

Jacob de Backer
(Antwerp, ca.1555 – ca.1585)

Allegories of the Theological Virtues and the Liberal Arts

Executed ca.1575-1585

Oil on canvas, series of eight paintings

209 x 149.5 cm

Faith

Paper label (upper right corner): “[4]80”

Inscriptions: “Fides”. “Ivstvs Ex Fide / vivit sicut / Habraham / Crededit Omnes / Fily Dei
Estis / Per
Fidem In / Christo iesv / Rom. 10”.

Hope

Inscriptions: “Spes.” “Spe enim / Salvi Facti. / Svmvs / Qvi Spera / Mvs In Devm / Vivvm
Qvi / Est
Salvator / Omnivm. Hebr. 6.”.

Charity

Paper label (upper right corner): “481”

Paper label stuck on the stretcher on the reverse: Servicio de Defensa del Patrimonio
Artístico

Nacional

Inscriptions: “Charitas”. “Nvnc Avt.. / Manet Fide. / Spes Charitas / Tria Haec Maior / Horvm
Est

Cha / ritas. I Cor. ia / ..per Omnia / ..aritatem Ha / Qvod Est”

Grammar

Paper label stuck on the stretcher on the reverse: “[M]inisterio de Educación Nacional /
Servicio de

Defensa del Patrimonio Artístico Nacional / Fotografiado...”

Inscriptions: “Gramatica. Fons et origo Omnivm Artivm”. “Carmenta”. “Cadmvs”. “Virgilivs”.
“Homervs”. “Catonis”.

Dialectics

Paper label (upper right corner): “479”

Inscriptions: “Dialectica” “Veritas”. “Sofia” (in Greek). Est Ars Artivm et sientia Scientiarvm”.

“Elocuencia” y “Gloria”. “Artes Virtvtis. / svnt Magistrae”. “Hermes Trimegistvs”.

“AristoteleS”.

“Prvdentia”.

Rhetoric

Paper label (upper right corner): “477”

Inscriptions: “Rethorica. Svm Benedicendi Et Orandi Scientia”. “Nvncivs Deorvm”.

“Lvcianus Samo

2. "Invidia". "Concio".

Geometry

Inscriptions: "Rethorica. Qvantites Abstrvsas Manifesto". "Octavi: Avgvstvs". "Hipparchvs". "Evclides". "Hypatia Alexandri:"

Arithmetic

Paper label (upper right corner): "476"

Inscriptions: "Aritmetica. Ad Divina Assvrgit et Ad Hvmana Descendit". "Zoroastres". "Pithagoras".

Provenance:

D. Juan Antonio Desvalls y de Ardena (1740-1820) Marquis of Alfarrás, 6th Marquis of Lupiá and III Marquis of Poal. Palace of the Labyrinth of Horta, Barcelona.

By descent D. Luis Desvalls y Maristany (1931-2014) 10th Marquis of Alfarrás

Exhibited:

Madrid, Fernán Gómez, Centro Cultural de la Villa. A su imagen. Arte, cultura y religión. Isidro G.

Bango Torviso (curator), november 2014 – april 2015, pp. 316-319, núms. 86. Allegory of Faith ; 87. Allegory of Hope ; 88. Allegory of Charity.

Puebla, Museo Internacional de Puebla, Mexico. El arte de las Naciones. El Barroco como arte global. October 2016- January 2017.



Fig.1 *Faith*

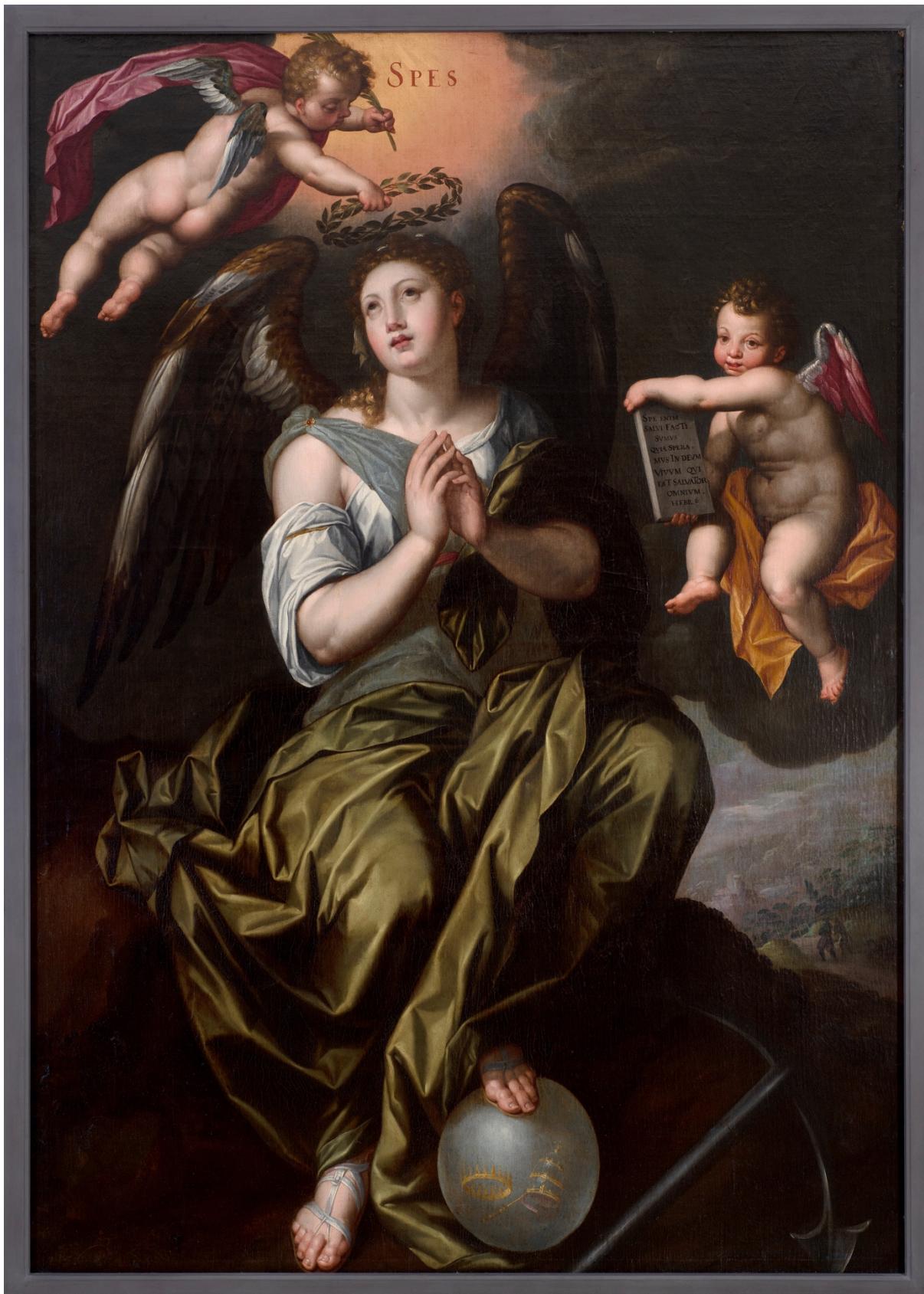


Fig.2 *Hope*



Fig.3 *Charity*



Fig.4 Grammar



Fig.5 *Dialects*



Fig.6 Rhetoric



Fig.7 *Geometry*



Fig.8 *Arithmetic*

Identification of the paintings and their provenance

These eight oil paintings on canvas constitute a series of allegories of the three Theological Virtues – Faith, Hope and Charity – and the five Liberal Arts, comprising the three of the trivium, Grammar, Dialectics and Rhetoric, and two of the quadrivium, Arithmetic and Geometry. The paintings are attributed to the Flemish painter Jacob de Backer (Antwerp, ca.1555 - ca.1585). Each measures 209 x 149.5 cm and all are painted in oil on a fine herringbone twill weave canvas, which is clearly visible in the one that has not been relined.

To judge from the drawings, prints and paintings with which they can be related, this is an incomplete series lacking the depictions of Music and Astronomy.¹ (Fig.1) The association between the Virtues and the Liberal arts of the classical tradition was common from the Middle Ages onwards and numerous authors attempted to reconcile the system of human knowledge of the Liberal Arts under the protection of philosophy with that of divine wisdom represented by theology, guardian of the Christian Virtues.



(Fig. 1)

¹ The rector's office of the Universidad del País Vasco has an Allegory of Astronomy which I have not seen at first hand and have not been able to measure or to establish on what type of canvas it is painted. However, it would seem to have belonged to the present series. It was reproduced by Jesús María GONZÁLEZ DE ZÁRATE , "De la estampa", Archivo Español de Arte , 293 (2001), p. 72-80, fig. 1, who considered it an anonymous 17th -century work with a composition based on a print by Anton II Wierix (after Francesco Primaticcio) from a series on the Liberal Arts.

Stuck to the front of five of the paintings at the upper left are circular paper labels with numbers running from 476 to 481, which can be dated to the 20th century,² of which number 478 is missing, as well as those that would logically correspond to the numbering of the start of a series of ten canvases. In addition, Rhetoric and Arithmetic have fragmentary labels stuck on their stretchers from the Servicio de Defensa del Patrimonio Artístico Nacional, albeit without any other information that clarifies their whereabouts during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) or the immediately following years.³

These paintings appeared on the art market in Madrid in 2006, with the exception of the Allegory of Hope, which was acquired shortly afterwards in order to complete the group and which is unlined, unlike the rest. It would seem that all of them were in the collection of Luis Desvalls y Maristany (1931-2014), 10th Marquis of Alfarrás. According to family tradition, they had belonged to his illustrious predecessor Juan Antonio Desvalls y de Ardena (Barcelona, 1740-1820),⁴ Marquis of Alfarrás from 1769⁵ and subsequently 6th Marquis of Lupiá and 3rd Marquis of Poal through his father's side. Juan Antonio Desvalls, an aristocrat, wealthy landowner and educated scientist, was one of the most notable figures of the Enlightenment in late 18th-century Barcelona. His interest in physics, atmospheric effects, mathematics, architecture, gardening and art led him to become personally involved in a range of activities, including the founding of the Experimental Physics and Mathematics Congress (1764), which would later give rise to the Royal Academy of the Sciences and Arts in Barcelona. During the Peninsula War he organised the resistance against Napoleon's army. In 1812 he was elected member for the city in the Parliament of Cadiz, although he never actually went there.⁶ Among Desvalls's most important contributions to the artistic heritage in Barcelona was his construction at the end of the 18th century of the Laberinto de Horta, a Neo-classical garden with a mythological layout and iconography. Surrounding the pond built in 1794 is a

² It is likely that these labels relate to the information supplied by M. Díaz Padrón on what he termed the "copies from the Soler Damiano collection", of which he found images in the documentary holdings of the Servicio de Recuperación (ref no. 27833, archive photo C-472). See Matías DIAZ PADRON , "Hendrick de Clerck: una serie de las 'Artes Liberales' identificada en el monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial y algunas anotaciones a nuevas obras suyas en España", *Boletín del Seminario de Arte y Arqueología* (Valladolid), LXXIV (2008), p. 127-150, particularly p. 131 and note 14.

³ As follows: 476 (Arithmetic), 477 (Rhetoric), 479 (Dialectics), 480 (Faith) and 481 (Charity). Hope, Grammar and Geometry have lost their respective numbered labels.

⁴ In Catalan, Joan Antoni Desvalls i d'Ardena (Barcelona, 26 October 1740 to 10 March 1820). For all issues on the family history and lives of its members, see Josep FERNÁNDEZ TRABAL , *Els Desvalls i Catalunya. Setcents anys d'història d'una família noble catalana* . Lleida, Pagès Editors, 2013, particularly pp. 345-438.

⁵ Through his marriage to María Teresa de Ribas, 3rd Marchioness of that title. She was the heir to the house of Ribas y Boxadors, Vallgornera y de Pallás. She died on 5 de December 1796. See Francisco José MORALES ROCA : "Officialium Cataloniae (IV). Regidores del Ayuntamiento de Lérida. Dinastía Borbón (1716- 1833)", *Hidalguía* , 316-317 (2006), p. 445.

⁶ Joaquín LLARO Y VIDAL , *Elogio del I. S. D. Juan Antonio Desvalls y de Ardena, marqués de Lupiá, y vicepresidente de la Academia Nacional de Ciencias Naturales y Artes de esta ciudad por...* Leído en la Junta celebrada ...el día 15 de noviembre de 1820, Barcelona, Antonio Brusi, 1821. An essential source today is FERNÁNDEZ TRABAL , *Els Desvalls...*, 2013, pp. 345-438, with a lengthy biography.

pavilion⁷ dedicated to the Muses, small temples, sculptures and fountains. Within the garden the Marquis built a “country house”⁸ around the old medieval structure of the Sobirana Tower. Desvalls directly supervised the project’s construction between 1793 and 1802, employing the masters of works Jaume and Andreu Valls, the Italian sculptor Domenico Bagutti and the French gardener Joseph Delvalet.⁹ (Figs. 2-5).



Also worthy of mention was Desvalls’s purchase in 1798 of a carriage decorated with episodes from the Iliad that had belonged to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini in Bologna and which arrived in Barcelona in 1802 (Barcelona, Museo de Artes Decorativas).¹⁰ It is not known when Desvalls acquired the paintings of the Theological Virtues and the Liberal Arts nor the position they occupied in his residences, as they could have been in his town palace on the Carrer del Dormidor de Sant Francesc in Barcelona¹¹ or in his country home of the Laberinto de Horta, which had a garden pavilion decorated on the interior with stuccoes of the Muses, Virtues, sciences, arts, etc, and an exterior allegorical sculpture of The Union between Art and Nature, beneath the mottoes *Artis Naturaque Parit Concordia Pulchrum* (“The harmony of Art and Nature gives rise to Beauty”) and *Ars Concordis Foetum Naturae Matris Alumbrat* (“Harmonious Art gives birth to the fruit of Mother Nature”).

⁷ FERNANDEZ TRABAL, 2013, p. 409-410, citing the Baron de Maldá, Calaix de Sastre, VII, p. 33.

⁸ As noted on the commemorative stone marking the visit on 10 October 1802 of Charles IV and María Luisa de Borbón, which the Marquis de Alfarrás had set up on his estate.

⁹ Josep Maria Montaner i Martorell, *La Modernitzacio de L'Utilitat Mental de L'Arquitectura a Catalunya (1714-1859)*. Barcelona, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1990, p. 314 and 356-358. Albert Cubeles i Bonet, “El Jardí del Laberint d'Horta, l'obra d'un aristòcrata il·lustrat (I)”, *Revista de Catalunya*, 281 (2013), p. 117-148; (II), 282 (2013), p. 97-126; (III) 283 (2013), p. 121-157.

¹⁰ Josep CAPSIR, *La carrossa del marqués d'Alfarràs, Lluís Desvalls i Maristany*. Barcelona, 2001. FERNÁNDEZ TRABAL, 2013, p. 396.

¹¹ FERNÁNDEZ TRABAL, 2013, pp. 353-354, reproduces a plan of the house/houses (p. 375). The building of 1774, known as the Palacio de Alfarrás, was bombed during the Spanish Civil War. The façade on calle Clavé survived and in the 1940s a new classicising building was constructed around it.



(Figs. 2-5)

The subjects of these paintings clearly reflect the Marquis's scientific and artistic interests. It would appear that until the 1960s they were in the Laberinto palace and it is feasible to suggest that the contents of this leisure palace was removed to another location when Luis Desvalls y Trías (ca.1900- 1987), 9th Marquis of Alfarrás, exchanged the Laberinto park with the City Council of Barcelona in 1967 for other plots of land that were smaller but had planning permission granted for building on them. Shortly afterwards the family sold the paintings, which were shown by various Barcelona antiques dealers at the Feriarte fair in 2006. The artist Jacob de Backer (ca.1555 - ca.1585) worked in Antwerp in the second half of the 16th century. His exact dates of birth and death are unknown.¹² There are few documents facts regarding his life, making him an enigmatic case whose chronology depends on documented information relating to other painters with whom he was associated. The painter and biographer of artists Karel van Mander (1548 - 1606) included a moving biographical account of Backer in *Het Schilder-Boeck* (1604), written with more

¹² There is no complete agreement on this issue. I use the dates proposed by C. van de VELDE , "Backer, Jacob de" in Jane TURNER (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art* , 3, pp. 23-24.

enthusiasm than documentary accuracy.¹³ Van Mander states that Backer was born in Antwerp and was the son of a painter who abandoned him as a child when he was obliged to flee from an impending trial. For some years Backer trained and work in the studio of Antonio van Palermo (1503/1513 - ca.1589), a painter and picture dealer, then in that of Hendrick van Steenwijck (ca.1550 - Frankfurt, 1603).¹⁴

According to Van Mander, Palermo excessively exploited the young Backer's talents and dedication, resulting in his death at the age of around thirty. He died in the arms of his master's daughter Lucretia¹⁵ around 1586 or the previous year, probably before Van Steenwijck moved to Frankfurt.

It is notable that Backer was not a member of the Antwerp guild of painters,¹⁶ a rare occurrence within the context of the guild-regulated Low Countries. Nor is it known that he went to Italy, which makes the marked influence of Italian Mannerism in his work even more surprising. Recent studies of his work have deduced a series of facts relating to the decade 1575 to 1585. De Vos questioned the attribution of works that were previously considered fundamental within Backer's oeuvre, such as *The Last Judgment*, supposedly of 1571 (Antwerp, Fine Arts Museum), which he considered a studio replica, or *The Last Judgment* for the funerary monument of Christophe Plantin (Antwerp cathedral), which was previously considered a work by the artist executed just before Plantin's death (1 July 1589) but which is now thought to be a studio copy of *The Last Judgment* (Dieppe, château-musée) painted for the tomb of the painter Pieter Goedkindt (the son-in-law of Antonio van Palermo) in the Carmelite convent in Brussels.¹⁷ In contrast, now attributed to Backer is a drawing for *Divine Wisdom* which bears an apocryphal signature of Martin de Vos, dated 1577 (Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet).¹⁸ As a result, Jacob de Backer's artistic personality presents various unresolved issues and his oeuvre is difficult to structure due to a lack of securely dated autograph works. During the brief period of his professional activity (ca. 1570/1575 – ca.1585) his output was large and varied, encompassing biblical subjects,

¹³ Karel van MANDER, *Le livre des peintres de Carel van Mander. Vie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands* (1604). Traduction, notes et commentaires par Henri Hymans. Paris, Librairie de l'Art, 1884, vol. I, pp. 286-288.

¹⁴ Jeremy HOWARTH, *The Steenwyck family as masters of perspective: Hendrick van Steenwyck the Elder (ca. 1550-1603): Hendrick van Steenwyck the Younger (1580 /82-1649): Susanna van Steenwyck (dates unknown - active 1639 - ca. 1660)*. Brepols, 2009

¹⁵ In addition to Lucretia, baptised in Antwerp on 25 July 1561, who owned six paintings by Backer in 1626, Antonio van Palermo had another daughter, Catalina, married to the painter Peter Goedkindt the Elder, who died on 9 April 1621. Her husband died in July 1583 and was buried in the same tomb in the Carmelite church in Antwerp, with a *Last Judgment* by Backer over the tomb (Ph. ROMBOUTS and Th. DE LERIUS, *De Liggeren en andere historische archieven der Antwerpsche Sint Lucasgilde, onder zinspreuk: "Wt ionsten versaeamt".... / Les Liggeren et autres archives historiques de la Gilde Anversoise de Saint Luc, sous la devise "Wt ionsten versaeamt".... transcris et annotées par Ph. Rombouts et Th. Van Lerius*. Antwerp, 1872-1876 p. 194, note 3).

¹⁶ ROMBOUTS, / DE LERIUS, *De Liggeren...*, 1872-1876.

¹⁷ The two versions of *The Last Judgment* were questioned by Dirck de Vos, "Het 'Laatste Oordeel' puerta de Jacob de Backer: een problema van oorspronkelijkheid", *Boletín Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België*, XXII, 1973, pp. 59-72.

¹⁸ Astrid TYDÉN -JORDAN, "Sapientia Divina, en motreformert propagandamålning av Jacques de Backer", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 52 (1983), pp. 64-74.

religious and moral allegories, and series of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Senses, the Virtues and the Liberal Arts, all of which were esteemed by a cultured client base of aristocrats, humanists and collectors for whom Backer painted fine quality originals, as well as offering numerous replicas produced by studio assistants and copies which have subsequently undermined his autograph oeuvre. Leuschner coined the term “the Backer group”¹⁹ for this wide range of works, proposing the criteria to be used to separate original works from studio products and copies that reflect the style of other painters with different characteristics. Van Mander saw two paintings of Adam and Eve and an Allegory of Charity in the house of Melchior Wijntgis in the city of Middelburg. Prior to 1594 Count Cosimo Masi, Alessandro Farnese’s secretary during his period of rule in Flanders, acquired a “series of the seven deadly sins” which had been confiscated by the Farnese in 1612 (Naples, Capodimonte Gallery). Furthermore, the inventories of the Archduke Ernest of Austria (Vienna, 1553 – Brussels, 1595)²⁰ include works by the artist, as do those of other aristocrats.

Some works by Backer were engraved in the late 16th century, including the Allegorical Series of the Five Senses in the form of sensual female nudes;²¹ an Allegory of Faith enchainè, depicted as a buxom nude woman,²² of which there are various painted versions;²³ and an Emblem of Temperance in the form of two child angels bearing grapes among the clouds.²⁴ Backer’s work reveals a profound assimilation of the pictorial language of Italian Mannerism as practised by Vasari, Bronzino, Zucchi and other Florentine and Roman painters. His style is an amalgam of the Flemish artistic traditions and Italian influences which notably defined painting in Antwerp in the late 16th century and which are also evident in the work of his contemporaries such as Frans Floris, Frans and Ambrosius Francken, Crispin van den Broeck and Martin de Vos. Contemporary engravers made a crucial contribution to unifying this style, producing a local version of Italian art which these painters deployed with remarkable technical ability in terms of composition, line, colouring and allegorical subjects.

¹⁹ Eckhard LEUSCHNER , “Defining de Backer. New evidence on the Last Phase of Antwerp Mannerism before Rubens”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* , vol. 137 (April 2001), pp. 167-192, particularly p. 171-172 on the definition of “the Backer group”.

²⁰ Paul COREMANS , “L’Archiduc Ernest, sa cour, ses dépenses, 1593 -1595. D’après les comptes de Blaise Hütter, son secrétaire intime et premier valet de chambre”, *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Historie* , vol. 13 (1847), pp. 85-147. Listed as by “Jean de Backher” are various paintings of Original Sin, the Annunciation, the Passion and the Resurrection. (p. 141).

²¹ Agnes CZOBOR, “‘The Five Senses’ by the Antwerp Artist Jacob de Backer”, *Netherlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 23 (1972), pp. 317-327. Simone BOORSCH, “Jacob de Backer’s Drawing for the Sense of Smell”, *Leids Kunsthistorische Jb.* (1982), pp. 367-372. In the series in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Hearing is signed: “*Jacob de Backer inuenit*” and “*Iohannes Meyssens excudit Antweriae*”.

²² Signed “*Jacob de Backer pinxit*” and “*Anton Wierix fecit et excud.*” London, British Museum, no. 1859,0707.2941.

²³ J. MIHALKOWA , “Patience: A propos d’un tableau de Jacob de Backer”, *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* , XXV (1984), pp. 121-131.

²⁴ Signed “*Jacques de Backer inventor*” and “*Chrispiaen de Pas Sculp.*” London, British Museum, no.1868,0612.2109.

Line and colour make a crucial contribution to defining the figures' monumental forms. In all of them the line defines the outlines of the bodies and faces, with a particular interest in the complex folds of the draperies. These fluid lines perfectly define the areas of different, principally cool colours (green, ochres, yellows, blues, greys), intermingled with large areas of mauve-tinted pink. The bodies of the seated figures are clearly evident beneath their garments, with the fall of light producing large areas of shot colour. Within the clearly defined outlines the colouring is intense and brilliant, and the pearly faces have an enamel-like texture.

This style was characteristic of most European schools of painting in the second half of the 16th century. It arose with Mannerist painting in Florence and Rome and was soon assimilated by the so-called Romanist painters from the Low Countries, artists who had travelled to Italy and seen the work of the Italian painters at first hand.²⁵ One of these artists was Jacob de Backer, who was a prestigious figure in his day and a key name in the Antwerp school. There is no documentary evidence to prove that Backer went to Italy, a fact that has given rise to numerous theories, including the supposition that he did in fact go there, thus explaining the intensely Italian nature of his work.²⁶

For the present author the traditional attribution of this series to Jacob de Backer is judicious and fully valid, albeit involving the intervention of other artists from his studio or occasional collaborators, which explains the uneven quality evident between the different canvases. Aside from this technical and stylistic aspect, the series is one of the clearest known examples of the classical Greco-Roman and Christian culture that so profoundly impregnated Flemish humanism in the 16th century.

Description of the allegories

Within the group of the Theological Virtues, the Allegory of Faith takes the form of a young woman holding a cross, her triumph proclaimed by an angel with a golden trumpet. In her other hand she holds a chalice, which rests on a gilt plaque with a scene of the resurrection of Christ, also shown in glory with a palm of triumph and a laurel wreath with which he crowns Faith. She is seated on rocks against a background of dark clouds, which part to reveal a glowing area of light with the sign that identifies her as FIDES. A cartouche at the lower left corner is inscribed: "Ivstvs Ex Fide / vivit sicvt / Habraham / Crededit Omnes / Fily Dei Estis / Per Fidem In / Christo iesv / Rom. 10" Faith wears a green tunic with gold embroidery around the neck. She also wears a red belt and grey cloak and has elaborately plaited hair that gives her a sophisticated appearance. The quality of the painting of the principal figures is excellent and both are of a physical type frequently found in Backer's work. However, the same cannot be said of the vegetation growing around the rock on which Faith is seated, nor of the grey background clouds, elements that reveal less skilled

²⁵ Flemish Romanism is an interesting chapter in the history of painting in the Low Countries, although not the most popular. See Leo van PUYVELDE, *La peinture flamande au siècle de Bosch et Brueghel*, Brussels, 1964, chaps. 7 and 8, pp. 376-422. Exhib. cat., *Flaminghi a Roma, 1508-1608. Artistes des Pays-Bas et de la Principauté de Liège à Rome à la Renaissance*. Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts / Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1995. Koenraad JONCKHEERE, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm. Experiments in Decorum, 1566-1585*, New Haven / London, Mercatorfonds / Yale U. Press, 2102.

²⁶ This is assumed by Leen HUET , in *Flaminghi a Roma, 1508-1608*, 1995, p. 68, who locates the trip between 1565 and 1570.

participation.

The Allegory of Hope shows a winged woman with her hands joined, looking up to the heavens, from where she receives a laurel wreath and palm. She is seated on a rock against a background of dark clouds that reveal a distant landscape. Her name, SPES, appears within the area of glowing brightness that illuminates the clouds. She wears a white tunic and green mantle, a colour symbolic of hope, also referred to by the anchor and crystal sphere on which appear a crown, sceptre and papal tiara, alluding to human and divine power. On her right a child angel holds up a tablet bearing the text: *Spe enim / Salvi Facti. / Svmvs / Qvi Spera / Mvs In Devm / Vivvm Qvi / Est Salvator / Omnivm. Hebr. 6*", taken from Saint Paul to the Hebrews. This canvas is notable for the intense illumination which produces areas of dark shadow on the draperies and effects of shot colour on the areas covering the prominent knees. Hope is a more robust figure than the delicate Faith and Charity and some of the anatomical details are rather coarse on the neck and hands, although there are physical features that are close to other works by Backer and his circle such as the plump bodies, chubby faces and spiral curls of the angels. The technical differences noted here are undoubtedly due to the participation of collaborators in this series.

The Allegory of Charity depicts a woman sitting on a rock with a child on her lap who receives bunches of grapes from another child. She holds a pear in her right hand. The principal action is focused on the right side of the composition, while on the left we see a nude boy holding a cane cross. Although his appearance brings to mind Saint John the Baptist, the grapes and the cross are undoubtedly symbols of the Passion of Christ. From among the background of dark clouds an angel flies over Charity's head, crowning her with a plaited wreath while her name, CHARITAS, stands out in glowing letters. The draperies are painted in a wide range of shades of green and pink for the angel and mauves, yellowish ochres and reds for the allegorical figure. At the lower right corner is a cartouche which, although suffering from losses to the text and restoration, can be read as: "Nvnc Avt.. / Manet Fide. / Spes Charitas / Tria Haec Maior / Horvm Est Cha / ritas. I Cor. ia / ..per Omnia/ ..aritatem Ha / Qvod Est".²⁷ Like the Allegory of Faith, the outstanding quality of the figures contrasts with the simplified handling of the landscape and the background of clouds.

These three paintings share the same composition as three in the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (figs. 6-8), which were part of the legacy of Count Pierre-Ernest de Manfeld to Philip III in 1604.²⁸ The delicacy of the line, carefully painted landscape backgrounds and subtle nuances of colour make them particularly sophisticated in terms of style. Their attribution to Hendrick de Clerck reveals the stylistic proximity between Antwerp artists of the late 16th century.²⁹

²⁷ In the painting of the same composition but different style in the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, the inscription is longer and can be read almost completely: "NVNC AVTEM / MANET FIDES / SPES CHARITAS / TRIA HAEC MAIOR / HORVM EST CHA / RITAS . I COR . 13 / SVPER OMNIA / CHARITATEM HA / BE .E QVOD EST / VINCVLVM PERFEC -/ TIONIS ".

²⁸ Pieter MAARTENS , Jean-Luc MOUSSET , and Bernd RÖDER , "La donación Mansfeld a Felipe III: un primer resumen de las investigaciones", *Reales Sitios* 168 (2006), p. 16-35.

²⁹ Matías DÍAZ PADRÓN, "Hendrick de Clerck..., op. cit., 2008, p. 127-150.



Figs. 6-8

The figures of the Liberal Arts are also notably coherent in stylistic terms as a reflection of Backer's particular artistic personality although in the case of these figures there may be some influence from earlier models, making it difficult to establish a chronological sequence. While no drawings or prints have been associated with the Theological Virtues in this series, for the Liberal Arts there are five 16th-century drawings (four in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt³⁰ and another that was sold at auction a few years ago; (fig. 9)³¹ which have signatures or inscriptions of the period that identify them as works by the Italian Mannerist Francesco Primaticcio (1504 - 1570). Their style is not perhaps the most typical of that artist but nor is it completely remote from him,³² and what is certainly clear is that in the 16th century these drawings were considered to be by him. Anton II Wierix (Antwerp ca.1555/1559 - 1604) must have made use of them with some licence when engraving a series of seven prints dated 1592, in which he acknowledges Primaticcio as the inventor of the composition.³³

³⁰ Simone TWIEHAUS, *Zeichnungen Bolognas und der Emilia 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert, Graphische Sammlung des Hessischen Landesmuseums Darmstadt*. Heidelberg 2005, cat. no. 202. Inv. no. AE 1420-1423, signed or inscribed "F. Bolognese", i.e. Francesco Primaticcio.

³¹ Sotheby's, Old Master and British Drawings including Property from the Descendants of Walter Brandt. London, 7 and 8 July 2011, lot 6, ink and black wash on paper, 253 x 192 mm. [see: <http://www.sothbys.com/en/auctions/2011/old-master-british-drawings-sale-l11040.html>]

³² Primaticcio's graphic style is evident in the numerous preparatory drawings for the "Gallery of Ulysses" in the Palace of Fontainebleau, studied by Sylvie BÉGUIN, Jean GUILLAUME and Alain ROY, *La galerie d'Ulysse à Fontainebleau*. Paris, 1955.

³³ M. MAUQUOY-HENDRICKX, *Les estampes des Wierix: conservées au Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier. Catalogue raisonné*, Brussels, 1979, vol. II, p. 279. Signed on the Allegory of Grammar, which is number 1 in the series, "Francisc. Bolon. Invent", "Anton Wierix excud." "1592". It is followed by Astronomy (no. 2), Dialectics (no. 3), Rhetoric (no. 4), Geometry (no. 5), Music (no. 6) and Arithmetic (no.7). The impressions in the British Museum have the inventory numbers 1870,0625.718 to 1870,0625.724.



Fig. 9

As is habitual with intaglio prints, Wierix's prints (figs 10-14) show the compositions in the reverse direction to their original drawings, for which reason we can deduce that the paintings attributed to Backer were not based on the prints but perhaps on the above-mentioned drawings. Nor do the paintings in El Escorial (first attributed to Backer and later to Hendrick to Clerck)³⁴ reproduce the inverted images seen in the prints. Wierix's engravings may perhaps be the final link in a creative sequence that starts with the drawings attributed to Primaticcio and is followed by the series by Jacob de Backer from the collection of the Marquis of Alfarrás.

³⁴ Díaz Padrón, op. cit., 2008, p. 127-150, in which he reconstructs the fragmented series in El Escorial on the basis of Wierix's prints and from "old and notable copies that conform to the period" in the Soler Damiano collection (which he does not reproduce), identified by their reference numbers in the Fondos de Recuperación de la Guerra Civil (no. 27833, photo C-472). He rejects the attribution to Jacob de Backer of the El Escorial series which he himself had suggested at an earlier date. See Matías Díaz Padrón, "Tres lienzos de las artes liberales de Jacques Adriaensz [sic] Backer en el Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial", in Real Monasterio-Palacio de El Escorial. Estudios inéditos en el IV centenario de la terminación de las obras, Madrid, CSIC, 1987, pp. 261-266. He does not make use of the Darmstadt drawings. Enquiries made with the documentary and photographic services of the Servicio de Recuperación Artística (Madrid, Library of the CSIC) have revealed that there is no reference to the above-mentioned Soler Damiano collection, nor files with such high numbers. It has not been possible to check what the "copies" referred to by Díaz Padrón were like, nor if they were the same as or were the ones belonging to the Marquis de Alfarrás.



Figs. 10 -14

An analysis of the Allegories of the Liberal Arts reveals a more complex approach than in the Virtues, giving rise to depictions of figures from the classical world, virtues and abstract concepts identified with signs.

The Allegory of Grammar (GRAMATICA. FONS ET ORIGO OMNIVM ARTIVUM) is surrounded by the inventors of the Greek and Latin alphabets and founding figures of those literatures. Grammar is shown as a mature woman holding an open book in one hand, pausing from her reading to welcome a child. Opposite her is Carmenta (or Nicostrata), the Roman deity of childbirth to whom the invention of the Latin alphabet is attributed.³⁵ Her luminous figure stands out among the dark clouds, while Grammar is seated on the back of Cadmus, whom Greek mythology considered the inventor of the Greek alphabet. At her feet is Virgil, wearing a laurel wreath, accompanied by Homer and the Roman historian Cato.

³⁵ Pierre GRIMAL, *Diccionario de mitología griega y romana*. Barcelona, Paidos, 2008, p. 88.

The composition can be directly related to the drawing considered to be by Primaticcio.³⁶ Backer modified the figure of the small child welcomed by Grammar eliminating its clothes in order to show it nude and replacing the exclamatory gesture of the outstretched arms with an imploring one. He also eliminated other secondary figures. The robust form of the nude child and the rounded faces of the women are highly characteristic of Backer's style. Both the forms and style of these figures reveal similarities with the physical types in the Allegory of Charity.

The Allegory of Dialectics is depicted as a mature woman wearing a red tunic, her bust and head protected by a cuirass and helmet. On a tablet at her feet is the inscription: "EST ARS ARTIVUM ET SIENTIA SCIENTIARVM". In her right hand she holds a banner inscribed with the terms Eloquence and Glory, while with her left hand she holds a closed book, its spine and cover inscribed "ARTES VIRTUTIS. / SUNT MAGISTRAE". Dialectics is seated in profile and is surrounded by the philosophers Hermes Trismegistus and Aristotle, who points to the sky where a white dove is flying and in which appear the names of Dialectics, Truth and Wisdom (the latter written in Greek). Behind Dialectics is a personification of Wisdom (with her name in Greek characters on her cap). Written in Greek letters on another book is the name of Manetho, a 3rd-century Egyptian historian and priest who wrote numerous works of history in Greek. It is surprising that Dialectics is united in this composition with Prudence, as a result of which the arts of the trivium are united with those of the Cardinal Virtues. The Allegory of Rhetoric, with the motto "RHETORICA. SVM BENEDICENDI ET ORANDI SCIENTIA", is depicted as a mature woman seated and almost seen from behind but turning her head to look at the viewer. She wears a white brocade tunic and a tight bodice. In her left hand she holds Mercury's caduceus and, in her right, a white handkerchief. Mercury, messenger of the gods, emerges from her throne of dark clouds while another, faceless figure is identified as the writer Lucian. The composition is completed by two secondary allegories of Envy and Concio, a concept of classical rhetoric that refers to any type of public discourse before a gathering of people.³⁷ As in almost all the other works in this series, there is a notable contrast between the more meticulous style of the principal figure and the secondary ones, which are painted in a relatively abbreviated manner, as seen here in Mercury's torso and in the Michelangelesque bodies of the other figures, all depicted with dark shadows.

Only Geometry and Arithmetic represent the arts of the quadrivium in this series. The Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt has the two related drawings as well as those of Music and Astronomy.³⁸ Astronomy can be reconstructed from a painting in the rector's office of the Universidad del País Vasco (Bilbao), which has the same composition as the one attributed to Hendrick de Clerck in El Escorial.³⁹ The female figure representing the

³⁶ From the Latin *concio*, *concionis* [meeting, assembly] Ángel Luis LUJÁN ATIENZA, *Retóricas españolas del siglo XVI: el foco de Valencia*, Salamanca, 1999, p. 274. Manuel LÓPEZ MUÑOZ, Fray Luis de Granada y la Retórica, Almería, 2000, p. 41, note 25, defines it as "the typical manifestation of the rhetorical praxis of humanist ecclesiastics [...], the allocution of the faithful gathered together (con-cieo) in the assembly", thus differentiating it from the sermon (sermo), which has religious connotations.

³⁷ Idid.

³⁸ TWIEHAUS, *Zeichnungen Bologna...* op cit., 2005, cat. nos. AE 1420, 1421, 1422 and 1423

³⁹ See note 1.

Allegory of Geometry with the motto “GEOMETRIA. QVANTITES ABSTRVSAS MANIFESTO” is depicted seated on a throne of clouds. She wears a tightly fitting chemise under a green tunic with a yellow lining and a red mantle thrown back over her shoulders. Her identifying symbol is a set square which she holds in her right hand, a pendulum suspended from its right angle. Geometry is surrounded by Octavius Augustus in heroic dress, Hipparchus, Euclid and Hypatia of Alexandria, who has a very androgynous if not overtly masculine appearance.

The final painting in the series is that of the Allegory of Arithmetic, which has the inscription at the upper edge “ARITMETICA. AD DIVINA ASSVRGIT ET AD HVMANA DESCENDIT”. Arithmetic is represented here as a mature woman seated on clouds and on the fallen body of Zarathustra. She wears a white chemise, a green dress and a grey-mauve toned cloak. As her identifying symbol, in her right hand she holds a tablet with arabic numerals on it. An anonymous male figure and Pythagoras reinforce the meaning of this Liberal Art. The associated drawing in the series in the Hessisches Landesmuseum has not survived. The composition of the painting is much simpler than that of Wierix's engraving, eliminating two secondary figures and transforming a third one. The morphology of the face and the anatomical structure of Astronomy is similar to the allegory of Time freeing Faith (Warsaw, Narodne Museum), widely accepted as by Backer due to its relationship to Faith enthralled, which was engraved by Anton II Wierix after a painting by the artist.⁴⁰

Professor Ismael Gutiérrez Pastor
Department of Art History and Theory
Universidad Autónoma, Madrid

⁴⁰ An impression in the British Museum, London, no. 1859,0709.2941. Signed on the plate: “*lac. De Backer pinxit*” and “*Anton. Wierix fecit et excud*”. MAUQUOY-HENDRICKX, 1979, 1251.