill in the distance.

As has been stated, however, there are a number of differences between the two prints. In place of the servant preparing to slaughter the fatted calf seen in Van Heemskerck's woodcut, Rembrandt shows a man separating the calf from the herd of cattle. Moreover, Rembrandt substitutes a maidservant for the male shown following his colleagues in the woodcut and portrays her in the act of opening a shutter

in order to observe what is taking place.[43] This change reinforces the dramatic, momentary character of the etching. Rembrandt's print surpasses Van Heemskerck's woodcut and all previous depictions of the subject in the dramatic expression of human emotion. While the majority of earlier works convey the father's concern and the prodigal's repentance, none expresses as vividly or as effectively either the father's compassion as he rushes to embrace his son or the prodigal's heartfelt remorse. Furthermore, none portrays the prodigal in such a pitiful state. The bones of his emaciated body, only partially covered by rags, are clearly visible, and his scrawny frame appears to be racked by sobs as he is overwhelmed by his anguish.

According to Valentiner and Van Moltke, Rembrandt's etching influenced the Return of the Prodigal Son (Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art) painted by Govaert Flinck sometime around 1640-43, not more than seven years after he left Rembrandt's studio (Plate 57).[44] However, Judson, who acknowledges that the painting contains a number of motifs found in Rembrandt's works of the 1630's and 1640's, states that the compositions are considerably different.[45] Indeed the resemblance of specific features is not great. Although both works show the servants within the doorway, the father on the stairs, a woman opening a shutter to discover the cause for the commotion, and a herd of animals within the distant landscape, the father does not embrace his son; the woman opening the shutter is an older woman who likely represents the prodigal's mother rather than a maidservant, and she appears in a less prominent position. Finally, there are three figures rather than one among the herd of animals that may be sheep rather than cattle. The indistinguishable species of animal depicted and the inclusion of three figures, none of whom attempts to separate one of the animals from the herd, suggests that Flinck did not understand the significance of the subsidiary scene in Rembrandt's etching and that he included a similar scene simply because he found it interesting. Moreover, unlike Rembrandt, Flinck adds incidental features that are distracting. He depicts both a woman filling her bucket at the well, whose obliviousness to what is taking place in more disturbing than her action, and

a small boy who attempts to silence a barking dog.

Though the particular features do not bear a marked resemblance to those in the etching, the dramatic character of the painting recalls Rembrandt's work. There is the same sense of sudden activity and of commotion that creates sufficient disturbance to cause the woman in the house to open a window in order to find out what is happening. In Flinck's painting the activity is intensified. The father does not embrace his son but rushes toward him with outstretched arms, and he is followed by the boy who hurries down the steps toward the dog that barks hysterically. Consequently, the focus of the work is not on the father's compassion and the son's repentance but on the excitement generated by the prodigal's return. Unlike Rembrandt, Flinck sacrifices the expression of deeply felt emotion in order to enliven further the dramatic action of the scene.

Totally different in conception is another painting of the return of the prodigal son by an artist, perhaps Gerrit Willemsz. Horst, who studied under Rembrandt (Plate 58).[46] The picture does, however, contain a few minor features that reveal the artist's familiarity with both Flinck's painting and Rembrandt's etching. Like Rembrandt he shows the prodigal son wearing a short sword or dagger at his side, a feature that appears only in these two works and Rembrandt's late painting. He also depicts the woman opening the shutter in order to look out the window. However, the position of this motif within the composition bears a greater resemblance to Flinck's painting. Also reminiscent of Flinck's work are the structure of the house that extends from the left border across approximately two thirds of the painting and the presence of the small boy and his dog. Here, however, in keeping with the rather somber mood of the work, the boy and his dog stand still and attentively observe what is taking place.

In addition to the small boy, there are a number of figures who witness the father's reception of his son. Of these the two men engaged in conversation are the most prominent, and they recall similar men included in sixteenth-century representations of the subject (Plates 13, 16, 17 & 32). In accordance with the tradition

established by his predecessors, this artist portrays them as disgruntled individuals attired in exotic costumes. Furthermore, as in two of the earlier pictures in which a few such observers are given prominence, the servants are not present. In place of the servants included in both Rembrandt's and Flinck's work, there appear on the stairs a youth wearing a plumed hat and a maternal figure holding the hand of a small child, all of whom regard the father's reception of his son. The protagonists' expressions and poses convey their emotions only to a limited degree, and the overall effect of the picture is one of subdued solemnity.

In yet another painting by an artist who was influenced by Rembrandt (Plate 59), the father's reception of his son is both less solemn than the previous work and less dramatic than the works by Flinck and Rembrandt.[47] Here the father is shown stepping forward to embrace his son who with bowed head and hands clasped in prayer kneels on the ground. The father's concern is as evident as the prodigal's remorse. Nonetheless, in comparison with Rembrandt's etching (Plate 56), the expressions are restrained, and there is none of the dramatic action and sense of commotion that characterizes Flinck's painting (Plate 57). However, these three works and the other Rembrandtesque painting (Plate 58) do have some points in common: the location is similar; all portray the protagonists either on the stairs leading into the house or close by; and all include the motif of the woman opening the shutter.

Like the other unknown Rembrandt follower, this artist represents, though less prominently, a few beturbaned and disgruntled men and a young man wearing a plumed beret who observes the father's reception of his son from a place on the stairs. This man's companions, however, are two men rather than a woman and a small child. Additional witnesses are also portrayed, though here they appear in the lower left hand corner, and they do not simply gaze at the principals but gesticulate excitedly.

In general this painting fits easily into the established iconographic tradition; there are, however, two unusual if not exceptional features. Though the prodigal's body is not nearly as emacia-

ted as it is in Rembrandt's etching, his appearance is equally pitiful, because, unlike all the representations we have seen thus far, his head is shorn of virtually all its hair. Thus it is apparent that he is an outcast, who like a convict is shunned by society. The prodigal's distressed condition makes the other unusual element, the sculptural relief of Charity, all the more meaningful, as shall be demonstrated in the next chapter. As in Van Bassen's painting (Plate 49), the only other picture that includes a relief of Charity, the sculpture is placed above a doorway, here the doorway that leads into the father's house.

Though Jacob Willemsz. de Wet does not depict a sculptural relief of Charity in the Return of the Prodigal Son, he represents a motif that most likely is intended to convey the same meaning (Plate 60).[48] Set apart from the other figures in De Wet's painting is a woman with two children, one of whom she holds in her lap while the other places its arms around her neck. It is more than probable that she is intended as a living representation of Charity. By showing her as a living being rather than as a sculpture, De Wet alludes to this virtue in an unobtrusive and naturalistic manner. At the same time, by setting her apart from the others, he distinguishes her and indicates that she is significant.

Though De Wet studied with Rembrandt between 1630 and 1632, there is little evidence of Rembrandt's influence in this painting. Only the oriental and rather elaborate costume worn by one man and the type of building can be considered even vaguely Rembrandtesque. Like Rembrandt and those who were influenced by the master, this artist depicts the prodigal son kneeling, if not on the stairs themselves, close by the stairway that leads into the house. However, the manner in which the father receives his son differs not only from these works but from all other depictions of the return of the prodigal son, all of which portray the father either embracing the prodigal or reaching out toward him. Here the father does neither. Instead, he stands holding the finery intended for his son and regards the unfortunate youth not with compassion but with anger. He is accompanied by a small boy, who carries a robe, and

by several members of his household. Included among these witnesses are two men, one of whom is dressed in an exotic outfit, an old woman (presumably the prodigal's mother), and a maidservant, who appears to be addressing a man who is only dimly visible. Like the father, none of these witnesses expresses compassion; the prodigal's mother seems to be angry and the others are only mildly concerned or merely interested. The painting is picturesque rather than dramatic or deeply moving.

It is apparent that seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists represented the return of the prodigal son in a variety of ways. Like their sixteenth-century predecessors, some portrayed it with subsidiary scenes within the context of the parable. Of those who did not, a few included subordinate events or other references to subsequent episodes, but most rendered it as a fully independent subject. While some artists were influenced by Italian art, the majority adhered to the indigenous style and showed the event in a more naturalistic manner. Whatever the style and mood of these works, they all depict the father receiving his son in the presence of at least one witness who cannot be identified on the basis of the biblical text. In addition, all but one represent the prodigal son on his knees regardless of the character of the picture. His pose is the same, whether the scene is a dramatic or a deeply moving one, whether it is given a decorative or a picturesque quality. In these respects, the seventeenth-century artists adhered to the established iconographic tradition. However, they diverged from the tradition by representing the father's reception of the prodigal in close proximity to the house and by including, more often than not, the prodigal's mother and other females among the witnesses who gather around the protagonists.

It is within this tradition, established in the sixteenth-century and slightly transformed in the next, that Rembrandt's late masterpiece must be viewed (Plate 1). The Return of the Prodigal Son, in keeping with the continuous post-medieval tradition, displays the prodigal son kneeling before his father, who touches him, and in accordance with the seventeenth-century variations it represents the father

receiving his son directly in front of the house in the presence of male and female witnesses. These witnesses include a standing man in exotic attire, a seated man wearing a velvet beret, a woman who leans against the pier of the arch, and a woman who stands on the stairs. Like the general features of the painting, these particular observers fit into the established tradition and their counterparts can be found in a number of the examples discussed above.

The most insignificant of the witnesses, the women, are included in many prints and paintings, where they appear as members of the father's household or more specifically as either maidservants or as the prodigal's mother. The latter can be identified by virtue of prominence or age. An older woman is depicted among those who crowd together as they witnesses the prodigal's return in paintings by Janssens, an unknown seventeenth-century Flemish artist, and De Wet and in De Wael's drawing (Plates 46, 51, 60 & 47). She also appears behind the maidservant in Steen's painting, behind the father in Buns's picture, peering out of the window in Flinck's work, and on the stairway in the representation perhaps by Horst (Plates 50, 54, 57 & 58). The prodigal's mother distinguished by her prominent position is portrayed in the engravings by Van de Passe, Van Londerseel, and Visscher (Plates 38, 39, 41 & 44), in the woodcut by Van Sichem (Plate 43), and in the paintings by Vrancx and Van Bassen (Plates 45 & 49). Therefore, it is more than likely that the woman who is closer to the father and son in Rembrandt's painting is intended to represent the prodigal's mother.

The woman who stands on the stairs is rendered by Rembrandt as an almost indistinguishable figure. Her insignificance and what can be discerned of her attire suggest that she is a maidservant, a character who like the prodigal's mother is included in a substantial number of depictions of the prodigal's return. She can be seen in Van Londerseel's engraving, in Visscher's engraving in the Theatrum Biblicum, and in Steen's painting (Plates 39, 44 & 50). She stands to one side in De Wet's painting, where she is pointing to the event, and in Flinck's picture, where she is oblivious to it (Plates 60 & 57). Finally, she is shown observing the father's reception of

his son from a window in the prints by Van de Passe and Rembrandt and in the paintings by two unknown Rembrandt followers (Plates 38, 56, 58 & 59).

Like the women, the male observers in Rembrandt's painting appear in a great many works by other artists. Male witnesses who are not part of a group containing both men and women are included in large numbers in the prints by Lucas van Leyden, by an anonymous Netherlandish artist active in the middle of the sixteenth-century, and by Jacob Matham (Plates 15, 14 & 40). Moreover, two or three men are given prominence in the works by Van der Weyden, Massys, Bol, and the two unknown Rembrandtesque artists (Plates 13, 16, 17, 32, 58 & 59). In all of these examples, the witnesses, if not clearly annoyed, are at least not pleased by what they see. While Rembrandt includes two observers, they do not converse with one another, as is normally the case, and only one of them seems to be irritated or puzzled by the father's reception of the prodigal. As a result of this distinction, one might be tempted to identify this figure as the prodigal's elder brother despite the lack of precedent in the established tradition. Whether or not he can be so identified will be determined in the last chapter, where Rembrandt's painting will be examined in light of the iconographic tradition as it is related to the various theological interpretations of the parable.

The seated male witness does not appear in the long robes or the rather exotic headgear worn by his companion, as is usual in those works in which a few male observers are given prominence. However, it should be noted that both Van der Weyden and Bol portray some of these men in long robes and tall hats and others in shorter dress and different caps or bareheaded (Plates 13, 18 & 32). Like the young man who stands on the stairs in the painting by an anonymous artist of the Rembrandt school (Plate 59), the younger observer in Rembrandt's painting wears a velvet beret and reacts to the father's reception of his son not with displeasure but with compassion. However, unlike the young man who stands on the stairs apart from the beturbaned observers, this witness is neither standing nor

separated from his more exotically garbed companion. Thus it is evident that though the male witnesses resemble and are derived from those contained in earlier works, they are also quite different.

Another feature apparently inspired by previous depictions of the return of the prodigal son, yet distinguished from its sources, is the sculptural relief that represents a horn-playing musician. Both Van Bassen and one of Rembrandt's followers include sculptural reliefs in their paintings, but these reliefs represent Charity, not horn players (Plates 49 & 59). In addition, horn-playing musicians are portrayed frequently in renditions of the prodigal's return that include the banquet celebration (Plates 13, 16, 17, 18, 39 & 42), and one is represented in Jan Steen's picture, painted at about the same time as Rembrandt's, that does not show the banquet scene (Plate 50). However, in none of these is the musician rendered as a sculptural relief. Like Jan Steen, Rembrandt must have included this figure as an allusion to the subsequent celebration, but unlike Steen, he includes the horn player in the form of a relief in order to refer to the merrymaking without disturbing the solemnity of the picture.

The particular source for this feature is Maarten van Heemskerck's 1559 painting in which a horn-playing musician appears in the same position as the relief in Rembrandt's work, above and to the right of the father's left shoulder (Plate 18). This is one of many features that reveals that Rembrandt was indebted to the painting of his predecessor, whose works he not only collected but employed as sources of inspiration for a number of his biblical subjects, including his first depiction of the return of the prodigal son.[49] Rembrandt's debt to Van Heemskerck's painting is evident. In both works, the prodigal son and his father are effectively set apart from the others by their placement on higher and different ground close to the picture plane. Van Heemskerck depicts the two on a knoll in the foreground; Rembrandt represents them on what appears to be an elevated platform. Furthermore, the poses of father and son are similar, despite the different angles from which they are seen. Though the prodigal gazes up at his father in the one

work and bows his head in the other, in both his face is obscured by shadow presenting a lost profile, a feature unique to these two images.[50] The poses of the fathers bear a greater resemblance to one another. In each, the father is portrayed bending over his son as he gently places his hands on the prodigal's back.

While there are differences, the relationship that exists between the ways in which the father receives his son in these two works is perceptible and significant. None of Rembrandt's other predecessors portray the father and son in a fashion that so closely resembles his late painting. None but Van Heemskerck show the father placing both hands on his son's back in a manner that could have inspired Rembrandt, who recognized the potential inherent in the gesture and exploited it in order to indicate that the father blesses his son. Finally, none but Van Heemskerck render the father's pose as an encompassing embrace that shelters and protects the repentant youth.

Cornelis Anthonisz.'s woodcut is cited by Linnik as the source for a number of features in Rembrandt's painting, including the poses of father and son (Plate 23). Here, however, the father places only one of his hands on the prodigal's back, while the other rests on his shoulder. More significantly, the two are separated by an arm's length that creates a sense of emotional as well as physical distance; there is none of the intimacy evident in Van Heemskerck's and Rembrandt's paintings and no implication of protection and safe harbor. Nonetheless, the other elements cited by Linnik indeed suggest that Rembrandt was familiar with Anthonisz.'s woodcut.

Linnik points out that the witnesses encircle the protagonists in much the same way and that the women labelled Dilectio (Love) and Fides (Faith) in the woodcut are related to two of the observers in the painting. Fides, like the bearded male witness, is shown in profile, standing at the right edge of the composition, and Dilectio resembles the woman who leans against the pier. She wears a similar headdress and like her counterpart appears close to the arch and in front of at least one other female figure.[51] Though it seems likely that Rembrandt derived some of the features in his

painting from the woodcut, its impact was not as seminal as that of Van Heemskerck's painting.

It is rather odd that no one has observed the relationship between Rembrandt's and Van Heemskerck's paintings, especially when one considers that the influence of Van Heemskerck's woodcut on the 1636 etching has long been recognized. One can only assume that Van Heemskerck's painting is not well known. Some see the influence of Van Heemskerck's woodcut not only in the etching but in the Leningrad painting. Tümpel states that Van Heemskerck's woodcut (Plate 31) is related to the painting, and Bruyn writes that while the woodcut no longer had a direct impact upon Rembrandt's conception of the subject, as it had when he made the etching, it remained the point of departure.[52] The painting, in my opinion, bears little resemblance to the woodcut, and contrary to Bruyn's statement, the print was no longer the point of departure. It is possible, however, that Van Heemskercks' engraving (Plate 28) played some role in the formation of Rembrandt's conception. The high arch in that print may have inspired Rembrandt to transform the entrance of the house into a monumentalizing arch.

None of Van Heemskerck's works, however, can account for two features not yet discussed, one of which affects the prodigal's appearance while the other is part of his attire. At his side he wears a short sheathed sword or dagger, an element that appears in both Rembrandt's etching and a painting by one of his followers (Plates 56 & 58). Whether or not this visually insignificant aspect of the prodigal's attire is iconographically important will be considered in Chapter IV. Of greater significance is his shaved head, which contributes powerfully to the pitiful nature of his appearance. This motif is employed, as it is in the work by an anonymous Rembrandtesque artist, to emphasize that the prodigal son is an outcast (Plate 59). This painting cannot be dated with any accuracy. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether Rembrandt devised this motif or whether he derived it from this painting and more effectively exploited it.[53]

It is obvious, in light of the above examination, that Rembrandt was thoroughly familiar with the way in which the return of the prodigal son was represented by both his predecessors and contemporaries. None of the figures or the motifs, with the possible exception of the prodigal's shorn head, appears for the first time in the Leningrad painting. The prodigal's tattered garments and sheathed knife, like the monumental arch, are all included in at least one earlier representation of the subject, while the witnesses and the horn-playing musician are part of the established visual tradition, as is the father's embrace of the kneeling prodigal. Yet all of these more or less familiar elements are employed in an entirely new way, and each is as distinctive as the overall effect of the painting.

No other artist approaches the sublime mood of solemn reverence that is attained by Rembrandt, and none so successfully focuses attention on the father's reception of his son nor so ably integrates the witnesses into the composition. No other representation of the theme so effectively conveys either the father's boundless love and compassion for his son or the depths of the prodigal's suffering and repentance. Nonetheless, Rembrandt's Leningrad picture is to be seen not outside of the context of the visual tradition but as the magnificent culmination of it. However, the painting is a good deal more than the culmination of a tradition, and this examination only barely accounts for the presence of the features included. It does not begin to explain the extraordinary impact of the painting.

Surely, something more than previous depictions of the return of the prodigal son inspired Rembrandt to create, in the last years of his life, this splendid and profoundly moving work that is not only the culmination of a tradition but the culmination of his career. What inspired Rembrandt can only have been the subject itself. Clearly, the story of the prodigal son touched something within the artist and stirred him to achieve what is arguably his greatest creation and undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of western art. It is not surprising that the theme should have had such an affect upon Rembrandt

because, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the parable of the prodigal son is not only a moving human story but a biblical text that presents Christ's message concerning the Christians' most basic concerns--sin and salvation.

Footnotes to Chapter II

[1]There are only a few pre-thirteenth-century depictions of the parable of the prodigal son. The earliest of these appears in an eleventh-century Byzantine manuscript (Ms. grec. 74) now in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Ewald Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn (Dusseldorf: Verlag L. Schwann, 1955), p. 10.

[2]See pages 56-81, for an explanation of the relationship between the form and content of medieval depictions of the parable of the prodigal son.

[3]The return of the prodigal son also appears outside of the context of the parable in typologically arranged manuscripts. See below, pages 70-73.

[4]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 39.

[5]Ibid., p. 19.

[6]The parable also appears in stained glass windows in the cathedrals of Sens, Auxerre and Poitiers. Emile Male, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 199.

[7]The symbolic meaning of the parable is conveyed in both windows by the inclusion of scenes following the depiction of the prodigal's return, as is discussed below in pages 72-73. Both windows extensively illustrate the prodigal's sinful life, showing in detail the way in which he dissipated his patrimony, though the biblical text merely states that he wasted his goods in riotous living in the company of harlots (Luke 15: 13 & 30).

[8]According to Vetter (Der verlorene Sohn, p. 20), the tapestry was woven during the first third of the fifteeth century.

[9]The lower border of the tapestry is missing. For an explanation of the symbolic significance of the scenes depicted see below, pages 73-75.

[10]Philippe Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery 18 (1955):15.

[11]See below, pages 75-81, for a discussion of these scenes and their significance.

[12]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 13.

[13]Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," p. 30.

[14]Konrad Renger, Lockere Gesellschaft: Zur Ikonographie des Verlorenen Sohnes und von Wirtshausszenen in der niederländischen Malerei (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1970), p. 51. The notes accompanying the woodcut in the archives of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorishe Documentatie in The Hague state that it is the work of a Dutch artist executed about 1550 and add that the style of the work suggests that the artist was associated with the circle of Jan van Scorel.

[15]F. W. H. Hollstein, Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co. and Van Gendt & Co., 1949-1981), 10:114.

[16]Friederich Winkeler, Die altniederländish Malerei in Belgien und Holland von 1400-1600 (Berlin: In Propylaen Verlag, 1924), p. 309.

[17]Though Massys, like the designer of the mid-sixteenth-century woodcut, includes the elder son, he does not show the dancing that the elder son heard but only the music. The musicians are shown playing horns as they stand by the banquet table.

[18]The engraving can be dated to the last half of the sixteenth century, as Hans Bol was born in 1534 and died in 1593.

[19]Rainald Grosshans, Maarten van Heemskerck (Berlin: Horst Boettcher Verlag, 1980), p. 218.

[20]I. V. Linnik, "Once More on Rembrandt and Tradition," Album Amicorum J. G. van Gelder (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), p. 244.

[21]Thomas Kerrich, A Catalogue of the Prints which have been engraved after Maarten van Heemskerck or rather an Essay toward such a Catalogue (Cambridge: J. Smith, 1829), p. 71.

[22]Grosshans, Maarten van Heemskerck, p. 219.

[23]The four woodcuts are reproduced in Hollstein, Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 8:235.

[24]Otto Benesch, Beschreibender Katalog der Handzeichnungen in der Graphischen Sammlung Albertina (Vienna: Verlag von Anton Schroll & Co., 1928), p. 43. The Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam possesses a complete set of Julius Goltzius's engravings.

[25]The Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam possesses complete sets of the engravings illustrating the parable of the prodigal son by Van de Passe, Van Londerseel, Matham, and Visscher. The six engravings by Van de Passe after De Vos, who was a resident

of Antwerp until his death in 1604, were most likely executed between 1585, when Van de Passe entered the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke as a master, and 1637, when Van de Passe died. Van Londerseel was born in 1572 and died in 1635; consequently, his engravings must have been executed prior to 1635 and not earlier than the last years of the sixteenth century. The first of Matham's four engravings after Van Mander bears the date 1592. Vinckboons's four drawings (London, British Museum) after which Visscher made the engravings are dated 1608, and according to Korneel Goosens the prints were completed in either 1608 or 1609; David Vinckboons (Antwerp: Ars Patriae, 1954; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), p. 91. Along with the return of the prodigal son, there are three other engravings of episodes from the parable by Collaert contained in Hieronymous Natali's Evangelicae Historiae Imagines (Antwerp: n.p., 1593), pp. 66-69. Like Visscher's set of engravings after Vinckboons on which it is based, Van Sichem's illustration of the parable consists of four prints; the woodcuts with accompanying text appear on pages 100 verso through 104 recto in Ludovico de Ponte's Der Zielen Lust-hof (Louvain: Isbrandt Jacobsz, 1629). The title page of Theatrum Biblicum reveals that it was published by Nicolas Jansz. Visscher, who made the engravings, in 1643 but gives no place of publication; the pages on which the four engravings of the major episodes from the parable appear are not numbered. The location of Vrancx's Return of the Prodigal Son and of the other three paintings in the series is not known. All the paintings were sold at Sotheby's in London on July 10, 1974. Like most of Vrancx's work, the paintings are not dated. However, they were certainly completed between 1600 and Vrancx's death in 1647. The settings, treatment of space, and scale of the figures resemble the Italianate park scenes produced by Vrancx following his return to Antwerp from Italy in 1600, some of which are discussed by Frederich Winkler in "Der unbekannte Sebastian Vrancx," Pantheon 22 (1964):326-28. It is worth noting that the four paintings were freely copied by Michiel Coignet who was active in Antwerp around 1642. Coignet's pictures (Northamptonshire, Lamport Hall Collection) are discussed by Gyles Isham in "Cooper and Coignet," Connoisseur 85 (1930):312-16. Isham, however, does not note the derivation from Vrancx, an observation made by Marijke de Kinkelder who brought Isham's article to my attention.

[26]The painting is the last of five pictures illustrating the parable that Janssens painted in 1661. The location of these paintings, which were sold at Sotheby's in London on November 19, 1975 is unknown. The works are derived from a set of five etchings, the second of which bears the date 1658, by Jan Baptist de Wael after drawings by his father Cornelis de Wael.

[27]The third figure in this scene seems to be the woman who appears in the foreground. A woman also is present in the scenes showing the father's discussion with his elder son in Van Londerseel's and Matham's engravings (Plates 39 & 40).

[28]After 1536, when Jörg Binder's loose translation of Gulielmus Gnapheus's Acolastus appeared in print, the prodigal's mother became a popular character in German dramatizations of the parable; Adolf Schweckendiek, Bühnengeschichte des verlorenen Sohnes in Deutschland 1527-1627 (Liepzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss, 1930), p. 13. The prodigal's mother is also included in Netherlandish works. She is mentioned in a popular Dutch book (based upon a French morality play entitled Moralité de L'Enfant Prodigue) printed in 1540 and several times thereafter; G. J. Boekenoogen, "De Historie van de verloren Sone": Naar het Antwerpschen Druck van Godtgaf Verhulst uit het Jaar 1655 (Leiden: Boekhandel En Drukkerij E. J. Brill, 1908), pp. 13, 60, & 65. The prodigal's mother plays and important role in Cornelis de Bie's Den verloren Sone Osias oft Bekeerden Sondaer: Comedie op de woorden ghetrocken wyt de Heylighe Schriftuer (Antwerp: Mesens, op de Lombard - vest, in den gulden Bybel, 1689). As the title page reveals, De Bie's work was written earlier and was performed on the stage in 1678. W. D. Hooft gives the prodigal son not a mother but a stepmother in his play Heden-Daeghsche verloren Soon (Amsterdam: Nicolaes van Ravesteyn, 1640). Hooft's play was written in 1630 and was performed in that year and in 1640; Johannes Friederich Haverman, W. D. Hooft en zijne Kluchten (The Hague: De Swart en Zoon, 1895), pp. 11 & 16.

[29]Examples of depictions of the various episodes from the parable within a single work that gives prominence to the prodigal son carousing are: Frans Francken the Younger's pictures in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (1614) and the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe (ca. 1630-35); a painting by Christoph Jacobsz. van der Lamen in the collection of Gabriel Jooris in New York; and a painting by Simon de Vos in the Musée Communal des Beaux Arts in Bruges (ca. 1620-25).

[30]Walter Leidtke, "The Three 'Parables' by Barent Fabritius with a chronological list of his paintings dating from 1660 onward," Burlington Magazine 119 (1977):320.

[31]Daniel Pont, Barent Fabritius (The Hague: N. V. Drukkerij Trio, 1958), p. 53.

[32]When the painting was in the collection at Corsham Court, Tancred Borenius described it as a sixteenth-century Flemish work; A Catalogue of the Pictures at Corsham Court (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1939), p. 72. However, the insignificance of the figures and the emphasis upon the interior architecture and spatial construction are characteristic features of Van Bassen's work. Moreover, the painting resembles Van Bassen's depiction of Lazarus and the rich man (Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum), a work which is both signed and dated 1624; Die Sprache der Bilder (Brunswick: Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, 1978), p. 41. The rooms,

which in both pictures are the dominant features, are rather similar, and in both works only a small scene by an archway to the left reveals that a biblical event is depicted. The Brunswick picture is superior; there is less clutter and the figures are more effectively articulated. Therefore, it is likely that the Detroit picture was painted earlier in Van Bassen's career, perhaps not long after he registered as a master in the Delft St. Luke's Guild in 1613. In any case, I believe that the Detroit Institute of Arts' attribution of the picture is correct.

[33]See below, pages 119-20.

[34]Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, The Religious and Historical Paintings of Jan Steen (New York & Montclair: Allanheld and Schram, 1977), p. 135.

[35]A photograph of the picture appears among seventeenth-century works by unidentified Flemish artists in the archives of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague. The present location of the picture which was in the collection of D. Katz in Dieren in 1928 is unknown.

[36]The artist who painted this picture has not been identified. A photograph of the painting appears among the works by anonymous seventeenth-century Flemish artists in the Rijkskbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague.

[37]The picture is signed and dated.

[38]Guercino's painting is reproduced in Nefta Grimaldi's Il Guercino: Gian Francisco Barbieri (Bologna: Tamari Editori, n.d.), plate 141.

[39]The painting is signed and dated. It is discussed by Helen Fechner who states that little is known about Jan Buns beyond the fact that he moved to Cologne at the end of the 1660's, most likely after having been active in Amsterdam, "Ein unbekanntes Bild von Jan Buns," Oud Holland 82 (1967):138-39.

[40]"Ein unbekanntes Bild von Jan Buns," p. 138.

[41]Benedict Nicolson, Hendrick Terbrugghen (London: Lund Humphries, 1958) p. 55. Nicholson discusses Bramer's painting in the context of both Terbrugghen's Fluteplayer (Cassel, Gemaldegalerie) and his The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (Kansas City, Nelson Gallery - Atkins Museum). Nicolson states that a late echo of the fluteplayer's head "in lost profile with the light on the back of the neck, or of the executioner holding St. John's head (formerly in Colonel Anson's collection)," can be found in Bramer's painting. The figure that Nicolson refers to is the cavalier in the foreground of Bramer's picture.

The cavalier stands in the foreground, well in front of the father, yet his right arm disappears behind the father's back. This is confusing, as is the presence of the poorly articulated figure behind the father for whom there is insufficient space. These features and the unusual pose of the prodigal son suggest that Bramer originally intended to depict another subject. The pose of the prodigal is reminiscent of renditions of St. John the Baptist kneeling with his hands bound as he places his head on the chopping block. If Bramer set out to represent the execution of the Baptist, this would explain the spatial discrepancies, because the figure representing the prodigal's father would not have been present to impinge upon the other two figures. This would also account for the presence of the cavalier who appears in no other representation of the return of the prodigal son and who, as Nicolson points out, recalls the executioner in Terbrugghen's painting of the beheading of the Baptist.

[42]B. P. J. Broos cites twenty-one books and articles in which Van Heemskerck's woodcut is mentioned as the source for Rembrandt's etching; Index to the formal Sources of Rembrandt's Art (Maarsen: Gary Schwarz, 1977), pp. 84-85.

[43]A woman opening a shutter in order to see what is happening appears in two earlier depictions of the return of the prodigal son. She is shown above the banquet celebration in Visscher's engraving after Vinckboons (Plate 41) and in the building at the right side of Van de Passe's engraving after De Vos (Plate 38). Either of these works may have suggested the motif to Rembrandt, though he uses it more effectively in a more prominent position.

[44]W. R. Valentiner states that the picture was painted in about 1640 and cites the relationship with Rembrandt's etching as one of the reasons for assigning this date to Flinck's work; Rembrandt and his Pupils: A Loan Exhibition (Raleigh, North Carolina: The North Carolina Museum of Art, 1956), p. 119. J. W. von Moltke, while mentioning the similarity with the etching, dates the painting to about 1642-43 and notes its relationship to other works by Rembrandt; Govaert Flinck (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co., 1965), p. 27. He points out that the doorway resembles the one in Rembrandt's 1633 etching, the Good Samaritan, and that the yapping dog is almost identical to the dog that appears in The Nightwatch, painted in 1642. Finally, he adds that the obelisk by the herd of animals appears in a number of Rembrandt's works.

[45]E. Haverkamp - Begemann et al., Rembrandt after Three Hundred Years: An Exhibition of Rembrandt and his Followers (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicage, 1969), p. 68. J. Richard Judson, who wrote the catalogue entries for the paintings in this exhibition, states that several of the motifs found in Flinck's painting appear in Rembrandt's works of the late 1630's and early 1640's. He notes that the general arrangement of the figures on the stairs in front

of the rather strange building and the open view into the distance to the right are common in Rembrandt's biblical paintings of this period, such as the Visitation (Detroit Institute of Arts) painted in 1640. He adds that the obelisk appears in Rembrandt's etching, Landscape with Obelisk, and in his painting of the same name (Boston, Isabella Gardner Museum), a work in which, as in Flinck's painting, the "romantic landscape recedes into the space in terms of parallel planes of alternating dark and light zones."

[46]In 1964, this picture was in the possession of the art dealer H. Jungling in The Hague. Its present whereabouts, however, is not known, and the latest reference to it in the information accompanying a photograph of the work in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie is the record of the staff's examination of the painting in 1967. At that time, Flinck's signature and the date 1645 that purportedly appeared on the painting were not decipherable, and it was determined that the picture was possibly the work of Gerrit Willimsz. Horst who studied with Rembrandt between 1635 and 1640.

[47]A photograph of this unlocated painting appears among those that are attributed simply to the school of Rembrandt, no more specific attribution being possible.

[48]The location of this painting by Jacob Willemsz. de Wet is unknown.

[49]A book "with all the works of Heemskerck" appears as item 227 in the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt's possessions; Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, The Rembrandt Documents (New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1979), p. 371. Among Rembrandt's paintings of biblical subjects that may have been inspired by Van Heemskerck's works are David with the Head of Goliath before Saul (Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung) and the Dismissal of Haman (Leningrad, Hermitage). For a discussion of these works in connection with engravings after Van Heemskerck see: Christian Tümpel, "Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandts: Zur Deutung und Interpretation der Bildinhalte," Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 20 (1969):115, and "Ikonographische Beiträge zu Rembrandt: Zur Deutung und Interpretation seiner Historien," Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen, 13 (1968):106-08.

[50]It is worth noting that Rembrandt, like Van Heemskerck, shows the prodigal's tattered garments falling about the lower part of his body in strips. In Van Heemskerck's paintings, one of these strips of material falls across his buttocks and upper right thigh and this strip together with the one that falls across his left shoulder and right hip forms a circular shape. In Rembrandt's picture a similar shape is formed by the material covering

the prodigal's buttocks and the strip that falls across his ankles. It is through this opening that we see the prodigal's thigh. In both cases, the devices are employed to emphasize the prodigal's vulnerability without depicting him naked.

[51]Linnik, "Once More on Rembrandt and Tradition," p. 204.

[52]Tümpel, "Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandt's," p. 117. I should point out, however, that Tumpel has verbally informed me that he independently came to the conclusion that Rembrandt was influenced by Maarten van Heemskerck's painting. J. Bruyn, Rembrandts Keuze van bijbelse Onderwerpen Utrecht: Kunsthistorisch Instituut der Rijksuniversiteit, 1959), p. 16.

[53]As the artist of this painting has not been identified, it is impossible to prove that the picture was painted before Rembrandt's. However, this seems more likely than not, as Rembrandt's style increasingly declined in popularity after the middle of the century. Nonetheless, Rembrandt continued to attract followers in his later years and it is possible that this artist, like Aert de Gelder, was among those drawn to the master.

CHAPTER III

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARABLE AS EXPRESSED IN IMAGES OF THE REPENTANT PRODIGAL SON

In the previous chapter, it has been shown that sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists depicted the return of the prodigal son in a variety of ways and that all of their works differ markedly from those of their predecessors. While some of these differences in the modes of representation employed are undoubtedly the result of general artistic trends, others can be accounted for only by changes that took place in the way in which the parable was interpreted outside the artistic sphere.

Though all theologians agree that the parable of the prodigal son reveals that God is merciful and willing to forgive repentant sinners, they differ in their interpretations of numerous particulars. Prior to the Reformation, theologians wrote lengthy commentaries that eludicate not only the general significance of the parable but the meaning of each individual episode, and these commentaries present, if not precisely the same explanations, analyses that concur on most fundamental points. Following the Reformation, however, there was a great deal of controversy concerning the interpretation of all aspects of the parable, with the exception of its most basic significance mentioned above. As shall be demonstrated, these differences in the way in which the parable was understood had an impact upon the frequency of depiction and the mode of representation of both the parable as a whole and of the episode of the prodigal's return in particular. Furthermore, certain interpretations caused both the return of the prodigal son and the prodigal son himself to be portrayed outside of the parable in other contexts.

Medieval Representations of the Return of the Prodigal Son

Prior to the sixteenth century, the return of the prodigal son appeared in connection either with typologically related subjects or the other episodes from the parable. In both cases, the meaning conveyed by the prodigal's return reflects the influence of the interpretations of Jerome, Ambrose, and/or Tertullian. This can be demonstrated only by an examination of the contexts in which the return of the prodigal son is placed.

With one exception, the pre-sixteenth-century depictions of the parable represent the return of the prodigal son simply as one of a number of more or less equally prominent scenes. All of these works portray the episodes as individual events separated from one another, and all include material not mentioned in the biblical text. Moreover, most render many of the scenes in a distinctly symbolic manner. These features are all employed to convey the underlying meaning of each episode and of the parable as a whole.

Notwithstanding their agreement on the fundamental points of interpretation, the Church Fathers provide slightly different explanations of certain passages. Moreover, Tertullian's discussions of the parable of the prodigal son appear in his treatises on penance, On Penitence and On Purity, and are focused upon those virtues.[1] Consequently, his exegeses are not nearly as exhaustive as those of Jerome and Ambrose. Finally, it must be noted that all three present different levels of interpretation: what Jerome calls the mystical interpretation and the moralizing one. They all state that, on the one hand, the prodigal son represents sinners and that, on the other, he represents the Gentiles. To put it in Jerome's words:

> According to the present parable, we must accept him [the prodigal son] as among the publicans and sinners who were called by the Lord to repentance. But according to the mystical interpretation, it is also a prophecy concerning the future calling of the Gentiles.[2]

Because these interpretations of the parable are extraordinarily complex and because I will have to refer to them repeatedly, it

is necessary to examine them in detail. Therefore, though I will employ the depiction of the parable of the prodigal son that is presented in the Bible moralisée as a vehicle for the examination of the analyses of Ambrose, Jerome, and Tertullian, I will consider many passages of these exegeses that have no bearing on this representation as such.

In the Bible moralisée, the parable of the prodigal son is represented in eight roundels, each of which is followed by an explanatory scene (Plates 2 & 3).[3] These explanatory scenes along with the accompanying text reveal the symbolic significance of each of the events depicted, the first of which shows the father giving the prodigal his share of goods while the elder son looks on. According to the parable, the younger son, having asked for his portion, the father divided his living among his two sons (Luke 15:12).

The two sons are intended to represent two peoples. Tertullian, Ambrose, and Jerome all declare that the prodigal son represents the Gentiles and his elder brother the Jews.[4] Jerome, however, also explains that they are to be seen as sinners and saints, and Ambrose adds that the prodigal signifies repentant sinners, repentant mankind, and that his elder brother represents those who are unreceptive to that which is godly, those who lack an understanding of that which is ecclesiastical.[5] Though Tertullian also defines the prodigal son as simply a sinner, he never explains how we should see the elder brother in this particular context.[6] Finally, all three agree that the father can only represent God.[7]

Like the Church Fathers, the author of the Bible moralisée, reveals that the father is to be understood as God and that the younger son represents the Gentiles. The inscription accompanying the explanatory roundel which follows the depiction of the prodigal son receiving his goods states that God gives the Gentiles their spiritual inheritance.[8] The explanatory scene depicts God handing the Gentiles a bowl of coins marked with crosses which indicate that the gift is spiritual in nature. The non-material nature of the goods is explained by Jerome, the only one of the three who

discusses the specific quality of the portion that the prodigal received. Jerome writes that the goods signify the non-material substance that God gives us all in equal measure: life, reason, thought, and speech. He alleges that these enable us to do as we wish; we are given that free will which distinguishes us from the animals.[9]

The next roundel shows the prodigal son wasting his patrimony by drinking and dicing with harlots. The account of this event in the parable states only that the prodigal son, having received his portion, journeyed to a far country where he wasted his substance in riotous living (Luke 15:13). However, later, the elder brother declares that the prodigal wasted his goods with harlots (Luke 15:30). The depiction of this episode is followed by the explanatory scene that portrays both lovers at a banquet and a man worshipping an idol, the presence of which can be accounted for by the inscription stating that the far country is a land of idolatry.[10]

Tertullian, who does not dwell on this episode, says only that the substance wasted signifies wisdom received from God and that the country is a place far from God.[11] Jerome and Ambrose also state that the country is a place far from God, and Ambrose adds that it is a place of the shadows of death, where man wastes the whole wonderful portion of his nature through carousing.[12] Of the three Church Fathers, however, it is Jerome who explains the sins of the prodigal in a way that most closely corresponds to the explanatory scene. He writes that riotous living is an expression of hostility to God and that it destroys the substance of the Father. Furthermore, he lists idolatry as one of the sins committed by the prodigal that led to his subsequent suffering.[13]

The prodigal's sufferings, illustrated in the next roundel, are described in the parable, wherein it is stated that as a result of having lost everything and of a mighty famine that swept the land, the prodigal son was driven by hunger to work as a swineherd for a citizen of the far country (Luke 15: 14-15). The explanatory scene that follows presents the devil directly beneath the citizen, portrayed in the previous roundel, and includes not only the Gentiles,

according to Vetter, but the Jews who can be identified by the tall hats they wear. This scene, he says, indicates that both the Gentiles and the Jews are enslaved by the devil.[14] That Vetter's analysis is incorrect, is revealed by the accompanying inscription that states that the citizen represents the devil; the prodigal son stands for the Gentiles, and the pigs' draff is to be understood as the errors of the Pharisees.[15] Thus it is clear that the explanatory roundel depicts not all Jews but the Pharisees alone and includes them only as a means of indicating the significance of the pigs' draff.

While this explication of the significance of the pigs' draff does not correspond exactly to any of the meanings given in the exegeses of Tertullian, Ambrose, or Jerome, the statement that the prodigal's service to the citizen signifies the Gentiles' bondage to the devil appears in the works of all three Church Fathers, who also provide interpretations of other aspects of Luke 15:14-15.[16] Tertullian interprets the prodigal's hunger as signifying hunger for truth, which drove him to the devil who in turn sent him to tend swine, where he would not have sufficient food to sustain life.[17]

Ambrose writes that the famine signifies hunger for virtue and good works, while Jerome argues that it reveals that the country is far from God because all places in which men dwell without God are places of famine.[18] Both agree that the pigs' draff, which according to the parable the prodigal wished to eat but no man gave unto him (Luke 15:16), cannot satisfy the prodigal's hunger. In analyses that are similar in spirit to that given in the inscription, Ambrose asserts that the pigs' draff signifies the boastful speech and learning of vain men, and Jerome describes it as secular wisdom, empty of meaning, that leaves one without virtue and hungry for the truth. However, he also adds that the draff can be understood as pleasure that never satisfies but only creates an insatiable appetite for more pleasure.[19]

Before he returned home, an event that is depicted in the next roundel, the prodigal came to himself and remarked that his father's hired servants had an abundance of bread while he was starving.

He then resolved to return to his father, to confess that he had sinned and, no longer worthy to be his father's son, to ask to be made a servant (Luke 15: 17-19). These passages, not discussed by Tertullian, are analyzed in detail by Jerome and Ambrose.

According to Ambrose, the words "came to himself" mean that the prodigal returned to God, because whoever returns to the Lord returns to himself and whoever separates himself from Christ loses himself. These explanations reveal that Ambrose is discussing the prodigal son as representing both the Gentiles, who were ignorant of Christ, and those who leave Christ through sin. Ambrose then devotes several paragraphs to an examination of both the prodigal's reference to his father's servants and of other biblical texts in which servants appear. He explains that the servants who have an abundance of bread are those from Israel who serve not because they wish to do good but because they are desirous of gain, and he contrasts them to the child of God who is moved not by a desire for earthly goods but by the Holy Ghost. This statement is followed by references to a number of biblical texts, including the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16), in the context of which Ambrose writes that the steward in the house of the Father (the kingdom of God) is Christ who wishes to make us worthy as workers even when we appear late.[20]

Having related the parable of the prodigal son to that of the laborers in the vineyard, Ambrose urges the reader to follow the prodigal's example, to confess his sins without fear, recognizing that God is merciful and that Christ will intercede. In addition, he stresses the importance of the prodigal's words "I will arise" (Luke 15:18) by referring to the commands of Paul and Moses:

> Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Ephesians 5:14).
> But as for thee, stand thou here by me...(Deuteronomy 5:31).

These references are made to support his statement that Christ chooses those who stand, and he urges the reader to stand up and hurry to the church where God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost abide.[21]

Like Ambrose, Jerome asserts that the servants represent the Jews who adhere to the law only because they find it advantageous to do so, and he too refers to the passage from Deuteronomy in his commentary on the words "I will arise." Jerome declares that the words are well chosen because in his father's absence the prodigal son had not stood upright, and he declares that while sinners characteristically lie prone, the just stand erect.[22]

Having made the resolutions to return home and to confess his sins to his father, the prodigal acted on them. However, before he reached home his father saw him and, moved by compassion, ran to his son and fell upon his neck. Only then, after his father embraced him, did the prodigal confess that he had sinned against heaven and in his father's sight and was not worthy to be called his father's son (Luke 15:20-21). Tertullian discusses the return of the prodigal son in a manner that is meant both to console the reader and to show him how to behave. He tells the reader that God will receive him even if he has wasted everything:

> He will receive you - precisely because you have come back. He will be happier over your return than over another's self-control, but only if you repent from the bottom of your heart, only if you contrast your hunger with the repletion of your father's servants, only if you abandon the filthy herd of swine, only if you seek out your father, even though he be offended, and say to Him: "Father, I have sinned and I am no longer worthy to be called Thine."[23]

Like Tertullian, Ambrose addresses the reader. He writes that your resolutions spoken inwardly in spirit are heard by the Father who sees you approaching from far away and hurries to you. God's haste represents His foreknowledge, and His embrace signifies His charity. Ambrose then reveals that the father falls on the neck of the one lying on the ground in order to raise him up toward heaven, where he shall seek his maker. Reverting again to address the reader, Ambrose states that Christ falls on your neck to free you from the bonds of servitude and to place on your neck his own sweet yoke. This is a reference to Christ's statement that those who are heavy laden should come to him, and they shall find rest in their souls because His yoke is easy and His burden light (Matthew 11: 28-30).

Ambrose concludes this section of his exegesis with the explanation that Christ falls on your neck because you convert or change your ways.[24]

Jerome's commentary is similar to Ambrose's in many respects, though he relates the prodigal to the reader only once and then in a statement in which he includes himself:

> We come to the Father when we leave off tending swine, according to the saying: "As soon as you return and make lamentation you shall be saved."[25]

Jerome argues that before the prodigal son returned to his "ancient father" by worthy works and sincere repentance, God who is omniscient, "runs forward to his coming and by His Word which took flesh by a virgin, anticipates the return of His younger son."[26] In the next paragraph in which Jerome comments on the statement that the father ran to his son and fell upon his neck, he emphasizes that the prodigal did not earn his redemption. Jerome writes that God, before the sinner confessed, fell upon his neck:

> He assumed a human body-- and... so He placed upon the younger son (by grace rather than because of merit) His light yoke, that is the easy precepts of His commandments.[27]

In the Bible moralisée, where the depiction of the return of the prodigal son shows the prodigal standing before his father, who clasps one of his son's hands, the youth is shown standing in order to demonstrate that he is freed from the bonds of sin. This reflects the interpretations of both Ambrose and Jerome who stress the significance of the prodigal's words "I will arise." Though the father is portrayed holding one of his son's hands rather than falling on his neck, the meaning attributed to this act by Ambrose and Jerome is conveyed in the inscription, which reveals that Christ assumed human form, as a demonstration of the depths of God's love and mercy[28] This meaning is also conveyed in the explanatory roundel in which Christ is represented receiving the Gentiles.

The symbolic scene reflects other aspects of the interpretations of Jerome and Ambrose. Christ not only receives the Gentiles but directs their attention to God in Heaven, in accordance with Ambrose's statement that the sinner is raised up to seek his Father in heaven.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the broken idol in this scene, (that is placed next to the roundel containing the idol worshipper) demonstrates that the Gentiles are no longer bound by sin but, accepting Christ's yoke, convert to Christianity.

That the Gentiles convert to Christianity is underscored in the next symbolic roundel. which depicts the Gentiles being baptized after they have been prepared for the sacrament by members of the Dominican order. This event follows the representation of the prodigal son receiving the ring, robe, and shoes (Plate 3). The inscription states that the ring, robe, and shoes respectively represent faith, baptismal innocence (Taufunschuld), and healing doctrine.[29] The interpretation of these items put forth by the Church Fathers differ only slightly from this explanation and from one another. According to Ambrose, the ring signifies the seal of faith, the robe represents the wedding garment (Matthew 22:2-14), that is the garment of wisdom that clothes the weakness of the body in the strength of spiritual wisdom, and the shoes stand for an understanding of the gospels that provides protection for proper intent and good conduct and that enables one to walk according to the spirit rather than according to the flesh.[30]

Jerome presents the same interpretation of the shoes, and declares that the robe is:

> that robe which Adam had forfeited by sinning, the robe which in another parable is called a wedding garment, that is, the covering of the Holy Spirit, without which no one can attend the banquet of the King.[31]

However, Jerome does not state that the ring signifies the seal of faith but instead interprets it as a sign of likeness to Christ.[32]

Tertullian, who does not discuss the significance of the shoes, like Jerome, defines the robe as that vesture lost by Adam through transgression, which in an earlier passage he explains as the cloak of the Holy Spirit, and like Ambrose, he asserts that the ring seals the pact of faith. However, he adds that the ring was granted after the prodigal had been questioned.[33] This statement, taken in conjunction with an earlier one that explains the ring as the seal of baptism,[34] reveals that the Gentiles, represented by the prodigal

son, undergo conversion to Christianity. Tertullian makes this abundantly clear in the statements that conclude this paragraph and begin the next:

> and so thereafter, he feeds upon the richness of the body of the Lord, I mean the Eucharist.
>
> Here then is the prodigal son. He is one who was never antecedently virtuous. He was a prodigal from the beginning because he was not a Christian from the beginning.[35]

Tertullian's reference to the eucharist is in accordance with the interpretations of the following events in the parable presented by Ambrose and Jerome. Both explain that the fatted calf slaughtered for the banquet represents Christ who is sacrificed for mankind. Jerome writes that the fatted calf that is sacrificed for the benefit of penitents is "the Savior Himself, on whose flesh we feed, whose blood we drink daily."[36] Ambrose's reference to the connection between the banquet and the eucharist, is more explicit. Commenting upon the slaughter of the calf, he writes that the flesh of Christ, abounding in spiritual strength, will be the prodigal's food, after which he will enter into the community of mysteries through sacramental grace.[37]

In keeping with the interpretations of the Church Fathers, the crucifixion of Christ is placed after the depiction of the fatted calf being slaughtered and prepared for the meal and before the representation of the banquet celebration, thus revealing that the killing of the calf represents the crucifixion of Christ, and that the banquet at which the calf is eaten signifies the eucharist. The banquet scene, which includes a number of musicians, is followed by a depiction of the Gentiles standing before a crowned woman who raises her arms toward heaven; she personifies the Church, as is revealed by the accompanying inscription. The text states that the banquet signifies the restoration of the grace of God and that music and song stand for the praise sent by the Church toward heaven on account of the conversion of the Gentiles.[38] Taken together these roundels demonstrate that Christ's sacrifice, commemorated in the eucharist, enables the Gentiles to be reconciled with God, and that this is an occasion for joy.

While in his reference to the eucharist Tertullian only alludes to the banquet celebration, both Ambrose and Jerome discuss the joyful nature of the occasion. In his comments on the verse in which the father orders the calf to be killed and decrees that they should eat and be merry (Luke 15:23), Jerome asserts that the merry-making refers to Christ's explanation of the parable that precedes that of the prodigal son. Here Christ states that there shall be joy before the angels of God when a sinner does penance (Luke 15:10).[39] Then, commenting upon the concluding words of the next verse in the parable of the prodigal son-- "and they began to be merry" (Luke 15:24)--Jerome writes: "This banquet is celebrated daily, daily the Father receives a son. Christ always sacrifices Himself for believers."[40]

Supporting his assertion by a reference to John 4:34 ("Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work"), Ambrose declares that the food is given for the redemption of our sins, for our salvation, and the banquet celebration expresses the Father's joy. His joy reveals, according to Ambrose, that the one who was lost is found and brought back to life. Ambrose explains that the words "is alive again" (Luke 15: 24) signify that through His grace God brings the dead to life, adding that the dead can refer both to penitents and to the Gentiles, whom God chose to bring the Jews to nought.[41] However, the explanation that is most clearly reflected in the symbolic scene and the inscription in the Bible moralisée is Ambrose's statement that the joy occasioned by the sinner's return and expressed in the banquet celebration is the same joy that animates the Father and the Son and that reposes in the foundation of the Church.[42]

The last portion of the parable deals with the behavior of the elder son who returned from the fields while the merrymaking was in progress. As he approached the house he heard music and dancing and asked a servant what these things meant. Upon hearing the reason for the celebration, he became angry and would not enter the house, thereby prompting his father to come out to entreat him. The elder son responded to his father by stating that he, who had

never transgressed his father's commandments, had never been given a kid, and yet a fatted calf has been killed for one who wasted everything with harlots (Luke 15:25-30). To this his father replied:

> Son thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found (Luke 15: 31-32).

Tertullian's discussion of the parable, as has been mentioned, is concerned with the importance of penance. Consequently, he devotes little attention to the elder son's behavior beyond stating that the elder son's envy is meaningful because the Jews, "who certainly should have been with the Father always, begrudged salvation to the Gentiles."[43] Ambrose and Jerome, however, discuss the elder son's behavior at some length. Jerome explains that the elder son is one who is "weighted down by the burden of the law" and that his activities in the field indicate that he is one who is concerned with earthly things and sensual pleasure. The elder son's inquiry as to the cause for the music and dancing, according to Jerome, reveals that Israel cannot understand why God's adoption of the Gentiles is an occasion for joy, and only Israel does not sing God's praise in response to the salvation of sinners.[44] Jerome goes on the explain the elder son's subsequent behavior in the following manner: the elder son's anger and his statement that he had served his father for many years indicate that he adheres to the justice of the law and does not obey the justice of God. Moreover, his assertion that he never transgressed one of his father's commandments is false, because he transgresses his father's commandments by begrudging another his salvation and by boasting of his righteousness, when none are clean in God's sight. He is like the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10-14), who condemns the behavior of another and who mistakenly believes himself to be righteous.[45]

The father does not refute his son's assertion but rather tries to assuage his anger by saying, "thou art ever with me." This indicates that the elder son is bound by the law and that he is with his Father to the end, in accordance with God's statement to David:

> If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgement, if they profane my justices and keep not my commandments, I will visit their iniquities with a rod, and their sins with stripes. But my mercy will I not take away from him.[46]

Mercy is not denied the elder son, who also transgresses God's commandments and is visited with the rod.[47]

Commenting upon the father's words "all that I have is thine," Jerome asks how all God's possessions can belong to the Jews. Following his analysis of the scriptural use of the word all, in which he states that it is often employed to mean not everything but a majority,[48] Jerome makes the following statement:

> Although it must be believed that He denied him nothing, whom He urged to eat the fatted calf."[49]

Thus, in spite of his equation of the elder brother with the Jews, who "are tormented by envy and are unwilling to be saved unless their brother perishes,"[50] Jerome reveals that the elder son is not denied mercy and like his brother is saved.

In his discussion of the last verse of the parable, Jerome alleges that it shows that "we too can live through penance who were dead in sin."[51] He adds that all three parables in Luke 15 contain in their concluding verses the words "was lost and is found" and these demonstrate that "under diverse comparisons there is the same indication of the reception of sinners."[52] Notwithstanding that this sentence concludes Jerome's analysis of the last words of the parable of the prodigal son, his exegesis continues on for several pages.

The next paragraph begins with the following sentences.

> And these indeed are spoken in the person of the Gentile and the Jew. But let us see how the parable may be understood concerning the saint and the sinner in general. And in other respects there is no doubt that they are applicable to the just man. The following is the point at which scruple is felt by the reader: why a just man should begrudge a sinner his salvation and should be so filled with anger that he is moved neither by sympathy for his brother nor by his father's entreaties nor by the rejoicing of the whole house.[53]

To this Jerome replies that the justice of the world is not justice in comparison with God's justice, and even saints may be envious. Only God is capable of absolute mercy and only He is free of sin.[54]

In order to convince the reader, Jerome relates those represented by the elder son and those represented by the prodigal to the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). He argues that the Gentiles are the laborers who are called in the eleventh hour and who receive the same reward that is granted those who were hired first. According to Jerome, all are rewarded with salvation though their labors are diverse,[55] and this comparison between the two parables reveals that the elder son, like the laborers who were hired first, is accorded mercy and is saved.

Ambrose's analysis of the elder son's behavior is similar to Jerome's in many respects. He claims that the elder son's activities in the fields indicate a preoccupation with worldly things, and he too relates the elder son to the Pharisee who because he has observed the letter of the law believes that he is righteous. In addition, Ambrose declares that the elder son should consider how Christ's statement to the elders and priests of the temple applies to him: "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21: 31).[56] In spite of his negative characterization of the elder son who he writes is envious and ignorant of the will of God and therefore remains outside,[57] Ambrose argues that the good Father also desires the elder's salvation and says "thou art ever with me" be it as a Jew in my Law, be it as a righteous one in my community--but also because you abandon your envy. Then follows the conclusion of this commentary in which Ambrose writes: "and all that I have is thine," be it in so far as you as a Jew possess the mysteries of the Old Law, be it in so far as you as one who has been baptized possess the New Law.[58] These statements reveal that Ambrose, like Jerome, interprets the elder son as representing both the Jews and the just and that he too interprets the last verses of the parable to mean that not only the younger but also the elder son will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In accordance with the interpretations of Ambrose and Jerome, the inscription and the final roundel that follow the representation

of the father speaking with his elder son in the Bible moralisée, reveal that the elder son is redeemed. The inscription states that the elder son represents the Jewish people who begrudge the conversion of the Gentiles but who in the end find true faith through the grace of God. This is illustrated in the final roundel that shows Christ receiving the Jews.[59] It is worth noting that Christ receives the Jews in much the same manner as the father receives the prodigal and Christ receives the Gentiles in the seventh and eighth roundels (Plate 2). As has been demonstrated, the return of the prodigal son signifies the conversion of the Gentiles and their liberation from the bondage of sin. Therefore, the resemblance between the depiction of Christ's reception of the Jews and the representation of the return of the prodigal son and Christ's reception of the Gentiles must be both intentional and meant to emphasize that the Jews convert to Christianity.

Of all pre-sixteenth-century depictions of the parable of the prodigal son, the Bible moralisée most explicitly conveys the Church Fathers' explanations of each episode and their belief that the prodigal son and his elder brother represent respectively the Gentiles and the Jews. The parable is clearly presented as an allegory of the fall and redemption of mankind in which it is demonstrated that, alienated from God since the fall, mankind is again reconciled with God through His love expressed in the sacrifice of Christ. Like the Bible moralisée, most pre-sixteenth-century representations of the parable also portray it in keeping with the mystical interpretation put forth by Ambrose and Jerome, according to which the return of the prodigal son represents the conversion of the Gentiles.

With one exception, all pre-sixteenth-century depictions of the prodigal's return show him on his feet, to recall his words, "I will arise" and to signify that the bonds of sin have been broken and that the Gentiles convert to Christianity. That this meaning is conveyed in the Velislav Bible (Plate 4),[60] for example, is indicated by the scenes that follow the prodigal's return: the son receiving the required items and the banquet celebration. In the former, the servants prepare to give the shoes and the ring to the

prodigal, who already wears the robe. The robe resembles a priest's stole and this, combined with the portrayal of the father, who holds a cruciform scepter and blesses his son as he presides over the ceremony, creates the impression that it is the ordination of a priest that is represented. Clearly, this episode is rendered as a ceremony of initiation in order to reveal that the Gentiles convert to Christianity.

Underscoring this meaning is the banquet scene, which also appears as the celebration of a sacrament. Flanked by the prodigal son and a woman in a nun's habit, who personifies the church, the father prepares to cut a loaf of bread. His gesture, the ritualistic appearance of the scene, and the fatted calf, to which the prodigal and a servant point, signify that the Gentiles are redeemed by Christ's sacrifice as commemorated in the Eucharist. As in the Bible moralisée, musicians are included to demonstrate both that the return of one who was lost is an occasion for joy and that the music stands for the praise sent toward heaven by the Church on account of the conversion of the Gentiles.

As no other depictions of the parable include the personification of the Church or show the prodigal's reception of the ring, robe, and shoes as a ceremony of initiation, it is necessary to demonstrate that, prior to the sixteenth century, the prevailing interpretation of the parable was the mystical one presented by Ambrose and Jerome. Only then can we prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that, unless otherwise indicated, the return of the prodigal son signifies first and foremost the conversion of the Gentiles. This can be accomplished by an examination of both medieval doctrine and the Church liturgy.

In the liturgical calendar, the parable of the prodigal son and the story of how Jacob rather than Esau received Isaac's blessing (Genesis 27:6-40) are the texts designated for the Saturday following the second Sunday of Lent. As Vetter suggests, the pairing of these texts reflects the influence of the interpretations of Ambrose and Jerome.[61] The stories are similar; both relate how the younger, seemingly undeserving, son received what the elder believed to be

his by right, while the elder was in the fields serving his father's interests. However, the relationship between Jacob and the prodigal son, on the one hand, and Esau and the prodigal's elder brother, on the other, only becomes meaningful if one keeps the mystical interpretation of the parable in mind. Then it becomes clear that Esau's resentment of the favor accorded Jacob, like the elder brother's anger occasioned by the banquet celebration given the prodigal, signifies the envy of the Jews who begrudge the salvation of the Gentiles but who also will be redeemed in the end.

That the elder sons signify the Jews and the younger represent the Gentiles is made clear in the Concordantia Caritatis, a typologically arranged manuscript compiled by the Cistercian abbot Ulrich von Lilienfeld between 1351 and 1358. This manuscript, organized in accordance with the liturgical calendar, depicts the father embracing the prodigal, while his elder son looks on, beneath which are represented Isaac blessing Jacob in the presence of Esau and Abraham giving Isaac Ishmael's birthright as Ishmael watches.[62] The story of Isaac and Ishmael, like that of Jacob and Esau, reveals that though the younger son is temporarily preferred the elder will find favor in God's sight and the two sons will be reconciled (Genesis 21: 14-20, 25:9 and Genesis 27: 18-40, 33:4). Ulrich von Lilienfeld added the scene of Isaac and Ishmael to the illustrations from the liturgical texts in order to emphasize that the younger and the elder will be reconciled, as is implied in the interpretations of Ambrose and Jerome, and to reveal that the Jews will be reconciled with the non-Jewish peoples, thereby completing the processes of the redemption of mankind. This is the doctrine of reconciliation which, like the liturgy, proves that the mystical interpretation of the parable was the prevailing one. As explained by Verdier:

> The gist of the doctrine of reconciliation is that the elder descent of Abraham, the descent according to the flesh, will be deprived only for a time of its inheritance to the benefit of the younger son - the non-Jewish branch of Mankind. In due time, the reunion of Israel with the Church will sum up the whole process of the Redemption of Man.[63]

In the Goslar Gospels and the windows at Bourges and Chartres (Plates 12, 6 & 5), the parable of the prodigal son is presented in accordance with the doctrine of reconciliation, as is indicated by the elder son seated in harmony with his father and brother at the banquet table. Verdier states that "exegesis and medieval iconography took for granted the reconciliation of the two sons,"[64] and that those who represented the parable never lost sight of the doctrine of reconciliation.[65] The doctrine requires that the parable be understood according to the mystical interpretation of Ambrose and Jerome; thus it is clear that in this context the return of the prodigal son must represent the conversion of the Gentiles.

There are other features in the Goslar Gospels and the windows at Chartres and Bourges that indicate that the parable is intended to convey the mystical interpretation of the biblical text,[66] and it should be noted that the addition of what appears to be purely descriptive detail in the scene of the prodigal's return at both Chartres and Bourges and the presence of narrative action in the latter do not belie the assertion that this episode is symbolically significant. Indeed, the trees are not purely descriptive details; they are added and the father's house, included in the Bible moralisée and the Goslar Gospels, is omitted in order to demonstrate that the father, who saw his son approaching from afar, had compassion and ran to meet him. That the father hastened toward his son is evident in the window at Bourges, where he is shown taking a step forward, with his cloak floating out behind him. The father's action is not simply an enlivening motif anymore than the setting is a mere indication of a concern for textual accuracy; both are employed to emphasize that God is compassionate.[67]

In light of the above, it is evident that the predominant meaning presented in thirteenth and fourteenth-century depictions of the parable was the mystical interpretation. However, that the other interpretation put forth by the Church Fathers, the message that God is merciful and willing to forgive repentant sinners, was not ignored is demonstrated by the scenes with which the return of the

prodigal son is linked in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis. This typologically arranged manuscript originated about 1324 and like the Biblia Pauperum appears to have been developed to aid the lower clergy in the preparation of sermons. It shows the return of the prodigal son along with three representations of penitent sinners, two of which are taken from the Old Testament and the other from the New. They represent Manasses in chains, David before Nathan, and Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet with her tears. In this context, it is obvious that the return of the prodigal son represents the forgiveness of a repentant sinner and not the conversion of the Gentiles, an interpretation that is supported by the accompanying text in which it is stated that one should do penance for the kingdom of the Lord is at hand.[68]

In the fifteenth century, a significant development took place; the prodigal son gradually came to be seen first and foremost as a repentant sinner with whom the reader or viewer was encouraged to identify. This approach can be termed the moralizing interpretation, because when the individual sees himself in the prodigal son, the parable not only serves to console him but shows him how to conduct himself. It warns him of the disastrous consequences of sinful behavior and urges him to humbly confess his sins and repent. While the moralizing interpretation gained greater influence during the fifteenth century, it by no means replaced the mystical one, as can be demonstrated not only by examining the works of art but by turning to two fifteenth-century German editions of the Biblia Pauperum, both of which show the resurrected Christ appearing to His disciples in the center and Joseph reunited with his brothers on one side. The return of the prodigal son appears as the third scene in one of these editions in which an accompanying text explains that in a spiritual sense the son represents the sinner who returns, is received by God with grace, and is restored with all his goods.[69] According to Verdier, the other edition, dated about 1425, shows the prodigal son and his brother kissing, thereby illustrating the words from Psalms 84:11, "Mercy and Truth have met each other; Justice

and Peace have kissed." As he points out, these words are employed by Peter Chrysologus in his fifth sermon on the parable, where they are applied to the return of the prodigal son.[70] Peter Chrysologus states that the father runs out to greet his son, which he explains signifies that when we were sinners Christ died for us, and he adds that the father kissed his son. "When? When mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed.'"[71] He then goes on to elucidate the meaning of this and subsequent episodes in accordance with both the mystical and moralizing interpretation.[72] This, Verdier argues, demonstrates that the scene of the prodigal son and his brother, which as the inscription reveals is dependent upon Peter Chrysologus's exegesis, also conveys both interpretations.[73]

Both interpretations are also presented in two fifteenth-century depictions of the parable. In one of these, the tapestry in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Marburg (Plates 7 & 8), eight episodes from the parable, each surrounded by a paraphrase of the relevant passage in the biblical text, are rendered.[74] Unlike the works discussed thus far, this one includes neither a scene of the reconciliation of the two brothers nor of the father addressing his elder son. The last episode is the banquet celebration which shows the prodigal son seated at the table with his father and mother,[75] while the elder son and a servant stand to either side indicating that the elder son has just discovered the cause for the celebration. His resentment is evident, as he presents a woeful countenance to the viewer and points with disbelief at his joyful father. As Jerome states, Israel cannot understand why God's adoption of the Gentiles is cause for rejoicing. Whether the Jews will submit to God's entreaties and join the celebration as Jerome and Ambrose indicate or whether they will remain outside, as Tertullian contends, is left open to question. Because the prodigal son is shown standing in the scene of his return, signifying that the Gentiles convert to Christianity in keeping with the interpretions of Ambrose and Jerome, it seems likely that the designer is following their explana-

tions which reveal that the Jews will also be redeemed. Nonetheless, this remains unclear.

That the prodigal son is to be understood as representing the Gentiles, in accordance with the mystical interpretation, and sinners, in keeping with the moralizing one, is demonstrated in the elaborate border that enframes the representation of the parable. This depicts the life of man from birth (a baby in its mother's lap, at the left of the upper border) to death (a man in a sick bed below tombs marked by crosses, at the top of the left border). In the corners of the upper border are the Lamb of God and the pelican piercing her side to feed her young, which symbolizes both charity and, like the Lamb of God, the crucifixion of Christ. These images reveal that mankind is redeemed by God's love and the blood of Christ. As Vetter states, the events from the parable are connected with these images and taken together they convey the underlying meaning of the biblical text -- the story of the salvation of mankind.[76]

The moralizing interpretation is conveyed also by the relationship between the scenes in the border and the episodes from the parable. The events from the life of man are included to encourage the viewer to identify with the prodigal son, and in conjunction with the symbolic images they show him that Christ died upon the cross so that he too might be saved. Because the tapestry was placed on the floor in front of the altar when the eucharist was celebrated, Vetter explains that the symbolic scenes remind the individual approaching the altar of the significance of the sacrifice of the mass. He adds that taken as a whole the tapestry can be understood to mean that the life of man will end with a return to God or that man will find himself in a situation, like the one to which the prodigal was brought, that necessitates a return to God. The interpretations of the Church Fathers, Vetter concludes, are still binding in the late Middle Ages, though they are applied in a manner that ties the parable more firmly to human experiences.[77] In other words, the influence of the moralizing interpretation begins to emerge.

In the Brussels tapestries (Plates 9 & 10), as in the Marburg tapestry, it is evident that while the moralizing meaning is presented

the mystical one has not been forgotten. Indeed in this case it is emphasized, and unlike the Marburg tapestry, there can be no question about whether the Jews are among the saved. The elder son, identified by the pitchfork he holds, is included in the return of the prodigal, the last of the scenes representing episodes from the parable, which appears toward the center of the second tapestry (Plates 10 & 11). The second half of this tapestry shows scenes that parallel the episodes of the parable depicted in both tapestries. Verdier, who examines the relationship in detail, links the prodigal's departure with the fall of man, his sojourn in the far country with Adam and Eve and their descendents in the Vale of Tears and in Limbo, and his return with the redemption of mankind portrayed by Adam kneeling before Christ.[78] Thus one perceives that the scenes in the latter half of the second tapestry have been added to convey the mystical interpretation of the parable. In this context, the elder son's presence in the return scene, paired as it is with the redemption of man, indicates that the Jews too will be saved, a meaning that is underscored by a number of features in the return scene itself.

According to Verdier, the trumpet players allude to the doctrine of reconciliation because they resemble allegorical trumpet players in the Crucifixion of the Redeemer, another tapestry woven by the same workshop, in which they represent the Church and the Synagogue standing on Mt. Calvary and Mt. Sinai.[79] In addition, the designer intended to portray the father holding one of the hands of each of his sons. That the father does not hold his elder son's hand but instead grasps his robe is surely the result of the weavers' mistake. Thus it is perfectly clear that in keeping with the established iconographic tradition the Brussels tapestries continue to present as well the mystical interpretation of the parable.

There are, however, a number of unprecedented features and motifs. For example, this is the only pre-sixteenth-century representation of the parable that shows the return of the prodigal son as the last and the most prominent scene. As pointed out in the previous chapter, this scene is extended from the lower to the upper border

in order to separate the New Testament episodes from the following set of images. Furthermore, though the return of the prodigal son is the major event, there are references made to the subsequent episodes: the servant shown placing the robe on the prodigal's back, the musicians, and the elder son.[80] These features demonstrate that the scene is intended to represent not only the return of the prodigal son but the concluding episodes, and this accounts for its prominence.

That the prodigal's return is shown as the main event and that a scene of crucial symbolic significance, the killing of the fatted calf, is omitted can be explained by the program. The presence of Christ before whom Adam kneels in the scene representing the redemption of mankind, which is the counterpart to the final scene, makes the killing of the fatted calf unnecessary because obviously the two scenes are complimentary. Not only do they closely resemble one another, as evinced in the poses of the protagonists, but the inscriptions on the scrolls show that Christ addresses Adam in the words of the prodigal's father, and Adam completes the phrase begun by the prodigal, the confession acknowledging that he has sinned and is no longer worthy to be called his father's son.[81] Thus one understands why the return of the prodigal son is the main event in the final scene; it is the counterpart to the redemption of mankind that is the last of the following set of images. That it should have been selected for distinction is not surprising. It is the pivotal moment in the parable, the moment of return to God, which signifies the conversion of the Gentiles, on the one hand, and the repentance of the sinner, on the other, and in both cases represents the bestowal of God's grace.

While the requirements of the program explain why the prodigal's return appears as the main event in the final scene from the parable and why it is given such prominence, they cannot account for the prodigal's pose. Unlike all other pre-sixteenth-century works, the Brussels tapestries portray the prodigal son not on his feet but on his knees. The pose is employed to stress that the prodigal son is repentant,[82] and this is born out by the words on the scroll

at his feet: "I have sinned."[83] Here then is the first indication that the tapestries present not only the mystical but the moralizing interpretation; the prodigal son is represented as a repentant sinner with whom the viewer is encouraged to identify. While the father's forgiveness of the prodigal is intended to console the viewer, in this context the scenes that precede the prodigal's return are meant to show him how to live in order to be forgiven.

In the first tapestry, the prodigal son is led astray by The World (Mundus) who urges him to leave his father and introduces him to Lust (Luxuria) and other vices. That this can only lead to suffering is shown in the upper right hand corner where the prodigal is stripped of his goods and Hunger (Fames) approaches in the wake of The Wrath of God (Ira Dei), who is shown setting fire to a field of grain. These allegorical figures illustrate the verse in the parable wherein it is stated that a great famine arose and the prodigal began to be in want. However, they also make clear that God is angered by these sinful activities and that such behavior can only lead to misery.

In the second tapestry, the prodigal son, prompted by Hunger, kneels before the citizen who hands him a rod. The presence of Contrition (Contricio), the prodigal's pose, and the rod he is handed indicate that he is chastized by the citizen and made contrite. Clearly, the citizen cannot represent the devil, as the Church Fathers explain, because he serves a beneficial function. Accompanied by Contrition and Hunger, the prodigal is shown among the swine; he endures hardship; he does penance. In the next scene, the prodigal appears in the company of the Seven Virtues, and particularly prominent among them are Penitence (Penetentia), Mercy (Misericordia) and Hope (Spes), who holds a white cloth which the prodigal soaks with his tears. The meaning of these scenes in conjuction with the next one, the return of the prodigal son, is obvious; man is redeemed by his penitence and God's mercy.[84]

In order to present the moralizing interpretation effectively, the designer of the tapestries was forced to turn to sources other than the Church Fathers, who simply convey the moralizing meaning

and do not interpret each episode symbolically in this context. Moreover, he was forced to develop a new iconography because, as has been demonstrated, the vast majority of his predecessors were concerned primarily with the mystical interpretation. Among the possible sources of inspiration are those cited by Verdier: mystery and morality plays based upon the parable, poems and plays that deal with the theme of pilgrimage, and works of art that portray the story of man.[85] Verdier employs all but two of these sources in his analysis of the tapestries. He does not discuss either morality or mystery plays based upon the parable but states that there is good reason to believe that the designer was dependent upon a lost or undiscovered mystery play based on the theme. As justification for this assumption, he points out that the architectural frameworks that enclose some of the scenes resemble the stage sets employed by rhetoricians, and he adds that like the tapestries contemporary plays include a plethora of allegorical figures.[86]

Verdier's assumption is a reasonable one in all but one respect; the lost or undiscovered work is much more likely to be a morality rather than a mystery play. By the late fifteenth century, morality plays were much more frequently performed than were mystery plays, and it is these works that occupied the societies of rhetorians.[87] Furthermore, the moralizing aspect of the tapestries cannot be found in the mystery plays.

Like the designer of the tapestries, the Bruges rhetorician, Robert Lawet, conveys both the mystical and the moralizing interpretation of the parable in Twee schoone schriftuerlicke ende fyguerlicke gheestelicke rhethorycklicke Speelene van sinne vanden verloorene Zoone. Lawet's two plays make up a single work in which the parable of the prodigal son is dramatized and commented upon by allegorical figures, who explain both its mystical and its moralizing meaning to a character named The Inconsolable Sinner (Den Troostlosen Zondare). They show him how to live and comfort him with their explanations, and in the end they are so successful that he changes his name to Well-Consoled Man (Welghetroosten Mensche).[88]

Several of the allegorical figures who appear within the dramatization of the parable, as well as those who comment upon the play, bear the same names as those in the tapestries, and many who do not are given similar names and perform analagous functions.[89] Lawet's plays could not have influenced the tapestries because they were not written until 1583.[90] However, they probably are closely related to the kind of play that might have inspired the designer. As Galama notes, the plays are medieval in character and strike one as being more representative of earlier works than of those written at the same time.[91]

Another work that deserves mention and that may indeed have affected the tapestries is Den Spyghel der Salicheyt van Elckerlijc (The Mirror of Salvation of Everyman), written toward the end of the fifteenth century and first printed in 1495.[92] The play begins with Everyman enjoying himself in the company of the Seven Deadly Sins. His behavior so disgusts God that He send Death to Everyman, and though Death informs him that he may take one companion on the journey he must make, he is deserted by all his former friends.

Alone, Everyman begins his pilgrimage by visiting Good Deeds, a personification of his virtue. She is ill and therefore sends Everyman to Self-Knowledge, who in turn directs him to Confession. Confession informs Everyman that he must patiently endure the scourge of penance, and in due time Good Deeds will return to health. After her recovery, Everyman receives from Self-Knowledge the cloak of repentance that is wet with his tears. Only now is he ready to meet God.

Like Everyman, the prodigal son in Lawet's work and the Brussels tapestries is deserted by those who shared his life of sin, and he is brought to the path that leads to salvation by those sent by God, Fear (Vreese) and Deprivation (Armoe) in Lawet's play, and Hunger who follows the Wrath of God in the tapestries. That Self-Knowledge directs Everyman to Confession reminds one of the parable, which states that the prodigal came to himself and confessed his sins (Luke 15:17-18). Confession's statement that Everyman must

suffer the scourge of penance until his virtue recovers is paralleled in Lawet's play by the prodigal's enduring both Fear's rod and punishing disciple and the company of Deprivation until Good Intention (Den Goeden Wille) appears, and in the tapestries by the first two scenes in the second work. The cloak of repentance that Everyman receives before he is prepared to face God is the white robe that is given the prodigal in Lawet's play by Faith, Hope, and Charity, who join him and Good Intention as they journey home, and who chase away Fear.[93] Kat points out in his comments on Lawet's plays that the prodigal receives the robe before rather than after he returns home, and he states that this deviation from the biblical text was inspired by plays dealing with the theme of conversion or reform (bekerings spelen) such as Elckerlijc.[94] In the tapestries, the prodigal son soaks a white cloth with his tears but does not receive the robe until he returns.

I have discussed the Brussels tapestries in the context of these plays in order to demonstrate that a close relationship exists between works that deal with the parable and those, such as Elckerlijc, that warn one of the dangers of sinful behavior and that emphasize the importance of confession and penance. This relationship is significant because it suggests that the emergence of the influence of the moralizing interpretation of the parable in works of art executed during the second half of the fifteenth century may reflect the development of a broader moralizing trend.

Whether or not this is the case and whether or not, like the Brussels tapestries, the sixteenth-century Netherlandish depictions of the return of the prodigal son, all of which show him on his knees, employ this pose to convey the moralizing meaning of the parable will be considered in the next section. In order to answer this question satisfactorily it will be necessary to examine the return of the prodigal son within the context in which it is depicted and to study these works in light of both sixteenth-century interpretations and dramatizations of the parable.

Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Depictions of the Return of the Prodigal Son: The Impact of the Reformation

Sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the parable of the prodigal son, unlike medieval examples, display a marked concern for narrative continuity, dramatic action, and textual accuracy. With one exception, the only figures and scenes not mentioned in the biblical account that are included are those that contribute to the narrative action and the naturalistic mode of presentation. Furthermore, whereas all but one medieval depiction of the parable portrayed the episodes as more or less equally prominent scenes, now certain episodes are emphasized at the expense of others. All of these changes, as well as the increased popularity of the parable in the visual arts, are the result of new attitudes toward biblical exegesis.

As Bruyn explains, artists began to select biblical subjects on the basis of their moral content rather than for their liturgical or typological significance. Consequently, stories that previously had been depicted infrequently now became popular, and among these were the parables.[95] The artists were influenced by humanists, such as Erasmus and Coornhert, who were raised in the tradition of the Devotio Moderna. Although they did not deny the validity of typological interpretation, these humanists advocated the study of the New Testament as a guide for living one's life, because they believed that man could be perfected by following Christ and living in accordance with His teachings. As a result of this approach, the meaning of any New Testament text came to be seen as lying in its moral content rather than in its typological or liturgical significance.[96] The reformers also contributed to the breakdown of the medieval mode of exegesis, which had had such an impact upon the representation of biblical subjects prior to the sixteenth century. According to Tumpel, Luther and Calvin rejected typological and liturgical exegesis and argued that the real content of the Scriptures is revealed in its literal and historical meaning properly understood in relation to Christ.[97]

In light of these developments, it is clear that the changes that took place in the appearance of the parable were part of a broader stylistic trend influenced by the new attitudes toward biblical exegesis. Moreover, the approaches of both the humanists and the reformers indicate that the parable was no longer presented in accordance with the mystical interpretation, a contention supported by the elimination of the allegorical figures, obtrusive symbols, and non-biblical scenes employed in medieval works to convey this meaning. Instead, the moralizing interpretation that first emerged in depictions of the parable produced during the last half of the fifteenth century was the only one represented. This can be demonstrated by examining some of the sixteenth-century works in relation to the two fifteenth-century tapestries.

In the Marburg tapestry, the prodigal son is given a mother, whose presence completes a normal family unit and facilitates the viewer's identification with the prodigal (Plates 7 & 8).[98] For the same reasons, she appears in both Crispijn van de Passe's and Assuerus van Londerseel's engravings (Plates 38 & 39). The tapestry also contains a scene not mentioned in the parable, the prodigal son chased away by the whores who threaten him with sticks. A related image, the prodigal being stripped by his fickle companions, is included in the Brussels tapestries (Plate 9). These events portrayed in a host of sixteenth-century works, among them the engravings by Philip Galle and Crispijn van de Passe (Plates 26 & 39),[99] are employed to emphasize that the consequences of sinful behavior are immediate and disastrous. The admonition to avoid vice became increasingly important in the sixteenth-century representations, because the viewer, identifying with the prodigal son, saw that in the end the prodigal was forgiven. Consequently, it was necessary to provide a deterrent to sinful behavior. Finally, and most significantly, in the Brussels tapestries (Plates 10 & 11) the prodigal son is portrayed on his knees in order to show that he represents repentant sinners who are forgiven their sins, because God is merciful and because Christ died upon the cross to take away the sins of the

world.[100] All sixteenth-century Netherlandish depictions of the return of the prodigal son also represent the prodigal son kneeling, and one even includes an inscription containing the prodigal's confession of his sins (Plate 14). Thus there can be no doubt that in the Netherlands, during the sixteenth century, the parable of the prodigal son was presented in accordance with the moralizing interpretation.

It is equally evident that the mystical interpretation put forth by Ambrose and Jerome, in keeping with which the prodigal son and his elder brother are explained as signifying the Gentiles and the Jews whose reconciliation completes the process of redemption, no longer affected representations of the parable. Unlike all but one of their predeccessors, sixteenth-century Netherlandish artists include no scenes that refer to the reconcilication of the brothers. Adhering to the biblical text, they leave the elder brother's final actions open to question. Those who portray him show the elder brother speaking with a servant or his father and include no reference to his subsequent behavior (Plates 30, 39 & 40).[101] However, most do not depict the elder brother at all, further evidence that the story is important only in so far as it deals with the forgiveness of a repentant sinner and shows the viewer how to conduct himself. The inscriptions beneath these illustrations, like those on other contemporary illustrations of biblical subjects, simply paraphrase the relevant passages in the text, a practice anticipated in the Marburg tapestry.[102]

The moralizing interpretation also accounts for the prominence given the prodigal son carousing and the return of the prodigal son. These are the only two episodes that are shown not only as major events within every series of prints but also both as the most prominent scene in those depictions that illustrate the parable within a single work and as semi-independent subjects. These episodes in which the prodigal's fortunes undergo a radical change, like the prodigal's departure and tenure as a swineherd which also appear as major events within the series, are both dramatic and pivotal. They are the only ones that are further distinguished, because they

most effectively convey the secular and the religious content of the parable. As Renger has demonstrated, the prodigal's dissipation of his patrimony, which shows him deceived by his companions and which contains a number of prefigurations of imminent poverty, is stressed in order to warn the viewer of the disastrous consequences of sinful behavior.[103] Thus the viewer, identifying with the prodigal, not only sees in the father's loving reception of his son the hope of his own forgiveness and salvation but is admonished to eschew immoral activities.

There can be no question that the return of the prodigal son signifies that God is merciful and willing to forgive repentant sinners. This is the literal meaning of the episode. One must remember that parables are not accounts of actual events but are intended to reveal underlying meanings. Therefore, these meanings constitute the literal interpretations of the texts. That this assessment is correct can be demonstrated by examining the interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son put forth by Calvin and Luther, both of whom advocate literal exegesis. Luther argues that the three parables recounted in Luke 15 all were told to convey the same meaning , console repentant sinners.[104] Calvin also explains the parable of the prodigal son within the context of the rest of the chapter. He states that it confirms the doctrine expressed in the concluding verse of the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:10),[105] which he gives in the following words:

> In like manner, I tell you, there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God over one repenting sinner.[106]

According to Calvin, this doctrine reveals that there is greater joy over the repentance of one sinner than in the perseverance of many righteous men, and he adds that the mercy of God shines more brightly when a sinner, who was destined for destruction, is delivered; the greater joy is occasioned by the unexpected good.[107]

Thus it would appear that Luther and Calvin concur with the moralizing interpretation presented by Ambrose and Jerome. However, unlike Ambrose and Jerome, they do not state that the prodigal's elder brother can be seen as representing the just who will abandon

their envy.[108] Instead, they relate the elder brother to those who murmured at Christ's reception of sinners and publicans (Luke 15:2), the Pharisees and the scribes. Calvin states that he represents the scribes and that, like them, he falsely boasts of his obedience and pretends to be virtuous. Commenting upon the last portion of the parable, Calvin writes that the elder brother, who is grieved by the rejoicing that follows the prodigal's return, should not be offended at the expression of God's joy,[109] and in the last sentence he condemns the elder brother's behavior and states: "it is wicked hardness of heart not to rejoice, when we see our brethren returned to life."[110]

In sermons preached in 1522 and 1524 on the whole of Luke 15, Luther asserts that the prodigal son and his brother represent the two groups of people to whom Christ told the parables, the sinners and the Pharisees. In addition, in the later sermon he explains that the elder brother is also a model for monks and papists and that penance, confession, and pilgrimages are foolish and meaningless.[111] Luther attacks Catholic practices and the Catholics themselves, whom he equates with the elder brother, to underscore his contention that man is saved by grace, not by merit. He makes this abundantly clear in a sermon written in 1533 on the first of the three parables in Luke 15 which, as has been stated, he interprets as conveying the same meaning as the parable of the prodigal son. According to Luther, the parable of the lost sheep contains the true Christian doctrine of grace and the forgiveness of sins, as opposed to the doctrine of works and the law, and he argues that through baptism and Christ's blood we are freed from all works, saved by pure grace and mercy.[112]

Like Luther, Calvin, whose commentary on the parable of the prodigal son was first published in 1558, insists that man is redeemed by grace alone:

> It is wretched sophistry to infer from this, that the grace of God is not exhibited to sinners until they anticipate it by their repentance . . . ; it is wrong to infer from this, that repentance, which is the gift of God, is yielded by men from their own movement of their heart.[113]

Calvin argues that it is God who causes man to change his sinful ways, acknowledge his sins, and repent. He explains that man continues to indulge in sinful behavior unless pressed with difficulties, and therefore God sends him miseries to invite him to repentance. Furthermore, it is hope of a better condition that prompts man to repent, and the beginning of repentance is an acknowledgment of God's mercy that excites hope. Calvin then points out, in his comments on the prodigal's confession of his sins, that conviction of sin accompanied by grief and shame is another branch of repentance, for whoever does not perceive his sins and is not grieved by them will never return to the path of duty.[114] Calvin continues:

> Displeasure with sin must go before repentance . . . . Next follows confession, not such a one as the Pope has contrived, but one by which the son appeases his offended father; for this humility is absolutely necessary in order to obtain forgiveness of sins.[115]

According to Calvin, change, confession, and repentance are necessary before one can be forgiven or saved, but these are not performed of one's own volition; rather, they are the results of grace, of God's actions. Luther also argues that man must feel his sins, suffer sincerely, wish to be free of the same, and heartfeltly repent. However, the credit for his good actions is not his but Christ's. In his sermon on the parable of the lost sheep, he states that man's works and piety count for nothing; he is redeemed by the works of Christ, who died to give us eternal life. We do not walk on our own path but are carried on our shepherd's (Christ's) neck.[116] This is also made clear in his sermon on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10-14), in which Luther explains that good works are a sign of faith, the working of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit within one's heart, as is demonstrated by the publican who praises God for His mercy and who repents. If faith, which is a gift of God, is there, works will follow.[117]

Thus one perceives that Luther and Calvin diverge from the moralizing interpretation presented by Ambrose and Jerome not only in their analysis of the elder son's behavior and significance but in their explanation of why the prodigal is forgiven and saved.

Ambrose argues that one must first change one's ways, as does Jerome, who adds that one must also "make lamentation." The implication in both these exegeses is that these are actions that one makes of one's own accord. This implication is strengthened by the emphasis both place upon the prodigal's words," I will arise," which they explain as revealing that he resolved to return to God.[118] There is no indication that this is anything but an act of free will. Tertullian, who unlike Ambrose and Jerome, does not discuss the elder son in the context of the moralizing interpretation, also stresses that one must of one's own volition cease sinning, acknowledge one's fault, and sincerely repent.[119]

Luther, Calvin, and the Church Fathers agree that the return of the prodigal son signifies the forgiveness and redemption of repentant sinners, and all believe that to be forgiven one must confess one's sins and heartfeltly repent. The disputed point is whether grace is bestowed prior to the performance of these requirements or whether these actions are the result of grace. All sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the return of the prodigal son portray the youth on his knees in order to reveal that he repents, but within the naturalistic mode of depiction it is impossible to determine if he does so of his own accord or if God has brought him to repentance. Therefore, it is necessary to examine briefly some dramatizations of the parable to discover if there are other features that are employed to convey a sectarian interpretation of the parable.

The parable of the prodigal son was a favorite theme in northern European drama during the sixteenth century for two reasons: it could be easily employed to castigate immoral behavior, a major concern of the rhetoricians and other playwrights, and it could be easily adapted to serve as a vehicle for religious propaganda. While the rhetoricians seem to have dramatized the parable in order to present the moralizing interpretation and specifically to condemn sinful activities,[120] other playwrights also utilized it to argue the validity of sectarian beliefs.

Though the parable was dramatized prior to the Reformation, it was only after the advent of the Reformation that it enjoyed great popularity. Of the three plays designated by Kat as the pioneering dramas, two present Lutheran interpretations, while the third is a pre-Reformation work.[121] The last is Asotus, written by Macropedius (Joris Langheveldt), a North Brabantine Jeronymite, in 1507. In keeping with Jerome's exegesis, Macropedius reveals that the elder son finally acquiesces to his father's entreaties and joins the banquet celebration. Moreover, like Jerome, who compares the elder son to the uncharitable Pharisee who mistakenly believes himself to be righteous (Luke 18:10-14), he initially portrays the elder son as a despicable individual.[122] As Kat points out, this distinguishes Asotus from post-Reformation Catholic dramatizations of the parable, in which the elder son is presented as a more sympathetic character,[123] no doubt in response to Protestant works in which the elder son represents Catholics, who trust in the efficacy of works, and consequently is vilified.

Like Asotus, Acolastus, written by Gulielmus Gnapheus (Willem de Volder) in 1529, is a Latin school drama modelled on the works of Plautus and Terence, and both extensively treat the prodigal's sinful life in order to ridicule folly and vice and to warn of their disastrous consequences.[124] Gnapheus, however, employs the parable to argue the validity of Lutheran beliefs, and the first printing, in 1537, of Asotus may have been motivated by a Catholic need to respond to the extraordinary success of Acolastus, which was printed no less than forty-seven times in a variety of languages between 1529, when it was first performed in The Hague, and 1585.[125] Gnapheus uses the story of the prodigal son not to attack Catholic beliefs and practices but only to show that man is saved by grace alone, and perhaps for this reason, he eliminates the elder son.[126]

The play tells how the prodigal son, Acolastus, who suffers from pride, self-love, and a mistaken belief that he is self-sufficient, fails to acknowledge his father's wisdom and benevolence and insists on taking his goods and leaving home. He then journeys

to a far country where he succumbs to the flattery and pleasures provided by deceitful companions, who rob him of everything. Suffering from poverty and self-reproach brought on by a consciousness of the magnitude of his sins, he sinks into despair.[127] How he finds the strength to return to his father, Perlargus, is indicated in the following scene in which Acolastus appears on one side of the stage and his father, speaking with his friend and advisor, Eubulus, stands at the other.

Acolastus: It's all up with me, unless some kind of deus ex machina puts in an appearance. For consciousness of my sin is destroying me.

Pelargus: Come, I give no thought now to the evils he has committed. On the contrary, I am more concerned, Eubulus, to bestow honour upon the dishonored, rescue him who is lost, and bring the dead to life. This is my prayer.

Eubulus: Now you are really behaving in a manner that is worthy of you!

Acolastus: How strange! Suddenly I find myself inspired by a belief that my father is benign, generous, forgiving and affectionate; whence there dawns hope of forgiveness, so that I may lift up my head . . . . I will arise and straightaway seek my father's court, regardless of my filthy condition. I'll do it.[128]

Acolastus then goes to his father, kneels before him, and confesses: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son."[129] Pelargus rejoices and calls the servants to fulfill his commands, after which an epilogue is delivered in which the audience is informed that it has seen "how salvation is procured for fallen man" and told that this teaches the depths of the compassion of the Heavenly Father, who never reproaches his son but gladly welcomes him and causes the sound of celebration to resound through the whole house.[130] The epilogue concludes:

> We summon all of you who are present here to this same joy, if only you will acknowledge your sins and come to your senses; and we promise that like the Prodigal Son you will receive your Father's forgiveness.[131]

The Lutheran content of Acolastus is discussed at length by Atkinson,[132] but in light of the above it is clear that, in keeping with the Protestant interpretation, the prodigal son is saved not by virtue of his own actions but by God. Acolastus finds the power to return home only when God inspires him with hope and the belief that He is merciful. The means that Gnapheus employs, however, cannot be utilized by an artist unless he were to resort to symbols, allegorical figures, and/or interpretive inscriptions.

De Parabell vam vorlern Szohn, the third of the pioneering plays, was written by the Lutheran Burchard Waldis and first performed at Riga during carnival in 1527.[133] This German play is worth considering because the dramas written in Germany and the Netherlands influenced one another and, as Kat states, following the three pioneering works there was a great deal of plagiarism.[134] Unlike Gnapheus, Waldis repeatedly attacks Catholic beliefs and practices, as is evident in the introductory speech delivered by a narrator, who thereafter periodically takes the stage to explain the significance of certain events. At the beginning, the narrator declares that whoever doubts that man is saved by grace alone will find it proven in this drama, and he attacks the pope for teaching that works can help one to achieve salvation.[135]

Following the first act, in which the prodigal son takes his portion, leaves home, wastes his patrimony with whores and false friends, and ends up as a swineherd, the narrator explains the events in accordance with the Lutheran interpretation and reveals that the elder son represents those who believe in justification by works, while the prodigal signifies those who believe in justification by faith.[136] After the second act, in which the subsequent portion of the parable in dramatized in accordance with the biblical account, the audience is informed that only those who turn to God and put their trust in Him will be saved and that the envious elder son steadfastly refuses to succumb to his father's entreaties. Finally, an additional scene that is not part of the biblical text is employed to underscore just how despicable the elder son is, a scene presumably

inspired by either Ambrose's or Jerome's equation of the elder son with the Pharisee.[137] It presents an encounter between the elder son and the innkeeper which is a re-enactment of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, in the concluding verse of which (Luke 18:14) Christ states:

> I say unto you, This man [the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The innkeeper states that he now perceives the error of his ways and expresses a desire to be instructed in the true faith. The elder son then enters and thanks God that he is not such a one as his brother or this innkeeper. The latter, hearing these words, humbly begs for grace. Once again the narrator appears and explains the scene. He describes the elder son as a pious son of the Catholic Church and states that the scene, like the parable of the Pharisee and the publican on which it is based, reveals that whoever raises himself on earth shall be brought down by God and whoever belittles himself God shall raise up.[138]

Apparently, Waldis's play enjoyed sufficient popularity to warrant a Catholic response. In 1537, Hans Salat reworked it in order to present the argument that there is no grace without merit.[139] His play, Eyn Parabel oder Glichnuss uss dem Evangelio Luce 15 . . . , is one of the few written by Catholics in response to the popular Lutheran dramas.[140] As Kat's examination of the sixteenth-century nothern European dramatizations of the parable suggests, the vast majority present the Protestant viewpoint.[141]

While Catholic playwrights portray the elder son as a sympathetic character and the Protestant ones vilify him, this information is of little value when one attempts to determine whether a print or painting conveys a sectarian interpretation. As has been demonstrated, sixteenth-century Netherlandish depictions, with one exception, adhere closely to the account of the parable and do not add explanatory scenes. Consequently, as the Bible leaves the elder son's subsequent behavior open to question, artists, who did not

wish to diverge from the general trend favoring textual accuracy, were unable to show whether he eventually submitted to his father's entreaties or whether he remained angry and stubbornly refused to join the banquet celebration. The majority of the artists left him out of the picture altogether, which only indicates that they focused attention on the prodigal son. Certainly, it would be a mistake to assume that such works present a Protestant viewpoint simply because the elder son is not present in the popular Lutheran drama Acolastus.

Having examined the differences between the Protestant explanation of the parable's significance and the moralizing interpretation put forth by the Church Fathers and the basic means employed to convey both in dramatic productions, one can now attempt to determine whether or not artists, like playwrights, utilized the parable as a vehicle for religious propaganda. The exceptional representation, Cornelis Anthonisz.'s series of six woodcuts is the logical starting point, for it includes interpretive features (Plates 19-24). This work, printed in 1541,[142] contains allegorical figures, symbols, and explanatory scenes derived from a variety of sources.

It is likely that Anthonisz. was familiar with Acolastus; four of the woodcuts include elements that appear to have been inspired by the Lutheran drama.[143] The relationship is particularly evident in the fourth print of the series, in which the prodigal son appears at the pigs' trough, where he has been sent by Disease (Morbus), who is shown in the background enthroned in the Synagogue of Satan (Synagoga Sathanae). Surrounding the dejected prodigal, who listlessly feeds himself with the contents of the trough, are War (Bellum), Hunger (Fames), Disease, appearing a second time, and Despair (Desperatio), who cries out as she stabs herself, tears out her hair, and is attacked by a snake labeled Bite of Conscience (Morbus Conscientiae). In the left foreground, hell is represented by a monster (Infernus) with gaping jaws, by which the Devil (Diabolo) is seated as he holds the skull of Death (Mors) in one hand.

These figures and features representing the torments endured by the prodigal son recall Acolastus's description of his suffering

while he is among the pigs. He states that he has no choice but to eat the pigs' husks, because he cannot extricate himself from this disgusting condition but can only sink more deeply into the filth. He wonders if death might offer him something better, explains that he is tortured by his bad conscience, and worries that he may be haunted foreover by his sins.[144] His lament continues:

> The stories that are told of hell are myths, all of them, if I myself am not now truly experiencing the torments of that place. I am scalded, I am eaten up by self-reproach--yes, I call down curses on myself. I am one of the unjust for whom hell justly yawns . . . . And then on top of all this there is the unbearable hunger . . . .[145]

Like Acolastus, the prodigal son in Anthonisz.'s print is tormented by a bad conscience, sees the mouth of hell, contemplates death, and suffers from hunger and incapacitating despair. He has lost all hope and therefore makes no attempt to free himself from his filthy condition but eats the husks out of the trough labelled Leven of the Pharisees (Fermentum Pharisaeorum). Clearly he will receive no benefit from eating the contents of such a trough but will remain bound to the devil and tortured by an awareness of his sins unless God aids him. As Acolastus states: "Its all up with me, unless some kind of deus ex machina puts in an appearance." This sentiment is voiced by the wise counselor, Eubulus, elsewhere in Acolastus where he informs Pelargus that God is the supreme power in the universe, and only He can reclaim his son.[146]

That it is God who leads man from sin to hope and repentance, as Luther and Calvin assert, is evinced in the woodcut by the two hands holding an orb and a flail labelled Divine Wrath (Ultio Divina).[147] As Calvin states, man continues to sin until God sends him miseries to press upon him and invite him to repentance. In the following woodcut, the return of the prodigal son, it is revealed that God brings the sinner to hope and repentance (Plate 23). The prodigal son is shown kneeling before his father in the presence of Faith (Fides), Repentance (Penetentia), Hope, (Spes), Truth (Veritas) and Love (Dilectio). Repentance crushes Desperate Conscience (Desperata Conscientia) underfoot and points to the blazing

sun that bears the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words for God, thereby revealing that God reclaims the sinner and grants him repentance, hope, and faith. The presence of Love and of Truth, who holds an open book, presumably the Bible, demonstrates that God forgives the sinner because He is charitable, the truth of which is found in the Scriptures.

The final print of the series underscores the Protestant interpretation. Here the prodigal son, attired in the ring, robe, and shoes that Love holds for him in the previous work, embraces Peace (Pax), while Justice (Justicia), Joy (Laeticia), and Constancy (Constantia) stand by. Beneath an archway, to the left behind Justice, the father addresses his elder son labelled Jewish People (Gens Judaica). The designation, Jewish People, does not belie the Protestant interpretation. Luther refers to the elder son as representing the Pharisees, and Calvin concedes that those who believe that he signifies the Jews have good reason for doing so. However, he adds that they do not sufficiently attend to the whole passage, which indicates that Christ responded to the murmuring of the scribes.[148] Not only the scribes but the Pharisees murmured at Christ's association with sinners, and thus the elder son must represent both. As the Pharisees are Jews, Anthonisz. may have decided to label the elder son Jewish People for this reason. In any case, the designation is utilized to demonstrate that the elder son adheres to the justice of the law and fails to recognize that Christ has come to take away the sins of the world. He is shown turning his back on Justice and standing beneath the wrathful countenance of the sun. The sun represents God, as it did in the previous print, but here it signifies the wrathful God of the Old Testament. The Trinity is completed by the dove of the Holy Spirit above the prodigal's head, and the crucified Christ, over the altar in the church interior to the right.

The Holy Spirit, above the prodigal son, is included to show, in keeping with Luther's statement, that good actions stem from the Word of God and the workings of the Holy Spirit within one's heart.[149] These enable man to follow the path of Christ, and the

way to Christ, to salvation, is represented by the sacraments of baptism and communion celebrated in the church interior. These are the only sacraments accepted by Protestants, and their presence reveals that, in Luther's words, "we are only through baptism and Christ's blood freed from all works, justified by pure grace and mercy."[150]

As has been demonstrated, Anthonisz. presents the Protestant belief that God leads man from sin to hope and repentance, and shows that His love is so great that He gave His only son to die upon the cross in order to redeem man, to free him from works and bestow grace upon him. However, with the exception of Acolastus, no sources for Anthonisz.'s symbols and allegorical figures have been cited. Certainly he invented some in order to convey the Protestant interpretation, but others are derived from an analysis of the biblical text contained in a book printed about 1540 in Antwerp (hereafter referred to simply as the "commentary").[151] This commentary contains many of the unique features employed by Anthonisz. to attack Catholic beliefs and practices, such as pilgrimages, which Luther calls foolish and meaningless in one of his sermons on the parable of the prodigal son.

For example, in the third woodcut, the prodigal is attacked by Poverty (Paupertas) and Heresy (Haersis) and is forced toward Superstition (Superstitio), who is dressed like one making a pilgrimage to St. James (Plate 21).[152] She directs him to the Synagogue of Satan in which Disease is enthroned. This print illustrates the passage in the commentary in which the prodigal son is described as being completely depraved and incapable of leaving his sinful state, "unless God in His Grace strikes him with hunger, want, and poverty."[153] Though forced to abandon his worldly pleasures, the prodigal does not cease to sin but merely exchanges one form of vice for another. As the commentator points out, once the youth is deserted by his companions he becomes "dependent upon a citizen of the land of darkness, who is from the Synagogue of Satan."[154]

Anthonisz. portrays Heresy, rather than personifications of want and hunger, as the figure, who along with Poverty, assails

the prodigal son, and further diverges from the commentary by adding Superstition. He includes Superstition in the guise of a pilgrim in order to emphasize that Catholic practices such as pilgrimages do not aid one but rather lead one away from the true path. This is precisely the path that the prodigal avoided, according to the commentator, who explains that the prodigal was speedily reconciled with his father, because he went directly to him instead of making pilgrimages to Rome and St. James.[155] He urges the reader to follow the example of the prodigal son and to go not to the servants, in other words the priests, but to the father.[156]

Obviously Anthonisz. depicts the prodigal following exactly the wrong course of action to warn of the dangers inherent in it. Not only are pilgrimages to St. James revealed to be superstitious practices, but it is demonstrated that they lead to the devil. Superstition directs the prodigal to the Synagogue of Satan, and Disease enthroned within sends the prodigal to tend swine under the domination of the Devil. Moreover, Disease wears the three-tiered papal tiara indicating that he represents the pope, presented here as the devil's minion, who leads people to hell.[157]

In the following print, which reveals the consequences of such superstitious, Catholic practices, the influence of the commentary is again apparent. The commentator argues that one cannot force oneself to true repentance by dwelling on one's sins; only God can bring one to this state, and a pre-occupation with one's transgressions leads only to an illusion of remorse, an illusion that is merely a satanic simulation.[158] That the prodigal is obsessed by his sins and is experiencing an illusion of remorse is suggested by the presence of the Synagogue of Satan in the background. However, his sufferings are real and are brought about by the Wrath of God, and this, as has been demonstrated, invites the prodigal to true repentance and hope. This is revealed in the next woodcut, where Repentance, Hope, and the other Virtues stand beneath the sun, representing God, which reveals, in accordance with the commentary, that only God can drive out vice and instill virtue (Plate 23).[159]

In the final print, the elder son appears as one who adheres to the justice of the law, which the commentator describes as the justice of the flesh (Plate 24). He writes that the elder son and those like him are incapable of perceiving the distinction between the justice of the flesh and the justice of God. They will never be guests of the Holy Spirit, because they never feel the true joy of the Holy Spirit in their consciences. They resent the favourable treatment of those they deem undeserving, believe themselves to be justified, and boast of their holiness and good deeds.[160] The significance of the elder son's behavior is explained by the commentator:

> See how the false holy one envy it that the sinners are so easily received in grace saying: One must first earn grace with good works, fasting, praying et cetera. The flesh cannot understand that the merit of man is less than nothing. We must receive the grace and gifts of God only through the goodness of God and the merit of Christ.[161]

In keeping with the commentary, Anthonisz. distinguishes the prodigal son from his elder brother and shows him as a guest of the Holy Spirit, whose joy he experiences. In addition, in the last two prints, he makes clear that the prodigal is redeemed by God's goodness and Christ's merit.

While it is evident that the symbols, allegorical figures, and explanatory scenes are derived from a Lutheran drama and a Protestant commentary and that Anthonisz. employs them to communicate a sectarian interpretation of the parable, some of them also could have been inspired by the exegeses of Ambrose and Jerome, and these convey meanings acceptable to Catholics as well as Protestants. For example, the presence of the devil in the fourth print is in accordance with the Church Fathers' explanation that this episode signifies bondage to the devil (PLate 22).[162] More significantly, the final print shows that the killing of the fatted calf symbolizes the crucifixion of Christ, and it illustrates Jerome's and Ambrose's interpretation of the banquet (Plate 24).[163] The banquet, that in all but one pre-sixteenth-century representations is rendered as the final or the penultimate scene from the parable, is not depicted

by Anthonisz., who includes instead the celebration of the eucharist and the figure representing joy in order to convey its significance. That the viewer is expected to understand that these features are portrayed in place of the banquet is also suggested by the dove of the Holy Spirit that appears above the prodigal, who wears the robe. As Jerome and Ambrose state, the robe reveals that he is attired in the covering of the Holy Spirit, which is required if one is to attend the banquet of the king.[164] In the context of the series, which presents the parable in adherence with the Protestant interpretation, this is a sign of faith, a sign that he has the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in his heart. Moreover, it is clear that the slaughtering of the fatted calf represents the crucifixion of Christ. The two are equated visually; both appear in a landscape visible through an archway.

Though neither Luther nor Calvin specifically state that the killing of the calf signifies Christ, other Protestant theologians do.[165] Furthermore, this explication is in keeping with their understanding of the parable's meaning. While Luther does not discuss the banquet celebration, Calvin reveals that it represents God's joy at the return of one who was lost, and as both argue that the three parables in Luke 15, the first two of which conclude with statements that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:9 & 10), convey the same significance, its meaning is implicit in their interpretation.

This is of the utmost importance, because the killing of the fatted calf (or the calf being led to slaughter) and the banquet celebration appear in most sixteenth-century Netherlandish depictions of the parable. Of those artists who represented the parable in series of prints, only Hans Bol includes neither, while in his woodcut series Van Heemskerck portrays only the killing of the calf (Plates 32 & 31). Only Anthonisz. and Philip Galle, who made a set of engravings after designs by Van Heemskerck, add at least one print that portrays an episode subsequent to the prodigal's return; the rest emphasize the return of the prodigal son by rendering it as

the major event in the final image. That these artists include the killing of the calf and the banquet celebration as auxiliary scenes reveals that they continued to be seen as significant (Plates 38, 39, 40 & 42). Their presence demonstrates that the sinner is forgiven due to Christ's sacrifice and that his repentance is an occasion for joy,[166] meanings that convey a non-sectarian interpretation of the parable.

In Galle's engravings after Van Heemskerck, the return of the prodigal son, the fourth of six prints, bears an inscription that states that the prodigal, moved by repentance, finally returns to his father, who receives him with grace (Plate 28). This is followed by a depiction of the slaughtered calf, the dance, and the banquet, that appears again in the final print (Plates 29 & 30). Although the inscription states only that the father gives the prodigal new clothing (depicted in the previous print), slaughters a calf, and all rejoice, the prominence given the slaughtered calf and the way it is hung on a cross beam underscores that this signifies the crucifixion of Christ.

Van Heemskerck also includes the calf and the banquet in his painting of 1559, the Return of the Prodigal Son (Plate 18). Here the preparations for the slaughtering of the calf are suggestive of the sacrificial significance of the event. For example, one of those who will participate washes his hands in the huge fountain. However, only the presence of the horn-playing musician provides any indication that the banquet, shown on the terrace, signifies that the return and repentance of a sinner is cause for rejoicing. Van Heemskerck merely alludes to the joyful character of this scene, placed unusually close to the main event, because an exuberant renditon of it would both distract the viewer's attention from the father's reception of his son and disturb the solemn mood of the picture. As the rendition is subdued, the viewer's attention remains focused upon the moving portrayal of the father's heartfelt compassion for his sincerely repentant son, which emphasizes God's great love and mercy and evokes a reverential response from the viewer.

Like Van Heemskerck's painting, the other semi-independent depictions of the return of the prodigal son include the fatted calf and, with the exception of Lucas van Leyden's engraving (Plate 15), represent the banquet celebration. Both Massys and Bol also show the banquet taking place on a terrace to the accompaniment of music provided by horn-playing musicians (Plates 16 & 17). In these works, however, the subsidiary scene is so far removed from the prodigal's return that there is no danger of its detracting attention from the father's reception of his son.

That the fatted calf and the banquet continued to be viewed as conveying the meanings attributed to them by Ambrose and Jerome can be further demonstrated by examining Gosewijn van der Weyden's 1526 triptych, in the central panel of which the two scenes appear behind the foreground representation of the return of the prodigal son (Plate 13). Here the road that the prodigal travelled to return to his father is shown as a winding path that leads over a bridge, directly in front of which is the fatted calf being led to slaughter. As Renger mentions, several sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the parable that give prominence to the prodigal son carousing show the father receiving his son on a bridge, and one depicts a bridge connecting the scene of the prodigal among the swine with a land mass leading to a city dominated by a cathedral and including several church spires.[167] Renger points out that a bridge spanning a river and leading to a city is one of the symbols for Christ in Picinellus's Mundus Symbolicus, first printed in 1653, in which the text accompanying this image cites John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The bridge on which the father receives his son, adds Renger, signifies the salvation of the sinner and is employed in place of the churches or church-like palaces that in other works represent God's grace.[168]

The bridge, however, is not in fact employed in place of the churches and church-like palaces to signify God's grace, as Renger contends. Rather it represents that the sinner is redeemed by Christ's sacrifice and is utilized instead of the killing of the calf. None

of the works he mentions includes the slaughtering of the fatted calf, and the placement of the calf directly in front of the bridge on the path in Van der Weyden's triptych reveals, in accordance with John 14:6, that the only way to the Father is through Christ. Moreover, though none of the works that show the father receiving his son on the bridge contains church-like palaces, all depict the father's residence, which Johannes Meder, in sermons printed in 1495 and several times thereafter, equates with the Church. This interpretation is no doubt inspired by the exegeses of the Church Fathers with which Meder was familiar;[169] they explain the banquet as the celebration of the eucharist, thereby implying that the father's residence is the Church.[170]

The father's residence is equated with the Church in both Dürer's late fifteenth-century engraving of the repentant prodigal among the swine and in the work mentioned above, in which a bridge connects the pigs' sty to a city containing a cathedral and several churches. In this painting (Paris, Musée Carnevalet), executed by a Flemish artist during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, as in Dürer's engraving, the prodigal son on his knees among the swine clasps his hands in prayer and gazes at the church. Vetter who discusses Dürer's engraving points out that the church is employed to signify the father's residence in accordance with Meder's explanation.[171] In all the sixteenth-century Netherlandish works that contain the banquet celebration, it takes place on the terrace of an elaborate palace, which, in light of the above, represents the Church and heaven; for as long as the father is understood as God his residence is both the Church and heaven. Consequently, the banquet must signify both the eucharist and the joy occasioned in heaven when a sinner repents, interpretations acceptable to Protestants and Catholics alike. The latter meaning certainly must have been perceived by everyone, because the Church Fathers, Luther, and Calvin, all discuss the parable in the context of the two preceding parables in Luke 15, both of which conclude with the statements that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7 & 10). Furthermore, as the banquet is never depicted without the fatted

calf in the vicinity, it is unlikely that its eucharistic significance was overlooked.

Notwithstanding that the calf and the banquet remained significant, the items called for by the father, with the possible exception of the robe, did not. Commenting upon the words "bring out the best robe," Calvin writes:

> Although in parables (as we have frequently observed) it would be idle to follow out every minute circumstance, yet it will be no violence to the literal meaning, if we say, that our heavenly Father not only pardons our sins in such a manner as to bury remembrance of them, but even restores those gifts of which we had been deprived; as on the other hand by taking them from us, he chastises our ingratitude in order to make us feel ashamed at the reproach and disgrace of our nakedness.[172]

Calvin does not explain what the gifts are that we had lost. However, earlier in the commentary he describes the prodigal's state after he lost everything as being "destitute of sound judgement" and hungry because he did not know how to "use in moderation an abundant supply of the best bread."[173] The best bread must refer to the eucharist, to the benefit of Christ's sacrifice, and sound judgement perhaps refers to the workings of the Holy Spirit that Luther states enable one to do good works.[174] Thus it would seem that Calvin intends the robe to signify that God having forgiven our sins helps us to reform and leads us to salvation. As Meder states in his sermons, the prodigal properly attired enters his father's house, the place of eternal bliss.[175]

The meanings of the ring, robe, and shoes are given by the Church Fathers in the context of the mystical interpretation of the parable. However, both Ambrose and Jerome state that the robe is the divine covering without which one cannot attend the banquet of the king, without which one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.[176] In light of the interpretations of Ambrose, Jerome, and Calvin, it is possible to argue that the robe, like the calf and the banquet, retains symbolic significance in the sixteenth-century as in the medieval representations. Certainly, it is the most prominent item in both, frequently visible when the ring and shoes are not.[177] Nonetheless, it must be admitted that within the context of the

moralizing interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son, in conjunction with the two preceding parables, the meaning of the robe is not as readily apparent as those of the calf and the banquet. In addition, the servants bearing the robe and other items do not appear in the works of Van der Weyden, Massys, and Van de Passe (Plates 13, 16 & 38). The evidence is not conclusive, and consequently whether the robe is intended to convey symbolic meaning remains open to question.

All of the traditional or commonplace features, with the exception of the witnesses, have been accounted for. The witnesses are included in all but Galle's engraving after Van Heemskerck, where, in keeping with the biblical text, only the father hastens to meet his son (Plate 28).[178] While the presence of the servants, who appear as the only observers in Van Heemskerck's woodcut and painting and in Collaert's engraving (Plates 18, 31 & 42) and along with other figures in all but the exceptions mentioned above, can be explained by a subsequent passage in the biblical text, that of the other attendents cannot. The prodigal's mother, who is distinguished in Van de Passe's and Van Londerseel's engravings and who appears perhaps in the background of Matham's print, is included to create a normal family unit, thereby facilitating the viewer's identification with the prodigal, as has been demonstrated (Plate 38, 39 & 40).[179] In Van Londerseel's engraving she is accompanied by maidservants, one of whom holds the robe for the prodigal, and the woman who observes the father's reception of his son from a window in Van de Passe's print must also be seen as a maidservant, whose action enlivens the drama because she is clearly responding to the commotion caused by the prodigal's return.

The male witnesses, however, do not help the viewer to identify with the prodigal nor do they contribute to the narrative action. Whether included in large or small numbers, these men never appear to be pleased by what they see. Most register anger or disbelief, while a few seem indifferent, and only one, the bearded man in the foreground of Matham's engraving (Plate 40), is sorrowful. In pose

and expression he recalls the servant who stands holding the robe at the right edge of the group in the anonymous woodcut (Plate 14). None of these witnesses can be identified as the prodigal's elder brother, for none is sufficiently distinguished from his companions. Notwithstanding that at first glance the youngest of the three men in Van der Weyden's triptych might seem to represent the elder brother, the presence of the elder son in the background by the gate where he is shown speaking with his father demonstrates that, in keeping with the biblical text, he did not return from the fields until the merrymaking was in progress (Plate 13).

Considering their negative reactions, it is safe to assume that these men are included in lieu of the elder brother, whose appearance at the return of the prodigal son would be in violation of textual accuracy. They serve to convey not the primary meaning of the parable, the message that God is willing to forgive sinners and rejoices when one repents, intended to console the viewer and convince him that he too should repent of his sins, but the secondary lesson that one should be charitable. As Calvin states in his summary of the content of the events following the beginning of the merrymaking:

> This latter portion of the parable charges those persons with cruelty, who would wickedly choose to set limits to the grace of God, as if they envied the salvation of wretched sinners, who did not think that they received the reward due their merits, if Christ admitted publicans and the common people to the hope of eternal inheritance. The substance of it therefore is, that, if we are desirous to be reckoned the children of God, we must forgive in a brotherly manner the faults of brethren, which He forgives with fatherly kindness.[180]

In those works that include disgruntled or at best indifferent observers, the witnesses' lack of charity is contrasted to God's love which in these, as in all but one of the sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations, is stressed by portraying the scene at some distance from the house; this placement draws attention to God's compassion by showing that the father did not wait for his son but ran forth to meet him. In this manner, the artists of these works and perhaps Van Heemskerck, who shows the servants

in his 1559 painting reacting negatively to the father's reception of his son (Plate 18), demonstrate that, in Calvin's words, "it is wicked hardness of heart not to rejoice, when we see our brethren returned from death to life."[181] The secondary message is not Calvin's invention; it is implicit in the parable itself. Christ told all the parables in Luke 15 to two groups of people, for two reasons. He told them both to console the sinners and the publicans and to admonish the Pharisees and the scribes, who murmured at His association with those they deemed despicable. Recognizing this, Calvin equates the elder son with the scribes and Luther compares him to the Pharisees. Moreover, in order to convey this message Burchard Waldis adds to his dramatization of the parable a re-enactment of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, in the guise of an encounter between the elder son and the now humble innkeeper.[182]

Neither the presence of the witnesses nor the secondary meaning they are included to communicate, however, indicates that the Protestant interpretation is presented. Lucas van Leyden's engraving, which depicts both hostile and indifferent observers, is a pre-Reformation work (Plate 15), and more significantly, Ambrose and Jerome explicitly condemn the elder son's lack of charity. Jerome states that the elder son's assertion that he never transgressed his father's commandments is false, for he does so when he begrudges another's salvation and when he boasts of his righteousness, though none are free of sin. In addition, he compares the elder son's contempt for his brother, whom he mistakenly deems less worthy than himself, to that of the Pharisee for the publican, a comparison that certainly inspired Waldis. Ambrose too equates the elder son with this Pharisee but only to point out that both are mistaken in their belief that they are righteous. In order to draw attention to the dangers of such behavior, he refers to another biblical passage (Matthew 21:31), in which Christ informs the priests of the temple that because they did not believe the Baptist the publicans and harlots will enter heaven before they will.[183]

That the majority of sixteenth-century Netherlandish artists should have included these witnesses to admonish the viewer to be

charitable is simply further evidence that the moralizing interpretation replaced the mystical one. The viewer confronted with these works is not only consoled by the father's loving reception of his son and encouraged to repent but he is warned to avoid uncharitable behavior (Plates 13-17, 32 & 40). In all but the anonymous woodcut, where only the attire of the servants is discernable, and Matham's engraving, where the short garments worn by the foreground observers are the only ones clearly represented (Plates 14 & 40), at least one of these men wears long robes, and at least one, in Matham's engraving as well as in the others, wears turban-like headgear. These are features suited to scribes and Pharisees,[184] and it is possible that they are employed to remind the viewer that Christ told the parables not only to console the sinners and publicans but to admonish the Pharisees and scribes.

As has been demonstrated, with the exception of Anthonisz.'s series of woodcuts (Plates 19-24), sixteenth-century Netherlandish representations of the return of the prodigal son portray it in a manner that is acceptable to Protestants and Catholics alike. The emphasis placed upon the episode, by rendering it as a semi-independent subject and, within the context of the parable, as either the most prominent scene or the major event in the final print, reveals that the consoling message that God is willing to forgive repentant sinners is the primary one. This meaning is underscored by the poses of the prodigal son and his father, which are indicative of repentance and compassion, and the placement of the scene at some distance from the house. Moreover, the inclusion of the fatted calf and the banquet celebration, which in all but one work takes place to the accompaniment of music provided by horn-playing musicians supports this meaning. These events that appear as subsidiary scenes in the majority of the works show that God's love is so great that He gave His only son to redeem sinners, whose repentance causes rejoicing in heaven. The male witnesses, whose presence cannot be explained by the text of the parable, are the only other features that are included in the majority of these representations of the

return of the prodigal son, and they convey the secondary meaning, the admonition to be charitable.

There is nothing in any but Anthonisz.'s work that can be seen as conveying a sectarian interpretation. Thus it is clear that, in order to employ the parable as a vehicle for religious propaganda, it is necessary to resort to an anachronistic mode of depiction and to deviate from the trends toward: textual accuracy, narrative continuity, and naturalistic representation. Whether the return of the prodigal son, both within and outside of the context of the parable, continued to be portrayed in a non-sectarian manner or whether seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists were able to devise a means of presenting it in accordance with either a Catholic or Protestant viewpoint will be determined in the following section.

Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Representations of the Return of the Prodigal Son and the Impact of the Counter-Reformation

Unlike their predecessors, seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists show the father receiving his son close by, rather than far from the house, and while the majority include the fatted calf, most omit the banquet scene. However, with one exception all portray the prodigal son on his knees, and depict the father either embracing or reaching out to his son. Therefore one can conclude that the essential meaning, the consoling message that God is willing to forgive repentant sinners, is not affected by these changes. Moreover, the elimination of the fatted calf in some works and of the banquet celebration in most is the result not of a difference in understanding but of the tendency to depict the return of the prodigal son as an independent subject, free of subsidiary scenes. Of those artists who represent the episode within the context of the rest of the parable, only one includes neither the calf nor the banquet, and only two of the others omit the banquet scene (Plates 46-48).

The artists who depict the return of the prodigal son within the context of the parable generally adhere to the established tradition, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter. The only

major departure would appear to be the change of setting, perhaps employed to account for the presence of the witnesses and the immediate fulfillment of the father's commands. The other change seems at first to be a minor one: the presence of women among the witnesses, one of whom represents the prodigal's mother. Though the prodigal's mother and maidservants appeared in a few earlier works, at least the prodigal's mother is included in all such seventeenth-century representations. In Nicolas Visscher's engraving after David Vinckboons and in Cornelis van Sichem's woodcut derived from it, she hastens forth to greet her son, while in Sebastian Vrancx's painting she stands rooted to the ground and raises her hands in a gesture of amazement (Plates 41, 43 & 45). In the engraving in the Theatrum Biblicum and in Cornelis de Wael's drawing, she like the father, reacts with sorrowful compassion (Plates 44 & 47). Hieronymous Janssens, however, portrays her as rejoicing. Her joyful countenance is visible between and behind two younger women, who along with some of the other attendents, seem to be pleased by what is taking place (Plate 46). Significantly, as in Crispijn van de Passe's and Assuerus van Londerseel's engravings, where the prodigal's mother also is represented, none of these works include clearly resentful witnesses. Consequently, there is no reference to the secondary meaning of the parable, the admonition to be charitable. Thus the change is not as insignificant as it might at first appear. These artists apparently wished to focus attention on the primary meaning of forgiveness.

Of these artists only Janssens incorporates neither the calf nor the banquet, and only he shows several of the witnesses rejoicing at the prodigal's return (Plate 46). The young women, who stand in front and at either side of the prodigal's mother appear pleased as do several of the other attendents. Perhaps Janssens, none of whose paintings in this series includes subsidiary scenes, portrays the positive reaction of the witnesses as a means of referring to the significance of the banquet. However, it should be noted that neither the banquet nor joyful witnesses appear in De Wael's drawing, upon which the painting is based (Plate 47). Furthermore, while

the mood of the drawing is subdued and the costumes and setting are relatively plain, the atmosphere of the painting is festive and the costumes and setting are elaborate and quite splendid. In such a context, the fatted calf, present among the witnesses in the drawing, would appear incongruous, and consequently Janssens eliminates it. As both the calf and the banquet appear in all other such representations of the return of the prodigal son, it would seem that, in the seventeenth century, they continued to be considered significant. However, it is possible that they were depicted simply because they formed part of the visual tradition. In order to determine which of these possibilities is more likely, one must examine both the independent depictions of the return of the prodigal son and the only seventeenth-century Netherlandish picture that renders the major episodes within a single work that does not give prominence to the prodigal son carousing.

The only seventeenth-century Dutch representation of the episodes within a single work is Barent Fabritius's painting of the parable of the prodigal son, one of three pictures of parables that he executed for the Lutheran church in Leiden, in 1661 (Plate 48).[185] Here rendered as subsidiary scenes in the background and between the departure and return of the prodigal son are the prodigal son carousing, the prodigal among the swine, and the killing of the fatted calf. As the decision to include these scenes and to omit the subsequent events is the result of the commission, it is necessary to analyze the program.

Liedtke, who states that the parable of the prodigal son is not found in the Lutheran lectionary, asserts that, like the other two parables, it would seem to have no special connection with Lutheranism. He accounts for its presence by suggesting that it was chosen because a large portion of the congregation consisted of foreigners attending the University of Leiden, most of whom had left prosperous homes in foreign lands, and who perhaps were inclined to be prodigal.[186] Contrary to Liedtke's observation, the parable of the prodigal son is particularly meaningful for Lutherans, who interpret

it as revealing that man is justified by grace alone.[187] This, in Luther's words, is what he holds and glorifies as his main doctrine, which is the true Christian doctrine of grace and the forgiveness of sins as opposed to the law and the doctrine of works.[188] This statement made in the context of his sermon on the parable of the lost sheep applies to all three parables in Luke 15, which Luther, like other theologians, argues convey the same meaning.[189] This is important to keep in mind, because as is recorded in a Lutheran lectionary printed in Amsterdam in 1649 the gospel text for the third Sunday after Trinity is cited as Luke 15:1.[190] Clearly, this scriptural notation refers to more than one verse and most likely to the entire chapter; Luther, on at least two occasions, preached upon the chapter as a whole.[191]

The parable of the prodigal son was chosen by Rudolphus Heggerus, who devised the program,[192] because, unlike the parable of the lost sheep, it deals with human beings, and thus is more effectively integrated with the two additional parables. Furthermore, it contains a greater number of episodes which helps to link it with Fabritius's other pictures, and it reveals that Christ died upon the cross to take away sin, which connects it to the pre-existing set of paintings in the church.[193] The parable of the prodigal son is the keystone of the program and for this reason, as well as because it conveys the main doctrine of the Lutheran faith, it appears in the center flanked by the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (at the left) and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (at the right).[194]

The episodes preceding the return of the prodigal son are included to show that he is a sinner who suffers as a consequence of his reprehensible behavior and is reduced to eating pigs' draff. Presumably, as in Anthonisz.'s series of woodcuts, the prodigal son among the swine is employed to demonstrate that he despairs and, incapable of helping himself, sinks further into his filthy condition (Plate 22).[195] Only now is the prodigal ready to be saved, as Luther explains: "Who He [God] would save, He must first make

a despairing sinner."[196] The repentant prodigal, on his knees, is embraced by his father behind whom stand two servants, while in the background the calf is slaughtered. These scenes reveal, in the context of the Protestant interpretation, that the sinner is brought to repent and confess his sins by God's merciful grace and Christ's sacrifice, as a result of which he is redeemed.

The importance of repentance and confession is stressed in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the subject of the painting to the right (Plate 61). The picture contrasts the self-righteous conduct of the Pharisee with the publican's humble acknowledgement that he is an unworthy sinner, and presents the consequences of each type of behavior. The publican leaves the temple with lowered eyes and a humble expression, and above him flies an angel holding a banner bearing the words: "Et qui se Humiliat Exaltabitur. Matth." This is a continuation of the statement, begun on the banner held by the devil above the Pharisee: "Qui se Exaltet Humiliabitur . . . ." The inscription is not taken from Matthew but from the last verse of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:14):

> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The reference to Matthew is included to draw attention to the Pharisee's display of pious behavior and to urge the viewer both to avoid such display and to follow instead the example of the publican, to pray as he does. In Matthew 6:5-6 the proper manner of praying is described:

> And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.
> But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

That this is the text referred to is obvious. Not only does its content fit the meaning of the picture but Fabritius shows the devil, above the Pharisee, holding a mask, a clear allusion to his

hypocritical conduct.[197] Furthermore, he depicts the Pharisee again standing in the street with his head bowed in prayer. He is the picture of smug self-satisfaction and of evil, and that his behavior is damnable is demonstrated by the presence of the devil.[198] The mask not only signifies that the Pharisee is a hypocrite but emphasizes that he is deceived and is not righteous, though he believes himself to be so. It can also indicate that his righteousness is of the wrong kind. According to Luther, there are two kinds of righteousness, one which has great appearance in the eyes of the world but is nothing before God, and the other that men do not recognize but God calls it righteousness, and it pleases Him. An example of the former, he adds, is the proud Pharisee, while the humble publican is an example of the latter. Luther's commentary on this parable continues with his answer to a rhetorical question. What, he asks, is lacking in the pious man? Nothing more than that he does not know his own heart. He has forgotten God's mercy, gentleness and love. For God is nothing more than pure mercy and whoever fails to see this holds therefore that there is no God. Moreover, he lies to God when he states that he does not wish to sin and then sins by refusing to love his neighbor. The publican, on the other hand, humbly acknowledges his sin and prays to God to be merciful to him, a poor sinner. This is what is preached in the gospels.[199]

Like the prodigal son, the publican humbly confesses that he is a sinner, and for this reason the two frequently are compared. Bullinger, in his sermon on the forgiveness of sins, with which Heggerus must have been familiar,[200] writes that it is necessary that we all acknowledge and confess that we are sinners and that we are, from nature and through our deeds, children of wrath and damnation. He adds that in the gospels there are two good models of those who openly confess before God, and these are the prodigal son and the publican, and he urges the reader to follow their example: "So let us affirm that we are all sinners."[201] According to Bullinger, this confession should be made not to priests but to God alone, and he emphasizes that Christ atones for our sins: "So it is certain

that through the death of Christ the faithful are forgiven all their sins."[202] Rogers too compares the prodigal's confession of his sins to the publican's. In his lengthy commentary on the parable of the prodigal son, which appeared in Dutch in 1659, he discusses the prodigal's humble confession to his father and explains that it shows one must confess to God. One should think, he adds, of the publican, who smote his breast and asked God to be merciful to him, a poor sinner.[203] Later, after reminding the reader that he should humble himself so that God may raise him in due time, as Peter stated, he refers again to the publican and draws attention to how Peter's admonition is related to the concluding verse of that parable.[204] Perhaps, like Rogers, Luther thought of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican when he selected I Peter 5:6 ("Humble yourselves therefore under the mightly hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.") as the text from epistles to accompany Luke 15:1 in the lectionary.[205]

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican not only stresses the importance of humble confession but warns of the dangers of self-righteous and uncharitable behavior. As has been shown, Catholics and Protestants both equate the Pharisee with the prodigal's elder brother in order to convey this warning.[206] Like the parable of the prodigal son, that of the Pharisee and the publican supports Luther's main doctrine. While the former demonstrates that man is justified by grace alone, the latter reveals the dangers of trusting in the efficacy of works. The Pharisee mistakenly believes himself righteous, because he tithes and fasts twice a week (Luke 18:12), actions that, like pilgrimages, Luther deems to be meaningless.

Luther, however, does not absolve one of the necessity of performing good works, but he sees good works as a sign of faith and not as something that man is capable of on his own. In his sermon on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, he writes that faith comes from the Word and that, when the Word enters into the heart of a man, he becomes pious and purified. The beginning of piety, Luther continues, is not in us but in God's Word, and good works follow only after God lets His Word resound in our hearts so that

we may learn to recognize God and believe in Him. Therefore, one must believe from this that the publican had heard God's Word.[207] It is presumably for this reason that in the lectionary Luther pairs the first verse of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican with I Corinthians 15:1,[208] which, along with the beginning of the second verse, states:

> Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand;
> By which also ye are saved . . . .

It is the Word, the message of the gospels, that works in one's heart and brings faith, and if "faith is there, works must follow;" they are the signs of faith.[209]

According to Luther's interpretation, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, like the parables of the prodigal son and the Pharisee and the publican, teaches that one should be charitable to one's fellows and relates the fate of one who has faith and that of one who does not.[210] The painting of this parable, to the left of that representing the prodigal son, shows the rich man in the center, where he indulges his appetites and refuses to give Lazarus even a crumb from his table. In the background, to the left, is portrayed the death of the rich man and, to the right, Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man in the flames of hell. The scene of the rich man feasting with his wife, like that of the prodigal son carousing, is intended to warn the viewer of the dangers of a pre-occupation with temporal pleasures. As Rogers states in his comments upon the prodigal's dissipation of his patrimony, people who behave in this manner are godless fools who can think only of the here and now and not of the future.[211] Moreover, Rogers specifically refers to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in his discussion of the consequences of such behavior. Here he warns the rich to think of the time when they will have not a drop of water to cool their lips (Luke 16:24).[212]

Each of the three parables painted by Fabritius demonstrates, according to Luther's interpretation, that man is saved by faith alone, and each condemns uncharitable behavior. However, though

the two end paintings contrast the fate of those who have faith with the fate of those who lack it and reveal the disastrous consequences of lack of charity, the central panel does not. Instead, it focuses attention upon the prodigal son, by eliminating his elder brother. While the end paintings show that once one has faith confession, repentance, and virtue naturally follow, that of the parable of the prodigal son is employed to make clear that faith is a gift of God. That the repentant sinner, who confesses his sins, is redeemed by God's merciful grace and Christ's sacrifice is demonstrated by the father's reception of his son and the killing of the fatted calf. The placement of the calf is significant; though the calf was slaughtered after the prodigal's return and consequently is shown in the background, when the picture is read from left to right, it appears before the return scene. Thus it intervenes between the scenes of the prodigal's sinful life and his return, thereby emphasizing that the sinner is saved by the grace of God, Who works faith in his heart, and by the sacrifice of Christ, Who takes away the sins of the world.

In the context of the program, the painting of the prodigal son conveys what Luther calls his main doctrine, the doctrine of grace and the forgiveness of sins, as opposed to that of the law and of works. In order to give this meaning prominence, the secondary one, the admonition to be charitable, is conveyed by the other two paintings, which also underscore what is evident in the central panel, the message that if the viewer wishes to be saved he must cease indulging his sensual appetites, acknowledge his sins, and repent. The episodes following the killing of the calf are omitted, because they would make it impossible to depict the return of the prodigal son at the right edge of the painting with only the slaughtering of the calf intervening between it and the scenes of the prodigal's sinful life. Moreover, as has been presented, the significance of the elder son's action is communicated in the other two pictures. Finally, the joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, occasioned by the repentance of a sinner, normally

represented by the banquet celebration, is presented in the Angel Concert, which concludes the set of works that hang opposite the organ loft (where Fabritius's pictures were hung), a set of works which reveal that Christ died upon the cross in order to take away the sins of the world.[213]

Like Fabritius, several seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists include the fatted calf in a subsidiary scene and omit the banquet celebration and the elder son. However, while archival evidence enables one to explain the program that influenced Fabritius's representation, no such documentation is available for the other works. Of the artists who depicted the return of the prodigal son outside of the context of the parable, few incorporated a subsidiary scene, but, with one exception, those who did portrayed the fatted calf (Plates 49, 51, 56 & 53). While the presence of the calf in Rembrandt's etching, like that of the elder son in Van Cuylenbergh's painting, can be accounted for by the sources upon which these were based,[214] the other works diverged from the norm and included a subsidiary scene containing the calf presumably because it was deemed to be significant. That it was not incorporated simply because it forms part of the visual tradition is indicated both by the artists' willingness to diverge from the trend toward portraying the return of the prodigal son as a totally independent episode and by its presence in works by two other artists, who were not willing to depart from this trend. In the paintings by Steen and an anonymous Flemish artist, the fatted calf is integrated into the main scene (Plates 50 & 52). The latter picture, in the St. Waldetrudiskerk at Herenthals, emphasizes that the calf is intended as a sacrificial offering. One of the servants places a wreath around its neck, as the other prepares to leads it off to slaughter.

None of the independent depictions of the return of the prodigal son include the banquet celebration, a scene that, unlike the fatted calf, cannot be integrated into the main event. Its omission, however, does not imply that its significance was forgotten but rather that it was deemed less important than that of the calf. None of these works incorporate more than one subsidiary scene, and all

that depict the fatted calf portray observers that are not disgruntled. Thus one can conclude that of all the features and events discussed in the passages that follow the description of the prodigal's return, the calf was considered to be the one most meaningful to the primary message of the parable. That the symbolic content of the banquet celebration was understood is indicated by Jan Steen's inclusion of the horn-playing musician, who leans out of the window and exuberantly blows his horn, a motif employed in earlier works to underscore that the return of one who was lost is an occasion for joy.[215] In addition, the air of preparation and the festive character of the painting in Herenthals suggest that the participants rejoice and prepare to celebrate the return of the one who was lost.

As has been mentioned, none of the works that include the calf show observers who react negatively to the father's reception of his son; indeed in some works, such as another painting by an unknown Flemish artist (Plate 51), the witnesses are distressed by the prodigal's pitiful condition and many clearly express their compassion. Thus, it is evident that these artists are concerned only with the primary meaning of the parable. Van Cuylenbergh,[216] Buns, and Flinck, none of whom depict the fatted calf, also focus attention upon the primary meaning, for they too do not portray disgruntled witnesses (Plates 53, 54 & 57). In these works, God's mercy is stressed, and no reference is made to Christ's sacrifice, as the calf is omitted. It must be admitted that the servant in Buns's painting seems less than pleased by the father's reception of his son, but whether or not he is employed in place of the witnesses not mentioned in the biblical text to refer to the secondary meaning, like the servants in Van Heemskerck's painting (Plate 18), remains open to question.

The hostile observers in two pictures by followers of Rembrandt are certainly represented in order to condemn uncharitable behavior and to admonish the viewer to avoid such conduct (Plates 58 & 59). These men, like their counterparts in the paintings by Gosewijn van der Weyden and Cornelis Massys and the engravings by Hans Bol and Julius Goltzius, wear turban-like hats and/or long robes and express their displeasure to one another or to the world in general

(Plates 13, 16, 17 & 32). As in the earlier works, they appear in place of the elder son, who was not present when the prodigal returned home, to convey the secondary meaning of the parable.[217] While the sixteenth-century depictions portray not only these men but the prodigal's father in long robes and turban-like headgear, Rembrandt's followers show the father bare-headed so that there can be no mistake about the identity of the observers; they represent those who react like the Pharisees and the scribes to whom Christ told the three parables in Luke 15 and to whom Luther and Calvin compare the elder son. However, as has been shown, their presence does not indicate a sectarian interpretation, because Ambrose and Jerome also condemn the elder son's lack of charity and compare him to the Pharisee who mistakenly believes himself to be righteous and more deserving than the publican.[218]

In one of these paintings, the beturbaned observers, standing at the base of the stairs, express their anger and disbelief at what is taking place (Plate 59). Unlike the sympathetic witnesses at the top of the stairs, one of whom reacts with compassion and clearly is deeply moved by the father's reception of his son, they are not stirred to pity by the prodigal's distressed condition. His wretchedness is underscored both by his nakedness, covered solely by tattered rags, and his shorn head. The latter motif stresses what is already evident, that he is an outcast shunned by his fellow man. The men at the base of the stairs are repelled by him, and those in the lower left-hand corner mock his plight and jeer at him. These men are employed to reveal that the repentant sinner can find shelter and relief only in his father and to indicate that uncharitable behavior is reprehensible.

As has been mentioned, Calvin, in his discussion of the elder son's conduct, specifically informs the reader that if he wishes to be reckoned a child of God he must forgive the faults of his brothers, and Ambrose writes that the elder son, whom he equates with the Pharisee, should consider how Christ's statement to the elders and priests that the publicans and adulterers will enter heaven before them, applies to him.[219] Thus it is clear that the

artist contrasts the men in the lower left and at the base of the stairs with those by the doorway in order to condemn uncharitable behavior and to show the viewer how he should respond to his fellows. This is reinforced by the sculptural relief of Charity, above the more sympathetic witnesses. It not only emphasizes that the repentant sinner is redeemed by God's merciful love, the primary meaning of the parable, but conveys the secondary one, the admonition to be charitable to one's brothers.

In the other painting by an unknown follower of Rembrandt, perhaps Gerrit Willemsz. Horst, the witnesses, who react negatively to the father's reception of his son, are contrasted with the prodigal's mother, who holds the hand of a small child (Plate 58). The two boys, who also observe what is taking place, display expressions that are difficult to determine, while the woman indeed appears compassionate. It is not outside the realm of possibility that she is intended to represent Charity, included as a living person and thus more naturalistically and unobtrusively integrated into the composition than the sculptural relief.[220] It is worth noting that both Van Londerseel, who depicts the prodigal's mother in the foreground, and Jacob Matham, who does not, show a woman carrying a small child in the background, where she is represented standing by the father as he addresses his elder son (Plates 39 & 40). In such a context, these women must represent Charity and are employed to draw attention to the elder son's lack of this virtue. Thus it is likely that the woman in this painting is also meant, as an allegorical figure of Charity, to underscore the secondary message of the parable.

In the previous chapter, the suggestion was made that the seated woman in Jacob Willemsz. de Wet's painting signifies Charity (Plate 60). In light of the above, one can conclude that the manner in which she is portrayed, with one child in her lap and another holding on to her neck and set apart from the rest of the witnesses, demonstrates that she is a living personification of Charity, and this further supports the contention that the prodigal's mother in the above mentioned work represents this virtue.

While De Wet includes hostile observers, Bartholomeus van Bassen, who includes an allegorical figure of Charity in a relief does not (Plate 49). Though the relief may be depicted to admonish the viewer to be charitable, the lack of disgruntled witnesses makes this unlikely. Rather it appears that this relief along with the only other recognizable sculpture, that of David is portrayed in order to underscore the primary meaning of the parable.

In support of this contention, is the frequency with which David is mentioned as an example of a repentant sinner in theological literature. Directly following his discussion of how hope of God's mercy is the beginning of repentance,[221] Calvin points out that the prodigal's father saw his son from afar, which proves that God's goodness is boundless and that He will not treat one harshly, and he supports this by references to Isaiah 65:24 and to David's statement in Psalms 32:5, which he states is well known. He quotes David's words: "I said, I will acknowledge against me my unrighteousness to the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."[222] Luther, too cites David as a model of one who confesses his sins and repents. In his sermon on the parable of the lost sheep, Luther refers to David's admission that, like a lost sheep, he has gone astray (Psalms 119:176), and later he adds that the repenting sinner, who sincerely wishes to be free of his sins and lead a better life, is just the lost sheep that Christ seeks.[223] In addition, Bullinger, a Protestant, explains that confession is an aspect of repentance and that when you search your heart you repent. He states that the prodigal son confessed his sins while he was among the swine, and that Zaccheus, the publican, and David are examples of others who acknowledged their sins.[224]

Thus it is clear that the sculptures of David and Charity are represented to emphasize that the prodigal son is a repentant sinner who acknowledges his faults and is saved by God's merciful love. One might argue that David is intended to urge the viewer to confess his sins and repent, and consequently Charity too must convey a didactic message, an admonition to be charitable. However, in view

of not only the lack of displeased witnesses but the presence of the fatted calf, this seems unlikely. As has been mentioned, the calf does not appear in any seventeenth-century Netherlandish work that conveys the parable's secondary meaning.

Though all of the aforementioned theologians who feature David as an example of one who confessed his sins and repented are Protestant, the presence of David does not indicate that Van Bassen presented a sectarian interpretation of the parable. Prior to the Reformation, David appeared along with the prodigal son as an example of the penitent sinner in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis.[225] Furthermore, both are included among the penitent sinners before the resurrected Christ in paintings by Otto van Veen (Mainz, Landesmuseum), Peter Paul Rubens (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), Anthony Van Dyck (Paris, Louvre), and Gerard Seghers (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). These paintings are examples of a Counter Reformation devotional image of which there are two basic variants, one showing the penitent sinners before the resurrected Christ and the other depicting them before the Madonna and Child. To the best of my knowledge, the prodigal son appears in all of these works, in spite of the variations in the number and identity of the penitents.

In order to determine whether or not the inability to convey a Catholic viewpoint within representations of the parable contributed to the development of this image requires an examination not only of its evolution but of an exceptional depiction of the return of the prodigal son and illustrations of this episode that can be found in two Catholic publications. Both Adriaen Collaert's engraving and Christoffel van Sichem's woodcut appear, with accompanying inscriptions written by Jesuits, in illustrated Bibles, printed respectively in 1593 and 1629 (Plates 42 & 43).[226] The inscriptions, in Latin in the earlier work and in Dutch in the later, are virtually identical, and in keeping with the tradition established in the sixteenth century all but one are not interpretive. With the exception of the inscription following the letter "F" that appears by the scene of the father addressing his elder son, they simply paraphrase the relevant biblical passages. Following the letter "F" is the

statement that the elder son returns from the fields and reacts to the celebration in an unworthy manner. His father, however, kindly asks him to join the banquet and appeases him.[227] There is nothing in the biblical text that suggests that the elder son was appeased, and this explanation is taken not from the Bible but from the exegeses of Ambrose and Jerome. The appeasement of the elder son is an essential part of the mystical interpretation, which continued to be accepted by Catholics in the seventeenth century, though the moralizing one was clearly predominant.[228] However, both Ambrose and Jerome also state that in the context of the moralizing interpretation the elder son represents the just, who finally abandon their envy.[229] Considering the dominance of the moralizing understanding, one can assume that the elder son, in these two prints, signifies the just.

The exegeses of Ambrose and Jerome influenced not only these works but a seventeenth-century Catholic dramatization of the parable. This play, adhering to the sixteenth-century, post-Reformation tradition established by Catholic playwrights, portrays the elder son as a sympathetic character, who, though initially angered by the celebration, succumbs to his father's entreaties and joins the banquet.[230] In addition to the treatment of the elder son, the explanation of the scenes surrounding the prodigal son repenting among the swine, displayed on the title page, reflects Jerome's exegesis by stating that if you turn to God, He will help you when you repent.[231] This statement paraphrases Jerome's words: "As soon as you return and make lamentation, you shall be saved."[232] Thus the need for the sinner's cooperation is stressed; he is saved by grace, but not by grace alone.

That man must cooperate with God's grace is explicitly stated in the Decree of Justification issued by the Council of Trent, on January 13, 1547:

> It is furthermore declared that in adults the beginning of justification must proceed from the predisposing grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from His vocation, whereby without any merits on their part they are called; that they who by sin had been cut off from God, may be disposed through

> His quickening and helping grace to convert themselves by their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that grace; so that while God touches the heart of man through the illumination of the Holy Ghost, man himself neither does absolutely nothing while receiving that inspiration, since he can also reject it, nor yet is he able by his own free will and without the grace of God to move himself to justice in His sight. Hence when it is written in the sacred writings: Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you, we are reminded of our liberty; and we reply: Convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall be converted, we confess that we need the grace of God.[233]

The decree reveals that man has free will, and though this does not enable him "to move himself to justice," it does allow him to reject grace. This contention is refuted by Protestant theologians such as the Lutheran Martin Chemnitz, who writes in his lengthy response to the decrees of the Council of Trent that "the power for spiritual things has been lost through sin; so that the will of itself can do nothing."[234] Moreover, he adds that the grace of God, which works in us, should be considered as operating, not cooperating.[235]

It may have been as a result of the desire to indicate that the sinner cooperates with God's grace that an unknown Flemish artist portrayed the prodigal son on his feet rather than on his knees in the painting in St. Waldetrudiskerk at Herenthals (Plate 52). This, the only post-medieval work to show the prodigal son standing, depicts the father holding his son's elbows, a gesture that may indicate that he raises him up. On the other hand, the prodigal's pose may be employed, as it was in medieval works, to draw attention to his words of resolution, "I will arise," revealing that he acts of his own volition, accepts God's grace, and cooperates with it. If this is indeed the artist's intention, he pays too high a price to communicate one aspect of the Catholic interpretation, for he sacrifices the emphasis that otherwise is placed upon confession and remorse. This unsatisfactory solution underscores, as has been demonstrated, that within the confines of the prevailing naturalistic mode of representation it is impossible to convey adequately a sectarian interpretation of the parable.

In light of the above, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the inability to communicate visually the Catholic interpretation of the parable, within a representation of it, was one of the factors that contributed to the development of the devotional image of the prodigal son among the penitent sinners before the resurrected Christ or the Madonna and Child. Like the parable, this devotional image demonstrates the greatness of God's love and the importance of confession and repentance, and Vetter, who discusses the genesis of the image at some length, begins his analysis with an examination of a Castillian painting from the second half of the sixteenth century which shows the prodigal son on his knees before the resurrected Christ. According to Vetter, the prodigal confesses his sins to Christ, who is flanked by the Virgin and an angel who holds a white robe. In the heavens above angels celebrate the repentance of the sinner, represented in the background by the scene of the prodigal son among the swine. This scene, says Vetter, shows that confession follows repentance, and he adds that the Virgin, who is attired in a nun's habit, signifies the Church which intercedes with God on behalf of the sinner. Thus the painting documents the Catholic conception of the sacrament of penance.[236]

The meaning and importance of this sacrament was discussed in the session of the Council of Trent that met on November 25, 1551. In the publication that was issued as a result of this session, the first chapter, entitled "The Necessity and Institution of the Sacrament of Penance," contains the following statement:

> But since God, rich in mercy, knoweth our frame He has a remedy of life even to those who may after baptism have delivered themselves up to servitude of sin and the power of the devil, namely the sacrament of penance, by which benefit Christ's death is applied to those who have fallen after baptism. Penance was indeed necessary at all times for all men who had stained themselves by mortal sin, even for those who desired to be cleansed by the sacrament of baptism, in order to obtain grace and justice; so that their wickedness being renounced and amended, they might with a hatred of sin and a sincere sorrow of heart detest so great an offense against God.[237]

The Castillian painting and the images of the penitent sinner before the resurrected Christ or the Madonna and Child are related to

this passage. They reveal the greatness of God's mercy, by showing that he gave His only son to take away the sins of the world, and demonstrate the benefits of penance, by depicting sinners known for their self-reproach and repentance. Moreover, those that represent the resurrected Christ illustrate that the benefit of Christ's death is applied in the sacrament of penance. That the prodigal son should have been invariably included is hardly surprising, for as the Church Fathers explain he remained enslaved by the devil until he confessed and repented of his sins. Furthermore, it should be noted that in his exegesis of the parable Jerome writes that the killing of the fatted calf signifies that Christ was sacrificed for the benefit of penitents--the meaning conveyed by these devotional images--and in his comments on the last verse of the parable he explains that it reveals that we who were dead in sin can live through penance.[238] Finally on January 15, 1566, in a general session of the Council of Trent, the prodigal son was recommended as a splendid example of a Christian penitent.[239]

The return of the prodigal son appears in the left wing of Frans Floris's triptych, painted about 1550-1560 for a church in Zoutleeuw, another work discussed by Vetter in his examination of the evolution of the devotional image (Plate 62).[240] This work is a Flemish one and consequently is of greater importance than the Castillain picture to an understanding of the development of the image of the penitent sinners in the Netherlands, or more precisely, the Southern Netherlands; as a purely Catholic image it did not appear in the Dutch Republic. According to Vetter, the return of the prodigal son is represented as a scene of confession, while the right wing shows a scene of forgiveness, an episode from the parable of the unmerciful servant, the king forgiving the unmerciful servant his debt. The wings flank a depiction of the publican and the Magdalene kneeling below and at either side of Christ, Who is surrounded by the signs of the evangelists and crowned by the angel of Matthew. Vetter, citing Luke 7:36 & 47-48, writes that the Magdalene is included as an example of one who was forgiven by virtue of her great love.[241] She is the woman

who went to the house of the Pharisee and there washed Christ's feet with her tears and of whom Christ said to the Pharisees:

> Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, many as they are, shall be forgiven her, because she has loved much but he to whom little is forgiven, loves little (Luke 7:47).

While the Magdalene is forgiven as result of her great love, the publican is justified, as it says in the parable (Luke 18:14), because he humbly confessed his sins.

The central panel, states Vetter, was originally topped by a triangular panel representing God leaning out of the clouds with one hand on the globe and the other in a gesture of blessing. The diagonals of the wings culminated in this triangular painting, underscoring that the wings reveal God's love, which is made visible in the central panel by the Word of God assuming human form. He adds that the signs of the evangelists signify that the things by which man is redeemed (Heilstatsachen), Christ's having become man, the passion, and Christ's resurrection and ascension, are related in the gospels. Finally, Christ is portrayed in the central panel as an intercessor for those who come to him; the penitent sinners witness the forgiving love of God through which they are saved.[242]

The only problem with Vetter's analysis is that the right wing represents the king condemning, not forgiving the unmerciful servant as is evinced by the king's angry countenance. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18: 21-35) was related by Christ in response to Peter's question concerning the number of times that he should forgive his brother who sins against him. The parable tells how a servant, requesting more time to repay his loan, was forgiven his great debt by the king. The servant, however, failed to follow the king's example and without compassion for his fellow servant, who owed him but a small sum, refused to grant him additional time, attacked him, and had him thrown into prison. Upon hearing this, the king became enraged and, denying the unmerciful servant's pleas for mercy, delivered him over to be tortured. In conclusion,

Christ states that God will treat you thus if you do not forgive your brothers. Clearly the king represents God, and the torture to which he sentences the servant signifies hell. Thus the right wing, which shows the king denying the servants pleas for mercy and, in the background, the servant being delivered to the torturers, illustrates the fate of those who are uncharitable.

In view of this evidence, the program of the triptych must be seen as recalling Last Judgment imagery. The left wing, the return of the prodigal son, portrays the saved, while and the right presents the damned. The prodigal received by his father enters heaven; the unmerciful servant sentenced to torture, enters hell. In the central panel, the presence of the Magdalene as well as the publican reveals that not only must one humbly confess one's sins and repent but one must be charitable, the primary and secondary meanings of the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal is forgiven his sins because like the publican he trusts in God's mercy, confesses, and repents, while the servant is condemned because, unlike the Magdalene, he "loves little."

Another work that includes both the Magdalene and the prodigal son, linking charity and repentance, is Hieronymous Wierix's engraving after Maarten de Vos (Plate 63). The print shows a repentant sinner raising his hands in prayer toward heaven, from which beams of light emanate. Behind him to the left the Magdalene appears before the risen Christ, while to the right an allegorical figure of Charity directs the sinner's attention toward Christ, portrayed as the Good Shepherd, behind Whom one sees the prodigal son repenting among the swine and returning to his father. In the heavens above God receives the repentant sinner. This print, which Knipping explains as an illustration of Divine Love,[243] shows that the repentant sinner is redeemed by God's love and Christ's sacrifice. The repentant sinner is equated with the Magdalene and the prodigal son, whose return signifies God's reception of the repentant sinner. The rays that stream down from heaven reveal, in accordance with the Decree of Justification, that the beginning of justification must proceed from the predisposing grace of God, and Christ, carrying

the lost sheep, is depicted to show, as the decree states, that we are saved by His vocation.[244] Finally, the Magdalene before the resurrected Christ demonstrates that the benefit of Christ's death is applied through the sacrament of penance, as explained in "The Necessity and Institution of the Sacrament of Penance."[245]

Though preached by Rumoldus Backx in the Antwerp Cathedral during the last decade of the seventeenth century, long after the engraving was made, two sermons express the content of this print. In his sermon on the conversion of a sinner, Backx states that the gift of God, the action of the Holy Spirit within the repenting sinner, helps lead him to salvation. "The hope of conversion begins to convert the sinner and love completes the conversion," states Backx, who adds that the Holy Church acts like the Good Shepherd, who seeks that lost sheep and joyfully places it on His shoulders.[246] In addition, he compares the Holy Church to the prodigal's father who receives his son with love and grace.[247] In another sermon he explains that the sinner must have good intentions and say like the prodigal son, "I will stand up and go to my father."[248] The prodigal son, who left his father's house and squandered his goods, he continues, is an example of a sinner, but because he returned to his father, he is a mirror of repentance and a picture of upright conversion.[249] The print includes several features that are mentioned in Backx's sermons and indeed it could serve as an illustration of his statement that hope, the result of God's grace that streams down from heaven in the form of light, begins the process of conversion while love completes it. Works such as Wierix's engraving, not mentioned by Vetter, must have contributed to the evolution of the penitent sinners before the resurrected Christ or the Madonna and Child.

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest example of this devotional image is Otto van Veen's painting, executed for the Altar of the Tradesmen's Guild in the Church of Our Lady at Antwerp, not long after 1581 (Plate 64).[250] The penitent sinners included in the paintings and engraving discussed above are all represented. The prodigal son and the Magdalene kneel, along with David, before

the resurrected Christ, while the publican stands with his head bowed in the temple in the background. The good thief, who converted on the cross, is shown standing behind David, and in the distance, visible between the good thief and Christ, are people kneeling on the ground. In the heavens above are cherubs and music-making angels. This scene is incorporated to show that the angels rejoice when a sinner does penance. This is suggested by a scene that is related to Van Veen's painting in Robert Lawet's plays, written in 1583, which contain a dramatization of the parable of the prodigal son that is explained by allegorical figures,[251] and by one of Backx's sermons preached many decades later.

In his sermon on conversion, delivered on Palm Sunday 1694, Backx stated:

> Bernard says, "the tears of penitents are the wine of angels," but Christ himself also says "that there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no penance."[252]

Like Backx, Lawet refers to this biblical passage in the context of a discussion concerning the benefits of penance. Truthful Proof and Spiritual Inspiration attempt to comfort The Inconsolable Sinner by pointing out that Christ came to heal sinners and that He forgives all sins out of love. Spiritual Inspiration then gives examples of those to whom mercy was shown--Peter, Mary Magdalene, Matthew, Zaccheus, and the publican--and Truthful Proof adds that when they heard Jonah preach the Ninevites did penance and were forgiven. As The Inconsolable Sinner remains inconsolable, Spiritual Inspiration reminds him that Christ is the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep and heals the sick, and Scriptural Consolation concludes the arguments of the allegorical figures by stating that the conversion of a sinner causes more joy than the righteousness of ninety-nine people. The Inconsolable sinner says that he has seen Christ bearing the cross and this is excellent consolation.[253]

Though Van Veen does not include Peter, Matthew, or Zaccheus, he does represent Mary Magdalene, who appears in the foreground along with the prodigal son, and the publican, who is shown in

the background. In addition, the crowd of penitents to the left of the temple in which the publican appears must represent the penitent Ninevites. The inclusion of the rejoicing angels indicates that Van Veen developed this image in order to convey the meaning of the parables in Luke 15. Supporting this contention is the representation, in the temple behind the publican, of the Pharisee, with whom Ambrose and Jerome equate the prodigal's elder brother. His presence underscores that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine righteous persons. As has been demonstrated, it is to this passage that the banquet scene containing musicians in depictions of the parable and of the return of the prodigal son refers. Clearly the desire to convey the Catholic interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son, in particular, and of Luke 15, in general, contributed to the development of the devotional image of the penitent sinners before either the resurrected Christ or the Madonna and Child. Indeed the source of this evolution can be found in illustrations of Christ as the Good Shepherd.

The representations of Christ as the Good Shepherd, however, are non-sectarian, because they emphasize not the sinner's penance but the redeeming action of Christ. In a New Testament printed in Antwerp in 1513, scenes of the prodigal son carousing, repenting among the swine, and returning to his father appear behind an image of a repentant sinner kneeling before Christ, Who carries a sheep on his shoulders.[254] A more significant work is a woodcut by Cornelis Anthonisz. (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum) dated 1540 (Plate 65).[255] This print depicts Christ, as the Good Shepherd, in the center, accompanied by a scroll that bears the words:

> I shall feed my sheep myself, says the Lord. That which was lost will I seek and that which was driven away shall I bring back, which is sick, will I heal.[256]

Christ is surrounded by kneeling sinners: the prodigal son, David, and the publican. The scroll by the prodigal son records the prodigal's confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you," and that by the publican, though incomplete, must

be understood as a paraphrase of his plea: "God be merciful to me a sinner."[257] The scroll by David is empty but likely was intended to contain David's words, cited by Luther in his sermon on the parable of the lost sheep, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant."[258]

The depiction of Christ as the Good Shepherd was replaced by that of the resurrected Christ in some devotional images to reveal that the benefits of Christ's death are applied in the sacrament of penance and by the Madonna and Child, in others, to show that the Church administers the sacrament and intercedes for the sinner. As has been demonstrated, the Madonna in the Castillian painting represents the Church, and she surely retains this significance in the subsequent paintings, such as a picture in the Gemaldegalerie in Cassel that, according to Vetter, is the work of Rubens's studio (Plate 66).[259] The painting shows the prodigal son, the Magdalene, David, Augustine, Dominic, Francis, and George grouped around the Madonna and Child with the infant John the Baptist. As Vetter explains, George appears because his victory over the dragon parallels Christ's victory over death, and the Baptist is included for two reasons. He bears witness to Christ as the Lamb of God, and he calls the sinners to penance. The sinners are portrayed in the company of saints, who will intercede for them, as will the Madonna.[260]

While the parable of the prodigal son and the image of the Good Shepherd were the primary sources for the evolution of the devotional image portraying penitent sinners, following Van Veen's painting, this image no longer gave prominence to features derived from Luke 15. However, it is worthy of mention that though the return of the prodigal son, outside of the context of the parable, was depicted with some frequency by seventeenth-century Dutch artists, I have been able to discover only three such representations by their Flemish counterparts. As the Catholic Church was an important patron of the arts in the Southern Netherlands, this suggests that because depictions of the return of the prodigal son could not

effectively convey Catholic beliefs and doctrines its popularity declined and another image was developed to communicate its primary meaning.

In Netherlandish art, the return of the prodigal son, as has been shown, was given prominence both within the context of the parable and as a semi-independent or independent subject, once the mystical interpretation, that had had such an impact upon medieval representations, lost ground to the moralizing one. This occurred around the beginning of the sixteenth century, when changing attitudes toward biblical exegesis and an increasing concern with the castigation of immoral behavior caused biblical texts to be reworked in order to present meanings applicable to the individual's life, that is to provide him with models whose conduct was worthy of emulation or to demonstrate the disastrous consequences of reprehensible behavior. The parable of the prodigal son became popular in sixteenth-century Netherlandish art, because in the person of the prodigal the viewer was confronted with both. The scene of the prodigal son carousing was given prominence to warn that such actions lead to suffering and that of the prodigal's return was emphasized to encourage the viewer to confess his sins, repent, and trust in God's merciful love. Furthermore, the prodigal's elder brother could be utilized to admonish one to be charitable.

The parable also became popular because its primary significance, upon which Catholic and Protestant theologians agreed, that of God's willingness to forgive repentant sinners for whose redemption He gave His only son to die upon the cross, is a fundamental tenet of the Christian religion. As the return of the prodigal son most effectively conveys this meaning, it also was portrayed by the overwhelming majority of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists as the major or only event in the final print or painting of a set of episodes. In these works, as in the others, it was rendered in a variety of ways. Some draw attention to the redeeming role of Christ, by including the fatted calf, and some refer to the joy in heaven occasioned by the repentance of a sinner, by depicting the banquet scene and/or a musician. A number represent

hostile witnesses in order to convey the secondary meaning, and a few of these show allegorical figures of Charity to underscore this message. The representation of Charity is also contained in one work in which no such witnesses appear, where it is utilized to stress the parable's primary significance. This meaning is presented by all artists, whether they show the father's reception of his son close by the house or, in keeping with the biblical account, far from it. All but one show the father reaching out to or embracing his son, and all but one portray the prodigal son on his knees in order to reveal that he is a repentant sinner.

Following the Reformation the parable of the prodigal son became a vehicle for religious propaganda in dramatic productions, and Catholic and Protestant theologians, commenting upon it, argued either that it reveals that the sinner cooperated with God's grace or that he is redeemed by grace alone. With rare exceptions, depictions of the return of the prodigal son, however, do not communicate sectarian doctrine. The prevailing trend toward textual accuracy and a naturalistic mode of representation makes such communication impossible, and one can determine the Protestant or Catholic content of these works only when there is documentary evidence available or when the artist deviated from the norm.

Finally, in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, Flemish artists serving the Catholic Church, which unlike the Calvinist Church not only allowed visual images in the sanctuary but employed art as a means of conveying doctrine, developed a new image that communicated a sectarian interpretation of the parable. At the same time, Flemish artists all but ceased to depict the return of the prodigal son outside of the context of the parable, while their colleagues in the Dutch Republic, where Calvinism was the official religion, continued to represent it with some frequency.

Clearly the religious significance of the parable of the prodigal son is one crucial to Christian theology, and this along with its secular didactic content accounts for its popularity in Netherlandish art and drama. The appeal of the return of the prodigal son, however, lies in its religious meaning alone, a meaning that is of the utmost

importance to the individual. No other biblical subject so effectively and so personally demonstrates the magnitude of God's love for the repentant sinner nor so easily enables the viewer to identify with the protagonist, to see how this consoling message applies to him.

In the following chapter, Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son, indisputably the greatest and most moving rendition of the subject, will be examined in light of the tradition and related works by the artist. Such an examination is essential if one is to understand the personal as well as the religious significance of Rembrandt's masterpiece. That Rembrandt found the subject personally meaningful is self-evident for otherwise it is impossible to explain why toward the end of his life he should have chosen to portray it in greater than life-size figures. The Return of the Prodigal Son expresses a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith and Rembrandt's belief; it is at once the culmination of the visual and iconographic tradition and of the artist's career.

Footnotes to Chapter III

[1]In the sections that deal with the penitence of those who have been baptized and with the scriptural proofs of God's mercy in his treatise, On Penitence, Tertullian explains how certain aspects of the parable of the prodigal son and of the other parables in Luke 15 are to be understood. However, his complete exegesis of Luke 15 appears in his treatise, On Purity. Tertullian, Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity, trans. William P. Le Saint (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), pp. 27-31 & 68-82.

[2]Jerome, The Letters of St. Jerome, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1963), p. 123.

[3]According to Ewald Vetter, who points out that the Bible moralisee presents the interpretation of the Church Fathers most completely, the manuscript is considered to have been compiled by the Dominican, Hugo of St. Charo (d. 1263). Der verlorene Sohn (Dusseldorf: Verlag L. Schwann, 1955), p. 14.

[4]Tertullian, Treatises on Penance, p. 78; Ambrose, Ausgewahlte Schriften: Lukaskommentar, trans. John Ev. Niederhuber, 2 vols. (Kempten & Munich: Verlag der Jos. Kosel Sohnen, 1915), 2: 441.

[5]Jerome, The Letters, p. 129; Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2: 441.

[6]Though in his exegesis in On Purity (pp. 77-82), Tertullian clearly states that the prodigal son can represent only the Gentiles, in On Penitence he employs the example of the prodigal son to console all sinners. He informs the reader that the father in the parable represents God and that He will receive you if you sincerely repent and that He will be happier over your return than over another's self-control (pp. 30-31). Thus, it would seem that because he wishes to convince the reader of the importance of avoiding sin in On Purity, he denies the validity of the argument that the prodigal son signifies a Christian sinner. He states that those who believe this would say to him that if you sin, don't worry:

> remember God is good! It is to his own not the heathen that He opens His arms. A second penance will receive you and after you have been an adulterer, you will again be a Christian (pp. 81-82).

However, in On Penitence, he wishes to urge the reader to repent of his sins, and he then employs the parable to prove that God is merciful and to show that the sinner will be forgiven. In this context, he uses only the portions of the parable that deal with the prodigal and does not discuss the elder son.

It should be noted that in On Purity Tertullian is referring to canonical penance which was the norm until the middle of the seventh century and which differs from the sacrament of penance as administered by the Catholic Church thereafter. Canonical penance was severe and the penitential exercises that allowed the penitent to be re-admitted to the community of the faithful were publically performed. Moreover, one could be excluded from the Church and received back again after the performance of penitential acts only once; Thomas Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 4-5.

[7]Tertullian, Treatises on Penance, pp. 30-31; Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:441; Jerome, The Letters, p. 113.

[8]Willibald Witwitzky, Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn in der bildenden Kunst bis Rembrandt (Dissertation Ruprecht-Karls Universität zu Heidelberg, July 24, 1930), p. 9.

[9]The Letters, p. 114.

[10]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 15.

[11]Treatises on Penance, p. 78.

[12]Jerome, The Letters, p., 114; Ambrose, Lukaskommentar 2: 445-46.

[13]The Letters, p. 115.

[14]Der verlorene Sohn, p. 15.

[15]Witwitzky, Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn, p. 9.

[16]Tertullian, Treatises on Penance, p. 78; Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:446; Jerome, The Letters, p. 116.

[17]Treatises on Penance, p. 78.

[18]Jerome, The Letters, p. 115; Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:446.

[19]Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:447; Jerome, The Letters, p. 117.

[20]Lukaskommentar, 2:447-48.

[21]Ibid., 2:450-52.

[22]The Letters, pp. 119-20.

[23]Tertullian, Treatises on Penance, p. 31.

[24]Lukaskommentar, 2:452-53. The word bekehren can mean either to convert or to change.

[25]The Letters, p. 120.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., pp. 120-21.

[28]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 15.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Lukaskommentar, 2:453-54.

[31]The Letters, p. 121. As has been stated, the wedding garment without which one cannot attend the banquet of the king is a reference to Matthew 22:2-14. In these verses, a parable is told in which the kingdom of heaven is likened to the banquet given by a king to celebrate his son's marriage. Thus it is clear that without the robe, that signifies the covering of the Holy Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. This also emphasizes that the prodigal son, who is given a robe before he attends the banquet, is saved; he enters the kingdom of heaven as one of the chosen. As is stated in Matthew 22:14, "Many are called but few are chosen."

[32]The Letters, pp. 121-122.

[33]Treatises on Penance, pp. 77-78.

[34]Ibid., p. 78.

[35]Ibid., P. 78.

[36]The Letters, p. 123.

[37]Lukaskommentar, 2:454.

[38]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 15.

[39]The Letters, p. 123.

[40]The Letters, p. 123.

[41]Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:455. Ambrose's statement that the Gentiles are selected in order to bring the Jews to nought is based upon I Corinthians 1:28, wherein it is stated: "And base things of the world and things despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought thing that are."

[42]Lukaskommentar, 2:454-55.

[43]Treatises on Penance, p. 78.

[44]Jerome, The Letters, pp. 124-25.

[45]Ibid., pp. 125-26.

[46]Ibid., pp. 126-27. This is derived from Psalms 88:31-34.

[47]Jerome, The Letters, p. 127.

[48]Ibid., p. 128.

[49]Ibid., pp. 128-29.

[50]Ibid., p. 129.

[51]Ibid., p. 123.

[52]Ibid., p. 129.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., pp. 130-31.

[55]Ibid., pp. 131-33.

[56]Ambrose, Lukaskommentar, 2:456-58.

[57]Ibid., p. 458.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 16.

[60]The locations and dates of all works previously discussed can be found in Chapter II, where they are introduced.

[61]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 10. The two texts were paired in the Church liturgy until the twentieth century.

[62]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 17. The manuscript is still in the possession of the Cistercian foundation in Lilienfeld. The page that I have discussed appears as the seventh plate (abb. 7) in Vetter's book.

[63]Philippe Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery, 18 (1955):30. That the mystical interpretation of the parable was indeed the prevailing one

can be supported with further evidence. Peter of Riga presents the mystical interpretation of the parable in his versified Bible, Aurora, a late twelfth-century work that enjoyed great popularity until the fifteenth century; Paul Beichner, ed. Aurora: Petri Rigae Biblia Versificata (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1965), 2:503-4 & 1:XXVII-VIII.

[64] Ibid., p. 22.

[65] Ibid., p. 30. Verdier (p. 53) notes that there are two exceptions to the rule: two fifteenth-century German tapestries, one in the church of St. Sebaldus in Nuremberg and the other in the church of St. Elizabeth in Marburg.

[66] Vetter (Der verlorene Sohn, p. 14), who points out that the elder son is present at the banquet, notes the similarity between the banquet scene and depictions of the Last Supper, a resemblance that demonstrates the eucharistic significance of the meal. This meaning is reinforced by the scene of the killing of the calf that, in this context, underscores that Christ died upon the cross to redeem the Jews as well as the Gentiles. Moreover, Vetter states that the banquet celebration and the prodigal's return are placed on the first page of the Gospel of St. Luke, rather than next to the relevant passages in the fifteenth chapter, because they reveal the essential meaning of the Gospel--the message of salvation.

At Bourges, the return of the prodigal son is placed directly beneath the banquet celebration and includes the servant who holds the robe in readiness. He is shown holding only the robe in order to stress, in accordance with the interpretations of Ambrose and Jerome, that without the robe that signifies the covering of the Holy Spirit one cannot attend the banquet of the king. As has been pointed out, this allusion to the parable, in which the banquet given to celebrate the wedding of the king's son is likened to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 22:2-14), reveals that the Gentiles who have converted to Christianity are saved for they can attend the banquet; they can enter heaven (see above note 31). Thus the presence of the elder son at the banquet celebration in the window at Bourges reveals that the Jews too are redeemed, and in keeping with the doctrine of reconciliation, this is emphasized by the depiction, in the peak of the window above the banquet scene, of the father holding one of the hands of each of his sons.

Christ appears in the peak of the window at Chartres where He is shown making what Yves Delaporte describes as a gesture of blessing, Les vitraux de la Cathédrale de Chartres, (Chatres: E. Houvet, 1926), pl. 152. His presence reveals that it is through Christ's sacrifice that mankind is again reconciled with God and that the episodes from the parable are interpreted in accordance with the mystical interpretion. As Vetter states, in Der verlorene Sohn (p. 19), the events depicted all relate to Christ and are to be understood as demonstrating the reality of salvation.

That salvation is a reality for the elder as well as for the younger son, for the Jew as for the Gentile, is indicated by the elder

son's presence at the banquet scene and is underscored by the gesture made by the father. According to Verdier ("The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son." p. 50), though the elder son is seated on his father's right, the father proffers the cup to the younger son with his right hand--a gesture recalling the crossed blessing extended by Jacob to Ephraim and Manasses." This allusion to the blessing of Ephraim and Manasses is employed to show that, though the younger is preferred, the elder is also blessed, because though Manasses is the first born, Jacob blesses Ephraim not Manasses with his right hand. In response to Joseph's attempt to reverse the order to blessing, Jacob said that Manasses shall be great but Ephraim shall be greater (Genesis 48:8-20).

[67]Not only the depiction of the prodigal's return but other scenes in the windows at Bourges and Chartres lack the ritualistic quality of the episodes presented in the manuscripts. It is for this reason and because the windows extensively treat the prodigal's sinful life, represented by only one scene in the manuscripts, that Émile Mâle mistakenly concludes that these and other thirteenth-century French windows merely illustrate the parable and writes that, despite the existence of lengthy commentaries on the biblical text, no attempt was made to give these interpretations plastic form; The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 199. It has been demonstrated that Mâle is incorrect, and I need only add that the extensive treatment of the prodigal's sinful life shows just how undeserving the prodigal was of his father's forgiveness and thereby magnifies the greatness of God's compassion. This reveals that though subordinated to the mystical interpretation the moralizing one was not totally neglected.

[68]Kurt Kallensee, Die Liebe des Vaters: Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn in der christlichen Dichtung und Kunst (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960), p. 36. Of the Church Fathers, it is Tertullian who most emphasizes the necessity of penance. Indeed, he discusses the parable in his treatise On Penitence, as has been mentioned, and it would appear that whoever compiled the Speculum was influenced by Tertullian. The statement in the text that one should do penance for the kingdom of the Lord is at hand is derived from Matthew 3:2 which is followed by a verse that explains that John the Baptist, who spoke these words, is the one to whom Esias referred when he mentioned a voice crying in the wilderness that said: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matthew 3: 3). In one of his discussions of the parable, Tertullian refers to these passages. He urges the reader to remember that John preached penance to the soldiers and the publicans, as well as to the the sons of Abraham, "when he made ready the paths of the Lord" (Treatises on Penance, pp. 80-81).

[69]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 16.

[70]"The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," p. 30.

[71]Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons and Saint Valerian, Homilies, trans. George E. Ganss (New York: Father of the Church, Inc., 1953), p. 49.

[72]Ibid., pp. 49-51.

[73]Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," p. 30.

[74]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 20.

[75]Though one might argue that the woman represents the Church because a personification of the Church appears in the banquet scene in the Velislav Bible (Plate 4) and because, in his discussion of the prodigal's departure, Peter Chrysologus urges the reader to stay in the "house of our Father" and to remain "in the bosom of our Mother", (Selected Sermons, p. 29) which must signify the Church, I think this is unlikely. In both the Bible moralisée (Plate 3) and the Velislav Bible, where personifications of the Church are shown, the women representing the Church are attired in costumes that make their identities clear. Whereas in the Marburg tapestry the woman's costume is not distinctive. She must be seen as the prodigal's mother who, though she is not mentioned in the parable, is included in order to underscore the connection between the episodes and the scenes from the life of man in the border, the first of which shows a baby in its mother's arms.

[76]Der verlorene Sohn, p. 20.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," pp. 30-44.

[79]Ibid., p. 30.

[80]See Chapter II, pp. 15-16.

[81]Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," p. 44.

[82]Christian Tümpel states: "Der kniefall bezeichnet die Reue," in "Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandts: Deutung und Interpretation der Bildinhalte," Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 20 (1969):134.

[83]Verdier, "The Tapestry of the Prodigal Son," p. 44.

[84]Ibid., p. 20.

[85]Ibid., p. 25.

[86]Ibid., pp. 15 & 26.

[87]J. A. Worp, Geschiedenis van het Drama en van het Tooneel (Rotterdam: Fa Langerveld, 1903), p. 111; G. D. J. Schotel, Geschiedenis der Rederijkers in Nederland (Amsterdam: J. C. Loman Jr., 1862), p. 210.

[88]E. G. A. Galama, ed., Twee zestiende eeuwse Spelen van de verloren Zoone door Robert Lawet (Utrecht: N.V. Dekker, 1941; Nijmegen: van de Vigt, 1941), pp. 34-37.

[89]In the Brussels tapestries, the prodigal son is led astray by The World (Mundus), who introduces him to a number of Vices including Lust (Luxuria) and Extravagance (Dissipatio). Though it is Sensual Inclination/Instigation (Sinnelick Ingheven)and Bad Intention (Quaden Wille) who lead the prodigal astray in Lawet's plays, The World (De Wereldt) and Excess (Overdaet) run the inn to which the prodigal is led, and they provide him with food and drink and a companion, Lust (Wellust Des Vleesches). Galama, Twee zestiende eeuwse Spelen, pp. 119-43. Additional similarities between the tapestries and Lawet's plays are discussed in the text in the context of Elckerlijc.

[90]Galama, Twee zestiende eeuwse Spelen, p. 3.

[91]Ibid., p. 10.

[92]J. A. Worp states that Elckerlijc was written toward the end of the fifteenth century and that following the first edition of 1495, it was reprinted in 1500, 1525, and several times thereafter (Geschiedenis van het Drama en het Tooneel, pp. 11-12). The edition of the play that I have used and from which I have taken the English names for the characters is Henri Logeman's "Elckerlijc" a Fifteenth-Century Dutch Morality and "Everyman" a nearly contemporary Translation (Ghent: Librairie Clemm, 1892).

[93]Galama, Twee zestiende eeuwse Spelen, pp. 144-178. In these pages the above events are related and some of them are explained by the allegorical figures. Truthful Proof (Warachtich Bewys) informs The Inconsolable Sinner that Deprivation will dominate the prodigal son and this will bring him wisdom, and Scriptural Consolation (Schriftuerlick Troost) adds that God sent Deprivation to lead the prodigal from The World. Before Good Intention joins the prodigal, there is a scene in which God appears in heaven with Faith (Gheloove), Hope (Hope), and Charity (Liefde Gods) and having seen how the prodigal suffers He decides to send His companions to help him.

[94]J. F. M. Kat, De verloren Zoon als letterkundig Motief (Amsterdam: J. Babeliowsky en Zonen, 1952), p. 65.

[95]J. Bruyn, Rembrandts Keuze van bijbelse Onderwerpen (Ultrecht: Kunsthistorisch Instituut der Rijksuniversiteit, 1959), p. 12.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Christian Tümpel, " The Iconography of the Pre-Rembrandtists," The Pre-Rembrandtists (Sacramento: The E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, 1974), p. 128.

[98]See above, page 75 and note 75.

[99]The expulsion of the prodigal son appears as a separate scene in Van Londerseel's series of engravings and as an event subordinated to that of the prodigal son carousing in the woodcut series by Van Heemskerck and the sets of engravings by Matham, Visscher, and Julius Goltzius. For the locations of these works, see Chapter II, note 25. A symbolic portrayal of the event is also included among the woodcuts by Anthonisz. (Plate 21).

[100]See above, page 78.

[101]The father is shown addressing his elder son in Collaert's engraving in Hieronymous Natali's Evangelicae Imagines Historiae, and though there is no visual indication that the elder son relented, this is implied in the inscription, which states that the father appeased him (Plate 42).

[102]Bruyn, Rembrandts Keuze van bijbelse Onderwerpen, p. 12. The inscription on Galle's engraving states that the elder brother bears this [the celebration] with difficulty and is criticized by his father for being incapable of just conduct toward others. The inscriptions on Van Londerseel's and Matham's engravings make no reference to the elder son's behavior. The former states simply that the father holds a joyous banquet for his son who has returned, and the latter explains that after he considers his father's wealth and realizes that he has walked in error in foreign lands, the prodigal son perceives that his only hope and safety lie in his father, who receives his son with open arms and prepares a joyous banquet.

One might argue that the inscription on Galle's engraving condemns the elder son and thus is interpretive rather than descriptive. However, there is an implied reproach in the father's final response in the biblical text that justifies such a paraphrase.

[103]Konrad Renger, Lockere Gesellschaft: Zur Ikonographie des verlorenen Sohnes und von Wirtshausszenen in der Niederländischen Malerei: (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1970).

[104]Kat., De verloren Zoon, p. 38.

[105]John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 2:343.

[106]Ibid., 2:340.

[107]Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, 2:341.

[108]See above, pages 67-68.

[109]Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, 2:350-51.

[110]Ibid., 2:351.

[111]Kat, De verloren Zoon, pp. 37-38. Luther's rejection of the value of confession requires some qualification. Luther did not condemn the act of confession but rather the theory and practice of sacramental confession as put forth by Catholic authorities; Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation, p. 351. In light of this, we can assume that it is to sacramental confession that Luther refers in this sermon.

[112]Martin Luther, Eine Predigt/vom verloren Schaf/ Luce XV/D. Mart. Luth. zu Wittenberg fur dem Churfursten zu Sachsen/Herzog Johans Fridrich gepredigt 1533, n.p., Ai recto & Bii verso.

[113]Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, 2:347.

[114]Ibid., 2:348.

[115]Ibid.

[116]Luther, Eine Predigt/vom verloren Schaf, pp. Eiii recto Fiii verso.

[117]Martin Luther, Ain Sermon von dem Gleyssner/ein Offenbarn Sunder/ Luce am xviij/Doct. Mart. Luther gepredigt zu Wittenberg 1523, n. p., Aii recto- Aiii recto.

[118]See above, pages 60-61. It should be noted that in his discussion of the way the father received his son, Jerome states: "He placed upon the younger son (by grace rather than because of merit) His light yoke." However, this statement is made in the context of the mystical interpretation, according to which the prodigal signifies the Gentiles, and it follows Jerome's assertion that the father falling upon his son's neck signifies the coming of Christ (see above, pages 61-63). Thus the words, "By grace rather than because of merit," do not apply to the forgiveness of repentant sinners.

[119]See above, pages 60-62.

[120]Clearly, the rhetoricians' performances reflect the increasing concern with the need to castigate corrupt morals. According to Worp (Geschiedenis van het Drama, pp. 11 & 126-27), they deal with social, as well as religious, questions and present moral truths and lessons of worldly wisdom. Furthermore, as a result of his examination of rhetoricians' performance staged between 1543 and 1566, Sturla Gudlaugsson states that they display a marked interest in the role of personal responsibility and a demand for ethics, and he adds that biblical themes were reworked so that individual circumstances appear as typical examples of moral conduct, Ikonographische Studien über die Holländische Malerei und das Theater des siebzehn Jahrhunderts (n.p.: Dissertations-Verlag Karl J. Triltisch), p. 39. In light of this information, it is not surprising to discover, as Kat states (De verloren Zoon, p. 60), that the rhetoricians employed the parable of the prodigal son not to argue the validity of sectarian beliefs but to wage war on corrupt morals.

[121]De verloren Zoon, p. 39.

[122]Ibid.; W.E.D Atkinson, Acolastus: A Latin Play of the Sixteenth Century by Gulielmus Gnapheus (London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario, 1964), p. 224.

[123]Kat, De verloren Zoon, p. 42.

[124]Atkinson, Acolastus, p. 2; P. Minderaa, Gulielmus Gnapheus Acolastus (Zwolle: W.E.J. Tjeenk Willink, 1956) pp. 9-14.

[125]Atkinson, Acolatus, pp. 2 & 223. According to Adolf Schweckendiek, Acolastus was translated into German by Jörg Binder already in 1530. Binder's Comoedia von dem Verlorene Sun/Luc am 15 vertutscht und gehalten zu Zurich im jar M.D. XXXV, first printed in 1535, contributed greatly to the popularity of the theme in German drama. It should be noted that Binder took a number of liberties with Gnapheus's play and added a characters including the prodigal's mother, who thereafter figured in most works; Bühnengeschichte des verlorenen Sohnes in Deutschland 1527-1627 (Leipzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss, 1930), p. 13.

[126]Atkinson, Acolastus, p. 223. Atkinson states that by 1529 Gnapheus had been imprisoned twice for his religious convictions (p. 1). These experiences may have influenced his decision to avoid anti-Catholic rhetoric.

[127]Atkinson, Acolastus, pp. 91-197.

[128]Ibid., p. 197.

[129]Ibid., p. 199.

[130]Ibid., pp. 201-03.

[131]Ibid., p. 203.

[132]Ibid., pp. 48-66.

[133]Kurt Kallensee, Die Liebe des Vaters, p. 47.

[134]Kat, De verloren Zoon, p. 47.

[135]Kallensee, Die Liebe des Vaters, pp. 47-48; Hugo Holstein, Das Drama vom verlorenen Sohn: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Dramas (Halle: Druck und Verlag von Otto Handel, 1880), p. 11.

[136]Kallensee, Die Liebe des Vaters, pp. 48-50.

[137]Ibid., pp. 50-55. See above, pages 66-68.

[138]Kallensee, Die Liebe des Vaters, p. 55.

[139]Franz Spengler, Der Verlorene Sohn im Drama des XVI. Jahrhunderts (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1888), p. 12; Schweckendick Bühnengeschichte, p. 11.

[140]Schweckendiek, Bühnengeschichte, pp. IX & 11.

[141]De Verloren Zoon, pp. 42-46.

[142]I. Linnik, "Once More on Rembrandt and Tradition," Album Amicorum J. G. van Gelder (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 224.

[143]While the fourth woodcut is most closely related to a passage in Acolastus, the first and third also contain features that appear to have been derived from the play. In the first (Plate 19), the prodigal takes leave of his father, and ignores his father attempts to direct his attention to Conscience (Conscientia), who holds the tablets of the law. This recalls a similar incident in the play when the prodigal discards the book of the Law given him by his father (Atkinson, p. 115). In the second print, the prodigal is so enamoured of sensual pleasure, represented by Caro, that he fails to perceive that his purse has been stolen (Plate 20), a scene that is related to Acolastus only in so far as the prodigal is deceived and cheated by fickle companions (pp. 137-77). Having stripped him of everything, his false friends desert him and in the third print (Plate 21), the prodigal is struck by Poverty (Paupertas) and Heresy (Haersis).

At this moment, in the play, Acolastus laments: " Luxury (mother of poverty) whom I cherished as my best beloved . . ., now that I can offer her no means of support, . . . has gone and left me her daughter. (p. 189). Finally, like Acolastus (see above, pages 90-91), the fourth and fifth prints demonstrate that the prodigal, incapable of helping himself, is redeemed by God.

[144]Atkinson, Acolastus, pp. 189 & 191-93.

[145]Ibid., p. 193.

[146]Ibid., p. 155.

[147]In the Brussels tapestries, the Wrath of God (Ira Dei) brings Hunger (Fames), in the scene that precedes the prodigal's being chastized by the citizen of the far country (Plate 9 & 10). As has been demonstrated, a similar device is employed in Elckerlijc and Lawet's dramatization of the parable, where personifications of death and suffering are sent by God to lead the protagonists from vice (see above, page 80). It would appear that such devices are part of a general moralizing tradition and that their specific religious significances are dependent upon the context in which they appear. It should also be noted that the citizen, in the Brussels tapestries, to whom the prodigal, prompted by Hunger, appeals, does not enslave him but serves a beneficial function (see above, page 79).

[148]See above, page 86; Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, 2:349-50.

[149]See above, page 87.

[150]Luther, Eine Predigt/vom verloren Schaf, p. Bii verso: "wir sind schlechts durch die Tauffe und durch Christus blut frey von allen Werken/ aus lauter gnad und barmhertzigheyt gerecht/ . . . ."

[151]The book, entitled Hier beghinnen de Sermonen oft Wtlegghinghen op alle de Evanghelein vander Vasten metter Passien, alsomen die inder Kercken houdt, zeer costelick wtghelegt; bears neither date or publisher's name. However, in the catalogue in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, it is stated that it was printed around 1540 in Antwerp.

[152]That she appears in the guise of a pilgrim journeying to St. James is indicated by her pilgrim's staff and the scallop shell insignia on her cap. The rosary on her wrist is another sign of an outward act of piety that is deemed by Luther to be meaningless.

[153]Hier beghinnen de Sermonen, p. Mii recto: "Het en ware dat hem God wt vaderliker trouwe sloech met honger/gebreck/ en armoede/."

[154]Ibid., p. Mii recto: "so hangt hi eenen borger des lants der duysternisse aen/ die wt der synagoge Sathane is . . . ."

[155]Ibid., p. Mvi verso. (There are no page numbers after Mv. I have therefore continued the page numbers.)

[156]Ibid., p. Mviii recto.

[157]The depiction of the pope as the devil's minion, who serves his master by leading people astray, recalls the prologue of Waldis's play in which the pope is equated with the anti-Christ and condemned for teaching the false doctrine of salvation by merit (Holstein, Das Drama vom verlorenen Sohn, pp. 11-12).

[158]Hier beghinnen de Sermonen, p. Mvii recto.

[159]Ibid. The commentator writes: "Therefore one must have God [in one's soul] before one can receive repentance and sincere virtue" ("Daerom so moetme God eerst hebben/ eermen warachtich berou en op rechte deuechden mach vercrijgen.").

[160]Hier beghinnen de Sermonen, p. Mvi recto.

[161]Ibid.
Siet hoe de valsche heyligen dat benijden /dat de sondaers so lichtelic in genaden ontfangen werden/ seggede Men moet de gracie eerst met goede wercke / vasten bidden / etc. verdiene / Tvleesch en can niet verstaen / dat de verdienste des mensche min dan niet is. Wi moete de gracie en gave Gods / allee doer de goetheyt Gods en de verdiente Cristi vercrijgen.

[162]See above, page 59.

[163]See above, pages 64-65.

[164]See above, page 63.

[165]Nehemia Rogers, De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer. Ofte een Verklaringe over het 15. Capittel des H. Evangeliums Lucae, trans. Cornelius A. Diemerbroeck (Utrecht: Hermannus Ribbius en Johannes van Waasberge, Boeckverkopers, 1659), p. 596.

[166]The inscriptions on Van de Passe's and Van Londerseel's engravings are the same; they both state that the father has a joyous banquet for his son who has returned (Plates 38 & 39). While the banquet celebration is clearly visible in these two prints, it is difficult to tell whether the figures, on the terrace above the dance in the background of Matham's engraving (Plate

40), are meant to represent the participants at the banquet. That we are to see them as participants at the banquet, however, is suggested by the inscription which concludes with the statement that the father receives his son with open arms and prepares a joyous banquet (see above, note 102). The inscriptions on Natali's engraving, where the musicians are already playing but the banquet has not yet begun, state that the father runs to meet the prodigal from afar and rushes into his embrace and kisses him. He bids his son to adorn himself and get ready for the banquet. For a more precise translation of the description of how the father received his son, see below, note 227.

[167]The works mentioned (Lockere Gesellschaft, pp. 68-69) are a drawing by Aertgen van Leyden (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland), and paintings by the Master of the Prodigal Son (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), Frans Pourbus the Elder (Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh), Gosewijn van der Weyden (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan: Cranbrook Academy of Art), and an anonymous Flemish artist active in the second quarter of the sixteenth century (Paris, Musee Carnevalet). The first three works show the father receiving the prodigal on a bridge, while the last do not. All of these works are reproduced in Lockere Gesellschaft, plates 42, 6, 43, 30 & 41 respectively.

[168]Lockere Gesellschaft, pp. 69-70. In all likelihood, the bridge was seen as the path of Christ long before Picinellus used it in an emblem. Already in the fifteenth century, Jan van Eyck employed a bridge, leading over a river to a city dominated by churches, in his Madonna and the Chancellor Rolin (Paris, Louvre). Here the Christ Child, seated on His Mother's lap, appears in front of the city, and is hand, raised in a gesture of blessing, marks the beginning of the bridge behind it.

[169]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, pp. 22-23.

[170]Both Ambrose and Jerome explain the eucharistic significance of the banquet within the context of the moralizing as well as the mystical interpretation and reveal that Christ's body and blood, partaken of at communion, are given to us for our benefit and salvation. Moreover, Ambrose states that the joy that animates the Father reposes in the foundation of the Church (see above, pages 64-65).

[171]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 27.

[172]Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, 2:348-49.

[173]Ibid., 2:344-45.

[174]See above, page 88.

[175]Vetter, Der verlorene Sohn, p. 23.

[176]See above, page 63 and note 31. It should be noted that Ambrose also explains that the shoes convey another meaning that is not secret; they enable us to walk according to the spirit rather than according to the flesh (Lukaskommentar, 2:454). However, though he discusses the shoes, as well as the robe, in the context of the moralizing interpretation, there is no evidence that sixteenth-century Netherlandish artists continued to see the shoes as being symbolically significant.

[177]Though the window at Bourges is the only medieval representation that includes only the robe (Plate 6), the robe is the only discernable item in the engravings by Lucas van Leyden, Bol, Goltzius, and Van Londerseel (Plates 15, 17, 32 & 39).

[178]The servants are present in Galle's engraving but only in the subsidiary scene, where they are shown adorning the prodigal son, who appears for a second time, a clear indication that the action takes place later.

[179]See above, note 75 and note 28 in Chapter II.

[180]Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony, p. 349.

[181]See above, page 86.

[182]See above, pages 91-92.

[183]See above, page 68.

[184]Men in long robes appear in the background behind a merry company in an illustration from J. Starter's Friessche Lusthof printed in 1620. Kurt Bauch, who reproduces the print, writes of these men in long robes: "Fast sehen sie aus wie Priester oder Gelehrte, es sind Weise die alte Geistigkeit verkörpern;" Der Frühe Rembrandt und seine Zeit: Studien zu Geschichtlichen Bedeutung Seines Frühstils (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1960) p. 30. Moreover, it is stated in Luke 20:46: "Beware of the scribes which desire to walk in long robes."

In illustrations of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee is always attired in long robes, and in all but two of the following examples that appear in illustrated Bibles, he wears a tall hat or turban-like headgear. Novum Testamentum Illusstratum Insignium Rerum Simulacris (Antwerp: Johannes Richard, 1513), p. 146; Dat Gheheel Neue Testament ons Heeren Jesu Christi (Artoys: Marie Ancxt, Ghesworebackprintersse, 1553), n.p.; Le Nouveau Testament De Nostre Seigneur Jesus Christi Antwerp: Christofle Plantin, Imprinteur du Roy, 1573), pl. 101; Mattaeum Merian, Icones Bibliae. Biblische Figuren/ daerinnen die feurnemste Historien in Heiliger Goettlicher Schrift begriffen (Strassburg: In Verlegung Lazari Zetzners S. Erben, 1627), p.

75; Theatrum Biblicum (n.p., Nicolas Janz. Visscher, 1643), n.p.; I.P.S., Den Grooten Figuer - Bibel (Alkmaar: Symon Cornelisz., 1646), n.p. Jan Philipsz. Schabaelje, Den Grooten Emblemata Sacra (Amsterdam: Druckerye van Tymon Houthaak, 1654), n.p.; Biblia Sacra. Dat is de Gheele Heylighe Schrifture (Antwerp: Pieter Jacobsz. Paets, 1657), p. 154; Pieter H. Schut, Toneel ofte Vertooch der bybelsche Historien (Amsterdam: Nicolas Visscher, 1659), n.p.

[185]Walter Liedtke, "The Three 'Parables' by Barent Fabritius with a chronological list of his paintings dating from 1660 onward," Burlington Magazine 119 (1977):319. Liedtke states (p. 320) that the three paintings were commissioned to adorn the new organ loft that was being built as part of a project to enlarge and remodel the church.

[186]Ibid., p. 323.

[187]See above, page 86.

[188]Luther, Eine Predigt/vom verloren Schaf, p. Ai.

[189]See above, page 85.

[190]Evangelien ende Epistelen op alle Sondaegen ende de voornaaemste Feest-Dagen des geheelen Jaers (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz. Boeckverkooper, 1649), pp. 44-45.

[191]See above, page 86.

[192]Liedtke ("The Three 'Parables'," p. 323) states that Johannes Pechlinus was the preacher at the Lutheran church in Leiden from 1642 until 1690 and that after 1665 he was assisted by J.B. Pistolius. However, J. Loosjes states that Rudolphus Heggerus was the preacher at that church between 1622 and 1665, when he died; Naamenlijst van Hoogleeren en Predikanten van de Luthersche Kerk In Nederland (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1925), p. 112. We can assume that Heggerus was the senior preacher not only by virtue of his years of service but because his name precedes that of Pechlinus in every entry in the Lutheran cashbook, where the record of the commisssion is recorded. The cashbook is now in the Leiden Archives, where I examined it with the archivist, Mr. De Baer, who informed me that the word "Magister" that accompanies Heggerus's name in the entries is a title given to those who had received a university education.

Heggerus must have devised the program, which reveals a thorough knowledge of Lutheran doctrine. Moreover, as the senior preacher, he is the logical person to have performed this function. Finally, judging from the response he wrote to Caspar Ledebuhr, with whom he was engaged in a controversy, Heggerus was an autocratic individual, unlikely to leave the devising of the program of a

major commission to a subordinate. His response to Ledebuhr is entitled: Apologia dat is, Waerachtigh verhael teghens het leugenachtich gedruckt laster-geschrift: . . . . It was printed in Leyden in 1652 by Willem Christiaens vander Boxe.

[193]On the balcony opposite the organ loft hang nine paintings which pre-date the three by Fabritius. According to Liedtke ("The Three 'Parables,'" p. 320), seven of these are described in the archives of the Lutheran church, as follows: the Fall (Adam and Eve) by Bloemaer, the Annunciation by Versluis, the Nativity by Joris van Schooten, the Crucifixion by Van Schooten or a follower, the Descent from the Cross copied after Rubens, the Resurrection by Van Staveren, and the Ascension. E. H. ter Kuile gives the titles of the remaining two pictures as the Last Judgment and the Angel Concert, in De Nederlandsche Monumenten van Geschiedenis en Kunst (The Hague: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1944), 7:94. These paintings demonstrate that Christ came to earth, assumed human form, died upon the cross, and conquered death, in order to take away the sins of the world and grant man eternal life. The Angel Concert, that follows the Last Judgment, emphasizes the joyful nature of the message conveyed.

[194]Daniel Pont writes that the parable of the prodigal son must have been placed in the center due to the prominent role it had always played in both Christian cultural life and in preaching through word and image and that this placement must have been anticipated by the commission. Moreover, he argues that the arrangement of the pictures, as they now hang in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, with Lazarus and the rich man to the left and the Pharisee and the publican to the right, must have been the original one, as the perspective lines, fall of light, and division of color, all indicate; Barent Fabritius (The Hague: N.V. Drukkerij Trio, 1958), p. 53.

[195]See above, pages 93-97.

[196]Roland Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 221.

[197]Fabrituis's inclusion of both the devil holding the mask and the angel may have been inspired by Christoffel van Sichem's woodcut illustration of a passage in Matthew 6. This woodcut appears between the fifteenth and sixteenth verses, in that chapter of an illustrated Bible, which state:

> But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
> Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

The hypocrite in the illustration is shown with the letter "B" by him and a devil over his head, while the other man is depicted

by the letter "C" and with an angel over his head. The accompanying inscriptions state that the man designated by "B" is a hypocrite, who presents a gaunt face so that men praise his fasting, and that the man marked by "C" presents a happy appearance and has a good heart. This appears on the seventeenth page of the New Testament in Biblia Sacra printed for the second time in Antwerp by Pieter Jacobsz. Paets in 1657.

It seems likely that Heggerus was familiar with this publication and that he brought Fabritius's attention to it. This would account not only for the presence of the devil and the angel and the gaunt face of the Pharisee, but for the inscriptions taken from the earlier verses in the same chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[198]It is worth noting, as Pont points out (Barent Fabritius p. 55), that the structure in front of which the Pharisee and his companion stand is derived from the Synagogue Sathanae that appears in the third and fourth woodcuts of Cornelis Anthonisz.'s series (Plates 21 & 22).

[199]E. Muller, ed., Luthers Erklarung der Heil Schrift (Nordhausen: Verlag von Fr. Eberhardt, 1888), pp. 251-52.

[200]Bullinger's Huys-Boeck was a popular text and one that was frequently re-printed in the Dutch Republic, as R. B. Evenhuis points out. Moreover, he adds that it was found in most houses and that the Calvinist Church recommended that it be taken on visits to the sick and that the sermons contained in it should be read in houses of correction; Ook dat was Amsterdam: De kerk der Hervorming in de Gouden Eeuw (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1967), 2:33. Heggerus was certainly acquainted with Calvinist works and doctrine because he studied at the Univeristy of Leiden where he was enrolled in 1622; J.P. die Bie and J. Loosjes, Biographisch Woordenboek Van Protestantsche Godgeleerden in Nederland (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, n.d.), p. 609.

[201]Heinrich Bullinger, Huys-Boeck/ Vijf Decades: Dat is vyftich Sermoonen/ vande voornemste Hoofstucken der Christelicker Religie/ in dry Delen gescheyden (Leyden: Jacob Andriaensz. Boekverkooper, 1607), p. 32 verso: "So laet ons dan vast houden/ day wy alle sondaers zijn."

[202]Huys-Boeck, p. 33 recto: "soo is dan seker/ dat door de dood Christi/ den geloovingen alle sonden vergeven worden."

[203]De ware bekeerde Sondaer, pp. 578-80.

[204]Ibid., pp. 588-89.

[205]Evangelien ende Epistelen, pp. 44-45.

[206]See above, pages 66-68 & 91-92.

[207]Luther, Ain Sermon von dem Gleyssner / ein Offenbarn Sünder, p. Aii verso.

[208]Evangelien ende Epistelen, p. 54.

[209]Luther, Ain Sermon von dem Gleyssner / ein Offenbarn Sünder, p. Aiii recto: "Ist der glaub da / so müssen die werck folgen."

[210]The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16: 19-31) tells how the beggar, Lazarus, languished by the gate of the rich man's house and was given nothing, while the rich man feasted sumptuously daily. It relates that Lazarus died and was carried to the bosom of Abraham and that the rich man went to hell. From hell, the rich man saw Lazarus and begged Abraham to send Lazarus to bring him water, but Abraham refused and said that Lazarus, who had evil things on earth, is now comforted, and he who had good things is now tormented. The rich man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who would repent upon seeing one who had been sent from the dead. However, Abraham again refuses and argues that the rich man's brothers would not be convinced "though one rose from the dead."

Luther, in his commentary on this parable, asserts that it teaches that one is saved by faith, as is demonstrated by the different fates of these two men, and adds that it also shows that the world is full of avarice. He then refers to Luke 16:15, a passage related only a few verses before the parable, which states:

> Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

You Pharisees, Luther continues, justify yourselves believing you are pious because you have enough, and you deem disreputable those who suffer. You adorn your greed and call your mammon God's blessing, because you must appear to uphold God's law (Müller, Luther's Erklärung, p. 245).

Having condemned the rich and the Pharisees, whom he equates with one another due to their greed and their lack of faith and self-knowledge, Luther denounces them for their lack of charity. He states that the rich man had no love for his neighbor, which demonstrates that there is nothing more unmerciful or blind than lack of faith. Lazarus, however, did not wish evil upon the rich man but prayed for him, and this reveals, argues Luther, that out of faith comes the other virtue, the love of one's neighbors (Müller, Luthers Erklärung, p. 246). The importance of love is also stressed in the Lutheran lectionary (Evangelien ende Epistelen, pp. 42-43), where the parable of Lazarus and the rich man is paired with I John 4:16, which states:

> And we have known and believed the love that God hath in us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.

[211]De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, p. 387.

[212]Ibid., p. 433.

[213]See above, note 193.

[214]See above, pages 33 & 34.

[215]See above, pages 64-65 & 100-102.

[216]Van Cuylenbergh, who includes the subsidiary scene of the elder brother addressing a servant, does so because it appears in Guercino's painting upon which his work is based, and his picture conveys only the primary meaning of the parable.

[217]See above, pages 105-107.

[218]See above, pages 66-68.

[219]See above, page 68.

[220]Paintings of Charity, reproduced in the D.I.A.L. Index, by J. Boeckhorst (Antwerp, Museum der Commissie van Openbaren Onderstand van Antwerpen) and Ferdinand Bol (Berlin, castle, inventory number 6331), portray Charity as an ordinary, unidealized woman accompanied by playful children. The pictures could easily be mistaken for genre scenes, were it not for the lack of domestic settings. The information concerning the location of these works has been copied from the cards in the Index.

[221]Commentary on a Harmony, 2:346.

[222]Ibid., 2:347.

[223]Eine Predigt / vom verloren Schaf, pp. Eii *verso* Fii *recto*.

[224]Huys-Boeck, p. 143 *recto*.

[225]See above, page 73.

[226]Hieronymous Natali, Evangelicae Historicae Imagines (Antwerp: n.p., 1593); Ludovico del Ponte, Der Zielen Lust-Hof (Louvain: Isbrandt Jacobsz., 1629).

[227]More precisely translated, the inscription in Collaert's engraving states that the elder son comes from the field and when

he realizes what has happened, reacts unworthily, and he goes to his father who entreats kindly and appeases him. The inscription by Van Sichem's woodcut states that the other son comes from the fields and takes this thing [the celebration] badly; his father entreats him in a friendly manner and appeases him. It should perhaps be noted that the inscriptions explaining the father's reception of his son can be considered interpretive, unlike the others. The inscription by Van Sichem's woodcut states "Die Vader loopt van verre in't gemoet ende omhelst hem." "Gemoet" in seventeenth-century Dutch means the innermost part of man. The best translation of the sentence that I can devise is: "The father runs from afar in spirit and embraces him." The same meaning is conveyed in the Latin explanation and must be employed to underscore that the father represents God.

[228]In the Decree Concerning Justification issued by the Council of Trent in 1547, in accordance with the mystical interpretation of the parable, it is stated (Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, p. 34) that:

> the first robe [Luke 15:22, c. 31, D II de poenit.], given them through Jesus Christ in place of that which Adam by his disobedience lost for himself and for us, is given so that they may bear it before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ and may have life eternal.

Though this is applied to penance, as well as to conversion, it indicates that the mystical interpretation was still employed by Catholic theologians. Moreover, as they never rejected the validity of typological exegesis, they must have continued to accept the mystical as well as the moralizing interpretation of the parable.

[229]See above, pages 67-68.

[230]Cornelis de Bie, Den / verloren Sone/ Osias/ oft Bekeerden Sondaer/Comedie op de Woorden ghetrocken uyt de Heylighe Schriftuer (Antwerp: Mesens, 1689), p. 59. Not only is the elder son described as being reconciled with his brother, but it is stated that he embraces and kisses him.

[231]De Bie, Den/verloren Sone, pp. 3 recto - 3 verso.

[232]See above, page 62.

[233]Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, pp. 31-32.

[234]Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, Ltd., 1971), 1:453.

[235]Ibid.

[236]Ewald Vetter, "Der verlorene Sohn und die Sünder im

Jahrhundert des Konzils von Trient," Sonderdruck aus Spanisch Forschungen der Gorresgesellschaft: Erste Reihe Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kultur geschichte Spaniens (Münster; Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1960), 15:177-78, 182-83.

[237]Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, p. 192.

[238]See above, page 64.

[239]John B. Knipping, Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands, (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1974; Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1974) 1:319.

[240]Vetter, "Der verlorene Sohn und die Sunder," p. 189.

[241]Ibid., p. 192.

[242]Ibid, pp. 190-92.

[243]Knipping, Iconography of the Counter Reformation, 1:24.

[244]See above, pages 123-124.

[245]See above, page 125.

[246]Rumoldus Backx, Sermoonen van de Seer Eerw Rumoldus Backx . . . Over de Bekeeringh van den Sondaer (Antwerp: Petrus Jouret, 1713), pp. 136 & 141. The sermons, though not printed until 1713, were preached during the years 1694 and 1695.

[247]Backx, Sermoonen, p. 141.

[248]Ibid., p. 490.

[249]Ibid.

[250]Knipping, Iconography of the Counter Reformation, 1: 316.

[251]See above, page 79.

[252]Backx, Sermoonen, p. 8:

> Bernhard segt "de traenen der Penitenten zyn de wyn der Engelen"; maar ook Christus self segt dat eer in den Hemel meer blydschap sal syn over eenen Sondaer penitentie doende, dan over negen-en-negentigh Rechtveerdige die geen penetentie en behoeven.

[253]Galama, Twee zestiende eeuwse Spelen, pp. 108-115.

[254]Novum Testamentum, p. 138 verso.

[255]The version in the Ashmolean is the only impression known to me.

[256]The inscriptions are transcribed by F. J. Dubiez in Cornelis Anthoniszoon van Amsterdam: Zijn Leven en Werken (Amsterdam: H.D. Pfann, 1969) p. 105; "Ick sal mijn scapen selven weyden spreect die// Here/ Dat verlore was wil ick soecken / en dat// verlore Worpen was sal ic wederombrenge/ di cranc// is wil ick gheneesen etc. Ezech. (XXXIV:16)."

[257]Dubiez, Cornelis Anthoniszoon, p. 105; "Vader ick heb gesondicht inde hemel ende // voor u." The incomplete statement by the publican contains the following words: ic publicaen/ O God u// my sondige mense."

[258]See above, page 121.

[259]Vetter, "Der verlorene Sohn und die Sünder," p. 194.

[260]Ibid., pp. 194-95.

CHAPTER IV

REMBRANDT'S THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON: THE FINAL SOLUTION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Dominating Rembrandt's splendid painting is the profoundly moving image of the father gently laying his hands on the back of his repentant and pathetic son (Plate 1). No other artist so effectively and affectively conveys the intensity of the father's compassion, the son's remorse, and the bond of love that unites them. This image, which in Clark's words "has the completeness of some ancient symbol,"[1] is so convincing an expression of God's mercy and His willingness to forgive repentant sinners that all have assumed that this, the primary message of the parable, constitutes the sole content of the picture. Consequently, the other figures and features of the composition have not received the attention that is required to explain their contribution to the significance of the painting. This becomes evident when one considers that the presence of the sculptural relief has been noted by only a single art historian and that, beyond suggesting that one of the male witnesses represents the prodigal's elder brother, few have attempted to identify the observers as individuals; most merely consider how they reinforce the reverential mood evoked by the father's loving reception of his son.

Of those who have commented upon the witnesses, only Bob Haak asserts that they contribute nothing to the main theme and indeed detract from it. He states, in addition, that they are of such poor quality that it is difficult to believe that they are by Rembrandt's hand.[2] Like Haak, H.E. van Gelder, Knuttel, Neumann, Rosenberg, and Weisbach consider the observers as a group and do not distinguish among them. Rosenberg simply observes that they stand silently and reflect the deep emotion of the main pair, while

Van Gelder writes that the stillness of their demeanor is expressive of spiritual feeling.[3] Weisbach explains that they participate by devoutly watching and directing attention to the main spiritual focus,[4] while Neumann and Knuttel compare the group to a choir. The latter regards the observers' silence and attentive amazement as comparable to the explanatory accompaniment of the choirs in ancient tragedies.[5] Neumann, however, considers the choir to be more spiritual in nature. He asserts that the restrained gestures and statue-like immobility of these figures endow them with a universal character, one which transcends all individuality, and adds that they appear like a choir of holy witnesses, that with sensitivity but without clearly illuminated consciousness accompanies the event.[6]

Michel and Hamann, while identifying the attendants, also fail to consider them as individuals and see them as united in expression. Michel indicates that they are servants and, in a characterization similar to Neumann's, states that they look on in wonder at a scene they cannot comprehend.[7] The observers are defined as the prodigal's brothers and sisters by Hamann, who points out that the prodigal's brother appeared in the 1636 etching (Plate 56), where he is shown unwillingly bringing the garments for his sibling and where his sister or a maid looks out of the window. These figures, he adds, stand spellbound on the periphery and share the father's feelings.[8]

While some of these explanations capture the mood of the painting, none takes into account the range of expression or the varying degrees of prominence accorded the witnesses. Presumably recognizing that the standing male witness is rendered with the greatest distinction and believing, therefore, that he must be more than an anonymous observer, Alpatow, Benesch, and Von Bode identify him alone. Von Bode, who argues that he represents a steward, writes that the luminous and vigorous color is the vivifying element which causes the viewer to lose sight of the figures' rigid poses, tame grouping, and apparent lack of expression which strikes one so unpleasantly in reproductions of the work.[9] Benesch, who before

confronting the picture merely stated that the four figures merge with the shadows,[10] remarked after seeing it:

> Anyone who has seen the picture in bright sunlight will remember the silent onlookers and the strange spell they cast, and the way the parable becomes a scene from a dream, a reflection of the dark mirror of their souls. The mighty figure on the right, is the elder son, approaching with a solemn, reproachful mien.[11]

Though Alpatow states that this figure, which links the affected father to the indifferent, curious, and almost evil attendants in the background, is the discontent elder son, he adds that the son's gaze is sympathetic and his countenance is noble and filled with sorrow. Thus one can assume that he is transformed from one who is discontent and envious into an ally of his father's.[12]

Like Benesch and Alpatow, Kalff, Tümpel, and Goldscheider, claim that the most prominent witness represents the elder son. According to Goldscheider, this mistrustful individual is accompanied by the indifferent overseer seated behind him, the prodigal's mother who leans against the arch, and a maidservant.[13] Tümpel characterizes neither the elder son nor the other figures, whom he identifies as servants,[14] while Kalff discusses the expression of each but identifies only the elder son who, he writes, stands stiffly and reacts little. He compares the others to a choir in a tragedy, a choir that attends and explains what occurs. Here, however, it can scarcely give an account of what it sees, as it is so deeply impressed. Failing to discern the woman on the stairs, Kalff adds that the woman whose eyes burn with the glow of joy is particularly affected by what she sees, as is the seated man albeit to a lesser extent.[15]

Eisler and Veth agree with those who assert that the elder son is present among the observers, but they identify him rather as the seated man. After discussing the moving depiction of the father's reception of his son, Veth states that the echo of this poignant event resonates in the observers. He discerns only three of the four figures: the astonished woman who leans her head against the arch, the morose elder son seated in front of it, and the standing man, whom he describes as a wanderer, who sees the past and gazes

into the future, "a magician who understands and passes on."[16] Like Kalff and Veth, Eisler overlooks the woman in the distance, and he declares that in the three figures color, gesture, and mood are dissipated and finally silenced. The woman and the prodigal's brother appear beneath a dark void, while the standing man shares in the sacred bond that unites the main group.[17] Musper differs from all others who discuss the identity of the witnesses by asserting that the figure by the arch is not a woman but the prodigal's younger brother, who it must be admitted is described in the biblical text as being both older than the prodigal and away from home when his brother returned. He adds that the other figures already appeared in Rembrandt's 1636 etching, where they are shown in different positions, the maidservant peering out of the window and the two men, called servants in the Bible, coming down the stairs.[18] Finally, Busch considers only the role played by the standing male witness, whose significance he explains in light of Cornelis Massys's engraving of Samuel annointing David in the presence of Jesse and his other sons. According to Busch, the standing witness is derived from the figure of Jesse who also stands holding a staff in front of him and with his beturbaned head slightly inclined. Having remarked that the subjects of both works are related, as each indicates that the youngest and seemingly undeserving son is preferred to the others, Busch suggests that the relationship between the standing man and Jesse may be iconographically significant. The standing man in Rembrandt's painting may represent an additional father figure, whose presence underscores the religious content of the father's reception of his son, emphasizing that it signifies a spiritual event, the bestowal of grace.[19]

None of the above analyses of the witnesses consider the individual identities and significances of the observers. Some see them as an anonymous group the presence of which relates to the meaning presented in the image of the father and son, while others identify some or all of the witnesses but still view them as a group or distinguish only the standing male. Still others identify them and fail to probe the roles that they play. As a group, the

observers, attentive and immobile, contribute to the reverential mood of the painting and thereby reinforce the parable's primary meaning, so affectingly communicated by the depiction of the father tenderly laying his hands on the back of his repentant son. However, as has been shown in the first chapter, Rembrandt carefully composed the six figures in pairs and presented them in varying degrees of prominence. Moreover, he arranged the witnesses in a loosely linked diagonal in which the figures become progressively more distinct as they move from the left background to the right foreground. Clearly, just as he distinguished the image of the father and son to reveal that it is the most significant feature within the work, he differentiated among the observers to indicate the range of their iconographic importance.

All of those who have discussed the witnesses have failed to perceive that Rembrandt has differentiated among them in this manner, and all have neglected to examine the painting in light of both the iconographic tradition and the evolution of Rembrandt's conception as expressed not only in the 1636 etching, which many have considered, but in the drawings. As a result, no one has correctly identified all of the observers or accounted for their presence. Moreover, only Neumann notes the appearance of the sculptural relief, and he mistakenly suggests that it refers to the prodigal's tenure as a swineherd, because he too was unfamiliar with the iconographic tradition.[20] Before turning to the works of other artists, it is necessary to consider the evolution of Rembrandt's conception of the subject as it developed following the 1636 etching discussed above (Plate 56).[21]

This evolution is documented in three drawings,[22] the first of which was completed about 1642 (Haarlem, Teyler Museum), while the other two were executed about 1656-57 (Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett) and 1658-59 (Vienna, Albertina).[23] The Haarlem drawing differs markedly from the etching (Plate 67). The subsidiary scene, the maidservant, and the servants bringing the required items, which are present in the etching, have been eliminated,

and only a small boy observes the event. In addition, the action and emphatic display of violent emotion are toned down. The prodigal son, who now rests his head against his father's chest, is still agitated, but his body is no longer convulsed by sobs, and his father instead of hastening to embrace him stands motionless with his left hand on his son's head in a gesture suggestive of blessing.

Like the Haarlem drawing, the other two works contain only a single witness and are pervaded by a sense of solemnity and quietude (Plates 70 & 71). In the Dresden drawing, the faces of the protagonists are obscured--the father stands with his back to the viewer, his left arm hiding the prodigal's face (Plate 70). The figures are indistinctly defined, but it appears that the father bends over his son and places his hands on the prodigal's shoulders. The woman who observes the father's reception of his son from within the doorway raises her hands to her face in a gesture of awe, and it is her expression that strikes a note of reverence and conveys to the viewer the sense that this is a solemn and momentous occasion.

The woman within the doorway in the Albertina drawing stands still as she gazes at the father and the prodigal (Plate 71). Here these figures are both clearly visible and powerfully expressive. The exhausted prodigal clasps his hands in prayer and rests his head against his father's chest as he does in the Haarlem rendition. The father raises himself up from the bench on which he was seated, bends over the prodigal, and in a protective manner encircles the youth's shoulders with his right arm.

The Haarlem and Albertina drawings contain a number of unusual features that are derived from depictions of subjects other than that of the return of the prodigal son. For example, the small boy in the Haarlem drawing appears rarely in representations of the prodigal's return, and never as the sole witness. It seems likely that he is derived from the figure of Isaac in Gerbrand van den Eeckhout's drawing of the dismissal of Hagar (Berlin, Küpferstichkabinett), executed in the early 1640's (Plate 68).[24] Here Isaac stands on the stairs and leans on a low wall as he watches his father send away his half brother, Ishmael, and Hagar. Not

only is Isaac's pose closely related to that of the small boy in the Haarlem drawing, but both display a similar speculative expression. Van den Eeckhout studied under Rembrandt between 1635 and 1640, and therefore it is not unreasonable to suggest that Rembrandt could have known the drawing. Furthermore, the placement of the father's hand on the prodigal's head, an unusual gesture in depictions of the prodigal's return, is reminiscent of another drawing of the dismissal of Hagar that is attributed to Gerband van den Eeckhout (Plate 69).[25] Here Isaac peers out from behind his father and glares at the kneeling Ishmael, while Abraham places his left hand on Ishmael's head and raises his right as he bestows his blessing.

When this drawing was sold in Paris it was believed to represent the return of the prodigal son.[26] Like the Haarlem drawing and most seventeenth-century Dutch depictions of the prodigal's return, it shows the father and his kneeling son, in the presence of attendants, in front of the arched entranceway of the house. Consequently the mistake is understandable. Whether or not Rembrandt knew this work is unanswerable, its date like its location remaining unknown. However, there is no need to suggest that he did. The inspiration for the father's gesture in the Haarlem work could have been provided by another depiction of this subject. In the 1640's Rembrandt himself made a number of drawings of the dismissal of Hagar, in one of which Ishmael kneels before Abraham in order to receive his blessing (London, British Museum).[27] What is important is that the relationship between the Haarlem Return of the Prodigal Son and these drawings indicates that Rembrandt's conception of the New Testament subject was influenced by representations of the dismissal of Hagar.

The presence of the woman, standing within the doorway, in each of the later drawings of the prodigal's return might suggest that the Old Testament subject was still in Rembrandt's mind, because she appears in the same position as Sara in the drawings of the dismissal of Hagar. However, the poses of the prodigal son and

his father in the Albertina drawing reveal that another subject, that of Isaac blessing Jacob, was foremost in Rembrandt's thoughts. The sources for the unusual features in this work, the presence of a single female witness and the father shown raising himself up from a bench, can be found in Mathias Merian's engraving of Isaac blessing Jacob, which was printed prior to Rembrandt's drawing (Plate 72).[28] Here, as in the Albertina drawing, the woman stands aside and looks on, while the father bends over his son who kneels before him with his hands clasped in prayer. Even though Isaac remains seated as he places his one hand on his son's head and blesses him with the other, while the prodigal's father raises himself up off of the bench in order to embrace his son, these differences do not weaken the overall resemblance between the works.

The derivation of motifs from other subjects is characteristic of Rembrandt's working method. As Bauch notes, recurring patterns of particular motifs appear in depictions of different subjects. He explains that the works which display such patterns are bound by their inner content as well as by their external appearance, and adds that they resemble one another because they are thematically related.[29] Bialostocki, whose attitude changed following Tümpel's explanation of Rembrandt's working method,[30] once asserted that in his later works Rembrandt evolved his conception not from a particular text but from a circle of ideas expressing a certain psychological mood; Rembrandt picked a theme to express his personal knowledge of problems of experience, not to illustrate a text, and he insisted that the titles of the late pictures tell us nothing about their content, the picture itself becoming a symbol.[31]

Tümpel explains that he disagreed with Bialostocki's notion that Rembrandt began with an idea and that the subject only emerged during the creative process and was nothing more than the materialization of an idea. Like Bauch, he is convinced that Rembrandt began with a subject in mind and worked from visual and iconographic traditions as well as from the text. Concurring with Bialostocki's analysis in one respect, Tümpel believes that the related themes are of the utmost importance. However, he argues that they played

a later role in the process; they contribute to Rembrandt's formal conception and the final expression of the psychological and historical situation but are not the starting points.[32] In other words, while to Bialostocki Rembrandt worked from the universal to the particular, and only during the process of arriving at the final solution associated the inner content with a particular subject, for Tümpel Rembrandt worked from the particular to the general and his perception of the connection between the subject and related themes enabled him to endow the work with universal significance.

Tümpel categorizes Rembrandt's utilization of motifs and features borrowed from other works of art. He states that Rembrandt borrowed motifs: from depictions of the same subject for their formal and iconographic significance, from different subjects for purely formal reasons, and from different subjects for iconographic as well as formal purposes.[33] Rembrandt's employment of features in the Haarlem and Albertina drawings that are derived from representations of the dismissal of Hagar and Isaac blessing Jacob fits into Tumpel's third catagory. The Old Testament subjects are themes that are related by their inner content to the return of the prodigal son and Rembrandt, recognizing this connection, derived features from representations of these subjects in order to create a new conception of the prodigal's return and to endow it with universal significance.

The dismissal of Hagar and the return of the prodigal son are superficially related; both events take place in the presence of witnesses in front of the father's house. But it is the inner connection that prompted Rembrandt to look at depictions of the one subject while working on a representation of the other. Both deal with the expression of a father's love for one of his sons and of his concern for his son's suffering, the hardship that Ishmael will encounter and that which the prodigal has already endured.

While working on the Albertina drawing, Rembrandt turned to a representation of Isaac blessing Jacob as a source of inspiration, presumably because he wished to stress that the younger son, despite

his apparent lack of worth, is received by his father. Both the story of Jacob and Esau and the parable of the prodigal son tell how the younger, seemingly undeserving son receives what the elder believes to be his by right, and relate that the elder was angered when he discovered what had occurred in his absence. For this reason, the return of the prodigal son appears with depictions of Isaac blessing Jacob and Abraham giving Isaac Ishmael's birthright in the fourteenth-century manuscript, the Concordantia Caritatis.[34] In addition, due to this relationship, the parable of the prodigal son and the story of how Jacob received his father's blessing are paired in the Catholic liturgy.[35] The parallels between these texts were evident to Protestant as well as Catholic theologians, and though they presented a different interpretation, they too argued that both texts convey the same meaning. In one of thirteen sermons preached on the story of Jacob and Esau, Calvin commenting upon the words "the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23), points out that God said these words to Rebecca before the two were born, before either had done good or evil, and he interprets this text like that of the parable to mean that man is saved by grace not merit.[36] In addition, Nehemia Rogers, who compares the prodigal's elder brother to Esau in his lengthy commentary on Luke 15, cites Jacob (Genesis 32: 9-10) as one who, like the prodigal, acknowledged his lack of worth.[37] Clearly, Rembrandt turned to depictions of Isaac blessing Jacob while working on the Albertina drawing, because he was reminded that Jacob like the prodigal son did not earn his father's blessing.

Not only particular features present in the portrayal of the Old Testament subjects but the mood of such works affected Rembrandt's conception of the return of the prodigal son. There is a sense of solemnity in the Haarlem and Albertina drawings and a hushed atmosphere that recalls the mood of the Paris drawing of the dismissal of Hagar and Merian's representation of Isaac blessing Jacob. This demonstrates that Rembrandt indeed was seeking to express the inner human drama of the subject and that in his quest for the means to

present the most convincing rendition of a father's love for his son he sought inspiration in works that deal with this theme. In this manner he moves toward his final solution.

Only in its mood does the Leningrad painting bear a marked resemblance to the earlier drawings. Nonetheless, the evolution of certain features can be traced in at least the Haarlem and Albertina drawings. In the two drawings as in the painting, the prodigal son leans against his father and places his head against his father's chest. Moreover, the way the father receives his son in the painting is a synthesis of the blessing gesture in the Haarlem work and the protective manner with which the father embraces his son in the Albertina representation. In the painting, the father lays his hands on his son's back in a way that may have been inspired by Maarten van Heemskerck's painting (Plate 18). However, this gesture that bespeaks the father's great love is the fruition and a brilliant transformation of those employed in Rembrandt's earlier drawings. It reveals that the father both shelters and sanctifies the prodigal. As Hamann states, he performs a sacred rite.[38]

It is clear that the evolution of the father's gesture stems from depictions of Abraham blessing Ishmael and, more particularly, Isaac blessing Jacob. That Rembrandt still had the latter subject in mind when he painted the Return of the Prodigal Son is evident. As Alpatow notes, the forerunners of the repentant prodigal appear in Rembrandt's innumerable drawings of Christ healing the lepers and of Jacob kneeling before Isaac's death bed.[39] I believe that the direct prototype for the prodigal's pose can be found in the drawing of Isaac blessing Jacob (London, Lady Melchett's Collection) executed about 1652 (Plate 73).[40] Here, as in the painting, the youth kneels with his back to the viewer, his head bowed and turned slightly to the right. Here, too, the father bends over his son as he blesses him, and only the upper portion of the old man's body is clearly visible.

The evolution of Rembrandt's conception of the return of the prodigal son reflects the general development of his art. The illustrative details, incidental elements, and dramatic action of the

etching are omitted from the drawings in which Rembrandt focuses upon the inner experience and emotions of the individuals. True the drawings are not intended as finished works and therefore would not incorporate less significant details. However, the immobility of the protagonists and the way in which the emotions of father and son are conveyed in the Haarlem and Albertina works are indicative of Rembrandt's increasing concern with the inner rather than the external drama and of his desire to express the relationship between a father and his son in a manner that transcends the particulars and focuses upon the universal significance.

While Rembrandt's evolving conception of the main group in the Leningrad painting can be traced in the drawings, his conceptions of all but one witness cannot. Only the woman who leans against the arch appears in two of the three drawings of the return of the prodigal son. She is reminiscent of the young women who also observe the father's reception of his son from within the doorways in the Dresden and Albertina drawings. These two women, set apart from the main groups, recall Sara in depictions of the dismissal of Hagar and Rebecca in representations of Isaac blessing Jacob. Thus, despite their apparent youth, they must be intended to represent the prodigal's mother, and one can assume that the woman in the Leningrad painting also represents the prodigal's mother. In order to verify this identification and to determine the identity and significance of the other witnesses, it is necessary to examine Rembrandt's painting in light of other depictions of the return of the prodigal son.

The presence of the two women is easily explained. The one leaning against the arch certainly represents the prodigal's mother who is commonly included in depictions of the prodigal's return (Plates 39, 41, 43-47, 49, 50, 57, 58 & 60), and the indistinctly defined woman who stands on the stairs in the upper left hand corner must be the maidservant. She observes the father's reception from above, as do the maidservants in Rembrandt's etching, Crispijn van de Passe's engraving, and two paintings by followers of Rembrandt (Plates 56, 38, 58 & 59).

The more prominent male witnesses are more difficult to identify. Many have asserted that one or the other represents the prodigal's elder brother, notwithstanding that in previous works of art he never witnesses the prodigal's return, and in those depictions of the subject in which he appears he is portrayed only in a subsidiary scene. Such an assertion poses a major problem; as has been demonstrated, the two male witnesses are paired, and if one represents the prodigal's elder brother, how are we to account for the other? Those who have made this suggestion either ignore the second figure or call him a steward or a servant, neither of which is an acceptable identification. The steward does not appear in the parable or in any other representation, and it is impossible to argue that either is a servant, as neither carries the ring, robe, or shoes.

It would appear that the male witnesses are included, like similarly attired figures in so many other depictions of the subject (Plates 13-17, 32, & 58), to represent those who behave like the prodigal's elder brother. Such non-biblical figures serve in place of the prodigal's elder brother, who according to the text was in the fields when the prodigal returned, to convey the secondary meaning of the parable, the admonition to be charitable.[41] Consequently, most of these attendants are united in their expression of hostility and disbelief, while only a few are rendered as indifferent or at best sorrowful. Rembrandt, however, diverges from this tradition and clearly differentiates between the two men. The standing man whose tall hat, long robes, and expression of mingled anger and sorrow place him in the tradition of the disgruntled witnesses seems rather withdrawn. As if having difficulties accepting what he sees, he retreats within himself. In contrast, the seated man is obviously deeply moved; he gazes intently at the father's reception of his son and presses his fist against his heart. In addition, while the bearded man stands somewhat apart, the seated one is linked with the prodigal son by his placement and pose.

Rembrandt's transformation of the tradition is significant. He emphatically distinguishes the two men from one another in order to call to mind that Christ told the parable of the prodigal son

to two different groups, the sinners and publicans, on the one hand, the Pharisees and scribes, on the other. He related the parable to console the former, to demonstrate that God is merciful and willing to forgive repentant sinners, and to show the latter that, by murmuring at His association with people they deemed disreputable, they were behaving in an uncharitable manner. By linking the seated man with the prodigal son and by setting the standing man, who signifies those who behave like the elder brother, somewhat apart, Rembrandt reveals that they refer to these two different groups--their presence thus serving to underscore the parable's primary meaning as well as to convey the secondary lesson.

This contention can be supported by interpretations of the parable. Luther and Calvin both equate the prodigal son with the sinners who gathered to hear Christ, and Jerome writes that the prodigal son can be seen as being among the sinners and publicans. Furthermore, Luther asserts that the elder brother signifies the Pharisees, while Calvin claims that he stands for the scribes.[42] Finally, both Rogers and Jan Philipsz. Schabaelje, who explains the meaning of the parable in Den Grooten Emblemata Sacra, printed in 1654, state that the prodigal represents the sinners and the publicans and his elder brother signifies the Pharisees and the scribes.[43] Schabaelje adds that Christ related the parable to these two groups of men to reveal that He came to seek those who were lost and to demonstrate God's love and to show how unjustified is the jealousy of the Pharisees. Den Grooten Emblemata contains illustrations of biblical stories and substitutes explanatory accounts of the events for biblical texts. It was intended for popular consumption, and consequently one can assume that its contents were well known. Following his account of the parable, Schabaelje writes that its messages are still meaningful for us today: it presents a living picture of God's unchanging love for erring mankind, the lesson that man's folly leads him to ruin, the lesson of the Cross which brings one to self-knowledge and repentance, and the revelations that the justice of the law is not wisdom and that love overcomes

everything and is the road to perfection.[44]

In light of the above, it is evident that Rembrandt transformed the tradition and differentiated between the two male witnesses in order to refer to the two groups to whom Christ told the parable and to underscore the parable's primary meaning, as well as to convey its secondary one. Only one other artist, an unknown Rembrandt follower, differentiates among the witnesses (Plate 59). Here, beneath the sculptural relief of Charity, are several men, at least one of whom reacts with compassion, thereby distinguishable from the obviously hostile observers who stand at the base of the stairway and in the lower left hand corner of the picture. Rembrandt, however, distills these groups into two immobile figures and thus not only emphasizes their significance but creates an additional association.

Along with the Pharisees and scribes and the sinners and publicans, the two male witnesses refer to an individual Pharisee and an individual publican, those in the parable in which they are discussed. As has been mentioned, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican and that of the prodigal son are linked in three paintings of parables by Barent Fabritius and in numerous sermons and theological commentaries.[45] Ambrose, Jerome, and Waldis all equate the prodigal's elder brother with the Pharisee, and in the seventeenth-century Nehemia Rogers does the same.[46] Moreover, seventeenth-century theological works frequently pair the prodigal son and the publican and present both as models of sinners who humbly acknowledge their transgressions and repent.[47] Noting these relationships, Rembrandt portrays the standing witness in long robes and turban-like headgear that cause him to resemble not only the hostile observers in depictions of the prodigal's return but the Pharisee in representations of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, such as Fabritius's painting (Plate 61) and numerous engravings in illustrated Bibles.[48] While the dress of the publican in these works is less standard, in the overwhelming majority he is shown like the seated man in Rembrandt's painting striking his chest with his fist, a gesture derived from the biblical text which states that he smote his breast and begged God to be merciful to him, a

sinner (Luke 18:13). Clearly, Rembrandt intended the viewer to perceive the relationship between the seated man and the publican and between the standing witness and the Pharisee and to draw the appropriate conclusions. He intended the viewer to realize that the witnesses are included to demonstrate that God is willing to forgive those who like the prodigal son and the publican humbly acknowledge their sins and repent, and to contrast the uncharitable behavior of men like the prodigal's elder brother and the Pharisee with God's infinite love.

Rembrandt's desire to convey these meanings explains why he linked the seated witness with the prodigal son and connected the standing man and the father, both of whom wear red. This also accounts for the prominence of the male witnesses, because it would seem that the less distinct female witnesses are included only as traditional figures in representations of the subject, their presences contributing to the mood of the painting but not to its significance. However, before making such an assertion, careful attention should be paid to their positions within the composition in order to determine if their relationship to the other figures and their surroundings is indicative of some further significance.

The prodigal's mother leans against the arch next to the sculptural relief of the horn-playing musician. Her position and the inclination of the musician's body, which like his leg and horn point toward her, suggest that the two are in some way connected. As has been shown, horn-playing musicians are employed in representations of the prodigal's return (Plates 13, 16, 17, 18 & 39) to reveal that the return of one who was lost is an occasion for rejoicing and that the repentance of one sinner causes more joy in heaven than the righteousness of ninety-nine persons. This meaning reflects Rogers's statement (contained in his discussion of the merrymaking which followed the prodigal's return) that God's forgiveness of sins is cause for joy.[49] Thus it is clear that Rembrandt, who derived the figure of the horn-playing musician from Maarten van Heemskerck's painting (Plate 18) rendered him in a relief to

reveal the joyful message of the parable without disrupting the reverential mood of the picture. Furthermore, he placed the relief next to the head of the prodigal's mother, the only witness who presents a joyful countenance, in order to draw attention to its significance.

As Linnik points out, the prodigal's mother who rejoices at her son's return is closely related to the personification of love in Cornelis Anthonisz.'s woodcut, one of Rembrandt's sources of inspiration (Plate 23). Both these women stand behind the main groups and tower above them, and both wear kerchief-like headdresses, the ends of which fall to their shoulders. Linnik also asserts that the woman in Rembrandt's painting wears a sparkling pendant around her neck, a correspondence to the flaming heart emblazoned on Love's breast. In light of both this relationship and the presence of Charity, included in the form of a relief or as a living being, in paintings of the prodigal's return by Bartholomeus van Bassen, and unknown Rembrandt follower, Jacob Willemsz. de Wet, and another unknown Rembrandt follower, it seems likely that Rembrandt intended the prodigal's mother to refer to this virtue (Plates 49, 59, 60 & 58). This theory gains credence when one considers that the representations of the prodigal's mother in the last mentioned painting and in engravings by Assuerus van Londerseel and Jacob Mathem resemble personifications of Charity. In all three works the prodigal's mother is shown with a small child (Plates 58, 39 & 40). Finally, in the engravings, she stands by the father as he addresses his elder son and thereby draws attention both to the father's great love and to his son's lack of charity. By employing the prodigal's mother to allude to charity and by placing her between the father and the standing man, Rembrandt too emphasizes God's love and underscores the contrast between the prodigal's father and the uncharitable standing witness.

Many who have commented upon the parable stress the importance of charity.[50] For example, Rogers writes that one should examine oneself and refrain from judging one's fellows, and adds that if

God deals gently with sinners so should we. In his discussion of the merrymaking that followed the prodigal's return, he also explains that true conversion is a cause for joy. Moreover, he states that one should not be envious and angry at one's brother's welfare but should praise God.[51] Love, remarks Bullinger in a sermon on that virtue, is a gift of God given from above so that man from his heart may love God first and foremost and love his fellows as himself.[52] Thus these texts support the above interpretation of the significance of the allusion to Charity presented by the prodigal's mother in Rembrandt's painting.

If, then, three of the four witnesses contribute to the meaning of the picture, it is necessary to reconsider the role played by the maidservant; it is unlikely, despite her apparent insignificance, that she is included simply because she is a commonplace figure in depictions of the subject. It has been noted that she balances the vertical form and great height of the standing man and, like him, serves to close the composition. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that her significance is related to his. She is almost completely enshrouded in shadows and must represent, like her counterpart, those who remain in darkness and cannot comprehend the magnitude of God's love and mercy. However, while this woman is sunk in darkness the upper portion of the man's body is illuminated, suggesting that he is not completely blinded to the significance of what he sees. Thus, by simultaneously comparing and contrasting the maidservant to the standing male witness, Rembrandt draws attention to the latter's enigmatic character.

As has been mentioned, Alpatow suggests that the bearded man undergoes a transformation from one who is envious and discontent to one who becomes the father's ally. However, the conflicting emotions evident in his expression and the partial illumination of his body can be seen as signs of an unresolved inner struggle as well as indications of transformation. Moreover, he appears to be somewhat withdrawn as he pulls his arms up against his body, to enhance the impression that he is set apart from the others.

The prodigal's mother and the compassionate seated man are both physically and emotionally closer to the father and the prodigal. Though the divine aura of light that envelops the father and his son radiates outward and strikes the bearded witness more strongly than the rest, it does not fully free him from the shadows. The conflict between light and darkness is a visual metaphor for the struggle within his soul, revealing that he is caught in the throes of a moral dilemma. While partially illuminated by the divine radiance measure expressive of God's love, he remains rooted in the darkness of ignorance and envy. Whether he will remain mired in envy or will be transformed remains open to question.

Like the parable, Rembrandt presents one with an unresolved situation, and one is forced to ask whether he diverges from both text and tradition and does, in the final analysis, intend the most prominent witness to represent the elder son; the final reactions of each are expressed clearly in neither the painting nor the parable. Reconsidering the visual evidence with this possibility in mind, one is forced to conclude that the standing man plays two roles; he is paired with the seated man, and he is also set apart from the other witnesses, and linked with the father and prodigal by both color and light. In the one capacity, he alludes both to the Pharisees and scribes and the the self-righteous Pharisee from the parable, and in the other he represents a character from the parable of the prodigal son, the elder son. By presenting him as an enigmatic figure, Rembrandt adheres not to the letter but to the spirit of the biblical text. Like Rembrandt's other late works, the Leningrad painting is a representation of the inner content and human experience inherent in the event, not an illustration of the narrative.

As is repeatedly pointed out by Rembrandt scholars, the master increasingly abandoned his earlier narrative style. Eliminating incidental and even identifying motifs, and replacing dramatic action with silent and immobile figures, he sought to express not the external but the inner drama of the soul. The emphasis placed upon universal human emotion and experience, coupled with the omission of particular

identifying features, makes it difficult to identify the subjects of some of Rembrandt's late paintings, such as the so-called Jewish Bride (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) and the picture in the Hermitage at Leningrad which according to Kahr and Tumpel represents the dismissal of Haman.[53] As has been explained, Rembrandt arrives at the inner essence of any given subject by borrowing gestures and features from themes that possess the same inner content. It is this that prompted Bialostocki to write that the specific subjects of Rembrandt's late works are irrelevant,[54] a statement that he later retracted when he agreed that Rembrandt proceeded not from the general to the specific but from the particular to the universal.[55]

Rembrandt's final conception of the father receiving the prodigal son was affected by depictions of Abraham and Ishmael and of Isaac and Jacob. By studying such representations and by borrowing motifs from them, Rembrandt arrived at a deeply moving image that is a universal expression of the emotional bond between father and son. Moreover, by transforming Isaac's gesture of blessing, Rembrandt reveals the religious significance of the parable more effectively than any other artist. The father sanctifies his son, demonstrating that the repentant sinner is received with grace. This calls to mind Bauch's statement that Rembrandt's iconographic style has a religious, as well as a human reality.[56]

The connection between Jacob and the prodigal was the dominant influence in the formation of Rembrandt's final solution, due to the relationship between the inner content of the stories. In both cases, it is the younger, seeming undeserving, son who is received by his father, and both texts were interpreted by Protestant theologians as signifying that man is saved by grace not merit. However, although this connection becomes apparent when one reads the texts, it cannot be expressed visually. In addition, the scene of Isaac blessing Jacob does not deal with the theme of remorse. Consequently, in order to stress that the prodigal son was a sinner who was deeply troubled by his transgressions, Rembrandt turned

his attention to another subject, that of Judas repenting of his actions.

Though both Judas and the prodigal son experienced bitter remorse as a result of their transgressions, the fate of the two is radically different; the prodigal son was forgiven his sins, whereas Judas had no hope of mercy. This difference, as well as the change that took place in Rembrandt's style between 1629, when he painted Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver (Mulgrave Castle, Yorkshire, Normanby Collection), and the last years of his life, when he painted the Leningrad picture, accounts for the markedly different manner in which the protagonists express their remorse. Nonetheless the relationship between the two is significant; both are portrayed in tattered garments, on their knees, and with heads almost devoid of hair. It is this last feature that attracts one's attention by virtue of its unusualness. Why did Rembrandt depict Judas and the prodigal in this manner?

Judas, the very picture of despair, weeping and wringing his hands, kneels before the priests in the temple, after having thrown the silver in front of them. Both the silver and Judas's anguish confront them with their own guilty role in his despicable actions, and they have no desire to be so confronted. Some are outraged, some slink away, and others shun him. Judas's appearance, suggesting that in his grief and despair he had rent his garments and torn out his hair, emphasizes that his deeds have made him an outcast, one from whom men turn with disgust.

It is for this reason, rather than because both repent of their sins, that Rembrandt portrays the prodigal son with his head shorn of hair in the Leningrad picture. Indeed, according to the Calvinist interpretation, Judas did not truly repent of his sins. Bialostocki, who while discussing the two pictures together does not note the physical resemblence between Judas and the prodigal son in Rembrandt's paintings, points out that in the Statenvertaling, the official Calvinist translation of the Bible into Dutch, it is stated that Judas's repentance is not genuine.[57] Moreover, in his commentary

on the parable of the prodigal son, Rogers explains that Judas's terrible grief is worldly sadness that gives death, as opposed to godly sadness that gives life. This distinction becomes comprehensible when one considers Rogers's earlier statement that despite his great repentance Judas remains far from God, because he could not recognize God's mercy.[58] Such an analysis reflects Calvin's explanation that repentance begins with an acknowledgment of God's mercy.[59] Clearly, when he painted the return of the prodigal son, Rembrandt turned to his depiction of Judas and derived this motif from it, because both Judas and the prodigal were outcasts who suffered as a consequence of their transgressions. By rendering the prodigal in this manner, Rembrandt not only stresses his plight but emphasizes the magnitude of God's love and mercy and contrasts it with man's lack of compassion.

The relationship between Judas and the prodigal son is discussed by Bialostocki, who considers them along with Haman as examples of the sinner as tragic hero in Rembrandt's art. He points out that the choice of negative figures, like Judas and Haman, as the protagonists in works of art is unusual and notes that Kahr, presumably disconcerted by the focus on such a despised individual in the Dismissal of Haman, unsuccessfully attempted to draw parallels between Haman and Christ.[60] Moreover, according to Bialostocki, Rembrandt was the first artist to depict the repentance of Judas as an independent subject, and it is significant that in so doing Rembrandt stresses Judas's self-awareness and psychic pain, rather than showing his fate as the just punishment of a sinner or the fall of pride.[61]

Bialostocki concludes his discussion by drawing attention to the personal significance of Rembrandt's elevation of great sinners to heroes within his art. He notes that Rembrandt, who in the Return of the Prodigal Son expresses the experience of sin, bad conscience, and the desire, after repentance, for reconciliation, portrayed himself as the prodigal son carousing in the painting of that subject in the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. Furthermore, he represented himself as one of those who helps to crucify Christ in the Raising of the Cross (Munich, Alte Pinakothek). Evidently, he is one who could

understand the experiences of great sinners. As Bialostocki explains, it is not difficult to understand that the sinner whom Rembrandt most liked to depict is one who shows true repentance and is completely forgiven--the prodigal son. While at the beginning of his career there appears the representation of Judas, a negative hero who despairs of forgiveness, at the end the development is closed with one who "sees from the darkness the light of love."[62]

Obviously, Rembrandt represented the return of the prodigal son toward the end of his life because the subject was personally meaningful. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that at the same time that he painted himself in the Raising of the Cross and the Prodigal Son Carousing, Rembrandt executed his first rendition of the return of the prodigal son, the 1636 etching.[63] In light of this, it is worth considering another work in which Rembrandt portrayed himself as a biblical figure, the Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) painted in 1661.

Here Rembrandt shows himself with Paul's attribute, the instrument of the apostle's martyrdom, the sword, and a sheaf of papers. According to Van Thiel, the last three letters of the six letter word on the uppermost page are "sis." This suggests that the word is Efesis, the Dutch word for Ephesians, Paul's epistle that contains a description of how one should arm oneself. In the last chapter of Ephesians, Paul writes that one should take the shield of faith, "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked", and "the helmet of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6: 16-17). Van Thiel relates this passage to the painting and explains that Rembrandt shows that the sword, with which Saul threatened Christendom, becomes for Paul the weapon of the Spirit, namely the Word of God.[64] However, he does not discuss the peculiar position of the sword, which protrudes from Rembrandt's body as if it were piercing his heart. In all likelihood Rembrandt employs this device to reveal that the word of God has penetrated his soul. This implication is reinforced by the light that strikes the papers representing Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, and that in Benesch's words, forms

a visionary penumbra around Rembrandt's head and transfigures his face.[65] Benesch's explanation of why Rembrandt portrayed himself as Paul fits with this interpretation: Rembrandt showed himself in the guise of Paul because he too is one who has found the way out of the labyrinth of the world to the paradise of the heart.[66]

Taking Benesch's explanation as a starting point, one can consider what led Paul and presumably Rembrandt out of the labyrinth of the world. In the context of the picture, the answer must be the Spirit, the word of God. Significantly, in Ephesians 2:4-6 Paul writes:

> But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
> And hath raised us up together.

In light of this it is probable that Rembrandt must have identified with Paul because Paul was called by God due to no merit of his own. Paul's lack of merit is noted by Rogers in his commentary on the parable of the prodigal son. Arguing that man is converted by grace alone, Rogers cites as proof the conversion of Paul and states that God saw Paul, a sinful man with nothing special to recommend him, from afar and called him.[67] It would appear that the Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul is at once Rembrandt's confession that he too is a sinner and an acknowledgment of Paul's consoling message presented in Ephesians 2:4-6 and 8-9:

> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not by yourselves, it is the gift of God:
> Not of works, lest any man should boast.

The prodigal son, like Paul, was a sinful man whom God saw from far away and who, according to the Protestant interpretation, was saved by grace not merit. This brings us to the Return of the Prodigal Son. Surely Rembrandt, who had depicted himself both as the sinful prodigal and as the Apostle Paul, must have chosen in the last years of his life to paint a larger than life-size rendition of the return of the prodigal son as a deeply personal confession of his faith.

And so Rembrandt arrived at the essence of the parable, indeed of the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. He presents

the picture to the viewer as Christ presented the parable to the two groups of men for two reasons, to show that God is merciful to repentant sinners and to admonish one to be charitable. God's great love and bestowal of redeeming grace are presented in the father's reception of his son, and the sculptural relief conveys the message expressed in the concluding verse of the parable of the lost sheep namely that there is more joy in heaven over the repentance of one sinner than in the righteousness of ninety-nine people. Witnessing the event is the prodigal's mother, whose joy underscores the meaning of the relief and whose presence draws attention to God's charity and thus to the parable's secondary meaning. This meaning is also conveyed by the male witnesses, who represent the Pharisee and the publican in an allusion to the parable which contrasts the humble publican to the self-righteous, uncharitable Pharisee. This allusion is employed to show the viewer that if he too wishes to be forgiven his sins he must behave like the publican, who humbly acknowledges that he is a sinner and trusts in God's mercy, and not like the Pharisee, who mistakenly believes himself righteous and is uncharitable toward others. The two men also allude to the Pharisees and scribes and the sinners and publicans to whom Christ told the parable.

As has been demonstrated, the standing male witnesss is represented both as part of the chain of witnesses and apart from them. Once he is separated from them, the seated man with whom he is paired is seen in the context of the other three. In this manner, Rembrandt shows the viewer the path out of the labyrinth of darkness which engulfs the maidservant. He must first acknowledge God's great love and charity and believe that God rejoices when a sinner repents, and then he must humbly acknowledge that he is a sinner, who trusts in God's mercy. These steps are alluded to by the prodigal's mother and the relief and by the seated man who strikes his fist against his breast.

The standing man, partially illuminated in contrast to the maidservant who is enveloped in shadows, is separated from the wit-

nesses; he is the prodigal's elder brother, a conflicted individual. Like the parable, Rembrandt leaves unanswered the question of his final reaction. It is unclear whether the light of the Spirit works within him and transforms him into one who will rejoice in his brother's good fortune or whether he remains rooted in the darkness of the world. As the seated witness is linked with the prodigal, both sinners who humbly acknowledge their sins, the standing man is linked with the father, a connection that can be drawn for purposes of either contrast or comparison.

By including the prodigal's elder brother, Rembrandt diverges from the established tradition, and while the painting can only be fully comprehended when viewed in light of this tradition, it stands apart from it. The narrative action and illustrative details present in varying degrees in all of the works of his predecessors have been expunged, sacrificed to the sublime expression of the inner human and religious content of the parable. The encroaching shadows shroud the setting making it indistinct and creating an atmospheric ambience. The immobility of the figures and their silence as they gaze at the father's reception of his son reinforces the reverential mood of the picture. The father and son set apart from the others are enveloped in an aura of light that at once expresses the bond of love that unites them and at the same time transforms them into a symbolic image of God's eternal and infinite love for the repentant sinner. As Bialostocki writes, the light functions as the gold ground in medieval pictures; it sanctifies the image.[70]

Herein lies the key to the picture's meaning. The father and son appearing in a separate realm beyond time and space are presented to the male witnesses as Christ presented the parable in Luke 15 to the Pharisees and scribes and the sinners and publicans who were to see themselves represented by either the prodigal or his elder brother. Christ left the elder brother's final behavior open to question not to be enigmatic but to lead the Pharisees and the scribes to perceive the error of their ways and to draw their own conclusions. In keeping with the parable, Rembrandt does not reveal whether the

elder brother remains rooted in darkness or whether he sees the light. As he does not clearly condemn the elder brother, Rembrandt holds out the hope that he too will perceive that he is a sinner. While the possibility of the transformation of the elder brother conflicts with Protestant doctrine, it is in keeping with Rembrandt's approach to biblical subjects, which as Bruyn notes is intensely personal and transcends sectarian interpretation. According to Bruyn, Rembrandt's religious attitude as expressed in his works was the heritage of a humanist past, the highpoint of a tradition that was connected with the rise of Protestantism without being a Protestant phenomenon.[68] In any case, the interpretation of the elder brother's reaction is left up to the viewer.

Rembrandt's refusal to be explicit in his portrayal of the the elder brother is crucial, because the radiant image of God's merciful love is presented to the viewer as to the witnesses. Like the two groups of men to whom Christ told the parable, the viewer is expected to perceive that he too is a sinner who sins as the prodigal by his great transgressions or as the elder brother by his lack of charity and by mistakenly believing himself to be righteous. Thus it is evident why Rembrandt portrayed the father and son as a virtually autonomous image. The viewer whatever the nature of his failings is to see that he is a sinner. As Bullinger writes, like the prodigal son let us acknowledge as Paul taught that we are all sinners.[69] Surely, the profoundly moving representation of the father's reception of his son, this sublime image of God's compassion and mercy, is presented to console the viewer. In this manner, Rembrandt conveys the parable's essential meaning, presenting it to the viewer as Christ presented the parable to the Pharisees and scribes and the sinners and publicans.

As Rosenberg writes:

> All formal features, and the colours in particular, have taken on a symbolic significance, just as the parable itself gains full meaning only through its deeply symbolic character,[71]

In a similar vein, Neumann states that form and content are one and the same; the opposition of form and content, body and soul,

is resolved and the original divine unity is restored.[72] "Physical substance," remarks Benesch, "is now no more than the outward manifestation of an ultimate spiritual essence."[73] Rembrandt's supreme achievement is the result not merely of his genius as a painter but of his understanding of the parable, which he found so personally meaningful and which expresses the essence of his faith. "This is Rembrandt's last word. He achieves the greatest spiritualization in the expression of grace."[74]

Footnotes to Chapter IV

[1]Kenneth Clark, Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 187.

[2]Bob Haak, Rembrandt: His Life, his Work, his Times (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.), p. 328.

[3]Jakob Rosenberg, Rembrandt (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 234; H. E. van Gelder, Rembrandt (Amsterdam: H. J. W. Becht, n.d.), p. 54 (Chapter IV).

[4]Werner Weisbach, Rembrandt (Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926), p. 514.

[5]G. Knuttel, Fakkeldragers van de nederlandsche Schilderkunst (Antwerp: De Sikkel & Utrecht: Mij. W. de Haan N.V. 1947), p. 127.

[6]Carl Neumann, Rembrandt (Munich: Verlag von F. Bruckmann, 1924), 2:622.

[7]Emil Michel, Rembrandt: His Life, his Work, his Time (London, William Heinemann, 1894), 2:188.

[8]Richard Hamann, Rembrandt (Berlin: Safari Verlag, 1948), pp. 421 & 424.

[9]Wilhelm von Bode, The Complete Work of Rembrandt (Paris: Charles Sedelmayer, 1902), 7:24-25.

[10]Otto Benesch, Rembrandt: Biographical and Critical Study (Lausanne: Skira, 1957), p. 132.

[11]Eva Benesch, ed., Otto Benesch Collected Writings (London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1970), 1:266.

[12]Michael W. Alpatow, Studien zur Geschichte der weseuropaischen Kunst (Cologne: Verlag M. Du Mont Schauber, 1974), p. 133.

[13]Ludwig Goldscheider, Rembrandt: Paintings, Drawings and Etchings (London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1960), p. 186.

[14]Christian Tumpel, "Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandts: Deutung und Interpretation der Bildinhalte," Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 20 (1969):138-39.

[15]J. Kalff, Rembrandt en de Bijbel (Amsterdam and Antwerp: N.V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Kosmos", 1949), p. 117.

[16]Jan Veth, Rembrandts Leven en Kunst (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkemas Boekhandel, K. Groesbeek & Paul Nijhoff, 1906), p. 119: "een magier die begrijpt en voorbijgaat."

[17]Max Eisler, Der alte Rembrandt (Vienna: Druck und Verlag der Ostereichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1927), pp. 109-10.

[18]H. Th. Musper, "Die Datierung von Rembrandts Verlorenen Sohn in Leningrad, "Amici Amico: Festschrift fur Werner Gross zu seinem 65 Geburtstag (Munich: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 1968), pp. 232 & 237.

[19]Werner Busch, "Zur Deutung von Rembrandts Verlorenem Sohn in Leningrad," Oud Holland 85 (1970):180-82.

[20]Neumann, Rembrandt, 2:620.

[21]See above, pages 34-35.

[22]Wilhem R. Valentiner reproduces five drawings that he identifies as the return of the prodigal son; Rembrandt: Des Meisters Handzeichnungen (Stuttgart, Berlin, and Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags - Anstalt, n.d.), 1:408-12. Along with the three that I have reproduced, he includes two others, one that at the time was in his collection and is now in the Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (p. 409) and another that is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (p. 412). Otto Benesch adds another drawing to these five; The Drawings of Rembrandt (London: The Phaidon Press, 1957), 4:283. However, Irene Linnik and Yury Kuznetsov include only four of the drawings reproduced by Valentiner in their list of Rembrandt's depictions of the return of the prodigal son which accompanies Plate 148, the reproduction of the Leningrad painting; Dutch Paintings in Soviet Museums (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1982).

does not repredrawing added Neither the London drawing, included by Valentiner and Benesch, nor the Paris drawing, added by Benesch, represent the return of the prodigal son. As Christian Tümpel has demonstrated ("Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandts"), the London drawing depicts the messenger bringing Eli the news of the death of his sons (pp. 125-26), and the Paris drawing represents the departure of Tobias (p.134). The drawing in Rotterdam, accepted as a depiction of the return of the prodigal son by Benesch, Valentiner, Linnik, and Kuznetsov, cannot represent the subject. The drawing includes a number of features found in no other representation, including a woman milking a goat. The old man and one of the women standing by him appear to be stunned as they confront the kneeling youth, who seems to be one who brings bad news. I discussed the drawing with Christian Tümpel and he agrees that it does not illustrate the return of the prodigal son.

[23]Benesch, The Drawings of Rembrandt, 3:150, 4:291 & 296.

[24]Werner Sumowski, "Gerbrand van den Eeckhout als Zeichner," Oud Holland 72 (1962):11.

[25]A reproduction of the drawing appears in the archives of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague, where it is attributed to Van den Eeckhout.

[26]According to the information accompanying the photograph in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, is the information concerning the the drawing was sold in Paris on February 25, 1924.

[27]The drawing in the British Museum that shows Ishmael kneeling before Abraham, who places his hand on his son's head, is dated about 1649-50 by Benesch (The Drawings of Rembrandt, 4: 179, plate 781). Between about 1640 and 1650, Rembrandt made six drawings of the dismissal of Hagar, four of which show Abraham placing his hand on Ishmael's head. The drawings are all reproduced in the fourth volume of The Drawings of Rembrandt, plates 622, 627, 652, 654, 733 & 781.

[28]Mathias Merian, Icones Biblicae (Strassburg: Lazari Zetzner, 1629), p. 53.

[29]Kurt Bauch, Studien zur Kunstgeschichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1967), pp. 130 & 139-41.

[30]Jan Bialostocki, "Der Sunder als tragischer Held bei Rembrandt," Neue Beitrage zur Rembrandt-Forschung, ed. Otto van Simson and Jan Kelch, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1973), pp. 137-38.

[31]Jan Bialostocki, "Ikonographische Forschungen zu Rembrandts Werk", Munchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst, Dritte Folge, 8:205-06.

[32]Christian Tümpel, "Beobachtungen zur Nachtwache, "Neue Beiträge zur Rembrandt - Forschung, ed. Otto van Simson and Jan Kelch, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1973) p. 175.

[33]Tümpel "Studien zur Ikonographie der Historien Rembrandt's," p. 114.

[34]See above, page 71.

[35]See above, page 71.

[36]Thirteene Sermons of Maister John Calvine, Entreating of the Free Election of God in Jacob, and of the Reprobation in Esau (London: Thomas Tobie Cooke, 1579), pp. 17 recto - 20 recto.

[37]Nehemia Rogers, De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer/Ofte een Verklaringe over het 15. Capittel des H. Evangeliums Lucae, trans. Cornelius a Diemerbroeck (Utrecht: Hermannus Ribbius en Johannes van Waasberge - Boeckverkopers, 1659), pp. 654 & 508-10.

[38]Hamann, Rembrandt, p. 424.

[39]Studien zur Geschichte des westeuropaischen Kunst, p. 131.

[40]Benesch, The Drawings of Rembrandt, 5:262.

[41]See above, pages 105-07.

[42]See above, pages 86-87.

[43]Rogers, De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, p. 367; Jan Philipsz. Schabaelje, Den Grooten Emblemata Sacra (Amsterdam: Tymon Houthaak, 1654), n.p.

[44]Schabaelje, Den Grooten Emblemata Sacra, n.p.

[45]See above, pages 110-116.

[46]See above, pages 67-68 & 92-93; Rogers, De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, p. 670.

[47]Jan Willemsz., 't Kleyn Sermoenboeck: Bestaende in eenige stichtelijke, leerachtige Predicatien, ende Uytleggingen over verscheyde Texten der Heyliger Schrifture (Amsterdam: Gerrit van Goedesbergh, Boeck-Verkooper, 1656), p. 193; Heinrich Bullinger, Huys-Boeck Vijf Decades/Dat is vyftich Sermoonen (Leyden: Jacob Adriaensz., Boeckverkooper, 1607), pp. 32 verso & 143 verso; Rogers, De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, pp. 578 & 588.

[48]See above, Chapter III, note 184.

[49]See above, pages 64 & 102; De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, p. 651.

[50]See above, pages 66, 68 & 95-96.

[51]De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, pp. 670, 673 & 622-23.

[52]Huys-Boeck, p. 35 recto.

[53]Madlyn Millner Kahr, "A Rembrandt Problem: Haman or Uriah?" Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 28 (1965): 258-73; Christian Tumpel, "Ikonographische Beitrage zu Rembrandt:

Zur Deutung und Interpretation seiner Historien," Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen 13 (1968):106-111.

[54]"Ikonographische Forschungen zu Rembrandts Werk," p. 206.

[55]"Der Sünder als tragischer Held," pp. 137-38.

[56]Studien zur Kunstgeschichte, p. 140.

[57]"Der Sünder als tragischer Held," p. 147.

[58]De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, pp. 497 & 491.

[59]See above, page 87.

[60]"Der Sunder als tragischer Held," p. 142.

[61]Ibid., pp. 146-47.

[62]Ibid., pp. 149-50.

[63]Bergström, Tümpel, and Gerson all date the Dresden picture about 1636; Invar Bergström, "Rembrandt's Double Portrait of Himself and Saskia: A Tradition Transformed," Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 17 (1966):45; Christian Tümpel, "Ikonographische Beiträge zu Rembrandt," p. 117; Horst Gerson, Rembrandt Paintings (New York: Reynal & Co., 1968), p. 232. The Raising of the Cross was completed in 1636; Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, and E. H. ter Kuile, Dutch Art and Architecture 1600-1800 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972), p. 93.

[64]P. J. J. van Thiel, "Zelfportret als de Apostel Paulus van Rembrandt van Rijn," Openbaar Kunstbezit, no. 2, 1967, pp. 1a & 1b.

[65]Benesch, Rembrandt, p. 123.

[66]Ibid.

[67]De Ware Bekeerde Sondaer, p. 540.

[68]J. Bruyn, Rembrandts Keuze van bijbelse Onderwerpen (Utrecht: Kunsthistorisch Instituut der Rijksuniversiteit, 1959), pp. 19-20.

[69]Bullinger, Huys-Boeck, 32 verso.

[70]"Ikonographische Forschungen zu Rembrandts Werk," p. 201.

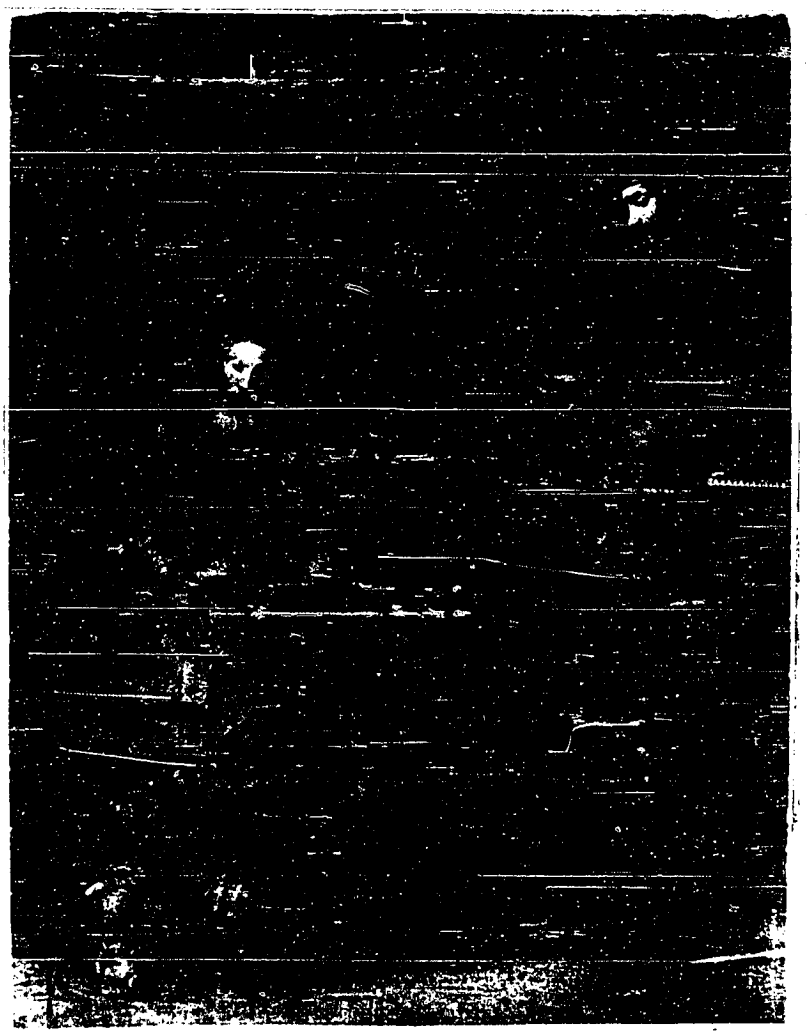
[71]Rembrandt, p. 234.

[72]Rembrandt, 2:624.

[73]Benesch, Rembrandt, p. 132.

[74]Neumann, Rembrandt, 2:624: "Dies ist Rembrandts letztes Wort. Die höchste Vergeistigung gelingt ihm in dem Ausdruck der Gnade."

ILLUSTRATIONS



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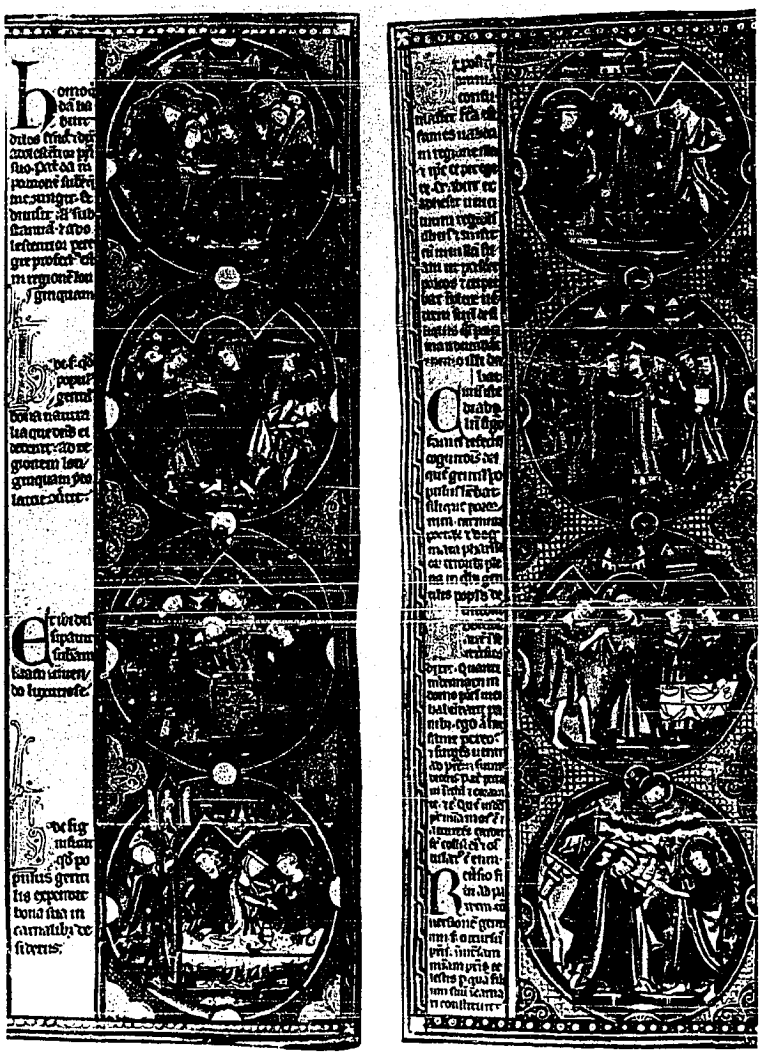

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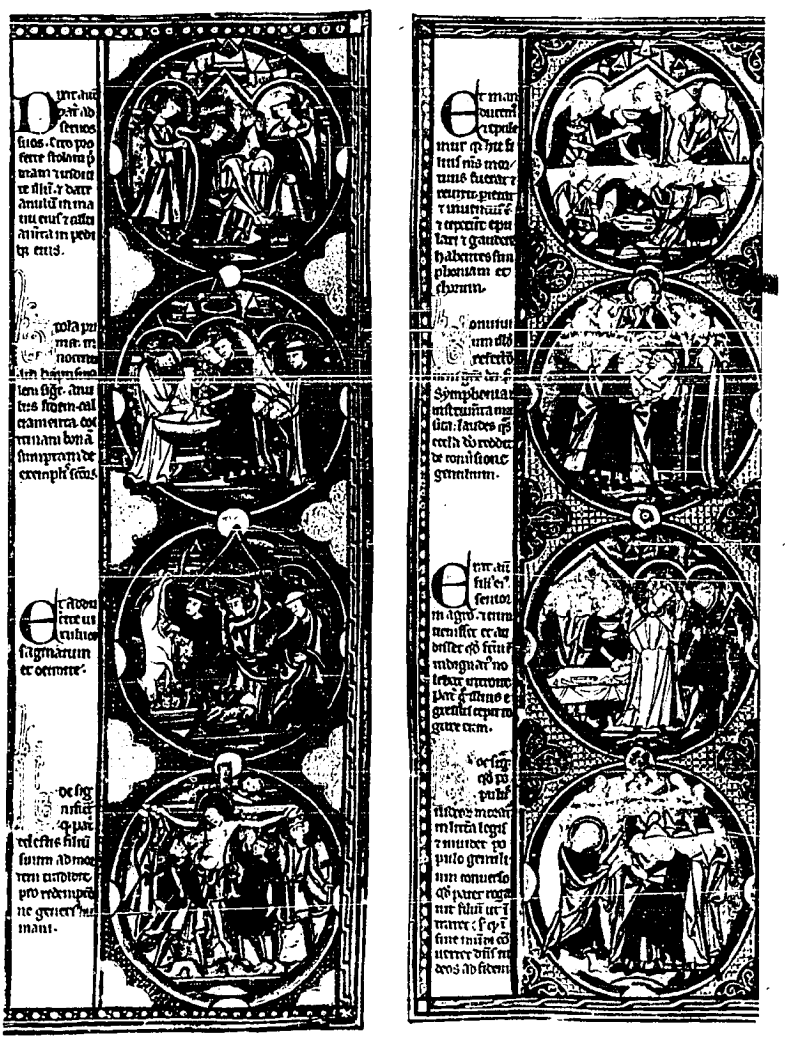

Plate 3

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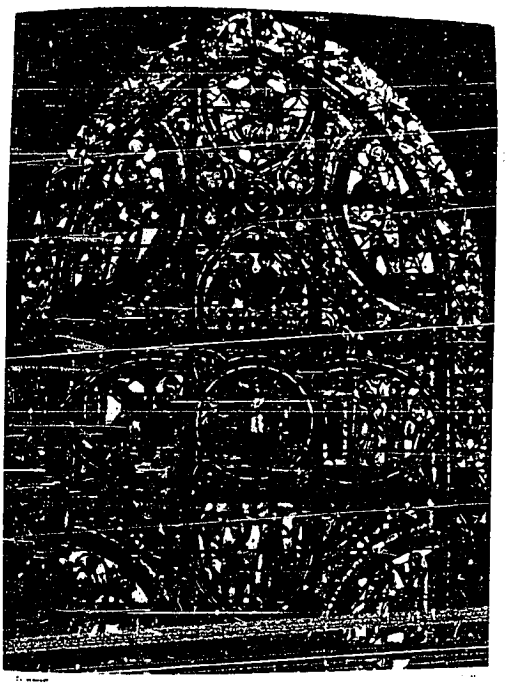
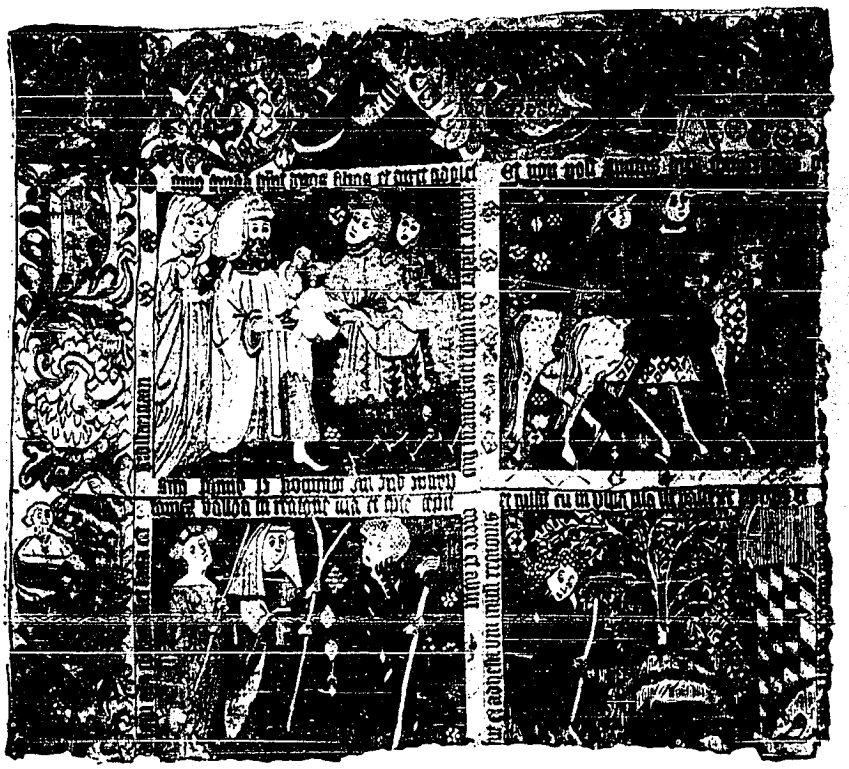


Plate 5

Plate 6



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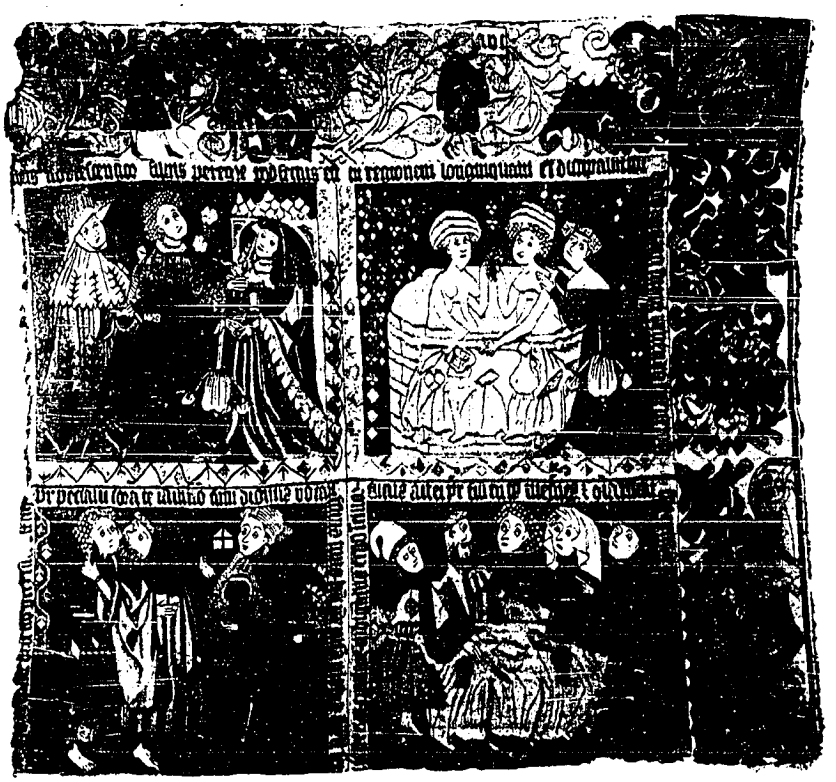

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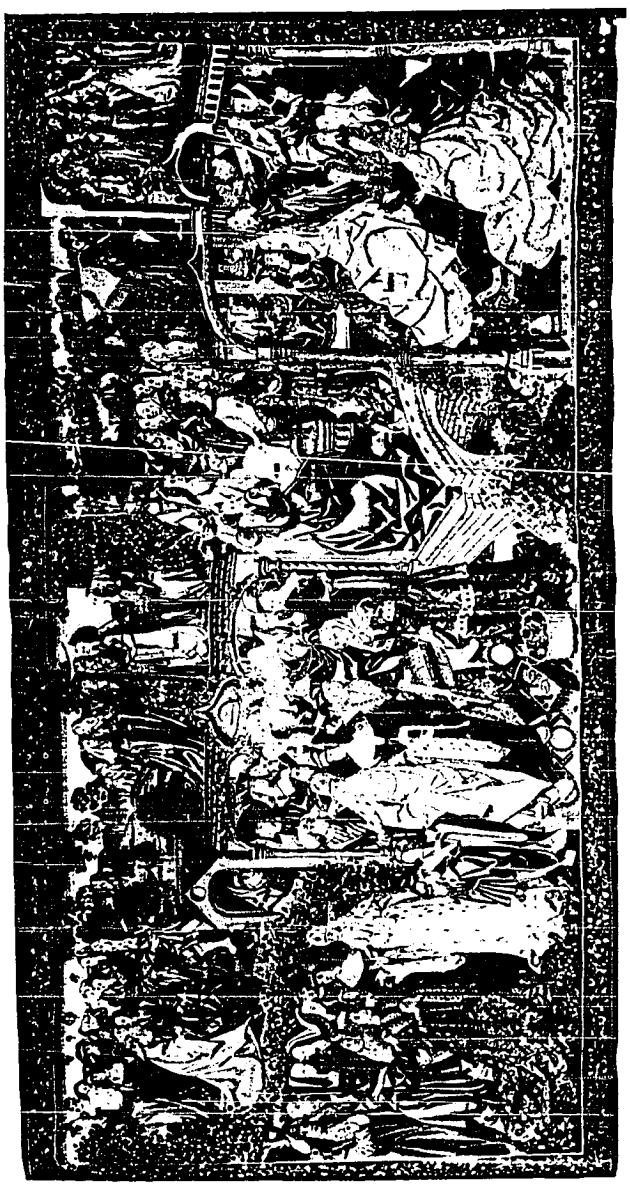


Plate 9

Plate 10

Plate 11

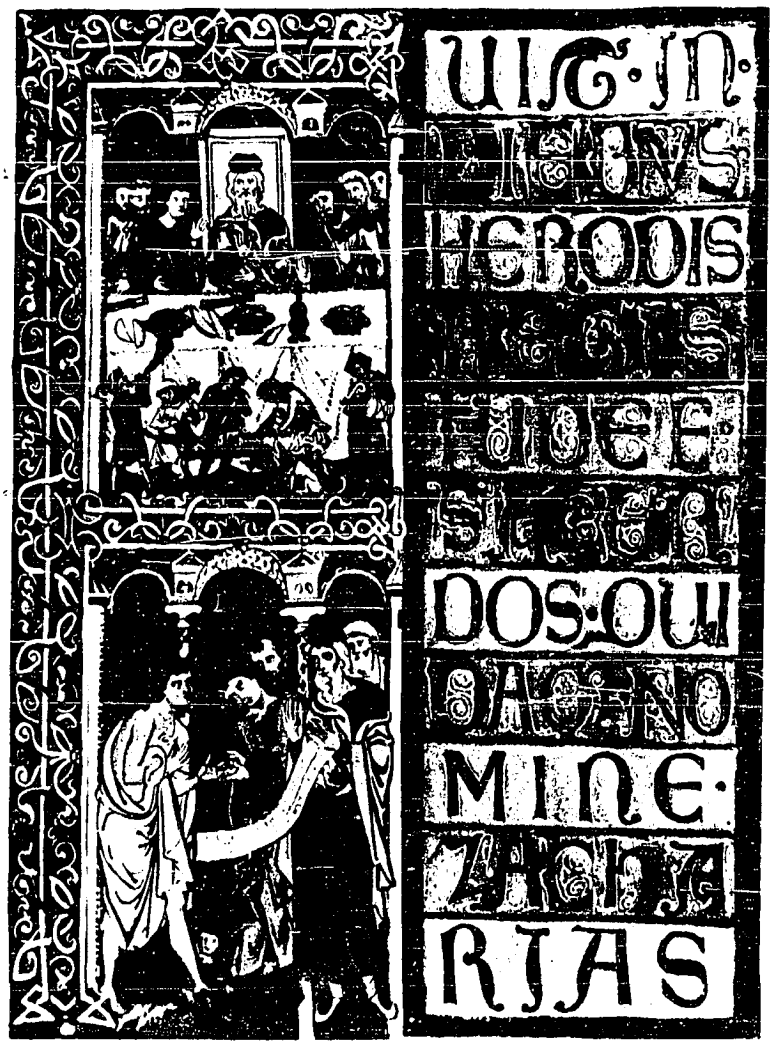


Plate 12

Plate 13

Plate 14

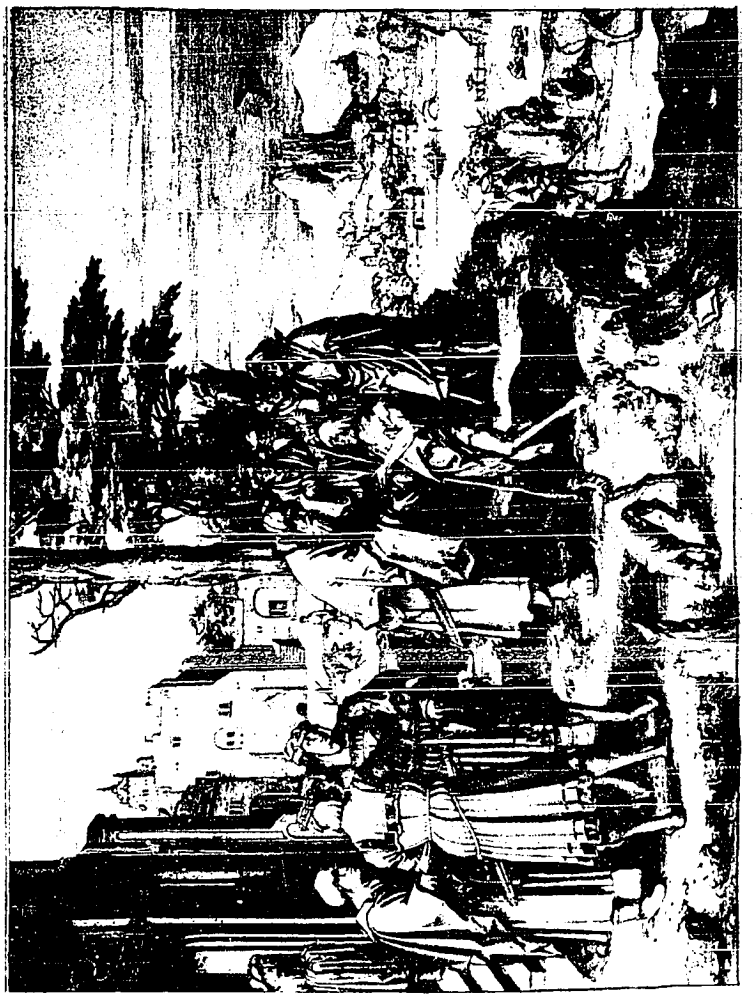
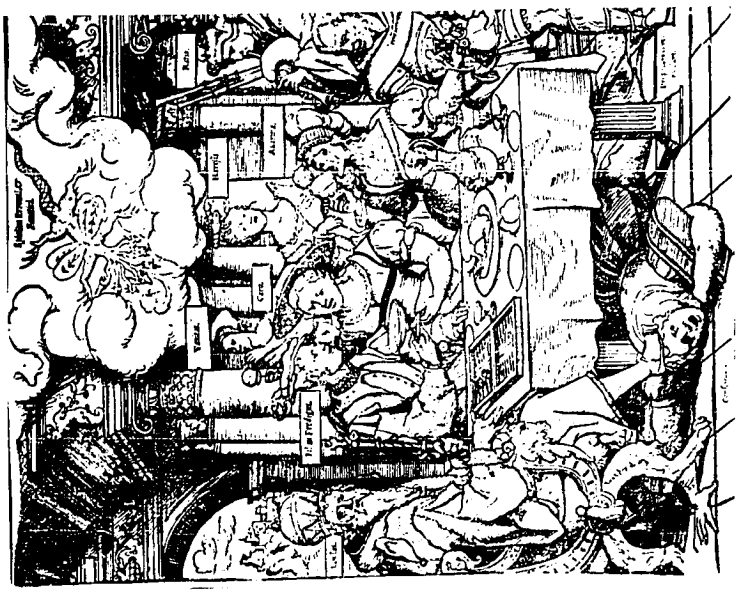


Plate 15

Plate 16

Plate 17

Plate 18



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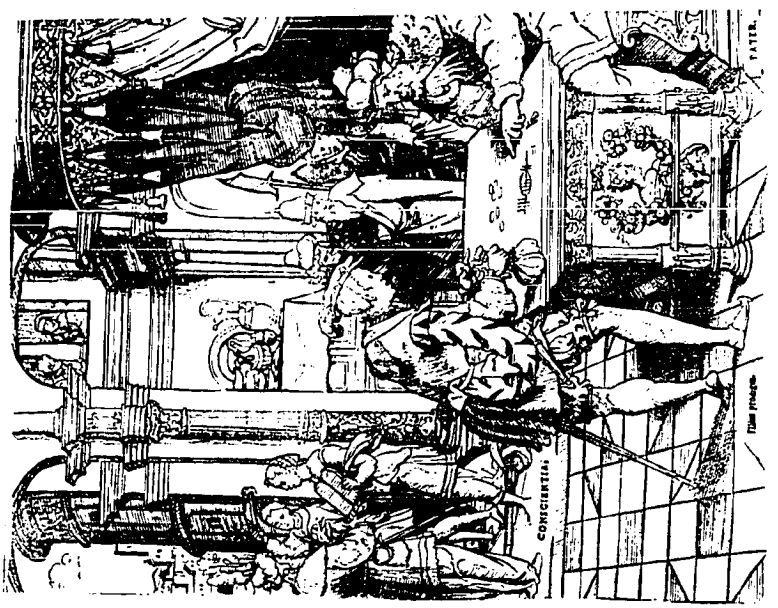

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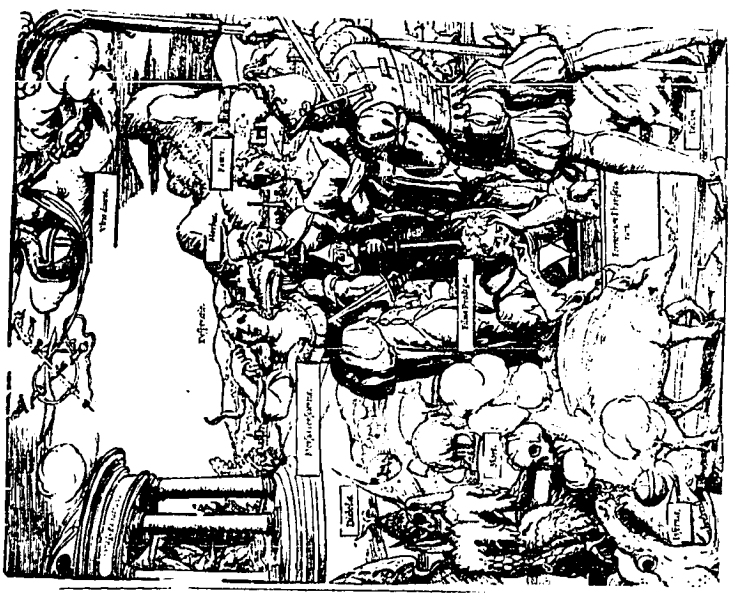

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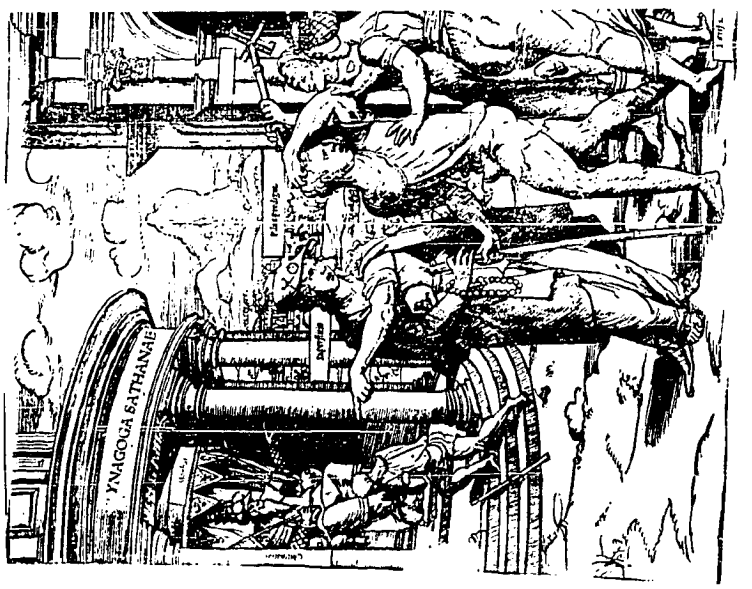

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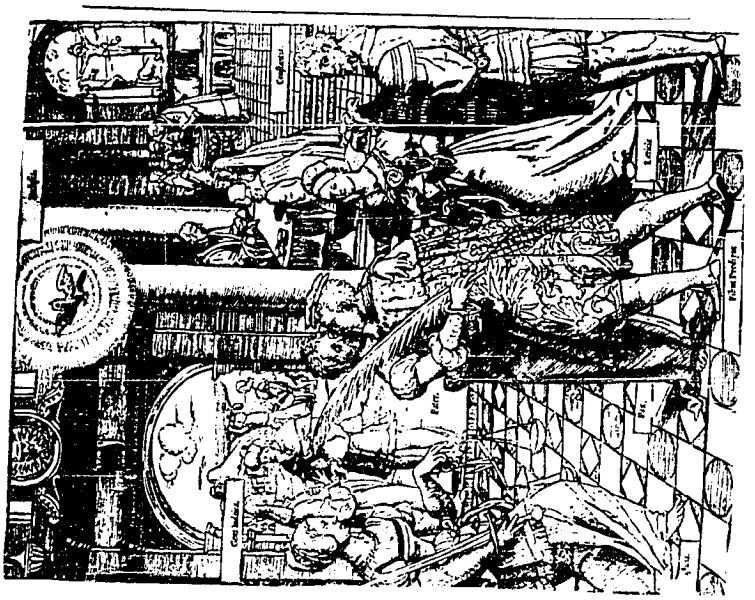

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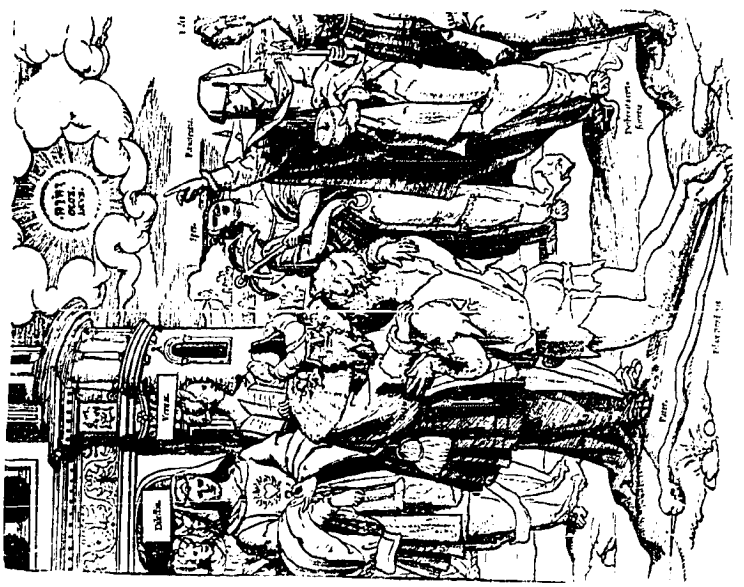


Plate 23

Plate 25

Plate 26

Plate 27

Plate 28

Plate 29

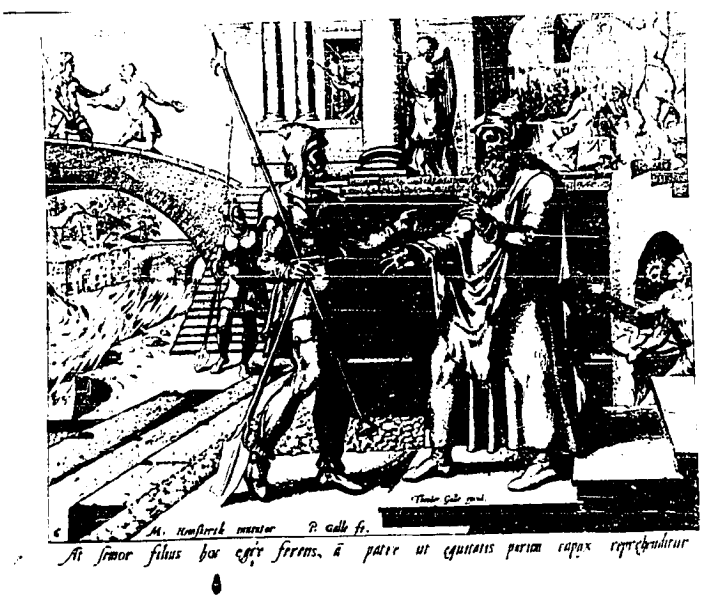
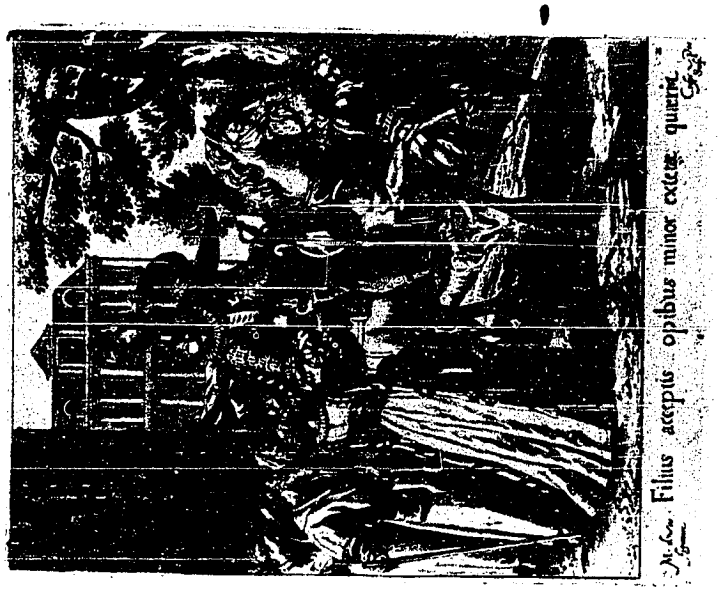


Plate 30

Plate 31

Plate 32



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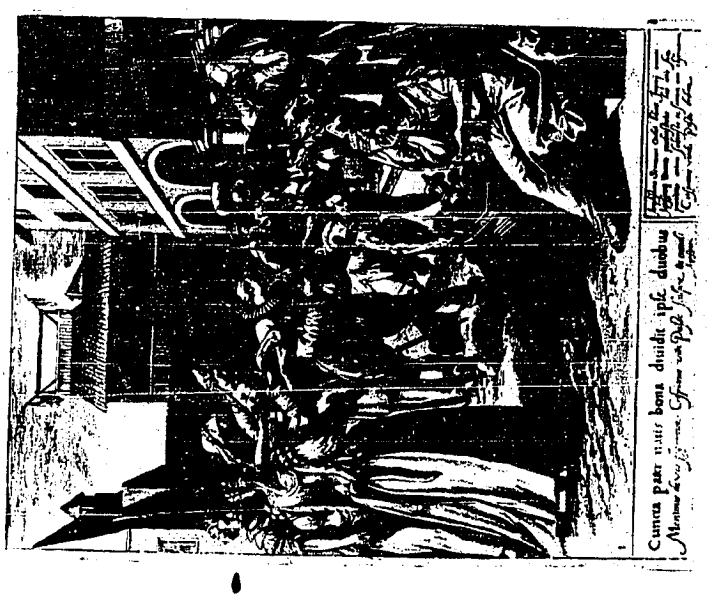

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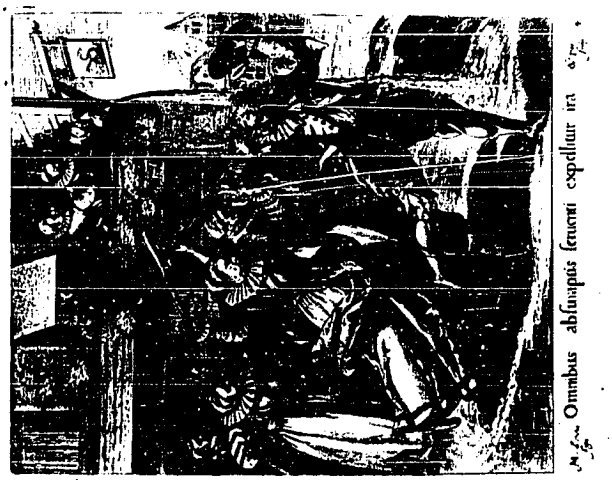

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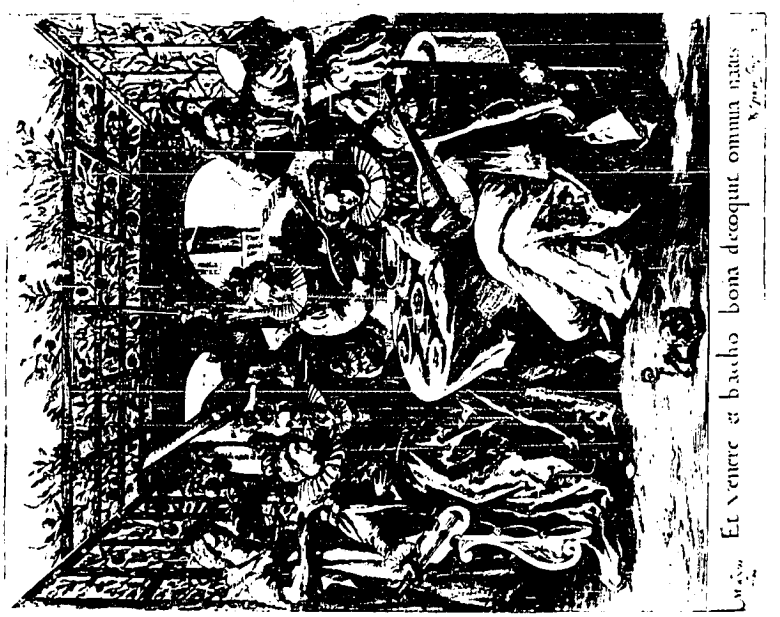

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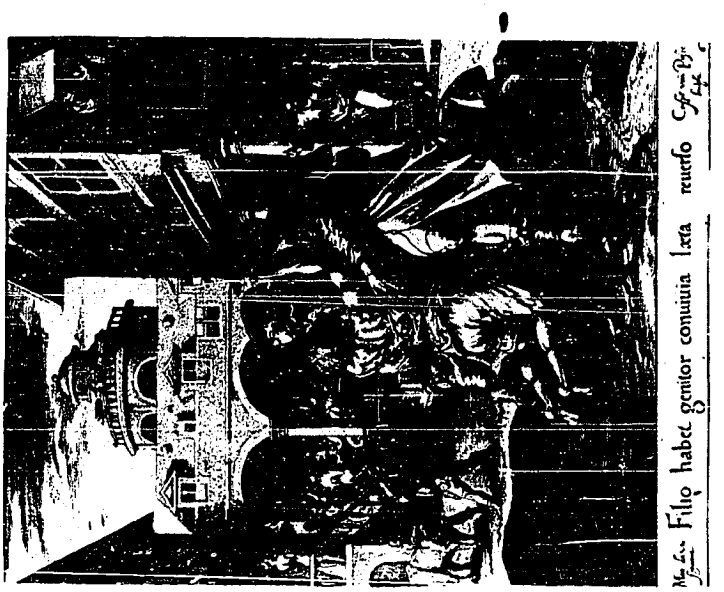


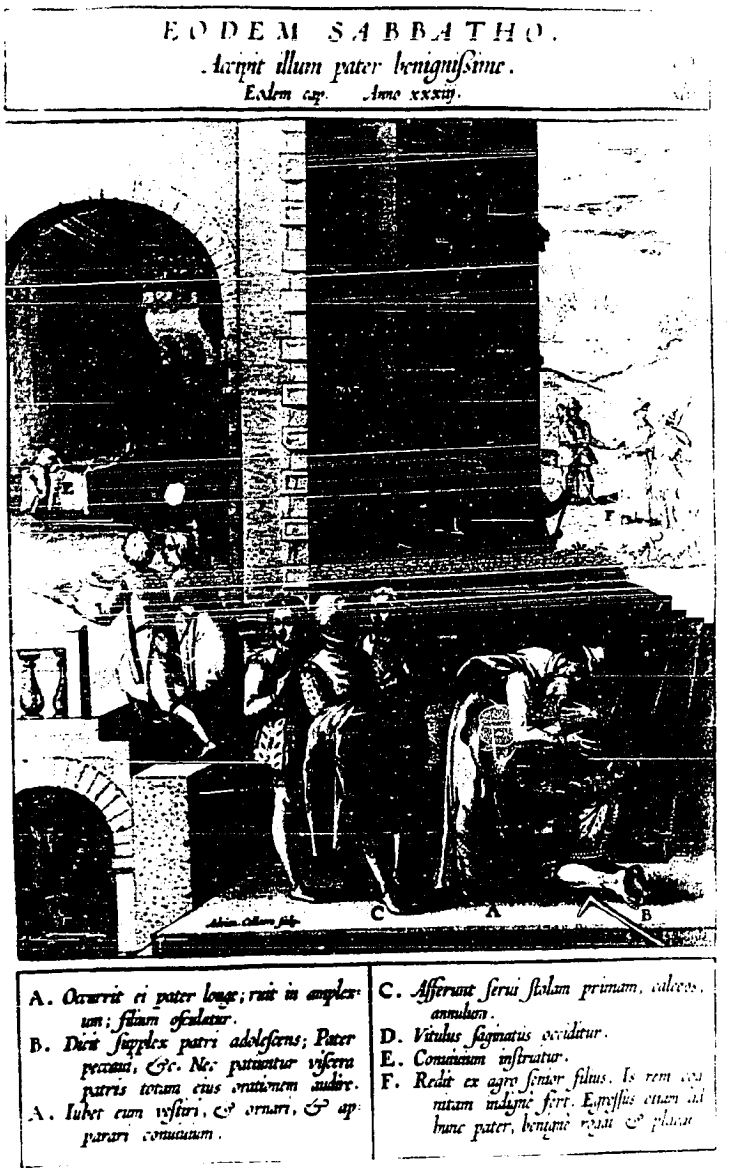
Plate 38

Plate 37

Plate 40

Plate 39

Plate 41



A. *Occurrit ei pater longe; ruit in amplexum; filium osculatur.*
B. *Dicit supplex patri adolescens; Pater peccaui, &c. Ne: patiuntur viscera patris totum eius orationem audire.*
A. *Iubet eum vestiri, & ornari, & apparari conuiuium.*
C. *Afferunt serui stolam primam, calceos, annulum.*
D. *Vitulus saginatus occiditur.*
E. *Conuiuium instruitur.*
F. *Redit ex agro senior filius. Is rem ita gestam audiens fert. Emissus etiam ad hunc pater, benigne rogat & placat*

Plate 42

Plate 43

Plate 44

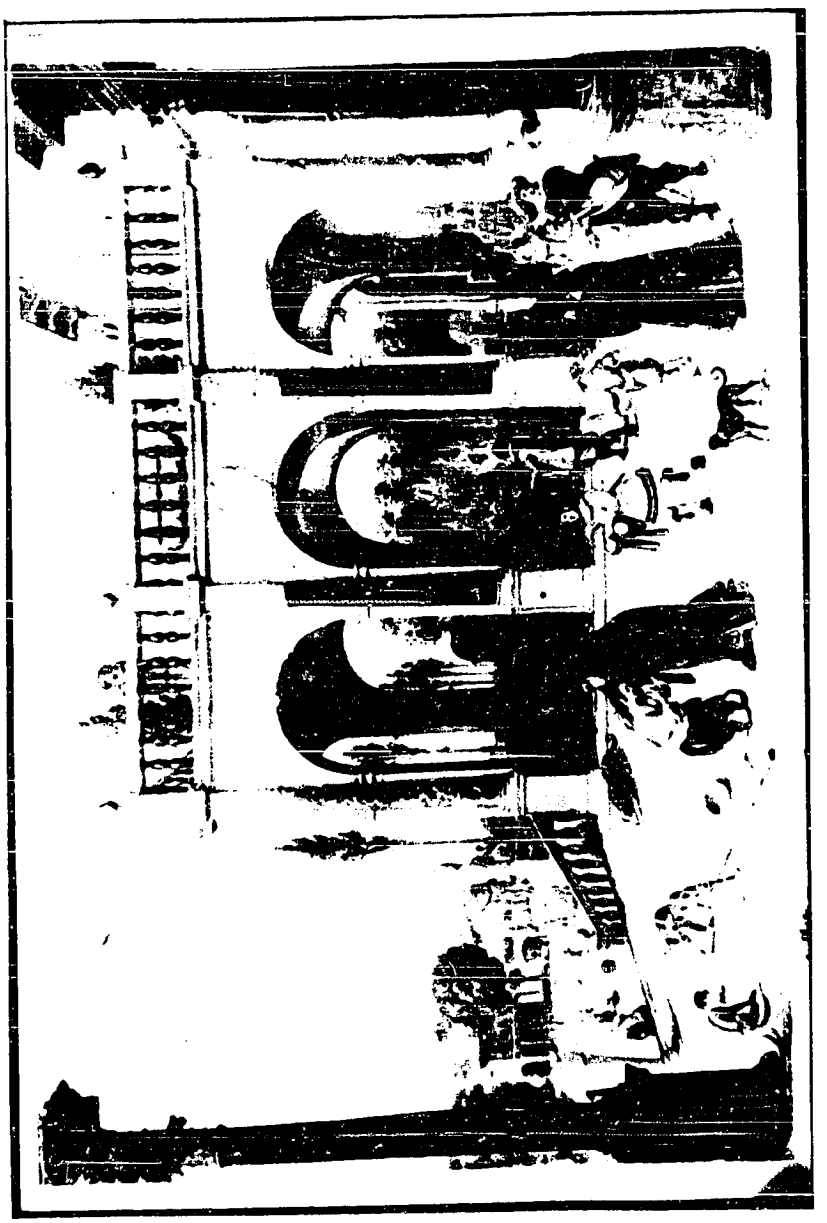
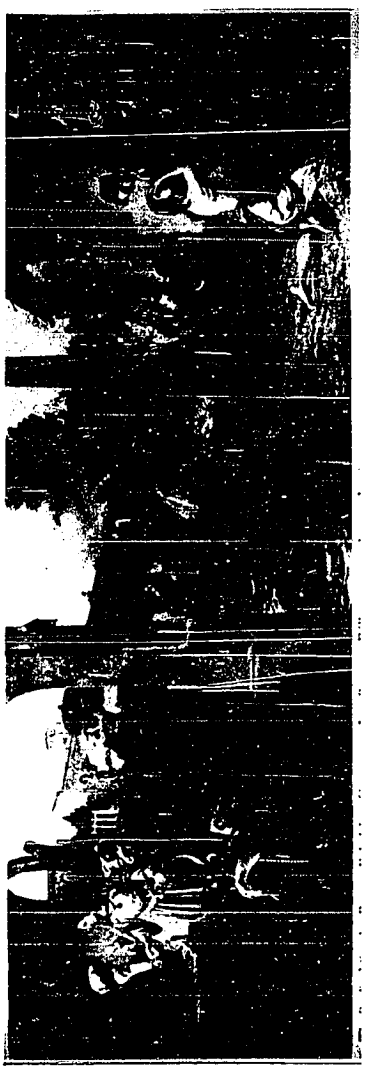


Plate 45

Plate 46

Plate 47



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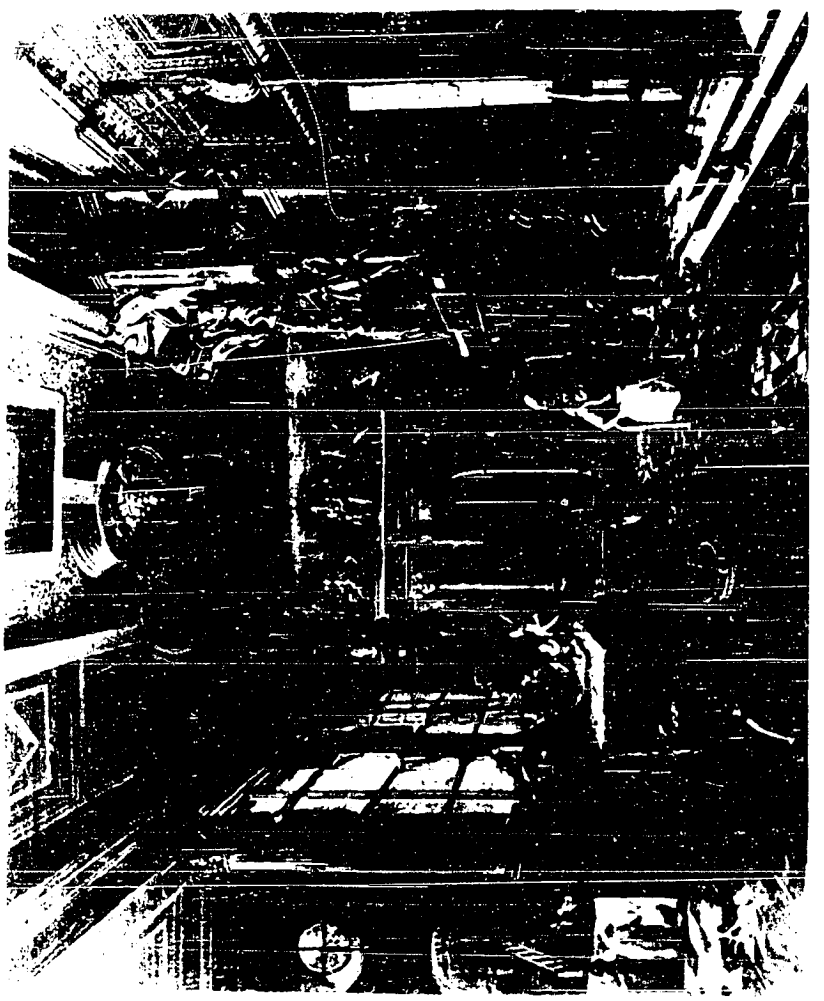

Plate 49

Plate 50

Plate 51

Plate 52

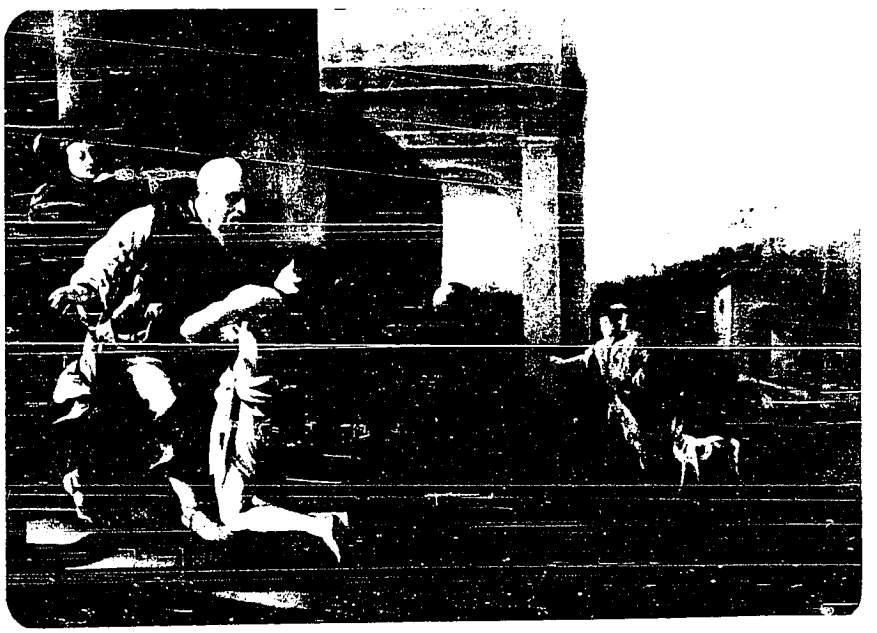

Plate 53

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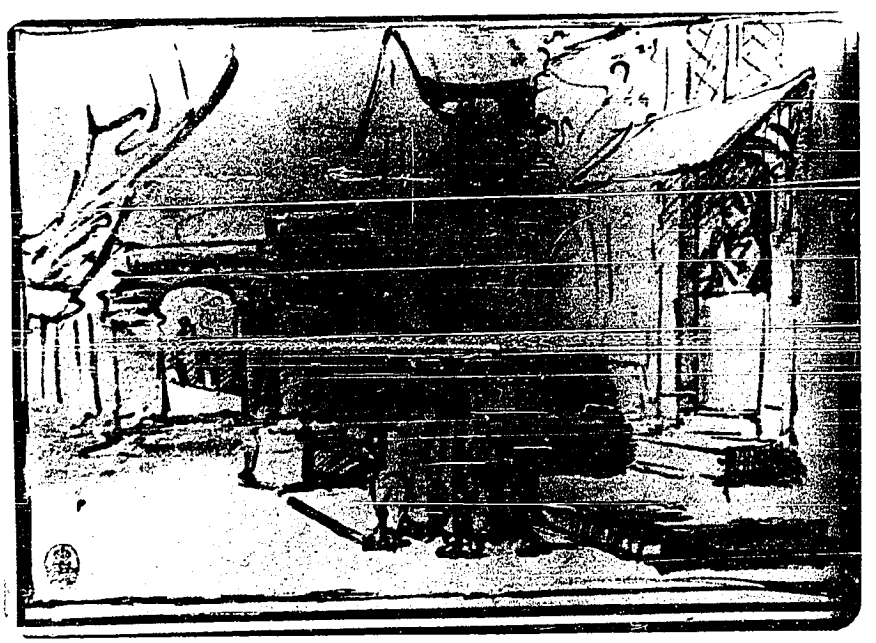
Plate 69



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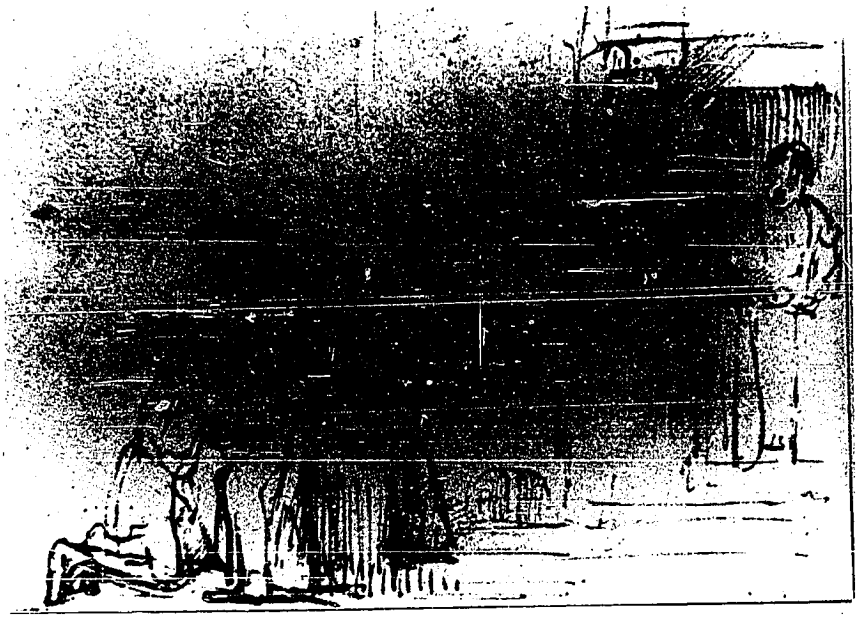

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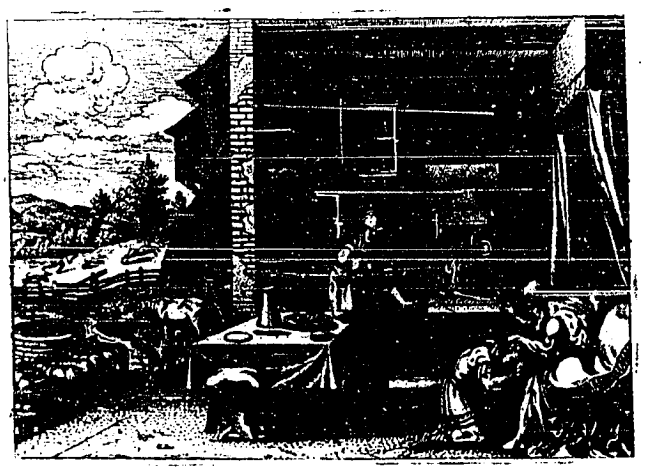

Plate 72

Plate 73

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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