

Article

The Body of Christ and the Embodied Viewer in Rubens's *Rockox Epitaph*

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Abstract: On behalf of the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) confirmed the usefulness of religious images and multisensory worship practices for engaging the bodies and the minds of congregants, and for moving pious devotees to empathize with Christ. In the center panel of the *Rockox Epitaph* (c. 1613–1615), a funerary triptych commissioned by the Antwerp mayor Nicolaas Rockox (1560–1640) and his wife Adriana Perez (1568–1619) to hang over their tomb, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) paints an awe-inspiring, hopeful image of the Risen Lord that alludes to the promise of humankind's corporeal resurrection at the Last Judgment. In the wings, Rockox and Perez demonstrate affective worship with prayer aids and welcome onlookers to gaze upon Christ's renewed body. Rubens's juxtaposition of the eternal, incorruptible body of Jesus alongside five mortal figures—the two patrons and the three apostles, Peter, Paul, and John—prompted living viewers to meditate on their relationship with God, to compare their bodies with those depicted, and to contemplate their own embodiment and mortality. Ultimately, the idealized body of Christ reminds faithful audiences of both the corporeal renewal and the spiritual salvation made possible through Jesus's death and resurrection.

Keywords: Peter Paul Rubens; Nicolaas Rockox; Adriana Perez; epitaph; resurrection; Jesuits; heart; Ages of Man



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1. Introduction

The immaculate, resurrected body of Christ is the subject of the *Rockox Epitaph* (Figure 1), a triptych painted by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) between 1613 and 1615. Epitaph paintings, designed to hang over the tombs of their patrons, are funerary monuments that commemorate the dead.¹ Risen from the grave and glowing with divine light, Rubens's life-sized, bare-chested Jesus displays his muscular body and wounded palms to three astonished apostles, who marvel at the miracle they are witnessing. Inspired by Caravaggio, the artist sets the four figures against a sparse, dark background and employs theatrical lighting to focus the viewer's attention on the radiant body of Christ.² Brightly illuminated and conspicuously unmarred—missing the canonical side wound—Jesus's renewed body practically pulsates with life: his cheeks are flushed, tendons flex in his forearms, and a network of blue veins traces the path of blood back to his beating heart.

Rubens employs numerous artistic techniques to encourage the viewer to look at the body of Christ. The translucent white loincloth around Jesus's hips and the voluminous crimson drapery framing his torso direct the beholder's gaze to that divine body. Simultaneously, the vibrant red textile distinguishes Christ from his earthly companions, who wear muted shades of blue that better blend into the dark background. In contrast to Jesus's carefully modeled figure, the apostles' bodies are both obscured and truncated. The youth in the foreground is reduced to a head, an arm, two hands, and a knee. Likewise, the elderly man next to him is little more than a head atop an amorphous green-blue sheet. In the background, the body of the middle-aged man is almost entirely shrouded in

shadows—his shoulder is only visible because the light from Christ’s body shines on him. In this composition, the apostles are secondary figures. Note how Rubens crowds them together on the right to provide ample space for Jesus on the left.



Figure 1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rockox Epitaph* (open): (a) Portrait of Nicolaas Rockox, (b) Resurrected Christ appearing to apostles, (c) Portrait of Adriana Perez, c. 1613–1615, oil on panel, 143 × 123 cm (center), 146 × 55 cm (wings), Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. 308, 307, and 310.

Across the three interior panels of the *Rockox Epitaph*, the sightlines of the figures guide audiences toward the body of Christ, prompting onlookers to pray and to contemplate the Resurrection. For example, Rubens depicts the awestruck apostles with their eyes on Jesus, their gazes transfixed by his miraculous appearance and his divine beauty. Similarly, from their positions in the wings, the two patrons of the triptych invite the beholder to look on with them and to imitate their pious meditations. In the left wing, with a hand on his heart and a finger marking his place in a small prayer book, Nicolaas Rockox (1560–1640) looks at Christ in quiet contemplation. In the right wing, his wife Adriana Perez (1568–1619) glances out at viewers, beckoning them to participate, as she uses coral and gold rosary beads to aid her own prayers.

Working in the early seventeenth century, when the Catholic Church encouraged artists to create religious art that captivated the minds and senses of their congregants, Rubens provided his patrons with a compelling depiction of Christ, whose glorious body evokes feelings of awe and devotion in pious viewers. Moreover, because Jesus’s resurrected body promises faithful observers eternal salvation and their own resurrection at Christ’s Second Coming, the epitaph gives hope and joyous reassurance to those contemplating death along with Rockox and Perez. In this paper, I argue that Rubens’s juxtaposition of the eternal, incorruptible body of the Risen Lord alongside the mortal, earthly bodies of three apostles, the portraits of two seventeenth-century patrons, and (in time) the interred bodies of the

deceased in their tombs below the triptych, prompted living viewers to meditate on their relationship with God, to compare their bodies with those depicted, and to contemplate their own embodiment.

While my analysis broadly considers early modern viewers' empathetic responses to the *Rockox Epitaph*, this paper also explores Nicolaas Rockox's concerns about his aging body, his mortality, and his relationship with Christ. Best known as Rubens's friend and patron, Rockox was middle-aged when he commissioned his epitaph: in 1613, he was 52 years old, and his wife Adriana was 45.³ By that point in his life, Rockox had been married for over twenty years, he possessed great wealth and an excellent reputation, and he had achieved substantial professional success: he was knighted in 1599; he had served five of his eventual nine terms as outside mayor (*buitenburgemeester*) of Antwerp; and he had led the city into the Twelve Years' Truce in 1609.⁴ Certainly, Rockox had many blessings to celebrate, but the aging government official lived during a time of high mortality rates, premature deaths, disfiguring war wounds, and rampant disease. Evidence of the transience of life and the corruptibility of one's body was omnipresent.

Though he would live to be 80 years old, Rockox's preemptive funerary commission indicates that he was thinking about his own mortality and the state of his body and soul as early as his fifties. The *Rockox Epitaph*, which eventually hung over the tombs of Nicolaas and Adriana in their family chapel in Antwerp's Church of the Friars Minor Recollects (*Minderbroederskerk*), functions as a memorial to its prosperous patrons, proclaiming their piety in perpetuity.⁵ When the wings of the triptych close over the immaculate body of Christ, the exterior panels declare their patronage, displaying the coats-of-arms of Nicolaas and Adriana above two trompe-l'oeil sculptural cartouches (Figure 2).⁶ Beyond its practical purpose as a commemorative artwork, I propose that the overall composition—which pictures a life-sized portrait of Rockox beside his Risen Lord—offers insights into the patron's bodily relationship with God and his perspective on life after death. Ultimately, the body of Christ reminds faithful audiences of both the corporeal renewal and the spiritual salvation made possible through Jesus's death and resurrection.



Figure 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rockox Epitaph* (closed), c. 1613–1615, oil on panel, 146 × 55 cm (wings), Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. 309 and 311.

2. Affective Worship and Religious Art in the Catholic Church

In Rubens's lifetime, Protestants and Catholics agreed that religious art could have a strong effect on viewers, but the two confessional groups responded to the power of images differently. While some Protestant sects destroyed religious art, trying to prevent idol worship, the Catholic Church preferred to harness the power of images to inspire empathetic connections between faithful congregants and their God. Between 1545 and 1563, the Council of Trent convened on behalf of the Catholic Church to discuss the Protestants' critiques, to determine areas for reform, and to clarify or restate theological doctrines.⁷ During their twenty-fifth and final session in 1563, they reaffirmed that religious images are both appropriate and beneficial in the church. The Council of Trent explained:

...images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be placed and retained especially in the churches and that due honor and veneration is to be given them [...] because *the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent*, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, *we adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear*.⁸

For the Catholic Church, religious images were helpful aids that channeled prayers and adoration to God and his saints. In their defense of images, the Council of Trent wrote:

...by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations, the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith [...] *great profit is derived from all holy images*, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because, through the saints, the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and *be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety*.⁹

The Catholic Church used religious images to teach biblical lessons, bolster faith, and fortify parishioners' relationships with the Lord. Among the myriad narrative and iconic artworks that they employed, the most important religious images featured Christ.

Artistic representations of Christ were essential tools of the early modern Catholic Church, because Jesus's body is the location and the proof of several foundational tenets of their faith, including the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements.¹⁰ For example, in the *Rockox Epitaph*, the wounds in Jesus's palms indicate that he has already been crucified, but his body is no longer bruised or bleeding from the Passion. Instead, Jesus is alive, restored and transformed, appearing to his followers after the Resurrection. According to Christian scripture, Christ died on the cross, sacrificing himself to atone for mankind's sins. He was buried, and on the third day he rose from the grave. For forty days, Jesus spent time with his disciples and appeared to hundreds of witnesses before ascending into Heaven. Through his triumph over sin and death, Jesus made humanity's salvation possible—which makes the Resurrection the most important Christian miracle. Depictions of Jesus, such as Rubens's, illustrate complex theological doctrines, teaching or reminding viewers about the miracles and promises of Christianity.

Remarkably, religious artworks were only part of a much larger, multisensory program of rituals and ceremonies that the Catholic Church performed to engage the minds and the bodies of their congregants. In a decree from their twenty-second session, the Council of Trent explained why sensory worship practices were vital to the Church:

...since the nature of man is such that he cannot without external means be raised easily to meditation on divine things, holy mother Church has instituted certain rites, namely, that some things in the mass be pronounced in a low tone and others in a louder tone. She has likewise, in accordance with apostolic discipline and tradition, made use of ceremonies, such as mystical blessings, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, whereby both the majesty of so

great a sacrifice might be emphasized and *the minds of the faithful excited by those visible signs of religion and piety* to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice.¹¹

Catholic worshipers heard dynamic speaking, smelled sweet incense, saw ornate clothing and flickering candlelight, and tasted the sacramental bread and wine (the body of Christ) when they took communion. As active participants, the faithful moved and touched their bodies in accordance with the rituals: making the sign of the cross, bowing their heads, closing their eyes, and kneeling and rising from prayer.

In this period, in the wake of the Tridentine decrees, artists hired by both the Catholic Church and Catholic patrons adopted a similarly multisensory and visually compelling style in their art. Religious Baroque art employs theatrical lighting, emotional intensity, asymmetrical compositions, oversized scale, and foreground figures to involve viewers, to fully engage their senses, and to draw them into the painting. In the *Rockox Epitaph*, Rubens uses most of those visual strategies to engage the audience's gaze and grant them greater access to Christ's glowing body. From the subtly shining crown of Jesus's head, down through his left fingertips, the artist uses a diagonal to enliven his austere composition and to move the eye back and forth, from Christ's face to his punctured hand (Figure 3). The strong contrast between Jesus's luminous body, clothed in bright red, and the opaque black background, illusionistically pushes the Christian savior forward—closer to the beholder outside the painting. By foreshortening Jesus's right forearm and adding a dark, contrasting outline along that arm and the left shoulder, the artist amplifies the three-dimensionality of the powerful figure. Moreover, Rubens angles Jesus's body toward viewers outside the triptych, giving living audiences the best view of their Risen Lord and including them in the moment. Each of the life-sized, three-quarter length figures stands in the extreme foreground of the paintings—seemingly close enough to address or to touch.¹² Religious Baroque artworks used their engaging style to move people to devotion, to reconfirm Catholic doctrines, and to bring worshippers—in both body and soul—closer to God.¹³

Perhaps more than any other religious order, the Jesuits exemplify the Catholic embrace of empathetic and spectacular worship. Founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and six companions, the Jesuits, or the Society of Jesus, engaged their audiences with multisensory, theatrical performances and religious images.¹⁴ To support their efforts toward evangelization and religious education around the world, the Jesuits staged Christian plays, displayed moving images, and published illustrated emblem books. In 1622, for example, Antwerp's Jesuit community celebrated the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier by filling the streets with music, fireworks, fountains, ballets, a triumphal procession, and twelve open-air stages.¹⁵ In a breathtaking display on the Meir, Antwerp's main thoroughfare, automatons enacted the miracle of Saint Ignatius casting devils out of possessed people—bringing to life the scene painted by Rubens around 1616 for the main altar of the city's newly constructed Jesuit church.¹⁶

In addition to the marvels they orchestrated and the magnificent images they commissioned, the Jesuits engaged worshippers' senses with their publications. One of their most popular texts was Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, first published in Latin in 1548. *Spiritual Exercises* is a customizable guide for individuals undertaking a spiritual journey to reform themselves and to order their lives toward God's will.¹⁷ Under ideal circumstances, each "exercitant" would devote thirty days to the recommended exercises, supervised by a Jesuit "director".¹⁸ The secluded participant is instructed to follow a daily routine of self-examination (to eradicate one's sins), meditation, contemplation, prayer, penance, and confession.



Figure 3. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rockox Epitaph* (open, center panel), Resurrected Christ appearing to apostles, c. 1613–1615, oil on panel, 143 × 123 cm, Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. 307.

The immersive, affective exercises were designed to cultivate empathetic engagement with the stories of Christ's life. Generally, each exercise begins with a preparatory prayer, followed by three "preludes". During the first prelude, the exercitant recalls the history of a specific biblical episode, such as the events of the Resurrection. The next prelude requires the participant to "compose" or imagine the place where the biblical episode occurs—envisioning the scene in their mind's eye. When meditating on the Resurrection, one could

imagine what it was like to witness Christ's empty sepulcher. In the final prelude, the exercitant asks God for the appropriate feelings for the day's meditation: tremendous joy befits Jesus's triumph over death.¹⁹ Next, the participant contemplates three to six points related to the day's theme. Finally, the exercise concludes with one or more "colloquies", or imagined conversations with Christ, the Virgin Mary, or God the Father. Each step of the exercise draws the participant closer to God.

To further enhance their imaginative, embodied meditations, the exercitant should engage each of the senses. In the second week, Ignatius recommends applying the five senses to one's contemplations:

The First Point. By the sight of my imagination, I will see the persons, by meditating and contemplating in detail all the circumstances around them, and by drawing some profit from the sight.

The Second Point. By my hearing I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying; and then, reflecting on myself, I will draw some profit from this.

The Third Point. I will smell the fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness and charm of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues, and of everything there, appropriately for each of the persons who is being contemplated. Then I will reflect upon myself and draw profit from this.

The Fourth Point. Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk or sit. I shall always endeavor to draw some profit from this.²⁰

The spiritual exercises are deeply sensory, engaging the body and the mind on multiple levels.

While there is no record of Nicolaas Rockox owning a copy of the *Spiritual Exercises*, his financial investment in the local Jesuit church and his proximity to all the pomp and circumstance of the Society of Jesus strongly suggest that he was familiar with the affective approaches they advocated. In 1615, in anticipation of Ignatius's canonization, Antwerp's Society of Jesus laid the foundation stone for a new Jesuit church (the current Saint Charles Borromeo Church), which Rubens helped design and decorate. Rockox contributed 4300 guilders to the cost of the building and décor.²¹ Around 1620, he presented the church with a painting of the *Return from the Flight into Egypt* by Rubens, which was to hang above the altar of Saint Joseph in the south side aisle of the church. Evidently, the marble altar was also erected at Rockox's expense: his arms were once visible on it, but they were later concealed by other ornamentation.²² Following the completion of the church, which was dedicated to Saint Ignatius, Rockox donated a silver suspension lamp worth 2000 guilders, which burned with five flames of different colors—an appropriately wondrous gift for the theatrical Jesuits.²³

Of course, the Jesuits were not the only religious group to benefit from Rockox's charity. As a wealthy government official, he commissioned multiple paintings and financed construction projects for the Franciscan Church where he and his wife would be buried. The Franciscans are a mendicant order that, similar to the Jesuits, deeply and empathetically contemplated the body of Christ and engaged the bodies of worshippers. Saint Francis, the order's founder, embodies the concept of living in imitation of Christ. According to Christian tradition, in 1224, while he was praying on the mountain of Verna, a seraph appeared to Saint Francis and gave him the stigmata, the wounds of Christ's Passion. Rockox appropriately commissioned three paintings of Jesus to decorate the Franciscan Church.

Around 1610, Rockox hired Rubens to paint *Christ on the Cross* (Figure 4) for the Church of the Friars Minor Recollects.²⁴ In the painting, Christ's arms and torso are stretched over the Cross, pinned in place by nails in his wrists and feet. The body of Christ shines in the surrounding darkness, as he looks up toward Heaven—still alive, still suffering for the sins of the world.²⁵ Because the painting hung over the door to the sacristy, beholders gazed up at the Crucifixion, simulating the posture of witnesses to the real event beneath the elevated cross. The placement of the image—as well as its realism—engaged both the bodies and the sympathies of the pious viewer.

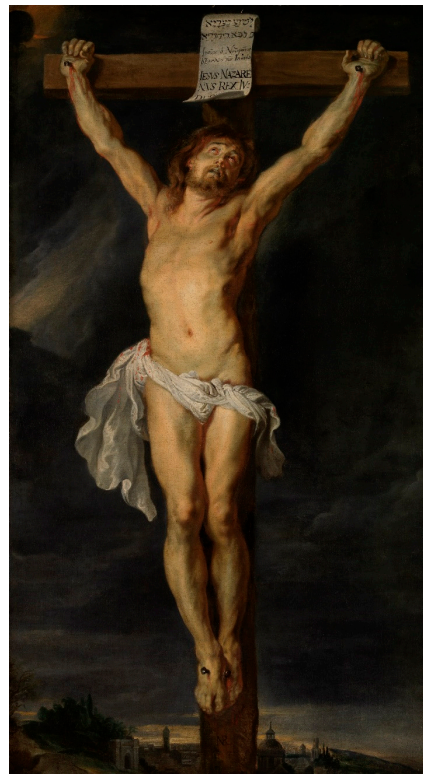


Figure 4. Peter Paul Rubens, *Christ on the Cross*, 1613, oil on canvas, 221 × 121 cm, Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. 313.

As Nicolaas and Adriana prepared their final resting place in the Franciscan Church, they hired Rubens to paint their epitaph and made plans to construct a family chapel behind the high altar. Tragically, the couple could not have predicted that Adriana Perez would die before the Rockox Chapel was built. When she passed away at age 51 on 22 September 1619, Adriana was not immediately buried beneath the *Rockox Epitaph*, which Rubens had already completed in 1615. Instead, in the fall of 1619, Rockox financed a new high altar and hired Rubens to paint a new altarpiece for the church.²⁶ The *Crucifixion*, known as the *Coup de Lance* (Figure 5), and the architectural, marble framework in which it was displayed, were presented to the church in 1620.²⁷ In that same year, Adriana was interred in a temporary tomb below the high altar. Between 1619 and 1624, Nicolaas Rockox sponsored the construction of the so-called Rockox Chapel, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.²⁸ After living another twenty-one years as a widower, Nicolaas prepared for his own death and arranged for Adriana's body to be re-interred in the vault of the Rockox Chapel.²⁹ Following his death on 12 December 1640, Nicolaas was laid to rest next to his late wife, beneath the *Rockox Epitaph*. The couple's generosity was considered a public good as well as a guarantee that long after they died, people would see their epitaph portraits and pray for them.³⁰



Figure 5. Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, *The Crucifixion* (called *Le Coup de Lance*), 1619–1620, oil on panel, 429.6 × 310 cm, Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. 297.

However, during those twenty intervening years, the grisly *Crucifixion* altarpiece served as Adriana’s memorial. The monumental painting illustrates the moment in Christ’s Passion when an unnamed Roman soldier pierces Jesus’s side with a spear to confirm that he is dead (John 19:34). According to Jacobus de Voragine’s brief hagiography, the blind soldier was named Longinus. When the blood of Christ ran down the lance into his eyes, Longinus’s sight was restored, and he believed that Jesus was God.³¹ At the foot of the cross, a beardless youth and grey-bearded older man tilt their heads back to watch the crucifixion. From a similar vantage point, clergymen outside the painting, standing at the high altar in the Franciscan church, could observe Christ’s death and imagine themselves witnessing the biblical event. Through prayer and spiritual exercises, the viewer could envision the scene atop Calvary; hear the moans of the crucified; smell the blood, sweat, and animals; touch the foot of the cross; and taste the tears of the weeping mourners. Each of the three paintings that Rockox commissioned for the Franciscan Church prompts viewers’ multisensory engagement—calling on their own lived, embodied experiences to enhance their understanding of biblical events.

Through affective worship practices and artworks, the Catholic Church engaged the bodies of believers, urging them to contemplate and to empathize with the body of Christ. Thus, Rockox and his contemporaries were conditioned by the dynamic, multimedia context of the Church to interpret art with all five senses. As a result, embodied approaches to worship and to viewing religious images influenced how seventeenth-century audiences understood and engaged with the *Rockox Epitaph*.

3. Carrying Christ in One's Heart

Standing in the wings of their commemorative triptych, Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez use meditative aids to focus and stimulate their prayers, engaging their senses in worship. Adriana holds her rosary beads with both hands, sliding her fingers over the coral orbs to count her prayers, keeping track of her devotions through touch. With his left hand, Nicolaas holds a small book with a red cover and gilded pages, marking his place in the religious text with his index finger. The color of the book and the beads matches the crimson drapery clothing Christ, visually reinforcing the couple's connection to the Risen Lord, who is the subject of their prayers.³² With his eyes on Jesus, Rockox points to his heart with his right hand, signaling his personal relationship with Christ. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings, touching the center of one's chest was a well-established gesture of love or friendship.³³ Certainly, this affectionate gesture communicates the patron's love of God. Additionally, I propose that Rockox points to his heart because that is where Christ is supposed to enter the body of the faithful and dwell.³⁴

One of the most popular devotional texts in the early modern period, *De Imitatio Christi* (The Imitation of Christ),³⁵ written by Thomas à Kempis in the fifteenth century, instructs readers to prepare their hearts to receive God:

The kingdom of God is within you, saith the Lord (Luke 17:21). *Turn thee with all thine heart to the Lord* and forsake this miserable world, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Learn to despise outward things and to give thyself to things inward, and thou shalt see *the kingdom of God come within thee*. For the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and it is not given to the wicked. Christ will come to thee, and show thee His consolation, *if thou prepare a worthy mansion for Him within thee*. All His glory and beauty is from within, and *there it pleaseth Him to dwell*. He often visiteth the inward man and holdeth with him sweet discourse, giving him soothing consolation, much peace, friendship exceeding wonderful.³⁶

Sales records from the *Officina Plantiniana*, the premier printing press in Antwerp, record that Nicolaas Rockox purchased at least two copies of *De Imitatio Christi*, first on 26 June 1617, then on 11 September 1620.³⁷ But even if he never read the book, the lessons inside were well-known to seventeenth-century Catholics. Biblical passages, religious treatises, contemporary sermons, and devotional images regularly instructed Christians to cleanse their hearts for Christ to enter.³⁸

One of the most popular series of religious emblems of the seventeenth century focuses on the human heart, which is purified through its encounter with Christ during prayer and meditation.³⁹ *Cor Iesu amanti sacrum* (Heart of Jesus Sacred to the Loving Votary or, alternatively, Heart Sacred to the Loving Votary of Jesus) is a set of eighteen small engravings (each approximately 7.8 × 5.6 cm), designed, engraved, and published by the Antwerp engraver Anton II Wierix before 1604.⁴⁰ The series begins with a title page that pictures a massive, flaming heart held aloft by a group of six contemporaries (Figure 6). The Franciscan and Jesuit friars in the foreground are joined by lay men and women, including an elite gentleman, who wears a millstone collar similar to the one worn by Rockox in his epitaph. With its ensemble of clergymen and laymen, representing different sexes and ages, the book announces that its contents are appropriate for an array of readers.⁴¹



Figure 6. Anton II Wierix, Titlepage for *Cor Jesu amanti sacrum*, before 1604, engraving, 9.1 × 5.5 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, inv. no. 1278.325-3.

Each of the other seventeen engravings in the series shows an adorable, robed Christ Child interacting with the heart. Before he can take up residence there, the Christ Child sets to work, cleansing the heart of sin and worldly temptations. For example, in one image, he uses a broom to sweep away sins, depicted in the form of snakes, lizards, snails, and a winged demon with a serpentine tail (Figure 7). Inscribed below the scene, the Latin commentary exclaims:

Blessed temple of the heart! Let the one to whom heaven gave a throne cleanse you with his own hands. Sweep, courageous boy! Frighten the monsters with your look! Grind them under your feet!⁴²

After a sequence of therapeutic interventions, the heart is finally ready to house the Lord. Another engraving in the series features the Christ Child enthroned in the believer's heart, crowned and wielding a scepter (Figure 8). The radiant halo of light around his head likewise shines around the dove of the Holy Ghost above the purified heart. Below, two courtly angels genuflect in deference to the Lord. The cherub on the right even gestures to his own heart, pointing to his chest like Rockox does. The accompanying inscription reads:

Who here would not be calm in expression? Behold, Jesus holds the scepter in the palace of the heart. Jesus, just open your mouth, command what you want, give forth what you command; we are here to serve.⁴³

The charming illustrations of the busy Christ Child in *Cor Jesu amanti sacrum* personify the transformative, spiritual work of prayer and meditation. This print series visualizes the deeply personal relationship between the body of the individual Christian and the body of God: Jesus is imaginatively internalized and housed in the embodied viewer.



Figure 7. Anton II Wierix, *The Christ Child sweeping reptilian monsters out of the believer's heart with a broom*, in *Cor Jesu amanti sacrum*, before 1604, engraving with etching, 7.8 × 5.6 cm, Wellcome Collection, London, inv. no. 31768i.



Figure 8. Anton II Wierix, *The Christ Child enthroned in the palace of the believer's heart*, in *Cor Jesu amanti sacrum*, before 1604, engraving with etching, 7.8 × 5.7 cm, Wellcome Collection, London, inv. no. 31747i.

In the same period when Rubens designed the *Rockox Epitaph*, the artist painted an entire triptych on the theme of carrying Christ. On 7 September 1611, the council of the Kolveniers Guild, a prestigious militia guild armed with rifles, hired Rubens to paint them a new altarpiece. As the president (*hoofdman*) of the Kolveniers Guild, supervising the company for thirty years, between December 1602 and January 1633, Nicolaas Rockox must have played a part in securing the commission for his friend. By 1614, the artist completed the *Descent from the Cross* triptych (Figures 9 and 10), which was installed over the Kolveniers' altar in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp.⁴⁴



Figure 9. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Descent from the Cross Triptych* (closed), c. 1612–1614, oil on panel, 421 × 153 (wings), Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.

The theme of the triptych was inspired by the militia guild's larger-than-life patron saint: Christopher. According to the *Golden Legend*, a compendium of the lives of the saints, a giant named Christopher ferried the Christ Child across a river on his shoulders.⁴⁵ Because he was a giant and because the name "Christopher" (*Christophoros* in Greek) means "Christ-bearer", both Catholic and Protestant authorities questioned the authenticity of the saint in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁶ Even so, the Catholic Church defended the saint's historical existence and celebrated him as a glorious martyr.⁴⁷ Instead of taking his story literally, however, worshippers were encouraged to think of the giant's tale as an allegory: like Christopher, a true Christian should willingly carry Christ himself.⁴⁸

Following Tridentine guidelines about altarpiece decorum, Rubens painted Christopher on the exterior of the triptych (Figure 9).⁴⁹ When the altarpiece is closed, the muscular giant—modeled after the *Farnese Hercules*, studied by Rubens in Rome—emerges from the darkness, straining under the weight of the Christ Child on his shoulder. The interior panels of the triptych picture three scenes related to the bearing of Christ (Figure 10). In the left wing, the visibly pregnant Virgin Mary carries Christ in her womb during the Visitation; in the center, lamenting followers of Jesus support his body as they lower him from the

cross in the Deposition; and in the right wing, the wizened Simeon holds the holy infant in his arms in the Presentation in the Temple.

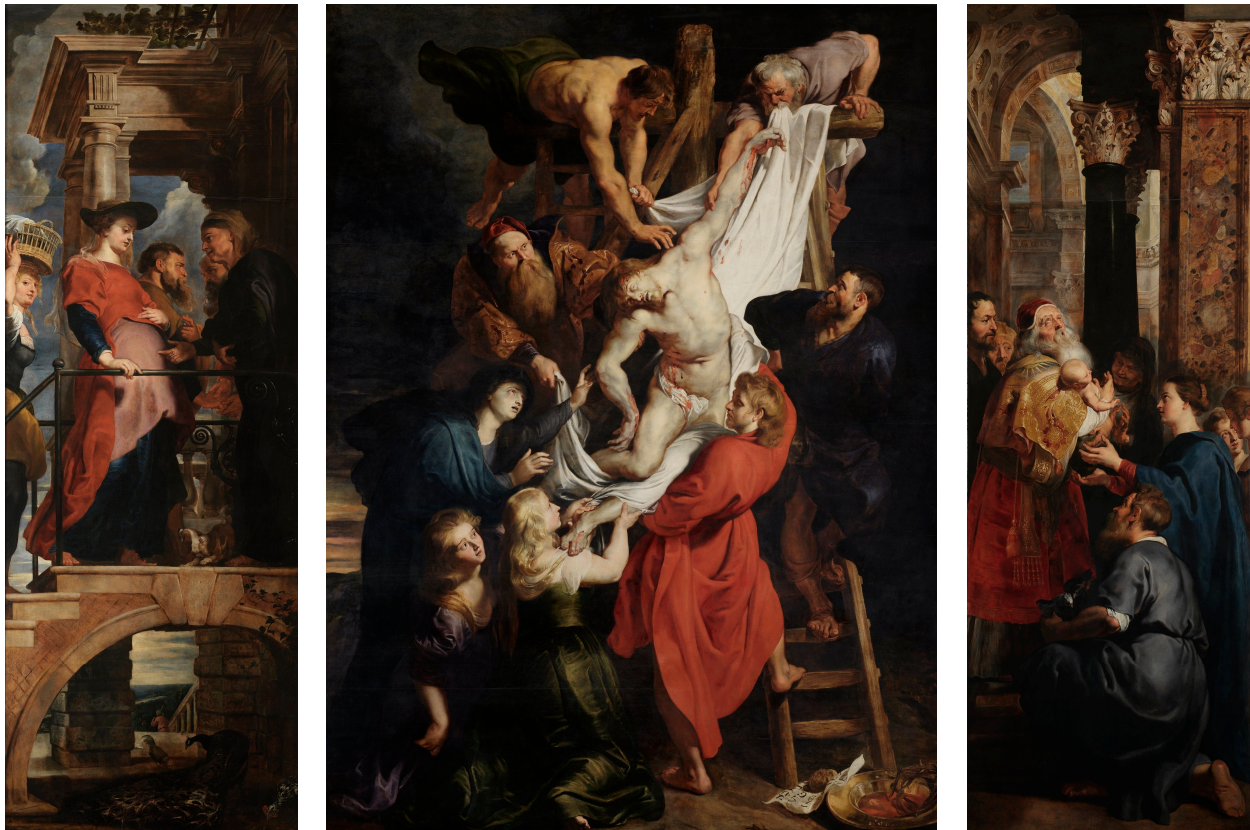


Figure 10. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Descent from the Cross Triptych* (open), c. 1612–1614, oil on panel, 421 × 311 cm (center), 421 × 153 (wings), Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.

Remarkably, Rubens included a portrait of Nicolaas Rockox in the right wing: dressed in classicizing garments, the city official's profile is visible behind the prophet Simeon (Figure 11).⁵⁰ Painted with a thicker beard and more hair on his head, the altarpiece portrait closely resembles the likeness of Rockox that Rubens prepared for his epitaph. Perhaps in thanks for the prestigious altarpiece commission or as a mark of their friendship, the artist honors Rockox by depicting him as a witness to a sacred event, sharing the same space as the Christ Child.⁵¹ From his privileged position, Rockox watches the old man thank God for allowing him to see Jesus—to see Salvation incarnate—before he dies.

After blessing the infant, Simeon spoke to Mary, saying: “Behold this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted” (Luke 2:34).⁵² Holding the newborn body of Christ, Simeon foresees Jesus's inevitable suffering (pictured in the center panel), and he alludes to people's disbelief in the Resurrection to come. In the Christian tradition, the joy of the infant Christ is always linked with the despair of the Passion and the promise of the Resurrection. Rubens depicts the elderly prophet cradling the newborn against his chest, over his heart, where Jesus should dwell in all believers. Here, Simeon is shown like a high priest in the middle of Mass: he wears luxurious red and gold garments, directs his eyes to Heaven, and elevates Jesus, whose round head resembles the consecrated Host. The emphatically Catholic depiction alludes to the miracle of Transubstantiation, during which the holy wafer is transformed into the Body of Christ. Devout early modern Catholics should both carry Jesus in their hearts and take the Body of Christ into their own during communion.



Figure 11. Peter Paul Rubens, detail of Nicolaas Rockox with Simeon and the Christ Child, *The Descent from the Cross Triptych* (open, right wing), c. 1612–1614, oil on panel, 421 × 311 cm (center), 421 × 153 (wings), Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.

In the *Rockox Epitaph*, Nicolaas touches his chest and gazes toward the Risen Lord, whom he carries in his heart. While the seventeenth-century gentleman contemplates the idealized exterior appearance of Jesus, God looks at Rockox's heart. The Lord explained to Samuel:

Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature: because I have rejected him, nor do I judge according to the look of man: for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart. (Samuel 16:7)

While religious art is concerned with the appearance of God, God is not concerned with the appearances of men. Underneath his fine garments, the truth of Rockox's faith is written on his heart, which the Lord reads. It is noteworthy that Rockox's heart is mentioned in the dedicatory inscription thanking him for the high altar of the Franciscan church:

Burgomaster Rockox put up this altar to Christ.

Its picture was made by the hand of Rubens.

Whether you look to the handiwork of the artist or the heart of the donor,
nothing could have been given in a nobler spirit.⁵³

In the early seventeenth century, faithful Catholics cultivated profoundly embodied relationships with God—carrying Christ within themselves, inviting Jesus into their hearts, and using their imaginations and their senses to contemplate the miracles of his life.

4. Appearing to Peter, Paul, and John—Without a Doubt

In the interior of the *Rockox Epitaph*, Rubens's artistic decisions direct viewers' eyes to the resurrected body of Christ, with whom the audience is intended to forge an empathetic bond. To better understand how seventeenth-century onlookers, such as Nicolaas and

Adriana, interpreted and interacted with the triptych, one must first clarify the nature and the subject of the center panel. Since the patrons are actively praying in the wings, one can imagine the couple's ardent, affective contemplations have rewarded them with a vision of Christ, represented by the center panel.⁵⁴ Rubens's painting may visualize what the couple is seeing in their minds.⁵⁵

As Barbara Haeger proposes, the center panel can also be interpreted as a painting that Nicolaas and Adriana are using to guide their prayers—like the book and the rosary beads, the painting of Christ's appearance is a powerful Catholic devotional tool.⁵⁶ Note how the dark, shadowy backgrounds of the three interior panels do not align. Nicolaas and Adriana are pictured in architectural interiors: the stone archways overhead signal that they are standing inside a church—possibly an allusion to their soon-to-be-built family chapel.⁵⁷ Notably, the plum-colored drapery over Adriana's head is tied back with a cord and fastened to a rod by metal rings. It appears that the deep purple curtain has been pulled back to reveal the painting it protects: an appearance of the resurrected Christ to his apostles.⁵⁸ Cleverly, Rubens offers viewers the same meditative aid to use in their prayers as the Rockoxes appear to be using: the triptych's center panel. Audiences are welcome to join the couple, to follow their example, and to use the *Rockox Epitaph* for their own spiritual exercises.⁵⁹

The center panel can, furthermore, be understood as a painting of the Risen Lord based on how Nicolaas and Adriana are portrayed treating the image.⁶⁰ The patrons are standing in the wings: they are rendered at the same height as the apostles, but hierarchically lower than Christ. Traditionally, patrons are portrayed humbly on their knees. For example, in the interior wings of Jan Sanders van Hemessen's *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* (Figure 12), commissioned around 1537 or 1539 by Nicolaas Rockox's grandparents, all of Rockox's relatives are kneeling.⁶¹ Moreover, as one would expect, Nicolaas's grandfather Adriaan is presented by his patron saint, Adrian; likewise, his grandmother Catharina van Overhoff is accompanied by her patron saint, Catherine. In comparison, Nicolaas and Adriana are depicted alone in their panels, without saintly intercessors.



Figure 12. Jan Sanders van Hemessen, *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* (open), c. 1537–1539, oil on panel, 98 × 99 cm (center), Sint-Jacobskerk, Antwerp.

Koenraad Jonckheere proposes that Rubens may have pictured the couple in upright stances to avoid the appearance of venerating the image. They look at the depiction of Christ in the center panel without idolizing it.⁶² Debates about the proper use of religious artworks—dating back to the beginning of the Church—continued to afflict artists, their creations, and their patrons, even after the Council of Trent’s defense of images in 1563. Only a few years after Rockox was born in 1560, tensions and suspicions boiled up again in 1566, when Calvinist iconoclasts destroyed religious images in Antwerp. By *not* kneeling, the Rockoxes are decidedly *not* venerating the painting as they would Christ; instead, they are treating the image as an image. Admittedly, the artist’s decision to picture Nicolaas and Adriana standing is a wise compositional choice that makes the best use of space; however, as Jonckheere argues, the patrons’ postures may also comment on the theological controversy regarding the proper use of images. Because the Catholic Church advocated for the responsible use of religious artworks, the couple’s stance in relation to the painting may signal their Catholicism. Likewise, at a time when Protestants rejected the rosary, Adriana’s bright red prayer beads proudly broadcast her confessional identity as Catholic.⁶³

Whether the center panel is best interpreted as a vision or as another prayer aid, most scholarship on the *Rockox Epitaph* has concentrated on identifying the scene and the three apostles it portrays.⁶⁴ Since the late eighteenth century, when Jacob van der Sanden described the painting as the Incredulity of Thomas, art historians have predominately used their interpretive skills and close readings of biblical verses to support and to make sense of that identification.⁶⁵ According to the Gospel story, recounted in John 20:24–29, Thomas did not believe his fellow apostles when they reported seeing Jesus alive after the Crucifixion.⁶⁶ In fact, the skeptical disciple insisted that he would not believe until he saw “in [Jesus’s] hands the print of the nails, and put [his] finger into the place of the nails, and put [his] hand into his side”. When Christ appeared to the group again—this time with Thomas present, the Risen Lord instructed his doubting follower: “Put in thy finger hither, and see my hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing”. Once Thomas accepted the truth of the Resurrection, Jesus responded: “Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed”.

Several scholars, including Adolf Monballieu, David Freedberg, and Koenraad Jonckheere, have acknowledged that identifying the central panel of the *Rockox Epitaph* as the Incredulity of Thomas is problematic.⁶⁷ The subject of the panel is neither clear nor self-evident because the image adheres neither to the biblical texts nor to the expected Christian iconography. Nevertheless, the epitaph is continually referred to as *The Incredulity of Thomas*. According to Freedberg, “Doubting Thomas” in the center panel evokes the concept that belief in the resurrection of Christ need not depend merely on the evidence of sight.⁶⁸ For Thomas Glen, who interprets the triptych as a whole, the skeptical disciple in the center functions as a foil for the faithful patrons in the wings: unlike Thomas, who required tangible proof to believe, Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez are portrayed as true believers—they are blessed because they “have not seen, and have believed”.⁶⁹

While the epitaph certainly attests to the patrons’ belief in the resurrection of Christ, I am unconvinced that Nicolaas and Adriana selected the Incredulity of Thomas for their commemorative monument. Valerie Herremans has astutely observed:

It . . . seems highly unlikely that the donors of the triptych, for whom it was plainly intended as a profession of faith (as witnessed by the book and the paternoster they hold), would have chosen as the central theme of their memorial a subject exemplifying the very opposite.⁷⁰

Why would a pair of devout Catholics choose to be buried underneath an image of someone questioning the most important miracle of their religion? Scholars offer contradictory accounts of Saint Thomas’s reception in Rubens’s time. According to Alexander Mossel, early modern theologians and commentators condemned Thomas for his disbelief.⁷¹ However, Barbara Haeger has found that sixteenth-century commentaries and engravings associated Thomas with belief in the Resurrection, which made him a worthy model for emulation.⁷²

Heike Schlie writes that Thomas was an ambivalent figure with positive connotations as a witness to the miracle of the Resurrection.⁷³

Regardless of how the saint was perceived in the seventeenth century, if Rubens truly wished to portray the Incredulity of Thomas, he would have clearly depicted the skeptical apostle inspecting Christ's wounds with his hands, following Caravaggio (Figure 13) and other contemporaries.⁷⁴ In their commitment to the Doubting Thomas identification, scholars have largely dismissed Rubens's unmistakable deviations from the standard iconography of the event. When asked to depict the Incredulity of Thomas, medieval and early modern artists adhered to the well-established tradition of picturing the apostle touching or about to touch Christ's side wound. For example, in Caravaggio's graphic rendering from around 1601 or 1602, which Rubens must have seen in the Giustiniani collection in Rome, Thomas plunges his finger into Christ's body.⁷⁵ The Flemish painter was certainly inspired by the Italian artist's painting—the overall compositions are very similar, with the figure of the resurrected Christ appearing to three of his followers against a minimal, dark background.⁷⁶ However, the differences between the paintings are profound.



Figure 13. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Thomas*, c. 1601, oil on canvas, 107 × 146 cm, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg (SPSG)/Fotograf: Hans Bach, Potsdam, inv. no. GK I 5438.

Unlike Caravaggio, Rubens did not depict Thomas or anyone else touching the Lord's body—he did not even paint a side wound for Thomas to inspect!⁷⁷ Koenraad Jonckheere and James Pilgrim interpret the artist's omission of the side wound as an invitation to viewers to assess their faith and the role of empirical evidence in their religion. According to Jonckheere, the artist “deliberately constructed an ‘unstable’ iconography by blurring and omitting key signifiers”, raising questions in the minds of beholders and forcing them to “reconsider their opinions on the sense of sight and touch within the Christian religion and their own devotion”.⁷⁸ Likewise, in Pilgrim's estimation, by not painting the side wound, Rubens designed the *Rockox Epitaph* to prompt an “epistemic dilemma”: the center panel

solicits and exacerbates the beholder's rational doubts, while the behavior of Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez in the wings suggests how the viewer's doubts might be set aside.⁷⁹ Certainly, skeptical philosophy circulated among the men in Rubens's circle, many of whom regularly engaged in *quaestio disputata*, a thoughtful process of questioning with the goal of gaining knowledge.⁸⁰ However, neither inquiry-based interpretation of the triptych considers the funerary purpose of the epitaph or the desires of the devout Catholic patrons.

Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez commissioned Rubens to create a monument that would attest to their faith, and thus, the preparedness of their souls to face death. It is highly unlikely that the patrons wished for the epitaph—intended to hang over their entombed bodies for all time—to test their viewers' faith or spark a complex discussion on empirical evidence. Instead, Rubens, who knew where the side wound belonged (see his *Crucifixion*, Figure 5), may have chosen not to depict Christ's pierced torso to prevent an undesired association with Doubting Thomas. Alternatively, by picturing Jesus without the wound, Rubens may have prompted Catholic viewers to remember that the Roman soldier pierced Christ's body to confirm that he was dead. Perhaps the clever artist excluded the side wound to emphatically confirm that Christ is alive. The missing side wound has certainly inspired many creative interpretations. Yet, it is important to note how Rubens has simplified everything in the center panel: there is no side wound, no background, and no saintly attribute to identify the three apostles. Nothing detracts attention from Christ's resurrected body.

Previous publications' insistence on finding and explaining the presence of Thomas and the absence of iconographical details has overshadowed the prominence of the body of Christ in Rubens's composition. As discussed above, the artist employs several techniques to focus the viewer's attention on the immaculate Risen Lord—the true subject of the epitaph. Compare, for example, how Rubens exposes more of Jesus's body than Caravaggio does in his painting. The Italian artist covers Christ's body with a white cloth, while Rubens highlights the body in red and reveals his muscular torso. Notably, Caravaggio's three attendant apostles appear in the round, equally sharing the painted space, while Rubens truncates the secondary figures to emphasize the significance of Jesus's body. The Flemish master even changed the appearances and attitudes of his apostles: they calmly marvel at the miracle while Caravaggio's figures gape in shock. Rubens was inspired by Caravaggio's *Incredulity of Thomas*, but he did not paint a copy—specifically, he did not paint Doubting Thomas.

Tellingly, even among scholars who remain convinced that the *Rockox Epitaph* features Thomas, there is no consensus on which of the three men is the doubter. Over the years, each of the three figures has been called "Thomas". Following Jacob van der Sanden, Adolf Monballieu, David Freedberg, Barbara Haeger, and Marius Rimmele suggest that Thomas is the youngest apostle.⁸¹ Agreeing with Max Rooses, Thomas Glen points to the oldest man as Thomas.⁸² Rounding out the possibilities, Lodewijk Taeymans, Cyriel Verschaeve, and Willibald Sauerländer have called the middle-aged man Thomas.⁸³ Misguided by the eighteenth-century identification, scholars struggle to find Thomas among the group. Working with his patrons, Rubens did not paint the skeptical examination of Christ's body; instead, he painted Jesus appearing to three familiar saints: John, Peter, and Paul.

The youngest apostle is John, the beloved Evangelist, and the eldest is Peter, upon whom Christ built the Church.⁸⁴ Though they do not carry attributes, their physiognomies are recognizable, since their relative ages and features are well established in pictorial convention. In Rubens's many renderings of John, the apostle's visage and hairstyle are subject to change, but he is typically young, blonde, and (mostly) beardless. Some artists paint John with no facial hair, only smooth cheeks, but in the *Rockox Epitaph* and in the *Descent from the Cross* triptych (Figure 14), Rubens pictures the young man with a few sparse hairs on his chin. Wearing bright red in the center panel, John the Evangelist is easily recognizable in Rubens's *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 10), where the fair-haired youth lowers Jesus's body down from the cross. Typically, John is pictured in red, but in the *Rockox Epitaph*, he does not wear his signature color next to Jesus, who is draped in crimson, allowing the focus to remain firmly on the Risen Lord.⁸⁵



Figure 14. Peter Paul Rubens, detail of Saint John the Evangelist, *The Descent from the Cross Triptych* (open, center panel), c. 1612–1614, oil on panel, 421 × 311 cm (center), 421 × 153 (wings), Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.

The wizened apostle Peter also takes on different forms in Rubens's oeuvre. The artist alters the length and shape of his grey beard and the degree of his baldness but retains both facial attributes. A recognizable Peter, with a bushy beard and balding head, appears among *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* (Figure 15), another epitaph painted around 1616.⁸⁶ Instead of holding the keys of Heaven, Peter tightly clasps his hands together, seeking Christ's forgiveness for thrice denying that he knew Jesus of Nazareth. Because Rubens continually employs the standard Peter iconography, the older apostle is easily spotted, even among the many saints surrounding the Madonna and Child, for example in the upper left corner of a massive *Enthroned Madonna* altarpiece from 1628 (Figure 16).⁸⁷ Knowing how Rubens pictures him, the balding, grey-bearded elder in the *Rockox Epitaph* is undeniably Peter.⁸⁸

The third, middle-aged apostle is slightly harder to identify without attributes, but I agree with Adolf Monballieu, David Freedberg, and Barbara Haeger that this man must be the Apostle Paul.⁸⁹ Rubens regularly depicts Paul with dark hair and a brown beard, holding his martyr's sword. Often, Peter and Paul are pictured together in Rubens's paintings, drawings, and book illustrations.⁹⁰ For example, Paul appears next to Peter in the 1628 *Enthroned Madonna* altarpiece (Figure 17). Standing in the shadows beside Peter, Rubens's dark-haired Paul has a ruddy complexion that matches his depiction in the *Rockox Epitaph*. In the same period when he painted the epitaph, sometime between 1613 and 1620, Rubens and his studio assistants prepared a set of pendants featuring Peter and Paul (Figures 18 and 19). These seven-foot-tall, arched canvases were originally installed in the window niches in the apse of the choir of the Capuchin church in Antwerp.⁹¹ On the left, in a blue tunic draped with a yellow mantle, white-bearded Peter brandishes his keys. On the right, wearing a red tunic and purple mantle, dark-haired Paul leans against his sword of martyrdom. Because the current whereabouts of the paintings are unknown, the pendants are only available in relatively low-resolution images. Nevertheless, it appears that Rubens and/or the members of his workshop used the same model for this authoritative, pensive

Paul and the heavy-lidded, dark-eyed apostle in the *Rockox Epitaph*—they even have the same full mustache covering their mouths.



Figure 15. Peter Paul Rubens, *Christ and the Penitent Sinners*, c. 1616, oil on panel, 147 × 130 cm, Alte Pinakothek, © Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, inv. no. 329, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/de/artwork/apG9Bom4Zn> (accessed on 30 November 2023).



Figure 16. Peter Paul Rubens, *Enthroned Madonna surrounded by Saints*, c. 1628, oil on canvas, 564 × 401 cm, Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. IB1958.001.

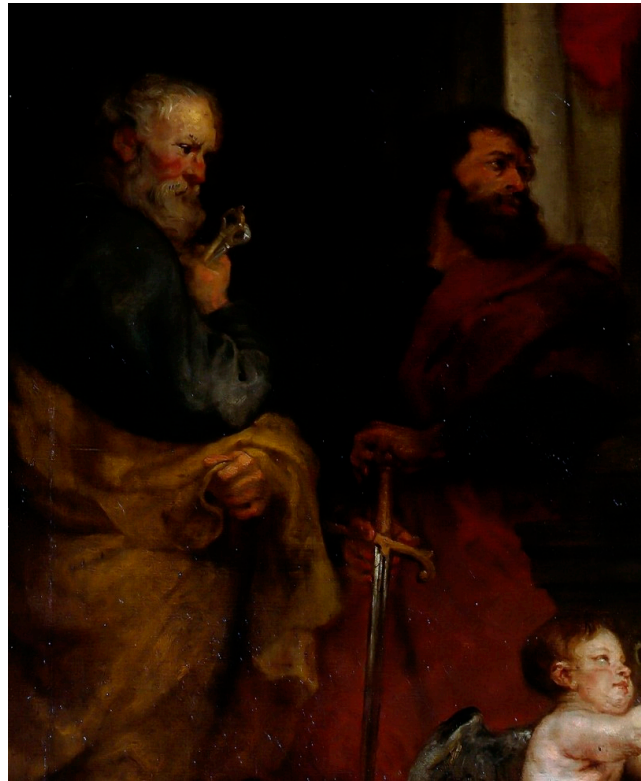


Figure 17. Peter Paul Rubens, detail of Saints Peter and Paul, *Enthroned Madonna surrounded by Saints*, c. 1628, oil on canvas, 564 × 401 cm, Collection KMSKA-Flemish Community, Antwerp, inv. no. IB1958.001.



Figure 18. Peter Paul Rubens and workshop, *Saint Peter*, c. 1613–1620, oil on canvas, 219 × 110.5 cm, whereabouts unknown.



Figure 19. Peter Paul Rubens and workshop, *Saint Paul*, c. 1613–1620, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 110.5 cm, whereabouts unknown.

Scholars who attempt to name the figures in the *Rockox Epitaph* have done exceptional work analyzing the visages and excavating the biblical texts, but few have considered that the patrons almost certainly directed Rubens to depict specific apostles. Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez surely knew the identities of the three saints in their epitaph—and those holy men were important to them. Both patrons may have had an affinity for Paul. According to the 1640 inventory of Rockox's home, the Antwerp mayor owned one of Rubens's paintings of the *Conversion of Saint Paul* (Figure 20), from around 1601 or 1602.⁹² Traveling on the road to Damascus to continue persecuting Christians, Saul (who became Paul) was blinded by heavenly light and fell to the ground, where he heard and saw Christ (Acts 9). After three days without vision, God returned Paul's sight; he was baptized; and he began preaching about Jesus. Paul's conversion and subsequent Christian devotion surely resonated with Adriana Perez, who was a descendant of Spanish *conversos* or "New Christians" that converted from Judaism to Catholicism.⁹³ In the panel that hung in the couple's home, Rubens represents the tumultuous moment when Paul falls from his horse; from his position on the ground, he looks up into the sky, where Christ appears in Heaven, emerging from the clouds, wearing a red cloth. The artist depicts Jesus consistently between the biblical panel and the *Rockox Epitaph*. In the *Conversion of Saint Paul*, it is noteworthy that Rubens pictures the famous apostle with dark hair and a full beard (Figure 21). Adriana and Nicolaas could certainly recognize Paul's features in the center panel of their epitaph.



Figure 20. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, c. 1598–1599, oil on panel, 72 × 103 cm, © LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna, inv. no. GE 40.

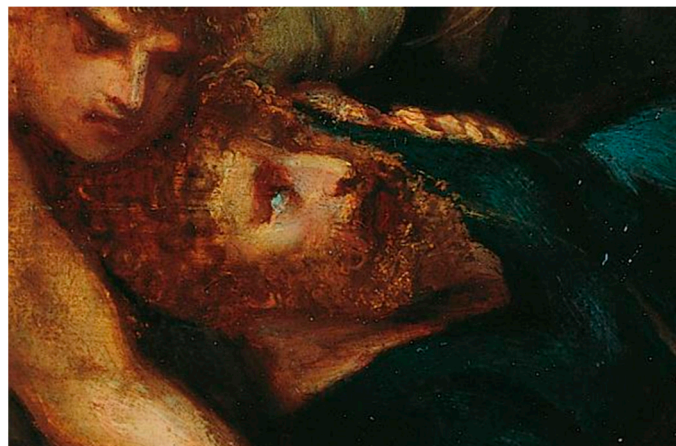


Figure 21. Peter Paul Rubens, detail of Paul's head, *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, c. 1598–1599, oil on panel, 72 × 103 cm, © LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna, inv. no. GE 40.

Moreover, throughout his life, Nicolaas Rockox must have spent hours praying for the souls of his deceased family members in front of a mid-sixteenth-century painting of Peter and Paul, accompanying a muscular, semi-nude figure of Christ (Figure 22). The left exterior wing of Jan Sanders van Hemessen's *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* features the kneeling figure of Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, who shoulders his cross and touches his bleeding side wound. Flanking Christ are grey-bearded Peter, holding the keys of Heaven, and dark-haired Paul, gripping the hilt of his sword of martyrdom. When Nicolaas was just a boy, his father Adriaan died at the age of 45, and he was interred beneath the *Last Judgment* triptych in the family chapel in St. James's Church (*Sint-Jacobskerk*) in Antwerp.

On days when the triptych was open, ten-year-old Nicolaas could see the boyhood likeness of his father kneeling behind his armored grandfather (Figure 12). Adriaan, the youngest of the three brothers, is pictured on the far left. In the aftermath of his father's death, as the eldest son, Nicolaas must have accompanied his widowed mother to St. James's Church to pray for his soul. Since triptychs were only opened on Sundays and on feast days in accordance with the liturgical calendar, the Rockoxes would have seen the exterior paintings far more often than the interior ones. In fact, the paintings on the exterior wings of the *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* may have been the most familiar and most influential images that Nicolaas Rockox knew.



Figure 22. Jan Sanders van Hemessen, *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* (closed), c. 1537–1539, oil on panel, 98 × 99 cm (center), Sint-Jacobskerk, Antwerp.

When he asked Rubens to design his epitaph, Rockox may have instructed the artist to refer to his grandparents' earlier commission, both to pay homage to his noble lineage, and to celebrate the Rockox family's history of art patronage in Antwerp. Notably, Rubens's rendering of Jesus in the *Rockox Epitaph* echoes that of Van Hemessen in several ways. Both painters present Jesus in profile, looking to the right. The two artists also focus on the muscularity of God-Incarnate, depicting toned muscles in the chest, arms, and neck. The trapezius, the muscle that extends from the shoulder to the neck, is especially thick and over-developed, and the pronounced pectoral muscles are accentuated by the shadowy, recessed sternum. Likewise, both Van Hemessen and Rubens tilt Christ's torso at the same angle, making his body more accessible to the beholder. Though Rubens's figure is partially inspired by the ancient sculptures that he studied in Italy between 1600 and 1608 (discussed below), some of the musculature and positioning of Christ's body seems to come from Van Hemessen's work, painted for an older generation of Rockoxes. Whether the idea to cite the *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* in the new commission came from Rubens or Rockox, a visual

connection is apparent. Thus, when a dark-bearded, middle-aged figure and a balding, grey-haired man appear beside Christ in the *Rockox Epitaph*, they should be understood as Peter and Paul, once again taking inspiration from the earlier triptych.

In her theologically rich interpretation of the *Rockox Epitaph*, Barbara Haeger also sees an elderly Peter and middle-aged Paul in the center panel. She argues that the two saints signal their different visual experiences with Christ. Peter was an eyewitness to Jesus's life and resurrection, beholding miracles with corporeal sight; while Paul, who only converted after Jesus's Ascension, accepted Christ with his spiritual sight.⁹⁴ In the *Rockox Epitaph*, as he did in life, Peter stares at Christ's wounded hand, observing the physical damage done to Jesus's human body. In contrast, Paul gazes upon the face of his risen Lord, looking at the divine light shining around his head. Though Haeger connects her discussion of vision and faith back to the Incredulity of Thomas, explaining how the doubtful apostle experienced both corporeal and spiritual sight, for me, the assembly of Peter, Paul, and John alludes more generally to the *multitude* of occasions when the resurrected Christ appeared to his followers.

5. A Moment Out of Due Time, a Promise for All

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious texts offer detailed accounts of Jesus's appearances after the Resurrection, encouraging readers to meditate more comprehensively on the miraculous events. For example, during the fourth week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, participants are instructed to contemplate thirteen specific apparitions from "The Mysteries of the Life of Christ Our Lord".⁹⁵ Ignatius explains that after Jesus had "taken up his body again, he appeared to the disciples on many occasions, and discoursed with them".⁹⁶ In the forty days following his triumph over death, the Risen Lord appeared to (1) the Virgin Mary, (2) Mary Magdalene, (3) the holy women, (4) Peter, (5) the disciples on their way to Emmaus, (6) all of the apostles, except Thomas, (7) all of the apostles, including Thomas, (8) seven apostles who were fishing, including Peter and John, (9) all the disciples on Mt. Tabor, whom he commissioned to teach and to baptize the nations in the name of God, (10) more than 500 brethren at once, (11) James, (12) Joseph of Arimathea, and (13) Paul, after the Ascension.

Likewise, in his popular, richly illustrated *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*, first published in Antwerp in 1595, the Jesuit priest Jerome Nadal (1507–1580), one of Ignatius's closest collaborators, describes and explicates Christ's appearances from his Resurrection to his Ascension.⁹⁷ According to Nadal, Peter and John took leading roles among the apostles—they even believed in Jesus's Resurrection before seeing him with their own eyes. While John looked after the Virgin Mary, Christ appointed Peter as the pastor to his flock and his vicar on earth, making him the first Pope.⁹⁸ In the context of the *Annotations and Meditations*, the Incredulity of Thomas is only one of several important episodes in the Risen Life of Christ. Through multiple appearances, Jesus dispelled the doubts of numerous people—including many of his closest friends and followers.

In addition to the popular Jesuit texts that were circulating, in 1614, Antwerp's *Officina Plantiniana* published a new edition of the *Breviarium Romanum* (Roman Breviary), one of the most important liturgical books of the Catholic faith. Hired by the printing house, Rubens designed the titlepage and ten full-page illustrations for the breviary.⁹⁹ Intended for everyday use, the massive book contains 1000 pages of prayers, psalms, scripture lessons, hymns, and readings, divided into thematic sections that are organized according to the liturgical calendar and the canonical hours.¹⁰⁰ In a 58-page section devoted to the days and weeks following *Dominica Resurrectionis* (Resurrection Sunday), the breviary offers myriad readings on Christ's various posthumous appearances. For example, on Resurrection Sunday, one should read selections from Gregory the Great's twenty-first homily, which explains how the holy women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—brought spices to Jesus's tomb to anoint his dead body. The women found an empty tomb and met an angel who told them that Christ had risen (Mark 16). Over the next week, breviary owners are encouraged to read about the Supper at Emmaus; Jesus's

appearances to his disciples; the second miraculous draught of fishes; Christ's apparition to Mary Magdalene; the Lord's commission to his followers; and the episode when Mary Magdalene informs Peter and John about the empty tomb, so they inspect the sepulcher and believe in the Resurrection. Multiple contemporary religious publications reiterate the lessons of Christ's many apparitions after his Resurrection.

Some art historians, who do not subscribe to the Doubting Thomas identification, have argued that the center panel of the *Rockox Epitaph* depicts one of these other instances when Christ appears to his disciples. Ingrid Haug initially proposed that the center panel pictures a more general appearance of Christ before the disciples.¹⁰¹ In agreement with Haug, in his publications, Justus Müller Hofstede refers to the Rockox panel as *The Appearance of the Risen Christ to the Disciples*.¹⁰² Three passages in the Gospels describe Jesus's appearance among his disciples, during which he displays his wounds as proof of his triumph over death.¹⁰³ Instead of the Gospel of John, where the skeptical Thomas story appears, Müller Hofstede cites the Gospel of Luke, in which Christ appears to the eleven disciples. Rubens's choice to reduce the number of disciples—from a group of ten or eleven, down to three—can be explained by the influence of Caravaggio or his preference for clarity and pictorial effectiveness over adherence to the biblical text.¹⁰⁴

Mireille Madou has proposed that the center panel depicts Christ appearing to his closest friends: John, Peter, and James the Greater.¹⁰⁵ While no Gospel text documents the Risen Christ appearing to that specific group, Madou considers it a logical occurrence in the sequence of events in their friendship. Although I do not see the middle-aged apostle as James the Greater, I agree with Madou that the scene in the center panel does not represent a moment described in the Gospels.

In religious art, Peter, Paul, and John are sometimes depicted together, as they are in Albrecht Dürer's *Four Apostles* from 1526, but there is no Gospel text that describes Jesus appearing to those three men as a group.¹⁰⁶ Christ appeared to Peter and John during the forty days following the Resurrection; then, after the Ascension, Jesus appeared to Paul. According to Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, after the Resurrection, Christ:

... was seen by Cephas [Peter]; and after that by the eleven [apostles]. Then he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once. . . . After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all, *he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time*. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰⁷

Since the grouping of Peter, John, and Paul cannot represent a specific biblical episode, as they were never together with their Risen Lord, I propose that the center panel should be interpreted as a moment "out of due time". David Freedberg notes how Rubens's epitaphs, painted between 1612 and 1618, are "timeless in a very specific sense; they had to be, because of the very nature of their function", as commemorative funerary monuments.¹⁰⁸ Even though he maintains the Incredulity of Thomas identification, Freedberg acknowledges, "A work such as the Rockox triptych does not depict a particular biblical incident, but represents a scene which transcends the purely narrational moment".¹⁰⁹

Rubens's *Christ and the Penitent Sinners*, painted around 1616, is another epitaph that pictures a group of biblical figures who never actually assembled (Figure 15). Creatively, Rubens brings the resurrected Jesus together with the golden-haired Mary Magdalene, cross-bearing "Good Thief" Dismas, crowned King David, and grey-bearded Peter. The four figures beg their Risen Lord for the forgiveness of their sins in the artist's visualization of the Catholic sacrament of penance. *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* is an atemporal, doctrinal piece—and so is the *Rockox Epitaph*.¹¹⁰

Expanding on Jacob van der Sanden's identifications of the apostles, Adolf Monballieu first described the *Rockox Epitaph* as a doctrinal piece that represents belief in the resurrection of the dead.¹¹¹ According to Monballieu, the apostles Thomas, Peter, and Paul were chosen because of their testimony in connection with the Risen Lord—not because of their presence at a particular apparition.¹¹² In agreement with Monballieu's logic, I suggest that John, Peter, and Paul may have been selected for their scriptural accounts concerning the resurrection

of mankind. In John 11: 25–26, Jesus explains: “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live: and every one that liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die for ever”. In his first epistle, Peter instructs Christians to “sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, being ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you” because Jesus Christ “swallow[ed] down death, that we might be made heirs of life everlasting”.¹¹³ Building on the work of Monballieu, I propose that the *Rockox Epitaph* is not just a doctrinal piece about *belief* in the Resurrection, but about the *promise* that the Resurrection offers pious Catholics.

The miracle of Christ’s Resurrection is not limited to Jesus’s own triumph over death: the promise of corporeal resurrection extends to all humankind. In 1 Corinthians 15: 20–22, the Apostle Paul explains, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep [die]: For by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive”.¹¹⁴ Jesus’s Resurrection prefigures and makes possible the resurrection of the dead at his Second Coming for the Last Judgment. Notably, Paul’s words are quoted five times throughout the *Dominica Resurrectionis* section of the *Breviarium Romanum*, reiterating and underscoring the broad theological implications of the Resurrection miracle: because Christ is risen, all shall be risen.¹¹⁵

In the same epistle to the Corinthians, Paul goes on to describe how the buried, earthly bodies of mankind will be resurrected and transformed in an instant—they will no longer possess mortal bodies like that of Adam, but celestial bodies like that of the Risen Lord. When Christ returns, Paul explains:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and *the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?¹¹⁶

When the dead are resurrected, what is sown in corruption will rise in incorruption; what is sown in dishonor will rise in glory; what is sown in weakness will rise in power; and what is sown a natural (earthly) body will rise a spiritual (heavenly) body (1 Cor. 15: 42–44). In his commentary on Corinthians, first published in 1614, Cornelius à Lapide (1567–1637), a Flemish Catholic priest and Jesuit, explains: “The natural body is one that eats, drinks, sleeps, digests, toils, suffers fatigue, is heavy, and offers resistance to other bodies”.¹¹⁷ When the earthly body is raised as a spiritual body, it is not a spirit, but “spiritual in the sense of being wholly subject and conformed to the spirit, so that it no longer stands in need of food or drink, it toils not, and feels no weariness, but is, so to speak, heavenly and deified. . . .”¹¹⁸ Fallible human bodies that suffer illness, wounds, aging, and various calamities and shortcomings will be transformed at the resurrection into incorruptible, immortal forms—akin to the body of Christ, as he is gloriously pictured in the *Rockox Epitaph*. Death no longer has its sting because the joyful promise of resurrection and of eternal life with God drives away the despair associated with mortality.

Anna-Claire Stinebring argues that the center panel of Van Hemessen’s *Rockox Last Judgment Triptych* (Figure 12), which Nicolaas Rockox’s grandparents commissioned, portrays the fully embodied resurrection of humankind and, thus, offers viewers “hope and joyful anticipation in the face of death”.¹¹⁹ She notes how the resurrected bodies in the Last Judgment panel are “uniformly youthful and whole”—none of the figures is skeletal or decaying.¹²⁰ Humanity is pictured in spiritual bodies; their earthly bodies have been transformed in an instant. While Christ’s judgment of the masses is, at first, terrifying to behold, the triptych trained the Rockox family to confront death, temper their fears, and find comfort in the promise of their own resurrection. While Van Hemessen was painting the Last Judgment panel, in 1539, the Antwerp chamber of rhetoric, The Gillyflower, won first prize at the Ghent *landjuweel*, a competition for local chambers of rhetoric, with their answer to the prompt: “what is the dying man’s greatest hope?”¹²¹ In their play on the theme of

dying well, The Gillyflower rhetoricians replied: “the resurrection of the flesh”. Antwerp’s pious intellectuals understood the promise and the hope offered by Christ’s Resurrection.

In his own massive depiction of the Last Judgment (Figure 23), completed by 1617, Rubens pictures the resurrection of the flesh.¹²² Muscular, idealized bodies of men and women rise from the ground, carried up to Heaven by angels on the left or pulled down to Hell by devils on the right. In the center of the *Great Last Judgment*, below Christ’s feet, two angels with billowed cheeks sound their trumpets. Just as Paul foretells, “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”, the dead rise incorruptible and changed. Unlike Van Hemessen, Rubens includes skeletal figures emerging from their tombs as the trumpets blare to illustrate the instantaneous transformation described by the apostle. Notably, the Flemish artist’s animated skeletons and horn-playing angels resemble figures in Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* fresco (c. 1536–1541), painted on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. During his travels in Italy between 1600 and 1608, Rubens studied Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel figures, as evidenced by his red chalk drawing of a seated male nude (*ignudo*) in the British Museum.¹²³ As Marcia B. Hall has demonstrated, the Italian master’s famous *Last Judgment* fresco, in fact, represents the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body described by Paul.¹²⁴



Figure 23. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Great Last Judgment*, c. 1617, oil on canvas, 608.5 × 463.5 cm, Alte Pinakothek, © Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, inv. no. 890, <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/de/artwork/Dj4mkQbL5A> (accessed 30 November 2023).

In consultation with his devout patrons, I propose that Rubens incorporated the theme of mankind’s corporeal resurrection in his design for the *Rockox Epitaph*. By juxtaposing the renewed, heavenly body of Jesus with the earthly bodies of the apostles and the patrons, the artist introduces a provocative tension that forces audiences to compare the mortal figures with the embodied deity. In contrast to Jesus’s immaculate and everlasting body, Nicolaas, Adriana, and the apostles all appear as living humans, subject to aging and the

passage of time. Rubens's naturalistic, life-sized rendering of the figures reminds faithful viewers of the transformation to come—giving sick, aging, and disabled onlookers hope as they await their own resurrection and eternal life with God. As early modern audiences employed affective viewing strategies to forge multisensory, empathetic connections with Christ, they may have also extended their imaginative empathy to the other figures in the paintings.

6. Mortality and the Ages of Man

The idealized, heavenly body of Christ shines with divine light, differentiating the deity from the nearby mortals in the *Rockox Epitaph*. The juxtaposition of immortal and temporal figures may have reminded viewers of humanity's fallibility and the origins of their own imperfection. According to Christian tradition, Nicolaas Rockox, Adriana Perez, and the rest of humankind are descendants of Adam, who was made in God's perfect image, but who brought Original Sin into the world through disobedience. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they recognized their nudity and felt shame. God punished the first couple and all their children with mortality, manual labor, and pain in childbirth (Gen. 3: 16–19). Adam and Eve's primordial punishment is written on the bodies of their descendants.

In his treatise *On the Imitation of Statues*, written between 1609 to 1615, Rubens states that it is wise to “embrace the close study of [ancient] statues”, because mankind has “fallen to a worst state, unforgiven after our fall or weakened by irrecoverable loss as the world grows older”.¹²⁵ Believing that humanity had declined since the Fall, Rubens insisted that artists imitate exemplars from Antiquity that were temporally closer to God's original design. According to the artist, ancient sculpture is “quite close to its natural original and to perfection”, while the bodies of living men bear the signs of centuries of corruption, sin, and mortality—“perfection slides downward into a worse state with the coming of successive vices”. In Rubens's estimation, the ancients also possessed superior bodies because they exercised daily, while his lazy contemporaries primarily ate and drank, developing “protruding” stomachs and “effeminized” legs and arms.¹²⁶ Seventeenth-century men's bodies fell short of Rubens's exacting standards, so he referred to ancient statues when rendering divine figures.

Appropriately magnificent in form and musculature, Jesus's body in the *Rockox Epitaph* is partially modeled after the *Belvedere Hermes* (known to Rubens as *Antinous*), an ancient Roman statue that the Flemish artist encountered in the Vatican collections in Rome (Figure 24).¹²⁷ Rubens's lost drawings of the Vatican *Antinous* survive in the meticulous copies created by Willem Panneels, an assistant who joined the workshop around 1623.¹²⁸ As Panneels's copy illustrates, Rubens borrowed and adjusted several features of the statue in his depiction of Christ: the torsos are mirrored; both figures have drapery over their arms; and the musculature of the arms and abdominals are nearly identical. Looking at his portrait next to Rubens's resurrected Jesus may have urged Rockox to think about the imperfection of his own body and his transience in comparison to the eternally perfect body of the Redeemer.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, individuals were regularly forced to grapple with the temporality and vulnerability of their bodies. Many people died unexpectedly from incurable illnesses, the plague, fatal accidents, warfare, and childbirth. Neither Rubens nor Rockox was a stranger to death. In fact, both men shared the same childhood tragedy of losing their fathers when they were just ten years old. Rubens's father died at the age of 57, and Rockox's father died even earlier at the age of 45. By 1613, the mayor had surpassed the age that his father reached by eight years.



Figure 24. Willem Panneels, after Peter Paul Rubens, Front of the Belvedere Antinous, c. 1628–1630, drawing, 309 × 137 mm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, KKSgb16376.

Shortly before the creation of the *Rockox Epitaph*, Rubens and Rockox were confronted once again with the pain of mortality. On 28 August 1611, the artist's beloved older brother Philip Rubens (b. 1574) died at age thirty-seven. Peter Paul survived all six of his siblings, but he must have felt the loss of Philip most acutely. The Rubens brothers, who were only three years apart in age, had a warm and affectionate fraternal relationship, as well as an intellectual friendship fostered by their shared love of the classical world. They even lived together in Rome for much of 1606, until Philip, a respected scholar with degrees in the law, returned to Antwerp in the fall. Surely, Philip's decision to put down roots in Antwerp must have encouraged Peter Paul to establish his own career there.¹²⁹ On 14 January 1609, Philip was appointed as one of the four municipal secretaries (*griffiers*) of the city. As a multiterm mayor and alderman of Antwerp, Nicolaas Rockox worked alongside Philip in the city government. The older gentleman developed close relationships with both Rubens brothers. Two weeks after Philip's death, when his son and namesake was baptized on 13 September 1611, Rockox was selected as the infant's godfather.¹³⁰ The arrival of Philip's son so soon after his passing must have been a poignant reminder of the unending cycle of life and death.

For men living in the tumultuous, war-torn seventeenth century, the loss of friends and family members was common. By 1613, having regularly grieved deceased loved ones and heard mortality discussed in sermons and in philosophical treatises, Rockox and Rubens must have thought about the length of a lifetime, the process of aging, and the type of legacies they wished to leave for posterity. The two friends certainly would have talked about getting older—as friends do—remarking on the effects of time and missing loved ones such as Philip. When he discussed his epitaph design with Rubens, Rockox had no idea that he would bury both of his younger brothers, Jan (1570–1619) and Adriaan (1568–1638), and his wife before he died.

Thoughts of the afterlife and resurrection occupied Rubens's mind and workshop in this period.¹³¹ From around 1612 to 1618, he and his assistants painted several epitaphs featuring the resurrected Jesus. In the 1616 *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* (Figure 15),

discussed above, Rubens—probably working with Van Dyck—reuses the Christ figure from the *Rockox Epitaph*, rotating the muscular body 180° and adding the missing side wound. The familiar deity is accompanied by four emotional sinners, who are overwrought with guilt. Large translucent tears pour from the reddened eyes of Peter and Mary Magdalene. Nearby, King David and the “Good Thief” Dismas focus intently on Christ, imploring him for forgiveness with the sincerity of their shining, wide-eyed stares. *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* offers Catholic audiences, who were trained to empathize with religious images, an example for emulation. The woeful sinners with pleading eyes could move equally culpable beholders to pray for God’s mercy.

After the printer Jan I Moretus died in 1610, his widow Martina Plantin commissioned Rubens to paint a triptych for their tomb in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp.¹³² Their son Balthasar, the new head of the *Officina Plantiniana* and Rubens’s childhood friend, paid for the commemorative painting, which shares its design with the later *Resurrection of Christ* illustration that the artist created for the 1614 *Breviarium Romanum*. In the center panel of the *Moretus Epitaph* (Figure 25), a muscular, heroic Christ strides forth, rising from his rocky sepulcher.¹³³ In the narrative composition, populated with terrified Roman soldiers, Rubens sets the shining, dynamic body of Jesus—almost entirely nude—against a shadowy background that draws the viewer’s attention to the miracle. The Risen Lord is an especially appropriate subject for epitaphs, which hung above the interred, deceased bodies of their patrons—presumably where they would remain until Jesus raises them from their graves, reunites their bodies with their souls, and welcomes them into Heaven.¹³⁴

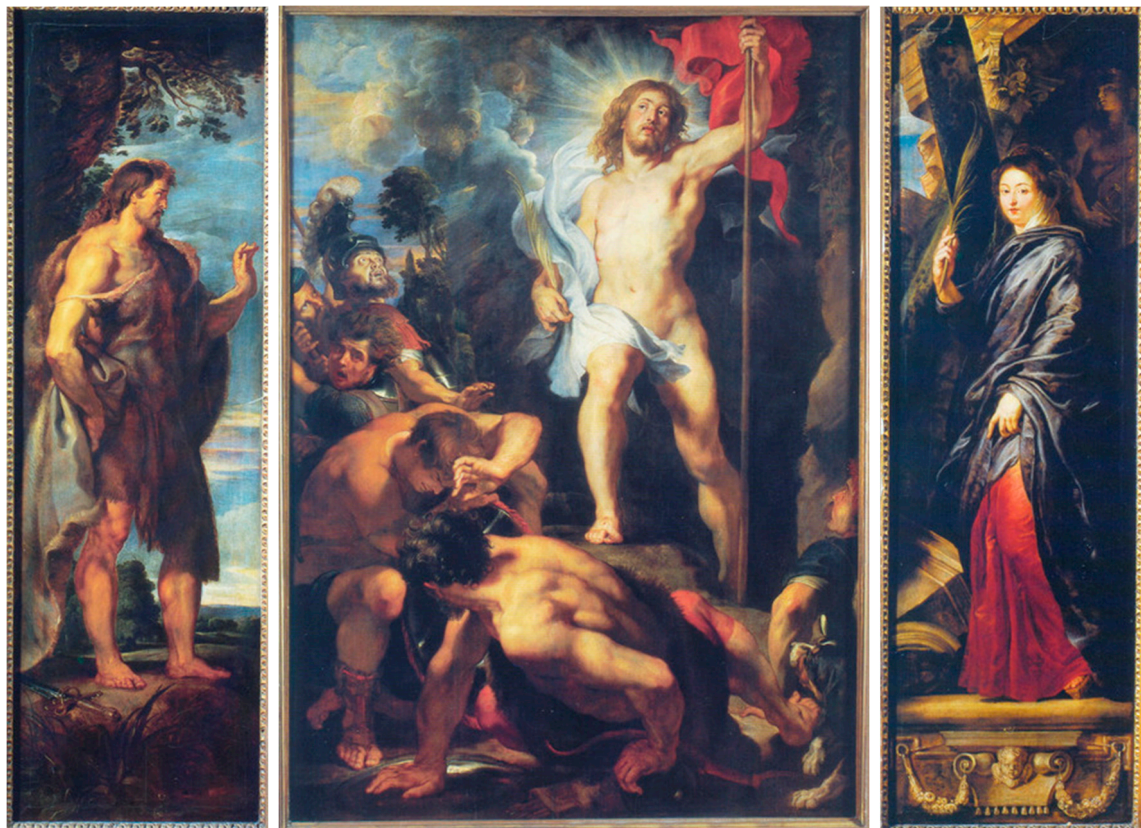


Figure 25. Peter Paul Rubens, *Moretus Epitaph* (called *The Triptych of the Resurrection of Christ*), 1612, oil on panel, 185 × 128 cm, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp.

The perfection of Christ’s body in Rubens’s paintings acts as a foil to the bodies of the mortals nearby him—the earthly figures inside the paintings, the living audiences in church chapels, and the deceased individuals interred below their tombstones. A photograph taken during the temporary installation of the *Rockox Epitaph* in the Gallery of Honor at the

Rijksmuseum evocatively illustrates the various bodies that Rubens brought together for comparison—those in the painting and those outside the painting (Figure 26). The scale of the epitaph figures and the realism employed by Rubens surely facilitated seventeenth-century audiences' empathetic viewing of the figures. In his artworks, Rubens is known to juxtapose dissimilar figural types to amplify their disparity. For example, in *Samson and Delilah*, which he painted around 1610 to hang in Rockox's home, Rubens positions the titular blonde beauty next to an old, wrinkled, sun-darkened crone.¹³⁵ In the *Rockox Epitaph*, I propose that Rubens surrounds the heavenly body of Jesus with aging figures to draw attention to man's mortal life cycle and inevitable decay, which reminds pious beholders that their temporary, earthly bodies will not last, but be transformed at the Second Coming.

The artist specifically represents three distinct ages of men in the figures of the apostles. As Christ foreshadows the corporeal renewal that awaits at the Last Judgment, the aging figures of John (Youth), Paul (Middle Age), and Peter (Old Age) underscore the transience of earthly life. In fact, in the company of the three apostles, the portrait of Nicolaas Rockox can also be interpreted as an example of the "Ages of Man".¹³⁶ In Rubens's time, popular printed series of three to twelve engravings illustrated and described the "Ages of Man", which characterized men according to the stages or decades of their lives.¹³⁷



Figure 26. @rijksmuseum, installation photograph from Twitter post (1 February 2018), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In the *Rockox Epitaph*, fair-skinned, blonde-haired John the Evangelist personifies Youth, around twenty or thirty years old. The beloved apostle resembles the baby-faced young man used to represent *ADOLESCENTIA* (Figure 27), in the six-part series created by the Antwerp-born printmaker Crispijn de Passe the Elder. According to the accompanying inscription: "This living image is that of a youth without a keeper, rejoicing in his dogs and the dust of horse races, capturing birds with birdlime and fish with a net, turned easily to vices and bitter towards his admonishers".¹³⁸ The well-dressed youth removes a bird from his hunting dog's mouth, as his peers engage in music-making, courtship, and hunting

behind him. During adolescence mankind does not have a care in the world—engaging in various pleasures.



Figure 27. Crispijn de Passe (I), *ADOLESCENTIA* (Youth), in six-part *Ages of Man* series, c. 1590–1637, engraving, 21.7 × 14.9 cm, © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0712.63.

Youthful John is regularly shown without facial hair to convey his minority. From a distance, John also appears beardless in the *Rockox Epitaph*, but closer inspection of his face reveals that Rubens painted the first growth of a beard on his chin: sparse hairs softly shadow his lower jaw. In the early modern period, when young men typically did not start growing facial hair until their mid- to late twenties, the growth of a mustache or especially a beard was associated with a specific early stage of manhood and maturity.¹³⁹ For example, in a ten-part *Ages of Man* series, also by Crispijn de Passe, the printmaker's depiction of *Man at the Age of Thirty* includes a description of the first growth of a beard: "when youthful glory has begun to paint the jaws, there is the strong age, and it burns more than any [other]".¹⁴⁰ Rubens puts the sparse beard of John in direct contrast with the full beards of his companions, who represent more advanced stages of a man's life.

With his dark brown hair, thick beard, and robust coloring, the Apostle Paul represents Middle Age, around forty or fifty years old. Paul's full head of hair and ruddy, tanned complexion signal his ideal masculinity. According Aikaterini Georgoulia, in Rubens's self-portrait at the age of 45, the artist portrayed himself with reddened cheeks to visualize his manly humors: a hot, dry man at the peak of virility should have a flushed complexion.¹⁴¹ Remarkably, the eighteenth-century viewer Jacob van der Sanden describes Paul "with brown [eyes/hair] and a long beard in the prime of manhood".¹⁴² In De Passe's six-part *Ages of Man* series, the fourth print entitled *VIRILITAS* (Manhood) features a bearded man in his prime wrangling a ferocious, rearing lion (Figure 28). The Latin inscription describes: "This is the real image of the manly age, seeking wealth, friendships, and honors, wishing to bridle high-spirited lions in chains, to hunt, and to gain beautiful praises in war".¹⁴³ The lion's sharp claws and teeth communicate his powerful capabilities, but they are matched by the fortitude of the virile, middle-aged gentleman who keeps the beast chained to a tree.

Wearing a contemporary ruff and doublet, like that of Nicolaas Rockox, the middle-aged man is a modernized Hercules, who has bested the lion and taken its characteristics for himself. The parallel drawn between the robust man and the fearsome beast is visualized in the echoed turn of their heads and the similar arrangement of their limbs.



Figure 28. Crispijn de Passe (I), *VIRILITAS* (Manhood), in six-part *Ages of Man* series, c. 1590–1637, engraving, 22 × 14.9 cm, © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0712.64.

The wizened figure of Peter, whose wispy white hair is so thin that light reflects off the top of his head, personifies Old Age, around sixty or seventy years old. Peter's fluffy white beard and eyebrows appear alongside a deeply wrinkled brow. By placing Peter beside John, the artist underscores the age difference between the elderly apostle and the youthful one. In De Passe's fifth engraving entitled *SENECTVS* (Old Age) (Figure 29), an older gentleman with a long beard and receding hairline examines necklaces and chains, which he takes from a large chest of coins. No longer fit enough to wrestle a lion, the man sits in his chair surrounded by his riches—including chalices, vases, books, and plates of meat and fruit. Visible through the window over the man's shoulder are laborers moving barrels: this could be the source of the elder's wealth. The sentiment of the inscription describing Old Age is unflattering: "This is the expressed likeness of setting old-age, difficult, complaining, longing for silver and gold, far from hope, weak, severe, wretched, sick, near to the grave, and afraid of looming fate".¹⁴⁴ In "Ages of Man" series, the later decades of sixty and seventy are often associated with riches, both hoarded and spent—sometimes given to churches in hopes of securing one's redemption.



Figure 29. Crispijn de Passe (I), *SENECTVS* (Old Age), in six-part *Ages of Man* series, c. 1590–1637, engraving, 22.2 × 14.9 cm, © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0712.65.

While the early stages of the Ages of Life are characterized by pleasures and strength, living in the moment, the later stages are deeply concerned with the status of one's soul and the aftermath of death. For example, in the sixth and final engraving in De Passe's series, the figure of *AETAS DECREPITA* (Extreme Age) (Figure 30)—who does not look a day older than Old Age—is joined by a menacing skeleton of Death that looms over the man's shoulder with an hourglass in his grasp. As Death prepares to take him away, the old man examines the scroll in his hand, which reads: *Humanæ miserię egressio* (The departure from human suffering). The accompanying inscription explains the aged man's trepidation:

I am unsure; is this the image of an ancient old man tipping towards the underworld even now, wanting and fearing his death? His mind, conscious of the sins he committed, burns him, carrying his own witness in his heart by night and day.¹⁴⁵

With death on the horizon—in this case, in the room ready to escort him to the afterlife—the very old man, who remembers his sins, fears the impending results of God's judgment.

In the early modern period, the aging process was also illustrated as a set of ten steps called the "Stairs of Life".¹⁴⁶ Pieter Nolpe's print *Differences of Ages of Men*, created between 1642 and 1665, follows the standard format, picturing infancy at the bottom left, middle age at the highest plateau, and death at the bottom right (Figure 31). According to seventeenth-century cultural values, a man reached his peak age around fifty, then he started to decline into his sixties.¹⁴⁷ The Dutch inscription at the bottom explains: "Thirty gives a full/complete man, who can carry flags and weapons. Forty shows a brave/strong hero, a lord in the house and in the field. Fifty stands at the top, filled with wisdom and good advice/counsel".¹⁴⁸ Nolpe's thirty-year-old man wears a sword at his waist and a cuirass on his chest, as he serves as the ensign to a civic militia, holding a massive flag aloft. On the next step, a forty-year-old man in armor, including a helmet, grips a baton signaling his role as a commander. The fifty-year-old man at the pinnacle wears simple, fine garments, similar to the clothes that Rockox wears in his portraits. He holds a glove in his hand, marking his elevated status.



Figure 30. Crispijn de Passe (I), *AETAS DECREPITA* (Extreme Age), in six-part *Ages of Man* series, c. 1590–1637, engraving, 21.8 × 15.1 cm, © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, inv. no. 1873,0712.66.

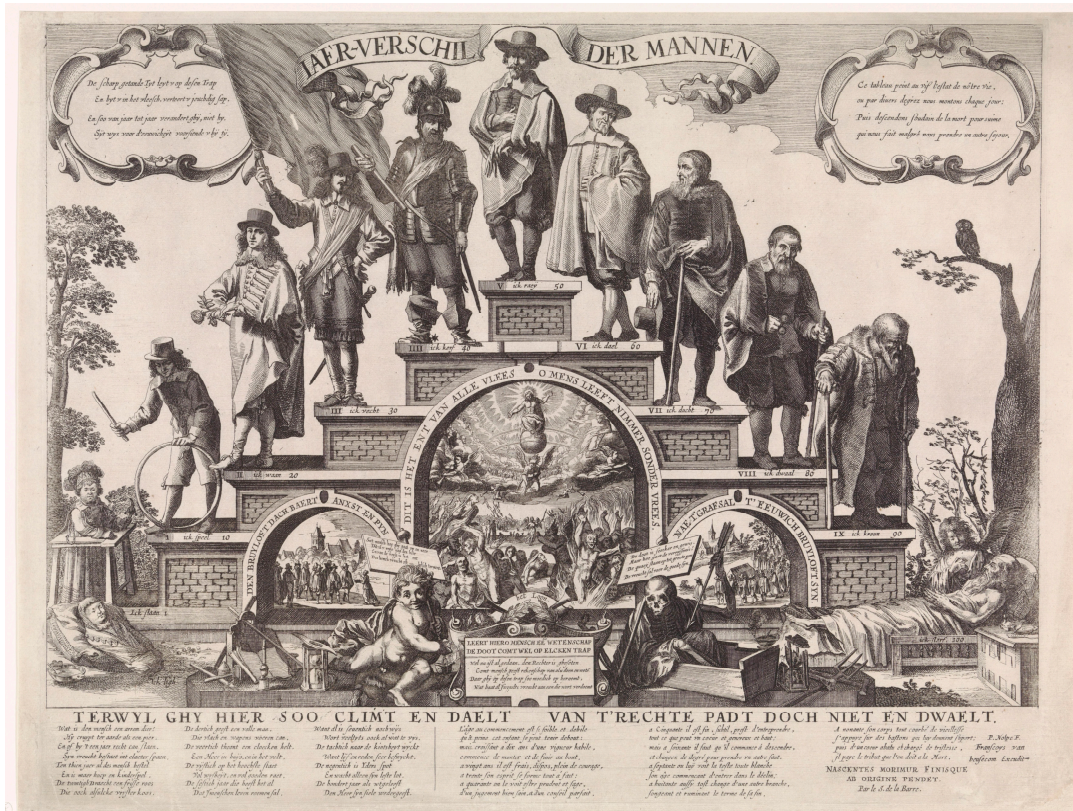


Figure 31. Pieter Nolpe, *Differences of Ages of Men* (or *The Stairs of Life*), c. 1642–1665, etching, 40.3 × 51.3 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1908-2486.

When Rockox commissioned his epitaph, he was standing at the pinnacle of manhood, with the pitfalls of advanced age ahead of him. From 1613 to 1615, when Rubens painted Rockox's portrait, the mayor was between 52 and 54 years old. In the left wing, the portrait of Rockox shows the sitter in middle-age with dark hair on his head and chin, but his hairline is receding, and wrinkles mark his face. In this case, the signs of aging signal that he is "filled with wisdom". However, according to the Stairs of Life motif, after a man reaches the top position of fifty, he is destined for decline. In Nolpe's engraving, the accompanying French inscription on the right warns:

At fifty, he is complete/perfect, subtle, ready to engage, all that a heart can, and generous and proud: but at sixty, he must begin to descend, and change degree to take another leap. At seventy, one sees his head all white, his age begins to enter into decline: at eighty, (he) quickly changes to another branch/chapter, contemplating and ruminating on the term of his end.¹⁴⁹

The men on the downward slope have progressively greying beards and bent postures, which they support with walking sticks. In the upper left corner, the Dutch inscription on the plate advises: "Sharp-toothed Time leads you up these stairs and bites you in the flesh, consumes your youthful juice/sap, and so from year to year you change, not he. Be wise for eternity, provide for yourself in due time".¹⁵⁰ Central to the stairs of life theme is the visual evidence of aging on the body—Time changes your appearance across the years. Ultimately, the oldest men are weakened and ridiculed. The Dutch inscription describes: "Eighty gives way to dotage/second childhood because body and reason succumb/greatly weaken. Ninety is everyone's laughingstock/ridicule and only awaits his final fate. One hundred years, once worn out, the Lord returns his soul".¹⁵¹

Both the Ages of Man and the Stairs of Life deliver the same ultimate message. The printed series, so popular in the early modern period, directly connect pictures of aging, mortal bodies with the outcomes of death—with the final outcome of Judgment Day. Warnings about Judgment Day and concerns about entering Heaven instead of Hell were ingrained in representations of the aging in the early modern period. Unsurprisingly, in the archway underneath Nolpe's "Stairs of Life", the viewer is confronted with a picture of the Last Judgment with Christ enthroned in Heaven, deciding the fates of rising bodies below (Figure 32). The inscription describes, "This is the end of all flesh/O man never lives without fear".¹⁵² As one's earthly flesh withers away, man fears where his soul will go after death—and for how long. Flanking the Last Judgment, a youthful putto and the skeleton of Death hold signs with statements reiterating the uncertainty of one's destination along an inevitable path. The fleshy child states: "See, man, how you go up and down. This is your journey to the Lord, and [at] the end of the journey is the joy of heaven or hellish torment".¹⁵³ Seated in a coffin, the skeleton explains: "Death is certain and sure. *But how will the resurrection go?* Sinners [will] rise to great pain; joy will be for the good".¹⁵⁴

Although the Ages of Man and Stairs of Life prints depict full lives, from infancy to extreme old age, seventeenth-century gentlemen, like Rockox and Rubens, knew that a long life was not guaranteed. With ceaseless religious wars that resulted in famine and helped spread the plague, death could occur at any time. "Death will come at every step", warns the inscription between the putto and skeleton. Similar themes are present in Rockox's library. An unrelenting passage in *Imitatio Christi* rebukes the reader:

Ah, foolish one! why thinkest thou that thou shalt live long, when thou art not sure of a single day? How many times hast thou heard how one was slain by the sword, another was drowned, another falling from on high broke his neck, another died at the table, another whilst at play! One died by fire, another by the sword, another by the pestilence, another by the robber. Thus cometh death to all, and the life of men swiftly passeth away like a shadow.¹⁵⁵

The lives of men are fleeting and fragile, susceptible to innumerable dangers. Youthful beauty and strength will fade, but reaching Old Age is not guaranteed.



Figure 32. Pieter Nolpe, detail of the Last Judgment, *Differences of Ages of Men (or The Stairs of Life)*, c. 1642–1665, etching, 40.3 × 51.3 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1908-2486.

Affective worship and viewing practices encouraged by the Catholic Church (discussed above) primed early modern audiences of the *Rockox Epitaph* to imaginatively empathize with the bodies in religious art—most ardently with the figures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. However, those multisensory, immersive approaches to visual representations often extended to the bodies of bystanders in the composition, allowing viewers to imagine themselves as witnesses to sacred events. For example, the young and old man present at the foot of the cross in Rubens’s *Crucifixion* (Figure 5) are undeniably surrogates for viewers outside the painting. Artists, like Rubens, facilitated audiences’ imagined entry into religious paintings by including a variety of surrogate figures for the beholder. As viewers compared their bodies with those in religious paintings, they may have sympathized with figures of a specific age and/or gender—their own.

The *Rockox Epitaph* offers audiences multiple potential entry points into the painting. As beholders view Christ’s risen body with empathy, awe, and hope, they can also think of their own embodied experiences of aging, faith, and prayer, aligning themselves with the apostles or even with the commemorated patrons. Regardless of their age, Rubens offers audiences an avatar that corresponds with their own place on the Stairs of Life. Over a lifetime, the viewer might relate more closely to the older figures that correspond to their own age. Certainly, male beholders could relate to the various men, empathetically imagining themselves in those privileged positions near Christ.

Women were also offered entry points into the epitaph. Female viewers could imagine themselves in the positions of the apostles—just as they were encouraged to cultivate empathetic relationships with Christ. However, the figure of Adriana Perez must have offered a more appealing and poignant avatar for female audiences. As a woman standing next to the Risen Lord, Adriana Perez reminds the viewer of the holy women who witnessed the miracle of the Resurrection. The religious texts discussed above specify that Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene and the holy women—then the women were tasked with telling the apostles what they had seen. From her position in the right wing, Adriana resembles one of the holy women who saw Christ. Instead of looking at Jesus's body, Adriana turns to look at the beholders, beckoning them to come and see the miracle, emulating the women in the Bible.

Over nearly two decades, the widower Nicolaas Rockox was able to use his family chapel in the Church of the Friars Minor Recollects for private or daily masses, and to attend the annual memorial mass for his late wife, which was performed at the high altar.¹⁵⁶ One can imagine Rockox visiting the chapel to pray for Adriana's soul, seeing her unchanging face in the *Rockox Epitaph*. Meanwhile, his own visage less and less resembled the likeness in the left wing. Rockox, who lived until he was eighty years old, first saw himself as a virile, middle-aged man, but over time he may have come to relate more closely to the older figure of Peter.

The years following the death of his wife and youngest brother must have been difficult for Rockox. In 1620, with death on his mind, he purchased a copy of Robertus Bellarminus's *De arte bene moriendi libri duo* (The art of dying well in two books).¹⁵⁷ In addition to coping with his grief, Rockox would have had concerns about the potential violence that could break out when the Twelve Years' Truce ended in 1621. The combination of grief and stress likely contributed to his health problems in the early 1620s. Rockox may have been struggling with his health in 1620, when he was once again nominated to be the external mayor of the city. His nomination was supported by bishop Johannes Malderus, but on the lists of names for the renewal of the law, it is noted that "Nicolas Rockox, chevalier" requested to be excused from the position.¹⁵⁸ Either his health improved, or else his nomination could not be denied in 1621, when Rockox was again elected external mayor. This highly respected, seasoned city official was put in charge during the uncertain, tumultuous time following the end of the truce. Yet, again in 1624, Rockox chose to decline the mayorship. A note to Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia reads:

For *buitenburgemeester* (external mayor). Nominated by the Bishop and the Margrave. Nicolaas Rockox, Knight. Appears to be the most capable, but since he has asked Your Highness to excuse him, due to an illness that he proves with certificates from physicians, we do not see how he can be elected.¹⁵⁹

Rockox apparently had poor health in his sixties—or he did not have the same drive for power that he had in his earlier decades with Adriana by his side.

In 1625, Rockox served his ninth and final term as the external mayor of Antwerp. That year, a print was made after Anthony van Dyck's portrait of Nicolaas Rockox from 1621.¹⁶⁰ The stately work on paper, engraved by Lucas Vorsterman, shows Rockox with expensive antiquities and fine clothes (Figure 33). The engraving is amusingly similar to depictions of old age printed by De Passe, who was certainly familiar with contemporary portrait prints of elite gentlemen. In the portrait engraving and in De Passe's "Old Age" print (Figure 29), both men are pictured with riches and windows overlooking city vistas—and they both wear the fur-lined *tabbaard* associated with elite, well-educated men of advanced age.¹⁶¹



Figure 33. Lucas Vorsterman, after Anthony van Dyck, *Nicolaas Rockox*, c. 1625, engraving, second state, 31.6 × 26.7 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1906-745.

7. Conclusion

In the interior panels of the *Rockox Epitaph*, Rubens painted the Resurrected Jesus surrounded by representatives of the Ages of Man, who call attention to humankind's mortality. Through immersive, multisensory meditation and affective viewing, beholders envision themselves near God—living with Jesus in their hearts—and imagine the moment their earthly bodies will be transformed into eternal ones. Rubens's depiction of Christ next to Peter, Paul, and John does not convey a message of skepticism or doubt. Instead, Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez commissioned an image that would move beholders to awe, wonder, devotion, and joyful anticipation that they would someday see the body of Christ, risen again, through the eyes of their own resurrected bodies as they entered Heaven. Having written extensively about the outcome of Christ's Resurrection and the importance of that miracle for mankind, Paul is a perceptively selected figure for a funerary monument. The *Rockox Epitaph* immortalizes Rockox and Perez as prosperous, elite members of Antwerp society, while drawing attention to the impermanence and the imperfection of mankind. The resounding hope of the epitaph is recalled in the first line of the Latin inscription on the couple's tombstone: *In Christo vita* (Life in Christ).¹⁶²

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Notes

¹ Freedberg (1978).

² Büttner (2020). Compare the *Rockox Epitaph* to Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Thomas* (Figure 13; c. 1601–1602; Sanssouci Picture Gallery), *Saint Jerome in Meditation* (c. 1605; Museum of Montserrat), and *David with the Head of Goliath* (1609–1610; Borghese Gallery).

³ Though Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez may have initiated the commission earlier, technical studies reveal that Rubens originally dated the epitaph to 1613, then changed the date to 1615. The date is located in the top left corner of the left wing, as if it is carved in the stone wall above Nicolaas's head. Nicolaas Rockox was baptized on 14 December 1560, so he was 52 years old for most of 1613. Likewise, Adriana was baptized on 28 January 1568, so she was 45 years old for most of 1613. They were married on 5 September 1589. See: Freedberg (1984, pp. 81–91, nos. 18–22).

⁴ On the lives of Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez, see: Huet and Grieten (2010); Baudouin (2005); Van Cuyck (1881); Houtman-De Smedt (1971); Grimmert (2024).

⁵ The epitaph hung on the north wall of the Rockox Chapel, located behind the high altar. On the Church of the Friars Minor Recollects, see: Herremans (2014). The lost church once stood where the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten) is today.

⁶ The cartouches may have once contained—or were intended to contain—inscriptions. Haeger proposes individual biblical verses, John 20:31 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. See: Haeger (2004, pp. 139–41); Freedberg (1984, p. 91).

⁷ For a brief summary of the Council of Trent's purpose, history, and impact on religious art, see: O'Malley (2013).

⁸ Schroeder (1960, pp. 215–16). Author's italics for emphasis. Both Rockox, a prolific patron of Catholic art, and Rubens, with countless artistic contributions to churches around Europe, would have been interested in the Council's rulings in support of religious art. The official Tridentine decrees were published in Antwerp in October, 1565. Both men could have read the brief section concerning sacred images.

⁹ Schroeder (1960, p. 216). Author's italics for emphasis.

¹⁰ Talvacchia (2013); Steinberg (1983).

¹¹ Schroeder (1960, p. 147). Author's italics for emphasis.

¹² On the iconic half-length composition, see: Ringbom (1984).

¹³ On multisensory or “sensuous” worship, see: Hall and Cooper (2013); De Boer and Göttler (2013); Smith (2002); Benay and Rafanelli (2015).

¹⁴ On the Jesuits and art, see: Bailey (2009); O'Malley (2015); Muller (2019); Smith (2002).

¹⁵ Huet and Grieten (2010, p. 207).

¹⁶ See note 15 above.

¹⁷ Ignatius of Loyola (1991, pp. 50–54).

¹⁸ Though Ignatius divided the exercises into four sections, called “weeks”, the duration of those weeks is flexible—not limited to seven days. The program can easily be adapted to the timeline, preparedness, and moral and physical strength of the participant.

¹⁹ Ignatius of Loyola (1991, p. 136).

²⁰ Ignatius of Loyola (1991, p. 151).

²¹ Baudouin (2005, p. 85).

²² Baudouin (2005, p. 86).

²³ See note 22 above.

²⁴ While no archival documents connect Rockox to Rubens's *Christ on the Cross*, the initials “NR” appear at the foot of the cross. Recognizing Rockox's extensive patronage of the Franciscan Church, it is likely that *Christ on the Cross* was his first contribution. Judson (2000, pp. 26, 123–26, no. 30); Herremans (2014, pp. 46–47).

²⁵ Pilgrim interprets Rubens's “furtive omission of the wound on his torso” as an indication of the artist's “hesitancy about representing his crucified body”. However, Rubens does not depict Jesus with a side wound in *Christ on the Cross* because Jesus is alive. The Roman soldier, called Longinus, did not pierce Jesus's side until after he died. See: Pilgrim (2022, p. 927).

²⁶ On 14 September 1619, the Antwerp sculptor Melchior van Boven (c. 1620) signed a contract with a master stone cutter from Namur, named Jean Brigaude, for the delivery of the stone for the high altar at the price of 1300 guilders. Judson (2000, p. 145).

²⁷ Judson (2000, pp. 139–46, no. 37); Van Hout (2011).

²⁸ According to Herremans, the construction of the Rockox Chapel, sometime between 1619 and 1624, may have been connected to the extension of the Porziuncola Indulgence. Saint Francis was in the Porziuncola, a chapel near Assisi devoted to Saint Mary of the Angels, when he was first called by Christ, and at the end of his life, Saint Francis returned to the chapel to die. Initially, only visitors to the chapel in Assisi were granted the Porziuncola Indulgence, but on 4 July 1622, Pope Gregory XV extended its scope:

any believer who, having received the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, visited a Franciscan Church on 2 August (the Feast Day of Saint Mary of the Angels) would receive it. What may have started as a family chapel, built after Adriana's death, could have been reimagined as a Porziuncola Chapel in Antwerp's Franciscan Church. If the testimony of Father Antonius Gonzalez (*Hierosalemsche reyse*, 1678) can be trusted, pilgrims flooded Antwerp seeking the Porziuncola Indulgence: he reports no fewer than 28,000 people received communion. A document dated 29 November 1624, mentions the chapel, and thus, may be regarded as a *terminus ante quem*. See: Herremans (2012), pp. 97, 106–7).

Herremans (2014, p. 54); Herremans (2012, p. 95).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholics believed that souls spent time in Purgatory, atoning for their sins in life, before ascending to Heaven. Through acts of piety (e.g., worshiping the Eucharist, purchasing indulgences) and acts of charity (e.g., giving alms to the poor, making donations or improvements to the Church), the devout could reduce their time and their suffering in limbo. The wealthiest Christians donated magnificent artworks and sponsored the rebuilding and maintenance of church interiors, often in exchange for commemorative services on behalf of themselves and their families. For more on the salvation of the soul in the seventeenth century, see: Herremans (2012).

Jonckheere (2019, p. 108).

Rimmele (2012, p. 248). Rimmele notes how Rubens's use of the same shade of red for the devotional aids and for Christ's garment visually unite the wings with the center panel.

Cohen (2011).

On the heart in the early modern period, see: Barclay and Reddan (2019); Jager (2000); Glen (1977). Glen has suggested that Rockox's gesture may allude to the Catholic tradition of making the sign of the Cross, in which "the Son" is indicated at the sternum. Rockox could certainly be in the middle of crossing himself, paused at the moment that references Jesus.

On the *Imitatio Christi* in Rubens's time, see: Von Habsburg (2011).

Kempis (1999). Author's italics for emphasis.

Fabri et al. (2005, pp. 53–54, 153–54). With both of these orders, Rockox also purchased *Officium Beatae Mariae Virginis*.

Göttler (2010); Hamburger (1997).

Grzeskowiak and Hulsboom (2015); Göttler (2010, p. 178).

The prints are undated. Marie Mauquoy-Hendrickx dated them to around 1585. Zsuzsanna van Ruyven-Zeman proposed a later date, toward the end of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Grzeskowiak and Hulsboom note that the *terminus ante quem* of the series signed "Anton Wierx [!] fecit et excud[it]" must be Anton II Wierix's year of death, 1604. Grzeskowiak and Hulsboom (2015); Göttler (2010); Melion (2021).

Grzeskowiak and Hulsboom (2015, p. 133).

O beatam cordis ædem! Te cui cælum dedit sedem purgat suis manibus. Animose puer verre, monstra tuo vultu terre, tere tuis pedibus. Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.

Quis hic vultum non serenet? Iesus ecce sceptrum tenet cordis in palatio. Iesu tantum ora pandas, manda quod vis, da quod mandas; adsumus obsequio. Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.

Although Rubens completed the *Descent from the Cross* triptych by 1614, a receipt from 13 February 1621, indicates that Rubens was not paid the full 2400 guilders owed until 1621. For a detailed account of the Kolveniers' payments to Rubens, see: Judson (2000, pp. 162–90, esp. 168–69, nos. 43–46).

Judson (2000, p. 186).

Judson (2000, p. 166).

De Poorter (1981, p. 90).

Silver (1983).

Saints, such as Christopher, were not permitted to appear inside altarpieces. Several church decrees were issued concerning this matter. In particular, see a proclamation, dated 3 December 1563, *De invocatione et veneratione ac Reliquis Sanctorum et Sacris Imaginibus*, XXVe Session of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), as well as proclamations from the Provincial Council of 1607 and the Diocesan Synod of May 1610. See: Judson (2000, p. 166).

By including Rockox inside the altarpiece in a Gospel scene, Rubens challenged the limits of propriety, especially of the Church's post-Tridentine discomfort with and discouragement of contemporary people making appearances in the life of Christ. See: Van Leeuwen (2010).

Rockox appears as a witness in two more paintings: Anthony van Dyck, after Peter Paul Rubens, *St Ambrose and the Emperor Theodosius*, c. 1619–1620, oil on canvas, 149 × 132 cm, The National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG50, and Cornelis de Vos, *The Restitution of the Church Treasures to Saint Norbert after the Defeat of the Heretic Tanchelm, with a Portrait of the Snoeck Family*, 1630, oil on canvas, 153 × 249 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, Antwerp, inv. no. 107.

All biblical citations are from The Douay-Rheims Bible (Baltimore, 1899), <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Douay-Rheims-1899-American-Edition-DRA-Bible> (accessed 30 November 2023).

Van Hout (2011, p. 13); le Grelle et al. (1871, p. 145).

- On the Netherlandish tradition of affective meditation that stimulated visionary experiences, see: [Harbison \(1985\)](#); [Melion et al. \(2012\)](#); [Melion \(2009\)](#); [Rothstein \(2005\)](#); [Hamburger and Bouché \(2006\)](#).
- See Haeger's discussion of affective worship that leads to visionary experiences and spiritual sight: [Haeger \(2004\)](#), pp. 130–33).
- [Haeger \(2004\)](#), pp. 119, 135).
- [Rimmele \(2012\)](#), p. 248; [Freedberg \(1984\)](#), pp. 88–89). Rimmele suggests that the couple appears in the side aisle of a church, while Freedberg proposes the ambulatory.
- On the revelatory use of the curtain in the *Rockox Epitaph*, see: [Rimmele \(2012\)](#), pp. 248–50).
- On Rockox and Perez as exemplars for onlookers, see: [Haeger \(2004\)](#), pp. 135–36; [Glen \(1977\)](#), p. 109).
- [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#), pp. 110–12).
- [Stinebring \(2022\)](#).
- See note 60 above.
- [Morse \(2023\)](#).
- Key bibliography on the *Rockox Epitaph* includes: [Monballieu \(1970\)](#); [Glen \(1977\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984\)](#); [Haeger \(2004\)](#); [Mossel \(2012\)](#); [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#); [Herremans \(2012\)](#); [Herremans \(2014\)](#).
- Monballieu published Jacob van der Sanden's poem from around 1770 to 1771 and his notes, which identify the three apostles as Thomas, Peter, and Paul. See: [Monballieu \(1970\)](#), pp. 152–53). In his poem, Van der Sanden writes: *Daar agter Thomas word in d'Ongelooovigheid/Door Christus zelf verlicht, en tot berouw geleyd*. He goes on to describe the apostles in his second note to the poem: *Den Zaligmaker is afgebeld, vol van goddelijke Glorie, en toonende na zijn glorieuze verryssenis de kenteekens van zijn wonden, toerijkende de rechte hand aen den apostel Thomas, afgebeld, als een blonten jongman en wetensbegeerig, nevens den grijsaert Petrus, boogende het hoofd met oodmoedigheijd, waer by Paulus, als tweeden Prins der Apostelen, met bruijnen en langen baert in de kragt der mannejaeren aenschouwd met verwonderende ingetogentheid den Heere, en opperleeraer van het Geloof*.
- John 20: 24–29.
- [Monballieu \(1970\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984\)](#); [Freedberg \(1978\)](#); [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#); [Mossel \(2012\)](#); [Kramer and Schily \(1999\)](#).
- [Freedberg \(1984\)](#), p. 83).
- [Glen \(1977\)](#), pp. 103–8).
- [Herremans \(2014\)](#), p. 55).
- [Mossel \(2012\)](#), pp. 53–56).
- [Haeger \(2004\)](#), p. 122).
- Instead of using the condemnatory title *Doubting Thomas*, Schlie advocates for retitling the panel *Thomas prüft den Auferstehungsleib* (Thomas examines the Resurrection Body). See: [Schlie \(2016\)](#), pp. 34–35).
- Locally, Rubens and Rockox would have known Maarten de Vos's *Incredulity of Thomas* (1574, oil on panel, 207 × 185.2 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, Antwerp, inv. no. 77), painted for the altar of the furrier's guild (*bontwerkersambacht*) in the Cathedral of Our Lady.
- [Gilbert \(1995\)](#), p. 152; [Pilgrim \(2022\)](#), p. 917).
- Rubens knew Caravaggio's work, which he adapted and made his own. Around 1612 to 1614, Rubens painted *The Entombment* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, inv. no. 6431) after Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* (c. 1600–1604, Chiesa Nuova, Vatican City).
- Technical research performed on the *Rockox Epitaph*, during its 2015–2016 restoration, concluded that the side wound was never painted. [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#), p. 108, note 25; [Gurewich \(1957\)](#); [Gurewich \(1963\)](#).
- [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#), pp. 101, 113).
- [Pilgrim \(2022\)](#), p. 925).
- [Pilgrim \(2022\)](#), pp. 948–56; [Jonckheere \(2019\)](#), pp. 113–14).
- [Monballieu \(1970\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984\)](#); [Haeger \(2004\)](#); [Rimmele \(2012\)](#).
- [Rooses \(1888\)](#), p. 157, no. 346; [Glen \(1977\)](#), p. 104).
- [Sauerländer \(2014\)](#), p. 67; [Verschaeye \(1938\)](#), p. 89; [Taeymans \(1913\)](#), p. 167).
- Scholars who identify the youngest apostle as John the Evangelist: [Rooses \(1888\)](#), p. 157; [Haug \(1967\)](#), p. 1335; [Sauerländer \(2014\)](#), p. 67; [Herremans \(2014\)](#); [Madou \(2017\)](#).
- Rubens pictures John the Evangelist in red robes in his twelve-panel series of apostles in Madrid (Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint John the Evangelist*, c. 1610–1612, oil on panel, 107.5 × 83 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P001647). c.f. Freedberg supplements his argument that the youth is Thomas by noting how Thomas wears green. [Freedberg \(1984\)](#), pp. 83–84).
- [Freedberg \(1984\)](#), pp. 55–58, no. 11; [Freedberg \(1978\)](#), pp. 69–70). Rubens must have also known his teacher Otto van Veen's *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* (c. 1605–1608, oil on panel, 269 × 214 cm, Landesmuseum Mainz).

- ⁸⁷ *The Enthroned Madonna surrounded by Saints* (c. 1628, oil on canvas, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, Antwerp, inv. no. IB1958.001) will be published among the large altarpieces in a forthcoming volume of the *Corpus Rubenianum*. See: [Bulckens and Vanoppen \(n.d.\)](#).
- ⁸⁸ Scholars who identify the oldest apostle as Peter: [Haug \(1967, p. 1335\)](#); [Monballieu \(1970\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984\)](#); [Haeger \(2004\)](#); [Sauerländer \(2014, p. 67\)](#); [Madou \(2017\)](#); [Rimmele \(2012\)](#). Rubens pictures Peter with a grey beard and balding head in his twelve-panel series of apostles in Madrid (Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Peter*, c. 1610–1612, oil on panel, 107 × 82 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P001646).
- ⁸⁹ [Monballieu \(1970\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984\)](#); [Haeger \(2004\)](#); [Rimmele \(2012\)](#). Rubens pictures Paul with a dark beard, curly hair, and thoughtful brown eyes in his twelve-panel series of apostles in Madrid (Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Paul*, c. 1610–1612, oil on panel, 107.5 × 83 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P001657).
- ⁹⁰ Both Peter and Paul are depicted on the titlepage of the 1614 *Breviarium Romanum*, and they appear seated together in the full-page illustration for All Saints. See: [Judson and van de Velde \(1978, pp. 146–48, nos. 28\)](#). Moreover, Rubens and Rockox both could have seen Peter and Paul sitting at the feet of Jesus in Maarten de Vos's *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death* (1590, oil on panel, 352 × 280.2 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, Antwerp, inv. no. 72), painted for the altar of the Longbowmen's Guild (*oude voetboog*) in the Cathedral of Our Lady.
- ⁹¹ [Vlieghe \(1972, pp. 63–65, nos. 49–50\)](#).
- ⁹² The inventory mentions: *Een schilderye olieverwe op pannel in syn lyste, wesende de bekeeringe van St Paulus*. See: [Denucé \(1932, p. 89\)](#); [Duverger \(1989, p. 384\)](#); [Freedberg \(1984, pp. 110–14, no. 29\)](#).
- ⁹³ [Hanquet \(1958, pp. 43–63\)](#).
- ⁹⁴ [Haeger \(2004, pp. 123–24\)](#).
- ⁹⁵ [Ignatius of Loyola \(1991, pp. 197–200\)](#).
- ⁹⁶ [Ignatius of Loyola \(1991, p. 200\)](#).
- ⁹⁷ [Nadal \(2005\)](#).
- ⁹⁸ In 1584, one of Rockox's friends inscribed a page in his friendship book (*album amicorum*) with a depiction of this important biblical episode. Standing before a flock of bright, white sheep, Jesus, clothed in royal purple and crowned with rays of light, points to a grey-bearded, haloed Peter, who places one hand on his heart and holds a key to Heaven in the other. The inscription written around the image comes from John 21:15–17, when Jesus asks Simon-Peter if he loves him, and he tells his disciple to feed his sheep (*pasce oves meas*). See: D. Simon Arents (?) and unknown artist, *Entry with Jesus telling St Peter to Feed His Sheep*, in the *Liber Amicorum* shared by Nicolaas and Adriaan Rockox, 1584, gouache and ink, each page approximately 15.3 × 9.8 cm, Rubenshuis, Antwerp, inv. no. RH.D.035.
- ⁹⁹ Rubens first created two full-page illustrations of *The Adoration of the Magi* and *The Ascension of Christ* for the 1613 *Missale Romanum*, published by the *Officina Plantiniana*. Those two illustrations were modified and reused in the 1614 *Breviarium Romanum*. Rubens then created a title page for the breviary and eight more drawings, including *David Poenitens*, *The Annunciation*, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, *The Resurrection*, *Pentecost*, *The Last Supper*, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, and *All Saints*. Rubens's titlepage, engraved by Theodor Galle, features the enthroned personification of *Ecclesia* (the Catholic Church), sitting above the text, which is flanked by Saint Peter and Saint Paul. See: [Judson and van de Velde \(1978, pp. 85–89, nos. 18, 119–122\)](#); [Bertram and Büttner \(2018, p. 54\)](#).
- ¹⁰⁰ The *Breviarium Romanum* was first published in 1568 under Pope Pius V. The revision of texts was part of a large-scale liturgical reform initiated by the Council of Trent. While the first editions of the book were published in Rome, Christophe Plantin, who founded *Officina Plantiniana* in 1555, soon obtained the exclusive rights of publish the breviary in the Netherlands, in Spain, and in the Spanish colonies. See: [Judson and van de Velde \(1978, p. 86\)](#); [Bertram and Büttner \(2018, p. 54\)](#).
- ¹⁰¹ Haug notes that the panel is traditionally identified as Doubting Thomas, primarily based on two eighteenth-century engravings, which modified their model to make it clearer that the image depicts the skeptical apostle. Instead, Haug identifies the disciples Peter and John in the panel. [Haug \(1967, pp. 1335–36\)](#).
- ¹⁰² Hofstede credits Haug for her identification of the Rockox panel as an appearance of the risen Christ before the disciples. He does not attempt to identify the apostles. Herremans, Mossel, Pilgrim, and Kramer and Schily agree that the center panel likely represents a more general appearance of Christ to the apostles. See: [Hofstede \(1965, p. 309, footnote 130\)](#); [Hofstede \(1971, p. 261\)](#); [Herremans \(2014, p. 55\)](#); [Mossel \(2012\)](#); [Pilgrim \(2022\)](#); [Kramer and Schily \(1999\)](#).
- ¹⁰³ John 20:19–23; John 20:24–29; Luke 24:33–48; for a summary of the theological passages and scholarship on the *Rockox Epitaph*, see: [Mossel \(2012, p. 51\)](#).
- ¹⁰⁴ [Freedberg \(1978, p. 56\)](#).
- ¹⁰⁵ According to Madou, John, Peter, and James the Greater were part of Jesus's inner circle of friends who experienced drastic (*ingrijpende*) events together: they saw Jesus raise a girl from the dead (Mark 5:37–43); they ascended Mount Tabor and witnessed the Transfiguration and glory of Christ (Matthew 17:1–9); and they were the three who Jesus told to watch as he prayed in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–34). See: [Madou \(2017\)](#).
- ¹⁰⁶ Thanks to Shira Brisman for reminding me about Dürer's paintings. The Munich panels are sometimes referred to as *The Four Holy Men*.

- 1 Corinthians 15: 5–10. Author's italics for emphasis.
- Freedberg (1978, p. 71).
- See note 108 above.
- Monballieu (1970, p. 151).
- Monballieu (1970, p. 140).
- See note 111 above.
- 1 Peter 3: 15–22.
- 1 Corinthians 15: 20–22. Author's italics for emphasis.
- Breviarium Romanum (1614, pp. 393, 404, 414, 424, 433). *Christus resurrexit à mortuis primitiæ dormiéntium: quóniam quidem per hóminem mors, & per hóminem resurrectio mortuórum: & sicut in Adam omnes moriúntur, ita & Christo omnes vivificabúntur*. Each time 1 Corinthians 15: 20–22 appears, it is joined by two specific passages that drive home the meaning of the Resurrection: (1) Romans 6:9, "Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him", and (2) 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust; that he might offer us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit".
- 1 Corinthians 15:52–55. Author's italics for emphasis.
- Lapide (1896, p. 390).
- Lapide (1896, p. 390). The resurrection at the end of time includes all of mankind. According to Cornelius à Lapide, "...Christ is the cause of the resurrection of all, even of the wicked: (1) Because Christ wished by His resurrection to abolish the power of death over the whole human race entirely... (2) Christ merited resurrection for the wicked, even as wicked, that He might inflict just punishment on His enemies, that His glory might be increased by the eternal punishment of His enemies". See: Lapide (1896, p. 374).
- Stinebring (2022, p. 115).
- Stinebring (2022, pp. 100, 114).
- Stinebring (2022, pp. 101–2).
- Freedberg (1984, pp. 201–11, no. 49).
- Peter Paul Rubens, after Michelangelo, *Study of an Ignudo*, c. 1606, red chalk drawing, 38.8 × 27.8 cm, The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1870,0813.882. See: Logan and Belkin (2021, p. 158).
- Hall (1976).
- Rubens (2018, p. 100).
- Rubens (2018, p. 100). "The main respect in which men of our age differ from the ancients is their sloth and their unexercised lifestyle: that is, their eating and drinking and lack of concern for the exercise of the body. As a consequence, the pressed-down weight of a stomach protrudes, always full because of assiduous gluttony; legs are effeminized and arms, aware of their inactivity".
- Pilgrim (2022, pp. 944, 947–48); Rubens (2003, pp. 55–56). Rubens mentions the statue of Antinous (*Belvedere Hermes*) in his *Theory of the Human Figure*.
- Panneels entered Rubens's workshop around 1623 and spent five-and-a-half years as a student before registering as a master in the painter's guild in August 1628. From 1628 to 1630, while he was away on diplomatic missions, Rubens entrusted the care of his house to Panneels. It is unclear whether the trusted student copied his master's drawings during his apprenticeship, or if Panneels clandestinely accessed guarded materials while Rubens was away. See: Huvenne and Kockelbergh (1993, p. 13); Balis (2020, p. 4).
- For a discussion of several potential reasons why Rubens remained in Antwerp—falling in love with Isabella Brant, falling out of favor with Vincenzo Gonzaga, and facing increasing competition for commissions in Italy, see: Vermeylen (2004).
- De Poorter (2015, p. 239).
- Freedberg writes: "...Rubens was more preoccupied with themes of death, resurrection, and commemoration in the years between 1612 and ca. 1618 than has generally been recognized". Freedberg (1978, p. 69).
- Martina Plantin (1550–1616) was the second daughter of Christopher Plantin, the founder of the prosperous Antwerp printing house *Officina Plantiniana*, established in 1555. Around 1558, Jan Moretus began working for Christopher Plantin. In 1570, he married Martina. When Christopher Plantin died in 1589, his son-in-law inherited the printing house. After Moretus died in 1610, his two sons Jan II and Balthasar I Moretus ran the business together.
- Freedberg (1978, pp. 53–55); Freedberg (1984, pp. 31–39, nos. 1–5).
- Nicolaas Rockox and Adriana Perez planned for their bodies to rest in the Church of the Friars Minor Recollects until Judgment Day, but their bones were moved in the 1840s. Huet and Grieten describe how the bones associated with the Franciscan church were repeatedly (and not too carefully) moved to local cemeteries, so it is possible that the patrons' bones are dispersed across Antwerp. See: Huet and Grieten (2010, pp. 260–61).

- See: Peter Paul Rubens, *Samson and Delilah*, c. 1610, oil on panel, 185 × 205 cm, The National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG6461.
- Hults has noted that each of the five men in Rubens's two paintings of *Dying Seneca* can be interpreted as one of the "Ages of Man". See: Peter Paul Rubens, *Dying Seneca*, c. 1612–1613, oil on panel, 185 × 154.7 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. no. 305; Peter Paul Rubens, *The Death of Seneca*, c. 1612–1615, oil on canvas, 181 × 119.8 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P003048. The sage, wizened philosopher Seneca is joined by a young, beardless scribe, an older soldier, and two bearded, middle-aged men. The men surrounding Seneca offer a visual foil for the elderly figure. See: [Hults \(2018, p. 678\)](#).
- On the Ages of Men theme, see: [Janssen \(2007a\)](#); [Sears \(1986\)](#).
- Hoc vivum est IVVENIS custode carentis Agalma, / Gaudentis canibusque, et equestris pulvere circi, / Captantis volucres visco, piscesque sagenâ, / In vitium facilis flecti, monitoribus aspri.* Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.
- According to Hollander, mustaches and especially beards were "signs of mature manliness", since young men living in the early modern period typically only began growing facial hair in their mid- to late twenties. See: [Hollander \(2019\)](#); [Fisher \(2001\)](#).
- Coeperit ast juvenile decus cum pingere malas, Fit robusta aetas ardet ut ulla magis. Feruidus arma petit, patriis non degener oris: Colla uti taurus atrox subtrahit atque jugo.* Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich. See: Crispijn van de Passe (I), *Man at the Age of Thirty*, c. 1574–1637, engraving, 12 cm diameter, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. No. RP-P-1908–5631.
- [Georgoulia \(2014\)](#). See: Peter Paul Rubens, *Self-Portrait*, signed and dated 1623, oil on panel, 85.7 × 62.2 cm, Buckingham Palace, The Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, London, inv. no. RCIN 400156.
- In his second note on the 1770–1771 poem, Jacob van der Sanden writes: *Paulus, als tweeden Prins der Apostelen, met bruijnen en langen baert in de kragt der mannejaeren*. See: [Monballieu \(1970, p. 153\)](#).
- Hæc est ætatis germana virilis imago, / Divitias quaerentis, amicitias et honores, / Magnanimos cupidæ vinclis frenare leones, / Venari, et pulchram bellis acquirere laudem.* Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.
- Hæc est occiduae effigies expressa senectæ / Difficilis, querulæ, argentoque inhiantis et auro, / Spe longæ, invalidæ, tetricæ, miserabilis, ægræ, / Vicinæ capulo, atque instantia fata timentis.* Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.
- Fallor; an hæc etiam SENIS est vergentis ad orcum / Decrepiti, optantis mortem atque horrentis IMAGO? / Conscia patrati quem mens peccaminis urit / Nocte dieque suum portantem in pectore testem.* Latin translated by Maxwell Dietrich.
- There are many examples of the *Stairs of Life*, printed in Germany, France, and the Low Countries, and dated to fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- [Janssen \(2007a\)](#); [Janssen \(2007b\)](#); [Sears \(1986\)](#).
- De dertig geeft een volle man, / die vlag en wapens voeren kan, / De veertig toont een kloeken held, / een Heer in huis, en in het veld, / De vijftig op het hoogste staat / vol wijsheid, en vol goede raad.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- À cinquante il est fin, subtil, pret d'entreprendre, / tout ce que peut un coeur et généreux et haut, / mais à soixante il faut qu'il commence à descendre, / et changer de degré pour prendre un autre saut, / À septante où lui voit la tête toute blanche, / son âge commençant d'entrer dans le déclin, / à huitante aussitôt change d'une autre branche, / songeant et ruminant le terme de sa fin.* French modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- De scherp getande Tijd leidt u op deze trap / en bijt u in het vlees, verteert uw jeugdig sap, / en zo van jaar tot jaar verandert gij, niet hij, / Wees wijs voor de eeuwigheid voorzie u bijtijds.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- De tachtig wijkt naar de kindsheid, / want lijf en reden zijn zeer bezwaftenomen, / De negentig is ieders spot / en wacht alleen zijn laatste lot, / De honderd jaar, (wanneer/eens) uitgeleefd, / geeft de Heer zijn ziel terug.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- Dit is het einde van al het vlees, / O mens, leeft nooit zonder vrees.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- Ziet mens, hoe gij op en neer gaat, / Dit is uw reis naar de Heer / en het eind van de reis is / de vreugde van de hemel of de helse kwelling.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- Author's italics for emphasis. *De dood is zeker en gewis, / Maar hoe gaat de verrijzenis! / De slechten staan op tot grote pijn / De vreude zal voor de goeden zijn.* Dutch modernized and translated with the assistance of Petra Maclot.
- [Kempis \(1999, Book 1, Chapter 23:7\)](#).
- [Herremans \(2014, p. 53\)](#).
- [Fabri et al. \(2005, pp. 54, 154\)](#).
- [Huet and Grieten \(2010, p. 199\)](#).
- [Huet and Grieten \(2010, p. 210\)](#). *Voor buitenburgemeester. Voorgedragen door de bisschop en de markgraaf. Nicolaas Rockox, Ridder. Lijkt de meest bekwame, maar aangezien hij Uwe Hoogheid heeft doen verzoeken om hem te willen excuseren, ten gevolge van een ziekte die hij aantoon met certificaten van geneesheren, zien wij niet hoe hij gekozen kan worden.*
- See: Anthony van Dyck, *Nicolaas Rockox*, 1621, oil on canvas, 122.5 × 117 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, inv. no. ГЭ-6922.
- [De Winkel \(1995, 2006\)](#).

- 162 Latin tombstone inscription: *In Christo vita. Nicolaus Rockox Eques hujus Urb. Consul VIII Adrianæ conjugī clariss. P. cum qua XXX ann. Concors vixit. Decessit XXII septemb. An MDCXIX aet. LI. Ille conjugem secutus pridie idus Decembris anno MDCXL aetatis LXXX. Bene de sua bene de postera aetate meritis.* Translation by Maxwell Dietrich: Life in Christ./The knight Nicolaas Rockox/Mayor of this city nine times/For his most excellent wife Adriana Perez/With whom he lived in harmony thirty years./She died on 22 September 1619/At the age of 51./He followed his wife 12 December 1640/At the age of 80./He earned the good graces of his own time/And those of the future. See: [Rooses \(1888, p. 159\)](#).

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