



---

The Curious Case of the "Chiarito Tabernacle": A New Interpretation

Author(s): Christopher R. Lakey

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Getty Research Journal*, No. 4 (2012), pp. 13-30

Published by: [J. Paul Getty Trust](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41413129>

Accessed: 22/02/2013 15:55

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*J. Paul Getty Trust* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Getty Research Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# The Curious Case of the *Chiarito Tabernacle*: A New Interpretation

*Christopher R. Lakey*

## I

According to Florentine legend, in 1328 Chiarito del Voglia, a wealthy layman, experienced a life-altering vision of Saint Zenobius while tending to the saint's tomb. Zenobius, the nominal first bishop of Florence, appeared to Chiarito clad in white pontifical vestments and blessed him with a sign of the cross, curing him of a lingering throat ailment. Soon thereafter, Chiarito took a vow of chastity and devoted his life to the care of nuns and other chaste women in Florence and neighboring Fiesole.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps because of his charitable nature, Chiarito was prone to visions of the divine, the most famous of which the Florentine artist Pacino di Bonaguida recorded in paint. Just beneath the majestic gilded gesso relief of Christ and the Apostles, which dominates the central panel of the J. Paul Getty Museum's *Chiarito Tabernacle* (fig. 1), Pacino painted three scenes of the visionary kneeling before a priest and awaiting Communion. Two of the scenes represent visions that Chiarito experienced while in prayer: at the far left, a host sprouting wheat shafts is prominently displayed on an altar; at the far right, Chiarito anticipates ingesting the host, which Pacino shows as a homuncular crucified Christ in flight.<sup>2</sup> In the third scene (between the two visions), Chiarito receives the host from a priest.

These peripheral episodes are related to the altarpiece's principal scene, located in the upper register. Here, in sculpted form, Pacino depicts a frontal cross-nimbed Christ hovering midair against a gold background incised with geometric forms. Christ, clothed in a regal gown, holds a jewel-encrusted book in his left hand and greets beholders in a typical gesture of blessing with his right. Thirteen golden rays emanate from his navel: twelve rays enter the mouths of the Apostles who surround him (six on either side); the thirteenth ray divides the panel vertically, entering the picture space below and integrating with the host that the priest places in Chiarito's mouth. The subject matter of this scene has intrigued scholars since Richard Offner first wrote about the piece in 1947.<sup>3</sup> The upper register, which Offner identifies as the Last Supper (Communion of the Apostles) (fig. 2), has been the focus of numerous recent interpretations that hinge on the growing privatization of devotional practices in the later Middle Ages, in particular Eucharistic devotion.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this flurry of attention, scholars have been somewhat mute on the iconographic relationship between the central panel and the outer panels and have not identified the program's target audience, which I suggest was a group of religious

*Getty Research Journal*, no. 4 (2012): 13–30 © 2012 Christopher R. Lakey



Fig. 1. Pacino di Bonaguida (Italian, active ca. 1302–40). *The Chiarito Tabernacle*, ca. 1340s, gilded gesso and tempera on panel, 97.2 × 28.7 cm (38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (85.PB.311)

women.<sup>5</sup> By considering a number of observations concerning the prominent role of religious women in the outer panels and the importance of sight and touch mediated through the innovative use of relief in the central panel, a more nuanced interpretation of this object emerges. In my view, Pacino’s tabernacle presents a cohesive argument regarding how Chiarito’s visionary experiences established him as an exemplar of the chaste and holy life and a suitable guardian of nuns and young women.

## II

There can be no doubt as to why the central panel has received more attention than the outer wings: the bizarre, visionary quality of the iconography and the esoteric medium of gilded gesso relief are delectably intriguing to scholars of medieval and Renaissance art, inviting their analysis and interpretation. The most difficult motifs to understand in this panel are the golden rays issuing from Christ’s navel. There is no known visual or textual precedent for this imagery, and Öffner suggests the rays are *fistulae*, or liturgical straws, used to imbibe the wine/blood of Christ during communion ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> Seen in this light, Pacino’s symbolic rendering depicts the Apostles using



**Fig. 2.** Pacino di Bonaguida (Italian, active ca. 1302–40). *The Chiarito Tabernacle* (detail showing the large central panel), ca. 1340s, gilded gesso and tempera on panel, 97.2 × 28.7 cm (38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (85.PB.311)

antique liturgical instruments to literally feed off Christ's immaculate body. Since the patristic tradition, the Communion of the Apostles has been understood as the institution of the liturgical Eucharist. To take just one example, in Saint Augustine of Hippo's account of this episode in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, the bishop understood Christ's salvific blessing, as symbolically reenacted through the institutionalization of the Eucharistic meal, to be a liturgical rite.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, traditional depictions of this scene show Christ administering Communion to the Apostles from behind an altar, as on an early Byzantine paten from the mid-sixth century (fig. 3), or around a table in an iteration of the Last Supper.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of Offner's argument, the strange iconography of Pacino's work could signify a more vernacular and mystical interpretation of the scene, one that is substantiated by medieval discourses on Eucharistic vision. Theological developments in the thirteenth century, especially the Fourth Lateran Council's doctrinization of the dogma of transubstantiation in 1215, the founding of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264, and the institutionalization of the Elevation of the Host, catalyzed the popularity of Eucharistic devotion.<sup>9</sup> At stake was access to the transubstantiated body of Christ both visually and materially: seeing the host as the real presence of Christ during Mass and consuming his body and blood during Communion. The growing importance of the visualization of the Eucharist led to an abundance of new images across media that reflected both the institutional character of the rituals, as in a depiction of the Elevation of the Host in the Getty's fourteenth-century psalter by the Master of the Brussels Initials (fig. 4), and the more personalized nature of the rite, as in Chiarito's visions depicted in the lower register of the central panel by Pacino.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of Offner's interpretation, recent commentators on the *Chiarito Tabernacle* have noted the connection between the central panel and Eucharistic discourses on the visible and the invisible: Pacino graphically inscribed the process of Christ's body becoming visible as the host. Klaus Krüger has argued that the work's iconography points to the literalization of the transubstantiation because the *fistulae*, doubling as the host, are connected to the body of Christ. Likewise, Victor Schmidt has remarked that Pacino's work "demonstrates the relationship between Eucharistic devotion and the desire to be granted a vision of Christ in yet another fashion," namely, in the figure of the homunculus-Christ present in the host.<sup>11</sup>

However ingenious Offner's interpretation of the scene of Christ and the Apostles may be, it is difficult to fully accept, for a number of reasons. While it is clear the Apostles and Chiarito are receiving some kind of nourishment from Christ, the panel does not depict the Communion of the Apostles, a subject in which weighty sacerdotal undertones are typically present. Chiarito receives Communion, the holy sustenance—but he cannot administer Communion. He was not a member of the apostolic priesthood, and therefore the primary message of this panel should be reconsidered.<sup>12</sup> There are other subtle clues that have been marginalized by the traditional interpretation; they lead to a more nuanced understanding of the patron's possible motivations relating to the message of the work. For one, the Apostles and Chiarito are not the only figures receiving golden



**Fig. 3. Paten with Communion of the Apostles.** Early Byzantine (Constantinople or Syria), ca. 565–78, silver repoussé with gilding and inscription in niello, 3.2 cm high × 35 cm diameter (1¼ × 13¾ in.). Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (bz.1924.5). Photo © Dumbarton Oaks



**Fig. 4. Master of the Brussels Initials (Italian, active 1390–1410).** *The Elevation of the Host*, in Psalter (Bologna), 1389–1404, tempera colors, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink on parchment, 33.02 × 23.97 cm (13 × 9½ in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (ms.34, fol. 130)

rays from Christ, a detail often overlooked by Offner and others: some of the figures at the bottom of the right panel also receive that distinction. Above them, at the top of the right panel, a monumental God sits enthroned and presents a bloodied, crucified Christ to the beholder in a representation of the Holy Trinity (Mercy Seat) rendered in perspective.<sup>13</sup> Below, a group of religious women are seated in a crowd interspersed with laymen and women listening to a Dominican preacher. The holy women are marked out from the rest of the crowd by streams of golden rays mixed with blood that fall from Christ's wounds onto their heads. Miraculously, the golden rays touch the heads of only the six veiled women. Chiarito watches from behind the pulpit, withdrawn from the temporality of the sermon, and it has been suggested that this is one of his visions.<sup>14</sup> Here, in a scene reminiscent of the Pentecost, the veiled women—and no others—have been elected by the Godhead. Representations of the Pentecost prominently depicting divine light were common at this time, exemplified in the illumination by Pacino's sometime collaborator the Master of the Dominican Effigies (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Master of the Dominican Effigies (Italian, active ca. 1325–50). *The Pentecost*, in *Laudario* (Florence), ca. 1340, tempera and gold on parchment, 43 × 31.75 cm (16<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (ms.80, verso)

To understand how the central panel in relief and the depiction of the election of the nuns operate together, the central panel needs to be considered in a new light. In what was the first description of the Getty's tabernacle, the eighteenth-century antiquarian Antonio Francesco Gori (1691–1757) described the figure of Christ as *Christus Dominus* and the rays of gold coming out of his navel as *funiculi*—that is, cords or ropes.<sup>16</sup> Gori saw the object placed on an altar in the monastery of Santa Maria Regina Coeli, the Augustinian monastery that Chiarito is said to have founded, though traditionally it has been argued that Chiarito did not commission this altarpiece for the monastery.<sup>17</sup> Gori interpreted this scene as rendering an eschatological doctrine expressed in the Gospel of John 12:32, when Christ said to the crowd: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.”<sup>18</sup> This episode takes place well before the Last Supper. Christ has triumphantly entered Jerusalem and encountered a throng of people, including Gentiles. Just prior to speaking those words, Christ proclaimed his eminent death and judgment of the world. In medieval exegetical writing, this episode was interpreted as Christ gathering the elect to him in heaven. To take one example, Gregory the Great (540–604) glossed the verse as follows in a letter to clerics from the church of Constantinople: “For in that which He says in the Gospel, ‘When I shall be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself,’ *He means all that are elect.* For one could not be drawn to God after death who had separated himself from God by evil living.”<sup>19</sup>

Following this line of thought, the golden rays should be understood not as liturgical instruments but rather as signs of a type of election through the descent of divine knowledge, or wisdom: those who *know* Christ will be saved, those who do not will be cast into hell. Christ establishes a hierarchy, beginning in the central panel, by offering divine wisdom first to the Apostles, then to Chiarito, and then, in the right panel, to the nuns. Here, the Apostles act as models, or exemplars, for Chiarito, who in turn acts as an exemplar for the nuns. Another contemporaneous work of art similarly displays rays of light emitting from Christ (though not from his navel) to holy personages in a hierarchical manner. In the pinnacle of the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, an altarpiece now associated with Lippo Memmi though traditionally attributed to Francesco Traini (fig. 6), Christ sits in a mandorla against a gold background.<sup>20</sup> Rays of light issue from his mouth, which the Evangelists and other erudite figures, including Plato and Aristotle, receive on their heads. These individuals encircle the massive figure of Thomas, who sits squarely in the middle of the pictorial field with an open book. The interpretation of this work is clear, as Joseph Polzer has pointed out: Thomas, who had just been canonized in 1323, receives divine wisdom, in the form of golden light, from Christ, the Evangelists, Aristotle, and Plato—and then through his writings deflects wisdom onto others located beneath him.<sup>21</sup>

Despite key differences in the source of received knowledge—Thomas receives divine wisdom through the word of Christ (*verbum*) and Chiarito through Christ's body, the word made flesh (*verbum caro factum est*)—both types of knowledge are depicted as golden rays. How does Chiarito's reception of divine wisdom relate to the altarpiece's production? There has been surprisingly little speculation concerning how Chiarito's



**Fig. 6.** Francesco Traini (Italian, active ca. 1320–65) or Lippo Memmi (Italian, active ca. 1317–56). *The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ca. 1332–40, tempera on panel, 375 × 258 cm (147<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 101<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.). Santa Caterina d’Alessandria, Pisa, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

patronage bears on the iconographic program of the entire work; most scholars have focused their attention on the central panel alone. No doubt the dearth of documents relating to the altarpiece has hindered attempts at comprehensive analyses, and there are few indisputable facts regarding Chiarito and his patronage of Pacino.

According to his *Vita*, penned by Antonio Maria di Vincenzo Riconesi in 1653, Chiarito was born into a family of good fortune and substantial means in Prato around 1300.<sup>22</sup> He never took priestly vows, but lived a charitable life. After his vision of Saint Zenobius, he and his wife, Costanza Dolcibeni, took a vow of chastity and began to oversee the well-being of nuns and other women. Long before he was given directorship of Santa Maria Regina Coeli in 1343, he served as the principal representative (*governatore e procuratore*) at the monastery of Santa Maria del Fiore (Fiesole), the hermitage of Santa Croce (Fiesole), and the monastery of Santa Margherita di Cafaggiolo (Florence).<sup>23</sup> He died sometime between 1348 and 1356, most likely from an illness associated with bubonic plague (Black Death), and was beatified in 1478. His tomb rested under the high altar of the church of Santa Maria Regina Coeli, which also housed some of his relics. When Santa Maria Regina

Coeli was founded, Chiarito and Costanza brought their family with them, along with other nuns and virgins under their care in Florence and Fiesole. The founding of the monastery took almost two years and included complex negotiations between the confraternity of Orsanmichele, the prior of San Michelle Berteldi, and the Convertite, a convent of reformed prostitutes for whom, initially, the new monastic complex was built.<sup>24</sup>

Could Chiarito have commissioned the altarpiece for the founding of the new monastery after all? Unfortunately, the known documentary evidence does not point in that direction. Even though Riconesi dates Chiarito's visions of the host to 1342 and claims they occurred *in* the monastery, the monastery had not been built at that date. If Offner's date of around 1340 is correct, Chiarito's visions occurred sometime between his vow of chastity in 1328 and 1340. Nevertheless, between these years Chiarito cared for nuns and other women, and this object could have been commissioned for any number of monastic institutions. That he was able to bring Pacino's tabernacle with him to Santa Maria Regina Coeli and install it on an altar suggests that the work's message—which was twofold—was originally directed at a female religious audience. Let us consider the first part of the message at some length. The imagery elevated Chiarito in the minds of the women by establishing him as a visionary who had communicated with the divine. Pacino depicted this divine communication in two ways, thereby providing multiple visual accounts for the nuns to contemplate: in the scenes showing Chiarito's visions of the host and the blessing of the nuns, and in the form of the divine light. The importance of light in communicating with the divine became a popular trope during the later Middle Ages—and, perhaps not unimportantly, *chiarito* can mean “enlightened.”<sup>25</sup>

According to the Franciscan theologian Saint Bonaventure (1217–74), the ability to see God in the natural world—that is, in “created things” like the host—required divine illumination.<sup>26</sup> This theme often appeared in religious art of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a time when Italy witnessed a flowering of devotional practices tied to the mystical experiences of individuals who intended to teach others a spiritual path through their example (*exempla*), often related in vernacular treatises and sermons produced by members of the Mendicant orders.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Getty altarpiece functioned as a sermon, or mystical treatise, through which Chiarito's experiences were relayed to the women, establishing him as a suitable guardian because of his divine wisdom.

On the right panel, only the nuns receive the golden light, which strongly suggests that the altarpiece's message was directed at a particular female audience. The left panel contains additional iconographic elements that support this thesis. At the top of the left wing, Pacino painted a famous vision of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, *The Mystical Marriage*. Here, Mary sits enthroned, looking out at the beholder and cradling Christ with both hands, while Catherine supplicates the Virgin for her son's hand in marriage. Directly below, in a unique scene of Christ blessing the Virgin on the road to Calvary, Pacino depicts Christ walking to his left, toward his eminent death, and turning his body in the opposite direction. Christ looks his mother in the eyes, blessing her and the cohort of women she leads with his right hand, as if to reassure them of what lies ahead in the afterlife. In the next

scene, a highly charged Crucifixion, Mary is shown deeply distressed, with her head inclined downward and her eyes tightly closed: she cannot bear the sight of her son dying on the cross. In the context of a female monastic institution, these powerful images of Catherine of Alexandria and the Virgin would have been well received. Indeed, they convey the altar-piece's second message: the mystical spouse of Christ and the mother of the divine were role models females could emulate in their spiritual lives, which would have been directed by Chiarito and Costanza, and sustained through Christ and Eucharistic devotion.

### III

Despite this reinterpretation of the iconography of the central panel, there is no denying that Christ's body and Eucharistic devotion are important themes of the *Chiarito Tabernacle*. Many visual reminders of Christ's salvific message appear prominently throughout all three panels: Pacino depicted three scenes of Communion, two bloodied Crucifixions, and one large gilded relief of Christ's body, from which the Apostles and Chiarito receive spiritual nourishment. Following Gori's Johannine interpretation, scriptural evidence on the importance of spiritual nourishment can be found just prior to Jesus's proclamation regarding the elect. In John 12:23–25, Jesus confronts a group of Gentiles who traveled from all over to witness his presence, saying:

The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Amen, amen I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, Itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal.

The Eucharistic theme in this passage was evident to medieval authors. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74), for example, understood the passage as Christ comparing himself to a grain of wheat because “the reason he came was to refresh and nourish our spirits, which is principally done by bread made from wheat.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, sight and corporeality are important here: the Gentiles traveled to *see* Jesus in the *flesh*; the wheat, a symbol and the physical agent of the Eucharistic host, represents Christ's body.

While the sense of sight was essential to medieval Eucharistic practices in the later Middle Ages and metaphysical visions were crucial in legitimizing Chiarito as an exemplar for nuns, Pacino's use of sculpted relief to emphatically remind beholders of Christ's tangible, bodily presence effectively formalized these themes. In the central panel, Pacino employs a cunning wit in mediating the relationship between the sense of sight and touch. By using high relief to create the triumphant figure of Christ and the supplicating Apostles, the sacral immediacy of the image takes on new weight. Not a flat, two-dimensional image, relief endows the figures with true three-dimensionality and a corporeality that beholders would feel a strong desire to touch: Christ's flesh is palpable.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the tabernacle retains evidence of physical contact with its beholders. The faces of Christ's tormentors were scratched off of scenes on the left panel, an act of iconoclasm clearly evident in *Christ Before Herod* and *The Flagellation*. In the central panel, in a clever

addition by an unknown hand, a crouching dragon was painted behind Chiarito in his vision of the incarnate-host, perhaps suggesting that, through Beato Chiarito's benevolence and devotion, the monastery and its inhabitants would be safe from the temptations of the outside world. Finally, the central panel is noticeably worn. It is tempting to suggest that the wear was caused by beholders, in a heightened state of devotion, touching the relief—though to my knowledge there are no conservation reports supporting this hypothesis.<sup>30</sup>

When considered as a mixed-media image, the *Chiarito Tabernacle* and the issues it raises can be contextualized within a wider corpus of medieval devotional imagery. Here, a “mixed-media image” refers to an object that combines traditional mediums of painting and sculpture in order to visibly enhance a divine figure's tangibility and thus endow it with a sense of physical corporeality in relation to the pictorial field. These objects include, but are not limited to, altarpieces such as the *Madonna with the Large Eyes* made for the cathedral of Siena (fig. 7); painted crucifixes and *Sedes sapientiae* (thrones of wisdom); and “relief-icons.”<sup>31</sup> These images were thought to contain the real presence of a holy personage, either literally (that is, as a reliquary) or relationally, functioning as a tangible conduit to the divine by calling to mind and to sight the material form of Christ or a saint.<sup>32</sup> Such messages were relayed through the spatially dynamic interplay of painting

**Fig. 7.** Master of the Tressa (Italian, active mid-1200s). *Madonna with the Large Eyes*, ca. 1220, tempera and gesso on wood, 47 × 67 cm (18½ × 26¾ in.). Siena, Italy, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY



and sculpture, through the tactile protrusion of the picture plane, and by capitalizing on the important relationship between the object's location and function in terms of the audience. Often these objects were placed on altars, in close proximity to beholders, in order to generate affective piety. By endowing figures with a tangible sense of divine presence, the crucial analogical step from the earthly realm to the heavenly was mediated artistically.<sup>33</sup> Pacino emphasized this relationship inversely to spark affective piety in beholders: the immaterial was made emphatically more material, perhaps, to signify that a higher state of reality could be reached through devotion to the Godhead.<sup>34</sup>

From a technical perspective, how did Pacino create the three-dimensional central panel? According to conservators, there are two possibilities. Pacino could have built up the figures in relief by applying *gesso grosso* (a coarse gypsum) to the ground, layered *gesso sottile* (a finer gypsum) on it, covered the areas to be gilded in *bole*, a type of clay, and gilded the forms. Alternatively, he could have cast the figures in wax or *gesso sottile*. When the *gesso* mix set, the forms would have been affixed to the panel with another *gesso* mixture. Once this application hardened, the relief would be covered with the *bole* and gilded in the conventional way.<sup>35</sup>

Offner likens the Pacino altarpiece to images that combine painting and sculpture, but he does not flesh out the topic—he notes only that Pacino wanted to replicate earlier models, such as the mixed-media objects discussed above. While Krüger mentions the relief, he likens it to an imitation of the work of a goldsmith, such as Byzantine icons, revetments, and other types of images in metal.<sup>36</sup> These readings—even if somewhat accurate—are negative evaluations in which Pacino's relief is understood as an imitative, cheap version of something else. However, when we recognize the innovative nature of the relief and the process by which it was made, the patron's motivations behind the commission become more apparent.

Moreover, analyzing the original viewing conditions of the altarpiece sheds new light on how Pacino's techniques enabled beholders to visualize the materialization of Christ's body and fostered a dynamic relationship between sculpted relief and spectator. The golden rays, Christ, and the Apostles all possess corporeality and project from the surface. Clearly, Pacino designed this work to be seen from an oblique line of sight, by a beholder kneeling and looking up at the *Christus Dominus* on an altar, a pose Chiarito adopts three times in the center panel. When the altarpiece is viewed from this kneeling position, the forms appear more natural and the figures' materiality becomes more perceptible than when seen from a standing position, and the figures emerge from the gilt background in a virtual state. From a low vantage point, the material differences between figure and surface become evident.<sup>37</sup> The palpable sense of Christ's body is also evident when the object is lit in certain ways—either by oblique, natural lighting or by candlelight, both of which are typical in medieval churches. Viewed in natural raking light, the figures in relief appear more tactile, and the holiest parts of this work—which were consciously produced to relay a message of corporeality to beholders—look more fully three-dimensional (fig. 8).



**Fig. 8.** Pacino di Bonaguida (Italian, active ca. 1302–40). *The Chiarito Tabernacle* (view of relief in raking light), ca. 1340s, gilded gesso and tempera on panel, 97.2 × 28.7 cm (38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (85.PB.311)

What beholders witnessed in the central panel was a powerful image: a divinely illuminated, immaculate figure of Christ, who had risen triumphantly from his brutal death, a death depicted on each side panel. If the nuns were to feel empathy for the dying Christ on the cross, they would feel an equal measure of elation in front of their glorious *Dominus*.

**Christopher R. Lakey** is an American Council of Learned Societies/Mellon New Faculty Fellow in the Department of the History of Art at Johns Hopkins University; he received his PhD in the history of art from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009 and holds an MA in medieval studies from the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto.

**Notes** At the Getty, I would like to thank Scott Allan, Christine Sciacca, and Yvonne Szafran for conversations about Pacino and for photographic and bibliographical assistance. Parts of this essay were presented at the 2009 College Art Association Annual Conference in the panel “The Senses in Early Modern Art and Visual Culture” and the 2010 Trecento Conference in Honor of Andrew Ladis. I am grateful to

the organizers and audience members for their helpful questions and comments. Special thanks are due to the anonymous readers for the *Getty Research Journal*. This article has benefited greatly from my discussions with Jacqueline E. Jung, Herbert L. Kessler, Aden Kumler, and Tristan Weddigen. Research for this article was graciously funded by Reed College and the American Council of Learned Societies.

1. On Chiarito's life, see Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese Fiorentine*, vol. 5, *Del Quartiere di S. Giovanni* (Florence: Pietro Gaetano Vivani, 1757), 174–98; Godefroid Henschen et al., eds., *Acta sanctorum . . . Maii, tomus sextus quo continentur dies XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII* (Paris: V. Palmé, 1866), cols. 0161B—0166D; and Scipione de Paoli, "Chiarito di Firenze, beato," in *Bibliotheca sanctorum* (Rome: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università lateranense, 1963), 3: cols. 1229–1230. Since the late ninth century, the body of Saint Zenobius has been interred in the Florence cathedral, though Chiarito's seventeenth-century biographer, Antonio Maria di Vincenzo Riconesi, claimed he was tending to the tomb in "ecclesia S. Ioannis." Zenobius's previous resting place was the basilica of San Lorenzo. For the cult of Saint Zenobius, see Marica Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 220–40.

2. These episodes were recorded, *ex post facto*, in Chiarito's *Vita*. See Henschen, *Acta sanctorum*, col. 0161D: "Adeo gratum habuit Deus illum dimittentis se animi religiosum famulatum, ut id etiam voluerit visibiliter demonstrare. Ergo cum aliquando ministraret sacrificio Missae, visus sunt ei splendidus radius, progrediens ab Hostia sacrosancta, & pectus suum percutiens." It seems to me that Riconesi described Chiarito's visions as depicted by Pacino.

3. See Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, section 3, *The Fourteenth Century*, vol. 5 (New York: Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1947), 21n22, 132n2, 208n4, 287; and Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, section 3, *The Fourteenth Century*, vol. 6 (New York: Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1956), 141–48.

4. See Dominique Rigaux, *À la table du seigneur: L'Eucharistie chez les primitifs italiens, 1250–1497* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), esp. 182–84; Klaus Krüger, "Medium and Imagination: Aesthetic Aspects of Trecento Panel Painting," in Victor M. Schmidt, ed., *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 57–82; Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250–1400* (Florence: Centro Di, 2005), 141–60; and François Boespflug, "Eucharistie et Trinité dans l'art médiéval d'Occident (XIIe–XVe siècle)," in Nicole Bériou, Béatrice Caseau, and Dominique Rigaux, eds., *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident (Antiquité et Moyen Âge)*, vol. 2, *Les réceptions* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2009), 1111–67.

5. Barbara Baert is an exception. Her essay, "Nourished by Inwardness: The Beato Chiarito Tabernacle (c. 1340)," *Annali dell'Università di Ferrara, Sezione Storia*, no. 4 (2007): 28–50, studies Pacino's tabernacle exclusively within the broader theme of late medieval female piety. Unfortunately, I was made aware of her essay too late to fully address the argument in my work. I would like to thank Christine Sciacca for alerting me to Baert's piece.

6. Offner (1956), 141n10. Krüger follows Offner's interpretation. See Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 73. *Fistulae* were fashioned out of metal or glass and covered in silver or gold, and often decorated, or ornamented, in some fashion. *Fistula* was one of many names for these instruments. Others include *calamus* and *tutellus*. See Joseph Braun, *Das christliche Altargerät in seinem Sein und in seiner Entwicklung* (Munich: Hueber, 1932), 247–64, esp. 264, where Braun reproduces drawings of two medieval *fistulae*. The use of liturgical straws during Communion was not common during the later Middle Ages, and their depiction in art quite rare. I know of only one instance where a *fistula* was depicted, though I have not seen the original nor a reproduction. Miri Rubin describes a fourteenth-century Venetian missal in which a miniature contains a scene of Communion where a priest uses a straw to drink from a chalice: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana; Marciana III (III) 2116, fol. 176r. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 72. For the circumstances of the manuscript's

commission, see most recently Holger A. Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, 1200-1400," in Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson, eds., *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), 200-206.

7. See, for example, Saint Augustine, "Tractate 25, chapters 13-14," in idem, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 255-57. On Augustine's interpretation of Christ as mediator *qua* priest in the *Communion of the Apostles*, see Erik Thunø, *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Art* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002), 79-83.

8. On the paten, see most recently R. S. Nelson, K. M. Collins, and C. Barber, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 216-17, cat. no. 37. On the iconography of the *Communion of the Apostles*, see Gertrude Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1983), 2:38-43.

9. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 49-82.

10. The miniature precedes the Canon of the Mass on folio 130. On the artist, see Robert G. Calkins, "An Italian in Paris: The Master of the Brussels Initials and His Participation in the French Book Industry," *Gesta* 20, no. 1 (1981): 223-32.

11. Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 73-75; Schmidt, *Painted Piety*, 158. These interpretations safely position the *Chiarito Tabernacle* in relation to the growing literature on visual devotion in medieval art and on medieval visuality generally. See especially the recent works by Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Jeffery Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion," in Klaus Krüger and Alessandra Nova, eds., *Imagination und Wirklichkeit: Zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 47-69; and Cynthia Hahn, "Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality," in Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 169-92.

12. Though called a *clericus* in his *Vita*, Chiarito was a layman; he was married and had a family. To my knowledge, there are no known documents that disclose his membership in a monastic order, even a tertiary order, and he certainly did not take priestly vows.

13. Otto Von Simpson has argued that images of the Mercy Seat (*Gnadenstuhl*), sometimes called the Throne of Grace, refer to the passage in Hebrews 4:16 in which Christ's crucifixion is typologically related to sacrifices performed by the high priest on a *propitiatorium*, or portable altar. In this rendition, God sits in judgment and presents beholders with Christ's body and blood, through which they may gain forgiveness, or mercy, at the end of time. The passage reads: "Adeamus ergo cum fiducia ad thronum gratia ut misericordiam consequamur et gratiam inveniamus in auxilio oportuno" (Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid). See Otto Von Simpson, "Über Die Bedeutung Von Masaccios Trinitätsfresko in S. Maria Novella," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 8 (1966): 119-59, esp. 126-30. Herbert L. Kessler has recently argued that Pacino utilized perspective in the image of the Holy Trinity to distinguish it from the relief of Christ and the Apostles and the less-illusionistic scenes of Christ's life and Chiarito's visions. In this way, Pacino was able to focus attention on the centrality of the Trinity in relation to the Eucharistic theme of the altarpiece, while at the same time reminding beholders of the distance between themselves and God, a distance they could bridge only through God's mercy. See Herbert L. Kessler, "Speculum," *Speculum* 86 (2011), 10.

14. Baert noticed that the crowd received the blood of Christ, but she did not specify that the nuns were the only members of the audience who were marked out. She also argued that this was a vision of Chiarito because he has golden rays coming out of his eyes. However, upon close inspection of the panel in situ it is clear he has no rays coming out of his eyes. The two faint lines in black pigment near his eyes were used to define some aspect of the pulpit; one can find these lines just *behind* Chiarito, as well as on the pulpit's steps. See Baert, "Nourished by Inwardness," 30. The issue as to why nuns would be depicted

in a crowd listening to a sermon (and not cloistered) has been raised by a number of scholars, and the suggestion that they are widows has been lodged. However, they are wearing monastic garb. Because this depiction is clearly based on a vision of Chiarito's, I believe some artistic license was taken in regard to the reality of a cloistered versus public life. Although the social history of nuns in medieval and Renaissance Florence is important in this context, due to space I cannot deal extensively with this issue.

15. The so-called Master of the Dominican Effigies was Pacino's contemporary and collaborator. On his life and work, see, most recently, Ada Labriola, "Alcune proposte per la miniatura fiorentina del Trecento," *Arte Cristiana* 93 (2005): 14–26; Laurence Kanter et al., *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300–1450* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 56–83.

16. Antonio Francesco Gori, *Thesaurus Veterum Diptychorum* (Florence: Albizzini, 1759), 3:200: "In superiore stat Christus Dominus, rotundo nimbo gemmato ac radiato, ornato capite, dextera benedicens, sinistra vero Evangelii sui Librum praefert. Amictus est tunica & pallio: at ex eius umbilico duodecim tenues funiculi egrediuntur."

17. For example, Miklòs Boskovits argues that the altarpiece either was used by Chiarito himself or was commissioned for another institution because it lacks any iconographic reference to the Augustinian order. See Richard Offner et al., *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, section 3, *The Fourteenth Century*, vol. 9, *The Painters of the Miniaturist Tendency*, ed. Miklòs Boskovits (Florence: Istituto di storia dell'arte, 1984), 49n167.

18. The Vulgate reads: "et ego si exaltatus fuero a terra omnia traham ad me ipsum." See Gori's explanation, Gori, *Thesaurus Veterum Diptychorum*, 3:200: "Sedulus ac pius Pictor illud forsitan exprimere voluit, quod ore suo dixit Christus Dominus noster, *Cum exaltus fuero a terra* (hoc est in lingo crucis suspensus, ut SS. Patres interpretantur) *omnia traham ad me ipsum.*"

19. Gregory the Great, "Chapter 9, Epistle 15," *Register of Epistles*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. 2, vol. 12, *Leo the Great; Gregory the Great, Pt. 1*, ed. J. Barmby and Charles Lett Feltoe (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1895), 216–17.

20. Serena Romano, for one, has recently called this attribution into question, arguing that Lippo Memmi likely painted the altarpiece. See Serena Romano, "Il Trionfo di S. Tommaso in S. Caterina a Pisa," in Angiola Maria Romanini and Antonio Cadei, eds., *Arte d'Occidente: Temi e Metodi; Studi in onore di Angiola Maria Romanini*, 2 vols. (Rome: Sintesi informazione, 1999), 2:901–11. See also Katherine H. Tachau, "Seeing as Action and Passion in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, eds., *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 344–45.

21. The altarpiece was made for the Dominican church of Santa Caterina in Pisa, where it still stands. Polzer dates the work to around 1323. See "The 'Triumph of Thomas' Panel in Santa Caterina, Pisa: Meaning and Date," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 37 (1993): 29–70. I would like to thank Herbert Kessler for alerting me to this image.

22. There is no precise date for his birth; most sources agree that he was born around 1300, though he could have been born earlier. For bibliographic accounts of his life, see note 1.

23. On this point, see especially Richa, *Notizie storiche*, 188–89, and S. G. C., "Un monastero di Suore Agostiniane in Via San Gallo (1348–1786)," *Bollettino Storico Agostiniano* 13 (1924): 15–20.

24. For the history of the founding of the monastery, see Richa, *Notizie storiche*, 188–189, and S. G. C., "Un monastero," 15–20. The monastery was located on 105 via San Gallo; the building now houses a conservatory. In addition to Chiarito's tomb and relics, Santa Maria Regina Coeli was home to a miraculous Crucifixion and an *ex voto* of Lorenzo de' Medici; it was known as Il Chiarito, after its founder. See, for example, "Documenti 31—1552 febbraio 25," *Archivio di Stato* (Florence), published in Arnaldo D'Addario, ed., *Aspetti della Controriforma a Firenze* (Roma: Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato, 1972), 391–98. The document states "seguito di pochi anni (1370) dall'altro delle monache di Santa Maria Regina

Coelorum (50 nel 1552, 62 nel 1552), detto anche di Chiarito dal nome del fondatore, messer Chiarito del Voglia.” This is repeated in many of the documents relating to the monastery; see, for example, Francesco Bigazzi, ed., *Iscrizioni e memorie della città di Firenze* (Florence: Arnaldo Forni, 1886), 250.

25. I would like to thank Joanna Cannon for reminding me of the importance of Chiarito’s name in this context.

26. On this topic, see especially Bernard McGinn, “How Augustine Shaped Medieval Mysticism,” *Augustinian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2006): 1–26. Here, McGinn explains Augustine’s importance to the formation of Bonaventure’s thought, especially in terms of the role divine illumination played in spiritual life. In the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (translated as “The Soul’s Journey into God”), Bonaventure believed that “by praying in this way [according to the six stages of contemplation or *speculatio*] we receive light to discern the steps of the ascent to God”; see McGinn, “How Augustine Shaped Medieval Mysticism,” 17–18. Bonaventure was extremely popular during the mid-fourteenth century and his theological arguments were often depicted in art. Pacino, for example, produced a panel painting of the *Tree of Life* (mid-1300s), now in the Accademia, Florence, after Bonaventure’s popular treatise *Lignum Vita*. See *S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 10 vols. (Quaracchi, Italy: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902). For English translations, see Saint Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of Saint Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

27. What interests me in this context is how, according to McGinn, “How Augustine Shaped Medieval Mysticism,” a mystic provides others with accounts of direct experiences of the divine: visions, raptures, and so on. In 1333, an important mystic, Domenico Cavalca (a Dominican preacher from Pisa) wrote the treatises *Specchio de’ peccati* and *Specchio de Croce* in the vernacular for lay audiences to raise their minds up to God through divine illumination. These works were very popular in Florence precisely when Chiarito began to have his visions and devote his life to the care of women. On Cavalca, see Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1989), 101; Carla Casagrande, “‘Motions of the Heart’ and Sins: The *Specchio de’ peccati* by Domenico Cavalca, OP,” in Richard Newhauser, ed., *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: PIMS, 2005), 128–45. Cavalca’s works are published in Arrigo Levasti, ed., *Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1935).

28. Thomas Aquinas, “Caput 12, Lectio 4,” in idem, *Super evangelium S. Joannis lectura* (Rome: Taurini, 1952), 307. “Dicit ergo: ego veni ut semen ad fructificandum, et ideo vere dico vobis Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet, idest, nisi ego moriar, fructus conversionis gentium non sequetur. Ideo autem grano frumenti se comparat, quia ad hoc venit ut reficeret et sustentaret mentes humanas: hoc autem praecipue efficit panis frumenti.”

29. Another example of the use of relief in a painted work to play up the relationship between the incarnation and real presence can be found in Simone Martini’s 1333 altarpiece of the Annunciation now in the Uffizi (the Sant’Asano altarpiece) in which the words “AVE MARIA” are raised in relief, making the word literally a tangible, corporeal substance. I would like to thank Anonymous Reader 2 for pointing out this comparison.

30. This issue has been raised by a number of scholars; however, there is no way to verify it without a conservation report. In some cases, the desire to *touch* the divine was as important, if not more important, than the desire to *see* the divine. On the relationship between touch and sight in medieval sculpture, see the important essay by Jacqueline E. Jung, “The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination,” in Colum Hourihane, ed., *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History* (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, Dept. of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University, 2010), 203–40.

31. On the Siena altarpiece, see Henk Van Os, *Sienese Altar Pieces, 1215–1460* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1988), 1:11–20. For *Sedes sapientiae*, see Ilene Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom* (Princeton: Princeton

Univ. Press, 1972) and Fernanda De'Maffei, ed., *Mostra di sculture lignee medioevali*, exh. cat. (Milan: Edizioni dell'Ente Manifestazioni Milanesi, 1957). For "relief icons," see Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2010).

32. For just one instance of this, see Coppo di Marcovaldo, *Virgin and Child*, in Santa Maria Maggiore, Florence (second half of the thirteenth century). The polychromed heads of Mary and Christ project strongly from the panel. The figures are made from plaster and contained a cavity in their heads that held relics (Christ's blood and a piece of the true cross). See Marco Ciatti, "The Typology, Meaning, and Use of Some Panel Paintings from the Duecento and Trecento," in Victor M. Schmidt, ed., *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 24–26. For the use of relief in painting during this period, see Lars Jones's essay, "Visio Divina? Donor Figures and Representations of Imagistic Devotion: The Copy of the 'Virgin of Bagnolo' in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence," in Victor M. Schmidt, ed., *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 31–55. Jones makes similar arguments in terms of a beholder's relation to an image in relief versus one in painting and provides an excellent argument regarding the philological relationship of *revelata* to *rilievata* (and *rilievo*) in Italian devotional texts.

33. On this point, Forsyth argued: "As isolated effigies within the church, close to the worshipper, like him/her in size, sharing his own environmental space, yet both human *and* god-like in form, the austere figures [*Sedes sapientiae* sculptures] must have provided an excellent bridge for the transition from reality to abstraction." Forsyth, *Throne of Wisdom*, 10.

34. Hamburger has argued that fifteenth-century painters Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden thought of medieval sculpture as a "frame of reference" in their paintings that re-created highly naturalistic depictions of human bodies—sometimes bodies that were literally sculpted—because sculpture "had a higher claim on reality than a mere picture." See Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing," 51–55. A decade earlier, Pacino made a similar statement regarding the relationship between sculpture and painting—though in this instance sculpture was the medium par excellence to communicate a higher state of reality. Krüger made a similar argument, though he does not focus on the medium of relief except in passing. See Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 73–74.

35. Similar techniques regarding relief in gesso and wax are described by Cennino Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, ed. Daniel V. Thompson (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1932) and in the twelfth-century work by Theophilus, *The Various Arts = De diversis artibus*, ed. and trans. C. R. Dodwell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986). On the conservation of the Pacino altarpiece, see Arie Waller, "Pigments and Organic Colorants: Two Case Studies," in Tonnie Bakkenist et al., eds., *Early Italian Painting Techniques and Analysis* (Maastricht: Limburg Conservation Institute, 1997), 73–74. According to Yvonne Szafran, conservator of paintings at the J. Paul Getty Museum, this object will undergo further tests for an upcoming exhibition. Szafran also indicated that the gilded parts of the panel might have been highlighted by some type of enamel. I would like to thank her immensely for her time, for her help in sorting through issues of the work's conservation, and for allowing me to read an early draft of a 2009 conservation report presented at the National Gallery, London. See Yvonne Szafran et al., "Painting on Parchment and Panel: Exploration of Pacino di Bonaguida's Technique," in Marika Spring, ed., *Studying Old Master Paintings: Technology and Practice* (London: Archetype, 2011), 8–14.

36. Offner (1956), 141; Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 73.

37. It is important to note the optical illusions this produces: seeing the panel from directly in front or from far away flattens the forms optically and they become less naturalistic to the eye. This phenomenon in sculpture has a long history.